

NORTH DUDLEY AREA COMMITTEE

Wednesday 8th April, 2009 at 6.30 pm
High Arcal School, Arcal Drive, Sedgley

PRESENT

Councillor Ryder (Chairman)
Councillors Caunt, Evans, Mrs Millward, Mottram, Perry, Mrs Ridley, Simms, Stanley and Wright; Mr J Millward.

Officers

The Interim Director of Law and Property (as Area Liaison Officer), Assistant Director - Culture and Recreation and the Group Engineer - Traffic and Road Safety (Directorate of the Urban Environment); The Interim Assistant Director – Early Years, Youth and Education, The Area Team Manager - Early Years, Youth and Education (Directorate of Children Services), Interim Director of Older People and Head of Community Renewal (Directorate of Adult, Community and Housing Services) and Mrs Joan Rees (Directorate of Law, Property and Human Resources).

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE

Inspector M Sutton of West Midlands Police; Mr. S. Vincent, Operations Commander, Dudley Borough (West Midlands Fire Service) Ms G Heeley -Youth Forum Representative together with approximately 200 members of the public.

73 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors G. Davies, and Mrs. Ameson.

74 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillors Mottram and Mrs Ridley declared a personal interest, in accordance with the Member's Code of Conduct, in respect of Agenda Item No. 10 (Capital Allocations) in view of his membership and her husband's membership of the Coseley Bowling Club, respectively.

Councillor Perry declared a personal interest, in accordance with the Member's Code of Conduct, in respect of Agenda Item No. 10 (Capital Allocations) in view of his being a trustee of the Sedgley and District Community Association.

75 MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 28th January 2009, be approved as a correct record and signed.

76 CHANGE IN ORDER OF BUSINESS

Pursuant to Council Procedure Rule 13 (c) it was

RESOLVED

That the Public Forum be taken as the next item of business.

77 PUBLIC FORUM

In welcoming everyone to the meeting, the Chairman referred to an incident which had occurred at Coseley baths during the afternoon, which had necessitated the evacuation and closure of the baths. The Operations Commander, Dudley Borough (West Midlands Fire Service) updated on the current situation, advising that:

- (a) the incident referred to was now under control, with all emergency services having worked together to address the situation.
- (b) some visitors to the baths had been taken to hospital.
- (c) the emergency services were still in attendance at the scene and
- (d) investigations would take place over the next few days.

The Assistant Director Culture and Recreation confirmed the details given by the Operations Commander, advising that an investigation would be undertaken to identify the cause of the incident and to ensure that it did not occur again.

Before inviting comments from Members and the public, the Area Liaison Officer advised that the item on Coseley baths would, of necessity, need to be time limited, to enable other items on the agenda for the meeting to be addressed. He also advised that copies of the structural report and coloured copies of the photographs were on display around the room, for easier information.

Comments then made by Coseley East Ward Members included:

- (a) Concerns that, if following a health and safety enquiry, the incident which had occurred earlier in the day, proved to be caused by human error, it would not be used to close the baths prematurely.

- (b) Concerns that, despite an assurance by the Cabinet Member for Environment and Culture, the full structural reports of previous years would be provided, these had not been provided to Ward Members, although the summary report had been forthcoming, and that it should be read in conjunction with the full structural reports of previous years.
- (c) Concerns that it was inappropriate to propose the closure of the baths at the same time as the government was providing free swimming for those under 16 and those over 60, to encourage people to become more fit.
- (d) Dudley North residents did not have private fitness clubs with swimming pools attached.
- (e) Extended services provided by private partnerships were not available to residents of North Dudley families, who could not afford the high costs of such services.
- (f) Concerns that funding from the Government's Healthy Towns Initiative was being spent on local parks, but not everyone could go to the park, and perhaps the funding would be better spent on the baths.
- (g) Concerns that the nearest school pool to Coseley baths was at Ellowes Hall School, but that this had been out of action for some time.
- (h) the subsidy for the Coseley baths and the reported number of visits to the Centre compared to Halesowen and Dudley baths was disputed. It was suggested that the figures for attendances at the pool were comparable with those of Halesowen. In response, the Assistant Director of Culture and Recreation advised that the figures for attendances were available for perusal.
- (i) disappointment that the Council were still mindful to close the baths.

The co-opted member requested, on behalf of the Dudley Youth Forum, information on where young people would be able to go to swim following the closure of Coseley baths. In response, the Chairman advised that every effort would be made to find alternative provision at other public baths and school pools. He advised that no decision had yet been made on which venues would be able to provide alternative swimming provision.

The following written questions and comments were then taken from the floor:

- (a) that attendance figures for the baths were low compared to other facilities was due to the fact that only sixty people were allowed in to Coseley baths at any one time.

The Assistant Director Culture and Recreation advised that he would be happy to discuss the figures with the questioner outside of the meeting, but he confirmed that an accurate admission recording system was in place.

- (b) a representative of the Save Coseley Baths Group expressed the group's sympathy for those who had suffered during the incident which had occurred earlier in the day, and their families.
- (c) why had nothing been done before, as Coseley was the only racing swimming baths in the locality. Others were fun pools. The Assistant Director Culture and Recreation advised that current recommended pool sizes were 25metres and 50 metres, whereas historically, visitors to Coseley had enjoyed the benefits of a larger pool.
- (d) concerns that there would be nowhere for the under 16's and over 60's to go in North Dudley area to take advantage of the Government's new initiative for free swimming for these age groups.
- (e) would the Cabinet and/or the Committee agree to an independent structural survey on the structure of Coseley baths? The Chairman advised that the structural report was available for everyone, however if residents wished to commission an independent survey, at their own expense, they could do so. The results of such a survey would be considered by the Cabinet.
- (f) the Cabinet had not followed the correct consultation process, and a complaint to the Ombudsman would follow.
- (g) there was a need for a trainer pool, other than at Halesowen. Gifted children would have nowhere to train for Olympic Games.
- (h) there was a need for more facilities for the young people of Coseley, not less. Not everyone could go to the park.
- (i) what was planned for the ground once the baths were demolished?
- (j) would there be a reduction in the Council tax as a result of the closure of the baths?
- (k) why had a fence been erected around the baths in the last nine months, when there had never been a fence previously?
- (l) why wasn't the water-chute alongside the pool repaired or dismantled when it was no longer needed?
- (m) facilities at Bilston could not be considered as an alternative for North Dudley residents, particularly as work on the facility had not yet commenced.
- (n) concerns were expressed that, at a recent meeting, the Chairman of the Select Committee for Regeneration, Culture and Adult Education had reportedly stated that he did not wish to hear any more about Coseley Baths.

- (o) a request was made that the building be saved, to encourage community spirit into the area.
- (p) Members of the Cabinet and others of the same party should resign over the decision to close the baths.
- (q) was a maintenance programme in hand and if not why was money not put into a project.
- (r) why could Coseley baths not be rebuilt?
- (s) where could swimmers living in the North of the Borough go for an Olympic size pool?
- (t) why should North Dudley residents pay council tax when facilities were not being provided?

The Area Liaison Officer responded to the comments made by referring to the structural report, which indicated that no amount of maintenance would have prevented the closure of the baths. Regular maintenance of the building had been undertaken throughout its lifespan. It had been acknowledged in 2006 that the slabs on the main roof were defective and concerns were sufficient to necessitate further investigation, which indicated that the thirty year lifespan of the slabs used for the roof was almost at an end. The Engineers had kept the situation under constant review but had indicated earlier in the year that they could not guarantee the safety of the building beyond August, 2009. A repair was not a viable option and therefore the building needed to be replaced.

The Leader of the Council addressed the concerns expressed as follows:

- (1) the slabs on the roof could not be repaired and no amount of maintenance could have avoided the current situation.
- (2) the material used for the slabs had a lifespan of 30 years, which had been exceeded by 13 years.
- (3) other buildings made of the same material had been, or were being, demolished in all parts of the Country.
- (4) the type of material used, which had been very popular in the 1960's was now no longer considered fit for purpose.

Other Council owned buildings made of the same material, such as Brierley Hill Central Library and Tower Street computer centre had also been closed.

The main reason for the lack of funding was that the Government had awarded Dudley Council less central funding than neighbouring authorities. Due to this shortage there were not sufficient funds in the budget to cover a rebuild of the facility at Coseley.

When the Cabinet had discussed possible investment from private sector partnerships, none had expressed an interest in investing in Coseley baths.

As the Health and Safety report had indicated that the safety of the building could not be guaranteed beyond August 2009, the Cabinet had had no option but to agree to close the building in August 2009.

At this juncture, the Chairman called to a close the Public Forum item on Coseley baths and thanked everyone for the interest shown.

The meeting was then adjourned for five minutes to enable members of the public who did not wish to remain in the meeting to leave the room.

Following the adjournment, the following questions were raised and answered:-

- (1) The Coseley Business Watch support for the proposed traffic regulation order at Coseley was deferred for consideration under agenda item no. 11.
- (2) A member of the public raised concerns that the previously reported incidents of private hackney carriages parking illegally in Ettymore Road, was continuing to happen. The Chairman advised that the Council's Enforcement Officers had visited the area, but that he would request that they visit the area again. Inspector Sutton undertook to speak with the questioner outside of the meeting to obtain further details and investigate the concerns.

Inspector Sutton also undertook to investigate concerns regarding youths who had been witnessed causing damage to the telephone kiosk in Ettymore Road.

- (1) A member of the public expressed concerns regarding anti social behaviour in Sedgley Town centre and young people visiting licensed premises. She also expressed concern that there was no where for young people to go.

The Co-opted Member advised that there was a youth centre in Sedgley village where 13 – 19 year olds could attend.

The Chairman advised that if licensed premises were allowing young people to drink on their premises, their license could be revoked.

Inspector Sutton undertook to investigate the situation, but indicated that it was sometimes difficult to ascertain whether the under age drinkers had visited the licensed premises, or obtained the alcohol from elsewhere.

- (1) A member of the public expressed concerns at the speed of traffic travelling down the Ridgeway.

- (2) The same member of the public expressed concerns at the unsightly state of the land in front of garages at the end of Furlong Road, which he had reported previously.

Ward Members advised that they had investigated the problem, when it was originally reported. The garages were found to be privately owned and the owners difficult to locate. When the owners were located they would be requested to resolve the problems.

- (1) A member of the public questioned the annual budget for maintenance of all Council owned buildings, parks and amenities and Council offices. The questions were referred to the Interim Director of Finance for a written response.

78 PETITIONS

It was reported that two petition had been submitted to the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services expressing concerns relating to anti social behaviour and unwanted visits from relatives of a tenant. Both petitions were being investigated by the Director, in consultation with the Police and Legal Services.

A petition was submitted by a young person, on behalf of residents and containing over 1400 signatures, objecting to the closure of Coseley baths. The petition was referred to the Director of the Urban Environment for his attention.

79 YOUTH ISSUES

The Area Manager of Early Years, Youth and Education gave an oral update on youth issues in the North Dudley area including:

- (a) activities for young people proposed for the Easter holidays, including henna painting, music, consultations around summer provision, drama workshops based on anti social behaviour, art activities, sports and trips to Drayton Manor Park and ice skating.
- (b) The success of sexual health drop in sessions at youth centres and the possibility of a Chlamydia screening service in the near future.
- (c) Joint projects between Lower Gornal Youth Academy and Ellowes Hall School.
- (d) A recent St Patrick's Day activity evening.

- (e) An increase in numbers at Sedgley Youth Centre was reported. Activities offered included, a healthy lifestyles project, behaviour project, workshops on sexual health, cooking, alcohol and drug awareness and personal safety.
- (f) The detached youth team had made contact with an increased number of young people in the area. They were preparing applications for funding to enable specific projects to be undertaken later in the year.

The Area Team Leader, Early Years, Youth and Education introduced the newly elected Youth Forum representative, who would support the co-opted Member on the Committee in future.

The Co-opted Member reported on the very successful Dudley Youth Forum residential which had taken place in February. He referred to a number of issues raised by Adult and youth groups, which had emerged from work undertaken between the Youth Forum and the Community Renewal Officer, including anti social behaviour in town centres.

He also reported on the results of the Youth Parliament elections, which had not resulted in a representative from North Dudley. However, he undertook to work with the Youth Parliament to ensure that local views were expressed at national level.

He also welcomed the new Youth Parliament representative, who would be working with him in the future and supporting his work on the Committee.

POLICE ISSUES

Inspector Mark Sutton gave an oral report on Police issues in the North Dudley area, commenting that there had been an increase in the number of young people being mugged and mobile telephones stolen by young people from outside of the area. Additional Officers had been secured to work on this issue. The local Police Community Support Officers had been working with schools regarding safety in the school holidays and encouraging youngsters to take precautions when out in the evenings.

Inspector Sutton reported that there had been an increase in the numbers attending the Partners and Communities Together (PACT) meetings at the Bramford School. He encouraged members of the public to visit the Police website for further information on PACT meetings.

He undertook to speak with members of the public outside of the meeting on specific issues, including concerns regarding under age drinking in Lower Gornal on Monday evenings, at around teatime.

In response to comments made regarding the number of Police Officers available in the North Dudley Area, Inspector Sutton advised that he believed that he had adequate Police Officers to patrol the area, and had the ability to call in additional resources as and when required. He also had to be mindful that there were limited resources available to all areas.

An employee of British Telecom responded to a query as to where 999 calls were directed, advising that they went to a call centre in Glasgow from where they were rerouted to the nearest local Police station.

RESOLVED

That Inspector Sutton be thanked for his oral report on Police issues, and that the information given be noted.

81 FIRE ISSUES

The Operations Commander, Dudley Borough (West Midlands Fire Service) reported on Fire Service issues. He undertook to investigate the fly tipping near the garages at the end of Furlong Road, as this could present a fire hazard in the future. He encouraged anyone witnessing fly tipping to report the matter, so that it could be investigated.

The Operations Commander, Dudley Borough (West Midlands Fire Service) reported a small rise in the number of derelict buildings and requested that any empty properties be reported to the Fire Service to ensure that the building was safe and secure.

The Fire Service were preparing for a further programme of five day courses aimed at youths on the brink of crime.

The Fire Service were also engaging with young people to try to combat child obesity and were piloting a scheme in May, 2009, which, if successful, would be rolled out to other schools in the area.

In response to a question by a Member of the Committee as to how much of the Fire Service's budget was under spent, The Operations Commander, Dudley Borough (West Midlands Fire Service) undertook to investigate and send a response to the Member.

The Operations Commander, Dudley Borough (West Midlands Fire Service) advised that residents concerned as to how they might keep their plastic wheelie bins safe from fire and/or theft, might like to consider padlocking their recycle plastic wheelie bins to the wall of their house, or garage, or to the floor, if they could not locate them at the rear of their properties,

TRANSPORT ISSUES

In the absence of a representative of Centro, a Member of the Committee requested that a representative of Centro attend the next meeting to advise Ward Members of a proposal to erect bus shelters at every bus stop on the 558 bus route. It was considered to be important that Ward Members were made aware of what was happening in their localities.

RESOLVED

That the issue raised under transport issues be noted and arrangements made for a representative of Centro to be in attendance at the next meeting of the Committee.

CAPITAL ALLOCATIONS

A report of the Area Liaison Officer was submitted on applications received for funding from the Capital Allocation Budget of the Committee, which had been considered by the Committee's Capital Allocations Working Group, at a meeting held on the 16th March, 2009.

In presenting the report, the Area Liaison Officer advised that where the Working Group had requested clarification and/or additional information, all the requested information had been submitted and approved.

A representative of the Sedgley and District Community Association expressed disappointment at the recommendation of the Working Group in respect of his Association, and advised that they would wish to apply for a grant in the future.

The Area Team Leader Early Years, gave an undertaking that, should the grant for the Coseley Youth Centre be approved, the equipment purchased now for the Youth Centre would be transported to the new centre by professional removers.

RESOLVED

- (1) That, in the period between the Annual Council Meeting and the election of a Chairman at the first meeting of the Area Committee in the new municipal year, the Area Liaison Officer, in consultation with the Leaders of all political groups represented on the Committee, be authorised to determine urgent applications for capital funding.
- (2) That, subject to paragraph (1) above, the Area Liaison Officer, in consultation with the Chairman of the Committee and the Opposition spokesperson(s), be authorised to determine urgent applications for capital funding.

- (3) That the previous decision of the Committee, to refuse the application by the Sedgley and District Community Association for £9,760.40 towards the cost of connection of a storm water drain and construction of a drain run, on the basis that the Association had received previous support from the Committee be upheld.
- (4) That the application by Barnado's Time For Me Project for £900 towards the provision of a fire escape from the attic at the Source Youth Centre and the purchase of a sink and tables and chairs for the centre's craft room be approved.
- (5) That the application by Coseley Youth Centre for £3,957.16 towards the purchase of furniture, games and a new laptop for the centre be approved, subject to the equipment being stored securely, the equipment being transported to the new centre by a professional removal company, and to the information stored on the laptop be kept in accordance with the Council's data protection procedures.
- (6) That the First Lower Gornal Scout Group be awarded £4,200 towards the provision of a disabled shower and toilet facilities.
- (7) That the Upper Gornal Pensioners Club be awarded £1,000 towards the refurbishment of the entrance hall, including plastering and painting.
- (8) That the application by the Monday Friendship Hour for £300 towards the purchase of a commercial food mixer be approved.
- (9) That consideration of the application by the 50+ Group for £1,027 towards the purchase of new tables be approved.
- (10) That the application by Sedgley Park Football Club be deferred to enable further information to be obtained, including financial information and written quotations.
- (11) That the application by the Gornal Community Fun Day Planning Committee for £2,118.96 towards the purchase of sound equipment, gazebos and an advertising banner be approved.
- (12) That the application by St Peters Church for £1,504 for the purchase of a new range cooker be approved.
- (13) That the application by the Coseley Athletic Bowling Club for £4,140 towards the installation of an all weather shelter with disabled access at the bowling green be approved.

CASTLE STREET, ROSEVILLE SHOPPING CENTRE, COSELEY: PROPOSED TRAFFIC REGULATION ORDER

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on proposals for a one way flow and on-street daytime limited waiting in Roseville Shopping Centre, Coseley, as shown on the plan attached to the report submitted, to encourage shoppers to visit Roseville.

In support of the proposals, as set out in the report, a representative of the Coseley Business Watch, had, in the public forum, expressed the group's support for the proposal, set out in the report. The Group considered two-way traffic conflicts, parking and driving in Coseley to be extremely difficult and they considered that the proposals, if approved by the Cabinet Member for Transportation, would make shopping at Coseley a much better experience.

A Ward Member from Coseley thanked the Group Engineer for his work on the project, which he hoped would receive approval.

RESOLVED

That the Cabinet Member for Transportation be advised of the Committee's support for the making of the Traffic Regulation Order for Castle Street, Roseville Shopping Centre, as shown on the drawing TRS/N/M/536, attached to the report submitted and recommended to authorise the making of the Order.

COMMUNITY RENEWAL WORKING GROUP

A report of the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services was submitted on the progress of the North Dudley Community Renewal Plan.

In presenting the report, the Head of Community Renewal advised on the recent outcomes of the Working Group, including the co-option of a representative of the Tudor and Oval Tenants and Residents Association. She also advised that representatives of Professional Organisations would be invited to attend meetings of the working group as and when issues concerning their organisation were to be discussed.

The Head of Community Renewal informed of progress made regarding youth issues in the area, including efforts to address under age drinking.

The Chairman of the Community Renewal Working Group commented on the work being undertaken with Officers and Members of the Working Group. He drew attention to a visit, himself and fellow Ward Councillors had been made, earlier in the week, to a local voluntary group in the area. He also drew attention to:

- (a) the very professional and successful newsletter produced by the Tudor and Oval Tenants and Residents Association, which had recently been published. The Association had secured funding to produce the newsletter for a further three years.
- (b) the work being undertaken at High Arcal School to develop a Youth Club, supported by the young people at one end and the Tenants and Residents Association representative at the other.

The next meeting of the Working Group was scheduled for 5th May, 2009.

A Member of the Committee complimented the Association on the quality of the newsletter, which she had asked to be included in the next issue of the "Dudley Matters" publication.

Another Member of the Committee reported on the visit the previous week of the Ward Members to the community centre. He also expressed gratitude for the sterling work carried out by volunteers for the benefit of those less fortunate than themselves within the community. He congratulated all volunteers in Dudley for their good work.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the content of the report submitted, on the progress of the North Dudley Community Renewal Plan, be noted.
- (2) That the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services be advised of the Committee's support for the continued work of the Community Renewal Team in community localities.

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RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS

A report of the Area Liaison Officer was submitted on written responses to questions sent in response to questions asked at previous meetings of the Committee.

A Member of the Committee commented on the response regarding the 'gating' Order for the File Cutters' footpath and expressed concern that the Order had not been implemented. The Group Engineer Traffic and Road Safety undertook to investigate the matter further.

RESOLVED

- That the content of the report submitted be noted.
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87 WARD ISSUES

- (a) Councillor Mrs Millward commented on the success of the recently opened new public house in Lower Gornal, on the site of a previously derelict public house, and the number of new jobs it had brought to the area.
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88 SELECT COMMITTEE PUBLICITY

Information was given regarding the dates of future meetings of all Select Committees, which were held at the Council House, Dudley. Members of the public were invited and welcome to attend such meetings.

RESOLVED

That the information given in respect of the dates of future meetings of Select Committees be noted.

89 DATES AND VENUES OF FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE COMMITTEE

RESOLVED

That the dates and venues of future meetings of the Committee would be advised when determined at the Annual Council Meeting in the new Municipal Year.

The meeting ended at 7.40 pm

CHAIRMAN