

At a meeting of the WASHINGTON AREA COMMITTEE held at WOODRIDGE GARDENS, COLUMBIA on THURSDAY, 15TH APRIL, 2010 at 6.00 p.m.

Present:

Councillor Kelly in the Chair

Councillors Fletcher, Miller, Snowdon, Timmins, Trueman, Wake, Walker and Whalen.

Mike Poulter	-	City Services
John Rostron	-	City Services
David Pollington	-	Blackfell Neighbourhood Watch
John Chapman	-	Gentoo
Sharon Hodgson	-	Gateshead East and Washington West MP
Nicol Trueman	-	Chief Executives
Marion Marshall	-	Office of the Chief Executive
Paul Wood	-	Office of the Chief Executive

Members of the Washington Community.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Chamberlin, Cuthbert, I. Richardson, Scaplehorn and J. Stephenson.

Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 4th March, 2010

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 4th March, 2010 (copy circulated) be confirmed and signed as a correct record subject to the following amendments:-

- i) Clarification that Councillor Wake did not attend the meeting;
- ii) In relation to the Prosperous Area Summary Item, Councillor Trueman's comments on the issue of empty trading estates be amended to: Councillor Trueman commented that the trading estates, such as Swan Trading Estate, had been taken over with take away establishments and should be used for business purposes or otherwise designated as a retail park.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Washington Annual Report 2009/10

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) reflecting on the work delivered during 2009-10, via the Local Area Plans. The Annual Report focused on the following areas:-

- The area, people and place.
- Safe theme and priorities.
- Learning theme and priorities.
- Attractive and Inclusive theme and priorities.
- Healthy theme and priorities.
- Prosperous theme and priorities.
- Area Committee meetings.
- Funding and financial reports.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Nicol Trueman, Area Officer, presented the report and advised that the report set out the objectives and how the committee had performed over the year.

With regards to the Safe theme, Ms Trueman advised that the figures within the report were from the period 2008/2009 as the figures from 2009/2010 were not yet available, these figures would be reported to a future meeting of the Committee.

In relation to the Safe Area Theme and the crime rate figures, Councillor Miller commented that he appreciated the statistics in the report were from the 2008/09 year but he was deeply concerned that the Washington North Ward figures were still the worst despite the good work being done and felt that if there was no improvement the Committee would need to take a closer look at the issue.

Councillor Trueman agreed and also commented that although the figures looked bleak, that particular Ward included the Concord shopping area which carried with it an increase number of possible crimes that could be committed such as shoplifting and so on, as against more residential areas and which may account for the higher figures.

In relation to the Learning Area Theme, Councillor Miller commented that he was most unhappy with the figures for 11 year olds at Key Stage 2 in the Washington North Ward, as the statistics were consistently down yet the Central Ward was seeing results. Councillor Miller queried the role of the primary schools on the issue and requested that an officer of Children's Services attend a future meeting of the Committee to explain the situation.

Councillor Miller also queried the work of the Prosperous Learning Group as he questioned its effectiveness and also commented that the caption heading “Other achievements delivered” ought rather to be “Other actions ”

Councillor Timmins commented that extra resources had been put into the Washington North Ward for some time as a designated area of deprivation and it was best to use the statistics to analyze where the problems lay? Councillor Timmins also queried the impact of Sure Start as it appeared older age groups were achieving better outcomes and agreed that the Director from Children's Services should attend a future meeting to look at the issues.

The Chairman commented that he felt the Committee had a right to ask why the area was missing its targets and not getting the services for the funding it was providing and that the unacceptable Key Stage 2 figures needed to be explained.

Councillor Snowdon referred to Tables 2.1 and 2.2 in relation to the Key Stage 2 statistics and noted that they differed in their way of reporting which may also account for the poor figures.

In relation to the Healthy Area Theme, Councillor Trueman commented that Woodridge Gardens was a fine example of an extra care home, and they were certainly looking to create more excellent facilities.

Councillor Trueman also added that with help from Gentoo and the investment of over £32 million of funding, housing was really moving at a pace.

Councillor Wake queried the teenage conception rates in the Washington North Ward, in particular as they were extremely high.

Ms. Trueman advised that the figures were based on population per head rather than percentages.

Councillor Miller commented that the reports needed to have one general overall style of providing Members with statistics to avoid confusion.

The Chairman agreed and requested this be implemented for future reports.

In relation to the Attractive and Inclusive Area Theme, Councillor Trueman advised that care was needed when recording figures for empty properties as there were instances where a property was vacant because the tenant had been hospitalised for example.

The Chairman commented that the flats in the Sulgrave area may also have caused the poor figures on empty properties and that the Council was aware of the issue.

Councillor Miller commented that a great deal of the time, Anti Social behaviour was linked to the number of empty properties in the area, an issue which the Council needed to address and also queried how the Council was going to measure the success of dealing with private landlords.

Councillor Trueman advised on the great deal of work that had been achieved through the Private Landlords Forum on the Landlord Accreditation Scheme and had managed to drive out a large number of poor landlords.

Councillor Trueman also advised that the relationship with private landlords had gone from strength to strength and the Council had powers which enabled it to take over properties if required, but such properties needed to be highlighted with Enforcement Officers.

Councillor Wake raised concerns in relation to potholes on the roads and car parks at The Galleries Shopping Centre.

The Chairman advised that he had been trying to establish contact with Prudential on the conditions of the roads along with other issues but they had not yet responded. The Chairman advised that he would pass Councillor Wake's concerns on.

In relation to the Prosperous Area Theme, Councillor Miller commented that he was most unhappy with the level of progress that had been achieved. He expressed the need to look at the unemployment figures, particularly in the Washington North Ward and suggested an employment survey be carried out to see how many people employed in the area actually lived in Washington.

Councillor Miller felt that no good had come from the Enterprise Talent Scouts or the Neighbourhood Working Fund as no money had been spent. There were issues over the industrial estates and also a lack of available land for a cemetery in Washington.

Councillor Miller also felt a wider approach was needed on the NEET figures rather than just targeting hotspots and all of these issues needed to be looked at thoroughly.

The Chairman agreed that an employment survey was needed as it seemed beyond comprehension that the unemployment figures were so high when Nissan was based in the area.

The Chairman also commented that there were a number of empty buildings which could be used for training purposes and a more long term strategy was needed in creating jobs rather than token gestures to reduce the employment figures.

Councillor Wake commented that the introduction of the Metro/Leamside Line to Washington was vital and could help immensely in creating jobs, attracting people to the area.

Councillor Walker commented on the disappointing figures for the area and that they deserved an appropriate officer to attend to explain why they were underperforming.

The Chairman agreed and commented that if the Area Committee was tasked with setting targets then it needed to have the ability to challenge, when those targets aren't met.

Councillor Wake enquired as to the legalities of advertising jobs for firms such as Nissan in Washington and Sunderland before they are advertised elsewhere.

Marion Marshall, Solicitor, advised that the legalities of Councillor Wake's suggestions could be investigated further.

The Chairman requested a meeting with the Head of City Business and Investment Team to discuss such topics and also advised of scheduled visits to the industrial estates in Washington, of which he would report back on at a later date.

In relation to the Annual Report's reference to meetings, Councillor Miller raised concerns that £50,000 of SIP money had been allocated by Members for projects which had not progressed due to officers and requested an explanation as to why this had occurred.

The Chairman advised that he had asked for the issue to be addressed as he was aware Members were not happy with the situation.

Councillor Miller commented that he felt Officers were determining that their strategies were more important than Members' issues and this could not continue.

The Chairman proposed that the Deputy Chief Executive be invited to a future meeting to discuss the issues raised.

The Chairman also informed the Committee that he had been advised all future Community Chest funds would not be carried over into the next financial year, therefore he urged all Members to allocate SIP money no later than August/September. The Chairman requested that this information be emailed to all Members not present at the meeting.

2. RESOLVED that the Committee:-

- (i) invite an appropriate officer from Children's Services to attend a future meeting of the Committee;
- (ii) investigations into an employment survey be carried out;
- (iii) invite the Head of Business and Investment Team to a future meeting to discuss the employment issues raised;
- (iv) invite the Deputy Chief Executive to a future meeting to discuss Members' concerns;
- (v) that the Annual Report and supporting information be used to analyse and reflect on the work that has taken place throughout the past year and help to inform the June meeting as the Committee moves towards a new work plan.

Washington: Towards a new Work Plan 2010-11

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) for the Committee to consider beginning the process of identifying work streams for 2010/11. Those workstreams would then be finalised by Committee into a new work plan for the year.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Ms. Trueman explained that the May meeting of the Committee would run as a workshop to decide on the work plan for the year and allow more focussed priorities to be set with very clear outcomes and objectives identified.

The Chairman advised that the document was a work in progress and that a bigger take up of other colleagues' attendance was needed and also for the Task and Finish Groups to identify needs so that the Committee could justify spending the funds.

Councillor Miller requested that the issue of Washington's lack of provision for cemeteries be addressed under the Attractive and Inclusive theme and that more details be provided on lead agents that are allocated to projects.

Councillor Miller raised concerns over the amount of work put upon the Task and Finish Groups when they were limited to Councillors' availability and risked Councillor burn out as they were being asked to do more and more.

Councillor Miller also commented that he appreciated the length of reports needed to be shortened but cautioned against only having 'tick box' style reports.

The Chairman agreed that consideration needed to be given on the Task and Finish Groups but that Members did need to have an involvement in the issues. In relation to the length of reports, they would be shortened but Members would still receive updates through e-bulletins.

The Chairman also commented that the Washington Area Committee had set high standards and needed to continue to do so.

Councillor Walker commented that the number of bullet points under each theme needed to be reduced as there must not be another year with so many priorities that the Committee just becomes a talking shop.

Councillor Walker also advised of the work being undertaken by the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee on Health and Equalities, which covered many of the themes and priorities proposed.

3. RESOLVED that the Committee agree to:-

- examine the Local Area Plan priorities and focus the efforts of the Committee on areas where they can make a real difference;

- the principle of a limited number of priorities (suggest up to six), to include Responsive Local Services, to form the 2010/2011 Work Plan, which would be agreed at the June Work Plan meeting; and
- examine the governance process to ensure they can deliver the Committee's programme and priorities.

Before closing the meeting, the Chairman wished to thank Councillor Whalen and Councillor Stephenson for their service to the Council and wished them well in their retirement.

(Signed) J. KELLY,
Chairman.