

## **STOURBRIDGE AREA COMMITTEE**

Monday 15<sup>th</sup> October, 2012 at 7.00 p.m.  
at Hob Green Primary School, Hob Green Road,  
Pedmore Fields, Stourbridge

### **PRESENT-**

Councillor Attwood (in the Chair),  
Councillor C Wilson (Vice-Chair)

Councillors Body, Elcock, Hale, Hanif, Herbert, Jones, Kettle, Knowles, Lowe, Marrey, Mrs Martin, Partridge, Perks, Mrs Rogers, and Mrs Walker; Mr Downing and Miss Hathway.

### **OFFICERS:-**

Director of Children's Services (as Lead Officer to the Committee), Assistant Director Planning and Environmental Health and Group Engineer – Traffic and Road Safety (both Directorate of the Urban Environment), Ms R Cooper, Accountant, Mr T Holder, Solicitor and Assistant Principal Officer (Democratic Services) (Mr J Jablonski), all Directorate of Corporate Resources

### **ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:**

Inspector Lambert (West Midlands Police), Mr Wood and Ms Winpenny (both West Midlands Fire Service), Councillor Tyler (for Agenda Item Number 10), Caroline Dimbylow (for Agenda Item Number 9) and Mrs Shakespeare (the latter, on behalf of Margot James, MP) and 20 members of the public.

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### **DEATH OF COUNCILLOR KNOWLES**

The Chair referred to the recent death of Councillor Malcolm Knowles whose funeral was to be held at St Thomas's Church, Stourbridge, on Monday, 22<sup>nd</sup> October, 2012 at 2.30pm.

All present stood in silent tribute to the memory of Councillor Malcolm Knowles.

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### **APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE**

An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor Crumpton.

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DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest, in accordance with Members' Code of Conduct, were made in respect of any matter to be considered at this meeting.

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MINUTES

Arising from consideration of the minutes it was reported that in relation to the application for funding referred to at minute 14(4) on page SAC/11 of the minutes the position in respect of the Humara Project was that it was in fact not in liquidation and that the Local Authority were currently in discussions with relevant persons connected with the project.

It was also reported that in respect of minute 21(a) the street that should have been referred was in fact Duncombe Street and not Cobden Street as recorded at that minute.

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 25<sup>th</sup> June, 2012, be approved as a correct record and signed.

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YOUTH MATTERS

A report of the Director of Children's Services updating the Committee on Stourbridge Area Youth Forum known as 'Young People for Stourbridge (Y.P.4.S)' and in respect of the youth provision for the Stourbridge area was circulated at the meeting.

Miss Nadia Hathway, the young people's representative on the Committee commented briefly on the content of the report a copy of which would be uploaded to the Council's Committee Management Information System.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report circulated at the meeting, on the Stourbridge Area Youth Forum known as 'Young People for Stourbridge (Y.P.4.S)' and in respect of the youth provision for the Stourbridge area, be noted.

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## POLICE MATTERS

Inspector Lambert commented on the crime figures for the period from 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2012 to 14<sup>th</sup> October, 2012 compared with the same period in 2011.

Generally across the five wards comprising the area of the Area Committee the numbers of crimes committed were reducing. In relation to the Cradley and Wollescote Ward whilst it was broadly a similar picture the exception to this was the number of burglaries committed.

In view of the issues across the area of the Borough in relation to burglary, dedicated initiatives had been introduced concentrating on four respective areas one of which was in respect of Quarry Bank and Lye. Inspector Lambert also commented that a number of the burglaries had occurred in the daytime and asked that members of the public remain vigilant and contact the Police with any relevant intelligence to assist them in apprehending the offenders. Reference was also made to opportunistic thefts that had occurred in Stourbridge Town Centre on which action had been taken.

Regarding thefts reference was made to an initiative in which the Police handed out bells so that they could be attached to purses as a deterrent to theft. It was reported that such bells were still available and could be obtained by dialling 101 and asking for the Neighbourhood Team.

Arising from the presentation given a member of the public referred to burglaries affecting in particular the Asian community and arising from comments made by him it was agreed that the member of the public and Inspector Lambert meet so that the specific issues raised could be dealt with.

## RESOLVED

That the information reported on in respect of Police matters be noted.

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## FIRE SERVICE MATTERS

Mr Wood gave an oral report on fire matters, giving statistical information in relation to different types of incidents handled by the fire service. Generally numbers had remained virtually unchanged since the previous meeting of the Committee.

Mr Wood then reported on two recent initiatives being National Fire Service Week which would commence at the end of October and the Electrical Fire Service Week that had just been undertaken.

He further commented that arising from an online vote Stourbridge Fire Station had been voted Fire Station of the Year.

In relation to youth matters he referred to the Young Fire Fighters Association who generally went on to sign up for youth groups held in the Borough.

In response to a question from a member of the public Mr Wood commented that the arrangement whereby five paramedics were stationed at the Fire Station was working well.

#### RESOLVED

That the information given my Mr Wood on behalf of the Fire Service be noted.

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#### PUBLIC FORUM

- (a) A member of the public commented on the condition of the 'garden front' of the parade of shops on the Queensway and related issues including vandalism and requested that repairs and improvements be made.

It was agreed that the comments made be referred to the Directorate of Adult, Community and Housing Services for investigation and response direct to the questioner.

- (b) In response to a question regarding the green area from Gauden Road, Stourbridge that ran with the public footpath to, and over, Wychbury Hill, it was reported that the land referred to was in private ownership and that a number of plots had previously been sold some years ago. It was also commented on that this was part of the green belt and that Ward Members had always attempted to resist any development taking place.

The Assistant Director, Planning and Environment Health undertook to arrange for the matter to be further looked into and for a response to be sent direct to the questioner.

- (c) A member of the public sought an assurance that the benches at Swan Pool that were removed from opposite residents houses would not be replaced there and requested that they be moved to the far side of the football pitch.

In response to the question raised it was reported that discussions were to be held with the relevant officers and the Friends of the Swan Pool Park so that a survey could be undertaken and an assurance given that if the benches could be moved to the far side of the football pitch then that is what would happen.

The Assistant Director, Planning and Environment Health undertook to raise this matter with colleagues who would liaise with the relevant parties on this matter.

- (d) A member of the public commented on the issue of speeding vehicles in Studley Gate and considered that the measures that had been introduced had not had an effect on reducing the speed of vehicles in that area and adjoining streets such as Duncombe Street. He further commented on the parking situation when football matches were being held with cars being parked along the road. He again requested that something be done to curb speeding in the area.

In response the Group Engineer – Traffic and Road Safety commented that investigations into the position in Studley Gate were ongoing and that the Council took the concerns raised very seriously.

In addition to the comments made by the member of the public Councillor Mrs Walker referred to problems with specific reference to Duncombe Street and a suggestion was made that the possibility of introducing speed humps be investigated.

In response to an invitation made the Group Engineer – Traffic and Road Safety undertook to attend a meeting of the Swan Pool Park Group and the officer undertook to speak to the questioner further after the meeting.

- (e) A questioner referred to the condition of Swan Pool Park following the holding of football matches and to the condition of the accommodation used by footballers to change in. Both of which were considered to be unsatisfactory. He also referred to the path from Swan Street to the play area, which he considered to be in a bad condition.

A member referred to plans that were to be the subject of discussions between the relevant officers and other interested parties and invited the questioner to attend the meeting to be held.

The Assistant Director, Planning and Environmental Health also undertook to relay the relevant information raised at the meeting to colleagues.

- (f) Regarding a question raised in respect of issues to do with the Flat Green Bowling Clubs at Wollescote Hall Park it was noted that this matter would be considered in conjunction with Agenda Item Number 15 – Responses to issues raised at the last meeting of the Committee.

- (g) In relation to questions submitted regarding future arrangements for managing the Ernest Stevens Trusts in the light of proposed changes from Area Committee Meetings to Community Forums it was noted that this matter would be dealt with later in the meeting.
- (h) In response to a question on the Committee's views regarding comments on the proposed merger of Dudley, Walsall, Wolverhampton and Sandwell Local Authorities a member reported that whilst there had been discussions at a regional level on improving governance this had only extended to issues such as sharing service provision and that any changes to boundaries of existing Local Authorities would require an Act of Parliament.

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UPDATE ON CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAUX SERVICES –  
PRESENTATION BY THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF DUDLEY DISTRICT  
CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAUX

Caroline Dimbylow, Chief Executive of Dudley District Citizens Advice Bureaux, was in attendance at the meeting and commented on the content of a presentation that had been circulated at the meeting. Circulated with the presentation was a leaflet entitled Directory of Services.

Ms Dimbylow expanded on the points contained in the presentation and a copy of the presentation would be uploaded to the Council's Committee Management Information System.

Arising from the comments made regarding the services provided and related details members made a number of comments in particular referring to the valuable service offered and the likely impact that the forthcoming welfare reforms would have on the work of the Bureaux. Questions were also asked regarding the skills and training of the one hundred local people who gave of their time to provide the services and it was emphasised that the main requirement for a volunteer was people skills so that they could connect with people, explore their problems and be representatives of the community.

In response to a question as to the languages in which advice could be given reference was made to the varied backgrounds of the volunteers and to the provision on occasion of interpreters. In addition it was also noted that some people also had their own interpreter. One of the aspects of service that the Bureaux was continuing to strive for was to plug any gaps in provision and in this respect it was noted that one gap nationally was the difficulty that sign language users had in accessing advice so the Bureaux were looking to plug this gap.

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.

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### CONSULTATION ON THE REVIEW OF AREA COMMITTEES

A report of Scrutiny Chairs had been submitted outlining proposals for a review of Area Committees. The proposals were subject to a consultation period from 1<sup>st</sup> October to 9<sup>th</sup> 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 9 forum model in relation to electoral ward boundaries as shown at Appendix 1 to the report submitted and indicated that it was likely that area 9 in relation to Halesowen may be split into 2 forum which would then give a total of 10 community forums meeting 5 times a year. Following the presentation given a number of comments were made in particular relating to:-

- A query as to whether the first key question in paragraph 2 was being addressed the first key question being what should area/neighbourhood meetings achieve.
- It was queried whether the proposals could be achieved within the existing cost envelope even with the reduction in costs from not using a PA system as there would for example still be the cost of room hire.
- Reference had been made to natural communities however there appeared to be no account taken of the communities in which people lived for example those communities used by the Police in their beats.
- There were considered to be equality issues should microphones and sound systems not be used given that deaf people in particular would not be able to cope in such a meeting.
- The third bullet point in paragraph 3 – that meetings are an unsatisfactory mix of community engagement and Council decision making – was considered to be a misunderstanding in that apart from capital allocations and decisions in relation to the Stevens Trusts there were no other Council decisions that needed to be made therefore it was not an unsatisfactory mix.

- Although the comment had been made that one of the problems of Area Committees was that they were report driven it was considered to be the case that the Chair had a lead role to play in ensuring that this was not the case and that the Chair should be in control of the meeting.

The conclusion reached by the Member was that whilst he liked the aim that the proposals sought to achieve he doubted whether in practice it could be achieved particularly within the existing cost envelope.

Following on from the comments made other members commented as follows:-

- That there was a need to change so that forum meetings met the needs of local communities discussing matters of interest to a particular community.
- That members were elected to meet with members of the public holding surgeries and large meetings that were community based and that if the particular proposals or some aspects did not work they would be looked at and changed.
- A pledge had been given to try and take back meetings to the community so that for example instead of 30 minutes for a public forum session Councillors should have a 30 minute slot to talk to local residents with the rest of the meeting being devoted to residents and their issues. A change of this nature should be welcomed.

A further member commented as follows:-

- That it was doubted that there was a general consensus as indicated in paragraph 3 of the report submitted that Area Committees had become less relevant and appropriate and questioned where this consensus was.
- It was doubted whether any money was going to be saved by the introduction of the proposals especially as it was proposed to hold 50 meetings a year under the new proposals a great increase on the current number under the current arrangements.
- The need to include reference to Councillors attending neighbouring forums as necessary was considered to be irrelevant as this could be done currently.
- If changes were made to the proposals how would these be managed?
- It was considered that more work in relation to the community forum would fall on 2<sup>nd</sup> tier officers and it was hard to see how this was going to work given their current workload.



A further member commented that

- This was a genuine commitment to a genuine consultation and an attempt to make something better.
- It was hoped that those present would write in and participate in the consultation process and that the proposals would lead to better communication with communities.
- A further member commented that members already met with their communities in a number of recognised ways and that it was doubted whether the use of other facilities for the holding of meeting would provide a saving as a cost was likely to still be incurred.
- There did not appear to have been any consideration given to ensuring that there were adequate transport arrangements within the boundaries of the forum model outlined in Appendix 1 so that residents from different parts of the forum area could easily attend meetings within that area.
- It was queried whether the area grant allocations would remain at £10,000 per ward.

A conclusion reached was that there would be an increase in meetings; scepticism over what would actually be achieved; and the consideration that the neighbourhood forums would remain bureaucratic and council lead and that residents would be unlikely to get a response to their queries within the 48 hours indicated.

As part of the consideration of the neighbourhood forum review the future arrangements in respect of the Ernest Stevens Trusts were queried. In this regard three questions had previously been posed by a member of the public and were reiterated by a member during the consideration of this item. It was noted that the solicitor to the committee would ensure that written answers to the questions posed would be sent to the member and to the member of the public concerned.

An assurance was however given that the arrangements for the Stevens Trusts would not suffer as a result of the proposals contained in the report submitted and that this was one of a number of constitutional issues that were being looked into.

Arising from the comments made Councillor Tyler reiterated that the purpose of the proposals was to engage with local people and communities and get them involved through the use of the community forums and that he would be happy to talk to members of the public on the issues raised at the conclusion of this meeting.

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 9<sup>th</sup> 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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MARY STEVENS CENTRE, HAGLEY ROAD, OLDSWINFORD – REQUEST TO GRANT LEASE TO DUDLEY MIND OF PART OF FIRST FLOOR

A report of the Director of Corporate Resources was submitted on obtaining the consent from the Area Committee as trustees of the Ernest Stevens Trust to formalise the occupation of Dudley MIND of part of the first floor of the Mary Stevens Centre, Hagley Road, Oldswinford, by way of a Lease.

Arising from the presentation of the content of the report members queried the need for the Lease and the terms on which it would be granted together with the arrangements in respect of other occupants of the Mary Stevens Centre. It was considered that there was a need to regularise the position in respect of the whole building and a request made that a review be undertaken so that the whole situation could be regularised.

RESOLVED

- 1 That approval in principle be given to the negotiation of terms and conditions in respect of a Lease by Dudley MIND of part of the first floor of Mary Stevens Centre, Hagley Road, Oldswinford and that following such negotiations the terms be reported for approval to a future meeting of the trustees of the Ernest Stevens Trusts.
- 2 That the Director of Corporate Resources be requested to arrange for a review of the leasing arrangements regarding the remainder of the Mary Stevens Centre so that the trustees could be satisfied as to those arrangements and that following such a review a report be submitted to a future meeting of the trustees of the Ernest Stevens Trusts.

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GRANT ALLOCATIONS

A report of the Area Liaison Officer was submitted on applications received for grant allocations from the budget of the Committee. An addendum to the report was also circulated at the meeting in respect of a number of applications that had been received following the preparation of the report.

## RESOLVED

- 1 That the action taken by the Area Liaison Officer, in consultation with the Chair, Vice Chair and Ward Members in approving a grant of £5,000 to the United Church, Lye, towards the total project costs of replacing an existing lift, under the urgency provisions for the reasons indicated in the report now submitted, be noted.
- 2 That the action taken by the Area Liaison Officer, in consultation with the members of the Committee, in approving a grant of £3,991 towards the total project costs so as to allow free to access events during the Stourbridge Music Arts Rhythm and Theatre Festival, be noted.
- 3 That grants be made to the organisations below for the purposes indicated:-

<u>Organisation</u>	<u>Purpose of Grant</u>	<u>Amount of Grant</u>
Pedmore Senior Citizens Club	Grant towards the running costs of the group which include monthly rent of the facilities and speaker/entertainers costs	£445
Age UK Dudley	A contribution towards the total cost of replacing IT equipment at the Netherton Head Office to support the administration of the Age UK service within the Borough of Dudley (a similar request had been made to each Area Committee)	£740
Chawn Hill Church	A contribution towards total project costs to improve the centre building and install sports flooring	£4,260
Pedmore Neighbourhood watch	Purchase of a new printer along with replacement cartridges used to produce quarterly newsletters, notices, agendas and minutes and accounts.	£325.18

Caledonia Residents Association	A contribution towards the total project costs of excavating a car park in Grosvenor Way and to replace with hardcore and tarmac (grant approved on the basis of exceptional circumstances justifying a grant over £5,000)	£5,830
Norton Green Tenants and Residents Association	Purchase of 2 laptops and printers, a camera and various accessories to be used by the group to print information leaflets and newsletters and help communicate with the wider community.	£1,185
Stourbridge Christmas Lights	Purchase, erection and removal of 3 Christmas trees within the area of the Committee together with associated energy costs.	£5,000
Insight Carers Service	To reconnect the gas supply and work to bring the kitchen to a functional standard (applications submitted to Area Committees with a request that they make a contribution).	£1,250

- 4 That the application from the Change Consortium in respect of one of their projects namely the People's Orchestra be refused for the reasons stated in the addendum to the report submitted.

THE ERNEST STEVENS TRUST – FINAL ACCOUNTS

A report of the Treasurer was submitted on the accounts of the individual Trusts comprising the Ernest Stevens Bequests.

RESOLVED

That the Committee approve the accounts of the Trust, on behalf of the Council in their capacity as Trustees, and that the Chair be authorised to sign the accounts.

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STEVENS PARK AND RECREATION GROUND FOUNDATION TRUST

A report of the Treasurer was submitted on a request for a grant from the Stevens Park and Recreation Ground Foundation Trust received from the Stourbridge Glassboys Under 9's Football Club.

RESOLVED

That approval be given to the request received from the Stourbridge Glassboys Under 9's Football Club for a grant from the Stevens Park and Recreation Ground Foundation Trust in the sum of £495 for the purchase of 13 rain jackets and a substitution bench.

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RESPONSES TO ISSUES

A report of the Area Liaison Officer advising the Committee of the position regarding issues raised at the last meeting of the Committee was submitted.

Arising from the consideration of the report and in conjunction with a question raised in the public forum section of the meeting, deferred until consideration of this item, in respect of comments made regarding the Flat Green Bowling Clubs at Wollescote Hall Park, Councillor Mrs Martin raised five issues which it was considered still required investigation and response. A copy of the points raised was passed to the Assistant Director, Planning and Environmental Health so that she could refer these to her colleagues dealing with this matter.

The questioner also raised an issue regarding equality, which was also referred to in the note concerned. He requested that a meeting of all interested parties take place to discuss this and other issues.

During consideration of this item reference was also made to the award achieved in respect of Stourbridge in Bloom and an acknowledgement made of the efforts given by the people concerned in achieving this award.

In respect of paragraph 6 of the report concerning tree felling a member again raised concerns that Ward Members were not made aware of when work to fell trees was to be undertaken.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report submitted, and as reported at the meeting be noted.

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39                    ISSUES RAISED BY MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

No matters were raised under this Agenda item.

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40                    SCRUTINY COMMITTEE PUBLICITY

Forthcoming meetings of Scrutiny Committees were received and noted.

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41                    SCHEDULED DATE AND VENUE OF NEXT MEETING

Although the scheduled date and venue of the next meeting of the Committee was Monday 11<sup>th</sup> February 2013, at 7.00pm at Redhill School, Junction Road, Stourbridge it was unlikely that this meeting would go ahead in the light of the review of Area Committees referred to earlier in the meeting.

The meeting ended at 9.05 pm

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CHAIR