

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 26 September 2012

Present: Councillor D Elderton (Chair)

Councillors J Crabtree J Stapleton
D Mitchell M Sullivan
C Muspratt KJ Williams
T Norbury S Williams

Deputies: Councillors C Povall (In place of L Fraser)

Cabinet Members: Councillors B Kenny H Smith
C Meaden

15 MEMBERS CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

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.

Councillor S Williams declared a personal interest in agenda item 4 – Notice of Motion ‘Increasing Recycling’ Update (see minute 20 post), by virtue of him being a Board Member of the Merseyside Recycling and Waste Authority.

Councillor M Sullivan declared a personal interest in agenda item 5 – Library Strategy – Opening Hours (see minute 21 post), by virtue of him being a Friend of Pensby Library and a member of Pensby Reading Group.

16 MINUTES

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 26 June 2012 be approved.

17 HIGHWAYS AND TRAFFIC REPRESENTATION PANEL MINUTES

The Acting Director of Law, HR and Asset Management presented the minutes of the meeting of the Highways and Representation Panel held on 13 September, 2012.

The Panel had considered –

- Objection to the Local Area Forum Scheme – Proposed Pedestrian Refuge, Kings Road, Bebington. This item had been deferred and would be brought back to a future meeting for consideration.
- Objection to the Cycling Strategy / Safer Routes to Schools Scheme – Manor Lane / Withens Lane, Wallasey
- Objection to the Proposed Puffin Crossing – Spital Road Shopping Precinct, Bebington

With regard to minute 4 (Objection: Proposed Puffin Crossing – Spital Shopping Precinct, Bebington), Councillor Crabtree asked that the minute be amended to incorporate an addition to the resolution in that the Panel had also requested that, ‘Merseytravel be asked to look at the possibility of resiting the bus stop further along Spital Road’.

Resolved –

(1) That, subject to the amendment to minute 4, the minutes of the Panel be received.

(2) That the Committee recommend to the Cabinet Member for Streetscene and Transport Services that –

- (a) the proposed scheme to introduce a “No Entry” Traffic Regulation Order at the junction of Manor Lane and Withens Lane, Liscard/New Brighton, as shown on Drawing No. 3573 attached to the Panel report of the Deputy Director of Technical Services, be approved and implemented.**
- (b) the proposed scheme to introduce a Puffin Crossing on Spital Road, 100m west of it’s junction with Jocelyn Close, Spital as shown on Drawing No. TP2711b0 attached to the Panel report of the Deputy Director of Technical Services; and that Merseytravel be asked to look at the possibility of resiting the bus stop further along Spital Road’, be approved and implemented.**

18 **ORDER OF BUSINESS**

The Chair indicated that it was his intention to vary the order of business and consider item 8 (Budget Consultation – Scrutiny Workshops) next.

19 **BUDGET CONSULTATION - SCRUTINY WORKSHOPS**

The Council's Corporate Performance Manager, Lucy Barrow, gave a short presentation on a series of budget consultation Scrutiny Workshops that had been arranged during September and October, to consult on principles and to engage with the public, staff and stakeholders to inform improvements and budgets and the development of the three year Corporate and Financial Plans. Outline savings options would be the subject of further consultation in November/December prior to decisions.

She commented that the Authority faced a significant challenge in dealing with government cuts to its budget, adding up to around £100m over the next three years. A public questionnaire had been made available online and in a wide variety of locations and the Scrutiny Workshops would seek the views of Members, external partners and experts, as to how the Council's priorities may be achieved in the light of budget cuts. They would look in detail at the budgets within their remit and report back to the Cabinet. Their scope was to understand the scale of the challenge and to discuss options for delivering services differently.

Some Members referred to the lack of the Consultation Questionnaires in a number of supermarket locations where they would have expected to see them and Lucy Barrow said that she would take these points back to the Consultation team. There were targeted slots at a variety of locations throughout the consultation period and these were published and updated weekly on the Council website.

The Chair stated that the Sustainable Communities workshop would be taking place on Wednesday 10 October.

Resolved – That the presentation be noted.

20 **NOTICE OF MOTION 'INCREASING RECYCLING' UPDATE**

The Interim Director of Technical Services presented an update in response to the 'Increasing Recycling' Motion which was raised at Council on 12 December 2011 (minute 90 refers). A previous Motion termed Bin Charging (minute 22 refers) very much related to this was raised at Council on 12 July 2010 with an update presented at this Committee on 10 March 2011 (minute 128 refers). For the purposes of the report, the update covered the two related motions.

Robert Jones, Waste Strategy and Recycling Manager, introduced the report which stated that increasing the amount of household waste recycled was necessary for every country in Europe. The European Waste Framework Directive (WFD) committed Member States to contribute to achieving a European 50% recycling and composting rate by the year 2020.

The UK Government had committed local authorities of England and Wales to a statutory 50% recycling and composting target by 2020. In 2010, the UK Government passed the Localism Bill, enabling the Government to pass onto individual Councils any fines that might be incurred from Europe as a result of the UK potentially not meeting the target. It was important that Merseyside Waste Partnership (MWP) therefore met a minimum of 50% recycling by 2020 to avoid any potential challenge and resulting fine should the UK Government not meet its 50% recycling rate.

Merseyside districts, Halton Council and the Merseyside Recycling and Waste Authority were committed to meeting a pooled 50% recycling and composting target by 2020. The options for achieving this target were set out in the Merseyside Joint Recycling and Waste Management Strategy, which Wirral Council approved on 13 February 2012. The pooled target enabled the 6 Local Authorities to benefit from the "recycling performance" achieved at the 14 Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRC's) including 3 on the Wirral at Bidston, Clatterbridge and West Kirby. The recycling rate at all of these sites for 2011/12 was 54.41%.

The report gave a breakdown of the recycling rates across the 6 authorities and a detailed performance breakdown on performance to date for Wirral. During the next four years there would be a number of strategic and operational issues that would impact on Wirral's recycling rate which were outlined in the report, including:

- Impact of Resource Recovery Contract
- Options report exploring the costs and benefits of removing the free garden waste collection service
- Environmental Streetscene Services Contract Review
- Small Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment and Battery Recycling
- Trade Waste Recycling

Considerable investment by the MWP would be necessary to raise performance. However, the timing and nature of any investment should take into account the affordability of such funding, especially in light of the financial pressures that face all public sector bodies in current times. The partnership needed to work towards a position where any further significant investment in recycling or waste prevention initiatives could be implemented at proportionate cost to each district, in return for proportionate benefits. It was also important to note that for the Partnership to succeed and invest in the most efficient way possible, all districts needed to prioritise the pooled

recycling target over its own individual performance and be more accountable to it.

Responding to comments from Members Rob Jones gave some explanation as to why Wirral was performing better than most Merseyside authorities, although this was still only an average performance compared nationally. He also stressed the need for joint scrutiny across the districts to enable low performing districts to be held to account and drive performance across the partnership.

Members expressed concern at the rising costs of landfill tax and that certain actions might result in the progress made in recycling rates being reversed.

The Chair emphasised the need to avoid at all costs the prospect of green / garden waste ending up in green bins. He also suggested that a future report on the garden waste collection service should be brought to this Committee for its views prior to consideration by Cabinet.

On a motion by the Chair, seconded by Councillor Steve Williams, it was –

Resolved (unanimously) – That this Committee:

- (1) Requests the Interim Director of Technical Services to formally write to the Chair of the MRWA Board, the Director of the MRWA and the relevant directors of all Merseyside Councils to request that the partnership develop a suitable mechanism for scrutinising the individual performance of districts.**
- (2) Requests the Interim Director of Technical Services to invite the MRWA to present a progress update around increasing the range of materials accepted at the MRF to include a presentation of findings around the viability of rigid plastic recycling, Tetra Pak recycling, metal recycling such as foil and textile recycling.**
- (3) Requests the Interim Director of Finance to seek to establish a mechanism either internally or within the Merseyside Waste Partnership that Wirral Council (and district partners where applicable) have access to essential funding, along an ‘invest to save’ principle in order to improve recycling performance and reduce waste being sent to landfill.**

21 **LIBRARY STRATEGY - OPENING HOURS**

The Interim Director of Finance submitted a report which detailed the results of a recent libraries consultation in respect of opening hours. The Committee were asked to consider how Library opening hours might be taken forward in the light of this consultation, public requirements set against overall use and

the budget situation of the authority. The views of the Committee would be taken forward to Cabinet as part of the decision making process.

Malcolm Flanagan, Head of Benefits, Revenues and Customer Services, introduced the report in which, given the approach outlined in the library strategy, it was suggested that the Council look to first support the four main central sites (Birkenhead, Bebington, Wallasey and West Kirby) as being the key sites open later four evenings a week and open Wednesdays. Then at each smaller library that was currently open on a Monday and Thursday evening, that as one size opening may not fit all, a maximum of one evening opening was made available.

It was clear within financial constraints that this could not be extra hours so it would be best achieved, if locally required, by moving the morning opening time to later. As a broad principle it was suggested this would be two hours later to allow a closure time of 19.00. Given the impact of Bank Holidays on the service users it was proposed that any evening opening should be either on a Wednesday or Thursday. The need would be established by a site by site user consultation.

Opening hours at the merged Eastham and Heswall library one stop shops had been piloted to maximise resource and to respond to historical customer feedback providing a total of 46 hours opening per week, with Wednesday openings and no evening openings. More opening hours had been available to users under this change, Heswall having previously had 43 hours, and Eastham previously 39 hours. When specific consultation was done on the changed hours at these libraries out of 175 users asked, 153 (87.4%) said they preferred the library to be open on a Wednesday and closed on an evening, as opposed to the old hours.

Responding to comments from Members, Malcolm Flanagan, informed the Committee that the timeframes for the report to come to this Committee and then to Cabinet had meant that the consultation had had to be undertaken during late July and August, and the fact that children were unlikely to be using the library to do homework then could be added to the report. A marketing scheme was already in place with regard to digital inclusion and the facilities available in libraries.

Members welcomed the report and on a motion by the Chair, seconded by Councillor Sullivan, it was –

Resolved (unanimously) –

That this Committee recommends to Cabinet that:

(a) the four main central sites will open four nights a week along with Wednesday day time opening at these locations.

(b) site by site consultation be undertaken at other sites already offering, evening opening, to establish if revised opening hours should include one late evening opening per week which will be then subject to review.

22 TRADING STANDARDS EMPOWERMENT PARTNERSHIP

The Acting Director of Law, HR and Asset Management submitted a report which gave details of the newly established Trading Standards Empowerment Partnership which brought together organisations with an interest in business support and consumer empowerment to work together to identify issues, pool evidence, support businesses and consumers through the delivery of projects and campaigns for improvements.

Rob Beresford, Head of Regulation, introduced the report which stated that the partnership would raise the awareness of the services Trading Standards provided and Trading Standards would steer the implementation of an action plan. Actions would be decided by the partners with the activities reflecting priority areas for the community utilising the statutory powers and responsibilities of the Trading Standards Service. It would seek to provide more effective protection of vulnerable consumers, support honest businesses and through enhanced intelligence sharing, help Trading Standards tackle consumer detriment caused by rogue traders. The partnership would also focus on efficiency and provide a platform for joint delivery of funded projects.

The partnership had been founded with the engagement of 23 key stakeholders and was chaired by Councillor Brian Kenny. Trading Standards would be hosting the launch event on Thursday 27 September 2012, which was to be followed by bi-monthly meetings that would be used to coordinate the delivery of an agreed action plan.

Responding to comments from Members, Rob Beresford informed the Committee that the introduction of Neighbourhood Watch / No Cold Calling Zones did take resources which were limited, although through partnerships it might be possible to access funding opportunities for projects such as this. Resources weren't available for a local trading standards helpline although there was a national consumer advice line number and referrals were made to the Council when follow up work was required.

Resolved –

(1) That the report be noted.

(2) That it be noted that the national consumer advice line number is 08454 04 05 06.

23 DECISIONS TAKEN UNDER DELEGATED POWERS

The Interim Director of Technical Services reported, in accordance with the Approved Scheme of Delegation, of one instance where he had used his delegated authority in respect of the appointment of contractors. This was for the appointment of Bethell Group PLC for the refurbishment of Tower Road Bridges A & C.

The Deputy Director of Technical Services informed the Committee that he would email the Members once he had established the proposed finish date of the refurbishment work.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

24 PROPOSED MEMBER TASK AND FINISH WORKING GROUP

The Interim Director of Technical Services submitted a paper which requested the Committee to set up a Member Task & Finish Working Group on the issue of “How can the Council’s Streetscene customer service approach better meet Members’ needs”. It had become clear from various feedback channels that many Members of the Council were seemingly dissatisfied with the service they received from or through Streetscene. This was of concern because the range of services and issues covered by the Streetscene approach represented the great majority of contacts received by the council from the public. They were also (as is common to any council) those issues which most concerned Members in their capacities as Ward councillors.

The views from Members did, however, seem to be at variance with the high, and sustained, measured levels of public satisfaction (which were regularly reported to the Committee).

The Interim Director outlined the scope of the proposed short-term review (to be completed by the end of November, 2012) and the terms of reference. The outcome of the Review would feed into the 2013/14 budget setting process and would also help significantly to inform the design of the new, post-2014, Highways contract upon which work would by then have commenced and, later, a new refuse collection contract.

Resolved – That a Working Group comprised of Councillors D Mitchell, C Muspratt and S Williams be established with the terms of reference set out in the Interim Director’s paper.

25 REVIEW OF SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received an update on its work programme and the Deputy Director of Technical Services apologised to the Committee that a number of

items had not appeared on this agenda. A revised list of future agenda items would be circulated to the Committee with the minutes.

The Committee's attention was also drawn to minute 7 of the Scrutiny Programme Board held on 18 July 2012, which requested Scrutiny Chairs and spokespersons to review their work programmes to prioritise work consistently with the Council's Corporate Plan, and to consider also, the work programmes of other scrutiny committees to identify areas of work that involved, or potentially involved, cross-cutting issues and/or clear synergies (in law, fact or issue) with areas within their own work programme. In respect of the first part of this request the Deputy Director suggested that this was exactly what the Committee had been doing with its work programme list.

Resolved – That the Work Programme be noted and the Committee receive an updated version of the Work Programme with these minutes.

26 FORWARD PLAN

The Committee had been invited to review the Forward Plan prior to the meeting in order for it to consider, having regard to the Committee's work programme, whether scrutiny should take place of any items contained within the Plan and, if so, how it could be done within relevant timescales and resources.

Resolved – That the forward plan be noted.