

AT A MEETING

- of the -

**COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION WORKING GROUP** held at the Council House,  
Walsall on  
**Wednesday 15 November, 2006** at 6.00  
p.m.

**PRESENT**

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

**PORTFOLIO HOLDER**

Councillor Perry      Safer Stronger Communities,  
Partnerships and Vision 2021

**OFFICERS PRESENT**

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

Councillor Towe welcomed everyone to the meeting and gave a brief overview as to the history of the debate and the scope of the meeting.

01/2006.      **APOLOGIES**

The Chair advised the panel that apologies for non-attendance were received on behalf of Councillors Beeley and Woodruff

02/2006.      **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP**

Councillor Towe declared an interest as a member of a community association management committee and Councillor Bott declared an interest through a family member.

03/2006.      **BRIEF FOR SCRUTINY WORKING GROUP**

Members accepted the contents of the previously circulated note as a self explanatory note outlining the scope of the current work.

(annexed)

Councillor Towe then asked officers to give a brief overview of the current position of the community associations and neighbourhood resource centres.

04/2006. CURRENT POSITION

Officers spoke to the paper and gave a brief outline of the information currently available on the community associations.

(annexed)

Councillor asked why Joseph Leckie CA was not listed.

Carol Mason replied that the council did not have a service level agreement with them and that any activities were school based.

Steve Law confirmed that those CAs operating through schools were not registered through estates.

Councillor Burley clarified that those CAs on the list had service level agreements with the council.

Councillor Bott asked if the comments on the list were from members of staff or from the trustees.

Julie Ball confirmed that they were from council staff.

Following a general discussion those CAs most likely to be affected by new arrangements were highlighted and listed as follows.

#### **CAs subject to new arrangements**

|  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| Aldridge Manor CA                      |                          |
| Blakenall CA                           | Blakenall Row, Blakenall |
| Brownhills CA                          | Chester Road North       |
| Collingwood CA                         |                          |
| Manor Farm CA                          |                          |
| Old Hall CA                            | Wing Close, Bentley      |
| Palfrey CA                             | Milton Street, Palfrey   |
| Moxley NRC (AKA Moxley Peoples Centre) |                          |
| Goscote NRC                            |                          |
| Ryecroft NRC                           | Dartmouth House          |
| Brownhills Activity Centre             |                          |
| Willenhall Healthy Living Centre       |                          |

#### **Schools based CAs**

|                     |                |
|---------------------|----------------|
| Alumwell CA         | Primley Avenue |
| Brownhills CA       | Deakin Avenue  |
| Croft Street CA     |                |
| Frank F Harrison CA |                |
| Park Hall CA        |                |

Councillor Perry added that there was a need to generate a list of CAs occupying council property, with service level agreements with the council.

Councillor Phillips stated that there was a need to clarify that the CAs were connected to Walsall Council as it was very easy to set up an organisation and call it a CA.

04/2006. FORWARD OPTIONS

Councillor Towe asked officers to outline the options presented in the previously circulated note.

(annexed)

Julie Ball stated that the options had been drafted based on previous discussions at scrutiny and the current thinking of cabinet.

Councillor Burly stated that option 1 'to retain existing occupancy arrangements as they currently stand for individual centres' was out of the question. Option 2 'Granting leases of up to 50% of the market value to community associations and neighbourhood resource centres for a maximum term of 15 years, with the income ring fenced by the Council to meet major repair and maintenance costs' had already met an unfavourable response. She then stated that she would prefer the fifth option 'Granting a 21 year lease at a peppercorn rent with responsibility for day to day repairs and maintenance resting with the centre and major repairs being undertaken by the Council' but with further legal clarification of the meaning of minor and major repairs.

Councillor Phillips agreed that it was the obvious option, but added that a service level agreement should be in place.

Carol Mason replied that currently the council only had service level agreements with the Community Associations who provide either Community Development or Youth Activities on behalf of the council.

Steve Law added that the building use could be stipulated within the lease arrangements which could address the issue raised by Councillor Phillips.

Julie Ball added that a usage policy could also be developed, linked to the CA's business case and this could link into a list of approved CAs.

Councillor Burley asked if a clause could be added to the lease to trigger termination of the CA was not delivering the required service. How meaningful the lease would be in this case would be an issue, but she stated that she was concerned over the management of some CAs.

Steve Law replied that he was unsure how that could be made to work.

Councillor Perry added that there needed to be a wider debate around the voluntary sector and its ability to deliver. Capacity to support needed to be developed and he asked if the panel could widen the remit of this group to look at the issues. Further he stated that he was due to attend a meeting of the CAs recently reformed federation – Walsall Federation of Community Organisations.

Julie Ball added that the council could lobby the charities commission to address management issues.

Councillor Ault suggested that there were problems with having 2 or 3 issues tied to the lease. He felt that the building services needed to be separate to the management structure. He added that CAs didn't seem to know what they were responsible for.

Julie Ball replied that it was not about prescribing the activities of the CAs, but was more about setting acceptable standards.

Carol Mason highlighted the vast range of buildings and conditions.

Councillor Burley replied that this was the reason there needed to be clarification around the definitions of repair work.

Councillor Towe stated that there should be a building survey before leases were agreed.

Steve Law replied that the establishments team had a programme of conditions surveys.

Councillor Perry stated that it was essential that these should be done. The council could not have the debate with the CAs until the state of the buildings and associated costs were known. He added that there needed to be a debate around how the CAs delivered their services. Did they need buildings or could they share them and how any building repairs could be prioritised.

Councillor Ault felt that there needed to be regular reviews of building conditions, once the leases had been agreed and it should be made clear to all involved as to who was responsible for things.

Councillor Burley stated that it had to be remembered that there was not a bottomless pit of money, but that the council had a commitment to the community.

Councillor Phillips agreed that the fifth option would be the most appropriate but added that the repair issues should be addressed on a one to one basis before a lease was agreed. She then asked if there was a possibility of the future claw back of capital receipts from the disposal of buildings presently used by the CA to support CAs in the area.

Councillor Griffiths stated that the CAs had to be viewed as either businesses or services. If they were to be seen as business, they would need a business plan, else the community would need to take ownership and realise that funds would be limited. Further, a decision needed to be made to have either a blanket arrangement or individual arrangements dependant on the individual business plans.

Councillor Burley asked how long a buildings survey would take for the 12 CAs highlighted.

Steve Law replied that it would take around a month.

Councillor Burley then asked Councillor Perry what his deadline for an agreed approach was.

Councillor Perry replied that he was keen to resolve lease issues as quickly as possible. However, it was difficult to know how quickly that would be before he had chance to meet with the federation, but he felt that the issues needed to be resolved by the spring.

Councillor Bott asked how the council would ensure that any particular CA was solvent before a lease was issued.

Julie Ball replied that checks could be made through Companies House and this could be introduced as a standard check.

Councillor Griffiths asked if any benchmarking had been undertaken.

Councillor Perry replied that the Audit Commission had done some work on the financial side and he could make a copy of the report available to the group. However, he felt it would be useful to undertake a benchmarking exercise with other authorities.

Councillor Towe suggested that the group invite other authorities along to discuss how they supported/addressed CAs.

Stuart Bentley suggested that it might benefit the group to have a further meeting to collate and discuss all the available data on building conditions, feedback from the federation, terms of current lease, etc... before the panel made a decision as to which other authorities they wished to approach to share best practice with.

There was general agreement that this was the best way forward.

#### AGREED

- That the next meeting of the panel will be held in January 2007 and will discuss the findings of any desktop research, feedback from the federation, buildings survey and terms of current leases.

Their being no other business the meeting terminated at 7.25 p.m.