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TOURISM, COMMUNITIES, CULTURE & LEISURE COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 25 October 2022

Present: Councillor H Cameron (Chair)

Councillors T Smith J Johnson
S Percy J Grier
KJ Williams A Brame
I Camphor J Laing
M Collins J Bird (In place of N
Graham)

In attendance: Councillors I Lewis

28 **WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION**

The Chair welcomed attendees and viewers to the meeting and reminded everyone that the meeting was webcast and retained on the Council's website.

The Chair welcomed Councillor James Laing to his first meeting of the Committee.

29 **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Naomi Graham.

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

Members are asked to consider whether they have 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. No such interests were declared.

31 **MINUTES**

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 26 July 2022 be approved as a correct record.

32 **PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

The Chair indicated that two public questions had been received.

Mo Miller asked on which date Bromborough Civic Centre and Library were brought back into full council ownership from the Wirral Growth Company and whether or not this information was given to community groups that expressed an interest in a community asset transfer.

In response, the Chair advised that the site had always been in the ownership of Wirral Council, but as of 19 August 2022 the agreement which gave Wirral Growth Company a conditional option to purchase various sites including Bromborough Civic Centre was amended, and that this information was not given to groups expressing an interest in a Community Asset Transfer as it was not within the scope for Community Asset Transfers.

A supplementary question was then asked, advising that the land registry still showed the interest for Wirral Growth Company and asking whether, given the condition for the purchase of the Civic Centre, there was ever a way that a Community Asset Transfer could have progressed.

Following clarification from the Solicitor that the land registry records can often take time to update, the Chair advised that a written response would be provided.

Percy Hogg asked a question seeking assurance that all the items belonging to the Friends of Bromborough Library would remain in the library until the future of the library was clarified, and whether the book stock owned by library services would remain mothballed inside the library until the matter was clarified.

In response, the Chair advised that the Council would be emptying closed library buildings of their contents and any items belonging to friends groups not already removed would be safely stored pending any future decisions to be taken on asset transfers.

Following a clarification on the book stock owned by library services, the Chair referred the questioner to the minutes of the meeting held on 16 June 2022 where the original decision was taken.

The Chair outlined that a third question had been received, but in accordance with the Constitution it had been ruled out as it was materially the same as a question put within the previous six months. The Chair outlined her endorsement of the benefits of co-location of Council services and acknowledged the frustrations of a library already located within a civic centre not progressing in the recent Community Asset Transfer process, but reminded the Committee of her earlier response in relation to the previously held agreement giving Wirral Growth Company the option to purchase the site. The Chair thanked the efforts of officers in trying to keep all interested parties informed.

32.1 Statements and Petitions

The Chair indicated that no statements or petitions had been received.

33 QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS

The Chair indicated that no questions from members had been received.

34 CULTURE AND HERITAGE STRATEGY AND BOROUGH OF CULTURE PLANNING

The Senior Culture Manager introduced the report of the Director of Neighbourhood Services, which provided an update on the Culture and Heritage Strategy for Birkenhead, approved by the Committee in March, as well as detail on the proposed approach for developing plans for Wirral's next iteration as the Liverpool City Region Borough of the Culture in 2024.

The Senior Culture Manager brought members attention to the action plan for the delivery of the Culture and Heritage Strategy and Museum Services Strategy and provided an update on progress since the strategies were approved in March. This included the ongoing destination marketing project, supporting the launch of Eureka! Science and Discovery as part of an overall waterfront campaign being developed. A further update was provided on the planning for the 2024 Liverpool City Region Borough of Culture, where the key anniversaries that could be celebrated throughout the year were being identified such as the 50th anniversary of the birth of the Metropolitan Borough of Wirral, alongside mapping the planned and regular events which could be promoted as part of the programme.

Members welcomed the progress made and endorsed the approach to working with community and friends groups. The Committee discussed the various tourism and culture activities and it was confirmed that conversations were ongoing with Liverpool City Region for a culture travel pass, and that officers were preparing for key upcoming events such as Eurovision and The Open.

Resolved – That

(1) the progress to date in respect of the Birkenhead Culture and Heritage Strategy and Museums Service Strategy as detailed in Section 3 and Appendix be noted.

(2) the approach to planning for Borough of Culture 2024 as detailed in Section 3 be endorsed.

35 PUBLIC TOILETS CONSULTATION OUTCOME

The Senior Assessment Management Manager introduced the report of the Director of Regeneration and Place, which provided the outcome of a public consultation exercise undertaken as part of the 2022/23 budget setting process, to reduce the revenue expenditure for Public Toilets.

The Council provided 9 locations for Public Conveniences throughout the Borough and the proposal recommended the retention of West Kirby Marine Lake, Parade Gardens Hoylake, Harrison Drive (Kings Parade) New Brighton and Moreton Common, and the closure of Moreton Cross, West Kirby Concourse (external), Meols Parade (Bennetts Lane), New Ferry and Thornton Hough. It was reported that the toilets proposed for closure had not been open since the start of the pandemic due to operational and safety reasons, and their permanent closure would allow investment into the remaining four sites.

Members discussed the proposed permanent closure of the public conveniences at Thornton Hough and the impact of this on residents accessing the nearby sports facilities and national cycle route. It was noted that expressions of interests for Community Asset Transfer were received for sites included in the report but were outside of the scope and members encouraged these to be considered following the approval of the further Asset Strategy at Policy and Resources Committee.

On a motion by the Chair, seconded by Mike Collins, it was –

Resolved (Unanimously) – That

(1) the outcomes of the online public consultation through the “Have your say” consultation report at Appendix 1 be noted.

(2) the closure of the public toilets at Moreton Cross, West Kirby Concourse (external), Meols Parade (Bennetts Lane) and New Ferry be approved.

(3) approval be given that the Public Toilets identified for closure Moreton Cross, West Kirby Concourse (external), Meols Parade (Bennetts Lane), New Ferry be declared surplus to requirement and the Director of Regeneration and Place be authorised to consider other options for the sites including marketing them for sale and subsequent disposal, demolition and clearance or any expressions of interest from the communities.

(4) Officers work towards a solution where the toilets in Thornton Hough are available whilst sports teams are using the green and open at weekends, as the facilities in the community café are unavailable, and that these sites be prioritised and Expressions of Interest which were

received whilst they were not in scope, be rapidly progressed following Policy & Resources' consideration of the Asset Strategy.

The meeting was adjourned at 19.41pm and recommenced at 19.51pm.

36 **COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER - OUTCOME OF BUSINESS PLANNING STAGE**

The Director of Resources introduced the report which provided the outcome of the Community Asset Transfer business planning stage for libraries and made recommendations for these assets. The report detailed that nine libraries had been made available for Community Asset Transfer, with seven of the nine having received expressions of interest for transfer. The Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee had previously agreed to progress several expressions of interest to the business planning stage at its meeting on 16 June 2022, following which officers provided advice and guidance to the organisations resulting in their final submission being submitted on 25 August 2022. The business plans were appended to the report and recommendations were presented to members on each of the libraries in question.

It was moved by the Chair, seconded by Councillor Jenny Johnson, that –

‘The Director of Resources be authorised to:

- (1) Enter into negotiations to transfer the assets of
 - (a) Pensby library to Pioneer People; and
 - (b) Prenton Library to St. Stephens Church.

- (2) Enter into further discussions, for a period of time ending on 9 December 2022, with the groups who have submitted business plans for the libraries at Wallasey Village, Irby, Woodchurch and Hoylake with a view to achieving a viable business plan for a Community Asset Transfer;

- (3) Pursue alternative options including sale or commercial leasing for those libraries at Wallasey Village, Irby, Woodchurch and/or Hoylake for which viable business plans are not achieved within this timescale;

- (4) Enter into further discussions for a period of time ending on 9 December with Co-Op Academy regarding the option of an asset transfer to the Co-Op Academy of Higher Bebington library with a focus on education opportunities and;

- (5) Recommend to Policy and Resources Committee that the site of the Higher Bebington Library be appropriated by the Council for educational purposes in the event that

- (a) a viable business case for its use for educational purposes is established; and
- (b) matters relating to the covenant on the land imposed by Leverhulme Estates is resolved.

(6) Pursue the demolition of Higher Bebington Library and utilisation and appropriation as public open space if a viable business plan for educational use has not been submitted within the relevant timescales;

(7) Present an update report(s) on the progress of all the Community Asset Transfer and/or asset transfers to a future meeting of this Committee including;

- (a) the proposed heads of terms for the transfer of the libraries at Pensby and Prenton;
- (b) any viable business plans for the Community Asset Transfer of the libraries at Wallasey Village, Irby, Woodchurch and Hoylake.

(8) Any surplus from the £500k capital and/or £282k revenue funds shown in table 4.2 be reserved for the Library element of any business plans involving the transfer of Bromborough Civic Centre, following Policy and Resources' consideration of the Asset Strategy.'

The Chair asked the Committee to consider each proposed resolution individually.

Following discussions on recommendations 1 to 3 during which were agreed by assent, it was moved by Councillor Judith Grier, seconded by Councillor Jo Bird, that recommendation 6 be amended, to read –

'If a viable business plan for educational use of Higher Bebington Library has not been submitted within the relevant timescales consider any other alternative options prior to pursuing demolition and if any viable options are submitted report back to the committee on 25 January 2023.'

Following confirmation from the Director of Resources that the demolition would be unlikely to commence until 25 January 2023, and therefore there would be no additional cost, members were content with the amendment.

As the discussion on the demolition of Higher Bebington Library had been considered, recommendations 4 and 5 were agreed by assent. Recommendation 6 as amended was then put and agreed by assent.

Recommendation 7 was put and agreed by assent.

Recommendation 8, included as an addition to the officer recommendations, was put and agreed by assent. It was therefore –

Resolved (Unanimously) – That the Director of Resources be authorised to:

(1) Enter into negotiations to transfer the assets of (a) Pensby library to Pioneer People; and (b) Prenton Library to St. Stephens Church.

(2) Enter into further discussions, for a period of time ending on 9 December 2022, with the groups who have submitted business plans for the libraries at Wallasey Village, Irby, Woodchurch and Hoylake with a view to achieving a viable business plan for a Community Asset Transfer;

(3) Pursue alternative options including sale or commercial leasing for those libraries at Wallasey Village, Irby, Woodchurch and/or Hoylake for which viable business plans are not achieved within this timescale;

(4) Enter into further discussions for a period of time ending on 9 December with Co-Op Academy regarding the option of an asset transfer to the Co-Op Academy of Higher Bebington library with a focus on education opportunities and;

(5) Recommend to Policy and Resources Committee that the site of the Higher Bebington Library be appropriated by the Council for educational purposes in the event that

(a) a viable business case for its use for educational purposes is established; and

(b) matters relating to the covenant on the land imposed by Leverhulme Estates is resolved.

(6) If a viable business plan for educational use of Higher Bebington Library has not been submitted within the relevant timescales, fully consider any other alternative options prior to pursuing demolition and if any viable options are submitted, report back to the committee on 25 January 2023.

(7) Present an update report(s) on the progress of all the Community Asset Transfer and/or asset transfers to a future meeting of this Committee including;

(a) the proposed heads of terms for the transfer of the libraries at Pensby and Prenton;

(b) any viable business plans for the Community Asset Transfer of the libraries at Wallasey Village, Irby, Woodchurch and Hoylake.

(8) Any surplus from the £500k capital and/or £282k revenue funds shown in table 4.2 be reserved for the Library element of any business plans involving the transfer of Bromborough Civic Centre, following Policy and Resources' consideration of the Asset Strategy.

37 **LIBRARIES IMPLEMENTATION OF NEW OPERATING MODEL**

The Strategic Library Manager introduced the report of the Director of Neighbourhood Services which provided the committee with a progress update following decisions made at Committee on 16th June 2022 on the New Model for Wirral's public library service. The report detailed how, through the implementation of the new model, the service would continue to deliver a comprehensive, efficient, and accessible service to Wirral residents, and that in response to the emerging cost of living crisis within Wirral, the Library service, along with all Council services was currently considering its position, both financially and operationally, in how it can provide a valuable contribution to supporting residents and any emerging financial pressures.

The Committee noted the carbon neutral approach being sought by the Library Service and further discussed the environmental and budgetary implications of the mobile library service. Concerns were raised in relation to access to the contact centre and members were advised that work was ongoing across Neighbourhood Services and Revenues and Benefits to consider the issues raised.

Resolved – That the proposed New Model Implementation Plan and the progress made since the Committee in June 2022 be noted.

38 **COMMITTEE 2022-23 BUDGET MONITORING QUARTER 1**

The Senior Finance Business Partner introduced the report of the Director of Neighbourhood Services, which set out the financial monitoring information for the Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee as at quarter 1 (1 Apr – 30 Jun) of 2022-23 and provided Members with an overview of budget performance, including progress on the delivery of the 2022-23 saving programme and a summary of reserves to enable the Committee to take ownership of the budgets and provide robust challenge and scrutiny to Officers on the performance of those budgets.

It was reported that at the end of Quarter 1, there was a forecast adverse position of £2.847m on the Committees net revenue budget, of £5.138m. This position was based on activity to date, projected trends in income and expenditure and potential mitigation to offset areas of adverse variance.

The Committee discussed the importance of timely budget monitoring and sought an early indication of the Quarter 2 position, where it was reported that income levels had improved to present an improved position. Further

discussions took place in relation to health and safety restrictions and their impact on maximising income, as well as the breakdown of the Public Health contribution to Neighbourhood Services.

Resolved – That

- (1) the forecast revenue position presented at Quarter 1 be noted.**
- (2) the progress on delivery of the 2022-23 savings programme at Quarter 1 be noted.**
- (3) the forecast level of reserves at Quarter 1 be noted.**
- (4) the forecast capital position presented at Quarter 1 be noted.**

39 WORK PROGRAMME REPORT

The Committee considered the Work Programme which provided the Committee with an opportunity to plan and regularly review its work across the municipal year.

On a motion by the Chair, seconded by Allan Brame, it was –

Resolved – That the work programme, with the inclusion of an item to review the effectiveness of customer and community contact in the Revenues and Benefits contact centre, be noted.

40 EXEMPT INFORMATION - EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Resolved – That, under section 100 (A) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined by paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A (as amended) to that Act. The Public Interest test has been applied and favours exclusion.

41 COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER - OUTCOME OF BUSINESS PLANNING STAGE APPENDIX 1 LINKS TO BUSINESS PLANS

Members discussed the detail of the appendix.

Resolved – That the appendix be noted.

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