

AT A MEETING

- of the -

**NEIGHBOURHOOD SCRUTINY AND
PERFORMANCE PANEL** held at the

Council House, Walsall on

Thursday 24 August 2006 at 6.00 p.m.

PRESENT

Councillor Towe (Chair)
Councillor Burley (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Ault
Councillor Beeley
Councillor Beilby
Councillor Creaney
Councillor Griffiths
Councillor Woodruff

PORTFOLIO HOLDER

Councillor Walker Environment and Streetpride

OFFICERS PRESENT

Tim Challans	Assistant Director for Leisure Culture and Lifelong Learning
Keith Stone	Assistant Director for Built Environment
Chris Holliday	Head of Leisure and Culture
Graham Hood	Head of Green Spaces
Mike Parrott	Group Co-ordinator Arts & Development
Antonia Pompa	Promotions & Events Manager
John Pryce-Jones	Principal Policy Officer
Helen Dudson	Corporate Performance & Scrutiny Manager

15/2006. **APOLOGIES**

The chair advised the panel of a permanent change to panel membership with Councillor Griffiths replacing Councillor Aslam.

Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillor Bott and Councillor Phillips.

16/2006. **SUBSTITUTIONS**

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

- Delete: Councillor Phillips
- Substitute: Councillor Creaney

17/2006. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest or party whip identified at this meeting.

18/2006. LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

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

19/2006. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 13 June 2006, a copy having been previously circulated to each member of the panel be approved and signed by the chair as a correct record of the proceedings.

20/2006. FEEDBACK FROM SPECIAL MEETINGS AND WORK GROUPS

1. Decriminalised Parking Enforcement (DPE) Working Group 13 July 2006

Chair invited comment from Keith Stone. Keith informed the panel that councils do not have many options about DPE and briefly explained the process, issues and work involved leading up to move to DPE, particularly around traffic regulation orders.

Councillor Burley queried the proposal to introduce on-street charging and whether this would mean additional parking in the town centre and the potential impact this would have on congestion.

Keith Stone confirmed that where opportunities presented themselves the proposal was to charge for parking and that this would relate to fairer charging. He assured the panel that the intention was only to utilise opportunities if they were viable and did not impact in a negative way upon congestion. In response to Councillor Burley's concerns regarding the recent purge on verge parking, referred to in the notes of the DPE workgroup, Keith explained that of all environmental enforcement issues, this was the most difficult, but that a lot had been learnt from the recent exercise and that work was continuing on identifying areas where it was appropriate to enforce. He added that this would result in a report to Cabinet.

The chair asked that the panel note the information that had been circulated from the Select Committee on Transport (agenda item 6a.2) and if the panel agreed with the draft cabinet report that had been circulated supporting proposals for the move towards DPE.

AGREED:

- That the report to cabinet regarding DPE is approved and proceeds for consideration at Cabinet on 6 September and that subject to Cabinet approval updates on progress towards
- DPE would be received by the panel when appropriate. The chair did not feel it was necessary to present the report in person.

2. Green Spaces Working Group

The chair referred the panel to the Green spaces Work group minutes that had been circulated and explained that the work group had considered each of the priorities following the consultation and felt it was important that a minimum standard at each park be achieved.

(annexed)

Graham Hood confirmed that the service was considering the introduction of service standards but that these standards needed to flow from the green space strategy, which had yet to be approved. He informed the panel that the service was keen to ensure any standards addressed the priorities for the community and that following approval of the strategy and development of the standards each park would have a 5-year maintenance plan.

The chair queried the timescale for completion of the strategy.

Graham Hood confirmed that the draft strategy would come to scrutiny early October and then to Cabinet in November. Once the strategy was approved, work would commence to develop some standards that will apply to all parks.

Councillor Burley asked if the strategy would address resources issues.

Graham Hood explained that as much as possible would be done with existing resources but that having a strategy would allow more effective use of resources and would assist in attracting additional funding. He reminded the panel that extensive consultation had taken place with 10,000 questionnaires sent out with 1400 returned. Also consultations were undertaken with friends' organisations, members and staff, but that an equalities assessment of the strategy recognised the need to establish and maintain consultation with minority and other target groups.

Councillor Towe enquired how much resource was allocated to each park and what were the resource requirements needed to address problems and reach a minimum standard.

Councillor Burley added that the speed of response when incidents happened was also a resource issue.

Graham Hood confirmed that once the strategy was in place the allocation of resources would be addressed.

Tim Challans added that the bulk of money was spent on grounds maintenance and that they were looking at different schedules for different parks, to better allocate resources and also meet the needs of the parks. He explained that the depot moving out of George Rose Park would assist in improving that park and that the nature of maintenance work meant that some work completed was invisible and other work was often only visible for a short period before further damage was done.

Councillor Burley expressed concern that the development of different schedules for different parks may lead to unfair treatment and allocation of resources, but officers assured the panel that this would only be done to address different requirements at different locations.

Members also discussed the difficulties around policing parks that were open 24 hours a day and how other authorities, and responsible bodies, address potential problems. They asked if increased presence in parks, as previously requested, would be addressed by the strategy.

Graham Hood confirmed that the draft strategy recognised a presence in the parks as a key issue and that this would be a factor in the restructure of the service.

Chris Holliday added that the draft strategy addressed many of the concerns raised and that, in total, 151 open spaces were examined as part of the development of the strategy. Consultants had also strongly recommended that the Council have 25 premier park sites that it managed to a higher level of maintenance and future development. He informed the panel that there was a strong indication in the report to prioritise and reallocate resources to improve the efficiency of services. He recognised that quick response and presence were important and would hopefully form part of minimum standard and that to achieve this, site improvement plans needed to be considered and that some local management/friends groups were recognised as very good and could support this.

AGREED:

- The draft strategy would be presented to panel at their meeting on 5 October prior to being received at Cabinet.
- The Green spaces work group be re-established, with addition of Councillor Burley as a member, to consider the development of service standards once the strategy has been approved. The work group would not meet until after the strategy has been approved and work on the standards was underway.

21/2006. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION - Citizen Panel

John Pryce-Jones introduced the report detailing the results of the recent citizen panel survey, which the panel had been involved in drafting. He informed the panel that there had been a good level of response and had provided some very useful information for the service.

Tim Challans added that the reason behind this particular survey was to learn more about the views of local people. The following results were noted:

- Libraries received a better score than on the recent Tracker survey.
- There was a good recognition of the local history centre.
- Recognition that for museums and galleries there was a need to change 'awareness of' into 'usage' but this was a national problem and more people were conducting virtual visits of museums and galleries using websites. The service was restructuring its' marketing to provide more support to galleries but overall results show they have a good reputation.

- Poor awareness of concert halls and theatres, but actions was in train to try to address this issue. Tim Johnson informed the panel that the theatre at Bloxwich Library may benefit from library modernisation programme. Improvements to the Town Hall would need investment to capitalise on usage.
- Forest Arts Centre as a facility was not widely known about but soon we would be able to widely promote and improve general awareness about the venue.

Councillor Burley expressed disappointment that there was no mention of Darlaston Town Hall in relation to concert halls and felt that this demonstrated how poor we were as an authority in marketing what we had.

Councillor Towe asked how marketing and promotion was conducted.

Mike Parrott informed the panel that marketing was done mainly through the "What's on" publication and that this had been the most cost effective way of prioritising both venues and events.

In discussion regarding the Forest Arts Centre, it was noted that some members had not visited the facility and it was agreed that the next meeting of the panel on 5 October would be held at the Forest Arts Centre and would include a tour of the building.

Councillor Towe asked about customer satisfaction information and how it was used.

Antonia Pompa explained that quite extensive work had been done in a comprehensive way and results from this should start coming through in the autumn.

The chair acknowledged that the receipt of this information from the citizen panel survey concluded work that commenced in the last municipal year.

22/2006. KEY DISCUSSION ITEMS

1. Current Position, Forward Plan and Proposed Work Programme 2006/7

The chair took the panel through the report circulated which summarised the work the panel had undertaken during the last municipal year and also identified potential work themes for this year.

(annexed)

AGREED

- To re-establish the green spaces working group with addition to membership of Councillor Burley. Working group to meet after strategy approved at cabinet.
- Whilst the initial work regarding community associations had been completed, the panel requested an update as to the lease arrangements with community associations.
- To receive an update on the libraries modernisation programme.
- Community wardens (Councillor Beeley declared a conflict of interest regarding this item) was an item of work that had been started by the Regeneration scrutiny and performance panel but was now under the remit of this panel and a

briefing note regarding the current status, including areas that community wardens covered was requested.

- Work on illuminations to be concluded and would be discussed later in the meeting under a separate agenda item.

In addition to the information contained within the report the panel also considered the services included within their remit and invited officers to make suggestions for the work programme.

Councillor Griffiths informed the panel that if they did wish to consider NRF funding there was a report going to the Audit Committee, which could also be sent to the panel.

At the chair's invitation Keith Stone suggested that the panel may wish to consider the highways maintenance service as it has recently been reviewed and an options appraisal was being developed with a view to producing a procurement strategy in the autumn. He also informed the panel that there was a recycling proposal that they may wish to consider and he asked Councillor Walker to expand.

Councillor Walker informed the panel that the council had been awarded funding from the Local Authority Business Growth Initiative (LABGI) and that cabinet had agreed £200k to be used for recycling initiatives. She added that the money must be used on the exploration of new, not for profit, schemes and the proposal was to support the real nappy campaign as this is one area of recycling that Walsall has not yet addressed or progressed as well as other authorities. The money must be spent by the end of 2007. The suggestion to the scrutiny panel was that they could use some of this fund to investigate the feasibility of developing a policy in relation to recycling nappies and to fund the roll out of an initiative. She also informed the panel that, currently, no other recycling initiatives using this fund had been identified, but that LNPs were also to be consulted on what recycling issues they would like to address. She felt this was a real opportunity for scrutiny to be involved in policy development and suggested a target date of Real Nappy Week in April 2007 for the launch of the policy.

Councillor Burley asked why the fund was not being used to address other recycling initiatives; for example brown bin distribution.

Councillor Walker explained that the development of a waste strategy was progressing and would address this and many other issues. In addition, she informed the panel that the funding available was not enough to deliver some of these larger issues and must be used to fund new initiatives and schemes.

Councillor Woodruff asked if statistical information for geographical areas was known so it could be targeted properly.

Councillor Walker agreed this would be useful information and should be considered as part of the feasibility study and that recycling as an issue was the main topic for the citizen panel in February 2007.

The panel decided that they would like to be involved following completion of the feasibility study.

Councillor Towe asked when the Highways maintenance was due to be completed.

Keith Stone informed the panel that the consultants report was currently being considered and that no date had yet been set for the cabinet report.

It was agreed that this item would be considered by the panel at their December meeting.

During consideration of the panels remit it was agreed that information regarding the Safer Walsall Borough Partnership would be received at the next meeting of the panel in the form of a presentation.

2. Walsall Illuminations

The chair invited Mike Parrott to update the panel regarding the review of the illuminations.

Mike Parrott explained to the panel that the final report from the consultants had been received and circulated and that it contained proposals regarding a vision for the illuminations, the profile and economic impact amongst other things. He informed the panel that the timescale for reporting to cabinet would be determined by the completion of the scrutiny process and acknowledged the support the work had received from the panel.

The chair suggested that the most appropriate way forward was for the working group to meet to consider the report in detail. Following Councillor Ault's concerns regarding recent press announcements the chair confirmed that the recent articles in the press were not press announcements but articles written following the distribution of reports for the panel meeting.

Councillor Griffiths asked if there was any timescale for completing the work.

Tim Challans explained that the report from the consultants was now final and that a direction from the panel was being sought prior to reporting to cabinet.

AGREED

- The Illuminations work group be re-established and meets prior to the panel meeting on 5 October in order to consider the report in detail and identify recommendations to cabinet.

3. Discarded Drug Users Needles

The item was deferred until the following meeting as the officer who wrote the report was unavailable following the change of date for this meeting.

23/2006. CPA Improvement Plan

The chair invited Keith Stone to present the improvement plan that had been circulated.

(annexed)

Keith Stone explained that the improvement plan addressed issues arising from the inspection in 2005 and that it had been reported to Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel on a quarterly basis. He explained to members that the report circulated was for information as it illustrated how the actions that had not been completed had been embedded within the appropriate service and team plans to be delivered.

The panel noted the report.

24/2006. Date of Next Meeting

AGREED

- That the next meeting of the panel will be held on 5 October 2006.

Their being no other business the meeting terminated at 8.20 p.m.