

ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 2 July 2019

Present:

Councillor C Blakeley (Chair)

Councillors	G Davies	T Anderson
	K Greaney	D Burgess-Joyce
	B Kenny	H Cameron
	C Muspratt	A Hodson
	S Spoor	A Brame
	I Williams	S Hayes

**3 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST /
PARTY WHIP**

Councillor George Davies declared a personal interest in the Local Plan update as he had been involved in earlier stages of the Plan development when he was a Cabinet Member for Housing.

There were no declarations made in respect of the application of a party whipping arrangement.

4 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

Councillor Chris Blakeley nominated Councillor Christina Muspratt as Vice Chair. This was seconded by Councillor Andrew Hodson.

There were no other nominations.

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Christina Muspratt be appointed Vice Chair of Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee for 2019/20.

5 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 13 March 2019 be approved as a correct record.

6 **LOCAL PLAN UPDATE**

The Council's Assistant Director: Major Growth Projects and Housing Delivery provided an update on the development of the Local Plan. The Action Plan had been submitted to the Secretary of State on 5 April 2019 and a formal response was awaited. The Council would continue on the timescales within the action plan which were:

- Cabinet, on 25 November 2019 to consider Regulation 18 Plan
- Council, on 9 December 2019, or after Cabinet approval, to consider the Regulation 18 Plan
- Consultation on Regulation 18 from January 2020, or after Council approval
- Regulation 19 – July 2020
- Submission for Examination – November 2020.

An all Member briefing had taken place on 10 June and a series of future ones had been circulated to all Councillors including a key meeting with the QC on 26 September. The Local Plan Member Advisory Group was scheduled to meeting fortnightly and would in future include the Chair of Planning Committee.

Members asked for clarification on the process for disposal of Council owned land, and also whether a Cabinet decision for the disposal of land in green belt could be referred back to Council. Officers would provide notes on these issues.

RESOLVED:

That the update be noted.

7 **DOGS PUBLIC SPACES PROTECTION ORDER**

The Lead Commissioner for Environment updated the Councillors on dog control measures. This Committee had last considered the matter in January 2019, and the issue had originally been brought about following public concern about dog fouling expressed in a survey in 2017. The Council had been considering how to address anti-social behaviour by driving behaviour change. It had been thought that existing byelaws could be used to control dogs in play areas and cemeteries but on investigation the byelaws only covered certain areas and could not be amended. Central Government advice was that a Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) should be used instead.

Members were keen that more consultation was undertaken before a policy was drafted, including groups representing particular elements of society, e.g. people with autism. Members suggested that a more conciliatory approach be taken with enforcement to educate people and rely on their goodwill, and they

wished to see the draft at an early stage, possibly with a special meeting of this Committee to consider it.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the position reached in relation to the consideration of future dog control measures be noted; and**
- 2) The Cabinet Member be urged to withdraw in its entirety the existing PSPO proposals and engage with user groups such as, but not exclusively, Wirral Good Dogs and Friends of Birkenhead Kennels to ensure all their views are taken into account before any future PSPO proposals are brought forward for consideration.**

8 FUTURE PROVISION OF THE FLORAL PAVILION

The Assistant Director for Community Services introduced the report which provided an update on progress toward the transfer of the Floral Pavilion Theatre and Conference Centre to an alternative specialist theatre provider on a long lease, while the council retained the freehold ownership.

Members questioned aspects of the proposal, and it was clarified:

- that the fly height for the stage scenery was reduced during planning application following local objections, but there were mechanisms to enable larger sets to be staged
- that the theatre employed more staff directly than other theatres as it did not have a separate centralised office with back office staff and marketing
- that it was hoped that a new operator would be experienced in running other theatres and would have economies of scale because of centralised back office and specialised staff across its portfolio.
- the theatre ran at a higher proportion of seats sold than the national average
- as the theatre was rebuilt in 2008, no major capital costs were expected in the near future

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the new Cabinet Member be thanked in her role in carrying out further consultation so we get the right answers; and**
- 2) The report be noted.**

9 FUTURE PROVISION OF GOLF COURSES

The Assistant Director for Community Services presented this report which provided an update on progress towards the transfer of Arrowe Park and the

Warren municipal golf courses to an alternative specialist golf provider on a long lease, while the council retained the freehold ownership. The approach had been agreed by Council on 4 March 2019 as the most appropriate opportunity for savings in the long term while keeping the courses open for the benefit of residents and visitors to Wirral.

The Cabinet decision to proceed to detailed negotiation with the preferred bidder had been called in and since then the Cabinet Member had accepted the need for more consultations before proceeding, and there were plans for this Committee to undertake visits to all four courses accompanied by trade union representatives.

Members expressed concern at the degree to which people played on the courses without paying. They were informed that staff had a rota, travelling out in a random two-hour period each day to check and collect fees on all four courses. It had generated £13,000 in the first year and £12,000 in the second which indicated that the approach reduced the problem. Members suggested that an intense four-week trial be undertaken to see if more money could be collected and if it was viable to continue this in the longer term.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) The cabinet member be thanked for carrying out further consultation;**
- (2) The contents of the report be noted; and**
- (3) Officers be asked to look at ways to stop people playing golf without paying across the four golf courses.**

10 **HOMELESSNESS IN WIRRAL**

The Community Safety Operations Manager gave a presentation which informed Members about homelessness in the Borough and introduced the report which provided Members with an overview of homeless services in the Wirral; statistical data; and an update in regard to the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) from April 2018. The HRA placed new and significant responsibilities on local authorities to prevent and relieve homelessness and changed how services were delivered to households who approached the Council for assistance each year. The new Act changed the categories for reporting which made comparisons with previous periods difficult.

It was explained that homelessness could cover a number of different circumstances but the Council's focus was largely to offer advice and support to people at risk of becoming homeless.

Key changes included:

- the length of time to work with people at risk of becoming homeless increased from 28 to 56 days
- increased emphasis on interim accommodation and meeting a wider range of clients with advice
- personalised housing plan to help people resolve their own situations
- a new duty to refer for bodies such as housing teams and social services although it was noticed that only around 12% of referrals actually needed help.

There had been a 70% increase in cases since the changes (to about 3,500), largely because of the broader definition. This had increased caseloads for workers although it had been noted that the volumes were now decreasing. There had been an increase in the requirement for interim accommodation and Wirral Council preferred temporary accommodation rather than bed and breakfast.

Rough sleeping had increased at the annual count, with a 165% increase. The council provided a range of responses including the housing options 24-hour service and outreach.

The next steps included a review by end of 2019 and employing a Homeless Champion to work with other bodies and internally, raising the profile of the services.

Members questioned the statistics presented, such as whether they could be split by gender and the definitions for rough sleepers and HM forces. Thanks were given to the staff who provided the services.

RESOLVED:

That:

- 1) the statistics and content of this report as it relates to homelessness in Wirral be noted;**
- 2) the services offered by the council to prevent and respond to homelessness be noted;**
- 3) the additional work planned to effectively prevent and respond to homelessness in the future be noted; and**
- 4) a further report be brought back after next annual rough sleeping count.**

11 **2018/19 QUARTER 4 AND YEAR END WIRRAL PLAN PERFORMANCE**

The Team Leader - Performance and Scrutiny introduced the performance report for the Wirral Plan pledges under the remit of Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The report provided an overview of the progress in Quarter 4 and available data in relation to a range of outcome indicators and supporting measures. Overall, there had been a 64% increase in performance against targets.

RESOLVED:

That the content of the report be noted.

12 **ENVIRONMENT O&S COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee considered the existing Work Programme for the municipal year.

Members suggested that an additional item be added, being a working group to consider the Council's tree policy as there was a backlog of maintenance and conflicting views from residents. If the work crossed over with the remit of another Scrutiny Committee then the working group may need to be a joint one.

The Committee needed to determine membership of the statutory Wirral Flood & Water Management Partnership.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) The contents of the Committee's Work Programme for 2019/20 be noted with the addition of a working group to consider tree policy;**
- 2) The Member representation on the Wirral Flood & Water Management Partnership be Councillors Chris Blakeley, Christina Muspratt and Allan Brame; and**
- 3) The Mayor be written to and asked not to delegate any Council Notices of Motion to this Committee as it did not have the resources or time to deal with them.**