

NEIGHBOURHOODS SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

Monday 28 January 2008 at 6 p.m.

Panel Members present

Councillor Towe
Councillor Beeley
Councillor Bott
Councillor Mushtaq
Councillor Phillips
Councillor Sears
Councillor Woodruff

Officers present

Keith Stone, Assistant Director, Built Environment
Tim Challans, Assistant Director, Leisure, Culture and
Life-long learning
Alison Jarrett, Head of Service Finance
Vicky Buckley Head of Corporate Finance
Jez Holding Customer Services Manager
Deborah Humpage Customer Service Improvement
Officer
Simon Evans, Performance and Scrutiny Officer

61/07 APOLOGIES

Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillor Creaney.

62/07 SUBSTITUTIONS

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

63/07 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

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

64/07 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

(27 November 2007 and 6 December 2007)

Councillors Towe and Bott commented that they had still not heard from Jamie Morris regarding a meeting to discuss the maintenance of parks.

Councillor Bott stated that he had spoken to officers and established that section 106 monies had been allocated to be spent on a park within his ward. He encouraged other members to speak with officers to establish where section 106 monies were being spent in their ward.

Councillor Towe also raised the question of the additional service charge for Blakenall Library. He commented that the panel had picked this up previously and wanted to know what had happened.

Alison Jarrett confirmed that this had now been deferred for a year but agreed to get additional information to members as to why the costs had been raised.

Resolved

- Officers to arrange a meeting with Councillors Bott and Towe to discuss parks maintenance issues.
- Officers to provide information to members on the additional service charge for Blakenall Library.
- The minutes of the previous meeting were accepted as true and accurate.

65/07 FORWARD PLAN

The forward plan as at 9 November 2007 was submitted.

(annexed)

Councillor Phillips commented that some of the items on the forward plan were not easy to understand and asked for Plain English to be used. He also requested that a report comes to the next panel regarding the ongoing road works in the town centre.

Councillor Andrew said a site visit could also be arranged if members would wanted this. He also asked for item 10/08 to have Councillor Harrison as the contact member and not Councillor Harris.

Councillor Bott raised the issue of the former Bloxwich Neighbourhood Office and the Rough Hay site.

Councillor Andrew stated that the Bloxwich item referred to the transfer of the site to the school and agreed to discuss the Rough Hay site with officers.

Resolved

- Officers to request that Plain English be used in the forward plan and that item 10/08 is changed to reflect the appropriate contact member.
- Officers to provide an update on the progress of the town centre road works and also look at the possibility of arranging an on-site visit.
- The Forward Plan was noted by the panel.

66/07 DRAFT BUDGET 2008/09 PROPOSALS NEIGHBOURHOODS

67/07 DRAFT CORPORATE BUDGET 2008/09 PROPOSALS

The chair advised the panel that this was the latter stage of scrutiny's involvement in the budget and that whilst there was a lot of information Scrutiny should now only focus on the new items within the budget papers. Accordingly he suggested that the two items were taken together.

Alison Jarrett gave the Corporate and Neighbourhoods budget proposals presentation and asked members for questions and comments. (annexed)

Councillors raised questions about each of the new items that appeared on the budget sheets.

Councillor Towe questioned the reprovision of Darlaston multipurpose centre.

Tim Challans confirmed that it related to the clearing of the final elements of the building and the activity was part of a much larger leisure strategy that could include partners from the private sector and the development of increased leisure facilities at Darlaston Baths.

Councillors Towe, Phillips and Sears all raised concerns over the proposed deletion of car parking attendants at leisure centres and requested that this item was reconsidered by cabinet.

Councillor Towe questioned the proposed savings for borough wide schemes for voluntary sector grants as he felt no decision could be reached without identifying which schemes and the potential impact.

Alison Jarrett agreed to provide further details regarding this proposal.

Councillors Towe, Sears and Woodruff all commented about the proposed reduction of a part-time gym instructor in children's gyms and requested that this item was reconsidered by cabinet.

Councillor Towe asked for further details regarding the proposal to provide an alternative medium for delivering the curriculum programme which could provide a saving by releasing the narrowboats.

Councillor Phillips said it would be useful to know more details on usage and what the proposed alternative mediums were before a decision could be reached.

Officers agreed to provide further details regarding this proposal.

Councillor Towe raised his concerns over the savings identified in Library staffing levels.

Tim Challans confirmed that it did not amount to a reduction in people or opening hours. He said savings had been identified because Bentley Library was currently closed.

Councillor Phillips asked how these savings could be made the following year and recommended that the savings were for one year only whilst Bentley Library remained closed.

Councillor Phillips asked officers about the potential project funding for LNPs.

Alison Jarrett confirmed that this related to funding expectations that were monitored on a monthly basis. She agreed to provide the panel with updates if the proposed funding streams did not materialise.

Councillor Bott asked if the decision not to include the budget for dropped kerbs should be reconsidered, particularly in the light of the Disability Discrimination Act.

Keith Stone stated that the legislation was not immediate but that this item would be considered for inclusion in the following year.

Councillor Andrew confirmed that the proposal was for additional monies as monies had already been allocated. He also commented that funding often came from a number of sources and gave the example of red routes.

Councillor Towe suggested the panel support this item and asked officers to prepare a briefing note on where funding for community dropped kerbs was obtained.

Councillor Andrew commented on the success of developing new income streams from Costa Coffee.

Alison Jarrett stated that this was a new budget item which would be coming into the mainstream budget and not allocated directly to the New Art Gallery.

Resolved

- Of the new efficiency options presented to the panel, 2 were not supported, 1 was partially supported, 3 requests for further information were made and 15 were supported.
- Officers to provide more details regarding the proposed savings for borough wide schemes for voluntary sector grants.
- Officers to provide more details regarding usage of the narrowboats and what the proposed alternative mediums to deliver the curriculum are.
- Officers to provide the panel with updates if the proposed funding streams did not materialise.
- Officers to prepare a briefing note on the investment in dropped kerbs and where alternative funding was obtained.
- The 2 new proposals for revenues and fees were agreed by the panel.
- Of the draft investment options originally recommended but not included, the panel have requested cabinet to reconsider the proposal for community dropped kerbs.

68/07 WASTE POLICY – RESIDUAL WASTE TREATMENT FACILITY PROJECT WITH STAFFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

The Panel considered that the item for consideration under item 68/07 required the exclusion of the public and press under section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of schedule 12A of the Act and accordingly resolved to consider that item in private.

The Chair introduced the item and asked the panel if they were happy to take the item early to allow Councillor Walker to join the debate as she was unable to stay for the duration of the meeting.

Keith Stone presented the item and informed members of the councils desire to work in partnership with other authorities to bring about improved capacity for dealing with residual waste.

Councillors asked a number of questions about the proposals and asked for officers to keep them informed as work progressed with the project.

Resolved

The panel endorse the report and welcome future updates.

The panel resolved to end the private session and readmit public and press.

69/07 ILLUMINATIONS UPDATE

Tim Challans gave the panel a verbal update on the review of the illuminations. He advised the panel that the steering group originally set up to oversee the development of this year's event had been re-established to undertake the review. He informed the panel that many changes had been trialled this year including a change of dates, working with the town centre to encourage a shopping and leisure offer, a covered area and a log flume. Whilst customer satisfaction, at over 90%, was very positive, visitor numbers were disappointing with only 120, 000 visitors compared to 160,000 the previous year, this gave an overall shortfall of £217,000.

He informed the panel that the plan for 2008 was to base all budgets on visitor numbers of 150,000 and to look at all ways of increasing the levels of sponsorship. The group had also suggested moving the date back to the original dates which would still capture half term and Halloween but may be a little warmer and less susceptible to poorer weather conditions. These recommendations were contained within the report going to Cabinet on 6 February.

Councillor Sears said he felt the illuminations had passed their sell by date and should be replaced with something else.

Councillor Bott said he recognised officers had done everything to raise visitor numbers but have not been able to make a real difference. He felt the illuminations should go back to basics and provide a simple attraction for children with lights and a fun fair. He also suggested that each ward could be represented in some way at the illuminations.

Councillors Woodruff and Phillips both commented that they felt the illuminations should become more interactive in order to attract children.

Councillor Beeley said he felt the event should be simpler and less expensive without any big rides or themes although he felt it should continue as it was part of the heritage of Walsall.

Councillor Towe said that the expectation levels need to be lowered and the business plan should be based on target visitor numbers of 100,000. He also pointed to the fact that visitor figures suggested less and less people from Walsall were going and as Councillors they had a duty to consider tax payers money and how it was spent.

Resolved

The panel support the on-going, but scaled down, development of the illuminations.

70/07 STREET LIGHTING REVIEW

Keith Stone informed the panel that item responded to the panels request regarding the review of street lighting and where it was possible to reduce energy consumption.

Councillors discussed the item and agreed that there was considerable and detailed information within the briefing note, agreement was reached to take this as a separate item for discussion at the next panel meeting.

Resolved

The panel will take this item at the next meeting on 27 March 2008.

71/07 CUSTOMER SERVICE BUS – ROUTE LOCATION CONSULTATION

Jez Holding and Deborah Humpage presented the item and informed the panel of the proposed route locations, timetable and floor bus layout. Jez also stated that the bus could be used for other council campaigns such as healthy living, the promotion of the illuminations or working with partners on shared issues for example crime and disorder with the police.

Councillor Bott asked if the bus would be sponsored.

Jez Holding said that this was an option to be considered.

Councillor Phillips asked what success looked like for the bus in terms of visitor numbers and Councillor Beeley asked how successful the bus had been in other authorities.

Jez Holding said that no definite numbers had been identified and they would definitely look at the relative success of other authorities whilst also considering the numbers who visit the first stop shop. He went on to say that a range of services would be made available on the bus to appeal to a wide audience and that the bus was one way in which the council could demonstrate its commitment to delivering local access centres.

Councillor Bott commented that he would like to see the Bus visiting Moxley and asked if the bus would operate on Saturday mornings.

Jez Holding replied that normal Council opening hours would be used to start with but that feedback and customer usage could dictate how the bus operated in the future.

Resolved

The panel welcomed the development of this work but wanted to be kept informed on progress and numbers of people who used the bus.

72/07 PARKING STRATEGY - UPDATE

Keith Stone informed the panel of the proposed amendments to the strategy following consultation. The first refers to the removal of the approach to parking provision for new developments in relation to accessibility to local transport links. The second concerned the confirmation that the council would not commence on-street parking at this stage, but that this would be kept under review.

Resolved

The panel noted the report and asked for regular updates as the strategy progressed.

73/07 DATE OF NEXT MEETING:

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 27 March 2008.

The meeting terminated at 8.20 pm.

Chair:

Date: