

COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

18 January 2010 at 6.00 p.m.

Panel Members present

Councillor L. Harrison (Chair)
Councillor C. Creaney (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Z. Ali
Councillor P. Bott
Councillor D. Pitt
Councillor Melvin Pitt
Councillor I. Shires

Portfolio Holders present

Councillor M. Bird – Leader
Councillor B. Sanders – Leisure and Culture
Councillor C. Towe – Finance and Personnel

Other Members present

Councillor K. Chambers
Councillor S. Coughlan
Councillor P. Smith
Councillor A. Underhill

Officers present

Jamie Morris	Executive Director – Neighbourhood Services
Keith Stone	Assistant Director – Neighbourhood Services
Chris Holliday	Head of Leisure and Culture
Ben Percival	Sports and Leisure Manager
Tracey Evans	Lead Accountant
Craig Goodall	Acting Principal Scrutiny Officer

59/09 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors K. Aftab and Councillor G. Perry.

60/09 SUBSTITUTIONS

There were no substitutions for the duration of the meeting.

61/09 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest or party whip.

62/09 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meetings held on 26 November and 1 December 2009, copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

63/09 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CORPORATE SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

The Panel considered a series of recommendations made by the Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel from its meeting on 11 December 2009 during consideration of the council-wide financial position.

Craig Goodall reported that the recommendations of the Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel produced in the report on pages 14 and 16 in the agenda papers were incorrect. The final draft recommendations from the Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel were:

- 1. The resolution from Willenhall LNP be noted and forwarded to the Community Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel;*
- 2. The Community Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel identify compensatory savings proposal that would make it possible for Cabinet to consider keeping Willenhall Leisure Centre open in the short term;*
- 3. Subject to alternative savings being identified and agreed by Cabinet, the Community Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel carry out a full options appraisal to ascertain the long term viability of the centre and report this back to Cabinet.*

He also highlighted the recommendations made from Willenhall Local Neighbourhood Partnership.

64/09 REVISED DRAFT REVENUE BUDGET AND DRAFT CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2010/11 FOR COMMUNITIES AND PARTNERSHIPS PORTFOLIO AND LEISURE AND CULTURE PORTFOLIO

Members considered the revised draft revenue and capital budget proposals for 2010/11 for the Communities and Partnerships and Leisure and Culture Cabinet Portfolios.

Tracey Evans highlighted the revised draft revenue budget for the Communities and Partnerships and Leisure and Culture Cabinet Portfolios. She also highlighted the mainstream, external and reserve projects that featured in the draft capital programme.

The Chair opened the meeting for comments from members of the public present who all spoke against the budget proposal to close Willenhall leisure centre (WLC). The principle points made by members of the public were:

- All leisure centres were subsidised by the Council.
- Costs at WLC were reducing.
- As well as swimming WLC was used by a wide range of community groups.
- Willenhall was a deprived area so not all local residents were able to travel to the nearest alternative leisure centre.
- WLC had just been refurbished.
- If more housing was to be built in Willenhall then demand for a leisure centre would increase.
- It would be more difficult for local schools to maintain swimming as part of the curriculum if WLC closed. An employee of a Willenhall based primary school stated that her school would probably stop going swimming altogether.
- Closing WLC could increase anti-social behaviour in the area.

- A member of the public expressed disappointment at the recent Supported People grant error that had cost the Council £353,000 which would have enabled WLC to stay open.

The Chair invited comments from Members in attendance at the meeting.

Councillor Coughlan stated that he was disappointed the Council was prepared to subsidise all other leisure centres in the borough at the expense of WLC. Councillor Underhill explained that the swimming pool at WLC was only built in 1990 so was not at its end of life. She also explained that it was important to have good local facilities in order to attract people to live in the area.

The Chair opened the discussion to Members of the Panel. The following are the principle points of the ensuing discussion:

- There were 19 users per hour at WLC.
- Annual attendance at WLC was 80,000 visits. Approximately 10-15% of these visitors were school children.
- Each visitor to WLC was subsidised by £4.01. The lowest council subsidy per visit was Oak Park at 95p per visit.
- Work is currently underway with Sport England to quantify the level of swimming provision required, but previous advice received from Sport England indicated that the borough had twice as many swimming pools than its population and area required.
- Alternative provision to WLC was too far to walk to. Some walking routes to nearby alternative provision also involved walking through an industrial estate.
- The New Art Gallery (£5.54), Leather Museum (£9.41), Walsall Museum (£7.28) and the Local History Centre (£9.22) were all subsidised to a higher degree per visit than WLC.
- There was a need to tackle obesity and deprivation in Willenhall.
- A review of leisure provision in the borough was on the horizon. Any proposals to close any leisure centre should await the outcome of this strategic review.
- The impact on those schools using WLC needed to be considered.
- The free swimming programme for residents who were 17 years and under and over 60 had not financially disadvantaged the borough but had increased attendances at swimming pools.

