

TOURISM, COMMUNITIES, CULTURE & LEISURE COMMITTEE

Thursday, 22 June 2023

1 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.

2 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Tom Laing, Councillor Paul Martin and Councillor Kaitlin Stuart.

3 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 interests were declared.

4 MINUTES

The Chair requested that the word 'business' be changed to 'organisation' in relation to Community Asset Transfer.

Resolved – That subject to the above changes, the minutes of the meeting held on 9 March 2023 be approved and adopted as a correct record.

5 PUBLIC AND MEMBER QUESTIONS

6 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

The Chair informed Members that several public questions had been received and she would ask those in attendance to present theirs first.

Mary Jordan read out a question regarding Bromborough Civic Centre, noting that it had been a popular facility for the community and queried what consultation the Council had carried out to ascertain what local people want to see in their community; with whom they had consulted, what was the sample size, how has the data been analysed and what conclusions were drawn. The

Chair responded to say that Public Consultation had been undertaken and the Council had invited expressions of interest in a Community Asset Transfer. Two Business Cases had been submitted, and the views expressed in the two business cases will be taken into account by the Council when making any decision.

Mo Miller asked a question relating to Bromborough Civic Centre asking if any evaluation had been done on the costs, both financial and social, of disposal of Bromborough Civic Centre despite it having a viable future as a community asset. The Chair responded to say that the evaluation of the business plans and disposal is included in the exempt appendices to the report and is available to members of this committee so they can take a fully informed decision on the matter of Bromborough Civic Centre.

Irene Crowther asked a question relating to Bromborough Civic Centre, noting that the Committee had previously considered the centre as part of the Community Asset Transfer and that the report on this issue indicated that there was a viable community future for the Civic Centre, with both bids including a community Library in their planning. Mrs Crowther asked that if a decision is made to dispose of the Civic Centre and Library, would that not be a contravention of the Libraries Act by not considering Bromborough Library on an equal footing with other libraries considered for closure. The Chair responded to say that there had been public consultation before the Council decided to close any libraries, that the library had been closed because it was no longer required for an efficient and comprehensive library service and because of the need to make savings to balance the budget. Bromborough Library has been included, along with all the other libraries in Wirral, in the same process and therefore the Council does not believe that there is any contravention of the Libraries Act.

Susan Smith asked a question relating to Bromborough Civic Centre and queried if the committee voted for the option of disposing of Bromborough civic centre and library, what did the council intend to put in place to ameliorate the social isolation, poor mental health, low educational outcomes, poor provision for young people and poor health amongst the elderly. The Chair responded to say that there was already a significant number of services available to support the community in Bromborough including a Children's centre, youth centre etc. 43 services and activities are registered on Wirral infobank for the CH62 area specifically, and 205 for Bromborough, Bebington, Eastham and Port Sunlight areas. There were two community connectors assigned to the Bromborough area as well as vibrant local community organisations.

John Brace asked a question relating to the proposals to make the libraries at libraries of St James (Bidston and St James ward) and Beechwood (Bidston and St James) self-service (as opposed to staffed as they are at present) which is a recommendation in agenda item 8 (Libraries: Implementation of

New Operating Model). Mr Brace asked when the recommendations would be implemented, would this lead to job losses and how likely would the changes impact members of the public. The Chair responded to say that the majority of changes approved have now been implemented. Beechwood Library currently remains as a Council staffed library localised discussions continue for a co-located venue for a Library in the area. And following positive discussions with North Birkenhead Development Trust (St James) it was agreed that this would be the first Community Partner Library offer to commence with an effective date of 1st May. The revised opening hours offers an increase of 14 hours per week from the previous council staffed offer. No members of staff will be lost within the library service as a consequence of these 2 sites being self-service.

The Chair read out a question on behalf of Percy Hogg relating to Bromborough Civic Centre, noting that this was very similar to a question also received by Kate Hare. Mr Hogg stated that a petition previously been presented to the Committee and more people were signing up to volunteer to help run the library. Mr Hogg queried why this was being ignored. The Chair responded to say that the Council was aware of the strength of feeling in Bromborough and the two business cases and confirmed the library was closed because it was no longer required for an efficient and comprehensive library service and because of the need to make savings to balance the budget.

The Chair read out a question on behalf of Andrew Waring. The question related to Brackenwood Golf Club team who had worked hard to keep it as a managed area while a Community Asset Transfer could be arranged. Mr Waring wanted to know why a historical site could used for football pitches, noting that is it is a green area and should stay that way. The Chair responded to say that the Council had a deficit of playing pitches and explained the negotiations which had taken place with Brackenwood Golf Club. If the report's recommendation for Brackenwood Golf course was to be approved, then the area would remain as open space and be used for playing pitches (for a variety of sports), Biodiversity Net Gain and public access.

6.1 Statements and Petitions

Keith Marsh presented a petition of 1,807 signatures against building a sports hub at Brackenwood Golf Course and made a statement in relation to the Community Asset Transfer of Brackenwood Golf Course.

John Richardson made a statement relating to Brackenwood Golf Course, noting that at a previous committee there was a desire from Members and Brackenwood Golf Club to keep the golf club open and spoke of disappointment regarding the recommendations in the report and associated rents. Mr Richardson asked for a meaningful resolution to keep the Golf Course open.

Ann Edwards made a statement regarding Brackenwood Golf Course, stating its history and positive impact on the Community. Mrs Edwards confirmed the hard work to move forwards with the Community Asset Transfer and stated concerns regarding the report recommendations coming Back to Committee.

Robin Clarke made a statement regarding Brackenwood Golf Course, querying pitch provision and confirmed the steps taken by Brackenwood Community Golf to move forward the Community Asset Transfer and voiced concerns about the process.

Luke Agnew made a statement which related to the environmental impact of closing Brackenwood Golf Course, asking Committee to keep the golf course a symbol of our commitment to biodiversity, to a diversity of interests, and to a sustainable future.

Adam Mellor made a statement which related to Bromborough Civic Centre, noting that is the asset is disposed of, it cannot be brought back and noting that there is a clear gap in provision in South Wirral.

Alison Roberts on behalf of Steve Taylor-Smith made a statement regarding a Community Asset Transfer to Bromborough Civic Community Group. She noted that the transfer will offer the long-term viability of the centre, noting that it was an important part of the community.

Cherry Povall made a statement of the future of Bromborough Civic Centre and access to foodbanks, commenting that assets should be transferred to community groups, not larger organisations. The Bromborough Civic Community group had put together a viable business plan and will keep it as a community asset. Also queried was the amount of business rates charged to local businesses.

Jean Robinson made a statement relating to Woodchurch Leisure Centre and business cases noting that not all the information was available to the Committee due to previous exempt reports.

Janette Williamson made a statement relating to Woodchurch Leisure Centre, stating that there was insufficient information available for the Committee to make a decision.

Liz Grey made a statement relating to Woodchurch Leisure Centre asking the Committee to reject the demolition of the building, stating that until recently it was heralded as an aquatic centre of excellence.

7 **QUARTER 4 REVENUE AND CAPITAL MONITORING BUDGET REPORT**

The Senior Finance Business Partner introduced the report of the Director of Neighbourhoods. The report provided a summary of the year-end revenue

position for the 2022/23 financial year as at the end of March 2023 for the Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee. The report also provided Members with an overview of budget performance to enable the Committee to take ownership of the budgets and provide robust challenge and scrutiny to Officers on the performance of those budgets.

Members were informed that the year-end revenue outturn for 2022/23 represents an adverse position of £5.890m on the Committee net revenue budget of £5.359m

Members queried the footfall in leisure facilities and were informed that the performance monitoring report would be presented to the July Committee. A further query was made regarding the Council overspend and members were advised that a report was being presented to Policy and Resources Committee and Council regarding this. Members also discussed the option of building new leisure facilities and maintenance of existing premises. Members were informed there is a comprehensive programme in place to tackle update of leisure services as well as maintenance of buildings. The Terms of Reference for the committee was mentioned and a request that any subsequent reports mirror this.

On a motion by the chair, seconded by Councillor Angie Davies it was -

Resolved – That

(1) the draft, unaudited 2022/23 outturn adverse variance of £5.890m be noted.

(2) the draft, unaudited 2022/23 capital variance be noted.

(3) Subject to the inclusion of Environmental Health and Trading Standards the transfer to and use of earmarked reserves, as detailed in Appendix 2 be approved.

(4). the progress on delivery of the 2022/23 savings programme be noted.

8 2023/24 BUDGET AND BUDGET MONITORING PROCESS

The Director of Finance introduced the report, which set out how the 2023/24 budget would be monitored through the Committee system, which will facilitate the Policy and Services Committees (the Committees) to take ownership of their specific budgets and present appropriate challenge and scrutiny of Officers on the management and performance of those budgets.

Members queried the public health transfer of £7m from Public Health to the Tourism Communities Culture and Leisure Committee and were assured of a response from the director and raised the issue of any reports accurately reflecting the terms of reference of the Committee.

On a motion by the chair, seconded by Councillor Angie Davies it was -

Resolved – That

- 1. the process for in-year monitoring of the 2023/24 budget be noted.**
- 2. Subject to all budget reports being brought to this committee reflecting the terms of reference as laid out on the constitution, the Committee agrees to establish and appoint a Budget Monitoring Panel to comprise of the Committee Chair and Spokespersons, with sessions to be led by the relevant Director/Assistant Director.**

9 LIBRARIES: IMPLEMENTATION OF NEW OPERATING MODEL

The Strategic Library Manager presented the report of the Director of Neighbourhood Services. This report provided members of the Tourism, Communities, Culture & Leisure Committee (TCCL) with a progress update on the implementation plan for the Wirral's public library service (New Model).

At the TCCL Committee on 25th October 2022, it was resolved that the proposed New Library Model be developed. The New Model was the mechanism to drive the delivery of The Library Strategy 2021- 26. Together these products would strive to provide a balanced, sustainable, modern, and fit for purpose Library Service in Wirral which would ensure that all residents have access to a comprehensive and efficient service.

Members thanked officers for the comprehensive report and the new model as well as discussing the video calling booths, and the triage process for this. Members were informed that these were being rolled out across sites and noted that satisfaction in the service was high. It was noted that difficult decisions had been made, and queried if the stats could go into Power B.I so that Members could view them.

Resolved – that the proposed approach, work to date and the ongoing implementation plan of the Library new operating model be supported.

10 COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER

The Assistant Director for Special Projects presented the report of the Director of Resources which updated Members on the community asset transfer (CAT) of Hoylake Municipal Golf Course and made recommendations on community asset transfer (CAT) matters relating to Bromborough Civic Centre, Woodchurch Leisure Centre and Brackenwood Golf Course. It built upon the

CAT decisions made by this committee at its meetings of 16 June 2022, 25 October 2022, 2 February 2023 and 9 March 2023.

Members were informed that recommendations within the report enabled the Committee to make decisions on the assets that were in scope for Community Asset Transfer (CAT). If Committee resolved to transfer Brackenwood Golf Course to Brackenwood Community Golf Limited, and Bromborough Civic Centre to one of the two groups who had submitted business plans, then under the Constitution, this must be a recommendation to the Policy and Resources Committee, for their decision, as the asset values are over £500,000.

The Assistant Director for Special Projects gave a comprehensive overview of each recommendation and Members agreed to consider and discuss the three recommendations separately.

Brackenwood

Members discussed any financial loss in relation to Community benefits and discussed the viability and maintenance of a hybrid approach. Also discussed was the potential pressures on the Oval and were advised that there was a list of potential hub sites for other sports facility locations. Members were advised that several of these locations were subject to a Community Asset Transfer process which was pending decision. Members also discussed the issues surrounding parking provision and environmental impact, including a baseline for bio-diversity.

On a motion by the chair, seconded by Councillor Ruth Molyneux it was,

Resolved- That

(1) the Director of Finance be authorised to conclude negotiations on the heads of terms in exempt Appendix 2, for the transfer of Brackenwood Golf Course to Brackenwood Community Golf Limited, once an increase in the rent proposal from the company is agreed, and some provision for very small football/tennis pitches has been explored. This should form part of the recommendation to Policy and Resources Committee as the Asset value is £950k which is above the value that can be agreed by this Committee or the Director of Resources.

Bromborough Civic Centre

Members discussed the three options and asked for clarity on several of the options. Members then agreed to discuss the exempt items in a closed session and moved the exemption.

It was therefore, 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.

Following the resumption of the open session, on a motion moved by the Chair, seconded by Councillor Jenny Johnson, it was –

Resolved – That

(2) since the committee is minded to try and move towards a Community Asset Transfer for Bromborough Civic Centre, this item be moved to the July committee to enable a workshop to be convened so as to give both business cases the examination they deserve.

Woodchurch Leisure Centre

On a Motion by Councillor Angie Davies and Seconded by Councillor Paul Jobson it was –

Resolved (7:4) – That,

(3) the consideration of the future of Woodchurch Leisure Centre had been ongoing for quite some time and now requires urgent consideration and determination. To that end, the business case is to be referred to the Director of Finance for his immediate attention, following which a report is to be brought to the meeting of Policy and Resources Committee on 12 July for determination, ensuring that members are acquainted with all key facts.

11 APPOINTMENT TO BIRKENHEAD PARK MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

The Legal Officer presented the report of the Director of Law and Governance which asked Committee to review the continuing need for the Birkenhead Park Advisory Committee and to appoint Members and named deputies to serve on those for the 2023/24 municipal year.

Resolved – that the Monitoring Officer be authorised as proper officer to carry out the wishes of the Group Leaders in allocating Members to membership of the Birkenhead Park Advisory Committee and to appoint those Members in accordance with the rules on political balance, with effect from the date at which the proper officer is advised of the names of such Members.

12 **APPOINTMENT OF HERITAGE CHAMPION**

The Legal officer presented the report of the Director of Law and Governance, which asked Committee to consider the appointment of a Member Champion for Heritage. Members were informed that it was not possible to appoint Councillor Jerry Williams formally to be a Heritage Champion because he is not a Member of this Committee and as such is disqualified under the Constitution.

Resolved – that, a Member Champion in relation to matters concerning the Borough’s heritage should not be appointed, since the Mayor has offered to continue to carry out those functions as part of his Mayoral duties.

13 **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Legal Officer introduced the report of the Director of Law and Governance, which requested that newly composited Committee review the 2023-24 work programme moving into the 202324 municipal year. It was proposed that issues on the existing work programme that are for information purposes only can be considered via other means, such as briefing notes or workshops.

The Chair requested that a further report on the Third Sector be brought to Committee.

Resolved – that the report be noted and an update on the third sector be added to the work programme.

14 **EXEMPT INFORMATION - EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

15 **COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER - EXEMPT APPENDICES**