

REGENERATION SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

Thursday 23 September 2010 AT 6.00 P.M in a Conference Room at the Council House

Panel Members Present Councillor D. Pitt (Chair)
 Councillor D. Anson (Vice-Chair)
 Councillor I. Azam
 Councillor C. Creaney
 Councillor S. Coughlan
 Councillor I. Shires

Officers Present Tim Johnson – Executive Director (Regeneration)
 Mike Tichford – Assistant Director (Regeneration)
 Mark Lavender – Head of Strategic Regeneration
 Kevin Kendall – Head of Property Services
 David Lockwood – Housing Standards and Improvement
 Manager
 Chris Knowles – Lead Accountant
 Mike Spearman – Housing Standards Officers
 Leshia Chetty – Asset Management Project Manager
 Craig Goodall – Scrutiny Officer

16/10 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors M. Ahmed, D. Coughlan and L. Harrison.

17/10 SUBSTITUTIONS

Councillor C. Creaney substituted for Councillor D. Coughlan.

18/10 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

Councillor S. Coughlan and C. Creaney each declared a personal interest in Item 9 'Local Economic Partnership'.

19/10 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 24 June 2010, copies having been previously circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

(annexed)

20/10 ASSET MANAGEMENT 2010

Members were updated on the latest situation with the Asset Management 2010 project.

The Head of Property Services gave a presentation (annexed) explaining the key stages of the asset management programme.

Members discussed the benefits and potential problems that could be realised by transferring assets to the local community. It was suggested that a joint piece of scrutiny researching options with the Community Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel could take place.

Financial savings through energy efficiency were discussed. Members requested further information on the '1010' scheme whereby some local authorities were aiming to save 10% of their energy costs during 2010. The Head of Property Services explained that the Council 'Carbon Management Plan' planned to reduce the Councils energy expenditure by 40%.

RESOLVED:

That:

1. the Asset Management plan be considered at the 28 October 2010 Panel meeting;

and;

2. Members be provided with further information on the '1010' energy efficiency project.

21/10 ENFORCEMENT AND PRIVATE PROPERTIES

Members were provided with a summary of the current legal powers that were available to the Council when negotiation proves unsuccessful with landlords of privately rented dwellings. The Panel also considered a draft 'Housing Standards Enforcement Policy'.

The Housing Standards and Improvement Manager explained the range and numbers of privately rented properties in the borough, the numbers and types of complaints and problems encountered and the approach taken to resolving problems.

The following are the principle points from the ensuing discussion:

- 95% of complaints were from tenants with the remaining 5% from landlords.
- Complaints were processed through a priority matrix which dictated the required speed of response.
- Houses in multiple occupation (HMO) were a priority as they were recognised as high risk. There were many deaths in HMOs nationally each year so it was important that properties were made safe and met required standards.
- Tenants committing anti-social behaviour (ASB) were subject to usual

policies and procedures as any other resident. Landlords would be encouraged to have tenancy conditions to try and reduce or prevent problems.

- The Council could generally only encourage property owners to take action with problems occurring in vacant dwellings. This could include notifying their mortgage provider that the property was falling into disrepair. There were legal steps that could be taken, including orders to demolish properties, but these were expensive and used as a last resort.
- Funding from the Regional Housing Agency was received for grants and emergency remedial works.
- The Fire and Rescue Service took the lead on fire safety standards and equipment for flats, HMOs over commercial properties.
- Education of tenants was recognised as a key way to improve housing standards and information booklets were available across the borough. Members suggested that these were made available in libraries.

RESOLVED:

That:

- 1. the draft 'Housing Standards and Improvement Policy' be supported and sent to Cabinet for adoption;**
- 2. the housing guide to tenants be made available in all local libraries;**
and;
- 3. the Housing Standards and Improvement Manager to contact Councillor Ian Shires about his local housing problem.**

22/10 LOCAL ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT

The Panel were informed about work underway to develop a local economic assessment (LEA) of Walsall as required by the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.

The Head of Strategic Regeneration gave a presentation (annexed) explaining the need and purpose of the LEA. He explained that producing the LEA would enable a greater understanding of local conditions which could then be utilised to attract inward investment. He also highlighted ten economic challenges for Walsall.

The following are the principle points from the ensuing discussion:

- The Walsall economy was shrinking.
- The information provided by the LEA would feed into the Joint Core Strategy.
- The importance of utilising local area meetings to tackle Walsall economic challenges was discussed. Members felt that area meetings could be more engaged with the boroughs strategic aims and objectives.

- It was suggested that the focus of Willenhall Project Reference Group should change to employment rather than the current focus of housing.

RESOLVED:

That:

- 1. the Panel support the work and approach taken in developing the local economic assessment;**
 - 2. support the ten key economic challenges identified and request that the full scope of these challenges be identified;**
 - 3. the Panel recognise the importance of local involvement in the local economic assessment through methods, such as but not exclusive to, informal project reference groups and neighbourhood management meetings;**
 - 4. the minutes from the local economic assessment focus group be circulated to Panel Members for information;**
- and;**
- 5. the local economic assessment be considered at a future Panel meeting.**

23/10 LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIPS

Members were informed about the intention to create a Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) for the black country. The aim of a LEP is to form a partnership where local authorities and businesses work together to lead the development of local economic revival.

The Executive Director (Regeneration) explained that since the abolition of Advantage West Midlands there was a recognition regionally that there was still a need for local authorities and business to work together at a strategic level. He also highlighted the key themes of the LEP and the need to consider governance arrangements for transferring local views into the new regional body.

RESOLVED:

That:

- 1. the Panel support the submission of the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership proposal;**
- and;**
- 2. the Panel consider how the governance arrangements for seeking and**

inputting local views into the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership.

24/10 QUARTER 1 FINANCIAL MONITORING POSITION FOR 2010/11

Members were informed of the predicted revenue and capital outturn position for 2010/11, based on performance for quarter 1 (April to June 2010), for services within the remit of the Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel.

The Lead Accountant reported that there was currently a predicted revenue underspend of £34,000 and a forecast capital underspend of £1.29m. He explained that the capital underspend had in the main been caused by the need to make additional savings following the emergency budget.

Following a question from a Member of the Panel the Lead Accountant explained that there was a balance of £0 for 'Heating Replacement at Collingwood' as there was no agreed budget for the works.

25/10 BUDGET SETTING FRAMEWORK AND TIMETABLE 2011/12 – 2014/15

Members were informed of the budget setting framework for the budget for 2011/12 – 2014/15 as reported to Cabinet on 16 September 2010.

The Lead Accountant explained the budget setting process including the resource allocation project, working smarter strands and the budget setting timetable.

The Assistant Director (Regeneration) noted that the resource allocation project had established that the Regeneration Directorate matched the mean spending for comparable authorities.

The Panel discussed the importance of all Members being kept informed of important budget information as it was received.

RESOLVED:

That Members be informed of all important financial information impacting on the Council as soon as practicable.

26/10 WORK PROGRAMME 2010/11

The Panel considered their work programme and the latest version of Cabinets Forward Plan of key decisions.

RESOLVED:

That a report on New Deal for Communities be considered at the 28 October 2010 meeting of the Panel.

27/10 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was noted as 28 October 2010.

The meeting closed at 7.54 p.m.

Signed:

Date: