

**MEETING OF THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SAFETY
AND COMMUNITY SERVICES**

Monday 8th October 2007 at 6.00 pm
in Committee Room 2, Council House, Dudley

PRESENT:-

Councillor A. Turner (Chairman)
Councillors Burston, Ms Craigie, A. Finch, Hanif, Ms Foster, Harley,
Jones, Nottingham and Ryder.

OFFICERS

Assistant Director for Partnerships and Childrens' Trusts (Lead Officer to the Committee), Head of Policy, Police Liaison Officer and Messrs. Griffiths and Furidze (Directorate of Law and Property).

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE

Chief Superintendents Croft and Baldwin (OCU Commanders - West Midlands Police) and the Head of Strategic Research and Intelligence.

25 **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of the Vice Chairman of the Committee, Councillor Cotterill and Councillors Ahmed and Mrs Collins, the Assistant Director of Housing, the Head of Neighbourhood Management, the Head of Community Safety and the Principal Lawyer (Directorate of Law and Property).

26 **SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

It was reported that Councillors Ms Craigie and Hanif had been appointed to serve as substitute members for Councillors Mrs Collins and Cotterill, respectively, for this meeting of the Committee only.

27 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No Member made a declaration of interest in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct.

28

MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 13th September 2007, be approved as a correct record and signed.

29

CHANGE IN ORDER OF BUSINESS

Pursuant to Council Procedure Rule 13(c), it was

RESOLVED

That agenda item number 6a be considered as the next item of business.

30

REVIEW OF NEIGHBOURHOOD MANAGEMENT

A report of the Chief Executive was presented by the Head of Policy, on the outcome of an independent review by Leslie Silverlock, a Specialist Neighbourhood Advisor, of the existing Neighbourhood Management service, which contained the key recommendation that the service should refocus upon the City Strategy initiative to provide a more sustainable and targeted approach to tackling deprivation in the Borough. The Silverlock report had been presented to the Dudley Community Partnership in June 2007.

The key conclusions of the report were: -

- That there was a strong case for retaining some level of neighbourhood working in the borough to deliver the partnerships strategic objectives.
- That the future national agenda for the Council, including the Local Area Agreement and move to Comprehensive Area Assessment would require a neighbourhood focus.
- That there would not be any additional partner contributions to meet the shortfall in Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) reductions, leaving a Council contribution of £328,000 that was insufficient to sustain the current initiative.
- In light of this financial constraint, that any future neighbourhood management service would need to be reduced and more streamlined.

- That there were strong arguments to link the future initiative to City Strategy, and refocused on local neighbourhood renewal. The City Strategy focus was upon 5 wards – St Thomas's, Castle and Priory, Brierley Hill, Netherton and Woodside and St James's. In addition, the report recommended two peripatetic posts to sustain existing neighbourhood based working outside of these 5 areas. It would also require a management post to oversee the team, and ensure effective neighbourhood delivery of the City Strategy agenda.
- This refocused initiative could run for the years of the City Strategy and could be evaluated to identify how effective it was to improve services for local people, and achieve cost savings for local agencies through better targeting and co-ordination.
- By adopting a focus upon City Strategy there is an opportunity for the Borough to attract new funding from the Deprived Area Fund, although at this stage it is not clear about the nature and extent of this pot.
- That Neighbourhood Action Teams be set up in each of the 5 wards, together with an overall Steering Group to ensure effective management and direction of the initiative.

A report would be submitted to the Cabinet on 31st October 2007 to seek a decision on the proposed way forward.

Arising from the presentation made; questions were raised about the cost of commissioning the independent report; the possible loss of experienced staff; the lack of a job description for the proposed peripatetic staff; the non provision of cover for periods of absence of the peripatetic staff; the effectiveness on the two peripatetic Neighbourhood Renewal Advisors to cover the next four deprived areas and what contribution the partners would make to part fund the new initiative. The winding up of Neighbourhood Renewal funding and the impact on the role of the current Team should the numbers of neighbourhood managers be reduced and the effects on the Borough, were also raised. The meeting received the responses, previously circulated before the meeting to Members of the Committee and the public on the foregoing issues.

The Head of Policy responded to further concerns that some of the questions, submitted before the meeting, had not been adequately answered. Concerns were also raised at the level of Member involvement, the way in which City Strategy was being rolled out and the implications of the proposals on the Brierley Hill area.

It was reported that the independent report was commissioned and paid for by the Government Office for the West Midlands. The Leader of the Council had addressed the Dudley Community Partnership on the importance of securing partner contributions to neighbourhood management if the current operation was to be maintained.

The Dudley Community Partnership had received and endorsed the independent report's recommendations. The Committee was informed that despite the endorsement, no partner agency had indicated a commitment to financially support the existing operation. The meeting was informed that other partners already allocated additional resources to deprived neighbourhoods and therefore supported neighbourhood level working through their own resource deployment practices.

On the issue of current Neighbourhood Management staff being placed on the redeployment register, the Committee was informed that this measure was aimed at protecting such employees' future employment with Dudley MBC in the event a decision was made to reduce the number of staff employed. It was further reported that no decisions had been made as to whether employees would be made redundant and the 3 month period spent on the register would only start to run from the time a decision was made on the future of Neighbourhood Management. It was reported that the peripatetic officers would be a resource in the Non City Strategy areas to be deployed and also tasked by the relevant Area Committees in specific geographical areas. The role of the current Neighbourhood Managers would be reassessed in the light of the direction from the Area Committees to determine what continued, what could be done differently or ceased on a case-by-case basis.

A Member informed the meeting that it was clear the Borough was going to lose the Neighbourhood Renewal funding and alternative funding streams needed to be identified sooner rather than later. The meeting heard that it was important to preserve the benefits of the Neighbourhood Management programme by giving the new initiative a chance to succeed albeit with reduced resources. A further option would be for the additional resources to be identified from reductions in other areas of expenditure or an increased burden on local Council taxpayers. A view was expressed that the City Strategy approach would be the best way forward since the Council would avoid raising taxes and draw on additional funding attached to City Strategy such as the Deprived Area Funds.

The Chairman of the Select Committee on Health and Adult Social Care reiterated her Committee's statement, circulated to the Committee and the public, in support of the continued funding of neighbourhood management in the areas of health and in particular alcohol use, obesity, heart disease and smoking. Concerns were also expressed about the completeness of the evaluation, the criteria used and the involvement of ward members and Area Committees. The Chairman of the Committee read out a statement from the Chair of the Lye and Wollescote Partnership, expressing concern at the proposed changes and asking what alternatives would be put in place as well as calling on the Council to reconsider the proposals.

Representations had been made to the local Members of Parliament and the Council's partners on the Dudley Community Partnership had been invited to this meeting. It was noted that some of the partners could not attend due to other commitments.

Arising out the question and answer session, the Chairman of the Committee informed the meeting that there were three options, namely, to recommend to the Cabinet: -

- To accept the findings and recommendations of the Silverlock report, subject to strong representations being made to the Government and Dudley Community Partnership (DCP) expressing concern at the removal of Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) resources and recommending that alternative resources should be identified to maintain services to tackle identified levels of deprivation within the Borough;
- To maintain neighbourhood management as it currently operated and identify additional resources from reductions in other areas of expenditure or an increased burden on local Council tax payers to make up the expected funding gap;
- To take no action on the Silverlock report.

RESOLVED

That the report on the review of neighbourhood management be noted and that the Cabinet be recommended to accept the findings and recommendations of the Silverlock report, subject to strong representations being made to the Government and Dudley Community Partnership (DCP) expressing concern at the removal of Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) resources and recommending that alternative resources should be identified to maintain services to tackle identified levels of deprivation within the Borough.

The meeting ended at 6.55 p.m.

CHAIRMAN