

BUSINESS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 22 January 2019

Present: Councillor P Hackett (Chair)

Councillors J Stapleton D Mitchell
J Bird J Robinson
C Blakeley T Usher
T Cox KJ Williams
D Elderton S Williams
J McManus

Deputy: Councillor B Berry (In place of K Hodson)

Apologies Councillor C Spriggs

35 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Kathy Hodson who had a deputy standing in for her and from Councillor Christine Spriggs.

36 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST / PARTY WHIP

Members were asked to consider whether they had any disclosable pecuniary interests and/or any other relevant interest in connection with any item(s) on this agenda and, if so, to declare them and state the nature of the interest.

Members were reminded that they should also declare 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.

No such declarations were received.

37 MINUTES

Members were requested to receive the minutes of the Business Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 28 November, 2018.

Councillor Chris Blakeley asked that the minutes be amended to show Councillor Pat Hackett's name in the 'Apologies' section of the minutes.

Resolved – That, subject to the alteration above, the minutes of the meeting held on 28 November, 2019, be approved.

IMPACT OF CAR PARKING CHARGES IN COUNTRY PARKS - UPDATE

Steve Atkins, Parking Services Manager, introduced a report which provided an update on the income generated from parking charges at the Country Parks.

Since charging was introduced in the week commencing 22 January 2018, the total income received up to 31 December 2018 was £168,000. This included £27,100 from the sale of 542 annual parking permits. The annual parking permits could be used in any vehicle and in any of the Country Parks so represented value for money for regular park users. The total number of transactions (parking tickets purchased) was approximately 139,000 for the same period. This patronage at car parks didn't directly reflect on visitor numbers as driving / parking habits might have changed since the introduction of the parking charges.

To date £100,000 had been spent or committed to maintenance and improvements at the Country Parks which could be related to car parking, e.g. resurfacing of the car park at Arrove Country Park.

These proposals had met the predicted increased income to the Council of £150,000 p.a. which had been included in the Council budget for future years.

If parking charges were removed from the Country Parks then this would result in a deficit in the Council's approved financial plan for future years of over £150,000 which would need to be covered by compensatory savings or income from other service areas.

Further information had also been circulated to the Committee which included a comparison of the estimated / predicted costs with the actual outcomes and this information was up to and including 18 January, 2019.

The report recommended that the contents were noted, that charging for parking at the Country Parks remained and that the impact of the charges on traffic management issues was continually monitored.

Councillor Chris Blakeley stated that the Conservative Group was totally opposed to car parking charges in country parks as the Council should be encouraging people to attend parks and open spaces to benefit the physical and mental health of residents.

A Member commented upon the detrimental impact to businesses at Eastham Country Park and that not one business in the vicinity had been contacted by the Authority.

Another Member suggested that visitor numbers should be looked at over the next 3 years or so to see if numbers increased or decreased. Council policies

were not made in isolation and the country parks did need a certain amount of upkeep which could be paid for through the parking charges.

Responding to comments from Members, Steve Atkins stated that with regard to Wirral Country Park at Thurstaston, the only contact he had had was from the Park Rangers and the owner of the coffee shop but not in respect of any negative impact of the parking charges. With regard to visitor number statistics there had been approximately 146,500 transactions through the pay and display machines but these were not an indication of visitor numbers. It would be possible to undertake some visitor number surveys. There had been no formal assessment on the impact on businesses but there were ways and means to offer support to businesses.

A Member commented upon the discrepancy between some areas of Wirral, such as New Brighton and the Croft Retail Park not having any parking charges and other areas where there were charges. There was a need to encourage the use of public transport and for an increase in the areas accessible by public transport which would discourage the use of cars and be healthier for the environment.

Another Member referred to the need to look at the effect on businesses of reduced footfall from the car parking charges and that if businesses closed the Council would suffer a loss of business rates.

Councillor Dave Mitchell then moved –

“Committee notes that the findings reported in section 3.7 and 3.8 relate to firm opinions expressed at a meeting between local business owners, ward members and Councillor Sullivan (the then Chair of this Committee) on 11 July, 2018.

Committee also now appreciates the diversion of parking in other locations in the vicinity of the country park, has continued with the impact on Ferry Road, increased usage of the Leverhulme Pavilion car park and locations such as Torr Drive, Tebay Road (and within the car park of B&M) plus Riverwood Road.

Committee must understand the adverse effect that this has had on the local businesses who add so much to the visitor economy.

Committee recommends to Cabinet that the impact on the local business community should now be given the same consideration as other areas where plans for charges were dropped due to their impact.”

The motion was not seconded.

It was moved by Councillor Tom Usher, seconded by Councillor Jean Stapleton, that –

“(1) Committee notes that the considerations of residents and local businesses and their contribution to the local economy should be valued and given serious consideration in any decision.

(2) The committee notes that the country car parking charges have operated for a year and commits to monitoring the effects of country car parking charges in the coming months.

(3) Committee recommends that the Cabinet look at ways in which the effects of the country car parking charges can be minimised for local businesses and residents. We ask that any business support be given in order to assist with the transition and that the highways department look at implementing measures to ease the effects on the roads around country parks. We also ask that the extension of public transport to country parks be looked at.”

It was moved as an amendment by Councillor Chris Blakeley and seconded by Councillor Steve Williams, that –

“This Committee notes that the introduction of parking charges at our country parks has had a negative impact on visitors which has had a knock effect on business.

This Committee notes that the loss of income if charges were scrapped could be recovered by ceasing the production and distribution of its newspaper, the Wirral View.

Therefore this Committee requests Cabinet / Council to scrap parking charges at Wirral’s country parks and make up the shortfall in revenue by ceasing production and distribution of the Wirral View to ensure our country parks can be accessed by all free of charge.”

The amendment was put and lost (6:7). (Councillors Bruce Berry, Chris Blakeley, Tony Cox, David Elderton and Steve Williams voting in favour – Councillor Chris Blakeley having requested that the Conservative Members’ votes be recorded)

The motion was put and carried (7:6).

Resolved – That –

(1) Committee notes that the considerations of residents and local businesses and their contribution to the local economy should be valued and given serious consideration in any decision.

(2) The committee notes that the country car parking charges have operated for a year and commits to monitoring the effects of country car parking charges in the coming months.

(3) Committee recommends that the Cabinet look at ways in which the effects of the country car parking charges can be minimised for local businesses and residents. We ask that any business support be given in order to assist with the transition and that the highways department look at implementing measures to ease the effects on the roads around country parks. We also ask that the extension of public transport to country parks be looked at.

39 **INVESTMENT AND CHANGE BOARD AND THE NEW COMMERCIAL IDEAS PANEL**

The Chair introduced Shaer Halewood, Director of Finance and Investment, who gave a presentation on the Investment and Change Board and the New Commercial Ideas Panel.

The Board had been established to:

- provide strategic and corporate oversight of all major projects
- ensure projects were coordinated and all stakeholders cited
- discuss ideas for investment and change projects at their inception to determine whether to progress further
- agree requests for investment
- ensure effective decision making
- ensure reports and business cases were of the right content for Members to make an informed decision
- take an overall view on the Council's exposure to risk

Previous items discussed by the Board included:

- Birkenhead Commercial District
- Wirral Waters programme
- Significant strategic acquisitions e.g. Cinema in Birkenhead and New Ferry
- Investment for new cultural activities

In response to Members' comments Shaer Halewood stated that no additional staff had been employed to sit on the Board. What had been in place before had been fit for purpose but now the Council was involved in many more significantly large projects it was felt the need for more oversight and good governance should be put in place with the Board. Business cases had always been completed in their own areas but she had found the need for consistency in the production of business cases, particularly in relation to large projects, such as Wirral Waters, would be best practice and the introduction of this Board had enabled this.

Philip McCourt, Director of Governance and Assurance concurred that this was best practice and the introduction of the Board enabled advice on projects to be given in one place providing greater understanding across the authority and a gateway for officers to seek advice in one place.

Responding to further comments Shaer Halewood stated that as the Section 151 Officer she had a responsibility to ensure the Council's budget was balanced and accurate and that it was. The Council had to go through a difficult and painful process to balance its budget with reduced Government funding and did not have any money to spare. She also explained the difference between capital and revenue funding and that capital funding could be used to buy assets but not to run services. With the very low interest rates currently the Council could borrow money very cheaply and assets could be bought to provide an income stream, which could then be used to fund the day-to-day running of services.

Another Member suggested the need for the wider public to be given the opportunity to put forward ideas through such a Board for generating and retaining wealth within the community.

Responding to more comments, Shaer Halewood stated that the Board would be looking at proposals for a potential golf resort in the borough. She also outlined the internal reporting mechanisms for any projects which would be taken forward. Some of the projects being taken forward would then appear on the Forward Plan and there was always the opportunity for pre-decision scrutiny. Projects could be considered for their social value also as the proposals brought forward did not have to be solely about commercial value.

A Member queried the use of acronyms in the Terms of Reference for the Investment and Change Board, which had been circulated to the Committee and suggested a key be attached listing the acronyms and their meaning. He also suggested that the document be placed in the public domain.

Shaer Halewood agreed to provide a list of acronyms with the Terms of Reference, which would be published with the minutes.

Resolved – That the presentation and comments of Members be noted.

40 **BUDGET PROPOSALS SCRUTINY WORKSHOP REPORT**

A report from the Chair presented the findings of the Business Overview and Scrutiny Committee workshop in relation to scrutinising the 2019/20 budget proposals. A workshop had been held on 11 December, 2018 for Members to explore in more detail the four budget proposals which the Chair and Party Spokespersons had prioritised for further scrutiny and which fell under the remit of this committee. These were:

- Benefits of Economic Regeneration
- Disposal of Marine Point Freehold
- Asset Management – Capital Receipts
- Treasury Management

The Committee was requested to acknowledge this report as its response to the 2019/2020 budget proposals to be referred on to Cabinet as part of its considerations in developing any budget recommendation to Council.

The workshop report had noted the key points made by both Members and officers in attendance. No objections to the four proposals were raised at the workshop. Members of the Conservative Party in attendance reiterated their view that the scrutiny of the budget proposals should be held in public at a formal committee meeting and no opinion on those proposals presented at the workshop was given.

The Chair commented further that unfortunately the workshop didn't work too well as there was not enough time to discuss all of the information and that out of a number of budget proposals these had had to be whittled down to just four. A number of Members had not been able to make the workshop for a variety of reasons, including another workshop being held on the same evening and the workshop being called at very short notice.

Councillor Dave Mitchell asked for Councillor Allan Brame's name to be recorded in the Scrutiny Report as he understood that he had attended in place of himself.

Responding to Members' comments, Shaer Halewood agreed to provide a written response in respect of the question on Dominic House as to how long it had been empty, why the freehold and not the leasehold were proposed for sale and if there had been any expressions of interest from private or voluntary sectors for alternative uses for the building. With regard to a replacement Corporate Director for Economic and Housing Growth, she commented that the Corporate Director for Business Management was currently acting in this role and arrangements were being looked at as to how to replace this role.

A Member queried why the workshops did not appear in the diary and suggested that in future they should be full committee meetings. Another Member suggested that budget workshops should not be held in public.

It was then moved by the Chair and seconded by Councillor Jerry Williams, that –

“(1) Committee agrees to note the report but that the wording, ‘No objections to these four proposals were raised at the workshop’ be removed from the conclusions section.

(2) The Committee felt that they were not able to give due and proper consideration to the matters before them at the workshop because:

- More information needs to be forthcoming in advance.
- The timetable is too short and puts too much pressure on Members and officers to allow full and proper scrutiny.
- Due to Members’ other commitments it meant it was impossible to make a full and informed analysis of the proposals before them.

(3) Committee therefore asks Cabinet to take note of the comments of the Business Overview and Scrutiny Committee.”

Following advice from the Director of Governance and Assurance in respect of amendments and motions, it was then moved as an amendment by Councillor Chris Blakeley and seconded by Councillor Steve Williams, that –

“This Committee feels that the workshop was not able to give full and proper consideration to the matters before it because:

1. Not enough information was forthcoming.
2. The timetable is too short.
3. Committee does not believe a workshop held in private is right and proper and these important matters should be held in an open and transparent manner.

Committee therefore informs the Cabinet that it is unable to make any budget recommendations.”

The amendment was put and lost (4:8).

The motion was put and carried (7:4) (One abstention).

Resolved –

(1) Committee agrees to note the report but that the wording, ‘No objections to these four proposals were raised at the workshop’ be removed from the conclusions section.

(2) The Committee felt that they were not able to give due and proper consideration to the matters before them at the workshop because:

- **More information needs to be forthcoming in advance.**

- The timetable is too short and puts too much pressure on Members and officers to allow full and proper scrutiny.
- Due to Members' other commitments it meant it was impossible to make a full and informed analysis of the proposals before them.

(3) Committee therefore asks Cabinet to take note of the comments of the Business Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

41 **UPDATE ON LIVERPOOL CITY REGION DEVELOPMENTS**

Rose Boylan, Policy and Strategy Manager, introduced a report and gave a presentation setting out a brief overview of latest developments at the Liverpool City Region (LCR). A wide range of activity continued and the report highlighted a small extract of these, which included:

- A proposed LCR Cycling and walking network
- Year of the Environment 2019
- Inclusive Growth
- Potential implications of Brexit

Responding to comments from Members, Rose Boylan stated that Members would be invited to take part in workshops on inclusive growth and Shaer Halewood agreed to provide a figure on the cost of Wirral's Local Community Wealth Building Project. With regard to Brexit, Mark Camborne, Lead Commissioner for Community Services and Resilience, was leading on this for the Council.

Rose Boylan agreed to circulate the presentation to all the Committee members.

Councillor Jean Stapleton reported upon her work on the Liverpool City Region Scrutiny Committee and two of the workshops which the Scrutiny Committee had held recently, including one on EU funding post Brexit and its impact on the LCR and one on the effectiveness of careers education.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

42 **HIGHWAYS AND TRAFFIC REPRESENTATION PANEL MINUTES**

The Committee were requested to note the minutes of the Highways and Traffic Representation Panel meeting held on 17 December, 2018 regarding a proposal for car parking restrictions on Memorial Drive and Archway Close, Tranmere.

Councillor Steve Williams, Chair of the Panel, addressed the Committee and referred to press reports on the matter after the Panel had met which suggested that the objectors who had attended the Panel were not in the

majority and that residents of the new estate were in favour of match day restrictions on parking. He proposed that officers monitor the parking issues in a shorter period of time than originally agreed by the Panel and that officers discuss the matter with the ward councillors.

Resolved – That the minutes be noted and the suggestion of Councillor Steve Williams be agreed.

43 **BUSINESS O&S COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee considered a report from the Chair which explained the process of developing and managing a scrutiny work programme for the current municipal year. The report updated the Committee on the current status of items on the work programme.

An update was also provided on the Liverpool City Region Overview and Scrutiny Committee which had convened its first two scrutiny workshops in December, 2018.

The Chair proposed that the work programme be kept as it was and that an item on Muse and the Wirral Growth Company would be on the agenda for 5 March meeting.

A Member suggested the need to add a date in for the New Ferry disaster item on the work programme.

The Chair suggested that this matter be delegated to the Party Spokespersons and himself to agree a date with the Member as to when this would be scheduled.

In response to a comment from a Member, Philip McCourt, Director of Governance and Assurance reported that with regard to the Wirral Growth Company agreement, Muse's Board had yet to sign this off, although they were due to meet by the end of the month and once they had agreement, in the same way that Cabinet would give approval, the agreement would come into effect.

Resolved – That the Business Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programme be approved for 2018/19, taking account of the comments above.

Appendix to minute 39 - Terms of Reference for Investment and Change Board