

CENTRAL DUDLEY AREA COMMITTEE

Wednesday 7th November, 2007 at 6.30 pm
at Sledmere Primary School, off Buffery Road Road, Dudley

PRESENT: -

Councillor Rahman (Chairman)
Councillors Ahmed, Ali, Mrs. Aston, Mrs. Coulter, Cotterill, J Davies, Ms. Craigie, K Finch, J Martin, Mrs. Roberts and Waltho; and Mrs. Edwards

OFFICERS:

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

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE

Approximately 50 members of the public.

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APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors A Finch, Sparks and Mrs. While-Cooper; and Ms. Little and Mrs. Oakes.

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DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Rahman declared a personal interest in respect of Agenda Item Number 8(d) – Application for Purchase of Car Park opposite 43 Halesowen Road, Netherton, in view of the fact that he was a patient of the doctor making the application.

Councillors Mrs Aston and K Finch declared a personal interest in respect of Agenda Item Number 9 – Capital Allocations – Sycamore Green School Premises, in view of the fact that they, as Ward Members for Castle and Priory, had assisted with the application.

Councillor Cotterill declared a personal interest in respect of Agenda Item Number 9 – Capital Allocations – Quarry Bank Community Association, in view of the fact that he was an honorary Member of the organisation.

Councillor Mrs. Coulter declared a personal interest in respect of Agenda Item Number 9 – Capital Allocations – Netherton News Group, in view of the fact that a member of the organisation was a friend of hers.

Councillor Mrs. Coulter declared a personal interest in respect of Agenda Item Number 9 – Capital Allocations – Dudley Cancer Support, in view of the fact that she was a member of the Management Committee of the organisation.

Councillor Mrs. Coulter declared a personal interest in respect of Agenda Item Number 9 – Capital Allocations – Sycamore Green School Premises, in view of the fact that she was Chair of the Pupil Referral Unit Management Committee.

Councillor Rahman declared a personal interest in respect of Agenda Item Number 9 – Capital Allocations – Netherton News Group, in view of the fact that he was acquainted with members of Group.

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MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 11th September, 2007, be approved as a correct record and signed.

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PETITIONS

It was reported that the following petitions had been received and had been referred to the officers shown for attention: -

Petition from residents of Himley Road, requesting the implementation of measures along that road to reduce traffic and improve road safety. The petition was referred to the Director of the Urban Environment for consideration and attention.

Petition from residents of Parkway Road, requesting the implementation of measures along that road to reduce traffic and improve road safety. The petition was referred to the Director of the Urban Environment for consideration and attention.

Petition from residents of Butterfield Court, requesting that the phone box in the foyer of that building be retained. The petition was referred to the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services for consideration and attention.

Petition from residents of Quarry Bank, requesting that action be taken regarding the number of dogs being kept at an address in that area. The petition was referred to the Director of the Urban Environment for consideration and attention.

YOUTH ISSUES

This being his first meeting of the Committee, the Chairman welcomed Mr Nock, the co-opted member representing the Dudley Central Youth Forum.

Mr Nock reported on the recent activities of the Youth Forum, including their recent successful application of funding from the Youth Opportunities Fund. He reported that the Forum had secured funding for a number of activities and equipment, including a residential trip in December, new I.T. equipment for the Forum, time with a graphic designer to design an identity for the Forum, and transport for Forum members to assist them in attending meetings.

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.

A member of the public raised a concern in relation to the clearing of gulleys and the risk of flooding over the coming months. He stated that the fall of leaves and heavy rainfall in the autumn period could potentially recreate the blockages and resulting flooding which the central Dudley area had experienced during the summer, and commented that despite this inevitable risk, he was not aware of any Council plans for a widespread gulley cleaning programme to avoid a major disruption. He commented that the Council had, in recent years, failed to adequately sweep roads and clear gulleys, and requested that a commitment be made to increasing the number of gulley cleaning vehicles and introducing a regular cleaning programme to prevent future problems.

In responding, the Assistant Director of the Urban Environment – Environmental Management stated that whilst every effort was being made to keep gulleys throughout the Borough clear of blockages, resources for this service were limited as the Council possessed just two gulley cleaning machines. He commented that nationally Dudley was one of the better performing authorities in terms of street cleaning, and added that it was necessary to prioritise to ensure the worst affected areas and arterial routes were kept as clear as possible.

A number of written questions were submitted by members of the public in relation to the recent decision to withdraw funding from the Jigsaw Youth Theatre group. A number of members of the Group were in attendance at the meeting and they stated that attending the Group enabled them to learn valuable skills and meet new friends at an affordable cost of £1.50 per session. They also raised questions regarding the process through which the decision to withdraw funding had been made, and requested clarification as to why the organisation had been informed at such a late stage that it would be closed down. It was also commented that if the office space currently provided to the Group by the Council was withdrawn, the

Group would be unable to raise funds and would be forced to cease operating altogether.

In responding to the points raised, the Director of Children's Services stated that the Jigsaw Group was a voluntary organisation with charitable status which the Council had agreed to fund for a three-year period at a rate of £18,300 per year. The Service Level Agreement (SLA) governing the funding arrangement was always intended to expire in 2007, by which time it was hoped that the Group would either have secured alternative funding or increased sufficiently in size to become self financing. The unit cost of the services provided by the Group was higher than that of alternative provision which was available, and although it was regrettable that funding was being withdrawn, the Local Authority had a duty to allocate funding in the most cost-effective manner. In relation to the decision to withdraw funding from the group, he stated that since the original SLA had been put in place in 2004, it had only been envisaged that the Council would fund the project for three years. However, he and the Cabinet Member had looked very closely at the situation in Spring 2007, following which the decision not to renew the agreement had been formalised in July 2007. The delay in communicating the decision to the organisation had been due to Jigsaw staff being on leave during the school summer holidays. Notwithstanding this, he accepted the point that the organisation would not be able to survive in the short term without office space, and undertook to arrange for office facilities to be provided, at the expense of the Council, until the end of the financial year in March 2008.

Several Members of the Committee expressed dissatisfaction regarding both the decision to withdraw funding from the Jigsaw Group, and the manner in which the decision had been taken. Concerns were expressed that the alternative provision referred to by the Director of Children's Services would be in areas which were not accessible to Netherton children, meaning that the benefits currently being enjoyed by local young people would be lost. Members also felt that communication, both with the organisation and local Ward Councillors, had been inadequate throughout the decision making process, with the result that the possible options for securing funding and maintaining the service currently provided by the Group had not been properly explored.

At the close of the discussion on the matter, the Chairman proposed a course of action to be taken in light of the issues considered at the meeting. The proposal was duly seconded and it was

RESOLVED

That the Cabinet Member for Children's Services be requested to delay the implementation of the decision to withdraw funding from the Jigsaw Youth Theatre Group, in order to create time for further discussions, to include the Ward Members for the affected area, in relation to potential future funding opportunities, in order that Group can continue to operate in the Netherton area and provide a service for local young people.

WARD ISSUES

Councillor Cotterill raised:

- (1) a request that a section of Bush Road be widened, as cars were currently having to mount the kerb to make their way down the road.
- (2) a request that traffic lights be installed outside the Woodman public house at the junction of Dudley Wood Road and Saltwells Road.
- (3) a request that a 'safer routes to school' initiative be implemented in Quarry Bank. He stated that as yet he had had no response to a petition he submitted previously on behalf residents in relation to this issue, and commented that action was desperately needed to prevent further accidents.

Councillor Waltho raised:

- (1) an invitation to all members of the public to get involved in the management of the newly created The Dudley Group of Hospitals NHS Trust. He stated that approximately eight thousand local people had so far signed up to be involved in the trust at various levels, and invited all those present to take an application form from him if they were interested.
- (2) an announcement that construction work on the road safety scheme in Lister Road was due to start on Sunday 18th November, with work continuing on Sundays until it was completed.
- (3) an announcement that following efforts by local residents to clean the cenotaph in the memorial gardens off Grazebrook Road, a remembrance service would be held in the nearby church at 9am on Sunday 11th November, prior to the main service in the town centre later that morning.
- (4) an announcement that the St. Thomas's Community Games would once again be held in June 2008. He congratulated Councillor Ali in his efforts to organise the event and added that the dates would be announced in due course.

Councillor Ali raised:

- (1) a request for a meeting with the relevant officers to discuss the installation of a central reservation on New Rowley Road, in order to assist pedestrians in crossing the road safely.

- (2) 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 for safety reasons and stated that the businesses who wished to keep the route open should demonstrate to the Council why this was necessary.
- (3) concern that residents of St. Thomas's Ward had still not received their green waste 'wheelie' bins, despite the fact that the rest of the Borough had received their bins some time ago. He requested that the bins were distributed as soon as possible.

Councillor Rahman raised:

- (1) a number of concerns regarding consultation with local people and their Ward Members. He stated that a number of recent decisions affecting the Netherton, Woodside and St. Andrew's area, including the restructuring of Neighbourhood Management Services, the closure of Woodside Library and the closure of Netherton Housing Office, had been taken without adequate consultation either with the local community or their elected representatives. He expressed disappointment with the lack of consultation on these decisions and commented that they would further damage an already deprived area of the Borough.
- (2) a request that an area action plan be produced to kick start the economic regeneration of Netherton.
- (3) concern regarding traffic in Cinder Bank. He commented that the current congestion was leading to dangerous air pollution, and requested that the Council undertake work to assess the potential resulting damage to the health of local residents.
- (4) a request that a traffic management plan be produced for the Netherton area. He commented that the town had a number of traffic problems and requested that a plan be put in place to establish a schedule of works which could be followed to ensure that the problems were addressed.

Councillor J. Davies raised:

- (1) concern regarding the drinking of alcohol in Horsley Field Gardens. He commented that he had received complaints from elderly residents who had been intimidated by groups of youths and requested that the Police take action to prevent this happening, as the consumption of alcohol in the Gardens was prohibited.
- (2) a request that the Council take action to clean up the leaves in Buffery Park, which were covering footpaths and creating a potential hazard.

- (3) a request that the Council take action to clear up litter at the junction of Four Winds Road and Gads Green. He reported that he had received complaints from residents that litter had accumulated in that area and was covering roads and the pavement.
- (4) a request that speed bumps be installed in Windsor Crescent as cars were currently entering the road at dangerous speeds when leaving the traffic island.
- (5) a request that speed cameras be installed in Buffery Road to improve safety and prevent accidents.
- (6) a concern that scaffolding was being left up at Council properties well after the work that had originally required the scaffolding had been completed. He reported that he had noticed buildings which had retained scaffolding for up to two months longer than was necessary, presumably at an additional cost to the Council, and requested that scaffolding be removed promptly when it was no longer needed.
- (7) an observation that recently, during road works requiring the closure of Blackacre Road, signs had been erected indicating a diversion for motorists, despite the fact that Blackacre Road was not a through road.

Councillor Mrs. Roberts raised:

- (1) concern regarding traffic on Parkway Road. She reported that in addition to the street being used for parking by clients of the Doctor's surgery and the new beauty salon, cars were also using it as shortcut from Grange Road to Himley Road, resulting in severe congestion in the area. She requested that action be taken to alleviate this.
- (2) concern that motorists were using Himley Avenue as a shortcut through to Corser Street. She reported that residents in the area were concerned about the safety implications of this, and requested a meeting with an appropriate council officer to consider a means of improving the situation.

Councillor Ms. Craigie raised:

- (1) concern regarding buses mounting the pavement at speed in Harold Court when passing each other. She reported that she had raised this issue both with the Council's traffic officers and with Travel West Midlands, who had asked their drivers to take extra care in the area. However, she was concerned that drivers were still going too fast, as she had noticed damage to kerbstones in the area caused by buses.

- (2) a request for a school crossing to be installed in Overfield Road, to serve the various community facilities provided in that area.
- (3) a request that all residents living near the site of the proposed new retirement village in Russells Hall be directly consulted on the proposals prior to the Council giving approval to the plans.
- (4) a request that a full traffic management review be undertaken in relation to the Russells Hall area, particularly with the aim of addressing the use of the estate as a 'rat run', with the associated problems for residents.
- (5) concern that the Council appeared to be selling off sizable amounts of public land whilst several Directorates needed to acquire new sites in order to meet new challenges. She stated that the Council's priorities on, for example, recycling, meant that Environmental Management would need to acquire new land in order to provide new services.
- (6) a request that, following the Cabinet decision to restructure Neighbourhood Management Services, positive steps be taken to ensure that the most experienced and talented staff were retained for the good of the service and therefore of the local community.

Councillor Ahmed raised:

- (1) support for the comments made by Councillor Ms. Craigie in relation to the need for all local residents to be directly consulted on proposals for a retirement village in the Russells Hall area.
- (2) a request for a crossing to be installed at the junction between St. James's Road and Ednam Road, in order to ensure the safety of pupils of Castle High School when crossing the road there on their way to and from school.

Councillor J Martin raised:

- (1) concern in relation to parking and traffic in Hill Street and Simms Lane. Although he appreciated the efforts made by the governors of Hillcrest school to alleviate the problem, he requested that the appropriate Council officers work together with the school and the local Ward Councillors to find a lasting solution.
- (2) concern regarding the junction of Halesowen Road and Northfield Road. He reiterated a previous request that the possibility of remodeling the junction be considered, and requested a response from the relevant Council department including statistical information in relation to the amount of traffic passing through the junction and the number of recorded accidents.

- (3) a concern regarding dog fouling at the Spring Road entrance to Netherton Park. He requested that the Park Warden pay particular attention to this area, in order to keep it clean.
- (4) concern regarding that length of time it took for hypodermic needles found at the rear of Hillcrest School in Blackbrook Road to be removed. He stated that although he had reported the finding of the needles as soon as he became aware of it, they were not removed for two days. He questioned whether this was the usual amount of time required to remove dangerous items and requested a response explaining the delay.
- (5) concern regarding road safety at the bottom of Highbridge Road and on the Lodge Farm estate. He requested that traffic calming measures be implemented in the area in view of the steepness of some sections of the road.
- (6) a request, arising from concerns expressed by the Darby End Tenants and Residents Association that a traffic management plan be produced for the Darby End area, in particular to deal with the problem of traffic from Dudley Road and New Rowley Road cutting through the estate.
- (7) Support for the comments made by Councillor Rahman in relation to the lack of consultation on the restructuring of Neighbourhood Management Services, the closure of Woodside library and the closure of Netherton Estate Office. In relation to the closure Netherton Estate Office, he requested that the Directorate of Adult, Community and Housing Services provide him with statistical information in relation to the number of Dudley Council tenants living in the Netherton area, in order to establish the number of local people the Estate Office served.

Councillor Mrs. Coulter raised:

- (1) support for the comments made by Councillors Rahman and J. Martin in relation to the closure of Netherton Estate Office, particularly as the office had recently been refurbished using public funds.
- (2) a request that as soon as the appointment of a new Priority Neighbourhood Manager was confirmed, all Councillors be contacted directly and informed of their contact details.
- (3) a request that information she had requested at the previous meeting of the Committee in relation to the number of live births in Dudley in 2006, be circulated to members of the Committee as soon as possible.

Councillor Mrs Aston raised:

- (1) a request for a meeting with the appropriate Council officers to discuss problems with on street parking in Mulberry Green. She stated that the area had long-term problems with parking, including vandalism to vehicles, and that action needed to be taken to improve the situation.
- (2) A request that the Council take action to clear the steps leading from Burton Road to the Broadway, as they were presently overgrown and creating a potential slipping hazard for pedestrians.

Councillor K Finch raised:

- (1) support for the comments made by fellow Councillors regarding the lack of communication and consultation with Ward Members in relation to the recent decisions to close a number of local libraries and Estate Offices in deprived areas of the Borough.
- (2) concern regarding the level of unemployment and lack of opportunities in the Castle and Priory area. He stated that a report recently published in the local press had claimed that in certain areas of the Castle and Priory Ward, 25% of working age adults were currently unemployed. He commented that the Council and all of the relevant government agencies needed to make greater efforts to improve education and employment opportunities for young people, particularly in deprived areas.

Mrs Edwards raised:

- (1) concern regarding the recent decision of the Cabinet to close a number of local libraries in deprived areas of the Borough. She commented that these were the areas which most needed public libraries which provided a free service to all members of the community.

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

1. That consideration of the application to purchase land adjacent to 24 Mulberry Green, Dudley, be deferred, pending the outcome of work currently being undertaken to investigate ways of improving the situation in the area with regard to on street parking.

2. That the Cabinet Member for Housing be recommended to declare the land forming the alleyway between numbers 46 and 48 Cedar Road surplus to requirements, as indicated on the plan attached to the report now submitted, to be sold upon terms and conditions to be negotiated and agreed by the Director of Law & Property.
3. That the Cabinet Member for Transportation be recommended to refuse the application to purchase land adjacent to 117 Dudley Wood Road, Netherton, as indicated on the plan attached to the report now submitted, for the reasons stated in the 'comments' section of the report.
4. That consideration of the application to purchase the car park opposite 43 Halesowen Road, Netherton be deferred, pending the outcome of investigations currently being undertaken by the Directorate of Law and Property to establish whether an alternative appropriate site is available in the Netherton area.

CAPITAL ALLOCATIONS

A report of the Area Liaison Officer was submitted on the recommendations of the Capital Allocations Working Group regarding applications made for funding from the capital budget of the Committee. In submitting the report, the Principal Project Officer stated that in light of the receipt of additional information requested by the Working Group in relation to the application made by the Cyber Bus Project, it was now recommended that this application be approved.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the following amounts be awarded to the organisations stated:

<u>Organisation</u>	<u>Purpose</u>	<u>Amount</u>
Limes Road Club	Purchase of digital camera, water boiler and canteen teapot	£318.05
Cyber Bus Project	Purchase of portable power pack engine starting system, PC printer, games console and 4 wireless console pads	£1250.00
Age Concern Dudley (Netherton Office)	Purchase of I.T. equipment	£2500.00

Age Concern Dudley (Dudley Office)	Purchase of I.T. equipment	£3000.00
Cancer Support (DMB)	Purchase and installation of replacement windows	£4795.00
Wrens Nest Community Adventure Playground	Purchase of two computers with networking costs	£2098.00
St. Francis' Parish Centre	Purchase of computer and digital projector	£1000.00
Quarry Bank Community Association	Purchase of electric security shutters and security grills for windows	£6500.00
1 st Quarry Bank Scouts	Purchase of gas heaters, guttering, insulation and plaster board.	£3124.46
Cole Street Methodist Church Hall	Purchase of hearing loop system for use in areas of the building used by the community	£579.28

- (2) That consideration of the applications received from Wrens Nest Community Centre, Netherton News Group, Bumble Hole Conservation Group and the Oasis Project, be deferred to the next meeting of the Capital Allocations Working Group, pending the receipt of additional information, as indicated in Appendix 1 to the report submitted.
- (3) That, pending the receipt of a formal application in relation to the Sycamore Green School premises, £10,000.00 of the funds allocated to the Castle and Priory Ward be reserved to be spent on fire safety improvements in the parts of the school premises to be used by the local community.

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

The Committee received a visual presentation and a verbal update from the Tourism Development Officer in relation to the progress of the People's Millions Big Lottery bid – 'Black Country as an Urban Park'. Members were shown a short DVD outlining the project, and it was noted that copies of the DVD would be made available shortly to all schools in the Borough, in order to publicise the project.

It was reported that since the last meeting of the Committee, the bid had successfully progressed to the final, which would be televised on ITV1 in early December. It was reported that four bids had made it to the final, and that the competition would be decided by a national vote in which all members of the public were entitled to participate either via the internet from 26th November, or by telephone from 7th December.

In responding to the presentation, Members reiterated their strong support for the project, and expressed their thanks to the officers involved for their work so far, in particular for showing them round the Seven Sisters site on Monday 5th November. It was also noted that a further visit to the site was being arranged, in order that Members could be taken into the underground caverns on a narrowboat.

RESOLVED

That the presentation and verbal update in respect of the 'Black Country as an Urban Park' People's Millions BIG Lottery bid, be noted.

54 URBAN ENVIRONMENT - MATTERS RAISED AT CENTRAL DUDLEY AREA COMMITTEE – 11th SEPTEMBER, 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 11th September 2007.

RESOLVED

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

55 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.

56 DATES AND VENUES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

RESOLVED

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

- 22nd January 2008 – Dudley Concert Hall, St James' Road, Dudley
- 11th March 2008 – Saltwells Education Development Centre, Bowling Green Road, Dudley

The meeting ended at 8.25 pm

CHAIRMAN