

AREA FORUM (BEBINGTON AND CLATTERBRIDGE)

Tuesday, 26 February 2013

Present:

Chair
Councillors

C Povall
W Smith
KJ Williams
C Muspratt
P Kearney

Lead Officer

Mark Smith Head of Environment and
Regulation

Area Service Co-ordinator

Tracey Smith

Street Scene Manager

Phil Miner

Merseyside Police

Jim Steele
Sue Campbell

Merseyside Fire & Rescue

Natalie Hayes

Council Officers

Jim Thompson (Community Safety Team)
Julie Mann (Library Service)

Apologies

Councillors

A Sykes
C Muspratt

1 **WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES**

The Chair, Councillor Cherry Povall, welcomed forum members and 10 members of the public to the neighbourhood forum being hosted at the Women's WI.

Mark Smith read Neighbourhood Working Statement:-

A report proposing a new approach for Neighbourhood Working was recommended by Cabinet in January, and will now be voted on by all Councillors in the coming weeks.

The new Neighbourhood Working Approach will create four neighbourhood teams in Wirral and devolve decision making and budgets directly to local communities.

It aims to tackle issues at source and target resources based on the needs of individual areas. Budgets and decision making would be devolved to local areas, to be designated according to need.

Multi-agency teams, made up of public services including the local authority, police, and health, would be based in communities.

The move will result in the abolition of the existing 11 Area Forums.

Instead, local committees, chaired by Councillors and working with residents, would have a key role in drawing down and allocating resources, based on a neighbourhood plan which would have strong input from local people.

The benefits of joining up services and sharing knowledge are already well documented, reducing costs, promoting good practice, and enabling early intervention to reduce the demands on public services. Not only can they result in better, more effective services, but they are the way forward in terms of working more closely and effectively with Members, partners, and local people.

Wirral's budget deficit is well documented, and initial reports that this new way of working can not only reduce costs, but also result in better outcomes for local people, can only be welcomed.

Wirral still has a way to go in finalising plans for neighbourhood teams, but it is proposed that a neighbourhood team will be established in each of Wirral's four Parliamentary constituency areas, with staff and services being located within them.

Each team will report to its own Public Service Board, which includes public services such as the Council, Police, Health and Education. This team will co-ordinate the delivery of a Neighbourhood Plan.

The Neighbourhood Plans will be produced by each area's Constituency Committee, to be chaired by a Councillor and including councillors, community representatives, voluntary and community sector representatives, and - by invitation - the local MP. This plan will outline each area's needs and priorities.

An over-arching Wirral Together Public Service Board will have overall responsibility for the successful implementation of the scheme and for the Neighbourhood Plans.

Should the proposal be agreed, teams will begin working in communities from May 1.

Q: Can you tell where exactly you will be based?

A: Mark Smith – my understanding is a clear intention to have neighbourhood hubs based in local communities but we are not yet at the stage where we have identified particular assets.

Q: You are coming before us today to say this is going to happen but there is no meat on the bones – what is the cost?

A: Mark Smith – it would be inappropriate for Council Officers to comment on this until it has gone through full council.

Q: As a Council Officer your job is to put full details of what the cost of plan will be. We are trying to save money moving to a system that has not yet been fully costed. You can't say what savings have been made.

A: Mark Smith – in terms of absolute detail fill costs have not been mapped but there is evidence across the UK that this will work better.

A: Cllr Jerry Williams – I am confident things will move forward OK.

Q: When is a detailed plan of this to be available?

A: Mark Smith – the first big step is Council approving this. We are looking at fine tuning and then we can put this in place very quickly within the next couple of months.

A: Tracey Smith – we are saying the 1st May and something should be available for the public.

Q: We, the people have no say!

A: Cllr Jerry Williams – this is the most detailed consultation we have ever had. It has been really good and we have had extensive consultation.

A: Cllr Christine Muspratt – we have to look at different reasons as to why we are moving forward which is to get the community more involved. The staff involved have some good ideas but until it goes through Cabinet we cannot say – its democracy.

A: Cllr Cherry Povall – the attendance here is not a full representation of this area.

A: Cllr Walter Smith – 7,000 people responded to the consultation which were the people who were interested. It is not that people are not interested but this is why we need to expand and get them involved. There are more people on top table than there are on the floor.

2 PARTNER ORGANISATIONS UPDATE AND PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Merseyside Police – Jim Steele – we have two major issues which are car crime and burglaries. Issue is UPVC doors – people are not closing them properly so burglars are getting into houses, getting the car keys and taking the cars. 5 people from Liverpool were arrested and had 2 stolen cars from Bebington. They are currently on remand awaiting trial. A Wirral gang has also been arrested. 28 crimes in January and 14 of them were in unsecure vehicles overnight i.e. laptops, sat navs etc. PCSOs have been out educating people about the dangers of leaving valuables in vehicles.

Q: There was a campaign to stop people using mobile phones whilst driving?

A: Jim Steele We are running an operation each week where we have static road blocks and give tickets but there has been a vast drop in tickets.

Cllr Jerry Williams – New Bargain booze going in over the road from the acorn pub, contractors have been there this morning causing mayhem blocking pavements. I just want you to be aware of this. Off-licences can just open anywhere now. There is hardly anything we can do about it. 10 years ago I could – it just takes democracy away.

Cllr Cherry Povall – the law changed and you no longer have to establish need.

Cllr Walter Smith – it might be the law but what I find ridiculous is the ready availability of alcohol and you can open up an off licence wherever you want and there is nothing we can do.

Jim Steele– we are trying to get an alcohol free zone in New Ferry so maybe we could get that in other areas.

Q: Does the Police ever object to this? We now have garages selling alcohol!

A: Jim Steele – yes we do. Licensing will make objections but unless there is evidence objection will be worthless. Licenses can be called into review if there are problems.

Comment: I don't think the Government will do anything about alcohol as they make too much money.

Comment: Re: parking Teehey lane shops. This is a no parking zone and you could make an absolute fortune here with people parking each day dropping off and collecting their children.

Community Safety:

Jim Thompson re: burglaries below 1,000 per year over the borough for the past 3 years but I think we are not going to crack that barrier this year due to people not closing doors or windows. Remember to leave light on at night when out and put alarm on. We are a safe area. Domestic violence has one of the lowest repeat rates in the whole of the Northwest. 10% of criminals cause 80% of crime.

Merseyside Fire and Rescue:

Natalie Hayes There has been a death in Eastham Village and one last night so urge people to let us know if they know anyone who is vulnerable or high risk so we can fit a smoke alarm.

Q: How do you know if they are high risk?

A: Jim Thompson – I wouldn't worry if you are sure they are high risk or not, just refer them and they can be assessed.

Q: I see people getting alarms off you who are not high risk

A: Natalie Hayes – we need to assess everyone who now wants a smoke alarm.

If you don't score low enough then there is a charge of £23 which is one standard charge per house not per alarm.

Q: You said there were two deaths; where there no smoke alarms.

A: Natalie Hayes – I cannot comment on the most recent death as yet but the first death, there was a smoke alarm but it wasn't fitted by us.

Library Service:

Julie Mann

Libraries have been asked by the Council to work with Neighbourhood Forums so we can expand and enhance our role in the communities we serve.

The Council has also asked that we make the Forums aware of the contribution volunteers are making in libraries both in Wirral and in other parts of the country:

The Wirral Picture At present we have approximately 21 volunteers working as IT Support within Wirral Libraries. Our first aim was to replace the IT assistance formerly provided by PENTRA but we hope to extend this to all sites that require it in the future. As there are changes in the benefits system ahead which will require more and more people to apply online, it is likely more of Wirral's population may require access to our computer suites and help in using the technology. We have volunteers currently working in Bebington, Birkenhead, Wallasey, Prenton, Bromborough, Rock Ferry, St James, Moreton, Seacombe, Heswall & Wallasey Village libraries and our recruitment process is ongoing. We carry out informal interviews, CRB and/or identity checks, obtain references and require all our volunteers to abide by the council's policies on Customer Care, Data Protection & use of the Internet & Email. Our partners, The Reader Organisation, are recruiting volunteers who we hope will be able to go out to some of our "Home Reader" clients and read with them in their own homes – thus helping to alleviate loneliness & social isolation. We are investigating the possibility of setting up a second-hand bookshop in one of our libraries, organised and staffed by volunteers.

The Wider Picture Volunteers are being used widely in libraries throughout the country. In some cases libraries are run entirely by volunteers as an alternative to a library closing completely. In some of these libraries, support is still provided by the council & by qualified library staff. Volunteers are also working alongside paid staff to support them and enable opening hours to be extended or at least not reduced. Finally volunteers are used as extra help to enhance library services – acting as "meeters & greeters", facilitating reading groups, assisting with the Summer Reading Challenge for children and with story time sessions, running second-hand bookshops, helping in home reader services and as local studies assistants.

The Council also believes that the Forums need to be aware of the particular needs of various groups such as children, older people, people with special needs, and asked to investigate the ways in which their needs can be better catered for in the library –

We already work with partner organisations such as Reach out, Connexions, CAB and the Wirral Society for the Blind and Partially-sighted and The Reader Organisation. Some of our libraries are used as bases for Literacy Buddies to work. A wide variety of courses are held in our sites.

We are careful to look at Quality Impact Assessments and are part of the Departmental Equality Group. We are actively involved in various projects that promote improved health & well being.

We provide an e-book download service that is available 24/7. E-books have the potential to address the issue of social inclusion & enable partially-sighted people to access materials otherwise beyond their reach in terms of cost & accessibility. They can provide other benefits for these customers as today's e-reader devices have excellent features to improve accessibility (they are light and easy to hold, fonts can be increased, some have text narration, contrast can be increased or decreased etc)

and these customers no longer have to wait for large print editions to read the latest best-seller.

We have prioritised vulnerable groups such as our Home Reader clients and children to ensure that the current spending freeze will impact them as little as possible in terms of the service they receive from the libraries. We are keen that libraries continue to be seen as safe, welcoming, neutral spaces for all members of the community.

Libraries must ensure that all groups in the community have a chance to give their views - We utilise regular consultations and surveys to find out the needs and views of both users and non-users. A number of our libraries have "Friends" and "User" groups who are very pro-active in giving us feedback on our services & suggestions for improvements. The public can contact us in a variety of ways if they have problems or complaints – via written forms available from all sites or using the "Rate this Page" facility on the website. The library service plans to take an active part in the upcoming four-year Heritage project "Wirral Remembers" which intends to really engage with as many community groups as possible which could result in our services and resources becoming more widely known and better utilised throughout the community.

What's happening at YOUR local library?

Bebington Library: Computer suite with volunteer IT support. Tai Chi classes for the public with Nicholas Leon on Saturday mornings, beginners classes from 10 - 11 a.m. and improvers 11 - 12. Sessions cost £4. Need to ring 643 7219 to book a place. Reading Group - Generally meets last Thursday of the month. 6:30 to 8:00pm. Reach-out Work Club - Tuesdays 10:00am to 12:00noon. Baby Bounce & Rhyme - takes place every Thursday at 10.30am and the first Saturday in the month at 10.30am. [Story time](#) - takes place every Monday morning at 10:00am. Reading Groups - Meet monthly on a Thursday at 4.30 to 5:30pm.

Higher Bebington Library: Computers with Internet access & adaptive software is available for disabled users (screen magnification and text to speech). Stories and Rhymes for Under 5's 2.30pm every Thursday. Young Persons Reading Group - Ages 8-11. Saturday afternoon once a month. Please contact the library for details. Baby, Bounce and Rhyme - Held every Friday at 2.30pm (term time only).

Q: I am part of friends of Bebington Library. Re: consultation of changes of libraries they gave assurance that each library will include groups in all decisions. We are very keen that we are involved in all decisions. When will the consultation be?

A: Julie Mann I don't know in this area.

A: Cllr Jerry Williams – I don't think anything will go ahead without full consultation.

Q: with the Early Voluntary Redundancies (EVR) Libraries have lost a lot of staff and now they are at risk again. We really want an assurance as if more staff go that would cause a lot of stress.

A: Mark Smith – the broad approach when we has the EVR exercise there was a large scale of departure and even though people have had letters now it was just to see what the interest was.

3 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS:**

Q: The safehaven at the top of Teehey Lane, bollards have been hit a number of times and are still yet to be repaired.

A: Phil Miner – I will be asking questions tomorrow and look into this.

Q: Re: Heath Road, there has been subsidence re drains then in the same area there has been more and it is still not resolved.

A: Phil Miner – we have had issues with united utilities about this and a lot of investment has been done. We are awaiting united utilities to get camera survey done. There are two pipelines on this road.

Q: Lamp post knocked down on Neston Road – is it being replaced?

A: Phil Miner – we must have connection issue – we will look into it.

Cllr Cherry Povall closed the meeting and thanked everyone for their attendance.