

Cabinet – 21 March 2018

Response to the recommendations of the Corporate and Public Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee following petition to secure sites against unauthorised encampments

Portfolio: Councillor Shires – Communities, Leisure and Culture

Related portfolios: Councillor Jones – Clean & Green

Services: Community Protection/ Clean and Green

Wards: All

Key Decision: No

1. Summary

- 1.1 On 11 January 2018, the Corporate and Public Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a petition containing more than 500 signatures that was presented by Councillor Hicken. The petition called on the Council to protect parks and playing fields in Short Heath against unauthorised encampments through physical security measures and injunctions.
- 1.2 The Committee considered a report presented in response to the petition and questioned the Portfolio Holder for Clean and Green and the Portfolio Holder for Communities, Leisure and Culture.
- 1.3 The following recommendations were made by the Committee to be forwarded to Cabinet for the 21 March 2018 meeting:
 2. That, the Cabinet allocate finances in order to undertake preventative measures to parks and green spaces in Willenhall North and Short Heath in consultation with Ward Councillors and residents to secure sites from unauthorised encampments;
 3. In connection with (2) above, the Cabinet carry out a review of preventative measures and strategies in relation to unauthorised encampments across Walsall as a 'spend to save' measure;

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Cabinet agree the response to Corporate and Public Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

3. Response

- 3.1 Cabinet recognises the hard work of officers involved in all aspects of managing unauthorised encampments and the associated clean up of sites. It extends its thanks for the dedication and commitment these officers have shown.

- 3.2 Responses to Recommendations:

That, the Cabinet allocate finances in order to undertake preventative measures to parks and green spaces in Willenhall North and Short Heath in consultation with Ward Councillors and residents to secure sites from unauthorised encampments

In 2016, Cabinet members actively reviewed the approach to managing unauthorised encampments (UEs) in Walsall and committed to strengthen the approach through a series of strategic actions and investments:

In 2016, funding was made available to secure high risk sites through a series of measures. These included strengthening gates and fences and putting in place bunding. A prioritisation process was undertaken using criteria of number and frequency of UEs, size, community impact and clean up costs. A number of sites have now been secured and further works are planned. **Given current financial constraints, it is not possible to secure all sites in Walsall and investment continues to be made on a prioritised basis.**

There is currently no provision within Walsall for those who follow a travelling lifestyle, many of whom are from recognised ethnic groups and for whom this is a recognised way of life. Evidence from other authorities shows that where there is such suitable provision, in the form of a transit site or facilitating stopping for a period in certain locations, the number and frequency of UEs is reduced. Work has commenced to establish if such provision can be made in Walsall.

In connection with (2) above, the Cabinet carry out a review of preventative measures and strategies in relation to unauthorised encampments across Walsall as a 'spend to save' measure

In October 2016, a landmark injunction was secured which restrained named individuals from setting up UEs anywhere in the borough, restrained anyone from setting up a UE on 12 named sites and also restrained any one from engaging in anti social behaviour connected with a UE. This was one of the first such injunctions to be secured in the country. A number of other Authorities, including those in the Black Country have since followed Walsall's innovative approach. Two further injunctions have been secured in response to urgent circumstances, including the protecting of a polling station on the eve of the General Election. Eleven sites were protected in a further injunction which was granted in November 2017, including sites that were in the vicinity of Remembrance Sunday

Parades. These injunctions enable officers to move UEs quickly **however this eviction process is resource intensive. For this reason and for legal reasons this approach cannot be extended to all sites at risk in Walsall.**

Authors

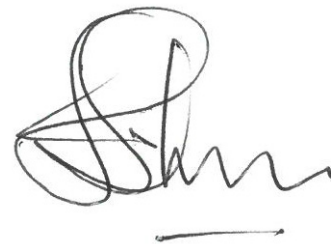
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Simon Neilson
Executive Director

8 March 2018



Councillor Shires
Portfolio holder

8 March 2018