
Report to
Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee

4th March, 2009

Report of
Councillor David Skinner

Title
Report Back on the Work Of Outside Bodies – Groundwork Coventry and Warwickshire

1 Purpose of the Report

1.1 The report sets out details of Groundwork Coventry and Warwickshire's work during the preceding twelve months and details the attendance of the City Council's representatives. It provides information about Groundwork Coventry and Warwickshire's pending assimilation into a new regional structure, Groundwork West Midlands and notes the end of the current Partnership Agreement between the Council and Groundwork, which expires on 31st March 2009. It also recommends that the Council should extend the period in office of its current Directors on the Groundwork Coventry and Warwickshire Board until the Trust is formally disbanded.

2 Recommendations

The Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee is asked to:

- 2.1 Note the work and achievements of Groundwork Coventry and Warwickshire during the last year.
- 2.2 Note the introduction of a West Midlands regional Groundwork structure and the dissolution of the Groundwork Coventry and Warwickshire Groundwork Trust.
- 2.3 Note that the Partnership Agreement between Groundwork and the Council will not be renewed when it ends on 31 March 2009.
- 2.4 Agree that the current Council representatives serving on the Groundwork Coventry and Warwickshire Board extend their period of tenure until the Trust winds up and becomes assimilated into Groundwork West Midlands.

3 Information on Work of Outside Body

3.1 In February 1995 members agreed to establish and part sponsor Groundwork Coventry, which was set up as a delivery mechanism to support environmental regeneration in accordance with the Council's priorities. Groundwork Coventry, which later became Groundwork Coventry and Warwickshire (Groundwork hereafter) in 2004, was set up as a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity, became a member of the not-for-profit Groundwork Federation of fifty trusts across the United Kingdom. As a founding member of Groundwork the Council is able to nominate three directors to the Board. Currently, these representatives are Councillors David Skinner and Phil Townshend and Carl Pearson, Head of Regeneration Services.

- 3.2 A sponsorship arrangement between the Council and Groundwork was agreed in 1995 and this was updated and extended in 2001 when Cabinet agreed a contract for services, facilitating partnership working. The Agreement was renewed in 2006 for a further three years to March 2009 with attendant sponsorship at a cost of £66 000 per annum to the Council. This sum was reviewed as part of the 2008 budget setting process in the context of government's movement away from grants towards commissioning and contracting through Local Area Agreement and other partnership mechanisms. A revised figure of £48 000 was agreed in 2008/09 and the Council's contract with Groundwork was adjusted to reflect this.
- 3.3 Groundwork has to date sustained its operations by using Programme Development Funding it receives on an annual basis from the Department of Communities and Local Government and which is channelled to the local trust level via the Groundwork UK Federation. Working with this as a base, and by accessing other funding sources and services; they have been successful in providing initiatives in the city, which this year have included:
- Support to the Your Neighbourhood Matters programme involving the development of Neighbourhood Service Improvement Agreements in six disadvantaged areas
 - Support to the Playbuilder programme to develop or refurbish 20-25 play areas across Coventry including base lining, public consultation and landscape architecture services to support the production of sketch scheme designs for four city parks
 - A sports and health portfolio including the Active Meadowlands programme which has a suite of sports, leisure and recreational activity targeted at young people, children and adults at Radford and the Sporting Chances programme
 - A youth project at Spon End, a programme of money management support for vulnerable young people who are living independently in Midland Heart homes, support to The Cyrenians through a digital media course, and professional support to Canley Regeneration Programme and the Swanswell Initiative
- 3.4 However, the Groundwork Board were notified in 2008 that the Groundwork UK Federation intended to introduce a new regional structure across the West Midlands that would incorporate three existing trusts. This new Groundwork West Midlands structure would replace the existing arrangements and would not allow the existing Groundwork Trust to continue, and attract national core funding to support its work. The Board considered its position and concluded that it had no realistic alternative other than to merge into the new arrangements; indeed it concluded this was in reality a 'transfer of undertaking' to the new body.
- 3.5 The Board has also instructed its Officers to work to achieve the winding up of the business and affairs of the Groundwork Coventry and Warwickshire Trust. It is anticipated this will be complete in the next twelve months albeit that the new structure will be formally established by April 2009.
- 3.6 In the light of these circumstances and because the Council is unlikely to fund a regional body using local tax payers revenue, the Partnership Agreement between the Council and Groundwork Coventry and Warwickshire, and associated funding, will not be renewed when it ends in March 2009. A proposal has been made in the budget setting process not to extend funding to Groundwork in 2009/10 and beyond.
- 3.7 It is fully recognised that the collaboration with Groundwork has been highly successful since 1995 in delivering a range of regeneration priorities for Coventry, and the Council fully intends to retain a working relationship with the new Groundwork West Midlands Trust

in future. Officers have indicated that the new Trust will be welcome to tender for appropriate contracted work in the same way the existing Trust does, and that the principal basis for future collaboration is likely to be with Groundwork as a supplier of services to the Council.

- 3.8 The Council's Directors have been actively engaged in the Board during these deliberations and will continue to be involved in overseeing the transfer process. As the City Council was a founding member of the Groundwork company, legal advice has been sought on the steps necessary for the Council to consider and agree when the final decision to wind up the current Trust needs to be taken.
- 3.9 During the transition period as the new regional entity is set up, it is not clear how Groundwork intend the new arrangements to work at an operational level in the sub region. Council Officers envisage that under the regional arrangements the Council will have less formal responsibility and a looser relationship in terms of the level of councillor and officer representation on the Groundwork West Midlands Board and that there will be some involvement in a proposed sub regional working group that will act as an operational, advisory body to the new Trust Board. When these deliberations are complete, Officers will report back to elected members if Groundwork West Midlands invites the Council to field appointees to the Board or Sub Regional Group.
- 3.10 At this stage, the Groundwork Board expect the current Trust to be formally wound up during an Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) in summer this year. Given the complexities involved as the current business and affairs of the Trust are wound up, it makes sense for the current Council representatives, who are familiar with the proposed changes and the ongoing work of the Board, to extend their period of office until the Trust is formally closed.
- 3.11 This continuity will enable Directors to continue to work with and support Groundwork during its assimilation and to represent the Council's interests in this process. It will also enable the Directors and officers to pursue action to develop a useful working relationship with Groundwork West Midlands in the future. In addition, as a founder partner of Groundwork and a company member, the Council should record its vote when the proposal to dissolve Groundwork and merge into the Regional Trust is tabled at the EGM.

4 Benefits to the City Council of extending the Appointment

- 4.1 The Council is a founder member of Groundwork Coventry and Warwickshire and will wish to record its vote when proposals to wind up the Trust and merge into Groundwork West Midlands are taken during summer 2009.
There was considerable concern among members of the Board, which Councillor Skinner shared, when the merger into the larger body was first mooted, but following further discussion, Councillor Skinner hopes that it is successful and that the interests of the staff are properly remembered. Councillor Skinner is very grateful to Carl Pearson whose clear thinking and lucid explanations really helped throughout those meetings.
- 4.2 The complexity involved in dissolving the business and affairs of the current Trust means it is in the Council's interest to extend the period in office of its current appointees, Councillors David Skinner and Phil Townshend and Carl Pearson, Head of Regeneration Services. These representatives are familiar with the current work of the Board so are well placed to provide continuity and support to Groundwork and to represent the Council's interests during the transition.

5 Attendance Record and Remuneration for the Appointment

5.1 Coventry City Council's representatives on Groundwork Coventry and Warwickshire are Councillor Skinner and Carl Pearson, and also from May 2008 Councillor Townshend and up to up to May 2008 Councillor Patton.

During the period of January 2008 to December 2008 inclusive, 5 Board meetings were held of which Councillor Skinner attended 3 and Carl Pearson 4. Councillor Townshend attended all three of the meetings that he was entitled to attend and Councillor Patton did not attend the 2 meetings that he also was entitled to attend.

5.2 There is no remuneration associated with the appointment.

List of background papers

Proper officer: Martin Yardley Deputy Director City Development

Author: Telephone 024-76831039
Councillor David Skinner

Other contributors:

Margaret Dieterman, Neighbourhood Renewal Advisor, Regeneration Services, City Development x2931

(Any enquiries should be directed to the above)

Trevor Howard, Employment and Community Regeneration Manager, Regeneration Services, City Development x2779

Clarissa Evans, Solicitor, Legal x3093

Phil Helm, Finance Manager x1303

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Description of paper **Location** CH59

Schedule of City Council Appointments to Outside Bodies