

# CONSTITUENCY COMMITTEE - BIRKENHEAD

Thursday, 1 March 2018

Present:

Councillor M McLaughlin (in the Chair)

Councillors	M McLaughlin	D Realey
	A Brighouse	J Stapleton
	P Davies	P Cleary
	S Foulkes	A Davies
	C Meaden	G Wood
	T Norbury	J McManus

## 23 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT- DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Steve Foulkes declared a personal interest in all matters contained within the agenda by virtue of any reference made to Magenta Housing of which he is a Board member.

Councillor Steve Foulkes and Councillor Denise Realey advised that as members of the Planning Committee they would not participate in any matter referring to the proposed Hoylake golf course development and would give due consideration to any planning application that may come forward in the future.

## 24 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been submitted by Councillors George Davies, Paul Doughty, Stuart Kelly and Brian Kenny.

## 25 MINUTES

### RESOLVED:

**That the minutes of the meeting of the Birkenhead Constituency Committee held on 5 October 2018 be approved as a correct record.**

## 26 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS - VARIATION OF ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Chair advised that, with the agreement of the Committee, agenda item 8 (Public Questions and Answers) would be considered immediately following agenda item 4 (Wirral Deen Centre – Presentation), and an issue to be notified to the Committee from the Wirral Society of Arts that would otherwise have been heard within agenda item 8 would be considered immediately prior to consideration of agenda item 7 (Birkenhead Constituency Committee).

## **WIRRAL DEEN CENTRE - PRESENTATION**

Mohammed Mustafizur and Ibrahim Syed welcomed the Committee to the Deen Centre and addressed the meeting on the origins of, and work undertaken at, the Wirral Deen Centre.

The Committee was advised that the Deen Centre had been set up in the local community to promote community cohesion, acting as an outreach project to bring communities together. As people who had grown up locally, it had become clear that people generally had not been aware of the other communities they were living alongside and the need to set something up to address this had been identified. As Muslims, there was a requirement to learn about the communities around them. The vision for the Deen Centre was for it to act as a community hub for all – the Council, and particularly the local Councillors who had nominated the Deen Centre for a Wirral Award 2017 for its work in bringing communities together and acting as a role model, were thanked for their support.

The Deen Centre operated as a social centre and a functioning mosque located on the same premises. Social projects included provision of meals for homeless people every Sunday in association with Fans Supporting Foodbanks and noting the support of Tranmere Rovers Football Club, Birkenhead Scouts meeting at the Centre, and Community Connectors being based there. The Centre also ran Islamic events, such as providing opportunities where people could learn about Islam, at Eid, and on other occasions. The Committee was advised that evening prayers had been held within the Mosque in the period prior to the meeting. Work with local churches, the Diocese of Chester and local schools, and solidarity meetings following the Manchester bombing, was also reported. The Centre had also recently secured training workshops and would shortly be providing IT classes.

The Committee was thanked for their support and welcomed in their use of the Centre for holding the Constituency Committee meeting. All present were reminded that the Centre was a community resource available for meetings and events.

The Chair, on behalf of the Committee, thanked the Deen Centre for their hospitality in hosting the meeting and welcomed their increasing part in the community.

### **RESOLVED:**

**That the Wirral Deen Centre be thanked for their informative presentation and for their work in the local community.**

**PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

In introducing this item, the Chair advised that those submitted questions relating to the Wirral Growth Company, Hoylake Golf Resort and council tax Band H houses would, so far as possible, be grouped together and would be responded to verbally by Councillor Phil Davies. Copies of the submitted questions and written responses, where indicated below, were circulated at the meeting.

Submitted **question** from Mr P Simpson, in attendance and who read his following question -

"What due diligence has the council done on Muse Developments and Morgan Sindall Construction Company, In the wake of both companies being involved previously in boroughs where, social cleansing has taken place. What guarantees will the council give, that, any homes demolished, will be replaced with like for like properties. Especially, in our deprived areas, such as Moreton, Seacombe, Birkenhead and New Ferry. As per the labour party policy on the houses crises."

Submitted **question** from Mr T Watson, not in attendance and whose question was read by the Chair -

"Has the Council sought to engage smaller local firms by breaking up the Wirral Growth Company project into smaller parts to allow such local firms to bid? This would surely help local businesses and benefit Wirral more. Under the present agreement no matter how many local firms are engaged, 50% of the profit goes to Muse developments or Morgan Sindall, a national construction company and therefore leaves Wirral."

Submitted **question** from Ms S Miller, not in attendance and whose question was read by the Chair -

"The Government has to bail out the now defunct Carrillion Company. Who will bail out the people of the Wirral should the Wirral Growth company collapse under a mountain of debt?"

In **response**, Councillor Phil Davies advised that as part of the OJEU procurement process, a lot of due diligence had been done of the preferred partner Muse Developments. This due diligence had been rigorous and done by independent legal advisors; as such he was confident in what had been done. He considered it wrong to suggest that Muse Developments and Morgan Sindall Construction Company had been involved in social cleansing having not seen any evidence of such, but the joint venture partnership with Muse was on a 50/50 basis and so the Council would have a veto on any deal. The Wirral Growth Company proposal was not predominantly a housing project but an extensive regeneration scheme involving commercial, retail and

some housing elements. If comparing the project to Haringey, any housing built would be new housing and as such the projects were not comparable.

Submitted **question** from Ms A Underwood, not in attendance and whose question was read by the Chair -

“The Labour manifesto pledges "to ensure housing is about homes for the many, not investment opportunities for the few. So why is Wirral Council lending a developer £26 million to build 160 Band H (worth at least £320,000) homes in Wirral West when that money would be more beneficially spent on affordable houses in this constituency?”

Submitted **question** from Mr G Turner, not in attendance and whose question was read by the Chair -

“The golfing fraternity in Wirral is well catered for as the borough has golf courses dotted all around the area. Given that the sport generally is in decline, why do Wirral Council think that it is a good idea to proceed with the Hoylake Golf Resort? How will it benefit the area? Don't we have more important things to spend money on?”

Submitted **question** from Mr P Simpson, in attendance and who read his following question -

"With due diligence now carried out on the Niklause Joint Venture Group. Will the leader Phil Davies guarantee the Wirral tax payers that, the Niklause Joint Venture Group, will not dissolve or go into liquidation? Furthermore, will he advise the tax payers of Wirral, How much interest will be charged against the loan of £26m to the group which he intends to borrow, then loan to the Niklause Group.”

Submitted **question** from Mr K Barnes, in attendance and who read his following question -

“The recent collapse of Carrillion has left the new Royal Liverpool hospital in disarray. The Labour NEC has recently voted to call on Haringey Council to pause its controversial 50-50 joint venture vehicle which has been criticised for “social cleansing” Despite a Europe wide search, the only Developer that could be found to take on the Hoylake Golf Resort Project was a developer with a history of bankruptcy and a zero credit limit. The Golf Resort is to be funded by building Band H houses and not social housing. Labour Party policy now prohibits the transfer of public land to private developers and flawed joint venture vehicles. How much of publically owned land will be transferred to the private partners of the Wirral Growth Company and do the Councillors believe that the Hoylake Golf Resort and the Wirral Growth Company plans won't end up in the same mess as the Royal Hospital and Haringey?”

In **response**, Councillor Phil Davies advised that the golf resort proposal was a completely different scheme to that in Haringey. No public asset would be transferred to a private company and all public assets would remain owned by the Council. In this regard he was confident this was not the same position as Haringey. Looking at all the deals raised at the meeting, Councillor Davies noted that the government had slashed the Council's income by £170M since 2010, with a further £130M by 2021. By 2021 the Revenue Support Grant from government would be removed and if the Council did not identify new income streams it would become bankrupt; reference was made to Northamptonshire County Council that had not made such provision and had used reserves that were available once only.

With regard to the golf resort, this had not been agreed, and feasibility studies and environmental and traffic impacts still required consideration. The Council would be failing in its duties not to consider such a scheme that could bring in £1M in business and residential taxes to fund local services and provide 175 direct jobs with further jobs in the construction phase. It was sensible to consider the project and to await the outcome of the studies. With regard to the question concerning due diligence, if Hoylake was to proceed, it would be proposed to charge a 5% interest rate on £2.5M to help fund public services.

With regard to Band H properties, Councillor Davies noted that the local government funding system was unfair as it penalised Councils such as Wirral that had mostly Band A and B properties; for example, a 1% council tax increase in Wirral brought in significantly less revenue than in wealthy Westminster which had predominantly Band H properties. There was therefore a need to encourage higher banded council tax properties as they brought increased revenue to the Council.

Submitted **question** from Ms K O'Rourke, in attendance and who read her following question –

"A recent World Health Organisation Study found that the Air Pollution in Birkenhead exceeds safety levels. In a recent high court ruling a judge branded the current government policy "unlawful" and has ordered local authorities to do more, and to take action as soon as possible. Air pollution kills thousands every year. What steps will the Council take to improve air pollution levels in Birkenhead and do the Councillors think that the Council's plan to spend £millions on new roads for a golf resort, just a few miles downwind of Birkenhead, should now be scrapped?"

Details of the following **response** prepared by the Environmental Health Department had been circulated and was taken as read -

"The World Health Organisation report relates to tiny airborne particles which can be inhaled, called PM<sub>2.5</sub>. Measured levels within Wirral meet the current

European / UK statutory levels of 25 microgrammes per cubic metre. The World Health Organisation has set a lower standard of 10 microgrammes per cubic metre. In 2013 the measured level in Wirral was 11. Since 2013 it has been below the World Health Organisation Level.

However, we are continuing to review measured and modelled data in order to assess levels of this and other pollutants (both in Birkenhead and across the Borough). Officers from a number of Council teams meet regularly to scrutinise and share air quality data from the Council and identify what further action can be undertaken. The Council also participates in a Regional air quality group which is looking at air quality across the region.

The Council monitors air pollution at 31 points throughout the Borough and there are two Department of Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) monitoring stations in Birkenhead. DEFRA publish this data on their website.

Wirral Council publishes the results of its air quality monitoring , together with an annual summary of action it is taking to improve Air Quality, on the Council website in an "Annual Status Review" document. This can be found by searching for Air Quality on the website.

Environmental matters are considered during the planning process.

Any questions or feedback would be most welcome and maybe made to [Environmentalhealth@wirral.gov.uk](mailto:Environmentalhealth@wirral.gov.uk) “

Councillor Phil Davies further **responded** with regard to the golf resort, noting that an Environmental Impact Assessment was a key study and would cover issues of air pollution. These studies would be available to the public for scrutiny.

Submitted **question** from Ms L Clough, in attendance and who read her following question -

“The closure of M&S is another blow for Birkenhead and a further indictment of Wirral Council's failure to support Wirral's main town centre over several decades, notwithstanding the very recent announcement of the "Wirral Growth Company". There has been a chronic need for serious investment in Birkenhead for many years. In the light of this why in recent years has Wirral Council ploughed over £1 million into the deeply unpopular golf resort / executive housing development proposal for Hoylake, especially as the leader of the council has recently said that "there is a national downturn in the amount of people playing golf". This is leading to a huge shortfall in fees collected at public golf courses in Wirral. Does the council accept that the chronic need for investment in Birkenhead means that further waste of resources to promote the Hoylake Golf Resort is totally unacceptable to the vast majority of people in Birkenhead and throughout Wirral.”

In **response**, Councillor Phil Davies advised that the challenge of investing in Birkenhead was why the Wirral Growth Company had been set up. Birkenhead town centre was a key area and it was planned to invest huge resources into improving the offer there, including a new market and new facilities. The challenge was the need to spend significant amounts of money on the project which the Council did not have. With regard to the golf resort, this would not just comprise golf but would act as a destination in its own right, for example in the hosting of conferences, which would bring in increased income. The Council needed to identify new income streams and did not want to end up in a similar position to Northamptonshire County Council.

The Wirral Growth Company was a mechanism to deliver investment. If the Council did not do this, it was questioned what alternative answer there was. The Wirral Growth Company presented the opportunity of a lifetime that needed to be grasped.

The following question from Mr T Watson, not in attendance at the meeting, and a written response, details of both being circulated at the meeting, were taken as read –

**Question** – “At the cabinet meeting on the 18th December 2017 George Davies said 'there is a massive shortage of top band houses (in Wirral)'. Whilst I recognise having more band H houses would bring in more Council tax revenue to Wirral, how do you conclude that there is a massive shortage of such houses? For there to be a shortage there must be an identified need. For there to be a shortage you would imagine that we have fewer than other boroughs? In fact we have the highest number of band H houses in Merseyside. In the Northwest there are only four boroughs that have more. What evidence do you have to support your statement?”

**Response** – “Cllr George Davies statement was made in relation to the fact that as a Council, we do not have as many Council Tax Band H homes as those in other bands. This is a fact and the report speaks for itself in that Wirral has the largest percentage of homes in Council Tax Bands A-C. There was no comparison on the need for this against other Local Authorities and the report does not state this.”

## 29 **LOCAL POLICING INITIATIVES - PRESENTATION**

Katie Wilkinson introduced herself to the meeting as the local policing sergeant. The objectives of the local policing team were reported as being to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB), address issues of drug and alcohol abuse, tackle youth related ASB and unreported hate crime, and assist in bringing together the number of communities in the locality who had little interaction with each other.

With regard to drug and alcohol abuse, work in Birkenhead town centre sought to address street drinking, and work with the Council on a community impact assessment approach sought to prevent additional licensed premises opening in areas of concern. To address drug dealing, reports from the local community were needed; it was acknowledged that people should not have to walk past these activities, but the police needed information if they were to address dealing. Regarding youth and ASB issues, the area around Woodlands Primary School where different communities lived alongside each other was being addressed. Relationships in school appeared fine, but different messages came forward out of school, possibly due to peer pressure.

The police, with partner agencies, sought to manage offenders responsible for ASB and hate crimes. As police awareness of unreported hate crime had grown, representatives of different communities had been brought together to try and solve the issue. Work was also being undertaken with registered social landlords to identify housing related issues. The Committee was reminded that the police service provided policing by consent, in that if crime was reported it could be addressed but that if the police were not informed it could not. Comment was made that improved community cohesion led to improved standards of living, and the work of the Deen Centre to break down barriers was noted.

Forthcoming activities included those geared towards making the Woodlands Park an area where all felt ownership, Stop Hate UK working in the area to explain why hate crime needed to be reported, and a variety of community activities and school visits.

A member of the public supported comments made in the presentation but, in referring to instances of ASB in other areas, expressed the opinion that local and community policing was vital but lacking. It was acknowledged that the community team had reduced following reductions in police and support staff numbers due to funding, but the point that the police needed to be made aware of issues to address hotspots was re-iterated.

A Member asked about action being taken to reduce rough sleeping. In response, it was advised that the police were working with other agencies to address issues linked to homelessness, but that issues such as drugs, alcohol and mental health, factors in many but not all instances, needed to be addressed making this a complex area.

A member of the public noted and supported the police efforts in trying to bring communities together and referred to other activities by other groups in this regard.

The Chair and the Committee thanked Sgt Wilkinson for her presentation to the meeting.

## **RESOLVED:**

**That Sgt Wilkinson be thanked for her presentation to the meeting and the work of local policing team be supported.**

### **30 FUTURE OF NEIGHBOURHOOD WORKING - PRESENTATION**

Councillor Matthew Patrick, Cabinet Member for Localism and Engagement, and Rachael Musgrave, Consultant in Public Health, addressed the Committee on matters relating to the future of neighbourhood working.

Councillor Patrick advised of a review considering the effectiveness of current neighbourhood working arrangements. The Constituency Committees are part of the current approach, the Committees being formed several years ago to replace Area Forums to provide an opportunity for residents to hear updates on local services and to raise issues. Reference was made to a study indicating that 97% of people felt that local communities would improve if people had an input, but that around 50% of Wirral residents felt they had no influence; this suggested that things had to change if the Council wished to increase participation. This was important as 75% of the actions related to the 2020 Vision and Pledges needed better work in communities.

The review into Constituency Committee effectiveness had considered what other models there were for neighbourhood working in use elsewhere; what value could be placed on investment to date; and what were the views of partners, residents and councillors.

Rachael Musgrave advised that a review of approaches elsewhere revealed a variety of approaches but none that had been formally evaluated. While there were some success factors, such as in differing ways of engagement and in ensuring ownership and transparency, there was no particular answer but to find the best way forward for Wirral. Looking at social value and return on the Committees' budget expenditure since 2013, while acknowledging that individual Committee's adopted their own priorities and approaches the review had shown an average £2.68 return for every £1 Committee grant. This Committee's focus on ASB and clean-ups had, in some instances, produced an equivalent £6.21 return. In seeking the views of others, there was a consensus that work with partners and the community had both to be done and be valued, and that community action made a difference.

Following the above, it was concluded that one size would not fit all, and that existing networks should be used to engage with agencies and with communities, as opposed to expecting them to come to the Council. It was felt that a Committee meeting was not necessarily the best way to approach this. Other considerations from consultation were that small grants and seed funding was really useful; that people valued the asking for help and advice;

that the dedicated officer support benefits the process in tackling issues and making connections; there was a need for a community builder; and there was a feeling of apathy with the political system.

In concluding, Councillor Patrick advised that there was no proposed model at this stage of the review. However, it was recognised that differing ways of working were in operation and there was no intention to stop the good things that were already happening.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the presentation be noted.**

31 **WIRRAL LIBRARIES TROLL TRAIL**

Susan Brown, Chair of the Wirral Society of Arts, advised the Committee of a piece of work undertaken with the objective of increasing usage of the Borough's libraries. The need for an increase in income was acknowledged, and an increase in usage of and footfall at libraries was needed. Their researches had suggested that many people did not know their library opening times and that, in an area where many people did not have computers, many did not know that they could access IT at libraries.

The Society had devised a 'Troll Trail' whereby young people would be encouraged to make their own troll with salt dough and take it to their local library up to 1 June 2018; the trolls would be judged and small prizes awarded. The Troll Trail was supported by leaflets providing links to library opening times and details of facilities available, and samples of leaflets and the salt dough were circulated at the meeting. The approach had been supported by and would be promoted through the Wirral Festival of Firsts.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the Libraries 'Troll Trail' project be noted.**

32 **BIRKENHEAD CONSTITUENCY COMMITTEE**

The Birkenhead Constituency Manager presented her report providing an update on progress in relation to agreed schemes of work from the budget devolved to the Constituency Committee to date and other Birkenhead Constituency Committee projects in progress.

The report considered and reported on progress of projects and schemes under the following areas –

- Keeping Birkenhead Clean
  - The launch of 'love where you live' litterpick kits;

- 2018 'In Bloom' proposed projects and In Bloom projects that had delivered positive outcomes, the Committee receiving a further verbal update from Mr John Booth, Oxton Secret Gardens, in respect of Oxton in Bloom and related activities;
  - Skip Fund Community Partnership days and clean-ups;
  - Clean-up dates in the past 12 months; and
  - Work of the 'Community Payback Team'.
- Feeding Birkenhead
    - St James Centre – North Birkenhead Development Trust, including appendices to the submitted report detailing St James holiday food and activities provision in the half term week commencing 19 February 2018;
    - Beechwood Update;
    - Rock Ferry Food Hub – Neo Café at The Beaconsfield Centre, the Committee receiving a further verbal update from Ms Emma Wilkes, Neo Community Café, concerning provision at the Food Hub;
    - Gautby Road Community Centre; and
    - Livingstone Street Centre – BEE Wirral Council.
- Improving Life Chances
    - Update for Improving Life Chances Community Pilots; and
    - Improving Life Chances Actions for 2017-18.
- Community Connectors Project, including presentation slides appended to the submitted report advising on the role and activities of the Community Connectors.
- Birkenhead First Activity Update 2017
    - Work of the Birkenhead Improvement District (BID) Team.
- Birkenhead Assets Update
    - The Beechwood Centre; and
    - Beaconsfield Centre, Rock Ferry

An appendix to the submitted report provided details of the Good Neighbour Champions Scheme, an initiative aimed at harnessing the principals of Asset Based Community Development by seeking to identify and work with people who would wish to volunteer to be a Good Neighbour in their street, road, cul-de-sac or neighbourhood, and reporting on the progress of the Scheme to date.

The Committee expressed their thanks for the work undertaken by the Constituency Manager and the Constituency Team.

**RESOLVED: That -**

- (1) the partnership work undertaken and future clean-up days funded by the skip fund be noted;**
- (2) the contribution of probation to Birkenhead clean-ups be noted;**
- (3) the 2018 Birkenhead in Bloom schemes be noted;**
- (4) the updates from food hubs and holiday food projects be noted;**
- (5) the updates regarding the Improving Life Chances community pilots be noted;**
- (6) the updates for the Birkenhead Improvement District (BID) Team, Community Connectors and those related to assets be noted.**