

# CORPORATE SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 17 December 2008

<u>Present:</u>	Councillor	L Fraser (Chair)	
	Councillors	C Teggin J Crabtree K Wood	P Southwood J Keeley
<u>Deputies</u>	Councillors	J Salter (In place of C Meaden)	
<u>Apologies</u>	Councillors	C Meaden	

## 36 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST/PARTY WHIP

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

Councillor L Fraser declared a personal interest in respect of minute 37 Strategic Asset Review by virtue of her membership of the Liscard Community Centre Joint Management Committee.

Councillor J Keeley declared a personal interest in respect of minute 37 Strategic Asset Review by virtue of his membership of the Liscard Community Centre Joint Management Committee.

Councillor J Crabtree declared a personal interest in respect of minute 37 Strategic Asset Review by virtue of his membership of the Birkenhead St James Trust Management Committee.

Members were reminded that they should also declare, pursuant to paragraph 18 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules, 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. No such declarations were made.

## 37 TRANSFORMING WIRRAL - STRATEGIC ASSET REVIEW

Further to minute 33 (2/12/08) the Director of Law, HR and Asset Management, gave a presentation comprising an overview of the report "Delivering the Strategic Asset Review" which set out proposals for the strategic consolidation of the Council's asset base across the Borough, and was agreed in principle by Cabinet on 27 November, subject to public and staff consultation as described in the report, with results of that consultation brought back to a further meeting of Cabinet on 15 January.

The Directors of Law, HR and Asset Management, and of Regeneration, responded to questions from members regarding proposals for the Pacific Road Theatre, Leasowe Recreation Centre, The Grange and the Warren Golf Course, and the future of the Guinea Gap site as part of a potential regeneration scheme involving the use of existing land and buildings around Wallasey Town Hall to promote the regeneration of the 'Seacombe/ Egremont Corridor.'

The Director of Regeneration reported upon the current position regarding the staffing implications associated with the SAR insofar as they affect his department. He reported that every effort was being made to minimise the impact on staff and the Council had a good record in managing workforce change through its redeployment and EVR schemes.

The Directors of Corporate Services and of Law, HR and Asset Management, reported that the review of office accommodation was in progress and further reports would be presented to Cabinet on more detailed proposals for accommodation change, including centralisation of current facilities management arrangements.

There was a general discussion concerning the consultation process and ways of engaging people in the Strategic Asset Review.

The Director of Corporate Services responded to questions concerning the consultation process. He explained that arrangements had been made to implement the Cabinet resolution and take the consultation process forward through four special area forum conferences which would give people the opportunity to find out more about the SAR proposals.

It was moved by Councillor Southwood and seconded by Councillor Crabtree that

"This committee recognises the importance of having an asset base which fulfils the needs of the local community. It also recognises the high and increasing costs of maintaining the current buildings.

We welcome the fact that Council has conducted an Asset Review, as this is something that this committee has itself highlighted the need for, and look forward to the review being extended to cover office buildings. However, we recognise the feelings of uncertainty that have resulted amongst service users and impacted staff.

We call on Cabinet to ensure that the proposed consultation ensures that these concerns are addressed and that the needs of the communities continue to be met.

Finally, we welcome the considerable and wide-ranging efforts that Cabinet is making to bring the budget under control and minimise council tax charges to local people".

The motion was put and carried (4:3).

It was moved by Councillor Fraser and seconded by Councillor Wood that

"We do not agree in principle, or in any other way, with the recommendation of the Strategic Asset Review and therefore recommend that Cabinet withdraws its closure programme and any future proposals.

The motion was put and lost (3:4).

It was moved by Councillor Fraser and seconded by Councillor Wood:

That Cabinet be requested to consider the following recommendations;

- (1) Where any future regeneration proposals involve the possible closure of council buildings, those proposals be brought to the appropriate scrutiny committee before public consultation commences.
- (2) No building will be closed and no service removed until such time that the alternative provision is operational and available to the people of Wirral.
- (3) That staff and user organisations be consulted over a realistic timescale on the understanding that future proposals should not entail reductions in the levels of service and accessibility.

The motion was put and lost (3:4). (Councillors Fraser, Keeley and Wood dissenting).

#### **Resolved (4:3)**

**This committee recognises the importance of having an asset base which fulfils the needs of the local community. It also recognises the high and increasing costs of maintaining the current buildings.**

**We welcome the fact that Council has conducted an Asset Review, as this is something that this committee has itself highlighted the need for, and look forward to the review being extended to cover office buildings. However, we recognise the feelings of uncertainty that have resulted amongst service users and impacted staff.**

**We call on Cabinet to ensure that the proposed consultation ensures that these concerns are addressed and that the needs of the communities continue to be met.**

**Finally, we welcome the considerable and wide-ranging efforts that Cabinet is making to bring the budget under control and minimise council tax charges to local people.**

#### **38 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

In response to a question from the Chair, the Director of Corporate Services agreed to investigate a problem which had arisen with a recent press release when the normal procedure for emailing councillors simultaneously had not been followed.