

AT A MEETING

- of the -

**NEIGHBOURHOOD SCRUTINY AND  
PERFORMANCE PANEL** held at the

Forest Arts Centre, Walsall on

**Thursday 5 October 2006** at 6.00 p.m.

**PRESENT**

Councillor Towe (Chair)  
Councillor Burley (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor Ault  
Councillor Beeley  
Councillor Beilby  
Councillor Griffiths  
Councillor K.Phillips  
Councillor Woodruff

**PORTFOLIO HOLDER**

Councillor Perry Safer Stronger Communities,  
Partnerships and Vision 2021

**OFFICERS PRESENT**

Tim Challans Assistant Director for Leisure Culture  
and Lifelong Learning  
Chris Holliday Head of Leisure and Culture  
Graham Hood Head of Green Spaces  
Julie Ball Head of Neighbourhood Partnerships  
and Programmes  
Brian Holland Interim Director, Safer Walsall Borough  
Partnership  
Alan Jarvis Walsall Drug & Alcohol Action Team  
Stuart Bentley Scrutiny Officer

25/2006. **APOLOGIES**

The Chair advised the panel that there were no apologies for non-attendance for this meeting.

26/2006. **SUBSTITUTIONS**

The chair advised the panel there were no substitutions for this duration of this meeting.

27/2006. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP**

Councillor Beeley declared a personal and prejudicial interest with regards to Community Wardens.

28/2006. LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

Members noted that there were no items for consideration in private at this meeting.

29/2006. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

AGREED

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 24 August 2006, a copy having been previously circulated to each member of the panel be approved and signed by the chair as a correct record of the proceedings subject to a minor alteration.

(annexed)

30/2006. FORWARD PLAN

Councillor Towe brought the attention of the panel to the illuminations review (54/06) listed for 18 October cabinet.

Tim Challans informed the panel that this would now likely be deferred to the 7 December cabinet meeting in order to incorporate the views of scrutiny.

Councillor Towe then asked whether the Highways maintenance procurement strategy (125/05) was the same strategy the panel had discussed at their previous meeting. If so, the panel would be interested in viewing the document.

Tim Challans stated that he would check the contents and report back to the panel.

Councillor Woodruff asked to see the winter service operational plan 2006/2007 (71/06) as she was particularly concerned with the placement of grit stores in the borough.

Tim Challans agreed to check the contents of the report and feedback to the panel.

AGREED

- That officers would feedback on the contents of the Highways maintenance procurement strategy (125/05) and winter service operational plan 2006/2007 (71/06) reports to the panel.

31/2006 FEEDBACK FROM WORK GROUPS

Illuminations workshop, 22 September 2006

Councillor Towe stated that the event had been very productive and the minutes reflected the majority of the outcomes of the meeting. However, it felt that the panel's discussion around early opening times and dates should be reflected in the report and that the input of Councillor Harris regarding commercial issues, should also be fed into the report.

Stuart Bentley thanked the panel for their added input and agreed to amend the minutes of the working group accordingly and, further, to assist in feeding the views of scrutiny into a subsequent cabinet report.

Councillor Towe asked when the report would be presented to Cabinet.

Stuart Bentley replied that it was likely that the report would now go to cabinet in December 2006.

Councillors Towe and Burley asked that the panel have a further opportunity to comment on the report before it submitted to cabinet.

Stuart Bentley replied that this would be possible, but that it may impact on the reporting timescales, i.e. it might be that the report would have to be delayed until the New Year.

There was general agreement that this was unacceptable.

Stuart Bentley replied that he would investigate the procedure and endeavour to have the report reported to the December Cabinet meeting.

Councillor Burley raised the issue of unlicensed traders outside the Arboretum.

Tim Challans agreed that there were issues around unlicensed traders but highlighted that the council had no enforcement powers. The council had to rely on the police, but it was evident that no-one had tried to move these traders on this year.

There was general agreement that the issue needed to be addressed.

#### AGREED

- That a draft cabinet report be presented to the panel at its next standard meeting, 7 December 2006 and that the report, subject to the panel's amendments and agreements, be presented to cabinet at its meeting of 20 December 2006.

#### 32/2006. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

##### 32.1 Feedback from cabinet on "Decriminalisation Parking Enforcement"

Councillor Ault stated that there had been some bad press around this issue along the lines of "loads of wardens hammering the residents". He stated that this was not the case and it should be highlighted that the emphasis was on getting traffic moving.

Councillor Towe replied that the press could not be stopped and would always pick up such issues.

Councillor Ault asked if something could be put in the press to counter the negative stories.

Councillor Towe replied that it was a possibility, but that enforcement was not due to be in place until April 2008.

Brian Holland added that press releases might best be timed to coincide with the launch.

Councillor Burley added that there needed to be a coordinated approach to the issue.

### 32.2 Lease arrangements for community associations.

Councillor Towe stated that the panel had raised its concerns at the previous meeting and had asked for a report to be brought to this panel. He added that he was a little concerned by the lack of content in the report and proposed that the issue be taken to a working group in order to give it much further consideration.

Julie Ball stated that it was a complicated issue and she would appreciate the input of scrutiny in order to help devise a coherent policy.

Councillor Towe asked if there had been any negotiation this far.

Julie Ball replied that there had been negotiations with the Neighbourhood Resources Centres and Community Associations who did not have lease arrangements, but no agreements had been reached. Negotiations had now ceased and the council were taking stock of the situation in light of national guidelines.

Councillor Towe asked if the panel could work with officers.

Julie Ball replied that they could and that they were aiming to produce a report for Cabinet by December.

Councillor Burley stated that she was extremely disappointed as she had hoped for more pro-active dialogue. She had hoped that the views aired at the original call-in would have been borne in mind.

Councillor K. Phillips asked whether ward councillors could obtain copies of the community association business plans.

Julie Ball replied that they were independent business entities, but she would gladly pass on the request.

Councillor Perry was invited to speak and he stated that he had agreed a process to start negotiations but that it had not been a fair process across the borough. He stated that he wanted a fair process with re-assessment of the existing leases and an investigation into why some associations did not have leases. Peppercorn rents had been agreed, but there was a need to address repair issues, which would require new and better ways of developing and utilising buildings to offset liabilities. There was a possibility of moving away from fixed site structures. He added that the new extended school provision could further impact on the situation.

Councillor K. Phillips stated that everything had changed in the last 12 months, so she felt that things were no further forward, despite all the hard work of the officers involved. She added that it was a shame that the views of scrutiny had not be listened to.

Councillor Perry added that there had been some confusion as Neighbourhood Resource Centres and Community Associations were in different portfolios and, as a result, cost had become a sticking point. When the portfolios had been re-aligned there had been an opportunity to take a fresh and closer look at the issues.

Councillor Towe was pleased that the issue now seemed to be moving forward.

Councillor Burley replied that the sticking point was still there. There was not a bottomless pit of funds and the issue was no further forward. She added that it must have been difficult for the officers involved.

Councillor Towe suggested that a working group should be formed, open to all members of the panel, to meet as soon as possible.

### AGREED

- That a working group meeting, to address the leasing arrangements for community associations, be called as soon as possible and that an update on the current position of all the community associations, and staffing commitments where possible, be presented at the group's first meeting.

### 32.3 Green Spaces Strategy.

Graham Hood gave an overview of the strategy. He added that all strategies were dynamic in nature and it would, therefore, change over a period of time. He welcomed, however, the input of scrutiny.

(annexed)

Councillor Bott asked if the Green Flag programme would involve major investment and whether this would be detrimental to the rest of the parks.

Graham Hood replied that the Green Flag scheme was recognised by the Audit Commission as a benchmark and would involve significant financial input. However, this would not be to the detriment of the other parks.

Councillor Towe stated that members wanted at least a minimum standard for all parks in the borough, as quickly as possible. He asked what the timescales for achieving this would be.

Graham Hood replied that all parks would have a management plan drafted and the process of producing these would begin as soon as the strategy had been agreed.

Chris Holliday stated that members were already aware that the draft Strategy proposed that there should be twenty-five premier parks. He confirmed that Kings Hill Park, Darlaston was one of these. It was anticipated that a minimum standard for cleanliness, tidiness, graffiti-free etc would be agreed with Members as soon as possible and then implemented to the premier parks in the first instance. It was however noted that each park would need its own management plan and as it was already mid-year this may not be possible before the end of the municipal year.

Councillor Towe stated that the panel would like to see them once they were drafted.

Councillor Burley asked if the objectives in the strategy had been costed.

Graham Hood replied that they had not all been costed as there would be a reliance on external funding in some cases, which may impact on timescales.

Councillor Towe asked what the council's commitment was.

Graham Hood replied that the service had put in a number of bids into the budget process but there was a continual search for external funding streams.

Councillor Burley asked that regular reports against the objectives be brought to the panel.

Tim Challans replied that he could arrange for a traffic light style report, with action plans, to be brought to the panel.

Chris Holliday said that the Greenspaces service had submitted approximately seventeen capital bids into the programme but whether these came to fruition remained to be seen.

Councillor Bott asked about the impact of section 106 legislation on the funding of the parks.

Tim Challans replied that there was already a section 106 supplementary planning document for open spaces and a certain percentage of the money would feed into the parks.

#### AGREED

- That the panel receive the complete management plans and agree a minimum standard for the premier parks in the first instance.
- That progress against the strategic objectives be reported to the panel and regular intervals.

#### 32.4 Community Wardens

Brian Holland spoke to the briefing note previously circulated.

(annexed)

Councillor Towe confirmed that there had been 50 to 60 wardens at one time, but that the numbers were now down to around 15. He asked if there had been any noticeable effect as a result.

Brian Holland replied that the numbers had decreased gradually and there was plenty of anecdotal evidence of their impact. However, there was no firm data to support these views.

Councillor Burley stated that a problem had been that the authority had not planned to mainstream the service. She was aware of impact of the wardens as reflected in the feedback she received from the community. She asked who the advisor would be.

Brian Holland agreed that the sustainability of the funding needed to be addressed and this had been one of the prime drivers for the work outlined in the note. He added that the advisor was part of a free service offered by the government office and that they were in the process of appointing. He re-iterated that there was no statistically

significant data to back-up the anecdotal evidence of the wardens' impact and he highlighted that this was a partnership issue and would impact on the partners' budget setting processes.

Councillor Perry stated that he was impressed by the wardens scheme and he was aware that they were anecdotally effective, but he agreed that it was a decision for the partnership. He added that he was sceptical about the future and was yet to be convinced by neighbourhood policing and the police's commitment to numbers of community officers. He also highlighted the issue of accreditation of wardens in order for them to be able to issue spot fines. With regard to street champions, he informed the panel that they were about to be trialled in 3 local neighbourhood partnerships and these trials would be evaluated.

Councillor Bott asked how the new Police Community Service Officers were being funded and how many does the authority have.

Brian Holland replied that they were funded by central government and 40 officers were due in November.

Councillor Burley expressed her concerns over the street champions scheme and the possibility of vigilantism. Further, she did not want the scheme to detract from the role of the elected members. Finally, she asked if it would be possible for the wardens to present at the next panel meeting.

Councillor K. Phillips replied that the wardens had no records and frequently received no feedback on issues they reported on.

Councillor Perry felt that members would benefit from looking at the scheme and it would be a valuable experience.

Brian Holland stated that the issue distilled down to a pragmatic point. Wardens do give support to the community, but how is that to be made sustainable. Also, it may be possible that the money could be spent more wisely through a policy driven budget. He added that the report would provide information to feed into these policy decisions.

#### AGREED

- That the community wardens service be invited to present at the next meeting of the panel, 7 December 2006

#### 32.5 Safer Walsall Borough Partnership

Brian Holland gave a presentation outlining the scope of the partnership and highlighting the progress made towards agreed targets.

(annexed)

Councillor K. Phillips thanked Brian Holland for the presentation and stated that she had found it really interesting. She then asked whether Walsall Courts had any specific domestic abuse courts.

Brian Holland replied that they had, but there were issues around scheduling arrangements that needed to be addressed as there were bottlenecks in the procedure.

Councillor Burley also welcomed the presentation but asked about the community liaison officers as she was not aware of them.

Brian Holland replied that these were working with Julie Balls team in order to develop initiatives in the Local Neighbourhood Partnership areas, through community action groups, in order to promote crime prevention measures and tackle both the fear of crime and actual crime and disorder levels within our communities.

Councillor Burley asked if there were still problems with the process of accessing Lantern House.

Alan Jarvis replied that the waiting time for access had been brought down from 3 months to 3 days; referral to prescription. This compares favourably with national targets of 5 days.

Councillor Perry highlighted that domestic violence had risen by 66% over the summer period and that the 2 police Operational Command Units had amongst the highest figures in the West Midlands. Domestic violence had already been highlighted as a stretch target within the Local Area Agreement and he had asked for a strategy to be presented to cabinet for its consideration. Although not a key decision issue he had argued that the authority needed to take a lead role in addressing the issues. He added that he would be championing the issue at cabinet level and was also looking for a lead within scrutiny.

