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ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE EMERGENCY AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

Monday, 14 June 2021

Present: Councillor EA Grey (Chair)

Councillors H Collinson M Collins
S Foulkes S Mountney
C O'Hagan L Rowlands
I Williams C Cooke
B Berry A Brame (In place
of A Corkhill)

1 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

The Chair opened the meeting and reminded everyone that the meeting was being webcast and a copy is retained on the Council's website.

2 APOLOGIES

Councillor Andy Corkhill had given apologies for absence and had been substituted by Councillor Allan Brame.

3 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interests.

4 MINUTES

The Chair proposed an amendment to the minutes and requested that in the Hoylake Beach management update (minute 47) resolution (3), the words 'the specification for the continuation of non-vegetation management activities at Hoylake beach, as set out in Appendix C to this report be approved, and' be removed as they were intended to be removed and replaced by an amendment made at the meeting so leaving them in was an error and misleading.

This was seconded by Councillor Steve Foulkes.

Resolved (by assent) – That the minutes of the meeting of the Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee held on 16 March 2021 be approved and adopted as a correct record subject to the words 'the specification for the continuation of non-vegetation management activities at Hoylake beach, as set out in Appendix C to this report be approved, and' in the Hoylake Beach management update (minute 47) resolution (3) being removed.

5 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were two questions from the public.

Question from Charlotte Smith:

Access to Hoylake Beach via the slipways is severely restricted by the build-up of grass, weeds, dandelions and watercress. This is particularly noticeable at King Gap entrance to Hoylake Beach and the old lifeboat slipway with excess sand blocking safe access to the beach. Wirral Council is in breach of the Equality Act 2010 (Section 149, schedule 12) by not providing safe access to the beach for disabled people, myself included. Will the Environmental Chair commit to legal obligations by clearing all slipways to allow safe access immediately within the next month?

Answer from Councillor Liz Grey:

Thank you for your observations regarding Kings Gap Slipway and the slipway at Alderley Road. For information the slipways do not form part of the adopted highway and therefore do not have the same maintenance standards as exist for the highway. The slipways act as an interface between the natural and man-made environment and users are made aware of the hazards present through the adjacent signage. This is the standard approach taken at all locations on the Wirral coast. The slipways are all inspected regularly, the most recent inspection on 2nd June 2021 identified that whilst sand and some vegetation growth at Kings Gap Slipway was observed, the conditions on the slipway were similar to those that would be encountered on the foreshore. I do agree with you that disabled access should be a priority and we as a Council voted to aim for Blue Flag status on our beaches. This will require us to ensure that we have good quality disabled access and I'm sure this will inform our plans when we reach that stage of the engagement and consultation process.

Officers have assessed your allegation and in their view they do not believe that the Council has breached the Equality Act 2010. The build up of sand will continue to be reviewed during future inspections however we are currently unable to remove or move any sand on the foreshore as we no longer have permission from Natural England to do this. A new application for assent, with supporting Habitat Regulations Assessment, is being prepared for submission to Natural England. We need to do this as Hoylake beach forms part of North Wirral Foreshore Site of Special Scientific Interest.

Basically we need permission to move sand.

Supplementary Question

Will the chair agree to designate a section of Hoylake Beach made available for local events to be exempted from SSI restrictions to continue on the beach such as the Tug of War, Bonfire Night and the Volley Ball team and organisers can make the area safe for recreational use. Natural England has stated after all that an Amenity Beach can be raked.

Supplementary answer

I'm glad you refer to the Natural England report and their references to an amenity beach and I would urge all interested parties to read that Natural England report especially the references to an amenity beach which you do seem to have interpreted differently from most other people.

Natural England is the Government's statutory nature conservation adviser and is responsible for enforcing laws that protect wildlife and the natural environment which includes North Wirral Foreshore Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) covering Hoylake Beach. As such Wirral Council has no powers to exempt areas of the SSSI from the regulations that cover it.

Permission must be sought from Wirral Council for any activities which have the capacity to harm the SSSI and before the Council grants permission they must in turn obtain consent from Natural England having assessed any request in accordance with the Conservation of Habitats and Species regulations 2010.

The second question was from asked by the Chair on behalf of **Gillian Homeri** who could not attend.

Question from Gillian Homeri:

Could you please confirm that when deciding the future if Hoylake Beach, this Council will stick to the science and the evidence and not be swayed by negative campaigning and bombardment from those who wish to ignore the facts and mislead the public? Can you promise to abide by the advice of Natural England and do what's right by the people of Wirral in an environment and climate emergency and protect both nature and residents from the threats they face.

Answer from Councillor Liz Grey:

Hoylake beach is changing naturally and it is becoming increasingly difficult for it to be effectively managed in a way that would gain assent from Natural England. The Council, as landowner, also has a statutory duty to further the conservation and enhancement of the SSSI. Through the work we are doing and with the findings of the independent Ecology and Geomorphology study later in the year – combined with public consultation – we will find the most effective solution, taking into account advice already received from Natural England and the regulations in place to protect the SSSI, to manage Hoylake beach in the long-term.

6 STATEMENTS AND PETITIONS

One petition had been received from Alex Lomas regarding traffic safety in Alfred Road, Oxton.

I'm here representing the families and residents of Alfred Road in Oxton.

Over the past two years we've seen the number of cars, vans and even HGVs using our residential street as a thoroughfare increase tenfold to avoid the lights on Oxton Road. A major catalyst we believe was the building of the Lidl supermarket which is situated on the cross road of Balls Road and Oxton Road. The street has become home to a growing number of families over the past few years. It changed from predominantly being flats before. Those families have children at toddler age and school children age and we strongly believe that if we don't act soon there could be disastrous consequences as the speeding traffic travelling down the road is in our opinion at a critical point and needs to be addressed. Following a number of near misses and numerous damaged vehicles on the street I decided that it was time that I reached out to the residents and we set up a petition and of a street of approximately 24 houses I think it speaks in volumes that there is over 46 supporters that everyone had the same growing concerns. We'd love for our street to be considered for a pilot for the low traffic neighbourhood or Play Street Scheme. A simple bollard at one end would cost very little but would transform our street and the lives of the families and the children. I've seen this happen in many other parts of the country but unfortunately in Wirral it seems it is very slow for it to happen and I'd like to ask could we please have a bollard?

The Chair reaffirmed that the Committee took road safety very seriously and would ensure that he got a full response.

7 QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS

There were no questions by Members.

8 CAR PARKING CHARGES OPTIONS REPORT

The Director of Neighbourhoods, Nikki Butterworth, introduced this report which consider alternative options for parking charges in 2021/22 and beyond. At the Budget Policy and Resources Committee on Wednesday 17th February 2021, budget proposals included a further £1 million to be achieved through 'additional and increased parking charges and whole scale car parking review'. During this Committee Members resolved that further work be undertaken by the Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee in respect of car parking charges to develop and implement proposals in line with the agreed Budget and for the Policy and Resources Committee to be updated accordingly. Full Council, at its meeting of 1 March, unanimously agreed the saving of £1m from additional and increased parking charges and whole scale car parking review as part of the 2021/22 annual budget.

Members debated whether there was sufficient information in the report to enable them to come to a decision. They noted that it was a challenging target and any change would upset some residents and could increase parking in

residential areas to avoid charges, but the alternative saving options included reductions in staffing, golf courses, refuse collection and leisure centres. There was a specific requirement from Government to comply with budget plans in order to gain funding to offset Covid-19 income losses.

Councillor Chris Cooke made a proposal for agreeing options 1, 3 and 4 which were:

1. Introduce charges into off-street car parks that are currently Free i.e.; Bromborough, Bebington, Irby, Hoylake, New Brighton etc.
3. Introduce parking charges into coastal locations e.g. New Brighton, West Kirby, Leasowe, Hoylake.
4. Standardised Charges. to implement a new and standardised tariff structure across all existing and any new charging locations, both on and off-street.

And also to standardise charges across the Borough.

Councillor Liz Grey seconded the proposal.

Resolved (6:4 with one abstention):

That this Committee

- (1) agrees to adopt car parking charging options 1,3 and 4 and to standardise charges at: £1 for up to one hour, £2 for up to two hours, £3 for up to three hours, £4 for up to four hours and £5 for over four hours or all day parking; and**
- (2) delegates authority to the Director of Neighbourhood Services to implement the decision of this Committee and the parking charges options selected as soon as is reasonably practicable.**

9 CARBON BUDGETS: 2019/20 BASELINE TO 2027/28

The Head of Environment and Climate Emergency, Mike Cockburn, introduced this report which detailed proposals for reinstating the Carbon Budget and proposed annual emissions limits (the Carbon Budgets) to allow the Council to measure its progress towards carbon net zero by 2030 as included in the Environment and Climate Emergency Policy.

Members were reassured that the target was difficult but was regarded as achievable by the external expert. The pandemic had helped in 2020 but future performance would require changes in many aspects of Council work such as building use, fleet operations, staff journeys, energy source.

Resolved – That

- (1) the proposed Carbon Budgets from 2020/21 to 2027/28 be approved;**
- (2) the Annual Carbon Budget Performance Reports are tabled in June each year.**

10 **CARBON BUDGET PERFORMANCE REPORT 2020/21**

The Head of Environment and Climate Emergency, Mike Cockburn, introduced this report which was the first annual Carbon Budget Performance Report and covered the 2020/21 financial year. It showed actual emissions compared against the 2020/21 Carbon Budget Target. This allowed the Council to measure progress towards its target of carbon net zero by 2030 as included in the Environment and Climate Emergency Policy. The Carbon Budget Target for 2020/21 was 10,349 tonnes CO₂e and actual emissions were 9,424 tonnes CO₂e. The reduction in emissions was achieved because of reduced use of Council assets due to the pandemic. Emissions associated with use of electrical energy had also reduced because of continuing 'decarbonisation' of national grid electricity.

Resolved –

That Carbon Budget Performance Report 2020/21 be noted.

11 **PROGRESS UPDATE ON BIODIVERSITY ACTIONS**

The Director of Neighbourhoods introduced this report. The Committee had approved the Council's Environment & Climate Emergency Policy at its previous meeting in March and since then officers had been developing the arrangements to progress the Policy's objectives and commitments. This report provided the Committee with an update on progress being made with the biodiversity, the biological variety and variability of life, aspect of the Policy. The report focused on 2 of the Council's biodiversity commitments within the policy, the 'Tree, Woodland and Hedgerow Strategy,' which was launched in July 2020 and 'Transforming our Open Spaces and Enhancing Biodiversity,' including the current position with the development of the Council's pollinator plan for roadside verges and parks green spaces and the new approach to grounds maintenance with a blend of reduced grass cutting and cessation of maintenance regimes being implemented during 2021-2022.

Members had noted messages of approval from residents about the policy and actions but had particular concerns, notably the rewilding of residential areas near river banks which made movement difficult and appeared to be attracting pests.

The Chair thanked officers who had undergone a complete change in how their work was judged, from aiming at neatness to encouraging insects and wild flora.

Councillor Bruce Berry proposed an additional resolution that 'this Environment, Climate Change and Transport Committee requests officers to revisit the rewilding policy with a view to reintroducing maintenance programs in residential areas and in particular areas close to river banks such as the Arrove Brook and the River Birkett both of which have seen an increase in

rodent activity and dogs plagued by ticks from the long grass since the cessation of grass cutting. We also seek assurance that long grass once cut is collected and removed off site.'

This was seconded by Councillor Michael Collins.

In response to questions officers confirmed that there would be a budget implication for this and there was no machine to collect and remove grass cuttings off site but they could revisit the issues as part of the review.

The proposal was put to the vote with four for, six against and one abstention so was declared lost.

Councillor Liz Grey proposed an additional recommendation:

“(3) Learning from the work in this report, Committee requests regular engagement and consultation in Communities through their elected representatives.”

This was seconded by Councillor Steve Foulkes.

Resolved (10:1) - That

- (1) the contents of the report on the progress being made against the Council’s biodiversity commitments be noted.**
- (2) note the development of the Council’s Pollinator Plan and request that the Director presents the Plan to Committee for approval this autumn.**
- (3) learning from the work in this report, Committee requests regular engagement and consultation in Communities through their elected representatives.**

12 2021/22 BUDGET MONITORING AND 22/23 BUDGET PROCESS

The Director of Resources presented this report which highlighted the processes for monitoring the 2021/22 budget and the budget setting process for 2022/23. The Committee was accountable for ensuring that the committee budget remained within the relevant envelope and was to take collective responsibility via the Policy and Resources Committee to ensure that the whole Council budget remained in balance at all times, by agreeing mitigating actions to bring the budget back in line, should a deficit be forecast.

One of the key documents required to enable the Council to receive approval for exceptional financial support was a balanced five-year medium term financial plan (MTFP). This document was prepared by Officers and required committee oversight and approval, with proposals being taken to workshops and then in further report to Committee.

Resolved - That

- (1) the content of the report and the current forecast position of savings for 2021/22 and the ongoing work being undertaken to mitigate any under-achievement be noted.**
- (2) the current proposals within this report from the Medium-Term Financial Plan from 2022/23 – 2025/26 be included and the Director of Neighbourhoods to develop them into full business cases, where appropriate, for inclusion in the 2022/23 budget proposals to Policy and Resources Committee at its October meeting for approval.**
- (3) a series of budget workshops be convened to identify any alternative savings/income/reductions in pressures to ensure that a full suite of costed and deliverable proposals can be recommended to the Policy and Resources Committee at its October meeting for approval.**

13 CAPITAL AND REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING QUARTER 4

The Director of Resources introduced this report which provided Members with an overview of budget performance for the Committee's area of activity. The financial information detailed the year-end revenue and capital outturn position, as reported at quarter 4 (Apr-Mar) 2020/21.

The revenue position was a £4.3 million overspend mainly due to the loss of car parking income. Also, major capital schemes had been paused so the Council couldn't charge capital salaries to them, and officers were diverted from their oral duties to help deal with the emergency response to the pandemic. The total was a portion of the total council overspend going to Policy and Resources Committee on 30 June. There had been some grant support centrally from Government but not all income had been eligible, so of £16 million losses around £11 million was compensated.

Resolved –

That the year-end revenue outturn position of £4.345m adverse and the performance of the capital programme, as reported at quarter 4 (Apr-Mar) of 2020/21 be noted.

14 APPOINTMENT OF PANELS, STATUTORY / ADVISORY COMMITTEES AND WORKING PARTIES 2021/2022

The Head of Legal Services presented this report which was to enable the Committee to review the need for various panels, statutory / advisory committees and working parties, and to arrange for the appointment of Members to them.

Resolved –

That the Monitoring Officer as proper officer be authorised to carry out the wishes of the Group Leaders in allocating Members to membership of the Active Travel Forum and the Wirral Climate Change Group to appoint those Members with effect from the date at which the proper officer is advised of the names of such Members.

15 **APPOINTMENTS TO WIRRAL FLOOD & WATER MANAGEMENT PARTNERSHIP**

The Head of Legal Services presented this report which was to enable the Committee to appoint members and possibly named deputies to the Wirral Flood and Water Partnership for 2021/2022.

Resolved –

That the Monitoring Officer as proper officer be authorised to carry out the wishes of the political group leaders in allocating Members to membership of the Wirral Flood and Water Partnership and to appoint those Members with effect from the date at which the proper officer is advised of the names of such Members.

16 **WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE**

The Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee was responsible for proposing and delivering an annual committee work programme. This work programme was to align with the corporate priorities of the Council, in particular the delivery of the key decisions which are within the remit of the Committee.

Councillors suggested the following updates to the Programme:

- Tree contract qualitative presentation following the awarding of the contract in 2020, to include criteria for decisions to remove trees, processes and volumes.
- update on road safety strategy and road safety recommendations made by the Road Safety Working Group
- 'No Mow May' review
- Recycling and upcycling updates
- Active travel items to return subject to discussions with the Chair of Economic, Regeneration and Development Committee
- update on the collaboration between the Council and litter pickers

Resolved –

That the work programme for the remainder of the 2021/22 municipal year be noted with the suggested items added.

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