

ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

Tuesday, 26 July 2011 at 6.00 p.m.

Panel Members Present

Councillor R. Carpenter (Chair)
Councillor K. Chambers (substitute for Councillor F. Westley)
Councillor C. Creaney
Councillor B. Douglas-Maul
Councillor S. Fitzpatrick
Councillor G. Illmann-Walker
Councillor J. Murray

Portfolio Holder present

Councillor T. Ansell - Transport and Environment

Officers Present

Jamie Morris	Executive Director, Neighbourhoods
Glyn Oliver	Engineering and Transportation
Neil Picken	Senior Constitutional Services Officer

81/11 APOLOGIES

Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillors F. Westley, M. Munir and V. Woodruff.

82/11 SUBSTITUTIONS

It was noted that Councillor Chambers was substituting for Councillor Westley

83/11 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

None.

84/11 MINUTES

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 16 June, 2011, a copy having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

85/11 ON STREET PARKING

The Executive Director, Neighbourhoods, drew Member's attention to the report as submitted which sought to respond to the petition as submitted by Valerie Vaz, MP. The petition stated:-

“We, the under-signed, are customers who are opposed to the parking restrictions on Ablewell Street. We urge Paul Leighton of Walsall Council to allow us 30 minutes parking amnesty.”

Members were advised that since the report was produced, it had come to light that two Authorities offered a period of amnesty prior to a charge being applied. These Authorities were now seeking to remove this facility as it had caused a great deal of confusion for the public which had led to an increase in complaints. This was particularly problematic in car parks whereby people had to collect their tickets from a machine rather than being automatically issued with a ticket prior to being allowed access through an automatic barrier. Members of the public using car parks whereby you have to walk to collect a ticket wrongly assumed that, as the first 30 minutes were free, they did not need to display a ticket. This was incorrect and had led to fines being issued. Officers advised that allowing a free 30 minute period would be open to abuse as people could keep returning to their vehicles to get a further ticket for a further 30 minute free period.

Members were informed that on-street parking had been introduced for the benefit of motorists and prevent problems such as double parking. People would also park for two hour periods reducing the opportunity for passing trade to park legally for shorter periods of time. It also ensured that off-street parking for long periods was used. There was also a revenue stream which would contribute to the costs of providing and maintaining car parking facilities within Walsall. Ablewell Street was expected to contribute 10% of the £100,000 identified as new income resulting from the introduction of pay and display parking on-street. Should the introduction of 30 minutes free parking be introduced, it would need to be offered at all on-street parking locations within Walsall and not just Ablewell Street. The potential loss of income, together with difficulties in enforcing a 30 minute free parking facility, the problems it could cause for members of the public had led officers to the conclusion that it was not a viable option.

Members questioned the submission of officers and sought clarity round the technical aspects of providing a 30 minute free parking period. Officers advised that the machines would need to be re-configured at a cost of £15,000 - £20,000 to allow different coinage to be accepted. Further costs would be incurred as the software would need to be adjusted. Members stated that whilst they accepted that problems could arise by introducing a 30 minute amnesty period, a solution needed to be found as this was an issue that affected local businesses within the town.

Having regard to the report as submitted, Members:-

Resolved

That the response of the Executive Director, Neighbourhood Services be noted.

86/11 WINTER SERVICE WORKING GROUP

Members were advised that the Working Group had met on two occasions. At its first meeting held on 5th July, 2011, the Working Group met with officers from the Council and considered matters including:-

- The draft Terms of Reference;
- The move to the new depot location at Apex Road, Brownhills;
- The additions to the gritting routes to take into account schools and bus routes;
- The most effective snow clearance methods for the town and district centres;
- Possible reduction of grit bins;
- The Winter Maintenance Service Plan.

At its second meeting held on 13th July, 2011, Members considered in more depth the issues surrounding provision and location of grit bins. As part of this discussion, Members considered the fact that new equipment had been purchased to assist the gritting fleet. This new equipment would enable officers to grit areas previously inaccessible for vehicles which could mean that grit bins may not be required.

The Working Group also received further information on the possible introduction of community gritting, whereby volunteers could be utilised to assist with the service. Members also received views from the Markets Manager and Regeneration Officer on the concept of community gritting and the winter service.

Members were further advised that the Working Group had agreed to consider the provision and location of grit bins again at their next meeting, together with the following matters:-

- New depot and gritting routes;
- Possible additions to the routes;
- Most effective winter service for town and district centres;
- Working time directive.

Members considered the update and it was asked, given the relocation of the depot to the north of the Borough, whether it would be feasible to have sub-depots around the Borough. In response, it was stated that the addition of sub-depots would be at an additional cost. This would include the purchase and ongoing maintenance of JCBs used to fill the gritting vehicles.

Members enquired as to whether grit bins had stickers affixed to them warning people that should they steal grit , it was a criminal offence and they would be liable to prosecution and a fine. Officers advised that this matter could be investigated further by the Working Group .

Resolved

- (1) That the draft Terms of Reference be approved;
- (2) That the progress made by the Winter Service Maintenance Working Group be noted.

87/11 MONITORING OF PROGRESS WITH TOWN CENTRE PARKING WORKING GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS

The Panel noted that the Town Centre Parking Working Group’s report was being submitted to Cabinet on 27th July, 2011.

Resolved

That a further update be considered by the Panel at their meeting scheduled to take place on 8th September, 2011.

88/11 WORK PROGRAMME AND FORWARD PLAN

Resolved

That the Work Programme and Forward Plan be noted.

89/11 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the date and time of the next meeting would be 8 September, 2011 at 6.00 p.m.

The meeting closed at 6.50 p.m.

Chair:.....

Date:.....