

COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

15 October 2009 at 6.00 p.m.

Panel Members present

Councillor L. Harrison (Chair)
Councillor C. Creaney (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Z. Ali
Councillor P. Bott
Councillor D. Pitt
Councillor M. Pitt
Councillor I. Robertson
Councillor I. Shires

Portfolio Holders present

Councillor B. Sanders – Leisure and Culture

Officers present

Keith Stone	Assistant Director – Neighbourhood Services
Sue Grainger	Head of Libraries and Heritage
Graham Hood	Head of Greenspaces
Julie Gethin	Head of Partnerships and Programmes
Steph Simcox	Service Finance Manager
Ben Percival	Sports and Leisure Manager
Craig Goodall	Acting Principal Scrutiny Officer

28/09 APOLOGIES

There were apologies for absence from Councillor K. Aftab.

29/09 SUBSTITUTIONS

There were no substitutions for the duration of the meeting.

30/09 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

The Chair declared a prejudicial interest in item 7 'Impact of the Library Modernisation Plan' and left the meeting for the duration of the item.

31/09 MINUTES

Craig Goodall outlined an editorial change that had been made to the minutes that would be signed by the Chair.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 8 September 2009, copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

32/09 DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Craig Goodall highlighted the available training opportunities for Members.

33/09 LOCAL NEIGHBOURHOOD PARTNERSHIP (NEIGHBOURHOOD MANAGEMENT) REVIEW

The Panel were informed of progress made with the consultation on the future of Local Neighbourhood Partnerships (LNP) including the proposed neighbourhood management model.

Julie Gethin explained the rationale for the review and highlighted the proposed new neighbourhood management model that was designed to improve engagement with local communities.

The following are the principle points from the ensuing discussion:

- Members expressed concern with the potential costs of the scheme at a time when the Council would be required to make financial savings.
- The cost of employing a neighbourhood manager for each area was of particular concern. It was explained to the Panel that the neighbourhood manager posts would probably be filled by existing post holders across partners. There were further concerns about the potential for the neighbourhood managers to support their own areas of interest rather than those of their communities.
- It was explained that the neighbourhood management model would feed into the community action tasking (CAT) process. This would enable action to address local problems to take place quickly.
- Some Members felt that proposed model was in practice no different to the current LNP model.
- Cover for neighbourhood managers would be provided from the neighbourhood management structure.
- The duties of a neighbourhood manager were discussed.
- A Member was supportive of the current LNP structure and expressed the view that they were in favour of a ward based approach to neighbourhood management.

RESOLVED:

That the comments of the Community Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel be feed into the consultation for ‘Developing a Model for Neighbourhood Management in Walsall’.

Having earlier declared a prejudicial interest Councillor Harrison left the room.

Councillor Creaney took the Chair.

34/09 IMPACT OF THE LIBRARY MODERNISATION PLAN

Members were informed of the impact and outcomes of the Library Modernisation Plan. The Plan took place between April 2006 and March 2009 and aimed to transform the library service and remodel or refurbish its network of branch libraries.

Sue Grainger explained that the project had significantly improved 13 libraries across the borough. She reported that large increases in visitors and membership had taken place at those libraries that had been improved. She added that some libraries were being developed as local information points where residents could find out about

Council services. It was noted that the planned replacement of Bentley library had been delayed.

Members were pleased with the success of the scheme, particularly where visitor numbers and memberships had increased. It was suggested that work be undertaken to increase the number of schools that visited libraries.

The Panel then discussed recent problems at Willenhall Library which was closed following the breakdown of the library's boiler.

Following questions from the Panel, Councillor Sanders reported that the boiler would either be repaired or replaced to enable the library to reopen. He was unable to give any indicative timescales as the work was currently being assessed. The matter was further complicated by the existence of asbestos in the boiler room.

Following questioning and suggestions from Members it was agreed that Councillor Sanders, Sue Grainger and Ward Members should meet to discuss the way forward. It was also agreed that Ward Members be kept fully informed of developments and of the timetable that the mobile library would be working to in the area.

Members requested that the thorn bush outside the Willenhall Library be cut back to enable residents to see the library signage.

The Panel discussed the meeting room facilities in the library that had once been Willenhall town hall. The meeting room was no longer used as it did not have disabled access. Sue Grainger reported that she had been investigating the possibility of using the room for democracy and citizenship classes in schools.

RESOLVED:

That:

- 1. Members be advised on the likely timescales required to re-open Willenhall Library;**
- 2. the Portfolio for Leisure and Culture, Head of Libraries and Heritage and local Ward Members meet to discuss the closure of Willenhall Library;**
- 3. Information on the use of mobile libraries in Willenhall be widely communicated ensuring that ward members are specifically kept informed of mobile library scheduling;**

and;

- 4. the thorn bush outside Willenhall Library be cut.**

35/09 GROUNDS MAINTENANCE STANDARDS WITHIN THE BOROUGH'S PARKS

The Panel were informed of the grounds maintenance standards which apply to the borough's parks and open spaces managed by Green Spaces.

Graham Hood explained that Green Spaces had a service level agreement (SLA) with Street Pride for the completion of grounds maintenance. This agreement set out that there were three types of parks in the borough, namely: Green Flag, Premier and Other Open Space. The SLA set out the tasks to be completed across each type of park but as yet did not contain details of expected standards. These would be set by April 2010.

The following are the principle points from the ensuing discussion:

- Green Flag parks required more resources to maintain and as such any increase in the number of Green Flag parks would have an impact on the amount of work that could take place at other parks under current resource levels.
- Section 106 planning gain money should be spent in the local area that development was taking place in.
- Members were supportive of the initiative to appoint apprentices to develop a team of suitably qualified staff to maintain the boroughs parks.
- Problems were discussed about the levels of residual cut grass across the borough.
- Due to restrictions with Council finances greater use of the voluntary and community sector should be used to maintain parks.

The Chair requested that the Panel consider the proposed maintenance standards for parks before they were finalised.

RESOLVED:

That:

- 1. the Panel consider the proposed maintenance standards for parks before they are approved by Cabinet;**
 - 2. Walsall Council increases its use of the third sector to improve and maintain the boroughs parks;**
- and;**
- 3. Councillor Ian Shires be contacted to discuss his specific problems with regards to grass cutting.**

36/09 LOCAL AREA AGREEMENT

The Panel were informed of progress against performance of the current Local Area Agreement (LAA) targets for the period 1 April – 31 July 2009.

A Member noted the high levels of obesity in primary school children (National indicator 56d) and the potential problems this could create in the future.

37/09 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL OUTLOOK AND BUDGET PROCESS 2010/11

Members were briefed on current funding issues, the medium term financial outlook and key dates.

Steph Simcox gave a presentation to the Panel (annexed) highlighting the budget setting process for 2010/11, Cabinet priority services, allocated budget savings by Directorate and allocated budget savings within the Panels remit.

The Panel discussed the recent Government announcement of the sale of Council capital assets in order to raise money to address the national budget deficit. Members were advised that no detailed proposals were available to be able to report how this announcement could affect Walsall. Steph Simcox advised that the Council was not allowed to use capital receipts as revenue funding.

38/09 BRYNTYSILIO WORKING GROUP – UPDATE

The Panel were informed of progress to date with the Bryntysilio Working Group.

The Chair and Vice-Chair highlighted progress to date including:

- Visit to Bryntysilio
- Visit to Staffordshire Outdoor Education Centres
- Discussions with Bryntysilio Trustees and Children's Services

The Panel discussed where Bryntysilio was managed within the Council, the cost per child to visit the centre, the centre management and the potential for external funding.

39/09 WORK PROGRAMME 2009/10 & FORWARD PLAN

The Panel reviewed their work programme and the latest copy of the forward plan.

RESOLVED:

That the following items be added to the agenda for the Panels meeting on 26 November 2009:

- 1. Final report of the Bryntysilio Working Group;**
- 2. Leisure Centres, and;**
- 3. Placarding for Community Events.**

40/09 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Panel noted the date of the next meeting as 26 November 2009.

The meeting terminated at 8.04 p.m.

Signed:

Date: