

COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

Tuesday, 12 July, 2011 at 6.00 p.m. in a Conference Room at the Council House, Walsall

Panel Members Present	Councillor L. Harrison (Chair) Councillor C. Creaney (Vice-Chair) Councillor I. Azam Councillor S. Coughlan Councillor L. Rattigan Councillor K. Sears Councillor I. Shires Councillor F. Westley Councillor A. Young
Portfolio holder present	Councillor Z. Ali (Communities and Partnerships)
Officers Present	Jamie Morris - Executive Director (Neighbourhoods) Paul Thompson - Strategic Development Manager (Libraries) Jo Lowndes - Partnership Manager Chris Allen - External Consultant Anna Sampson - Corporate Consultation and Customer Feedback Officer Craig Goodall - Scrutiny Officer
Others Present	Mr. P. Holmes J.P.

80/11 APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

81/11 SUBSTITUTIONS

There were no substitutions for the duration of the meeting.

82/11 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest or party whip for the duration of the meeting.

83/11 MINUTES

The Scrutiny Officer advised the Panel that the attendance shown in the draft minutes printed in the agenda pack had been amended on the version of the minutes to be signed by the Chair.

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 7 June, 2011, as amended, a copy having been previously circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

84/11 OUTCOME OF THE LIBRARIES CONSULTATION AND RESPONSE TO THE LIBRARIES RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY THE LEISURE CENTRES AND LIBRARIES WORKING GROUP

The Panel considered the outcome of the recent libraries consultation and Cabinet's response to the recommendations of the Leisure Centres and Libraries Working Group.

The Executive Director (Neighbourhoods) gave an overview of the report, including work that had taken place with the working smarter team.

The Strategic Development Manager (Libraries) provided the Panel with an overview of progress to date with the implementation of the recommendations made to Cabinet in November, 2010 from the Leisure Centres and Libraries Working Group.

The Corporate Consultation and Communications Officer provided Members with a summary of the consultation results. It was noted that the response rate to this consultation was exceptionally high. The Chair noted that the findings from the consultation were largely in agreement with the findings of the Leisure Centres and Libraries Working Group.

Following a question from a Member of the Panel, the Strategic Development Manager (Libraries) reported that there had been no progress with bringing the large meeting room at Willenhall Library into use due to difficult access issues. He also agreed to investigate discussed problems with the toilets in the library.

Resolved

That:

1. the report be noted;
and;
2. the Strategic Development Manager (Libraries) investigate potential problems with the toilets at Willenhall Library.

85/11 EVALUATION OF AREA PARTNERSHIPS

The Panel received an independent evaluation of the Area Partnership Neighbourhood Management arrangements. Chris Allen, External Consultant, provided the Panel with an overview of the findings from his investigation. He outlined his recommendations for development of the process and emphasised that they were focussed on fine tuning

rather than re-configuring the entire operation. The Portfolio Holder, Communities and Partnerships, welcomed the report and its findings.

The following were the principle points from the ensuing discussion:-

- The Panel debated the advantages and disadvantages of Councillors attending Area Partnership meetings. It was noted that sometimes, Councillor attendance at these meetings could play a part in the effectiveness of the meeting. Overall, the Panel felt that Members should not be involved in Area Partnership meetings as it was not the role of Councillors to be involved in operational issues;
- Some Members expressed frustration with gaining assistance with their case work from some partners. They felt it was important that partners understood the role of a Councillor and why it was crucial for their assistance to resolve problems on behalf of local residents;
- The Panel debated the advantages and disadvantages of setting up additional Local Authority supported meetings as Sub-Groups to Area Community meetings. On one hand it was felt that Members could achieve engagement without the assistance from the Local Authority but on the other hand, it was felt that a more structured way of engaging local communities would be effective;
- The Panel discussed the balance required in ensuring that Area Partnership areas were large enough for partners to resource but small enough for local people to identify with;
- Members felt that more resources should be given towards Area Partnership working to increase the flexibility of the team to deal with peaks and troughs in work and undertake important policy work on tackling Walsall's key problems;
- There was a discussion regarding the development of the 'Big Society'. It was noted due to high levels of deprivation in the Borough that local communities would probably require more support in order to build the capacity necessary to take on potential future opportunities. The Executive Director (Neighbourhoods) reported that the public services White Paper identified a model whereby Parish Councils would be given increased powers to make decisions and take on local services. However, there were currently no Parish Councils in Walsall and there were generally small numbers of Parish Councils in urban areas across the country. Therefore, it was difficult to anticipate how the White Paper would be implemented in Walsall and the West Midlands as a whole.

Resolved

That:-

- (1) Councillors should not be involved in Area Partnership meetings;
- (2) development work take place with local partners to assist them in understanding the role of an Elected Councillor and why it was critical to assist them in tackling the problems of local residents;
- (3) the Panel receive a six monthly update on progress in relation to the six Area Community plans.

86/11 **WORK PROGRAMME 2011/12 AND FORWARD PLAN**

Members considered the Panel's work programme and the latest version of Cabinet's Forward Plan of key decisions:-

'36/11 The strategic future of the library service in Walsall'

The Executive Director (Neighbourhoods) reported that this issue would no longer be considered at the Cabinet meeting in September.

Resolved

That:-

- (1) the following items be considered at 6 September meeting of the Community Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel:-
 - (a) Leisure Centres strategy and the recommendations of Libraries and Leisure Centres Working Group;
 - (b) crime and community safety in Walsall;
 - (c) the rehabilitation of offenders.
- (2) the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Bill be considered at 18 October meeting of the Community Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel;
- (3) financial monitoring be added to the work programme of the Community Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel.

87/11 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

It was noted that the date of the next meeting was 6 September, 2011.

In closing the meeting, the Chair and portfolio holder (Communities and Partnerships) expressed their thanks to Mr. Phillip Holmes J.P. for the work he had undertaken as a co-opted Member of the Community Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel. Members wished him luck on his new role as a Board Member on the Safer Walsall Partnership.

The meeting terminated at 7.16 p.m.

Signed:

Date: