

STOURBRIDGE AREA COMMITTEE

Monday 19th January 2009 at 7.00 p.m.
At Hob Green Primary School, Hob Green Road, Stourbridge

PRESENT-

Councillor C Wilson (Chairman)

Councillors: Adams, Banks, Barlow, Mrs Cowell, Hanif, Jones, Kettle, Knowles, Lowe, Mrs Rogers, A Turner and Mrs Walker, together with Mr R Nokes.

OFFICERS:-

Interim Chief Executive (as Area Liaison Officer), Assistant Director Planning and Environmental Health; Group Engineer – Traffic and Road Safety (Directorate of the Urban Environment); Area Detached Youth Worker Early Years Youth and Education Services (Directorate of Children Services); Assistant Director – Libraries and Archives and Adult Learning and the Area Community Renewal Officer (Directorate of Adult, Community and Housing Services) Solicitor – Legal and Democratic Services and Joan Rees (Directorate of Law & Property).

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Approximately 40 members of the public.

55. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors Attwood and Mrs Martin and Ms P Shepherd and Mr G Downing.

56. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No Member declared a personal or prejudicial interest, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, in respect of any items on the agenda.

57. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 17th November 2008, be approved as a correct record and signed, subject to the following amendments:-

- a) the inclusion of the name of Councillor Kettle to the list of apologies.

SAC/37

- b) That resolution 2 of minute no. 46 be amended to reflect that the £10,000 from the capital allocations budget, to be set aside towards the repair of the gates at Mary Stevens Park should take effect from the 2008/09 municipal year for a period of five years.
 - c) That the word "Wollescote" replace the word "Wollaston" in the first line of the first resolution in Minute No. 47.
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58. PETITIONS

Councillor Lowe submitted a petition, on behalf of residents of Wollescote, requesting that the Committee review its decision to set aside funds from the income of the Ernest Stevens Ground Trust for one specific project, outside of the area of Wollescote. The petitioners considered that the people of Lye and Wollescote had first call on the Charity. The petition was referred to the Director of Finance for consideration and discussed under agenda item no. 8.

In response to a query from a Member of the Committee, the Interim Chief Executive advised that the normal practice regarding petitions was that any petitions submitted would be acknowledged and referred to the appropriate Director for a response.

59. YOUTH ISSUES

A report on the Stourbridge Area Youth Service Team was circulated for information, indicating the Team's activities over the past two months and informing on delivery plans up to the end of the current financial year.

Mr Nokes advised that the Valley Road Youth Service would open for an additional day as from January 09.

The Stourbridge Youth Forum, which had been running for twelve months, now had 10 members regularly attending meetings.

The Cyberbus had run out of funding and would no longer be able to operate in the Stourbridge area, without securing additional funding.

Whilst Youth provision would continue at Valley Road, outreach workers would work in as many other areas of Stourbridge as possible in the future.

The Stourbridge Youth Forum was in the process of developing a strategy plan for the 2012 Olympics for the benefit of Stourbridge young people.

Councillor Mrs Walker welcomed the increases in service delivery for young people and undertook to investigate the possibility of obtaining additional funding to enable the Cyberbus to continue to operate in the Stourbridge area after April 2009.

RESOLVED

That the content of the written and oral reports on youth issues be noted.

60. PUBLIC FORUM

The Interim Chief Executive advised that a number of questions had been submitted regarding the decision of the Committee in November 2008 in respect of the Ernest Stevens Trust. These questions would be deferred for consideration under agenda item 8.

A question had also been submitted regarding the Committee's Capital Allocations budget and this was deferred for consideration under agenda item 7.

61. CAPITAL ALLOCATIONS

Before consideration of the report of the Area Liaison Officer the following issues raised in the Public Forum were considered.

a) In response to a question from a member of the public regarding the consequence of the amendment to resolution number two of Minute No. 46, it was confirmed that the current unspent balance of the capital allocations budget was £22,683.21.

b) In response to queries from members of the public regarding whether the capital allocations budget was underspent by £5,000 from previous years and whether this amount could be transferred to the "gates fund", the Group Accountant advised that an underspend in any financial year was automatically rolled over into the budget for the next year, and was included in the up to date figures submitted.

A report of the Area Liaison Officer was submitted on an application by the Stourbridge Cricket Club for funding from the Committee's capital allocations budget to part fund the cost of fully rewiring the pavilion and to allow them to continue and increase their work with the Local Community in schools and with local voluntary groups.

Since the report had been written, the Club had submitted written evidence confirming that they would be provided with electrical equipment to the value of £2,500 towards the upgrading and re-wiring of the electrical services within the club house at Amblecote, which would mean their request would be 50% match funded from an alternative source. Although the application did not meet the eligibility criteria for funding, because they had been awarded a capital allocation within the preceding 3 years, the Club had asked that their application be put forward for consideration.

RESOLVED

That, arising from the consideration given to the application submitted by the Stourbridge Cricket Club, the application be refused on the grounds that the Club had received a grant of £1,095.05 in March 2008 and therefore did not meet the eligibility criteria for funding.

62. ERNEST STEVENTS TRUSTS – FINAL ACCOUNTS

A report of the Director of Finance was submitted on the accounts of the individual trusts comprising the Ernest Stevens Bequests for the year ended 31st March 2008, as indicated in the report submitted

The following issues, raised during the Public Forum session were addressed:

a) A member of the public commented on the lack of a written response from a Member of the Committee to his letter to the Member, dated 21st November 2008 regarding proposals to ring fence for five years the income of the Stevens Park Ground Trust for the repairs to the gates at Mary Stevens Park. The Member apologised for the lack of a written response, which was due to a misunderstanding as he had considered that the matter had been addressed at the Committee's meeting on 17th November, 2008.

The Member concerned also praised the work undertaken by all members of the voluntary sector but pointed out that he thought voluntary organisations had misunderstood the essence of his proposal, which was not intended to ban voluntary organisations from applying for funding, and indeed, should the funding for the gates be secured from the lottery fund, then all the funds earmarked for that project would be returned to the Trust's funds for redistribution.

He also pointed out that in accepting the gift of the Trust, the Committee, as trustees, had a responsibility to maintain the properties within the ownership of the Trust.

b) In response to a request for the Committee to reconsider its decision to set aside funds from the Trust's income, the Interim Chief Executive advised that the terms of the Scheme for the Trust required the annual income to be deployed in the four ways indicated in paragraph 5 of the report submitted, the first of which was the maintenance and improvement of the Trust property, which included the gates at Mary Stevens Park. If the net income could not be usefully and beneficially used for these objectives, it could be applied for such other charitable purposes for the benefit of persons resident within the former Borough of Stourbridge, with preference being given to the area of the former Urban District of Lye and Wollescote, indicated in paragraph 6 of the report.

c) A Member of the Committee also suggested that Ward Members of Halesowen Area Committee, whose Ward comprised part of Lye and Wollescote should have been consulted on the decision.

d) In response to comments from a member of the public that he considered that consideration of allocating of funding towards the repair of the gates at Mary Stevens Park should have been deferred until the final costs were known, and in response to a request as to what the final costs of the repair to the gates would be, the Assistant Director Planning and Environmental Health advised that the estimated costs for the repair of the gates had been contained within the report previously submitted to the Committee and that the information given at that time was accurate. As quotations were only ever valid for a short period of time, when funding for the repair of the gates was secured either from the Lottery Fund or other sources, then a revised estimate for the work would need to be sought and the Committee would be made aware of this at the time.

e) In response to a query as to what effect restricting grants would have on "Putting Children and Young People First" and an explanation of what "exceptional circumstances" were, it was reiterated that it was not the intention to prevent organisations from applying for grants. All applications would receive the same consideration as at present. If some applications were considered as "exceptional circumstances" for the benefit of the community, the application would receive favourable consideration.

f) A member of the public, representing the Friends of Wollescote Park commented that they considered that organisations within the Lye and Wollescote area were being penalised by the decision to ring fence funds for the repair of the gates at Mary Stevens Park, and referred to an application by the Friends of Wollescote Park which had recently been refused as the Committee had considered that the work to be undertaken was the responsibility of a Council Directorate. It was re-iterated that there would be funding available for voluntary organisations in exceptional circumstances.

g) In response to comments made by a member of the public that the gates could be repaired at a lower cost than previously quoted using alternative materials, the Interim Chief Executive reported that the repair to the gates would cost in the region of £300,000, as stated in the report submitted to a previous meeting of the Committee. A contributory factor to the high cost was that the gates, as Grade II listed gates, needed to be repaired to the same standard in the same material, i.e. wrought iron, as the current gates.

h) In response to comments by a member of the public on the information contained within the report on the audited accounts of the Trust, the Group Accountant advised that costs could vary year on year for numerous reasons, which did not need recording in the audited accounts. He further advised that notes of explanation of the Accounts were attached at the end of the report submitted, to explain future plans and the statement of the Trustee's responsibilities. He did not therefore consider there was any need for an amendment to the accounts being submitted for approval by the Committee.

i) In response to a question from a member of the public as to a reference in the Deed of Trust that the Lye and Wollescote area should receive preference for the funding from the Trust, the Interim Chief Executive advised that that was only the case when deciding on the distribution of funds, after the first call on the funds, which included maintenance and improvement of the properties belonging to the Trust, as previously indicated, had been determined.

j) In response to comments from the representative of the Friends of Wollescote Park, as to whether, in the light of the ring fencing of funds for the repair to the gates at Mary Stevens Park, future applications by the Friends group would be allowed to exceed the existing limit of £5,000, the Interim Chief Executive advised that all applications would be dealt with on their individual merit.

Arising from the comments made Members of the Committee concluded that their decision, as Trustees of the Ernest Stevens Ground Trust, made in November 2008, to ring fence the income from the Trust for the repair of the gates at Mary Stevens Park, for a period of five years, had been appropriate and did not need revising.

RESOLVED

- 1) That the audited final accounts of the Ernest Stevens Trust for the year ended 31st March 2008, as attached to the report submitted, be approved.
- 2) That the Chairman be authorised to sign the accounts and annual returns for the year ended 31st March 2008, on behalf of this Committee.
- 3) That, having taken into account the comments referred to above, the decision of the Committee, as Trustees of the Ernest Stevens Ground Trust, made in November 2008, to ring fence the income from the Trust for the repair of the gates at Mary Stevens Park for five years be endorsed.

63.

ISSUES RAISED BY MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

Councillor Hanif expressed his appreciation of the work undertaken by the Council's refuse team over the festive period, but requested better communication regarding the dates and times of refuse collections during future festive seasons, as he believed that members of the public in the Stourbridge area were unaware of when the collections were to take place.

The Interim Chief Executive responded advising that he had considered the service first rate and that the information regarding collections had been published in a wide variety of ways and venues.

A Member commented that information on all Council services was always available on 01384 812345. Another Member commented that this was the first year that there had been no missed collection days over the festive season.

Councillor Kettle requested that glass displays currently exhibited in the Broadfield House Glass Museum be relocated to a venue within Stourbridge, should that property be closed. Councillor Mrs Walker agreed with the suggestion made.

Councillor Jones

a) requested an update on transport issues in Old Ham Lane. The Group Engineer, Traffic and Road Safety advised that work was still ongoing and that a report on this issue would be submitted to the meeting of the Committee in March 2009.

b) requested the removal of traffic calming measures which had been introduced as a temporary measure to reduce traffic to a single lane from Birmingham Street to the Ring Road, Stourbridge. Councillor Adams responded that the traffic restriction referred to had been experimental to try to prevent accidents. As the scheme had not been successful, the measures would be removed. In response to a suggestion that better signage be installed on the Ring Road to alert drivers as to directions, Councillor Adams advised that current signage on the Ring Road was adequate.

Councillor Lowe raised concern that Ward Members were not being properly consulted on the spending of Section 106 monies. The Assistant Director Planning and Environmental Health advised that she was aware that a report on Section 106 funding had been submitted to a recent meeting of the Select Committee on Regeneration, Culture and Adult Education and that a further report on consultation would be submitted to a future meeting of that Committee.

Councillor A Turner welcomed the withdrawal of the temporary barriers on the Ring Road. He suggested that discussion be undertaken with the owners of the BP garage on the Ring Road to negotiate an amendment to the entrance and egress to the garage from the Birmingham Street and to relocate them to the side of the garage site for safer travelling along Birmingham Street.

Councillor A Turner also expressed concern at the method by which the Police Community Support Officers based in Kingswinford attended to their duties on the Penfields Estate.

Councillor C Wilson advised that the Community Renewal Officer had requested a meeting with the representatives of Wards whom she had not yet made contact with and requested that the Members concerned speak to the Community Renewal Officer at the end of the meeting.

64. 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.

65. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date and venue of the next meeting of the Committee was noted as Monday 9th March 2009 at 7.00 p.m. at Hob Green Primary School, Hob Green Road, Stourbridge.

The meeting ended at 8.10 p.m.

CHAIRMAN