

ACOCKS GREEN WARD FORUM MEETING NOTES

Wednesday 13th September 2023

7pm – 8.30pm

Fox Hollies Forum

Greenwood Avenue

B27 7RA

Also Online via Zoom

COUNCILLORS: Roger Harmer and Penny Wagg

NOs OF ATTENDEES: 8 including 1 online

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Beverly Edmead – Community Governance Team

APOLOGIES

Debbie White – Neighbourhood Action Coordinator, Acocks Green
and Glebe Farm & Tile Cross Wards – illness

Acocks Green Local Police Team

Officers from the Private Rented Sector (PRS) Team

MATTERS DISCUSSED AT THE MEETING:

Cllr Roger Harmer in the Chair

1. Notice of Recording

Residents were advised that they were able to record and/or take photographs of the meeting.

2. Councillors News and Updates

- Issue of Section 114 Notice dated 5 September 2023

Cllr Harmer read out the contents of the formal statement regarding the announcement made on 5 September 2023 that a Section 114 Notice had been issued by the Council's Interim Director of Finance (S.151 Chief Finance Officer) under Section 114(3) of the Local

Government Act to confirm that the Council had insufficient resources to meet its financial liabilities relating to Equal Pay Claims and an in-year financial gap within its budget which was currently in the region of £87m.

The Council would tighten the spend controls already in place and put them in the hands of the S151 Officer to ensure there was a complete grip. The Notice meant that all new spending, with the exception of protecting vulnerable people and statutory services must stop immediately.

More information would be made available and shared in due course.

Cllr Harmer further advised that an Extraordinary City Council Meeting would be held on 26th September for the matter to be discussed and to agree a way forward.

A statement was read out by David Treadwell MBE on behalf of Acocks Green Neighbourhood Forum in response to the issue of the S114 Notice, expressing disappointment and concerns for all residents and the services that would ultimately be affected, as well as the humiliating position the City Council had allowed to be created.

Further concerns that funding grants to help support the ongoing work of much used and valued community /voluntary groups and organisations would no longer be provided along with local officer support and connection. Volunteers also significantly contributed to supporting/assisting the services provided by Waste and Parks through litter-picking/clean up groups and Friends Of Groups

Cllr Harmer advised it was inevitable there would be some disruption and delays to services where the authorisation of a new spend had to be signed off by the S151 Spend Control Board, and it was hoped these would be minimised as much as possible; however there were real concerns about the daily spiralling cost of the debts and until robust steps had been taken to address this and agree the Job Evaluation Scheme with the Trade Unions and its completion by April 2025, the liabilities would continue to increase.

He further advised that a S114 Notice had to be issued as the City Council had not been able to show a balanced budget for the last three years, which meant the accounts could not be signed off by the Auditors.

In the discussion that followed, several residents also expressed their sadness and disappointment regarding the current state of affairs, as well as a sense of anger that the situation had not been properly addressed from the beginning and allowed to drag on for a number of years; and that as a result of inaction, communities would continue to bear the brunt of the reduction in much needed services and

funding for the foreseeable future. The inevitable increase in Council Tax as a result was also a major concern, and residents hoped that an appropriate increase cap would be implemented.

3. Private Rented Sector Licensing Scheme Update

The item was deferred to the next meeting as officers from the Private Rented Sector Team had been unable to attend and submitted their apologies.

4. Other Local Updates

i) Councillors Updates

The following updates were given:-

- Regular 6-weekly meetings with the local police teams. Next meeting to take place on 19th Sept – residents should let Cllrs know of any issues/concerns they would like raised.
- Concerns had been raised with the PCC's (Police & Crime Commissioner) office following the submission of a petition regarding ASB on the canal towpath. A ward walkabout with the Assistant PCC Tom O'Neil is to take place following the police meeting on 19th Sept – residents encouraged to attend.
- StreetWatch activity to take place in Oct – residents advised of damage to Millennium Green following acts of anti-social behaviour which included throwing stones at passing cars and setting fire to signage. It was felt the alleged perpetrators were the same group involved with anti-social behaviour on the canal towpath and were pupils from the local secondary schools. Engaging with the schools and pupils and encouraging them to become involved in local projects/community activities could be a positive way forward.
- Petition requesting CCTV cameras had also been submitted.
- Regular meetings with the local District Engineers regarding ward highways issues and how the use of the highways minor improvement budget could be used to tackle some of the concerns identified by residents. Dagnall Road/Woodcock Lane area had been identified as an area for parking restrictions/bollards installation. Double yellow lines at junctions and enforcement cameras had also been requested.
- Schools – to date, there had been no rock concrete incidents identified in any school buildings in the city – a programme of inspections was ongoing.

ii) West Midlands Police – deferred as officers had been unable to attend

iii) Residents/Community/Voluntary Groups

- Oxford Rd/HMO Drugs Issues – matter ongoing with little/no input or action from police; however, there was a disproportionate response by the local team towards a local resident which was totally unwarranted or called for. Cllr Harmer agreed to follow this up outside of the meeting.
- An increase in shoplifting and aggressive street begging in the Village – there was little or no police presence to act as a deterrent and the loss of the Business Improvement District and the extra security that it bought had emboldened these types of behaviours. Cllr Harmer briefly advised of an in-depth discussion with Sgt Franklin regarding the increase in criminal activities and behaviours in the ward and the Village in particular, and the vision put forward by the new Chief Constable regarding the way forward for neighbourhood policing, including the need to recalibrate and reset to order to tackle the demands on all areas of the service.
- Exempt/Supported Accommodation continued to be a problem in the ward, with many owners still taking advantage of the loopholes in the current system even though new legislation had been passed but could take a few years to come into effect. A property in Caldwell Walk was a particular concern regarding the number of occupants allegedly living at the accommodation – Cllr Harmer agreed to investigate. In the meantime, residents should continue to report concerns so that they could be investigated by the relevant officers.
- Shakespeare Line Passenger Service via Spring Road – suggestions were made for a Friends Of/User Group the Line to be considered, which could be good way of helping to generate an income and/or environmental enhancements. Network Rail were known to be in favour of local groups/communities adopting their local station. Residents interested in finding out more should contact Nigel Lloyd.
- Number 11 Bus Service – a petition had been submitted to TfWM (Transport for West Midlands) regarding the decision by National Express relating to the service. I

Action: It was suggested representatives from both organisations were invited to a future meeting.

5. Date of Next Meeting

Wednesday 15th November 2023, Fox Hollies Forum or online via MS Teams – tbc

Meeting closed at 8.25pm