

CONSTITUENCY COMMITTEE - WIRRAL WEST

Thursday, 9 February 2017

<u>Present:</u>	Councillor	JE Green (Chair)	
	Councillors	E Boulton P Brightmore D Burgess-Joyce W Clements D Elderton G Ellis	M Patrick T Smith M Sullivan G Watt S Whittingham
<u>In attendance:</u>	Community Representative	J Hall MBE	
<u>Apologies</u>	Councillors	J Hale T Anderson	L Reece Jones

Prior to the meeting commencing the Chair requested that there be a minute's silence in memory of Councillor Denise Roberts (representing Claughton Ward since 1999), who sadly passed away on 8 February 2017 and Mr Phil Baker, former Engagement Officer for Wirral West, who sadly passed away before Christmas.

23 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were asked to consider whether they had any disclosable pecuniary interests and/or any other relevant interest in connection with any item(s) on this agenda and, if so, to declare them and state the nature of the interest.

Councillor Wendy Clements declared a personal interest in item 6 – Constituency Manager's Progress and Budget Report, by virtue of being Chair of the Greasby Community Association.

24 MINUTES

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 6 October 2016 be approved.

25 WIRRAL WEST YOUR WIRRAL OUTCOMES 2015 AND 2016

The Chair invited Ms Sally Ross of Magenta Living to provide a brief overview on the background to the 'Your Wirral' grant programme.

Ms Ross informed that Wirral Council and Magenta Living agreed in 2014 that the 'Your Wirral' Fund be administered via the Constituency Committees,

allocated on the basis of the number of housing units in each area. She explained that the structure of the 7 year programme had enabled the use of the V.A.T. element of funding to be utilised. This had allowed the allocation of £250,000 to be spent across the Wirral by the Constituency Committees in each of the financial years 2014-15 and 2015-16.

Members noted that as a result the Wirral West Constituency Committee had been allocated £40,000 in 2014-15 and again in 2015-16 to award 'Your Wirral' grants of a maximum of £2,500 to local voluntary and community sector (not for profit) groups.

Magenta Living stipulated that the terms and conditions and application process should be consistent in all four areas but that the decision-making process for awarding grants had been a matter for each Committee. Members were further informed that, in 2014-15 and 2015-16, 'Your Wirral' also made provision for Wirral wide projects and that each year, £50,000 had been 'ringfenced' for projects delivered across two or more constituency areas. In these cases funding awards had been agreed by a panel comprising Constituency Committee chairs or deputies.

Ms Ross stated that a good number of individual projects had benefitted from the fund, and it was pleasing to note how small amounts of money had made such a big difference to projects, and that it was fantastic to see what a community could do, when provided with the appropriate means.

The Chair then invited Ms Jane Morgan, Constituency Manager Wirral West to present her report detailing the specific outcomes of 'Your Wirral' in Wirral West over the past two years.

Ms Morgan informed the Committee that in summary the 'Your Wirral' funding that had been made available to the Wirral West Constituency area had enabled the following:

- 56 projects delivered by community, voluntary and faith groups and not-for-profit organisations;
- 43 community and voluntary groups involved in delivering projects;
- Hundreds of people benefiting directly (with outcomes including improving health and wellbeing and quality of life, reducing loneliness, increasing the aspirations of young people through involvement in sport);
- Thousands of residents and visitors benefiting indirectly;
- 13 community buildings improved, increasing their use and contributing to their long-term sustainability;

- Local parks and open spaces improved; and
- Valued local amenities put in place (e.g. public noticeboards).

The Chair expressed the Constituency Committee's thanks to all the volunteers, Magenta Housing and the Constituency Manager and Constituency Engagement Officer for all the work undertaken that had allowed the success of the 'Your Wirral' Fund projects.

Resolved – That the report, and the outcomes of the Your Wirral projects, be noted.

26 UPDATE FROM MERSEYSIDE POLICE

The Chair invited Inspector Paul Harrison to provide an update on neighbourhood policing arrangements in Wirral.

Inspector Harrison informed of the changes to Wirral West area policing, i.e. how new arrangements meant that policing of the area was now effectively a 'borderless force' whereby at times of high demand, police officers were now directed wherever needed. Inspector Harrison outlined the financial context to the changes in terms of Merseyside Police's budget, with £70 million of savings made since 2010 and a further £25million savings required over the next four years.

Inspector Harrison explained that officers remained committed to delivering the best possible service under the new arrangements, and that Wirral still retained its own detective team. He stated that, although in some cases this could mean that patrols come from Liverpool, this would also allow the utilisation of appropriate skills from surrounding areas. The tactical team would comprise of 50 officers with a central commander based in Liverpool..

Members questioned the Inspector on a number of key points arising from his verbal report, seeking assurance regarding the perceived loss of resources from the Wirral to Liverpool. Inspector Harrison explained that the new arrangements would still retain police officers in Wirral, but would mean that should there be significant need elsewhere, those officers would be redirected. He re-iterated that the same would apply if the need was on the Wirral. He informed the Committee that the primary basis for allocation of officers under the new arrangement was "Threat, Harm and Risk".

Members expressed their views and concerns regarding cuts to police budgets since 2010, feeling that the current position had resulted in a reactive force, and that knowledge of localities would diminish. Inspector Harrison explained that the police force would never become a purely reactive organisation, and that pre-planning, gathering of intelligence, identification of

individuals and continued working with partner organisations would ensure that such examples of good practice developed over the years would continue to remain in place.

Members raised the matter regarding communications and the ability to contact named officers either in management and/or PCSO roles. Inspector Harrison explained that it was his role to ensure that the communication links were effective and that the current times, budget constraints and fewer staff would provide challenges, but the police force remained committed to making it work.

The Chair opened up the meeting to allow member of the public to question Inspector Harrison. A number of concerns re-iterating points raised by the Committee were raised, alongside a number of specific questions relating to parking, traffic, road safety and law enforcement.

The Chair thanked Inspector Harrison for his report, and taking the time to respond to Members' and Public questions.

Resolved – That the update be noted.

27 REFLECTIONS ON CONSTITUENCY WORKING

The Chair invited Ms Jane Morgan, Constituency Manager Wirral West to introduce her presentation that set out a summary reflection of the work undertaken in the Wirral West Constituency.

Ms Morgan informed the meeting of the role of the Constituency Committees and constituency team and how team seeks to work across the diverse wards in Wirral West which each have their own characteristics and needs. She further informed how the team works with Councillors, community organisations and local volunteer to address specific issues and help improve the Constituency through the allocation of small grants (of up to £1,000 for a wide range of projects).

Ms Morgan also explained the team's work with partners on initiatives such as the Great Wirral Door Knock (held early December in Woodchurch), which had been a great success in helping to identify people requiring assistance with a variety of issues, that might not have otherwise come to light.

Ms Morgan provided additional information on a number of other projects that included:

- Addressing anti-social behaviour through the use of community funding to prevent children and young people getting involved in ASB, an example of which was a Woodchurch Primary School year 5/6 project involving role models.

- Special Places project – physical improvements in the local community i.e. bench seating in locations identified by residents.
- Road Safety - £100k allocated to junction protection and other road safety works.
- Creating opportunities to come together e.g. big lunches
- Large scale projects such as the new Woodchurch Play Area

The Chair expressed the Constituency Committee's thanks to the Constituency Manager, Constituency Engagement Officer and all partners and community organisations involved in the projects undertaken to help the residents of Wirral West.

Resolved – That the presentation be noted.

28 **ORDER OF BUSINESS**

The Chair suggested, and it was agreed that item 8 on the agenda, Community Question Time be considered as the next item, followed by the Community Representatives Update and the Constituency Manager's Progress and Budget Report thereafter.

29 **COMMUNITY QUESTION TIME**

The Chair invited questions from members of the public upon matters that were relevant to the Wirral West Constituency. One written question had been submitted in advance of the meeting from Ms Keren O'Rourke:

- "The Hoylake Golf Resort proposal includes 200 executive homes on Green Belt land and a Flood Plain. The Government White Paper published on Tuesday stated that Green Belt Protection will not be downgraded and Councils can only take land out of Green Belt in exceptional circumstances and that they should have looked at every alternative first. The Council's recent study into tourism on the Wirral showed that tourists overwhelmingly come here for the countryside, coast and nature and NOT for Golf. Better outcomes for jobs can be found by investing elsewhere. Do the Councillors agree that there is no 'exceptional circumstances justification for building on the Green Belt and that the Council is wasting £100,000s of tax payer's money on this project?"
 - The Deputy Chief Executive provide an answer to the question on behalf of the Assistant Director: Environmental Services that informed:

- Changing the boundaries of the Green Belt - Ministers have reaffirmed the government's commitment to the Green Belt – that only in exceptional circumstances may Councils alter Green Belt boundaries after consulting local people and submitting the revised Local Plan for examination and set out for the first time all the actions local authorities must take before considering the Green Belt. Source: Government Press Release 7 February 2017.
- Existing Green Belt Policy in Wirral - This remains unchanged and is set out in the Unitary Development Plan. Policy GB2 provides the guidelines for development in the Green Belt. It says “Within the Green Belt there is a general presumption against inappropriate development and as such development will not be approved except in very special circumstances...” This is the policy test that the Golf Resort project would have to satisfy within the current planning policy context. Not all aspects of the resort project are inappropriate (for example the golf courses are appropriate development) but the housing and hotel are inappropriate in terms of the policy.
- It is for the developer to make the case for ‘very special circumstances’ through the planning process and for the Local Planning Authority to assess the case along with all other relevant material planning considerations in determining the planning application.
- If the planning application was approved through the planning process, the land designation would not change (it would still be Green Belt) but the development, having demonstrated ‘very special circumstances’ would be allowed.
- The Chair informed of the independence of the Planning Committee and its quasi-judicial role as a Regulatory Committee, Councillor David Elderton also provided an explanation of how Members of the Planning Committee were duty bound to make decisions on planning applications based purely on planning grounds, adhering to planning law.

Additional questions were tabled as follows:

- A member of the public directed a question to the Committee asking that proposals to introduce on-street parking charges in Hoylake be reconsidered and whether their introduction was primarily to offset the expenditure on Hoylake Golf Resort?

- Community Representative Ms Jackie Hall, supported the questioners view stating that she was appalled at the proposed introduction of on-street parking charges, and had never experienced such strong local opinions on a topic before. She further stated that a petition of 2,472 signatures opposing the proposal had been raised in just 2 weeks, and that a number of people had expressed the view that should charges be introduced they would not be shopping in Hoylake.
 - The Chair informed that a similar petition regarding the introduction of parking charges in Wirral's Country Parks had raised in the region of 9,000 signatures, and that an Extraordinary Council Meeting had been called to debate the matter.
- A resident of Thornton Hough informed the Committee that recent road surfacing work 'top-dressing' in the area had started to fail within 24 hours of its installation. He further informed that an estimated 30-90% of the dressing surface / chippings had come away. He identified a particular stretch of road, where in addition pot holes had not been repaired and questioned what actions were being taken to address the poor quality of works.
 - Councillor Whittingham, Cabinet Member for Transport and Infrastructure responded stating he hadn't been made aware of this specific location and that if details were provided he would ensure the matter was addressed. He informed the meeting that he was aware of the problems associated with recent re-surfacing and that the contractor would be returning to make good the failed works at no additional cost to the Council. Another Member advised that he too had been contacted about the matter and that the works were to be undertaken when the weather would allow, most likely in the summer months.
 - The Chair expressed a view on the dangerous state of some of the roads as a result of the surface failing and advised of the telephone numbers that can be used to report a road or pavement defect that posed an immediate danger to the public (Monday - Friday 8am to 5pm - 0151 606 2004, Outside of these hours - 0151 647 7810)
- Commenting on the subject of libraries, specifically Greasby Community Library, a member of the public directed a question to the Committee concerning the reductions in library opening hours and support provided to the service from 'Friends Groups and Volunteers'. He asked for assurance that the efforts of volunteers were being recognised by the Council, would they be consulted on future

proposals involving the libraries, and whether their efforts had all been in vain?

- Councillor Wendy Clement echoed the questioner's request, stating that Members should take proactive action to help safeguard the library service.
 - Councillor Mathew Patrick informed that a consultant's report was to be presented to the Cabinet shortly, and that the implications of the reduction of £132million from the Council's current budget over the next 5 years should be recognised. He added that he also wanted to ensure that the contribution of the volunteers to the service should be taken into account.
 - Councillor Mike Sullivan reported his attendance at a meeting of the Library Forum the previous day, commenting on the phenomenal work undertaken by staff, volunteers and friends groups across the borough and efforts to try to keep the borough's 24 libraries open. He informed that given the required budgetary savings, it would be unlikely that the Council and its library service would exist in their current form in 2020.
- A member of the public directed a question regarding the shortage of places in Care Homes within the borough and nationally, expressing his belief that it be 'a disgrace'. He asked whether there had been any lobbying of Government on the subject?
 - The Chair informed that the opposition group had supported a resolution at Council on 19 December 2016 and, up until now, had not been approached to formally endorse any letter from the Leader on this matter.
- A member of the public commented on the recent planning application for a Fire Station in Saughall Massie. He asked that given the consultations, meetings and associated public interest and rejection of the application, was there still a likelihood that the same application could be resubmitted in another form? He sought assurance that when it comes back, it would be turned down.
 - The Deputy Chief Executive re-iterated earlier comments from members regarding the planning process but further informed that following the rejection of the application the Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service had a number of options available to it. The organisation could either: accept the decision of the Planning Committee, Resubmit an amended application, or appeal against the decision. It was the understanding of the Officer that an appeal had been lodged with the planning inspectorate and

an alternate planning application submission was also being drafted.

- A member of the public directed a question to the Committee regarding the pruning of trees in Upton Ward. He had sought clarification on the law regarding 'ancient light' from the Council and had not received a response.
 - The Cabinet Member Transport and Infrastructure advised that he would speak to the questioner after the meeting to obtain details of the complaint.
- Members of the public then raised a series of questions relating to the terms of reference of the Committee asking if the Chair must be an Elected Member, the use of community venues, and the difficulty in hearing due to the intermittent workings of the microphones and sound system.
 - The Solicitor present informed that the Chair had been elected by the Constituency Committee, but it was the case that one of the other Constituency Committees had until recently been chaired by the local Member of Parliament.
 - The Constituency Manager informed that the Constituency Committee had decided that it would hold its meetings in varied venues across the borough in order to make it easier for local residents to attend. She stated that this in turn had implications for the quality of sound dependent on venues, although it was tested before each meeting. The alternative would mean holding all Wirral West Constituency meetings at Wallasey Town Hall, utilising the sound equipment there.

30 **COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES UPDATE**

The Constituency Manager (Wirral West) informed that, as per the Council's Constitution, Constituency Committees can appoint Community Representatives with non-voting rights. The Constituency Manager further informed that Wirral West Constituency Committee had 5 such posts – one per Electoral Ward – and that recruitment continued where there are vacancies.

The Chair informed that one nomination / application to serve as a co-opted member of the committee had been received. Following the formal agreement by Members of the Constituency Committee, he invited Ms Alisha Butler-Ward to step forward and take her place at the table.

The Chair further informed the assembled meeting that any person(s) interested in serving on the Constituency Committee should contact the Constituency Manager or her office for further information on the post(s).

The Chair then asked Community Representative Ms Jackie Hall MBE for an update on local issues in the Hoylake area.

Jackie Hall MBE informed the Constituency Committee of her engagement with local residents and shop keepers in Hoylake on the subject of recent reports concerning the proposal to introduce on street parking charges. She commented that a view had been expressed that efforts to retain businesses and vibrant niche shopping areas would be curtailed by such a policy, and highlighted ongoing concerns from local residents and small businesses regarding the proposal.

Ms Hall further informed the Committee of the number of independent groups that existed in Hoylake and Meols, the positive benefits arising from networking between the groups. She also stated that she was currently awaiting a response from the council regarding an answer to a question about the responsibility for assets that may arise from the use of Council owned properties, e.g. libraries, by voluntary / independent groups.

Resolved – That

- 1) Ms Alisha Butler-Ward be co-opted as community representative for West Kirby and Thurstaston for the remainder of the municipal year; and**
- 2) Ms Jackie Hall's verbal report be noted.**

31 CONSTITUENCY MANAGER'S PROGRESS AND BUDGET REPORT

Further to her earlier presentation 'Reflections on Constituency Working' (minute 27 refers), the Constituency Manager (Wirral West) presented her report that provided an update on current projects and activities funded using the Committee's 2015-16 budget allocations and budgets carried over from previous years.

The report informed on a number of key areas relating to constituency projects and activities, that included:

- Wirral West Community Fund and response to Wirral West Community Vote
- Projects funded in each ward
- Remaining budget available for local improvements at the discretion of ward councillors
- Road Safety budget update

The Constituency Manager (Wirral West) provided a brief verbal summary, update on progress and highlighted the specific recommendations that £5,000 of the environmental budget be made available for a 'Small Grant, Big Difference' programme for activities which improve the local environment and that the remaining £3,000 be utilised to organise a series of clean up ('sparkle') days of action in selected locations co-ordinated by the constituency team.

Resolved – That

- 1) the Constituency Manager's report be noted;**
- 2) £5,000 of the environmental budget be made available for a 'Small Grant, Big Difference' programme for activities which improve the local environment (on the basis of £1,000 per ward, with a maximum grant of £200 for individual projects); and**
- 3) the remaining £3,000 be utilised to organise a series of clean up ('sparkle') days of action in selected locations co-ordinated by the constituency team.**

32 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Wirral West Constituency Committee was scheduled for 27 April 2017, at St Chad's Church, Roslin Road, Irby, Wirral CH61 3UH.

The Chair thanked all speakers, members of the public, Officers and Elected Members for their attendance.