

AT A MEETING

- of the -

NEIGHBOURHOODS SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL held at the Council House, Walsall on **Thursday 29 March 2007** at 6.00 p.m.

PRESENT

Councillor Towe (Chair)
Councillor Burley (Vice-chair)
Councillor Bott
Councillor Beilby
Councillor Creaney
Councillor Griffiths
Councillor Woodruff

ALSO PRESENT

OFFICERS PRESENT

Tim Challans Assistant Director - Leisure Culture and Lifelong Learning
Keith Stone Assistant Director - Built Environment
Paul Leighton Group Leader – Planning and Transportation
Carol Mason Community Development Manager
Sheri Rogers Domestic Violence Co-ordinator
Simon Evans Scrutiny Officer

50/06 APOLOGIES

The Chair advised the panel that no apologies had been received for this meeting.

51/06 SUBSTITUTIONS

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

- Delete: Councillor Phillips
- Substitute: Councillor Creaney

52/06 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

Councillor Bott declared a personal interest with regards to Darlaston Community Association.

53/06 LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

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

54/06 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON. –

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on 7 December 2006 and 1 February 2007, copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

(annexed)

55/06 FEEDBACK FROM WORKING GROUPS

Community Associations lease arrangement working group

Councillor Woodruff asked the panel to consider the dates of meetings as there had been a clash of meetings with the working group and the Health Scrutiny and Performance Panel.

Simon Evans advised the panel that all meetings were put into the municipal diary at the start of the year and were scheduled to avoid any clashes. Meetings that were arranged at the request of panels, such as work groups, were added in later and were held to best accommodate members availability. He further advised that other meetings such as LNP and School Governor meetings were only put into the diary once members had informed officers.

Carol Mason said that the Heads of Terms had been discussed by the Scrutiny Working Group, most of the points had been agreed, including a 25 year lease with a peppercorn rent, however clarification was still required with regard to insurance arrangements, there was also a query with regard to rate relief, as notification letters had gone out from the council giving the required 12 month period of notice for any possible change in the councils discretionary 20% rate relief. She also confirmed the decision made by the working group that there would need to be a Conditions Survey, before a lease would be signed. This would then require a schedule of works, and an identification of funding for repairs.

Councillor Burley mentioned that there were still a number of key issues that needed to be resolved before scrutiny could make any resolutions.

Councillor Towe agreed with the comment and stated that he was disappointed the information was not yet available and this would now need to be continued into the next municipal year.

Councillor Burley asked Carol Mason to pass on to the representatives of Community Association that the panel is waiting for further information prior to making a resolution.

Illuminations Working Group

Councillor Towe said that this work will now be picked up by the groups within the service area.

Tim Challans confirmed the groups work will be within the service area and not a work group and will provide input to the full panel next year.

56/06 KEY DISCUSSION ITEMS

Decriminalised Parking Enforcement

Keith Stone stated that a working group was set up last year and provided good input. The panel asked that the final input to the Department for Transport be provided to the panel.

Paul Leighton informed the panel of the main issues:

1. Decriminalised Parking Enforcement is now called Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE)
2. The proposed application to the Department for Transport for approval is essentially the same as discussed previously by the working group.

Councillor Towe asked when the submission has to be made by.

Paul Leighton confirmed that the submission needs to be in by the end May/beginning of June 2007.

Councillor Towe asked about the planned extensive public information exercise.

Paul Leighton said that the consultation exercise will follow the submission in late summer.

Councillor Bott asked if the Council kept any of the funds from this programme.

Paul Leighton stated that the Council could keep funds for the running costs for the scheme with any surplus funds being used only for transportation schemes in Walsall.

Councillor Griffiths asked if the Council funded any part of the scheme.

Paul Leighton stated that it will run at a deficit for the first 4 years and will require funding during this period. He confirmed that this information was considered last year by the working group. He went on to say that more parking enforcement officers will be recruited year on year and hopefully their role could be broadened over time as legislation changes.

Councillor Towe asked if the scheme included clamping.

Paul Leighton confirmed that clamping will only happen in extreme cases for persistent offenders but only by exception.

Councillor Towe asked about the impact of narrow roads on estates where there was little choice for parking.

Paul Leighton stated that the scheme only covers areas where traffic legislation applies for example single yellow line areas. However the council are looking to produce a verge parking report to look at specific problems on estates. He reminded the panel that any surplus from these schemes could also be used to improve the situation on the estates but there is no intention to target estates in the short-term.

Councillor Burley stated that the council need to ensure they are not heavy handed with this approach and talk to those people who will be affected by this at ground level.

