

## **CENTRAL DUDLEY AREA COMMITTEE**

Tuesday, 11<sup>th</sup> September, 2007 at 6.30 pm  
at Dudley Concert Hall, St. James's Road, Dudley

### **PRESENT: -**

Councillors Ahmed, Ali, Mrs. Aston, Mrs. Coulter, Cotterill, Ms. Craigie, A Finch, K Finch, J Martin, Mrs. Roberts, Sparks, Waltho and Mrs. While-Cooper; and Mrs. Edwards and Ms. Little

### **OFFICERS:**

Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services (as Area Liaison Officer), Assistant Director of the Urban Environment (Environmental Management), Principal Engineer and Group Engineer – Civil Engineering, (Directorate of the Urban Environment), Principal Project Officer and Area Housing Manager – Dudley (Directorate of Adult, Community and Housing Services), Assistant Director of Children's Services (Resources), Principal Solicitor and Mr R Jewkes (Directorate of Law and Property)

### **ALSO IN ATTENDANCE**

Approximately 20 members of the public.

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29                    **ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN**

### **RESOLVED**

That Councillor Waltho be elected Chairman of the Committee for this meeting of the Committee only.

(Councillor Waltho thereupon took the Chair).

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30                    **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors J Davies and Rahman.

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31                    **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Ahmed declared a personal interest in respect of Agenda Item Number 8 – Transforming Secondary Education, in view of the fact that his children were currently attending the Bishop Milner School.

Councillor Ali declared a personal interest in respect of Agenda Item Number 8 – Transforming Secondary Education, in view of the fact that his children were currently attending Castle High School.

Councillor Mrs. Coulter declared a personal interest in respect of Agenda Item Number 8 – Transforming Secondary Education, in view of the fact that she was currently the Chair of the Borough’s Pupil Referral Units (PRUs).

Councillors Ms. Craigie declared a personal interest in respect of Agenda Item Number 8 – Transforming Secondary Education, in view of the fact that she was a Governor of the Ellowes Hall School.

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### MINUTES

In connection with Minute Number 16 – Ward Issues, Councillor Ms. Craigie reiterated the concerns she expressed at the meeting of the Committee held on 12<sup>th</sup> June, 2007, regarding the future of Neighbourhood Management services, and requested that a report looking into the funding issues surrounding the service be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee.

In connection with Minute Number 18 – Highways Minor Works Capital Programme for 2007/08, Ms Little requested clarification as to when a report on the progress of the Safer Routes to School initiative would be submitted to the Committee. In responding, the Assistant Director of the Urban Environment gave an undertaking to pursue the matter and to arrange for a report to be submitted to the Committee as soon as was practicable.

### RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 12<sup>th</sup> June, 2007, and of the special meeting of the Committee held on 17<sup>th</sup> July, 2007, be approved as a correct record and signed.

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### PETITIONS

The following petitions were submitted by the persons indicated and referred to the officers shown for attention: -

Councillor Mrs Aston, on behalf of residents of Wrens Nest Road and surrounding roads, requesting that speed ramps be installed along the length of Meadow Road, up until the junction where that road meets the Broadway. The petition was referred to the Director of the Urban Environment for his consideration and attention.

Councillor Ali, on behalf of local residents, requesting the installation of speed deterrents in Bunns Lane, Kates Hill. The petition was referred to the Director of the Urban Environment for his consideration and attention.

Ms D Rushton, on behalf of local residents, requesting that the Council take action to help prevent the closure of the branch of Dr. Barnados in Wrens Nest Road, which was due to be closed in October. In relation to this matter, Councillor Mrs Aston, as Ward Member for the area concerned, expressed her support for the petition and requested that if possible the Council provide financial assistance to the organisation in order to prevent it from closing. The petition was referred to the Director of Children's Services for his consideration and attention.

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### YOUTH ISSUES

It was noted that no youth representatives were in attendance at the meeting. Members commented that it was difficult, in view of the time, venue and format of meetings of the Committee, for young people to attend. It was suggested that in future young people living in the Central Dudley Area be encouraged to raise issues via their Ward Members. In this regard, the Assistant Director of Children's Services (Resources), who was in attendance at the meeting, undertook to ensure that Members' contact details were made available in local schools, and that local young people were informed that they could raise issues with the Committee by contacting their local Councillors.

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### PUBLIC FORUM

Consideration was given to written questions submitted. The Chairman advised that further questions would be taken from the floor should there be any time remaining when written questions had been addressed.

Questions and answers were then given as follows: -

- (1) A member of the public raised a concern in relation to flooding which had occurred recently in the Central Dudley Area. He commented that although the flooding had been caused by severe weather conditions, the situation had been exacerbated by the Council's failure to adequately maintain and clear road drains. He requested clarification as to what measures the Council was taking to ensure that a similar situation did not occur in future, and specifically asked how many 'gully' cleaning vehicles the Council currently possessed.

In responding, the Assistant Director of the Urban Environment (Environmental Management) stated that the Council had two 'gully' cleaning machines which were currently in use. In relation to flood avoidance measures, he stated that the Council inspected all drains regularly, although primary routes were inevitably prioritised when it came to maintenance and repair. Whilst the Council made every effort to respond to flooding problems and clear blockages, the recent weather conditions had been totally unprecedented meaning that there was not sufficient capacity to prevent any flooding occurring.

In relation to this issue, Councillor Finch commented that he had received several reports of flooding from constituents, and commented that the blockages had existed prior to the rain which had caused the flooding. He commented that the Council needed to be proactive in keeping drains clear, rather than responding to problems which emerged.

- (2) A member of the public raised a concern regarding speeding on the Southern Bypass and the road between Castlegate Island and Burnt Tree Island. He commented that the problem of youths racing on these roads had become increasingly dangerous and requested that the Council take positive action, for example the installation of speed cameras, to address the situation. In responding, the Assistant Director of the Urban Environment (Environmental Management) agreed with the sentiments expressed. He undertook to investigate the situation and respond to the questioner in writing.
- (3) A member of the public raised a number of concerns in relation to traffic safety. She commented that traffic at Cinder Bank Island was causing particular danger to road users and pedestrians, owing to people driving without due care and attention, and requested that a traffic lights system and/or CCTV cameras be installed at the site in order to minimize the risk of accidents. She also requested that the Council liaise with Sandwell Council to secure the laying of double yellow lines on a particularly dangerous double bend in Brook Lane in the section leading on to Bowling Green Road, and asked that additional speed deterrent measures be implemented on those roads to prevent accidents.

In responding, the Assistant Director of the Urban Environment (Environmental Management) expressed sympathy with the points raised and undertook to investigate possible solutions and respond to the questioner in writing.

- (4) Concerns were also expressed by members of the public regarding the speed of traffic on the Wrens Nest and Priory estates, particularly in Meadow Road, Paganel Drive and the surrounding areas up to Dudley College, and it was suggested that a twenty miles per hour speed limit could be introduced in these areas in order to make them safer.

Councillor K Finch raised:

- (1) concern regarding the proposed closure of a number of Estate Offices in the Borough, in particular the office in Summer Road. He stated that this office was well used by local residents and commented that the proposed alternatives like Dudley Council Plus

were too far away for many residents to use. He requested that the policy of closure of the Estate Offices be dropped and that the facilities be kept open.

- (2) concern regarding anti-social behaviour in the area surrounding Summer Road Community Centre. He stated that despite the good efforts of the Police, he had recently witnessed between fifteen and twenty youths causing a nuisance and setting fire to a post box. He requested that further action be taken to prevent this kind of behaviour.

Councillor Mrs. Aston raised:

- (1) concern that she had not yet received a response to an issue she had raised previously in relation to parking problems on Mulberry Green. She requested that a response to this query be provided to her as quickly as possible.

Councillor A Finch raised:

- (1) concern regarding the condition of the road surfaces on the Wrens Nest, in particular Summer Road, and the accumulation of litter on those roads. He requested that action be taken to improve the condition of the roads and the litter situation.
- (2) concern regarding the accumulation of litter, in particular the number of empty bottles and cans, on Coronation Gardens. He requested that action be taken immediately to clear up the gardens.

Councillor Mrs. Coulter raised:

- (1) concern that the three Councillors for the Netherton, Woodside and St Andrews ward had not been informed of plans for the closure of the Netherton Estate Office. She requested that in future Ward Members be informed of similar proposals affecting their area.

Councillor J Martin raised:

- (1) concern regarding the speed of traffic on St Peter's Road and Cole Street. He stated that residents had contacted him to request that traffic calming measures like improved signage and reduced speed limits be implemented in the area.
- (2) concern regarding anti-social behaviour by youths who had been congregating on a green space at the junction of Cole Street and Worcester Road. He reiterated a previous request to meet with the Youth Team for that area to discuss ways of dealing with the problem.
- (3) concern regarding the proposed closure of Woodside library. He stated that several constituents, mostly elderly residents, had contacted him to express concern regarding the proposal. He

commented that Woodside was already a deprived area which would be further damaged by the loss of its library, and requested that he be kept informed of any developments regarding the proposal.

Councillor Ahmed raised:

- (1) concern regarding drains at the junction of Waterloo Street and Wellington Road, which he believed had collapsed. He requested that action be taken as quickly as possible to repair the drains.

Councillor Ms. Craigie raised:

- (1) concern regarding traffic management in Swancote Road and Holland Street. She stated that due to a large number of cars parking on these narrow streets, a number of residents had found themselves unable to get off their drives. She requested that immediate action be taken to improve the situation.
- (2) concern regarding youth activities in the St James's ward. She stated that earlier in the year she had attempted to make enquiries with the Russells Hall Neighbourhood Centre regarding their summer youth activities but had not received a proper response. She also expressed concern that a local play area had recently been burned down, and requested that the Council take action to ensure that an adequate level of youth provision was maintained in the St James's area.

Councillor Mrs. Roberts raised:

- (1) concern regarding the dumping of rubbish on the Himley Road. She stated that residents of a number of townhouses and flats towards the top of that road had started leaving black bin bags to the side of their building, with the result that a number of rats had been spotted in the vicinity. She commented that this was a particular concern as the road was used on a daily basis by parents and children walking to school, and requested that action be taken to remove the rubbish and prevent it building up again.

Councillor Ali raised:

- (1) concern regarding the opening in the road at the junction between Flood Street and King Street behind the Beatties department store. He reiterated a previous request that this opening be closed off in order to prevent drivers crossing lanes, as a number of accidents had already occurred because of this.
- (2) a request that a fence be erected to the rear of the residential development in Uplands Road, in order to protect existing residents from a steep bank at the back of the site.

- (3) concern regarding the lack of parking for residents of Banklands Road. He commented that there were between ten and twenty houses in this street which did not have any parking facilities at all, and requested that the Council investigate a possible means of addressing this problem.
- (4) a request for clarification in respect of the timescales for the distribution of green waste bins in the St Thomas's area. He stated that residents of his ward had not yet received their bins, and asked that the Council confirm the dates on which they would be delivered.

Councillor Waltho raised:

- (1) an invitation to all members of the public to get involved in the management of their local hospital. He stated that now Russells Hall hospital had obtained 'foundation' status, a major public engagement campaign would be undertaken with the aim of enlisting members of the public to serve as members of the trust and participate in the management of the hospital. He advised that he was in possession of application forms should any members of the public wish to get involved and encouraged them to speak to him should they be interested.

Councillor Cotterill raised:

- (1) concern regarding the lack of consultation with local communities regarding the proposed closure of a number of local Estate Offices and Libraries. He stated that the proposals, to be considered shortly by the Cabinet, had been formulated without any direct consultation with the services users who would be affected by the changes. He therefore proposed that the Committee make a recommendation that no decisions be made in respect of the proposed closures until a thorough programme of direct consultation with the public had been undertaken.

Members of the Committee expressed agreement with this proposal and it was

**RESOLVED**

That the Cabinet be requested to suspend decision making in relation to the proposed closure of a number of Estate Offices and Libraries, until such time as a proper programme of public consultation, involving the direct engagement of the affected service users, has been undertaken.

- (2) concern regarding a tree on Dalvine Road. He stated that the tree was grossly oversized for the area, with the result that it was causing large cracks in the pavement and blocking light from nearby properties. He requested that action be taken preferably to remove the tree or failing that to prune it.
- (3) a request that work on the Multi Use Games Area at Netherbrook School be sped up, as the current twelve month timetable for the completion of the project was too slow given the need for the facility.
- (4) concern regarding a property in Quarry Bank at which it had been alleged that dogs were being bred illegally, seemingly for the purposes of fighting. He commented that although the Council had issued residents living in the vicinity with diaries to record any disturbance, further action needed to be taken to remove the animals and prosecute the owners.

Councillor Sparks raised:

- (1) concern regarding the disturbance caused by recent waterworks in Thorns Road and Park Road. He stated that the works, undertaken by May Gurney Utility Services, had led to mass water leakage in the area, with resulting disturbance to local residents and increased danger on the roads. He requested that a letter be written to May Gurney, on behalf of the Committee, requesting that they take greater care in future to monitor their work, particularly on residential roads, in order to minimise the disruption to residents and vehicles.

Councillor While-Cooper raised:

- (1) support for the comments made by other Members in relation to the proposed closure of a number of Estate Offices and local libraries. She expressed agreement with the recommendation that the Cabinet should suspend decision making in relation to these proposals until proper consultation had been undertaken.

## TRANSFORMING SECONDARY EDUCATION

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted on the national Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme. The report set out the Local Authority's proposed strategy for accessing the programme, which was seen as the primary vehicle through which major capital investment in local Secondary Schools could be secured. Members were requested to consider the proposed strategy and raise any issues which they felt were particularly relevant in the Central Dudley area.

Arising from consideration of the report, a Member requested clarification as to the methods used to estimate the number of Dudley children who would be of Reception Year age in 2014/15, and requested that the statistical information in relation to the number of live births in Dudley in 2006 be circulated to the Committee, as it was not included in the appendices to the report, despite apparently being available from May 2007. In responding, the Assistant Director of Children's Services (Resources) gave an undertaking to provide these figures to the Committee following the meeting, and stated that using the birth figures up to and including those for 2006, it was possible to predict entries into the Reception Year up until 2011/12, which meant that it was also possible to predict secondary school numbers well beyond that year.

A Member commented that recent cuts in funding for the Ethnic Minority Achievement Service (EMAS) appeared to be at odds with the 'vision for Transforming Secondary Education' set out in the report, as this service focussed specifically on improving outcomes for children from ethnic minorities who were living in deprived areas.

Several Members of the Committee made comments regarding the need for flexibility of capacity in the secondary school system, expressing concerns that where a school grew in popularity or where sizable housing developments occurred, parents were often forced to send their children to schools which were a considerable distance from their home. In responding to these points, the Assistant Director of Children's Services stated that the Local Authority paid close attention to the popularity of schools and also to population movements in the Borough and tried to ensure that, as far as possible, supply met demand. In view of this, he envisaged that the BSF programme would incorporate both the expansion of existing popular schools and the building of new facilities where needed.

#### RESOLVED

1. That the emerging strategy for Transforming Secondary Education (TSE), be endorsed.
2. That the Cabinet Member for Children's Services be requested to take the above comments into account when developing the TSE strategy for submission to the Department for Children, Schools and Families.

#### BIG LOTTERY BID – A MILLION PEOPLE: BLACK COUNTRY AS AN URBAN PARK

A report of the Chief Executive was submitted on the Black Country Big Lottery bid for £50 million for the 'A Million People: Black Country as an Urban Park' project.

A presentation on the bid was received from the Principal Engineer – Civil Engineering. He gave an outline of the project, the Dudley element of which would facilitate the enhancement of the geological heritage on Wren’s Nest National Nature Reserve, including the provision of new visitor facilities and the opening up of a number of underground canals and mines which linked the site to Castle Hill. It was reported that the project, which was being led by the Black Country Consortium, was one of only six to be short-listed for a single grant of up to £50 million from the Big Lottery Fund Living Landmarks People’s Millions Programme. The Big Lottery committee would be holding a meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> October to decide which four of these six would go forward to a national televised vote in early December, which would determine which bid was successful.

Arising from consideration of the report, Members expressed strong support for the project, commenting that should the bid be successful, the whole of the Borough, as well as the rest of the Black Country, would benefit considerably. Members also made reference to the need for awareness of the project to be raised in all areas of the local community in order to ensure maximum support, and requested that a visit to the site of the project be arranged, in order that Members of the Committee could view the site first hand and learn more about the detail of the proposals.

RESOLVED

That the information in respect of the Black Country Big Lottery bid for the ‘A Million People: Black Country as an Urban Park’ project, as set out in the report submitted, be noted.

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APPLICATIONS IN RESPECT OF LAND AND PROPERTY OWNED BY THE COUNCIL

A report of the Director of Law and Property was submitted regarding land and property within the Committee’s area.

RESOLVED

That the Cabinet Member for Housing be recommended to refuse the application requesting permanent access rights, as indicated on the plan attached to the report now submitted, across Council owned land in Walker Street, Netherton, for the reasons stated in the ‘comments’ section of the report.

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DUDLEY SOUTHERN BYPASS AND CINDER BANK TRAFFIC ISLAND, NETHERTON – TRAFFIC AND TRANSPORTATION ISSUES

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on investigations in relation to Cinder Bank traffic island. It was reported that arising from comments made at a previous meeting of the Committee, a site meeting between Ward Members and officers had been held on 3<sup>rd</sup> July, 2007. Arising from this meeting it was now proposed that the services of a specialist design consultant be engaged in order to identify the nature and extent of traffic related issues at the site, and to consider the options for the remediation of those issues.

RESOLVED

That the Cabinet Member for Transportation be recommended to engage appropriate consultants, as proposed in the report submitted, in order to identify the nature and extent of traffic related issues at the site of Cinder Bank Traffic Island, and to consider the options for the remediation of those issues.

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41 URBAN ENVIRONMENT - MATTERS RAISED AT CENTRAL DUDLEY AREA COMMITTEE – 12<sup>th</sup> JUNE, 2007

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on a number of issues relating to that Directorate raised at the meeting of the Committee held on 12<sup>th</sup> June 2007.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report, and the Appendix to the report submitted, be noted.

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42 SELECT COMMITTEE PUBLICITY

Information was given regarding the dates for future meetings of all Select Committees, which were held at the Council House, Dudley. Members of the public were welcome to attend such meetings.

RESOLVED

That the information given in respect of the dates of future meetings of Select Committees, be noted.

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43 DATES AND VENUES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

RESOLVED

That the dates and venues of future meetings of this Committee, as follows, be noted: -

- 7<sup>th</sup> November 2007 – Sledmere Primary School, off Buffery Road, Dudley
- 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2008 – Dudley Concert Hall, St James' Road, Dudley
- 11<sup>th</sup> March 2008 – Saltwells Education Development Centre, Bowling Green Road, Dudley

The meeting ended at 8.15 pm

CHAIRMAN