
Report to

Cabinet Member (Neighbourhoods and Community Safety)

30 October 2007

Report of

Head of Neighbourhood Management

Title

Petition concerning the future of WATCH

1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To outline a response to a petition signed by 476 residents calling for the City Council to provide funding and support to gain additional funding to enable WATCH (Working Actively to Change Hillfields) Ltd to continue its operations.

2 Recommendations

The Cabinet Member is asked to:

- 2.1 Note the action taken so far to support WATCH to produce a draft Interim Action Plan.
- 2.2 Agree a one-off grant of £30,000 to support WATCH up to March 2008.

3 Information/Background

- 3.1 A petition signed by 476 residents was presented to council on 18 September 2007 calling for the City Council to provide the necessary funding and support in getting additional funding to enable WATCH to continue.
- 3.2 The organisation is based in Hillfields, in St Michael's Ward, and the petition was presented by Cllr Dave Nellist.
- 3.3 WATCH was established in 1996 with the overall aim to improve conditions in Hillfields. It is a Company Ltd by Guarantee, a Registered Charity and a Registered Development Trust. It has a membership drawn from the local community i.e. residents, businesses, voluntary and community organisations and is managed by an organising committee made up of 15 local people.
- 3.4 WATCH delivers a range of services to the community of Hillfields and the surrounding area; during the current financial year it has not been able to secure all the funding needed to meet the costs of these services. Approaches have been made to the Council to provide support, and council officers have been working with WATCH staff and Board members to identify ways to close the gap in WATCH's budget.

- 3.5 Over the last month council officers have worked with WATCH Operations Manager and Board Members to produce a draft Interim Action Plan. This outlines all of the current work undertaken by WATCH and how each work stream is funded.
- 3.6 The report recommends ceasing some activity, which is not financially viable, or not continuing some work beyond its current funding because there is already adequate provision of such activities in Hillfields. These are decisions for the WATCH Board but council officers expect these recommendations to be acted upon.
- 3.7 Council officers have been able to secure additional funding to support employment work undertaken by WATCH via LEGI and are optimistic that WATCH could benefit from other employment focused funding streams that will be available next year.
- 3.8 The Interim Action Plan includes calculations of the level of contribution each project should be making to the management and running costs of the WATCH premises. In most cases the projects cover their own costs but fail to contribute to the essential overhead costs. This report recommends making a one off grant of £30,000 to help towards these costs in 2007/08.
- 3.9 Future work programmes would need to be modelled using a full cost recovery formula, but in the short term it is these costs that leave WATCH with a funding shortfall.
- 3.10 Any future funding from the Council would be on the basis of commissioned services; further work is being undertaken to develop WATCH's business plan and to identify potential services that could be commissioned from WATCH.

4 Proposal and Other Option(s) to be Considered

- 4.1 To make a one-off grant of £30,000 to WATCH to support them up to March 2008.
- 4.2 Alternatively to do nothing, but this is likely to result in WATCH utilising their reserves to a point below which it would not be prudent to do so.

5 Other specific implications

5.1

	Implications (See below)	No Implications
Best Value		✓
Children and Young People		✓
Climate Change & Sustainable Development		✓
Comparable Benchmark Data		✓
Corporate Parenting		✓
Coventry Community Plan		✓
Crime and Disorder		✓
Equal Opportunities		✓
Finance	✓	
Health and Safety		✓
Human Resources		✓

	Implications (See below)	No Implications
Human Rights Act		✓
Impact on Partner Organisations		✓
Information and Communications Technology		✓
Legal Implications		✓
Neighbourhood Management	✓	
Property Implications		✓
Race Equality Scheme		✓
Risk Management		✓
Trade Union Consultation		✓
Voluntary Sector – The Coventry Compact	✓	

5.2 Finance - £30,000 can be made available from Neighbourhood Management (wardens service) which would have otherwise been declared as an underspend.

5.3 Neighbourhood Management and Regeneration services have provided support to WATCH over the recent past and have provided considerable additional support, including interventions from both Heads of Service, in order to produce the Interim Action Plan.

5.4 Work undertaken with WATCH is in keeping with the intentions of the Coventry Compact.

6 Monitoring

6.1 A grant aid agreement will be put in place for the £30,000, which will seek the production of a longer term business plan from WATCH, in which the council will expect issues raised in the Interim Action Plan to be addressed. Council officers will offer what support they can in the development of the business plan; further updates on this and future work planned with WATCH will be reported to a future Cabinet Member meeting.

7 Timescale and expected outcomes

7.1 Grant to be made immediately available and further work on business plan to be completed by December 2007.

	Yes	No
Key Decision		✓
Scrutiny Consideration (if yes, which Scrutiny meeting and date)		
Council Consideration (if yes, date of Council meeting)		

List of background papers

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Papers open to Public Inspection

Description of paper

Location

None