Keith Stone stated that a policy framework will be developed to decide where it would be reasonable to enforce and confirmed that consultation will be carried out during its preparation.

Paul Leighton reminded the panel of the previous recommendation concerning the possible introduction of on-street parking in Walsall Town Centre advised that as part of this exercise the council would be carrying out a feasibility study into this option.

Draft End of Year Report

Councillor Towe introduced this item and informed the panel that the information contained within the briefing note would be used to produce the Neighbourhoods Scrutiny and Performance Panel input into the Scrutiny end of year report and also confirm work items that need to be rolled into the following municipal year. He asked for the statement concerning service standards to be amended to reflect the scrutiny resolution which was about developing minimum standards.

Councillor Burley requested that her disappointment that the wardens had not been supported be documented.

Tim Challans informed the panel that a heritage lottery bid for the Arboretum and also for Bloxwich Library will be delivered on 30 March.

RESOLVED

- Officers include the minimum standards within the end of year report.
- Work of the illuminations steering group to be completed within the service and not through the scrutiny panel or work groups; major findings to be reported back to full panel on an ad hoc basis.
- The panel include the on-going development of the highways maintenance options appraisal in their work programme for 2007/08.

57/06 ITEMS REQUESTED FOR INFORMATION

Update on Domestic Violence Figures - Annexed

The chair welcomed Sheri Rogers to the meeting and asked her to present the item.

Sheri Rogers reported all data will be reviewed as verbal complaints will need to be added back in for January and February. This is an amendment to the policy.

She informed the panel that domestic abuse is not a single agency issue; a multi-agency team will be formed including Walsall Domestic Violence Forum, Police, Social Care, Health, Police and possibly Education. Awareness raising is key and a series of training packages have been produced. Walsall Interagency Sanctuary Project (WISP) are able to provide sanctuary rooms.

Councillor Burley asked if the figures can be broken down to localities and what the police response times were like.

Sheri Rogers stated that they got very few calls about poor service from the police. The police can refer victims to The Crisis Intervention Service and support can then be provided to victims including transport, benefits and court visits. The only way a victim can access this service is via the police who act as the gateway, however, she was disappointed to report the police do not offer this all the time.

Councillor Towe asked why this happens.

Sheri Rogers said there were no clear reasons, training had been offered and lots of support. Although the police (H2 only) have appointed 2 Domestic Violence Champions so this should change.

Councillor Burley asked about funding for the service.

Sheri Rogers said that Safer Walsall Borough Partnership provide funding through NRF for the next 12 months. External funding has also been obtained from the lottery. The service also has 2 help lines called Stepping Stones and SAYA which are looking for funding to ensure they continue.

Councillor Towe thanked Sheri Rogers for her comments and, on behalf of the panel, passed on his support for the good work carried out by the service.

58/06 CONSIDERATION OF SERVICE ISSUES

Councillor Towe said that it was excellent that the panel are getting this presentation on potential budgeting pressures so early on in the year. He invited Tim Challans and Keith Stone to present the item.

Tim Challans and Keith Stone presented the list of items that could have budgetary implications and asked the panel for questions.

(annexed)

Councillor Towe said that the council should be setting minimum standards of expectation based on these priorities and this should be fed into the process on an ongoing basis.

Keith Stone said the Council is getting more sophisticated about looking at satisfaction levels and where resources should be allocated.

Councillor Griffiths said that public involvement is needed otherwise it is a losing battle. We need to educate the public and show them that this is where there money is being spent. He asked about the current landfill situation with landfill and the costs associated with a possible incinerator.

Keith Stone confirmed that there are huge potential costs associated with landfill if Councils don't meet their landfill diversion targets as set by the government. The Council have just secured additional incinerator capacity which would reduce the amount of waste sent to landfill but there was still a need to continue to improve our recycling performance.

Councillor Burley asked about the potential issue with local access points.

Tim Challans said that this was about providing more information services on a local level and the capital costs were identified, the difficulty lies in the staffing costs.

Councillor Towe asked about the sustainability of the School Meal Service.

Tim Challans said a government grant is currently received and so the service needs to restructure for when this grant ends as there will be a drop in budget, particularly as the menus are becoming increasingly costly with the healthy options.

Councillor Towe thanked officers for the presentation which provided a useful insight into the budget pressures.

59/06 TRAINING OPPORTUNITES

The panel noted the training opportunities.

60/06 FORWARD PLAN

Contents of the forward plan were noted.

TERMINATION OF MEETING

There being no further business, the meeting terminated at 7.35 pm.

Chair.....

Date.....