

CONSTITUENCY COMMITTEE - BIRKENHEAD

Thursday, 5 October 2017

Present:

Councillor G Davies (Chair)

Councillors	A Brighthouse	J Stapleton
	P Davies	P Cleary
	WJ Davies	B Kenny
	S Foulkes	P Doughty
	T Norbury	A Davies
	D Realey	S Kelly

13 **MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT- DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Steve Foulkes declared a personal interest in all items contained within the agenda by virtue of any reference being made to Magenta Living of which he is a Board Member.

14 **CHAIRS WELCOME**

The Chair welcomed Members and the members of the public present to the meeting and thanked them all for their attendance.

Introducing the new venue, he highlighted the rationale behind the change in venue indicating that it was felt that it would be more beneficial to hold meetings within the different wards which in turn would improve attendances and be more accessible to residents and allow for ward based matters to be discussed.

In relation to the published agenda he proposed with the agreement of the Committee to a slight change in the running order and suggested that all presentations be dealt with first.

15 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C Meaden, J McManus, A McLachlan, M McLaughlin and G Wood.

16 **MINUTES**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Birkenhead Constituency Committee held on 14 June, 2017, be agreed as a correct record.

17 **PRESENTATION - OXTON IN BLOOM**

The Committee considered a verbal presentation from John Booth, Oxton in Bloom updating on the current activities in relation to the up and coming 'In Bloom' competition.

He highlighted some of the work that had been undertaken within Oxton which included the installation of an automatic water system.

Mr Booth indicated that last year's competition Oxton had received the 'Outstanding' Award and he was confident that this would be repeated this year.

There would be 26 entries in the competition.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chair thanked all groups and volunteers involved in the 'in Bloom' competition for their continued effort, commitment and excellent work undertaken so far which had contributed to making areas within the Borough more attractive.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) Mr Booth be thanked for his presentation; and**
- (2) the Committee's thanks be extended to all groups and volunteers involved in the 'in Bloom' competition for their continued effort, commitment and excellent work undertaken so far which had contributed to making areas within the Borough more attractive.**

18 **PRESENTATION - THE SILVERBACK PROJECT**

The Committee considered a presentation from Mr D Prescott, Wirral Ways to Recovery on the Silverback Project.

The project was established in response to a crisis in masculinity and poor life expectancy for men in Birkenhead and other parts of the Wirral.

Working in partnership with the Wirral Ways to Recovery, the majority of men who attended the project were in recovery from a form of addiction.

Inspired by the Men's Shed Movement and the Soulwork Movement in America the project worked on a two pronged approach which included practical training, skills sharing and development and the "Male Journey"

Mr Prescott highlighted the future plans for the project which included a formalised constitution; workshop and soulspace based at the Livingstone; grants and bids for funding; provision of training opportunities; social enterprise schemes and development of the Soulwork Programme.

Attending alongside Mr Prescott, representatives from the centre gave an account of their experiences of both working with people at the centre and how attending the centre had helped them along their recovery journey and built up their self-esteem.

In response to Members, Mr Prescott indicated that the project was in need of tools and materials which could be used for various projects.

Members congratulated Mr Prescott on the amazing work undertaken by the Silverback Project helping turning lives around.

It was suggested that the work and activities be advertised in the Wirral View.

RESOLVED:

That Mr Prescott and representatives from the Silverback Project be thanked for their informative presentation and the Committee's thanks and best wishes be conveyed to all involved.

19 **PRESENTATION - N/COMPASS**

The Committee considered a verbal presentation from Mr John Cotcher, updating on the work, current activities and future plan undertaken by N/Compass.

Mr Cotcher indicated that N/Compass was based at the St James Centre providing advocacy services across Wirral.

The Hub provided general Advocacy, independent Mental Health Advocacy (including DoLs and RPR) independent Mental Capacity Advocacy; Care Act Advocacy and a Single Point of Contact.

Available during office hours, advocates aimed to support professionals in upholding their duty to refer into statutory advocacy and provide easy access for clients.

Advocates provide assistance to people by helping to give them a voice and they are an independent body with no agenda of their own and assist people

to advise organisations as to what support they require. They offer support and guidance to people when accessing services and attend organisational meetings. They also take notes of proceedings to ensure all that is discussed is understood. The service was free and covered primarily health and social care.

In response to Members questions, Mr Cotcher indicated that the residents should be signposted to the service via the free national number detailed on the website. Advocates were employed paid members of staff. He welcomed those volunteers who could help in shaping the service going forward.

In relation to Universal Credit, Mr Cotcher indicated that advocates were not currently able to provide support to those people applying for Universal Credit and highlighted the difficulty people may face when going through the process in particular in relation to those people who may struggle to obtain a bank account without support which would massively disadvantage people.

RESOLVED:

That Mr Cotcher be thanked for his informative update.

20 **PRESENTATION - SELECTIVE LICENSING**

The Committee considered a presentation from Mr Steven Bowers, Senior Housing Standards Officer updating Members on selective licensing.

In introducing the selective licensing scheme, Mr Bowers explained that the scheme had been introduced due to poor property conditions; a growing private rented sector; high levels of health deprivation and empty properties; low rental values/ lower house prices; high tenancy turnover and property based crime.

He highlighted the method used to prioritise area suitability which had been subsequently agreed by Cabinet along with scoring criteria which was based on low demand, which was the main driver of Wirral's scheme.

The Scheme commenced in July 2015 in the following areas; Birkenhead South, Egerton North, Seacombe Library and Egremont Promenade South. Approximately 3,108 properties were identified, 41% of which were privately rented; 1326 licenses were granted in the licenced areas; 623 were granted in Birkenhead Constituency and 450 properties accredited in Selective Licensing areas.

Highlighting the consequence of failing to obtain a licence Mr Bowers indicated that this would incur unlimited fines with a possible criminal conviction; to date there had been 25 individual prosecutions for failure to

obtain a licence and associated Housing Act offences and further prosecutions were pending.

In relation to compliance checks, it was reported that in total 340 such checks had been completed; of these only 23% met the minimum standard; informal notices had been issued for 63% of properties with enforcement notices served on 14% of properties and 2 Prohibition Orders served.

Mr Bowers reported that funding for the Healthy Homes Team was secured until March 2020 and highlighted some of the assistance work undertaken by the team which included; free home safety checks; referrals to support services; tenancy support; cosy homes heating grants; solid wall installation and empty property grants.

Concluding his presentation, Mr Bowers highlighted future developments which included pursuance of unlicensed properties; continual compliance checks; possible introduction of civil penalties; continual monitoring and evaluation of existing schemes and a feasibility study.

Members congratulated Mr Bowers and his team on their hard work on such an excellent scheme which improved the standard of properties in the Borough.

In response to Members questions, Mr Bowers indicated that landlords whose properties fall outside of the designated area and were subject to compliance would be dealt with by officers within the Environmental Health team and could face prosecution.

The Chair indicated that in relation to HMO's (Houses of Multiple Occupancy) discussions were ongoing in relation to policies to consider such planning applications of these types of properties.

RESOLVED:

The Committee thanked Mr Bowers for his attendance and his informative report and the Committee's thanks be conveyed to all officers involved in the introduction of such an excellent scheme.

21 **BIRKENHEAD CONSTITUENCY COMMITTEE**

The Birkenhead Constituency Committee Manager presented her report that provided an update on progress in relation to agreed schemes of work from the budget devolved to the Constituency Committee to date. The report also provided details of other Birkenhead Constituency Committee neighbourhood projects.

The Constituency Manager introduced Emma Wilkies from Beaconsfield Centre who gave an update on the work undertaken in relation to the “in Bloom” competition.

Emma indicated that work on “Beaconsfield in Bloom” had continued from the hard work undertaken on last year’s entry. Work has been undertaken on the outdoor space and the area had been cleaned and areas cleared and planted with the assistance of the Environment and Street Cleansing teams and with the help of the local community.

She reported that an area in Rock Ferry had been adopted to make improvements to its appearance and made a request to Members for a notice board and benches for the area.

Neighbourhood Engagement Officer updated Members on the gardening project undertaken at the HIVE. Mr Brannan indicated that work had been undertaken to transform land between the fire station and the HIVE. Help had been received from officers from the Fire Authority, Council, Birkenhead Constituency and Ward Councillors. The project was almost complete and ready for the young people to use.

The Constituency Manager provided a verbal summary and update on progress for each item of report that included:

- Birkenhead In Boom – Proposed projects to be undertaken for the 2017 Competition. All groups had been invited to the North West Bloom Awards in Southport on 3rd November 2017.
- Community Partnership Days – Proved very successful, working in partnership with the Police, Fire and other partners. Areas have now seen a significant improvement. No flytipping had been reported in Beaconsfield and the skip tonnage had seen a reduction.
- The ‘Community Pay Back’ Team - A programme of alleyway week clearing and cleansing for Birkenhead had been delivered by the Community Pay Back team in particular in the Rock Ferry area. Wirral Ways to Recovery had assisted in the clear up work in Water Street. A clean-up day was planned for Larch Grove.
- Birkenhead in Bloom 2017 - 16 awards had been won at the RHS North West in Bloom competition last year with Oxtan winning the cup. There were a number of proposed projects planned and the aim was to submit more applications and build on current projects.
- Rock Ferry Food Hub – Neo at The Beaconsfield Centre – An update was provided in respect of, Neo at The Beaconsfield Centre. A number of projects had been successfully delivered during school holidays,

before or after school. There was growing demand in need and the centre was getting more volunteers and requests from people wanting to help. Representatives had attended two National Conferences highlighting work undertaken. The Asset Transfer Plan would be completed by November 2017.

RESOLVED:

That the progress and updates set out in the Constituency Manager's report be noted.

22 **PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

The Chair referred to a number of pre-raised questions that had been received by the Committee and the responses provided as appended to the minutes.

Councillor Doughty asked if Balls Road East could be included on the Community Clean Up days.