

**SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
14 FEBRUARY 2013**

69 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 Senior Policy 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 were expressed by Members in relation to the general analysis of consultation responses received. This included queries were raised regarding the 2.7% response rate. Members were assured that this had been the furthest reaching consultation that Wirral Council had ever conducted.

A Member sought details regarding clarification on the costs involved with the consultation and also requested a breakdown of responses for each ward. The Committee were assured that this information would be circulated to each Committee Member following the meeting.

A Member queried equality issues and was referred to section 3.0 of the report whereby it was suggested that Black and Minority Ethnic groups were well represented within the sample.

Officers were thanked and commended by the members of the Committee for all work conducted on the What Really Matters consultation.

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 –

1. Libraries

There were a number of options within this area, including further merging of libraries and One Stop Shops, the reduction of opening hours, particularly around Christmas and New Year, and the increased number of volunteers in the running of facilities.

Members expressed their support for the use of volunteers but queried the training facilities available for such staff on computer equipment. The Committee was assured that training would be provided to those concerned

2. Car Parking

The Committee considered the proposal to standardise car parking charges across the borough and reduce the 'all day' charge to a competitive rate of £2.50, and bring in annual and seasonal permit rates in outer Birkenhead car parks

The Committee expressed mixed reviews regarding standardised charging and some concerns were raised over the impact on towns and villages with local businesses. Comments were also raised regarding the accessibility and affordability of public transport in certain areas.

Councillor Norbury suggested that a more scientific study be conducted to involve Merseytravel and to review suitable transport plans for each particular area. The Chair suggested that this be considered at a future meeting

Councillor J Williams called for a Scrutiny Review Party to discuss issues regarding car parking. This was endorsed by the Chair.

3. Garden Waste Collection

Options considered were the introduction of a kerbside collection charge for garden waste, the proposal was that this would be an annual charge of £35.

Rob Beresford, Head of Regulation informed Members that if this option were to be agreed then the Council would contract this service out

The Committee noted that 51% of respondents stated this option to be completely unacceptable. Members took this on board and queried the viability of the proposal in terms of enforceability.

4. Household Waste Collection

Members in general supported the proposal to increase the charge of the 'ERIC' service from £20 to £26.50.

5. Kennels Service

Members expressed their concern over the proposed option to provide a joint kennel service with partners across Merseyside. This would mean residents having to travel to Halewood to collect their dogs. The Committee were largely opposed to this option and comments were raised regarding the importance of protecting vulnerable animals across the Borough.

6. Environmental Health

The Committee noted that Cheshire West and Chester Council were currently intending to proceed with the proposal to form a mutual service.

Members noted the consultation response.

7. Trading Standards

The proposal involved the reduction of service leading to the reduction of staff. Members raised concerns over door to door traders and loan sharks and the impact that a reduction in staff would have on the protection of the public.

Rob Beresford, Head of Regulation informed Members that the Government were conducting an extensive review upon Trading Standards and regional groups had been set up through which all loan sharks information is being channelled.

Members noted the consultation response.

8. Pest Control

Members considered the option to reduce the service, which will lead to a reduction in staff.

Rob Beresford, Head of Regulation responded to questions from Members with regards to redundancies and informed the Committee that it is anticipated that one redundancy would be made. The service currently has seven members of staff. Members noted the consultation response.

9. Highway Maintenance

There were a number of options in this area including the reduction of proactive maintenance of roads, footways, signage and street furniture, and which would mean the Council would focus most resources on maintenance where there was a direct safety issue.

Members highlighted the importance of protecting roads and commented that some of the quality of the work needed addressing. Members noted the consultation response.

10. Street lighting

Members considered that this option would reduce the service and mean focusing the activity on targeted inspections at problem sites.

Members noted the consultation response.

11. Highways Drainage

Members noted that the option would reduce the services and mean focusing the activity on targeted inspections and problem sites.

Members expressed their concerns with the reduction in service as regards to highways which are prone to flooding.

12. Street Cleaning

Rob Beresford, head of Regulation informed members that this option sought to encourage the community to improve levels of street cleanliness and if successful this reduction would be rolled out across other areas.

Members noted the proposal and expressed their support.

13. School Crossing Patrols

This option would involve inviting schools to pay for the crossing patrol service and removing the cost to the Council.

Councillor Mitchell declared a personal interest by virtue of him being a School Governor of two Wirral schools.

Members expressed strong concerns regarding the implementation of this option with particular focus on the protection of children from harm.

14. Removal of the Maintenance of Parks

The Committee noted that nearly 60%, of those who responded to the survey found the option to stop maintenance on a number of parks, green spaces, beaches and grass verges completely unacceptable.

Members commented that this was a highly valued service and expressed the importance of public opinion on this matter. They also acknowledged the value and support of friends of parks across Wirral and noted that not every park in Wirral received this

15. Reduction in the Maintenance of Parks

Members considered this option in line with the above option.

16. Community Patrol and Dog Fouling

Members of the Committee noted that the consultation response was fairly balanced and made no comments in relation to this issue.

17. Modernisation of Leisure

This option involved making a number of changes to pool operating charges to pool opening times, including closing Europa Leisure Pool and Guinea Gap Pool during less busy times, and reducing the staff requirements for the sauna operation at Guinea Gap Leisure Centre among others.

The Committee noted the contents of the report and comments were made regarding the importance of swimming for residents in the Borough. It was also stated that there was a high sickness rate amongst leisure centre workers and suggested that this issue needs to be looked into in more depth.