

HALESOWEN AREA COMMITTEE

Wednesday 6th July, 2011 at 6.30 p.m.
At Cornbow Hall, 10 Hagley Street, Halesowen

PRESENT

Councillors Body, Burston, Mrs Dunn, Mrs Faulkner, Hill, James, Ms Partridge, Mrs Shakespeare, Taylor, Mrs H Turner, K Turner, Vickers and J Woodall.

Officers

Area Liaison Officer (Treasurer), Assistant Director of Housing Strategy and Private Sector (Directorate of Adult, Community and Housing Services), Head of Executive Support, Head of Traffic and Transportation, Head of Economic Regeneration Delivery, Planning Policy Manager, (Directorate of the Urban Environment), Assistant Director, Education, Play and Learning, Youth Area Team Leader (Directorate of Children's Services), Interim Assistant Director Law and Governance and Mrs M Johal – (Directorate of Corporate Resources).

Also in Attendance

Inspector Clive Steedman – West Midlands Police
Mr Andy Grosvenor – West Midlands Fire Service
Ms Julie Winpenny – West Midlands Fire Service

There were approximately 20 members of the public in attendance.

1 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED

That Councillor Burston be elected Chairman of the Committee for the ensuing municipal year.

(Councillor Burston thereupon took the Chair)

2 ELECTION OF VICE CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED

That Councillor Taylor be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Committee for the ensuing municipal year.

3 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors Crumpton and Ms Nicholls.

4 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 17 (Transportation Issues) with regard to reference made to bus lanes as he was employed by Centro.

Councillor K Turner declared personal interests in respect of Agenda Item No 11 (Emergency Services Issues) in view of him being a Member of the West Midlands Fire Authority, Agenda Item No 19 (Delegated Capital Budget) in view of him being on the Electoral Register for St Margaret's of Antioch and any reference made to Halesowen Victorian Fair in view of him being a Member of the Halesowen Rowley Regis Rotary Club.

Councillor Mrs Turner declared a personal interest in respect of Agenda Item No 19 (Delegated Capital Budget) in view of her being on the Electoral Register for St Margaret's of Antioch.

Councillor J Woodall declared a personal interest in respect of Agenda Item No 19 (Delegated Capital Budget) in view of him being a member of Halesowen Parish Church of St John the Baptist.

5 MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 9th March, 2011 be approved as a correct record and signed.

6 TERMS OF REFERENCE AND PROTOCOLS FOR AREA COMMITTEES

A report of the Area Liaison Officer was submitted setting out the terms of reference and protocol for Area Committees.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report, and Appendices attached to the report, submitted on the terms of reference and the protocol for Area Committees, be noted.

7 APPOINTMENT OF CO-OPTED MEMBERS

A report of the Area Liaison Officer was submitted on the appointment of co-opted members to the Committee for the 2011/12 Municipal Year.

RESOLVED

That co-opted members be not appointed to the Committee for the 2011/12 Municipal Year.

8 APPOINTMENT OF WORKING GROUPS

A report of the Area Liaison Officer was submitted on the appointment of Working Groups of the Committee for the 2011/12 Municipal Year.

Members were of the view that Working Groups should not be appointed and that any debates should take place at the Area Committee meetings.

A Member requested that a report on progress of the Cradley/Windmill Hill Regeneration be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee. In responding a Member commented that a report would be submitted to the Regeneration, Culture and Adult Education Scrutiny Committee and that it would be more appropriate if a report was submitted to the Area Committee following consideration of the matter by the Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED

That no Working Groups be appointed for the 2011/12 Municipal Year.

9 APPOINTMENT OF COUNCIL REPRESENTATIONS TO OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS

A report of the Area Liaison Officer was submitted on the appointment of representatives of the Committee to serve on outside organisations for the terms indicated.

