

Finance and Best Value Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date:	Monday, 2 February 2009
Time:	5.45 pm
Venue:	Committee Room 1 - Wallasey Town Hall

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AGENDA

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST/PARTY WHIP

Members are asked to consider whether they have personal or prejudicial interests in connection with any item(s) on this agenda and, if so, to declare them and state what they are.

Members are reminded that they should also declare, pursuant to paragraph 18 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules, whether they are 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.

2. TRANSFORMING WIRRAL - STRATEGIC ASSET REVIEW (Pages 1 - 24)

At its meeting on 15 January, 2009 (minute 325 refers), the Cabinet agreed the following resolution following a public consultation on the Strategic Asset Review.

“Cabinet welcomes the high level of public participation in this consultation as set out in the Cabinet report. Cabinet notes that residents also made it clear that they were prepared to pay more to keep facilities open;

Cabinet acknowledges that residents on a peninsula believe it is particularly important that their children have the opportunity to learn to

swim and take part in swimming activities and that there have been representations from the public and from the health community on the importance of swimming as a way of tackling obesity;

Cabinet noted the often passionate support of what were felt to be local community facilities and recognised the considerable time and effort put in by a number of correspondents who sought to provide detailed arguments for the retention of a particular facility;

Cabinet is particularly grateful for the hard work that went into the detailed document submitted on the importance of Woodchurch Leisure Centre to the local community;

Cabinet also recognises the high regard in which Wirral residents hold their historic buildings and accepts the need to respect Wirral's heritage;

It also recognises the clear commitment of staff, residents, local musicians and artists and young people to maintaining good cultural facilities and suitable performance venues on the Wirral and thanks those who submitted detailed reasons why these are important to the life of the community as a whole;

However, Cabinet is also mindful of the current economic climate and the hardship that will create for many Wirral people;

It is mindful as well of the fact that definite action is required to tackle Wirral's budgetary problems and that the recession will also impact on the Council in a number of ways, increasing the need for firm financial control in order to protect Wirral's Council Tax payers;

Bearing in mind the Council's Corporate Priorities and in particular the need to do everything possible to tackle social exclusion and deprivation, Cabinet therefore resolves as follows, and recommends to Council that:

- (1) The Woodchurch Leisure Centre be retained;
- (2) Officers are asked to explore the possibility of persuading any of the Council's strategic partners who may benefit from the use of the Leisure Centre to contribute towards the £374,000 subsidy currently paid by the Council to keep the Leisure Centre open and to investigate the level of current charges to swimming clubs, schools and other organisations across the borough to ensure that the Council Tax payers are receiving good value for money which should be the subject of a report to Cabinet on February 5th as part of the budget setting process;
- (3) The Woodchurch Community Centre adjoining the Leisure Centre be considered for transfer to the Community within a two year time frame and the Leisure Centre and Community Centre be seen as the clear focus for community activities;

- (4) The two year time frame for community asset transfer will expire on 16/1/11;
- (5) A two year provision be set up to allow Guinea Gap to remain open pending a better understanding of the potential scale of any development along the waterfront and the possibility of bringing forward any Government investment in the Housing Market Renewal Initiative which could contribute towards kick starting any major development initiative.
- (6) That negotiations are held with Arena/Leasowe Community Homes for the transfer of the Leasowe Recreation Centre to the benefit of the community, subject to the agreement of satisfactory terms and conditions.
- (7) Cabinet notes that members of the public made it clear during the consultation period that they believed the main focus of activity in the Bromborough/Eastham area should be located in Bromborough. Cabinet therefore resolves to locate the multi-purpose complex at Bromborough Civic Centre, incorporating the Bromborough Library and the One Stop shop currently located in Eastham.
- (8) This would, as a consequence, entail the closure of Eastham library. Residents of Eastham will be given the opportunity to explore alternative ways of making best use of all the facilities in Eastham to meet community needs, including the possibility, if the community so wishes, of a community transfer of the library building, proper access to IT facilities where they are needed, and a remote book ordering point in a relevant location.
- (9) That, in response to substantial public representation, and in recognition of the fact that it is geographically central to a number of deprived areas and housed in a building of historic interest, Upton Library be retained and Woodchurch Library closed.
- (10) In view of the fact that the closure of Eastham library and Woodchurch library was not directly set out in the proposals for consultation, transitional finance of up to three months, to the end of June 2009, will be available to allow residents to consider the best use of buildings within their communities.
- (11) That the development of the five major multi-purpose complexes in Bebington, Birkenhead, Liscard, Moreton and West Kirby (including brand new build in Moreton and Liscard) be confirmed.
- (12) That the smaller, community focused, multi-purpose complexes located in Greasby, Heswall, Leasowe, Rock Ferry and St. James, with the addition of Bromborough, be agreed and that the delivery of services in the Upton/Woodchurch areas be provided by a combination of the Woodchurch Leisure Centre, Upton Library and Upton One Stop Shop in the Department for Work and Pensions site.

- (13) That, in response to substantial public representation, Pensby Library be retained.
- (14) That the closure of the following libraries be confirmed: Beechwood Library, Eastham Library, Higher Bebington Library, Hoylake Library, Irby Library, New Ferry Library, Prenton Library, Ridgeway Library, Seacombe Library, Wallasey Village Library and Woodchurch Library.
- (15) Where the community, or organisations serving the community, express a specific interest in a library building after closure, particularly where there is a clear lack of alternative community facilities for potential community transfer, that potential for community transfer of the redundant library building will be vigorously pursued.
- (16) Officers are also asked to carry out an audit of community activities within Libraries scheduled for closure to assess which of those activities could usefully be carried out in other ways, through Children's Centres, Schools, Community Centres or other Council buildings, with particular regard to activities for under 5s, access to technology and homework assistance for school children, access to technology for the unemployed and access to technology and activities for the elderly.
- (17) In line with the Strategic Asset Review proposals, a system will be established for automatically reserving books online, from home, or from a number of community-based IT access points from which information technology can be accessed. These could be located in schools, community centres or other Council buildings, but will need to reflect the views of the local community. Officers are also asked to consider sympathetically the potential for limited transfer to interested community venues of currently held book stock.
- (18) Officers will work with the voluntary sector to expand the existing service to the elderly, housebound or vulnerable members of the communities and will ensure that door to door transport schemes already operating for those with disabilities, such as Dial a Ride, will be well advertised to current library users. In the light of this, and public reaction to the proposal, the option of a mobile library service will not be progressed at this time but will be kept under review.
- (19) That it be made perfectly clear that Birkenhead Central Library will remain open in its current building, which will be maintained as required; that there is no intention, and never was any intention, to demolish the building and that suitable alternative uses will be found for the building which will take account of its historic importance should the Council decide in the future that the needs of the Borough for a modern Central Library would be better met with a different building or on a different site.

- (20) That the following facilities be transferred to community management, where the community expresses an interest, within a two year period and in line with the Strategic Asset Review recommendations and that finances be identified in the budgetary process to assist communities in making this a viable proposition: Hoylake Community Centre, Westbourne Community Centre, Livingstone Street Community Centre, Noctorum Community Centre, Leasowe Lighthouse, Seacombe Community Centre, The Grange, Grosvenor Ballroom, Vale House, Greasby Community Centre, Overton Community Centre, Delamere Community Centre, Mayer Hall, New Ferry Village Hall, 65 The Village, Victoria Hall, Windsor Close Community Centre, Heswall Hall, Turntable Building , Kylemore Community Centre, Alexander Hall and Pensby Community Centre, Woodchurch Community Centre and Leasowe Community Centre. Community IT access points will be provided where required as part of the transfer.
- (21) That Grange Road West Sports Centre also be considered under the same terms for transfer to the community, and that discussions take place with those who currently use the facility, or other community members if necessary, to secure its continued operation.
- (22) That Beechwood Recreation Centre and Community Centre be transferred for Community use and that work be undertaken by officers to assess the best way in which this can take place with a report back to Cabinet as appropriate.
- (23) That the Wirral Museum be closed but that a new sustainable use which will secure the future of this iconic building be sought and expressions of interest invited.
- (24) That expressions of interest in Pacific Road Theatre by Community/Charitable Trust/Commercial Operator or other interested organisation be sought, or given the considerable interest already expressed, be considered as part of a bidding process, to run the facility as an independent arts and performance venue.
- (25) That the Wirral Transport Museum be transferred to a Community Development Trust, given suitable terms and conditions, or, if interest is expressed by an operator in the whole Pacific Road/Tramshed site, that the specialist role of the Transport Museum be protected as far as possible.
- (26) That the office accommodation aspects of the Strategic Asset Review be implemented and officers be asked to accelerate the process of making savings from the rationalisation of the Council's office accommodation.
- (27) That the closure of Bridge Court, Fellowship House, 98 Bidston Road, 4, Cavendish Road, Cavendish Enterprise Centre, Feltree

House, Rosewarne, 5/7 St. Andrews Road, Shore Road Pumping Station, Hillcroft, 245 Liscard Road, 16/18 Rullerton Road, Dock Road Depot, 19, Heath Road, Kennet Close, the old Courthouse and Mendell Lodge be agreed, and appropriate arrangements made for their disposal.

- (28) Cabinet is grateful for the views expressed by the Wirral Enabling Fulfilling Lives Group and confirms that no decision on the future of Cambridge Road Day Centre in New Brighton or Highcroft Day Centre in Bebington has been taken and that the future of these buildings and associated service provision will be considered as part of the DASS review of services.
- (29) That the Strategic Asset Review be agreed, subject to the above amendments and endorsements.
- (30) That, as a consequence of the above, the revenue saving of £3,101,000 be agreed; and
- (31) That a provision of £1,863,000 be created to cover the items above and any necessary transitional funding.”

In accordance with the procedure adopted for other budget proposals agreed by the Cabinet, the minute has been referred to this Committee for consideration.

The views of the Committee are requested and will be presented to the Council on 9 February 2009.

The Chair has requested the following documents be attached to this item –

1. Report of the Chief Executive to the Cabinet on 15 January 2009. **[Page 1]**
2. Appendix 2 to the Chief Executives report **[Page 7]**
3. Information presented to the Finance and Best Value Committee held on 7 January 2009 –
 - i. Savings on Closure/Transfer of Assets **[Page 13]**
 - ii. Consolidated schedules in respect of Library and Sports Centre closures **[Page 19]**
4. Statistical Analysis of Library Usage **[Page 23]**

3. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS APPROVED BY THE CHAIR