

CENTRAL DUDLEY AREA COMMITTEE

Tuesday 22nd January, 2008 at 6.30 pm
at Dudley Concert Hall, St. James's Road, Dudley

PRESENT: -

Councillor Rahman (Chairman)
Councillors Ahmed, Ali, Mrs. Aston, Cotterill, Ms. Craigie, K Finch, J Martin, Sparks and Waltho; and Mrs. Edwards, Ms. Little and Mrs. Oakes

OFFICERS:

Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services (as Area Liaison Officer), Head of Street Care, Head of Design & Projects and Group Engineer – Civil Engineering and Senior Warden – Wren's Nest Nature Reserve (Directorate of the Urban Environment), Principal Project Officer and Area Housing Manager – Dudley (Directorate of Adult, Community and Housing Services), Assistant Director of Children's Services (Early Years, Youth and Education Services), Principal Solicitor and Mr R Jewkes (Directorate of Law and Property)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE

Approximately 40 members of the public.

Mr T Coleshaw (Representing Natural England)

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APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors Mrs. Coulter, J Davies, A Finch, Ms. Roberts and Mrs. While-Cooper; and Mr. Nock.

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DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Ms Craigie declared a personal and prejudicial interest in respect of Agenda Item Number 9(c) – Application to lease/purchase land at Priory Court, New Street, Dudley, in view of the fact that she was a Member of Licensing Committee.

Councillor Rahman declared a personal interest in respect of Agenda Item Number 10 – Capital Allocations – Netherton News Group, in view of the fact that he was acquainted with the applicant.

MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Committee held on 7th November, 2007, were submitted.

In relation to Resolution (a) below, Cllr J Martin reiterated his previous request for a response in relation to the reasons why the removal of the hypodermic needles had taken two days in the instance referred to.

In relation to Resolution (d) below, Cllr Ali expressed the view that guidance should be issued to Members on the question of proceedings of Area Committees being recorded for television.

Councillor Ali commented that no reference was made in the minutes to the discussion at the last meeting of the Committee on the issue of television crews being allowed to film the proceedings, despite the fact that this had been discussed, with officers advising that this was inadvisable due to child protection and data protection issues. He requested that further guidance be provided to Members regarding this issue, in order to avoid uncertainty at future meetings.

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 7th November, 2007, be approved as a correct record and signed, subject to the following: -

- (a) the substitution of the word 'residents' for 'he' in the third line, and the substitution of the word 'they' for 'he' in the fourth line, of issue (4) of the matters raised by Councillor J Martin under Minute Number 50 (Ward Issues).
 - (b) the substitution of the words 'the provision of a safe crossing' for the words 'that traffic calming measures' in the second and third lines of issue (5) of the matters raised by Councillor J Martin under Minute Number 50 (Ward Issues).
 - (c) the substitution of the word 'Herald' for 'Harold' in the second line of issue (1) of the matters raised by Councillor Ms Craigie under Minute Number 50 (Ward Issues).
 - (d) the inclusion of reference to the discussion at the start of the meeting regarding the issue of television crews being allowed to film proceedings.
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PETITIONS

A Petition was submitted by Councillor Ali, on behalf of residents of Banklands Road, requesting that the Council take action regarding anti-social behaviour emanating from a particular property in that road. The petition was referred to the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services for consideration and attention.

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YOUTH ISSUES

No issues were raised under this item.

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PUBLIC FORUM

Consideration was given to written questions submitted, as set out below. The Chairman advised that further questions would be taken from the floor should there be any time remaining when written questions had been addressed.

A member of the public submitted a question on an issue raised previously by Councillor Ali, in relation to misuse of the access gap in the central reservation on Kings Street. He stated that recently, whilst riding his motorcycle in the area, he had been hit by a car cutting through the gap, and requested clarification as to what steps could be taken to alleviate the problem. In responding, the Head of Street Care stated that whilst he was not acquainted with the details of the problem, he would raise the matter with the appropriate officers in the Directorate of the Urban Environment and request that they look into possible solutions and respond in writing to the questioner.

Several questions were submitted in relation to the proposed reduction in funding for the Ethnic Minority Achievement Service (EMAS) for the 2008/09 financial year, which had recently been supported by the Cabinet, subject to approval by the Council at its February meeting. The questions submitted focussed on the following issues: -

- The perceived lack of consultation with service users on the issues prior to formal proposals being formulated.
- The feeling that the service had been 'targeted', with funding being cut in each of the last three financial years.
- The fact that there was still a high demand for the service, meaning that children's education would suffer when funding was reduced, with the effect that they would be more likely to become involved in crime, drugs, and religious extremism.
- A desire for ethnic languages to be taught in schools as part of the curriculum, in the same way that various European languages currently were.

- What, if any, 'risk analysis' had been undertaken to assess the academic and social effects of cutting the service on the groups targeted by the service, particularly the children who attended supplementary schools.

In responding to the points raised, the Assistant Director of Children's Services (Early Years, Youth and Education Services), stated that EMAS was a highly valued service within the Directorate of Children's Services. However, the national grant provided by Central Government to fund the service had been steadily reduced in recent years, and although the Local Authority had, until now, reallocated funding from other areas to maintain the service, the current extreme budgetary pressures within the Directorate dictated that funding would have to be reduced. In relation to risk analysis, she advised that the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, in formulating budget proposals for the coming financial year, had considered funding needs across the Directorate, and had found that reductions were unavoidable in a number of areas if the budget was to be balanced. In relation to the effect on service users of funding being reduced, she advised that, should the Council approve the budget proposals, schools would continue to receive the direct 'Ethnic Minority Grant', which could be deployed at their discretion to provide additional support for pupils from ethnic minorities. Although the remaining EMAS funding would still surpass the level of grant provided by the Government, the Directorate regretted having to propose a reduction.

Arising from these comments, a member of the public commented that the proposed reduction of £306,000 was a small fraction of the £62 million budget which would be allocated to the Directorate in 2008/09. Furthermore, no other services for which cuts were proposed would suffer to the extent that EMAS would, as the amounts of funding to be withdrawn from other services were considerably smaller. It appeared that the Council had targeted EMAS over a number of years, which in the long run would be to the severe detriment of local children from ethnic minorities who, it was contended, already underachieved academically in comparison with other children.

In responding to the points raised, the Assistant Director of Children's Services (Early Years, Youth and Education Services), stated that the final decision on the reduction in funding had not yet been made, and that full Council would agree the budget for 2008/09 at its meeting on 25th February. She reiterated her previous point that a number of other services were being cut in order to balance the budget, and stated that EMAS had not been 'targeted'. She gave an undertaking to forward all of the questions and comments made at the meeting to the Cabinet Member and the Director of Children's Services for their consideration.

Several members of the Committee expressed agreement with the comments made by members of the public, commenting that the proposed funding reduction for 2008/09, combined with previous years' cuts, amounted to an overall reduction in excess of £500,000. It was also commented that the lack of consultation with service users on the proposals appeared to be a growing problem within the Council, as Members had received a number complaints from constituents in recent months in relation to consultation on a number issues.

In summarising the discussion on the matter, the Chairman commented that EMAS had been set up to meet a real academic need within the Borough, and he could see no evidence that the demand for the support provided by the service had subsided. He stated that a number of issues had been raised which it would not be possible to consider in sufficient detail at the meeting and therefore proposed a course of action to the meeting.

RESOLVED

That the Assistant Director of Children's Services (Early Years, Youth and Education Services) be requested to provide a written response, to be circulated to the Committee and those members of the public submitting written questions, prior to the meeting of full Council to be on 25th February, 2008, including detailed responses to the issues raised at the meeting, the reasons why the Ethnic Minority Achievement Service (EMAS) was first established, the current position in terms of funding, and an analysis of the academic and social effects of reducing funding to the service.

A member of the public submitted a number of questions in relation to parking facilities at Woodside Community Association. He stated that the car park at the centre currently had just twenty spaces, while the centre had more than two hundred members. In addition to this, due to uncertainty as to whether the car park was the property of the Community Association or of the adjacent Highgate Primary School, it currently catered for parents of children who attended the school and the adjoining Children's Centre, and Dudley Council 'back-up' services vehicles. He commented that in view of other community facilities and staff which had been lost in the area recently, it was more important than ever to protect and support the Community Association. In responding, the Chairman expressed agreement with the comments made in relation to the need to support community facilities and activity in the Woodside area, and requested that Council officers look into the ownership of the land with a view to resolving the issue, and provide a written response to the questioner.

A member of the public raised a question in relation to a piece of derelict land in Windmill End, Netherton. She stated that the privately owned land had previously been fenced off securely, but that the fence had been pulled down and rubbish dumped on the site, resulting in rats congregating in the area. The questioner stated that although the land was messy, unsightly and having detrimental effect on the amenity of the area, the owner refused to keep in a tidy, secure state. It was requested that the Council take the matter up with the owner of the property in order that it could be tidied up and the fencing replaced.

In responding, the Chairman expressed agreement with the comments made and requested that Council officers look into the matter, take appropriate action and provide a written response to the questioner.

Mrs Oakes made reference to a previous question in relation to misuse the access gap in the central reservation on Kings Street, stating that although the access was necessary to serve Beatties and other shops in the Churchill Centre, it was being consistently misused, mainly, in her experience, by taxi drivers. She suggested that the Council either make contact with local taxi firms to warn them of the dangers of misusing the access or install a bollard to prevent abuse of the opening. Councillor Ali advised that a number of his constituents had raised the issue with him in the past, and commented that a major accident would occur at some point if the Council did not take action. In light of these comments, it was agreed that copies of the written response to be provided to the original questioner would also be sent to Mrs Oakes and Councillor Ali for information.

A member of the public raised a concern in relation to parking in the streets surrounding Russells Hall hospital on the Russells Hall estate. He stated that due to problems with parking on the hospital site, many staff employed at the hospital had started parking their vehicles in the surrounding streets, in particular Ashenhurst Road, during the daytime. As these staff often worked long shifts from 8a.m. to 7p.m., many residents were struggling to park their cars when returning from work. It was requested that the Council take action to improve the situation and protect residents' parking rights. Several Members expressed sympathy with the issue and support was expressed for plans to erect a multi-storey car park at the site. It was noted, however, that a planning application for such a facility had not yet been forthcoming. Councillor Ms Craigie also suggested the introduction of a residents permit scheme similar to that put in place by Wolverhampton City Council in the area surrounding Molineux stadium. In responding, the Head of Street Care gave an undertaking to raise the issue with the relevant officers in order that the possibilities for a suitable solution could be investigated and pursued as quickly as possible.

PRIORY PARK – STAGE 1 HERITAGE LOTTERY FUND BID

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on the Council's progress in relation to the preparation of a Stage 1 bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for the regeneration of Priory Park. The report set out details of the process for submitting the bid, and details of the proposed improvements were circulated to Members of the Committee and the public at the meeting. It was noted that these proposals were subject to the response to a public consultation exercise which was currently under way, and would close on 25th January.

Arising from consideration of the report, Members strongly welcomed the bid, and expressed thanks to all those involved, in particular the Friends of Priory Park, for their work so far in progressing the scheme.

A Member raised the issue of security and anti-social behaviour at the park, and commented that unless measures like improved fencing and the employment of a full-time Warden were pursued, any improvements achieved as a result of the bid would be virtually pointless. In responding, the Head of Design and Projects advised that the scheme included both capital and revenue elements, for which the engagement of parks staff would be eligible. In responding to a further question regarding whether other parks in the Borough would be able to apply for this type of funding, he advised that providing they met the criteria specified by the Heritage Lottery Fund, any park would be eligible to apply. However, as the process of compiling a bid was intensive and therefore costly, the Council would have to prioritise any prospective bids.

RESOLVED

1. That the information in respect of the Council's progress in relation to the preparation of a Stage 1 bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for the regeneration of Priory Park, as contained in the report submitted, be noted.
2. That the comments set out above in relation to the bid be taken into account as part of the consultation on the proposed scheme.
3. That the Cabinet be recommended to authorise the submission of a Stage 1 bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for the regeneration of Priory Park.

CHANGE IN ORDER OF BUSINESS

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

RESOLVED

That Agenda Item 13 – Wrens Nest National Nature Reserve Management Plan 2008-2012, be considered as the next item of business.

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WRENS NEST NATIONAL NATURE RESERVE MANAGEMENT PLAN 2008-2012

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on the Wren's Nest National Nature Reserve Management Plan 2008-2012. The Committee's support was sought for the publication of the Plan, which had been written following a review, carried out by officers of the Council, of the services provided at the Nature Reserve and the developments which would be required in the next five years.

In responding to a question from a Member, Mr T Coleshaw stated that although the recent Black Country Urban Park BIG Lottery bid had not been successful, the Council was working, in conjunction with Natural England to try and secure alternative funding, in order that the Seven Sisters mines could be reopened to the public in the future.

Arising from consideration of the report, a Member expressed support for the series of management objectives for the next five years set out in paragraph 8 of the report submitted, and commented that the main problem with delivering the Plan would be securing the required funds, particularly as the amount of funding set aside for the West Midlands was currently £90 million lower than it should have been, when compared to similar demographic areas.

RESOLVED

1. That the publication of the Wren's Nest National Nature Reserve Management Plan 2008-2012 Revision be supported.
 2. That the Cabinet Member for Leisure be recommended to approve the Plan.
 3. That the proposal that the Council seek appropriate funding sources to assist with the implementation of the Plan's actions, be endorsed.
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WARD ISSUES

Councillor Cotterill raised:

- (1) a request for a change in Council policy in relation to the extinguishment of Council tenancies when relationships between joint tenants came to an end. He reported that numerous cases in his ward had been brought to his attention where a marriage or relationship had broken down resulting in one tenant leaving, following which the Council had sought to evict the remaining tenant on the grounds that their tenancy was no longer valid. He commented that the Council should demonstrate more compassion in these situations and instead focus its efforts on evicting anti-social tenants.
- (2) a request that remedial work be done on a number of trees in his Ward, the details of which he had notified several times to Council officers over the twelve months.
- (3) concern regarding the site of the Golden Cross public house on Cradley Road. He reported that the property had been empty for some months, leaving it vulnerable to vandalism and potentially arson, and requested that the Council take positive action to ensure that the owner of the property take the necessary steps to ensure that the site was secured.
- (4) concern regarding the site of the former Kwik Save store on Cradley Road. He reported that this property and the adjoining car park were now empty, and expressed concern that unless the site was adequately secured, it could be targeted by travellers or vandals. He requested that the Council take action to ensure that the owner of the site ensured that it was kept secure.

Councillor Sparks raised:

- (1) concern regarding traffic at the island at the top of Quarry Bank High Street, particularly in relation to the left turn 'filter lane'. He reported that traffic in the area had been particularly bad over the Christmas period, and stated that one of the main problems was that at busy times, even when the traffic lights on the island were on green, it was not possible to get across the island owing to the build up of congested traffic blocking the way. He commented that this problem was largely due to the design of the junction being inadequate, as the filter lane for cars turning left was too short, and requested that work be undertaken to lengthen the lane as soon as possible to ease congestion in the area.

Councillor Ali raised:

- (1) a number of issues in relation to sport in Dudley, including a request for a future agenda item. He reported that the 2008 St. Thomas's Community Games would be held in the two weeks from Friday 20th June, with an opening ceremony being held at Dudley Castle. In relation to this, he stated that in previous years he had made efforts to obtain Council support for a Borough-wide games, to no avail. He requested that, particularly in view of the 2012 Olympics being held in London, a report be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee in relation to the possibilities for organising, with officer support, a Borough-wide Community Games to be held in 2010.
- (2) concern that although the road in Bunns Lane was being resurfaced, which he welcomed, the works did not appear to include the implementation of any safety measures. He requested that traffic-calming measures be installed in the road to prevent accidents from occurring.
- (3) a request that anti-skid surfacing, or some other safety measures, be taken in relation to the sharp bend outside the newsagents on Watson's Green Road, in order to reduce the risk of accidents occurring due to cars parking on both sides of the road.

