

NORTH WALSALL AREA PANEL MEETING

Tuesday, 27 January, 2015 at 6.00 p.m.

**Burrowes Street TMO, Tenant Management Resource Centre,
Burrowes Street, Walsall, WS2 8NN**

Present

Councillor K. Phillips (Chair)
Councillor L.D. Jeavons (Vice-Chair)
Councillor J. Fitzpatrick
Councillor C. Jones
Councillor T. Jukes
Councillor P. Lane
Councillor I.C. Robertson

Officers

Michael Greenfield- Area Manager
Ness Croft – Area Support Officer
Sarah Heath- ASB Officer
Inderjit Nijjer – Employment & Skills Officer
Tim Marren, Walsall Voluntary Action (WVA) Chief Executive
Lesley Shorthouse – Community Development Officer (WVA)
Inspector Jacqueline Nicholson
Kate Bowers, Interim Head of Communities & Public Protection
Matt Underhill - Committee Business & Governance Manager

89/14 **Welcome and Apologies**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

90/14 **Apologies**

Apologies for the duration of the meeting were received from Councillor Young.

91/14 **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor J. Fitzpatrick declared an interest in “Bloxwich Community Partnership –Tablets” & “Bloxwich Community Partnership – Ping Pong”, through Bloxwich Business Partnership CIC.

92/14 **Local Government (Access to Information) Act, 1985 (as amended)**

There were no items to be considered in private session.

93/14

Minutes of the previous meeting

The meeting considered the minutes of the meeting that took place on 20 November 2014.

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 20 November 2014, copies having been previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

94/14

Skills Provision with the Voluntary Sector – WMBC & WVA

The Employment and Skills Officer explained that a key objective of the Employment and Skills Team was to up-skill the local population and significantly improve their employment prospects. It was explained that in Walsall North 43.3% of adults have no qualifications. While 10% of residents have a higher education qualification compared to the national average of 27%.

It was explained that many jobs required basic skills in literacy and numeracy, while local employers also sought a range of other skills including technical, strategic and planning. It was further explained that 8% or more of local employers have a workforce that is under-utilised due to a lack of appropriate skills, while two out of five employers had difficulty recruiting employees with the right skills.

It was explained that schools, colleges and training providers participate in skills provision, this includes programmes aimed at improving the skills of older people. The Chair expressed concern at the lack of skills amongst the population of North Walsall which did not appear to have improved since 1998. She pointed out that if people are not encouraged to enter manufacturing there will be difficulties in replacing an ageing workforce. A Panel Member noted the importance of soft skills to employers. It appeared that many young people lacked these skills which are critical in public facing businesses. The importance of being able to think like your

employer and use initiative to help the business was also emphasised. A further Panel Member highlighted the difficulty young people have in even gaining experience as employers are often reluctant to provide any form of employment to those without any previous experience. A further Panel Member spoke of a young person who had undertaken a number of qualifications at Walsall College but had experienced difficulty in getting a job. The Employment and Skills Officer also explained that it often proves difficult to encourage local businesses to engage with the process of training.

The meeting identified the importance of young people being given a range of options in terms of career choices. For example, it was important that schools encouraged the pursuit of an apprenticeship where appropriate.

The Chief Executive Walsall Voluntary Action (WVA) explained that the service is based on Bridge Street and set out the range of work the organisation undertook including supporting voluntary sector staff and groups. It was further explained that most voluntary organisations are often established based on a specific need, with a small number of people and in a particular geographical location. It was the objective of WVA to support these groups and make them sustainable. Work was also undertaken to assist these groups in developing effective local networks. Other work undertaken with voluntary groups includes providing guidance in establishing effective governance and finance operations, together with assisting with access to funding.

The Community Development Officer (WVA) explained that she was currently undertaking work with a number of small voluntary groups based at Ryecroft Neighbourhood Resource Centre (NRC). The work includes undertaking health checks with the groups and ensuring they have effective action and business plans. In response to a Panel Member query it was explained that supports is provided for a number of small organisations in Beechdale and Willenhall, including the building of networks. It was also explained that work was being undertaken to

develop a hub and spoke model of support. The Chair expressed concern that the Ryecroft NRC was part occupied by a number of commercial enterprises which might limit the opportunities for voluntary groups to be based at the centre.

Resolved

That the presentation be noted.

95/14

Scrap Metal Dealers Act 2013

The Area Manager explained that since the introduction of the Act a number of enforcement days have been held, while the number of thefts of metal have fallen. In response to a Panel query it was explained that follow up work by the police to a check number of registration plates had found that these were legally registered vehicles.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

96/14

Area Manager's Report

In response to Panel queries Inspector Nicholson spoke of a range of pro-active policing. This included the deployment of PCSOs in Beechdale to help address anti-social behaviour.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

97/14

Funding Report

The Panel considered the funding applications as set out in the report.

Bloxwich Community Partnership – Tablets

Councillor J. Fitzpatrick, having earlier declared an interest, did not participate in the voting on this funding application.

It was explained that the funding was sought towards the introduction of computers to service users from the local community of a variety of ages. The Panel approved the application for £1,775.

Community Safety – Security Improvement to Mossley Greenspace

It was explained that the funding was sought towards the cost of fencing at Vernon way to stop off road bikes and fly tipping damaging the area. It was also explained that previously installed fencing had been ripped out. The Panel approved the application for £2,540.

Ryecroft NRC – Ryecroft Community Hub

It was explained that the funding was sought for the purchase of hairdressing chairs to support a ongoing community project. The Chair expressed concern regarding the application as she felt that it had received significant funding support from a range of sources already. A further Panel Member expressed support for the application as he felt it would help develop a range of important skills for those involved and make them more employable. The Panel approved the application for £700, with the Chair opposing.

Bloxwich Community Partnership – Ping Pong

Councillor J. Fitzpatrick, having earlier declared an interest, did not participate in the voting on this funding application.

It was explained that the funding was sought towards the purchase of ping pong equipment to encourage the engagement of young people in sport. The Panel approved the application for £689.21.

98/14

Councillor suggestions for future sessions

A Panel Member highlighted an issue with the former British Legion club in Bloxwich. She explained that there was a gate at the back of the building that was hanging off its hinges which was leading to anti-social behaviour and fly tipping.

A further Panel Member highlighted the importance of providing opportunities for young Muslim men to play sport. In relation to sporting activities for young people it was explained that a joint initiative with Walsall South AP and the council's Youth Service to seek to lease and run a snooker hall for young people was underway. It was explained that significant costs would be incurred in fitting the building out, particularly to make it Disability Discrimination Act compliant.

The Area Manager agreed to look into the case of a resident who was concerned that trees and roots on Broad Lane would damage his garden wall. A report was also requested from the Head of Planning and Building Control regarding action on vacant pub sites, including The Bull and Kings Arms.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

99/14

Area Partnerships future development

The Interim Head of Communities & Public Protection explained that she had now completed a restructure of the Area Partnership management and set out the new arrangements. The restructure had been carried out to ensure that the skills and expertise of the managers matched the particular requirements of the respective areas. It was also explained that further work was well underway to re-invigorate the Area Partnerships. As part of this process the Interim Head of Communities & Public Protection will be meeting with Members to better understand how they would like the Area Partnerships to operate in the future.

Resolved

That the briefing be noted.

The meeting terminated at 7.15 p.m.

Chairman:

Date: