

COMMUNITY SERVICES AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

Wednesday, 20 November 2013, at 6pm in a Conference Room of the Council House

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

Portfolio Holders present Councillor Towe – Finance
Councillor Arif – Environment
Councillor Ali – Public Health and Protection
Councillor Andrew – Regeneration and Transport

Officers present Jamie Morris – Executive Director (Neighbourhoods)
Keith Stone – Assistant Director (Neighbourhoods)
Chris Holliday – Head of Leisure and Community Health
Jackie Groves – Service Manager
Chris Knowles – Finance Manager
Nikki Gough – Committee Governance and Business
Manager
Jamie-Ann Edwards – The Head of Probation Service

124/13 Apologies

Apologies were received on behalf of Councillors Creaney and Shires.

125/13 Substitutions

There were no substitutions for the duration of the meeting.

126/13 Declarations of interest and party whip

There were no declarations of interest or party whip.

127/13 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 October 2013 were approved as a true and accurate record.

128/13 Overview of Staffordshire and West Midlands Probation – Walsall Local Delivery Unit

The Head of Probation presented the report (annexed). Members were informed that Walsall was successful in its delivery of interventions to reduce reoffending. Walsall was ranked 15th out of 203 authorities with a reoffending rate of 7.35%. The core tasks of the probation service included drug and alcohol issues, domestic violence and identification of risk to children.

Members asked for clarity around the involvement of private providers within the probation service. Members were informed that from April 1st 2014 medium or low risk cases would be managed by the new Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC). The intention of this was to introduce competition into probation work. High risk cases would be retained by the probation service. The Head of Probation stated that this meant introducing competition into probation work and organisations would be asked to bid for work. The detail of the model was not fully understood. Members agreed that it may be useful to have some further information when the procurement exercise has progressed. It was likely that this would be during April 2014.

In response to queries about local education providers, Members were informed that Age UK provided education and training to offenders and, in the future, so would Walsall College. It was also confirmed that the assessment of risk of an individual would remain with the national probation service.

Councillor Arif asked for further information on the 'Caldmore Village Centre', and it was questioned if this should read 'Caldmore Village Festival Group'? The Head of the Probation service agreed to provide this information to Councillor Arif.

Resolved

That: -

1. further report be considered by the Panel reporting on the increasing involvement of the private sector in probation services upon the completion of the procurement exercise.
2. The Head of Probation clarify the name of the Caldmore based voluntary and community sector organisation with Councillor Arif.

It was agreed that item 8 is received prior to item 6.

129/13 Draft Revenue Budget and Capital Programme 2014/15

The Chair welcomed Portfolio Holders and invited them to address the Panel. The Portfolio Holder (Resources) thanked the Chair and stated that clearly the Council needed to save money. The Executive Director outlined the budget process for scrutiny.

In response to queries from the Panel, the following response were provided: -

- A total net council tax requirement of £85.40m was based on a 0% tax rise
- The proposal to 'enable the local history centre and the new art gallery to develop their collections' in the draft capital programme – Leisure and Culture Portfolio (reserve list) was intended to rationalise the use of storage and it was confirmed that Officers would look to existing accommodation. It was emphasised that this was on the reserve list.
- The Libraries Universal Digital Offer had been proposed to ensure libraries are up to date with modern technology.
- The proposal to provide a new car park on Lucknow Road and the consultation of the car park was queried by Members. Officers confirmed that this simply meant that provision had been made in the capital programme for the scheme.
- Officers clarified that there are 1300-1400 statutory duties that the Council discharged and there may be choices as to how these services are delivered.
- Raising the age profile of fleet vehicles from 5 to 7 years would provide better value for money.
- The contractual inflation was for a huge number of services and was a normal part of waste disposal contracting.
- Items from Walsall museum would not be destroyed but any future items may not be saved for future public benefit.
- It was likely that display equipment purchased through the Heritage Lottery Fund would be redisplayed elsewhere and so there would not be a requirement for the cost to be repaid.
- Disabled access to graves would still be available but it may be that appointments would need to be booked.
- The removal of subsidies to sports users for the maintenance of sports facilities meant that where sports clubs regularly and sometimes exclusively used council pitches it may be that the clubs pay a contribution to the maintenance of the sites.
- Tarmac had reduced the cost of the contract rates.

A Member expressed concern that charges were being increased for Bereavement and Registration Services, and this was not in exchange for an improved service. Members asked for further information on the proposal to reduce subsidies for the maintenance of sports facilities and which sites this would affect. It was agreed that this information would be sent to all Members of the Panel.

Resolved

That: -

1. Members be provided with further information on the proposal to reduce subsidies for the maintenance of sports facilities and which sites this would affect;
2. the report was noted.

130/13 School Catering Working Group

The Head of Leisure and Community Health presented the report (annexed) and informed Members that this report updated the Panel on the progress of the recommendations made by the School Catering Working Group. In response to the working group's recommendations the Panel were informed that the school catering service complied with the School Food Trusts standards for nutrition. The School Meal take up was close to 'best in class' at 86%. The Food Dudes Programme was continued to be provided in 29 schools with 3 more due to start.

Members discussed the budget proposal to operate a full cost recovery from schools for school meals. The Government plans for all key stage 1 children to have a free school meal from September 2014 was discussed, although it was acknowledged that the implications for schools and funding arrangements had not yet been released.

The Executive Director for Neighbourhood Services stated that the key message was that if the school meals service was operating at full cost recovery, there would be no net cost to the Council and this meant the service would continue to operate. Schools were able to receive different services and request variations to other schools.

In response to concern raised about 'food dudes' and children with allergies, The Catering Manger stated that she would raise this with the operators.

Resolved:

That:

1. The School Catering Manager raise the issue of ensuring the needs of children with allergies are met within the 'Food Dudes' programme;
2. The report be noted.

131/13 Quarter 2 Financial Monitoring Position 2013/14

The Finance Manager presented the report (annexed), which summarised the predicted revenue and capital position for 2013/14, based on the performance for quarter 2 for services within the remit of the Community Services and Environment Scrutiny and Performance Panel.

Members were informed that there was an overspend of £397k. This was largely attributed to the underachievement of car parking revenue and the underachievement of savings targets relating to anti-social behaviour.

Members asked for further information on the Markinson decision. It was agreed that this would be circulated to all Members by the Finance Manager.

Councillor Illmann-Walker raised concerns at the quality of work completed at a car park, The Executive Director agreed to have a conversation with him outside of the meeting.

It was agreed that the Panel would receive further information on the car park strategy at a future meeting.

Resolved:

That:

1. Members be provided with further information on the 'Markinson Decision';
2. The Executive Directors (Neighbourhoods) discuss the quality of workmanship at a car park with Councillor Illmann-Walker;
3. The Car Park Strategy be considered at a future meeting of the Panel;
4. The report be noted.

132/13 Work Programme 2013/14 and Forward Plan

Resolved:

That the following items be considered at the 7 January 2013 meeting of the Panel:

1. Play Strategy
2. Coroner Services
3. Willenhall lawn cemetery extension feasibility study

133/13 Date of next meeting

It was noted that the date of the next meeting was 7 January 2014 at 6pm.

The meeting closed at 7.45 p.m.

Chairman

Date: