

CORPORATE AND PUBLIC SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

11 January 2018 at 6.00pm at the Council House, Walsall

Committee Members Present	Councillor A. Andrew (Chair) Councillor C. Creaney (Vice – Chair) Councillor P. Bott Councillor M. Bird Councillor S. Craddock Councillor L. Rattigan Councillor G. Sohal Councillor S. Wade Councillor M. Ward	
Members Present	Councillor Hicken Councillor L. Hazel Councillor Nawaz	
Portfolio Holder	Councillor S. Coughlan Councillor K. Chambers Councillor C. Jones Councillor I. Shires	Leader of the Council Personnel and Business Support/Agenda for Change Clean and Green Community, Leisure and Culture
Officers Present	Simon Neilson Barbara Watt James Walsh Lorraine Boothman Chris Holliday Ben Percival Chris Knowles Carol Williams Susan Wright Paula Bayes Craig Goodall Matthew Powis	Executive Director – Economy and Environment Director of Public Health Assistant Director – Finance Regulatory Services Manager Head of Leisure, Culture and Operations Sport and Leisure Service Manager E&E Finance Business Partner Head of Information, Communication & Technologies Electoral Services Manager Electoral Services Deputy Manager Senior Democratic Services Officer Democratic Services Officer

229/17 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors S. Cooper, M. Nazir, K. Phillips.

230/17 Substitution

There were no substitutions.

231/17 Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

There were no declarations of interest or party whips.

232/17 Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)

There were no items to consider in private session.

233/17 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 23 November 2017 copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

234/17 Petition: Secure our Parks and Playing Fields in Short Heath

The Committee heard a petition in regard to securing parks and playing fields from unauthorised encampment in Short Heath which had received more than 500 signatures. The Chair outlined the format for the item and invited the petition organiser to introduce their petition.

Councillor Hicken (Lead Petitioner) introduced the petition which had called for injunctions on parks and playing fields in Short Heath & Willenhall to prevent unauthorised encampments. He highlighted concerns regarding an increase in the number of unauthorised encampments in the borough and the number of sites in Short Heath and Willenhall which require the introduction of deterrents or require further preventative measures. He further stated that additional resources and defences for affected sites would save the Council long term financially.

A Member sought clarification on the number of illegal unauthorised encampments in the last two years. Councillor Hicken clarified that there had been a couple of incidents within the last two years. However, he stated that there had been several unauthorised encampments at Rough Wood in the last five years.

The Chair sought clarification on whether the petition was requesting preventative measures. Councillor Hicken clarified that the Council needed to look at prevention methods and defences for sites in Bloxwich, Essington

and Rough Wood as those had been concerning areas for unauthorised encampments for residents.

The Cabinet Member for Clean and Green confirmed that King George V Playing Fields, Bloxwich had been a targeted spot for unauthorised encampments. He highlighted that individuals had broken locks and gates on several occasions to gain access to the park. He concluded the Council was evaluating alternative prevention options for sites in the borough such as King George V Playing Fields. However, preventative measures had to be considered alongside budgetary pressures.

A Member stated that the Council required greater support from the Police in order to target unauthorised encampments throughout the borough. In response, the Cabinet Member for Clean and Green highlighted the Police had increased pressures on resources and delivery of service. He further stated that the Council had to deal with high cost of enforcement officers and associated legal costs. He concluded that it was more cost effective to stop unauthorised encampments through preventative measures rather than clearing and disposing waste following an unauthorised encampment.

The Cabinet Member for Community, Leisure and Culture highlighted that unauthorised encampments in the borough had been a historic problem that extended to the wider Black Country and West Midlands. He further stated that barriers to protect certain sites had been problematic due to the grass cutting programmes in the area and equipment requiring appropriate access. However, the Council had achieved a balance approach by providing protection to hotspot sites, while considering local concerns about barriers and inhibiting the Council's ability to maintain local areas.

He confirmed that in regards to enforcement of injunctions, the Council had targeted injunctions for specific sites within the borough and 18 particular families. He further stated that the Council had achieved three injunctions across 24 sites across the borough through evidence based interventions.

Members were informed that transit sites had been successfully established by Oldham MBC and Halton Borough Council. Both authorities were reported to have good onsite management and were popular with the traveller community.

A Member sought clarification on whether the Council could procure additional Police services for extra support in dealing with unauthorised encampments. The Leader of the Council clarified that the Council had investigated further into procuring Police resources. He stated that the Police had been willing to assist with requests as resources allowed. He highlighted that the Council had reduced the amount of unauthorised encampments during 2016/17 and 2017/18 by prioritising resources to targeted hotspots. However, the Council was working to achieve a sustainable solution which involved transit sites.

The Committee debated issues relating to the petition. The principal points from the ensuing discussion were as follows:

- Issue of displacing unauthorised encampments to other areas and sites;
- A desire for increased Police support in dealing with unauthorised encampments. However, the Committee noted the work carried out by officers and the progress made with Council and Police cooperation;
- Body cameras used by enforcement officers would be implemented in future;
- Action to reduce unauthorised encampments was broadly welcomed by the Committee;
- Capital funding had been allocated to a travellers site at Willenhall Lane;
- Information regarding clean up costs following unauthorised encampments and disposal costs associated would be provided in writing.

Following the debate it was **moved** by Councillor Andrew and duly **seconded** by Councillor Bird that:-

- a) the Committee commends the work of council officers in regard to unauthorised encampments;
- b) the Cabinet allocate finances in order to undertake preventative measures to parks and green spaces in Willenhall North and Short Heath in consultation with Ward Councillors and residents to secure sites from unauthorised encampments;
- c) the Cabinet carry out a review of preventative measures and strategies in relation to unauthorised encampments across Walsall as a 'spend to save' measure.

On being put to the vote the motion was declared carried.

The Chair thanked Councillor Hicken for attending the meeting and presenting the petition.

Resolved:

1. **That, the Committee commends the work of council officers in regard to unauthorised encampments;**
2. **That, the Cabinet allocate finances in order to undertake preventative measures to parks and green spaces in Willenhall North and Short Heath in consultation with Ward Councillors and residents to secure sites from unauthorised encampments;**
3. **In connection with (2) above, the Cabinet carry out a review of preventative measures and strategies in relation to unauthorised encampments across Walsall as a 'spend to save' measure.**
4. **That, clean up costs and associated financial implications regarding unauthorised encampments be provided to Members in writing.**

235/17 **Draft Capital Programme 2018/19 to 2021/22 and Draft Revenue Budget Update**

On 11 January 2018, the Committee received the draft revenue budget and draft capital programme 2018/19 to 2021/22.

The Committee noted changes to the revenue savings proposals for 2018/19 in particular to Savings 17 on garden waste collection charging.

The Chair invited Members of the Committee to propose questions and comments to the relevant portfolio holder and the following responses were made:-

Clean and Green

Garden Waste Proposals

A Member highlighted that a cessation in trade waste operations could enable operations to be focused on core services.

Deputy Leader and Regeneration

Replacement of obsolete fixed site speed enforcement camera infrastructure

A Member sought clarification on the location of replacement fixed site speed cameras. The Committee were informed that potential sites had not been finalised and that the Council were analysing the impact of current fixed cameras in Birmingham and Solihull.

Prior year approval – CCTV upgrade to equipment

A Member sought clarification on the implementation of an upgrade programme to CCTV equipment. The Committee were informed that every CCTV camera would be upgraded with an additional £60,000 spent on mobile cameras.

Personnel and Business Support/ Agenda

High level parapet wall – Sneyd, Vernon Way

Members were informed that a high level parapet wall required improvement works to ensure safe access to a swimming complex at Sneyd Community Association. It was further stated that scaffolding and boarding costs had been included in the costs of the works.

Disabled Facilities Grant

A Member sought clarification in regards to the outcome to lifts and hoists no longer fit for purpose or requests for removal from residents. The Cabinet Member for Personnel and Business Support/Agenda informed the Committee that a response would be provided in writing.

Community, Leisure and Culture

Invest to Save – Oak Park Active Living Centre – Second Artificial grass pitch – match funding being sought from Football Association

Members were informed that additional parking at Oak Park Active Living Centre had been considered and parking issues would be addressed before a construction of a second artificial grass pitch.

Resolved:

That the draft capital programme 2018/19 to 2020/21 be noted.

236/17 Four Yearly Elections Update

The Committee considered an item on four yearly election proposals. The Leader of the Council introduced the report which outlined proposals to change the election cycle in the borough from elections by thirds to all Member elections every four years. He highlighted that the current system had benefited the electorate in holding democratically elected members to account and encouraging younger voters to engage in politics.

Members sought clarification on whether any other Local Authority had proposed similar changes. The Electoral Services Manager informed the Committee that Birmingham City Council had changed its election cycle to four yearly which would be implemented in May 2018 and Dudley MBC had recently finalised a consultation with residents on four yearly proposals. She reported that Dudley MBC had received 1500 responses to its consultation with 1224 responses to keep elections by thirds.

It was agreed that the Committee monitor changes to the election cycle at Birmingham City Council and it was proposed that a cross Scrutiny Committee working group could be established in the new municipal year to look at the issue.

Resolved:

- 1. That, a cross Scrutiny Committee working group be established in the new municipal year to examine Election proposals;**
- 2. In connection with (2) above, the Committee monitor changes to the election cycle at Birmingham City Council.**

237/17 Forest Arts Centre

The Committee were updated on the activities and performance of the Forest Arts Centre, Walsall. The Sport & Leisure Service Manager informed the Committee that the centre had reviewed operations and its management structure to reflect a more business focused approach which included:-

- Revised fees and charges;
- Attracting new and more diverse business and bookings;
- Focused approach to marketing and promotion;
- Operational efficiency.

He informed the Committee that the centre had been successful in attracting new clients to the venue with a mixture of high profile events, conferences and traditional performing arts entertainment. The centre had been successful in reducing the subsidy from the Council by £285K for the years 2018 to 2019/20. However, he highlighted that the centre would receive a Council subsidy of £100K for 2020/21. He concluded that the centre was moving forward to grow the profile of the centre and attract higher yielding performers.

The Committee commended the report and the work of officers in regard to improvements at the Forest Arts Centre.

Resolved:

That the Forest Arts Centre Update be noted.

227/17 Areas of focus – 2017-18

The Committee considered its areas of focus and the forward plans of Walsall Council and the Black Country Joint Executive Committee.

Resolved:

That:

- 1. The areas of focus 2017/18 be noted;**
- 2. The forward plans be noted.**

228/17 Date of next meeting

It was noted that the next meeting would take place on 22 February 2018

Termination of Meeting

There being no further business, the meeting terminated at 7.39p.m.

Signed:

Date: