

WITHAM AREA PANEL

13th December 2005

Present

Graham Eavery
Richard Scott BDC
Ray Horrell
Valerie Ahern

Miriam Clarke
Cath Horrell
Shelia Vincent
Ian Perry BDC

Apologies

Neil Coughlan

Ian Marshall

Notes from previous meeting

These were noted. Richard said that he had been unable to organise the paper work for the 'Neighbour Hotspots' but would bring this back to a future meeting

Witham Area Office relocation

Richard explained about the proposed move of the Witham Area Office to the library and Causeway House, outlining the principles and ideology.

The main areas of concern were where and how could the rent and council tax payments be made. The group also felt that there would be a loss of access to local staff such as the Estate Managers together with the feeling of a lesser local service. Richard explained that the same frontline staff would be providing a service from the library together with a 'doorstep' service by the Estate Managers. The payment options had been extended to include post offices and 'Pay point' outlets, with extensive work being under taken to ensure all those that use the office are clear on what other methods are available. The panel requested that an article for the 'On the House' magazine be considered in addition to the information that is being provided to the public.

Environmental Improvements

Richard gave an update on the current schemes. The discussion moved to Estate Inspections and the frustration that was felt in the difficulty in resolving issues that are outside the control of Braintree District Council, an example being the parking in Cypress Road Witham. Members of the Panel also highlighted an issue with street lighting on the Powers Hall End estate, Richard to investigate and will arrange information to those concerned.

Richard advised that next year's budget had yet to be set, but that he would bring details of the budget and schemes back to a future panel for consideration.

Community Gateway Model.

Graham read out an information sheet to do with the Community Gateway model after he had attended a recent training course. Afterwards Graham explained about the commitment that was needed to ensure that everything ran smoothly and continued to develop. The group acknowledged this but also realised the benefits of having a greater say that could be obtained.

The proposed transfer to a Housing Association was raised together with the fears around this. The recent public meetings has highlighted some concerns but also identified potential individuals who could become involved in the process. They also showed how many fears were incorrect with accurate information providing peace of mind.

Other issues discussed were the level of future rents and should the water rates be included as part of the rent payment or be collected separately by the Water Authority. Water meters could also be installed in all properties, which the Panel felt might be better for the tenants.

Most present felt that the Authority should deal firmly with those who were in arrears.

Performance Indicators

These were discussed with the decrease in the rent arrears acknowledged. Other areas looked at included the Estate Ranger work showing where he has the most problems

Any Other Business

With the emphasis on informing the tenants, the Panel felt that it would be useful to offer a training course on reading and writing to those who want it at the Community Office. Richard to investigate.

Mrs. Clarke requested information on when the next estate blitz was on Powers Hall End Estate.

The group praised Linda Gore, an Estate Manager based at the Witham Area Office, for her hard work on the Templars Estate.

Graham advised that he is due to go into hospital on 29th January so may miss the next meeting.

Graham Eavery
Chairman