

AT A MEETING
- of the
**REGENERATION, HOUSING,
ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY SAFETY
SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL**

held at The Council House, Walsall on
Tuesday 26 April 2005 at 6.00pm

PRESENT

Councillor I Shires (Chairman)
Councillor Yasin (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Coughlan
Councillor Harrison
Councillor Johnson
Councillor Robinson
Councillor Rose
Councillor Twedde
Councillor Underhill

125. CHANGES IN MEMBERSHIP

The following changes in membership were noted for the duration of the meeting: -

Delete: Councillor Coughlan
Substitute: Councillor Underhill

Delete: Councillor Aslam
Substitute: Councillor Rose

126. APOLOGIES

Apologies for non attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillor Harris.

127. RECEIPT OF DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

The members of political groups represented on the panel indicated that there were no whipping arrangements for any of the political parties in respect of the items on the agenda. There were no declarations of interest.

MINUTES

128. RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meetings held on 16 March and 18 March 2005 copies having previously been circulated be approved and signed by the chairman as a correct record.

WORKING GROUP FEEDBACK

129. REGENERATION WORKING GROUP

Members were advised that a working group meeting has been arranged to take place at 3.00 p.m. on 17 May 2005 to which a demonstration of the planning accessibility software would be made.

130. TELECOMMUNICATION MAST WORKING GROUP

Councillor Shires advised the panel that a telecommunication mast workshop had been held at Bescot Stadium on that afternoon and gave his apologies for non attendance. Councillor Johnson advised that the event had finished quite late in the afternoon and members had just travelled back from Bescot Stadium. She said it was disappointing that only eleven members had attended the member development event and gave a brief verbal summary of the afternoon's events. She advised that a number of actions from the meeting would be pursued through the work of the telecommunications work group in particular: -

- The rollout of information relating to mobile phone operators plans for the year.
- The involvement of Local Neighbourhood Partnerships (LNP) in the rollout procedure.
- Investigation of different street furniture such as mini masts and mono poles.
- Mast sharing – the operators had indicated they were willing to mast share but it was felt that further encouragement from members would be required for this to happen.
- Schools becoming involved in joint working to consider school bullying videos on phones and the age of children and ability to have phones in schools.

She said the event had been very positive. David Elsworthy advised the panel that the discussion had been open, frank and honest and apart from a vodafone representative all other mobile phone operators had been represented at the event in addition to the mobile phone operator's association representative. He said it was a very informative session and that members, and mobile phone operators had benefited from the event and had learned from each other. He said that members had emphasised the desire to scrutinise the telecommunications industries rollout plan which would be available in October which indicates where new masts are needed. He said it

would be very good to include this piece of work in the scrutiny work programme. He emphasised the benefits for members of capturing the rollout plans at an early stage and that the mobile phone operators were quite prepared for local phone industry representatives to come and talk to the Local Neighbourhood Partnerships about the rollout plans. He said that Local Neighbourhood Partnerships with their local knowledge would be able to suggest places that were not advisable for telecommunication masts and that a two way relationship would be beneficial to both parties.

Mr Elsworthy said that the mobile phone operators had been keen to look at unused land and that the council may wish to look at council land for placement of telecommunication masts. He said also discussed in detail at the workshop was the design of masts and the possible use of art work to disguise the masts in local areas. Members had seen this as a positive move forward marrying the telecommunication industries need for further masts with regeneration and that the operators were very keen to work with the council and to provide further information to development control committee on the types of mast available. In conclusion he said that the event had been a great success and that all in attendance had left the workshop very much wiser.

Councillor Robinson asked if the telecommunication masts were safe. In response Mr Elsworthy advised that a number of separate studies had been commissioned and that scientists would never say that they are 100% safe, however, if telecommunication masts are within the ICNIRP guidelines then they were relatively safe. He advised that it had been recognised that the most dangerous piece of equipment was the telephone handset itself as this had to charge up to receive radio signals and that the further away from the phone the more charge would have to be released to reach the mast.

Councillor Shires welcomed the communication with operators and said it was important to grasp the opportunity to negotiate at the earliest opportunity. He welcomed the willingness of telecommunication operators to work with the council.

131. CPA IMPROVEMENT PLAN WORKING GROUP

The notes of the meeting 24 April 2005 were submitted: - see annexed. Members received the notes of the CPA Improvement Plan working group.

132. ENVIRONMENT IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The Environment Improvement Plan document was submitted:
(see annexed.)

Keith Stone was in attendance to outline the improvement plan document. He explained that the document was a response to the environment inspection and that any actions already complete were included in the document to complete an audit trail of actions. He gave examples from within the document of how the improvement plan action would address and respond to the issues indicated in the inspection report and invited questions from members relating to the document. There followed a number of questions

from members in relation to un-adopted roads and potholes, kerbs and access verges. In response to which Mr Stone advised the asset management plan for the whole of the network was being developed.

Councillor Robinson said the improvement plan was a good news story and it was encouraging that all staff and officers had worked hard to address the issues raised and should be congratulated. In particular he welcomed the communication links with Local Neighbourhood Partnerships and advised that Blakenhall and Bloxwich Local Neighbourhood Partnership had highlighted the environment as one of its key issues. He welcomed the link between the improvement plan, Local Neighbourhood Partnerships and the local community.

Councillor Johnson referred to:-

- section K of the report relating to targets for recycling and composting of household waste. She recognised the improvements in recycling and felt that a lot more recycling should be considered by Walsall Council. She highlighted the concerns of members that the recycling boxes had no lids.
- section M, the inspection of play areas and voiced her concerns that permanent repairs may not be completed within twelve weeks. She emphasised the repairs to walkways should be inspected as many pathways in parks were very muddy. She said the report was fantastic and showed a great way forward for environment services.

Councillor Shires referred to the Local Neighbourhood Partnership links and also welcomed the link from the environment inspection improvement plan to local people. He felt it important that Local Neighbourhood Partnerships each received the report to focus on their specific local issues.

Members agreed that the document could be used as a launch pad to discuss environmental issues in the localities. Councillor Shires referred to page 8 of the document relating to transportation issues and referred this page to the regeneration working group at its next meeting.

Members were informed that the report would be submitted to cabinet at its meeting on 15 June 2005.

133. RESOLVED

That Regeneration, Environment, Housing and Community Safety Scrutiny and Performance Panel agree the environment inspection improvement plan and recommend that when considering the document cabinet take into consideration the comments of this scrutiny panel relating to: -

- Engaging Local Neighbourhood Partnerships and the need to circulate the environment inspection improvement plan to Local Neighbourhood Partnerships as a launch pad for considering environmental issues in their area.

- The need to focus on transportation issues shown on page 8 of the document.
- The issues relating to recycling in particular the need to increase recycling in the borough as outlined in the improvement plan and to consider comments relating to the lack of a lid on the current recycling bins and possible problems arising from open topped recycling bins.
- The need to resurface side roads in addition to main roads
- The need to check that permanent repairs in parks are being completed within twelve weeks as stated in the document and the need to surface paths within parks which are currently muddy.

SAFER WALSALL BOROUGH PARTNERSHIP

134. BEST VALUE REVIEW IMPROVEMENT PLAN PROGRESS UPDATE

Brian Holland was in attendance at the meeting to outline the document previously circulated. He outlined the analysis of the recommendations contained within the best value review of crime and disorder document April 2005: -

(see annexed)

Mr Holland took members through each point contained within the document highlighting the key issues and current position with the work.

Councillor Robinson congratulated him on an excellent report and welcomed the progress made to date. Councillor Shires welcomed the interaction of the officers with local partners through Local Neighbourhood Partnerships and in response to questions by Councillor Shires, Mr Holland advised that partners were making an contribution and almost 50% of the posts are paid for by local partners.

Members discussed the problems of enforcement relating to anti-social behaviour, litter dropping and parking issues and felt that to develop some solutions for these problems would need joint working with partners and other scrutiny panels. Councillor Shires emphasised the lack of facilities for young people resulting in some anti-social behaviour and suggested a joint meeting with Community Organisation, Leisure and Culture to work and highlight some of these issues and to look at youth provision and anti-social behaviour.

In response to Councillor Yasin's questions relating to wardens and funding Mr Holland advised that the Walsall Housing Regeneration Agency provide the warden's service and that Walsall Council commission the service from them. He advised that the SRB funding assist and that NRB funding would also expire at the end of March 2006. Councillor Shires said there was an issue to find sustainable funding for wardens and suggested that there must be a mainstream funding found for the provision of such an important service to the community. It was moved by Councillor Shires, seconded by Councillor Johnson that cabinet consider the possibility of mainstream funding for wardens as part of the budget consultation 2006-7. Members voted unanimously. It was

135. RESOLVED

That cabinet should consider the mainstream funding for wardens as part of the budget consultation 2006-7.

136. REGENERATION AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT DIRECTORATE PLAN

The draft directorate plan was submitted: -
(see annexed)

Keith Stone and Tim Johnson were in attendance to outline the plan. Keith Stone advised members that this document was in response to a realignment of the directorate and was not yet in existence. He outlined the document with a presentation to members.

Members raised a number of questions and concerns relating to the document. It was suggested by the chairman, Councillor Shires that it would be more beneficial to the scrutiny panel to take this document to a special meeting and have a really in-depth discussion and to look carefully at the directorate plan. Councillor Shires suggested further that the two elements of the plan needed separate meetings and suggested two meetings take place, one to consider regeneration issues and the other to consider built environment issues.

Members considered concerns of Councillor Robinson relating to the inclusion of the preferred partner in the document before them and suggested that Fujitsu be invited to the special regeneration meeting to give further information to members on its regeneration proposals. Councillor Shires suggested that Mr Stone and Mr Johnson complete the presentation to this evenings meeting and that two special meetings be arranged in the new municipal year to which Fujitsu would be invited to attend assuming the partnership progresses.

On the conclusion of the presentation Councillor Shires thanked the officers for the presentation.

137. RESOLVED

That two special meetings be arranged to consider the directorate plan and that Fujitsu be invited to attend the regeneration meeting.

138. SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS AND THE ISSUES REGARDING THE
CREMATORIUM AND CEMETERIES

Judith Sunley and Steve Billings were in attendance to give a presentation to members and an opportunity to discuss the proposed course of actions.

Members asked questions relating to the presentation and in particular asked for further information relating to the select committee findings referred to that met to consider crematoria. Members further requested information about

other local authorities' actions following the government select committees findings.

Councillor Shires thanked Judith Sunley for the presentation and suggested that a special meeting be held to look in-depth at the review of bereavement services.

139. RESOLVED

That a special meeting be arranged for the start of the municipal year to consider the review of bereavement services and that the following additional information be brought to the meeting: -

- The report to the Environmental Services Committee highlighting the issues raised by the government select committee report.
- Information about other local authorities' actions in response to the select committee findings.
- Information relating to costs to develop Streetly Crematorium.
- Availability of other external funding.

140. 2005 WEST MIDLANDS LOCAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN SUBMISSION

Martin Yardley was in attendance at the meeting to outline the key issues and proposed approach in respect of the local transportation plan 2005 relating to the Walsall situation. He requested member's comments on the document before them. In response to questions members were informed that officers were looking to work with (Local Neighbourhood Partnerships) and that there was a need to agree the selection criteria.

141. RESOLVED

That members endorsed the local transportation strategy before them.

142. FORWARD PLAN

Members considered the items contained within the forward plan for decisions by cabinet and noted the document.

143. TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 8.30 p.m.