

HALESOWEN AREA COMMITTEE

Wednesday 7th November, 2012 at 6.30 p.m.
At Cornbow Hall, 10 Hagley Street, Halesowen

PRESENT

Councillor Burston (Chair)
Councillor Taylor (Vice Chair)
Councillors Bills, Body, Hill, James, Ms Nicholls, Ms Partridge, Russell, Mrs Turner, K Turner and Vickers

Officers

Area Liaison Officer (Treasurer), Assistant Director of Housing Strategy and Private Sector (Directorate of Adult, Community and Housing Services), Assistant Director Economic Regeneration and Transportation, Group Engineer (Traffic and Road Safety) (all Directorate of the Urban Environment), Assistant Director for Quality and Partnership and Youth Area Team Leader (both Directorate of Children's Services), Assistant Director Law and Governance and Mrs M Johal (both Directorate of Corporate Resources).

Also in Attendance

Inspector Des Lambert – West Midlands Police
Mr Dean Harris – Station Commander, West Midlands Fire Service
Ms Julie Winpenny – West Midlands Fire Service
Ms Caroline Dimbylow – Citizens Advice Bureau (for Agenda Item Number 6)
Councillor Tyler (for Agenda Item Number 12)

There were approximately 50 members of the public in attendance.

19 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received on behalf of Councillors Crumpton, Mrs Shakespeare and J Woodall.

20 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Declarations of disclosable pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, were made by the following Members in respect of the matters indicated:-

Councillor Body declared a non-pecuniary interest in respect of Agenda Item No 4 (Petitions) with regard to a petition that had been received from Friends of Homer Hill Park objecting to the sale of land which formed Cradley High School and the pertaining presentation being made to the meeting in view of him being the Chair of Homer Hill Friends Group.

Councillor Russell declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in respect of Agenda Item No 13 regarding the application for a grant to the Earls Gymnastics Club as her youngest child attends the Club and her older child attends the school and she withdrew from the meeting during consideration of this item.

Councillor Russell declared a non-pecuniary interest in respect of Agenda Item No 13 regarding the application for a grant to Hasbury Pre-School as one of her children attends Hasbury School.

21 MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 4th July, 2012 be approved as a correct record and signed.

22 PETITIONS

(a) Petitions Received Since the Last Meeting

- (i) Support the Ban on Fishing at Priory Pool, Leasowes Park
A petition had been submitted from residents of Halesowen seeking the continuation of the ban on fishing at Leasowes Park. The petition had been referred to the Director of the Urban Environment for consideration.

Ms Marianne Diller exercised her entitlement under the Petitions Scheme to address the Committee on the subject of the petition for up to three minutes. In doing so, she conveyed the views of the petitioners on the reasons why they considered that the ban should remain in that fishing was not appropriate in certain parks, Leasowes Park had received a green space Award and that the Management Plan for the park had stated that the fishing pegs should be removed as fishing was not suitable for that particular park. It was also stated that fishing was illegal and reference was also made to a document containing bye-laws.

- (ii) Anglers Petition for Fishing at Priory Pool, Leasowes Park
A petition had been submitted from residents of Halesowen requesting that the last remaining four fishing peg provision be restored. The petition had been referred to the Director of the Urban Environment for consideration.

Dr John Tate exercised his entitlement under the Petitions Scheme to address the Committee on the subject of the petition for up to three minutes. In doing so, he conveyed the views of the petitioners on the reasons why they considered that the fishing ban should be lifted and commented that fishing was not only for anglers but for children, that fishing was a well recognised leisure facility and that a trial period of eighteen months be considered to enable the situation to be monitored. Photographs together with an article from the Dudley and District Chronicle, dated 4th September, 1987 were also circulated which stated that a massive clean up campaign, "Operation Poolclean", had been undertaken by a team of people from the Dudley Anglers Federation at Leasowes Park to demonstrate that Anglers had historically looked after the pool.

(iii) Petition from Friends of Homer Hill Park Cradley High School and Leisure Centre Complex

A petition had been submitted from the Friends of Homer Hill Park objecting to the sale of land that formed Cradley High School and Leisure Centre complex and requesting that the Council reconsider its decision with a view to retaining the land for use as green open space. The petition and questions had been referred to relevant Officers for a response.

Mr Harry Bloomer, on behalf of the Friends of Homer Hill Park Group exercised the entitlement under the Petitions Scheme to address the Committee and gave a presentation on the subject of the petition. In doing so, he pointed out that a number of questions relating to the decision to close Cradley Leisure facilities had also been submitted together with the petition.

The Chair requested that copies of the questions together with responses be circulated to all Members of the Committee.

The Cabinet Member for Human Resources thanked Mr Bloomer on his excellent presentation and she indicated that a full explanation of the facts had been requested. A public meeting was due to be held on 21st November, 2012 and details of the proposals of the planning application that had been submitted would be looked at and members of the community would be given the opportunity to submit their comments. She further gave an assurance that efforts would be made to overcome some of the problems and concerns that had been raised relating to the loss of the football pitch and the changing facilities and she gave an undertaking to work in the best interests of the people of Cradley.

(b) Receipt of Petitions for Referral to the Petitions Officer

A petition was submitted on behalf of residents of Halesowen to save the Sons of Rest Building. The petition would be referred to the Director of Corporate Resources for consideration.

The Assistant Director Law and Governance indicated that he was aware of the concerns of the local community and that discussions were taking place with Councillor Russell with a view to moving the matter forward.

23 YOUTH SERVICE

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted on the Youth Service provision for the Halesowen Township Area.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report, on the Youth Service provision for the Halesowen Township Area, be noted and endorsed.

24 UPDATE ON CITIZEN ADVICE BUREAUX SERVICES

Ms Caroline Dimbylow, Chief Executive of Dudley District Citizens Advice Bureaux circulated copies of a presentation on the work of the Advice Bureaux and expanded on the points contained in the document. A leaflet entitled Directory of Services was also circulated.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the presentation, and as referred to at the meeting, be noted and that Ms Dimbylow be thanked for the presentation given.

25 EMERGENCY SERVICES ISSUES

Mr Dean Harris, Station Commander, West Midlands Fire Service orally reported on fire matters, giving statistical information in relation to different types of incidents handled by the Fire Service, and in doing so, reported that incidents in Halesowen were continuing to reduce and figures to date had shown a 33% reduction. Efforts on pushing initiatives such as Home Safety Checks, electrical guidance and general advice on fire continued with a view to preventing fires.

Mr Harris reported that work on the new Fire Station would commence in March 2013 with a view to being operational from March 2014.

RESOLVED

That the information given in the verbal update on Fire Service issues be received and noted.

26 AREA POLICE AND COMMUNITIES TOGETHER (PACT) ISSUES

A schedule of PACT meetings arranged in the area of the Committee had been included with the agenda for information.

Inspector Des Lambert, West Midlands Police, reported on the crime figures for the period from 1st April, 2012 compared with the same period in 2011. He commented that generally the numbers of crimes committed were reducing with the exception of cars being broken into which had increased.

Arising from the presentation a Member congratulated the police on their achievements and also commended the Youth Service for attending PACT meetings and indicated that it was an excellent opportunity for young people to communicate and engage with the police.

A Member again complained about the timings of PACT meetings and indicated that there was a PACT meeting being held that night and that it clashed with the Area Committee meeting and he requested that consideration be given to avoid these clashes in the future.

A member of the public referred to the difficulties experienced in crossing the road outside Hasbury School owing to speeding traffic that ignored the school crossing patrol officer. She stated that when she dialled 101 she was told that it was not the responsibility of the Police but that of the Council. Inspector Lambert indicated that safety of children was paramount and a Member indicated that she would investigate the matter. It was also reported that a Road Safety Campaign for Children was being looked into.

RESOLVED

That the information given in the verbal update on policing issues be received and noted.

27 PUBLIC FORUM

- (1) A member of the public referred to an article that had appeared in the Halesowen News that stated that the Halesowen in Bloom project had ceased. He indicated that he had not been made aware that the project had stopped and stated that if this was the case whether consideration could be given to the Halesowen Gardeners Club taking on its maintenance on behalf of the community.

In responding the Assistant Director Economic Regeneration and Transportation reported that he was not aware that the project had stopped and he undertook to investigate the matter and respond directly to the questioner concerned.

- (2) An update on the removal of the bus lanes on Queensway, Halesowen was requested.

In response the Group Engineer (Traffic and Road Safety) stated that the recommendation of the Committee and consultation undertaken would be reported to the appropriate Cabinet Member shortly for a decision on the matter.

- (3) Reference was made to the petition submitted earlier in the meeting relating to the Sons of Rest Building and land on the junction of Wallwell and Huntingtree Road and it was queried as to why the sale had been allowed to take place and whether local Councillors had been consulted.

In responding the Assistant Director Law and Governance stated that Councillors did not make the decision but that Ward Councillors had been consulted. It was reiterated that discussions were currently taking place relating to the issue.

The Cabinet Member for Human Resources stated that procedures relating to disposal of land were currently being investigated with a view to ensuring that the community were consulted in the future.

28

WARD ISSUE

Councillor K Turner requested that consideration be given to a “Walk of Fame” through Halesowen Town Centre similar to that in Birmingham. He asked that the Committee accepts the concept of the “Walk of Fame” and that details relating to the layout, formation and funding be discussed at a future meeting.

A Member stated that although he supported the proposal consideration should be given to the street traders that were currently trading on the site and indicated that it was their livelihood.

Members supported the proposal and requested that details be submitted to a future meeting.

RESOLVED

That the Assistant Director Economic Regeneration and Transportation be requested to investigate the matter and report to a future meeting.

29 RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS RAISED AT THE MEETING OF THE
HALESOWEN AREA COMMITTEE HELD ON 9TH NOVEMBER 2011

A report of the Area Liaison Officer was submitted informing the Committee of the written responses made to questions asked at the previous meeting.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report submitted, be noted.

30 CONSULTATION ON THE REVIEW OF AREA COMMITTEES

A report of Scrutiny Chairs was submitted outlining proposals for a review of Area Committees. The proposals were subject to a consultation period from 1st October to 9th November, 2012 and recommendations would then be submitted to the Cabinet and Council in November, 2012.

Councillor Tyler, Lead Member on the review of Area Committees was present at the meeting and commented on the content of the report submitted. In commenting he referred to the nine forum model in relation to electoral ward boundaries as shown at Appendix 1 to the report submitted and indicated that area 9 in relation to Halesowen would be split into two forums, which would then give a total of ten community forums meeting five times a year. Area 9 would comprise of Belle Vale and Halesowen North and Area 10 would comprise of Hayley Green and Cradley South and Halesowen South.

Following the presentation given the following comments were made and queries raised:-

- It was queried how the proposals could be achieved within the existing budget given the considerable increase in meetings from fifteen to a total of fifty per year.
- It was queried how money was going to be saved by the introduction of the proposals given the increase from five Area Committees to the proposed 10 Forums which would inevitably mean an increase in the numbers of Chairs and Vice-Chairs thus impacting on Special Responsibility Allowances.
- Reference was made to the reduction in Officers attending the meetings and it was stated that Officers' presence was required to enable them to respond to queries in a timely manner and it was further stated that although it was suggested that questions be submitted in advance of meetings, realistically, this did not happen.
- There would be an overall increase in Officers attending meetings due to the substantial increase in meetings.

- It was considered that microphones were required due to difficulties in hearing that would arise whilst conducting meetings in large halls and particularly when large numbers of public were in attendance.
- Some Members agreed that there was a need to review Area Committees with a view to improvements being made.
- It was considered that the Special Responsibility Allowances for Chairs and Vice-Chairs be withdrawn to save money and that consideration should also be given to offering Chair or Vice-Chairmanship to someone other than a Councillor.
- It was considered that the layouts of the new boundaries were politically biased and unfair.
- A member of the public expressed concern that Councillors did not have the authority to make decisions and that decisions were made by Cabinet Members and Officers. It was suggested that under the provisions of the Localism Bill the Council should consider returning to the Committee System.
- A comment was made that there was no need to have Forums for Councillors to communicate with the community, as there were other avenues such as emails and attending Members' surgeries to keep in touch.

Councillor Tyler made the following responses to comments made and queries raised:-

- Consideration was being given to the availability of a looped system at venues and to ensure that all venues were disability compliant.
- The current budget for special responsibility allowances given for Chair and Vice-Chairs across the five Area Committees would not increase, as the existing budget and allowances would be equally distributed across the proposed ten Forums.
- There would only be two Officers attending Forum meetings and these would be low rank Officers.
- The suggestion that the Chair and Vice-Chair of Forums being someone other than a Councillor was welcomed and consideration would be given to this once the Forums were up and running.

RESOLVED

- (1) That comments on developing the proposals contained in the report submitted outlining proposals for a review of Area Committees be submitted to the Director of Corporate Resources by the deadline of 9th November, 2012.

- (2) That comments and views received during the consultation period be collated and considered by the Cabinet and Council during November, 2012.
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31 AREA COMMITTEE GRANTS

A report of the Area Liaison Officer on the allocation of expenditure from the delegated Area Committee grants budget for 2012/13 was submitted.

(Having previously declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in this item Councillor Russell withdrew from the meeting during its consideration and rejoined the meeting following its consideration).

RESOLVED

- (1) That the action taken by the Area Liaison Officer, in consultation with Members of the Committee, in approving a grant of £9815 to the Earls Gymnastics Club towards the purchase of specially discounted equipment used in the Olympic Games, be noted.
- (2) That unspent grants, as set out in Appendix 2 of the report submitted, be made available for reallocation.
- (3) That approval be given to a grant of £1000 being made to Bethel Chapel towards the total cost for the purchase of Arts and Crafts.
- (4) That a request for a grant of £740 to Age Concern (Dudley) towards the total cost of £3694.68 for the purchase of Information Technology (IT) equipment, be refused, as it was a limited company and it was felt that they were not in need of the money.
- (5) That approval be given to a grant of £1350 being made to The Hope Centre to replace flooring.
- (6) That approval be given to a grant of £5000 being made to 1st Coombs Wood Scout Group towards the cost of refurbishment of the toilets and the provision for disabled installation.
- (7) That, subject to the trees being updated and made more presentable, approval be given to a grant of £2913.42 being made to Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council, Directorate of the Urban Environment for the total cost of purchasing three Christmas Trees to be sited in the Halesowen area.
- (8) That approval be given to a grant of £4500 being made to Hasbury Pre-School for the total cost of purchasing and erecting a canopy to provide shelter for the children during poor weather conditions.

- (9) That approval be given to a grant of £5000 being made to Halesowen Chamber of Trade towards the total cost of £6192.58 for the refurbishment of Christmas lights in Halesowen.
- (10) That approval be given to a grant of £1152.46 being made to Access in Dudley for the total cost of purchasing two laptops, Micro Soft Office and suitable security software.
- (11) That approval be given to a grant of £3174 being made to Old Halesonians Association towards the total cost of £4000 for the purchase of an electronic scoreboard.
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32 SCRUTINY COMMITTEE PUBLICITY

As a way of giving additional publicity to meetings of the Council's Scrutiny Committees, details of Scrutiny Committee meetings had been included on the agendas of meetings of Area Committees.

The information given in respect of publicity for future meetings of Scrutiny Committees was noted.

33 CHAIRMANS REMARKS

Death of Honorary Alderman Jackson

The Chair referred to the recent death of Honorary Alderman Jackson and stated that he had been a Member of the Council and had also been Chair of the Halesowen Area Committee for a number of years.

All present stood in silent tribute to the memory of Honorary Alderman Jackson.

Thanks

As this was most likely to be the last meeting of the Area Committee the Chair thanked all Members and Officers for the work undertaken on behalf of the Committee.

The meeting ended at 9.05 pm.

CHAIR