

**CANNOCK CHASE COUNCIL**

**BRIEFING NOTE**

**PERFORMANCE AND PARTNERSHIPS SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE**

**14 JANUARY 2009**

**DIRECTOR OF GOVERNANCE**

**ATTENDANCE OF REPRESENTATIVES AT COMMUNITY FORUMS**

**1. Purpose of Briefing Note**

1.1 To provide Members with details of the attendance of representatives from partner organisations at meetings of the Community Forums during November/December 2008.

**2. Recommendation(s)**

2.1 The Sub-Committee is requested to:

- (i) Note the outcome of monitoring the attendance of representatives at meetings of the Community Forums during November/December 2008;
- (ii) Consider what, if any, future arrangements it would wish to see in place for ensuring that, wherever possible, representatives attend and respond to matters raised at Community Forums. Any such arrangements will need to be recommended to Cabinet for approval.

**3. Key Issues**

3.1 At the meeting of the Sub-Committee held on 27 August 2008, Members expressed concern that representatives from partner organisations had not attended meetings of the Community Forums in order to respond to specific issues that had been raised. The Sub-Committee requested that the situation be monitored during November and December 2008 and that Members be informed of any issues arising from the Community Forums.

3.2 Set out below are details of the Community Forums that took place during November/December, together with details of those representatives who were unable to attend the Forum to deal with specific issues:

**Cannock Community Forum – 25 November 2008**

Of the representatives from partner organisations invited to attend the meeting, all attended with the exception of Staffordshire Casualty Reduction Partnership (commonly known as the Speed Camera Partnership) and Staffordshire County Council Social Services.

A representative from the Casualty Reduction Partnership was unable to attend the meeting, although the item was dealt with satisfactorily by the representative from Staffordshire County Council Highways.

With regard to the item for Social Services, a statement was provided which was read out by the Lead Officer on the basis that they had declined the invite to attend the meeting. There were, however, a number of questions asked in relation to the item that were unable to be answered. The Forum agreed that the matter be discussed at the next meeting of the Forum and that a representative from Social Services be requested to attend.

Heath Hayes, Wimblebury and Norton Canes Community Forum – 2 December 2008

All of the representatives from partner organisations attended the meeting to respond those items included on the agenda.

Rugeley & Brereton Community Forum – 1 December 2008

Of the representatives from partner organisations invited to attend the meeting, all attended with the exception of a representative from Staffordshire Casualty Reduction Partnership (also known as Speed Camera Partnership), Staffordshire County Council Passenger Transport & Road Safety Team and Environmental Services.

A representative from the Casualty Reduction Partnership was unable to attend the meeting, although the item was dealt with satisfactorily by the representative from Staffordshire County Council Highways.

The item for the representative from the Passenger Transport and Road Safety Team was discussed at the previous meeting of the Forum. The representative attended this previous meeting and provided the individual requesting the item with a response, albeit outside of the meeting. The individual requested that the response be read out at the next meeting of the Forum on 1 December 2008. Rather than the representative attending the meeting to give the same response, a written statement was provided which was read out by the Chairman, thereby satisfactorily dealing with the matter.

With regard to the matter for Environmental Services, the item arose following the last meeting of the Forum and was very non specific with no details of the individual requesting the item being provided. On this basis, a general statement about recycling was provided by Environmental Services which was read out by the Chairman to the satisfaction of the Forum.

Hednesford Community Forum – 9 December 2008

As a result of the recent closure of the Aquarius Ballroom and no alternative venue being available, the meeting was postponed until 14 January 2009.

- 3.3 It is clear from the last round of Community Forums (and from previous meetings) that in the majority of cases, representatives from both the Council and partner organisations do attend meetings to respond to items and that where representatives are not able to attend, a written statement is usually provided and read out by either the Chairman or the Lead Officer.
- 3.4 The practice of providing a written statement in response to a question does, in the majority of cases, tend to deal with the matter. However, this practice can, on vary rare occasions, lend itself to individuals not receiving a response to any supplementary questions they may have in relation to a particular matter (as was highlighted recently at the Cannock Community Forum).

- 3.5 It is important to note that Democratic Services, when preparing agendas for Community Forums, endeavour to ensure that appropriate representatives attend meetings in order to respond to items raised by local residents and Members. The representatives are advised in writing of the items to be discussed and are provided with the dates, times and venues of the Forums. Where representatives indicate that they are unable to attend, they are requested to provide a written statement to be read out by the Chairman or Lead Officer. Whilst every effort is made to ensure that all items are responded to either in person or via a written statement, it is important to note that there is no legal requirement for representatives to attend meetings or respond to items.
- 3.6 The Sub-Committee is requested to consider what arrangements it would wish to see in place in order to deal with those situations where representatives do not attend meetings of the Community Forums and recommend to Cabinet the approval of any such arrangements.
- 3.7 Members are also requested to note that at a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 11 August 2008, it was agreed that the Director of Governance review the arrangements for advertising meetings of the Community Forums in order to raise public awareness. It is intended that following this review, a report will be submitted to the Scrutiny Committee setting out a number of proposals.