

# BUSINESS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 4 March 2020

Present: Councillor D Mitchell (Chair)

Councillors T Cox K Greaney  
M Collins J Stapleton  
G Davies KJ Williams  
S Foulkes S Williams  
A Gardner

Deputies: Councillors T Norbury (In place of J Bird)  
A Wright (In place of G Watt)  
C Muspratt (In place of J Walsh)

## 47 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Jo Bird, Joe Walsh and Geoffrey Watt, all of whom had deputies standing in for them.

## 48 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 Steve Foulkes declared a personal interest in respect of agenda item 4, 'Update on Liverpool City Region Developments' by virtue of a passing reference to his place of employment.

Councillor Andrew Gardner declared a personal interest in respect of agenda item 5, 'NNDR and Business Rates Retention' by virtue of his business.

## 49 MINUTES

Members were requested to receive the minutes of the Business Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 23 January, 2020.

In connection with minute 41, 'Scrutiny Review – New Ferry', and in response to a comment from a Member, David Armstrong, Assistant Chief Executive, gave an update to the Committee on the situation and that the Council were

now in full possession of the site. The Review was being referred to Cabinet on 24 March, 2020.

**Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 23 January, 2020, be approved.**

#### 50 **UPDATE ON LIVERPOOL CITY REGION DEVELOPMENTS**

The Committee received a report from Rose Boylan, Policy and Strategy Manager, which set out a brief overview of the latest developments at the Liverpool City Region (LCR).

A Member commented upon the Merseytravel Bus Review and current discussions on bus franchising which was now moving to the next phase and expressed confidence that this would lead to better bus services across the City Region.

A Member queried the consultation which had taken place in Birkenhead with regard to the future proposed regeneration of the town centre and the fact that not many shoppers now visited Birkenhead should have led to the consultation being extended into other parts of the borough. Rose Boylan agreed that she would take these views back.

Another Member commented that this was a very positive report for Wirral constituents on initiatives which the LCR was leading on.

**Resolved – That the report be noted.**

#### 51 **NNDR AND BUSINESS RATES RETENTION**

The Committee considered a report on the Business Rates Retention scheme and the impact of 100% retention for Wirral, as well as an update on the proposed changes including 75% rates retention.

Vikki Gregorich, Senior Finance Manager, in response to a Member's comment stated that she would have to respond in writing with regard to whether or not all the business estate on Wirral had been captured.

**Resolved – That the report be noted.**

#### 52 **COMMERCIALISATION UPDATE**

Stuart Bellerby, Senior Commercial Manager, gave a presentation to the Committee which provided an update on commercialisation activity taking place within the Council. It summarised the 5 key commercial strands and where current commercial activity was taking place. It also highlighted some commercial benefits to the Council already from the commercial approach.

Responding to comments from Members he clarified the position with regard to fees and charges and the net cost to the Council of running the Floral Pavilion, which stood at £900,000. Some of these charges were for statutory functions such as cemeteries and crematoria, which were required to set fixed fees and also to provide a certain standard of maintenance at the cemeteries. He also acknowledged the need for the use of the correct terminology with regard to a section in the report referring to 'charging for green waste'.

With regard to the traded services income, work was being undertaken with Finance to separate out the expenditure on a particular traded service. This had been undertaken with HR for schools which had been separated out from the Council's HR function. Work was also done jointly with Cheshire West and Chester Council as joint owners of the company Edsential to ensure that they provided a good value for money service for Wirral's schools too. In respect of contracts with suppliers, the Council did have early payment clauses built in to benefit both the Council and the supplier and this was undertaken on a contract by contract basis.

David Armstrong, Assistant Chief Executive, informed the Council that the Director of Finance was looking to maximise all opportunities in terms of the contracts used to buy services. Another development was in the social value element which contractors could give not just in terms of use of local suppliers but also in terms of tangible benefits provided to the local community, such as the contractors who worked on the A41 resurfacing carrying out refurbishment of a play area in Rock Ferry near the A41 and cleaning up graffiti on street furniture and planters near Cammell Lairds.

With regard to fees for licences, such as for taxi drivers, Stuart Bellerby commented that the Council had a statutory duty to provide these though any income could not exceed expenditure. He confirmed that different areas were being looked at with regard to charging and premium rate charges, such as in Registrars, where although fees for births, marriages and deaths were set nationally, the Council was able to offer a premium rate service for an express service, which it currently did. Work was also being undertaken with environmental colleagues in terms of developing their commercial offer which could be of benefit to local businesses.

In respect of the Tour of Britain cycling event, discussions were ongoing with the organisers about bringing the event back to the Wirral and lessons had been learnt from this year's event as to how a more commercial approach could be taken in the future.

Officers were exploring options around opportunities with regard to the climate emergency and developing the green agenda with one example being around the siting of more electric vehicle charging points.

A Member also suggested that the Council could operate more efficiently and be more environmentally friendly if all Council services were moved to Birkenhead, making Council services more accessible by public transport.

**Resolved – That the report be noted.**

53 **FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT QUARTER 3 2019/20**

Vikki Gregorich, Senior Finance Manager, introduced a report which set out the Council's revenue and capital monitoring position for 2019/20 quarter 3. An adverse revenue position of £832,000 was currently forecast, which was a £403,000 increase from the Quarter 2 forecast position of £429,000. This was largely due to income targets not being fully met and increased costs from the Coroners Service. Some pressures were forecast to be mitigated by employee vacancy savings.

Responding to comments from Members, Vikki Gregorich informed the meeting that although she did not have the detail of the services which customers were choosing not to buy back she would circulate the list to the Committee. She understood that a number of schools, particularly Academy Schools, had chosen not to buy back services when their contractual obligation to the Council had ceased. David Armstrong, Assistant Chief Executive, informed the meeting that when the joint company for educational services, Edsential, had been set up with Cheshire West and Chester Council, they were buying a number of services from the Council, such as for a payroll system, which they were now purchasing from a much smaller supplier.

**Resolved – That the report be noted.**

54 **MANAGEMENT OF CAMPERVANS IN WALLASEY AND NEW BRIGHTON SCRUTINY REVIEW**

The Chair introduced a report which set out the findings and recommendations arising from a scrutiny review into the management of campervans in Wallasey and New Brighton. The review was commissioned as part of the Business Overview & Scrutiny Committee's work programme in 2018/19 in response to a number of resident concerns around overnight parking of campervans in Wallasey and New Brighton. The review panel had been chaired by Councillor Lesley Rennie with Councillors Dave Mitchell and Sarah Spoor on the Panel.

David Armstrong, Assistant Chief Executive, commented that this was a very valuable piece of work and the current temporary restrictions had worked well in managing the issue.

The Chair commented that the Panel had endorsed the proposals to make the current restrictions permanent and the residents had welcomed the current

restrictions. Members also referred to the need to provide alternative off-highway provision for campervans and that this should also be looked at as a potential commercial opportunity too.

**Resolved –**

**(1) That the findings of the Scrutiny Review Panel be approved.**

**(2) That the report be referred to the most relevant committee within the new governance arrangements for 2020/21 for consideration so that these findings might be used to inform future provision for motor caravans at coastal locations.**

## 55 **2019/20 QUARTER 3 WIRRAL PLAN PERFORMANCE**

The Chair introduced the report which provided the 2019/20 Quarter 3 (October – December 2019) performance report for Wirral Plan pledges under the Business theme. The Quarter 3 report was included as an appendix to the report, and provided an overview of the progress in Quarter 3, including available data in relation to a range of outcome indicators and supporting measures.

A Member welcomed the lower figures in respect of the numbers of people killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents with these being the best figures for a number of years.

**Resolved – That the report be noted.**

## 56 **WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE**

The Committee considered a report from the Scrutiny Officer on the current scrutiny work programme. Also attached to the report was a key regeneration projects workshop report. A further workshop was scheduled to be arranged in March, 2020 on the roll out of 5G on Wirral.

With regard to the regeneration workshops report a Member queried what would happen to the profit which was due to be made by the Wirral Growth Company and shared between the Council and its Muse partners. He suggested that it should be for elected Members to decide how this money would be spent.

David Armstrong, Assistant Chief Executive, agreed to provide a written response for all the Committee on this.

A Member welcomed the proposed developments which were due to take place in Birkenhead and across other parts of the borough and commented that it was up to Members to make this a success. It would be a huge project

for Birkenhead and an opportunity to establish itself and compete once again with other retail / leisure areas across the region.

**Resolved –**

**(1) That the proposed Business Overview & Scrutiny Committee work programme for 2019/20, be approved.**

**(2) That the contents of the Business Overview and Scrutiny Regeneration Workshop Report be noted.**

57 **VOTE OF THANKS**

As this was the last meeting of this Committee before the new governance arrangements were due to come into operation, the Chair thanked Anna Perrett and Alex Davidson, the Scrutiny Officers for all their work with the Committee and also David Armstrong, Assistant Chief Executive and Committee and Legal staff.