

**WILLENHALL NORTH/WILLENHALL SOUTH/SHORT HEATH AREA
PANEL MEETING**

**New Invention Community Resource Centre, The Square, New
Invention, WV12 5EA**

Tuesday, 10 November, 2015 at 6.00 p.m.

Present

Councillor C. Creaney (Chair)
S. Coughlan (Vice Chair)
Councillor S. Cooper
Councillor D. Coughlan
Councillor A. Hicken
Councillor D. Hazell
Councillor E. Hazell
Councillor I. Shires

Officers

Ian Cruise Taylor – Youth Support Services Delivery Manager
Michael Greenfield – Area Manager Willenhall and Short Heath
Neil Picken – Senior Committee Business and Governance Manager

Also in Attendance

Gary Fulford – Chief Executive, Walsall Housing Group
Karen Marshall – Director of Governance and Compliance, Walsall
Housing Group

144/15 **Apologies**

Apologies for the duration of the meeting were received from Councillor D. Shires.

145/15 **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor S. Coughlan – Community Director - Palfrey Community Centre
and Trustee of Willenhall CHART.

Councillor E. Hazell – Board Member – Walsall Housing Group

146/15 **Local Government (Access to Information) Act, 1985 (as amended)**

There were no items to be considered in private session.

147/15 **Walsall Housing Group Governance Review**

The Panel received a presentation from the Chief Executive of WHG.

Members were advised of the reasons behind the request for a change to the governance arrangements which would remove the three Council appointed members of the Board. It was stressed that this would not prevent any councillor applying to become a Board Member, however, they would need to meet the criteria/have the appropriate skill set to be appointed.

It was highlighted that the National Code of Governance, adopted by WHG, suggests that the Board should consist of no greater than twelve members. As the existing Board was higher than this, WHG had to declare that they were non-compliant. Further, the Regulations state that Board Members should be able to deal with the complexity of the regulatory framework including the Bond market and Regeneration Projects. Members noted that the existing Board consisted of three councillors (appointed by Council) and five residents. These appointments were not controlled by WHG. The concern was reiterated that should the Board not reduce in size and be able to demonstrate it was fit for purpose, it would once again be non compliant. This was of even more importance as the Homes and Communities Agency were becoming more stringent.

Arising from the presentation a number of issues were raised by Councillors:-

Clarity was sought as to how the Council/Councillors would be able to raise concern and keep abreast of the work undertaken by WHG, given that there was a proposal within the Councils budget to cease Area Committees, which WHG proposed to use as Councillor Forums. In response, the Chief Executive of WHG advised that they were keen to design something with Councillors. He also advised that the Council retained the right to call a general meeting as they retained the right to be heard. In terms of day to day matters, WHG were revising the Councillor Enquiry system to ensure that it was improved in terms of communication and speed of responses.

A question was raised regarding the impact of the spare room subsidy tax and the impact that it was having on WHG tenants. WHG advised that it had impacted on tenants however work had been undertaken to mitigate any impact with the use of discretionary housing payments. This funding however was no longer available. A lot of tenants had moved into smaller

properties, some chose to stay and pay and others fell into arrears. For those in arrears every effort was made to support them and tenants were still assisted to move to a smaller property – an option not available if the arrears are not due to the bedroom tax.

Reference was made to the impact of the budget in July, 2015 which meant that there would be a 1% reduction in rent. The impact was that the budget would be reduced by £35million over a four year period. A new business plan had been agreed to meet the new budget and the Committee were assured that spend would continue within communities using the Visionary Investment Enhancing Walsall fund (VIEW). Should the Area Panels cease as a result of the Councils budget, the VIEW would be again be used.

In terms of apprenticeships, it was explained that given the budget reduction there would be a limit to the amount of apprentices that could be kept in employment. Younger people were being encouraged to take on apprenticeships in office based roles. Within this context the Committee were advised that some staff within WHG were in a redundancy situation due to the budget implications.

Clarity was sought by a member of the Panel as to whether the Customer Scrutiny Panel would consist solely of Tenants. It was confirmed that Councillors would not sit on this Panel.

