

# TOURISM, COMMUNITIES, CULTURE & LEISURE COMMITTEE

Thursday, 23 January 2025

Present:

Councillor I Lewis (Chair)

Councillors	A Ainsworth	C Cooke
	P Jobson	KJ Williams
	G McManus	K Stuart
	G Bennett	R Molyneux
	J Johnson	M Redfern

56 **WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION**

The Chair welcomed attendees and viewers to the meeting and reminded everyone that the meeting was webcast and retained on the Council's website.

57 **APOLOGIES**

The Chair informed the committee that no apologies had been received.

58 **MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Members are asked to consider whether they have 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. No interests were declared.

59 **MINUTES**

**Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 28<sup>th</sup> November 2024 be approved and adopted as a correct record.**

60 **PUBLIC AND MEMBER QUESTIONS**

60.1 **Public Questions**

There had been one public question submitted and accepted prior to the meeting.

Mr David Sutton had been unable to attend the meeting, and so the Principal Lawyer to the Committee read out the question.

The question was in relation to disability access in Birkenhead Park, specifically wheelchair users and their adaptive vans being unable to access the park due to the gates being closed.

It was agreed that a written response would be sent to Mr Sutton within 10 working days.

#### **60.2 Statements and Petitions**

No statements or petitions had been received for this meeting.

#### **60.3 Questions by Members**

No member questions had been received for this meeting.

### **61 LEISURE SERVICES TRANSFORMATION UPDATE**

The Assistant Director of Leisure, Libraries and Community Engagement and the Major Projects Lead presented the report on behalf of the Director of Neighbourhoods. The report set out and sought support for the general direction of travel for leisure services including strategic objectives in terms of funding, facility priorities, timelines and projected outcomes to guide decision-making over the next 10 years. This was to ensure that the service met the needs of the community, whilst delivering value for money.

The Major Projects Lead explained that the landscape of leisure provision had shifted in recent years, influenced by changing demographic trends, increased demand for health and wellbeing activities and advancements in technology. Financial pressures on local authorities had necessitated a more sustainable and innovative approach to service delivery, and so officers needed to rethink the way that services were delivered. Additionally, the council's facilities were ageing, mixed between 30 and 120 years old, and significant investment was needed. The dedicated, knowledgeable staff had achieved fantastic results on innovation without cutting corners on quality.

The report gave members an overview of the current state of the Council's leisure facilities, the challenges and opportunities identified, and the roadmap for transformation.

Members asked officers for the justification of focussing primarily on Birkenhead within the recommendations, and raised concerns that the indicative timelines set out in the report were too long. Members also asked for updates on progress relating to performance improvement of the service, as well as requests for information relating to data collection at leisure centres and measuring footfall and what might be attracting residents to these sites.

In response to comments, the Assistant Director explained that the Birkenhead Regeneration Masterplan was the most live regeneration project at the time, with the proposed public sector health & wellbeing hub complimenting other developments in the area. The timelines set out in the

report were indicative, and projects would be reactive as funding was found. He explained that following a review into the service, officers were taking proactive measures to address the recommendations on performance. The Assistant Director agreed to circulate information relating to footfall data and national statistics that could show that people were moving back to local authority facilities, away from private facilities.

**Resolved – That the Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee:**

- 1. Approved the proposed Direction of Travel for Leisure Service Sites as set out in Appendix 2 to the report.**
- 2. Authorised the Director of Neighbourhood Services and Interim Director of Regeneration and Place to commission design and development works as necessary, and which result from initial investigative / feasibility work associated with proposed Public Sector Health & Wellbeing Hub in Birkenhead, thereby supporting the principles of the Birkenhead Town Centre Masterplan.**

62 **REPORT ON THE PROPOSED CONFIRMATION OF THE NEW BOROUGH WIDE SMOKE CONTROL AREA**

The Air Quality Manager introduced the report on behalf of the Director of Neighbourhoods, which proposed revoking the existing Smoke Control Orders and the making of a single Smoke Control Order for the whole of the administrative area under the provisions of the Clean Air Act 1993.

