

CANNOCK CHASE COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

HELD ON MONDAY, 28 NOVEMBER, 2011 AT 4.00 P.M.

IN THE CIVIC CENTRE, BEECROFT ROAD, CANNOCK

PART 1

PRESENT: Councillors

Gilbert, P. (Chairman)

Beddows, J.	Jones, Ms. J. L.
Bernard, Mrs. A.F.	Jones, R.
Bernard, J.D.	Morgan, C.W.J.
Grocott, M. R.	Spicer, Mrs. A.
Holder, M.J.	Todd, R.

14. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M.R. Green, Mrs. D. Grice, J.T. Kraujalis, and A. Williams.

15. Declarations of Interests of Members in Contracts and Other Matters and Restrictions on Voting by Members and Party Whip Declarations

The following declaration of interests was made:

Grocott, M.R.	Wife works at Hagley Park School	Personal
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No party whip declarations were made.

16. Minutes

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 26 September, 2011 be approved as a correct record and signed.

17. Hagley Park Academy

(Councillor M.R. Grocott removed himself from the meeting for the duration of this item.)

Mrs. C. Hardman, Head Teacher at Hagley Park Academy and Principal of the combined Rugeley Academies (Hagley Park Academy; Fair Oak Academy and Rugeley Sixth Form Academy), gave a presentation on the Rugeley Academies' Improvement Plan, 2011-12, copies of which were distributed to the Scrutiny Committee Members. It was reported that

the Improvement Plan was still a draft and should be treated as confidential.

She explained that the Improvement Plan consisted of six major goals broken down into 15 key objectives. The goals contained within the plan were categorised as:

1. Design a rich and personalised **creative curriculum**.
2. Build strong **relationships** and a **reputation** for innovation and excellence
3. Develop **excellent leadership and structures** which support learning, development and achievement.
4. Raise standards of **achievement and attainment**.
5. Deploy new design **technologies** and keep pace with technological developments.
6. Provide a programme of **enrichment**.

Members noted the contents of the presentation and the Improvement Plan and sought clarification on a number of points.

A Member commented that the plan did not mention working with local primary schools to improve levels of basic numeracy and literacy. Mrs. Hardman advised that it was correct that the work wasn't mentioned in the plan as the school already went into local primary schools to hold master classes to help struggling pupils learn the basics.

A Member commented that, from recollection, the school buildings were rather dull and dreary, leading to a sense of pessimism from the off. Mrs. Hardman acknowledged that a substantial level of capital investment was required to make significant changes to the school buildings; however, in the interim, the whole of the school interior had been repainted in light colours and there had been a refurbishment of the main reception and canteen areas which gave the building a brighter aspect and more positive feel.

Comments were also made about attitudinal differences in learning and preparing for exams between boys and girls. Mrs. Hardman acknowledged these concerns and advised that the school was working on a "chunking" method for teaching boys, where smaller blocks of work are given with short deadlines to avoid the tendency to put stuff off until the last minute. Mrs. Hardman suggested that there appeared to be low career expectations/aspirations and this might be a reflection of the fact that there were no longer identifiable local industries employing large numbers, such as mining or the power station, which provided obvious routes into work and potential for advancement. Allied to this, employers had also commented to her on the difficulty of attracting suitable people locally for management positions. Mrs. Hardman commented that the situation wasn't helped by the fact that Government funding for children in Staffordshire was at substantially lower levels per head than in other parts of the country.

Members thanked Mrs. Hardman for her attendance at the meeting.

18. Quarter 2 Performance Report, 2011-12

Consideration was given to the Report of the Head of Policy (Enclosure 5.1 - 5.7 of the Official Minutes of the Council).

Robert Lamond, Performance Manager, gave Members an overview of the report and explained that its purpose was to inform Members on the progress of the Council during Quarter 2 of 2011-12 in respect of the Priority Outcomes set out in the Corporate Plan 2011-

14 and the supporting Priority Delivery Plans. Members were reminded that the report had been simplified to make it more reader friendly and case studies included as Annexes, and asked if they had any questions, or comments / suggestions they wished to have incorporated into the next year's performance plan.

Members advised that it would be useful to have cumulative figures, period on period, in order that they could see that actual level of performance. Some Members also commented that they would like benchmarking information. The Performance Manager reminded Members that the majority of the information that was reported was drawn from the Corporate Plan and Priority Delivery Plans, and data was provided for comparison purposes as a measure of relative performance; however, he saw no reason why - subject to further discussion and agreement with the relevant Heads of Service and Portfolio Holders – suitable additional information couldn't also be included in future years.

Members sought clarification of information in respect of the "Rate My Place" scheme which was provided by the Head of Environmental Health.

RESOLVED:

That:

- (A) The performance information and the case studies relating to PDP's as detailed at Annexes 1, 2, 3 and 4 to the report be noted.
- (B) The actions and indicators which were rated Red or Amber and the associated commentary / remedial action proposed by the Lead Officer be noted.
- (C) Cumulative figures and benchmarking information be included.

19. Issues in Relation to the Allocation of Council Properties

Consideration was given to the Briefing Note of the Head of Housing (Enclosure 6.1 – 6.7 of the Official Minutes of the Council). The Housing Portfolio Leader was in attendance for this item at the request of the Scrutiny Committee which had resolved at its previous meeting that:

"The Housing Portfolio Leader be requested to attend the next meeting of the Committee in order that the issues relating to where people with drug problems were housed and also young people being housed in bungalows normally reserved for the elderly could be discussed further."

The Housing Portfolio Leader advised that the briefing note provided full details of the Council's allocations policy in respect of the issues raised by the Committee.

The Chairman of the Housing Policy Development Committee, who was present, also advised that the Housing PDC was also looking at the issue of anti social behaviour in Council-owned properties and would be considering reports on a variety of associated subjects with a view to making recommendations to Cabinet later in the year.

RESOLVED:

That the information in respect of the Council's allocations policy as presented in the briefing note be noted.

20. Noise Nuisance and Breaches in Tenancy Conditions

The Head of Housing gave a presentation to the Committee in respect of noise nuisance and breaches in tenancy conditions. Members were advised of the three levels of anti social behaviour (Category C - Environmental; Category B – Persistent; and Category A – Serious), including examples of each, and advised of the various remedies at each level available to the Council. Remedies ranged from offering advice and encouraging mediation, to possession of the property. (More comprehensive information was made available to the Scrutiny Committee.)

The Head of Housing also advised the Committee that the Housing PDC at its meeting on 23 November, 2011, had considered a number of possible actions to reduce or eliminate noise at an early stage including the possibility of introducing Police checks of all housing applicants; providing improved assistance, support and feedback to complainants; and adoption of a simplified and improved toolkit of powers following publication by the Home Office.

The Head of Environmental Health then took over to discuss noise nuisance as covered by the Environmental Protection Act and Statutory Nuisance Act.

Members raised concerns about complainants not being prepared to log anti social behaviour / noise complaints in an incident diary. Concerns were also raised about the effectiveness of noise monitoring equipment when the subject of the complaint is informed that equipment has been installed. The Head of Environmental Health stressed the importance of completing the incident diaries to provide supporting evidence when further action was taken, and advised that problematic tenants generally continue to play music loudly even if they are aware that they are being monitored.

RESOLVED:

That the information in respect of noise nuisance and breaches of tenancy conditions as presented be noted.

CHAIRMAN

The meeting closed at 5.50 pm