RESOLVED

That the following members be appointed to serve on the organisations shown for the terms indicated:-

Beechtree and Wollescote Welfare Institute – Councillors Body, Crumpton, Ms Partridge and Vickers – Period of 4 years from 1st January, 2012

James Grove Sports Ground Recreational Trust – Councillor James – Period of 4 years from 1st May, 2012

Cradley Community Association – Councillor Crumpton – Annual

Lutley Community Association – Councillor Burston – Annual

Wollescote Community Association – The Ward Members for the Cradley and Wollescote Ward, namely Councillors Body, Crumpton and Ms Partridge – Annual

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PETITIONS

- (a) It was reported that the following petitions had been received since the last meeting and that a report would be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee:-

- (i) Chadbury Road – Objecting to Parking Restrictions
- (ii) Brookwillow Road – Objecting to Proposed One-Way System
- (iii) Hillbank Road – Objecting to Proposed One-Way System Proposals
- (iv) Spies Lane, Howley Grange and Shenstone Valley Road – Parking Restriction Proposals
- (v) Shenstone Avenue – Parking Restrictions
- (vi) Howley Grange Road – No Waiting Proposals

A Member referred to proposals for Brookwillow Road and reported that responses to a survey that had been conducted had shown that 50% of residents supported the one-way system.

Members requested that full discussions be held with Ward Councillors regarding all the proposals prior to a report being submitted to the next meeting.

- (b) No petitions were presented at this meeting.

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EMERGENCY SERVICES ISSUES

Mr Andy Grosvenor, West Midlands Fire Service reported that there were no significant issues to report although there had been a slight increase in arson from the previous year. The Armed Forces Day Celebrations had been a success and four hundred people had attended.

RESOLVED

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

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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.

Inspector Steedman updated the meeting on further dates of PACT meetings and urged members of the public to attend with a view to raising issues of concern.

A Member informed the meeting that the Safeside School Quiz Finals would be held on 12th July, 2011 and it was reported that there was a representative for the Dudley Borough.

The Committee thanked the police for tackling speeding traffic problems and in particular for conducting the speed checks on Huntingtree Road. A Member commented that the number of people attending PACT meetings had dropped but this may be due to positive work and action being taken by the police.

RESOLVED

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

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PUBLIC FORUM

- (1) Questions were asked about the reasons for the reduction in Area Committee meetings, who had made the decision, why meetings were being restricted to one location and not rotated across the Wards and it was queried what savings had been made. Complaints were also made that residents had to pay for parking to attend the meetings if they were held at the Cornbow Hall and that this would affect turnout.

In responding the Area Liaison Officer stated that the reduction in Area Committees had saved £20,000 across the five Area Committees and that it was a decision that had been taken by the Council.

Members indicated that Cornbow Hall was a central location and that there was an adequate bus service, that free off street parking was available after 6pm and that the disabled could park free at the multi storey car park serving Cornbow Hall.

- (2) Reference was made to the no waiting proposals on Howley Grange Road and concerns were raised about the loss of parking, which would result in a loss of trade for businesses.

In responding it was indicated that a petition had been received and that the matter would be considered as part of the discussions.

- (3) It was queried what criteria had been used to determine which roads would be resurfaced in Halesowen during April 2011. Complaints were also made about the quality and swiftness of the work that had been undertaken on certain roads and that some roads had suffered from patchy tarmac.

In responding the Head of Traffic and Transportation indicated that he was not aware of the full details but stated that planned maintenance had been organised through a traffic survey. He pointed out that extreme weather conditions during the past couple of years may have contributed to the state of the roads but he undertook to investigate the matter and write direct to the questioner with a response.

- (4) Reference was made to the loss of trade and shops, particularly market stalls in Halesowen Town Centre and it was queried what the Local Authority were doing to promote trade and also how the Council were supporting local and ethically produced foods.

In responding the Head of Economic Regeneration Delivery informed the meeting that efforts had been made to try and make the Town Centre more attractive and referred to the Halesowen in Bloom initiative. There was also a programme of events and a range of markets that were held from time to time but it was pointed out that a significant number of Town Centres had suffered losses as this was a challenging time and more and more people were now shopping online.

A Member referred to the success of the Victorian Fair and commented that it had attracted four thousand people to the Town Centre. The event would again be held next year and an assurance was sought that the Council would again contribute towards the event and it was requested that consideration be given to road closure charges and any other expenses being waived to enable the event to take place.

Members pointed out that there were positive things happening in and around the Town Centre and efforts were being made, as far as possible, to promote the Town Centre. A survey of the Borough had been conducted towards the end of last year, which had shown that Halesowen had the least number of empty properties of the Borough's Principle Town Centres.

- (5) Views from the Committee were sought on the reduction in fire-fighters, fire engines and fire cover and an assurance from the Committee was sought that public and fire fighter safety would not be compromised if the plans to close Cradley Heath and Halesowen Fire Stations went ahead.

In responding a Member commented that he had requested that full consultation should take place prior to any decision being made and it was indicated that meetings were being held for the public to express their opinions. It was pointed out that the West Midlands Fire Service had to make savings and that further losses had to be made next year and in future years.

Members placed their thanks on record to fire fighters and expressed their support to them. Some Members indicated that they were against the closure of fire stations in Halesowen and that they would attend the consultations to convey their views and to consider the views of others.

- (6) Concern was expressed about the changes to 16-19 funding and the change in transport arrangements for disabled children and that consultation was being made via the website which was difficult to do. Concerns were expressed about the affordability factor and it was further commented that bursaries had to be paid back and that day care centres were also being cut.

In responding the Assistant Director, Education, Play and Learning indicated that he was not aware of the specifics relating to consultation being online only and undertook to investigate the matter. With regard to changes to the 16-19 funding it was stated that there had been a change in administration. Previously funding had been administered in London but this was no longer the case and that the Local Authority were now responsible. The Local Authority had deliberated on the best way to meet the increasing costs of transport and consultation on the matter was being sought.

- (7) A question had been received prior to the meeting about the growing problem of graffiti and metal thefts and concerns were expressed that the police did not record graffiti or metal theft crimes committed in public places unless reported by the Council. It was stated that whilst the problems were known, the extent of them were not being recorded by the Police and that the lack of such records reflected a lack of police resources to tackle the problems.

In responding the Head of Executive and Support indicated that a small team were responsible for cleaning graffiti around the Borough and every attempt was made to keep public buildings and highway structures graffiti free.

Inspector Steedman reported that the police regarded everything that was reported as a crime, that they were audited externally and internally and that figures were correct. However, Inspector Steedman acknowledged the extent of the problem and indicated that arrests were made for criminal damage and he urged the public to continue to report the problem to enable the police to pursue the matter.

With regard to metal thefts Inspector Steedman reported that metal was an expensive commodity and that Operation Crypton had been launched to tackle the problem. Discussions were also being held with a view to changing legislation to stop scrap dealers from accepting cash deals.

Councillor Ms Partridge referred to the regeneration of the Colley Gate area and commented that the area suffered from numerous derelict and unused properties and anti-social behaviour.

In responding the Head of Economic Regeneration Delivery indicated that in the event of the proposed residential development on land at Foredraft Street it was intended to secure improvements to Foredraft Street itself.

PROGRESS OF ELECTED MEMBER VISITS TO ADULT AND CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE ESTABLISHMENTS 2010/11

A joint report of the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services and the Acting Director of Children's Services was submitted on the progress of visits to Adult and Children's Social Care establishments undertaken by Members during 2010/11 and on actions taken in response to Member comments. Further nominations from the Committee were sought for Members to carry out visits to Social Care establishments during 2011/12.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the information contained in the report, and Appendices to the report, submitted on the progress of elected Member visits to Adult and Children's Social Care establishments during 2010/11, be noted.
- (2) That Councillors Burston, Mrs Dunn and Taylor, Members previously nominated in the 2010/2011 Municipal Year continue to undertake visits to Social Care establishments in the 2011/12 Municipal Year and that any further members who wished to undertake such visits be requested to submit their names direct to the Quality and Complaints Manager (Directorate of Adult, Community and Housing Services).

HIGHWAYS MINOR WORKS CAPITAL PROGRAMME FOR 2011/12

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on the proposed programmes of work for Local Safety Schemes, Safer Routes to School and Pedestrian Crossings within the Halesowen Area for the 2011/12 financial year. Details of proposed schemes were set out in Appendix A to the report submitted.

Arising from the presentation of the report a Member referred to the A456 Hagley Road near Lutley Lane proposal and requested that a survey be conducted following the scheme's implementation to enable a comparison to be made on any increase in pedestrian footage.

RESOLVED

- That the proposed Local Safety Schemes and Safer Routes to School Schemes and Pedestrian Crossings, as outlined in Appendix A to the report submitted, be noted.
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TRANSPORTATION ISSUES

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on a number of transportation issues in and around Halesowen Town Centre.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the information contained in the report, and Appendix to the report, submitted on transportation issues in and around Halesowen Town Centre, be noted.
 - (2) That the Cabinet Member for Transportation be recommended that the Council, in partnership with Centro and bus operators carry out a detailed review of the operation and impact of the three identified bus lanes and report back to a future meeting.
 - (3) That the Cabinet Member for Transportation be recommended that in light of the latest crossing analysis a controlled crossing at the Grange Roundabout was not justified and that no further action should be taken.
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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, with particular regard to the Halesowen Area Action Plan.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the information contained in the report, on progress of the Halesowen Area Action Plan and developments in and around the Halesowen Town Centre, be noted.
 - (2) That further reports be submitted to the Committee on the preparation of the Halesowen Area Action Plan and on the outcome of further consultation exercises carried out as part of its preparation.
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DELEGATED CAPITAL BUDGET

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

In presenting the report the Area Liaison Officer referred to the grant made to the Wollescote Community Association and reported that information received had indicated that the claim would be completed by the deadline. Reference was also made to an error in Appendix 2 of the report submitted relating to Caslon Community Partnership and it was pointed out that the figure should state £5000 and not £2500.

Arising from the presentation of the report it was requested that detailed information on how the applicant had been communicated with regarding the unspent allocations be provided in future reports.

The Area Liaison Officer advised that grants that were approved would be subject to a further capital allocation of £50,000 being agreed for 2011/12 by Council at its meeting on 18th July, 2011.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the Area Liaison Officer, in consultation with the Chairman and a representative from the Opposition Group on the Committee, be authorised for 2011/12 to agree requests from Community and Voluntary Groups for small grants, up to a maximum of £2,000, a continuation of previous practice.
- (2) That the following decisions be made in respect of the grants indicated to organisations set out in Appendix 2 to the report submitted:-
 - (a) That the grant of £5000 to Caslon Community Partnership for fencing to secure the site be withdrawn and made available for reallocation.
 - (b) That the grant of £2500 to Cradley Town Football Club for disabled facilities be deferred to the next meeting pending consideration being given by Officers to further information that had been received.
 - (c) That the surplus money of £426.80 from the grant made to Halesowen/Dudley Yemeni Community Association to purchase a minibus to provide disabled access for elderly people with special needs be brought back to the central capital pot for reallocation to other groups.
 - (d) That the position in respect of Wollescote Community Association as reported at the meeting be noted.

- (3) That approval be given to a grant of £1978 to Abbey Road Allotments for the installation of a water dip tank with tap, top soil to fill raised beds and wooden picnic tables.
 - (4) That approval be given to a grant of £5000 to Halesowen Parish Church of St John the Baptist to replace their existing boiler.
 - (5) That a grant of up to £3000 requested by Loaves n Fishes for the total cost of ICT equipment be deferred pending further information so as to ascertain whether funding had also been sought from Sandwell Council.
 - (6) That a grant of up to £5000 requested by the Howley Grange Scout Group for the ongoing refurbishment of the site to include the tarmac of the car park, fencing, landscaping, entrance porch and flooring, be refused as several grants had been made to them in the past.
 - (6) That approval be given to a grant of £3390 only being made to St Margaret of Antioch for the provision of redecoration of the interior of the church and purchase of a new sound system.
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DATES AND VENUES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

RESOLVED

That it be noted that future meetings of the Committee would be held at 6.30 pm at the Cornbow Hall on 9th November, 2011 and 21st March, 2012.

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SCRUTINY COMMITTEE PUBLICITY

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

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

The meeting ended at 8.30 pm.

CHAIRMAN

HAC/12