

AT A MEETING
of the
**COMMUNITY ORGANISATION,
LEISURE AND CULTURE SCRUTINY
AND PERFORMANCE PANEL** held at
The Council House, Walsall on
Thursday 8 December 2005 at 6.00pm

PRESENT

Councillor Towe (Chairman)
Councillor Phillips (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Arif
Councillor Beeley
Councillor Bott
Councillor Burley

Officers in Attendance

Tim Challans
Vicky Crowshaw
Paul Simpson
Jez Holding
Abida Akram
Hajinder Kaur
Pat Warner

APOLOGIES

Apologies for non attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillor Ault, Councillor Beilby and Councillor Woodruff.

SUBSTITUTIONS

There were no substitutions notified at this meeting.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

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

MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

RESOLVED

That the minutes of previous meetings held on 6 October 2005 and 23 November 2005, copies having been previously circulated to each member of the panel be approved and signed by the chair as a correct record.

UPDATES FROM WORKING GROUPS

Green Spaces Work Group 10 November 2005

Councillor Phillips reported on the site visit which had been arranged to a Green Flag Park in Birmingham and also to examples of good practice in Walsall and areas of concern in Walsall. She said that Palfrey Park stood out as an example of good a working relationship with the community and was very pleasing to the eye. The George Rose Park was however in very poor condition. She said the Ground Maintenance Service, based at the site, needed to be removed and it was noted that the play equipment had been destroyed and trees had been burnt on the site. She continued that there was a need for change on this site and that if action was not taken very soon to improve this provision George Rose Park will not achieve Green Flag status.

The panel was further informed about the visit to the Kings Heath Park which was a green flag park. She explained that the facilities there were extremely well presented. Having met with the team looking after the site it was clear that the six full time workers and the financial resources being poured into that site enabled it to attain Green Flag status. She reiterated that green flag status would not be given to this authority unless some dramatic changes are made and a champion was found for the provision of green spaces within the borough.

Councillor Towe said it was hoped that the strategy being produced by the group would com out with proposals to assist changes.

Tim Challans confirmed to the panel that there was a team already setup looking at park improvements within this borough.

The panel thanked Councillor Phillips for her feedback on this issue.

Procurement Work Group 3 November 2005

Councillor Towe reminded the panel that they had agreed at a previous meeting that this working group would be established during this municipal year to look at the procurement of leisure management. It appeared that there had been some delay and he asked Karen Adderley to advise members of the current position.

Karen said the working group was unable to start its work because the leisure management procurement process had not yet commenced. She explained that the leisure management service had gone out to tender again resulting in a delay in the

procurement process. She enquired whether members wished to wait until the New Year to commence scrutiny of this service from the beginning of the procurement process or whether members wished to look at another procurement process in particular the library tender where members would be able to commence scrutiny at gateway 3.

Councillor Beeley suggested the panel should delay commencement of the scrutiny process until the new year when the panel could commence at gateway 0 with the leisure management procurement.

Members were in general agreement with this suggestion and it was: -

RESOLVED:

That the scrutiny of the leisure management procurement process be delayed until the new year.

NOTES OF SPECIAL PANEL MEETING

Council Funding to Voluntary and Community Organisations

Councillor Towe reported on the discussions at the workshop held on the 15 November 2005 in respect of the funding to voluntary and community organisations.

He said the workshop had looked at a number of different ways of allocating funds to various organisations and this could be pursued at a future workshop meeting.

Councillor Bott reminded members that at a previous meeting the panel had agreed that it would monitor the bids before cabinet had an opportunity to make a decision on them.

Councillor Towe said that the workshop looked at the grant application forms with a view to reviewing the process next year. It was also felt that more organisations should be given the opportunity of obtaining a grant and proposals will be formulated the next meeting.

Councillor Towe said it would have been advantageous to view the notes of that workshop meeting and requested that the notes be circulated to members of the panel as soon as possible.

A further query was raised in respect of the process for these applications.

Karen advised the panel that the portfolio holder is provided with a list of all the bids and details of all the applications with some comments on these bids from officers. She continued that the portfolio holder nominates the bids to be presented to cabinet.

Karen further confirmed that the next workshop meeting in respect of this issue will be arranged in the new year and the proposed application forms to be used will be brought to that meeting for perusal.

BUDGET INFORMATION 2006/7

Members received additional information as requested in the form of the investment bids together with budget reduction efficiencies and specific information relating to the green spaces parks budget and the libraries budget: -

(see annexed)

Councillor Towe reminded members that a decision in respect of the budget proposals submitted at the last meeting had been deferred pending further information which had been requested at that meeting.

Members were now being requested to peruse the proposals set out in the document circulated with the papers and submit this panel's views for incorporation into the budget report to cabinet.

Vicky Crowshaw advised members that the first set of information set out under **Neighbourhood Services** in respect of:

- a) Walsall Outdoor Adventure Centre
- b) Replacement of flexible learning centres.
- c) Schools catering

had been submitted to the panel for information only because these bids are already included within the budget as they are the full year effect of decisions taken in setting the 2005/6 budget.

Members were therefore asked to submit their views in respect of the investment bids and the budget reduction efficiency proposals as set out.

Investment Bids - Neighbourhood Services		
Proposed Bids	Priority Given	Comments
Olympic Scholarship	High	<p>Consideration should be given to using the proposed cost of £20,000 to promote the availability of such funding in the borough.</p> <p>Council should be looking to promoting sponsorship perhaps with the commercial sector and other established sports centres to widen the partnership approach.</p> <p>Panel happy to see the £20,000 proposed being allocated initially but with the likelihood of an additional amount being provided within the next two years since £20,000 is felt to be insufficient to put a child through an elite sports training.</p>
Park Force Initiatives	High	Members noted that the budget for this proposed service would grow at the rate of inflation.

Ready, Steady, Summer	High	<p>Concerns were expressed about the proposal to look to community partners to make a bigger contribution towards the funding of this service and the uncertainty regarding what action this council will take if the partners are unable to contribute as expected. Whilst this service continues to be a high priority these concerns must be addressed.</p> <p>Vicky Crowshaw suggested that if available, further information is required from Finance team in respect of the amount of finance being provided for this service and details of partner's contributions to the total funding at the next meeting of the Panel on 2 February 2006.</p> <p>This information is required at the next budget conferencing meeting to take place on the 2 February 2006.</p>
Community Associations	Deferred	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions were raised regarding the finance for youth services and where this was coming from. • The question was also raised as to whether the Neighbourhood Resource Centres could bid into the budget. • The £200,000 proposed figure is similar to that allocated previously i.e. (250,000 2004/5) but this money can only be used for the elderly. • Can more money be provided for community associations to fund the age groups up to 13 and those over 19 years of age?. • Concern that money is being distributed via Local Neighbourhood Partnerships. • The money allocated should be provided for community associations additional funds should be separately provided for local neighbourhood partnerships. • Note the proposed reassessment of youth services and that Tim Challans will report to a future meeting of this panel on the performance of the services over the last year. • A decision as to the priority order of this proposed service be deferred until further information is provided at the next budget

		<p>conferencing meeting in early February. The information should identify what services the allocated funds have been targeted at and also further clarification as to whether local neighbourhood partnerships or community associations should have responsibility for the funds being allocated.</p>
<p>Budget Reduction / Efficiencies</p> <p>Neighbourhood Services: -</p> <p>Increase income from events admissions fees. Increased fees and charges sports facilities, pitches etc. General service reduction/efficiencies – arts events and tourism. General services reduction/efficiencies – Art Gallery.</p>	<p>These bids were felt to be acceptable.</p>	
<p>Introduction of LNP based team working system for grounds maintenance.</p> <p>Reduction in LNP consultancy costs.</p>	<p>Deferred.</p> <p>Deferred.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concern was expressed regarding the proposed reduction in this budget at a time when a working group is looking at improving green spaces in the borough. • Note that although the idea is to deliver the service better with efficiencies particularly since the Leisure and Culture Services have been brought together under one service area there are still: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Concerns that the proposed 6% saving might not be achieved. b) Concern about the proposed efficiency saving in neighbourhood services which appears to go against the strategic plan for improving neighbourhood services. c) Concern in respect of the level of proposed efficiency savings to the LNP consultancy costs – consideration should be given to more

		<p>savings being directed at this service as opposed to the grounds maintenance.</p> <p>d) Prior to any decision being made in respect of the amount of efficiency savings being proposed towards the LNP consultancy costs, more information be provided to this Panel about the budgeted consultancy fees for the whole of the council including any proposed 2006/7 efficiency savings for the council as a whole. This information to be provided by finance team for the 2 February meeting.</p>
Increase in vacancy management for non PTCF Leisure and Culture staff.	This bid was felt to be satisfactory.	

Councillor Arif enquired about the additional resources which had been requested at the last meeting in respect of community cohesion.

Karen advised the panel that community cohesion is an integral part of the equality service provision throughout all service areas. The equality unit would be considering it as a priority and would be putting it into their service plan. Further more this area has also been identified through the LAA agreement. She concluded that a report would be submitted to this panel at its April meeting regarding the future plans for this service.

Members proceeded to discuss the additional information requested in respect of:

a) Library budget services.

Members thanked officers for the information provided. Paul Simpson advised the Panel that in order to answer detailed questions, it would be appropriate to provide further information at a more detailed level. Finance officers were requested to prepare a more detailed breakdown of the figures currently provided in respect of the library services budget for consideration at the special budget meeting in February. This information should include a breakdown of all direct costs and the equipment being used in the library, access for disabled, book budget, etc.

b) Green spaces (parks) budget

Members thanked officers for the additional information provided but were also of the view that more detailed information was required, such as, how much it would cost

to bring the parks within the borough up to green flag status, this would enable more meaningful discussions to take place.

The panel also suggested that the champions for each of the council's parks could be brought together at the working group to consider how to improve the situation within the borough.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Best Value Performance Indicator BV12

The panel received a report prepared by Harjinder Kaur and tabled at this meeting: -

(see annexed)

The panel welcomed Harjinder who reminded members of the reasons for the preparation of this document. She said that following consideration of the above performance indicator at the last meeting members had requested further clarification on the process for measuring sickness absence; the mechanisms of this sickness policy and data collection; the actions the council is taking to improve performance/compliance of the policy and further clarification of how the council is measuring any improvements.

The panel was advised of the details requested as set out in the document circulated at the meeting and noted the methods used to measure sickness absence within the council's employment; an explanation of how the policy works; how sickness cases are managed; compliance of management and a summary of the sickness management.

Members were advised that monitoring would be continued throughout the year and that mandatory training was being provided for managers.

Members thanked Harjinder for the information presented at the meeting. Councillor Arif requested that officers prepare for consideration at a future meeting of this Panel, a further breakdown of the sickness cases per directorate and department and a breakdown of the percentage of long-term sickness leading to dismissal.

Second quarter performance information

Members received and noted the report to cabinet on 30 November 2005: -

(see annexed)

RESOLVED

That this information be received and noted.

FURTHER INFORMATION REQUESTED BY MEMBERS

First Stop Shop

The panel received a briefing note together with the papers previously circulated:

(see annexed)

The panel welcomed Jez Holding who addressed them on the current position.

Members were advised of the new opening times for the First Stop Shop; the provisions made for deaf or hearing impaired and also for visually impaired visitors.

Members enquired whether consideration had been given to the one stop shop being open over the weekend periods. The panel were advised that the new partnership with Fujitsu would be looking at establishing this with citizens via a consultation process. He suggested however, that this could be built into the consultation process which was already being carried out across the council.

The panel welcomed Abida Akram who was also in attendance, to advise members of the preparation for the improved corporate translation service. She advised the panel that there had been an identified need to improve this service and make it easier for everyone to access. A tender was being prepared for the service to be provided as a whole or for some of the service to be provided by different organisations.

Councillor Towe said he hoped that during the tendering process local organisations could be considered for the provision of this service.

Members thanked both Jez and Abida for their presentation and expressed their support for the continued improvement in the first stop shop facilities.

Termination of meeting

The chairman advised the panel that due to the pressure on time he proposed to defer all further items on the agenda to a future meeting of the panel.

RESOLVED

That the meeting terminate at this time and that all remaining items on the agenda be considered at the next meeting of the panel.

There being no further business the meeting terminated at 9.00 p.m.