

AREA FORUM (OXTON AND PRENTON)

Thursday, 1 November 2012

Present:

Councillor T Norbury (Chair)

In attendance:

Councillors P Williams
S Kelly
A Brighthouse

D Realey
P Doughty

Community Representatives Sarah Goulding, Kay Crook

Lead Officer Chris McCarthy, Interim Director of Technical Services

Community Engagement Co-ordinator Louise Harland-Davies

Community Safety Steve Preston, Ian Lowrie

Merseyside Police Inspector Brian Griffiths

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service Paul Murphy

Council Officers Viv O'Leary, Finance

Apologies

Rob Beresford
Alan Dollery
Gary Cummings
Inspector Roy McGregor

1 **WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES**

The Chair, Councillor Tony Norbury, welcomed Neighbourhood Forum members and 24 members of the public to the meeting. Apologies received from Rob Beresford, Alan Dollery and Insp McGregor.

Chris McCarthy read out a statement concerning the Neighbourhood Funding and the next steps before any announcements to the availability of the funding are made.

Q. Mr Collinson: The Look After Yourself Group wrote to Mr Burgess asking if the spending freeze is on the council and NHS funding that makes up the Neighbourhood Fund or just the council element of the fund but so far they have not had a response.

A. Chris McCarthy will look into the issue to see if a response from Mr Burgess was prepared.

2 **MATTERS ARISING**

Louise Harland-Davies gave an update on the matters arising that were raised at the forum in June. This covered updates on cycling accident rates, parking in cycle lanes, parking on pavements and around Borough Road.

Q. Denise Realey: Has anyone visited Borough Road to ensure the parking issues have been resolved?

A. Louise Harland-Davies: I will look into it to see if this has been done

Q. Alan Brighouse: Are the cycling accident statistics for this forum area or the whole of Wirral?

A. Chris McCarthy: The statistics cover all of Wirral.

Cllr Kelly asked for the Neighbourhood Forum minutes from June be amended as it was confirmed after the meeting that the proposed 20mph zones would be the new legal speed limit, enforceable by the police.

Minute decision:

Louise Harland-Davies to liaise with Technical Services regarding parking issues in Borough Road

3 **BUDGET CONSULTATION: WHAT REALLY MATTERS?**

Louise Harland-Davies gave a presentation on the What Really Matters consultation which covered why the savings have to be made, the results of the first stage of the consultation and the next steps. Louise also paid thanks to Woodchurch Road Primary School who submitted over 80 filled in questionnaires from the children.

A discussion then took place resulting in the following questions being raised

Q. John Brace: Are all the comments being published for people to see?

A. Louise Harland-Davies: Yes the comments will be available to the public

Q. Paul Haywood: The tick box part of the questionnaire is easy to analyse but will people's comments be taken into account? Someone may have a good idea but because its just one person's comment it may get lost in the system?

A. Chris McCarthy: We will take this comment back and look at the capabilities of the system.

Q. Cllr Alan Brighouse: What will be for the format for the next stage of the consultation?

A. Louise Harland-Davies: We will be working with all the groups that we visited in the first stage of the consultation. The second round of the consultation will provide more detailed questions

Q. Mr Merrick: Questions were so generalised that it was impossible to make budget decisions on them. We needed proper budgets and figures to be able to answer the questions. Instead of the consultation focusing on cuts it should have been branded as an opportunity for the council to work better and more efficiently like all businesses do every year.

A. Cllr Paul Doughty: All the Council departments are available online for anyone who is interested in looking at them. The reason why the first questionnaire didn't give details of department budgets as the council was trying to obtain peoples' priorities in the services they use. These cuts are being forced on us and the council has no option but to consult in the manner it has.

A. Cllr Pat Williams: I object to the term cuts and we have to look at the best way of running services. I think it would be useful if people knew which council services were statutory and non-statutory in the next stage of the consultation.

Q. Andrew Taylor: The consultation will get difficult because of the savings that have to be made. Are the savings going to mean that whole services are withdrawn?

A. Cllr Paul Doughty: If people were aware of the statutory services that the council has to deliver they would understand the scale of the problem the council faces.

A. Chris McCarthy: This consultation will help the council develop a 3 year budget plan. The first questionnaire was just the first step of that.

Q. Ken Tomley: Does the council have to find £100m which is a third of the budget over 3 years or 15% of the budget based on the councils £800m income.

A. Chris McCarthy: The council has to save £100m which is a third of the net budget.

A. Cllr Stuart Kelly: The information to the public has to be more accessible to understand. Councils have always been asked to reduce expenditure and find different ways to deliver services.

COUNCIL TAX CONSULTATION

Viv O'Leary gave a presentation on the council tax budget, details on why it is being done and the issues behind it. Wirral receives £33m from the National Government for Council Tax benefits and this is being reduced by 10% meaning the council has £3.3m less. The council has to protect vulnerable people, however it is up to us to define who is vulnerable as the Government has only said that elderly and disabled people should be protected.

Q. Paul Haywood. Are the political parties coming up with any ideas on how this money can be saved?

Q. Sarah Goulding: All people on benefits can be classed as being vulnerable?

A. Viv O'Leary: It is a difficult task however savings have to be made and this is the only way of achieving them.

Q. Ruth Shaw: Will all the benefits be covered by statutory law?

A. Viv O'Leary: We have to design our own scheme. There will be an appeal process which will go through the Valuation Scheme.

Q. Cllr Denise Realey: The council tax benefit is the first hit in a number of tax reductions. Bedroom tax is coming for people in Social Landlord housing and then Universal Credit is being introduced so it is important that everyone gets the correct information.

Q. Leonora Brace: What will happen if someone is disabled but they have an extra bedroom for a carer who stays over night?

A. They would be exempt as they would be protected because of their needs.

Q. Paul Haywood: How will feedback on these consultations be available to people as it's important that all the information is available?

A. Cllr Tony Norbury: The Neighbourhood Forums are one way of this, as well as councillor's surgeries.

Q. Cllr Paul Doughty: All Registered Social Landlords such as Wirral Partnership Homes will be writing to their tenants informing them of the changes.

Q. John Brace: If council tax collection rates go down will this affect how much money the council has?

A. Viv O'Leary: Possibly. The council will also be setting up a small discrepancy fund for people to apply to.

Q. Cllr Pat Williams: Are there posters being distributed to council buildings to advise people of the changes being introduced?

A. Viv O'Leary: Yes and all One Stop Shop staff are being briefed.

Q. Cllr Denise Realey: This is a huge issue and will affect many people.

A. Viv O'Leary: The council is working with all the Registered Social Landlords to data match people who will be effected and we are doing all we can to support them.

Q. Louise Harland-Davies: We will invite someone from Wirral Partnership Homes to the next forum to discuss the issues around benefits.

Minute decision:

Louise Harland-Davies to invite a representative from Wirral Partnership Homes to the next neighbourhood forum meeting

5 **PARTNER UPDATES**

Brian Griffiths (Merseyside Police)

There is a current crime trend at the moment of criminals forcing UPVC doors and stealing car keys so it is important that residents make sure they lock all doors and windows properly and keep car keys out of sight and away from doors.

Over the bonfire period the Police, Fire Service and Council work closely together to ensure that everyone is as safe as possible and if anyone sees a illegal bonfire being built they should report it as it can be removed.

Paul Murphy (Merseyside Fire Service)

The Fire Service is facing budget cuts and over the next few years the fire service will drastically change. We have embedded 5 managers with partner agencies such as the council, NHS and community safety team to improve partnership working.

Statistics on secondary fires, incidents over the bonfire period and road traffic incidents are all down on the same period last year.

Q. Alan Brighthouse: Is Birkenhead Fire Station working well?

A. Paul Murphy: The temporary service has been working ok and everything remains on course.

Community Safety:

Ian Lowrie encouraged everyone to lock UPVC doors, as the Police reported, this is a big issue at the moment. The Police Commissioner elections are taking place on the 16th November and it is important that everyone looks at the information. The CCTV camera in Oxtun village is working well and so far a number of people have been arrested because of it

Steve Preston informed the forum that last year 65 tonnes of illegal bonfire material was removed which saw a decrease in the reported number of incidents. Alley gates are causing a problem at the moment as people are leaving them left open and the weight of the gate is damaging the hinges meaning the council has to pay to have them repaired

6 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

Q. John Hardaker: Will the councillors be taking a pay cut to help save the council money.

A. Cllr Denise Realy: The councillors have already taken a 5% cut in expenses.

A. Cllr Paul Doughty: Wirral Councillors received among the lowest expenses in the Northwest and the political parties have recently reduced the support staff they get which has reduced the budget.

Q. Ruth Shaw: Are GP's Consortium still invited to the forums to ensure residents are kept up to date with what is happening?

A. Louise Harland-Davies: Partners such as the NHS now attend the forums when there is a relevant topic being discussed. A representative can be invited to the next forum to give an update on the GP consortium.

Q. Maria Homsley: 2 weeks ago a council wagon was in Elm Road North replacing road markings. We have never had road markings before so why have they been done now, isn't this a waste of money?

A. Louise Harland-Davies: This issue can be taken away and reported to the next forum.

A. John Hardaker: I have been informed that the road markings have been introduced so the NSL can now start fining drivers who park on the road.

Q. Joanne Nugent: What's the situation with the funding?

A. Chris McCarthy: At present time the funding has been suspended.

A. Cllr Denise Realy: If possible it would be important to inform groups of other pots of funding available such as Sainsburys who are having discussions about supporting the BMW track in the Arno.

A. Cllr Stuart Kelly: It would be interesting to have information on the amount of match funding from external organisations, as the forum funding contributes more to the third sector through match funding than the money it gives out directly.

A. Cllr Pat Williams: The Friends of the Arno worked hard on their bid and we are concerned with the impact of the funds being frozen on the community.

A. Cllr George Davies: Your Wirral funding is currently available for bids of a maximum of £2500.00

The Community Engagement Co-ordinator then suggested having funding on the agenda at a future neighbourhood forum meeting

Q. Mr Dowling: Williamson Art Gallery, the Priory and Birkenhead Town Hall are currently having maintenance work carried out on them. Will this work be completed and what will happen to Birkenhead Town Hall?

A. Cllr Paul Doughty: The projects will be completed. The council wants to bring Birkenhead Town Hall into use as council officer accommodation.

Q. John Hardaker: is it wise to spend £220,000 on 20mph zones as the previous minutes state that they are not enforceable?

A. Chris McCarthy: The Road Safety Funding is for road safety measures and not just 20mph zones.

A. Cllr Stuart Kelly: Roy McGregor announced at the last forum that he thought that the 20mph zones were not enforceable. However this has been checked and the zones would be enforceable.

Q. Kay Crook: I agree with the decision to have Birkenhead Town Hall as officer accommodation as rent is being paid on Cheshire Lines. In Warrington they turn the street lights down in the early hours of the morning. Why doesn't Wirral do this?

A. Chris McCarthy: The council is running a pilot at the moment around turning off street lighting and if successful it would be recommended that this is done more.

Q. Cllr Denise Realey: The Warm Front Scheme currently has incentives to allow them to grants towards installing boilers.

A discussion was held about the time and venue of the forum to be held in February as a number of attendees raised the new time and lack of information being publicised regarding the venue.

After a vote with a show of hands it was agreed that the forum would continue with the new time of 6.30pm-8.30pm. The venue will be publicised well in advance of the date.

Minute Decision:

Community Engagement Co-ordinator to contact Technical Services regarding road markings on Elm Road North

To invite a representative from the NHS to attend the next meeting

7 DATE OF NEXT MEETING:

20th February 2013: Venue to be confirmed.

The Chair thanked everyone for their attendance, and closed the meeting at 8:50pm