

CONSTITUENCY COMMITTEE - WIRRAL SOUTH

Wednesday, 18 December 2013

Present: Councillor A Hodson

Councillors P Gilchrist L Rowlands
T Harney W Smith
A Hodson A Sykes
K Hodson J Walsh
C Muspratt I Williams
S Niblock KJ Williams
C Povall

Apologies Councillors P Kearney D Mitchell

8 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

9 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the accuracy of Minutes of the meeting of the Constituency Committee – Wirral South on 21 October 2013 be approved.

10 CHAIRS ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair indicated that Item 3 – Public Questions and Answer Session was to be moved to end of the agenda, to enable the public to ask questions if they so wished, on the agenda items discussed at the meeting.

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced Inspector Ross Meredith, Neighbourhood Inspector Wirral South, Merseyside Police and Mr Alan Fletcher, Station Manager Heswall and Bromborough, Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service.

COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVE RECRUITMENT PROCESS UPDATE

The Committee considered the report of the Constituency Manger updating on the progress of the Wirral South Constituency Committee's Community Representative Selection Group.

Mr F.Adams, Constituency Manager, introduced the report which indicated that since the previous Constituency Committee meeting held on 21 October 2013, further contact had been made with a large number of community organisations throughout the constituency, following which a further 6 community representative applications had been submitted. As such the total number of applications received was now 11.

The Community Representative Selection Panel met On Tuesday 26 November 2013, with the membership of Councillor Phil Gilchrist, Councillor Christina Muspratt, Councillor Cherry Povall, Councillor Les Rowlands (in place of Councillor Andrew Hodson) and Councillor Irene Williams representing each electoral ward.

It was proposed that the recruitment of Community Representatives not go ahead this financial year based upon the view that the proposed process was not robust enough. It was further proposed that the process should be delayed to allow for successful applicants to be co-opted at the first committee of 2014/15. This was agreed by all elected members in attendance.

Any decision to delay the appointment of Community Representatives will allow the recruitment process to gain from the proposed Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) work proposed within the constituency for 2014/15 (for further details please see appendix 1: ABCD Briefing Paper).

In response to Members, the Assistant Chief Executive/Head of Universal and Infrastructure Services was in attendance at the meeting and informed that the Committee's budget could roll over, but advised that this may result in a reduction in allocation in the future. The Committee asked for further clarification on this issue.

Members commented that the recruitment process in relation to the appointment of community representatives needed to be undertaken as a matter of urgency; setting out a sufficient timetable of the procedure and process to be followed.

A Member commented that they felt enough time hadn't been given to enable the public to apply for the posts; therefore, welcomed the delay in the recruitment process, which would enable all appropriate groups to apply if they so wished.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the recruitment of Community Representatives be delayed to allow for a full review of the process in line with paragraph 3.4 of the report;**
- (2) any review in line with paragraph 3.4 of the report be completed in time to allow for successful applicants to be co-opted at the first committee of 2014/15;**
- (3) the content of appendix 1: ABCD Briefing Paper be noted; and**
- (4) the Constituency Manager be requested to seek clarification in relation to the rollover of Committee's budget allocation to the next financial year.**

12 CONSTITUENCY COMMITTEE PRIORITIES AND SPEND UPDATE

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Neighbourhoods and Engagement setting out the priorities and processes relating to the spend for Wirral South Constituency Committee for 2013/14.

The report indicated that the Committee at its first meeting agreed to set up the 'Priority Setting' Task & Finish Group to set priorities for the remainder of the 2013-14 financial year. (Minute 4 refers). The Group considered priorities for 2013/14 from the information available and processes for spend against those priorities.

A range of information was taken into account by the 'Priority Setting' Task & Finish Group to determine proposed priorities for the Committee to concentrate on this financial year (2013/14). This included a 'Constituency Profile' document (produced by analysts in Public Health and a specific document reviewing the current situation in relation to fuel poverty in Wirral South (produced by Wirral's Acting Housing Strategy Manager).

Those in attendance at the 'Priority Setting' Task & Finish Group also expressed a desire to allocate £10K per Ward to allow for various improvements work to be carried out. This desire had since been echoed by a number of elected members both verbally and via e-mail.

The Task & Finish Group suggested the following approach:

- £10K per ward for improvement work (e.g. highways/grounds maintenance improvements yet to be defined with associated costs)
- A project utilising a suite of methods is developed to reduce levels of childhood obesity in Wirral South

- Further research to be carried out to assess the reliability of the fuel poverty statistics for the constituency prior to any decision regarding further spend
- Promoting the collective energy provider switch to ensure all are receiving maximised value for money

The report outlined in broad terms the proposed priorities but did not give specifics of projects and allocated spend. It was suggested that the 'Priority Setting' Task & Finish Group met once again in the New Year to agree allocation per project following further evidence gathering. A further report would be brought to the next Wirral South Constituency Committee on 26 February 2014 detailing exact allocation of budget to each individual priority.

In response to Members, Mr Adams indicated that he had met with Public Health and submitted a list of proposals for a 20K programme where impacts could be seen.

In relation to the proposals coming forward from Public Health, A Member raised concern that they felt that the funding was being spent on issues that had no real relevance or no importance to the members of the public in the area and suggested that smaller projects that would be of a benefit to the community be undertaken that would be less time consuming and evidenced a real impact to the community.

Members commented that in relation to the child obesity priority, it was unclear as to why this had been selected, given that there was no clear evidence to support this and it had not been brought to the attention of the Members of the Families and Wellbeing Policy and Performance Committee as a major issue for Wirral South. In response, Mr Adams indicated that the priority was chosen by the members of the Task and Finish Group who had considered evidential information.

In relation to fuel poverty, a Member asked if the 25k funding allocation from Health could be used towards this priority; as it was felt that fuel poverty did not constitute one of the high level outcomes set out by Health. It was further suggested that the priority should be addressed during the winter months and that a small project for example; a leaflet drop could be undertaken which would cost a limited amount of funding.

Members indicated that in relation to the budget allocation, they felt that as each Ward had its own issues and priorities, funding should be equally split between each of the wards. Mr F. Adams, Constituency Manager expressed his view that the £50K should be spent on practical improvement work. Some Councillors expressed a wish to allocate to various community groups but Mr Adams felt this was unwise without a robust and open to all grants process attached.

RESOLVED (12:1) - Councillor Niblock voted against: That

- (1) the allocation of £10K to each of the five wards be approved; and**
- (2) the previously appointed Priority Task and Finish Group be requested to reconvene in January 2014 to further assess the priorities chosen, the individual project costs and agree further action**

13 PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT THROUGH THE CONSTITUENCY COMMITTEE

The Committee considered the report of the Constituency Manager which set out a proposed process for public engagement through Wirral South Constituency Committee.

This was an initial starting point that would form part of a broader public engagement framework and be supported by a communications strategy.

Merseyside Police operate 'Have Your Say' meetings with members of the public. These had been held in each ward across the borough on a monthly basis. The Police have decided to refocus these meetings around the Constituency footprints and reduce their frequency to quarterly.

There was an opportunity to reduce duplication, create efficiencies and bring together a variety of public engagement forums into one meeting. The report set out a proposed way forward in relation to the 'Have Your Say' meetings and Public Question Time.

Members raised concerns and indicated that whilst they welcomed the Police and Fire service attending the Committee, they felt there was still a need for separate "Have your say" meetings and local meetings to be held, this, they felt would enable the public to raise issues in a private setting and not in the formality of a Committee meeting.

A Member suggested that it may be of some benefit if Police officers were in attendance for the Public Question/Answers session this would enable them to feedback to residents on any concerns/issues raised and also update on any issues affecting their area.

RESOLVED:

That the adoption of a Public Question Time based on the format outlined within the report be approved.

14 **PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND ANSWER SESSION (NOT TO EXCEED 20 MINUTES)**

The members of the public in attendance raised the following questions/ comments.

Question 1

In relation to war memorials, does the Council have a designated officer dealing with these, as the War Memorial Trust had funding available for memorials in the Borough?

In response, Mr Adams indicated that the Council did have a designated Officer and agreed to forward the information to the member of the public

Question 2

In relation to the reduction of "Have Your Say" meetings why not have them 1 hour per week than attending the Area Committee every three months?

In response, Inspector Meredith indicated that the Police nationally had introduced this change, he was now looking at redesigning the "Have your say" meeting to meet the needs of the Community, he further commented that it was his intention to retain the informal "meet your local bobby" surgeries within the area.

Question 3

What is the role of the Community Representatives?

In response, Mr Adams indicated that the role descriptions were set out within the ABCD document appended to Item 4 of the agenda, which had yet to be formally launched. The Community Representatives would form part of the Committee but would also be expected to attend other meetings outside of the Committee cycle.

Question 4

In relation to the Wallasey-based Save Energy Advice Service, this was not an advice service as we are not able to contact them.

In response, Mr Adams indicated that this was a service used and recommended by the Housing Strategy team, but agreed to look into this issue and respond

Question 5

The “have your say” are important; if you have these as part of the Committee you will disengage the public who want to report their issues.

Question 6

In relation to the procedure for the member of the public raising questions, it was unacceptable to ask for these in writing prior to the meeting and urged Members to re-look at this.

In response, the Chair indicated that as well as questions in advance, public questions could be asked on the night, subject to the discretion of the Chair.

Question 7

We can't really have an impact on fuel poverty, however, Lyndale Special School was under the threat of closure this was a more pressing health and wellbeing issue. Also, twenty minutes allocated for public questions was not long enough.

In response, the Chair advised and encouraged members of the public to contact their Ward Councillors if they had any specific issues/questions they wished to raise prior the Constituency Committees meetings.

Question 8

Under the new format we feel we can't engage or participate.

Ms L. Harland-Davies, Neighbourhood Engagement Officer (Wirral South) indicated that she was responsible for community engagement for Wirral South and suggested that residents may wish to form a community forum of their own, this was something which had been done in Eastham area with her help .

Question 9

Would there be a possibility of having a youth representative as part of the Committee?

The Chair and the Members of the Committee welcomed the suggestion and directed the individual to upcoming (revamped) Community Representative application process (as per item 11 above).

Question 10

Whilst this was not an ideal process, this was agreed by the Council as a way forward for engaging with the public, the Committee now needed to move forward.

Question 11

Instead of Childhood Obesity which was previously discussed could a priority be set to assist the local churches retaining food bank facilities which was a real issue for Wirral South?

15 **APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR FOR THE NEXT MEETING**

RESOLVED: That

- (1) Councillor P. Gilchrist be elected Chair for the meeting of the Committee scheduled for 26 February 2014; and**
- (2) Councillor S.Niblock be elected Vice-Chair for the meeting of the Committee scheduled for 26 February 2014.**