

AT A MEETING

- of the -

NEIGHBOURHOOD SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL held at the Council House, Walsall on **Tuesday 13 June 2006** at 6.00 p.m.

PRESENT

Councillor Towe (Chair)
Councillor Bott
Councillor Phillips
Councillor Creaney

ALSO PRESENT

Councillor Walker (Portfolio holder)

OFFICERS PRESENT

Jamie Morris – Executive Director
Keith Stone – Assistant Director
Tim Challans – Assistant Director
Julie Ball – Head of Neighbourhoods Partnerships and Programme
Graham Hood - Head of Green Spaces
Sam Mills
Pat Warner

1/2006 **APOLOGIES**

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

2/2006 **SUBSTITUTIONS**

The chair advised the panel of the following substitution to the panel for the duration of the meeting: -

- Delete: Councillor Burley
- Substitute: Councillor Creaney

3/2006 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP**

There were no declarations of interest identified at this meeting.

4/2006 **LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985**

Members noted that there were no items for consideration in private at this meeting.

5/2006 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 5 April 2006, a copy having been previously circulated to each member of the panel be approved and signed by the chair as a correct record of the proceedings.

6/2006 ILLUMINATIONS WORKSHOP 10 APRIL 2006

Members received the minutes of the special workshop to consider the illuminations review consultation document.

Councillor Towe briefly reminded members of the discussions at that meeting and the recommendation that a further special meeting would take place following the stakeholders' event which had been reported at that meeting.

Members approved the minutes of that special meeting as a correct record.

Councillor Towe went on to advise members of the stakeholder event which took place on 7 June 2006 to evaluate the consultants report in respect of the future for the Walsall Illuminations. He confirmed that the meeting had been very effective in terms of the proposals which were put forward there. The three consultants appointed by Council to prepare the documents in relation to the future of the illuminations were present to present their findings and proposals for the future. He said those present at the event felt happy that the illuminations would improve in the way suggested.

He said he had asked for the documents presented at that meeting to be circulated to all members. He said that consideration would also be given at the next meeting of this panel as to whether a working group would be established to further consider this matter.

7/2006 PANEL REMIT PRESENTATION

The chairman welcomed Jamie Morris, Executive Director for the Neighbourhoods services directorate who attended to present his directorates plan for 2006/7.

Jamie circulated a copy of the directorate plan for 2006/7 and having introduced his senior management team advised members that each member of the senior management team present would be briefing the panel on the detailed plans within each section of the directorate to enable members to have the opportunity to decide on the areas within the remit of the panel which could be scrutinised within this municipal year.

Jamie advised the panel that its remit now matches that of the directorate and that officers would be in a position to provide a one to one service to the panel. The remit also reflected the portfolios, this he said emphasised the size of the new remit of this panel.

The panel were further advised that the Neighbourhoods services directorate is the biggest directorate within the council employing some 3,500 people and its gross revenue budget being £122m, that of half of the council's budget.

Each member of the senior management team proceeded to advise the panel in detail of the future plans for their area within the directorate.

Tim Challans advised the panel in respect of the remit covering the Leisure, Culture and Lifelong Learning services. One of the key issues within this area of the panels remit is Library Modernisation which he said had already commenced. The provision of a Contact Centre and work on the location of Local Access points had also commenced and Tim Challans advised that these would be provided in the areas of greatest need.

Councillor Towe said that he would like to be provided with information in respect of the provision of these centres as soon as a decision as been made.

Tim Challans also referred to the Green Spaces Strategy which would be discussed as a separate item on the agenda. The Forest Arts Centre, he advised members was an excellent example of improved services. He emphasised that the arts centre now provided excellent services for the local community and the aim is to improve the building externally in the near future.

He also referred to the plans to improve marketing of all the services within the Leisure and Culture remit. He advised members that the New Art Gallery building has been improved and plans are being put together for a more popular programme. The College of Continuing Education as recently undergone an Ofsted inspection and the results have been satisfactory. Some areas however, needed improvement and work was already commencing to ensure that these services improved. There were also proposals to improve the contribution leisure and culture makes to healthy living through sports, the arts and looking at healthy options for provision of meals within schools. A report was also being prepared for submission to cabinet on the contribution of the arts and sports to the health priorities.

In respect of the management options for leisure, he said consultants had already started on option appraisals.

Julie Ball advised the panel of the proposals for the Neighbourhood Partnerships and Programmes team and the Community Safety services.

Julie Ball advised the panel that she would be working with the Community Safety Unit to achieve the LAA targets for safer, stronger communities by reducing crime and the fear of crime; improving community engagement which would involve local neighbourhood partnerships and improve the environment.

She referred to the local neighbourhood agreements which were currently being prepared for submission to the local neighbourhood partnerships. She continued that the voluntary and community centre support was also being reviewed.

In answer to questions raised, Julie emphasised that the Local Neighbourhood Partnerships (LNP) would continue to improve their services to the community and that local people will have a greater say in the decisions taken by the LNPs. The panel agreed that it would be advantageous to review the progress of the Local Neighbourhood Partnerships in two months time to see how well the changes were progressing.

