

COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

Tuesday 14 July 2009 at 6.00 p.m.

Panel Members present

Councillor L. Harrison (Chair)
Councillor C. Creaney (Vice-Chair)
Councillor K. Aftab
Councillor Z. Ali
Councillor P. Bott
Councillor D. Pitt
Councillor I. Robertson
Councillor I. Shires

Portfolio Holders present

Councillor B. Sanders – Leisure & Culture
Councillor C. Towe – Personnel & Finance

Other Members present

Councillor C. Ault
Councillor R. Carpenter
Councillor G. Wilkes

Officers present

Jamie Morris	Executive Director – Neighbourhood Services
Clive Wright	Director, Walsall Partnership
Sue Wedgwood	Assistant Managing Director – Walsall Children’s Services – Serco
Vicky Buckley	Head of Corporate Finance
Julie Gethin	Head of Partnerships and Programmes
Ben Percival	Sport and Recreation Manager
Anthea Cooper	Centre Manager - Bryntysilio
Craig Goodall	Acting Principal Scrutiny Officer

06/09 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor M. Pitt.

07/09 SUBSTITUTIONS

There were no substitutions for the duration of the meeting.

08/09 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest and party whip in respect of items on the agenda.

09/09 MINUTES

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting adjourned on 8 June 2009 and reconvened on 17 June 2009, copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

10/09 BRYNTYSILIO

The Panel received a discussion paper, outlining four possible future courses of action, on the future of Bryntysilio Outdoor Education Centre (Bryntysilio), promoted by problems with current arrangements, the lapsing of the existing leases and anticipated future funding limitations.

Ben Percival reminded Members that the former Neighbourhoods Scrutiny and Performance Panel had identified the potential to review the Councils use of Bryntysilio during consideration of the 2009/10 budget setting process. Other issues concerning the level of investment the site required and the lapsed lease presented an opportune time for Members to consider the Councils future use of the facility.

The Chair reported that the Council had received many letters and opinions on Bryntysilio. She also noted that in order to make an informed recommendation on the future of the centre more information than was contained in the report was required. She suggested establishing a working group that would allow Members to consider the topic in detail, speak to a variety of interested parties and visit Bryntysilio and potential alternatives.

The Panel supported the Chairs suggestion. The following are the principal points from the ensuing discussion:

- The Council paid a lease of £22,000 a year for the use of Bryntysilio. This had been a set amount for the duration of the lease. The Council also paid all running costs associated with the venue. This equated to Council net expenditure of approximately £500,000 a year.
- It was not compulsory for schools to use Bryntysilio or indeed visit any outdoor centre as part of the national curriculum. If schools did choose to visit an outdoor centre Walsall Children's Services – Serco, did not specify that schools should visit Bryntysilio.
- Walsall Holiday Camp Trust decided upon all details related to the provision of free holidays to underprivileged children.
- A number of comments were made about the value provided to children of visiting Bryntysilio and whether the same value could be achieved at other outdoor centres.
- Costs had been reduced at the centre and the possibility of external funding had been investigated but no funding streams had been identified.
- It was not possible to sell capacity at Bryntysilio as this would prevent local children attending.
- A short report by Anthea Cooper, Centre Manager at Bryntysilio was circulated. (annexed).

Following a question from the Panel it was explained that a new lease for the centre remained unsigned. It would be beneficial for the working group's investigations to be complete before budget setting for 2010/11 commenced but this was not critical.

In the interests of Member capacity the Panel agreed to defer their working group investigation into alcohol related anti-social behaviour until their investigations into Bryntysilio were complete.

Resolved:

That:

- 1. a working group be established to consider the Councils future use of Bryntysilio Outdoor Education Centre;**
- 2. the working group investigation into alcohol related anti-social behaviour be deferred until the completion of the Bryntysilio Working Group;**
- 3. Councillors: K. Aftab, C. Creaney, P. Bott, L. Harrison and I. Shires be appointed to the Bryntysilio Working Group;**

and;

- 4. Councillor L. Harrison be appointed Lead Member of the Bryntysilio Working Group.**

11/09 COMMUNITY ACTION TASKING

Members were updated on progress with the Community Action Tasking (CAT) process that the former Neighbourhoods Scrutiny and Performance Panel had made a series of recommendations on.

Julie Gethin recapped the range of issues previously expressed by Members with the CAT process and the action that had been undertaken to improve the engagement of Members in the process. She also presented a breakdown of issues that had been raised at CAT meetings, highlighting that the level of activity varied greatly across the borough.

The Panel were reassured about the ongoing issues regarding the communication of CAT activity. Concerns were expressed regarding the best way to communicate issues to CAT meetings, lack of engagement from partners, and issues being marked as 'closed' when problems, such as anti-social behaviour, were still occurring.

Following the expression of concerns by Members, Julie Gethin noted that the effectiveness and engagement of partners in the CAT process was being reviewed.

A Member suggested that members of the public should be able to report anti-social behaviour to the First Stop Express.

Resolved:

That the members of the public become able to report anti-social behaviour to the First Stop Express.

12/09 WALSALL PARTNERSHIP BUSINESS PLAN & LOCAL AREA AGREEMENT

Members considered the Walsall Partnerships business plan and the outturn figures for the Local Area Agreement (LAA).

Clive Wright highlighted the issues included in the Walsall Partnership business plan that were within the Panels remit. Members expressed an interest in receiving reports on the following topics when there were issues to report:

- Local Neighbourhood Partnership review
- Voluntary and Community Strategy sector strategy
- Development of a borough-wide approach to equalities
- Review of working arrangements with duty-to-co-operate partners

A handful of Members expressed the belief that sometimes it was difficult to engage with partners and that partners often failed to communicate appropriately with the public.

Clive Wright provided Members with an overview of the LAA, highlighting the indicators that were within the Panels remit. The Panel discussed the potential that the phrasing of 'place survey' questions could skew the outturn figures of certain LAA indicators.

Following a query from a Member of the Panel Clive Wright agreed to provide the Panel with further information on the activities and partnership working undertaken at Darlaston JET.

Resolved:

That:

1. the Community Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel consider reports on the following issues from Walsall Partnership when there are issues for the Panel to consider:

- a. Local Neighbourhood Partnership review;**
- b. Voluntary and Community Strategy sector strategy;**
- c. Development of a borough-wide approach to equalities;**
- d. Review of working arrangements with duty-to-co-operate partners;**

and;

2. Members be provided with further information on the activities and partnership work undertaken at Darlaston JET.

13/09 2008/09 FINANCIAL OUTTURN

The Panel were informed of the revenue and capital outturn position for year end 2008/09 for services within their remit.

Vicky Buckley outlined the outturn figures for Community Services related functions including an analysis of use of earmarked reserves, carry forwards, final capital outturn and reasons for budget variances that had resulted in a revenue overspend of £1,233,056. The net position on capital was an underspend of £55k.

Members requested a detailed breakdown on the overspend on CCTV.

Resolved:

That Members be provided with a detailed breakdown on the reasons regarding the overspend on CCTV by Safer Walsall Partnership.

14/09 COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION

Members considered the draft local guidance for Councillor Call for Action (CCfA) at Walsall Council.

The following are the principle points from the ensuing discussion:

- Members requested separate training for all Members to increase their understanding of CCfA. The potential to deliver this through political group meetings and mixed group training sessions was discussed.
- It was explained that no CCfA's had been submitted in either Kirklees or Birmingham, where CCfA had been introduced early.
- Members noted that the 'duty to co-operate' for partners applied to scrutiny.
- Craig Goodall explained that the part of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 that allowed Councils to delegate individual decision making powers to ward members was a discretionary power. A decision would need to be taken by Council in order to enable this provision in Act. Westminster Council had implemented a similar scheme to this part of Act by devolving budgets to individual wards but the final decision making was still taken by a Cabinet Member on the recommendation of ward members.

Resolved:

That training for Councillor Call for Action be provided for all Members.

15/09 WORK PROGRAMME 2009/10

That:

- 1. the effects of libraries modernisation scheme be considered at the 26 November 2009 meeting of the Community Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel;**
- 2. the alcohol related anti-social behaviour working group be deferred until the completion of the Bryntysilio working group;**

and;
- 3. the Community Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel consider reports on the following issues from Walsall Partnership when there are issues for the Panel to consider:**
 - a. Local Neighbourhood Partnership review;**
 - b. Voluntary and Community Strategy sector strategy;**
 - c. Development of a borough-wide approach to equalities;**
 - d. Review of working arrangements with duty-to-co-operate partners.**

16/09 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Panel noted the date of the next meeting as 8 September 2009.

The meeting terminated at 7.22 p.m.

Signed:

Date: