

AT A MEETING
of the
**REGENERATION ENVIRONMENT
HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY
SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE
PANEL** held at The Council House,
Walsall on **Thursday 16 March 2006** at
7.00pm

PRESENT

Councillor I. Shires (Chair)
Councillor Arif
Councillor Anson
Councillor Harrison
Councillor Sahori
Councillor Robinson
Councillor Yasin

Councillor M.G.Pitt (Portfolio Holder)
Councillor A.Paul

Officers in Attendance

Jamie Morris (Executive Director - Corporate
Services)
Nozmul Hussain (Director Safer Walsall
Borough Partnership)
Inspector Gwyn Bevan (Safer Walsall Borough
Partnership)
Bashir Ahmed (Community Wardens)
Jazz Bains (Community Wardens)
Stuart Bentley (Scrutiny Officer)

APOLOGIES

Apologies for non attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillor Rose.

SUBSTITUTIONS

The chairman advised the panel of the following changes to the membership of the committee for the duration of the meeting: -

- Delete: Councillor Johnson
- Substitute: Councillor Sahori

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Arif declared a personal non-prejudicial interest in that that his nephew was employed as a community warden.

COMMUNITY WARDENS SERVICE POST APRIL 2006

Councillor Pitt reminded the Panel of their recommendation for 20 February 2006, requesting that officers make enquiries of the strategic partnership in order to try and secure additional funding for the Community Wardens service. He informed the Panel that the Partnership had met on 3 March 2006 and, having discussed the matter, no additional funding was available.

Nozmul Hussain then tabled a report "Transitional funding for Community Wardens post April 2006" and explained that it detailed progress since the meeting of the Partnership board on 3 March.

(annexed)

Councillor Shires asked Nozmul Hussain to take the Panel through the report.

Councillor Robinson asked if this report represented a cut in the Community Wardens service.

Jamie Morris confirmed that it would be a smaller service but that it would continue.

Bashir Ahmed confirmed that the report represented a 50% cut in the service.

Councillor Shires asked how these wardens would be deployed.

Nozmul Hussain replied that they would be targeted across the borough and referred the Members to the details within the report.

Councillor Pitt confirmed that there would be no cut in the Youth Wardens service as this was funded separately. He further stated that Street Champions would soon be on stream.

Inspector Bevan also stated that over 40 Police Community Safety Officers (PCSO's) would come on stream from November 2006.

Councillor Shires stated that he felt the Panel had been bounced into this situation and he felt that people should have known that the funding was time limited and an exit strategy should have been devised much earlier; Lessons needed to be learnt. He further stated that some service going forward was better than none, but he was still not convinced that there was a well thought out strategy, which included partners. He felt that a strategy needed to be developed. The Executive had not consulted with scrutiny, but it would make sense in order to get some continuity of policy making.

Jamie Morris replied that he understood the frustration over timescales and the uncertainty over the long term. There had been an awareness of the funding situation, but it had been complicated by the implementation of the Local Area Agreement (LAA). That implementation process had just finalised, which included the agreement of targets, and the Pillars of the LAA had been asked to re-prioritise to enable some wardens to be kept. As a result, it had not been possible to set a budget any earlier. He further stated there was vulnerability going forward as there was uncertainty as to how the new services would fit together. This would have to be evaluated at a later date when they were all in place.

Councillor Pitt suggested that scrutiny could play a role in this.

Councillor Anson stated that he still did not know how this would affect his ward and he asked how the PCSO's would be deployed.

Bashir Ahmed replied that he was working with Nozmul Hussain to look at a number of possible models of deployment.

Councillor Sahori asked if the PCSO's would be deployed, primarily, in town centres and what level of protection Street Champions would receive.

Inspector Bevan replied that the PCSO's would be deployed across the borough, dependant on an audit of need which would be revised on a 6 monthly basis.

Councillor Pitt highlighted that the Street Champions would be non confrontational, reporting low level issues.

Councillor Shires stated that it was generally expected that NRF monies would stop and there would be a need for mainstream funding. The Police and Council were the pro-active partners, but others seemed to be standing back. There was a need to convince these partners that they are also affected by antisocial behaviour and the Community Wardens could save money in the long term. He suggested that there was some work to be done here. The Executive should be pushing this with the Local Strategic Partnership. He then asked Councillor Pitt what the long term policy for tackling antisocial behaviour was as it was currently linked to time limited monies.

Councillor Pitt replied that the Council currently had a good system. He agreed that the time limited funding was an issue but he was keen to increase the community involvement and increase the number of Street Champions. The biggest partner was the public and they needed to be involved. He expressed a desire for increased Police funding from Central Government but also highlighted the work of the Fire Service and the PCT, through the youth offending scheme, as partners. He concluded by stating that he would welcome the input of scrutiny.

Councillor Shires stated that it had taken a crisis to bring these issues to the surface and there needed to be some mechanism adopted to ensure that it did not keep happening.

Councillor Robinson stated that there didn't seem to be a policy and he disagreed with Jamie Morris's earlier remark about not being able to set a budget earlier.

Councillor Shires asked what the council's commitment to a service was, in respect of mainstream funding.

Councillor Pitt replied that the budget would be looked at from 1 April.

Councillor Shires stated that the Executive would start looking at it, not scrutiny.

Jamie Morris stated that there was nothing preventing the Panel from reviewing the matter.

Councillor Shires stated that progress had been made but he felt that a policy group was needed to help develop a sustainable policy for community safety and that partners should be involved in this.

Councillor Pitt welcomed the prospect.

Councillor Shires stated that some wardens had already been lost and asked how staff to man the reduced service could be guaranteed.

Bashir Ahmed replied that only 3 wardens had been lost to date and internal recruitment was already underway.

Councillor Shires stated that he felt that the call-in had been justified and that some service retention had been guaranteed with a possible way forward. However, it was regrettable that there needed to be this discussion.

Resolved

That the Regeneration Environment Housing and Community Safety Scrutiny and Performance Panel:

- Express its disappointment at the outcome of this process and feel the cut in the Community Warden service to be detrimental to Walsall's communities.
- Believe Cabinet should learn lessons from the process and consult with scrutiny on all future issues that affect this panels work.
- Establish a Community Safety Working Group to help develop a sustainable policy for Community Policing.

There being no further business the meeting terminated at 8.10 p.m.

Signed.....

Date.....