The panel welcomed Keith Stone who presented the services within his remit of the built environment.

Keith Stone advised the panel that the built environment encompasses a wide range of issues and he proceeded to advise the panel of the current status of each one of those issues: -

1. Recycling and Waste Management – Keith referred to this issue as hot topic in terms of the governments' current request for a reduction in waste and also that of recycling.

He continued that over the year residents were being encouraged to recycle their household waste including the increased use of compost bins. In reply to a question, Keith said that not every resident would be provided with a brown bin but that the service was being improved. He also further advised the panel that the target for reduction in waste had increased to 30%.

He said that a letter had been circulated to non users of their brown bins and Councillor Phillips requested that a copy of that letter be sent to her to enable her to answer some questions raised by residents.

2. Decriminalised parking – Keith referred to a report which was being submitted to cabinet shortly in respect of the decriminalisation of parking enforcement. He said that one of the recommendations within this report was that the matter be referred to this scrutiny panel for their comment. He further enquired whether the panel would consider setting up a working group at this meeting to enable this issue to be considered as a matter of urgency in any event before the next scrutiny panels meeting.

Members considered the issue and AGREED: -

That a working group be established in respect of environmental enforcement to consider, in particular, decriminalisation of parking enforcement and that the membership on this working group will be as follows: -

- Councillor Phillips
- Councillor Bott
- Councillor Towe
- Councillor Ault

It was AGREED:

That the first meeting of this working group is set up as soon as possible and that the report being submitted to cabinet be the main item for consideration at this meeting.

3. Bereavement Services – Keith advised the panel that this review was being progressed.

4. Town Centre Transport Package – Keith advised that the transport package would commence next month and that it would be completed within the next two years.

5. Highways Maintenance – Keith said that officers were looking at how to get the best value for all citizens following an audit commission view some years ago. He said that the work was almost completed and that a report on this would be submitted to the scrutiny panel prior to submission to cabinet.

6. Asset Management Transformation Plan – Councillor Bott referred to a plot of land which he hoped to discuss in more detail with Keith Stone in respect of the length of time this land was being processed for sale by the council.

Jamie rounded off the presentation by confirming with the panel that it might be difficult for members to prioritise what to look at bearing in mind the large number of issues within the remit of this panel.

Jamie felt that it would be advantageous due to the low attendance at this meeting if those members unable to attend this meeting would meet with him prior to the next meeting of the scrutiny panel to enable him to brief them on the directorates plan for 2006/7, this he felt would help the panel to make a decision as to which issues would be placed on their work programme for consideration throughout the municipal year.

Members thanked officers for their presentations and AGREED: -

That because of the volume of issues within the remit of this panel it might be advantageous for all members to be fully briefed prior to any discussions taking place in respect of the issues to be placed on the work programme for further consideration.

8/2006 CURRENT POSITION AND PROPOSED WORK PORGRAMME 2006/7

The report of the executive director was submitted: -

(see annexed|)

RESOLVED:

That the contents of the report be noted and that the consideration of the work programme for 2006/7 be deferred for consideration at the next meeting.

9/2006 ESTABLISHMENT OF WORKING GROUPS

The report of the executive director was submitted: -

(see annexed)

Members considered the report and RESOLVED:

That further consideration of the establishment of any working groups be considered at the next meeting following the discussions in respect of the contents of the work programme.

10/2006 GREEN SPACES STRATEGY

Members welcomed Sam Mills and the new Head of Green spaces, Graham Hood who addressed the panel in respect of this matter.

The panel received a copy of the draft consultation document in respect of the Walsall Green Spaces Strategy: -

(see annexed)

Sam briefed the members on the contents of the draft consultation document and sought the views of the panel in respect of the strategic objectives set out in the action plan attached to the report. He said it was hoped that members would be able to suggest a priority order for undertaking the actions set out in this document.

The panel AGREED:

That the green spaces working group should be re-established for the 2006/7 municipal year to enable that working group to consider the action plan as set out in the draft consultation document.

The membership of the working group will be as follows: -

- Councillor Beeley
- Councillor Beilby
- Councillor Bott
- Councillor Phillips
- Councillor Towe

11/2006 PERFORMANCE AND MONITORING ITEMS

Members AGREED:

That this issue would be considered at the next meeting following consideration of items to be placed on the work programme.

12/2006 RESOLUTION FROM CABINET RE: STRATEGIC REVIEW OF COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION FUNDING

The panel noted the recommendations from cabinet at its meeting on 22 March 2006 in respect of the report submitted to cabinet relating to the strategic review of community association funding.

13/2006 FORWARD PLAN

Members noted the issues which will be considered in the near future at cabinet which relate to the remit of this scrutiny panel.

14/2006 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was AGREED:

That the next meeting of the panel will be held on 17 August 2006.

There being no further business this meeting terminated at 8.00 p.m.