

BUSINESS OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

THURSDAY, 23 JANUARY 2020

MINUTE 41

Having declared a prejudicial interest, Councillor George Davies left the room whilst this item was under consideration.

The Chair introduced a report which set out the findings and recommendations arising from a scrutiny review into the Council's response to the New Ferry explosion.

The review panel consisted of Councillors Dave Mitchell, Jo Bird, Steve Hayes and Mike Collins. It was agreed during the scoping meeting that Councillor Dave Mitchell would chair the panel. A cross party panel was convened and at a scoping session held in October 2019 the following review outcomes were agreed.

- To ensure that all necessary steps had been taken to address those residents, traders and other people affected by the incident.
- To consider what improvements could be made by the council and partner organisations in their response to future disasters.

Over the course of November and December 2019 the review panel undertook several interviews and stakeholder sessions. The full report, recommendations and scoping document were attached as appendices to the report.

Councillor Jo Bird commented that it had been a privilege to be on the Review Panel and expressed thanks to all the officers, residents, victims, traders and organisations who had given evidence to the Panel. She urged the Committee to support the Review Panel's recommendations in full without amendment.

The Chair then read out a note of thanks from local residents to the cross-party panel for all their hard work in producing the scrutiny report and asked for the recommendations to be supported in their entirety, without amendment or deletion. The Chair also thanked Anna Perrett, the Scrutiny Officer, for all her work on the review.

Members expressed their thanks to the Members, officers and former members of the Council for all their work.

Responding to comments from Members, David Armstrong, Assistant Chief Executive, stated that one project team would be established to drive forward the whole range of investment work to be undertaken in New Ferry. With regard to bills which had been sent out to residents for scaffolding, he had previously apologised for the tone of letters sent out and acknowledged that lessons had been learnt and he would pick this up further once details of individual cases had been provided. With regard to claiming costs back from those found guilty of a criminal offence, this would be something to be addressed through the Council's legal officers, though the Council had only been obliged to make the area safe it had gone beyond that in clearing the rubble from the site. The Council was in the final stages of buying the site and once it had done so the

Council would take up the concrete slabs and foundations and make the site a more attractive space.

The Chair read out a statement issued by the Council that day on regeneration for the area and stated that things were now certainly now moving in the right direction.

A Member suggested that the report should be sent to everybody who took part and that it would be helpful to see a report back to this Committee following its consideration by Cabinet. Some Members expressed the view that this was going to be unlikely because of the change in governance arrangements to come in May. Members also expressed the wish for such pieces of work to be able to continue under the new committee system and Councillor Tony Cox, Chair of the Standards and Constitutional Oversight Committee assured Members that it would.

Resolved –

(1) That this Committee supports the contents and recommendations of the Scrutiny review ‘New Ferry Explosion’.

(2) That the report be referred to the next appropriate Cabinet Meeting for consideration of the recommendations made.