

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE HELD ON TUESDAY 20 JANUARY 2015

PRESENT

The Mayor - Councillor Swift
The Deputy Mayor - Councillor Adams
Councillor Baddeley
Councillor Davies
Councillor Deane
Councillor Hall
Councillor Hart - Chair
Councillor Hawley
Councillor Jackson
Councillor Jones
Councillor Lovatt
Councillor Rogers
Councillor Sheldon MBE
Councillor Tolley
Councillor Whilding
Councillor Wood

83.14 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence and reasons accepted were received from:

Councillor Deaville
Councillor Ellsum
Councillor Harper

84. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- a Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and Dispensations: Minute 87: Councillor Wood in the Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service; Minute 86: Councillor Tolley as a West Midlands Ambulance Service member and Councillor Jones as an employee of West Midlands Ambulance Service.
- b Other Disclosable Interests: Councillor Tolley in any item connected with Biddulph Youth and Community Centre; Minute 91.2: Councillor Hall as a member of Biddulph Rotary.

85. MINUTES

It was **Resolved** to sign the Minutes of the meeting of the General Purposes Committee held on 16 December 2014.

86. AMBULANCE SERVICE

Lee Washington, General Manager of the Stafford division of the West Midlands Ambulance Service (WMAS), was invited to address the meeting.

Mr Washington advised members to be aware that the health service was under extreme pressure and the ambulance service was no different. London and the South West were worse off, but we were also in difficulty. West Midlands Service was performing best nationally, however. The Staffordshire health economy was not the best – the hospital was struggling to cope with demand, especially since the closure of Stafford hospital.

There had recently been a recruitment programme and an additional 250 staff had been recruited, this figure would soon rise to 300. Not all would come into Staffordshire, but there would be an increase. Locally, Biddulph had the car operating 24/7. This maintained an ambulance presence in the area. WMAS was achieving the response standards in Biddulph. The thing that had changed was that when people could not get to see a doctor they would dial for ambulance and see a doctor at the hospital. The non-emergency phone number 111 had come into operation during the year and was referring calls to ambulances at slightly over the national average.

Councillor Deane asked how many ambulances were based in Biddulph in addition to the car. Mr Washington replied that none were based here. When the ambulance station closed, the community paramedic service was introduced that proved to be more beneficial to the area. The car would be activated to the patient and the ambulance called.

Councillor Deane asked what would happen when the car was busy. Mr Washington replied that there was an ambulance based at the Haywood Hospital which should get to Biddulph in 8 minutes. It was known how many ambulances to put on at certain times of the day and this system was very successful. There was occasionally a spike in demand, but the system normally worked well. There was an Ambulance Hub near to the main hospital, but vehicles were deployed to different areas to wait for calls.

Councillor Wood was becoming concerned about cuts to the health service. He asked if there were other response standards than time to the patient. He had heard that there were variations in response times in the handling of calls by up to two minutes. Councillor Wood also asked how WMAS was managing to recruit with the current inflationary budget cuts. Mr Washington responded that when a call was activated, it was triaged to find the correct response needed. There was a limit of one minute for this and then the ambulance would be activated. London and the South West were doing trials on elongating these periods up to three minutes.

The Ambulance Service had changed from being an emergency service to a primary care team and was getting tied up with patients longer than it should. Crews were being dispatched to 999 calls for non-serious matters; immediate despatch would remain for cardiac arrest etc. Finances were stretched as it was a huge Trust; stretching from Leek to Hereford. Re finance, WMAS had some reserves which was enabling it to recruit, plus it had Winter Pressures money from central government. There were some other areas of finance which could be tapped into.

Councillor Whilding gave anecdotal evidence where someone had called 999 just before Christmas and the ambulance had taken more than 8 minutes, more likely double that time. This had been very stressful for the family.

Mr Washington responded that there were not enough resource for ambulances to be everywhere. There would be future occasions when peaks arrived and it would not be possible to meet the 8 minute standards. He gave additional figures of 95% response within 19 minutes, and 75% within 8 minutes. The Service was not dealing with a known commodity and had to best-fit the resources to the needs.

Councillor Hawley noted that Biddulph Moor had Community First Responders (CFR) and asked what reliance was put on them; were they being used? Mr Washington replied that firstly, they were volunteers and could only be called when they had

booked onto the system. If they were available and the Biddulph car was on a previous call, they would be used and then backed up by an Ambulance. The greatest worth of the Community Responder was to the rural community - it was a very valuable asset. Biddulph also had a lot of static automated defibrillators around the town, giving added performance. Councillor Jones noted that the CFR was always backed up by an ambulance.

Councillor Jackson asked about the 111 service, noting that the ambulance service is in talks with them to bring response times down. Had the 111 service helped or hindered? Mr Washington replied that it had helped a lot of people, but had also hindered, as the call handlers could only deal with what people told them. There were many people who knew how to work the system and got themselves unnecessarily to Accident and Emergency (A&E), causing congestion. He then explained the 111 flag system and the problems with it.

Councillor Hart drew discussion to a close noting that WMAS knew what the problems were and it was trying to work through them. Problems were now being caused by A&E congestion, and this was not the fault of the Ambulance Service. Changes to hospitals in Staffordshire had led to this. Councillor Hart felt encouraged by what had been said and hoped that Mr Washington would come to a future meeting, which he agreed to do.

87. STAFFORDSHIRE FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE

This item was deferred, as Councillor Harper was not present.

88. COMMUNICATIONS/CORRESPONDENCE RECEIVED

- a A letter was received from manager of the Oil Buying Club offering to come to discuss a free service with Council. Councillor Wood approved of this in principle, but was not comfortable with a private company coming to speak and felt that this Council should not promote one company over others. Councillor Hawley suggested that the information be passed to the Resident and Community Associations. It was Moved to do this and to decline the offer.
- b The crossing at the Biddulph Arms had been reported as dangerous to the County Council, following some near-accidents. Councillor Davies added that he was involved in an ongoing battle to get the crossing improved. He had reports, particularly at night where some cars stopped, but others went through. Lighting was poor. He had been in regular dialogue with Staffordshire Highways and the crossing lines had been repainted. Councillor Davies had taken photos at night and would pass these to County Councillor Deaville at Stafford. Councillor Hall added that the crossing was a very dangerous area and would get even more dangerous with the increase of parked cars. There had been many near misses. Customers visiting the chip shop should park on the frontage, as in the planning application. The County Council did know about the dangers of that area, pedestrian refuges and white hatched lines had been installed some years ago. There were petitions and letters, and Councillor Hall added that he did not want people to pay with their lives. He proposed that this Council should write to support Councillor Davies' photos.

Councillor Rogers remarked that only the previous week he had seen a man almost run over on the crossing. He was keen to pursue this before someone was killed. Councillor Deane seconded the proposal. Councillor Jackson felt that improvements could be made by installing illuminated posts, but the County

Council's contract did not allow this. He noted that County Councillor Lawson had £10,000 every 12 months in his Divisional Highways Programme. Councillor Jackson suggested that Councillor Lawson be asked what he could do and if he would support the campaign, saying that he felt that this would be the quickest route. He added that the PCSOs should be encouraged to ticket people parking on zig-zag lines. Councillor Jones added that offenders parking on the crossing lines could receive penalty points on their driving licences. Councillor Lovatt was unsure how the situation could be improved, but suggested a letter to Staffordshire Police asking it to stop people parking on zig-zag lines at the Biddulph Arms crossing. This was proposed by Councillor Whilding and seconded by Councillor Jackson.

It was proposed by Councillor Hall and seconded by Councillor Deane to write to County Councillors Deaville and Lawson asking for their help in improving the crossing. This was supported unanimously.

89. MEETINGS ATTENDED DURING THE MONTH

- a Councillor Lovatt had received a complaint about bins not being emptied in Biddulph Valley Park; she had spoken to Officers at the District Council and heard there had been a report and requested a copy. This was Agreed.
- b Councillor Rogers spoke of his recent Olive Branch training by Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Services (FARS). He visited approximately 100 homes a month and would refer homes where he saw a problem to FARS. They would then offer them a free home safety check. The project is called the Olive Branch Project, named after a lady who lost her life in a house fire.

90. LENGSTHMAN WORK

Members were reminded to report items for the Lengthsman, along with a sketch location plan.

91. CHIEF OFFICER'S REPORT

1 Staffordshire Regiment Memorial

A request had been received from Jim Massey, Staffordshire Regiment Association Secretary, as follows:

'The Association is working on a project to replace our existing memorial in the National Memorial Arboretum in Alrewas (NMA). The existing memorial was one of the first to be placed in the NMA and now looks dated and a bit jaded. We have a committee to run it, volunteer members who include builders and stone masons all raring to do the work in the spring and our plans have been approved by the NMA Planning Committee.

We have raised well over £20,000 toward the target of £30,000. So I can assure you that this is not a pipe dream, but a live project with a high chance of success.

If Biddulph Town Council decide that this would be an appropriate project to support, we can ensure that you are kept up to date with progress and ensure that our audit trails are open and above board.'

This would seem an appropriate use of the funds raised for a Staffs Regiment memorial by past Town Mayor, Maureen Roberts. The project also has the

support of the family of the Biddulph soldier who was killed in Basra in March 2007.

Councillor Jones felt that this was an ideal way of using the money and proposed that this Council support the suggestion, seconded by Councillor Wood. Councillor Lovatt proposed that this be added to the agenda of the next General Purposes Committee meeting, this was Moved.

2 Biddulph & District Youth Orchestra

The BDYO is nearing the end of a project to create a new prospectus to attract young musicians to join this very well-regarded orchestra. Mr Frank Harris, Secretary to the BDYO, is seeking Biddulph Town Council's permission to use the Council badge on the front cover. He plans to place four small logos in the lower quarter of the page, representing the four main funding bodies and sponsors; already having permission from Staffordshire County Council, and also seeking permission from SMDC and The Rotary Club of Biddulph to use their logos.

Permission proposed by Councillor Jones, seconded by Councillor Wood and Moved.

3 Fairtrade Town

Biddulph has renewed its status as a Fairtrade Town; first achieved in December 2012, with the next renewal due in January 2017. We have been presented with a copy of the certificate.

4 Libraries Consultation Update

Letter received from Councillor Lawrence of Staffordshire County Council.

Councillor Wood was really concerned about this information, and felt that the County Council was changing the model part way through. He called it 'smoke and mirrors confusion' and proposed that a letter be sent stating that this Council was not happy with ANY reduction at Biddulph, in the strongest possible terms, and to seek clarification. Councillor Jackson felt that this was a trial run of sorts, as some areas did not have the capability of volunteers and the Cabinet had listened to them. This Council needed to clarify if Biddulph Library would be affected. He seconded the proposal, which was Moved unanimously.

The meeting closed at 8.55 pm

SignedDate.....