

At a meeting of the WASHINGTON AREA COMMITTEE held at the MILLENNIUM CENTRE, CONCORD on WEDNESDAY, 15TH APRIL, 2009 at 5.30 P.M.

Present:

Councillor Walker in the Chair

Councillors Chamberlin, Kelly, Miller, Scaplehorn, Snowdon, Stephenson, Timmins, Trueman, Wake and Whalen.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Fletcher.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Area Committee Governance and Business Processes

Dave Leonard, Area Co-ordination and Health Lead, delivered a presentation relating to the new Area Governance proposals.

Mr. Leonard advised that it was proposed a non voting member from the Police, Gentoo, College, NHS and Fire Authority sit on the Committee with three Members from the community/voluntary sector also.

Councillor Trueman commented that Gentoo were not the only partners that the Committee work with and that consideration should be given to other equally deserving partners.

Mr. Leonard advised that the core Members reflect the Local Strategic Partnership Framework, but acknowledged that the Area Committee would want other Members around the table to support its work.

Councillor Miller questioned the proposal to include the College in the membership as their expertise did not lie in primary and secondary school issues which would therefore perhaps be under-represented .

Councillor Miller also suggested that to reflect the status of the City, a seat should be available to the Business Investment Team or such like, to

emphasise the importance of the Business Plan and also with many viable partners available from the voluntary sector, it was necessary to carefully consider the selection criteria for additional Members

Mr. Leonard suggested that a representative from Children's Services might better span the primary or secondary school issues. Councillor Miller agreed.

Councillor Timmins raised concerns over the selection of partners, as some partners would not bring any resources, whereas the College bring funding, so it is not an easy decision to make and needs to be looked at from every angle.

The Chairman advised that the Committee would be able to call upon the Business Investment Team at anytime they required so would not need them as a partner but noted the College does bring in funding. The Chairman agreed that both Councillors Miller and Timmins had valid points and that serious consideration needed to be given to the issue.

Councillor Kelly expressed concerns over the rigidity of the appointment of partners and felt that there should be the facility to invite additional partners as and when required.

The Chairman advised that there would be the facility to invite relevant partners as required for a particular topic.

A member of the public enquired if the public would be allowed to attend the full meeting or just the public session at the beginning of the meeting.

The Chairman advised that members of the public would be able to attend the full meeting with the proposed public session providing a chance for them to bring concerns to Members' attention.

Councillor Wake felt that having timing restrictions on the meeting would be of concern as some issues may take longer than others.

The Chairman advised that the timing structure would not be rigid and that it would be up to the Chairman and Members' discretion to try and get through the Committee business as necessary.

In relation to the partners from the voluntary sector, Councillor Stephenson enquired where Age Concern would fit in the proposals.

Nicol Trueman, Area Regeneration Officer advised that a list of possible partners would be provided to Members for their consideration and a decision could be made within the guidance so there is fairness and equality.

The Chairman commented that the identification of partners needed resolving quickly as they would be involved in the workshop due to be held in May.

Councillor Kelly suggested that when the voluntary sector organisations are looked at, consideration is given to the partners that could bring in funding streams to those particular organisations also.

Councillor Chamberlin commented that with the Youth Strategy, for example, the service providers are important, as well as the funding.

Councillor Timmins suggested that a Washington Forum be included that could represent a whole range of sectors.

Councillor Kelly commented that the Committee has Washington Pride, who have excellent contacts with representatives of many voluntary groups and enquired if they could compliment the Committee.

Councillor Trueman agreed with the proposal of a forum being invited onto the Committee as there is not just one organisation that provides a particular service.

Mr. Leonard briefed the Committee on the proposal to introduce a workplan for the Area Committee, similar to what is in place with the Scrutiny Committees.

Mr. Leonard advised that the Work Programme would set out the structure for the meetings planned and show what stage the Committee was at with the priorities identified.

Members agreed with the proposal to introduce a Work Programme to the Area Committees.

In relation to the SIB Governance, Councillor Kelly enquired if there would be an appeal process for the applications that had been rejected before they came to Committee.

Ms. Trueman advised that the criteria for the applications would be determined at the Area Committee, which would discuss a particular issue and establish a number of key points. Applications from groups would then be sought to address these key points with the support of the Committee.

Councillor Kelly commented that he did not want to see the smaller groups excluded.

Councillor Miller commented that even though the Committee would set the criteria, he did not want to see SIB applications rejected from smaller groups because they had not hit that criteria perhaps through lack of personnel skilled in completion of such applications and like Councillor Kelly, felt it inappropriate if the smaller groups were isolated.

Councillor Wake enquired if the applications would be filtered and only include the department's recommendations.

Ms. Trueman advised that any applications submitted would not be rejected and would come before the Committee for their consideration.

Councillor Timmins commented that the Committee should tread carefully when setting the criteria, as it is public money and requires transparency.

Councillor Miller enquired on the improved monitoring procedures and post award proposals.

Mr. Leonard advised that these would monitor how the groups have performed with the grant provided, if it has been spent appropriately or if they need additional support.

In response to Councillor Miller's query, Mr. Leonard advised that the Support Team would monitor the services delivered post award of the grant.

Neil Revely, Director of Health, Housing and Adult Services briefed the Committee on his role as Area Lead Executive and advised that under the revised restructure there would be Executive Management engagement, steering and support to help the Committee deliver on its aspirations.

Mr. Revely also advised that he would be able to provide a dual role, representing the Chief Executive at the Committee meetings and also representing the Area Committee at EMT.

Councillor Miller enquired if the self assessment criteria and improvement measures were tied in with Phil Spooner's project.

Mr. Leonard advised that they would work very closely together and that their role was to make sure that the relevant officer takes responsibility for an issue for a quick resolution to improve satisfaction/perception levels.

Councillor Miller welcomed the proposal and commented that he and Councillor Chamberlin have had a number of issues where it has been difficult to find the correct officer to speak to.

Mr. Leonard informed the Committee that it was not just about hitting targets, but looking at the difference being made to the locality. If a target is being hit repeatedly yet nothing has changed then this is an issue that needs addressing.

The new proposals are strongly linked into the scrutiny process so, if performance is not good in particular areas, it can be addressed, with different partners brought in to look at the issue.

It is not just about receiving statistics, but looking at the outcomes and if something cannot be delivered, it could be elevated to EMT, LSP or partner boards.

Mr. Leonard also advised of the need to inform residents of the project as communication was key to the outcomes.

Councillor Miller commented that he believed communication was one of the most important parts of the project, with feedback from the residents of Washington to see if progress is being made in the right manner and that he would like to see the strategy come back to Committee when completed.

A member of the public that was in attendance commented that it was vital the public be informed as part of the procedure and raised concerns over the condition of Princess Anne Park.

The Chairman advised that the proposed public sessions would be an ideal opportunity for such issues to be raised.

Councillor Timmins felt that there were major problems with the water quality/contamination at Princess Anne Park and the issue should be investigated.

The Chairman commented on the option for someone to put a bid in to investigate the matter at Area Committee.

1. RESOLVED that the presentation be received and noted and the comments made be considered when developing the final recommendations.

Local Area Plans – Priorities

Nicol Trueman, Area Regeneration Officer, provided a presentation on the Local Area Plans – Priorities and advised that it was for Members to decide if the priorities are direct or indirect.

Direct priorities made up 3 per cent of all the priorities, where immediate action could be taken using SIB or SIP funding. Indirect priorities made up the remaining 97 per cent and were ongoing priorities which were currently being delivered.

The Chairman enquired if Members were happy with the priorities.

Councillor Miller commented that he was happy with the priorities but did not agree with the ranking of them. Figures delivered by the Police in relation to crime and anti social behaviour are reducing. Councillor Miller posed the question whether the Committee should allow residents' fears to drive the agenda or to make an informed decision on how to proceed.

Councillor Miller also commented that he believed the first direct responsibility should be to develop and improve the unused business units in Washington to ensure it is a prosperous business area and tackle unemployment.

Councillor Wake agreed that it seemed unnecessary that factories and warehouses are built when there are empty business units already.

The Chairman advised that the ranking of the priorities could be discussed with the partners at the workshop.

Ms. Trueman advised that when the analysis was completed, the unused factories/ business units may be looked at by the Area Committee, but as it is an ongoing study at the moment, it is classed as an indirect priority and would not require Area Committee's budget to be spent on the issue.

Councillor Kelly agreed that the Area Committee's budget should not be spent on issues already being investigated by other programmes and also that addressing anti social behaviour or the attractiveness of the area are issues, but there are more important issues to consider.

A member of the public in attendance commented that the crime figures have reduced as many people are not reporting instances of anti social behaviour and agreed that it was an important issue to tackle.

Councillor Trueman agreed with the priorities but commented that there appeared to be a barrier for the sharing of information with the Police.

Councillor Trueman also commented that after listening to members of the public, the neighbourhoods had lost the rapport with the Police and will not report issues to them anymore.

Councillor Wake advised that many people had told him they would no longer report issues to the Police for fear of being targeted.

Ms. Trueman commented that she would not like the community to think that the Committee consider the indirect priorities any less important than the direct priorities; all are very important.

The difference in the priorities being that a direct priority may be something that the Area Committee commission and pay for out of their budget, whilst the indirect priorities could be an issue already being studied from another programme that the Area Committee might want to look at and have the ability to impact on.

Councillor Scaplehorn commented that he appreciated that the unused business units were an issue but equally the attractiveness and appearance of the area needed improvement.

Councillor Kelly commented that there were many adverts on the roads of Washington for units to rent.

Councillor Wake also commented that the signage for the estates such as Wear Estate and Pattinson Estate are in poor condition and look unsightly.

Councillor Trueman commented that on the Swan Industrial Estate, every unit is a takeaway establishment and that it is worse than a high street.

The Chairman commented that the amount of money being put aside for new start up units may be something Members want to look at.

Councillor Snowdon advised that personally, she would like to see Business Support in Washington.

The Chairman advised that Members may need to see further details on how the money is to be spent.

Councillor Kelly stated that he would have liked the issue of Front Street, Concord, and its many takeaways to have been on the list of priorities.

Councillor Wake informed the Committee that littering was an issue in his Ward and in particular the styrofoam cartons that takeaway shops provide. Councillor Wake enquired if there was any legislation that could be used to stop the shops from selling such cartons.

Ms. Trueman advised that there was no legislation but maybe there could be stipulations on applications for shops to be more environmentally friendly.

The Chairman enquired if Members agreed that the priorities proposed be taken to the next stage.

2. RESOLVED that the presentation and priorities be received and noted and the comments made be considered when developing the final recommendations.

The Chairman thanked Members and officers for their attendance and closed the meeting.

(Signed) P. WALKER,
Chairman.