

COMMUNITY SERVICES AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

Tuesday, 30 July, 2013 at 6.00 pm in a Conference Room at the Council House

Members in Attendance:

Councillor V. Woodruff (Chair)
Councillor I. Azam
Councillor B. Douglas Maul
Councillor G. Illmann-Walker
Councillor L. Rattigan

Portfolio Holders in Attendance:

Councillor M. Arif – Environment
Councillor I. Shires – Community Engagement & Voluntary Sector

Officers in Attendance:

Jamie Morris - Executive Director (Neighbourhoods)
Keith Stone - Assistant Director (Neighbourhoods)
John Leach – Head of Communities and Partnerships
Steve Pretty – Head of Engineering and Transportation
T Evans – Lead Accountant
Chris Knowles - Services Finance Manager
John Grant – Scientific Manager
Vicki Popplewell – Regional Co-ordinator (Low Emissions Strategy)
Lynne Hughes – Area Manager - Community Safety
Inspector Mandy McPhee – West Midlands Police
Steve Gittins – Deputy Manager – Community Safety
Craig Goodall - Committee Business and Governance Manager

93/13 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor C. Creaney and Councillor K. Hussain.

94/13 Substitutions

There were no substitutions for the duration of the meeting.

95/13 Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

There were no declarations of interest or party whip for the duration of the meeting.

96/13 Minutes

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 3 June 2013, copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

97/13 Draft Revenue and Capital Outturn 2012/13 Pre Audit

Members were informed that the draft revenue and capital outturn for the year ended 2012/13, subject to external audit, for services within the remit panel.

The Lead Accountant reported that there was a revenue under spend of £587,000 (net the use of earmarked resources and carry forwards) and a capital under spend of £334,000 (net of approved carry forwards into 2013/14). She tabled an amendment to the report contained in the agenda papers (annexed).

The Executive Director (Neighbourhoods) reported that the revenue under spend was particularly pleasing and had been delivered against challenging budget pressures.

The £78,031 under spend in Libraries was noted by the Chair. She questioned why there was an under spend when some Libraries often appeared to be under staffed when visited. It was reported that a significant portion of the savings had been made from savings in staff salaries. Members requested further information on staffing levels at Libraries.

The meeting debated car parking and whether the vitality of the town centre could be improved by offering free car parking in Council owned car parks. It was noted that the majority of car parks in Walsall were operated by the private sector. A car parking strategy was being developed which would review the Council's offer. Car parking currently earned £1.3 million a year for the Council. If free car parking was introduced this income would be need to be replaced or saved in the budget.

Retained housing land was land that was not part of the housing stock transfer to Walsall Housing Group. It often related to footpaths and other small portions of land. There was a small budget in place to maintain these areas.

Members noted that the Council's Trading Standards Team had assisted with testing for horsemeat. Figures on the results for Walsall tests were requested.

Resolved:

That:

1. further information regarding the salary under spend in the Library Service, broken down by each library and any information on vacant posts be provided to Members;
 2. information on the results of horsemeat testing for Walsall be provided to Members;
- and;
3. the report be noted.

98/13 **Low Emissions Town & Cities**

Members were informed of the activities associated with the West Midlands Low Emissions Town and Cities Programme (LETCP) in regard to the Council's statutory duties and responsibilities relating to Borough wide review and assessment of air quality.

The LETCP Regional Co-ordinator delivered a presentation on the programme to the Panel (annexed). The LETCP have been established to create an improved partnership approach to a shared problem.

Members learned that Nitrogen Dioxide and particulate matter were the pollutants that needed to be reduced to improve air quality. Diesel engines were the main emitters of Nitrogen Dioxide. The onus had been placed on vehicle manufacturers to reduce emissions. This was encouraged through EU legislation. Further information on the Council's vehicle fleet was requested with regard to its emission rates including Nitrogen Dioxide.

The main cause of pollution in Walsall was from the M6 motorway. One potential solution of reducing pollution would be to encourage traffic to use the M6 Toll.

A LETC Strategy was being developed which would tie in and support planning and transport strategies. The forth coming Site Allocation Document would feature air quality as a broad theme. It was noted that some developments could take place in already polluted areas.

A discussion took place on providing charging points for electric cars. It was noted that some Local Authorities were providing a set proportion of charging bays per car park.

Work took place with Schools to improve air quality. In particular targeting parents who were leaving their cars idling whilst waiting to pick up children.

Resolved:

That:

1. Members be provided with details of the Council vehicle fleet to include details of vehicle emission rates including Nitrogen Dioxide emissions;

2. a further report on the outcome of the low emission zone technical studies be presented to the Panel at a future meeting;
- and;
3. the report be noted.

99/13 **Community Safety Roles, Responsibilities and Statistics**

The Panel were informed of partner activity currently in place to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB).

The Area Manager (Community Safety) highlighted many aspects of partnership working in tackling crime and ASB to the Panel including;

- The role of Safer Walsall Partnership;
- The Community Safety Plan and its six priorities;
- The increased role of Area Partnerships in tackling crime and ASB;
- Overall crime data from 2011/12 and 2012/13;
- Key work activity undertaken;
- The result of resident surveys in relation to crime and ASB;
- The development of the shared working practices to tackle ASB between the Council and Walsall Housing Group;
- The role and responsibilities Police Community Support Officers.

The following are the principal points from the ensuing question and answer session:

- A Member considered that a significant portion of crimes went unreported which was reflected in the statistics reported to the Panel. It was acknowledged that issues of reporting could be improved particularly where instances were reported to different partners. However, incidents of serious crime where involvement of the Police would always be required were also reduced. Police crime figures and recording were audited to ensure accuracy;
- The new approach to domestic abuse commissioning involved the use of pooled budgets from partners to develop a single pathway approach. Previously there were multiple pathways and varying levels of service quality. GPs were involved with identifying domestic abuse;
- The ASB Team consisted of a Manager, Deputy Manager, five and a half full time equivalent ASB Officers, two part time Reassurance Officers and a Community Liaison Officer. In addition to this primary organisations such as Registered Social Landlords had their own ASB resources. Work was taking place to develop a joint approach to

tackling ASB with WHG. If this was successful it was hoped to extend the agreement to other RSLs;

- There were seventy Street Champions. It was acknowledged that they were a good resource and encouraged the role of the citizen;
- Walsall had good detection rates for burglary.

Resolved:

That:

1. progress with the development of the anti-social behaviour partnership between Walsall Council and Walsall Housing Group be considered at a future meeting;
 2. the latest crime and anti -social behaviour statistics be sent to Members;
 3. a list of employees including their roles in the Walsall Council Anti Social Behaviour Team be sent to Members;
- and;
4. further statistics on the number of occasions Police and Community Support Officers have used their standard and discretionary powers be provided to Members.

100/13 Devolution through Area Partnerships

The Panel were updated on progress against the seven proposals regarding devolution through Area Partnerships.

The Head of Communities and Partnerships set out progress with the seven areas. In particular he explained that participatory budgeting would commence shortly with residents being asked to consider proposals to develop verge parking in their areas.

The Panel commented that there was little public engagement at Area Partnership meetings for participatory budgeting to be successful. This was acknowledged and it was explained that participatory budgeting aspired to engage residents at numerous opportunities and events in order to get as many public contributions as possible. Members suggested that all know local groups should be approached for their views for participatory budgeting.

The Portfolio Holder (Community Engagement and Voluntary Sector) explained that it was important to tackle apathy in contributing to consultations. He hoped this apathy would rescind when residents realised that they had a genuine say with participatory budgeting.

Following a question from the Chair it was explained that the proposals for Local Area Coordinators was still being developed. A Steering Group meeting was taking place to bring the issue forward.

Resolved:

That all known local groups across the Borough be contacted to contribute to the consultation on participatory budgeting;

101/13 Work Programme 2013/14 and Forward Plan

Resolved:

That:

1. Forward Plan item 43/13 "Household Waste Recycling Centre and Transfer Station Contract" be considered at 27th August, 2013 meeting of the Panel;
 2. an update on the recommendations of the Greenspace's Working Group be included when the Panel consider the Play Strategy;
 3. the Winter Service Plan be considered at the 10th October, 2013 meeting of the Panel;
 4. Willenhall Lawn Cemetery extension feasibility study be considered at the 7th January, 2014 meeting of the Panel;
- and;
5. a letter be sent to all Panel Members inviting them to join the Welfare Reform Working Group being operated by the Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel.

102/13 Date of next meeting

It was noted that the date of next meeting was 27th August, 2013 at 6.00 p.m.

The meeting closed at 8.22 p.m.

Chairman:

Date: