

HALESOWEN AREA COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 10th March, 2010 at 6.30 p.m.
At Lutley Community Centre, Brookwillow Road, Halesowen

PRESENT

Councillor James (Chairman)
Councillor Burston (Vice Chairman)
Councillors Crumpton, Mrs Dunn, Hill, Ms Nicholls, Ms Partridge, Mrs Shakespeare, Taylor, Mrs H Turner, Vickers and J Woodall.

Officers

Area Liaison Officer (Interim Director of Finance), Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services, Assistant Director Libraries, Archives and Adult Learning, Head of Executive Support, Head of Economic Regeneration Delivery, Group Engineer (Transportation) (all Directorate of the Urban Environment), Area Community Renewal Officer (Directorate of Adult, Community and Housing Services) and Mrs M Johal – (Directorate of Law, Property and Human Resources).

Also in Attendance

Acting Sergeant Dave King – West Midlands Police
Mr Steve Scriven – West Midlands Fire Service

There were approximately 45 members of the public in attendance.

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APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received on behalf of Councillors Body, Mrs Faulkner and K Turner.

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DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Declarations of Personal Interests, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, were made by the following Members in respect of the matters indicated:

Councillor Burston declared a personal interest in respect of Agenda Item No 14 (Halesowen Town Centre Development) in view of him being an employee of CENTRO.

Councillor James declared a personal interest in respect of Agenda Item No 15 (Earls High School Foundation Account – Application for Release of Funds) in view of him being a Governor of the School.

Councillor Hill declared a personal interest in respect of Agenda Item No 15 (Earls High School Foundation Account – Application for Release of Funds) in view of him being a Governor of the School.

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MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 14th January, 2010 be approved as a correct record and signed.

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PETITIONS

(1) Residents of Whittingham Road

It was reported that a petition had been received from residents of Whittingham Road about the Proposed Local Road Safety Scheme. The petition had been referred to the Directorate of the Urban Environment and it was noted that a response had been sent to the first named petitioner in February.

(2) Residents of Grange Crescent

A petition was submitted by Councillor Woodall on behalf of residents of Grange Crescent requesting that consideration be given to making Grange Crescent a “No Vehicles Except for Access” area. It was reported that the petition would be submitted to the Directorate of the Urban Environment for attention.

(3) Haden Hill Road Safety Campaign

A petition was submitted by a resident requesting that consideration be given to reducing the speed limit on Haden Hill Road from 40 mph to 30 mph. It was reported that the petition would be submitted to the Directorate of the Urban Environment for attention.

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EMERGENCY SERVICES ISSUES

No matters were raised under this item.

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AREA POLICE AND COMMUNITIES TOGETHER (PACT) ISSUES

A schedule of PACT meetings arranged in the area of the Committee had been included with the agenda for information.

Acting Sergeant King reported that at a recent PACT meeting complaints had been made about anti social behaviour, particularly on the Lodge Field Estate. The matter was being tackled and information was being gathered on the culprits with a view to behaviour contracts and Anti Social Behaviour Orders being issued. With regard to the Lapal area residents were becoming increasingly concerned about parking around the local schools. Following discussions with the police and the Council's parking enforcement officers it had been agreed that Council Officers would pay particular attention to those areas. Letters had also been sent to parents asking them to park in appropriate areas and Police Community Support Officers had also given out a number of tickets to vehicles that were causing an obstruction.

A member of the public complained about the lack of advertising given to PACT meetings and indicated that only four members of the public were in attendance at the last meeting. Acting Sergeant King undertook to report the matter back with a view to consideration being given to increasing publicity.

RESOLVED

That the information given in the verbal update on policing issues be noted.

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PUBLIC FORUM

- (a) A resident of Hollybank Grove complained about car parking problems and queried when double yellow lines to restrict parking would be placed on the road.

In responding the Group Engineer (Transportation) indicated that the road had been added to the list of schemes to be investigated.

- (b) A question was asked on behalf of the Halesowen History Society. The Society used the Shenstone Theatre for its lectures and other business and complaints had been made about the intrusion of music being played by the ladies aerobic exercise group in the adjoining room. It was requested that sound insulation be installed.

In responding the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services reported that they were aware of the problem and costs for sound insulation were being investigated, and if feasible, insulation would be installed.

- (c) It was stated that the trees on Highfield Park were being felled and the reason for this was queried. It was rumoured that the trees were being felled to extend the skate park, and if this was the case, assurances were sought that the area would be fenced off with a lockable gate. Residents experienced various problems caused by drug users, drinking and other incidents and protection was required for residents.

The Head of Policy (Executive and Support) undertook to investigate the matter and respond direct to the questioner concerned.

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WARD ISSUES

Councillor Ms Partridge

Referred to the Unitarian Church on Park Lane and requested that barriers be placed in front of the wall to prevent it from being damaged as the wall had been repaired but continued to be further damaged.

The Group Engineer (Transportation) undertook to investigate the matter.

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RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS RAISED AT THE MEETING OF THE HALESOWEN AREA COMMITTEE HELD ON 14TH JANUARY 2010

A report of the Area Liaison Officer was submitted informing the Committee of the written responses made to questions asked at the previous meeting.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report submitted, be noted.

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REPORT OF HALESOWEN AREA COMMITTEE WORKING GROUPS

A report of the Area Liaison Officer was submitted on issues arising from meetings of the Working Group.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report, and Appendix to the report, submitted, be noted.

QUEENS AWARD VOLUNTARY SERVICE

Mr C Stone, on behalf of the Queens Award - Voluntary Service, gave a verbal presentation on the Queen's Award, which was established by the Queen in celebration of her Golden Jubilee in 2002. The Award was equivalent in status to the MBE and Mr Stone encouraged people to nominate voluntary groups. Further information and contact details were available from the Democratic Services Officer for those that were interested.

RESOLVED

That the verbal presentation given by Mr Stone on the Queens Award, be noted.

HALESOWEN LIBRARY AND ACCOMMODATION CHANGES

A report of the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services was submitted responding to concerns with regard to Halesowen Library and on developments in service delivery arrangements in the Halesowen district area.

In presenting the report, the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services informed the meeting that the library services in Dudley had been marked as being "weak" in 2006. Following the modernisation of library services, Dudley was now ranked as being amongst the top library services in the country. Improvements achieved now included a message talkback service used to receive feedback from the public, and, upon request, a space for teenagers, extended opening hours and upgrading and replacement of computers.

Arising from the presentation of the report the following comments were made:-

- Changes to the Halesowen Library had adversely affected the reference section
- It was acknowledged that Encyclopaedias could be found online but this did not apply to all reference books
- Following the changes made to the library the reference section had been made smaller and lacked furniture
- The table that was placed in the reference section was laden with papers and leaflets
- Emails were received from the library to borrowers of books to remind them to renew but no other information was received, particularly to consult on matters
- It was felt that the report submitted was one-sided and it did not mention the losses

- There had not been any proper consultation
- Prior to the changes Halesowen Library used to be well equipped with a variety of books
- It was extremely difficult to find books. Library staff were willing to help but they were overstretched
- Space was now very limited in the library and computers obstructed the corridor
- It was queried whether alternative accommodation could be found for social care staff
- Members complained about not being informed and that no consultation had taken place
- Disabled access in the library was limited and it was felt that due to the clientele that visited social care staff the library was not suitable. It was felt that the Housing Office would be better as it had disabled spaces outside and had better disabled access
- It was suggested that email addresses be used to consult and gather feedback rather than just for the renewal of books

In responding the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services reported that satisfaction rates received from feedback had been exceptionally high from Halesowen Library. There was a diverse range of opinions and teenagers, young children, parents and computer users were happy with the service. However, the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services confirmed that further discussions could be held with regard to the reference section and to ascertain people's perceptions on what they felt had been lost. The Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services explained that social care staff had to move into the library because of health and safety reasons. Resources were finite and consideration had to be given to striking a balance with the need to accommodate as many library users as possible within existing and limited resources. With regard to disabled access in the library it was reported that consideration had been given to the matter and discussions had been held with blue badge holders who in turn had said that they were satisfied with the arrangements. Consideration would be given to individuals who experienced any difficulties and a home visit could be requested for the issuing of their blue badge. It was also pointed out that there was a short lease for the Housing Office.

The Assistant Director Libraries, Archives and Adult Learning explained that when new stock was ordered an equal amount of old stock had to be removed and that books were not kept permanently. However, if someone wanted a particular book they could fill in a request or reservation slip. It was pointed out that there were various online features to enable the ordering and renewal of books to take place although it was acknowledged that this could be more widely publicised. The Assistant Director Libraries, Archives and Adult Learning undertook to respond to the Member concerned with regard to the number of books available before and after the changes to the library.

The Director informed the meeting that the Library Forum was an initiative that was formed as part of the modernisation of library services and consultation had been made via feedback from the filling of talkback forms. Modernisation had taken place following information received from extensive feedback and it was pointed out that efforts were made to listen to all views but it was difficult to satisfy everyone.

The Chairman referred to the Library Forum and suggested that consideration be given to establishing the Forum on a more formal and structured basis using the Housing Forum model so that stronger representations could be made. The Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services undertook to consider the issue and to investigate the possibility of piloting such a Forum in the Halesowen area.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the information contained in the report submitted on developments in service delivery arrangements in the Halesowen area, be noted.
 - (2) That the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services be requested to consider the possibility of piloting the Library Forum in Halesowen on a more structured and formal basis, as indicated above.
 - (3) That a further update report be submitted to the September meeting of the Area Committee giving consideration to concerns raised and any feedback.
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EMPTY SHOPS GRANT

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on the Government's Empty Shops Grant initiative and the decision of the Cabinet on allocation of the funding.

A Member suggested allocating the money to one centre rather than to three separate centres. This would enable a bigger pot being spent in one area and that a more worthwhile project could be undertaken.

RESOLVED

- (1) That approval be given, in principle, to supporting the Empty Shops Grant initiative with match funding of £790 each being allocated from the Area Committee's delegated capital allocations budget for the three local centres in Halesowen, namely, Cradley/Windmill Hill, Shell Corner and the Stag.

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- (2) That the Area Liaison Officer, in consultation with the Chairman, be authorised to approve specific allocations on a scheme by scheme basis up to an agreed maximum for the local centres.
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HALESOWEN TOWN CENTRE DEVELOPMENT

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on progress with regard to physical developments taking place in and around Halesowen Town Centre.

Arising from the presentation of the report members of the public referred to the Grange Island proposals and commented that pedestrian safety was paramount and that signalised crossings should be implemented instead of money being spent on the cosmetic appearance of the island. The accuracy of the survey was also questioned.

The Chairman reported that underground ducting for the pedestrian crossings had already been provided to facilitate their implementation should the need arise in the future. It was agreed that another survey on a "like for like" basis be undertaken in June 2010. It was also suggested that a sketch and material to be used on the island be shown to Members of the Committee.

In response to a query from a Member, the Group Engineer (Transportation) explained that installing signals on the island would have a detrimental impact on the flow of traffic. In response to a further query it was confirmed that if the money was not spent it would not revert back to the Highways Agency but would instead be added to the Integrated Transport Block budget.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the information contained in the report, on progress with regard to developments in and around Halesowen Town Centre, be noted.
- (2) That the Cabinet Member for Transportation be requested to endorse an application to bus service providers to review bus services within the Halesowen area.
- (3) That a further pedestrian survey be undertaken in June 2010 and that no further work be carried out on the island until the results of the survey were known.

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THE EARLS HIGH SCHOOL FOUNDATION ACCOUNT – APPLICATION FOR RELEASE OF FUNDS

A report of the Interim Director of Finance was submitted on an application for release of funds from the Earls High School Foundation Account.

RESOLVED

That the request for the release of up to £100,000 of funding from the Earls High School Foundation Account for the new building project linked with the Performing Arts Status and Collegiate, be approved.

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DELEGATED CAPITAL BUDGET

A report of the Area Liaison Officer was submitted on requests for funding from the Delegated Capital Budget.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the action taken by the Area Liaison Officer, in consultation with the Chairman and Opposition Spokesperson, in approving a grant of up to £90 to St Clements Court towards a Wii fit plus balance board, be noted.
 - (2) That approval be given to funds not spent on the reconstruction of a set of steps on the park and the replacement of steps leading to the bowling green area, in the sum of £1,322, being redirected towards the purchase of replacement benches for the Friends of Huntingree Park.
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DATES AND VENUES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

It was noted that dates and venues of future meetings of the Committee would be determined at Annual Council on 20th May, 2010.

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SELECT COMMITTEE PUBLICITY

As a way of giving additional publicity to meetings of the Council's Select Committees, details of Select Committee meetings had been included on the agendas of meetings of Area Committees.

The information given in respect of publicity for future meetings of Select Committees was noted.

The meeting ended at 8.55 pm.

CHAIRMAN