The Air Quality Manager explained that members had previously agreed to the revocation of the existing Smoke Control Orders, the making of the single Smoke Control Order for the whole of the borough, and that any objections be referred to a meeting of the Committee. She explained that they had received one objection, and that the same objection had been received by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), with details as to the objection being found within the report.

The Chair thanked officers for the report and for addressing the concerns arising from the objection.

Members questioned the need to publish the notice within the London Gazette, and whether there were any costs associated with this. They also raised questions as to whether the objector currently lived within an area with a smoke control order, queries around woodburning, and the enforcement of the smoke control order.

The Air Quality Manager and the Senior Manager for Environmental Health explained that Schedule 1 of the Clean Air Act 1993 specified that the

Authority must publish the notice in the London Gazette, most likely as this paper held a permanent record for each council. They told members that the objector lived in an area currently without a smoke control order. In response to a query regarding woodburning, they told members that they recognised that woodburning was a popular trend, and that their main concern was about supporting residents to do this as safely as possible, in line with the regulations. They did acknowledge a promotional video on the Council's social media channels, however this video was about raising awareness of responsible wood burning. They explained how the enforcement of the smoke control order would work, including the ability to issue Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs), but that the procedure was more about how to advise residents and provide guidance and encourage behaviour change. Officers did have the opportunity to take enforcement action if advice and guidance failed.

**Resolved – That the Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee:**

- 1. Noted the objection made during the statutory public consultation process opposing the making of the proposed Smoke Control Order as referred to at paragraphs 3.12 to 3.14 of the report;**
- 2. Approved that, subject to confirmation by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Director of Neighbourhoods be authorised to proceed with the process of:**
  - a. revocation of existing Smoke Control Orders, which affect the Council's administrative area; and**
  - b. the making of a single Smoke Control Order to apply to the whole of the Council's administrative area in the terms of the draft order set out in Appendix 1 to the report.**

**63 UPDATE ON THE REVIEW OF COMMUNAL GRAVES IN WIRRAL**

The Chair informed Members that there were some members of the public in attendance for this item. He said that any member of the public wishing to address the Committee on this issue could do so, out of respect for the issue.

The Head of Parks and Countryside introduced the report on behalf of the Director of Neighbourhood Services. He highlighted the evocative nature of the report, and that all involved wished to see that still born or born asleep babies received the proper dignity. He said that this report came from a request from Members, who wished for an update on the Council's actions to acknowledge the practice of burial in communal graves. It had been a common practice nationally throughout the 1950s to the 1970s. It had been highlighted to the Council through a BBC News Northwest feature in

November 2022, which had raised a number of enquiries from members of the public and a subsequent investigation highlighted the issue.

The report showed the actions taken to date, however he stressed that it was important to acknowledge that this was a practice that should not have taken place. He gave Members details as to the memorial services the Council had held throughout 2023, and the report also gave details as to the proposed next steps.

In September 2024, Oldham Council launched an online burial register, and officers from Wirral had discussed with Oldham how they had digitised those records. Officers were currently seeking quotes from IT providers and making assessments as to how much this might cost to digitise Wirral's records, and they were finalising these costs. In terms of grave registers, officers did not believe it would be appropriate to digitise these, due to issues on consent around GDPR. He believed that burial registers would provide enough information for families to locate the graves of their loved ones, in addition to the services provided at Landican Cemetery.

Two members of the public, Gina Jacobs and Diana Williams gave testimonials of their experiences to the Committee. They thanked Council officers, particularly those at Landican Cemetery, for their work and support but that more needed to be done. They asked the Committee to support efforts for an apology and greater support from the government on this issue. The Chair and Committee Members thanked both Mrs Jacobs and Mrs Williams for their heartfelt presentation.

The Bishop of Birkenhead Julie Conalty also addressed the Committee. She also thanked staff and hoped the digitisation of the records would help families to find those babies still missing.

The Head of Parks and Countryside addressed some of the points made by the public. He stressed that officers could not identify with certainty what guidance pre-NHS staff were working to. He stressed to Members that Wirral was one of the only Local Authorities putting up memorials as well as attempting to digitise their records. It would be helpful, in his view, if the government supported Local Authorities more in seeking to address this issue in a meaningful way. The Cemeteries and Crematorium Senior Manager also addressed the Committee and responded to comments raised by the public in regards to religious burials.

Members thanked Mrs Jacobs, Mrs Williams and the Bishop of Birkenhead for attending the meeting and for speaking out on a difficult subject. Members also thanked Officers for their support and work on this issue.

Members asked about further support that could be provided at Landican Cemetery, and queried the costs of digitising the burial registers. Members also agreed that any contact to government should include the local MPs.

The Chair informed Members that he wished to move additional recommendations. On a motion proposed by Councillor Johnson, and seconded by Councillor Bennett, it was –

**Resolved - That the Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee:**

- 1. Noted and endorsed the contents of the report**
- 2. Thanked campaigners for their work**
- 3. Requested officers contact MHCLG and local MPs to seek their support for a national response to this issue and additional resources for local authorities**

The Chair offered an unconditional apology, on behalf of Wirral Council and the councils it inherited, to the campaigners and those affected by this issue.

64 **EXPLORING COMMUNITY MANAGED LIBRARY MODELS**

The Regional Co-Ordinator for the Community Managed Libraries Network for the North, Mr Paul Kelly, addressed the Committee.

He told members that there were 642 community managed libraries across the country, with Wallasey Village Library being the latest addition to this growing movement. The Community Managed Libraries Network was a small charity, with 3 members of staff. They supported the network of libraries to develop and function and be sustainable. They provided training and guidance to community managed libraries across the country, for them to support each other and to raise the profile of their work nationally. They had over 20,000 volunteers supporting the charity nationally, with 467 paid staff. The report provided to Members gave some examples of the support the Network gave to communities and some success stories.

Mr Kelly told Members that a Community Managed Library model may not be the solution for every case, but that the Network was keen to support Local Authorities when looking at options available to them and to communities.

The Chair declared a non-pecuniary interest as a Trustee of Wallasey Village Library.

Members raised the following questions/comments:

- Details as to the assistance that the Community Managed Libraries Network might offer to local community groups
- Details as to figures around added value in terms of the benefit of community hubs and effects on local areas
- Whether the Network could work more strategically with the Council to secure external funding
- Whether there were any costs to joining the scheme

- How this process was different to the Community Asset Transfer process
- Whether any groups had successfully crowdfunded to raise money

Mr Kelly responded to queries from members. He described the process of supporting communities and what services they provided. He told members that there was lots of external funding available to community groups, and that the CML network was working on a framework of how to measure social impact. The network was keen to work with authorities to look at funding, including the Arts Council.

The Chair informed Members that he wished to propose some additional recommendations. It was proposed by Councillor McManus, and seconded by Councillor Bennet, that –

**Resolved – That the Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee:**

- 1. Noted the presentation**
- 2. Invite groups to register their interest in taking a greater role in the running of libraries**
- 3. Requested progress to introduce a ‘Fast Track’ Asset Transfer Policy**
- 4. Requested officers meet with the Community Managed Libraries Network**

## 65 PUBLIC CONVENIENCES AND CHANGING PLACE PROVISION

This item had been deferred from the meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> November 2024. Members had requested information relating to the Council’s public conveniences and changing places provision, following a petition from the Thornton Hough Community Trust at the committee meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> October 2024. The Interim Director of Regeneration and Place was unable to attend this meeting to introduce the report.

The Chair invited Geoff Dale, the Chair of Thornton Hough Community Trust, along with another member of the Trust, to address the Committee on this issue. They appealed to the Committee in relation to the public conveniences on Thornton Hough green, and how it was important to have this provision for the community. Since the committee meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> October 2024, the group had been in touch with a group called ‘Community Payback’ who had offered to put the toilets on their list for any work or maintenance needed to be done. They had tried to present information that the toilets could be cost-neutral in their running, and hopefully have them re-opened in future. Mr Dale corrected some information found on page 86 of the agenda pack. This information suggested that one accessible toilet on Thornton Hough green was open at

weekends during the football season. He informed Members that this had not been the case.

Members asked whether information could be shared on footfall in and around Thornton Hough, and how many public footpaths there were in the area. Members also raised concerns over a lack of a list of disabled facilities and questioned some of the locations of the permanently open toilets provided within the report. Members made comments about vandalism, and what officers could do to tackle this issue, and whether public convenience could be considered within regeneration plans, specifically considering locations and opening times.

The Chair informed Members that he wished to propose some additional recommendations. It was proposed by Councillor Redfern, and seconded by Councillor McManus, that –

**Resolved – That the Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee**

- 1. Noted the contents of the report**
- 2. Thank Thornton Hough Community trust for their continued work on this issue**
- 3. Requested costs for the installation of ‘pay per use’ at Thornton Hough toilets**
- 4. Welcome the officer of ‘Community Payback’ to renovate the premises**

Members also agreed for a further report to come before Committee to address the questions raised by Members on footfall, disabled facilities and inclusion of conveniences within regeneration plans.

**66 COMMUNITY SAFETY ANNUAL REPORT**

The Assistant Director for Neighbourhoods, Safety and Transport introduced the Community Safety Annual Report. This report provided Members with an update on key activity in relation to one of the ten thematic areas of the Wirral Community Safety Strategy (2021-2026). The theme of this report was anti-social behaviour (ASB).

The Assistant Director (AD) highlighted to Members several sections of the report. The report gave statistics of an encouraging trend regarding ASB, with the last few years seeing this trend diminishing. There was still an importance of reporting instances of ASB, for officers to build a comprehensive picture for officers to take action. One change of this trend had been October 2024, which was described as a ‘blip’. It was thought this was down to the lead into Mischief Night, but officers had put a lot of effort in to try and address this and plan for it. Officers also had been experiencing an issue of analytical support,



due to long-term sickness, however additional support had been brought in and so officers could continue work on analysing this information and bring this back to Members.

The report also showed a range of activities under operational names, that officers worked on in collaboration with other partners throughout the year. Officers also relied on intelligence and data to deliver various aspects of the intervention measures and preventative measures, to try and address increased in ASB. One such event was the school summer holidays. The report made reference to the Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs) around the borough, some of which were put into place during and after Covid-19. Some of these PSPOs were coming to the end of their legal term, so officers had initiated consultations in various areas as to whether they should be replaced or removed.

The Assistant Director highlighted the important work of the Community Safety team. They had been shortlisted for three national awards, with the results to be announced in early 2025.

Members queried the uptick in ASB trends in October 2024, and whether officers saw any indication that the trend was coming down and why this October was different to any other year.

The Assistant Director explained that without access to analytical data, it had been difficult to do this work. However, with additional support, they were now able to review this, and were expecting the trend to return to normal.

**Resolved – That the report be noted.**

67 **TOURISM, COMMUNITIES, CULTURE AND LEISURE COMMITTEE PERFORMANCE REPORT**

The Director of Neighbourhoods introduced the report. This report provided performance information in relation to Community Safety, encompassing Community Safety delivered by the Council and partner organisations in Wirral.

There were no questions on this item.

**Resolved – That the report be noted.**

68 **MEMBER CHAMPION FOR HERITAGE - UPDATE REPORT**

The Member Champion for Heritage, Councillor Williams, introduced his regular update report to Members, and gave an additional verbal update.

He discussed the Wirral Heritage & Culture Champions/Ambassadors Training Programme, which officers hoped to start soon. He was pleased that this would be moving forwards.

Members asked whether the funding for the training had a deadline to be spent by. The Member Champion explained that there was only funding available until the end of March 2025.

The Head of Place, Culture and Visitor Economy explained that officers had met with Wirral CVS before Christmas, and officers were confident that they could deliver the training with the requirements and funding before the deadline. In response to a question regarding funding for the new year, he told Members that the funding for this programme came out of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. The exact spending requirements had not been decided yet, and so there was a chance the funding could continue into the new financial year.

**Resolved – That the report be noted.**

## 69 **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chair introduced the report on the Committee's work programme.

He told Members that they were not looking to add anything to the Committee's agenda in March 2025. Any requests for additions could be added to the work programme in the new municipal year.

**Resolved – That the Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee work programme for the remainder of the 2024/25 municipal year be agreed.**

## 70 **EXEMPT INFORMATION - EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

The Chair asked the Principal Lawyer to the Committee to explain the reasoning behind the recommendation to enter exempt session.

**Resolved – That, under section 100 (A) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the following appendices be deemed to be exempt from publication on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined by paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A (as amended) to that Act.**

**2025-26 Budget Report Update**

**2025-26 Budget Report Update – Exempt Appendices**

## **Leisure Services Transformation Update – Exempt Appendix**

### **71 2025-26 BUDGET REPORT UPDATE**

The Head of Finance (Place) introduced the report on behalf of the Director of Finance, which provided an update on the budgets within the remit of the Committee in respect of forthcoming pressures and proposed savings that were being considered within the Medium-Term Financial Plan.

It was also for the Committee to consider feedback and outcomes from the Budget Oversight Panels (BOPs) which had been held in recent months. The Panels enabled officer and member liaison on proposed budget options, to facilitate discussion and allow direction to be obtained on further analysis required. The Panels also provided an opportunity for alternative proposals to be considered.

It was stated that it was also for the Committee to consider feedback and outcomes from the Budget Oversight Panels (BOPs) which had been held in recent months. The Panels enabled officer and member liaison on proposed budget options, to facilitate discussion and allow direction to be obtained on further analysis required. The Panels also provided an opportunity for alternative proposals to be considered.

The Policy and Service Committees were responsible for those services being delivered under their operational headings within their actual budget envelope. The Policy and Resources Committee, in consultation with the respective Policy and Service Committees, had been charged by Council to formulate a draft Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and budget to recommend to the Council.

The Council was required to set a balanced budget each year and set a Medium-Term Financial Plan which considered the future pressures and savings options that would be taken forward to result in a balanced budget position.

It was reported that the Council faced a severe budget challenge to identify savings required to set a balanced budget for next financial year, largely due to increased demand and costs for social care services, compounded by the previous significant reductions in Government funding and uncertainty around the future financial settlements.

Unless significant, deliverable cost reductions were identified and approved, the Council would not meet its statutory obligation to set a legal and balanced budget without a significant increase in funding.

The Head of Finance informed members that, following discussions with officers, an alternative second recommendation was being proposed. This was to delegate authority to a final Committee Budget Oversight Panel, to consider and agree any amendments to the proposals as set out in Appendix 3, and for the Budget Oversight Panel to agree the final outcomes and feedback to be presented to the Policy and Resources Committee.

Members discussed the content of the exempt appendices.

**Resolved – That**

- 1. The indicative pressures and proposed savings detailed in Appendices 1 and 2 be noted; and**
- 2. The Committee’s Budget Oversight Panel be delegated authority to consider and agree any amendments to the proposals, as set out in Appendix 3, and agree the final feedback and outcomes to be reported to Policy and Resources Committee.**

**72 LEISURE SERVICES TRANSFORMATION UPDATE - EXEMPT APPENDIX**

**Resolved – That the Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee noted the exempt appendix.**

**73 2025-26 BUDGET REPORT UPDATE - EXEMPT APPENDICES**

**Resolved – That the Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee noted the exempt appendices.**