

COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

Thursday 20 January 2011 at 6.00pm in a Conference Room at the Council House, Walsall

Panel Members Present Councillor L. Harrison (Chair)
Councillor O. Bennett
Councillor P. Bott
Councillor D. Coughlan
Councillor C. Creaney
Councillor R. Martin
Councillor L. Rattigan
Councillor K. Sears
Councillor D. Shires

Portfolio Holders Present Councillor Z. Ali – Communities and Partnerships
Councillor M. Bird - Leader
Councillor A. Harris – Leisure, Culture and Environment
Councillor C. Towe – Finance and Personnel

Officers Present Jamie Morris – Executive Director, Neighbourhoods
Chris Holliday – Head of Leisure and Community Health
Sue Grainger – Head of Libraries, Heritage and Arts
Steph Simcox – Service Accounting and Financial Training Manager
Craig Goodall – Scrutiny Officer

65/10 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received on behalf of Councillor S. Coughlan.

66/10 SUBSTITUTIONS

Councillor D. Coughlan substituted for Councillor S. Coughlan.

67/10 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

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

68/10 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meetings held on 25 November 2010 and 30 November 2010, copies having been previously circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

69/10 REVISED DRAFT REVENUE BUDGET AND DRAFT CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2011/12 FOR CONSULTATION

The Panel considered Cabinets revised draft revenue budget and draft capital programme proposals for 2011/12.

The Service Accounting and Financial Manager provided the Panel with an overview of draft revenue and capital proposed budgets. She also highlighted that the proposed investments to the stray dog reception and disinfestation income shortfall that were reported to the Panel on 30 November were now being considered by the Environment Scrutiny and Performance Panel. She also explained the impact of the draft formula grant settlement, in particular the uncertainty around the future of the Music Support Grant which was dependant on the outcome of an ongoing review.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Personnel explained that if the Music Support Grant (£848,000) was lost there would be knock on effects to operations at the Forest Arts Centre.

The Panel considered the budget proposals presented to them. The following is a summary of the principal points of discussion by Portfolio and budget proposal.

Leisure, Culture and Environment

Draft Capital Programme

Green Spaces Improvement Plan

It was explained that proposals for improvements to parks would be drawn up through wide consultation with local people, including friends groups and area community meetings. A Member highlighted the need to spend the money available from this project in all local parks rather than just the areas premier parks.

Dilapidations at Bryntysilio

It was explained that the final cost of repairing dilapidations at Bryntysilio was currently subject to an independent assessment.

Walsall Arboretum Restoration Programme

This was an externally funded project through the Heritage Lottery Fund. The first phase of the restoration had been completed with a new youth area delivered. The next stages included redeveloping the grandstand, boat house, bowls pavilion, a new visitor centre and landscaping work. The programme should be complete by mid 2013.

Introduction of Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) in Libraries

It was proposed that RFID would be introduced in six libraries, namely:

Central
Aldridge
Bloxwich
Brownhills
Darlaston
Willenhall

RFID would allow the reduction of staff levels required to issue and discharge items and allow staff to focus their time on more added value activities rather than being behind a counter issuing books.

The capital investment in RFID was critical to ensuring that the remodelling proposals in the revenue budget could be achieved.

Draft Revenue Budget

Saving 3: Remodelling of library service

The Portfolio Holder explained that where branch libraries from Council operated buildings closed local library services would be retained, where possible, in partnership with local community organisations or from recognised community buildings. This should enable the national library standard of every household being within 2 miles of a local library to be maintained. It was noted that modern libraries provided access to computers and the internet. It had not yet been decided which libraries would close.

A Member of the Panel supported the idea of providing library services from local community buildings. He felt that library services could be franchised to private sector organisations.

Following a question from a Member of the Panel the Portfolio Holder explained that any Council owned library building vacated due to the remodelling would be demolished to prevent vandalism and to allow the land to be sold on. A Member of the Panel suggested that sites should also be fenced to prevent anti-social behaviour.

In closing the item a Member suggested that following the reduction of the Playbuilder programme consideration should be given to using surplus play equipment located in vacant schools.

Communities and Partnerships

The proposed draft revenue and draft capital programme for the Communities and Partnerships Portfolio was noted.

RESOLVED:

THAT:

- 1. the proposed revenue and capital budget for 2011/12 for the Leisure, Culture and Environment Portfolio be noted;**
- 2. the proposed revenue and capital budget for 2011/12 for the Communities and Partnerships Portfolio be noted;**

and;

- 3. The Head of Leisure and Community Health investigate the possibility of re-using unused school play equipment that might be relocated to another site elsewhere in borough for use by the wider community.**

70/10 WORK PROGRAMME 2010/11 AND FORWARD PLAN

RESOLVED:

THAT:

- 1. The following items be considered at the 22 February meeting of the Panel:**
 - a. Engagement and Utilisation of the Voluntary and Community Sector/Big Society, to include the outcome of national charities and social enterprises survey;**
 - b. Community Safety Plan;**
 - c. Quarter 3 Financial Monitoring;**

and;

- 2. The following items be added to the Panels work programme for consideration at a future meeting:**
 - a. Greenspaces Improvement Plan, and;**
 - b. Anti-Social Behaviour Working Group recommendation monitoring.**

71/10 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the date of the next meeting was 22 February 2011.

The meeting terminated at 6.45 p.m.

Signed:

Date: