

NEIGHBOURHOODS SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

Thursday 6 December 6 p.m.

Panel Members present Councillor Creaney (Chair)
Councillor Beilby
Councillor Bott
Councillor Mushtaq
Councillor J. Phillips
Councillor Sears
Councillor Woodruff

Officers present Jamie Morris, Executive Director Neighbourhoods
Keith Stone, Assistant Director, Built Environment
Tim Challans, Assistant Director, Leisure, Culture and
Life-long learning
Alison Jarrett, Head of Service Finance
Simon Evans, Performance and Scrutiny Officer
Steve Pretty, Head of Engineering and Transportation
Mark Rickard, Group Leader, Transportation
Jo Whiting, Senior Rights of Way Officer
Vanessa Holding, Directorate Account Manager -
Performance

49/07 APOLOGIES

Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillors Towe and Beeley

50/07 SUBSTITUTIONS

- There were no substitution(s) for the duration of this meeting.

51/07 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest or party whip identified at this meeting.

52/07 Late item – Budget Review from Corporate Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel

Councillor Creaney introduced the item and asked members to consider the request made by the Corporate Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel.

Jamie Morris and Keith Stone provided some context to the particular item in question regarding the introduction of a street car parking charge in Town Centres, this included the potential benefits.

Resolved

- To recommend this item is included in the proposed fees and charges and to inform the Corporate Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel accordingly.

53/07 Amendment to Forward Plan

Councillor Creaney introduced the item and invited comments from Jamie Morris.

Jamie Morris gave the background and stated that an opportunity to sell Norfolk Place and purchase a new site had come up and the service required cabinet to consider the proposal immediately which is why it had been entered onto the plan.

54/07 Forward Plan

The forward plan as at 9 November 2007 was submitted.

(annexed)

Resolved

- The Forward Plan was noted by the panel.

55/07 Performance Update – 6 Month review

Jamie Morris introduced the item and delivered a presentation to support the report.

(Annexed)

He asked members for their comments and questions.

Councillor Creaney asked whether residents would be notified in advance of the dates that the Customer Contact Bus would be in their areas.

Tim Challans said they would be notified and further details would be available when the specified roll-out was fully developed.

Councillor Creaney asked about the sauna facilities being withdrawn from Willenhall as he also felt they encouraged users to use other facilities such as the baths.

Tim Challans agreed to look at the facilities currently provided and those that could potentially be provided for Willenhall in the future.

Councillor Woodruff asked how effective the occupational health service was in helping to work towards bringing down staff sickness levels, in particular, the project currently being run at Bradford Council who work with local GPs.

Jamie Morris thanked Councillor Woodruff for her comments and agreed to look into the project at Bradford Council.

Councillor Phillips asked around the subject of recycling and if the increase in street cleaning in particular was attributed to any particular factor.

Keith Stone said there was no number one factor although a balanced approach was needed including looking at all issues, for example, not paying landfill taxes and fly tipping.

Jamie Morris said they were looking o get more prosecutions which would help to send a clear message.

Councillor Beilby asked about partnership working with WHG as they take much longer to clear fly tipping than council owned areas.

Keith Stone said they work closely with WHG although it was a concern.

Jamie Morris agreed to raise this with WHG and inform the panel of the outcomes of this meeting.

Councillor Phillips said complaints of fly tipping were becoming more prevalent at surgeries.

Councillor Creaney said he often went straight to the top at WHG to get fly tipping removed

Jamie Morris encouraged members to use the contact centre and then use senior managers if the problem was still not resolved in council related matters.

Councillor Mushtaq raised the issues of tree trimming with Street Pride but was told it could not be sorted within 5 years.

Keith Stone said individual items were difficult to discuss at the meeting but agreed to discuss the specific issue with Councillor Mushtaq outside of the meeting.

Councillor Beilby asked if plastic and card would be included in the changes to the recycling scheme.

Keith Stone confirmed that they were and would bring back any future findings to the panel via the Waste Management Working Group.

56/07 Illuminations Update

Tim Challans gave a brief update and informed the panel that the initial surveys were good. 25% of visitors were new, 8.2 out of 10 visitors gave a positive perception of price and venue and 8.5 out of 10 were positive about the food. 88.5% said the event met expectations and was correctly promoted. 70% would visit again the following year.

Although the weather was not too bad it was generally cold over the 6 weeks. The free buses were less successful. 9 buses ran from the LNP areas but only 21 people actually booked to use them.

