

BUSINESS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 29 November 2017

Present: Councillor M Sullivan (Chair)

Councillors P Hackett D Mitchell
RL Abbey T Pilgrim
E Boulton J Stapleton
G Ellis KJ Williams
A Leech S Williams
J McManus G Wood

Deputies: Councillors I Williams (In place of W Ward)
D Elderton (In place of J Hale)

28 COUNCILLOR WALTER SMITH

The Chair paid tribute to Councillor Walter Smith, who had recently passed away, and the Committee stood in silent tribute to his memory.

29 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted that no further apologies had been received other than for Councillors John Hale and Warren Ward, both of whom had deputies standing in for them.

30 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 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 Anita Leech declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 4, 'Universal Credit Full Service November 2017' by virtue of her membership of the Leasowe Community Homes (Prima) Board and being a governor on the Leasowe Nursery School and Family Centre; a personal interest in agenda items 6, 'Notice of Motion: Wirral Well-Made Need for Infrastructure Support' and 7, 'Update on Liverpool City Region Developments' by virtue of her being Chair of the Planning Committee.

Councillor Ron Abbey declared a personal interest in agenda item 4, 'Universal Credit Full Service November 2017' by virtue of him being a governor on the Leasowe Nursery School and Family Centre.

Councillor Jerry Williams declared a personal interest in agenda item 4, 'Universal Credit Full Service November 2017' by virtue of his employment.

31 **ORDER OF BUSINESS**

The Chair agreed to vary the order of business and take item 6 on the agenda next.

32 **NOTICE OF MOTION: WIRRAL WELL-MADE NEED FOR INFRASTRUCTURE SUPPORT**

The Chair reported that at the meeting of the Council held on 16 October, 2017 (minute 68 (4) refers), the following Notice of Motion proposed by Councillor Chris Blakeley and seconded by Councillor Lesley Rennie was referred by the Mayor to this Committee for consideration –

WIRRAL WELL-MADE NEED FOR INFRASTRUCTURE SUPPORT

“Council notes that in Moreton more than 500 new houses will be built in the next two/three years including:

- 297 on the former Burton's site
- 122 on the former Fernbank Farm site and
- a number (yet to be determined) on the former Foxfield School.

However at the recent 'Moreton Conversation' it was clear that, while plans to push forward with the initiative were welcomed, no thought had been given to provide adequate infrastructure to support the proposals including additional education, health and public transport provision.

Council therefore requests the Leader of the Council to put in place, alongside these proposals, plans to ensure that fully adequate infrastructure is designed which will include working with Merseytravel to bring forward the plans for the provision of the long overdue and much needed Town Meadow Railway Station.”

In accordance with Standing Order 7 (6), Councillor Blakeley had been invited to attend the meeting in order for him to be given an opportunity to explain the Motion.

Councillor Blakeley elaborated on the motion which had also been referred to the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny

Committee. The proposed Town Meadow Railway station had been in the planning since 1984 and at a cost of £8m-£9m would bring real benefits to the area.

Councillor Ron Abbey stated that the proposed station had always been an aspiration but unfortunately Merseytravel had had a third of its budget cut since 2010 and funding was not currently in place to support it.

Councillor Blakeley stated that a business case had previously been undertaken which supported the proposal as had a survey undertaken by Mott Macdonald on behalf of Merseytravel in 2010.

The Strategic Commissioner for Environment commented upon the process of planning colleagues' involvement when there were large scale developments and a transport assessment process in which any pressures on the local network would be highlighted. Sometimes a Section 106 agreement could also be used. With regard to education services he gave details of the ratio of school places required to new houses being built and also referred to the fact that quite a number of schools had spare capacity.

Members expressed support for the need to look at infrastructure, particularly when it was proposed to build 3,500 new homes in Wirral by 2020. The Chair referred to the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority which was currently looking at the issue of spatial development.

Resolved – That the motion be referred to Merseytravel and officers in Forward Planning for a report to be brought back to this Committee.

33 **MINUTES**

Members were requested to receive the minutes of the Business Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 19 September, 2017.

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 19 September, 2017, be approved.

34 **UNIVERSAL CREDIT FULL SERVICE NOVEMBER 2017**

The Head of Customer Services, Lisa Jamieson, introduced a report which set out the move to Universal Credit Full Service (UCFS) on Wirral.

Nicky O'Connor, the manager of the Job Centre Plus had sent her apologies that she was unable to attend the meeting but had extended an invitation to Scrutiny Committee Chairs and Members to see the work being undertaken at the Job Centres in Wirral.

The report updated the Committee on implementation locally together with support arrangements in the process of being introduced to support Wirral residents claiming Universal Credit (UC) under Full Service, effectively from 15 November 2017, as the gateway to new applications in respect of Housing Benefit closed to most residents.

The matter linked to a number of Wirral's associated 20/20 Pledges, significantly and directly 'People' pledges, protecting the most vulnerable and ensuring their safety and protection through reducing poverty and preventing associated hardship.

Currently nationally available data was limited. The DWP reported, as at 30 October 2017, that there were 4,945 people claiming Universal Credit across Wirral. Of this total, 1,679 working age claimants were in receipt of Universal Credit and claiming Council Tax Support. This represented approximately 8.6% of the total working age Council Tax Support claimants which suggested the remainder would move to Universal Credit over the next few years.

The Chair referred to the non-attendance of the Job Centre Plus manager, but although every effort had been made to ensure their attendance it was apparently part of the Civil Service constitution not to attend Local Authority scrutiny meetings.

Responding to comments from Members, Lisa Jamieson's and Nicky Dixon's, Manager – Assessments, comments included the following:

- They Assessments team were working alongside colleagues in Children's Services to look at the impact on those pupils claiming free school meals and the website would be updated accordingly regarding eligibility criteria.
- Volunteers would be opening the service to make local welfare payments across the Christmas period on 27,28 and 29 December and the details of these arrangements would be communicated to all Members by email.
- They were aware of the challenges in reaching people with no internet access and the Council was doing everything it could to engage.
- A lot of work was being undertaken with social and private landlords so that landlords could understand how they could support their tenants.
- There was a Universal Credit newsletter for landlords and there would be a dedicated landlord forum established in the New Year.
- They explained the procedure for when issues were handed over to bailiffs, a Member having expressed the need for more leniency to be shown by bailiffs, and that this was only when all avenues for debt recovery had been exhausted.
- With regard to the hardship fund this would be nearing exhaustion in the near future but the Council continued to monitor the situation.
- People would go on to Universal Credit as their circumstances changed.

The Chair referred to the fact that the matter of Universal Credit would be discussed at the Scrutiny Chairs' meeting on 4 December, 2017 as it did impact across all Scrutiny Committees, and it would be decided which Committees would discuss which areas. He also mentioned that the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Scrutiny Committee would be looking at the issue of Universal Credit.

Resolved – That the report be noted and a further report be brought to this Committee in March 2018 following the initial implementation period. The purpose of the follow up report would be to deliver a summary of impact.

35 **NOTICE OF MOTION: MAKING MORE TIME FOR PEDESTRIANS**

The Interim Assistant Director: Law and Governance reported that at the meeting of the Council held on 16 October, 2017 (minute 68 (3) refers), the following Notice of Motion proposed by Councillor Phil Gilchrist and seconded by Councillor Chris Carubia was referred by the Mayor to this Committee for consideration –

MAKING MORE TIME FOR PEDESTRIANS

“Council notes that National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) recently began a consultation on creating an environment in which people are more active...

<https://www.nice.org.uk/news/article/local-councils-should-make-it-easier-for-people-with-disabilities-to-be-active-says-nice>

In raising this issue, it argued that active travel will help to prevent a range of chronic health conditions, leading to savings for the NHS and society at large.

Its general aim - to make it as easy as possible for people to walk, cycle or use other forms of active travel rather than making short journeys by car - would fit well with the aims of this Council and strategies being adopted by the Liverpool City Region.

Council recognises that whilst NICE is not expected to report upon the results of its latest study until the end of March 2018, the report contained ideas that can be considered in the meantime.

As NICE suggested that Councils should ensure that crossings with signals give enough time to cross the road, this Council requests officers to report on how extending the time allocated to crossing the road can be achieved so that the needs of pedestrians, wheelchair users and the elderly can be better addressed.”

In accordance with Standing Order 7 (6), Councillor Gilchrist had been invited to attend the meeting in order for him to be given an opportunity to explain the Motion.

Councillor Gilchrist elaborated on the motion and referred to a couple of specific sites where it might be helpful to adjust the timings at crossings.

The Strategic Commissioner for Environment commented upon the positive nature of the motion. He informed the meeting that there were clear technical design standards and guidance governing the time periods for all puffin, toucan and traffic light crossings. This could be tackled in a generic or a site specific manner, timings were adjusted if there were particular concerns at a specific site. The issues for traffic engineers were to ensure junctions were working at capacity, maintaining traffic flows and avoiding unnecessary build-ups whilst maintaining sufficient times for pedestrians to safely cross roads. He suggested that a more detailed note on the issue could be provided for Members.

A Member suggested that Members could flag up with the Highways Service when they had particular concerns over a specific site.

Resolved – That the motion be noted and referred to officers in Highways for a more detailed report to be provided on the issue.

36 UPDATE ON LIVERPOOL CITY REGION DEVELOPMENTS

Rose Boylan, Policy and Strategy Manager, introduced a report and gave a presentation setting out a brief overview of latest developments at the Liverpool City Region (LCR). The Metro Mayor had made some key policy announcements which included:

- River Mersey Tidal Commission
- Connectivity: LCR Digital Vision
- Single investment approach – provide one front door for all those seeking to invest and do business in the LCR.
- Ambitious Skills goals – campaign for the underspend from the National Apprenticeship Levy to be spent locally to roll-out degree level apprenticeships.
- Housing – including a major initiative to tackle the City Region housing shortage by building 25,000 new homes before 2022.
- Transport – including smart ticketing and a review of the fast tag.

Responding to comments from Members, Rose Boylan commented that empty homes would be in the scope of the homelessness review and discussions were being held across the six authorities.

A Member referred to the number of new build homes, 3,500, to be built on Wirral by 2020 and the numbers receiving planning permission, including on brownfield sites.

Members expressed the view of the need for the amount of time between planning permission being granted and the time a development started to be reduced and this matter had been included in a Government white paper.

The Chair referred to the spatial development plan which would be scrutinised by the LCRCA Scrutiny Committee. The Metro Mayor was still formulating plans and a budget for the City region would be set in the new year.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

37 **LIVERPOOL CITY REGION COMBINED AUTHORITY SCRUTINY PANEL - VERBAL UPDATE**

The Chair gave a verbal update on the work of the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview & Scrutiny Committee. He reported that there were concerns regarding capacity and the fact that secondment of officers from the six Authorities was taking staff away from their day jobs.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

38 **2017/18 QUARTER 2 WIRRAL PLAN PERFORMANCE**

The Strategic Commissioner for Environment, Mark Smith, introduced a report which provided the 2017/18 Quarter 2 (July - September 2017) performance report for Wirral Plan pledges under the Business theme. The Quarter 2 report was included as Appendix 1 to the report, and provided a description of the progress in Quarter 2, including available data in relation to a range of outcome indicators and supporting measures.

Responding to comments from Members, Mark Smith commented on the travel training programme for young people who had difficulty using public transport and stated that he would be able to provide some information on this.

A Member expressed disappointment over the performance indicator for the percentage of working-age people claiming out-of-work benefit and the fact that the DWP had said that they would no longer be supplying this data due to the roll out of Universal Credit.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

39 **FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT QUARTER 2 2017/18**

Jenny Spick, Senior Manager, Financial Planning and Policy, introduced the report of the Assistant Director: Finance which set out the Council's revenue and capital monitoring position for 2017/18 quarter 2. The report gave details of key issues within the business theme, progress on the implementation of savings and income and debt. There was a current projected overspend of £50,000 which would be balanced out by an underspend in treasury management.

Jenny Spick also stated that she would be happy to give a presentation to the March committee meeting on any particular areas of finance.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

Following consideration of this item a Member suggested that Committee Members could inform officers if they had questions on particular reports in advance of the meeting and if there were going to be no questions on a report the officer could be stood down from attending the Committee.

The Chair suggested that he would look into this with the Party Spokespersons and report back.

40 **HIGHWAYS REPRESENTATION PANEL MINUTES**

The Committee were requested to note the minutes of the Highways and Traffic Representation Panel meeting held on 25 September, 2017.

Resolved – That the minutes of the Highways and Traffic Representation Panel of 25 September, 2017, be noted.

41 **POLICY INFORM: BUSINESS**

The Chair introduced a report on the November Policy Inform Briefing paper which provided an overview of ongoing and recent national legislation, bills presented to Parliament and emerging policies.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

42 **BUSINESS OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE REPORT**

The Committee considered a report from the Chair which explained the process of developing and managing the scrutiny work programme for the municipal year.

At the September meeting, the Committee had agreed to add pre-decision scrutiny of the Council's Road Safety Plan to the committee work programme. A workshop had been scheduled for Wednesday 13 December with key senior officers.

With regard to budget scrutiny 2018/19, in line with previous municipal years, it was anticipated that workshops would be held for members of each of the scrutiny committees to review proposals as the 2018/19 budget was being developed. The dates and format for these sessions had yet to be finalised.

The implementation and impact of the recommendations following Cabinet approval of the Residents Parking Scrutiny Review would be followed up by this committee at an appropriate time.

The Strategic Commissioner for Environment referred to the commissioning of the Highway Services contract which would bring the service back under direct control and he would provide more information for the Committee in March, 2018.

Resolved – That the work programme be approved with the above additions.