

DUDLEY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

BRIERLEY HILL AREA COMMITTEE – 1st FEBRUARY, 2007

REPORT OF THE BRIERLEY HILL AREA LIAISON OFFICER

MATTERS RAISED AT THE BRIERLEY HILL AREA COMMITTEE

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. To update Committee on a number of issues raised at the 7th December 2006 Brierley Hill Area Committee that relate to services provided by the Council.

BACKGROUND

2. The Council provides a number of services that have considerable impact on local communities.
3. Requests for service and information are received at Area Committee on a regular basis from both members and the general public, relating to a range of services. Few enquiries can be answered immediately, with many prompting further investigation, feasibility studies and public consultation, prior to being reported back to Committee.
4. To keep Committee updated, a progress report is attached.

FINANCE

5. There are no immediate financial implications for the Council arising from this report.

LAW

6. Anti-Social Behaviour Orders are largely governed by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998.
7. Provisions relating to Highways including trees thereon are contained in the Highways Act 1980.
8. Provisions relating to the Council's Housing stock are contained in the Housing Act 1985.
9. Section 51 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 places a duty on the Council as Waste Disposal Authority for its areas to provide places where its residents may deposit their household waste free of charge.

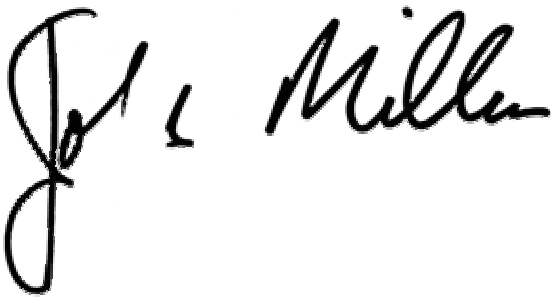
10. Traffic Regulation Orders are made under Section 1 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984.
11. The Traffic Calming Act 1992 amends the Highways Act 1980 to allow works to be carried out to promote safety and to preserve or improve the environment.
12. Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972 authorises the Council to do anything which is calculated to facilitate or is conducive or incidental to the exercise of any of its functions.

EQUALITY IMPACT

13. This report is consistent with the Council's Equality and Diversity policy. There is no direct effect on children or young people.

RECOMMENDATION

14. The Committee is recommended to note the contents of this report.



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Brierley Hill Area Committee Liaison Officer

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List of Background Papers

See progress report attached

DUDLEY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

BRIERLEY HILL AREA COMMITTEE – 1ST FEBRUARY, 2007

REPORT OF THE AREA LIAISON OFFICER

RESPONSE TO PETITION

A petition was received at the previous meeting of Area Committee from tenants and residents of Chapel Street Estate calling for the immediate reinstatement of the cash services in the Chapel Street Estate office, and called upon the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services to respond accordingly.

Response:

The cash receipting facilities were withdrawn from the Chapel Street office on 4th September 2006 for Health and Safety reasons. This was following an Audit inspection by Rent Control. It identified that security at the office was compromised because a door that should have remained closed and secure was also the only means of escape for the staff and was being left open and therefore insecure.

Estimates for the alterations to address the security issues, ranged from £13k to £25k. This expenditure, even at the lowest level, could not be justified when measured against usage of the office for cash payments and the availability of alternative payment options. Those wishing to continue paying by cash could do so via the Area Office, the Post Office or Pay Point at a local shop which, in addition, offered increased hours of business.

Letters were sent to all customers who made a payment at the office in late August 2006, advising them of the alternative methods of payments now available and offering them a visit from the Housing Managers should they require information or help with arranging an alternative way of paying. There was criticism that little notice was given of the withdrawal of the service. Obviously it would not have been in the interest of our customers or staff to announce a security problem.

Local Councillors raised concerns that the elderly residents living on the estate would not be able to make payments in the office. The vast majority of elderly residents live in the four High Rise blocks near to Brierley Hill Town Centre. They are Brickiln Court, Briar Court, Chapel Court and Dean Court (192 flats in total). In the two month period prior to the removal of the service, 23 residents from the four blocks mentioned above made use of the cash receipting facilities. Of these, 21 now pay at Cottage Street, 1 uses the Post Office and 1 has moved.

The average amount of money collected at the office was between £900 and £1000 per day. Since withdrawal of the cash service, customers have found alternative ways to pay their rent etc., confirming that there were sufficient alternative payment options available to them.

Of the 43 signatories on the petition only 3 made a payment at Chapel Street in August 2006.

In presenting the report to Brierley Hill Area Committee, Councillor Harris specifically asked that the Cabinet Member for Housing and the Director review their original decision to remove the cash collection service.

Councillor Evans and Linda Sanders were involved in the original decision to withdraw cash from Chapel Street. A review of a decision would usually be based on the provision of additional evidence/information.

The petition itself has not raised any additional issues.

The decision was taken on the following grounds :

1. A cash audit report had identified security issues that, if not addressed, represented a Health and Safety risk to staff and potentially an insurance issue.
2. Estimated cost of required works could not be justified in terms of cash collected at the office.
3. The payment options available to customers, including those wishing to continue payment by cash were more than adequate to meeting the differing needs of our customers.
4. The decision was to withdraw the cash facility and not close the office. It was recognised that currently a Housing Management presence at a local level is needed at Chapel Street.

In view of all the circumstances the original decision to withdraw cash collecting facilities from the Chapel Street Office was the correct one.

YOUTH ISSUES

Following the well received presentation of the Brierley Hill Youth Forum at the previous meeting in December, copies of the presentation were circulated to all members of the Committee as requested.

As a follow on from the Youth Forum's presentation, arrangements have been made for a presentation on the activities of the Brierley Hill Community Forum at this Area Committee meeting.

PUBLIC FORUM ISSUES

Wordsley Hospital Site Development

A request for information was raised concerning whether provision had been made for a school and a doctor's surgery on the development at the former Wordsley Hospital site. It was agreed that the issue of the doctor's surgery be referred to the Dudley Primary Care Trust.

With regard to the provision of a school, the Council has carried out a considerable amount of work on this in conjunction the developer. An agreement has been reached for a capital contribution (Section 106) for the equivalent of two new classrooms. These will be built on an existing primary school site as an expansion of that school. The capacity and size of existing schools in the defined area of the development yielded sufficient places. However, the Council argued the need for the capital contribution on the basis of parental preference.

Concerning the doctor's surgery, the vast majority of GP Practices are independent contractors within the National Health Service, which means very few of them are run by the Primary Care Trust. In the case of Dudley, no GP practices are run by the PCT.

Any discussions regarding the possible provision of a GP Practice would be independent of the PCT, as it would in effect be a discussion between two private companies. However, the submitted planning application does not make any reference to the provision of a doctor's surgery, only for the development of residential properties.

Community Policing of Brierley Hill

Following concerns made by a member of the public that Brierley Hill had become the most unlawful town in the West Midlands, Democratic Services, as a matter of course, have invited Police Community Support Officers to attend Committee to discuss progress on matters relating to the community policing of the town.

APPLICATION IN RESPECT OF LAND AND PROPERTY OWNED BY THE COUNCIL

A request was made at the previous Committee to clear land adjacent to 23 Mill Street, Brierley Hill (Dreamland) and consider having it placed on a regular maintenance schedule. In addition, the land was also requested to be treated for vermin and have it placed on a regular rodent control schedule.

Response:

Operatives from DUE's Environmental Management Division have removed the litter, cut back the vegetation and treated the site for vermin. The site is now included on a planned maintenance programme.

WARD MEMBER ISSUES

a) Cllr Ms Harris requested a report to Committee on the current situation concerning the Brierley Hill Parallel Route and the Brierley Hill Action Plan in the context of the Brierley Hill Strategy planning document.

Response:

An earlier report on the agenda for this Area Committee outlines the current position in relation to the Brierley Hill Sustainable Access Network (generally referred to as the 'Parallel Route'). It is intended that a further report on the Brierley Hill Area Action Plan will be submitted to the next meeting of this Area Committee on the 29th March 2007.

The future report will cover progress so far on the production of the Area Action Plan (AAP) but in essence it will:

- Have a vision for Brierley Hill
- Set out the context for development at Brierley Hill i.e. its location and characteristics, the particular issues that need addressing and any national, regional or local policies or strategies that must be taken into account (such as the Community Strategy)
- Have a series of policy objectives
- Allocate sites for certain uses in order to deliver the vision and objectives
- Set out the development principles for those sites
- Set out who is going to deliver the proposals and when
- Set out how delivery of the proposals will be monitored

The Council has commenced work on AAP and when adopted, it will form part of Dudley's statutory planning framework - the 'Local Development Framework'. It will be the starting point for making decisions on planning applications within Brierley Hill.

There is however, a statutory process that the Council must go through in order to produce the AAP. The Council is currently at the start of that process where evidence is gathered about the area in order to identify the issues that the AAP should respond to and address.

The identification of issues and priorities will be undertaken in consultation with key stakeholders and the public where appropriate, so that everyone can make their views known early on in the process. The report will also explain how comments are dealt during the next stage in the process when any 'options' for the future development of Brierley Hill will be proposed and consulted upon.

b) Cllr Ms Harris requested the clearance of rubbish from the land at Junction Road, Wordsley and that the site is considered for inclusion on a regular maintenance schedule.

Response:

Operatives from DUE's Street Care have removed the litter. The site is now included on the planned maintenance programme for litter collection.

c) Cllr Islam, on behalf of the local Tenants and Residents Association, expressed concern about the high speed of vehicles along Leys Road and Brierley Hill Road.

Response:

Whilst the Council receives many complaints about the speed of traffic on roads throughout the Borough, this is strictly an enforcement matter for the Police Authority and not the Local Authority. The Council does however, remain mindful of residents' concerns and in order to lessen the problems being experienced, it does consider a range of measures that may be helpful in complementing any action taken by the Police.

The following arrangements have therefore been put into place for:

- i) The Police Authority to be advised about the concerns being raised by the local residents with a request that they take such enforcement action that they deem to be appropriate.

- ii) The erection of temporary 30 mph 'Speed Kills' signs to act as a reminder to motorists of the prevailing speed limit and the need to drive in a more considerate manner.
- iii) Consideration being given to the added benefits of using the Council's 'Speed Visor' equipment in this area as the flashing speed limit sign associated with this particular option can often have a more dramatic visual impact on driver behaviour.
- iv) Add these roads to the list of sites to be considered as part of next year's annual assessment of sites in order to consider the benefit of introducing any additional or improved traffic management measures.

d) Cllr Islam also expressed concern about the lack of a footpath over the bridge in Brierley Hill Road.

Response:

The provision of a footway on the southern side of Brierley Hill Road would clearly be beneficial to pedestrians who currently have to either walk in the carriageway or cross the road in an area where forward visibility is restricted from the one direction by Buckpool Bridge and from the other direction by the sharp bend in the alignment of Brierley Hill Road near to its junction with Moor Street.

Unfortunately, and notwithstanding any cost implications or practical difficulties in constructing a new footway due to the significant differences in ground levels, only part of the adjoining land on which the footway would have to be constructed is owned by the Local Authority with the remaining section being in the ownership of British Waterways.

However, following the preliminary contact which had already been made with British Waterways in order to establish more precise boundaries of land ownership, it has since emerged that substantial damage has recently occurred to a parapet wall owned by British Waterways in the very area currently under consideration. It is therefore intended, that officers from within the Directorate of the Urban Environment should take this opportunity to explore with British Waterways whether any of the necessary remedial works that will now be required could be modified or extended to provide wider mutual benefit and thereby address the issue of providing a footway.

With discussions currently on-going, officers will provide a verbal update to Committee on developments as soon as an agreement has been reached.

e) Cllr Tomkinson requested the provision of traffic lights at the junction of High Oak and Pensnett Road.

Response:

Significant traffic flows along the whole length of the A4101 between Kingswinford and Dudley already result in this road being heavily used throughout long periods of the day. Vehicle movements at the various junctions along its length, such as those at High Oak and the nearby Tansey Green Road, clearly intensify the level of congestion in these areas.

Whilst the introduction of traffic signals may be considered to be an appropriate traffic management system to address or relieve congestion resulting from these turning movements, the resolution of one set of problems at a particular junction can not be considered in isolation as this could easily lead to even greater detrimental effects on both the immediate and wider road network in the surrounding area.

The Council does therefore, consider this type of issue from a more strategic perspective so that in addition to a number of relatively smaller schemes which may be carried out in order to improve road safety, it also develops proposals as part of a 5 year programme of works for larger highway improvement schemes. In this way, the Council can then assess the suitability of appropriate measures to address the traffic problems across the highway network as a whole.

The implementation of any future programme of works will ultimately be subject to the necessary funding being approved as part of the Government's Annual Transport Capital Settlement. However, the Council has already identified High Street/High Oak, Pensnett as a scheme that would be suitable for implementation within the next 5 years and it has therefore, provisionally indicated that preliminary design works could be started during the 2007/2008 financial year, with detailed design and construction works following in succeeding financial years.