Councillor Rahman raised:

- (1) thanks to Council officers for the work undertaken recently to clean up the Woodside area, in particular the efforts made to clean out gulleys. He requested that similar work now be done in the Netherton area, in particular to clean up dog foul in the streets surrounding Northfield Road Primary School.
- (2) reiterated a previous request for an area action plan to be drawn up to set out sustainable solutions to traffic problems in Netherton. He requested that officers consider the possibilities for the formulation of a plan and contact him with their comments.
- (3) reiterated a previous request for action to be taken to improve the flow of traffic at the junction between Northfield Road and Halesowen Road. He stated that he had raised this issue numerous times since being elected as a Councillor, with no progress being made, requested that a report be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee in relation to the possibilities for remodelling the junction.

Councillor Waltho raised:

- (1) concern that the traffic scheme being proposed for Lister Road did not address the problems raised previously by residents and Councillors at the local PACT meeting. He requested that officers revisit the scheme and amend the plans to deal with these issues.
- (2) a request that potholes in New Mill Street be repaired as soon as possible.
- (3) a request that graffiti on the footbridge in King Street be cleaned off as soon as possible.

Councillor Ahmed raised:

- (1) a request that potholes in Alexandra Street, Edwards Street and Russells Hall Road be repaired as soon as possible.
- (2) concern regarding the zebra crossing in Wellington Road. He reported that often cars did not stop when pedestrians were waiting to cross the road, and therefore requested that another type of crossing, using some form of traffic lights, be installed to ensure that residents could cross the road safely.

Councillor Ms. Craigie raised:

- (1) concern that she had not yet received a written response in relation to three of the Ward Issues she had raised at the last meeting of the Committee. She requested that responses be provided to her as soon as possible.
- (2) a request that potholes in Stepping Stone Street be repaired as soon as possible.
- (3) concern regarding parking in Ashenhurst Road. She echoed the comments made by residents earlier in the meeting and requested that a safety officer visit the Russells Hall hospital car park and the surrounding area to view first hand the danger and inconvenience which was being inflicted on local residents.
- (4) a request for information regarding the recent appointment of City Strategy Area Managers. She requested details of the appointment process, including the dates on which interviews were held, the dates on which the eight successful applicants were appointed and, as soon as possible, details of the areas to which each new Manager would be assigned, in order that Members could make contact with them at the earliest opportunity.

The Committee expressed general support for this request, and it was

RESOLVED

That the information referred to in point (4) above be circulated to all Members of the Committee as soon as possible.

Councillor J Martin raised:

- (1) concern that he had not yet received the information he had requested at the last meeting of the Committee in relation to the amount of traffic passing through the junction of Halesowen Road and Northfield Road, and the number of recorded accidents at the junction. He requested that this information be provided to him as soon as possible.
- (2) support for the comments made by residents during the Public Forum in relation to the overgrown land in Windmill End. He requested that necessary action be taken to ensure that the land was tidied up, as he had been advised, in conversations with residents, that the land had been in its current state for almost twenty years. He requested that officers keep him updated directly of any developments in relation to the matter.
- (3) congratulations to the Police and Council officers on the reduction in crime in the Woodside area. He commented that the community and Police needed to continue to co-operate in order to improve the situation further.
- (4) thanks to Pam Levy, Priority Neighbourhood Manager for Woodside and Holly Hall, for her work with the local communities in those areas.
- (5) thanks to the Housing Officers operating in his Ward for their hard work in dealing with a substantial workload in the area, particularly in relation to housing queries.

Councillor Mrs Aston raised:

- (1) a request that potholes in Stepping Stone Street be repaired as soon as possible.

RESOLVED

- (1) That consideration of the application to purchase land at Kwik Save, Peartree Lane, Cinder Bank, Dudley, be deferred pending the outcomes of the ongoing feasibility study in relation to the remodelling of Cinder Bank Traffic Island, and confirmation of whether or not the land will be required as part of any proposed works recommended as a result of the study.
- (2) That, subject to the land being leased or sold to the Police and to work being commenced shortly on a Traffic Management Study to address the serious problems currently being experienced in Netherton in relation to traffic congestion and parking, the proposed disposal of surplus land at Church Road, Netherton be supported in principle.
- (3) That the Cabinet Member for Law and Property be recommended to refuse the application to lease or purchase land, as indicated on the plan attached to the report now submitted, at Priory Court, New Street, Dudley, for the reasons stated in the 'comments' section of the report.

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CAPITAL ALLOCATIONS

A report of the Area Liaison Officer was submitted on the recommendations of the Capital Allocations Working Group regarding applications made for funding from the capital budget of the Committee.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the following amounts be awarded to the organisations stated:

<u>Organisation</u>	<u>Purpose</u>	<u>Amount</u>
Netherton News Group	Purchase of media trays and a finishing unit to be used in the printing process.	£3,000.00
Bumble Hole Conservation Group	To cover the final costs of the installation of a wildlife viewing platform	£5,000.00
The Oasis Project - Church of God of Prophecy	Repaving the driveway to improve disabled access	£4,905.00
Wrens Nest Community Centre	Purchase of new carpeting and a new roller shutter door	£1,516.92

Netherton Cricket Club	Installation of new fencing and a gate including removal of brambles and other unsightly vegetation	£3,500.00
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- (2) That the Area Liaison Officer be authorised to carry out the agreed actions within the control procedures.
- (3) The Area Liaison Officer be authorised to renew efforts to encourage further grant bids through Committee advertising, press releases and communication with community and voluntary organisations through the Dudley Council for Voluntary Service and Dosti.

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DELIVERING THE MASTERPLAN FOR DUDLEY TOWN CENTRE

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on progress in respect of the delivery of the Dudley Town Centre Area Development Framework. Details of a number of projects either currently underway or planned for the future, with the aim of regenerating Dudley Town Centre, were included in the report, together with an appraisal of the current position in relation to the implementation of the Framework.

Members welcomed the various projects and initiatives referred to in the report, and expressed support for the implementation of the Framework as a means of regenerating several areas of the Town Centre.

In relation to the work currently underway in relation to the Civic Quadrant, it was noted that no decision had yet been made as to whether the project would go ahead. Feasibility studies were currently under way, following which proposals for a new facility could possibly be made. However, the viability of any proposals which did emerge from the initial studies would have to be proven before the project could be taken any further.

RESOLVED

That the information in relation to the progress in respect of the delivery of the Dudley Town Centre Area Development Framework, as contained in the report submitted, be noted.

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FORMATION OF THE PUTTING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE FIRST' CHARITY

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted on the proposed amalgamation of eighteen small 'inactive' Dudley education charities, to which the Council had been appointed trustee.

The Assistant Director of Children's Services (Early Years, Youth and Education Services), reported that, subject to the support of all five Area Committees, and to a formal consultation on the proposed changes as required by the Charity Commission, the existing charities would be rationalised and made into to one new organisation, in order that the funds they held could once again put to good use. She advised that the new charity, to be called 'Putting Children and Young People First' would be of benefit to local children and young people, as it would give awards in recognition of educational achievements.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the principle of rationalisation of the eighteen existing charities referred to in the report submitted, be endorsed
- (2) That the issuing of a public consultation document, to include the proposals outlined in paragraph 13 of the report submitted, be endorsed.

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URBAN ENVIRONMENT - MATTERS RAISED AT CENTRAL DUDLEY AREA COMMITTEE – 7th NOVEMBER, 2007

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on a number of issues relating to that Directorate raised at the meeting of the Committee held on 7th November 2007.

RESOLVED

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

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SELECT COMMITTEE PUBLICITY

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

RESOLVED

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

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DATES AND VENUES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

RESOLVED

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

11th March 2008

– Saltwells Education Development
Centre, Bowling Green Road, Dudley

The meeting ended at 8.45 pm

CHAIRMAN