

**COMMUNITY AND LEISURE SERVICES POLICY & SCRUTINY PANEL
THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC CENTRE, STOURPORT-ON-SEVERN**

Thursday, 10th March 2005

PRESENT:

Councillors: B T Glass (Chairman), J Baker (Vice-Chairman), A J Buckley, Mrs P V Hayward, Mrs L Hyde, Mrs R L Lewis, Miss M A Mason, M J Shellie, R Wheway.

OBSERVERS: Councillor N Desmond, Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure Services.

CM.807 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

CM.808 APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTES

No substitutes were appointed.

CM.809 COMPOSITION AND ATTENDANCE OF COMMITTEE

AGREED:

The attendance of the Panel, as per the Attendance Record Sheet appended to the Agenda be noted.

CM.810 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Councillor R Wheway declared a personal interest in the Skateboarding Item (minute CM.813 refers), as he is a Children's Play Consultant.

CM.811 MINUTES

AGREED: The minutes of the meeting held on the 6th January 2005 be confirmed as a correct record of the meeting and signed by the Chairman.

CM.812 PRESENTATION ON POLICE COMMUNITY SUPPORT OFFICERS

The Panel received a presentation from Chief Inspector Dave Jones on Police Community Support Officers.

Chief Inspector Jones began his presentation by explaining that uniform

presence on the streets and in public places had long ceased to be the sole preserve of Police Officers so nowadays there was a mixture of security patrols, a variety of warden schemes and community safety/neighbourhood patrols.

The Police Reform Act 2002 created the possibility for police support staff, endowed with limited powers, to undertake a variety of uniformed patrolling tasks. These staff were designated Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs).

Chief Inspector Jones told the Panel that in September 2004, North Worcestershire Division recruited the first five PCSOs, two of them based at Wyre Forest. These were Lee Hanson and John Sinclair. The Police Authority planned to increase the number of PCSOs from 5 to 13 during 2005/06 and this would happen over the next couple of months. Four out of the thirteen PCSOs would be placed in Wyre Forest. In the course of his presentation, Chief Inspector Jones told the Panel the following:

- a) The primary purpose of PCSOs was to increase reassurance to the public by adding to the visible uniformed policing presence in the community. The role of the PCSOs included:
 - b) Supporting other police activities eg. Dealing with anti-social behaviour, crime and road safety.
 - c) Contributing to “The four better outcomes” which are:
 - To provide reassurance
 - To reduce disorder and anti-social behaviour
 - To reduce crime and increase detections and bring more offenders to justice
 - To reduce road casualties
 - d) Complementing partnership activities eg. Closer working with Wyre Forest Community Housing Wardens.
 - e) Being tasked in accordance with the principles of National Intelligence Model to address/target local issues eg. Persistent problem, planned operations.
 - f) Carrying out enforcement procedures eg. Confiscation of intoxicating liquor, seizure of tobacco (Fixed penalty notices).
 - g) Offering general crime prevention advice and care for victims and witnesses.
 - h) PCSOs would not:

- Perform tasks outside their terms of reference.
- Engage in activities assessed as high risk – they are civil staff not Police Officers.
- Operate outside their designated powers

Chief Inspector Jones concluded his presentation by stressing that the goal of the Police Authority was to have first class PCSOs and not second class Police Officers.

A member commented that, whilst there were good schemes, there were still parts of Wyre Forest where various people did not want to accept anyone else but a police officer and therefore, they rejected neighbourhood wardens. Their opinion was that they paid their taxes for police officers rather than wardens. The public had been promised extra police on the streets yet they had seen no evidence of it.

Chief Inspector Jones explained that hotspots were identified by the number of phone calls received from or regarding an area, reports from the patrol officers and wardens who worked in the areas, strategic assessment and data analysis. He continued to tell the Panel that Patrols had to cover various areas during the times when they were not called out to specific incidents.

It was noted that people in areas that had not been classified as hotspots still feared crime and intimidation. A Member mentioned that if the patrols targeted the hotspot areas, other areas would be neglected. Chief Inspector Jones explained that the areas with a high crime rate were the main priorities. Those areas that were not classified as hot spots would not be ignored. Wyre Forest was divided into areas and all areas were covered by patrols. Each patrol had their own area to cover and each patrol took pride in their work and knew what was going on in that area.

Chief Inspector Jones spoke of the importance of joint working with Police, Wardens, the Primary Care Trust, Probation services, Street Managers and the Council. He spoke of the monthly district tasking process, which ensured that they would be proactive in solving potential problems.

Chief Inspector Jones told the Panel that 65% of the population feared crime and only one in five people realised that the crime rate was going down. When faced with the question of insecurity issues, Chief Inspector Jones elucidated that having a great police presence in certain areas could actually heighten the fear of crime because people would think that these areas were unsafe. Police officers, along with PCSOs, were stationed in different areas so that they were visible. He added that West Mercia Police had taken on another 300 police officers this year.

Responding to a Member's question about Warden Schemes, Chief Inspector Jones said that they could not guarantee more funding, as it had been a one off payment and not mainstream money.

A member was pleased that PCSOs were the eyes and ears of the community and that they actually walked along the streets but despite these positive points, she expressed her concern about police in general. Now that there were these people patrolling the streets, she queried the role of the police officers. In her view, taxpayers were paying for police yet hardly ever saw them. The question was put forward as to whether there was too much paper work that was preventing Police Officers from patrolling the streets. Chief Inspector Jones said that there were beat officers, on every patch, who worked closely with the wardens. Police performance was good across the board in this area but there was still a need for more police.

Members questioned whether the PCSOs were there to support the community or the police. Chief Inspector Jones made it clear that it was a Government initiative from the Home Office to employ PCSOs and that originally West Mercia police had rejected the idea, as they had only wanted street wardens.

The Chairman thanked Chief Inspector Jones and Lee Hanson for attending the meeting and giving an interesting presentation.

CM.813 SKATEBOARDING

The Panel scoped the work of the Skateboarding Task and Finish Group in accordance with the recommendation from the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 26th January 2005 which requested that further consultation be undertaken by the Group (Minute number CM.686 refers).

A Member of the Panel explained that when the issue had been presented to Cabinet, a more in depth Scrutiny was requested so it was referred to the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee who consequently passed it back to the Community and Leisure Services Policy and Scrutiny Panel. It was noted that the Task and Finish Group had been short of time and had been unable to look at the issue in great depth and a strategic overview had been undertaken.

The Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure Services explained what information would be needed before referring the proposals to Cabinet. He explained that there had been insufficient information in the original report and that in the next report, the Group would need to investigate the popularity and actual demand for skateboarding, what size skate-park would be needed and what the end-users' demands would be.

The original report had estimated that pump-priming funding of £5000 would be needed, but there appeared to be no hard facts to provide evidence for this need. The information required would be used as evidence to support the argument for future Council funding. The Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure Services also explained that there were no strict deadlines for this information so the Group would have plenty of time to investigate each issue carefully.

Councillor Fran Oborski said that, in her role as Chairman of Wyre Forest District Youth Strategy Group, a detailed scrutiny to look at the demands for skateboarding would be welcomed. She affirmed that it had been more than three years since a detailed survey had been undertaken. A sub group of the Wyre Forest Youth Strategy Group was formed to look at Skateboarding Provision three or four years ago.

It was stated that the Fun Box was too costly to manage in terms of time and operationally. The original intention was also for the Fun Box to be taken out to rural areas, where there was a lack of regular public transport. This would allow those children, who would normally be unable to get to town centres, to have an activity near to their homes. A service option has been passed, as part of the budget process to enable this to happen. Parish Councils have been consulted to establish suitable potential venues

A Member suggested that the Task and Finish Group look at the profile of users of indoor and outdoor facilities in Wolverhampton. She highlighted the fact that outdoor facilities could be dangerous in winter due to ice.

It was mentioned that Stourport Riverside would make a good site for a skate-park as it was in the town centre with easy access for all. It was noted that the half-pipe on the Walshes Estate in Areley Kings was underused. When questioned about using the site behind the Old Beams Pub in Stourport, the Panel was told that it was used as the over-spill for the car park at the leisure centre and therefore, could not be used.

A member also drew the Panel's attention to the fact that skate-parks were not only used by children but that the ages could range from 7 to 23 years. This was a large age group, which would have to be taken into consideration providing smaller ramps for the younger people and larger ramps for the older people. It was suggested that perhaps, there could be more small sites and one or two larger, more central sites. A member mentioned that BMX riders and in-line skaters would also use skate ramps.

A Panel Member mentioned that usually when children were questioned as to whether they would want a skate-park, they would say yes even if they were not going to use it. Her opinion was that the Council should not always give too much weight to the responses of children.

A member stated that skateboarding had been discussed many times over such a long period of time and he feared that they would never reach a conclusion. He was also anxious that the skateboarding issue would be like the basketball courts in the past, which, once built, were rarely used. In opposition to this statement, another member explained that about fifteen years ago, when the Skateboarding craze began, it was thought that it would just be a short phase yet today, skateboarding appeared to be as popular as ever. The whole point of the Task and Finish Group report would be to discuss this issue and investigate the demand.

The Cultural Services Manager said that it would be a very extensive exercise to carry out, with a limited amount of resources and expertise in this area. She reminded the Panel about the amount of work that had gone on to date. A Member commented that the point of Scrutiny exercises was that Members should lead the work, with officers assisting where they could. The Cultural Services Manager suggested that the brief be widened to include youth activities generally as skateboarding only appealed to approximately 10% of the youth population.

It was mentioned that any future funding would not necessarily have to come from the Local Authority. The main issue at the moment would be identifying the need for a skate-park in order for future funding to be secured..

AGREED:

- a) **The Task and Finish Group ascertain whether or not there is a need for an additional Skatepark with a timescale of 6-7 months for preliminary investigations and for extra exercises, such as identifying funding, to be carried out after this time.**
- b) **The Task and Finish Group also look at other youth activities in addition to skateboarding.**
- c) **A letter be sent to all Members inviting them to be part of the Task and Finish Group and this be reported back to the next Scrutiny Panel meeting.**

CM.814 PRESENTATION BY THE LEISURE SERVICES MANAGER

The Panel received a presentation from the Leisure Services Manager regarding her role and the current and future activities of her section.

The Leisure Services Manager reported that there would be many events in recognition of the 150th Anniversary of Kidderminster Town Hall plus a series of other events including:

- Classical music concerts
- Country and Western Mini Festival
- Kite Festival
- A special event for the Under fives
- Free Workshops during October Half Term
- French market

The Leisure Services Manager stressed that these events were not for profit and that many of them were in partnership with voluntary organisations. The Events Section provided support wherever possible to these groups as well as directly organising and managing events.

The Leisure Services Manager went on to discuss Bewdley Museum. A new Development Officer, Ruth Finney, had been appointed and would start work in April 2005. Her role would focus on marketing, funding and working with volunteers.

Last year, Bewdley Museum had 32,600 visitors, which was an increase from the year before. Prior to free admission, visitor numbers were around 10,000 per year. Recently, the museum had undergone various improvements such as a new ramp to the toilets plus improvements to a craft unit and the catering unit.

The Leisure Services Manager informed the Panel that the museum would be opening on the 25th March 2005 and that all exhibitions had been put together in-house from the collection. The museum also intended to have audio guides and a programme of education throughout the year. She stressed that a lot of work had gone into Bewdley Museum over the past year and that she was pleased to see such a huge improvement. A Member remarked on the huge improvement that she had noticed at the museum when she visited for the Leisure Services Tour.

The Chairman stated that it was very reassuring to know that the Council was still providing quality leisure services and thanked the Leisure Services Manager for the energy and professionalism that she had put into her presentation.

CM.815 PRESENTATION ON CLEANLINESS AT WYRE FOREST GLADES LEISURE CENTRE

The Panel received an update from the Cultural Services Manager on cleanliness at the Wyre Forest Glades Leisure Centre following Members' concerns at the previous meeting on 6th January 2005 (Minute number CM.610 refers).

The Cultural Services Manager reported that there had been concerns over the Christmas period about the cleanliness at Wyre Forest Glades Leisure

Centre but she had been assured that this had been a one-off incident and that the number of complaints had decreased. She made it clear that changing rooms would sometimes be dirty due to so many people constantly walking through them and that just one person with dirty shoes would be able to dirty a whole changing room very easily. The leisure centre carried out regular inspections every twenty minutes to maintain standards of cleanliness.

The Cultural Services Manager also said that last year, Wyre Forest Glades had achieved the highest mark nationally for Quest, which was the industry's quality award. Part of the scoring for Quest was measured on cleanliness

Reference was made to an article, which appeared in the local press stating that Wyre Forest Glades was to be refurbished. It was noted that this had arisen, as it had been a service option, which had ultimately not been adopted.

The Chairman thanked the Cultural Services Manager for her update.

CM.816 DRAFT WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COMMUNITY SAFETY STRATEGY (2005-2008)

The Panel received a briefing paper from the Strategy, Partnerships and Communications Manager on the Draft Wyre Forest District Community Safety Strategy (2005-2008).

The Strategy, Partnerships and Communications Manager explained that by law, the Council had to produce a Community Safety Strategy that was a summary of all processes and consultations that had taken place over the year. All of the information from various groups such as the Primary Care Trust, the Fire Service, Neighbourhood Watch etc. had been analysed to produce this report. From all of the investigations, four priorities had been chosen on which they could focus their attention.

The Strategy, Partnerships and Communications Manager reported that in the past three years, there had been many key successes including a reduction in various crime categories. In the most vulnerable areas, it appeared that the number of incidents had risen but it was the fact that because there were wardens in these areas, more incidents were being reported which, in the past, would not have been reported.

The Strategy, Partnerships and Communications Manager explained that the Council would work with other partners on the four priorities, which were

anti-social behaviour, drugs and alcohol, public perception of crime and violent crime.

In concluding her talk, the Strategy, Partnerships and Communications Manager stressed that it was a strategy aimed to enhance the quality of life of its local communities and was prepared and would be implemented by the Wyre Forest Community Safety Partnership. The purpose of this Agenda Item was to invite feedback from the Panel.

In response to a Member's comments about the wording in part of the report that said, "More facilities to get kids off the streets", the Strategy, Partnerships and Communications Manager explained that an independent company had carried out the research and that the wording had not been changed. The information provided in the report was from what members of the public themselves had said. Therefore, the comments had been taken as stated.

In response to a member's comment that the majority of work appeared to have been carried out between June and October 2004, the Strategy, Partnerships and Communications Manager told the panel that survey results had been analysed from October 2004 onwards.

A member questioned what improvements could be made to Oldington and Foley Park. It was explained that previous investments and ideas had been small and short term but now that there was the seven year Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder Programme, this is a longer term investment, which would, address all quality life issues as a whole.

The Chairman thanked the Strategy, Partnerships and Communications Manager for her informative contribution.

CM.817 WORK PROGRAMME

The Panel considered the Committee's Work Programme for the current municipal year having regard to the Community Strategy, Corporate Plan and annual Priorities.

RECOMMENDED: to the Finance and Corporate Affairs Policy and Scrutiny Panel:

Neighbourhood/Street Warden Funding be added to the Work Programme for the next Finance and Corporate Affairs Policy and Scrutiny Panel Meeting.

AGREED:

Skateboarding and Youth Activities Update be added to the Work

Programme for the next Community and Leisure Policy and Scrutiny Panel Meeting.

The meeting ended at 8.30pm.