

**The Minute of the meeting of Scrutiny Management Board, 16
October, 2008**

122/08 **Saint George's Day Parade**

The Management Board received a report from the Sandwell Events Manager on the Council's support for the safe facilitation of a Parade between Stone Cross and Dartmouth Park in West Bromwich to celebrate Saint George's Day. Direct costs of £9,500 were met by the Council to fund Health and Safety requirements to hold a safe Parade; this represented 28% of the total cost of £34,000 spent on the trilogy of Saint George's Day events.

The history of the Parade, other St George's Day events and other events which the Events Team supported or organised were also reported. The Events Team worked with the Parade organisers, now constituted as Stone Cross St George's Association, and the Police to ensure that the Parade was managed in a safe and secure environment.

In 2008 a 'no alcohol' message had been included in press releases and advanced publicity for the Parade. In an attempt to try and address the issue of the increasing consumption of alcohol on the route. This had resulted in a reduction in anti-social behaviour.

Unfortunately in 2008, the Parade was infiltrated by an uninvited band which it appeared had paramilitary roots and inspired some objectionable chanting.

The Management Board also viewed two video clips from the YouTube website on the internet which showed footage of the Parade as it was about to start and of the uninvited band within the Parade.

The Chair asked Councillor Archer to explain his involvement with the Parade and the seemingly political statement he made as the Parade was about to start. Councillor Archer responded that he had been requested to lead the Parade in patriotic songs as he had been each year since he was the Mayor in April, 2006. His statement was made since many people had been under the impression that the Parade would be stopped in that or future years.

Following members' questions relating to political and racist behaviour involved with the Parade, persons representing the organisers and those who had attended the event responded:-

- All of the organisations involved in staging the Parade agreed that the event should be non-political.
- Persons found handing out political based leaflets were asked to leave.
- If stewards witnessed or were advised of racist behaviour they would bring it to the attention of the Police.
- No Council de-brief had yet been held on the 2008 Parade. There needed to be timely de-briefs for every event in the Borough, which could provide a repository of information for all organisers.

In relation to the second clip showing footage of the uninvited band, members raised concerns as to how this had not been prevented:-

- Most people involved with the organisation of the Event remained at the head of the Parade and so were not aware of what might be happening at the rear of the Parade.

The third band had not been invited and had no permit.

- 120 stewards were involved with the Parade, 70 on road closures and 50 on the route. It was felt that the stewards should be more evenly distributed through the length of the parade.
- The stewards had not been advised as to how many bands should have been in the Parade and did not either at the time or later report they had seen the band.
- It was admitted that the overall management of the stewards needed to be strengthened in the future.
- There were 20 plus Police Officers involved with the Parade. At the de-brief following the event no-one reported any instances of political extremism.
- It was unlikely that a totally "sterile" Parade could be achieved but appropriate interventions such as training for the Police and stewards could be put in place to try and minimise or prevent overt political remarks.
- Did the Cultural Services Division attempt to collect statistics as to the number of people attending the event and their ethnicity? - This could be done at the park as a representative sample, but was not really feasible for the Parade.

- The Council should aim to make all of the events it supports inclusive and promoting cultural diversity. It was its duty to promote good race relations.
- If a positive video of a previous St George's Day Parade existed could the organisers make it available for perusal by the Executive members of the Council?
- Can the tenor or nature of the Parade be changed? It needed to be the best for Sandwell people, not necessarily the biggest in the country.

A resident who lived near to the route of the Parade reported on what he had heard and seen at the Parade when he went to investigate chanting emanating from the uninvited band, which was associated with a far right organisation. There were badges, emblems and t-shirts associated with other far right organisations, but none of these had been identified by the Police debrief.

Resolved:-

- (1) that the Management Board notes that there is clear evidence of far-right political extremists infiltrating the 2008 St George's Day Parade in Sandwell, with no apparent observation or record of this by any of the stakeholders;
- (2) that the Cabinet and other stakeholders be recommended:-
 - (a) to examine the evidence of the events that took place, particularly in the context of the responsibility of all public bodies to promote good race relations and develop community cohesion in Sandwell;
 - (b) to give early consideration to how, and if, political extremism can be eliminated at any future St George's Day events in the Borough;
 - (c) to give consideration to developing the St George's Day celebrations into a static park event with the aim of providing a family-friendly event in a safe environment;
 - (d) that an analysis of the members of the public who attend future events is undertaken by stakeholders;

- (e) that intelligence is gathered on any future events by all stakeholders in order that early de-briefings can identify issues and concerns;
- (f) that no politicians be invited to speak at any future St George's Day events and that no political parties be able to display banners or promotional materials;
- (g) that West Midlands Police Officers undergo training to develop an awareness of the covert signs of any political extremism at future events.