It was suggested that a mechanism should be developed which would allow for feedback from the Customer Scrutiny Panel to be delivered to Councillors. It was agreed that this would be explored.

Resolved

That the presentation be noted.

148/15 Targeted Youth Work Model Feedback

The Panel received a report which set out an update on the position in relation to the proposed changes to targeted youth work.

The Youth Support Services Delivery Manager provided clarity that the allocation for Willenhall North, Willenhall South and Short Heath would be £78,152. There would also be funding separately for direct delivery across the Borough. In terms of Direct Delivery, this would consist of a single team of one manager and four youth workers. There would also be 60 hours of part time youth work available.

The allocation of work would be carefully considered to ensure that resource was provided where it was most needed and where it could have most impact.

A Committee Member stated that they had concern relating to the way in which need was identified. Anti social behaviour was subjective and so could not be relied upon to allocate resources.

Discussion followed on the capability to commission services, in particular what would happen should the area partnerships cease to operate, as per the budget savings. In response, the Youth Support Services Delivery Manager advised that the use of commissioning groups using area partnerships was agreed prior to the budget being released. They would still contact partners and work with elected members to identify a way to commission. In terms of the process, the £78,152 would be available in April, a specification for the delivery of youth work would be drafted and interested parties invited to bid for the funding. Each area would then have a Commissioning Panel.

A Member stated that the commissioning model did work elsewhere but cautioned that a large company could bid for all of the work.

A Member expressed the view that the revised process to allocate funding was unfair. It was also suggested that the voluntary sector within the area was not as strong as it could be. They needed support to become effective and so it was short sighted to expect them to pick up services. The YSS Delivery Manager acknowledged the issues affecting commissioning local delivery and said that organisations bidding for the work would have to show a high level of awareness of the needs of locality(ies) for which they were bidding. The Direct Delivery team's responsibilities included capacity building.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

149/15 **Public Participation**

At this point Councillor Creaney left the meeting and did not return. Councillor Coughlan took over as Chair of the meeting.

Members considered a report which sought their view as to whether to establish a public forum and/or appoint co-opted members.

Members commented that in light of the budget proposals, to remove Area Partnerships and thus Area Panels, it was not appropriate to consider the matter at this time.

It was moved and duly seconded that a report be considered at a future meeting setting out the process to establish a Willenhall Community Forum which would consist of established groups. Further, that it should have funding made available to it that would have otherwise been available to the Area Panel.

Resolved

That a report be considered at a future meeting setting out the process to establish a Willenhall Community Forum which would consist of established groups. Further, that it should have funding made available to it that would have otherwise been available to the Area Panel.

150/15 **CHART 'Hub and Spoke' Model of Working**

The Chair sought the Panels consent to withdraw this item as the author of the report was unable to attend.

Resolved

That the report be withdrawn.

151/15 **Area Manager's Report**

The Panel considered a report (annexed) setting out some of the work carried out within the Local Area.

A question was raised regarding empty and derelict properties as progress was frustrating. The Area Manager advised that he would try to progress matters through the void property group.

Members of the Panel also felt that the Site Allocation Document, as detailed at 4.1 of the report submitted, required further consideration. It was therefore moved and duly seconded:-

That a special meeting of the Willenhall North, Willenhall South, Short Heath Area Panel be convened prior to the end of December, 2015 to consider:-

- The Site Allocation Document;
- The Area Action Plan;
- Willenhall Economic and Development Programme.

Resolved

1. That the Area Manager chase progress on empty and derelict properties in Willenhall through the void property group;
2. That a special meeting be convened prior to the end of December, 2015 to consider:-

- The Site Allocation Document;
- The Area Action Plan;
- Willenhall Economic and Development Programme.

152/15 **Funding Report**

Members received the funding report (annexed) which set those projects carried forward from the previous year, approved projects and a list of funding requests for consideration.

The list of funding requests contained within appendix 1 of the report was considered.

Resolved

That the following funding be approved:-

Walsall Youth Support Services £400.00

Walsall Town Centre Partnership £1,000.00

153/15 **Date of next meeting**

The date of the next meeting was noted as 19 January, 2015

The meeting terminated at 8.05 p.m.

Chairman:

Date: