

NORTH WALSALL AREA PANEL MEETING

Wednesday, 18 September, 2013 at 6.00 p.m.

Beechdale Lifelong Learning Centre, Stephenson Square, Beechdale Estate, WS2 7DY

Present

Councillor Oliver (Chairman)
Councillor Westley (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Jukes
Councillor Phillips
Councillor Smith
Councillor Thomas

Officers

Michael Greenfield, Area Manager
Lynne Hughes, Area Manager – Community Safety
Laura Terry - Partnerships Officer
Dave Edwards - Traffic Management
Matthew Underhill, Committee Governance & Business Manager

12/13 **Apologies**

Apologies for the duration of the meeting were received from Councillor J. Fitzpatrick, Councillor S. Fitzpatrick, Councillor Jeavons, Councillor Harrison and Councillor Young

13/13 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest

14/13 **Local Government (Access to Information) Act, 1985 (as amended)**

There were no items to be considered in private session.

15/13 **Minutes**

The meeting considered the minutes of the meeting that took place on 3 July, 2013

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 3 July 2013, copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

16/13

Community Safety Plan

The Chair explained that this item would be considered earlier than in published agenda. The Area Manager – Community Safety introduced the briefing.

It was explained that following the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 local partners were required to work together to tackle crime and disorder. These responsible authorities include the council and the police. From this partnership work key local priorities were identified to inform the local Community Safety Plan. The current Plan for Walsall runs from 2011-2014 with an annual refresh taking place. The key strategic priorities include tackling violent crime, domestic violence, acquisitive crime, town centre violence and alcohol and substance misuse, together with community cohesion and anti-terrorism. In relation to acquisitive crime it was explained that a key element of addressing this issue was effective communication with residents to encourage them to lock sheds and not leave windows open.

It was explained that 2012/13 was proving to be a particularly successful period for reported incidents of crime in Walsall. This was especially notable given that periods of increased economic hardship tended to result in higher levels of crime. For example, there has been a 15.4% fall in the number of reported crimes, or three thousand fewer reported crimes. While reported incidents of ASB fell by 20%. It was explained that Walsall had the biggest reduction in overall reported crime across the region. This reduction was attributed to a number of operations which sought to tackle a range of different types of crimes including violent crime and the theft of cars from residential properties.

It was explained that the Walsall Intelligence Network brought together analysts from across the town to share data and enable the local Police and Crime Board to better understand how resources should be used. While going forward it was explained that the Police and Crime Commissioner was keen to increase the number front line officers.

The Area Panel's representative on the Police and Crime Board highlighted a number of issues. This included the police not advising whg when they had taken action against whg tenants. He also expressed concern regarding a lack of feedback at meetings on how local issues including ASB were being addressed. Officers explained that this might be down to the mechanics of meetings with queries raised at one meeting dealt with at the next. However, officers would also be able to respond to individual queries raised by Members outside of meetings. In addition, a working group has been established to seek to further address the issue of ASB. The Member also expressed concern regarding the frequency with which personnel within the local Bloxwich community team changed. This meant that it was difficult to establish effective long-term working relationships. He also pointed out that from the perspective of the community these changes created a further barrier for the reporting of crime as some officers were more community minded than others. This might also partly explain the fall in reported crime. Other Panel Members agreed and identified a lack of confidence that action would be taken for residents electing not to report incidents of crime, or even fear of reprisals discouraging them from making such reports. However, some Members also identified the positive impact of partnership work between whg, the council and the police. While a recent event held in Beechdale, where Police Community Service Officers explained the various requirements related to reporting a crime to local residents, was hailed a success.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

Funding Report

The report of the Partnership Manager was submitted:-

It was explained that carry-over of funding for projects from the previous financial year had now been approved. It was also explained that an evaluation of those projects which have already been approved prior to the change in the approval process would be undertaken. For example, feedback was sought in relation to the Bentley Lane Environmental Project which included a Community Payback clear up of the area. The Keep Out of the Cold project was a scheme to provide young people with breakfast and activities prior to school based in Blakenall Community Centre two or three days a week. The scheme is proving successful and there are plans to extend it to elsewhere in the borough. It was explained that a high number of people have been engaged with as a result of this project and this will enable a full evaluation of its performance.

In relation to projects approved by the Panel at their previous meeting it was explained that an evaluation of the Positive Activities Summer Programme was underway, this will include an assessment of the impact of the work being undertaken. It was also explained that a report regarding the Summer Programme would be received at the Panel's next meeting.

In relation to new applications it was explained that the Area Manager had applied for umbrella funding of £1,200 for the maintenance and repair of the domehawk cameras.

The Panel approved the application.

It was explained that an application had been received by the Life Education Centres (LEC) who deliver a range of age appropriate

interventions for young people. Working with five primary schools in North Walsall the LEC will target young people and educate them about alcohol and drug misuse, with the funding request £2,045. The Chair queried why funding for this work was being sought when it would form part of the school curriculum. Officers explained that it this work was intended to enhance the work undertaken on the curriculum. However, officers agreed to provide guidance on how this work will fit in with the curriculum.

Councillor Westley declared an interest as he is a Governor of one of the schools. The Panel approved the application.

An application had also been made by Environmental Health for the purchase of five covert cameras as part of Operation Capture to help tackle fly tipping.

The Panel approved the application.

An application had been received from Highways for the installation of a community dropped kerb to the south side of Stoney Lane. It was explained that the cost of the scheme would be determined by the scheme chosen by Members (either £2,240 or £5,340) with the use of a tactile surface the more costly of the two options. Members considered the merits of the two options and also the specific need for a dropped kerb. A Member highlighted the benefit of a dropped kerb for wheelchair access, while another explained he would support the application on the basis that it would allow access to King George's park. Members also expressed concerns regarding the danger of a precedent being set whereby applications would be received for similar schemes elsewhere. The Chair also wanted confirmation that there was no other council funding available to pay for these works.

The Panel agreed to defer the item until the next meeting while officers sought confirmation that these works could not be funded by other council resources.

An application had been received from the Friends of Around The Lea resident group for purchase of bulbs and tools. The objective was to improve The Lea to encourage families to use it. Members acknowledged the hard work and commitment of the resident group.

The Panel approved the application.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

18/13

Area Manager Update

The report of the Area Manager was submitted:-

In relation to Safer Walsall Workgroup it as explained that the Dispersal Order covering Stephenson Square to Reedswood Park had been effectively implemented by the police. At Stephenson Square a Member noted that a criminal incident had taken place recently. In addition stopping Doorstep Crime had been promoted through the Beechdale Community Housing (BCH) newsletter.

However, a camera had been stolen from Forest Lane on Saturday 10th August 2013.

It was also explained that a £5k monthly allocation for the West Midlands of Proceeds of Crime Act Funding has been allocated to the region. Officers were considering proposing a bid for some of this funding for repairs to the cricket pitch in Birchills Leamore. In relation to the deployment of domehawk cameras it was explained that where cameras had developed a fault they would be left in place to act as a deterrent, while arrangements were being made for their repair.

In relation to the Positive Activities Workgroup it was explained that this included the IYPSS Summer Activities Programme, as well as Detached sessions in Coalpool/ Harden which have included sports related trips to Woodlands in Streetly. Positive Activities work has also included engagement with young people in Mary/ Lewis Street regarding existing cricket facilities in Birchills (Birch Street).

In relation to the Economic Workgroup it was explained that a key activity was seeking the participation of businesses in North Walsall in an apprenticeship scheme. A Member expressed concern regarding the availability of apprenticeships to young people and the danger of some being excluded for being “over-qualified”.

In relation to the Health Working Group it was explained that work included tackling teenage pregnancy. It had been noted that a rise in teenage pregnancy rates had resulted from a worker being temporarily removed from the local programme, that worker was now returning.

It was agreed that the Panel would receive guidance regarding weight management programmes and other work being undertaken to tackle obesity at its next meeting.

In relation to the work stream priority – creating cleaner and tidier neighbourhoods it was explained that various officers had undertaken a walk of Mill Lane Nature Reserve. A range of actions were identified, including cutting back of shrubs. It was also explained that Operation Fridge was aimed at reducing the fly tipping of fridges by all fridges in vehicles being marked with a UV pen and the driver and occupant’s details recorded. In relation to Whateley Road Playing Fields it was explained that whg and the council were working together to take action against the resident who has fenced off an area for their own use. It was also explained that a Local Community Leader Campaign Day will be taking place on 21/22nd September. This is where young people go into Walsall town centre to deliver their campaigns. A Member also praised whg for their support and funding of skip days.

In relation to scrap metal Members identified ongoing concerns regarding roads which were dominated by scrap collection vehicles which will create parking difficulties for other residents, as well as properties where the occupant was amassing large amounts of scrap metal. However, Members also acknowledged the benefit of the activities of legitimate scrap metal dealers, which included the effective recycling of unwanted items.

A Member explained that Beechdale residents are currently organising a petition in response to concerns regarding the potential creation of traffic issues in relation to the proposal for the construction of a facility by BH Energy Gap.

In relation to Big Local Mossley a Member explained that the steering group would be meeting shortly to determine how to spend the £20,000 available for promoting £1m funding that will be made available to residents in Mossley

Resolved

That the report be noted.

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19/13

Participatory budgeting/ Verge parking

Officers explained that the objective of Participatory Budgeting (PB) was to involve local people in making decisions regarding funding priorities. It was further explained that across Walsall there is an initial focus for the PB process on issues around cleaner and greener services and highway maintenance, including verge parking. It was also explained that for 2013/14 there was a borough wide allocation of £250,000 for verge parking schemes, this equates to £41,600 per Area Partnership. A list of potential verge parking sites has also been produced. It is proposed that local residents will be informed about the process and invited to vote on their preferred scheme. The result of this vote will then be considered at

the next appropriate Area Panel for ratification. However, it was stressed that any approved scheme would still require feasibility work, including in relation to planning permission and other legal and regulatory conditions, and therefore might not go ahead.

The Chair expressed a number of concerns with the proposals. He felt that the funding allocation was not equitable given the size of population of North Walsall, while he pointed out that a number of the proposed schemes were significantly in excess of the £41,600 allocation that the area would receive. It was therefore very possible that local residents would vote for a scheme that was not deliverable, with the danger that their expectations would be raised and then dashed. Officers also confirmed that around 20% should be added to the quoted cost of the proposed schemes. The Chair noted that again this might mean that a voted for scheme would undeliverable if the funding was not available. The Chair also expressed concern that other key local issues, such as activities for young people, did not feature in the PB process. He was also concerned about the significant but potentially ultimately fruitless work that officers might be required to undertake in relation to a scheme should it not prove viable. Members expressed the concern that they did not consider that this was a proper exercise in PB, therefore they did not wish to participate in the exercise of choosing the relevant scheme. Instead the Panel requested guidance with priority options by officers based on relevant criteria. Members identified other roads within North Walsall that might prove to be worthy of consideration for a verge parking scheme. Officers also explained that of the existing list alternative action could be taken in some cases. For example, where putting in provision to ensure a bin wagon could travel down a residential road without any difficulty.

It was agreed that officers would produce a revised list of possible schemes for the Panel's consideration at a future meeting. This process would include reviewing any suggestions for schemes by Members.

Resolved

That officers produce a revised list of possible verge parking schemes for the Panel's consideration at a future meeting.

Termination of the meeting

The meeting terminated at 7.50 p.m.

Chairman:

Date: