

CONSTITUENCY COMMITTEE - BIRKENHEAD

Thursday, 28 November 2013

Present

Chair

Frank Field MP

Councillors

J Crabtree

AR McLachlan

G Davies

M McLaughlin

P Davies

T Norbury

WJ Davies

D Realey

P Doughty

D Roberts

S Foulkes

H Smith

S Kelly

J Stapleton

B Kenny

P Williams

G Davies

M McLaughlin

P Davies

T Norbury

WJ Davies

D Realey

P Doughty

D Roberts

S Foulkes

H Smith

S Kelly

J Stapleton

B Kenny

P Williams

1 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR

RESOLVED: (unanimously)

That Councillor P Davies be elected as Chair.

2 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR

RESOLVED: (unanimously)

That Councillor P Davies be elected as Chair.

3 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors A Brighouse and C Meaden.

4 CHAIRS OPENING REMARKS

Councillor P Davies welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the Constituency Committee and invited Members and Officers to introduce themselves. Introductions were then made.

Councillor P Davies informed that he was very excited about the Constituency model being rolled out in Wirral. He told the meeting that it was exciting to be involved at the beginning of the journey and that overtime it was the intention that the Council would devolve significant responsibilities and budgets to the four Constituency Committees.

Councillor P Davies reported that a number of Members and Officers had visited Sunderland City Council to see its neighbourhood working model in operation. Sunderland had set up Area Committees which had encouraged public involvement. Local residents now were able to have a say in Council affairs.

Councillor P Davies informed that the next step in respect of the Council's neighbourhood working was to develop Constituency priorities. It was the intention to elect Frank Field MP as Chair of the Committee for the rest of the Municipal Year. Unfortunately, Mr Field was delayed. Councillor P Davies indicated that at the appropriate time he would move a motion to this affect and vacate the Chair.

5 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

The Committee queried when it would be necessary to declare declarations of interest as a number of them were in employment, and when to declare collective or block declarations of interest e.g. as they were all school governors.

The Head of Legal and Member Services and advised Members that it was not necessary for them to declare any collective or block interests at this meeting.

6 APPOINTMENT OF CO-OPTEEES

On a Motion moved by Councillor P Davies and seconded by Councillor M McLaughlin it was

RESOLVED:

That Frank Field MP be co-opted to serve as a member of this Committee, without voting rights.

7 TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Constituency Manager presented a report by the Head of Neighbourhoods and Engagement. The report detailed the background to the setting up of the Council's Constituency Committees and the scope of their roles. Also, included was the framework/core principles for the Committees' further development which had been approved by the Cabinet in May 2013. Attached to the report was Article 10 of the Council's Constitution which had been approved by the Council at its meeting on 30 April 2013.

The Committee noted that the report presented to the Cabinet in May 2013 had proposed that each Constituency Committee would develop its own terms of reference on the basis that 'one size did not fit all' in respect of constituency working. It also proposed that, once appointed, each Constituency Committee would put in place its own terms of reference, subject to Council approval, over and above Article 10 and the core governance principles. The Cabinet had agreed this and resolved that when the detail of Constituency Committees arrangements were finalised the Council's Constitution would be amended to reflect any additional changes as necessary.

The report indicated that the Committee should develop a committee procedure 'handbook' which would set out, over and above the terms of reference in the Council's Constitution, how it would operate.

The report further indicated that a 'Task and Finish' Group would be put in place to develop the Committee's 'handbook' and that this 'Task and Finish' Group of Elected Members be supported by the Constituency Manager who would present a draft handbook based on other examples.

In response to Members, Ms Tolcher, Constituency Manager confirmed the process and mechanism for community engagement, ensuring Community representation on the Committee be included in the Handbook.

A Member asked for clarification in relation to the role of Community Representatives in terms of voting, which they felt was unclear. In response it was clarified that Community Representatives had voting rights but not on financial matters.

A Member raised concerns that the Committee was spending too much time on its processes. It was explained, that this was the Committee's first meeting and that some constitutional aspects of the meeting needed to be discussed.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) Article 10 of the Council's Constitution be updated, in due course, to ensure that all Constituency Committees have the scope and flexibility necessary to drive forward the constituency working model and deliver the functions increasingly devolved to them; and**
- (2) a 'task and finish group be established to develop (for approval) a 'handbook' which sets out the proposed operating procedures, relevant arrangements and practices for this Committee consisting of Councillors J Crabtree, M McLaughlin, J Stapleton and A Brighouse.**

{If Councillor A Brighouse is unable to sit on the task and finish group, Councillor P Williams will sit on it instead.}

8 UPDATE ON DATA COLLECTION

The Constituency Manager presented a report by the Head of Neighbourhoods and Engagement. The report informed that in July 2013 two workshops had been held with all local councillors in Birkenhead, Frank Field MP and Officers from the Neighbourhoods and Engagement Team. They had been held to discuss the operational elements of this Committee and it had been concluded that the priority was for a task to be carried out which gathered thorough data on the current spend on public services in Birkenhead, in comparison with other constituency areas.

The Committee raised the following issues:

- The differences in life expectancies on one side of the Borough to the other and what needed to be done to use resources to obtain what those people living on the other side of the Borough received, looking at statistics that inform what is being delivered and what is being spent;
- The data collected needed to be used to inform corporate priorities and programmed work going forward;
- The need for an accurate pattern of public spending, the raw data will help the Committee put together its Constituency Plan;
- The Council needed to avoid any duplication, enhance what the voluntary sector is doing and ensure that funding is being targeted in the right places;

- It was important to remember the Council's corporate objectives and work collectively for the benefit of Birkenhead;
- There is a need to interrogate the data further. It was suggested that a small amount of the budget allocation for 2013/14 be used to recruit a Post Graduate student to do further analysis. This would provide conclusions and recommendations on the priorities to inform the Constituency Plan; and
- This analysis should Borough wide and discussed with other Constituency Committees.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the content of the report and the information collated to date be noted; and**
- (2) the Head of Neighbourhoods and Engagement be requested to recruit a Post Graduate student to do further analysis and provide conclusions and recommendations on the priorities to inform the Constituency Plan**

9 DEVELOPING BIRKENHEAD - CONSTITUENCY PRIORITIES AND BUDGET EXPENDITURE PROCESS FOR 2013-14

The Constituency Manager presented a report by the Head of Neighbourhoods and Engagement. The report informed that a function of the Committee was to develop and agree a Constituency Plan for the area. It was the intention that such a Plan would draw on robust data, including feedback from previous consultations and the knowledge, expertise and experience of all Ward Members, partners and community groups as well as Constituency Committee Members.

The Committee noted that the proposed operating model and the funding allocation of £50k for each Constituency Committee had been set out in a report to the Cabinet on 23 May 2013. Also, on 10 October 2013 the Cabinet had received a report which had informed it that a further amount of £25k would be devolved to each Constituency Committee for Public Health initiatives from a non-recurrent underspend identified within the public health grant for 2013-15. As a result, the Committee was being asked to determine expenditure in relation to a total of £75k by the end of the 2013-14 Financial Year.

The report set out considerations for the Committee and proposed an approach to identifying priorities for the remainder of 2013-14 and for developing a budget expenditure process in respect of the monies that had been allocated to it.

The Committee noted that there were a lot of needs in the Constituency area to consider including alcohol dependency, life expectancies and child poverty. The Birkenhead Profile identifying priorities for Birkenhead 2013/14 was attached to the report at Appendix 1 and it was acknowledged that there was both limited data and funds available to the Committee. Members considered that it may not be possible to make much impact this year but it could begin to consider community needs. The 'Suggested Priorities for Budget Distribution in Birkenhead 2013/14' as collated based on the data, profile and consultation taken place was attached to the report at Appendix 2.

It was reported that a Members' Workshop held in July 2013 had recognised that these issues were still valid although some of the detail may have changed. The Committee was informed that the Constituency Manager had explored and discussed these issues further with local groups, Members, Council Services and partners.

The Committee was asked to consider what could be tackled with the resources available. Members commented as follows:

- Resources had been allocated to 'The Love Wirral' initiative which would run for twelve months and was an opportunity to put forward ideas to improve local environments which may result in a grant being made to bring them to fruition;
- It was hoped that funding could be attracted from other areas and it was queried whether these areas were ambitious enough;
- The £50k each Constituency Committee had been allocated was referred to as 'seed corn' and the expectation was that other agencies would add to it. A question was asked on the representations the Council had made to other agencies for financial contributions. It was noted that Officers were working with the Public Services Board and the next stage in development was to be successful in encouraging other public sector bodies to provide some funding.
- It was important for the Committee to 'kick-start' against local priorities but some were one-offs and concern was raised over missed opportunities.
- It was queried whether it would be possible to carry funding over into the next Financial Year.
- There were large numbers of young people not in employment or training (NEETS) in the Birkenhead Constituency, compared to the others there was at least double.
- Older people on low incomes should be classed as a priority and it was noted that in fact it came under the second priority detailed in the report.
- It would be disappointing if the Committee was unable to make any significant improvements from any small funding allocations it may make. It was considered that as Members were familiar with issues and understood the needs in their own wards, it was proposed that a

small Task and Finish Group be set up to give full consideration to this and recommends the best approach to the Committee.

- As well as paying attention to what people and organisations in the Constituency area had said it was important to understand the data provided.
- The only priority that could be linked was the problem of rubbish being deposited in alleyways, vacant land/shops. The value of the Council's Waste Contract was quite considerable yet parts of Birkenhead looked like the third world. Why was effective tidying up not included in the Contract? This needed to be addressed. Was the Contract in practice a good bargain?
- The way the Council allocated its resources did not result in life chances changing. It was imperative that interventions were made at the beginning of life.
- Schools could tell when children were 10 and 11 years old that they would end up as NEETS so why did the Council not do something about it? Some funding should be used to prophesise who would become NEETS.
- Organisations were being asked to submit proposals against Appendix 3 to the report (Financial Protocol). The Committee was not asking Organisations to focus on what it wanted them to focus on. They were focusing on what they wanted to focus on.
- Instead of asking for off the shelf initiatives the Committee needed a process which identified its priorities. Before deciding how to spend next year's £75k, priorities must have been decided and the process agreed.
- If this year's £75k could not be used it must not be wasted.
- It was necessary to get at the root cause of what made Birkenhead a uniquely bad place to live. Poverty had a common link. Time must be found to make the case for what made Birkenhead, Birkenhead.
- Birkenhead people did not always receive free newspapers and there were many different languages spoken. Communication issues must be tackled.

The Strategic Director for Transformation and Resources was in attendance at the meeting and informed that the Committee's budget could roll over. A way forward would be to commit funding for proposals that the Committee may make.

The Committee noted that, alternatively, it could open its own bank account and put the £75k into it. The Committee could make a difference and would spend its budget, whatever its size, much more effectively. The Members of the Committee were representatives, not delegates, elected to use their judgements. The Council was providing a terrific opportunity to the four Wirral Constituencies, not just to think outside the box but to break the box open.

A Member proposed that the Committee could agree to allocate a relatively small proportion of its funding to obtain some quick wins around environmental issues and to pay for a post graduate to drill down through the data to establish why things were the way they were and the other three Constituency Committees be asked to make a similar contribution. These were practical steps to take to make a difference immediately.

In the longer term, the Member proposed that there be a debate around health and the NEETS and a Task and Finish Group be set up to look at this and how the Committee could use the rest of its resources, rolling it over if it was considered necessary.

Another Member proposed that linked to the previous proposals the Committee obtain a yard stick to judge the Council's bigger contracts and to give local people the chance to work.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) **the report be noted; and**
- (2) a task and finish group be established to determine the priorities and proposals for spend in relation to environmental issues, data collection and improved communication.

10 **APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR**

RESOLVED (unanimously): That

- (1) **Frank Field MP be elected Chair of the Committee for the remainder of the Municipal Year; and**
- (2) **Councillor G Davies be elected Vice-Chair of the Committee for the remainder of the Municipal Year.**

11 **ASSET BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

The Constituency Manager reported orally on the recent mapping exercise, workshops and discussions held with Public Health. Funding was now being sought to pay for assistance to undertake the drilling down that the Committee required. Members needed to understand the extent of the need, what caused it and what needed to be done to counteract it.

A Member asked whether it was the intention to share the progress being made in respect of the work undertaken on asset based community development with the Committee. The Constituency Manager informed that this would be the case. She was considering the tools and support required

to up skill the workforce. A specification was being drafted and it was her intention to present a report to the next meeting of the Committee. This item would appear as standard on all future Committee agenda.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

12 PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

The Chair invited members of the public to ask questions.

Question 1. – Mr J McGinley

The Bedroom Tax had an adverse affect on the lives of the people of Birkenhead. Mr McGinley was aware that Councillors were appalled by the suffering and hardship being experienced. Why could the Council not be persuaded to insist provisions of the 1985 Housing Act, in terms of room size, applied?

Question 2. – Mr P Haywood

How does this Committee link into the full Council meeting?

Question 3

On line there were three PDF documents but the data associated with these were not there. There are no columns to the left so it is difficult to understand.

Question 4

Concerns were raised regarding a skills gap and community representation at meetings. Would there be workshops arranged so members of the community could obtain a better understanding? People may say that this is a beauty competition. People needed to understand what the Committee was about and I struggled tonight.

Question 5 – Lynn Evans, Chair of the Devonshire Park Residents Association

What was really exciting and new about this Committee? It was looking at the huge need we know we have. I thought it was about strategy and addressing the problems strategically, looking at Birkenhead's unique character and investments. Opportunities and aspirations should set the agenda for this. You have talked about NEETS. What about entrepreneurialism?

Devonshire Park has drawn up a Neighbourhood Plan. The Committee should start working on strategic issues with the help of Devonshire Park who already has experience of this. You don't need a lot of money.

Question 6 – Mrs P Cocker

This meeting is like an Area Forum gone mad! Can someone put together a plan on one or two sides of A4, for discussion at the next meeting, on what we need to prioritise? We can then agree a plan of action and go back into the community and at the March 2014 Committee meeting the community can have its say. It is important to spend money on those responsible for anti-social behaviour in a meaningful way.

13 **SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS**

RESOLVED:

That the future meeting dates for the Committee be agreed as follows:

- **30 January 2014; and**
- **27 March 2014.**

14 **CHAIR'S RESPONSE TO ISSUES RAISED AT THE MEETING**

Frank Field MP responded to issues raised at the meeting.

The practical issues raised by Mr McGinley would be considered and a response provided.

Mr Field referred to Mr Hayward's question and informed that he was very excited about the Constituency Committee initiative. It was an opportunity to change the way politics was done on Wirral. The Committee would try to be clear in its direction and intent.

Mr Field told the meeting that in this country we ran a system of government that tried, in a marginal way, to change how money was spent. The Committee had an opportunity to concentrate on outcomes and try to match them with aspirations. As meetings were held members of the public would be able to align themselves to what was going on.

The Committee would focus on outcomes that it wanted to achieve for Birkenhead, spending its money in the best way possible. It would link, in a not mechanical way, to address aspirations. The Committee was engaged in beginning a very difficult exercise that would change how the Council would do politics and change how it spent money. The Council had set out on a journey. The Committee was responding to it, grappling with it and trying to

come to terms with it. It could not have come at a better time. The Council would now spend money more smartly as budgets were being cut.

Mr Field informed that the Committee's aspirations for Birkenhead would involve the business community. Devonshire Park had opportunities and a group of people dedicated to it. The Devonshire Park model could be used for what the Committee wanted to do for Birkenhead.

Mr Field told the Committee that he had wanted to be its Chair because he did not underrate what the Council was offering it to do. No other Council in the country was doing this. The Committee was making its own faltering moves.

Mr Field proposed that a Working Group be set up consisting of Councillors P Davies, P Doughty and S Kelly and himself but the membership would change as its work was progressed. This Working Group would determine priorities for spend in 2013/14.

Mr Field told the Constituency Manager that she would need to include in the handbook the vision and aspirations for Birkenhead and how the Committee intended to bring this to life. He asked Members and members of the public present at the meeting to email the Constituency Manager with their visions (in a couple of sentences) for Birkenhead. The Committee would then build on this and it would be its guide in everything it did.

RESOLVED:

That the proposals of the Chair as set out above be agreed.