

AT A MEETING

- of the -

COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION WORKING GROUP held at the Council House,
Walsall on
Thursday, 18 January 2007 at 5.00 p.m.

PRESENT

Councillor Towe
Councillor Burley
Councillor Bird
Councillor Beilby
Councillor Griffiths
Councillor K.Phillips
Councillor Bott

OFFICERS PRESENT

Julie Ball	Head of Neighbourhood Partnerships and Programmes
Steve Law	Property Manager
Carol Mason	Community Development Manager
Stuart Bentley	Scrutiny Officer

05/2006. **APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTIONS**

The Chair advised the panel that apologies for non-attendance were received on behalf of Councillor Woodruff and that Councillor Bird was in attendance as a substitute for Councillor Ault.

06/2006. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP**

Councillor Bott declared an interest through a family member.

07/2006. **ITEMS FOR INFORMATION AND CONDITION SURVEYS**

Councillor Towe referred to the items previously circulated and stated that there was a lot of information in them.

(annexed)

He added that it appeared that there was no clear consensus on a local authority approach to the issues, but the documents did highlight that community associations were not responsible for external repairs.

Councillor Burley stated that the issue of external repairs was still a sticking point, alongside the length of lease arrangements sufficient enough to allow associations to apply for external funding. She added that community associations were crucial and the council needed to support them.

Councillor Towe agreed and added that all the documents indicated that community associations should be supported.

Councillor Phillips asked whether the council had a budget for the repairs to community association buildings.

Steve Law replied that there was no specific budget allocation but repairs were funded from the larger property service budget.

Councillor Towe stated that the Central Government reports clearly stated that councils should be responsible for the buildings.

Councillor Phillips added that this made sense, in case the community associations were to pull-out, as it would leave the buildings in good repair for re-letting by the council.

Councillor Towe stated that there was a general agreement for peppercorn rent with the council being responsible for external repairs.

Councillor Phillips referred to the buildings condition survey and stated that the buildings appeared to be in reasonable condition.

(annexed)

Steve Law stated that it was reasonable to expect tenants to be responsible for internal repairs needed due to wear and tear.

Councillor Burley replied that floors could be expensive to replace and would place a large financial burden on the associations. The nature of the repairs needed to be defined.

Councillor Towe replied that he expected that these details would be defined in the lease.

Julie Ball replied that the issue of the definition of major and minor repairs had been picked up by the associations as an issue.

Councillor Bott stated that there was no condition survey for Darlaston community association, which was subject to a 21 year lease. He added he was concerned over the contents of the lease and the existence of asbestos in the building.

Steve Law replied that a survey had not been produced as a result of the lease arrangements in place. He added that, in response to a request to do so, he would circulate a copy of the lease to all members of the panel.

Councillor Towe asked whether the listed repairs could be completed before the associations were asked to sign the lease agreements.

Steve Law replied that this was unlikely as there was no money available.

Julie Ball stated that there was a rolling programme of repairs and added that any speeding of the process would require extra funding.

Councillor Burley asked how big the budget was.

Carol Mason replied that further to enquiries made with officers in the past she had been told it was very small.

Councillor Phillips stated that the associations would prefer a lease, with a peppercorn rent, in order to begin applying for external funding.

Julie Ball stated that lottery funding could be used to replace items such as windows.

Steve Law replied that if the council were the landlords it would make it difficult for the associations to draw down funding for repairs.

Councillor Towe asked where the council was with level 2 repairs.

Steve Law replied that he believed the current state of budgets across the council meant that the emphasis was on level 1 repairs.

Carol Mason added that the associations were reluctant to sign up to leases with repair work still outstanding.

Councillor Griffiths asked what had happened to the council's asset survey.

Steve Law replied that there was a programme of asset disposal from which the council generated in the order of 6-7 million pounds per year. This money was then mainstreamed.

Councillor Phillips recommended that 10% of this money should be ring-fenced for asset upkeep.

Councillor Burley suggested that section 106 monies should also be investigated.

Julie Ball stated that the document "Communities Taking Control" mentioned the creation of an incentive fund for the transfer of assets (section 5.4, p19) and she also believed that the Local Area Agreement could support this particular agenda. She suggested that she further investigate these avenues. She added that a beacon scheme had also been mentioned, which may release additional funding and if the associations were willing to take some liabilities risks, the council could support the associations to bring in external funding. A post was now in place within the partnership that could assist in this.

Councillors Bott and Burley asked whether the council checked if the associations had public liability insurance.

Carol Mason said that she was sure that they had but would confirm this.

08/2006. FEEDBACK FROM WALSALL FEDERATION OF COMMUNITY ASSOCIATIONS (WFCO)

Julie Ball informed the group that she had liaised with the associations during a LNP event. There had been general discussions around the major issues and they had

stated that they wanted some form of lease arrangement as long as it was favourable. Their big fear was the responsibility for repair works. None of the associations spoken to had said that they would not sign a lease, but resourcing repairs was a big issue.

Councillor Burley asked whether there was a uniform approach to lease lengths.

Julie Ball replied that Neighbourhood Resource Centre leases had been recommended to be in the order of 10-15 years dependant on the size of funding they were looking to attract.

Carol Mason added that in her experience some funding streams, lottery in particular, required a 25 year lease, dependent on the amount of funding being applied for.

Julie Ball replied that a table detailing the length of lease arrangements required for types of funding stream had been produced while working with the Neighbourhood Resource Centres. She agreed to circulate this to the group.

Councillor Burley asked if a 21 year lease would affect the council.

Julie Ball replied that any lease would have a break out clause and she recommended that any lease be reviewed every 3 years. She recommended a 15 year lease but would be guided by the type of funding the associations were looking to attract. She added that a reasonable length of lease could also send the right message to the associations.

Councillor Burley highlighted the need to manage properly. She thought that management committees were needed comprising of community members.

Julie Ball wondered whether such arrangements could be specified in the lease.

Steve Law replied that he wasn't sure if it could be as leases were generally formulated in property terms. It would have to be done in a different way.

Julie Ball agreed that it would involve the merging of property and stronger communities agendas, but it could lead to a unique lease arrangement.

There was general agreement that this was worth exploring.

Councillor Griffiths added that the buildings were valuable assets and was concerned that there was no template for performance management.

Carol Mason added that at the recent WFCO Annual General Meeting there had been a change of Chair and suggested it may be a good idea to invite representatives from both the WFCO and other non members, who have an interest, to the next Scrutiny Working Group meeting.

Members agreed that this would be beneficial.

Councillor Griffiths noted that some of the figures in the conditions survey were now 12 months out of date.

Councillor Burley asked if the figures could be updated.

Councillor Towe asked if the community associations could be asked to comment on the current state of their buildings.

Steve Law replied that he could certainly ask.

AGREED

- That the next meeting of the panel will be held on 28 February 2007 at 6pm.
- That officers investigate incentive funding, beacon schemes and support from the Local Area Agreement.
- That the Chair of the Walsall Federation for Community Organisations and representatives of the community associations be invited to the next meeting.
- That officers circulate the table relating the length of lease to the funding streams sought to all members of the group.
- That officers ask the community associations comment on the condition of the buildings they occupy.
- That officers circulate a copy of the lease for Darlaston community association to all members of the group.
- That officers check the whether the community associations had public liability cover.

There being no other business the meeting terminated at 6.00 p.m.