

BUSINESS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 17 September 2019

Present: Councillor D Mitchell (Chair)

Councillors J Bird J Walsh
T Cox G Watt
M Collins KJ Williams
A Gardner S Williams

Deputies: Councillors S Jones (In place of S Foulkes)
C Muspratt (In place of G Davies)
T Norbury (In place of K Greaney)
P Stuart (In place of J Stapleton)

16 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors George Davies, Steve Foulkes, Karl Greaney and Jean Stapleton, all of whom had deputies standing in for them.

17 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 made.

18 MINUTES

Members were requested to receive the minutes of the Business Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings held on 27 June and 4 July, 2019.

Resolved – That the minutes of the meetings held on 27 June and 4 July, 2019, be approved.

19 NEW FERRY - A REPORT ON THE INCIDENT AND THE ACUTE AND RECOVERY PHASES

Mark Camborne, Lead Commissioner, Community Services and Resilience, introduced a report and gave David Ball's apologies to the Committee, as he was unwell. The report evaluated the role played by the Council, the

emergency services and other key stakeholders in respect of the gas explosion in New Ferry in March 2017. In particular, the level of effectiveness of the Council and its partners during the respective acute and recovery phases.

In addition the report provided an update on the Council and its key strategic partners' role in leading the current regeneration phase and any next steps.

During considerable discussion on the report, Mark Camborne, David Armstrong (Assistant Chief Executive) and Ray Squire (Economic Projects Manager) responded to questions and their comments included:

- An explanation as to how a 'major incident' could be declared and this could be by any agency. Mark Camborne, as one of the first Council officers to arrive on the scene, had defaulted to the Chief Fire Officer who was there and was dealing with the acute phase of the incident and was in essence the lead officer at the scene with control of the site.
- There was a meeting of people on site at the time but he would not class this as a typical Strategic Coordinating Group, which would meet in a designated command and control centre, such as at Bridle Road.
- Council officers provided what was requested by the Chief Fire Officer, such as closure of roads and the removal of some rubble to clear a pathway through the site whilst remaining mindful that the police would need to investigate the incident too. Once the Chief Fire Officer had been provided with all that the Council could provide Mark Camborne and David Armstrong then went to help at the Life Centre church where people had been displaced to.
- Upwards of £400,000 had been spent on demolition work, with much of the rubble and timber being removed to the site of the former Rock Ferry High School where a crushing plant was already in place to deal with demolition work taking place there.
- Progress had been made with regard to negotiations for the acquisition of properties affected by the explosion, although some negotiations were more protracted than others.
- With regard to health provision there were clear tried and tested plans in place and with the reception centre having been set up at the Life Church, Bebington, ambulance crews and medics were in that facility for the first 24/36 hours dealing with people who presented at the Life Church. People also presented at Walk-In centres and Accident and Emergency, an immediate concern was dealing with shock.
- In the medium to long term it was hoped people would refer to their own GP in respect of mental health issues and he was also aware that health representatives were present at most, if not all, the public meetings which had taken place during the recovery phase.
- Through the emergency planning process, the on-call Gold Commander for the NHS was aware of the incident and they put plans in place to deal with the incident, and there were medical practitioners there to deal with

the acute phase. It was acknowledged that maybe more could have been done by the health service in terms of help with mental health issues that may have arisen. People were seen to in ambulances on a one to one basis.

- The Council officers did provide support on a practical level but the health needs were more appropriately provided by medical practitioners.
- With regard to the condition of the site, the Council did not own any of it so permission was required from landowners and it would have been better if the Council had been able to improve the site sooner but negotiations had to take place with owners of some buildings, which had to be cleared out first, prior to demolition.
- With regard to ongoing mental health services provision this would need to be asked of the mental health service for them to address if there were to be any future incidents.
- With regard to consultation a number of senior officers did spend some time with people affected by the incident listening to the positive aspects of the Council's response along with comments on what the Council could learn. David Ball, Assistant Director Major Growth Projects and Housing Delivery, had also spent several months in the area feeding information back to the Council.
- Council staff who attended the site did have access to the Employee Assistance Programme through which they could access confidential counselling services. Formal debriefing sessions had also been held along with informal discussions between officers.
- The Council would accept a learning point of latent recovery from mental health trauma and there were reviews taking place across a city region level in terms of resilience planning.
- There were still engagement officers in the area and an engagement plan, albeit unwritten, had been executed. If improvements were required as to how this was carried out then this would be addressed.
- The Council had addressed the incident in the best way it could with reduced resources and with reduced access to facilities which ten or more years ago would have been at the Council's disposal (i.e. a significantly reduced workforce and schools, now academy trusts, which the Council no longer had control over).

All Members thanked all the officers involved for all their work on the night of the devastating event and over the months to follow.

The Chair referred to Members' comments, many of which were addressed in the Merseyside Resilience Forum debrief reports and which could be picked up by a future working party on the matter. There were nine recommendations in the multi-agencies debrief reports, two of which were for working parties in relation to the NHS and health and a further one would be picked up by this Committee in the work programme.

On a motion by the Chair, duly seconded, it was –

Resolved – That the report be noted.

20 **2019/20 QUARTER 1 WIRRAL PLAN PERFORMANCE**

Alan Evans, Interim Director for Economic and Housing Growth, introduced a report which provided the 2019/20 Quarter 1 (April – June 2019) performance report for Wirral Plan pledges under the Business theme. The Quarter 1 report was included as Appendix 1 to the report, and provided an overview of the progress in Quarter 1, including available data in relation to a range of outcome indicators and supporting measures.

Responding to comments from Members, Alan Evans commented that he would be happy to bring a report back regarding businesses which were paying the apprenticeship levy but which were not actually taking on any apprentices and how this impacted on adult learning opportunities. With regard to the Wirral Chamber of Commerce, they had a contract from the Council to provide business engagement with a number of businesses each year providing additional support and providing outreach engagement across the Wirral business base.

Members requested further information on the number of businesses which the Chamber were engaging with which were not members of the Chamber. In response, Alan Evans stated that the Chamber did engage with businesses which were not members in several key sectors. If there were particular geographical areas in which no businesses were Chamber members then he would pick this up as an action to be addressed with the Chamber

A Member also suggested that the Chamber of Commerce could attend a meeting of the Committee and give a presentation on their work.

Resolved – That the report and comments be noted.

21 **FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT OUTTURN 2018/19 AND ESTIMATE FOR QUARTER 1 2019/20**

Sarah Cox, Principal Accountant, introduced the report of the Director of Finance and Investment which set out the Council's revenue and capital monitoring position for 2019/20 quarter 1 and also the final outturn information for 2018/19.

Responding to comments from Members, Sarah Cox and Peter Molyneux, Senior Manager Corporate Finance, stated that they could provide further details on those areas where income targets were being met and those areas where they weren't. An explanation was given as to how some expenditure had been re-profiled from the 2019/20 capital programme into the 2018/19 capital programme, in effect bringing the expenditure forward and some

projects had been put back from 2018/19 to the 2019/20 programme. With regard to the shortfall in the printing service income, options were being explored to bring in income from other sources.

The Chair thanked Sarah Cox for her first presentation to the Committee and on a motion by the Chair, duly seconded, it was –

Resolved – That the report be noted.

22 **UPDATE ON LIVERPOOL CITY REGION DEVELOPMENTS**

Alan Evans, Interim Director for Economic and Housing Growth, introduced a report which set out a brief overview of the latest developments at the Liverpool City Region (LCR). This included the development of a Local Industrial Strategy; a Household into Work scheme; funding for Tower Road, Birkenhead streetscape project; LCR Town Centre Fund; funding for Eureka National Children's Museum and the first LCR Cultural Awards to be held at the Lady Lever Art Gallery in November.

In response to a comment from a Member, Alan Evans stated that there were a number of plans in place to support businesses in the event of a 'no deal' Brexit and an ongoing dialogue was taking place across the Liverpool City Region (LCR) in terms of the impact on the port at Sefton and for Twelve Quays, Wirral with a view to maximising the funding available. He also referred to the possibility of 'free port' status and what this could mean if there were some added value process through imports of goods and then some assembly process before goods then left the ports and this was being discussed at a policy stage within the LCR.

In response to a further comment, Alan Evans, stated that collaboration took place at a Liverpool City Region level on the visitor economy. He could not reference anything specifically with regard to the heritage economy that was undertaken at a City Region level apart from, if Wirral asked for certain things to be marketed then they would showcase Wirral assets across the wider City Region.

On a motion by the Chair, duly seconded, it was –

Resolved – That the report be noted.

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

The Committee considered a report from the Scrutiny Officer which explained the process of developing and managing a scrutiny work programme for the current municipal year. The report also updated the Committee on the current status of scrutiny reviews and workshops on a variety of topics. A report on the Council's scrutiny arrangements would be considered by the Standards

and Constitutional Oversight Committee at its meeting on 26 September, 2019. Councillor Lesley Rennie had agreed to chair the Camper Vans Task and Finish Scrutiny Review. A scrutiny workshop session had been held on 5 September to update Members on regeneration projects for Wirral Waters and Birkenhead Town Centre from which the view from all parties was that Members needed to see cranes on site and spades in the ground.

Councillor Jo Bird suggested that a Scrutiny Review Panel be established to look at the lessons learnt from the New Ferry explosion whilst hearing first hand from the victims and on the preparedness of the Council for disaster responses. After some debate on the potential remit of the Review Panel it was then -

Resolved –

- (1) That the contents of the Committee's Work Programme for 2019/20, be noted.**
- (2) That a Scrutiny Review Panel be established to look at the lessons to be learnt from the New Ferry incident and that dependent on the results of the review the Panel then look at a major incidents procedure and protocol.**