

AT A MEETING
- of the

**REGENERATION, HOUSING,
ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY SAFETY
SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL**

held at The Council House, Walsall on
Thursday, 23 February 2006 at 6.00pm

PRESENT

Councillor Shires
Councillor Arif
Councillor Anson
Councillor Harrison
Councillor Robinson
Councillor Rose
Councillor Yasin
Councillor McCracken

Clive Wright (Director – Walsall Borough Strategic Partnership)
Martin Yardley (Assistant Director- Regeneration)
Keith Stone (Assistant Director for the Built Environment)
David Elsworthy (Service Manager - Planning, Building & Pollution Control)
Bryan Pell (Head of Physical Regeneration - Urban Regeneration Services)
Clinton Simmons (Head of Economic Regeneration)
Steve Pretty (Service Manager - Engineering Design & Construction)
Stuart Bentley (Scrutiny Officer)
Nikki Ehlen (Scrutiny Officer)

CHANGES IN MEMBERSHIP

Members noted the following change in membership for the duration of the meeting: -

Delete: Councillor Aslam
Substitute: Councillor McCracken

APOLOGIES

Apologies for non attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillor Johnson.

MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

(annexed)

Resolved:

That the minutes of the previous meeting, 11 January 2006, copies having been previously circulated, be agreed, and signed, as a correct record.

LOCAL AREA AGREEMENT

Clive Wright (Director of the Walsall Borough Strategic Partnership (WBSP)) introduced himself to the panel and presented a contextual overview of the Local Area Agreement (LAA) with a particular emphasis on the 2 pillars falling under the remit of the Regeneration Panel; namely Safer and Stronger Communities and Economic Development and Enterprise.

(annexed)

Councillor McCracken expressed her pleasure regarding the moved to more aligned and rationalised service delivery across the partnership, removing overlap and duplication. She believed that this would have a positive impact on service delivery. She then asked how communication with the disabled community had been facilitated and offered here assistance in this regard.

Councillor Robinson agreed that this was a positive move but worried about the apparent lack of communication across partners. He saw a disjointed approach to policy making as evidenced by the clash in priorities around budget setting and vision setting.

Councillor Shires stated that such an issue was a more appropriate debate for Council during the budget debate but he asked what the role of scrutiny would be with respect to the LAA.

Clive Wright replied that there were still challenges for the partnership in order to make a difference on the ground. He indicated that there would need to be lead partners for each target in order to best co-ordinate the approach and these lead partners may not need to be the council. He added that scrutiny could undertake quarterly monitoring of the LAA acting in the role of accountable body.

Councillor Arif stated that he thought the structure of the WBSP was right but he believed that there was still a tendency to concentrate on the small amount of centrally derogated funds, such as Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) and New Deal for Communities (NDC), rather than looking at how to generate extra funding. He asked if anything was being done along those lines.

Clive Wright replied that there was encouraging work with the Partnership for Walsall Enterprise and Regeneration (PoWER) group. They were using NRF monies to look at how to attract additional funding. He said that would be challenges over that next year around embedding the new commissioning process.

Councillor Shires stated that the LAA was a 3 year scheme and perhaps scrutiny should look to ensure an exit strategy, helping to mainstream schemes where appropriate.

Councillor McCracken agreed that there thought should be given to an exit strategy as the council was the accountable body. She highlighted that, with the increasing move to partnership working, governance was becoming difficult. However, it was important to get it right as it all comes back to the council in the end.

Councillor Shires agreed, but felt the council had a special role as it was directly accountable to the electorate. He indicated that Councillors needed to change how they worked and provide the Political leadership within the partnership framework. He suggested that scrutiny could monitor the roll-out of the LAA and look at how the themes could be moved on after the 3 years.

Councillor Arif stated that it would be useful for the Panel to be informed about what the Economic Development and Enterprise pillar would be delivering.

Clive Wright replied that a website had been launched to give such information and agreed to inform Members of the web address.

Clinton Simmons added that Walsall faced big challenges over the next 10 years and the LAA would help identify the best interventions to address these issues.

Councillor Arif stated that he believed that WBSP was set up for 10 years and was now half way through its life and he asked if this would have an effect on outcomes.

Clive Wright replied that he was unaware of any such time limit and that the government consultation document inferred that increased partnership working was the way ahead.

Councillor Shires thanked officers for their input and requested that the panel be kept informed of progress.

DARLASTON STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT AREA

Bryan Pell reminded Members of the information they received at the previous meeting at stated that this report was intended to facilitate the works once an agreement had been reached regarding the actual plans for the development.

(annexed)

Steve Pretty stated that Government had agreed to treat the scheme as committed as long as work commenced during the financial year 2007/8. He further stated that the Walsall Regeneration Company (WRC) were leading on making land available, but that the circulated report would give statutory back up to purchase orders if they were needed. He then tabled a current Key Dates Programme and an indicative layout plan for Members information.

(annexed)

The Panel thanked the officers for their input and discussed points for clarification on the indicative layouts.

Councillor Shires expressed his continuing concerns with regards to access other than by car and asked that the scope should be widened to take into account schemes such as the Midlands Metro, Rail Links, etc...

Steve Pretty replied that Metro links were being investigated.

Councillor Shires replied that Midlands Metro was constantly being delayed and he believed that was a need for a plan B.

Councillor Robinson asked if there was any scope to insist on local labour when offering contracts in the area.

Clinton Simmons replied that it was a matter for procurement who can make local labour and desirable option but they could not insist.

Councillor Shires stated that there needed to be a link between the skills of the local population and the jobs created in the area.

Martin Yardley stated that there was already a scheme, in conjunction with Asda and Tesco, whereby retail academy graduates would be guaranteed a position. It was possible that this scheme could be extended to produce jobs for local people.

Councillor McCracken stated that such large re-development schemes had a huge impact on the local community and asked if Cabinet Members could involve the most affected ward Members at a much earlier stage in the process in order to facilitate public consultation.

Councillor Shires stated that it was a matter of engagement and allowing an opportunity to feed into the process. He stated that he had seen a presentation on the accessibility plan using software able to overlap several maps and he had found it very informative.

Bryan Pell stated that work the accessibility plan was still ongoing and that it was planned to bring it to the panel in due course.

OPEN SPACE RECREATION SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT

Bryan Pell presented an overview of the justification for the document and highlighted that it would give a statutory basis to enable section 106 agreements for open space contributions.

(annexed)

Councillor Shires asked about the consultation with the Local Neighbourhood Partnerships (LNP's) and suggested that they should be approached again as he was aware that the consultation event was not well attended for a number of reasons.

Bryan Pell replied that a briefing paper may be prepared.

Councillor Shires stated that the developers would be providing money depending on the value of the land and didn't this mean that the leafier areas of the borough would receive the majority of the money raised.

Bryan Pell replied that the SPD provides flexibility around distribution of funds in order not to penalise areas of deprivation.

David Elsworthy echoed this point and highlighted that the scheme would be delivering a huge income stream compared to the previous scheme.

Councillor Arif asked if the scheme would apply to brown field sites.

Bryan Pell replied that it would apply across the board on any development with more than 10 dwellings, including flats.

Councillor Arif asked how many, on average, dwellings were built in Walsall.

Bryan Pell replied that 500 new dwellings per year, in schemes of 10+ dwellings would be a reasonable estimate.

3G WORKING GROUP

David Elsworthy updated the panel on the work of the group and highlighted that the group were in general agreement with the proposal put forward by BT, but that they had been informed by AMEY about issues around the possibly inadequate amount of monies, to cover costs, that would be received from the units and the possible upfront legal costs that could be incurred when amending the AMEY contract. However, the group recommended that the council agree to proceed with a contract subject to certain caveats as outlined in the report.

(annexed)

David Elsworthy then informed the panel that BT had been in contact and had decided to delay the process due to the slower adoption than anticipated of 3G technology. However, he suggested that the panel still endorse the recommendation of the group in order to have the political backing to pursue a possible contract at a later date.

The Panel endorsed that recommendation of the panel.

Resolved

That the Regeneration, Housing, Environment and Community Safety Scrutiny and Performance Panel recommend that Cabinet proceed with a contract for the installation and hosting of telecommunications equipment subject to;

- All upfront legal and contract development costs being met by BT.

- All operational costs that the council and its lighting PFI partner (AMEY) may incur being met by BT.
- All additional risks being identified and managed through the contractual arrangements.

FORWARD PLAN

Members received information regarding items of interest on the current forward plan.

Councillor Shires highlighted the item on “Leather Heritage – designation of new conservation area around Station St, Navigation St. and Marsh St, near railway station” and stated that he was aware of concerns over areas of conflict. He suggested that a task and finish work group be form to look at the issue and asked if Members would like to contribute.

Resolved

That the Regeneration, Housing, Environment and Community Safety Scrutiny and Performance Panel constitute a time-limited task and finish work group to report back to the next meeting of the above panel; it’s membership to be;

Councillor I. Shires
 Councillor Arif
 Councillor Harrison
 Councillor Rose

DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS

Councillor Shires informed the panel that the recommendation to Cabinet, following the call-in of the decision on community wardens, had included the calling of a further meeting of the panel in mid-march to address issues around transitional funding arrangements for the service. He asked that Members endorse the calling of this meeting and suggested Thursday, 16 March at 7pm as a possible date.

Resolved

That the Regeneration, Housing, Environment and Community Safety Scrutiny and Performance Panel call a special meeting to address issues around the transitional funding of the community wardens service, to be held on Thursday, 16 March at 7pm in a committee room of the Council House, Walsall.

TERMINATION OF MEETING

There being no further items, the meeting terminated at 7:50 p.m.

Signed..... Date.....