

AREA FORUM (OXTON AND PRENTON)

Wednesday, 3 February 2010

Present:

Councillor P Williams (Chair)

In attendance:

Councillors A Bridson
F Doyle

S Holbrook
P Southwood

Community Representatives Alan Dollery, Sarah Goulding, Patrick Toosey

Lead Officer Rob Beresford, Head of Regulation

Area Service Co-ordinator Louise Harland-Davies

Street Scene Manager Garry Cummings and Mark Smith, Head of Service

Community Safety Mike Collins

NHS Wirral Martin McEwan, Paul Edwards

Wirral University Teaching Hospital
NHS Foundation Trust Christina Saint-Martin

Merseyside Police Inspector Brian Griffiths

Merseyside Fire and Rescue
Service Ian Maxwell

Apologies

Inspector Roy McGregor, Councillor S Kelly,
Jack Cuffe Older Peoples Parliament

1 **WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

The Chair, Councillor P Williams, welcomed Area Forum members and 18 members of the public to the meeting in Oxton.

2 **AREA CO-ORDINATOR'S REPORT (INCLUDES MATTERS ARISING)**

Minutes and Matters arising from the October Forum:

The Area Co-ordinator drew attention to Appendix 1 of matters arising from the October 2009 meeting relating to the topics:-

Euston Grove: Building Control Officers have contacted the owner's agent regarding the wall and have been advised that details of the costs of repairs are awaited from the surveyor/contractor. Advice on the anticipated start date on site to carry out the repairs to the wall will be advised as soon as the costs have been received.

Streetscene's Call Monitoring Procedures: The Contact Centre Team Leader had advised that contact centre advisors initially take the customer's details – name, address and phone number – and log the request for service on to the Customer Relationship Management system (CRM). At the end of the call, a CRM reference number is given, and the customer is given an expectation as to what will happen next, including timescales.

If the customer calls about an existing enquiry, the advisor will interrogate CRM to see if there are any progress notes. The advisor can also arrange call backs and can also log emails received from members of the public and third parties such as Neighbourhood Wardens, on to CRM.

The Chair explained that one of the areas of concern was that people get through to Streetscene and they are put on hold whilst the advisor contacts another Department.

Mark Smith, Streetscene Manager: replied that a rigorous approach is taken to dealing with calls through the calls centre. The operators should be dealing with the issue at source, and not refer to colleagues in other Council Departments. Set scripts are issued to ensure a consistent approach is taken to dealing with standard queries. When an unusual query is received, the operator would take the details and speak to the service manager in the back office.

A member of the public pointed out that a reference is not always given at the end of the call, and it is necessary to ask for one. In his experience, there is a delay, the call appears to be disconnected, before it is reconnected and the reference number is given.

Mark Smith replied that all enquiries should have a reference number. He asked for practical examples where the correct procedures are not being followed and they will be investigated.

Councillor Doyle had contacted Streetscene earlier in the day on behalf of a colleague who had a problem with their bin. He was given a reference number as a matter of course, and told the enquiry would be logged.

Appendix 1 included an update on spending on You Decide 09/10

The sum of £10,037 has been allocated for Youth Activities and young people are being identified to participate in the activities.

Andy Wild's post as Community Sports Officer, was funded in 2008/09. The report shows his success in the area and should be applauded.

The Area Co-ordinator apologised for the delay in issuing the Area Forum Streetscene Update – January 2010, copies of which were on chairs.

Ruth Shaw stated that a question had been raised about the cost of respite for Mental Health.

Martin McEwan: NHS Wirral, replied that the total spend in 2009/10 was £40 million, made up of £30 million for statutory organisations [NHS/LA]; £8 million on private providers for mental health, £2 million on voluntary organisations, and £259,000 on carer support services.

Alan Dollery: advised that after the decision had been made to site a bench near the War Memorial in Osmaston Road, a local lad, Steven Boote, had been killed on 3 November whilst serving in Afghanistan. Steve's parents had welcomed the suggestion that a plaque with his name is placed on the bench. The Chair agreed that the proposal is an excellent idea and one she would support.

The Chair undertook to enquire if Steven Boote's name will be added to the War Memorial in Hamilton Square.

Patrick Dowling asked for an update on the state of the building and how the roof had coped with the recent heavy fall of snow.

The Area Co-ordinator stated that she had clarified the issues raised with the co-ordinator for the Gallery, who had given an assurance that the grant has been approved, the funding has not yet been received but repairs will begin shortly. As venues alternate between Oxton and Prenton, the Williamson was chosen for this round of forums.

The Area Co-ordinator explained that as part of the forum "Have your Say" had been held before the meeting from 4pm onwards. Members of the public had been invited to come along and meet local service providers and complete questionnaires about the area. The responses received would be included in the area plan.

Robbie Bell had stood down as Community Representative at the last meeting. The vacancy will be advertised across the two Wards and in the local Press. Nominations will be welcome for anyone who is interested in becoming a community representative. Nominations would also be welcome for a Business Representative and for a Faith Representative.

The Chair asked for nominations to be sent to the Area Co-ordinator using the contact details given on the front of her report. The Chair gave an assurance that all nominations received will be dealt with appropriately.

A member of the public commented that the minutes record that 40 members of the public had attended the last area forum. He would like more people to attend as there were lots of groups who simply do not know that the Area Forum exists.

Rob Beresford replied that the forums are constantly being reviewed. He was unable to offer a solution this evening, but he was prepared to feedback the comments received into the review.

Alan Dollery stated that he is aware personally of everything that is going on, as are members of his association. The way the Area Forums are advertised cannot go further than they are already with notification through posters, advertisements in the

local Press, and stressed that meetings are always well supported when there is an issue that people are interested in. Between 200/300 people had turned up when there was a threat of a landfill site in Prenton and there had been a good turnout over the library closures. Area forum meetings are here for people who want to come and they will attend if there is a need.

The question was raised:

Do members of the public appreciate the purpose of the Forum and the representation?

Who elected the community representatives we have here and who are they representative of?

Do forums provide value for money?

Area Co-ordinator replied vacancies are advertised in the press, those interested complete applications forms which are passed to the elected members.

The Chair stated that the issues have been discussed at previous meetings.

The additional comments were made:

I think they are advertised well, on the community board at Sainsbury's, and they do try their best.

[Councillor Holbrook] – People turn out if there is a crisis. It is disappointing for us as Councillors to see meetings not well attended. The area forums have been running for some time now, they were created in a certain way, and they still run in that way. The time is probably right to have a look at the formula used so far, and not just this one, but all eleven area forums, and see how they can be improved.

People can come along if there is a crisis and people say it is a useful place to go to if they have an issue.

Andrew Taylor: Attendance is not as bad as it looks. I represent quite a large number of people, even though they might not be here tonight. You have to factor this in. This is a good representative outcome, given the apathy in local politics, but shouting at people doesn't work.

Alan Dollery: I represent a lot of people in Prenton. The area forum is better than having nothing at all.

Leonora Brace: People were coming and going between 4 pm and 6 pm. They were leaving what they wanted to say in the box because they had other things to do.

The Area Co-ordinator stated that she would like to see a 'full house'. She asked if the public could help to advertise forums too by encouraging their neighbours and their local community to attend try and generate as much interest as possible. If everyone brought just one person each, the numbers would double.

The Chair encouraged everyone to give their suggestions on how to improve the situation at any time.

Minute decision: That the minutes of the meeting of the Area Forum of 6 October 2009 be confirmed as a true record.

3 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Mr Lennon I would like to express my concern about an arrangement between a voluntary organisation and Wirral Council.

It is my understanding that a Central Government initiative was responsible for Wirral undertaking a series of conservation area character appraisals which were conditional upon a withdrawal of central government funding in the event of any failure to implement the programme.

There are, I believe, 24 designated conservation areas throughout Wirral. For no obvious reason, only 16 of these areas were selected for inclusion in the programme of the preparation of character appraisals. Oxton Village conservation area, to the understandable consternation of the Oxton Society, was amongst those excluded from the programme.

The Oxton Society, anxious to discover the reasons for this exclusion, accepted the opportunity for a delegation from the Society to meet with senior officers from the Authority. Although no reason was given for the exclusion of Oxton Village conservation area from the appraisals programme the Authority initially declined to reverse its decision. Desperate to ensure that Oxton Village would be able to share in the potential benefit of a character appraisal and the subsequent compilation of an Area Management Plan, the Society and the Authority agreed that the Oxton Society would provide a degree of expertise and that the Society and the Authority would share the £5,000 cost of engaging the services of specialist consultants

This is remarkably similar to a recent previous arrangement when, in return for the offer of a contribution of £1,000, again from the Oxton Society, the Authority agreed to engage specialist consultants to examine the case for an extension of Oxton Village Conservation area.

Primarily as a Council taxpayer, but also as a lifelong member of the Oxton Society, I have concerns about the current arrangement.

I have received no response from the Conservation Officer [Matthew Crook]. I believe that the Area Co-ordinator is aware that the Authority's record of response to correspondence is abysmal. I can give instances where the Local Authority has ignored correspondence.

In desperation, I sent a sheet containing 13 questions, and ask

- the Officers here this evening because the Local Authority has declined the opportunity to respond in any mature way.
- Area Co-ordinator Matthew Crook has shared information with me, and I sent the responses to you by email this morning.
- Chair You've raised serious matters, as the Conservation Officer is not here to deal with the matter and you have had a response by email I do not think that we can deal with the matter further at this meeting. There is an official complaints procedure you can go through if you remain dissatisfied.
- Brian Christian OPP forum Attendance at forums. We have 'away days.' If it is a subject of interest and you have an awareness programme you will get people to attend. Would it be possible to change the ethos of the forum and instead of getting the general public to bring questions, choose a subject which will affect the area directly, and this would generate interest. When people are interested in a particular subject they will attend.
- Mr Taylor Can I ask at a future forum, we have information on how you become a conservation area and what the benefits are?
- Chair A presentation at the next meeting?
- Alan Dollery 1) There was a letter in the paper from David Green about grass verges. I have not seen anyone in the local paper being fined for such action. Prenton Dell is full of parked cars on pavements and grass verges. I wonder if David Green could enlighten us on whether they intend to prosecute people as they have been threatening to do for years and I cannot see any action in the Prenton area and I would like him to stop the practice.
- 2) The new Chief Constable. A few weeks ago there was a comment from another Chief Constable saying people involved in antisocial behaviour are not committing a crime – they are not robbing or killing anyone. Antisocial behaviour is horrible and it is a crime. I would like to know the stance of our new Chief Constable.
- Brian Griffiths The new Chief Constable is Mr Murphy. I worked with him 23 years ago when he was a Detective Sergeant in Wallasey – he has served the majority of his service on Merseyside. I have seen a number of communications from him so far. One of the main issues is that he is setting his stall out to gain public confidence. The main issue is what has been classed as low level anti social behaviour. However, anti social behaviour in my view is what affects people's lives; day to day anti social behaviour does affect people. I have had some good feedback locally and I work with Wirral anti-social behaviour team and with Wirral Partnership Homes. We have just had our first closure

order for anti-social behaviour, the first on Wirral. This particular individual was removed from his house because of anti-social behaviour towards local residents. We are very proud of that and it has made a big difference to individuals in that area. Our partners are getting much smarter in dealing with ASBOs. For example, when an individual breached the order we received support from Wirral Magistrates who imprisoned the individual for 12/16 weeks at a time.

I would ask you to report any issues you have on antisocial behaviour.

Chair Parking on grass verges. I have seen people contacted in Holm Lane.

Mark Smith There has been progress and a lot of interest recently from Elected Members of the Council on the progress we are making on this. About 18 months ago we brought in a policy to stop parking on verges. We introduced a relatively small number of trial streets across the Borough. One of the practical issues, some of the traffic signs require changing and we have added more signs in relation to those restrictions but the money set aside has not gone as far as we initially hoped.

We are taking a report to the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee and I can let Mr Dollery and other forum members have an update on that.

We are following on with the second phase, bearing in mind the limited financial resources we have.

Mr Dollery Do you go out weekends and evenings to see perpetrators?

Mark Smith The Civil Enforcement Officers work at other times and weekends etc as necessary.

Brian Griffiths [Police] If it would assist, I would be more than happy for my Officers to provide a photograph of the vehicle registration plate, if a vehicle is parked on a verge.

Paul Haywood It will give people no choice but to park on the road. If they park on both sides this will prevent access by emergency vehicles and bin lorries. The answer is asphalt over the grass verges or make parking bays.

Member of public The Police send Community Support Officers, but they said they could do nothing. They have to see the driver drive on to the grass verge before they can book them. We have so many cars parked on pavements we have to walk on the road.

Brian Griffiths [Police] I think you have been given wrong information. If you drive on a verge and you are causing damage to the verge it is criminal damage. I think you could go along those lines.

Patrick Dowling My question is about the consultation process, and about leadership of the Council.

In June, 22 members of the public attended to hear the Chief Executive Officer of the Council talk about the Local Government structure – an overview of how the Council functions and how decisions are made. The Council launched a consultation to give the public the opportunity to contribute. The exercise ended on 30 November, and I was one of only 40 [out of perhaps half a million residents on Wirral] who responded in writing, hence the headline 'Apathy' in the local Press.

What happened at that meeting on 21 December and how was the future of the Council decided?

Councillor Holbrook gave a full verbal account of the Council meeting on 21 December that culminated in a decision to approve and adopt the proposals relating to the Leader and Cabinet Executive model of governance. He described the questions raised about the voting system at the subsequent meeting, adding that personally he would like to see the system reviewed so that people are given a real opportunity to express their views and those views are evaluated and taken into account in reaching a decision.

Councillor Doyle added that the Council has a lot of work to do in the way it consults with people. A good example is the Libraries issue, and that is something that a group of Councillors are looking at to improve the system.

The Chair announced that the allocated time has been exceeded and further questions could not be accepted.

Minute decision:

Area co-ordinator to invite a representative from the Conservation Team to attend the next area forum meeting.

4 **PARTNER UPDATES**

Partner Updates were incorporated into Section Two of the Area Co-ordinator's Report.

Brian Griffiths drew attention to a 'Face the Public' meeting on 10 February at West Kirby Civic Centre, when senior officials from the Police, Local Authority and Primary Care Trust will be available to any questions that members of the public may have.

5 **FUTURE MEETINGS**

Wednesday, 23 June 2010 at a venue to be advised.

The Chair thanked everyone for their attendance and contribution and closed the meeting of the Area Forum at 8.35 pm.