Councillor Burley replied that she had seen the strategy within the cabinet papers and that she felt that it was a very good piece of work. However, she was also concerned about the level of unreported domestic violence, especially within the Asian community.

Councillor Perry asked if scrutiny could play a role in scrutinising the stretch target.

Brian Holland added that if members wished to see the domestic violence profile, he would be happy to make it available.

Councillor Griffiths agreed that the issue needed further investigation.

## AGREED

- That the panel receive regular updates on progress towards the Local Area Agreement stretch target for the reduction of domestic violence.

## 33/2006. KEY DISCUSSION ITEMS

### 33.1 Discarded drug needles

Alan Jarvis spoke to the report previously circulated and asked members if they had any questions.

(annexed)



Councillor Woodruff stated that she was well aware of how effective the team were. She asked how the team was financed and how they would move forward.

Alan Jarvis replied that the team had shifted its emphasis to partnership working, which had greatly reduced the running costs of the team. It was felt that increased partnership working, with agencies such as Street Pride and Addaction, would be the way forward.

Councillor Woodruff then asked why only 9 pharmacies had been chosen for the needle exchange programme.

Alan Jarvis replied that Addaction had found the number manageable and a mapping exercise had shown that there was borough wide coverage, apart from the Brownhills area where a further 2 to 3 pharmacies were being approach to fill the need.

Councillor Woodruff expressed concerns over the health and safety of street-care employees with respect to vaccination against hepatitis B/C. She emphasised that the council had a duty of care in this respect.

Brian Holland stated that it was often easy to be judgemental, but there were very real problems in Walsall that would need radical measures to address. He added that the team were working very well, do a tremendous job in difficult circumstances.

Alan Jarvis added that the team were confronting the issues head on and not sweeping them under the carpet. They also welcomed any opportunity for an open and honest debate of the issues.

Councillor Towe asked for clarification of what people should do if they found a needle.

Alan Jarvis replied that the first contact should be through Street Pride. The team were mostly employed to clear highlighted black spots where they would do mass pickups. However, it was extremely encouraging that the methods employed during these pickups were actually engaging with the users. This was actually a unique occurrence for such a service.

Councillor Perry stated that he was looking to move proposals forward, but highlighted the need to tackle the lack of understanding amongst the public.

Alan Jarvis added that any new proposal would be subject to a full public consultation before any actions were taken, such as the provision of drug consumption rooms.

Councillor K. Phillips stated that she was really pleased with progress and she felt that the council had suddenly woken up to the issues. She also felt there was a need to publicise the successes.

Alan Jarvis replied that publicity could sometimes be a double-edged sword for the team, but he would welcome it.

Councillor Bott asked whether the panel could visit Addaction.

Alan Jarvis replied it would feed back the request and liaise with officers to facilitate a visit.

## AGREED

- That a date be organised for members of the panel visit Addaction.

### 33.2 Voluntary sector grants – options for future development

Councillor Towe stated that the panel had previously looked at this issue and the report covered some one the items that the panel had highlighted.

Julie Ball gave an overview of the paper, previously circulated and highlighted the need for partner involvement to work with the simplified forms. She added a community cash scheme was being developed where Local Neighbourhood Partnerships could perform outreach work. An initial figure of £1,200 per ward was proposed.

(annexed)

Councillor Towe welcomed this but would have liked to have seen £1,500 per ward.

Julie Ball stated that this money would give Local Neighbourhood Partnerships choices for their areas and the funding could be increased incrementally.

Councillors Towe and Burley welcomed the proposal as a good start.

Councillor Burley asked how the Local Neighbourhood Partnerships would advertise the scheme.

Julie Ball replied that officer support from the Local Neighbourhood Partnership teams would help set up grant application panels.

Councillor Burley asked if this would be a separate funding stream for the Local Neighbourhood Partnerships.

Julie Ball replied that it would be, but the Local Neighbourhood Partnerships could combine the two.

Councillor Griffiths asked about access to the small sparks funds.

Julie Ball replied that the small sparks fund came through Health, Social Care and Inclusion, but she would feed back to the panel on that.

34/2006. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

## AGREED

- That the next meeting of the panel will be held on 28 November 2006 for budget conferencing followed by a standard panel meeting on 7 December 2006.

Their being no other business the meeting terminated at 8.50 p.m.