

AREA FORUM (OXTON AND PRENTON)

Tuesday, 22 February 2011

Present:

Councillor P Williams (Chair)

In attendance:

Councillors

A Bridson
S Holbrook
S Kelly

A Brighthouse
D Realey

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

Community Safety

John Kenny

NHS Wirral

Sheila Hillhouse

Wirral University Teaching
Hospital NHS Foundation Trust

Sandra Shannon

Merseyside Police

Sergeant Mark Roberts, Sergeant Sam Parker

Merseyside Fire and Rescue
Service

Terry Murphy

Council Officers

Jim Lester Head of Cultural Services
Peter Riley, National Lottery Project
Manager

Apologies

Inspector Roy McGregor, Merseyside Police

1 **WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

The Chair, Councillor P Williams, welcomed Area Forum members and 25 members of the public to the meeting. A microphone was available for anyone wished to use it.

The Chair welcomed new members/representatives Sandra Shannon, Wirral University Teaching Hospital, Sheila Hillhouse, NHS Wirral, Sergeant Mark Roberts and Sergeant Sam Parker, Merseyside Police and Terry Murphy, Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service.

Apologies for absence were received from Inspector Roy McGregor, Merseyside Police.

2 **MINUTES AND AREA CO-ORDINATOR'S REPORT**

The minutes of the October Forum were included in Section One of the Area Co-ordinator's report.

Minute decision: That the minutes of the meeting of the Area Forum of 19 October 2010 be confirmed as a true record, subject to the inclusion of Cllr Denise Realey in the list of those present.

Matters arising: The Area Co-ordinator drew attention to page 11 of her report and the response received to a query raised by Patrick Dowling on Street Lighting Equipment in and around Oxton Village.

Section Two of the Area Co-ordinator's report contained local updates. The attention of the Area Forum was drawn to the progress report on the Council's consultation programme *'Wirral's Future: Be a part of it'*. The decisions will feed into the Council's new Corporate Plan in due course.

Information was given on the availability of funding from *Your Wirral*. The Area Co-ordinator will send application forms, on request, to local groups and organisations who wish to apply for funding. The closing date is 25 April.

The area forum has been asked for suggestions for the siting of grit bins funded from the Winter Resilience Fund. Cards showing locations of bins already requested in 2011/12, and asking for precise locations of additional bins, were available at the meeting.

Minute decision: To thank the Area Co-ordinator for her report.

3 **PARKS AND COUNTRYSIDE SERVICE PROCUREMENT EXERCISE (PACSPE)**

The Chair welcomed Jim Lester, Head of Cultural Services, and invited him to talk about the review of the Parks and Countryside Service Procurement Exercise.

Jim Lester explained that his responsibilities include Art Galleries and Museums, in addition to Parks and Countryside services.

The review of services started in June 2008 and a report taken to Cabinet in July 2010 included an outline business case prepared by independent consultants looking at various options for the Council to consider. At the meeting in July, elected members decided that, with some exceptions, all the services should be kept together and provided by a single contractor.

The scope of the exercise was to look at all the points of work and consider which services should be kept in scope and those that should be excluded. In January 2011, the Director of Engineering Services reported to Cabinet on the areas that should not be included, namely the Landican Crematorium and Bereavement Services, the Tam O'Shanter Urban Farm, schools' grounds, the Lifeguard Service, golf pavilions [but not the day to day management of the golf courses] allotments and charges for allotments. These services would transfer to Asset Management.

The contracts for grounds maintenance, grass cutting, management of the Parks' Ranger Service, maintenance of hedges, trees and grass verges and areas of open space associated with that will be brought into the single contract.

The contract will be worth between £6 and £9 million. Research into what neighbouring local authorities are doing indicates that the contractor brings innovation and different ways of working and that considerable savings can be made with a single contract. Biffa manages the bin collection service and Highway Maintenance recently transferred to Colas, and both services are doing well.

Currently, Wirral Council employs between 150/160 staff to deliver the services, although the numbers have reduced by a recent voluntary exercise. The remaining staff will transfer to the new contracted and their existing pay and conditions will be protected under TUPE regulations.

Consultations and regular discussions have taken place with the staff and representatives from groups including user groups, specialist user groups, [eg people representing golf clubs, football and bowling clubs, Friends' groups and people involved with heritage and the arts.

The next round of meetings will take place in March 2011 in Wallasey Town Hall. The Parks workshop will be on 3 March, bereavement service focus session on 8 March, the golf session on 15 March, and the sports session, particularly on bowls and football, on 23 March. The main purpose of the sessions will be to provide more

detailed information on the services and the feedback received will be used to inform the new contract.

Efforts have been made to identify all the representative groups of Friends across Wirral. New groups are welcome and details of any group that has not already been approached would be appreciated from members of the public to ensure they are included in the process.

The specification will be completed by the end of March/early April, tenders will be invited for return in the Autumn, with a view to the new contract starting early in 2012.

Parks are owned by the Council and they will remain in the ownership of the Council. The delivery of the contract will be monitored working in partnership with the contractor and will involve user groups. The expectation is that the contractor will work with the user groups and attend meetings such as Area Forums.

Jim Lester responded to questions:

Q [Cllr Bridson] Can you explain how the contract will be monitored to make sure that standards are maintained, or improved?

A A requirement will be built into the submission that the contractor must demonstrate how they intend to maintain standards.

A set of key performance indicators are being developed – for example, on the standards expected for parks that are awarded a Green Flag.

Penalties will be applied if the contractor does not comply with the standards expected. The contract is a ten year contract to allow the contractor to take a long term view and build up equipment and machinery and to ensure that sufficient staff are recruited and are trained appropriately.

Q [Cllr Realey] The 150/160 staff. What happens with each group of staff, some are engaged in direct work and some in the office?

A We have lost about 40 staff – a mixture of front of house and back room staff – through early voluntary retirement/severance. Members have already agreed that some staff will be replaced by seasonal workers. We think we will have appropriate cover as normal for this year.

In the future, the contractor will look at staffing levels over time. The contractor will determine staffing levels, but cannot reduce or change the standards of delivery without the agreement of the Local Authority.

Q [Alan Dollery] I accept that it is a completely separate issue, but are the charges for pitches likely to increase?

A The Local Authority will remain responsible for all income generated through hire charges. Decisions are made by Elected Members and this year the charges will increase by 3%.

Q The litter in Duck Pond Lane. The Friends do a valuable job but will there be any overlap between Biffa and the new provider for litter collection?

A The Parks and Countryside Service is responsible for litter picking. It is accepted that improvements are needed in Duck Pond Lane. It is hoped that the new contract will improve standards.

Q [Chair]: I received reports of broken glass in the children's play area over the weekend, but staff were unavailable to deal with it at that time. Part of the resolution of the Budget Cabinet last night was that cleaning will be undertaken if necessary during weekends. The resolution is subject to final approval at the Budget Council meeting next week.

Q [Cllr Brighthouse] Who makes the Green Flag Award?

A It is the Civic Society nationally. People are keen to improve the standard of parks and they came up with the idea of the Green Flag. Trained judges use set criteria to judge whether the standards have been met. The process is done annually on an individual basis. A small fee is payable.

There are 12 Green Flags in Wirral and the aim is to increase the number of Green Flags so that everyone who lives in Wirral has access to a Green Flag park.

The Park must have a Friends' Group and the Council works with local Friends' Groups to help the park get the Green Flag.

Q [Cllr Holbrook] The contractor has to apply for and obtain some kind of affiliation status to the Merseyside Pension Fund, so that transferred staff remain in the Fund. The way it has been done by other contracts if the contractor does not go down that route is to transfer staff to a scheme with comparable benefits. It is extremely likely that any contractor would want the staff to remain within the Merseyside Pension Fund, and we as a Council will be encouraging any contractors to do that because it is the most secure route for our employees.

The Chair thanked Jim Lester for the presentation.

4 **FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR LOCAL GROUPS AND CLUBS**

Support and advice available from Community Foundations for Merseyside.

Graham Batey gave a presentation on a range of funding programmes currently administered by the Community Foundation for Merseyside and the themes they target.

The foundation works closely with a range of donors and partners to help them connect with local voluntary and community groups across Merseyside. The foundation undertakes an annual Local Needs Analysis with input from grant applicants, donors, staff and volunteers, to help identify the issues which most need addressing on Merseyside.

Six themes have been identified as the issues most affecting Merseyside this year. These themes feed into the grant programmes on offer and can help make a difference in local communities.

Funds are available for projects which target children and young people, the local community and wider environment, seek to engage the community and increase community participation, tackle worklessness and related problems through training and employment, improve all aspects of people's lives physically, emotionally and socially, and projects based around arts and cultural activities which improve wellbeing and increase community participation.

To be eligible to apply, the organisation must have a Constitution, Accounts, a Bank Statement and, where applicable, a Safeguarding Policy.

Information on the themes is available on the website www.cfmerseyside.org.uk.

Application forms were available at the Area Forum.

The Chair thanked Graham for the presentation.

NATIONAL LOTTERY

The Chair welcomed Peter Riley, Wirral Council's National Lottery Project Manager.

Peter explained that for every £1 spent on a national lottery ticket, 28p goes to good causes and funding is distributed to Arts, Heritage, Sport England and the Big Lottery. His role is to help groups in Wirral obtain some of that money.

The Awards for All programme gives grants ranging from £300 to £10,000, and is available to every group provided they have a constitution, a bank account with two signatories, a committee with at least three members, a Chair, Secretary and a Treasurer. Registered charities automatically qualify but this is not a requirement.

Although Lottery regulations do not allow him to write applications for groups, Peter Riley is prepared to look at applications and advise on 'Lottery speak' etc. He urged any community group that is properly constituted and has an idea they want to run with, to contact him and he would offer advice. If a group has had an application rejected in the past, he would be willing to advise how it can be turned around. If he felt that an application did not meet Lottery requirements, he would advise accordingly.

Hundreds of groups across Wirral have bid successfully for grants up to £10,000, receiving in total about £2.5 million just from Awards for All. There are fifteen different programmes that groups can apply for.

Peter would welcome requests for information and would leave his contact details with the Area Co-ordinator.

Peter responded to the questions:

Q [Cllr Brighthouse]. You do a fantastic job, the money goes to all sorts of groups, but how do you monitor what it is spent on? Do you get to situations where you have to try to recoup funds because they are not being used properly?

A The National Lottery do the monitoring, not me. My job is to help groups get the money. We do not monitor it.

The panel for Awards for All meet monthly. It is an open application process. You can download an application form but they will monitor you. As far as I am aware, there has only been one project in Wirral where funds have been clawed back.

Q [Mr Dollery]. Does Lottery funding cover paid staff to run the project?

A It depends on which programme you go to. There are many different programmes. To qualify for Awards for All it has to be a new activity, not something you are doing already. Potentially, you can apply for up to £10,000. The lottery will fund equipment, sessional staff to run the programme or activity, but will not fund ongoing costs for rent, heating and lighting. Groups have the opportunity to receive £10,000 within a period of two years from the date of the application.

Reaching Communities provides lottery funding for a new project for a five year period and will fund salaries.

The caveat is that funding is getting very tight and is more competitive. At least three months should be allowed from the date of the application

Lottery funding is not a one-off programme. Groups can re-apply. The Lottery will give feedback on why they think a project does not qualify.

Peter can help groups to re-word the application etc so that groups can re-apply.

The Chair thanked Peter Riley for the presentation.

VOLUNTARY COMMUNITY ACTION WIRRAL [VCAW]

The Chair welcomed Linda Denman, Community Support Manager, Community Action Wirral.

Linda Denman explained that VCA Wirral offices are based in The Fire Station, Exmouth Street, Birkenhead, in Wallasey at 220-224 Liscard Road, and in Pennant House, 63 The Village, Bebington.

The mission of VCA Wirral is to provide effective support for local groups, organisations and individuals in order to enhance the quality of people's lives and build strong communities.

The strands are –

Community Support –which offers advice and support on Funding, monitoring performance and quality, Governance, Training and Volunteering.

Community Development – Wirral Link, which is an independent network made up of individuals, community groups and organisations working together to speak as one voice to influence and shape local health and social care services.

Wirral Third Sector Assembly – local third sector organisations which support the creation of local networks and partnership working to improve outcomes for local people by improving communication across all sectors.

Wirral ProHelp provides free professional advice and support to local community groups and voluntary organisations.

Commissioning and procurement – support to organisations and groups by offering a toolkit developed by VCA Wirral.

Business Development offers an online Centre ICT suite, e-learning, branding services, business planning and social enterprise, office rentals, room and equipment hire.

Wirral Compact – an agreement between the public sector and the voluntary and community sector which aims to improve the way they work together.

Linda Denman gave examples of the support available to organisations and some project ideas.

The Chair thanked Linda Denman for an interesting and informative presentation.

5 **CENSUS 2011**

Frank McGinley explained that he was one of eleven area co-ordinators working under one Census manager for the whole of Wirral. He was co-ordinator for Neston, Claughton and North Prenton.

He began his presentation with a quiz on when the census started, the population of Wirral in 2001, the percentage of returned census forms. All the questions were answered correctly by members of the public.

The census day, 27 March 2011, will be publicised in the media and reminders and information will be given to coincide with popular TV programmes.

The census will provide a snapshot of the population on 27 March 2011 and the information will be used to fund local councils. There is a legal

requirement to fill in the census form and non-compliance can lead to a £1,000 fine.

Census forms will be sent by Royal Mail to each address in early March. Returns can be returned via Royal Mail or can be filled in on line. Householders must show everyone who was resident at the address on 27 March.

A collector will call to addresses where the form has not been returned, and this will be followed by a second visit if the form has still not been returned.

Help is available by the helpline 0300 0201 101, by texting 18001,0300 0201 160, via local authorities' support and information services, and local drop in centres.

Cllr Holbrook emphasised the importance of people completing the census because it impacts on the amount of grant that local councils receive.

Frank McGinley responded to questions

Q Will help be available for the elderly and vulnerable, and people who will not open the door etc and need help?

A If there is a situation where people know where these people are, they should contact us and we will go in and help in that way. We have a specialist group who will try to access the 'hard to reach'. We also liaise with wardens, etc.

Q Is anything available to support the Polish community?

A We have leaflets in Polish and we have a translator. We do on an area basis where we know pockets of people live.

Q What happens if you are abroad on the day?

A It is the normal place of residence. I will find the answer to that separately.

Q Is information passed on? I know private companies can obtain this information from the Census and Council and then send their literature.

A The Census does not deal with individual properties. No-one will be told the number of bedrooms and gardens etc. It is not broken down. What the Council do I don't know.

A [Bob Beresford]: I'm not sure what you are referring to but I am not aware we would generate any information, and certainly not on a commercial basis. I will discuss the issue separately with you after the meeting, or leave your name and address with the area co-ordinator and you will be contacted.

The Chair thanked Frank McGinley for the presentation.

[Richard Neale]: There is a suggestion that there is a planning application in the Townfield shopping area that might result in a Tesco store, and there are concerns about the validity of the application.

A [Bob Beresford] I am aware of an application made by a land owner in Townfield Close to vary an existing planning permission. I understand planning permission was given for four small units and the application is to vary that for one larger unit. The application will be going to the Planning Committee at the end of March. People are being consulted on the application and that will be open until the March meeting.

If you have any views you can make representations. Details of the application are on Wirral's website.

A [Cllr Kelly]. I spoke to the Planning Officer this week and she told me she has informed the agent that the Council would expect an application of this sort to be a full application, and not an exchange of conditions.

The name Tesco was in the frame because the agent also deals with Tesco's planning applications.

I have spoken to Claughton councillors so that ward members have a joint approach in reviewing the impact of the proposal on the existing parade. I understand that the Planning Committee is at the end of March but the consultation process is now over.

Q [Paul Haywood]: Are people in the area aware of this application? People often don't find out what is going on until the construction starts. The Oxton councillors should be putting a flyer out in the Townfield area to highlight the things going on. I was the instigator of a playing field for children in that area. I think it is a shame that you three people who represent this area are not going out and notifying local residents of Townfield, or the school, until after it is approved that there will be a supermarket that will overburden that road, and the school at the corner.

A [Chair/Cllr Kelly]: It is being done. We are in the process of delivering information in the area of Hargrave/Townfield estates and currently people are being informed. We have not yet been in contact with the school, but yes, we are informing the residents. I have spoken to Councillor George Davies and I am sure he will be informing residents in the Claughton area.

The owner of the post office is organising a petition, so it is unlikely that people who use the post office will be ignorant of the application.

Q [Mr Dollery] A new sandwich bar/cafe has opened in Prenton Hall Road, and information has been given out about opening hours

etc. but I can't get much information other than it was taken over by the owners of the Premier shop.

- A [Cllr Bridson] The premises are owned by Wirral Partnership Homes. We have to find out whether they are setting the conditions or the Council's Planning Department or Licensing Department. The application for the sandwich bar went in several years ago and was not taken up. It is likely that the permission is about to run out and will have to be taken up. We will look into that and let you know.

Minute decision:

Area co-ordinator to liaise with Cllr Bridson to provide an update regarding sandwich bar/café in Prenton Hall Road

7 PARTNER UPDATES

The Chair drew attention to the information on Partner Updates and invited questions.

The Area Forum responded to a number of questions and comments on Grit Bins.

Requests for grit bins to be re-located, removed or replaced will be actioned when bins are being installed in new locations. [When making requests for bins, it is important to specify the exact location where bins are required].

A definitive list will be drawn up at the end of the current programme. Ways are being considered of securing the bins and improving their appearance.

- Q [Cllr Kelly]. Referring to the list of carriageway resurfacing, whilst Gerald Road was resurfaced to a high standard, the surface of Shrewsbury Road is very disappointing. The process involved a substance being sprayed onto the carriageway and covered by grit which has since worn away. The dust and chippings spread onto the pavements and are carried into people's homes on their shoes.**

Using a cheaper method is a false economy because it is likely to involve remedial work and more expenditure later on.

- A [Gary Cummings]. The process used is a cheaper option, but a more expensive option would probably mean that work would not be done.

The process involves sand and stone being driven down into the sprayed service, but loose chippings does not mean that the process has failed. The contractor will be asked to look at Shrewsbury Road and if it has failed to decide what needs to be done to rectify it.

Q A request was made some time ago for work on the pavements in Cambridge Road. Why have all the paving stones been taken up in Woodchurch Road and replaced with tarmac?

A There is constant vehicle override in Woodchurch Road and tarmac is the best material in these circumstances; it avoids the need to return time and time again to repair/replace paving stones

Q [Cllr Realey] People pay to park at Arrowe Park Hospital, but the car parks have so many holes they are dangerous.

A [Gary Cummings] Hospital car parks are not the responsibility of the Council

Sandra Shannon [WUTHT] offered to take back the matter.

Q [Mr Dollery]. The island outside the post office and the library in Prenton. If Gary looks at the records people are there every week putting the kerbstones back. I had a letter from Gary twelve months ago stating he was looking into the matter. Have you any thought on taking the whole island away?

A [Gary Cummins]: Some work will be done tomorrow morning to do with physically removing the island and re-aligning it. The way forward is to remove the island. Information is being collated on all the money spent on the island in the last two years to justify the expenditure needed to remove the island. Hopefully, the island will be removed in the next financial year.

Q [Cllr. Bridson] Has anyone any comments to make on the new traffic lights on the island on the M53? The feedback I am receiving is that everyone is happy. There were 62 incidents in the last year, and none since the new scheme was introduced. Has anyone any complaints?

A [Mr Dollery] There was one comment in the Press that the lights were like Christmas lights, but it is a massive improvement in the area.

Minute decision:

WUHT to provide an update regarding car park surfaces at Arrowe Park Hospital

8 FUTURE MEETINGS: DATE AND VENUE TO BE CONFIRMED

The date and venue for the next meeting will be confirmed.

The Chair thanked everyone and closed the meeting of the Area Forum at 9pm.

