



Vibrant, Safe and Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel Minutes - 5 February 2015

Attendance

Members of the Vibrant, Safe and Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Stephen Simkins (Chair)
Cllr Mary Bateman
Cllr Greg Brackenridge
Cllr Barry Findlay
Cllr Bhupinder Gakhal
Cllr Keith Inston
Cllr Caroline Siarkiewicz
Cllr Tersaim Singh
Cllr Richard Whitehouse

Employees

Deborah Breedon	Scrutiny Officer
Karen Samuels	Head of Community Safety
Chris Huddart	Head of Commerce Services
Robert Johnson	Information/Resources Manager

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

- 1 Apologies**
Apologies were submitted on behalf of Cllr Andrew Wynne and Cllr Ian Brookfield.
- 2 Declarations of Interest**
Cllr Stephen Simkins declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 7 on the agenda relating to WV Active Business Transformation, as a leisure card member.
- 3 Minutes of the previous meeting (4 December 2014)**
Resolved:
That the minutes of the meeting 4 December 2014 be approved as a correct record subject to an amendment to minutes 8 relating to Contacting the Police – Front Office Closures.

That the minute to amended to read ‘ That Cllr Greg Brackenbridge indicated that he had received and returned the consultation letter; he indicated that the reduction in front office opening hours or closures is regrettable but recognised that police presence on the streets is a preferable use of resources.

4 **Matters arising**

There were no matters arising.

5 **Police and Crime Commissioner**

Judy Foster, Assistant Police and Crime Commissioner (APCC) for the West Midlands and Andrea Gabbitas, from the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) West Midlands were in attendance at the meeting and provided a response to the following questions that had been circulated in advance of the meeting:

1. What are the PCC's plans for 2015-16 and how reflective are these of local need?
2. How will the Victims Commission work to ensure local victims of crime are adequately supported?
3. What steps is the PCC taking to protect and improve Policing services across the West Midlands when such significant financial savings need to be made. (An estimated further £100M of cuts to the Policing budget is expected).
4. How will the PCC's office ensure Wolverhampton is able to maximise future opportunities from the PCC?
5. What will be the impact of closure of police stations in relation to the community cohesion and reassurance agenda?

Judy Foster, APCC, thanked the Chair for sharing the lines of enquiry In advance of the meeting, she advised that it had been useful to have opportunity to prepare responses to pinpoint the issues and give more detail.

What are the PCC's plans for 2015-16 and how reflective are these of local need?

The West Midlands Police and Crime Plan 'Pride in Our Police' has recently been drafted and is currently under consultation. She advised that the scrutiny panel had received an update on the Wolverhampton Local Policing and Crime Plan 2014/15 at its last meeting, Chief Inspector Tracey Packham, Police liaison officer, provided an update on actions and progress made in relation to neighbourhood specific issues. She confirmed that each of the local 'Pride in Our Police' consultations are underway for 2015/16 plan.

The four local priorities are also PCC priorities:

1. Reducing re-offending
2. Gangs
3. Substance misuse
4. Violence against women and girls

The APCC indicated that the West Midlands receive a settlement from Government to deliver the West Midlands Police and Crime Plan. She highlighted the challenges and the changes being made to deliver more cost effectively.

A new major ICT programme 'Accenture' will deliver savings and improve services through technology. She advised it is also necessary to have an honest approach to policing, to support, empower and develop communities, especially with the force facing a reduction of 2,000 police officers before next year.

The APCC advised that the PCC has a couple of issues of particular interest, as follows:

- Transport minister / gets economic regeneration in our Cities and boroughs;
- Keen to develop Pride in the Police and encourage people to report hidden crime – to encourage where it is under reported.

The Chair voiced concerns that the proposed reductions would make neighbourhood policing unsustainable. He was assured that many of the reductions would be as a result of people leaving and that a budget for 450 officers had been set aside to replace some that leave. The APCC advised that the Police were currently facing a recruitment freeze.

The police liaison officer advised that restructure and reconfiguration of services were underway, initiatives such as:

- Custody suite centralised to improve quality and reduce costs. Operate fewer custody units with improved service
- Zero based budgeting
- Disestablish back office posts
- Accenture – global company to harness and modify policing

She advised that the changes are challenging and that reductions by geographical hubs are providing difficult due to Local Authority Boundaries, one 'golden nugget' in the locality is neighbourhood policing and the need to manage offenders, ASB and prevention within local communities. The APCC advised that the force had managed reductions thoughtfully about where staff need to be. The impact upon local policing will be what accentuate can do to reduce costs and increase efficiencies with less bodies on the ground. The West Midlands is outstanding for managing austerity measures.

In response to a question about victims support the APCC advised that the victims commission launched recently take account of the emotional and practical services for victims of crime and has started to map out victim support based on priorities highlighted in the plan

- New victims support service should be operational and providing targeted support by April 2015
- Commissioning of support services to work through local crime board and will build on what is already available

The panel members voiced support for the PCC and asked what more the Local Authority could do to challenge the cuts to policing. The APCC advised that the current consultation is a means to make comments and observations either as individuals or as a Local Authority.

In response to a question relating to protecting and improving Policing services across the West Midlands when such significant financial savings need to be made the APCC advised that:

- there will be a reduction in police presence on the ground of 450 over two years, 250 in 2015 and 200 in 2016

- There will be £100M cuts over the next few years, £23M (5%) reduction this year across the Country
- The Government has top sliced funds to create an innovator fund however the redistribution of funds via a crude formula in reality means that the West Midlands does not benefit and a fairer funding campaign is underway
- The West Midlands relies on Council tax to make up some of the funding gap, the 1.99% increase is the most the PCC can ask for without undergoing public referendum
- The Accentuate ICT project will maximise efficiencies

In response to a question about how the PCC's office will ensure Wolverhampton is able to maximise future opportunities from the PCC the APPC advised that the West Midlands have been fortunate in that both Bob Jones and David Jamieson had been local Councillors and heavily involved in local communities and working closely with the Councils and officers. She advised that the heads of Community Safety across the West Midlands get together regularly and there is a network of Boards, Committees and the PACTs where local people, partners and councils get together to discuss the issues that impact on crime reduction, policing and crime.

The panel discussed what more the Health and Well Being Board could do to broker discussions between Police and Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) about funding some of the initiatives which cut across the fear and impact of crime and the health and wellbeing agenda. The APPC advised that the Safer Wolverhampton Partnership (SWP) has shared partnership goals and is committed to achieving the goals together to make the best possible use of resources.

Karen Samuels confirmed that the Cabinet Member Cllr Elias Mattu was a member of the SWP and that the SWP carried out a robust planning process to agree the local policing plan every year. She indicated that the plan is reflective of local need. The APPC advised that David Jamieson wants to see fully costed plans by the end of February to release the funding for next year and that there is more collaborative working planned going forward. She confirmed that the accounts are publically available and agreed to forward details of the latest accounts to councillors.

In relation to the final question the APPC advised that the decision to close some front office public counters had been as a result of wide public consultation. She advised that public rarely visited the front counters, 7000 people had been consulted, by BMG consulting company, across 41 front counters and that the running costs had been monitored. The outcomes were conclusive; the on-line savings far outweighed the demand for front counters to remain open, the counter service was not in the top three of methods of contacting the police. Many people preferred telephone and other modern ways of getting in contact with the police.

The panel were advised that the actual closure dates had not been agreed, Wednesfield was likely to be at the end of February and Bilston at the end of March, these are to be considered at PACT meetings.

In response to councillors questions the police liaison officer advised that all partner agencies are working smarter together about putting officer on the beat in the areas of greatest need and ensuring where there is a demand there is front counter support in hours of most demand. She advised that there are still police available, but the resource is being better deployed.

The Panel acknowledged that the police have to work differently and make best use of resources, looking for alternatives and using technology to meet the public needs. The Chair thanked all concerned for a good debate about policing and future plans and invited the APPC to a future meeting to share the outcomes of the public consultation about the 'Pride in our Police' West Midlands Police and Crime Plan public consultation.

Resolved:

That the Police and Crime Commissioner be invited to a future meeting of the panel to share the outcomes of public consultation and the future plans for the West Midlands Police and Crime Plan.

6 **Blakenhall Community and Healthy Living Centre**

Chris Huddart and Robert Johnson attended the meeting to provide a progress report regarding the reduction of subsidy from Blakenhall Community and Healthy Living Centre.

The panel were advised that a savings proposal had been identified as set out in the report. The centre will reduce current opening hours by 22% to 58 hours a week. The revised opening hours will be structured around peak times; a full consultation will take place amongst centre users via a customer survey and the equal opportunities monitoring form associated with this will be used to make a revised judgement on the impact this proposal will have on the nine protected equalities characteristics. Panel were advised that as a result of the reduction in opening hours there will also be a reduction in the staffing establishment with a potential loss of ten part-time jobs, however three new part-time posts will be established and one post will have hours reduced from 37 to 25 per week.

In response to questions the panel were advised that there will be an increase in the number of swipe cards to access the facility and the alternative use of the hall and large kitchens to increase income. Councillors considered the lack of parking for the facility and the opportunity to liaise with St Luke's School about use of car parks.

Resolved:

That the scrutiny panel endorse the progress which has been made regarding the reduction in subsidy from the Blakenhall Community Helath and Living Centre

7 **WV Active Business Transformation**

Chris Huddart, Head of Service, Leisure and Communities and Cllr Elias Mattu, Leisure and Communities, were in attendance to provide a progress report relating to the transformation of business and future opportunities to increase the participation rates across the city through the utilisation of mainstream facilities.

The panel were advised that Bert Williams Leisure Centre, Aldersley Leisure Village and Central Baths have developed models that ensure savings can be met and that they remain open for business. The new business approach, outlined in the report and on line booking facilities have increased demand, efficiency and use of facilities. The Cabinet member outlined a number of the achievements to date and concluded his presentation with a comment that this leisure offer is the best offer in the country for flexibility, but that there is still more to do.

The Chair welcomed the work that has been achieved and he concurred that the leisure card is very good.

There followed a period of discussion where some comments were highlighted to the Cabinet Member, as follows:

- Cllr Richard Whitehouse indicated that there was a feeling that the over 60's members of the Bert Williams Leisure Centre are subsidising others who use all facilities and that this was also the case at Cosely.
- Bantock Park 'Pitch and Putt' should be promoted to attract more visitors and snack bars profile should be raised as a place to visit.
- Welcome the competitive pricing of monthly leisure card
- Good business sense to reduce 40 different types of payment to six to get people through the door

The Cabinet Member confirmed that there is work on-going to look at maximising all outlets and income raising potential to generate more income from leisure in the city. The Panel was advised that level two coaches and some instructors have recently been appointed to build the business and class availability.

Cllr Greg Brackenbridge asked for clarification about the induction process for gym membership and indicated that the waiting list to be inducted was a barrier, when often people have been or are members of other gyms and know about the equipment. The booking system was also felt to be a barrier until it is working properly.

The Panel welcomes the funding that had been secured through bids to Sports England, to refurbish Central Baths, and for the £18.6M funding for Bert Williams Centre.

The Chair indicated the importance of linking public health into the leisure offer, the obesity challenge for the city warrants more shared commissioning and opportunity in the city. He further suggested more volunteering and work experience that cuts across the health and fitness agenda. The Cabinet Member advised that training is being looked at and a nutritionist has been recruited to work with and train instructors, life guards and assistants to free up level three instructors.

The Chair welcomed the longer term strategy for sport and leisure in the city and congratulated officers, the Cabinet Member and staff at the leisure centres for the encouraging progress being made. He added that the customer experience has improved enormously.

Resolved:

That the update report is received and a further progress report is requested in six months to focus on the sports centre and longer term plan.