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TOURISM, COMMUNITIES, CULTURE & LEISURE COMMITTEE

Thursday, 28 November 2024

Present:

Councillor I Lewis (Chair)

Councillors	A Ainsworth	KJ Williams
	P Jobson	R Molyneux
	G Bennett	M Redfern
	C Cooke	G Davies (for G
	T Murphy (for K	McManus)
	Stuart)	

Apologies

Councillors G McManus K Stuart

41 **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.

42 **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors G McManus and K Stuart. Councillors G Davies and T Murphy deputised.

43 **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.

44 **MINUTES**

Members raised an issue with the previous minutes not making reference to the agreed site visit to Thornton Hough public toilets, to meet with the Thornton Hough Community Trust.

Resolved – That subject to the amendments above, the minutes of the meeting held on the 17th October 2024 be approved and adopted as a correct record.

45 **PUBLIC AND MEMBER QUESTIONS**

46 **PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

One question had been submitted and accepted in advance of the meeting.

Andrew Evans attended the committee meeting to ask a question regarding the Hoylake Municipal Golf Course. He asked whether the council had a plan for the use of the former gold course site, and whether any plan could involve some combined sports and nature (reserve) use, and if a plan were not implemented, whether the land was at risk from housing development.

The Chair addressed Mr Evans' question. He explained that the Council had taken the decision to close the Hoylake Municipal Golf Course and remove the maintenance budget in March 2022, as part of the 2022/23 budget setting process. Members then decided to put this surplus asset into a community asset transfer process and the Tourism Committee had, on the 16th June 2022, agreed to invite the Royal and Ancient to submit a business plan for a transfer of the asset.

The Chair said that the committee had been updated on the progress of the development of a business plan for the transfer of the asset on the 22nd June 2023. He described the uses being developed, such as short term gold formats, and that the plan would enable the course to be used for such activities between Open Golf Championships and then, in the year the Open was held, it would be available for the practice area, car parking and tented village. Following the event, it would revert back to other uses until the next Open.

Members had received a further update report as part of a general report on community asset transfers at the committee meeting on the 19th September 2024. The former golf course was vital for the hosting of the Open Golf Championship at Royal Liverpool, and without it the championship could not take place. The current agreement for future Opens at Hoylake were set to expire in 2026, and discussions were ongoing with the R&A and Royal Liverpool Golf Club on a new future agreement. It was vital for the Council to negotiate on these issues so that it secured a future agreement and a transfer which benefitted the Borough, and hopefully these negotiations would conclude this financial year. The matter would then be reported to the Policy and Resources Committee for decision.

Mr Evans added that he understood the Council's challenging financial situation, and had brought his question to committee for clarity for local

interests. It was a popular facility for young people in the area, and there was a concern that they would have to travel outside the area for activities that could take place on the site.

The Chair suggested that, once the decision was brought before the Policy and Resources Committee, that Mr Evans contact his local ward councillors to make representations.

46.1 **Statements and Petitions**

No statements or petitions had been submitted for this meeting.

47 **QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS**

No member questions had been submitted for this meeting.

48 **EXPLORING COMMUNITY MANAGED LIBRARY MODELS**

The Chair informed Members that Mr Paul Kelly, Regional Co-Director of the Community Managed Libraries Peer Network, was unable to attend this meeting due to personal circumstances.

Members agreed to defer the item to the next meeting of the committee.

49 **RESTORATION OF NEW BRIGHTON MARINE LAKE**

Clare Mahoney and Colin Clayton, representatives of the Friends of New Brighton Marine Lake, introduced their report, which presented Members with details of the group and their work on New Brighton Marine Lake.

A short promotional film was shown to the Members of the committee.

The representatives explained that they were local residents, who had been brought together by their commitment to New Brighton Marine Lake. The group had been formed following an outbreak of blue/green algae a few years prior, as an advocacy group. They were made up of 42 volunteers, with a committee of 10 members, and had been active for 18 months.

In January 2024, the group had met with a local marine ecologist, and had discussed the improvements needed for the lake. Their main task had been to fundraise for a full ecology report to be undertaken, which had been completed the week before this committee meeting.

They had wished to attend the meeting and discuss this issue with Members, so that the committee could get a sense of who the group were, how they worked, particularly as the group wished to work closely with the Council in taking forwards the recommendations of the ecology report.

They described their governance arrangements and that they and their volunteers were incredibly proud of their achievements over the last 12 months. They described some of the events the group held, such as community litter picks, days of action with the Council's Parks and Countryside team, and charity events. The group had applied and had been successful in gaining grant funding, as well as highlighting the work of the group in other community settings. They wished for the lake to be returned to its former glory, and the comprehensive evaluation of the state of the lake would set out in detail how to bring it back to life.

The next stage for the group was to establish a strong, working relationship with the Council. They thanked officers, particularly officers in the Neighbourhoods directorate. They had wanted to come before committee to ask for an agreement to a formal working relationship, as the Council were the asset owner of the lake. In order to continue to apply for grant funding, they needed to have formal support from the asset owner.

Members raised their thanks to the group for their work supporting the lake, as well as recording their thanks for the support from council officers. Members queried whether the presentation, and ecology report, should also be shared with the Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee. Members also requested to review the ecology report and discuss what the Council could do to support progress going forwards.

Members asked the representatives whether they had applied for the Heritage Lottery Fund, to which the representatives responded that they had thought of this, however reiterated the point that these funding applications included the criteria of a clear articulation of their relationship with the Council.

Members also discussed the number of marine lakes nationally, and whether the group could support other local groups and share their knowledge.

The Assistant Director for Leisure, Libraries and Customer Engagement responded to a question raised about delays to the memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the group and the Council. He explained that officers had been meeting with the group fairly frequently over the last 12-18 months, and he recorded his thanks to the group for their work and dedication. Officers had done some interventions and risk assessments on the lake, and these had been shared with the group. Officers had also commissioned for water testing. The lake was a large, unsupervised body of open water, and there were large risks involved. He had reviewed the MOU, and officers were working through this, to ensure the best delivery model and agreement that would work for both the Council and the group. Officers wanted to ensure protections but also the maximum benefit for the lake, and following this, the group would be awarded whatever autonomy was needed.

Following discussion, the Chair proposed an amendment to the recommendation.

It was also agreed that once the ecology report was available, that this be shared with Members of the Committee and a site visit be arranged to discuss the findings of the report.

Resolved – That the Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee:

- 1. Thanked the Friends of New Brighton Marine Lake for their presentation and work undertaken on the lake so far;**
- 2. Requested the Director and Assistant Directors of Neighbourhoods meet with the Friends of New Brighton Marine Lake to address the points raised at the meeting; and**
- 3. Refer the report and presentation to the Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee for consideration.**

50 **UPDATE REGARDING THE WORK OF THE COUNCILS ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SERVICE**

The Senior Manager for Environmental Health introduced the report of the Director of Regeneration and Place, which provided the committee with an update on the work of the Environmental Health service. The report included performance details of the service from the 1st November 2023 to the 31st October 2024.

She explained that the Environmental Health Service was responsible for providing a wide range of statutory frontline services to local businesses and residents. The appendix, attached to the report, highlighted a number of requests the service received during this period.

She highlighted that Table 4 within the report showed that there had been 428 new food businesses on an annual basis, with these businesses wanting support and advice from the service. There had been 981 food hygiene inspections, with a large number of businesses being compliant. There had been three prosecutions during this period.

Members raised the following questions/comments:

- Table 3 of the report, Council pest control service – had the team seen any exotic pests in the borough, in light of changes to climate change
- Page 37 of the report, reference to drains
- Page 39, reference to dangerous dogs, were the team involved in any cases with XL Bully breeds
- The process through which service requests came through to the team
- Queries regarding pest control treatments
- Any more information to be given on noise nuisance and complaints
- Environmental food services, inspections done by contracted service, a query whether this could be brought in-house
- Table 3, housing standards, at what point would the team step in

- Why there were so many Freedom of Information requests regarding animal health
- At what point would food outlets be forcibly shut down
- Queries around bonfires
- Whether the team had seen an increase in complaints regarding housing issues

In response to questions, the Senior Manager for Environmental Health told Members that the Environmental Health team had not seen any unusual pests in the borough. The team provided treatments for basic pest control. The team had responsibility for drains in private properties, but any gutters or road gulleys were the responsibility of the Environmental Services team. In regards to dangerous dogs, the team had prepared for changes to legislation, and had close links with Birkenhead Kennels and the RSPCA, to provide advice or take enforcement action. She described the noise nuisance policy to members, and explained that funding had been made available during Covid-19, as officers were diverted elsewhere, to provide contracts to address inspections backlogs, with this contract due to end in December 2024. In regards housing issues, there had been an increase in complaints regarding damp and mould. This work was done in conjunction with the Housing Standards team, who had received funding to address these complaints.

The Chair also requested that information be presented to the Spokespersons of the Committee and to Councillor J McManus, regarding the location of Birkenhead Kennels.

It was also requested that if other suitable spaces for animal groups were found, that this information be circulated to members.

Members recorded their thanks to the Senior Manager and the Environmental Health team.

Resolved – That the report be noted and the contents endorsed.

51 **UPDATE ON THE COUNCIL’S PUBLIC CONVENIENCES AND CHANGING PLACES PROVISION.**

It was agreed by assent that this item would be deferred to the next meeting of the committee, on the 23rd January 2025, to allow officers to include requested content items from Members.

52 **COUNCIL PLAN PERFORMANCE REPORT QUARTER 2 2024-25 THEME: SAFE, RESILIENT AND ENGAGED COMMUNITIES**

The Director of Neighbourhoods introduced the report, which was a quarterly performance report in relation to the Council Plan: Wirral Working Together 2023-27 for the Theme Safe, resilient and engaged communities.

He explained to Members that the report focussed on seven performance indicators. There were only two performance indicators giving new information to Members since the last quarterly report, in relation to participation in leisure sites and active borrowers from libraries. There were some data sets within the report which included data from 2022/23.

In response to a question on budget constraints, the Director explained that the Committee's next Budget Oversight Panel would review budget proposals developed for the 2025/26 budget, which was a private meeting.

Resolved – That the content of the report be noted and referred to the Policy and Resources Committee.

53 **2024/25 BUDGET MONITORING FOR QUARTER TWO**

The Head of Finance introduced the report of the Director of Neighbourhoods, which set out the financial monitoring information for the Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee as at Quarter 2 (30 September) of 2024/25. The report provided Members with an overview of budget performance, including progress on the delivery of the 2024/25 saving programme and a summary of reserves and balances.

She explained to Members that the current estimate forecasted an adverse outturn position of £1.387m on the Committee's revenue budget. In comparison, the overall Council position was an adverse outturn position of £21.56m.

For this Committee, the adverse position was made up of: £220,000 on Neighbourhood Safety, mainly relating to employee budget pressures; £994,000 on Leisure, Libraries and Theatre, in relation to staffing pressures; and £330,000 on Libraries, in relation to premises repairs and maintenance, and unachievable income targets.

The Committee were being asked to note savings of £1.3m, which were expected to be achieved in full, as set out within Table 2. The full capital programme position and reserves for the Committee were contained within the report at Tables 3 and 4.

Members raised queries over the health and safety works at Wirral Country Park, which had been pushed back to the 2025/26 budget; whether, through the playing fields strategy, any income could be amassed from this; and whether work to understand the staff enhancements costs had been undertaken.

The Head of Finance and the Director of Neighbourhoods agreed to circulate information regarding the health and safety works at Wirral Country Park, as well as a full breakdown of staff enhancement payments.

The Chair raised to the Director that, in the Quarter 1 Monitoring report, there had been no immediate pressures, whereas the Quarter 2 report was identifying budget pressures, and questioned whether this would have been predicted. He asked whether the Director could give assurances that the identified budget pressures would be incorporated into the 2025/26 budget.

The Director of Neighbourhoods responded that in regards to the Quarter 1 monitoring report, he had not wanted to begin the year predicting that they would overspend, however acknowledged that he had not appreciated the issues, particularly around overtime enhancements. Work was underway to ensure that there was provision for this within the revenue budget for Neighbourhoods. The Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) required the directorate to reduce spending in 2025/26 by £1m and £2m for 2026/27. Officers were looking at the more effective use of resources to reduce on overtime and enhancements.

He explained that officers were currently managing assets for which there was no budget for managing maintenance, which he hoped would be addressed when the move to the Corporate Landlord Model was finalised. He reiterated that colleagues in Finance were forensically examining budgets, to address the unachievable income targets, and officers were trying to fully understand the detail of the directorate's revenue budget.

Resolved – That

- 1. The forecast adverse position of £1.387m presented at Quarter 2 be noted, and the urgent need to examine all available options to address the position.**
- 2. The committee noted that the Director of Finance has contacted the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) to make them aware of the Council's financial position**
- 3. The progress on delivery of the 2024/25 savings programme be noted**
- 4. The forecast level of reserves and balances be noted**
- 5. The capital position at the end of Quarter 2 be noted.**

54 MEMBER CHAMPION FOR HERITAGE - UPDATE REPORT

The Member Champion for Heritage, Councillor Williams, introduced his regular update report to Members, and gave an additional verbal update.

He told Members that officers were working to submit two bids for the National Lottery Heritage Fund, in relation to projects in Hamilton Square and Argyll Quarter shopfronts. There had been discussions around the application process for the Heritage Lottery Fund, and whether the process could be

made simpler and less complicated. In regards to the Taylor Street Transport Museum and Heritage Railway Run, they were in the process of organising a governance meeting with elected members and officers with Big Heritage. Work had started on the Birkenhead Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan, and bidding work on the World Heritage Site was continuing.

In relation to the local listing campaign, a new attempt to push forward with highlighting building and sites of historic importance which were not listed, would launch in a few days time. Councillor Williams thanked the new Principal Heritage Officer for her work, and the work of the Conservation Areas Wirral and the Wirral History and Heritage Association.

The launch of the Wirral Heritage & Culture Champions Training Programme would start in early 2025, with local heritage and culture groups involved with the programme and other training organisations.

Councillor Williams informed Members that Walter Citrine, of the Trade Union Congress, had been nominated for a Blue Plaque.

Finally, he told Members that he was pleased to announce that Wallasey Central Library had been awarded a Grade 2 Heritage listing.

Members asked whether Council officers were placed to support members of the public and local organisations in submitting heritage lottery bids. The Head of Place, Culture and Visitor Economy explained that it was not the role of officers to assist or put in applications for anyone in relation to heritage lottery bids.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

55 **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chair introduced the report which presented the Work Programme for the Committee. He asked if any members had amendments or additions to present.

The following was raised and was agreed to be added/amended on the Work Programme:

- Community Asset Transfers - Performance Management (testing the success classification of asset transfers, how the Council was measuring community engagement and the success of this, how communities were benefitting from these transfers, performance measures and feedback)
- Detailed list of all asset transfers
- Aquatics Policy

Members agreed for a briefing to be held in the New Year, with Chair and Spokes to discuss the Asset Transfer request with officers in more detail.

Officers explained that work was being done on the aquatics room at Europa Pools with Swim England. A report would be brought, however this would be at the beginning of the new municipal year.

Members queried when the Committee could expect information on the Playing Pitch Strategy, and asked that unscheduled reports be given an estimated timescale of coming before Committee.

The Chair asked Councillor Bennett to provide an update to Members on the matter of communal graves in the Wirral. A report would be made available to the Committee in January 2025. The Chair asked Councillor Bennett to share the report and meeting details with those members of the public he was in communication with.

Resolved – That, subject to the amendment of the items noted at the meeting, the work programme be noted.