

CORPORATE SERVICES SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

Thursday 7 February 2008 at 6.00 p.m.

Panel Members present

- Councillor M. Longhi
- Councillor M. Bird
- Councillor J. Rochelle
- Councillor J. Phillips
- Councillor H. Sarohi
- Councillor D. Turner

Officers present

- Sarah Homer – Assistant Director - Strategic Transformation
- Rob Flinter – Assistant Director - Performance Management
- James Walsh – Assistant Director - Finance
- Clive Wright – Director, Walsall Strategic Borough Partnership
- Paul Milmore – Head of ICT Strategy and Client Services
- Craig Goodall – Scrutiny Officer
- Jody Latham – Performance and Scrutiny

58/07 APOLOGIES

Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillors C. Towe and A. Griffiths.

59/07 SUBSTITUTIONS

There were no substitutions for the duration of this meeting.

60/07 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

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

61/07 TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Members considered the available training opportunities.

(annexed)

Craig Goodall outlined an Institute of Local Government Studies course (INLOGOV) on 'Scrutiny and the New Legislation' available for councillors on 24 April 2008.

Following a request from Members for information on the Local Government Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 it was agreed to invite Bhupinder Gill, Assistant Director of Legal and Constitutional Services, to present an item to the Panel at its next meeting.

Resolved

That Bhupinder Gill, Assistant Director for Legal and Constitutional Services, present an item on the implications of the Local Government Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 on 10 April 2008.

62/07 SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY

Members received an update on the Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS).

The Chairman reminded Members that they had considered an earlier draft of the SCS at their meeting on 13 December 2007 where they had resolved for 'automotive forms of transport' to be included in the SCS and to receive an update at a later date.

Clive Wright informed the Panel that a dedicated officer was supporting the comprehensive consultation that was taking place to finalise the SCS. This included:

- A leaflet summarising the vision of the SCS was being sent to every household in the borough with the next edition of Walsall Pride. Delivery via Royal Mail was anticipated to increase the number of households receiving Walsall Pride and the SCS leaflet
- Focus groups of local residents
- Local Neighbourhood Partnerships
- Private and Voluntary Sector
- Scrutiny and Performance Panels
- Ethnographic exercises

Clive Wright informed Members that the SCS was the 12 year vision which fed into the Local Area Agreement (LAA) which was the 3 year delivery plan for the SCS.

Following questions from Members Clive Wright explained that an exercise had taken place to cross reference the council's priorities with those identified in the SCS. Rob Flinter confirmed that all of the councils corporate plan priorities for 2008/09 were linked to the new SCS.

Clive Wright explained that a 2% response rate was anticipated from the 109,000 leaflets on the SCS that were being distributed to every household in the borough. The SCS was also available online.

In response to a question it was explained that those voluntary sector organisations who were directly involved with Walsall Borough Strategic Partnership (WBSP) would be asked directly to contribute to the consultation. Other voluntary sector organisations were being asked for their comments via Walsall Voluntary Action.

Following a suggestion from a Member Clive Wright agreed to distribute a copy of the SCS to every library in the borough.

Clive Wright accepted the Chairman's invitation to present an analysis of the consultation feedback received on the SCS.

Resolved

That (a) that copies of the Sustainable Community Strategy be circulated to library in Walsall;

and;

- (b) an analysis of the feedback received from the consultation on the Sustainable Community Strategy be presented to the Panel at a future meeting.**

63/07 LOCAL AREA AGREEMENT

Members received an update on the progress made in developing the new Local Area Agreement (LAA) for Walsall; were advised on the shortened 'long-list' of indicators submitted to government office for the West Midlands (GOWM) on 25 January 2008 and were informed of the next steps to reaching a draft final version to be taken to cabinet for approval on 19 March 2008.

Clive Wright explained that the LAA took its lead from the SCS priorities.

The new Comprehensive Area Assessment was introducing a national indicator set of 198 different indicators. A maximum of 35 of these indicators could be chosen for the new LAA. The indicators had been reviewed firstly down to 90 then to 53. This had been achieved via discussions with WBSP partners and portfolio holders. Although up to 35 indicators could be chosen for the new LAA the aim was to reduce this down to 25 indicators. These needed to be sent to GOWM by 25 March 2008.

The 53 indicators currently identified were being assessed by a technical group of partner employees to select the final indicators.

Clive Wright explained that each indicator had several targets that feed into it.

In response to a question Clive Wright explained that the indicators from the current LAA would be retained as local indicators in addition to the new ones so that their success or otherwise could be assessed.

Members discussed how the standard of housing could be improved in the private rented sector. Clive Wright informed the Panel that it was possible to provide assistance to improve standards but assistance needed to be carefully awarded to avoid accusations of state aid. It was noted that those landlords with a certain number of properties had to obtain a licence which ensured minimum standards.

Clive Wright assured members that Walsall Alliance of Tenant Management Organisations and Beechdale Housing Association had been consulted.

In relation to the target to increasing the number and choice of affordable homes members discussed what steps could be taken to prevent affordable housing being purchased by buy-to-let landlords. It was noted that this was something that was difficult to achieve and that perhaps the Development and Control Committee may be better off securing developer contributions towards new social housing rather than demanding a percentage of each development is allocated to affordable housing. Cash from developers could be used to build new social housing on disused land currently owned by the council.

64/07 INFORMATION SECURITY AT WALSALL COUNCIL

The Panel considered information security at Walsall Council.

Paul Milmore outlined the current project work on information security and stated that a revised policy had recently been endorsed by the Corporate Management Board. This was in response to previous criticism from an audit report who felt that the information security policy required ownership from senior managers.

The audit report had identified other areas that required updating in the current information security policy. A further gap analysis had been carried out to identify problem areas.

It was the council's intention to achieve the ISO 270001 standard. This was a comprehensive list of 137 procedures that aimed to increase information security.

In response to a question about what practical measures could take place to increase information security for example new software or hardware provision Paul Milmore stated that there was ongoing investment in secure networks. The existing network had already been audit tested and was considered secure.

A member highlighted compatibility issues between Microsoft Office 2003 and 2007 users. Following a question Paul Milmore explained that it was not possible for viruses to be included into screensavers as it was in games. It was likely that a corporate screensaver would be introduced in the future.

Paul Milmore agreed to clarify the credit checking process for staff likely to be in receipt of information at security levels 1 and 2.

The Panel noted that credit checks could sometimes provide information on a households previous occupants that were unconnected with the current occupant. It was also important that employees should not be disadvantaged by being subjected to unnecessary credit checks.

Resolved

That Paul Milmore, Head of ICT Strategy and Client Services, to clarify why credit checks are necessary in those staff receiving information classed as security level 1 and 2.

65/07 ANNUAL REPORT FOR COUNCIL

Members considered what topics they wanted to include in the Security Annual Report 2007/08.

Craig Goodall explained that he had identified all of the areas considered by the Panel during the last year and noted them in the report. If members agreed with these broad headings he would draft a full activity report for the Panels approval. Once the content had been agreed it would be added to the Scrutiny annual Report and presented to council.

Following a discussion it was noted that the Welfare Rights Service could be observed so long as the council remained the accountable body.

Resolved

That the following areas be included in the Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel section of the Scrutiny Annual Report for 2007/08:

- **Welfare Rights Service**
- **Procurement Working Group**
- **Electronic Document Management System**
- **Corporate Services Performance**
- **Performance Information Management System and Data Quality**
- **Budget**
- **Sustainable Community Strategy**
- **Local Area Agreement**
- **Information Security**
- **Forward Plan**

66/07 DATE OF NEXT MEETING:

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 10 April 2008.

The meeting terminated at 7.02 pm.

Chair:

Date: