

CONSTITUENCY COMMITTEE - BIRKENHEAD

Thursday, 5 October 2017

Present:

Councillor G Davies (Chair)

Councillors	A Brighthouse	J Stapleton
	P Davies	P Cleary
	WJ Davies	B Kenny
	S Foulkes	P Doughty
	T Norbury	A Davies
	D Realey	S Kelly

13 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT- DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Steve Foulkes declared a personal interest in all items contained within the agenda by virtue of any reference being made to Magenta Living of which he is a Board Member.

14 CHAIRS WELCOME

The Chair welcomed Members and the members of the public present to the meeting and thanked them all for their attendance.

Introducing the new venue, he highlighted the rationale behind the change in venue indicating that it was felt that it would be more beneficial to hold meetings within the different wards which in turn would improve attendances and be more accessible to residents and allow for ward based matters to be discussed.

In relation to the published agenda he proposed with the agreement of the Committee to a slight change in the running order and suggested that all presentations be dealt with first.

15 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C Meaden, J McManus, A McLachlan, M McLaughlin and G Wood.

16 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Birkenhead Constituency Committee held on 14 June, 2017, be agreed as a correct record.

17 **PRESENTATION - OXTON IN BLOOM**

The Committee considered a verbal presentation from John Booth, Oxton in Bloom updating on the current activities in relation to the up and coming 'In Bloom' competition.

He highlighted some of the work that had been undertaken within Oxton which included the installation of an automatic water system.

Mr Booth indicated that last year's competition Oxton had received the 'Outstanding' Award and he was confident that this would be repeated this year.

There would be 26 entries in the competition.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chair thanked all groups and volunteers involved in the 'in Bloom' competition for their continued effort, commitment and excellent work undertaken so far which had contributed to making areas within the Borough more attractive.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) Mr Booth be thanked for his presentation; and**
- (2) the Committee's thanks be extended to all groups and volunteers involved in the 'in Bloom' competition for their continued effort, commitment and excellent work undertaken so far which had contributed to making areas within the Borough more attractive.**

18 **PRESENTATION - THE SILVERBACK PROJECT**

The Committee considered a presentation from Mr D Prescott, Wirral Ways to Recovery on the Silverback Project.

The project was established in response to a crisis in masculinity and poor life expectancy for men in Birkenhead and other parts of the Wirral.

Working in partnership with the Wirral Ways to Recovery, the majority of men who attended the project were in recovery from a form of addiction.

Inspired by the Men's Shed Movement and the Soulwork Movement in America the project worked on a two pronged approach which included practical training, skills sharing and development and the "Male Journey"

Mr Prescott highlighted the future plans for the project which included a formalised constitution; workshop and soul space based at the Livingstone;

grants and bids for funding; provision of training opportunities; social enterprise schemes and development of the Soulwork Programme.

Attending alongside Mr Prescott, representatives from the centre gave an account of their experiences of both working with people at the centre and how attending the centre had helped them along their recovery journey and built up their self-esteem.

In response to Members, Mr Prescott indicated that the project was in need of tools and materials which could be used for various projects.

Members congratulated Mr Prescott on the amazing work undertaken by the Silverback Project helping turning lives around.

It was suggested that the work and activities be advertised in the Wirral View.

RESOLVED:

That Mr Prescott and representatives from the Silverback Project be thanked for their informative presentation and the Committee's thanks and best wishes be conveyed to all involved.

19 **PRESENTATION - N/COMPASS**

The Committee considered a verbal presentation from Mr John Cotcher, updating on the work, current activities and future plan undertaken by N/Compass.

Mr Cotcher indicated that N/Compass was based at the St James Centre providing advocacy services across Wirral.

The Hub provided general Advocacy, independent Mental Health Advocacy (including DoLs and RPR) independent Mental Capacity Advocacy; Care Act Advocacy and a Single Point of Contact.

Available during office hours, advocates aimed to support professionals in upholding their duty to refer into statutory advocacy and provide easy access for clients.

Advocates provide assistance to people by helping to give them a voice and they are an independent body with no agenda of their own and assist people to advise organisations as to what support they require. They offer support and guidance to people when accessing services and attend organisational meetings. They also take notes of proceedings to ensure all that is discussed is understood. The service was free and covered primarily health and social care.

In response to Members questions, Mr Cotcher indicated that the residents should be signposted to the service via the free national number detailed on the website. Advocates were employed paid members of staff. He welcomed those volunteers who could help in shaping the service going forward.

In relation to Universal Credit, Mr Cotcher indicated that advocates were not currently able to provide support to those people applying for Universal Credit and highlighted the difficulty people may face when going through the process in particular in relation to those people who may struggle to obtain a bank account without support which would massively disadvantage people.

RESOLVED:

That Mr Cotcher be thanked for his informative update.

20 **PRESENTATION - SELECTIVE LICENSING**

The Committee considered a presentation from Mr Steven Bowers, Senior Housing Standards Officer updating Members on selective licensing.

In introducing the selective licensing scheme, Mr Bowers explained that the scheme had been introduced due to poor property conditions; a growing private rented sector; high levels of health deprivation and empty properties; low rental values/ lower house prices; high tenancy turnover and property based crime.

He highlighted the method used to prioritise area suitability which had been subsequently agreed by Cabinet along with scoring criteria which was based on low demand, which was the main driver of Wirral's scheme.

The Scheme commenced in July 2015 in the following areas; Birkenhead South, Egerton North, Seacombe Library and Egremont Promenade South. Approximately 3,108 properties were identified, 41% of which were privately rented; 1326 licenses were granted in the licenced areas; 623 were granted in Birkenhead Constituency and 450 properties accredited in Selective Licensing areas.

Highlighting the consequence of failing to obtain a licence Mr Bowers indicated that this would incur unlimited fines with a possible criminal conviction; to date there had been 25 individual prosecutions for failure to obtain a licence and associated Housing Act offences and further prosecutions were pending.

In relation to compliance checks, it was reported that in total 340 such checks had been completed; of these only 23% met the minimum standard; informal notices had been issued for 63% of properties with enforcement notices served on 14% of properties and 2 Prohibition Orders served.

Mr Bowers reported that funding for the Healthy Homes Team was secured until March 2020 and highlighted some of the assistance work undertaken by the team which included; free home safety checks; referrals to support services; tenancy support; cosy homes heating grants; solid wall installation and empty property grants.

Concluding his presentation, Mr Bowers highlighted future developments which included pursuance of unlicensed properties; continual compliance checks; possible introduction of civil penalties; continual monitoring and evaluation of existing schemes and a feasibility study.

Members congratulated Mr Bowers and his team on their hard work on such an excellent scheme which improved the standard of properties in the Borough.

In response to Members questions, Mr Bowers indicated that landlords whose properties fall outside of the designated area and were subject to compliance would be dealt with by officers within the Environmental Health team and could face prosecution.

The Chair indicated that in relation to HMO's (Houses of Multiple Occupancy) discussions were ongoing in relation to policies to consider such planning applications of these types of properties.

RESOLVED:

The Committee thanked Mr Bowers for his attendance and his informative report and the Committee's thanks be conveyed to all officers involved in the introduction of such an excellent scheme.

21 **BIRKENHEAD CONSTITUENCY COMMITTEE**

The Birkenhead Constituency Committee Manager presented her report that provided an update on progress in relation to agreed schemes of work from the budget devolved to the Constituency Committee to date. The report also provided details of other Birkenhead Constituency Committee neighbourhood projects.

The Constituency Manager introduced Emma Wilkies from Beaconsfield Centre who gave an update on the work undertaken in relation to the "in Bloom" competition.

Emma indicated that work on "Beaconsfield in Bloom" had continued from the hard work undertaken on last year's entry. Work has been undertaken on the outdoor space and the area had been cleaned and areas cleared and planted with the assistance of the Environment and Street Cleansing teams and with the help of the local community.

She reported that an area in Rock Ferry had been adopted to make improvements to its appearance and made a request to Members for a notice board and benches for the area.

Neighbourhood Engagement Officer updated Members on the gardening project undertaken at the HIVE. Mr Brannan indicated that work had been undertaken to transform land between the fire station and the HIVE. Help had been received from officers from the Fire Authority, Council, Birkenhead Constituency and Ward Councillors. The project was almost complete and ready for the young people to use.

The Constituency Manager provided a verbal summary and update on progress for each item of report that included:

- Birkenhead In Bloom – Proposed projects to be undertaken for the 2017 Competition. All groups had been invited to the North West in Bloom Awards in Southport on 3rd November 2017.
- Community Partnership Days – Proved very successful, working in partnership with the Police, Fire and other partners. Areas have now seen a significant improvement. No flytipping had been reported in Beaconsfield and the skip tonnage had seen a reduction.
- The ‘Community Pay Back’ Team - A programme of alleyway week clearing and cleansing for Birkenhead had been delivered by the Community Pay Back team in particular in the Rock Ferry area. Wirral Ways to Recovery had assisted in the clear up work in Water Street. A clean-up day was planned for Larch Grove.
- Birkenhead in Bloom 2017 - 16 awards had been won at the RHS North West in Bloom competition last year with Oxtun winning the cup. There were a number of proposed projects planned and the aim was to submit more applications and build on current projects.
- Rock Ferry Food Hub – Neo at The Beaconsfield Centre – An update was provided in respect of, Neo at The Beaconsfield Centre. A number of projects had been successfully delivered during school holidays, before or after school. There was growing demand in need and the centre was getting more volunteers and requests from people wanting to help. Representatives had attended two National Conferences highlighting work undertaken. The Asset Transfer Plan would be completed by November 2017.

RESOLVED:

That the progress and updates set out in the Constituency Manager’s report be noted.

22 **PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

The Chair referred to a number of pre-raised questions that had been received by the Committee and the responses provided as appended to the minutes.

Councillor Doughty asked if Balls Road East could be included on the Community Clean Up days.

Birkenhead Constituency Committee

Pre-raised questions for 5th October 2017.

1 Name: John Conlan

Date Received: 3rd September

Query: The EU has imposed a noise restriction, requiring new vacuum cleaners not to exceed 80 decibels ! I do wish the same legislation could be imposed on the high performance cars, motor-bikes, and scooters, belting up and down the roads of Birkenhead at all hours. When I was young the police would soon pull you over, and advise you to put the baffles back into the exhaust pipe, or else! How times have changed.

Response from Merseyside Police:

Currently there are no restrictions specifically on noise from vehicles. The police have powers to stop any vehicles that they consider to be driven in an anti-social manner and regularly carry out campaigns such as Operation Brookdale response to the anti-social use of scrambler and motor bike usage. The police have powers under the Road Traffic Act and Police Reform Act to seize any vehicle being driven / used in an anti-social manner. The location of any vehicles being driven in such a manner is high on the police's agenda and constantly asking for information and evidence relating to their location.

A section of the Road Traffic Act covers defective vehicles. If a vehicle was especially noisy and the police suspected it was defect in some way they have the powers to stop the vehicle and challenge the owner on the road worthiness of the vehicle.

2 Name: Steven Everard.

Date Received: 3rd September

Query: Why are the roads in Birkenhead / Bebington so bad. B5149 New Chester Rd from Kings Lane to St Plessington School is an absolute joke.

Kids are back to school next week some on their bikes and for 4 years they have to dodge pot holes and poor road surface. I sent this email so that when someone is hurt or killed because of the poor road surface you can't say you were not told. I have complained about this part of road for years.

Response from Technical Services:

Due to planned work by a utilities company it makes it impossible to carry out any repair work on the roads mentioned in the question. Once the utility company has completed its repair work, the council will commence with maintenance work to improve this section of the road network.

3) Name: Hector Birdwisa

Date Received: 3rd September

Query: Why do you have double yellow lines painted in parking bays? is it to confuse people in order to fine them?

Response from Technical Services:

In order to manager the available parking particularly in town centre location it is sometimes advantageous to have a mixture of restrictions in one area. For example: We may want to prohibit parking up to a certain time of day and this would be done with a single yellow line. However, we may also want to allow limited waiting in the same space and this would be marked out with a parking bay. The days/times of operation of the restrictions would be shown on an adjacent time plate. See example sign below that has 'No Waiting', 'No Loading' and 'Limited Waiting' at different times all in the one parking bay:



4 Name: Elizabeth Nesbitt
Date Received: 3rd September

Query: WHY HAS THE COUNCIL NOT PUT PARKING METERS ALONG THE FRONT AT NEW BRIGHTON?

ESPECIALLY NOW, WITH ALL THE CUTS THE COUNCIL HAVE TO MAKE BECAUSE OF REDUCED FUNDS FROM CENTRAL GOVERNMENT, THIS WOULD BRING IN A CONSIDERABLE AMOUNT OF REVENUE.

I KNOW I HAVE HEARD PEOPLE SAY VISITORS WOULD NOT COME IF THERE WAS PARKING CHARGES, BUT THESE CHARGES DO NOT HAVE TO BE HUGE. VISITORS DRIVE SOME DISTANCES TO COME THEY HAVE TO BUY FUEL FOR THEIR CARS DONT THEY?

ALSO, THE LARGE AMOUNT OF CAMPERS PARKING AGAIN FREE OF CHARGE.

Response from Wirral Council:

Options are currently being reviewed with regards to these matters.

5 Name: Stephen Fletcher
Date Received: 2nd September

Query: This is a beautiful road (Vyner Road North) which is now being use a litter dump for McDonalds and KFC customers, particular around the access point at Bidston Hill. Could we not install a litter bin and see if the amount of litter dropped reduces? Another possibility is to install some digital cameras to catch and penalise the culprits. The situation is getting worse and worse

Response from Wirral Council:

Vyner Road North is on a 12 weekly street cleansing schedule for litter and detritus, the last cleanse on the 15th September was completed to standard. A number of elements must be taken into consideration when committing to the removal, replacement or the installation of new litter bins. The Department works to a specific criteria which must be met to justify the cost of a litter bin installation. Currently the road is not one of the council's hot spot areas for litter and because of this it does not hit the required criteria for a litter bin to be installed. You can report to the council online a hot spot area for litter please follow the link <https://www.wirral.gov.uk/environmental-problems/street-care-and-cleaning/littering>

6 Name; Leonard Griffiths

Date Received: 13th September

Query: What can be done by the council to ban/remove people who are sitting in the Grange Road /Pyramids area's covered with blankets/sleeping bags, and begging for money; they appear from 9.00 am and pick up their bed clothing at 5.30pm and disappear; are these YOUNG PEOPLE really homeless? It is giving the town a down trodden image; these are young fit people who dont want to work and would rather get handouts from the people of Wirral; I do not visit the town centre anymore because of this ; 10 years ago these people were not to be found ,so why have they suddenly sprouted up? Surely the council can appoint an officer to move them on and provide a patrol of the shopping area from 9.00- 5.30; there are enough traffic wardens so why not dispense with one and appoint an officer?

Response from Merseyside Police:

Currently there is no legislation to combat homeless people form sitting in the street with the Police only having powers to address people begging, i.e. actively asking people for money / spare change. The Police and its partners have noticed an increase in the number of people in the town centre and in partnership with other services as part of a Town Centre group, have launched a scheme to educate shoppers and people about contributing to the issue by simply giving these individuals their spare change because they feel sorry for them.

A number of leaflets have been printed and distributed to assist with this. The economic climate has definitely had an impact but it is not uncommon for individuals to make around £100 a day without 'begging' per se. The police will use enforcement where possible and the offence of begging has been committed by using plain clothed operations to target these individuals. Recently there have been 3 criminal behaviour orders issued to individuals by the Wirral Anti-Social Behaviour Team for begging in Birkenhead and we actively look to enforce the conditions of these.

The police and its partners on the Town Centre Group will continue to take action to address the problem using the legislation available to them.

7 Name; Alan Dollery

Date Received: 22nd September

Query: As Chairman of the Prenton Tenants and Residents Association (PTRA), I would like to ask the meeting to re-consider their actions they took when I first brought this issue to their attention.

The issue is about the weeds that have been growing regularly in the gutters, and on the pavements, around our shopping area in Prenton Hall Road. (also in other surrounding areas I might add.)

However, our shopping area situated in Prenton Hall Road is a major thoroughfare, through the heart of the Prenton Dell Estate, therefore a very busy area with all types of traffic passing through.

We have people from the community doing their daily shopping, people traveling on buses, and drivers passing through the area, and what do they see? Weeds in abundance they are growing wild and freely in and around this area.

This is not what the PTRA want people to see, the PTRA don't want people to think that their area is being neglected or not being looked after, or worse that the PTRA is failing in their commitment to the community by making sure that the area we live in is respectable and gets the attention if and when required, as most residents do pay Council taxes.

The PTRA are also aware of the cut backs the council have to make, but in this situation it is dangerous for volunteers to attempt any clearance of these weeds by standing in the busy road, no, unfortunately I feel that is a professionals job and with barriers, and weed treatment is not the answer either.

Response from Wirral Council:

Increase in weeds in residential areas is a problem faced by many local authorities. One of the main reasons for this is due to the changes made in legislation which states which herbicides can and cannot be used in residential areas.

In approximately 2007/2008 legislation was changed to state that residual weed killers, which stayed within the soil system killing weeds as they germinated, could no longer be used resulting in only a Glyphosate based Herbicide being available, this type of Herbicide is classed as a Systemic herbicide. Not only did residual weed killer kill active weeds it also suppressed the growth of new weeds. Systemic Herbicides weed killer can only kill the weeds it comes into contact with (Green part of the plant). Because of this systemic weed killer does not suppress new growth meaning that a road or highway could be sprayed with Systemic Herbicide weed killer one day yet new weeds could grow the next day and continue to grow until the next

scheduled spray approx. 12 weeks later weather dependant but each inclement weather day extends the scheduled date further back a week.

Trials are taking place to identify the most effective systemic weed killer available. It is recognised that weeds in residential area has increased, however the council is trialling methods of tackling the issue with the current perimeters set by legislation and budget options.