Councillor Beilby said he felt it should be trialled again next year as the buses would work better the more people knew about them.

95% said they came to the town solely to visit the illuminations.

The website proved popular with over 1million hits. However, visitor numbers at 120,000 was less than expected. Although not yet available the income will not be as good as expected.

Tim Challans said a number of questions need to be asked within the review, including whether the same target audience were just being stretched over a longer period. Overall the key message was positive from the review and satisfaction but poorer visitor numbers. He said he would reconvene the steering group to review the findings.

Councillor Woodruff asked what visitor numbers the service was hoping for.

Tim Challans said he had hoped for around 180k.

57/07 Highways Maintenance

Keith Stone introduced the report and explained why it was being tabled and not distributed. He informed the panel that the project is progressing quickly and is being updated weekly which would also allow staff members to hear the information themselves as it became available and by no other means.

He stated the maintenance contract is for 4 years with the possibility of either one or two further extensions of 2 years each and that this would be based on performance. He also stated that staff are being updated on a fortnightly basis and this included unions. 15 Companies were sent details of the contract. 9 are being evaluated for consideration for tender. He said the programme had slipped by 2 months but the service was getting additional resources to try and catch up, although the 1 April deadline now looked unlikely. The council is negotiating short-term extensions to contracts to cover the period between 31st March 2007 (when the existing contracts expire) and the commencement of the proposed new contract.

An obligation to provide depot accommodation to support delivery of the contract will also be placed on a new partner as part of the tender process.

Councillor Phillips asked if one of the criteria is that the depot is located within the borough.

Keith Stone said it was unlikely to be a specific requirement but that the need for operational effectiveness would be made clear to bidders and that depot location would inevitably be a factor in securing this.

Resolved

- That the panel note the report

58/07 Draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan

Jo Whiting gave the presentation

(Annexed)

She invited questions and comments on this and the improvement plan which was provided to members.

Councillor Bott asked about a particular right of way that Walsall Council will not adopt.

Jo Whiting stated that there is a legal process to follow to ensure any area could be adopted.

Councillor Creaney asked who opens and closes gates when gating areas are introduced.

Jo Whiting stated that the council would have a responsibility to put a process in place but any option could be considered including closed for 24 hours a day, private contractors being used or even volunteers. The council would need to establish the process. She stated, it was not easy to close a public right of way when there is a duty to keep them open.

Councillor Creaney accepted this point but stated that some areas did need to be gated off at certain points in the evening only when they became hot spots.

Jamie Morris said if it is not a right of way and things are being held up to inform the service as they should not be held up, he asked Councillor Creaney to provide specific details.

Councillor Beilby confirmed from his own experience that it is very difficult to get any area gated off.

Councillor Bott asked about the right of way by the Black Country Route because no one has ownership of it.

Jo Whiting said she would need to investigate it further to find out more details and to examine the site.

Mark Rickard stated it was questions such as these that made it necessary to have a rights of way strategy in place. He said they were working with SWBP to include safety and crime issues.

59/09 Update on Councillor Call for Action

Simon Evans updated the panel with latest developments regarding this matter. He commented that the initial Community Call for Action has now been changed to become Councillor Call for Action (CCfA) following the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act achieving royal ascent on 30 October 2007. In effect this removed the opportunity for residents to raise CCfA directly as they will now need to be raised by councillors in order for them to be considered at a Scrutiny panel. Guidelines will be published later in the year and as such there is now no requirement to have procedures in place for commencement in April 2008. The CCfA version proposed by the Home Office is still on pause and again, we are waiting for further news on this in February. He recommended that the CCfA work group waits for further guidance before agreeing to meet.

Resolved

- That the CCfA work group wait for further government guidelines before continuing with any more work on this subject.

60/09 Bereavement Services – Review of Fees and Charges

Keith Stone informed the panel that this item was at the request of the Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel who asked the Neighbourhoods panel to monitor the fees and charges of the Bereavement Services.

He gave an overview of the costs of the service and the proposed increases and provided a comparison of Walsall and neighbouring council's.

He informed the panel of the report which was presented to, and agreed by cabinet which highlighted the proposed increases.

In response to a question raised by Councillor Bott he informed the panel that benefits were in place from the DWP to cover certain costs for qualifying persons.

Councillor Bott asked about the charges for memorials.

Keith Stone agreed to look into the issue of costs for memorials.

Resolved

- Officers to inform members of the background to the costs for memorials.

The meeting terminated at 7.55 pm.

Chair:

Date: