

**WILLENHALL NORTH/WILLENHALL SOUTH/SHORT HEATH AREA
PANEL MEETING**

Willenhall Chart, 19 Gomer Street, Willenhall, WV13 2NS

Tuesday, 19 January, 2016 at 6.00 p.m.

Present

Councillor C. Creaney (Chair)
Councillor S. Coughlan (Vice Chair)
Councillor D. Coughlan
Councillor E. Hazell
Councillor D. Shires
Councillor I. Shires

Officers

Paul Gordon - Head of Business Change
Kate Bowers - Head of Communities & Public Protection
Jo Lowndes – Partnership Manager
Simon Tranter – Head of Regeneration Development & Delivery
Jo Nugent – Team Leader - Borough Wide Development
Kauser Agha – Regeneration Officer
Neil Picken – Senior Committee Business and Governance Manager

Also in Attendance

Councillor A. Andrew (Deputy Leader of the Council and Economy, Infrastructure and Development).

97/16 **Apologies**

Apologies for the duration of the meeting were received from Councillor D. Hazell.

98/16 **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor S. Coughlan – Community Director - Palfrey Community Centre and Trustee of Willenhall CHART.

99/16 **Local Government (Access to Information) Act, 1985 (as amended)**

There were no items to be considered in private session.

Willenhall Economic and Development Programme

The Panel received a report [annexed] outlining the proposal to develop a medium-term programme of targeted regeneration activity for Willenhall which might result in the creation of an investment plan.

The Deputy Leader of the Council and Economy, Infrastructure and Development advised that he had consulted all Ward Councillors on the proposals. It was important to get an understanding of the number and types of businesses and assist them to work together to drive forward and attract investment. He advised that this had been successful elsewhere within the Borough. Previous work carried out was recognised with progress made with transportation arrangements. The ambition was to improve businesses and create homes.

A numbers of members expressed concern that similar initiatives had been undertaken in the past, including the work of the Project Reference Groups and consultants. This suddenly came to a halt as it was no longer deemed a priority and so many businesses felt let down.

The Deputy Leader advised that the recession impacted upon previous initiatives. He highlighted that Project Reference Groups were not hands on. He emphasized the need to move forward, look at competitors and learn from them and build on successes. He also stated that it was important to get businesses on board.

A Member stated that trades may not be forthcoming as they had previously been promised improvements which had never materialised. That said, Willenhall had great potential to grow and develop.

It was commented that Ashmore Lake Road was not illuminated sufficiently. Within the report [annexed] it was suggested that there had been commercial and industrial development in Ashmore Lake including an ambulance depot and training/office facilities. It was suggested that a site visit be undertaken with all Members of the Panel invited, in order that any problems could be identified and resolved.

A member asked whether it would be possible for the Council to establish a registered business as traders needed to see progress. The Deputy Leader advised that income generation was looked at often including initiatives such as Business Improvement Districts. It was clear that Willenhall needed to move forward to put in a good position should the Enterprise Zone be expanded.

A debate ensued on Void properties. The Panel expressed concern that there were a number of properties that were vacant and asked whether it

would be possible to use Compulsory Purchase Order powers (CPO) of the Council. The Panel were advised that CPO was very difficult as a deliverable scheme was required to be in place. The process was protracted. It was accepted that there were no quick fixes but with a well informed strategy progress could be made.

The Panel noted that a report would be submitted to Cabinet on the Willenhall Economic and Development setting out:-

- Potential resource and budget arrangements;
- Delivery and Governance arrangements;
- The approach to consultation.

Members of the Panel made it clear that all local Members should be actively consulted and engaged. The Deputy Leader advised that he would share the Cabinet report with all Members in the Willenhall North/Willenhall South/ Short Heath Area Panel.

Resolved

1. That Members undertake a site visit to Ashmore Lake Industrial Park;
2. That the Deputy Leader provide a copy of the Cabinet Report to all Members of the Willenhall North/Willenhall South/ Short Heath Area Panel, when available;
3. That feedback is provided to the Panel once a decision has been made by Cabinet.

101/16 CHART 'Hub and Spoke' Model of working

The CHART Development Manager introduced the report (annexed) setting out the work of the Willenhall Community, Health and Resource Training (CHART) Centre over the past two years.

Members acknowledged that the hub and spoke model should have brought in and assisted groups from further afield and asked where the groups visiting the CHART were located. The Development Manager advised that she would ensure that this information was provided following the meeting.

A Member noted that 'Walsall Voluntary Action' had supported the manager in her role and asked her for her experience of working with them. The manager advised that it had been very positive. In doing so, she commented that she will still building capacity within the CHART before reaching out to assist other groups in other locations such as Short Heath.

It was noted that funding for the post of the CHART Development Manager was due to expire at the end of March, 2016. Members felt that the post

should be supported and so suggested that an application be submitted to the Area Panel to fund provision to facilitate the hub and spoke model from the remainder of the spending allocation (16k). This was only an invitation to apply and it was made clear that funding applications all needed to meet the necessary criteria.

Resolved

That the CHART considers submitting an application to fund a post to facilitate the hub and spoke model from the remainder of the spending allocation (16k).

102/16 **Willenhall Community Forum**

At this point Councillor Creaney left the meeting and did not return. Councillor Coughlan took over as Chair of the meeting.

A Member advised that what was being sought was nothing new. Community Forums had existed before although it was accepted that they worked better in some areas than in others.

It was important, in light of diminishing budgets that all community groups were able to have a voice and opportunity to influence the council and receive assistance to access and apply for funding. It was possible that Area Panels would cease to exist, due to budget pressures. It was therefore important that meaningful engagement continued.

A debate ensued as to how the public could be better engaged and empowered.

The Head of Communities & Public Protection suggested that the key to active engagement was to understand what people wanted to meet about. The use and power of Social Media should also be exploited to maximise the benefits it could bring.

Members suggested that a devolved budget would empower residents and encourage participation. They also stated that social media could be also be risky if not managed correctly.

The Head of Communities & Public Protection explained that it was not always about money commenting that some Area Panels had struggled to spend the £40k allocation. It was emphasized that a community forum which embraced social media and involved face to face discussions would be of benefit so long as it concentrated on what the community wanted to discuss. Once engaged, the work of the forum could be developed to become more strategic.

It was recommended that the Area Manager creates an open group on Facebook entitled 'Willenhall Community Forum'. Questions should be asked and feedback provided to the next meeting of the Panel.

Resolved

1. That the Area Manager creates an open group on Facebook entitled 'Willenhall Community Forum'.
2. That the Area Manager submits relevant questions on the page providing feedback to the next meeting of the Area Panel.

103/16 **Internal Assurance of Area Panel Projects**

The Panel received a report [annexed] which set out the findings of an internal assurance review.

Members were advised that the review had been undertaken to ensure that any project which had been allocated funding through the Area Partnership, had utilised the funding for the purpose for which it was allocated.

The Head of Business Change advised that a copy of the map, appended to the report, would be circulated electronically to Members.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

104/16 **Area Manager's Report**

The Panel considered a report (annexed) setting out some of the work carried out within the Local Area.

Members suggested that future reports should be tailored to clarify the area within which work had been carried out.

Resolved

That future reports should be tailored to clarify the area within which work had been carried out.

105/16 **Funding Report**

Members received the funding report (annexed) which set those projects carried forward from the previous year, approved projects and a list of funding requests for consideration.

The list of funding requests contained within appendix 1 of the report was considered.

Resolved

That the following funding be approved:-

Applicant	Description	Funding approved
Public Rights of Way Team	Installation of a dropped kerb – junction at the corner of Coppice Lane and Howe Crescent.	£3,302.52
Public Rights of Way Team	Installation of a dropped kerb – 26 Fairlawn Close.	£3,302.52
Starcross Youth Theatre	Equipment – sound and lighting resources to stage concerts.	£2,300.00

106/16 **Date of next meeting**

The date of the next meeting was noted as 24 March, 2015

The meeting terminated at 8.01 p.m.

Chairman:

Date: