

At a meeting of the WASHINGTON AREA COMMITTEE held at the BRIDGE WOMEN'S EDUCATION CENTRE, GRASMERE, COLUMBIA, WASHINGTON on WEDNESDAY, 1ST OCTOBER, 2008 at 5.30 P.M.

Present:

Councillor Walker in the Chair

Councillors I. Cuthbert, Fletcher, Miller, Scaplehorn, Snowdon, Timmins, Trueman and Wake.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors A. Cuthbert, Kelly, I. Richardson and Whalen.

Introductions

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Minutes of the last Meeting of the Committee held on Wednesday, 2nd July, 2008

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting held on 2nd July, 2008 (copy circulated) be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Matters Arising

The following matters arising were discussed:-

Area Committee Representation on Local Multi Agency Problem Solving Groups

At the last meeting of the Committee, Councillor Snowdon was nominated to become a core Member of the Washington LMAPS Group. Since then, it had been clarified that a substitute could be nominated.

Councillor Trueman nominated Councillor Miller as a substitute representative for the Washington LMAPS Group and this was duly seconded by Councillor Fletcher.

Declarations of Interest

Item 8 – Strategic Initiatives Budget: 2007/2008 Ward Based Community Chest

Members of Washington Pride declared a personal and prejudicial interest in the item.

Under the relevant Authorities (Standards Committee) (Dispensations) Regulations 2002 the Standards Committee granted a dispensation on 12th February, 2008 for a period of four years to each Member of the Washington Area Committee who also served on the Washington Pride. Therefore, Members could consider the Washington Pride application without being excluded from participating.

Item 10 – Independence Day Celebrations

Councillor Snowdon declared a personal interest as a 'friend of Washington Old Hall'.

Presentation from Northumbria Police on Crime Rates Relating to the Washington Area

Unfortunately Sergeant Ken Robinson had been unable to attend the meeting therefore Members agreed to defer the item to a future meeting of the Committee.

Minutes of the Local Multi-Agency Problem Solving Groups (LMAPS)

Copies of the minutes of the Local Multi-Agency Problem Solving (LMAPS) Group held on 20th June, 2008 and 23rd July, 2008 respectively (copies circulated) were submitted.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

2. RESOLVED that the minutes of the LMAPS Group held on 20th June, 2008 and 23rd July, 2008 be received and noted.

Regeneration Issues Report: Feedback on Projects Previously Funded through Strategic Initiatives Budget (SIB)

The Chief Executive (Acting) submitted a report to provide information to the Area Committee on expenditure from Strategic Initiatives Budget (SIB) on projects it had previously funded.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Donna Bruce tabled a report from Community R Us who were awarded £20,488 in November 2007 for the development of a programme for children and young people. The report informed Members how the money had been spent.

Councillor Miller enquired whether he could be supplied with the names of residents in the local community who were involved in Community R Us in order that he could consult with them regarding new facilities for young people and their requirements.

A representative from Community R Us agreed to discuss this with Councillor Miller at the end of the meeting.

3. RESOLVED that the feedback report be received and noted.

Strategic Initiatives Budget (SIB): Regeneration Issues Report

The Chief Executive (Acting) submitted a report (copy circulated) on the proposed allocation of SIB funding to support the following initiatives of benefit to the area:-

- (i) Washington Victim Support Project;
- (ii) The Washingtonians.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Nicol Trueman, Area Regeneration Officer, presented the report, advising that the applications for funding before the Committee were requesting a total of £25,550 from the 2008/09 budget, and should the Committee grant these applications £137,997 would remain in the 2008/09 budget with three meetings remaining and a commitment of £19,910 would be made to 2009/10, subject to budget approval.

Kevin Rigg, Branch Manager, Victim Support – Sunderland Branch was in attendance to present the report which had been deferred from the Committee held in July, pending further information, and also to answer any questions.

Mr. Rigg advised that Committee Members' comments had been taken on board from the previous meeting and that the application had been amended accordingly. He then went on to outline the following:-

- Evidence relating to need – 4,275 reported crimes were committed in Washington during 2007/08;
- Consultation exercises had been completed with the Chair of LMAPS, Gentoo, Washington Police Team, Anti Social Behaviour Unit, Washington Pride and victims.

- The Project would recruit a new worker for the new position which would be established in Washington.
- In relation to the sustainability of the project, a team of local volunteers would be recruited and trained to the required standard, then, when their salaries expired, they would receive support from Sunderland Victim Support, until further funding could be secured.
- The project had received a letter of support from local MP, Sharon Hodgson.
- The project would attract £3,000 'in kind' funding from Gentoo.

Councillor Miller commented that he was pleased that the concerns raised at the last meeting had been addressed in detail and that work was underway with the victims of crime.

Councillor I. Cuthbert echoed Councillor Miller's comments and recommended to the Committee that they support this worthwhile project.

Geoff Rudd, Secretary for the Washingtonians, was present on behalf of the organisation. He was accompanied by Lesley Russell-Cuzack. Both were in attendance to answer any questions from Members.

Nicol Trueman, Area Regeneration Officer, advised that The Washingtonians were a constituted community group who were newly formed in August 2008. The group were seeking a one-off capital award of £15,595 from the 2008/09 budget to fund start up costs for a march and display band in Washington. All age groups were welcome to join from across the whole regeneration area, and although this was a newly formed group, Members of the Management Committee were experienced in managing community groups and grants.

There was no match funding with the application, however, the group had applied to Gentoo for funding and were also meeting with Sunderland Council for Voluntary Services (SCVS) to develop a funding strategy for future sustainability of the project.

Councillor Wake queried some of the figures, particularly the cost of kazoos and snare drums which he stated could be obtained more cheaply on the internet.

Ms. Russell-Cuzack advised that the group had undertaken their own research using the internet and was able to confirm that the cheaper instruments were not of the same size and quality as the ones they were proposing to purchase. Also, the group had promised to adhere to the Council's purchasing and procurement regulations, which would ensure that best value would be achieved.

Councillor I. Cuthbert enquired whereabouts in Washington were the twenty-four marching Members from. In response, Mr. Rudd advised that Members were from Concord, Sulgrave, Birtley, Glebe, Coach Road and Brady Square.

Councillor I. Cuthbert commented that the aspirations for the marching band were good. Nonetheless he held concerns regarding the robustness of the Business Plan, particularly as charging forty Members £1 per week would only achieve £2,080.00 per annum, which would not stand up to the total costs estimated for instruments, equipment, room hire and transport. Ms. Trueman advised that SCVS would advise The Washingtonians further in relation to costings, fees, transport, maintenance and sustainability issues and that this would be picked up through training and analysis.

Councillor Miller commented that he felt Washington needed more of this type of facility in the area, especially as it was inclusive of people aged between 5-50 years of age. He acknowledged earlier comments regarding the budget but was of the opinion that strong mechanisms were in place to monitor and manage the budgets effectively. He therefore fully supported the project.

Councillor Wake stated that he would support the project as it was an excellent way of getting young people off the streets. Having said that, he felt that almost £16,000 could potentially benefit more than just forty young people.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Wake regarding what affect it would have on the organisation if only a proportion of the amount requested was awarded, Ms. Russell-Cuzack advised that if the amount was reduced then this would impact upon the quantity of instrument purchases and that there would be insufficient numbers to go around.

Councillor I. Cuthbert requested that an updated Business Plan be brought to a future meeting of the Committee.

4. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) £9,955 as a contribution from the 2008/09 budget and £19,910 from the 2009/10 budget for Washington Victim Support be approved; and
- (ii) £15,595 as a contributon from 2008/09 budget from The Washingtonians be approved.

Strategic Initiatives Budget: 2007/2008 Ward Based Community Chest

The Chief Executive (Acting) submitted a report (copy circulated) to bring forward 18 projects recommended for approval from the 2008/09 Community Chest Scheme.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

In response to an enquiry from Councillor I. Cuthbert regarding whether the 'Washington Pride – contribution towards expenses for remembrance day' was meant solely for the Washington Remembrance Service or whether a contribution was being made by all 25 wards for the City's service, Nicol Trueman agreed that she would check and clarify the position.

5. RESOLVED that approval be given to the 18 projects recommended relating to the 2008/09 budget, as detailed in Annex 1 and Annex 1A to the report.

Residents Survey – Future of Adult Social Care 2007

The Director of Health, Housing and Adult Services submitted a report (copy circulated) informing Members of the results of a Residents Survey regarding the future of adult social care for 2007.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Chairman welcomed Jim Usher, General Manager of the Long Term Conditions Service, Health, Housing and Adult Services to the Committee and invited him to present the findings of the Residents Survey.

Mr. Usher advised the Committee that the Residents Survey was undertaken in response to the Local Government White Paper "Our Health, Our Care, Our Say". As was the Council's 15-year Commissioning Framework for Adult Social Care, which was based around five key aims to improve and develop solutions designed to meet the needs of individuals. These were:-

- Independent Living;
- Choice and Control;
- Equal Access for All; and
- Better Commissioning.

Each of the above-mentioned aims had been identified in the Sunderland Strategy and Local Area Agreement which would be used to take these issues forward.

Mr. Usher then referred Members of the Committee to Appendix 1 which set out a more detailed analysis of the findings. He indicated that respondents felt the Council was a much needed and useful resource. Nonetheless, they felt that decisions about their welfare should be taken by themselves. As such, the Council intended on working further with Members of Community Spirit to identify local concerns and issues and reduce inequalities.

Councillor Trueman commented that this was an excellent report and that it was pleasing to see that the Council were consulting with people.

Councillor I. Cuthbert, in referring to Appendix 1, commented that it was worrying to see a lack of inclusion of the older generation, and this was an issue that required remedying. In response, Mr. Usher advised that removing barriers and improving access to universal services was a major challenge for Health, Housing and Adult Services, which was the reason why a separate work stream was in place within the Directorate to address those issues.

Councillor Miller commented that it was pleasing to see responses from a range of ethnic backgrounds.

Councillor Wake enquired about the meaning of the aims entitled "Equal Access for All" and "Better Commissioning". Mr. Usher advised that these mean to improve services for those that require them, and to ensure to conduct a needs assessment, then follow the necessary procurement routes in order to commission services specifically to meet the individuals' needs.

Councillor Timmins commented that the Commissioners were the experts who determine the services required and that the report clearly steered a way forward, particularly in relation to health and wellbeing.

In response to an enquiry from a member of the public regarding whether services were provided to people with disabilities over the age of twenty-five, Mr. Usher responded that indeed they were provided, and confirmed that services did not stop at age twenty-five for those with disabilities.

6. RESOLVED that the Committee receive and note the results of the Residents Survey.

Independence Day Celebrations

The Director of Community and Cultural Services submitted a report (copy circulated) informing Members of an event that had taken place at Washington Old Hall to celebrate Independence Day on Friday, 4th July, 2008.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Jessica Bell, Arts Development Officer, briefly outlined the report, and in doing so highlighted the background associated with the event and the way forward.

Councillor Cuthbert enquired why the Committee had been presented with a report in September detailing the outcomes of an event held in July. Ms. Bell agreed to take this back to the Director of Community and Cultural Services.

7. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Washington Extended Library Service

The Director of Community and Cultural Services submitted a report (copy circulated) updating Members on arrangements associated with the closure of Washington Town Centre Library.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Members noted that a consultation event was due to take place on 9th October, 2008.

8. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Sunderland International Friendship Festival

The Director of Community and Cultural Services submitted a report (copy circulated) informing Members of the delivery of this year's Sunderland International Friendship Festival, featuring the Kite Festival 2008.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Jessica Bell, Arts Development Officer, outlined the report.

The Chairman expressed concern regarding the price of car parking, especially as the event had been publicised as 'free'. He then enquired how the £4 car park charge could be justified. Ms. Bell advised that this exact issue had been raised in the de-brief as a number of comments had been received on the issue, therefore, car parking was being looked into for the 2009 Festival.

Councillor Miller expressed disappointment that only Washington Councillors and Cabinet Members were invited to the event, and enquired why all Councillors were not invited as this would promote the event. Ms. Bell agreed to look into this.

9. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted and that dates for the Festival in 2009 would be Saturday, 4th July and Sunday, 5th July.

Housing and Council Tax Benefit Progress Report

The City Treasurer submitted a report (copy circulated) informing Members of the performance of the Benefits Section in the processing of new claims and changes in circumstances in accordance with the new National indicator (NI 181) for Housing and Council Tax Benefit and also, to update Members on developments relevant to the business. The report covered the period from 1st April, 2008 to 31st July, 2008.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Steve Atkinson, Benefits Manager, outlined the report for Members.

Councillor Wake commented that he had noticed in the report that those receiving benefits were now referred to as 'customers' rather than 'claimers'. He then went on to state that some vulnerable private sector tenants such as those misusing drugs/alcohol might not be able to take direct responsibility for managing their housing costs and in such instances it would be preferable to pay Local Housing Allowance (LHA) to the landlord and not the tenant".

Mr. Atkinson responded advising that the local authority did not enforce the policy, it was the DWP who implemented it nationally and the policy stated that the tenant must be paid the benefit unless a safeguard policy is applicable stating that the landlord must be paid instead.

In response to an enquiry regarding what proportion of officers' time had been spent on dealing with applications for Local Housing Allowance, Mr. Atkinson advised that six visitors were currently assessing requests and that three weeks work had been undertaken so far. That had amounted to one hundred and twenty-five applications being dealt with and approximately one hundred and fifteen were left to do.

Councillor Miller commented that he was delighted regarding the investment in ICT hardware to allow for a more efficient service.

10. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

(Signed) P. WALKER,
Chairman.