The Chair invited the Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Culture to respond.

The Leader acknowledged the strength of feeling from the local community but explained that the Council simply could not continue to subsidise WLC. Public sector finances were set to reduce in the future which meant local authorities would not be able to compete with the private sector. Over 2,000 Willenhall residents a week used the out of borough leisure facilities at Bentley Bridge. He accepted the mistakes with the Supported People grants but stated it was right and proper that the Council continued to support the organisations the money had been mistakenly granted to.

The Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Culture noted that the proposal to close WLC had been considered privately several times in recent years. WLC was too expensive for

the Council to maintain. Nearby leisure facilities, which were often cheaper than WLC, existed nearby. He paid tribute to the hard work of WLC staff.

It was proposed and seconded that the following budget investments be amended to allow WLC to remain open for an additional 12 months whilst a scrutiny investigation took place to establish methods of reducing operating costs with the view to keeping the centre open in the longer term. Reducing the amounts allocated to these budget proposals would still allow activity to progress in the short term.

Portfolio	Detail of Investment	Proposed Cost	Reduction to proposed investment to fund WLC
Business Support	Creation of 3 business analyst posts to support council wide efficiency activity. Funding is for one-off set up costs and it is expected that year 2 + the posts will generate sufficient efficiencies to cover the cost of the posts and achieve further savings for the council.	£120,000	£40,000
Business Support	Setting up a single operating model for customer service improvements and efficiencies in processes to support effective customer service across the organisation will be secured, supporting self-service as the most cost effective solution where possible.	£145,000	£76,000
Finance and Personnel	Corporate feasibility studies resource. A corporate resource to enable targeted feasibility studies /and investigation work to be undertaken	£225,000	£100,000
			Total Savings = £216,000

On being put to the vote the motion was declared lost.

It was proposed and seconded that:

1. the Panel recognise the difficult financial position the Council faces;
2. the Panel notes the dampening effect of the present Government which disadvantages the borough and its people by reducing Council funding by £18.46m;
3. the Panel recognise that according to Sports England swimming provision in the borough is oversubscribed by 100%;
4. Cabinet work with Children's Services - Serco to ensure that all school users of Willenhall Leisure Centre are found suitable alternative provision.

On being put the vote the motion was declared passed.

Councillor Ian Shires voted against the proposed motion.

RESOLVED:

That:

- 1. the Panel recognise the difficult financial position the Council faces;**
- 2. the Panel notes the dampening effect of the present Government which disadvantages the borough and its people by reducing Council funding by £18.46m;**
- 3. the Panel recognise that according to Sports England swimming provision in the borough is oversubscribed by 100%;**
- 4. Cabinet work with Children's Services - Serco to ensure that all school users of Willenhall Leisure Centre are found suitable alternative provision;**

and;

- 5. the draft capital programme 2010/11 for the Communities and Partnerships and the Leisure and Culture Cabinet Portfolios be noted.**

Councillor Ian Shires voted against resolutions 1-4.

65/09 WORK PROGRAMME AND FORWARD PLAN

The Panel considered their work programme and the latest edition of Cabinets Forward Plan of Key Decisions.

RESOLVED:

That:

- 1. the following items be considered at the 18 February 2010 meeting of the Panel:**
 - a. Enforcement against privately owned property;**
 - b. Quarterly financial monitoring;**
 - c. Terms of reference of alcohol related anti-social behaviour working group;**
- 2. Leisure Centre Strategy be considered at the 30 March 2010 meeting of the Panel;**
- 3. the report on grounds maintenance standards should include a park-by-park breakdown of the maintenance standards and specification levels and budget allocations.**

66/09 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Panel noted the date of the next meeting as 18 February 2010.

The meeting terminated at 7.22 p.m.

Signed:

Date: