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CONSTITUENCY COMMITTEE - WIRRAL WEST

Wednesday, 30 October 2013

Present:

Councillor JE Green

Councillors	E Boulton	M Johnston
	W Clements	M Patrick
	D Elderton	T Smith
	G Ellis	M Sullivan
	J Hale	G Watt
	M Hornby	S Whittingham

In attendance:

Councillor G Davies
(Cabinet Member)

Apologies

Councillor P Brightmore

1 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR

The Head of Legal and Member Services invited nominations for the appointment of the Chair.

On a motion by Councillor Wendy Clements, seconded by Councillor Eddie Boulton, it was –

Resolved – That Councillor Jeff Green be appointed Chair of the Wirral West Constituency Committee for the remainder of this municipal year.

Councillor Jeff Green in the Chair

The Chair then requested nominations for appointment of Vice-Chair.

On a motion by Councillor Mike Hornby, seconded by Councillor Gerry Ellis, it was –

Resolved – That Councillor John Hale be appointed Vice-Chair of the Wirral West Constituency Committee for the remainder of this municipal year.

2 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair referred to the sad news of the recent death of Sylvia Hodrien, former Labour Councillor for Upton Ward. Sylvia had been highly regarded by all of her colleagues and at the request of the Chair, the Committee stood in silence as a mark of respect.

He referred to the by-election in Upton Ward held on 24 October 2013 and offered his congratulations to the successful candidate, Councillor Matthew Patrick. He welcomed Councillor Patrick to the Constituency Committee.

The Chair commented also that Merseyside Police was a partner in the development of a constituency working approach and he was pleased to introduce Inspector Brian Griffiths, the Neighbourhood Inspector for Wirral West.

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Phill Brightmore.

3 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.

The Chair indicated that the Committee would be working closely with various community groups and local charities that most Members would be involved with.

No additional specific declarations were made.

4 TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Head of Legal and Member Services introduced the report of the Head of Neighbourhoods and Engagement with regard to the terms of reference of the Constituency Committee. He set out the current legal framework for the Committee's operation and referred to Article 10 of the Council's Constitution, which put in place the necessary provisions for the Committee to discharge such functions as may be delegated to it from time to time by the Executive and/or the Council. He referred also to the provision for the appointment of Community Representatives (see minute 5 post).

The Cabinet had recognised that the terms of reference for each Constituency Committee would evolve. Consequently, the Council's Constitution would be updated to reflect such changes that became necessary.

The Constituency Manager referred to a number of considerations that had been identified in the approach to constituency working, which had mainly emerged through workshops held earlier in the year. To address these, it was proposed that a Wirral West Constituency Committee 'handbook' would be developed by a 'task and finish' group, consisting of Members from each ward. The 'handbook' would set out how the Committee would operate and the report identified a number of suggested sections that could be included within its content.

The Chair was pleased that Article 10 of the Constitution would be updated in due course to ensure that the Committee would have the flexibility it required to fulfil its aims. However, his view was that, although 'task and finish' groups were very useful in some areas of work, he hoped that the officers would seek to involve all Members of the Committee in the development of a 'handbook', prior to bringing back an update report to the next meeting.

Councillor Hale expressed his concern that some of the governance principles in relation to Constituency Committees were overly prescriptive. Specifically, he commented that the Committee should not be restricted as to the number

of meetings that would be held during the year. In addition, he expressed a view that the Committee should be able to co-opt more than one Community Representative from any given ward, should it be considered appropriate to do so. In response, the Chair commented that it was incumbent on Members and officers to find a way for local people to be engaged in the work of the Committee without having to be formally co-opted to it.

Resolved –

- (1) That the Committee notes that Article 10 of the Council's Constitution will be updated in due course to ensure the Committee has the flexibility it requires.**
- (2) That the Constituency Manager be requested to engage with all Members of the Committee in order to develop a Wirral West Constituency Handbook and an update report be presented to the next meeting.**
- (3) That any recommendations identified as a result of the work undertaken to develop the Terms of Reference for the Committee be referred to the Cabinet in due course.**

5 COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES

The Constituency Manager presented the report of the Head of Neighbourhoods and Engagement, which set out progress made with regard to the selection of Community Representatives for the Wirral West Constituency Committee. She indicated that, working with Voluntary and Community Action Wirral, the Council had advertised and circulated information requesting applications from those persons who wished to be co-opted as Community Representatives on the Committee. A number of applications had been received and, subject to the views of the Committee, it was proposed that, in the interest of fairness and taking account that the Committee was at an early stage in its development, representatives should be selected on the basis of no more than one per electoral ward.

She commented that a process was now being implemented for ward Councillors to undertake informal interviews with prospective Community Representatives, using a consistent set of questions and scoring approach, to enable Members to make recommendations to the Constituency Committee. On the basis of those recommendations, it was anticipated that Community Representatives would be formally co-opted at the next meeting.

In response to a question from a Member, the Constituency Manager indicated that there had been a sufficient number of applications to enable an appointment to be made from each ward. However, the Chair commented that, if an appointment was not made from a particular ward at this stage, the Committee would not have to wait until the next municipal year to identify and appoint a suitable candidate. In the light of comments previously made by Councillor Hale, the Chair requested that the officers give due consideration as to how best to involve local people who were not appointed as Community Representatives.

Resolved –

- (1) That the progress made in the selection of Community Representatives for the Wirral West Constituency Committee be noted.**
- (2) That the formal co-option of Community Representatives take place at the next meeting of the Committee.**
- (3) That the Constituency Manager be requested to report also upon how best to involve local people in the working of the Committee, other than those appointed as Community Representatives.**

6 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The Chair indicated that he had asked that time be set aside to give members of the public the opportunity to ask any questions relevant to the Wirral West Constituency. He confirmed that no advance notice of any question had been received.

The following questions were asked –

- A request was made for Members and officers around the table to introduce themselves. And a show of hands was requested to indicate which wards members of the public had travelled from.
 - The Chair asked that all Members and officers introduce themselves. However, he expressed a view that the attendance of members of the public and their willingness to engage with the Constituency Committee process was of greater value than their place of abode. He hoped that future meetings would be held in other parts of the Constituency so as to allow attendance of people from all areas.

The Committee recognised the good level of attendance from members of the public, with approximately 80 residents present. It was hoped that, in future, robust monitoring of numbers in attendance and where they had travelled from to attend would be incorporated into the record.
- Specifically in relation to the savings option to introduce parking charges at public parks and other leisure areas, is 'What Really Matters?' true consultation or a 'fait accompli'? This in the light of recent press coverage, that such charges would be introduced.
- Will the results of the consultation be made public?
- Will consideration be given to alternative ways of managing public parks, such as by friends groups and other community organisations?
 - The Chair advised that the consultation was in relation to a set of proposals brought forward by the Chief Executive and Chief Officer team. At the end of the process, the Cabinet would then come to a view.
 - The results of the consultation would be made public.

- The Chair anticipated that as the Constituency Committee evolved and its resource was increased, it would be able to move forward with friends groups to explore alternative approaches as to how best to manage public parks and open spaces.
- In respect of the proposed parking charges at various parks and open spaces in the Constituency a further question was asked as to what consideration had been given to the potential congestion that could be caused by cars parking in neighbouring roads?
 - Members agreed that the impact of savings options needed to be carefully evaluated as to their impact on residents and local businesses. However, the Chair was of the view that the Committee should not be a part of the political process. No decision had yet been taken in relation to any matters in the published consultation document. However, elected Members would ultimately be held to account for the decisions they take and he suggested awaiting the conclusion of the consultation process.
- How many applications had been received from persons interested in being co-opted by the Committee as a Community Representative?
 - The Constituency Manager indicated that a total of nine applications had been received and the process for selection was ongoing, prior to formal co-option at the next meeting.

The Chair had previously commented that it was his intention to involve more local residents in the business of the Constituency Committee than those who would be formally co-opted as Community Representatives. He asked that the officers investigate the feasibility of a dedicated website to achieve greater participation.

- A question was asked as to how autonomous the Constituency Committee was in terms of its decision making powers.
 - The Chair agreed that the business of the Wirral West Constituency Committee was still, to some degree, subject to the Council's political process. However, he hoped that the Committee would not be a mini-Council but, would work with and engage local people in decisions to make the area better. Nevertheless, it was vital that any proposals from the Committee were evidence based.
- A local resident from the Woodchurch area expressed her view that the Committee was intimidating and that the Area Forums were a better way for the Council to engage with local people. She also expressed a view that parts of Upton Ward did not fit appropriately with the other Wards in Wirral West.
 - The Chair commented that decisions on Ward and Constituency boundaries were outside the remit of the Constituency Committee. The Chair was confident that all Ward Councillors would state the case for the communities they represented and he assured

members of the public that all Members of the Committee would work together, so as to meet their expectations.

He accepted that the Area Forums had merits and he commented that the work they had undertaken would not be lost. However, the Council had taken a decision to move forward on the basis of four Constituency Committees across Wirral and it was incumbent on members of the public to liaise with their Ward Councillors in order to influence the development of the Constituency Plan.

The Chair referred also to a Community Asset Audit being undertaken in Birkenhead and he anticipated that something on a similar basis could be undertaken in Wirral West.

- The Chair of the Older People's Parliament in Wirral referred to the biggest area of the Council's budget being Adult Social Care. She commented that significant numbers of elderly people across Wirral were lonely and isolated and she expressed a view that if more people looked out for elderly people in their neighbourhoods, Council spending in this area could be reduced.
 - The Chair agreed with the points made and was confident that the officers would investigate the points made.

The Chair concluded this part of the meeting by thanking members of the public for their questions and requesting that the officers take such actions arising as are appropriate.

7 DEVELOPING WIRRAL WEST CONSTITUENCY PRIORITIES AND BUDGET EXPENDITURE PROCESS FOR 2013/2014

The Constituency Manager presented the detailed report of the Head of Neighbourhoods and Engagement upon the development of the Wirral West Constituency Priorities and Budget Expenditure Process for 2013/2014.

She indicated that the Constituency Plan would draw upon robust data and would include issues highlighted by Members at a workshop held in July. It would also have regard to the results of engagement she had undertaken with local groups, Councillors, Council services and partners, to identify and explore issues for the Wirral West area.

At its meeting held on 23 May 2013 (minute 250 refers), the Cabinet had initially allocated £50,000 to each Constituency Committee to 'kickstart' work on the new working model with a focus on tackling inequalities. In addition (Cabinet minute 76 (10 October 2013) refers), a further £25,000 had been allocated to each Constituency for public health initiatives from a non-recurrent underspend identified within the public health grant for 2013/2015.

The Constituency Committee was therefore asked to determine expenditure in relation to a total of £75,000 by the end of the 2013/2014 financial year.

The Chair referred to his previous request that a Community Asset Audit be developed, which would help determine future priorities. However, he

indicated that, although the funding to be allocated in 2013/2014 was not a huge sum, the Committee was being asked to allocate it in a very short timescale. Consequently, he proposed that for the allocation of funds in 2013/2014, consideration be given to holding a Constituency event, at which those local community groups seeking funding could put forward evidence-based bids. Funding could then be allocated following due consideration by the Committee.

In view of the need for funding in the current financial year to be allocated as quickly as possible, Members broadly agreed with the approach proposed by the Chair and noted that in subsequent years, funding would be allocated in accordance with the priorities, which would be identified in the Constituency Plan once this was in place. Members noted also that funding should be allocated equally (£75k/5 Wards) i.e. £15,000 per ward.

The Constituency Manager drew the attention of the Committee to a requirement that the element of the budget for public health initiatives was subject to certain criteria, which would need to be brought to the attention of local groups seeking funding.

Resolved –

- (1) That the considerations set out in the report of the Head of Neighbourhoods and Engagement be considered in the formulation of the Community Asset Audit and Constituency Plan, to be presented to the next meeting of the Committee to highlight need and priorities for funding in future years.**
- (2) That, in view of the need for early progress to be made in the allocation of funding in the current financial year, the Constituency Manager be requested to liaise with Members to put in place an approach to allocate the Committee's budget for 2013/2014, subject to good governance and to any relevant funding criteria.**
- (3) That the allocation of funding in 2014/2015 and subsequent years be subject to an evidence based approach by the Committee, based on the Constituency Plan, currently being formulated.**

8 LOVE WIRRAL GRANT

Prior to the verbal report of the Constituency Manager being presented, the Chair expressed his dismay that, essentially, a decision had been taken which would result in funding being allocated for local environmental projects with no significant involvement of the Constituency Committee. He had anticipated that the Committee would be actively engaged with the local community and expressed a view that it would have been better to engage first with each of the Constituency Committees before deciding the process.

The Constituency Manager reported that the 'Love Wirral' campaign was launched in June 2013 to encourage people who lived, worked and visited Wirral to take pride in the local environment. The 'Love Wirral' grant was to be used to encourage communities to look after their neighbourhoods and funding of £40,000 had been split equally across the four Constituencies.

All suitable applications received by the closing date of 6 December 2013 would be added to an online voting page, accessed from the Council's website and the public would be able to vote yes/no on the projects they wanted to receive funding. One login would be allowed per person, to vote yes/no against each project. The projects with the most votes in each Constituency would be then presented to the Constituency Committees for endorsement and approval, with funding to projects to be awarded between 10 and 21 March 2014, and projects to be completed by 30 June 2014.

Members expressed the view that given the small sum of money to be allocated to the projects, it would have been more effective to add the sum to the overall pot to be divided between wards, with a caveat that it was to be spent on environmental projects. Furthermore, it appeared that the funding process was more about an application's popularity than its merit and there was no assurance that people voting for or against any particular schemes were resident in those areas.

Further concerns were expressed by members of the public that the grant criteria was unclear and that many people, particularly elderly residents, without internet access were excluded from the process. In response, the Constituency Manager agreed to liaise with residents, as required, to provide clarity in relation to the grant. The Assistant Chief Executive commented that the scheme had been signed off by way of delegated authority. It had been well-intentioned and he agreed to take back the various concerns that had been expressed.

Resolved –

- (1) That the report and the concerns expressed by Members be noted.**
- (2) That a report on the outcome of the process be presented to the next meeting of the Committee.**

9 ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS APPROVED BY THE CHAIR

With the agreement of the Chair, Inspector Brian Griffiths, Neighbourhood Inspector for the Wirral West Constituency highlighted the police resources that were available in the Constituency area and commented upon a number of operational issues associated with officers based in Hoylake, e.g. commuting to and from Upton Police Station. It was his intention to tie in the neighbourhood police priority setting to the Constituency Committee, taking into account that the Police priority in all areas was responding to calls.

The Chair advised those present that the West Kirby Library site would be closed for a period of six weeks, from 18 November 2013 to 2 January 2014, in order that essential work may be undertaken to merge the library and One Stop Shop. It would not be possible for the library to remain fully or partially open whilst the works were being undertaken. However, in order to mitigate as much as possible the negative impact on the community, there was proposed a small pop-up library on the site of the Concourse with a selection of latest titles and a staffed enquiry desk with a free reservation service.

In response to a question from a Member, the Chair confirmed that the minutes of the meeting would be published on the Council's website.

Resolved –

- (1) That a report be presented to the next meeting of the Committee upon the proposed approach to aligning the Police's 'Have Your Say' prioritisation process with the work of the Constituency Committee and operational arrangements for Wirral West.**
- (2) That the update regarding the temporary closure of West Kirby Library be noted.**
- (3) That upon publication of the minutes, copies be made available for inspection in libraries within the Constituency.**

10 **FUTURE MEETINGS**

The Chair advised that he proposed to hold future meetings of the Committee at locations across the Constituency area and indicated that the next meeting was scheduled to be held on Tuesday 17 December 2013. However, the date was subject to change and, if so, the date, time and venue would be published on the Council's website. The Chair requested that Committee Members liaise with the Constituency Manager with regard to any additional items they wished to be placed on the agenda.

On behalf of the Constituency Committee the Chair offered his thanks to all at St John the Baptist Church for their hospitality in hosting this evenings meeting.

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