

COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

Thursday 25 November 2010 at 6.00pm in a Conference Room at the Council House, Walsall

Panel Members Present Councillor L. Harrison (Chair)
Councillor S. Coughlan
Councillor O. Bennett
Councillor P. Bott
Councillor R. Martin
Councillor K. Sears
Councillor D. Shires

Portfolio Holders Present Councillor Z. Ali – Communities and Partnerships
Councillor C. Towe – Finance and Personnel

Officers Present Jamie Morris – Executive Director, Neighbourhoods
Clive Wright – Director, Walsall Partnership
Judith Sunley – Head of Public Safety
Andy Stewart – Head of Prevention, Workforce and Partnerships
Steph Simcox – Service Accounting and Financial Training Manager
Lynne Hughes – Area Manager – Community Safety
Craig Goodall – Scrutiny Officer

49/10 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received on behalf of Councillor C. Creaney and Mr. P. Holmes JP.

50/10 SUBSTITUTIONS

There were no substitutions for the duration of the meeting.

51/10 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest or party whip for the duration of the meeting.

52/10 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That

- 1. the minutes of the meeting held on 14 October 2010, copies having been previously circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record;**

and;

- 2. Members be provided with a detailed breakdown of the costs incurred so far regarding the investigations into the problems with the roof at Darlaston Swimming Centre.**

(annexed)

53/10 ENGAGEMENT AND UTILISATION OF THE VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR

The Panel were advised on progress with the creation of the 'Big Society', the possibility of transferring assets into community ownership, the use of volunteers to add value to mainstream work and data from national indicator 7 'environment for a thriving third sector'.

Big Society

The Director (Walsall Partnership) explained the principals of the Big Society as set out by the new coalition Government. The principals were based around three pillars of: Freedom, Fairness and Responsibility. He explained that the Government was aiming to increase levels of social responsibility and the main vehicle for this was for voluntary and community sector organisations to play a larger part in everyday life.

A draft policy paper produced by the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Personnel was tabled (annexed).

The Panel had a short discussion about increasing local influence in planning matters.

Community Ownership/Management

The Director (Walsall Partnership) explained that one way for voluntary and community sector organisations to play a larger part in every day life and become self sustainable could be through taking on property assets. However, current attempts to hand over property assets to community associations in Walsall had proved difficult due to the reluctance of community associations to take on the future maintenance liability of the buildings they were being offered.

He added that the cost of works established by a property condition survey at the Green Dragon Building for Brownhills Community Association was £47,961. Further information was requested on the condition survey for Bentley Youth and Community Centre.

The Use of Volunteers to Add Value to Mainstream Work

The Director (Walsall Partnership) reported that the 'Big Society' promoted

volunteering and individuals becoming involved through the 'responsibility' pillar. He explained that there would need to be a shift in the view of the public from volunteering for charitable purposes to volunteering to deliver more general roles. The Executive Director (Neighbourhoods) highlighted examples where the Council already engaged volunteers and explained that to increase this would require the development of comprehensive personnel policies and consultation with trade unions.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Personnel explained that the current financial situation meant that the voluntary and community sector could be looked upon to take on services that the Council could no longer afford to operate. He gave an example of a local library that was only open 3 days a week due to restricted council finances and suggested that it would be better for local people if the library wasn't operated by the Council but open for the majority of the week.

A Member of the Panel stated that he would not support the use of volunteers to replace paid roles at the Council. However, he would support the increased use of the voluntary and community sector to operate and deliver their own ventures. The capacity of voluntary and community organisations to undertake large operations also needed to be considered. It was important that the necessary expertise and support was provided and/or created prior to asking voluntary and community organisations to take on large tasks.

The Portfolio Holder for Communities and Partnerships explained that it was not the intention to replace paid staff with volunteers. Rather it was to remove the unnecessary bureaucracy that prevented volunteers undertaking activities that currently existed.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Personnel reported that there was uncertainty concerning the number and type of voluntary and community organisations in Walsall that needed to be resolved.

Working Smarter

The Director (Walsall Partnership) highlighted the linkages between the 'Big Society' concepts and the Councils 'Working Smarter' programme.

National Indicator 7 – Environment for a Thriving Third Sector

The Director (Walsall Partnership) reported the outturn data for the National Indicator 7 – Environment for a Thriving Third Sector. He also explained the changes that had taken place to the performance monitoring framework that had taken place and reported that new data for this area would be available in early 2011.

RESOLVED:

THAT:

- 1. the report be noted;**
 - 2. further information on the cost of works established from the property condition survey at Bentley Youth and Community Centre be provided to Members;**
- and;**
- 3. the results of the national survey of charities and social enterprises be reported to the Panel.**

54/10 WALSALL PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMMES AND RESOURCES

The Panel considered the draft Cabinet report regarding the allocation of programmes and financial resources at Walsall Partnership.

The Director (Walsall Partnership) set out the programmes being delivered through working neighbourhoods fund, community cohesion and climate change funding. A new appendix with updated financial figures had been sent to Members before the meeting (annexed). He reported that a project had been identified that would utilise the unallocated funding.

RESOLVED:

That the Panel support the allocation of Walsall Partnership and Resources funding.

55/10 MULTI-AGENCY PREVENTATIVE WORKING, AN INTEGRATED TEAM APPROACH

The Panel was advised of the ongoing work taking place in Children's Services concerning prevention and early intervention with vulnerable families and the potential to broaden the focus of this work regarding community safety aspects.

The Head of Prevention, Workforce and Partnerships explained the purpose, experience and results of the 'Think Family' (intensive family intervention) pathfinder project where two members of staff had generated potential savings of over £100,000 by taking a holistic approach to assessing the needs of families. The impact has reduced the number of children on the child protection register, and children who potentially would have gone into care, by 21. He explained that these positive results will have saved the Council money as if only 5 of the 21 children had been diverted from care this would have saved approximately £100,000. This is underpinned by a National Pathfinder Evaluation research report from the Department for Education. The success of the project has created a desire to broaden the focus with adult services and into community safety related issues such as, anti social behaviour and alcohol and substance misuse. It was reported that Children's Services were already committed to adding capacity to the team in 2010-11 to

reach more vulnerable families and generate further efficiencies via earlier intervention.

The following are the principle points from the ensuing discussion:

- Information sharing between partners, whilst improving, was still a barrier. Protocols were being developed to help facilitate improvements. It was noted that Area Partnership meetings were proving to be a successful forum for sharing information.
- A Member suggested that Councillors should not attend Area Partnership meetings.
- The project linked to neighbourhood management through children's representatives on area partnership meetings.
- The Parenting Practitioner currently employed in the Community Safety Team was to move into Children's Services to support the coordination of parenting programmes in the borough.
- It was hoped that extra central funding would be received to support the project in 2011/12.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

56/10 QUARTER 2 FINANCIAL MONITORING POSITION FOR 2010/11

Members were informed of the predicted revenue and capital position for 2010/11, based on performance for quarter 2 (1 July – 30 September 2010) for services within the remit of the Panel.

The Service Accounting and Financial Training Manager explained that there was currently a predicted net revenue overspend of £44,000 (0.02% of annual budget) and a capital under spend of £4.07m. She explained that there was an action plan in place to reduce the revenue overspend and that the capital under spend would be requested to be carried forward into 2011/12 in order to complete the required works within the Arboretum and Pelsall Health Centre

The Executive Director (Neighbourhoods) reassured Members that every effort would be made to deliver a balanced budget.

57/10 WORK PROGRAMME AND FORWARD PLAN

The Panel considered their work programme and the latest version of Cabinet's Forward Plan of key decisions.

58/10 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the date of the next meeting was 30 November 2010.

The meeting terminated at 7.14 p.m.

Signed:

Date: