

## **Council – 10 January 2011**

### **Communities and Partnerships Progress Report of Councillor Ali, Portfolio Holder**

Area Partnerships were launched in May 2010 and have already been extremely effective in addressing local issues. Our local partners such as the health service, police and Walsall Housing Group are officially committed to this new model of working and have provided support in a variety of ways – for example two of the area managers are from the NHS and one is from WHG, the area partnerships are using partner accommodation and some funding has also been provided to support local community safety projects. Area Partnerships have identified the key priorities for their area and plans are now being developed to identify how these local issues can be addressed. A consultation, engagement and communication strategy is also in development, which will be adopted across partners, and will set out how we will engage local communities in helping to solve local problems.

The work of Area Partnerships has also influenced other service areas of the council and its partners. The pilot work in St Matthew's ward identified the potential to re-design fundamentally the way we provide some council services with the potential for very substantial efficiency savings for the council and its partners. A monthly elected member newsletter is now produced for each Area Partnership, providing key contact details and giving information on action which has taken place.

Most types of crime and anti social behaviour (ASB) continue to fall in Walsall. Over 15,000 cases of ASB were recorded in 2009/10 – a reduction of 11% from the previous year. ASB has continued to fall this year, but remains a key concern for residents, featuring in the top three priorities for all area partnerships.

During the year officers have continued to carry out successful late night enforcement exercises to investigate complaints and prosecute private hire drivers who "ply for hire" and carry passengers illegally and unsafely.

Environmental Health has responded to over 9000 complaints since 1 April last year. Issues relating to noise and pest infestations dominate the work load. To date over 345 enforcement notices have been issued on residents and traders found in breach of their legal duties. Noise control enforcement continues to increase with over 50 abatement notices served and five successful prosecutions in the Magistrates Court against noisy licensed premises and neighbours. Five food businesses were immediately closed following inspection for conditions posing an immediate threat to public health.

Services in this portfolio are at the forefront of exploring the potential for sharing with other councils. We have been working with Sandwell Council since September piloting a shared emergency planning service. Work has also recently started on the feasibility of combining the trading standards services with other Black Country councils.

The 24/7 CCTV service is working more closely with the police to tackle town centre crime and the Town Centre retail radio scheme has been re-launched. More than 100 businesses are now in direct contact with the control room and take-up of the service by new premises is encouraging.

Work has been underway to set up a “street pastors” scheme in Walsall. This is a national scheme whereby uniformed volunteers from local churches patrol the streets to assist and protect people late at night, typically leaving pubs and night clubs. Volunteers wear a uniform and provide reassurance, support and aid at a particularly vulnerable time. The scheme is ready for launching in Walsall town centre from April 2011.

There are several national legislative and policy changes affecting the portfolio. The Police Reform and Social Responsibility Bill seeks to make the police service more accountable by replacing police authorities with directly elected police and crime commissioners. It also gives more powers to local authorities and police to tackle problem premises. The Home Office plans to publish a revised ‘Prevent’ strand of the counter-terrorism strategy shortly. Proposals are also due to be published in April 2011 to change alcohol pricing and new anti-social behaviour legislation is also expected. The government has recently published the Localism Bill and its plans for decentralising power and responsibilities from the state (central and local government) to individuals and communities. This will affect all council services but has particular relevance to the services under this portfolio.

The new “Scores on the Doors” food business scoring system will be implemented in Walsall in Spring 2011. The star rating of food premises will empower residents in making informed choices about where they eat and drive up standards in the industry.

In the last 12 months the contact centre has answered more than 303,000 telephone calls. This year has seen the service extended to handle some of our blue badge enquiries and assist facilities management in responding to emergency enquiries. In September Social Care Adult Services advisors were successfully integrated into the contact centre. This is providing improved call management data and enables us to look at skills sharing between our call handlers. Further work is planned during the coming year to extend the range of enquiries handled by our contact centre.

The first stop shop has again seen heavy demand with over 218,000 visitors through the doors in the first eight months of the financial year. We have seen an increase in the use of the First Stop Express by services wanting to provide specific advice and information or consult with communities; these have included Pollution Control, Benefits, Road Safety, Adult Safeguarding and the Area Managers. Partner agencies are seeing the wider benefit of this service with West Midlands police having used it to pilot monthly beat surgeries in Darlaston, a scheme which they are to extend into 2011. The NHS also plans to use the vehicle this year to promote its breast screening campaign in the Willenhall area. These types of initiatives help provide a more joined up approach to service delivery between the council and its partners which can only benefit our residents.

Councillor Z Ali

Cabinet Member  
Communities and Partnerships