

COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

Tuesday 22 February 2011 at 6.00pm in a Conference Room at the Council House, Walsall

Panel Members Present Councillor S. Coughlan (Vice-Chair - in the Chair)
Councillor O. Bennett
Councillor P. Bott
Councillor C. Creaney
Councillor R. Martin
Councillor L. Rattigan
Councillor K. Sears
Councillor D. Shires

Non-Voting Co-Opted Member Mr P. Homes JP

Regeneration Panel Members Present (Non – voting) Councillor D. Anson

Portfolio Holders Present Councillor Z. Ali – Communities and Partnerships
Councillor M. Bird - Leader
Councillor C. Towe – Finance and Personnel

Officers Present Clive Wright – Partnership Director
Judith Sunley – Head of Public Safety
Steve Gittins – Deputy Manager, Community Safety
Tracey Evans – Lead Accountant
Neil Picken – Senior Constitutional Services Officer

65/10 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received on behalf of Councillor L. Harrison and also D. Coughlan (a member of regeneration scrutiny and performance panel invited to attend due to consideration of the Big Society at the meeting).

66/10 SUBSTITUTIONS

There were no substitutions.

67/10 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

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

68/10 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meetings held on 20 January, 2011 a copy having been previously circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

69/10 BIG SOCIETY

The Panel considered a report on the latest policy developments relating to the Big Society.

The Director of Walsall Partnership introduced the item and gave a presentation to the Panel. The overarching theme of the presentation was that Local Authorities and the services they provide could change significantly in the future. Dependant on local interpretation and policy, it was possible that Councils could become commissioners, rather than deliverers, of service as the Government continues to transfer power from Central to Local Government.

A further key message was that transferring building assets could be transferred from the Council to community groups.

During discussion it was agreed that whilst aspects of the Big Society were positive, it was important for Walsall to adopt the right approach and make it work locally. The Chair stated that clarity would be welcomed from cabinet as to how Walsall was preparing for the Big Society and how it intended to fully engage with the Community to facilitate its delivery.

Further discussion ensued and comment was passed that many people, a figure of 20% was suggested, had volunteered for many years. Whilst this was acknowledged the Panel were advised that the Big Society was a 'sea change' with groups not only looking after but being accountable for services such as libraries and parks. Concern was expressed that there would need to be stringent safeguards in place to ensure that the process was fair and transparent. It was also important to ensure that local services were, as the Big Society suggests, looked after by local people rather than large multi national private companies in search of profit.

Walsall Housing Group (WHG) was referred to as an example of how the Big Society could work. WHG took over Walsall Councils housing stock and continues to be a successful tenant management organisation running successfully as a private company.

At the conclusion of the presentation Members of the Panel considered questions in relation to the Big Society and the following points were raised.

With regard to transferring building assets it was stated that guidance would

be required. This would need to establish clear and robust application processes setting out for example how a decision would be reached if a number of community groups were competing against one another to take ownership of an asset. Safeguards should also be in place should the company dissolve after taking responsibility for an asset. Officers advised that a paper had been prepared with regard to asset transfers and would be circulated to Members of the Panel.

In relation to a question regarding the transfer of services, Members stated again that clear direction was required on how the Council should respond to requests for the transfer of services. It was also suggested that staff be prepared and supported for what could be a significant period of change.

Discussion ensued on the readiness of the voluntary and community sector for the Big Society. It was suggested that steps be taken to ensure that services were kept and run within the local community. Question was raised over the commitment of volunteers to ensure that initial enthusiasm to take over services was sustainable.

Further discussion took place on the transition to a commissioning model and the role of Councillors within that process. Members expressed the view that there could be a lack of control once services were contracted out.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the Big Society be considered further at the next meeting of the Panel.**
- 2) That the report on transferring community assets, being considered by the Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel on 17 March 2011, be circulated to Members of the Panel.**

70/10 WALSALL COMMUNITY SAFETY PLAN

The Panel considered a report on the boroughs Community Safety Plan (CSP) which identified strategic priorities.

The Deputy Community Safety Manager detailed salient points from the report and highlighted each of the priorities. It was explained that the plan had been streamlined in order to make it a useable document. It was much more succinct and clearly showed the links between the CSP and Area Partnership Plans.

During deliberation, a question was raised as to whether there was a breakdown of the number of Police Community Support Officer's allocated per ward. Officers stated that this information would be available and agreed to contact the Councillor directly to provide the information.

A discussion ensued as to the effectiveness of Dispersal Orders. Officers

explained the process to be followed to make an order. Prior to an order being made substantial evidence base was required. It was noted that this approach was being reconsidered and it was possible that powers could be consolidated.

In terms of the effectiveness of Dispersal Orders, it was stated that with effective policing and key ring leaders being identified, Dispersal Orders could work and have a real impact within communities. An example of success was the eradication of drug dealing outside Tesco in Walsall Town Centre. Members were advised that the problem had not been displaced elsewhere which was often a concern when deciding to apply for a Dispersal Order.

The Head of Public Safety reported that a review of the tools and powers available to deal with anti social behaviour was being undertaken by the Home Office. It was anticipated that the process would be simplified and made more effective.

In response to a question regarding publicising those individuals responsible for anti social behaviour , it was stated that whilst it was a possibility, the decision as to do so was dependant on legal advice received. Members were assured that initiatives such as 'pubwatch' and the use of the town centre radio system were effective. It was accepted that the radio link did not link to district centres however this was a possibility for future improvements.

Within the context of neighbourhood policing, a member explained that they had experienced difficulty in contacting Darlaston Police Station since the Sergeant had been on sick leave . Officers agreed to investigate this matter and report back to the Member concerned. It was understood that the Inspectors would pick up the role in the Sergeants absence.

There then followed a discussion on the cuts within the Police and the commitment given that the cuts would not affect policing standards. Reference was made to regulation A19 in which Officers were being forced to take redundancy when they reach 30 years of service. This service also included anytime spent in the armed forces prior to joining the police.

Discussion followed on the role of Area Community Meetings (ACM) in the context of the Community Safety Plan. Members were advised that each ACM's produced a plan which would link with the CSP. Each ACM had the flexibility to respond to local needs. Meetings were now themed and key drivers for success were Members taking a strategic lead. A database of those attending meetings was compiled and invitations were being sent to a wider audience.

A Member stated that senior managers should be attending ACMs.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the Community Safety Plan be noted;**

- 2) **That a breakdown of Police Community Support Officer's per ward be sent to Councillor P. Bott**

71/10 QUARTER 3 FINANCIAL MONITORING POSITION FOR 2010/11

The Panel received a report summarising the predicted revenue and capital position for 2010/11, based on the performance for quarter 3 (1 April to December, 2010) for services within the remit of the Panel.

A question was raised as to whether the swimming baths at Willenhall would be demolished before the financial year ended. Officers advised that an update would be provided following the meeting.

RESOLVED:

- 1) **That the 2010/11 forecasted year end financial position for services under the remit of the Community Services Scrutiny & Performance Panel be noted;**
- 2) **That an update on the position of Willenhall Leisure Centre be forwarded to Councillor Creaney.**

72/10 FORWARD PLAN AND WORK PROGRAMME 2010/11

RESOLVED:

That the following items be considered at the 7th April, 2011 meeting of the Panel:

- a. **Monitor recommendations of ASB Working Group**
- b. **Greenspaces Strategy**

72/10 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the date of the next meeting was 7th April, 2011.

The meeting terminated at 8.05 p.m.

Signed:

Date: