

Your Home, Your Forum Meeting Notes

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| Forum: | Brierley Hill Area |
| Date and time: | 9th October 2024 at 6.30pm |
| Venue: | Brierley Hill Methodist Church, 24 Bank Street, Brierley Hill, DY5 3DA |
| Attendance: | <p>Councillors P Harley, D Harley, E Lawrence, W Little, L Johnson, K Lewis, M Webb, A Davies, J Foster, K Westwood, S Edwards, P Atkins, S Greenaway and M Cook</p> <p>Officers/ police: Superintendent Gill Davenport and Sergeant Aherne</p> <p>Tom Senior, Marissa Westwood,</p> <p>Members of the public: 38</p> |

| Agenda item | Notes |
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| 1. Welcome and introductions | Tom Senior welcomed everyone to the meeting and went through the house keeping arrangements. |
| 2. Election of Chair and Vice-Chair | <p>Tom Senior asked for nominations for the Chair.</p> <p>Councillors W Little and M Webb were nominated. Councillor W Little was voted as the Chair and Councillor M Webb was nominated and voted as the Vice-Chair</p> |
| 3. Apologies | Councillor K Archer and Inspector Crowe |

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| 4. Declarations of Interest | None |
| 5. Minutes | The minutes of the previous meeting were approved. |
| 6. Police Station Closures | <p>Superintendent Davenport addressed the meeting. She reported that there will be changes to the police model for the Borough and that although the Brierley Hill Station had been the Head Quarters for a long time it was no longer fit for purpose. West Midlands Police (WMP) were committed to a new building at Castlegate that would be fit for modern policing. Works were currently being undertaken. This represents a move forward for WMP and will save costs in the long run. She confirmed that the teams currently dealing with Brierley Hill would remain. There would also be a new base in Stourbridge but that there have been some delays with this. Superintendent Davenport went on to say that the police offer would be enhanced, and that the Halesowen Station would also be sold and that they will have a new base. The Dudley North Team will remain at Burton Road.</p> <p>Councillor A Davies questioned whether the service and the response times would still be the same if there was not a base in Brierley Hill.</p> <p>Superintendent Davenport responded that the response service is based on risk and not location and that response teams should not be in the station very much as they should be going from one call to the next. She said that the commitment to attend emergencies with 15 minutes remained.</p> <p>Councillor A Davies responded that this was not logical as there would be times when response teams were in the station and that they could be at Brierley Hill much quicker from the current location. Superintendent Davenport indicated that the response team asked to attend an emergency could be anywhere in the area.</p> <p>Councillor A Davies said that response teams could still be further away than they are now and people will not be able to access the front desk as easily and that the front desk should be in a central location and not the edge of the Borough.</p> <p>Superintendent Davenport replied that very few people used the front desk and tended to report crimes in other ways.</p> |

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| | <p>Councillor A Davies highlighted the costs of refurbishing the Brierley Hill Station in comparison to the high costs in buying the Castlegate site and the additional costs to revert the building to Police headquarters and therefore the financial argument for moving from Brierley Hill to Castlegate did not make sense. He further challenged the statement that 'Brierley Hill would have the same policing service that we have always had' - saying this simply cannot be the case as both the response team and front desk would be moved out of the area under this plan, meaning these police services would now be further away from residents in Brierley Hill, so a reduced service</p> <p>Superintendent Davenport acknowledged the comments made but indicated that the decision had been made and that the PCC had already committed to these actions and that the policing offer will still be of a high standard. It was further commented that as the decisions had been made we need to make the best of it and that the police should be informed if their service was not satisfactory.</p> <p>Councillor S Edwards asked about the police's work with other services and whether there was any intention to share facilities, how the police would stop people using the Burton Road front desk and what percentage of calls were directed to officers who were out and those that were in the station. In responding Superintendent Davenport replied that WMP worked with the fire service, Burton Road was not advertised as a front desk and that she did not the percentage but was of the view that most calls went to those that were out of the station and it also depended on the time of day.</p> <p>In responding to further queries, Superintendent Davenport indicated that there were strict home office guidelines on the requirements for holding cells and that this service required a lot of additional staff. It was confirmed that the nearest officer responded to emergency calls.</p> |
| 7. Have your say | <p>A member of the public asked about the parking charges. The question was in three parts:</p> <p>1, Why wasn't there a need for consultation on the policy?</p> <p>2, Was there an impact study and what was the outcome of it?</p> <p>3, Are there any measures planned to protect businesses in the town centres as a 50% drop in footfall is expected?</p> |

In responding Councillor P Harley stated that the Council was in financial difficulties and explained in detail the extent of the problems, particularly the high figures spent on adults and children's social care being vast and that these sums often had to be spent by law. There had been a 90% rise in some cases that equated to £6,500 per week for one child to be looked after. There were currently 554 looked after children and this was down by 8 but costs were still going up. Adult social care was also very expensive and the Council worked with the NHS but they were slow payers.

A member of the public asked why it cost £6,500 per week to look after a child. Councillor P Harley stated that it was a very complex issue. The decision on Penns Meadow school was the right one as it would save money in the long term. Some private providers charged up to £90,000 per year and this was far cheaper.

The Council had stopped recruiting and was putting their finances in order. In order to get any support from central government, the Council had to be able to demonstrate steps that it had taken itself. This includes measures such as charges for parking and green waste.

Councillor P Harley said that he did not accept that footfall would drop by 50% and indicated that the Council was moving to a new operating model. The introduction of parking charges goes against his instinct but had to be done to demonstrate that we are doing everything we can to save money and avoid a Section 114.

Councillor P Harley further reported that there had been a consultation and that the issue went through various working groups, was agreed by all political parties and scrutiny which asked for tweaks to the policy. He commented that the video on facebook showing a Kingswinford car park in the early morning before shops had opened was not a fair reflection of the policy. Income from the first week had increased substantially and car parks were still full in the town centre. There may have been issues with parking enforcement in the past but these are now being addressed.

A further point was made by a member of the public in that Heron Foods had seen 200 fewer customers per day and the library had been receiving fewer visitors.

Councillor P Harley indicated that Kingswinford Library would not close. It was confirmed that Dudley Council Plus (DCP) would close, be redeveloped and that DCP staff would be redeployed to libraries. The footfall would return and will need to be judged in about 6 weeks' time.

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| | <p>In responding to a query about the impact of the charges on Leisure Centres, Councillor P Harley said that membership was up 3.6% in September when a dip in membership was usually seen. The Council was currently asking for tenders to run the leisure centres and they would be asked to find a solution in respect of parking at Halesowen</p> <p>A member of the public asked about the entry systems at Dean Court Flats as people who should not be allowed were gaining entry. Residents were being told that parts were needed to fix the system and that the fault was making them feel like prisoners in their own home. The Tenancy Agreement they had states that there should be a secure entry system.</p> <p>Councillors W Little and A Davies indicated that they were aware of the issues and were of the opinion that there should be security patrols. Officers from the Housing Team confirmed that a new system would be installed and that it will be future proofed and that they will take the issue up with the out of hours team. They also committed to keeping people updated.</p> <p>Councillor A Davies asked for a letter to be sent to update residents.</p> <p>A member of the public asked whether anything was being done about dangerous roads in the area. It was said at a previous meeting that the Council would look into this. He said that there should be signs and crossing points. Councillor K Lewis said that she was aware that the Highways Team was looking at the issue but was not sure how far this had progressed. She undertook to provide an update when she hears from the Highways. Sargeant Aherne confirmed that they received many reports regarding dangerous driving but that resources were always an issue and they tried to enforce throughout the Borough. The police encourage people to join the Community Speedwatch and training could be provided. The Chair commented that there should be enforcement action until there was a structural solution.</p> <p>Superintendent Davenport undertook to provide contact details for the relevant officer.</p> |
| 8. Police and communities together | <p>Sargeant Aherne said that the police aimed to be as visible as possible and that this was part of the new policing model which was providing better outcomes for victims of crime</p> |

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| 9. Date of next meeting | 3 rd February 2025 in Kingswinford. |

Time meeting ended: 7.50 pm