

TOURISM, COMMUNITIES, CULTURE & LEISURE COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 18 January 2022

Present: Councillor H Cameron (Chair)

Councillors KJ Williams O Osanlou
G Wood P Cleary
M Booth P Stuart (In place of
A Brame B Kenny)
J Johnson A Gardner (In place
of S Williams)
J McManus (In
place of C Spriggs)

52 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

The Chair welcomed attendees and viewers to the meeting and reminded everyone that the meeting was webcast and retained on the Council's website.

53 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Chris Spriggs, Brian Kenny and Steve Williams.

54 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were asked to consider whether they have 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. No interests were declared.

55 MINUTES

Resolved –

That the minutes of the meeting of the Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee held on 17 November 2021 be approved and adopted as a correct record.

56 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

Six public questions had been received:

Question from Jonathon white

Hi my name Jonathon white, I am a resident in Wirral, I live in Liscard and was brought up in Moreton. I work as a PE teacher at Claremount Specialist Sports College and I was in 2020 the National Special Educational Needs Teacher of the Year. I am the inclusion lead for the Youth Sports Trust in Merseyside and I sit on the National Inclusion Steering Group with Swim England and the Department for Education. And I also manage a 21 secondary schools sports partnership called Peninsula PE which has over £85,000 worth of Sports England funding.

My question will be about Woodchurch swimming baths. I work with all the school on the Woodchurch Estate, the special schools and the primary school. It might seem a small figure in the context of some of the figures you may have been asked to discuss tonight or during this week, I also have a £3,000 pot of funding to work with swimming pools, local providers, Edsential obviously with being the provider for the Council, to increase the confidence and competence of your swim educators here in Wirral, around how to include young people with autism. I would also like to remind everybody that Wirral Council is also a member of the Merseyside Water Safety Forum.

My question is this: Is the committee aware of how many special schools in Wirral use Woodchurch Swimming Pool for their swimming lessons and, does the committee know why special schools in Wirral especially value Woodchurch Swimming pool?

Answer: Arrangements for school swimming is predominantly agreed between the Council and Edsential, the Council's education partner responsible for the management of this service. Edsential and the schools are responsible for ensuring that all statutory requirements relating to school swimming are fulfilled, irrespective of the designation of any particular school. All schools that were previously utilising Woodchurch have been relocated to other Council facilities without issue.

Question from Ruth Molyneux

My name is Ruth Molyneux and I live in Eastham. I am here to speak on behalf of Bromborough Library. Bromborough Library is a much-loved community resource and hub. Hundreds of people have signed a petition against its closure and left these comments:

From Toni: Libraries are the gift of knowledge, entertainment and company that is still needed for young and old.

Linda: This is a much loved and used part of Bromborough Village Community and needs to stay in our village.

Carole: The library is the heart of our local community. The emotional, mental, and intellectual wellbeing of all, from tots to the elderly is helped and should not be undervalued. Future generations deserve local access to an improved not removed library facility.

From Maureen: This is such an important community resource in Bromborough. I have always found it a very helpful, friendly, efficient library to use. Personally I found Bromborough Library invaluable during a very difficult time in my life.

Angela: The Library is most important for the education and mental health of the community.

So my question is, given that Bromborough Library is seen as something much more than somewhere that you just borrow a book, can the committee please explain how a mobile library facility will be an adequate replacement?

Answer: The mobile library is not intended to be a direct replacement for a physical library but does represent an alternative model through which the Council can fulfil its statutory obligations to provide a comprehensive and efficient Library Service. The mobile library is designed to supplement the physical locations under the preferred option and provide an enhanced programme of outreach work across the borough. Throughout the process of developing a set of proposals for a new operating model, the Council has strived to ensure that all residents have access to a Library Service when and where they need it. A set of design principles and criteria were developed to support this process which can be found in the report being presented this evening (item 7). If emerging Library Strategy is agreed, full consultation on these proposals can then be undertaken. The preferred option carries a number of physical library sites, co-located community libraries with a self-serve function, a mobile library, online library provision and a homereader service for those whose needs are greatest or cannot access the library service via other means. This has been carefully designed to ensure that accessibility impacts have been mitigated and that communities where a change to the library has been proposed, will still have access to a physical library within acceptable reach. Furthermore, paragraph 2.52 in the forthcoming libraries report outlines a commitment to explore community asset transfer arrangements in those sites where a closure has been proposed. The forthcoming consultation will give you the opportunity to express interest in this option, if viable, and will be subject to its own decision-making process post consultation.

Supplementary Question: It has been reported that Council taxes are to rise, so what I am asking is, are Wirral residents expected to pay more and get less?

Answer: The Government announced in the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement that General Council Tax can increase by 1.99%. The Referendum threshold for general Council Tax increases is set at 2% for 2022/23, this means that, as a minimum, local authorities will be able to increase their relevant basic amount of council tax (essentially their average Band D council tax including special expenses and levies but excluding local precepts) by up to 2% without having to hold a referendum. The provisional settlement also included permission to add in a 1% Adult Social Care Precept, over and above the inflationary increase of up to 1.99%. A recommendation of proposed changes to Wirral Council Tax levels will be put before members of the Policy and Resources Committee on 15th February, and a final decision will be made by Full Council 28th February 2022.

The Chair of the TCC&L Committee added a separate further comment relating to the above question:

Residents' perception of value for money may be subjective but as chair of this committee, I will strive to maintain quality services for the people of Wirral and ensure best value for taxpayers. In November 2020, auditors raised significant concerns over the Council's financial position in a letter to

management, although they had not identified any new value for money risks in relation to Covid-19. The budget gap we are now addressing is a structural deficit, caused by concurrent years of overspending and we all now need to put the Council on a sustainable financial footing.

(The following questioners were not present at the meeting, and received written responses to their questions)

Susan Kirkham

It is vital that a tourism strategy for the Wirral is current and aims to combat climate change whilst promoting the local economy. What plans are there to publish a new tourism strategy for the Wirral, following the previous Wirral Visitor Economy Strategy 2017-2020, to ensure the Cool2 Strategy is actioned?

Answer: Tourism is an important part of the Council's future plans and strategies and plans linked to this take into account the need to combat climate change whilst promoting the local economy. As part of its 2040 Regeneration Framework for Birkenhead, the Council has produced a Culture and Heritage Strategy which includes a number of priorities for tourism linked to the exciting developments taking place which include Eureka! Mersey, a new Transport Shed museum and the refurbishment of the U-Boat museum at Woodside as well as building on existing assets such as the waterfront, Birkenhead Priory, Williamson Museum and Art Gallery and Birkenhead Park. Partners in these projects are fully committed to sustainability and associated work on travel and wayfinding solutions which will encourage visitors to walk and cycle between these venues. Any new buildings or reuse of existing buildings will incorporate sustainable design. The Culture and Heritage Strategy also highlights the role of the creative sector in Birkenhead and wider Wirral in delivering innovative approaches towards local organisations and businesses promoting and achieving net zero targets. Creative sector partners are for example working together on an initiative linked to the high profile Good Business Festival taking place across the Liverpool City Region in March.

A priority project identified in the Culture and Heritage Strategy is the Destination Marketing programme which involves Wirral working with Liverpool City Region partners on tourism campaigns. For Wirral, this will include a focus on our significant assets, including the peninsula's magnificent coastline and open spaces and growing food and drink offer which has local produce and suppliers at its heart.

Question from Tony Parry

In the Council's draft library strategy, you stated that there were four different types of libraries, and you asked which of these do you, Greasby Library, think would be most suitable for the library you use the most? Are these four options still on the table for consideration. If they are, when will we, Greasby Library, be advised that our preferred option is acceptable, i.e., Community Library Hub (involves community partners, supported by the Council).

Answer: The four models presented as part of the libraries consultation in 2021 were offered as illustrative models as to how a library service can be delivered and not an exhaustive list. They serve as a foundation from which we can develop appropriate, needs-based models to support the delivery of the service. The aim of the consultation was to understand what people

valued about their library service, how the library service could be delivered, and what we could do to improve our offer within the context of available resources, sustainability and meeting our statutory obligations. Furthermore, the outcomes of this consultation provided insight that reaffirmed our priorities within the emerging Library Strategy. This consultation was an invaluable exercise but not prescriptive, and has been balanced against a suite of information, data and influencing factors to form a number of options. Item 7 on the agenda presented to the [Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee](#) on January 18th 2022 outlines three options for a future operating model based on a set of design principles and criteria which includes the outcomes of the consultation. This is what we will be consulting on going forward. This includes models indicative of Community Hubs (e.g., Seacombe), Central Libraries (e.g., Birkenhead), and Neighbourhood Libraries (e.g., Eastham). In reference to the preference for a 'Community Hub' in Greasby, paragraph 2.52 in the same report outlines a commitment to explore community asset transfer arrangements in those sites where a closure has been proposed. The forthcoming consultation will give you the opportunity to express interest in this option and will be subject to its own decision-making process post consultation.

Question from John Smith

Could you clarify what criteria have been used to decide which of the current libraries are to be retained as staffed sites, which are to have RFID access only, and which are to be closed and replaced with the proposed Mobile Library and Outreach Sites, specifically what consideration has been given to usage and community support over the past ten years?

Answer: The report that was presented to the [Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee](#) on January 18th 2022 outlined the methodology, design principles (including those prescribed by the Department for Culture Media and Sport) and criteria that have been used in developing the three options for a future operating model. You can find this information at [Agenda for Tourism, Communities, Culture & Leisure Committee](#). We recognise and very much value the support Wirral's communities have given to their Libraries over many years and the benefits this has delivered. We will seek to build on these relationships as we move through the transformation of the Library Service.

Question from Phil Simpson

Brackenwood Golf Course is a site of archaeological interest. It is a site that needs to be investigated as part of the "Battle of Brunanburh" as describe by Professor Harding. Wirral Archaeological Society made repeated requests to carry out non-invasive geophysics investigations on the golf course and surrounding areas. These requests were ignored by Wirral Borough Council, can you please tell me why. You will be aware that the Minister for Levelling up housing Communities and Local Government, expressed through the NPPF that Heritage sites should be recognised as an "Irreplaceable resource and great weight should be given to the assets conservation".

Can you please tell me Why, you are ignoring the NPPF, with regard to paragraph 189 and 187b, which is an obligation to Local Authorities. It states....

"It is an obligation for Local Authorities to predict the likelihood that currently unidentified heritage assets, particularly sites of historic and archaeological interest, will be discovered in the future" Please can you explain why this government directive is not being followed by Wirral Borough Council.

ANSWER: The Council will consider favourably proposals for non-invasive archaeological investigations on the Brackenwood Golf course provided they are part of a professionally organised and supervised project relating to the search for the Battle of Brunanburh. The Council are currently working with the Wirral Archaeological Society to agree the development of a suitable professionally led project plan for the Battle of Brunanburh. The Council will be publishing the findings of a specialist review of the Wirral Archaeological Society's investigations into the battle in February 2022.

57 STATEMENTS AND PETITIONS

No statements or petitions had been received.

58 QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS

No questions from Members had been received by the required deadline.

Councillor Julie McManus asked a question without notice and the Chair had it answered by officers.

Question from Councillor Julie McManus:

Following on from public questions about swimming, can you confirm what has put into place that those children who travel further what provision will be made for them?

What will happen during Open golf championships as Hoylake golf course will be used during the Open?

Answer:

Hoylake is instrumental at hosting the Open golf championship in 2023. The requirement however is more related to a practice piece of ground and car parking space so there is no material effect to the municipal golf course but we are exploring options.

We work with Edsenstial regarding swimming lessons. Arrangements have been made for all schools at alternative sites.

Councillor Julie McManus asked a supplementary question which was what were the transport arrangements to get people there.

Answer to supplementary question:

The following schools utilised Woodchurch pre-Covid, and have been relocated as per the second column

| <u>Primary School</u> | <u>Relocated To</u> |
|-----------------------|---------------------|
| Brookdale | West Kirby |

| | |
|----------------|------------|
| Fender | Europa |
| Townfield | Oval |
| Prenton | Europa |
| Thingwall | West Kirby |
| St Peters | Europa |
| St Pauls | Europa |
| Gilbrook | Leasowe |
| Hillside | Leasowe |
| Woodchurch Rd | Europa |
| New Brighton | Guinea Gap |
| Bidston Avenue | Europa |

Additional Information

1. Edsential (CIC) are recognised as a key Wirral Council partner and the coordinator of primary school curriculum swimming in Wirral. As a result, we have always given Edsential priority booking/programming rights within swimming pools.
2. Edsential will cost the charge to each primary school, based on the cost of hire of the swimming pool, the cost of hire for the transport (if required) and an administrative charge for the coordination of the programme and compliance with curriculum standards, risk assessments, insurances, safeguarding standards etc.
3. Some primary schools (particularly those situated within walking distance of a Leisure Centre/swimming pool) choose to bypass Edsential and book directly with the Leisure Centre. This obviously means there is no transport charge or administrative Edsential charge.
4. With regard to the proposed closure of Woodchurch Leisure Centre, any primary schools that walked to the Centre to swim, will now have to travel to an alternative facility which will undoubtedly cost more because of the additional travel cost. This can be arranged through Edsential.

59 **A SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY STRATEGY FOR WIRRAL (2021-2026)**

The Assistant Director for Leisure, Libraries and Customer Engagement introduced the report of the Director of Neighbourhood Services which presented the 5- year strategy, “Creating an Active Wirral, A Sport and Physical Activity Strategy for Wirral”. It provided an overview of the collaborative process, needs analysis and strategic priorities required to increase sport and activity levels in the borough to deliver a reduction in health and social inequalities. The focus of the strategy was to set out the priorities for sport and leisure facilities, services and activities and sought to redress the balance between being a provider of facilities, both natural and built, and tackling inequality through preventative, outreach, and early intervention work. The strategy had input from over 1,000 people and organisations and was produced in collaboration with Sport England.

Members asked questions of officers and confirmed:

- That a report on the future of golf was to be presented early in 2023
- Details on finances, targets and timescales could be discussed at a Members workshop
- The draft strategy was back with consultants for finalising details such as finance
- The aspirations were to begin to tackle the 25% of people who are inactive, and to use assets such as open spaces that came at little cost
- There were potential mutually beneficial links to other Committees and meetings as well as other bodies such as public health and the NHS

Resolved: That

- (1) the Sport and Physical Activity Strategy (2021-2026) / Creating an Active Wirral be approved.**
- (2) the Director of Neighbourhoods be requested to develop the next stage of a delivery plan to be reported back to a future meeting of this Committee.**

60 LIBRARY STRATEGY AND FUTURE OPERATING MODEL

The Assistant Director for Leisure, Libraries and Customer Engagement introduced the report of the Director of Neighbourhood Services which provided the outcomes of the Library Strategy consultation and emerging Library Strategy for approval, with three options for an operating model to take to consultation. The Strategy and preferred option strived to provide a balanced, modern, and fit for purpose Library Service in Wirral to ensure that all residents had access to a comprehensive and efficient service which was relevant, based on need, and financially sustainable. It was explained that maintaining 24 library sites was unsustainable and was a constraint on development.

Members discussed the report and noted that needs were changing, such as increasing digital content, although there remained a core of users who preferred physical material. It was also noted that other services and volunteers could assist in enabling services to be provided.

Resolved: That

- (1) the key outcomes, themes, and findings from the Library Strategy consultation as set out in paras 2.1 to 2.14 be noted;**
- (2) the emerging Libraries Strategy in Appendix 1 be approved pending the determination of the Final Strategy following the consultation referred to in (3);**
- (3) submitting Options 1 to 3 (preferred) be approved for public consultation and engagement with service users, staff, key stakeholders and their representatives during February and March with the outcome to be reported to the first meeting of this Committee in the new municipal year.**

61 2022/23 BUDGET UPDATE

The Director of Law and Governance introduced his report which provided for consideration the recommendations of the Policy and Resources Committee in respect of the 2022/23 Budget Update. He emphasised that the Council had a significant financial challenge and had to demonstrate financial viability, under the scrutiny of an independent Assurance Panel. The proposals outlined were part of a draft budget and were therefore not without prejudice, and it was for the Committee to focus on these specific proposals, any comments on which would be fed back to the Policy and Resources Committee

Members questioned details of some of the options in the report which established:

- These were proposals and consultations on the proposals would take place with stakeholders
- Some existing facilities could provide more varied usage to their local communities.
- The justification and data for the proposals can be provided to Members at a workshop

Resolved: That -

- (1) the 2022/23 draft budget proposals be noted.**
- (2) the relevant director with portfolio be authorised to take the necessary action to consult on any proposals that require additional consultation and take necessary action to deliver the resulting service changes in consultation with the Chair and Group Spokesperson or reporting to the Tourism, Communities, Culture & Leisure Committee as the Director considers appropriate.**

62 WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee was responsible for proposing and delivering an annual committee work programme. This work programme was to align with the corporate priorities of the Council, in particular the delivery of the key decisions which were within the remit of the Committee.

The Chair referred to the need for the work programme to be limited to short term issues to focus on dealing with the budget options and prioritising savings over income opportunities.

The Director of Neighbourhood Services informed Members that a report on grassroots football would be brought to the next meeting of the Committee.

Resolved –

With the addition of a report on grassroots football being brought to the March meeting of the Committee, the content of the Tourism,

Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee work programme which is proposed in this report for the remainder of the 2021/22 municipal year be agreed.