

ECONOMY AND REGENERATION OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

12 FEBRUARY 2013

52 CONSULTATION FINDINGS: WHAT REALLY MATTERS STAGE 2

Further to minutes 29 (6 November 2012), 40 (5 December 2012) and 44 (16 January 2013), the Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive upon the outcome of the What Really Matters Stage 2 Consultation, which had been considered by the Cabinet at its meeting held on 7 February 2013 (minute 184 refers).

The comprehensive programme of consultation and engagement had been undertaken to inform the development of the Council's Corporate and Financial Plan for 2013-2016 and further to inform the decision making process surrounding significant budget savings. The Cabinet had noted the consultation process and implementation described within the report, and thanked Wirral residents, staff and other stakeholders for their input. Cabinet had also noted the detailed consultation findings in relation to each budget option as contained within Appendices 1, 2 and 3.

The Council's Corporate Performance Manager gave a brief presentation on the consultation findings and provided information in relation to targeted engagement and the methodology for the geographic and demographic analysis that had been undertaken. Key messages were that the Council should protect the vulnerable, retain responsibility for quality and look to raise income and eliminate waste. The Chief Executive had responded personally to all direct communication from members of staff and a team was in place to ensure Equality Impact Assessments, continued engagement and consultation and to show due regard to concerns raised.

Individual views expressed by Members in relation to the general analysis of consultation responses were that, in some instances, the comments did not represent a neutral interpretation; for example, 51% being shown as either strong support for an option or, conversely, being a slight majority against. However, Members accepted the accuracy of the figures and noted that the comments were subjective.

The Committee was requested to give consideration to the consultation feedback in relation to the following specific items, which fell within its remit and the Chair proposed that individual views expressed by Members could form the basis of feedback to Budget Cabinet –

- Public Relations and Marketing**

There were a number of options in this area, including a reduction in the core marketing budget of 50%, stopping the sponsorship of Tranmere Rovers Football Club, which would bring a saving of £135,000 and removing the funding which was used to subsidise tourism and visitor events throughout the Borough.

Members commented that in view of the significant benefits of tourism to Wirral and the need to build on the momentum in areas such as New Brighton, the

Cabinet should consider carefully the impact of removing subsidies for tourism events. Some Members also stated that more sophistication could be applied to grant making in terms of 'matched funding' and targeting high return events. Members commented also that Tranmere Rovers FC was a great community resource but, in times of austerity, agreed that the sponsorship should be stopped.

- **Car Parking**

Whilst technically not within the remit of the Committee, the Chair indicated that any proposals in relation to car parking charges could potentially impact upon businesses and shopping centres.

Members noted the consultation response and commented that the data analysis was not sophisticated enough to show the views expressed for standardised parking charges on an area by area basis.

- **Pre-Planning Advice**

Having considered the comments of the Head of Regeneration and Planning in relation to the likely impact of the proposed option, Members indicated their support for this option.

- **Apprenticeship Programme**

The Council had for the past few years funded 167 people to complete Apprenticeships, with a further 114 positions available during the current financial year. There were 2 options available within the consultation paper, the first to remove the budget for the programme, which would end the Wirral Apprentice Programme in its current form; and the second to reduce the budget to the programme and explore opportunities to develop a Liverpool City Region Apprentice scheme.

Members highlighted the value of the Apprenticeship Scheme and commented that with diminishing opportunities for young people, every effort should be made to invest in employment and training. Members also questioned whether an earlier version of the consultation had included an option to retain the current scheme. The Head of Regeneration and Planning proposed to investigate this and to respond to Members direct.

Individual comments were that the present scheme should be retained and, alternatively, that the Council should deliver the best scheme possible and to explore the development of the Liverpool City Region Scheme.

- **Handyperson Scheme**

Members made no comment in relation to the proposal to redevelop the service, for it to be targeted more effectively at people who have recently been discharged from hospital; and reducing the service available to the general public.

- **Restructure of Regeneration, Housing and Planning Department**

The Head of Regeneration and Planning outlined the proposed restructure of the Department, as a result of some significant changes, which had led to a

reconsideration of the work of the Department. Members indicated support for the option, under the circumstances.

- **Home Insulation**

Members noted the support for Option Two: To reduce the budget for the programme, allowing for some energy efficiency and fuel poverty work to continue.

- **Housing Support for BME Communities**

Under the circumstances, Members indicated their support for, or noted the support for the option to remove the service, as other services both from the community and public sectors could potentially fill the gap.

- **Supporting People**

The Chair referred to scrutiny work that had been planned in relation to Supporting People and advised the Committee of the significant work being undertaken at an officer level. A full report would be presented to the next meeting of the Committee and consequently, the planned scrutiny work would not now proceed. Members noted that the option would reduce the Supporting People budget from next year.

- **Investing in Wirral's Businesses (Invest Wirral)**

Members noted that the option involved a reduction in support to businesses through a number of avenues, including business investments, grants and other funds, which may be replaced regionally. The Head of Regeneration and Planning advised that the option would also reduce duplication with other services by removing the Invest Wirral events budget and social enterprise support. In response to comments from Members he indicated that officers were consulting widely to avoid any further duplication.

Resolved – That the Cabinet be requested to have due regard to the views expressed in relation to those budget options within the remit of the Economy and Regeneration O&S Committee.