

NEIGHBOURHOODS SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

Monday, 13th October, 2014 at 6.00 p.m. in a Conference Room at the Council House

Members in Attendance: Councillor C. Creaney (Chair)
Councillor C. Towe (Vice-Chair)
Councillor M. Arif
Councillor A. Ditta
Councillor D. Hazell
Councillor C. Jones
Councillor J. Murray
Councillor A. Nawaz
Councillor K. Phillips
Councillor I. Shires
Councillor G. Sohal

Portfolio Holders in Attendance: Councillor K. Hussain – Community, Leisure & Culture

Portfolio Holder Assistants in Attendance: Councillor G. Illman-Walker

Officers in Attendance: Jamie Morris - Executive Director (Neighbourhoods)
Keith Stone - Assistant Director (Neighbourhoods)
Mark Holden – Head of Clean and Green
Steve Pretty – Head of Engineering and Transportation
Sue Grainger – Head of Heritage, Libraries and Arts
Jo Lowndes – Partnership Manager
Paul Leighton – Group Manager (Road Traffic Network)
Chris Knowles – Services Finance Manager
Craig Goodall - Committee Business and Governance Manager

01/14 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor E. Russell.

02/14 Substitutions

Councillor C. Jones substituted for Councillor E. Russell.

03/14 Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

Councillor A. Ditta declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item “Quarter 1 Financial Monitoring Position for 2014/15”.

04/14 Minutes

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting which took place on 1st September, 2014, a copy having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

05/14 Urgent Item – Library Facilities at Bentley Employability and Learning Hub

The Chair introduced an urgent item to Members. He explained the reason for urgency as set out in his letter to the Panel with a copy of the draft Cabinet report (annexed).

The Head of Libraries, Heritage and Arts provided further detail on the proposed decision. She explained the background, alternative options considered, the outcome of the consultation process and further detail about how the Library facility would be set up and operated. She noted that following the initial capital investment there would be no ongoing revenue support provided from the Council.

The Panel debated the matter. The following are the principal points from the ensuing discussion:-

- Members felt that a Service Level Agreement (SLA) was required to ensure that the Library facility was provided for a minimum amount of time, for example two years, in return for the capital investment. Members felt that the facility should be regularly reviewed;
- Members were reassured that the facilities opening hours would be sufficient including evenings and Saturday opening. It was suggested that this should be included in a SLA too;
- The ambition of Old Hall People’s Partnership was to develop the site at Wing Close into an “Employability Hub”. Funding from the European Social Fund had been received for this purpose;
- The remaining capital receipts from the sale of Council land in Bentley would be returned into the capital programme budget;
- The use of volunteers in Libraries was agreeable to Trade Unions;
- The Library Service would operate events from Wing Close;
- Links to local schools would be maintained by the Library Service.

Resolved:

That:-

- (1) A Service Level Agreement be set up between the Council and Old Hall People’s Partnership with regard to the operation of a Library facility at Wing Close. The agreement should cover:-**
 - a. a minimum term of operation for the Library facility;**
 - b. a range of expected opening hours;**
- (2) A further report be considered by the Panel prior to the Library facility becoming operational;**
- (3) The Panel receive feedback on the operation of the Library facility six months after it has been operational.**

06/14 Parliamentary Inquiry into Litter and Fly Tipping

The Panel took part in a Parliamentary Inquiry into Litter and Fly Tipping.

The Head of Clean and Green explained the background to the inquiry and the questions which the Communities and Local Government Select Committee was seeking answers to. He highlighted the report which provided responses to the Select Committee's questions and requested suggestions for any further information which Members may wish to see included (annexed).

Members were pleased with the information prepared for the Select Committee and suggested the following additions for submission:-

- Highlight what the Council has done differently when collecting fly tipping to explain that operatives are pro-actively reporting incidents which is reflected in reduced call-outs but increased incidents;
- Include details of the Councils bulky collection costs and dates they were introduced to provide additional context;
- Highlight the "Reward Scheme" was considered effective;
- Highlight that prosecutions were seen as a positive deterrent but the legislation can be difficult to enforce. If this was rationalised then it could be made easier to prosecute offenders. The current arrangements around covert surveillance don't help in this area. Power should be returned to Local Authorities to help tackle fly tipping;
- Highlight that language issues could be a barrier when advising residents of legal methods for disposing of waste;
- Explain that the disposal of white goods was a significant problem particularly fridges. It was thought that retailers need to be more accountable and take more responsibility regarding the disposal of replacements;
- Highlight that frequencies of general waste collections, for example fortnightly, are likely to impact on fly tipping;
- The way forward is for more emphasis on preventative education. The Government should be more responsible and lead national campaigns against litter dropping and fly tipping;
- Fast food outlets and takeaways were viewed as a key contributor to local litter problems. More should be done to hold these businesses to account for the problems they cause. A tax on takeaway food businesses could be considered as well as using planning and licensing powers to enforce responsibility for local litter;
- Members were in support of a ban on plastic carrier bags as they were a consistent litter problem;
- There was a need to expand the top bullet point on page 20 to explain what "provide incentives/service/information to help small businesses to dispose of their waste correctly" means. The new powers coming through the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act, 2014 could have an impact in this area;
- The reintroduction of deposits on bottles would stop them being thrown out as litter;
- A copy of the Litter Working Group report should be included with the response to the Select Committee.

Resolved:

That, subject to the inclusion of the Panels comments, the information contained within the report 'Parliamentary Enquiry into Fly Tipping' be submitted to the Communities and Local Government Select Committee.

07/14 Devolution through Area Partnerships - Update

The Panel received an update on progress with the seven proposals for devolution through Area Partnerships.

The Partnership Manager took the Panel through each of the seven proposals and highlighted successful activity with regard to their implementation as detailed in the report (annexed).

Following a question it was explained that appointments to the posts of Local Area Coordinators were due to be confirmed imminently. Members were informed that the posts would be located within Children's Services. A Member of the Panel challenged this but was reassured that there would be a shared leadership team providing direction to the posts.

A Member expressed concern that a room at the Rycroft Community Hub was being used as an Italian Restaurant.

The Panel queried the future of the Area Partnerships model following the recent change in control of the Council. Members were informed that the existing framework was likely to continue with a focus on community engagement and developing the voluntary and community sector. The Portfolio Holder (Community, Leisure and Culture) explained that the way forward was currently being developed in more detail.

Members were reassured that the recent return of two seconded Area Managers to whg was not related to the change in Council control. Interim arrangements for the posts would be made shortly which included cover for the recently vacated Head of Communities and Partnerships post.

Resolved:

That the Panel consider proposals to refocus Area Partnership activity at a future meeting.

08/14 Winter Service plan 2014/15

The Panel considered details regarding the Council's draft Winter Service Plan 2014/15 (WSP).

The Head of Highways and Transportation set out the statutory background to the WSP. The Group Manager (Road Traffic Network) reminded Members of the key operational

responsibilities set out in the WSP. He explained a new requirement for Local Authorities to have a "Resilient Network Route". This route would be given priority during extreme weather conditions in order to maintain access to key essential services. He highlighted the "Resilient Network Route" to Members and noted it covered 95% of the local A-road network. He also reported on the changes to salting criteria, the development of snow champions in considering alternative road service treatments.

With regard to the "Resilient Road Network" Members noted that a number of roads were not included. With regard to Beacon Road the Panel were informed that due to the steep gradings on the road it would be difficult to keep it open during extreme weather. Queslett Road was suggested as an alternative route to keep open instead. It was noted that West Bromwich Road was not included on the "Resilient Network Route". It was explained that this was because Sandwell Council were not planning to keep their section of the road open. A Member suggested that routes around Ashmore Lake should be kept open due to the Ambulance Station located there.

The Panel was supportive of the snow champion initiative. They are pleased that local residents will be assisted in clearing their local streets. A Member felt it was important to try to get schools to buy into a similar ethos to prevent closures.

In closing the item Members of the Panel thanked the Group Manger and his team for their hard work in keeping the boroughs roads open during the winter.

Resolved:

That:-

- (1) the road network around Ashmore Lake be included in the Resilient Road Network;**
- (2) that the Resilient Road Network Plan consider the approach to the following areas:-**
 - a) Pheasey;**
 - b) Willenhall;**
 - c) West Bromwich Road;**

and;

- (3) that the report be noted.**

09/14 Quarter 1 Financial Monitoring Position 2014/15

Members were informed of the predicted revenue and capital position for 2014, based on reports of quarter 1 (1st April to 30th June 2014) for services within the remit of the Panel. The Executive Director (Neighbourhoods) reported that the Directorate was on target with a revenue under spend of £37,000 and a capital variance of -£1.249m.

The following are the answers to points raised from Members regarding the report:-

- There was a £75,000 under spend on the restoration and renovation of Broadway West Playing Fields. This money was being held to be used as match funding to support the Broadway West User Group with external funding applications for facilities in the area;
- No changes could be made to Borneo Street Allotments without permission from the Secretary of State;
- £30,000 retention sum for the Depot relocation would be released in 2015/16 subject of no issues arising with the new building;
- £500,000 under spend for Walsall Adult and Community College was due to differences between the financial and academic years.

Resolved:-

That the report be noted.

10/14 Work Programme 2014/15

Resolved:-

That:-

- (1) the 12th November 2014 meeting considers the following items:-**
 - a) delivering differently at Walsall Adult and Community College;**
 - b) essential changes to roadside waste collections;**
 - c) second quarter financial monitoring report;**
 - d) 2015/16 budget proposals;**

and;
- (2) the Forward Plan be noted.**

11/14 Date of next meeting

It was noted that the date of the next meeting was on Monday, 12 November, 2014 at 6.00 p.m.

The meeting closed at 8.07 p.m.

Chairman:

Date: