

AT A MEETING
of the
**COMMUNITY ORGANISATION,
LEISURE AND CULTURE SCRUTINY
AND PERFORMANCE PANEL** held at
The Council House, Walsall on
Wednesday 5 April 2006 at 6.00pm

PRESENT

Councillor Towe (Chairman)
Councillor Chambers
Councillor Arif
Councillor Ault
Councillor Burley
Councillor Bott

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Karen Adderley
Tim Challans
John Pryce-Jones
Harjinder Kaur
Sam Mills
Andy Dennis
Pat Warner

APOLOGIES

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

SUBSTITUTIONS

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

- Delete: Councillor Phillips
- Substitute: Councillor Chambers

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

Councillor Arif declared an interest in the item on the agenda relating to Voluntary Organisations Grant Applications.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RESOLVED

That the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of those items set out on the private agenda for the reasons set out therein and Section 100A of Local Government Act 1972.

MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 2 February 2006, a copy having been previously circulated to each member of the panel be approved and signed as a correct record subject to the following amendment: -

- Under the heading “Declarations of interest” - “Councillor Arif declared an interest in respect of the item on the agenda relating to Voluntary Organisations Grant Applications”.

BV12 – Sickness Absences

The panel welcomed Harjinder Kaur who had attended the meeting to consider the Best Value Performance Indicator BVPI 12.

The report of the director was submitted: -

(see annexed)

Harjinder advised the panel that the report presents the councils performance against BVPI 12 which relates to the average number of working days lost through sickness absence. It sets out performance in the context of the national future for employee sickness absence; shows absence levels by directorates and long and short term sickness data.

She confirmed that the council's current year data using quarters 1, 2 and 3 is 9.39 days lost through sickness which is below the lower quartile for the national average data for last year.

Members were also advised of the directorate performance as requested at a previous meeting.

Members were further informed of the details in respect of long-term sickness absences of six months or more.

The panel noted that under the councils managing sickness absence policy an absence of six months triggers a final case review at which point the matter is considered by a senior manager who will consider the employees ongoing employment position. Members were further advised that to date there had been

eighteen instances of employees being absent from work for six months or more. Members were also advised that managers now have access to a secure site which gives details of absence for their reports and shows when a notification of concern is due and whether or not a return to work interview has been carried out.

Councillor Chambers said that the question should be asked about the difference in sickness levels between the directorates and that a further service area breakdown within the directorates should be provided in order that the differences between the operational frontline services and that of the professional areas could be compared.

Members also expressed concern that the six month triggers classed as long-term sickness was too long a period and that sickness for more than three days should be considered as long-term.

It was felt that a three month absence should be considered as long-term and some figures of sickness above twenty days would be useful.

Councillor Arif requested that a further breakdown of the long-term sickness figures in respect of age and sex should be provided.

Members also felt that the procedure for long-term sickness together with the document provided to employees in respect of sick leave policy should also be provided to members.

The panel thanked Harjinder for the presentation and

AGREED:

That the information requested during the meeting be provided at the first meeting of the panel during the next municipal year.

At this point, Councillor Towe advised the panel that he would need to leave the meeting due to a previous appointment and enquired whether members would be happy for Councillor Ault to chair the remainder of the meeting.

It was RESOLVED:

That in the absence of Councillor Towe and the vice-chair, Councillor Phillips, Councillor Ault will chair the remainder of the meeting.

Councillor Towe then left the meeting at 6.35 p.m.

NOTES AND UPDATES FROM SPECIAL MEETINGS AND WORKING GROUPS

Green Spaces Working Group

The minutes of the Green Spaces Working Group held on 2 March 2006 were received and noted.

The panel welcomed Sam Mills and Andy Dennis who had attended the meeting to advise members on the current position in respect of the Green Spaces Strategy. Sam Mills advised the panel that unfortunately the consultant preparing the Green Spaces Strategy was not able to attend the meeting on this occasion to present the Green Spaces Strategy as had been previously envisaged. The strategy was still being prepared and would be completed for submission to the first meeting of the scrutiny panel during the next municipal year prior to submission to cabinet.

The panel was advised that the audit and assessment stages of the green space strategy had been completed, the final audit and assessment report was supplied to the council on the 20 February 2006 and copies of the LNP and New Deal reports had been supplied to each LNP and New Deal for comment.

Sam further advised the panel that a draft supplementary planning document (SPD) for Urban Open Space had been produced by the council's regeneration strategy team and that Andy Dennis was present at the meeting if members wished to raise any questions with him. He said that the supplementary planning document had been based on the findings of audits and assessments stages of the Green Spaces Strategy with guidance from the consultants about the content and suitable framework for such a document. He continued that the draft supplementary planning document was put out to public consultation for a four week period and sixty five comments had been received. He added that cabinet were being recommended to adopt the SPD on 12 April.

In respect of the strategy, a number of consultation events and exercises have been held to gain the views of various stakeholders. The strategy is currently being developed by the consultants with close involvement of the council officers.

Members expressed their disappointment that a consultant was not present at the meeting as had been expected and Councillor Chambers requested that details of the fee structure and consultants brief be provided for him.

Councillor Burley said she was concerned about the Section 106 funding and how this was going to be distributed.

Andy Dennis said that use of the money would be controlled by Section 106 Agreements and that he would like to see a panel being set up to oversee its distribution, this could, perhaps, be an existing scrutiny panel.

The panel thanked Sam Mills and Andy Dennis for their attendance and

RESOLVED:

That this issue be considered at the first meeting of the panel during the new municipal year.

Grant Applications Workshop

The minutes of the special meeting of the panel to consider grant applications for voluntary organisations were submitted.

Members also received copies of the cabinet report incorporating the criteria for successful grant applications together with three grant application forms and a notional timetable for approval of applications for 2007/08.

(see annexed)

The panel welcomed John Pryce-Jones and Karen Adderley who were present to discuss this item.

Members initially considered the cabinet report which set out the criteria for making a decision as to which grant application is successful from those submitted.

A number of queries were raised in respect of the criteria. Councillor Chambers enquired about the checks that were made on those organisations who had previously applied for grants and had been successful and whether there was any verification of the information submitted by those organisation.

John Pryce-Jones confirmed that a number of checks were undertaken including a copy of the organisations financial accounts.

Members further enquired how a final decision was taken to award funding to a particular organisation to the value requested.

The panel was advised that the final decision was made by cabinet based on recommendations from the portfolio holder following consultation with officers.

Councillor Arif said that the criteria should place restrictions on those organisations who have been funded within the past three years from receiving any further funding within the following three years to enable new organisations to benefit from the grants available.

Karen Adderley confirmed that in order to accept such a change in the criteria there would be a need to establish three separate pots of finance, particularly since there are some organisations which must be funded each year, such as CAB. It was possible however to look at the additional funding being received by organisations who had been successful with this council in order to establish how this could be co-ordinated.

Councillor Ault said it would help this scrutiny panel to contribute more readily to the process if they had a better knowledge of the work provided by the larger organisations.

Councillor Arif said that at the previous meeting it had been suggested that the organisation CAB could be invited to a workshop style meeting of this panel to allow members to more fully understand the organisations role and their need for the funds being requested through the grant application process.

Councillor Burley was of the view that the council should commit to funding large organisations such as CAB for more than one year to ensure continuity of service.

Councillor Ault reiterated that a more detailed look at the larger organisations needs would be useful to enable the scrutiny panel to make a better judgement of their needs.

Members considered the three draft application forms which had been prepared following discussion by the panel at its previous meeting and which were in bands of specific amounts of funding with version A being used for applications up to £1000, version B being used for applications for more than £1000 and up to a maximum of £5000 and version C being used for applications for more than £5000.

Councillor Burley said she was very happy to see that the forms had been updated inline with the suggestions put forward by the scrutiny panel and hoped that these suggestions would be put forward to cabinet for their approval.

She confirmed that in her view it would be useful to have a representative from the CAB at an early meeting of the panel in the next municipal year to enable the panel to assess their needs prior to any future applications being submitted to cabinet.

Members received the timetable setting out the process following the receipt of an application.

Members thanked John and Karen for their presentation and

RESOLVED

1. That the minutes of the special meeting of the scrutiny panel held on 10 March 2006, be approved as a true record of proceedings and signed by the chair.
2. That the recommendations set out in respect of the application forms be submitted to cabinet as a way forward to future applications.
3. That the Chief Executive of CAB be invited to attend the first meeting of the panel during the next municipal year to enable the panel to scrutinise the work of the organisation.
4. That the draft timetable setting out the proposed action in respect of grants applications and the deadlines for those actions be received and noted.

Illuminations Workshop

The minutes of the special meeting of the panel held on 17 March 2006 were submitted: -

(see annexed)

Councillor Burley said she was very disappointed that the document requested at that special meeting had not been circulated in readiness for the additional meeting which was due to take place on the 10 April 2006.

She confirmed that members had received a copy of the presentation which had been circulated with the agenda but that the report which had been referred to by

Councillor Perry at that meeting on the 17 March had still not be made available to members.

Councillor Chambers enquired whether Councillor Burley could be provided with a copy of the document under the Freedom of Information Act.

Tim Challans said the document which had been presented to the meeting by Councillor Perry was not a report but background analysis to enable officers to prepare the final review document which will be submitted to cabinet in due course, but that a copy could be sent to members if they so wished.

Members AGREED:

That a copy of that analysis document should be circulated to all members of the panel as well to those residents who had indicated an interest in the matter at the last meeting together with a copy of the agenda for the meeting due to take place on the 10 April 2006.

Community Cohesion

A briefing note prepared by Karen Adderley was submitted: -

(see annexed)

Karen advised the panel that her service area will be working closely with the Safer Walsall Borough Partnership to undertake an audit of what takes place within the community and to identify gaps and how those gaps can be remedied.

She continued that a key element in the LAA and Community Strategy will be working with Local Neighbourhood Partnerships and scrutiny to bring the strategy into operation.

Karen suggested that it might be appropriate to invite officers back to the next meeting of the panel to enable this area of work to be progressed further.

PRIVATE SESSION

The minutes of the private meeting of the scrutiny panel held on 31 January 2006 were submitted: -

(see annexed)

RESOLVED

That the minutes of that meeting be approved and signed by the chair as a correct record of the proceedings.

There being no further business the meeting terminated at 8.00 p. m.