

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL
HANDSWORTH WOOD WARD MEETING
THURSDAY 19 JANUARY 2017
7PM – 9PM
ST JOHN WALL SECONDARY SCHOOL
OXHILL ROAD
HANDSWORTH
B21 8HH

MEETING NOTES

Present: Councillors Gurdial Singh Atwal, Paulette Hamilton and Narinder Kaur Kooner

Officers: Ken Brown – Neighbourhood Development & Support Unit
Beverly Edmead - Community Governance Team
Ken Newport – Watch Commander, WMFS
Pat Whyte – Neighbourhood Development & Support Unit

There were approx. 26 residents present.

Cllr Gurdial Singh Atwal in the Chair

1. NOTICE OF RECORDING

The Chair advised that members of the press/public may record and take photographs except where there were confidential or exempt items.

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. APOLOGIES

Cllr Kooner for lateness.

3. BUDGET CONSULTATION 2017 - 2018

Following a request from the Chairman, Cllr Hamilton advised of the City Council's Public Consultation on its 2017/18 budget proposals, and outlined the key priorities for resources, these being Children; Housing; Jobs and Skills; Health.

Cllr Hamilton further advised of the financial challenges facing the Council and the further savings that had to be made following the continued reduction in Government funding.

A number of changes would have to be made to services/ service delivery as a result of the reduction in budget, and residents' views and comments were essential in helping to retain and/or shape future council services. One of the service areas that would face a severe reduction in budget would be the Supporting People Programme.

The budget proposal would be discussed at City Council on 28 February 2017, and the decision made would be final.

Cllr Hamilton stressed the importance of residents submitting their comments and views regarding the budget proposal as soon as possible. Whilst the consultation period formally ended 18 January 2017, views and comments would still be accepted if they were submitted within the next two days.

Residents expressed a number of concerns regarding the proposals including:-

- Changes to the Park Ranger/Warden Service which could see only 2 remaining to cover the city. This would have a detrimental impact on parks and green open spaces across the city. The loss of this service to Handsworth Park and the years of hard work that had gone into improving the visual appearance and reducing negative perceptions would be devastating. Residents expressed fears and concerns that parks and open spaces could become 'No Go Areas'.
- There was a need for better management of local facilities with the involvement of the local community. The lack of local officer support had left residents, community/voluntary groups and organisations feeling isolated and frustrated with service delivery at a local level.
- Greater efforts should be made to retain local services and to engage with residents, as well as improvements to partnership working.
- Significant funding from various government funding streams had been invested in the ward over the years, with little or no consideration to future longevity and sustainability. Again, greater efforts should have been made by the City Council to enable better use of these funding streams in order to protect community assets and services from the difficult decisions now having to be made in the ward.
- The City Council should adopt a more robust approach to standing up to central government regarding the cuts to funding.

Several residents felt that active vocal campaigns ,petitions and mobilisation of citizens were needed to highlight the cuts to funding and the future difficulties faced by everyone living in the city should these cuts go ahead.

Residents also felt that the City Council needed to be more proactive and coordinated in its partnership working arrangements with businesses and other public sector organisations, and that a number of current practices and contracts within the organisation needed to be reviewed and better managed.

Cllr Kooner advised of the internal reviews and scrutiny of existing contractual arrangements, which included Service Birmingham, and responding to residents' queries regarding the West Midlands Mayoral elections, advised that the City Council was one of several local authorities that formed the West Midlands Combined Authority, and this had no bearing on the budget cuts faced.

Residents were further advised that the City Council faced Central Government intervention if delivering a balanced budget and funding cuts were not addressed.

Residents expressed further concern regarding the impact the budget reductions could have on the increasing numbers of Homes of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) in the ward, the high turnover of private tenants/transient occupants, the blight and detrimental effect it had on the community, and officer involvement in tackling the issue. Farnham, Greenhill, Windermere and Stockwell Roads were highlighted as particular areas of concern, and that a more robust and coordinated approach in addressing the issue was essential. Greater controls and restrictions on the number of private landlords should be considered as well as making landlords more accountable for removing the mess left by their tenant(s).

Cllr Hamilton advised the Ward had been identified as one of the pilot projects approved by the Cabinet Member. As part of the pilot scheme, officers were required to engage/work with a number of partners to adopt a 'Total Place' approach to address issues of concerns within the ward.

Fleet and Waste Services were one of the key partners, given the significant amount of dumping/fly-tipping of household furniture as a result of the high turnover of private tenants in landlord properties. Private landlords would also be included in the pilot scheme.

Cllr Atwal as lead member for the ward would continue to keep residents informed.

Members advised that fly-tipping was huge problem citywide, and the costs associated with its constant removal were detrimental to the budget. Robust evidence was needed in order to successfully prosecute offenders; residents must continue to report incidents of fly-tipping/dumping and details/description of the offender if it was safe to do so.

Action: All to Note

The Chairman thanked Cllr Hamilton for the update.

4. LOCAL INNOVATION FUND

Cllr Kooner briefly outlined her role as one of the four recently appointed Assistant Leaders, which included:-

- Shaping and supporting local partnership working and engagement with communities.
- Encouraging residents/local communities to become more proactive, and working alongside their local Councillors to make a difference to their neighbourhoods.

In addition, a Local Innovation Fund of £48,000 had been made available to each ward to fund/support new innovative ideas to suit the needs of the community. The funding was not a grant aided scheme or a replacement for Community Chest funding previously allocated to each ward.

Cllr Kooner outlined the LIF criteria, and copies of the LIF proposal form were circulated to residents.

Following discussion, Members suggested that a wider partnership meeting with key stakeholders, community & voluntary groups and local residents should be arranged to explore ideas and suggestions for the use of the Local Innovation Fund (LIF). It would also be useful for everyone involved to share knowledge/good practices as well as learn more about bid-writing, capacity building etc. Partnership working was essential if the Fund was to be successfully used and be sustainable, unlike past funding programmes.

Action: LIF Partnership meeting to be arranged – date in February to be agreed. Chairman/Community Governance Team to make the arrangements and to advise residents accordingly.

CLLR UPDATES

Cllr Kooner advised of the following:-

- Changes to the City Council's Housing Allocation Scheme. All tenants would need to register online by 19 April 2017. Details of the changes would be sent to all tenants from 3 February 2017.
- National Clean Up Days 3rd – 5th March. Residents' participation was actively encouraged to help identify hotspot areas as well as help with the clean-up.

Action: All to Note

5. RESIDENTS ISSUES AND CONCERNS

Petition

The following petition was submitted:-

"We the undersigned residents of Handsworth Wood Ward request that our elected Birmingham City Ward Councillors hold bi-monthly (every two months) Ward meetings open to the residents of Handsworth Wood Ward, so that they can hear the views of residents on issues affecting the environment within the ward, agree actions to resolve these and report back on progress made".

Residents were briefly advised of the changes to the governance arrangements for ward meetings; these included an annual budget of £200 per ward for venue hire and changes to the City Council Constitution regarding the role of ward meetings.

Action: Petition to be referred to the relevant Lead Officer and that the petitioners and Ward Meeting be advised of the outcome accordingly.

Other Issues

Concerns were expressed regarding proposed budget cuts to schools, which could equate to approx. £771 per pupil, leading staffing cuts. Several residents felt it would be useful to launch a campaign in protest against the cuts and invite Union members to a future meeting.

Rubbish dumping and littering remain a concern, with businesses and shopkeepers being amongst the worst offenders. Residents called for a more robust and proactive approach by Enforcement Officers. Rookery Road was identified as one of the worst areas, with several businesses also encroaching on public space whilst displaying/selling their stock.

The Chairman advised of ongoing discussions with the businesses concerns; visits had been made several occasions by officers, however despite this, the problems still continued. Further efforts would continue to try to resolve the matter.

Concerns regarding obstructive parking on pavements and grassed verges were raised. Pedestrians were unable to get past without difficulty, wheelchairs users and parents with buggies/pushchairs were forced to go into the road if they wanted to pass. Residents were advised that obstructive parking remained a policing issue, and fines/tickets could be issued by Officers if the parking was deemed to be obstructive.

Action: Cllr Kooner requested that residents gave her specific locations following the meeting.

The local policing team to be invited to attend the next meeting.

Problems with an overgrown tree at 290 Oxhill Road, which still not had been addressed by Amey.

Action: Cllr Kooner agreed to pursue the matter.

Wheelie Bins were still not being returned to their collection point despite repeated requests. Hinstock and Philip Victor Roads were a particular concern.

Action: Cllr Kooner agreed to raise the matter with Fleet and Waste Management

Handsworth Wood Neighbourhood Forum had set up their Facebook page – use of the page to promote events/share information was actively encouraged.

Action: All to Note

Sandwell Valley Trails Group – clarity was sought on the reopening of the public right of way at Devils Lane to Hill Top. The Chairman advised the path required clearing and cleaning before it could be safely used.

Action: All to Note

Police Tasking Meetings – Cllr Hamilton confirmed these would continue to be held Bi-monthly. Residents were actively encouraged to contact Cllr Hamilton with any issues or concerns they would like raised at the meetings.

Action: All to Note

Community Contacts - several residents expressed disappointment that a number of significant and useful contacts had been lost since several funding programmes ended. The various programmes including Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) and Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) 4, 5 & 6 had seen a very useful directory of groups and organisations collated over the years, sharing information and making a difference in the wider community. The contacts included the Umbrella of Neighbourhood Forums, Community & Voluntary Groups and Organisations, Sure-Start and Children's Centres.

West Midlands Fire Service – Ken Newport, Watch Commander briefly advised of the proactive action being taken by the service to promote home safety and advice to all residents in the ward. Watch Commander Newport also advised of the number of incidents responded to by the local team at Handsworth Community Fire Station over the last 12 months. These included:-

32 Road Traffic Accidents (RTA)

61 Secondary Fires

43 Reported Fires

32 Specialist calls – including forced entries where the resident had been locked out/unable to gain access to their home

Residents were further advised of the Smoke Alarm programme carried out by WMFS free of charge, and encouraged to contact the service for advice and information.

The Chairman thanked Watch Commander Newport for his information update.

Good News Story

Cllr Hamilton advised that the Planning Application for the building of two houses next to 130 Hamstead Hall Avenue had been refused.

Special Thank You and Goodbye

The Chairman advised that Ken Brown, Ward Support and Development Officer would no longer be the Support Officer for the Ward.

The Chairman thanked Ken for his continued hard work, support and services to the ward, and wished him well for the future.

Action: All to Note

6. ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION AT FUTURE MEETINGS

Local Innovation Fund (LIF)

Policing Issues

Fleet and Waste Management/Cleaner Streets

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To be confirmed.

The Chairman thanked residents for their attendance and active participation.

8. AUTHORITY TO CHAIRMAN AND OFFICERS

Noted and agreed that:-

“In an urgent situation between meetings, the Chair, jointly with the relevant Chief Officer has authority to act on behalf of the Committee”.

The meeting closed at 8.56pm