

NORTH DUDLEY AREA COMMITTEE

Wednesday 24th June, 2009 at 6.30 pm
Lower Gornal Youth Academy, Temple Street, Lower Gornal

PRESENT

Councillors Mrs Ameson, Caunt, Evans, G Davies, Mrs Millward, Mottram, Mrs Ridley, Simms and Wright

Officers

The Interim Assistant Director of Law and Property (as Area Liaison Officer), Assistant Director of Community and Leisure and Group Engineer Traffic and Road Safety (Directorate of the Urban Environment), the Assistant Director - Older People and the Community Renewal Officer – Tudor and Oval, (Directorate of Adult, Community and Housing Services), the Assistant Director for Early Years, Youth and Education Services and the Area Team Manager of Early Years and Youth Development (Directorate of Children's Services) and Mrs J Rees (Directorate of Law, Property and Human Resources)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE

Inspector M Sutton West Midlands Police, Mr S Vincent - Operations Commander, Dudley Borough (West Midlands Fire Service) together with approximately 90 members of the public.

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED

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

(Councillor Wright thereupon took the Chair.)

2. APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor Perry.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No member declared a personal or prejudicial interest, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, in respect of any items to be discussed.

4. MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 8th April 2009, be approved as a correct record and signed.

5. APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED

That Councillor Mrs Ameson be appointed Vice Chairman of the Committee for the ensuing municipal year.

6. TERMS OF REFERENCE AND PROTOCOL 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 to the report, submitted on the terms of reference and protocol for area committees, be noted.

7. APPOINTMENT OF CO-OPTED MEMBERS

A report of the Area Liaison Officer was submitted on the co-option of persons to serve on the Committee for the 2009/10 municipal year.

In presenting the report, the Area Liaison Officer advised that since the report was written, Mr Millward had advised that he was no longer able to stand as a co-opted member of the Committee.

A Member of the Committee proposed that Miss Georgina Healey, the young lady who was to understudy Mr Millward, be co-opted to represent young people, in his stead.

RESOLVED

1. That Miss Georgina Healey, be appointed as the co-opted member for North Dudley Area Committee for the 2009/10 municipal year representing young people in the North of the Borough.
2. That, with the exception of a co-opted youth member, no other co-opted members be appointed to the Committee.
3. That a letter of thanks be sent to Mr Millward for his work whilst on the Committee.

8. APPOINTMENT OF WORKING GROUPS

A report of the Area Liaison Officer was submitted on the appointment of Working Groups for the 2009/10 municipal year.

RESOLVED

1. That North Dudley Area Committee Capital Allocations Working Group be reappointed for the ensuing municipal year, with its existing terms of reference, and that the working group comprise the Chairman, Vice Chairman and Councillors Evans, Mrs Ridley and Stanley.
2. That the North Dudley Area Committee Community Plan Working Group be reappointed for the ensuing municipal year, with its existing terms of reference, and that the Working Group comprise the Chairman, Vice Chairman and Councillors Caunt, Mrs Ridley and Stanley.

9. APPOINTMENTS TO OUTSIDE BODIES

A report of the Area Liaison Officer was submitted on the nomination of Members of the Committee to serve on outside organisations for the 2009/10 municipal year.

RESOLVED

That the following Members be appointed to serve on the organisations indicated for the 2009/10 municipal year or for the period indicated.

SOCIAL INCLUSION

TERM OF OFFICE

Baggeridge Miners Welfare Club –
Councillors Mrs Millward and Wright

Annual

Sedgley Combined Charities –
Councillors Caunt and Evans

4 year period from 1st
May, 2010

COMMUNITY ASSOCIATIONS

Sedgley and District

Councillor Evans

Annual

Upper Gornal Voluntary Recreation
Association

Councillor Ryder

Annual

Hurst Hill

Councillor G H Davies

Annual

Rainbow (Coseley)

Councillor Mrs Ridley

Annual

10. PETITIONS

It was reported that a petition containing 2558 signatures objecting to the closure of the Coseley Baths had previously been referred to the Director of the Urban Environment for consideration.

It was reported that several G.P.'s had written in support of the petition.

A number of further signatories to the Petition and to the number of G.P.'s in support of the petition were submitted by a Member of the Committee.

A number of local G.P.'s had also advised of their support of this petition.

A petition was also submitted, on behalf of local residents, objecting to the unkempt state of some void properties in Hartland Avenue, Coseley and to the adverse effect on surrounding elderly residents, on account of mini motor bikes gaining access to the fields at the back of the properties from the void properties. The petition was referred to the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services, with a request that a report on the matter be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee.

11. YOUTH ISSUES

A report of the Interim Director of Children's Services was submitted on the new Youth Service Plan for the North Dudley Area.

In presenting the report, The Area Team Leader Early Years Youth and Education advised that the report followed the recent reorganisation of the Youth Service. The Plan had already been shared with the Community Plan Working Group. It was intended that update reports would be submitted to the Area Committee in the future.

The Area Team Leader Early Years Youth and Education then presented an oral report on youth issues affecting the North Dudley area including:

- a) The proposed summer plan to include an art week, accredited activities, outdoor education, a variety of workshops and specific activities and a two week provision at all three youth centres in the area.
- b) The production of a DVD over the summer period to advertise the Forum and recruit new Members. The young people intended to make a presentation at a future meeting of the Committee.
- c) Various school projects, including an animated course for ten young people from Ellowes Hall School.
- d) A project to engage with young people at risk, funded by external sources and in conjunction with Community Renewal, Police, Community Safety and Connexions.
- e) The detached project, engaging with different groups of young people in Upper Gornal and Sedgley areas.

The Area Team Leader Early Years Youth and Education advised that numbers attending all Youth Centres in the area had dropped slightly, due to lighter evenings and weather. Staff had also been carrying out outreach work to engage with young people in local parks and other areas where young people congregated.

The Area Team Leader Early Years Youth and Education introduced a group of young people, who presented a letter expressing concerns regarding the recent removal of the Dudley North Skate Park facility. The young people expressed concerns that the skatepark had been removed without any consultation and requested that the skatepark be re-instated and that it be reinstated in the same locality.

A Member of the Committee advised that, due to vandalism and concerns for safety, the facility had needed removing immediately, which had curtailed the time for consultation on the removal. He also undertook to keep young people informed of progress regarding a future site for the skatepark.

Members of the Committee expressed sympathy with young people, for the loss of the Skatepark, which had taken considerable time to obtain, however, given its removal on safety grounds, following a number of acts of vandalism, including arson, there had been no alternative. Another suitable site for the skatepark would be investigated as a matter of urgency. Members of the Committee also expressed concerns that a small minority of vandals were responsible for the loss of the facility used by a large number of young people.

Some Members of the Committee expressed concerns at the lack of Police surveillance of the area around the skatepark.

12. POLICE ISSUES

Inspector Sutton, in response to comments relating to the lack of Police surveillance at the skatepark facility, advised that Police manpower had to be distributed to problem areas around the whole of the area. He advised that the sherpa cameras had been installed at the site referred to, but that they were only intended to be used in the short term, that is for not more than 72 hours. There was not sufficient Police manpower to justify monitoring of the area full time.

Inspector Sutton reported orally on the actions of the Police to combat the issue of anti social behaviour and noise nuisance, arising from riders of mini motor cycles, particularly in the High Arcal/Turks Hill area. Inspector Sutton reported that the Police were aware that access to parks and playing fields was often obtained through residents back doors and encouraged anyone knowing the address of these illegal riders and/or how bikers were gaining access to park areas via residential properties to advise the Police so that appropriate Police action could be taken. He also reported on a project whereby such motor bikes, when identified, were confiscated and crushed. The Inspector was hopeful that press coverage of the operation and proposed "crushings", would deter others from acting in such an anti social manner.

Inspector Sutton also advised that the other issue connected to concerns regarding the mini motor bikes was the sale of petrol to under aged young people.

Inspector Sutton also reported on the work of the Police in partnership with Officers of the Council to combat under age drinking and the sale of alcohol to under age drinkers.

He also reported on the Operation "Stay Safe" project and a trial in the North Dudley area, whereby youngsters out on the streets, late at night were being removed and taken to a 'safe centre' and parents being alerted to collect them. If successful, and subject to available funding, it was intended to roll out the project over the summer period.

A Member of the Committee commented on the “Stay Safe” project indicating that parents needed to take responsibility for their young people to ensure their safety.

13. FIRE ISSUES

The Operations Commander of Dudley Borough (West Midlands Fire Service) gave an oral presentation on services in respect of fire issues.

With reference to the concerns expressed regarding void properties and the adverse effect on elderly residents, Mr Vincent undertook to raise the issue at the next meeting of a multi agency Forum which included Officers and the Directorates of the Urban Environment and Adult, Community Housing Services.

Mr Vincent expressed surprise at the reference to the recent three fires at the skatepark facility, as the West Midlands Fire Service had only attended one incident, and no others were recorded.

In referring to incidents regarding illegally driven mini motor cycles, Mr Vincent advised that the Fire Service also had concerns regarding these issues as they were a potential fire hazard. The Fire Service were working with the Council's Trading Standards Officers to address issues concerning garages who sold the petrol for such cycles to minors.

With regard to the concerns expressed regarding void premises, these were sometimes used as places for drug users to congregate which was an issue of concern to all.

The finer weather brought with it the potential for increases in the number of reported incidents of fire and he encouraged those present to be more vigilant in the coming months.

A Member of the Committee expressed appreciation for all the work undertaken by Mr Vincent personally, particularly in Primary Schools, but also his work with young people.

14. TRANSPORT ISSUES

As there was no-one to represent Centro, no transport issues were raised. However, the Committee expressed concern that despite numerous invitations to attend meetings of the Area Committee, no one attended to address the Committee on transport issues.

A Member of the Committee undertook to discuss the Committee's views on the lack of attendance at meetings by Centro representatives at a meeting of the Integrated Passenger Transport Authority and Centro.

15. PUBLIC FORUM

Before reading questions from the public the Area Liaison Officer stated that any questions which were not addressed at the meeting would receive a written response from the appropriate officer. Questions and responses were then given as follows:-

1. A member of the public spoke in support of a previously submitted petition, requesting action to be taken regarding the void properties in Hartland Avenue. A Member of the Committee undertook to investigate and advise the questioner of the outcome.
2. A member of the public expressed concerns regarding mini motor cycle riders causing noise nuisance and damage at Cotwall End Valley. She made particular reference to an incident which happened a couple of evenings previously, when a walker was almost knocked down by one of the motor bikes. In response Inspector Sutton reiterated his earlier comments that Operations took place regularly whereby illegally driven motor bikes were confiscated and crushed. He encouraged local residents to alert the Police if they knew of properties which were allowing access through their back gardens to the Valley to bikers.
3. A member of the public commented on the strategic planning in Dudley, with particular regard to the closure of the Coseley Baths. His comments included:
 - a) why no money had been spent on Coseley Baths, following the closure of Brierley Hill Baths,
 - b) how were savings made from the Brierley Hill baths closure used?
 - c) why was the Council not applying for grant funding available for 2010/11?
 - d) what was happening to the money allocated for the development of Central Dudley, which might include Council Offices.

A comment was made that residents of Coseley did not appreciate being likened to "flat cap" people.

In response, the Assistant Director Community and Leisure advised that the Council did have a Strategic Plan for Leisure Centres which had been reported to Cabinet in 2004. Within

the Strategic Plan it was identified that Coseley Baths had a short to medium term left before any decision regarding its future needed to be made. This time had now arrived and the new facility at neighbouring Bilston would have an impact on Dudley's plans for Coseley Baths, however unpopular that might seem it was a factor that the Council had to consider.

4. In response to a request for Members of the Committee present to indicate by a show of hands whether or not they had voted for the closure of the Coseley Baths, some Members of the Committee commented that they had not been asked to vote on the closure of Coseley Baths, just on the proposed budget.

This comment was disputed by another Member of the Committee who advised that those who had asked detailed questions regarding the budget had been given the correct information. She also confirmed that there had been no objection to the budget proposals, which had included the closure of Coseley Baths.

5. Comments by a member of the public that the Independent Surveyor had been refused access to information requested regarding costings of repairs to the Baths were denied.
6. In response to comments regarding why funding had not been sought from Advantage West Midlands, a Member of the Committee advised that funding had been available for an Urban Village in a neighbouring Borough, but not for a swimming project in Dudley.
7. A member of the public commented that no one cared what happened to Coseley residents and referred to the closure of other facilities in the Coseley area.
8. A member of the public queried whether the decision to close the baths coincided with the termination of the mobile phone mast Agreement and what were the proposals for the building when the baths closed.

In response, the Assistant Director, Community and Leisure advised that the lease for the mast did not expire at the same time as the proposed closure of Coseley Baths. The Council were, in fact, in discussion with the company who owned the mast to come to an amicable solution before the expiry date of the lease.

9. A member of the public questioned why fencing was erected around the Coseley Baths, if the intention was to close the baths, to which a Member of the Committee advised that the fence had been erected to prevent further acts of vandalism and anti social behaviour around the outside of the building. The fencing had deterred offenders. The Member of the Committee also advised that Ward Councillors did care what happened in the Coseley Area.
10. A member of the public queried why there was so much opposition to the retention of the baths and asked for a rethink on the strategy for Coseley. He suggested that the building be “mothballed” until adequate funding could be found for the repair of the building.

At this point members of the public loudly protested against the closure, and in view of this, the Chairman, advised that there would be a short adjournment, after which the meeting would consider the remaining items of business on the agenda.

16. PROGRESS OF ELECTED MEMBER VISITS TO ADULT AND CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE ESTABLISHMENTS 2008/09

A joint report of the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services and the Interim Director of Children's Services was submitted on the progress of visits to adult and children's social care establishments during the 2008/09 municipal year and on further nominations to make visits in the 2009/10 municipal year. In introducing the report, the Assistant Director of Older People (Directorate of Adult, Community and Housing Services) acknowledged there had been problems which had led to a number of visits not having taken place. She also advised that members wishing to take part in the visits in 2009/10 would need to be CRB checked and attend a training programme prior to the commencement of visits.

A Member of the Committee advised that it would be useful if the Committee were updated regularly on visits which had taken place, to avoid unnecessary duplication.

RESOLVED

1. That the information contained in the report now submitted be noted.
2. That the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services and the Director of Children's Services be advised of Members who would be willing to undertake visits during the 2009/10 municipal year.

17. DELEGATED CAPITAL BUDGET

A report of the Area Liaison Officer was submitted on three applications received for funding from the Committee's Capital Allocation Budget. In presenting the report the Area Liaison Officer advised that any requested clarification or additional information had been submitted and approved.

RESOLVED

1. That the application by Sedgley Community Church (Sedgley Youth) for £5,000.00 towards the purchase of a 12/16 seater minibus be deferred to allow further information to be supplied.
2. That the decision of the Area Liaison Officer, in consultation with the Chairman and Opposition Spokesperson, to approve the application by Coseley Volleyball Club in the sum of £308.42 in respect of appropriate expenditure, towards the purchase of various sporting equipment including volleyballs and an outdoor volleyball net system be noted.
3. That the application by the TFKA Coseley Netball Club for £483.01 in respect of appropriate expenditure, towards the cost of purchasing training equipment be approved.

18. HIGHWAYS MINOR WORKS CAPITAL PROGRAMME FOR 2009/10

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on the proposed programmes for Local Safety Schemes, Safer Routes to School and Pedestrian crossings within the North Dudley Area for the 2009/10 financial year as set out in Appendices A, B and C to the report submitted.

In presenting the report the Group Engineer – Traffic and Road Safety advised that in future reports would contain maps outlining the sites of future programmes.

Some Members of the Committee requested that consideration be given to the introduction of traffic calming measures near Redhall School, which was on a split site.

In response to a Member of the committee's request that consideration be given to the crossing at Gospel End which was a danger to school children in the locality, the Group Engineer Traffic and Road Safety undertook to investigate.

The Operations Commander, Dudley Borough (West Midlands Fire Service) requested that the West Midlands Fire Service be included in the consultation on proposals for future Road Traffic Control projects.

RESOLVED

That the Cabinet Member for Transportation be advised of the Committee's support for:

- a) the proposed Local Safety Scheme at Brook Street/Bourne Street, Woodsetton and Himley Road/Brookbank Road, Lower Gornal.
- b) the proposed Safer Routes to Schools schemes for High Arcal School, Sedgley and Wallbrook Primary School, Coseley.

19. RIPPLES THROUGH TIME – WRENS NEST NATIONAL NATURE RESERVE HERITAGE LOTTERY FUND

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on the progress of the Ripples Through Time project and on proposals for further enhancement, access, education and interpretation within the Wrens Nest National Nature Reserve (NNR).

In presenting the report, the Assistant Director Culture and Community commented on the need to raise awareness of the project to ensure the work continued.

RESOLVED

- 1. That the content of the report submitted on The Ripples Through Time project – Wrens Nest National Nature Reserve Heritage Lottery Fund, be noted.
- 2. That the Cabinet Member for Environment and Culture be advised of the Committee's support for the making of arrangements for the submission of the Stage 2 Heritage Lottery Fund application.
- 3. That the Cabinet Member for the Environment and Culture be advised of the Committee's support for the promotion of the project to local communities to engage in the activities, events and learning opportunities which The Ripples Through Time project would bring to the National Nature Reserve.

20. COMMUNITY RENEWAL WORKING GROUP

A Report of the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services was submitted on progress to date of the working group and the development of the North Dudley Area Committee Community Renewal Plan.

On consideration of the information contained within the report, Members of the Committee commented on the number of key activities outlined for the Coseley Ward.

RESOLVED

That the content of the report submitted be noted and that the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services be advised of the Committee's support for the continuation of the work of the Community Renewal Team in community localities.

21. RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS

A report of the Area Liaison Officer was submitted on answers given to questions raised at the previous meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED

That the content of the report now submitted, and the Appendix thereto, be noted.

22. WARD ISSUES

Councillor Mrs Ameson reported on the free family fun for everyone at the annual Gornal fun day, which was intended as an American Independence Day themed event due to take place at the Recreation Ground on Vale Street (also known as the Quarry), Upper Gornal from 12- 4pm on Saturday 4th July, 2009.

Throughout the afternoon there would be a whole host of activities taking place, including a tombola, nail art and trampolining, a vintage car rally, face painting, line dancing, cheer leading display and workshop and much more. Budding footballers could even meet 'Wolfie' the Wolverhampton Wanderers mascot and try their luck at his penalty shoot out.

23. SELECT COMMITTEE FOR PUBLICITY

RESOLVED

That the dates and venues of future meetings of all Select Committees held at the Council House, Dudley be noted.

24. INSPECTOR MARK SUTTON

Inspector Sutton advised that this would be his last attendance at North Dudley Area Committee meetings, due to his move to another area. His colleague Inspector Vicky Willis would be attending future meetings of the Committee.

The Chairman thanked Inspector Sutton for all his support and work in the North Dudley Area.

25. AREA TEAM LEADER EARLY YEARS AND EDUCATION

The Area Team Leader Early Years and Education advised that a colleague would be attending the next few meetings, whilst she was on maternity leave.

Members of the Committee wished her well for her future event.

24. DATES AND VENUES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

RESOLVED

That the dates and venues of future meetings of the Committee be noted as follows:-

23rd September 2009 at 6.30 p.m. at Roberts Primary School, Robert Street, Lower Gornal, Dudley, DY3 2AZ.

2nd December 2009 at 6.30 p.m. at Ellowes Hall School, Stickley Lane, Lower Gornal, Dudley, DY3 2JH.

3rd February 2010 at 6.30 pm at High Arcal School, Arcal Drive, Sedgley, Dudley DY3 1BP

29th March 2010 at 6.30 pm at Lower Gornal Youth Academy, Temple Street, Lower Gornal, Dudley

The meeting ended at 8.35pm

CHAIRMAN