

TOURISM, COMMUNITIES, CULTURE & LEISURE COMMITTEE

Thursday, 9 March 2023

Present: Councillor H Cameron (Chair)

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

65 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.

66 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Jerry Williams, Councillor James Laing and Councillor Ivan Camphor.

67 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were 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.

68 MINUTES

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 2 February 2023 be approved and adopted as a correct record.

69 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

Gail Jenkinson attended the meeting to ask a question on whether the impact of the loss of library services could be considered before it becomes a budget

proposal in future years to save residents the distress of losing lifelines to social interaction and mental wellbeing.

The Chair responded that the context to this was that the External Assurance Report produced by CIPFA and published in November 2021 (as a requirement of the Council's request for a capitalisation directive) highlighted the following: "Overall Council spending is high compared to similar unitary authorities. This is particularly the case for cultural and related leisure services, where spending in Wirral per head is the highest of the 15 other statistical neighbour councils". It was for this reason that non-statutory services were a key focus of Council savings plans in 2022/23 and 2023/24. An equality impact assessment (EIA) was a tool that helped organisations such as the Council ensure that any decisions, practices, and policies are fair, and did not discriminate against any protected groups. Each budget saving and the impacts of, were considered against the 9 protected characteristics where appropriate, as defined by the Equality Act 2010: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race and ethnicity, religion or belief, biological sex, and sexual orientation. An Equality impact Assessment is not a legal requirement; however, The Council did have a legal obligation to take the Public Sector Equality Duty (Section 149) when we make our decisions and deliver our services. EIA's were therefore undertaken to assist with the Council's responsibility under equality law. Equality implications were considered at every stage of the process, however, depending on the proposal it was sometimes not possible to be as precise as we would like, until impacts emerge. The Equality Duty was an ongoing obligation and did not stop when an EIA is produced. Factors that were considered as part of the EIA budget process included, but weren't limited to workforce, communities, and services. As part of the budget process, equality implications were given sufficient weight alongside any other important considerations. Decision makers should consider the impacts and if they feel that the decision would be discriminatory, or the impact too great, they could ask Officers for more information, to reconsider or to not accept the proposal.

As your question references Libraries and Greasby Library in particular; Wirral Libraries were pleased to report that the budget options that affected the Service were not being taken forward and there were no plans to close or relocate any libraries at present. The Council could now move forward to ensure full delivery of our Library Strategy which will provide a balanced, sustainable, modern, and fit for purpose Library Service which will ensure that all Wirral residents have access to a comprehensive and efficient service. To that end, there would be extended opening hours in most of our libraries including community libraries. Greasby for example, would now be open four weekdays and every Saturday morning and the extended offer equated to an additional 91 hours per week across the Library Service. A range of activities (most of them free of charge) would be continued to be offered and plans were underway to deliver events for World Book Night and an exciting Summer Reading Challenge for children over the summer holidays.

A supplementary question was asked on whether, given that the majority of single parents and family carers are women, could it be considered discriminatory to propose the closure of libraries. The Chair agreed that a written response would be provided within 10 working days.

70 **STATEMENTS AND PETITIONS**

No statements or petitions had been received.

71 **QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS**

There were no questions by Members.

72 **COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER: FORMER LIBRARIES**

The Director of Resources introduced the report which made recommendations in relation to the community asset transfer matters (CAT) of the former libraries at Irby Village and Wallasey Village. It was reported that in relation to the transfer of Irby library, further works had been identified which needed to be done by the Council prior to the transfer of the asset. These related to the heating system and insulation of the building. The estimated cost was £20,000. It was therefore recommended that the capital sum to support the transfer was increased from £20,000 to £40,000 to cover the cost of the additional works. There was surplus budget in the approved funding for CAT to fund this increase.

Members recognised that producing business plans could be daunting for small business so the officer support and guidance throughout the CAT process was appreciated.

Resolved – That

(1) the capital allocation to support the transfer of Irby Library be increased from £20,000 to £40,000.

(2) the Director of Resources be authorised to conclude the transfer of the assets of Wallasey Village Library to the Wallasey Village Library and Community Centre, and Irby Library to the Friends of Irby Library based on the agreed terms reported in the exempt appendices 1 and 2 of this report.

73 **ASSET TRANSFER OF WIRRAL TRANSPORT MUSEUM**

The Head of Regeneration Delivery introduced the report of the Director of Regeneration and Place which proposed to transfer the Wirral Transport Museum to Big Heritage, a locally based non-profit organisation. It was

reported that this would be a 25 year lease contracted out of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1954. It was reported that the asset cost the council around £85,000 per year and so the transfer would represent a saving of that amount. Wirral Transport Museum was operated by volunteers and had a steady stream of visitors, Big Heritage had a wealth of experience operating visitor attractions across the region and there was a projected visitor increase from 6,000 to 40,000 per year.

In response to Member queries, the Head of Regeneration Delivery gave assurance that Big Heritage would continue to work with the skilled volunteers and that there had been a lot of interaction and consultation between the two groups. The Chair noted that a key focus had been to ensure that the groups that were so passionate about the transport museum saw this as an opportunity and that there was a future for the asset going forward.

The Assistant Director – Special Projects reported that an annual monitoring report was required from Big Heritage so that the Council had oversight of visitor numbers and costs and could consider actions to be taken where necessary.

Due to a need to discuss information contained in the exempt appendices, on a motion by the Chair, seconded by Councillor Judith Grier it was -

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 item 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 exempt session, the press and public were invited back into the meeting.

Resolved – That

- (1) the Heads of Terms for an Agreement for Lease, Museum Lease, Tramway Operation Agreement and Option Agreement in relation to the landholding of Wirral Transport Museum, East Side of Taylor Street Birkenhead to Big Heritage CIC substantially in accordance with the Heads of Terms as set out in Appendix 1 of this report be approved.**
- (2) the Director of Law and Governance, in consultation with the Director of Regeneration and Place be authorised to:**
 - (a) Negotiate and finalise the legal document associated with this Heads of Terms**

- (b) (b) Seek any necessary regulatory approvals from the Secretary of State in relation to the tramway operation.**

74 **CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE STRATEGY**

The Director of Neighbourhood Services introduced the report which set out the Customer Experience Strategy and how it would be achieved over the following four years. The Customer Experience Strategy was one of a suite of five strategies that shaped the Council's new operating model and delivery on its improvement plan. One of the key underpinning principles of the Wirral Plan was "Relationships -Working with residents, partners, businesses and communities for a better Wirral". The Customer Experience Strategy set out how the Council would engage with all customers to improve those relationships.

Members welcomed the strategy but raised concerns over customers who were digitally excluded. In response, the Director of Neighbourhood Services outlined that there would be different channels of communication and that sometimes there was enough information on the website but for more complex issues kiosks would be introduced in libraries for residents to have face to face appointments with trained members of staff to support them.

In response to Member queries around volunteers being trained to support residents it was outlined by the Senior Manager – Engagement that the strategy included details of digital inclusion partnerships and so assets that had been transferred to volunteer groups would receive support in offering guidance to members of the public and it was further emphasised by the Assistant Director – Leisure Libraries and Customer Engagement that the Council would explore all avenues to distribute the strategy such as social prescribers.

Resolved – That

- (1) the Customer Experience Strategy as set out in appendix one of the report be approved.**

- (2) the Customer Charter as set out in appendix two of this report be approved.**

75 **TCCL QUARTER 3 REVENUE AND CAPITAL MONITORING BUDGET REPORT**

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 3 (1 Oct-31 Dec) of 2022-23. The report 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.

At the end of Quarter 3, there was a forecast adverse position of £3.373m on the Committees net revenue budget, of £5.259m. This position was based on activity to date, projected trends in income and expenditure and potential mitigation to offset areas of adverse variance.

Members discussed the depletion of the earmarked reserves and were given assurance that these were dedicated to specific projects such as the purchase of gym equipment and were not the same as corporate reserves.

In response to a Member query, the Assistant Director – Leisure, Libraries and Customer Engagement reported that the expenditure for 3G pitches at Wirral Tennis Centre and Woodchurch Sports Pavilion had been delayed for the next financial year due to the delay in approval from the local lead flood authority following changes in the scope of the pitches.

Resolved – That

(1) the forecast revenue position presented at Quarter 3 be noted.

(2) the progress on delivery of the 2022-23 savings programme at Quarter 3 be noted.

(3) the forecast level of reserves at Quarter 3 be noted.

(4) the forecast capital position presented at Quarter 3 be noted.

76 TOURISM, COMMUNITIES, CULTURE AND LEISURE PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Assistant Director, Neighbourhoods, Safety & Transport introduced the report of the Director of Neighbourhood Services which provided information in relation to community safety. The report encompassed community safety delivered by the Council and partner organisations in Wirral. The Assistant Director, Neighbourhoods, Safety and Transport detailed the three areas the report covered which were Violence, Acquisitive Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour

In response to a Member query, it was reported that help points had been put in place in areas where there was a high risk of violence, particularly against women and girls and that calls went through to a control room where operators could see the caller on cameras and speak with them to offer help and advice.

Following a discussion on the provision of youth spaces and services, it was reported that the community safety partnership had representatives from youth services who vocalised the need for these spaces. The Assistant Director, Neighbourhoods, Safety and Transport outlined that there were a lot of fantastic activities available across the Wirral but there were a core of younger people that these weren't right for and that the Council needed to find ways to engage them.

Resolved – That the content of the report be noted.

77 **THIRD SECTOR COMMISSIONING AND COMMUNITY, VOLUNTARY AND FAITH SECTOR SUMMARY UPDATE REPORT**

The Director of Neighbourhood Services introduced the report of the Assistant Chief Executive which provided a summary update of spend and activity on the Community, Voluntary and Faith Sector (CVF) and third sector commissioning. It was reported that this was an initial report and that guidance from Members to inform future reports would be welcomed. Activities within the CVF sector ranged from high level strategic partnership work through to small scale activities that supported individuals and small community groups and that the work the sector undertook was valued highly and made a significant contribution to meet the needs of communities.

Members welcomed the report and queried why there was only mention of grant funding and not the commissioning and contracting work as this was an essential part of work with the CVF sector. It was noted that smaller organisations weren't always aware of grant funding and opportunities available, and that valuable work could be missed out on. Members requested that future reports include detail on how the Council is accessible to small organisations and more granularity on the financial information in respect of spend on each organisation and geographical spend.

On a motion by Councillor Helen Cameron, seconded by Councillor Jenny Johnson it was -

Resolved – That the summary report be considered as an interim position statement and a further update report be presented to Committee within 6 months to build on the work of the Health & Wellbeing board around local infrastructure and to;

- A) Respond to concerns around VCSE organisations' capacity to evidence need and how we aim to support them with streamlined processes.**
- B) Specify the circumstances when grant funding may be preferred over commissioning services or contracts.**

- C) Outline the decision processes on grant funding to the VCSE sector, in order to;
- ensure any measures of the intended benefits are established in advance.
 - evaluations against these measures are proportionate to the funding value.
- D) Clarify how risks associated with VCSE funding are considered at a corporate level.

78 **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chair invited the Heritage Champion, Councillor Jerry Williams to update Committee on heritage achievements over the 2022/23 Municipal Year. He thanked local heritage groups for their outstanding work and support. It was reported that Birkenhead Park and Port Sunlight Conservation Areas were awaiting a decision about their acceptance onto the World Heritage Site tentative list. Other projects such as the endeavour to secure National Battlefield Status for Brunaburh, uncovering a Viking ship in Meols and Heritage and Community Street Naming were detailed.

Members thanked Councillor Williams for his hard work undertaken as Heritage Champion.

Resolved – That the Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee work programme for the remainder of the 2022/23 municipal year be noted.

79 **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.

80 **EXEMPT APPENDICES - COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER: FORMER LIBRARIES**

Resolved – That the content of the appendices be noted.

81 **EXEMPT APPENDICES: ASSET TRANSFER OF WIRRAL TRANSPORT MUSEUM**

Resolved – That the content of the appendices be noted.

