

AREA FORUM (HESWALL AND PENSBY & THINGWALL)

Wednesday, 6 March 2013

Present:

Councillor	A Hodson (Chair)
Councillors	M Johnston M Sullivan K Hodson P Brightmore
Lead Officer	David Armstrong Assistant Chief Executive/Head of Universal and Infrastructure Services
Area Service Co-ordinator	Tracey Smith
Streetscene Manager	Mark Traynor
Community Safety	Mike Collins
Merseyside Police	Inspector Mick Blease
Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service	Ian Hardman
Council Officers Apologies	Linda Hodgson (Library Service)
Councillors	L Rowlands Ray Squire (Community Representative) Peter Cummings (United Utilities)

1 **WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES**

Cllr Andrew Hodson welcomed 14 members of the public to the Neighbourhood Forum at the Hope Centre.

Cllr Hodson welcomed newly elected councilors Philip Brightmore and Kathy Hodson to their first Neighbourhood Forum.

Peter Cummings has given his apologies, as he was due to attend the forum on behalf of United Utilities

2 **A MINUTES SILENCE IN REMEMBRANCE OF COUNCILLOR PETER JOHNSON**

A 1 minute silence was held in honour of Peter Johnson.

3 **MINUTES OF LAST MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING**

Technical Services have confirmed that the pedestrian crossing on Pensby Road will be completed once the electrical items needed to finish the work are delivered. The final cost of the crossing will be £32,000

RESOLVED: To accept the minutes of the meeting of the Area Forum on 17 October 2012.

4 **NEIGHBOURHOOD WORKING STATEMENT**

David Armstrong read out the statement regarding the future of the Neighbourhood Forums and the development of neighbourhood working with the proposal to establish 4 Constituency Committees based on the Parliamentary areas of Wirral.

Q. Will local people be involved with the Constituency Committees?

A. Tracey Smith: Many of the details of how the Constituency Committees will operate have not yet been released. Local people will have the opportunity to get involved as one of the main aims of the committees is to improve community engagement.

Q. There are settlement areas within the Core Strategy and all areas are different even within the Parliamentary Areas. How will these new committees deal with boundary issues?

A. David Armstrong: The Council has issues when workings across boundaries at the moment in departments where services are delivered across the Borough. Because decisions will be made by the Committees themselves and report to their own local board, the aim of the new model of working is to keep any boundary issues to a minimum.

Q. Will everyone who does not have access to the internet be kept up to date with progress on these committees?

A. Yes, we will continue to keep everyone informed of developments and meetings.

Q. How do these committees relate to the Localism Act?

A. Tracey Smith: Very much so as the Constituency Committees will give residents say over council budgets and services and staff will be located in the areas in Neighbourhood Teams, although these locations have yet to be arranged.

A. Michael Sullivan: It will give people more power to make decisions. While the model of 11 Neighbourhood Forums had money to allocate, these decisions were usually made by local councilors and a handful of community representatives. The new formula will allow people to have more of a say on the spending of resources.

A. Why was the information regarding the Constituency Committees not included in the recent What Really Matters consultation?

A. Tracey Smith: The consultation focused on budget issues.

Q. Philip Brightmore: I wanted to give thanks to Don McCubbin for all his hard work while he was the ward councilor. Are the parliamentary areas to be able to make decisions?

A. David Armstrong: The intention is for each Committee to report to its own board so hopefully local decisions will still be made which benefits the area. The Committees will also be made up of local councilors, community representatives and members of the voluntary and community sector.

A. Andrew Hodson: This new model of working is to try and engage more with the community. However it is difficult to comment on the details of the model as they have not been released yet.

5 UNITED UTILITIES UPDATE

No update as Peter Cummins unable to attend the meeting.

6 PARTNER ORGANISATIONS UPDATE

Linda Hodgson (Library Service)

Following a council motion the library service is looking to work closer with the Neighbourhood Forums and Constituency Committees when they are formed.

The Library Service is constantly looking at expanding the service it offers to residents. Currently there is a lot of working going on with volunteers, a number of partners such as Reach Out and other organisations offering drop in advice sessions.

Q. Is the internet free for Heswall library users?

A. Linda Hodgson: It is free for the first 30 minutes and then there is a charge for internet use. Job seekers are allowed slightly more free time.

Q. Is there always a volunteer on site at the libraries?

A. Linda Hodgson: The library cannot always guarantee a volunteer to assist people. However all library staff are trained to give IT advice to library users.

Ian Hardman (Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service)

Each fire station has its own community plan which is drawn up in partnership with other statutory organisations. There is also an over arching plan for the whole of Wirral.

The bonfire period was a success for the fire service with a 36% reduction in calls from the same period last year. All other statistics concerning the fire service have also decreased since last year including accidental dwelling fires, deliberate second fires and road traffic collisions.

Q. is it true that free smoke alarms for pensioners have stopped?

A. Ian Hardman: No, if the fire service are visiting a resident as a 're-visit' and are in a low risk category there maybe a small charge. It is still free for someone if it's the first visit or they are classed as a high risk.

A. Mick Blease: I ve had a number of calls from the fire service enquiring if I require a safety check and the prices charged are very good value for money.

Q. David Armstrong: The fire service are doing a tremendous job of working with young people and educating them around the dangers of driving at a young age. There are also 4 fire officers seconded to the Council's Youth Service around this project.

Mick Blease:

The Police are engaging with Wirral Council on the new model for neighbourhood working. There are benefits for the police in doing this as it gives local Inspectors more of a say on how were police resources are directed in the community.

A huge amount of police work recently has saw a gang of 6 men from Birkenhead arrested for a number of thefts from property. Wirral is generally still a safe place to live.

Q. Mike Sullivan: There was a robbery at the Spar/Post Office on Irby Road recently. Is there an update on this?

A. Mick Blease: There have been no arrests yet but the police are following a number of leads. The criminals stole very little cash and we are studying CCTV images at the moment.

Q. Mark Johnson: There has been a decrease in anti social behaviour in the area. Can you give us a bit of information on what work is going on with young people?

A. Mick Blease: We try to engage with young people at an earlier stage and educate them on their behaviour and where it will lead to if they don't change their lifestyle. This also means getting an understanding of family circumstances and offering advice and intervention where ever needed.

Mike Collins (Community Safety)

Council buildings and property such as schools and libraries are often a target for criminals as they know they are empty of an evening. If anyone sees people acting suspiciously around council buildings could they please call the Community Patrol Team on 0151 666 5265

At this time of year there is always an increase in the number of break-ins to sheds and garages. Over the past 12 months we have given over 200 tickets for dog fouling and 50 fixed penalties for littering.

Q. Andrew Hodson: Are people abusive when they are given a ticket?

A. Mike Collins: Generally we get more abuse when giving out tickets for dog fouling, although 98% of tickets are paid first time.

Q. Andrew Hodson: I've been concerned for a while that there could be a fatality on the Wirral Way as some cyclists go as fast as they can and time themselves.

A. Mike Collins: It is an area that we have given attention to and this issue has caused problems.

Q. Philip Brightmore: Do the figures for the reduction in fires over the Bonfire period include the smaller fires put out by the Community Patrol Team?

A. Mike Collins: No, however the figures would be encouraging anyway because of the amount of partnership work between all statutory agencies.

7 GENERAL PUBLIC QUESTION TIME.

Q. There has been an ongoing problem on around May Road with the Aldi lorries damaging kerbs, garden walls and more recently knocking over a steel post. Although they pay to repair the damage, it is getting to the point now where more serious damage will occur. The council is now also planning to change the parking restrictions in the area which we see us losing two of the free spaces.

A. Mark Traynor (Streetscene): Aldi will definitely be charged if they have caused the damage.

A. Andrew Hodson: I will liaise with Surjit Tour and Mark Traynor to see how this issue can be addressed.

A. Mike Sullivan: Unfortunately this is also a problem along Pensby Road. It is costing tax payers money as repairs have to be made.

Q. With the changes to the Welfare Reform Act and the introduction of the Bedroom Tax and Universal Credit have the registered Social Landlords considered re-classifying their property which would indicate they have less bedrooms and what work is going on to mitigate the problems that will arise from this?

A. Mark Johnson: The council formed a scrutiny committee specifically around this issue, which in partnership with a number of different agencies has put forward 18 recommendations to Cabinet to try and address the problem. Registered Social Landlords can re-classify their property but this would mean them receiving less rent so it is not feasible. A lot of hard work is going on but it may be 12-18 months until we get a real understanding of the problems people are facing.

A. Philip Brightmore: The council has put forward different pots of funding to assist people who will be affected when Universal Credit is brought in. Like the Bedroom Tax will not see the real problems until 12 months afterwards.

The meeting closed at 8.15pm