

REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT POLICY AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 17 September 2013

<u>Present:</u>	Councillor	A Brighthouse (Chair)	
	Councillors	S Foulkes S Williams E Boulton J Crabtree P Doughty G Ellis R Gregson	K Hodson M Johnston P Kearney A Leech M Sullivan KJ Williams
<u>Cabinet Member:</u>	Councillor	G Davies	
<u>In attendance:</u>	Councillor	D Roberts	

13 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST/PARTY WHIP

Members were asked to consider whether they had 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.

Members were reminded that they should also declare, pursuant to paragraph 18 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules, whether they were subject to a party whip in connection with any item(s) to be considered and, if so, to declare it and state the nature of the whipping arrangement.

Councillor M Sullivan declared his prejudicial interest in agenda item 5 – Highways and Traffic Representation Panel Minutes (see minute 17 post), insofar as it related to the proposed introduction of 20mph speed limits on various roads in Pensby.

Councillor J Williams declared his prejudicial interest in agenda item 5 – Highways and Traffic Representation Panel Minutes (see minute 17 post), insofar as it related to a proposed shared off road path for pedestrians and cyclists at Lever's Causeway, Bebington.

Councillor P Doughty declared his personal interest in agenda item 11 – Committee Referral – Permitted Development Rights (see minute 23 post) by virtue of his employment.

14 MINUTES

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 10 July 2013 be approved as a correct record

15 NOTICE OF MOTION - CUTS TO MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

The Head of Legal and Member Services advised that at the meeting of the Council held on 15 July 2013 (minute 21 refers), the following Notice of Motion proposed by Councillor D Roberts and seconded by Councillor J Stapleton was referred by the Mayor to this Committee for consideration.

CUTS TO MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

- (1) Wirral Council recognises the excellent work undertaken by Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service and applauds the commitment of its frontline and support staff. This Council also notes that those individuals' ability to protect the people of Wirral is being jeopardised by the Government cuts to funding as well as undermining staff morale.
- (2) This Council is deeply concerned by the findings of the Ken Knight review of fire and rescue services which makes the case for further huge cuts, mergers with other Authorities or Police Crime Commissioners and most worryingly privatisation. The Ken Knight review gives very little recognition of the very difficult decisions taken by Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority to date in managing the deepest cuts inflicted on any Authority in the Country and instead advocates its replacement by a PCC without any evidence whatsoever to prove that this would improve the service delivered to the residents of this city region.
- (3) This Council notes with serious concern the Government's alarming proposals to privatise part if not all functions of the fire and rescue service, along with yet further cuts to their grant funding which will impact on their ability in protecting residents from fire, road traffic collisions and other emergencies within the Borough of Wirral.
- (4) This Council is deeply worried that the Government has lost sight of the fire service's main purpose, to protect residents from fire, road traffic collisions and other emergencies and their devastating impact on our communities and that it threatens to put private profit ahead of the need to save lives and help people feel safe in their homes and community.
- (5) This Council further notes that the Government's proposals are in the context of a programme of ill-conceived efficiencies to fire and rescue services. The impact this will have on the communities of Merseyside is extremely worrying and places vulnerable residents in danger.
- (6) This Council also notes due to Government cuts which has seen Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service suffer cuts totalling £19.2m over the 4 year spending review with 180 firefighters posts deleted and a reduction in Fire engines from 42 to 28 by 2015.
- (7) The Government's proposal for further huge cuts in 2015 will have devastating effects on operational response and the community safety and prevention work delivered by the Authority to such an excellent standard.
- (8) This Council therefore calls on the Government, in particular the Secretary of State for Local Government and the Chancellor's department to cease their ill conceived and irresponsible cuts to our fire and rescue services and pledge instead to protect the public from further risk of fire by protecting this front line emergency service from further cuts and threats of privatisation.

In accordance with Standing Order 7 (6), Councillor Roberts had been invited to attend the meeting in order for her to be given an opportunity to explain the Motion. In accordance with Standing Order 7 (5), any recommendation from the Committee in relation to the Notice of Motion would be referred to the Council. Any debate at Council should take place upon the recommendation of the Committee and there should be no separate debate upon the motion itself.

Councillor Roberts indicated that the Notice of Motion had been submitted as a result of deep concerns around the findings of the Ken Knight review of fire and rescue

services, which made a case for further cuts to grant funding, mergers and privatisation. She stated that such proposals could seriously impact upon the ability of the Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service (MFRS) to protect Wirral residents from fire, road traffic collisions and other emergencies. She commented that cuts to grant funding to MFRS in recent years were double the national average and that the government proposals would lead to significant cuts in the numbers of firefighters and fire engines.

The Chair commented that he would have preferred to have heard evidence from the Chief Fire Officer to highlight the potential impact on Wirral of the proposals contained within the Ken Knight review. He referred also to the potential impact of a reduction in fire engines on the Council's emergency planning arrangements and upon the ability to respond to flooding, in the light of severe weather in recent years. Members commented that there was clearly a need for local discussion with fire professionals and to examine the link between spend and safety.

The Labour Group spokesperson and other Members expressed the view that the Notice of Motion should be fully supported, so as to support firefighters and send a message to the Government that such proposals are not acceptable. It was also suggested that all Members of the Council would benefit from hearing evidence from the Chief Fire Officer upon the impact on Wirral. The Chair also expressed a view that each of the Constituency Committees should be encouraged to take up this matter.

It was moved by Councillor Foulkes and seconded by Councillor Sullivan –

“That the Council be advised that the Regeneration and Environment Policy and Performance Committee fully supports the Notice of Motion in relation to Cuts to Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service”

The Motion was carried (8:6)

It was further moved by Councillor Foulkes and seconded by Councillor Sullivan –

“(1) That the Chief Fire Officer be requested to attend the next meeting of this Committee to highlight the potential impact of the Government proposals on the residents of Wirral.

(2) That a Special Meeting of the Committee be called, if necessary, and that all Members of the Council be invited to attend.”

The further Motion was carried unanimously.

Resolved –

- (1) That the Council be advised that the Regeneration and Environment Policy and Performance Committee fully supports the Notice of Motion in relation to Cuts to Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service.**
- (2) That the Chief Fire Officer be requested to attend the Committee at the earliest opportunity to highlight the potential impact of the Government proposals on the residents of Wirral.**
- (3) That a Special Meeting of the Committee be called, if necessary, and that all Members of the Council be invited to attend.**

16 YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN WIRRAL

The Strategic Director: Regeneration and Environment reported that at its meeting held on 16 January 2013 (minute 46 refers), the Economy and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviewed a detailed analysis of the effect of the economy on youth unemployment. He provided Members with an updated position on youth unemployment together with updates in relation to interventions that were available at national, city region and local levels to support young people into employment. He provided also an updated statistical Appendix, which reviewed data changes since the previous report.

Members expressed a view that although the improvement of employment prospects in Wirral was a key feature of the Council's Corporate Plan, youth unemployment specifically was a major concern for the Council. He welcomed all of the initiatives set out within the report and requested that a further update be presented to the 9 April 2014 meeting.

Councillor Johnston indicated that he had agreed to Chair a Task and Finish Group to undertake a piece of scrutiny work in relation to apprenticeships, which would soon be presented to the Committee. Members were eager that officers should take all opportunities to improve the Wirral apprenticeship offer. However, some concerns were expressed with regard to the real value of some apprenticeships being undertaken by young people and whether they all led to a specific trade qualification. There was also concern that unscrupulous employers could avoid paying a minimum wage using the guise of an apprenticeship.

The Head of Regeneration commented that youth unemployment was a particular challenge for the Council and that officers attached a significant priority to it. He proposed to bring back an update to the April 2014 meeting and to take up the comments from Members and specifically, whether the Corporate Plan had sufficient focus on youth unemployment.

Resolved –

- (1) That the report be noted.**
- (2) That the officers be requested to do all that is possible in addressing youth unemployment and improving the Wirral apprenticeship offer giving consideration to the value and quality of apprenticeships offered.**
- (3) That the Cabinet be requested to consider placing a significant priority on addressing youth unemployment by emphasising its importance in the Corporate Plan.**
- (4) That a further update be presented to the April 2014 meeting, the update to include a breakdown of apprenticeships undertaken by way of trade and timescale.**

17 HIGHWAYS AND TRAFFIC REPRESENTATION PANEL - MINUTES

Councillors Sullivan and Williams, having declared their prejudicial interest in this item, left the room during its consideration.

The Head of Legal and Member Services presented the minutes of the Highways and Traffic Representation Panel held on 11 September 2013.

The Panel had considered the following matters –

- Objections to Proposed 20 mph Speed Limits on Various Roads in Pensby
- A Petition objecting to Proposed Shared Off Road Path for Pedestrians and Cyclists at Lever's Causeway, Bebington
- A Petition requesting traffic management measures to address Parking and Speeding in Ben Nevis Road, Tranmere
- An objection to Proposed Traffic Signal Junction Improvement at Grove Road/Harrison Drive, Wallasey

In view of some concerns that had been expressed at the Panel in relation to consultation for highways and traffic schemes, the Head of Environment and Regulation outlined the process followed and confirmed that officers always adopted an inclusive approach, particularly with residents directly affected by any proposal. He suggested that the significant responses at the Panel meeting, both in favour and against, indicated the success of the consultation undertaken.

A Member commented that he was satisfied that the Panel had fully considered the evidence before it and had taken account of all of the views expressed by residents. However, it was important to understand that the themes under which bids for funding were submitted were not always in line with the priorities of local people.

Resolved –

- (1) That the minutes of the Highways and Traffic Representation Panel be noted.**
- (2) That the Committee recommend to the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation –**
 - (i) That the Proposed 20mph Speed Limit on Various Roads in Pensby, be approved.**
 - (ii) That the Proposed Shared Off Road Path for Pedestrians and Cyclists at Lever's Causeway, Bebington be approved.**
 - (iii) That the Proposed Traffic Signal Junction Improvement at Grove Road/Harrison Drive, Wallasey be approved.**
- (3) That no further action be taken in relation to the petition for traffic management measures at Ben Nevis Road, Tranmere.**

18 WORK PROGRAMME

Further to minute 12 (10 July 2013), the Chair presented an update upon the outcome of discussions with group spokespersons upon the formulation and development of the work programme for the ensuing municipal year. Although Members had identified a number of areas for review, it was recognised that it was important to have a manageable programme that could be adequately resourced considering elected member capacity and officer support.

He presented a detailed work programme in the form of a schedule for the municipal year, highlighting proposed activity against the following headings –

- Scheduled Reviews
- Potential Reviews
- Reports Requested
- Standing Items

A Member referred to an issue that he had raised at the last meeting with regard to issues associated with the use of PDAs in the brown bin collection, which was to be investigated by officers. In response to concern that a response had only recently been provided, the Head of Environment and Regulation indicated that he believed the Member had been advised that the matter had been fully resolved and the recent communication to all Members was to complete the Action Tracker. In response to a further question with regard to the Cheshire Lines Facilities Management contract, he proposed to provide a full response to all Members of the Committee.

Resolved –

- (1) That the Regeneration and Environment Policy and Performance Committee work programme, set out in Appendix 1 to the report now submitted, be approved.**
- (2) That the officers be requested to bring additional reports to future meetings of the Committee in relation to –**
 - (i) An Update on Parking on Pavements and Verges**
 - (ii) The Impact in Wirral of Cumulative Impact Assessments**
- (3) That an update be provided to all Members of the Committee upon the Council Mortgage Scheme.**

19 **DIRECTORATE PLAN PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT**

The Head of Regeneration provided an outline of the current performance of Regeneration and Environment (as at 31 July 2013) against the Directorate Plan for 2013/2014. The report translated the priorities set out in the Directorate Plan into a coherent and measurable set of performance outcome measures and targets that would be used to evaluate the achievement of Directorate priorities over the next year of the plan.

The development of the Directorate Plan would be an iterative process during 2013/2014 based upon the feedback and requirements of Members and portfolio leads. The latest version of the report contained –

- (i) Key finance information
- (ii) Year-end forecast position
- (iii) Exception reports (a). To maintain local environmental quality (LEQ) of litter, detritus, dog fouling in main gateways and shopping areas and (b). 60% of all major planning applications determined within 13 weeks.

The Strategic Director indicated that the Directorate Plan linked directly to the Corporate Plan and set Directorate objectives in national and local context.

The indicators contained within the Plan formed a hierarchy underneath the high level indicators specified in the Corporate Plan. He had signed off the indicators contained within the performance report and agreed the following parameters which underpinned on-going performance management –

- 2013/14 Plan
- 2013/14 Plan trajectory
- 2013/14 Performance tolerance levels (determine RAG [Red, Amber, Green] status)
- Head of Service responsible for delivery of target

He highlighted the importance of the report providing Members with the information required to evaluate the delivery of the key priorities identified by the Directorate Plan and he requested that the Committee use the information contained within this report to inform its future work programme.

Within the Plan, the following indicators were marked as Red –

- % of Major Planning Applications determined within 13 weeks
- To Maintain local environmental quality (LEQ) via the street cleansing of litter, detritus and dog fouling in main gateways and shopping areas

The Head of Regeneration and the Head of Environment and Regulation provided an explanation of the issues that contributed to the downward trend of each of the indicators and set out the corrective activities which were now in place to secure improvement.

Resolved – That the report be noted and the thanks of the Committee be accorded to the officers for the informative training provided to Members in relation to performance management.

20

REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT BUDGET MONITORING

The Interim Director of Resources set out an approach to future budget monitoring arrangements to ensure that there was consistency across the Policy and Performance Committees and to ensure that Members had sufficient information to scrutinise budget performance for the Regeneration and Environment Directorate.

He commented that the Coordinating Committee had agreed that, in order to fulfil its corporate and strategic scrutiny role, it would continue to review the full versions of the most up to date monitor reports at its future scheduled meetings. The report contained a link to full versions of the revenue and capital monitor reports already considered by the Cabinet. However, the Chair indicated that the latest monitoring information had been published for consideration by the Cabinet at its meeting on 19 September 2013. For the three Policy and Performance Committees aligned to the Directorates, it was proposed that the relevant sections from the most recent revenue and capital monitoring reports would be summarised into a bespoke report for each Committee, which would include –

- Performance against revenue budget
- Performance against capital budget
- Performance against in year efficiency targets

Members had been requested to review the last Revenue and Capital Monitor reports to Cabinet in July to determine if they had any specific questions relating to the budget for the Regeneration and Environment Directorate.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

21 **USE OF DELEGATED POWERS REPORT**

The Strategic Director of Regeneration and Environment reported in accordance with the “Approved Scheme of Delegation” and the “Contract Procedure Rules” upon the use of delegated authority to –

- (a) Accept the lowest tender to continue the maintenance of a number of sites acquired/created during the Housing Market Renewal Initiative, located in Birkenhead, Tranmere, Rock Ferry and Wallasey.

He commented that as part of the former HMRI a number of sites were acquired and/or created through the demolition of low demand housing. The majority of those remaining sites would eventually be redeveloped over time. However, in the mean time, arrangements were necessary to ensure the sites did not become a nuisance and blight on local neighbourhoods. The maintenance of the sites included grass cutting and fly tip removal. Following an evaluation of the tenders received, the winning contractor was determined to be Continental Landscapes Limited and the contract price for the 33 month term was £56,565. This compares to the previous contract sum of £20,000 which covered a 10 month period.

- (b) Accept the tender to appoint Nathaniel Litchfield and Partners to undertake a new Strategic Housing Market Assessment for Wirral.

Under Section 8 of the Housing Act 1985, local authorities were required to consider the various accommodation needs of the local population and to carry out periodic reviews in order to provide relevant and appropriate provision to meet these needs. The information obtained through this was used to enable the Council to update and inform its Housing Strategy, strategic priorities and to provide the evidence base for the preparation of the Local Development Framework. Following the subsequent evaluation of the tenders received, the winning consultant was determined to be Nathaniel Litchfield and Partners. The contract price submitted was £45,770.

Resolved –

- (1) That the use of delegated authority to accept the lowest tender to continue the maintenance of a number of sites acquired/created during the Housing Market Renewal Initiative, located in Birkenhead, Tranmere, Rock Ferry and Wallasey, be noted.**
- (2) That the use of delegated authority to accept the tender to appoint Nathaniel Litchfield and Partners to undertake a new Strategic Housing Market Assessment for Wirral, be noted.**

22 POLICY UPDATE

The Director of Public Health/Head of Policy and Performance reported that one of the key elements of good Overview and Scrutiny, highlighted by the Centre for Public Scrutiny, was horizon-scanning, looking ahead to future changes in local government in order for the Council to have sufficient time to adapt to them. She indicated that as part of the reorganisation of Scrutiny within the Council, the scrutiny support team was now located alongside the Council's Policy unit to ensure those areas were joined up more effectively. She presented a Policy Briefing to enable Members to review new areas of policy and the government initiatives that would impact on local government in the short to medium term and requested Members to consider whether there were any items that could be included in the Committee's work programme.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

23 COMMITTEE REFERRAL - PERMITTED DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS

The Head of Legal and Member Services reported that at its meeting held on 30 May 2013 (minute 34 refers), the Planning Committee referred the report of the Head of Regeneration and Planning on changes to Permitted Development Rights to this Committee for information.

Members expressed a view that the legislation was confusing and had led to increased pressure on Planning Officers with a potential loss in income in relation to some planning applications. The Head of Regeneration commented upon a number of issues associated with the changes to Permitted Development Rights and, in response to Members' concerns, agreed to circulate his report to all Members of the Council for information.

It was moved by Councillor Sullivan and seconded by Councillor Foulkes –

“That this Committee strongly disagrees with the Tory led coalition, of slackening the planning regulations that previously needed local Council involvement with regard to planning applications (particularly in relation to boundary distances), the potential impact on fees and on the already overstretched Planning Department”

The Motion was carried (12:1) with one abstention

Resolved –

- (1) That the report be noted and circulated to all Members of the Council for information.**
 - (2) That this Committee strongly disagrees with the Tory led coalition, of slackening the planning regulations that previously needed local Council involvement with regard to planning applications (particularly in relation to boundary distances), the potential impact on fees and on the already overstretched Planning Department (12:1 with one abstention).**
-