

COMMUNITY AND CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 4 December 2008

<u>Present:</u>	Councillor	C Meaden (Chair)	
	Councillors	A Pritchard S Quinn C Povall	P Gilchrist P Hayes
<u>Cabinet Member</u>	Councillor	S Kelly	
<u>Deputies</u>	Councillors	D Knowles (In place of W Smith)	

22 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST/PARTY WHIP

Members were asked to consider whether they had personal or prejudicial interests in connection with any item(s) on this agenda and, if so, to declare them and state what they were.

Members were reminded that they should also declare, pursuant to paragraph 18 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules, 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.

23 MINUTES

Resolved – That the minutes of the meetings held on 6 and 30 October 2008 be approved.

24 EQUALITY STANDARD

Further to minute 19 (6 October 2008), Jacqui Cross, Corporate Equality and Diversity Co-ordinator, submitted a Guide to the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) process. The EIA was a self assessment tool for Council departments and services to consider the impact of their work in order to be able to take appropriate action to minimise or remove negative outcomes. It was needed to ensure that the Council delivered all of its functions, services, projects, strategies and policies in a fair and equal way.

She provided members with guidance in relation to the issues which they should consider when completing the EIA template and, in response to comments from members, confirmed that she would be available to offer further assistance if it was required.

Resolved – That the completed Equality Impact Assessment forms be returned direct to the Corporate Equality and Diversity Co-ordinator as soon as possible to enable a composite document to be presented to the next meeting of the Committee.

25 **PROJECTED BUDGET 2009/2011**

The Director of Finance reported that at the meeting of the Cabinet on 27 November 2008 (minute 267 refers) a number of budget savings were proposed and referred to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee for urgent consideration before the meeting of the Council to be held on 15 December 2008. The proposal which fell within the remit of this Committee was –

- The sum of £140,000 of increased income from Wirral Partnership Homes following the closure of their cash offices be accepted.

The Director reported that since the establishment of One Stop Shops a significant area of work had been housing related queries. After Housing Stock Transfer and the establishment of Wirral Partnership Homes (WPH), the Authority continued to provide payment facilities and the initial contact point for housing enquiries. In addition, to assist customers, particularly in the major transition from being Local Authority tenants, WPH had continued to accept payments on behalf of Wirral Council and provided initial advice mainly on Council Tax through their network of public offices. The Director commented that this collaborative work resulted in no income changing hands with the charges being deemed to be the same to both organisations.

However, WPH had now decided to change their methods of payment and contact strategy and as such, from 2009/2010 they would not take payment for Wirral Council or give advice. However, WPH had stated that they were keen to agree to the Wirral One Stop Shops network remaining a key part of their access strategy for advice and referral and for the Authority to take payments on their behalf. The Director indicated that he would be making a charge to WPH with no contra charge being made, thus there would be an increase in income to the Authority.

In response to comments from members, the Director set out how the charge was calculated and indicated that it was in line with the contra charge that had previously been made. He confirmed that a Service Level Agreement was being finalised and that the cost and service would be reviewed on an annual basis by each organisation.

Resolved – That the proposed budget saving of £140,000 in respect of an increase in income from the ongoing work on behalf of Wirral Partnership Homes from 2009/2010, be approved.

26 **ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS APPROVED BY THE CHAIR - STRATEGIC ASSET REVIEW CONSULTATION**

A member referred to the special Area Forum Conference/Conferences which the Cabinet had agreed (minute 264 (27 November 2008) refers) should be convened as part of the consultation process in relation to the Strategic Asset Review. He set out his objection to joint meetings of Area Forums being held on a constituency basis on the grounds that, dependent upon where the meetings took place, many residents

would perhaps not be able to attend because of mobility issues. He commented also that there had been no consultation with Chairs of Area Forums and he referred to clashes of dates with other meetings. He expressed the view that consultation should be by way of the existing Area Forum structure.

The Cabinet Member outlined the rationale for constituency-based Area Forum conferences being held and he referred specifically to the practicalities of arranging individual forums within the timescale and the difficulties faced by Chief Officers in attending forums in addition to other meetings in the Council diary. In view of the wide ranging impact of the proposals, he expressed the view that, if it was not possible to organise a Wirral-wide event, then it was appropriate for constituency Area Forum conferences to take place. However, he indicated that the Deputy Chief Executive was aware of concerns that had been expressed and he agreed to discuss with him the need to ensure that the meetings were held in appropriate and accessible venues.

On a motion by Councillor Pritchard and seconded by Councillor Hayes, it was –

Resolved – (4:3) That the Cabinet Member for Community and Customer Engagement be requested to ask officers to arrange separate Area Forum meetings in order to consult with residents on the Strategic Asset Review.