

## **BRIEFING NOTE**

**TO: Neighbourhoods Scrutiny and Performance Panel**  
**DATE: 21 March 2007**

**RE: Draft - End of Year Review 2006/7**

### **Purpose**

To provide the panel with an overview of the major work streams undertaken during the municipal year 2006/7 and to agree any work streams to be carried over into the municipal year 2007/8.

### **Overview of major work streams 2006/7**

The panel has considered a variety of issues from the work programme agreed at the start of the year. Key areas of work were:

#### **Highways maintenance options appraisal**

A special meeting of Neighbourhoods Scrutiny and Performance Panel was held to consider the report regarding highways repair and maintenance (HRM). The panel received a draft copy of the cabinet report and a presentation from officers that detailed three (3) proposed options.

The panel recognised that action was required to ensure improvements in HRM occurred that demonstrated value for money and better met the expectations of residents.

The panel supported, in principle, the recommendations as detailed in the cabinet report but recommended that cabinet only proceed providing each phase of development to enter into a partnered framework contract was subject to full scrutiny, including costings, by the panel.

#### **Sustainability of the Wardens Service**

The panel were informed of the critical finding of the report, by the Neighbourhood Renewal Advisor's, that although the Wardens' programme was perceived as making a significant contribution to the Neighbourhood Renewal agenda, it could not be evidenced. The report contained an appraisal of four options and made comment on significant management and operational matters. The work was undertaken at a time when a new role for Police Community Safety Officers (PCSOs) and a move towards community policing was emerging.

The panel were informed that the issue would go forward to the executive board of the Local Strategic Partnership for consideration and prioritisation through the target action plan, with a decision likely to be made in February 2007.

The panel were broadly supportive of the service and heard from members of the service and other key stakeholders.

The Portfolio holder informed the panel that Council had amended and agreed a motion supporting the option "to seek funding for a further year using NRF resources linked to a review and evaluation programme", including a service level agreement, in order that the service could be evaluated.

In addition, the panel has:

- Received regularly monitored performance issues.
- Considered the budget and made comments and recommendations to cabinet.
- Received updates from the Citizen's Panel.
- Received presentations on the Safer Walsall Borough Partnership, the discarded needles scheme and the Libraries

## **Working Groups**

The panel also constituted four working groups looking at; Walsall Illuminations, the Greenspaces strategy, Community Associations lease arrangements and Decriminalised Parking Enforcement.

### **The Walsall Illuminations Working Group**

This group was constituted to input into a consultation process following the final report of SQW Ltd. on the future of the Illuminations. The Group met in September and made a number of recommendations that were incorporated into a report to Cabinet in December. Following the agreement of the recommendations in this report, the Working Group has taken on the role of steering group to develop and oversee a 5 year plan for Walsall Illuminations. The steering group will continue to meet, but has transferred from scrutiny into the service.

### **The Greenspaces strategy**

The group was constituted to consider the greenspaces action plan with a view to prioritising the strategic objectives as part of the consultation process.

Subsequently, the group recommended that:

- The council will ensure that green spaces are safe and attractive places for children and young people to play and socialise.
- The council will produce clear maintenance schedules with demonstrable outputs and communicate these to staff, friends groups and the wider community
- The council will produce clear service standards so that friends groups and local people know what to expect from grounds maintenance works and also levels of support in developing new projects.
- The council will review the role of frontline staff and their location.
- The council will consider how new investment in parks and green spaces can be sustained in the long term to a high standard.
- The council will develop models of good practice and make everyone aware of them.
- The council will continue to provide dog bins and signage on green spaces and promote the message of responsible dog ownership and use its powers to enforce the current legislation.
- The council will review the structure of the Greenspaces Service especially in relation to creating opportunities for development, policy and strategic planning.
- The council will consider management and maintenance planning at the earliest stage of developing new capital projects and it should do this with other partners, service providers and stakeholders.
- The council will continue to provide a range of opportunities for local people to take part in practical conservation activities that encourage participation and physical activity.

- The council will review the role of frontline staff and their location.
- The council and its partners will continue to promote the health benefits of allotments.
- The council will put in place appropriate mechanisms to ensure that up to date and accurate GIS data is shared across directorates.
- The council will review its expenditure on green space maintenance linked to the management planning process

### **The Community Associations lease arrangements Working Group**

This group was constituted to help develop lease arrangements for those community associations currently without a lease.

The group, along with representatives from the associations, have discussed issues around the level of rent, the length of lease and the liabilities of both the council and the associations.

The results of these discussions have informed a draft lease document for further consultation with the associations.

### **The Decriminalised Parking Enforcement Working Group**

This group was constituted following a recommendation from cabinet, with particular reference to:

- (1) The merits of introducing DPE with the management of service, notice processing and appeals service undertaken in house and the enforcement service contracted out.
- (2) The opportunity to investigate the extent that consistency of implementation and economies of scale can be realised through the shared utilisation of the Sandwell enforcement contract, in collaboration with other Black Country authorities.
- (3) The extent to which DPE wardens can be used as multi-functional enforcement wardens.
- (4) The merits of introducing limited on street charging for Walsall town and district centres, taking account of the implications of its introduction both in financial and traffic management terms”.

Following detail discussions around the issues the panel recommended to cabinet that:

1. The implementation of DPE proceeds and is monitored by scrutiny on a regular basis.
2. The application to the Secretary of State for DPE powers is received by scrutiny prior to seeking cabinet approval.
3. The implementation of DPE proceeds in the following way:
  - i. DPE is implemented with the management of service, notice process and appeals service undertaken in house with the enforcement service contracted out.
  - ii. Further work is undertaken to ensure as far as possible that consistency of implementation and economies of scale can be realised through the shared utilisation of the Sandwell enforcement contract, where possible.
  - iii. The multifunctional enforcement / ambassadorial role is encompassed and developed within the DPE enforcement remit as legislation permits.
  - iv. The introduction of limited on street charging is initially implemented within Walsall Town Centre, with charges comparable to neighbouring authorities operating on street charging. This will be to ensure the Network Management

Duty requirements imposed by the Traffic Management Act 2004 are achieved. Further evaluation of the need to widen on street charges to the District Centres to be undertaken and the findings reported to scrutiny and Cabinet after year one of DPE operation.

### **Recommended work streams to be carried over into 2007/8**

The following work streams have not yet been completed and it is recommended that the panel include them in their work programme for the municipal year 2007/8.

- The facilitation of the Illuminations Steering Group has transferred to the service; however, it is recommended that the panel continue to receive regular updates on its deliberations.
- The panel agreed the recommendations detailed in the report to cabinet on the highways maintenance options appraisal but recommended that cabinet only proceed providing each phase of development to enter into a partnered framework contract was subject to full scrutiny. It is, therefore, recommended that the panel include this item in their work programme for 2007/8.

### **Author**

Stuart Bentley  
Scrutiny Officer

☎ 01922 653317

[bentleys@walsall.gov.uk](mailto:bentleys@walsall.gov.uk)