

NEIGHBOURHOODS SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

Tuesday 10 June 2008 at 6.00 p.m.

Panel Members present

Councillor C. Towe (Chair)
Councillor C. Creaney (Vice Chair)
Councillor L. Beeley
Councillor P Bott
Councillor R. Martin
Councillor J. Phillips
Councillor D. Pitt
Councillor V. Woodruff

Portfolio holders present

Councillor A. Andrew – Deputy Leader, Property
Services
Councillor R. Walker – Environment Portfolio

Officers present

Jamie Morris – Executive Director – Neighbourhood
Services
Keith Stone – Assistant Director - Built Environment
Dave Roberts – Waste Management Manager
Helen Dudson – Corporate Performance and Scrutiny
Manager

The Chair welcomed Councillor D. Pitt and Councillor R. Martin as new members to the panel and confirmed that the panel calling notice would be corrected to include reference to Councillor Andrew in relation to property services.

01/08 APOLOGIES

Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillor Harrison, Councillor Perry and Councillor Harris.

02/08 SUBSTITUTIONS

There were no substitutions for the duration of this meeting.

03/08 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest or party whip identified at this meeting.

04/08 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 7 APRIL 2008

(annexed)

The Chairman reminded Members of a letter that they had been sent following the last meeting of the Panel regarding the Draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan. He explained that during the meeting the Panel had been advised that the budget for general Rights of Way maintenance stood at £25,000 for the year with additional funding of £100,000 received via the Local Transport Plan.

However, Mark Rickard, Group Leader Transportation Forward Planning, has since advised that the information provided was incorrect as the capital budget of £100,000 includes £25,000 specifically for community dropped crossings therefore the capital figure allocated this year for Rights of Way is in fact £75,000. The Panel noted this amendment.

Councillor Bott asked whether section 106 funding for open spaces could be used on rights of way. Officers confirmed that in principle it is acceptable but that each individual case would need to be considered.

Resolved

That the minutes, as amended, of the meeting held on 27 March 2008, copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record .

05/08 FORWARD PLAN

The Chair suggested and the panel agreed that the Forward Plan be considered as part of item 7 on the agenda as issues relating to the panel had been detailed in the report circulated in advance of the meeting.

06/08 TRAINING OPPORTUNITES

In-house training opportunities as detailed in the member development programme circulated to members were reviewed and members noted how to access training.

07/08 CONSIDERATION OF PANEL WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2008/09

The Chair invited Jamie Morris to address the panel in relation to the information contained in the report previously circulated. In doing so Jamie Morris reviewed directorate priorities and council pledges that the directorate supports the delivery of and also suggested work items for consideration by members. During the discussion many items were considered in detail including:

- Continuing work on parks and open space
- Community Cohesion including reference to a planned workshop for all scrutiny members
- The merger of the College of Continuing Education
- The joint procurement of interpretation/translation
- The libraries transformation programme
- Strategies for delivering Leisure Centre improvements.
- Tackling child poverty
- The new National Indicator Set (NIS) and Local Area Agreement (LAA) targets the directorate outcomes – several owned.

Members also considered some of the annual pledges the directorate were delivering and the complexities around tackling graffiti and fly tipping. They were informed by officers that work on enabling enforcement continued and all recognised the impact of prosecutions in helping to address issues. Members also considered the issues around

securing a prosecution in terms of evidence of who's dumping and recognised this delayed clean up activities. Officers confirmed that compulsory purchase could not be used to purchase land not maintained but that if the land owner can be traced they can be prosecuted for not taking action to prevent fly tipping. It was recognised that there continues to be a need for investment in enforcement and covert cameras and that there was ongoing proactive work with WHG to ensure they clean up on their land.

The usefulness of bulky item collections in tackling fly tipping was considered, particularly in reference to whether the current policy provides value for money when the costs of tackling fly tipping are taken into account. Officers explained that when the charge for bulky item collection was implemented there was no increase in fly tipping. It was confirmed that a lot of fly tipping is commercial waste (particular issue with tyres) and in responding to a query regarding fly tipping from surrounding boroughs it was confirmed that there appears to be no correlation between fly tipping and border locations. Officers agreed to undertake further analysis and report back to a future meeting. In addition officers agreed to investigate the cost of the bulky item amnesty run by New Deal for Communities and also the policies of other authorities in dealing with waste tyres.

Members also considered the delivery of the green spaces strategy and officers confirmed that all parks have service standards displayed and agreed to forward all standards to members of the scrutiny panel. There was also detailed consideration of a proposal from Councillor Towe regarding scrutinising anti social behaviour. It was recognised that this particular work stream would potentially be cross cutting with a number of other scrutiny panels and that this needs further consideration in scoping if agreed as a work stream. Officers agreed to circulate notes from scrutiny training event where a scoping exercise was completed in relation to anti social behaviour.

It was confirmed that member involvement in the Illuminations was via the service work group as the panel had completed its formal involvement. Councillor Andrew suggested the panel could add value by considering the leisure centre review as detailed in the forward plan and that their involvement would be appreciated, this was supported by panel members.

Resolved:

That:

- a) the further requested information outlined above regarding: geographical fly tipping hot spots, the cost of the bulky items amnesty in the New Deal area and the policy of neighbouring authorities in dealing with tyre waste be received at a future meeting;**
- b) the following items will be considered at future full panel meetings as information items so the panel can monitor the progress made:**
 - 1. highway repairs and maintenance contract**
 - 2. outcome of the street trading review**
 - 3. civil parking enforcement**
 - 4. sustainable travel to school policy**

c) That the following working groups be established, with membership open to all panel members and to meet as required to complete work programme:

- 1. Waste Management**
- 2. Anti social behaviour**
- 3. Councillor call for action**

d) Councillor Andrew to work with Councillor Harrison regarding the timing of future cabinet reports regarding the leisure centre review with a view to engaging scrutiny first.

08/08 NEW WASTE COLLECTION SERVICE – REVISED POLICIES

At the invitation from the chair Keith Stone explained that in response to a previous request from the panel to consider revised policies the report circulated detailed the proposals being presented to Cabinet on 18 June. He referred Members to the table on page 37 of the pack of papers which summarises all proposed changes.

In responses to points raised Councillor Walker explained that communication was key to the proposed changes and that during the first 6 months there would need to be some level of leniency to deal with issues of non compliance. Ultimately the council does have the power to enforce but this would only be used as very last option.

The policy re applications for a larger bin for households with 6 or more and the role of a waste audit were discussed. Officers confirmed that proposed policies were the result of detailed benchmarking and consideration of performance and trends within Walsall. It was confirmed that there were contingency plans in place for first couple of months to move side waste. Councillor Walker confirmed that the application forms for the larger bin would be distributed prior to service roll-out so household capacity will not be reduced overnight.

Officers confirmed that where possible the waste service is informed about planned road maintenance work and considers this in terms of bin collection and that the service liaised with the traffic department in relation to issues regarding access problems created by parked vehicles. It was also acknowledged that inconsistencies occur regarding the service being delivered, e.g. household waste collection vehicle accessing roads that green waste collection claim cannot access. Councillor Walker explained that there were some issues that related to personnel and that a programme of staff training had been designed to address the issues. Keith Stone added that currently there was a review of collection rounds with the aim of increasing efficiency.

In response to member queries Councillor Walker explained that the charge for bins, including compost bins was actually the cost and that the recent increase in cost of compost bins reflected the end of an external deal that subsidised the cost. She also accepted the suggestion that publicising a recycling league table in a format easily accessible to the public may help encourage residents to fully embrace the new arrangements and that current recycling rates by ward would be used as a baseline for performance prior to rollout. Officers confirmed that the proposals in terms of changes to the policy are based on extensive research and that some aspects of refreshment will continue. Councillor Walker added that issues will occur that will need to be considered from time to time and that she was confident these will be managed within the proposal. She added that whilst the phasing of roll out was a firm proposal a decision had not yet

been made as to which areas first but she confirmed that the intention was probably to go where recycling currently more successful to allow longer to communicate changes to other areas.

It was acknowledged that the current increasing cost of bins would have an unknown impact on budget if continued but that this was caused by unforeseen market conditions and that the service was continuing to work with colleagues in finance and that council contingency funds are there to support and mitigate against unforeseen market conditions. When questioned regarding the report officers also confirmed that private sector legal advice had been used as there was no capacity in house and that the firm used were experienced in the waste management field.

Cabinet members acknowledged that some areas and house styles (e.g. terrace housing) may have difficulty storing an additional bin and that they were aware of the affected streets and also that this was not an issue for all and that it was important to respond on an ad hoc basis when issues arise. Furthermore it was acknowledged that in areas where residual waste bins were used for disposing of garden waste as there were no brown bin collections would potentially have difficulties with the reduced capacity and that this needed further consideration. Councillor Walker also recognised that there were on going issues relating to personnel and training e.g. who decides a bin is too heavy for collection and that these would continue to be addressed. Members were informed that the weight of bins was difficult to judge and that the weight limit is linked to health and safety.

In response to further enquiries from members Councillor Walker confirmed that the assisted collection forms were reviewed to assess the length of time assistance is required for and that additional waste would continued to be collected when there had been a missed collection e.g. bank holidays and it was recognised that the extent of the change in policy needed careful communications and that advice regarding branding had been sort. When urged to consider looser criteria regarding larger households it was confirmed that the proposals were based on waste information from DEFRA but that nothing was set in stone and that there would be reviews from time to time to address issues as they arise.

Councillor Bott questioned whether action could be taken against wheelie bin cleaning companies for leaving waste debris in the road following the cleaning process and also whether space on bins could be sold as advertising space. In response officers recognised that wheelie bin cleaning companies operated in fixed geographical areas and that providing the businesses can be identified the scope of action could be investigated. Work was currently being completed in relation to the sponsorship of bins as a way of raising income and that the outcomes of this work could be presented at a future meeting.

The meeting terminated at 8.27 pm.

Chair:

Date: