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CONSTITUENCY COMMITTEE - BIRKENHEAD

Thursday, 24 July 2014

Present:

Chair	Rt Hon Frank Field MP	
Councillors	A Brighouse	AR McLachlan
	P Cleary	M McLaughlin
	G Davies	C Meaden
	P Davies	D Realey
	WJ Davies	D Roberts
	S Kelly	J Stapleton
		P Williams

Also Present

Mr J Brace
Mrs L Brace
Mr P Griffiths
Mrs P Cocker
Ms T Derbyshire
Mrs R Shaw
Mr D Shaw
Mr M Morton
Ms M Rushton
Ms M Moile
Mr G Vogiatzis

1 **APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR**

RESOLVED (12:1):

That Frank Field MP be elected Chair of the Committee for the Municipal Year 2014/2015.

2 **APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR**

RESOLVED (Unanimously):

That Councillor G Davies be elected Vice-Chair of the Committee for the Municipal Year 2014/2015.

3 **COUNCILLOR PAT CLEARY**

The Chair welcomed Councillor Pat Cleary, Ward Member for Birkenhead and Tranmere to his first meeting of the Committee.

4 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillor J Crabtree
Councillor P Doughty
Councillor S Foulkes
Councillor T Norbury
Councillor H Smith

5 **CHAIRS ANNOUNCEMENT**

The Chair indicated that he would be moving Item 5 – Initiatives to Improve Environmental Quality to end of the agenda to enable a more detailed discussion and allow members of the public to ask questions.

6 **MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor G. Davies declared a personal interest in agenda item 7 – Your Wirral Fund by virtue of his appointment as a Board Member of Magenta Living.

7 **MINUTES**

RESOLVED:

That subject to the addition of “Professor W.R.Lee, Williamson Art Gallery and Museum Action Group” to the list of attendees, and the addition of “At the request of the Chair, Mr W.R Lee, Williamson Art Gallery and Museum Action Group gave the Committee an update in relation to the future of the Williamson Art Gallery and Museum” to Minute 17(5)

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 January 2014 and also 10 April 2014 be approved.

8 **CONSTITUENCY MANAGER'S REPORT**

The Committee considered the report by the Head of Neighbourhoods and Engagement that updated the Committee on progress on the actions taken following its last meeting on 10 April 2014 (Minute 21 refers).

Attached to the report were appendices which the Constituency Manager presented to the Committee in relation to the Antenatal Breast Feeding Project Quarterly Report (April-June 2014); a draft copy of the Birkenhead

Constituency Handbook; Grange Road Action Plan; Community Project Update and a Briefing Paper on the Betas Project.

The Constituency Manager indicated that in relation to the action – Improving the Environment, she had circulated an email to Members asking them for their identified hotspots in relation to dog fouling and areas that appear as eyesores.

Appendix one to the report gave information in relation to the quarterly report for the antenatal project. The Constituency Manager advised that according to the information collated one interesting statistic was that only 40% of mums to be had a support network available to them.

In relation to the proposal to develop a ‘Community Hub’, the Constituency Manager indicated that she had re-written to schools within the Birkenhead area with over 50% of pupils living in areas of high income deprivation and invited them to submit an Expression of Interest for the project with a deadline of Monday 28 July 2014. An update on this project would be shared with the Committee.

The Chair indicated that students at Cambridge University had undertaken a piece of work with Reception teachers to help understand what skills were needed for school readiness. Results had shown that the most effective mechanisms were to have fun with children and reading to them. Ms Zoe Munby from the Birkenhead Foundation Years Project had been liaising with Headteachers of schools regarding carrying out a similar project; Beechwood had so far shown an interest. The Constituency Manager indicated that she would continue to work with Ms Munby to ensure the two projects work effectively together, not creating duplication or contradiction.

The Constituency Manager updated the Committee on the latest position in relation to the newsletter for Birkenhead and indicated that there may be some legal implications that needed to be further explored prior to publication and circulation.

The Head of Legal and Member Services advised the Committee that there was a need to ensure that the newsletter would not breach any aspects of the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity (the Code) and suggested that the decision on this be deferred and brought back to the next meeting of the Committee.

In response, a Member raised concerns that there had already been a significant delay in the implementation of this and that the publication was merely to relay local issues to the residents of Birkenhead who did not receive ‘free’ papers and expressed the view that this proposal should be progressed as a matter of urgency subject to the necessary checks on any legal implications.

In relation to the Committee Handbook, the final version was included with the papers and the Task and Finish Group would be meeting to discuss the implementation of the development of the Community Researchers.

The Constituency Manager indicated that within the Handbook, there was a proposal for members of the public to be able to submit questions prior to meetings and get a detailed response from the appropriate officers.

In relation to the Seven Beats Project, It was suggested and agreed that an update on progress of the project be given to the next meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the report regarding the Constituency Managers update be approved;**
- (2) subject to legal clearance from the Head of Legal and Member Services, the arrangements for the publication of a Birkenhead Newsletter be progressed as a matter of urgency; and**
- (3) the Neighbourhood Inspector be requested to provide a progress report on the Seven Betas Project to the next meeting of the Committee.**

9 CONSTITUENCY BUDGET AND SPEND

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Neighbourhoods and Engagement updating on the budget allocation for 2013/14 and giving an overview of the budget available for 2014/15.

The report indicated that as well as the budget allocation carried over from 2013/14, Birkenhead Constituency Committee had £40,000 remaining from the 2014/15 allocation and a devolved budget of £77,750 for the Integrated Transport Block Capital Programme Fund funding available for 2014/15. This was summarised within Appendix 2 of the report and expanded in further detail, with recommendations of how to progress the spend with each budget allocation.

Wirral Council had devolved a further £50,000 to the Birkenhead Constituency Committee for 2014/15 to be used to tackle priorities and reduce inequality. At the Birkenhead Constituency Committee meeting on 10th April 2014 (Minute 23 refers) it was agreed that £10,000 of the allocation would be allocated to fund the urgently needed repair works to the River Wall and Esplanade at Rock Park.

The report suggested that the Priorities Task and Finish Group be requested to work with the Constituency Manager to draft proposals for the remaining £40,000 allocation for 2014/15. The proposals for spend would be presented for discussion and approval at the Committee meeting on 30th October 2014.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the Priorities Task and Finish Group be requested to work with the Constituency Manager to draft proposals for the remaining £40,000 allocation for 2014/15 and the proposals be presented for discussion and approval at the Committee meeting on 30th October 2014; and**
- (2) a Working Group consisting of Councillors S. Kelly, G. Davies and D. Realy be established to manage a process of identifying and prioritising schemes of work to be carried out utilising the devolved budget for the Integrated Transport Block Capital Programme and the suggested schemes be presented for discussion and approval at the Committee meeting on 30 October 2014.**

10 YOUR WIRRAL GRANTS PROGRAMME

Prior to consideration of this item, Councillor G. Davies who had declared a prejudicial interest in this item left the room and took no part in the consideration of this item.

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Neighbourhood and Engagement informing of the changes to the administration of the Your Wirral fund and request nominations for a 'Working Group' to lead the assessment process of this fund for Birkenhead.

Members raised concerns regarding the Your Wirral Fund and suggested that the fund could be used to support those struggling to pay their rent as a result of the Bedroom Tax and consequently faced eviction, the Committee agreed to defer this item to allow further discussion.

RESOLVED:

That the report be deferred to the next meeting of the Committee to allow officers to undertake further discussions.

11 INDIVIDUAL ELECTORAL REGISTRATION

Following a request from Cabinet (15/3/14 – minute 161 refers) the Senior Electoral Services Officer, gave an update to the Committee on the transfer to Individual Electoral Registration ('IER'). The online registration had already been a success with people being able to register online from 10 June, 2014. It was anticipated that 80/90 per cent of the electorate would receive a letter confirming that they were registered under IER and did not need to do anything else. The focus would be on ensuring the remaining 10/20 per cent of the electorate would be registered in time for the General Election next year.

The Senior Electoral Services Officer indicated that the Department were undertaking a publication campaign and officers would be working within those Wards where there was the biggest deficit.

The Constituency Manager indicated the Neighbourhoods and Engagement Team would be assisting the Electoral team to disseminate the information to local groups.

The Head of Legal and Member Services reported that on-line registrations went live on 10 June; this incorporated individual electoral registration.

It was suggested and agreed that the Chair write to the Chief Executive of Wonga Loans to request information as to how many loans had been issued in Birkenhead and were they checked to see if they were on the electoral register.

A Member raised concerns that she was aware of properties from Magenta Living being advertised on Rightmove and expressed a view that these properties should be on property pool plus. It was agreed that an update on this be provided to the next meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the Electoral Services Officer be thanked for his update and he be invited to the next meeting of the Committee to report on the progress of Individual Electoral Registration;**
- (2) the Constituency Manager, on behalf of the Chair be requested to write to the Chief Executive of Wonga Loans to request information as to how many loans had been issued in Birkenhead and were they checked to see if they were on the electoral register; and**

- (3) **an update report regarding the property Pool Plus be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee.**

12 **SCHEDULE OF FUTURE COMMITTEE MEETINGS**

It was reported that the Council's Committee Calendar for the Municipal Year 2014/15 had been drawn up and the Committee was scheduled to meet at 6pm in Birkenhead Town Hall on the following dates:

- 24 July 2014
- 30 October 2014
- 29 January 2015
- 9 April 2015

The Chair proposed that due to the general and local elections being held in 2015 the dates set for January and April be moved to February and late May 2015.

RESOLVED:

That the Constituency Manager in consultation with the Head of Legal and Member Services be requested to look into suitable dates for February and May 2015.

13 **PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

The Chair invited members of the public to ask questions.

Question 1 – Mrs L Brace

Referring to the Childs Play Area in Gorse Road, she asked if arrangements could be made to open the gates to allow residents to access the play area with their children.

In response, Councillor A. McLachlan indicated that she had recently visited the childrens centre and the gates were unlocked and the play area was in use as was the community centre, she agreed to investigate the points raised.

Question 2 – Mrs L Brace

Referring to the disabled persons parking bay outside her property asked if Officers could arrange for the marking to be repainted as these had been damaged by work undertaken by United Utilities.

Mrs Brace was informed that this would be passed on to the appropriate Department for a response.

14 INITIATIVES TO IMPROVE ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Environment and Regulation updating on the environmental initiatives undertaken in the Birkenhead area by the Council's Waste and Environmental Services section. The Committee was requested to consider a range of suggestions for enhanced pro-environmental activity in the area.

The recommendations within the report supported the Council's strategic priorities "Protecting vulnerable people and communities" and "Narrowing the gap in inequalities"

The report detailed the progress of the borough wide environmental campaigns to tackle waste related issues and also the enhanced initiatives and associated costs available to the Committee.

In response to questions from the Chair, the Head of Environment and Regulation indicated that the £400,000 contribution from the Waste Development Fund was being used over a two year campaign period to drive pro-environmental behaviours and maximise recycling of household waste in terraced housing areas across the borough. A "Good Neighbour" campaign had also been introduced along with a number of enforcement initiatives.

In response to a question regarding enforcement, the Head of Environment and Regulation indicated that to date around 100 fixed penalty notices had been issued, but it was too early to indicate as to whether or not all notices had yet been paid. The Head of Environment and Regulation agreed to bring back a report to a future meeting of the Committee.

The Head of Environment and Regulation indicated that all cleansing schedules for the Biffa contract were posted on the Council's website and were available to the public. The Chair in response asked if this information could be simplified for the benefit of the general public.

It was noted that even though the Council had allocated a further £400,000 from the budget to move to monthly 'entry' cleansing, the Committee had requested a more enhanced service and rapid response and was allocated a further £20,000.

The Constituency Manager indicated that the requests for a more enhanced service and a rapid response were being explored.

The Head of Environment and Regulation explained that in relation to private land, once the land owner had been established, officers were able to serve notices or put a charge on them to clean up the land which they owned.

A member of the public thanked the Head of Environment and Regulation and his officers for their work they had undertaken to clear the refuse left by builders in Circular Road and asked if officers could help clear another property at Circular Road which had been left empty and was now overrun with rubbish and rats.

A Member expressed a view that despite additional funding being allocated to a project to enhance the cleansing of the area they had not seen a dramatic improvement and asked if the Committee would be allowed to approach social enterprise to assist with cleansing alongside the work undertaken by Biffa.

In response, the Head of Legal and Member Services indicated that as long as the two contracts did not overlap and social enterprise could offer best value, the Committee could approach them. The Head of Legal and Member Services suggested that in line with the Contract Procedure Rules, the Committee could invite Expression of Interest.

The Committee agreed to progress this project as a matter of urgency and report back to the next meeting of the Committee.

In response to the questions and comments made by Members, the Head of Environment and Regulation indicated that the funding of £20,000 could be used in a productive way, for example tackling areas of private land as the Biffa contract covered adopted highway only. He suggested that the Committee could add value by using resources for services that Biffa did not provide.

It was suggested and agreed that a Task and Finish Group be set up to progress the Committees recommendations from a previous meeting as a matter of urgency.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the progress of the borough wide environmental campaigns to tackle waste related issues as outlined in Section 2 within the report be noted;**
- (2) the enhanced initiatives and associated costs available to the Constituency Committee as outlined in appendix 1 to the report be noted ;**
- (3) Officers be requested to submit costings to the Committee for any alternatives to the suggested enhanced initiatives outlined; and**
- (4) a Task and Finish Group be set up to progress the Committee's recommendations as a matter of urgency.**

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