



Council Excellence Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date:	Tuesday, 21 September 2010
Time:	6.00 pm
Venue:	Committee Room 1 - Wallasey Town Hall

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AGENDA

1. MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST/PARTY WHIP

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

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

2. MINUTES (Pages 1 - 28)

To receive the minutes of the meetings held on 8 July (two meetings), 24 and 26 August 2010.

3. STRATEGIC CHANGE PROGRAMME UPDATE

Verbal Report

4. FINANCIAL MONITORING STATEMENT (Pages 29 - 32)

5. FIRST QUARTER PERFORMANCE EXCEPTION REPORT 2010/2011 (Pages 33 - 48)

- 6. REACHING EXCELLENT LEVEL OF THE EQUALITY FRAMEWORK FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT (EFLG) - QUARTER ONE 2010/2011 CORPORATE PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT (Pages 49 - 56)**
- 7. OFFICE RATIONALISATION**

To be circulated separately
- 8. TOTAL PLACE (Pages 57 - 62)**
- 9. REVENUES AND BENEFITS (Pages 63 - 68)**
- 10. BUDGET PROJECTIONS 2011 - 2015 (Pages 69 - 76)**
- 11. TREASURY MANAGEMENT QUARTERLY MONITORING (Pages 77 - 86)**
- 12. DELIVERING EFFICIENCY AND MEASURING AND REPORTING VALUE FOR MONEY GAINS IN LOCAL SERVICES (Pages 87 - 104)**
- 13. CUSTOMER SERVICE FOCUS GROUP (Pages 105 - 140)**
- 14. PUBLICATION OF EXPENDITURE - WORKLOAD IMPACT (Pages 141 - 144)**
- 15. AUDIT COMMISSION REPORT - MANAGING ATTENDANCE (Pages 145 - 172)**
- 16. FORWARD PLAN**

The Forward Plan for the period October 2010 – January 2011 has now been published on the Council's intranet/website. Members are invited to review the Plan prior to the meeting in order for the Council Excellence Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider, having regard to the work programme, whether scrutiny should take place of any items contained within the Plan and, if so, how it could be done within relevant timescales and resources.
- 17. REVIEW OF SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME (Pages 173 - 180)**
- 18. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS APPROVED BY THE CHAIR (PART 1)**

19. EXEMPT INFORMATION - EXCLUSION OF MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

The public may 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.

RECOMMENDED –

That in accordance with section 100A (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 the relevant paragraphs of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to that Act. The public interest test has been applied and favours exclusion.

20. SCHOOLS RISK MANAGEMENT (Pages 181 - 184)

21. CATERING TENDERS (Pages 185 - 188)

22. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS APPROVED BY THE CHAIR (PART 2)

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COUNCIL EXCELLENCE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 8 July 2010

<u>Present:</u>	Councillor	P Gilchrist (Chair)	
	Councillors	J Keeley A Brighthouse P Kearney B Kenny	A McArdle D McCubbin S Williams
<u>Deputies:</u>	Councillors	AER Jones (In place of P Davies) C Meaden (In place of J Stapleton)	
<u>Cabinet Member:</u>	Councillor	S Holbrook	
<u>In attendance:</u>	Councillors	G Ellis	J Hale

6 CALL-IN OF CABINET MINUTE 406 (15 APRIL 2010) - HOYLAKE LIFEBOAT STATION

At its meeting held on 15 April 2010, the Cabinet considered an exempt report of the Director of Law, HR and Asset Management in relation to offers received for the car park adjoining the original Lifeboat Station in Hoylake after the joint marketing of the site with Peel Holdings. The Cabinet resolved –

That the offer from M Rice on the terms set out in the report be accepted and, in the event of the sale not proceeding, the offer from S Barnes be accepted.

That decision has been called in by Councillors G Ellis, J Hale, J Green, Mrs L Rennie and T Anderson on the grounds that “The proposal runs counter to the criteria for regeneration of the area and that the proposals for use would not be consistent with this designation. The proposals would also be detrimental to The Kings Gap Conservation Area”.

7 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - 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.

Councillor S Williams declared a personal interest by virtue of his acquaintance with Mr Curry, a call-in witness, who had submitted a written statement for consideration by the Committee.

Councillor A Jones declared a personal interest by virtue of him having an association with the RNLI, being a member of the Management Committee of New Brighton Lifeboat Station.

The Head of Legal and Member Services advised the Committee that prior to the meeting he had offered advice to those Members who were also Members or deputies of the Planning Committee of the need for them to be mindful of potential issues of pre-determination in relation to any subsequent planning application that could be made in relation to Hoylake Lifeboat Station.

8 SUMMARY OF EXEMPT REPORT CONSIDERED BY THE CABINET

The Chair indicated that the report considered by the Cabinet at its meeting on 15 April 2010 had been an exempt report which, together with the exempt delegated decision report (of June 2009) to declare the land a surplus asset, had been provided to Members with their agenda. He had requested the officers to prepare a summary of the document, which did not contain exempt information. Accordingly, the Director of Law, HR and Asset Management presented a revised version of his earlier report, which had advised the Cabinet of the offers received for the car park adjoining the original Lifeboat Station in Hoylake, after joint marketing the site with Peel Holdings, who owned the buildings.

The Cabinet had been advised that six offers had been received for both the Council's land and the building owned by Peel Holdings and he indicated that the capital receipt would be split on a 50/50 basis, less legal and other disposal costs. The sale would also be subject to an overage payment clause, which would entitle Peel Holdings and Wirral Council to 50% (to be split 50/50) of any increase in value of the property if planning permission for an alternative use, with a market value higher than existing use, was obtained within 25 years of the sale.

The Director had outlined for the Cabinet each of the offers made and the local considerations in relation to the site. Ultimately, however, he indicated that it would be for the potential purchaser to satisfy the Planning Committee as to the appropriateness of any future use. He set out the planning implications in relation to the site and commented that local residents would have an opportunity to register their views as part of the planning application process.

9 EXPLANATION OF CALL-IN BY LEAD SIGNATORY

Councillor G Ellis referred to the historical significance of the Hoylake Lifeboat Station and expressed the view that the Cabinet, instead of marketing the site, should authorise negotiations to take place with Peel Holdings on the basis that they should make the property available to the Council at a peppercorn rent, so as to enable the building to be used as a Lifeboat Museum.

Councillor J Hale commented that the site was immediately adjacent to a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and, being located within the Kings Gap

Conservation Area directly on the promenade, was not suitable for use a commercial activity. He referred to the Council's Regeneration Master Plan (2004), which indicated that there had been public support for a Lifeboat Museum. However, since that time, there had been no further public consultation in relation to any other use for the site and the Director of Law, HR and Asset Management had recommended its joint disposal in order to secure the optimum capital receipt.

In response to questions from Members in relation to funding for the proposed Lifeboat Museum, Councillor Hale indicated that grant funding was available which, he believed, could accessed with the support of Council officers, in terms of their time and expertise.

10 **EVIDENCE FROM CALL-IN WITNESSES**

Mr J Curry advised the Committee that although he was a former Mersey River Pilot, he was also the Lifeboat Operations Manager of the Hoylake Lifeboat. He commented that there were five trust lifeboat museums throughout the Country and that each had had a significant benefit for the communities in which they were located. He referred specifically to the Moelfre Lifeboat Museum and its positive effect on the local economy. He expressed the view that there would be widespread support for a Lifeboat Museum in Hoylake and that the Council's assistance in negotiations with Peel Holdings would be vital for it to be achieved.

Mr J Percival advised the Committee that in addition to him being the proprietor of the Hoylake Sailing Club, he was a Deputy at the Hoylake Lifeboat. He referred to the significant numbers of educational visits to the Lifeboat Station and the high levels of interest in the local history of the institution. However, as the station was operational, it could not function as a museum. He referred to the benefits of tourism for the local economy and upon the potential for increased numbers of visitors to a Lifeboat Museum in Hoylake. He added that, if the project did not come to fruition, the assets belonging to the Council and to Peel Holdings would still be available for future disposal.

The Committee gave consideration also to a detailed written submission from Mr J Parr, who had been unable to attend the meeting. His submission referred to the historical importance of the Hoylake Lifeboat and to the widespread public enthusiasm for a Lifeboat Museum on the site, which would be unique in the North West. Mr Parr had stated that he was both willing and able to take a leading role in the establishment and development of a Lifeboat Museum.

11 **EVIDENCE FROM CABINET MEMBER'S WITNESSES**

Mr I Brand, Head of Asset Management, reported that the original decision to dispose of the Council owned car park area adjoining the Lifeboat Station was taken in June 2009 as a delegated decision by the Cabinet Member for Corporate Resources. The provisional basis for the sale, as a joint disposal with the Lifeboat Station buildings owned by Peel Holdings, had been agreed as the terms were considered to be favourable for the Council. That decision had not been called-in and he commented that the planning process would determine the ultimate use of the site. All bidders for the site had been advised of Planning policies.

With regard to the suggestion that the officers negotiate with Peel Holdings for the building to be made available at a peppercorn rent, he commented that Peel Holdings had already clearly stated that they were unable to do this and that in respect of their non-strategic assets, such as Hoylake Lifeboat Station, which were not deemed part of the Ports core business, it was their strategy to dispose at the best price determined by the open market. They had indicated recently that this remained the case at Hoylake.

He confirmed that the Council did not have to market the car park site jointly with the buildings. If it did not, Peel Holdings could act as it saw fit and the Council would retain the car park, albeit with a restrictive covenant, the benefit of which lay with Peel Holdings and the opportunity to maximise its value could be lost. In response to a question from a Member, he outlined the restrictive covenant held by Peel Holdings and indicated that they were prepared to release it if the site was marketed jointly, as agreed.

12 SUMMING UP BY MOVER OF THE CALL-IN

Councillor G Ellis referred to the expertise available locally to ensure the success of a Lifeboat Museum in Hoylake and in particular to Mr J Parr, who was unable to be present. However, the support of Council officers was vital and he referred to the expertise of the Council's Lottery Funding Officer and Heritage Officer. He was concerned that Peel Holdings appeared to be unwilling to reconsider their policies, having regard to the significant development being undertaken elsewhere in Wirral, but was confident that officers could negotiate further to assist the project. He requested the Committee to refer the matter back to the Cabinet in order for its decision to be reconsidered.

13 SUMMING UP BY CABINET MEMBER

The Cabinet Member for Corporate Resources commented that the decision of the Cabinet was to accept an offer for the sale of a piece of land. If the sale proceeded as agreed by the Cabinet, the purchaser would have to apply for planning permission for any change of use. All such planning related matters were not within the remit of the Council Excellence Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

If the car park was marketed jointly with the buildings owned by Peel Holdings, the Council would share in the combined value of the asset. However, if Peel proceeded with the sale of the building, the value of the car park in isolation at a future date would be further diminished because of the restrictive covenant.

He confirmed that he had approved the disposal of the land on 22 June 2009 under delegated powers, after consulting with Ward Councillors, and that his decision had not been called-in. The property had therefore been available in effect for a year. He commented also that he had subsequently been requested to make a delegated decision in relation to the sale of the land but, having consulted with Ward Councillors, had referred the matter to the Cabinet for determination, to enable Ward Councillors to attend the Cabinet meeting to put forward their views. This offer was not taken up and the Cabinet agreed to accept an offer on the terms set out in the report of the Director of Law, HR and Asset Management.

He further commented that officer time was valuable and that all were busy doing important work for the Council. To allocate time to this matter would inevitably mean doing less elsewhere.

14 COMMITTEE DECISION

The Head of Legal and Member Services indicated that upon consideration of an executive decision which had been the subject of a valid call-in, the following options were open to the Committee –

- If the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed with the decision, it need take no further action and the decision would become effective immediately at the close of the meeting.

Or

- If the Overview and Scrutiny Committee did not agree with the decision, it may refer it back to the Cabinet for reconsideration, providing a statement of reasons for the referral. The Cabinet's reconsideration of the matter, and subsequent decision would be final.

Or

- If the Overview and Scrutiny Committee did not agree with the decision and, having taken appropriate advice, it considered the decision was contrary to the Council's policy framework or approved budget, or was not within the Cabinet's remit or powers, it could refer the matter to the Council.

It was moved by Councillor Jones and seconded by Councillor Gilchrist –

“That the Cabinet be requested to seek discussions with Peel Holdings, with a view to facilitating the Hoylake Lifeboat Museum Project.”

It was moved as an amendment to the Motion by Councillor Keeley and seconded by Councillor Williams –

“That a time limit of three months be recommended to the Cabinet for the completion of negotiations.”

The Motion by Councillor Jones, incorporating the amendment by Councillor Keeley was carried. (10:0)

Resolved – That this Committee considers it appropriate for the Cabinet to explore whether the Hoylake Lifeboat Museum project is feasible and recommends that the Cabinet be requested to authorise relevant officers to enter into discussions and/or negotiations with Peel Holdings, for a maximum period of three months, with a view to exploring and/or facilitating the Hoylake Lifeboat Museum Project.

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COUNCIL EXCELLENCE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 8 July 2010

Present: Councillor P Gilchrist (Chair)

Councillors J Keeley A McArdle
P Davies D McCubbin
A Brighouse J Stapleton
P Kearney S Williams
B Kenny

15 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - 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.

Councillor Kearney declared his personal interest in agenda item 11 – Freedom of Information (FOI) Requests (see minute 25 post) by virtue of having made a number of such requests prior to being elected to the Council.

No further declarations were made.

16 MINUTES

Resolved – That the minutes of the meetings held on 17 March and 14 June 2010 be approved.

17 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

Resolved – That Councillor Alan Brighouse be appointed Vice-Chair for the ensuing municipal year.

18 FINANCIAL MONITORING STATEMENT

The Director of Finance provided a summary in tabular format of the current position of the revenue accounts and General Fund balances as at 31 May 2010. The monitoring statement included the composition of the original 2010/2011 budget by Department including agreed savings and policy options; monitoring against the 2010/2011 budget including the financial implications of any changes agreed through Cabinet decisions; anticipated variances not agreed by Cabinet, against the original

budget; and comments which provided an explanation of variances and areas identified as requiring further attention.

At this stage of the financial year only Children and Young People were projecting an overspend and the Director highlighted potentially volatile areas that had been identified within departments. He identified also decisions taken by the Cabinet which had an impact upon the financial position.

As at 31 May 2010 the decision taken by the Cabinet and the overspend in Children & Young People, if realised, would reduce the balance at 31 March 2011 by £1.8m (from £6.5m down to £4.7m). The Director of Children's Services continued to look at actions to address the projected overspend.

In response to questions from Members, the Director provided information in relation to the revenue implications associated with digital infrastructure. He also confirmed that both LABGI and LAA grants were now not available and that ABG had been reduced by £3.9m. The implications of the reductions would be highlighted in the June monitoring statement, which would soon be issued to Members.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

19 REVENUES AND BENEFITS

The Director of Finance provided information on the position in the period 1 April 2010 to 31 May 2010 in relation to Council Tax, National Non Domestic Rate, general debt and cash income collection and the payment of benefits and he provided comparison figures for the same period in 2009/2010.

Members commented upon income levels in relation to both Sports Centres and Golf Courses and, in particular, upon people playing on the Council's courses without having paid to do so. The Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Services proposed that a briefing note would be circulated to Members direct. In response to further comments in relation to Building Control Fees and Land Charges, he indicated that a fall off in building activity as a direct impact of the recession had resulted in a significant reduction in fee income. He proposed that a further more detailed briefing note be also circulated to Members.

Resolved –

- (1) That the report be noted.**
- (2) That briefing notes from relevant officers be provided to Members in relation to the fee income levels, now discussed.**
- (3) That the officers be requested to arrange for Finance training to be provided, primarily for Members and deputies of the Council Excellence Overview and Scrutiny Committee and that all Members of the Council be invited to attend.**

The Director of Finance reported upon progress of the Benefits Service over 2009/2010 and he outlined the challenges to be faced in the coming months. He reported that traditionally the Benefits Service had administered around 36,500 to 37,000 live claims for Housing Benefits and Council Tax Benefits (HB/CTB). However, during the past two years a significant shift in claimant activity had led to an increased (and increasing) caseload. The rate of increase escalated from January 2009 when the caseload exceeded 40,000 and the Director indicated that the continuing trend had resulted in 40,647 live claims at 31 May 2010. For 2009/2010, the benefit bill had increased substantially from the original estimate of £137,608,027 to £151,636,296. However, the Director indicated that the initial estimate for 2010/2011 of £154,979,207 was expected to increase further in line with national trends, influenced by the increased cost of Local Housing Allowance (LHA). In response to a question from a Member in relation to the staffing impact of increased caseload, the Director indicated that the Performance Delivery Team (PDT) of the DWP had provided assistance to the Council in relation to the improvement of systems. In addition, work was ongoing with software providers to ensure that computer systems were prepared for changes announced in the recent budget. In response to further comments with regard to rules changes, the Director indicated that regular updates of the impact of changes were provided to the Cabinet. If Members wished, the updates could also be presented to future meetings of the Committee.

The Director reported that key activity areas for the HB/CTB service comprised claims processing and the administration of the many changes that occurred during the life of a claim. This equated to optimising benefit take-up and maximisation for those already claiming, whilst actively securing the gateway to minimise the risk of loss through fraud and error. The Director highlighted the need for high levels of accuracy and expressed disappointment that the key work was not supported by robust national performance standards. However, performance monitoring procedures focused closely on accuracy and quality of processes, and a current average of between 94% and 95% was in keeping with historical national standards. Despite dips in performance at key holiday times, where impact on processing times was minimal, the Benefits service had maintained good service standards through a further period of increasing demand, challenge and change. Improvement and enhancement programmes continued with strategies routinely reviewed to ensure the ability to respond to customer expectation and ongoing DWP reforms.

The Director highlighted the work undertaken to prevent and detect fraud and reported upon service development with HB/CTB being subject to an ongoing review at national level. He commented also upon measures to further improve efficiency and set out the challenges for 2010/2011 in relation to the reform of LHA and Job Centre Plus.

Resolved –

- (1) That the report be noted.**
- (2) That updates in relation to the impact of Housing Benefit/Council Tax changes be presented to future meetings of the Committee.**

The Director of Finance presented the annual update on the work of the Customer Services teams, who provided the main access channels to services provided by the Council in line with the Customer Access Strategy. A wide range of training and development enabled most enquiries to be resolved on first contact with the Council, either on a face to face basis, by telephone or via the web. Work with departments was undertaken to identify efficiencies and improve their processes to ensure that the customer facing element of the service was transparent and was easily accessed.

The Director provided details of performance monitoring in relation to the Call Centre and One Stop Shops and commented that although the trend showed an improvement in 2009/2010, performance had been affected in the current year as a result of a surge in customer enquiries related to adverse weather conditions in December 2009 and January 2010.

He reported that a peer review exercise was currently underway to assess awareness of, and performance against, the Corporate Customer Care Standards. He commented that should the exercise identify the need for further training and awareness initiatives he would review what additional supporting resources were required, as it was imperative that the customer standards endorsed by the Council were acted upon by all staff so that members of the public could be assured of a consistent level of service. Customer surveys, a focus group and a mystery shopping exercise contributed to the improvement of service delivery and he commented that the Audit Commission Access to Services inspection team had ranked provision of services at two stars, on a scale of zero to three stars, with promising prospects for improvement. Building on this positive assessment, the Authority had continued to progress the recommendations to ensure that services were provided in ways that customers wanted. Compliance had also been achieved with the standards for both Charter Mark and Investors in People. In response to a comment from a Member, the Director proposed to present a report to a future meeting in relation to the Customer Focus Group.

He reported that the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system was used to record, progress and analyse customer feedback, excluding statutory complaints in Adult Social Services and Children's Social Care and the challenge was to consistently record and respond to feedback received across all Council departments. The reporting period 2009/2010 showed a 5% increase in corporate complaints received over the previous 12 months, compared to a 22% increase reported in 2008/2009. He commented that a single issue again dominated the 2009/2010 complaint figures (as with the Strategic Asset Review in 2008/2009) with the adverse weather conditions experienced in quarter 4 affecting delivery of key services such as refuse collection, which recorded 359 stage 1 complaints in January 2010. The annual report of complaint handling was presented to the Standards Committee on 21 June 2010 (minute 4 refers).

As the Audit Commission outlined in the Access to Services report, the Director indicated that it was the cutting edge approach to working with others where customers benefited most significantly and he provided details of partner agencies and community networks working with One Stop Shops and the Call Centre. In response to a question from a Member, the Director indicated that staff received significant levels of training in relation to work with other agencies.

Resolved –

- (1) That the thanks of the Committee be accorded to the officers for the comprehensive Annual Report, and the high levels of customer service be noted.**
- (2) That a further report be presented to a future meeting of the Committee in relation to the work undertaken by the Customer Focus Group.**

22 TREASURY MANAGEMENT ANNUAL REPORT 2009/2010

The Director of Finance presented a review of Treasury Management activities in 2009/2010, which confirmed compliance with treasury limits and prudential indicators and had been prepared in accordance with the revised CIPFA Treasury Management Code and the revised Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities.

The Director commented upon the outlook for the economy and interest rates as at February 2009, when the Treasury Management Strategy for 2009/2010 was determined. The economic recession and downturn in growth extended into 2009 and he reported upon events in 2009/2010, which indicated an outlook for 2010 of slow growth accompanied with high unemployment. He set out the strategy and outturn in relation to borrowing and investments and reported upon compliance with treasury limits and indicators. During the year Internal Audit carried out a review of the efficiency and effectiveness of the Treasury Management system controls, which were assessed as being 'excellent' and the Director commented that in the financial year 2009/2010 the treasury management activities had resulted in £1.2m of additional receipts from investment income, which had been returned to balances.

Resolved –

- (1) That the Treasury Management Annual Report be noted.**
- (2) That the transfer to the General Fund balance of additional investment income of £1.2m in 2009/2010 be noted.**

23 AUDIT COMMISSION PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REVIEW

The Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Services commented that Wirral Council had taken some significant steps to improve performance management in recent years and he reported that in April 2009, the Audit Commission began a three stage review of the Council's performance management arrangements, in order to work with the authority to deliver further improvements. He provided the Audit Commission's final report on the findings of the review and set out the areas for focus which had arisen from it. Overall, the Council had sound systems and processes to manage its performance effectively but those arrangements were not being consistently implemented across the organisation.

The report included an action plan for continued improvement that had been developed by the Council's Performance Management and Corporate Improvement Groups and had been approved by the Chief Officers Management Team.

Resolved –

- (1) That the findings of the Audit Commission review be noted.**
- (2) That the Audit Commission’s final report and action plan, appended to the report now submitted, be noted.**

24 **ANTI-FRAUD AND CORRUPTION POLICY**

Further to minute 51 (1 February 2010), the Director of Finance reported upon a review by Internal Audit of the Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy, which had been endorsed by the Cabinet on 15 April 2010 (minute 395 refers). The review had been undertaken during an exercise to assess the effectiveness of the overall arrangements for managing the risk of fraud and it indicated that the policy was found to be in need of updating in order for it to be compliant with current best practice and CIPFA/SOLACE guidance.

The Director presented an updated Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy and indicated that it was essential for it to be embedded within the culture of the organisation and pro-actively drawn to the attention of all members of staff, officers and Members of the Council. To facilitate this, the Policy would be made available on the Council’s Intranet and Internet and would be drawn to the attention of all Chief Officers via all available Council communication channels. Awareness training was also scheduled for later in the year including targeted sessions with relevant members of staff and the utilisation of on line training packages.

Resolved –

- (1) That the Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy be endorsed.**
- (2) That the Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy be made available to all Members, officers, and citizens by being included on the Council’s Internet site and that awareness training be scheduled to promote compliance across the Council.**

25 **FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUESTS**

Further to minute 58 (17 March 2010), the Director of Finance presented an analysis of 903 Freedom of Information (FOI) requests that had been received by the Council in 2009. He commented that since the introduction of the legislation which gave a general right of access to all types of recorded information held by public authorities, Wirral Council had received a higher than average number of FOI requests, which reflected both local topical issues and national media stories. A recent two year study by the Government Constitution Unit had produced a report on Freedom of Information Legislation and one of the key findings for local government was that the number of requests had not stabilised, as has been the case for Central Government, but remained on the increase.

He indicated that requests were required to be in a written format and that 95% of those received at Wirral were by email. The new web pages allowed for a Service Request button to be used to generate an FOI from the public. The requests were

received by the Information Manager, who liaised with the most appropriate officers in the various Departments of the Council to obtain the information.

Of the requests received, 168 had been refused for various reasons. In all such cases, requestors had been contacted and the reasons for their request being refused had been explained to them. However, of those, 53 were refused as they formed part of a repeated and vexatious notice that had been served on an individual member of the public. The Council was therefore under no obligation to answer any requests which came under the terms of the notice. Although the individual had been contacted on several occasions to remind him of the terms of the notice served, the requests still continued.

In response to a question from a Member with regard to the impact on officers' workload of the requirement to publish information in relation to items of expenditure over £500, the Director commented that it had not, as yet, been quantified. Monitoring would be undertaken and he proposed to present a further report to a future meeting of the Committee.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

26 FORWARD PLAN

The Director of Law, HR and Asset Management reported that the Forward Plan for the period July to October 2010 had recently been published on the Council's intranet/website. Members had been invited to review the Plan prior to the meeting in order for the Committee to consider, having regard to its work programme, whether scrutiny should take place of any items contained within the Plan and, if so, how it could be done within relevant timescales and resources.

The Chair referred to the Plan item 'Common Administrative Processes', which followed from the agreed implementation schedule for the HR and Payroll IT system. He proposed that this matter could form part of the Committees agreed Work Programme (see minute 27 post).

Resolved – That the published Forward Plan be noted.

27 REVIEW OF SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair provided an update on the current status of the Committee's Work Programme for the previous municipal year and invited suggestions from Members for the ensuing municipal year. Among the functions of the Committee was to scrutinise the work of the following portfolio holders –

- Community and Customer Engagement
- Corporate Resources
- Finance and Best Value

He indicated that the group spokespersons had met with the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Services and the Director of Law, HR and Asset Management on 5 July 2010 and had discussed various items for inclusion in the Committee's Work Programme. He commented upon the ways that topics selected for scrutiny could be handled and indicated that a topic chosen for review must have

the potential to make a difference and should be carefully chosen with reference to objective criteria.

Resolved –

(1) That the officers be requested to prepare a Work Programme for 2010/2011 based on the following issues –

- **A Review of Performance Indicators**
To have regard to the areas where performance indicators are redundant, and the areas locally, which the Committee consider should continue to be performance managed. To consider also balancing the need to monitor performance, against the time spent by officers in providing monitoring information.
- **Change Programme**
- **Common Administrative Processes**
- **Budget Monitoring**
How the authority performs against savings targets and, in particular, to review performance and the impact on local residents where savings are made.
- **Total Place**
- **Office Accommodation**
- **Cultural Services**

(2) That, in relation to Office Accommodation, the Head of Asset Management be requested to prepare a schedule for Members to visit key sites, prior to a Special Meeting of the Committee to consider Office Accommodation, to be held on 24 August 2010.

28 OFFICE ACCOMMODATION

At its meeting held on 24 June 2010, the Cabinet (minute 45 refers) referred the Office Accommodation report of the Director of Law, HR and Asset Management, together with the EC Harris Consultancy report to this Committee for consideration.

Resolved – That consideration of the report of the Director of Law, HR and Asset Management in relation to Office Accommodation be deferred to a Special Meeting of the Committee to be held on 24 August 2010.

29 EXEMPT INFORMATION - EXCLUSION OF MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Resolved – That in accordance with section 100A (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 it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined by the relevant paragraphs of Part 1 of

Schedule 12A to that Act. The public interest test has been applied and favours exclusion.

30 **TENDER REPORT: INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY HARDWARE - CENTRAL PROCESSORS**

The Director of Finance reported upon the outcome of a tender to replace some of the central processors or servers required for the principal computer applications. He set out the dates on which the processors would reach their End of Service Life (EOSL), after which they would no longer be supported by the manufacturer and he reported that to meet the challenges of approaching EOSL, maintenance costs that rose with the age of equipment and the need for additional processor power, IT Services had explored options to either make better use of existing hardware or to upgrade or replace the existing processors. He outlined the most economically advantageous solution and indicated that the project formed part of the Change Programme agreed by the Cabinet. He anticipated that, over a five year period, savings of £1.1m could be achieved.

Resolved – That the delegated decision of the Director of Finance in awarding the IT Hardware – Central Processors contract be noted.

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COUNCIL EXCELLENCE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 24 August 2010

Present: Councillor P Gilchrist (Chair)

Councillors A Brighthouse B Kenny
J Keeley D McCubbin
P Davies J Stapleton
P Kearney S Williams

Deputies: Councillors C Meaden (In place of A McArdle)

31 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST/PARTY WHIP

Members were asked to consider whether they had personal or prejudicial interests in connection with the following item 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 the item to be considered and, if so, to declare it and state the nature of the whipping arrangement.

No such declarations were made.

32 OFFICE ACCOMMODATION

Further to minute 28 (8 July 2010), the Director of Law, HR and Asset Management presented his report in relation to Office Accommodation, which had been referred by the Cabinet (minute 45 (24 June 2010) refers) to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration. The report presented the business case produced by EC Harris for the rationalisation of the Council's office accommodation. It identified related issues that required further consideration and sought guidance from Members on the preferred way forward.

The Head of Asset Management outlined the key issues contained within the consultancy report, which took a long term view in relation to both cost efficiency and the qualitative benefits that would be delivered. The report presented six options for consideration and he commented that beyond the 'do minimum' option, which was not recommended, any of the other 5 options would deliver savings and operational efficiencies. Option 3 (to retain Wallasey Town Hall, Cheshire Lines, Acre Lane, make better use of Solar Campus, refurbish Westminster House and provide the balance of the required accommodation in new build) was recommended as being the most economically advantageous solution. It would deliver discounted average revenue savings to the Council (compared with 'do minimum') in excess of £800,000

per annum over the model period of 25 years, plus further as yet unquantified savings. Those savings were dependent upon stated assumptions in the report, including a 10% reduction in staff numbers over the 25 year period under consideration. However, Members commented that the report recognised crucially, that the change programme, of which the SAR was a component, had not yet determined the future staff numbers or the organisation of functions within a rationalised portfolio.

Members referred to the significant investment that was required in option 3 before any savings would be achieved and commented upon the revenue implications of such investment. In response to further questions, the Deputy Director of Finance provided guidance for Members with regard to Prudential Borrowing to meet capital projects. However, the Head of Asset Management indicated that the model had been based upon all of the measures within option 3 being implemented. Following direction from the Cabinet, officers were investigating an alternative approach which did not involve new build and would deliver savings without the need for high levels of initial investment.

EC Harris had recommended that, because three of the modelled options were so closely ranked, further work should be done to confirm option 3 as the agreed way forward. Once a preferred option had been confirmed further detailed work would be undertaken to develop a final business case as the project moved forward. Separate detailed work was also required to address the related and building-specific issues outlined in the report so that the maximum advantage could be taken of opportunities arising from the rationalisation project.

Members had undertaken a site inspection of a sample of buildings affected by option 3 and considered various issues in relation to the proposals including the scope for savings in reduced facilities management costs. Members had regard also to the costs of the key works that were required, both short term and long term in relation to Westminster House and views were expressed as to whether it should be disposed of and, instead, to retain the North and South Annexes. Members also expressed concern about any proposal to mothball buildings in central Birkenhead, particularly the Conway Building, as it housed the main One Stop Shop. The Head of Asset Management indicated that detailed option appraisal work was required in relation to all of the One Stop Shops affected by the proposal.

He confirmed that a detailed options report was being prepared for the Cabinet, with a view to it being presented on 23 September 2010.

The Chair expressed the view that the Cabinet report should firstly be presented to the next meeting of the Committee in order that the views of the Committee may be presented to the Cabinet. The Chair went on to summarise comments made by Members in relation to the proposals for Office Accommodation, in the light of the recent site visits and having had regard to the consultancy report.

Resolved –

- (1) That the officers be requested to have regard to the views of the overview and scrutiny committee in relation to office accommodation –**
 - **A recognition of the importance of locality working**

- **A recognition of the need to achieve savings as a matter of urgency, including taking some buildings out of use for early disposal, to achieve those savings**
 - **The need to progress IT infrastructure/technology**
 - **The need for a clear understanding of the level of upfront investment required and the levels of savings that may be achieved**
 - **The importance of having a One Stop Shop in central Birkenhead was endorsed**
 - **That the views of the Conservation Officers should be sought in relation to the Conway Building**
 - **That consideration should be given to an increased use of the Solar Campus**
 - **That consideration be given to the refurbishment of the North and South Annexes in order to accommodate more staff**
 - **That there should be either effective refurbishment or disposal of Westminster House**
 - **That more work should be undertaken in relation to savings associated with Facilities Management**
 - **That new build should not be considered at the present time**
 - **That Wallasey Town Hall should remain as the Council's political centre**
 - **That there should be an increased use of Agile Working**
 - **That no further action should be taken at Cheshire Lines, other than to intensify its use**
 - **That the Council's Carbon Footprint should be reduced as a result of the proposals**
- (2) That the Cabinet report of the Director of Law, HR and Asset Management be presented to the meeting of the Committee scheduled for 21 September 2010, in order to allow the views of the Committee to be presented to the Cabinet at its meeting on 23 September 2010.**
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COUNCIL EXCELLENCE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 26 August 2010

Present: Councillor P Gilchrist (Chair)

Councillors A Brighouse B Kenny
J Keeley D McCubbin
P Davies J Stapleton
P Kearney S Williams

Deputies: Councillor C Meaden (In place of A McArdle)

Cabinet Member: Councillor JE Green

In attendance: Councillor S Foulkes

CALL-IN OF CABINET MINUTE 68 (22 JULY 2010) - AREA BASED GRANT

At its meeting held on 22 July 2010, the Cabinet considered the report of the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Services in relation to Area Based Grant 2010/11 and Priorities for Future Years.

The report set out (1) the current position on Area Based Grant across the Council; (2) recommendations where the recently announced Government reductions in Area Based Grant for 2010/11 should be made and the implications of these; (3) sought Members views on the allocation of the remaining Area Based Grant for 2010/11; and (4) advised on the approach to be considered for future funding allocations. The Cabinet –

Resolved –

- (1) That Cabinet agrees the ABG reductions in 2010/11 of £3,927,000 as set out below:

Source	Amount
Uncommitted ABG with no or low impact to services (not frontline)	£1,837,000
Uncommitted ABG with medium impact to services (not frontline)	£1,073,000
Working Neighbourhood Fund	£1,017,000
Total	£3,927,000

- (2) That a review of all future ABG funding is undertaken as set out in paragraph 5.2 of this report.

That decision has been called in by the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Labour Group, Councillor S Foulkes and Councillor P Davies on the grounds that –

“The report is misleading and plays down the actual impact of the cuts recommended.

Cutting over half a million pounds, for example, from the School Development Grant, which is used to raise the standards of teaching and learning in schools cannot be said to have no impact on front line services.

Children’s Services last year used £900,000 of uncommitted Area Based Grant to help reduce an overspend of £1.9m, of which £1.7m was due to increased spending on independent residential care for children. Cutting uncommitted grant will remove this flexibility and in so doing will have a direct impact on key frontline services.

There is a clear credibility gap between the priorities it says it is setting out to protect and the reality of what the Cabinet recommendations will mean.

A cut of £1.6m in the Working Neighbourhood Fund, for example, which is higher even than the cut recommended by the government, is in direct conflict with maintaining the Corporate Priorities both of mitigating the impact of the recession and reducing worklessness and of reducing the numbers not in employment, education or training.

Despite the much trumpeted dedication of this administration to consultation of all kinds, with staff, service users and the general public, there has been no consultation on these cuts at all, or any debate about their true impact. The reverse is true, with every effort being made to hide that impact.

It is not made clear that the way in which this report is written, and the recommendations are framed, means that the administration has now added a further £3.9m of additional cuts to be made to close the 2011/12 budget gap, which has already reached £24m and is rising fast, taking the total so far to nearly £28m, and this is before the full impact of the Comprehensive Spending Review is added to it.

The cuts in this year’s grant are fundamentally unnecessary, as recent growth figures have demonstrated, and a result of political dogma from the national Conservative Liberal Democrat coalition which puts ideological commitment to a smaller state above the interests of the nation and is prepared, in so doing, to jeopardise the country’s economic recovery by cutting too sharply too soon in order to achieve its ends over the course of a single parliament”.

33 CHAIR'S OPENING REMARKS

The Chair referred to the witnesses that had been invited to give evidence to the Committee and, having regard to the Call-In Guidelines and the Council’s standing orders, suggested how the call-in would be dealt with in order to ensure that it was determined in a fair and open manner.

34 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST/PARTY WHIP

Members were asked to consider whether they had personal or prejudicial interests in connection with the call-in item 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 the item to be considered and, if so, to declare it and state the nature of the whipping arrangement.

Councillor Mrs C Meaden declared her personal interest in the call-in of Cabinet minute 68 by virtue of her daughter's employment in the Children and Young People's Department.

35 **EXPLANATION OF CALL-IN BY LEAD SIGNATORY**

Councillor P Davies referred to the reasons for the call-in set out in the agenda paper and provided a detailed explanation of those reasons. In essence, he did not accept that the cuts proposed by the Cabinet would not have a direct impact on frontline services. He believed them to be unnecessary and that they would be damaging to recovery from recession. He accepted that the savings requirement had been placed on the Council by central government, but indicated that such large in year savings proposed resulted in the unpicking of a democratically agreed Council budget.

Most difficult to accept was the £1.6m cut in the Working Neighbourhoods Fund, which was some £1m in excess of the saving sought by the government. The Fund had been key to recovery from recession by the creation of apprenticeships and addressing worklessness. Feedback from the Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) community suggested that the demand for apprenticeships remained high and that the cut proposed would be particularly damaging in terms of employment opportunities.

He referred also to cuts proposed in the Children and Young People (CYP) budget, particularly the significant cuts in the School Development Grant and Extended Schools Start Up Costs. Further cuts he believed to be unacceptable were in relation to Teenage Pregnancy and Think Family and Youth Opportunity. He commented that all of the cuts referred to would have a direct impact on frontline services.

He expressed further concern that it appeared to have been an officer led exercise and that no consultation had been undertaken to ascertain the views of service users, Headteachers, trades unions or other key stakeholders.

Accordingly, he believed that the decision should be referred back to the Cabinet for reconsideration, having regard to the terms of the call-in notice.

36 **EVIDENCE FROM WITNESSES**

Mr John Piggott (Atlas Fire and Security)

Mr Piggott advised the Committee of the benefit to small businesses, particularly at a time of recession, of the Wirral Apprenticeship Scheme that was funded by the Working Neighbourhood Fund. He commented that at a time when many SME's were going out of business, the Scheme had allowed his business to create jobs for two young people that may not have been possible without the funding being available to remove the risk.

In response to questions from Members, Mr Piggott indicated that the financial benefit of the Apprenticeship Scheme was a critical factor, particularly in a time of recession. He acknowledged that there had been other schemes to help businesses but expressed the view that the Wirral 100 was the bravest and best provision of funding to provide real jobs for disadvantaged people that he had seen in 26 years in business.

Head of Strategic Development – Mr Kevin Adderley

The Head of Strategic Development gave a general outline of the support for businesses within the Working Neighbourhoods Fund and focused specifically on the success of the Apprenticeship Programme. In response to questions from members, he indicated that current apprentices were unaffected by the cut in funding of £1.6m. However, if it was still available, it could fund perhaps an additional 100 apprenticeships. When asked if the creation of jobs could be seen as a front line service, he expressed the view that it was the role of the private sector to create jobs and the role of the public sector was to create the conditions for that to happen. It also helped the Council to achieve its key strategic priority of reducing worklessness.

He referred also to the National Apprenticeship Scheme and reported that it differed from the Wirral scheme in that it did not assist with a wage subsidy to support businesses. In response to further questions, the Head of Strategic Development commented upon the Future Jobs Fund, which was a measure to tackle 18-24 unemployment, by the creation of temporary posts within the public sector to provide valuable work experience during a time of recession. It was due to finish in October 2011 with the last intakes in March 2011.

Director of Children's Services – Mr Howard Cooper

In response to questions from Members, the Director of Children's Services indicated that of the £3.9m cuts in Area Based Grant (ABG) agreed by the Cabinet, £1.5m affected the activities of the Children and Young People's Department (CYP). He confirmed that Chairs of Headteachers groups had been briefed in relation to the reductions in ABG and he was due also to meet with school governors on 28 September 2010. He stated that it had not been possible to consult more extensively, but that it had not been possible to do so, as the savings were required to be made in-year. The Director commented that prior to ABG, many of the grants to local authorities would have been ring fenced and that in Wirral, the ABG funding was passed to those Departments that would previously have received the ring fenced allocation. However, although most of the grant had been allocated to CYP, he commented that, in Wirral, the reduction had not been passed on proportionally.

In response to further questions in relation to the impact of cuts on recruitment for front line services, the Director stated that although there had been an impact, a judgement had been made as to how best to manage front line services with regard to a number of factors including the length of time a post had been vacant and whether a failure to recruit to a post would diminish the service or affect the ability to expand it. He had carefully examined the budget to identify where savings could be made and concluded that cuts in uncommitted expenditure would have a more manageable impact.

Deputy Director of Finance – Mr David Taylor-Smith

The Deputy Director of Finance reported that he was attending on behalf of the Director of Finance, who had been unable to attend the meeting. In response to questions, he confirmed that the reductions in ABG were for one year only, but it was not possible to predict what would happen in future years. He confirmed that, at present (Budget Projections 2011/2015 reported to Cabinet on 23 July) the gap between spend and resources for 2011/12 was £23.7m and that although the Council was not constrained to look at ABG only, it was important to note that ABG was now effectively a general grant. In response to a further question, he confirmed that the District Auditor had made no comment in relation to what consultation had been undertaken by the Council.

Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Services – Mr Jim Wilkie

In response to a question from Members, the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Services referred to an instruction from the Cabinet (minute 41 (24 June 2010) refers), which required him to bring forward a report to the Cabinet reviewing all spending that was financed through Area Based Grant funding. and setting out where the funding impacted on staffing. The review was required to assess the spending of ABG funding against criteria including its alignment with corporate plan priorities, the scale of impact and the record of effectiveness in achieving the desired outcomes from such spending. The review was then to form the basis on which spending decisions of ABG would be based both in the future and in the current financial year. He confirmed that the report had been prepared in conjunction with senior officers from various departments and that there had not been input from outside the Council. The timescale for in-year budget reductions to be achieved did not allow for wider consultation and he had received no specific instruction to consult with partner agencies or stakeholders.

He had considered the impact of reductions in ABG on front line services and having regard to the requirement to make in-year savings, he expressed the view that the impact of those savings would have been far greater if they had looked to reduce committed expenditure. Although significant, he expressed the view that the reduction in Working Neighbourhoods Funding of £1.6m, would not prevent the Council from achieving its priorities.

Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance and Best Value – Councillor J Green

In response to questions from Members as to whether the report presented to the Cabinet in July had been subject to a redraft or alteration, Councillor Green confirmed that it had been considered at a briefing meeting prior to the Cabinet, but that he did not recall any specific changes being made to it. When asked to comment upon the rationale for taking £1.6m out of the Working Neighbourhoods Fund, when the government had sought a saving of only £0.6m, he commented that the further reduction agreed by the Cabinet was in line with the reduction indicated by the government. He had accepted the advice from officers that the funding was currently uncommitted and therefore available to support the ABG reduction. He commented that although the Council would not be able to do all that it wanted to do as a result of the required cuts in ABG, the alternative was to cut committed expenditure, which would have had a far more damaging impact.

In response to further questions, he commented upon the importance of public consultation but, due to the urgency and extraordinary nature of the need to make in-year savings, it had not been possible to undertake a consultation exercise in relation to the current proposals.

37 SUMMING UP BY MOVER OF THE CALL-IN

Councillor P Davies expressed the view that the cuts in ABG would have a significant impact on frontline services provided by the Council. In particular, cuts in CYP would damage the ability of schools to narrow the gap and raise the attainment levels of young people in deprived areas. He indicated that the cut in the Working Neighbourhoods Fund, being far more than that proposed by the government, would have a detrimental effect on employment opportunities and would also impact upon the ability of local businesses to survive and prosper.

He commented that it was regrettable that there had been no consultation with partners or stakeholders and that the package of cuts appeared to have been formulated by officers.

He believed that minute 68 should be referred back to the Cabinet for further consideration and that the Council should protest to the government about the need to make in-year budget cuts. He commented also that before any budget reductions were finalised, any proposed cuts in ABG should be referred to the ongoing public consultation meetings for consideration.

38 SUMMING UP BY CABINET MEMBER

Councillor J Green referred to the previous use of uncommitted expenditure to control overspend in CYP and commented that there had been a reduced impact on CYP than there would have been if cuts in ABG had been proportionate to the grant allocation, as had been the case in a number of local authorities.

There remained £2.7m in the Working Neighbourhoods Fund, which would enable significant projects to be undertaken to benefit local businesses including the provision of super fast broadband. He indicated that the current apprenticeship scheme would be unaffected by proposed cuts in expenditure.

He commented that it was unfortunate that time constraints had not allowed consultation to be undertaken in relation to the proposed in-year cuts in expenditure. However, he stated that the impact would have been more significant if the Cabinet in June had not instructed officers to undertake a review of ABG spending as a matter of priority. He noted that the decision taken in June (minute 41 (24 June 2010) refers) had not been called in and he thanked the officers for their sound advice and for the work undertaken within very tight timescales.

39 ADJOURNMENT

At 7.20pm, the Committee stood adjourned for 15 minutes.

40 **COMMITTEE DECISION**

It was moved by Councillor P Davies and seconded by Councillor B Kenny –

“(1) That this Committee agrees to refer minute 68 back to the Cabinet for further consideration on the grounds that the £3.9m of cuts proposed will directly impact on front line services and make it more difficult for this Council to achieve its Corporate Priorities.

(2) That the Committee asks that Cabinet registers its grave concern with the government about requiring this Council to make large-scale and damaging in-year cuts when the Council’s budget for 2010/2011 has already been democratically agreed.

(3) That given this Conservative-Liberal Democrat Administration’s publicly declared priority for public consultation around the future of Council services and spending priorities, this Committee asks Cabinet to include these proposed cuts as part of the upcoming consultation with residents and key stakeholders and that no final decision is taken until the results of this consultation are known.”

It was moved as an amendment by Councillor P Gilchrist and seconded by Councillor J Keeley –

“(1) That this Overview and Scrutiny Committee endorses the Cabinet decision having considered the process which was began on 24 June 2010 with minute 41, the detail contained in the report of 22 July 2010 which clearly set out the levels of uncommitted grant and commentaries on the use of the Fund.

(2) That the Committee recognises the difficulties that the Council faced in meeting a change in the level of Area Based Grant in mid year.

(3) That the Committee recognises advice of officers was taken on the level of vacancies and on difficulty in recruitment and understands that ABG has been used in the past as a grant to balance the budget.

(4) That the Committee appreciates that there are substantial funds remaining in the Working Neighbourhoods Fund that can still be utilised to achieve the Council’s key objectives.

(5) That the Committee notes that the full cut in ABG was not passed on to CYPD, taking £1.5m of uncommitted money rather than £2.6m.”

The amendment was put and carried (6:4)

Resolved (6:4) (Councillors P Davies, B Kenny, J Stapleton and C Meaden voting against) –

(1) That this Overview and Scrutiny Committee endorses the Cabinet decision having considered the process which was began on 24 June 2010 with minute 41, the detail contained in the report of 22 July 2010 which clearly set out the levels of uncommitted grant and commentaries on the use of the Fund.

- (2) That the Committee recognises the difficulties that the Council faced in meeting a change in the level of Area Based Grant in mid year.**
 - (3) That the Committee recognises advice of officers was taken on the level of vacancies and on difficulty in recruitment and understands that ABG has been used in the past as a grant to balance the budget.**
 - (4) That the Committee appreciates that there are substantial funds remaining in the Working Neighbourhoods Fund that can still be utilised to achieve the Council's key objectives.**
 - (5) That the Committee notes that the full cut in ABG was not passed on to CYPD, taking £1.5m of uncommitted money rather than £2.6m.**
-

WIRRAL COUNCIL

COUNCIL EXCELLENCE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

21 SEPTEMBER 2010

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

FINANCIAL MONITORING STATEMENT

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This report provides a summary in tabular format of the position of the revenue accounts and General Fund balances as at 31 July 2010.

2. MONITORING STATEMENT

2.1 The monitoring statement is attached to this report and includes the following:

- Composition of the original 2010/11 budget by Department including agreed savings and policy options.
- Monitoring against the 2010/11 budget including the financial implications of any changes agreed through Cabinet decisions.
- Anticipated variances, changes not agreed by Cabinet, against the original budget.
- Comments providing an explanation of variances and areas identified as requiring further attention.

2.2 The Statement is produced monthly and sent to all Councillors. A formal report is submitted to each meeting of this Committee.

3. LATEST FINANCIAL POSITION

3.1 The Statement presents an update of the revenue budget and General Fund balances as at 31 July 2010.

3.2 At this stage of the financial year only Children & Young People are projecting an overspend whilst the potentially volatile areas within departments are:-

3.2.1 Adult Social Services - pressures around community care due to increasing demand, income targets and transport costs which has been assessed at £3 million. Not identified as a potential overspend at this time as the Director is looking at ways to keep within the budget allocated.

3.2.2 Children & Young People - a potential overspend of £1.8 million primarily from residential care placements and foster care costs. Again the Director is looking at actions to remain within the budget allocated.

3.2.3 Regeneration, presently retained as the former department whilst consultation as to its future remains ongoing, is heavily reliant upon meeting income targets which continue to prove challenging and are being closely monitored. 2010/11 also features the first year of planned four year investments into digital infrastructure and home insulation.

3.2.4 Technical Services - over £1 million of pressures arising from potential shortfalls in car parking income and the inflationary increase in the streetscene contract.

3.3 Decisions taken by Cabinet which have an impact upon the financial position:-

3.3.1 Cabinet on 18 March 2010 agreed to fund the inflationary increase in the National Minimum Fostering Allowances of £90,000 in 2010/11 from balances.

3.3.2 Cabinet on 24 June 2010 considered a report on the 2009/10 revenue out-turn which highlighted the addition of £3 million to the balances at 31 March 2010 that comprised a net underspend in the year of £0.3 million and £2.7 million of 'one-off' sums from the Insurance Fund (£2.5 million) and VAT recovery (£0.2 million).

3.3.3 Cabinet on 24 June 2010 also considered the implications for the Council of the Government announcement on 10 June 2010 on the 'Reductions in Grants to Local Government' which reduces the funding for local authorities in 2010/11. The loss of the 'one-off' LABGI/LAA (Local Authority Business Growth Incentive / Local Area Agreement) grants of £1.6 million has to be met from balances. The loss of £3.9 million of Area Based Grant was further considered by Cabinet on 22 July 2010 when 'uncommitted' resources were identified across departments to offset this loss of grant. This decision was subsequently 'called-in' for scrutiny by this Committee and on 26 August 2010 a recommendation endorsing the decision was referred to Cabinet.

4. FINANCIAL AND STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

4.1 As at 31 July 2010 the decisions taken by Cabinet and the overspend in Children & Young People if realised, would result in a balance at 31 March 2011 of £6 million. All Directors continues to look at actions to address any potential overspends within their departmental budgets.

Details	£million	£million
Projected General Fund balance at 31 March 2011 when setting the budget for 2010/11		6.5
Cabinet decisions		
18 March – Foster care allowances	-0.1	
24 June – Revenue out-turn 2009/10 resulted in increase in balance at 31 March 2010	+3.0	
24 June – Reductions in grants to Local Authorities 2010/11 comprising 'one-off' grants of £1.6 million and Area Based Grant of £3.9 million	-5.5	

22 July – Area Based Grant loss being met by a reduction in departmental budgets	+3.9	+1.3
Projected variances / potential overspends		
Overspend Children & Young People		-1.8
General Fund balance at 31 March 2011 based upon the projections at 31 July 2010		6.0

4.2 There are no staffing implications arising directly from this report.

5. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are none arising directly from this report.

6. HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are none arising directly from this report.

7. LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are none arising directly from this report.

8. COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are none arising directly from this report.

9. PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are none arising directly from this report.

10. LOCAL MEMBER SUPPORT IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no particular implications for any Members or wards arising out of this report.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

11.1 None were used in the preparation of this report.

12. RECOMMENDATION

12.1 That the contents of the financial monitoring statement be noted.

IAN COLEMAN
DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

Department	ORIGINAL BUDGET			MONITORING			COMMENTS (INCLUDING Red/Amber/Green RATING)	
	Policy Option	Saving Target	Agreed Budget	Changes Agreed	Changes Not agreed	Forecast	Rate	Comments
Expenditure	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000		
Adult Social Services	3,600	2,967	85,897	-50	-	85,847	A	Pressures of £3 million remain within community care due to increasing demand, achieving income targets and transport costs. Change agreed is contribution to the reduction in Area Based Grant (ABG) (22 July).
Children & Young People	100	280	78,406	-1,461	+1,860	78,805	A	Residential care (£1.4m), foster care (£0.6m) costs. Change agreed is contribution to the reduction in ABG (22 July).
Corporate Services	345	-	6,008	-200	-	5,808	G	No issues identified. Change agreed is contribution to the reduction in ABG (22 July).
Finance	505	1,410	26,096	-	-	26,096	G	Housing Benefit largest budget and demand continues to increase.
Law, HR and Asset Mgt	66	-	8,384	-2	-	8,382	G	No issues identified. Change agreed is contribution to the reduction in ABG (22 July).
Regeneration	4,166	-	60,837	-2,058	-	58,779	G	Income targets remain most significant challenge. Major options are year 1 (of 4) for digital infrastructure and for home insulation. Change agreed is contribution to the reduction in ABG (22 July).
Technical Services	1,033	640	43,504	-66	-	43,438	G	Income, particularly car parking, closely monitored. Pressures also include meeting the Streetscene contract inflation. Change agreed is contribution to the reduction in ABG (22 July).
Merseytravel	-	-	27,344	-	-	27,344	G	Fixed amount - no change.
Local Pay Review	-	-	1,130	-	-	1,130	G	Available to meet implementation of the Review.
Contribution from Balances	-	-	(4,223)	-	-	(4,223)	G	Before changes agreed by Cabinet.
LABGI / LAA grants	-	-	(1,600)	+1,600	-	0	R	Govt announced in June that grants not now being allocated.
Budget Requirement	9,815	5,297	331,783	-2,237	+1,860	331,406		
Income								
Revenue Support Grant	-	-	20,016	-	-	20,016	G	Fixed amount - no change
Area Based Grant	-	-	42,725	-3,927	-	38,798	A	Govt announced reduced allocation. Note: Care at Home to be deleted.
National Non Domestic Rate	-	-	137,844	-	-	137,844	G	Fixed amount - no change
Council Tax	-	-	131,198	-	-	131,198	G	Fixed amount - no change
Total Income			331,783	-3,927	-	327,856		
Statement of Balances								
As at 1 April	-	-	10,723	-	-	10,723		Opening balance – forecast for 1 April 2011 is £6.5 million.
Contributions from Balances	-	-	(4,223)	-	-	(4,223)		Before changes agreed by Cabinet.
Contributions to Reserves	-	-	-	-	-	-		No changes approved by Cabinet.
Cabinet decisions	-	-	-	-1,600	-	(1,600)		Reduction in grants -£1.6m (24 Jun) LABGI/LAA loss being met from balances.
Changes – Agreed Cabinet	-	-	-	+2,910	-	+2,910		Fostering +£90k (18 Mar), 2009/10 Accounts +£3m (24 Jun).
Changes – Not Agreed	-	-	-	-	-1,860	-1,860		Based on the departmental projections – not approved.
BALANCES			6,500	+1,310	-1,860	5,950		Projected balance at start / end of year

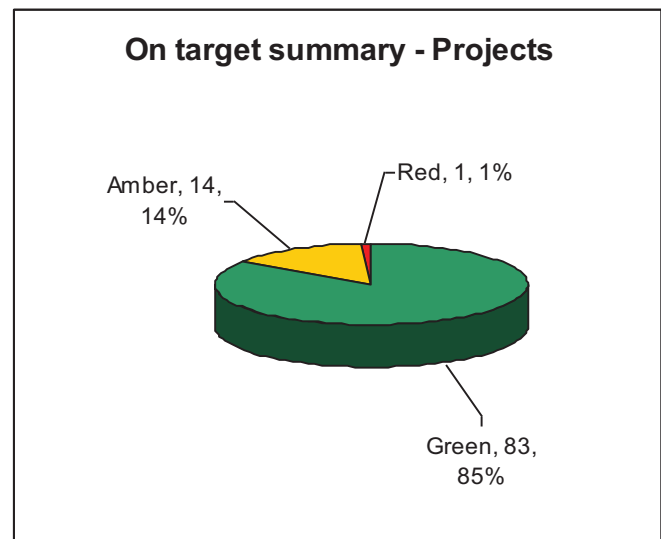
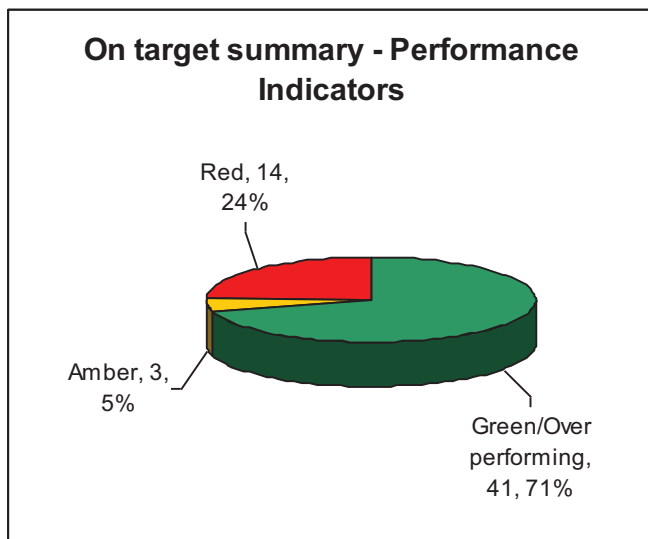
WIRRAL COUNCIL

COUNCIL EXCELLENCE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 15th SEPTEMBER 2010

FIRST QUARTER PERFORMANCE EXCEPTION REPORT 2010/2011

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 Members have requested that performance by exception is reported to the Council Excellence Overview & Scrutiny Committee. A presentation is prepared for Cabinet on performance and financial matters two weeks after the end of each performance quarter, with a more detailed report to the next available Cabinet meeting. Relevant performance and financial issues are also reported to the relevant overview and scrutiny committee on a quarterly basis.
- 1.2 The charts below show that overall performance at quarter one is good, with 71% (41) of the performance indicators rated as green or over-performing and 85% (83) of the projects rated as green.



- 1.3 However, a number of performance issues have been highlighted at quarter 1 and these are detailed in Section 2, as requested by the Committee.

2. PERFORMANCE ISSUES

- 2.1 The tables below show performance indicators and projects which are not performing as planned at the quarter one stage. Also included is the year end forecast position and PWC comparative information where available. Future reports will build on the picture and provide trend and comparative information where appropriate, such as JSA claimants.

To create more jobs, achieve a prosperous economy and regenerate Wirral


Performance against key Economic National Indicators (listed below) placed Wirral mainly in the lowest quartile against other authorities (All England and METS) based on performance data for 2009, which is the most up-to-date performance information available. Local measures are to be developed to enable more timely performance reporting.

- **NI 151 - Overall Employment rate (working age) (WNF)**

- NI 152 - Working age people on out of work benefits
- NI 153 - Working age people claiming out of work benefits in the worst performing neighbourhoods (WNF)
- NI 171 - New business registration rate

To create a clean, pleasant, safe and sustainable environment

Local 4272 - Percentage of under-age sales of alcohol during test purchase exercises

2009/10 Year End actual	2010/11 Quarter 1 Target	2010/11 Quarter 1 Actual	Direction of Travel	2010/11 Actual On Target	2010/11 Yr End Target	2010/11 Yr End Forecast	2010/11 Forecast On Target
1.63% (Lower is Better)	5%	20% (A)		Red	5% (Lower is Better)	5%	Green

Context:

In an evening exercise, if no sales are made, in excess of 15 off licences can be tested. However once a sale is made officers are required to gather evidence for legal action and this can halve the numbers of tests carried out, thus increasing the apparent percentage failure rate.

Corrective Action:


The current rate of 20% sales of alcohol is the result of targeting the less compliant traders, based on police intelligence. As more traders are subject to fixed penalty notices and subject to/warned about licence review it is envisaged the rate will drop.

The following projects have been assessed as **amber** (some non-critical milestones have been missed or there is a danger of non-critical slippage)

Portfolio	Key project	Status	Corrective Action
Housing and Community Safety	Housing Market Renewal Initiative New Build Programme	Amber	Legal problems related to lease of land for electricity sub station on Sevenoaks development Rock Ferry. Council Solicitor has expedited documentation for Lovell's (private developer partner) solicitor.
Culture, Tourism and Leisure	Parks and Countryside Procurement Exercise (Pacspe)	Amber	Cabinet Decision has been called-in and will now be reviewed in accordance with Standing Orders.

Improve health and wellbeing for all, ensuring people who require support are full participants in main stream society

NI 120a – All-age all cause mortality rate (Female)

2009/10 Year End actual	2010/11 Quarter 1 Target	2010/11 Quarter 1 Actual	Direction of Travel	2010/11 Actual On Target	2010/11 Yr End Target	2010/11 Yr End Forecast	2010/11 Forecast On Target
517.03 (Lower is Better)	488	524 (E)		Amber	488 (Lower is Better)	524	Green

Context:


All Age All Cause Mortality (AAACM) for Wirral continues to be higher than England with males significantly higher.

The main contributory factors remain cancers, digestive disorders from alcohol misuse and coronary heart disease (CHD). However early deaths from digestive disorders for females in Wirral is now lower than the England average suggesting that programmes in place to reduce early deaths from alcohol misuse are beginning to have an impact. Metrics used to measure progress on CHD also suggest programmes for CHD are also beginning to have an impact.

Corrective Action:

- Health Inequalities Action Plan is driving increased action and effective partnership working to reduce mortality.
- Continuing to work to reduce smoking prevalence and for the end of year 2009/10 the Stop Smoking Service achieved an additional 512 smoking quitters in Wirral. Phase 2 of the “Your Reason Your Way” Stop Smoking Campaign is about to commence following an extremely successful phase 1.
- Health Action Area (HAA) team targeting more effectively and working in partnership with GP practices in Health Action Area. Continuing to expand activities available to help and support people to make lifestyle changes.
- Vascular risk screenings available in the community and GP practices. Following a “Get Your Health Check” campaign 2122 screenings for vascular risk have been taken up in the community, 1028 of which were men. 39% of screenings were taken up by people living in the 20% most deprived areas of Wirral.
- Condition Management Programme and Wirral Working for Health continue to work with those on Incapacity Benefit and other working age related benefits and those on long term sickness absence to support people back into work, education, training or volunteering.
- Front-line staff training to deliver Brief Interventions on smoking, alcohol, healthy weight, mental health and physical activity continue to be delivered. A training plan is being developed to ensure continuation of the programme.

NI 121 - Mortality rate from all circulatory diseases at ages under 75

2009/10 Year End actual	2010/11 Quarter 1 Target	2010/11 Quarter 1 Actual	Direction of Travel	2010/11 Actual On Target	2010/11 Yr End Target	2010/11 Yr End Forecast	2010/11 Forecast On Target
73.35 (Lower is Better)	66.52	77.57 (E)		Red	66.52 (Lower is Better)	77.57	Red

Context:

Circulatory disease is one of the main causes of premature death (under 75 years of age) in England, accounting for just over a quarter of all such deaths in this age group. Reducing mortality rates will therefore make a significant contribution to increasing life expectancy. This is a Department of Health PSA Target: Substantially reduce mortality rates by 2010 from heart disease and stroke and related diseases by at least 40% in people under 75, with at least a 40% reduction in the inequalities gap between the fifth of areas with the worst health and deprivation indicators and the population as a whole. Directly Standardised Rates per 100,000 population aged under 75. Single year rates are used to enable timely reporting. The rate for persons is monitored, i.e. males and females combined. (This is different from NI120a & b - (All-age all cause mortality rate - females (120a) and males (120b))

Corrective Action:

Primary Prevention

Wirral-wide CVD Health Check Programme has delivered 41,938 health checks to date for 40-74 year olds across Wirral.

Establishment of CVD risk registers in all GP practices.

All patients with a CVD risk of over 15% have an annual review where appropriate treatment and lifestyle advice is initiated.

A range of services are available in the community to support lifestyle and behaviour change to reduce the risk of CVD. e.g. Stop Smoking Service, Lifestyle & Weight Management Service, MEND (Mind, Exercise, Nutrition, Do IT- to help overweight children), Alcohol Service. Health Area Action teams work in areas with high levels of deprivation to target population groups with the highest risk of ill health. They deliver evidence based public health interventions and work closely with Primary Care teams.

Secondary Prevention

Cardiac Rehabilitation Programme in place for people who have a diagnosed cardiac condition.

Intermediate Cardiac Service based in the community offers a local, accessible service for diagnosis and management of cardiac conditions, and works closely with secondary care cardiology.


Recommendations from a recent Review of Wirral Cardiac Services supported the repatriation of elective PCI and complex pacing to Wirral, in order to achieve national target rates. This will provide a local service for the Wirral population. The aim is to commence these services in Wirral in 2011/12. A Primary PCI service commenced for Wirral patients on 1 June 2010.

Wirral Stroke Development plan implemented: has improved access to diagnostics and thrombolysis. Rapid Access TIA clinic commenced.

Stroke Early Supported Discharge Team in place to offer intensive therapy in patients home's or place of care.

Stroke Support Services in place following discharge to offer support and information to stroke survivors and their carers.

NI 126 - Early Access for Women to Maternity Services

2009/10 Year End actual	2010/11 Quarter 1 Target	2010/11 Quarter 1 Actual	Direction of Travel	2010/11 Actual On Target	2010/11 Yr End Target	2010/11 Yr End Forecast	2010/11 Forecast On Target
82%	95%	90% (E)		Amber	95% (Higher is better)	95%	Green

Context:

All women should access maternity services for a full health and social care assessment of needs, risks and choices by 12 completed weeks of their pregnancy to give them the full benefit of personalised maternity care and improve outcomes and experience for mother and baby. Reducing the percentage of women who access maternity services late through targeted outreach work for vulnerable and socially excluded groups will provide a focus on reducing the health inequalities these groups face whilst also guaranteeing choice to all pregnant women.

Completion of the assessment empowers women, supporting them in making well informed decisions about their care throughout pregnancy, birth and postnatally. The national choice guarantees:

- choice of how to access maternity care;
- choice of type of antenatal care;
- choice of place of birth;
- choice of place of postnatal care.

The percentage of women who have seen a midwife or a maternity healthcare professional, for health and social care assessment of needs, risks and choices by 12 completed weeks of pregnancy

This is a new data collection.

Pregnancy – Pregnancy is defined as all maternities that extend past the first trimester, this would include still births and miscarriages and terminations after 12 weeks where known. It excludes pregnancies where care is provided outside an NHS setting or that have been terminated before 12 weeks.

Midwife – To qualify as a midwife in this definition the person must hold current registration with the nursing and midwifery council and being in active employment as a midwife with the NHS.

Maternity healthcare professional – This is a description which covers obstetricians and general practitioners with current registration with the General Medical Council and working for the NHS providing maternity services.

12 completed weeks – 12 completed weeks relates to the measured gestation of the pregnancy calculated following ultrasound assessment. This may be retrospective if the dates have not been confirmed until after 12 weeks.


Health and Social Care assessment of needs, risks and choices – This must include the use of the National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE) antenatal care guidance assessment tool.

Seen – This means completion of a full assessment, this may occur over multiple sessions but will be measured by the completion of the final session not the initiation of the first.

Corrective Action

A comprehensive action plan has been put in place to deliver this plan (e.g. extensive communications to GP's Children Centre's, Chemists and local trusts). Also, we are in the process of examining the data for this metric based on revised definitional guidance from the Strategic Health Authority (SHA). It is anticipated that this will increase performance levels.

NI 135 - Carers receiving needs assessment or review and a specific carer's service, or advice and information

2009/10 Year End actual	2009/10 Year End PWC – All England	2009/10 Year End PWC – All Mets	2010/11 Quarter 1 Target	2010/11 Quarter 1 Actual	Direction of Travel	2010/11 Actual On Target	2010/11 Yr End Target	2010/11 Yr End Forecast	2010/11 Forecast On Target
26.78%	2 nd (35 out of 79)	3 rd (16 out of 26)	22%	20.80% (A)		Amber	25% (Higher is better)	25%	Green


Context:

This indicator measures the number of carers receiving an assessment or review as a percentage of the total number of people receiving support.

Corrective Action:

This indicator would have been flagged as green if 3 more carers were identified during quarter 1. Given the latent delays in recording, this small number of additional carers will have received support during the quarter. Operational teams are being reminded to always consider the role of carers during reviews and assessments.

NI 145 - Adults with learning disabilities in settled accommodation

2009/10 Year End actual	2009/10 Year End PWC – All England	2009/10 Year End PWC – All Mets	2010/11 Quarter 1 Target	2010/11 Quarter 1 Actual	Direction of Travel	2010/11 Actual On Target	2010/11 Yr End Target	2010/11 Yr End Forecast	2010/11 Forecast On Target
52.44%	4 th (59 out of 76)	4 th (22 out of 27)	13%	5.12% (A)		Red	53% (Higher is better)	53%	Green

Context:

This indicator measures the number of people with a learning disability in settled accommodation at the time of their assessment or latest review.

Corrective Action:


Adults with LD in settled accommodation can only be counted against this indicator if they have had a completed review in the current year.

There are delays in reviewing support packages in the LD Team due to the impact of vacancies and implementing new business processes as part of Phase 2 of the Personal Budgets pilot which is affecting the capacity of the Reviewing Teams.

Clear targets have been agreed with the Team and actions implemented to bring performance back on track by the 2nd quarter. This includes focusing reviews on people who use in-house day services who are in the main in settled accommodation.

The accountable officer will monitor progress on a weekly basis” and escalate issues as they arise.

NI 146 - Adults with learning disabilities in employment

2009/10 Year End actual	2009/10 Year End PWC – All England	2009/10 Year End PWC – All Mets	2010/11 Quarter 1 Target	2010/11 Quarter 1 Actual	Direction of Travel	2010/11 Actual On Target	2010/11 Yr End Target	2010/11 Yr End Forecast	2010/11 Forecast On Target
4.99%	2 nd (39 out of 77)	2 nd (12 out of 26)	2.25%	0.52% (A)		Red	9% (Higher is better)	9%	Green

Context:

This indicator measures the number of people with a learning disability who are in employment at the time of their assessment or latest review.

Corrective Action:


Adults with LD in employment can only be counted against this indicator if they have had a completed review in the current year.

There are delays in reviewing support packages in the LD Team due to the impact of vacancies and implementing new business processes as part of Phase 2 of the Personal Budgets pilot which is affecting the capacity of the Reviewing Team. Clear targets have been agreed with the Team and actions implemented to bring performance back on track by the 2nd quarter.

Steps are being taken to find work opportunities across the Council and with providers via the new contracts framework. However the current economic climate may hamper progress.

The accountable officer will monitor progress on a weekly basis and escalate issues as they arise.

Local 8432 - Establish cohort of clients aged 16-35 with two or more episodes of self harm in the last 12 months who subsequently become engaged in meaningful social activities.

2009/10 Year End actual	2010/11 Quarter 1 Target	2010/11 Quarter 1 Actual	Direction of Travel	2010/11 Actual On Target	2010/11 Yr End Target	2010/11 Yr End Forecast	2010/11 Forecast On Target
2	2	0 (A)		Red	2 (Higher is better)	2	Green


Context:

This indicator measures the cohort of clients aged 16-35 with two or more episodes of self harm in the last twelve months who subsequently become engaged in meaningful social activities. This takes as its baseline an audit undertaken by the Wirral NHS in July 2008. The Wirral NHS will then determine and report the number of this cohort who have engaged in meaningful social activities.

Corrective Action:

Limited sign up from agencies for data sharing so agreed that data would be collected via Liaison Psychiatry. Arranged with Liaison Psych for follow-up data. For the purposes of the target 'social inclusion' would be interpreted as volunteering or referral and take up of other appropriate services/programmes e.g. Wirral Working for Health. Worked out initial cost savings for repeat attendees that are now in contact with Advocacy in Wirral and not presently repeating.

Local 8436 - To reduce the number of people with dementia admitted to residential and nursing care 5% reduction on 2007/8 admittances

2009/10 Year End actual	2010/11 Quarter 1 Target	2010/11 Quarter 1 Actual	Direction of Travel	2010/11 Actual On Target	2010/11 Yr End Target	2010/11 Yr End Forecast	2010/11 Forecast On Target
146 (Lower is Better)	39	51 (A)		Red	154 (Lower is Better)	154	Green


Context:

This indicator measures the effectiveness of community support for people with dementia.

Corrective Action:

12 more placements have been made than the 1st Quarter target. A thorough assessment and review process has validated these placements were unavoidable and the only way the Council could meet its statutory duty to meet their assessed need. As the DASS Transformation Programme continues to be rolled out in 2010 (in particular Assistive Technology, Self Directed Support and Market Management) it is anticipated more people with dementia will be supported in their own homes in the second half of the year. All placements will be subject to a thorough evaluation by the accountable officer and performance will continue to be monitored on a weekly basis.

Local 8857 - An increase in the number of new individuals who have received a service via Wirral Assistive Technology (including telecare and telemedicine)

2009/10 Year End actual	2010/11 Quarter 1 Target	2010/11 Quarter 1 Actual	Direction of Travel	2010/11 Actual On Target	2010/11 Yr End Target	2010/11 Yr End Forecast	2010/11 Forecast On Target
855	450	300 (A)		Red	3000 (Higher is better)	900	Red

Context:

The outturn is lower than expected. Compared to the same period in 2009/10 there has been an increase of 100 installs over the quarter. Following an announcement of investment in Assistive Technology over the next 3 years, the service is going through a period of development and expansion.

Referrals for the period are 373 – however time is required for Seniorlink Eldercare (SLE) to assess/ install these, and therefore may not be captured within the quarterly outturn.

The Assistive Technology Team and SLE have had new marketing leaflets produced and have set up a marketing programme of visiting team meetings across Health and Social Care. Teams are being made aware of the developments and direct access to specialist assessments by SLE. This began mid May and continues into July. SLE report an increase in referral rate since the start of this.

Corrective Action:

Continue with service developments and programme of visiting teams and marketing of service. The Assistive Technology (AT) Team are currently meeting re embedding AT in the HARTS (Home Assessment Reablement Team) service and the Self Directed Assessment (SDA) process within the Birkenhead Personal Budgets Phase 2 project.

An AT champion has been identified with the remit of promoting AT within Adults with Learning Disabilities. Further development work to be carried out in the next quarter: Integration of AT into hospital discharges via the hospital discharge team and prevention of admission via the Primary Care Assessment Unit (PCAU). Referral rates continue to be monitored.

Local 8866 - Percentage of Adult Safeguarding alerts dealt with in 24 hours

2009/10 Performance	2010/11 Quarter 1 Target	2010/11 Quarter 1 Actual	2010/11 Actual On Target	2010/11 Yr End Target	2010/11 Yr End Forecast	2010/11 Forecast On Target
No data available for 2009/10 as process only put in place in April 2010 (Direction of travel = N/A)	100%	50.52% (A)	Red	100%	90%	Red

Context:

This indicator measures the effectiveness of the amended Adult Safeguarding Process.

Corrective Action:

The amended Adult Safeguarding process has been in place for almost 3 months and changes in the process have had some impact on the turnaround time of alerts. However the care management system demands a complete set of data to be entered into the alert record and some gaps in the recorded information is undermining our ability to fully reflect operational performance against this target.

Local 8867 - Percentage of Adult Safeguarding incidents closed in 28 days

2009/10 Performance	2010/11 Quarter 1 Target	2010/11 Quarter 1 Actual	2010/11 Actual On Target	2010/11 Yr End Target	2010/11 Yr End Forecast	2010/11 Forecast On Target
No data available for 2009/10 as process only put in place in April 2010 (Direction of travel = N/A)	100%	54.26%	Red	100% (Higher is better)	95%	Green

Context:

This indicator measures the effectiveness of the amended Adult Safeguarding process.

Corrective Action:

The amended Adult Safeguarding process has been in place for almost 3 months and changes in the process have shortened the time it takes to resolve safeguarding incidents. However the care management system demands a complete set of data to be entered into the incident record and some gaps in the recorded information is undermining our ability to fully reflect operational performance against this target.


The following projects have been assessed as **amber** (some non-critical milestones have been missed or there is a danger of non-critical slippage)

Portfolio	Key project	Status	Corrective Action
Social Care & Inclusion	Health Inequalities Action Plan	Amber	The Health Inequalities Annual report (09/10) will go to Cabinet in July. The Quarter 1 (10/11) monitoring report will be complete by the end of July.
Social Care & Inclusion	Shaping the future of Care Services (Implementation of strategic decision regarding the future of in house provided services)	Amber	Further work is underway to produce individual action plans for each service area, with responsibilities and deadlines.
Social Care & Inclusion	Access to Services (Transformation of access in to services 24/7)	Amber	Full options appraisal to be considered by EDT Board in July 2010

Portfolio	Key project	Status	Corrective Action
Social Care & Inclusion	Improving Safeguarding arrangements (Ensuring people in Wirral who are vulnerable are safe)	Amber	Responsibility for the implementation of tasks transferred to Head of Branch Integrated Communities & Wellbeing, as of 1 June. Implementation is to be monitored.
Social Care & Inclusion	Implementing Assistive Technology Invest to Save Programme	Amber	Identified as Amber as the evaluation model has yet to be agreed by DASS. Work is underway to identify an evaluation model. CSED are involved in assisting with DASS with this process.
Social Care & Inclusion	Improving support for carers (Implementing the Carers Commissioning Strategy)	Amber	Action plan refreshed after the model of Comprehensive Carer support (DH Sept 09) and improved performance monitored.
Social Care & Inclusion	Reduce Hospital admissions Project (Project 13)	Amber	PID for the project is to be developed.
Social Care & Inclusion	Community Development Project (Project 14)	Amber	PID for the project is to be developed.
Social Care & Inclusion	Mental Health Commissioning Strategy	Amber	There is to be a New Horizons consultation event in July 09 to confirm the direction of the development.
Housing and Community Safety & Social Care and Inclusion	Implement Alcohol Strategy	Amber	Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy 2007-2010 updated for 2010-2011 and circulated amongst key stakeholders for comment. A New national alcohol strategy is due mid August and any local strategy will need to be aligned.
Housing and Community Safety	Underage sales prevention programme	Amber	The current rate of 20% sales of alcohol is the result of targeting the less compliant traders. It is envisaged that more education visits to traders will reduce the offending rate.

To help children and young people achieve their full potential

NI 53 - Prevalence of breast feeding at 6-8 weeks from birth

2009/10 Year End actual	2010/11 Quarter 1 Target	2010/11 Quarter 1 Actual	Direction of Travel	2010/11 Actual On Target	2010/11 Yr End Target	2010/11 Yr End Forecast	2010/11 Forecast On Target
28%	35.1%	27.4% (E)		Red	35.1% (Higher is better)	28.0%	Red


Context:

None provided.

Corrective Action:

1. Launch of breastfeeding social marketing 'breast milk it's amazing' campaign in June to staff and media - materials and banners distributed and website launched.
2. Production of breastfeeding training schedule – ongoing training delivered to health visitors, midwives and children centre staff.
3. Submission of stage 1 UNICEF Baby Friendly Initiative accreditation for the community.
4. Peer support programme launch in April and all volunteers now supporting new mums and meeting them on the hospital wards.
5. Draft breastfeeding care pathway drawn up by multidisciplinary working group.
6. The Infant Feeding Specialist at the Hospital now trained to deliver UNICEF breastfeeding training.

NI 60 - % of core assessments for children's social care that were carried out within 35 working days of their commencement

2009/10 Year End actual	2009/10 Year End PWC – All England	2009/10 Year End PWC – All Mets	2010/11 Quarter 1 Target	2010/11 Quarter 1 Actual	Direction of Travel	2010/11 Actual On Target	2010/11 Yr End Target	2010/11 Yr End Forecast	2010/11 Forecast On Target
75.9%	2 nd (29 out of 74)	2 nd (12 out of 24)	80%	58.3% (P)		Red	80% (Higher is better)	80%	Green


Context:

None provided.

Corrective Action:

An issue relating to the recording of assessments has been identified. Good practice guidance notes have been produced and circulated to the area teams and Data Officers are working with staff to improve performance in this indicator.

NI 61 - Timeliness of placements of looked after children for adoption following an agency decision that the child should be placed for adoption

2009/10 Year End actual	2009/10 Year End PWC – All England	2009/10 Year End PWC – All Mets	2010/11 Quarter 1 Target	2010/11 Quarter 1 Actual	Direction of Travel	2010/11 Actual On Target	2010/11 Yr End Target	2010/11 Yr End Forecast	2010/11 Forecast On Target
87.5%	1 st (18 out of 80)	1 st (5 out of 27)	80%	60.0% (P)		Red	80% (Higher is better)	80%	Green


Context:

Small numbers affect this indicator. Three out of the five children adopted to date have been adopted within 12 months of the decision that they should be placed for adoption. The 2 that were not adopted in the required time scale are siblings. It is more difficult to arrange for adoption where there are 2 or more siblings.

Corrective Action:

Continuous monthly monitoring of this indicator.

NI 63 - Stability of placements of looked after children: length of placements

2009/10 Year End actual	2009/10 Year End PWC – All England	2009/10 Year End PWC – All Mets	2010/11 Quarter 1 Target	2010/11 Quarter 1 Actual	Direction of Travel	2010/11 Actual On Target	2010/11 Yr End Target	2010/11 Yr End Forecast	2010/11 Forecast On Target
63.8%	4 th (65 out of 77)	4 th (21 out of 25)	72%	62.2% (P)		Red	72% (Higher is better)	66%	Amber


Context:

There have been a high number of children placed with their parents. A number of these placements have ended resulting in a move for the children back into Local Authority foster care placements.

Corrective Action:

Continuous activity to ensure placement stability of looked after children where appropriate. Statutory reviews of children in care placements are carried out at prescribed intervals. This indicator is monitored on a monthly basis.

NI 117 - 16 to 18 year olds who are not in education, employment or training (NEET)

2009/10 Year End actual	2009/10 Year End PWC – All England	2009/10 Year End PWC – All Mets	2010/11 Quarter 1 Target	2010/11 Quarter 1 Actual	Direction of Travel	2010/11 Actual On Target	2010/11 Yr End Target	2010/11 Yr End Forecast	2010/11 Forecast On Target
8.9%	4 th (72 out of 85)	3 rd (20 out of 27)	6.9%	8.2% (P)		Red	6.9% (Higher is better)	6.9%	Green

Context:

Performance has improved from 8.9% reported at 2009/10 year end.

Corrective Action:

A range of initiatives through the Tiger Group are on going. (A 'NEET TIGER Team' has been established as a task and finish group with key partnership representatives to ensure targeted activity is aligned across the Borough.) Connexions and Jobcentre Plus advisers are working together to support 18 year olds into an opportunity that best meets their needs.

The following projects have been assessed as **amber** (some non-critical milestones have been missed or there is a danger of non-critical slippage)

Portfolio	Key project	Status	Corrective Action
Children's Services and Lifelong Learning	All phases: raise standards in schools and settings by continuing to improve the quality of leadership and management, curriculum, assessment and learning, thereby ensuring none fall into an OFSTED category.	Amber	Four primary schools are in OFSTED category. Statements of action are provided by the Local Authority and verified by OFSTED. The Head of Branch, The Head Teacher and the Chair of Governors monitor the action plan on a half-termly basis.

Create an excellent Council

The following project has been assessed as **red** (some non-critical milestones have been missed or there is a danger of non-critical slippage)

Portfolio	Key project	Status	Corrective Action
Finance and Best Value	To ensure that efficiencies are planned and deliver value for money: Strategic change programme	Red	<p>Cabinet resolved (24/06/2010) that a review of the strategic change programme was to be undertaken.</p> <p>Following this review, Cabinet further resolved (22/07/2010) that responsibility for the change programme is transferred to the Director of Technical Services.</p> <p>The Director of Technical Services has now:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Established the programme office • Issues instructions and guidance in terms of change process • Introduced new governance and terms of reference for the new Strategic Change Programme Board • Revised and implemented standards of project control • Developed and implemented change management plan to ensure effective delivery of the programme

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 Members are requested to:

- Consider the information contained within the report and its usefulness in helping to identify how performance might be improved.

4. Financial implications

4.1 The financial implications arising from this report would be the cost of improving performance.

5. Staffing implications

5.1 There are no staffing implications arising directly from this report.

6. Equal Opportunities implications / Equality impact assessment

6.1 The implementation of the Council's corporate plan and departmental plans should have positive equal opportunities impact. Equality Impact Assessments will be undertaken where relevant for related projects and activities.

7. Health Impact Assessment

7.1 A Health Impact Assessment will be undertaken for all relevant projects and activities.

8. Community Safety implications

8.1 There are no specific community safety implications arising directly from this report.

9. Local Agenda 21

9.1 There are no local agenda 21 implications arising directly from this report.

10. Planning implications

10.1 There are no planning implications arising directly from this report.

11. Anti-poverty implications

11.1 There are no anti-poverty implications arising directly from this report.

12. Social inclusion implications

12.1 There are no social inclusion implications arising directly from this report.

13. Local Member Support implications

13.1 There are no local member support implications arising directly from this report.

14. Background papers

14.1 None

This report was prepared by Bev McEneaney who can be contacted on 0151 691 8164.

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COUNCIL EXCELLENCE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE: 31 AUGUST 2010

REPORT OF THE DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE / DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE SERVICES

REACHING EXCELLENT LEVEL OF THE EQUALITY FRAMEWORK FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT (EFLG) - QUARTER ONE 2010/2011 CORPORATE PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Welcome to the first corporate performance monitoring report for 2010/2011 for reaching the excellent level of the Equality Framework for Local Government.
- 1.2 As an 'achieving' Council (formerly known as level 3), departments should be embedding processes and systems that have been developed over the last two years, for example equality impact assessments, online equality and diversity training, flexible working arrangements, inclusive community engagement structures, etc.
- 1.3 However, as the Council works towards achieving 'excellent' status by November 2011, departments need to be developing more innovative activities that other organisations can learn from; activities that the Council can demonstrate have encouraged efficiencies as well as improved the quality of life of residents.
- 1.4 Therefore the format of reporting has changed to reflect a) the themes and expectations of the Equality Framework, b) the format of departmental action plans, and c) to present progress in a more informative and useful way.
- 1.5 Within this report you will find examples of:
 - Following best practice (green milestones)
 - Innovation (green milestones)
 - Opportunities for evidence case studies (green milestones)
 - Areas for further improvement (red and amber milestones)

2. Summary of Progress of Actions / Milestones (Green / Amber / Red)

Action Plan	Total Number of Projects	Green	Amber	Red	Not Applicable
Adult Social Services Action Plan	25	10	12	3	0
Children & Young People Action Plan	10	10	0	0	0
Technical Services Action Plan	38	36	2	0	0
Finance Action Plan	52	47	2	0	3
Corporate Services & Law, HR, Asset Management Action Plan	80	52	24	2	2
Community Cohesion Action Plan	24	8	8	5	3
Equality Watch Scheme 2009- 2012	44	34	10	0	0
Quarter 1 Totals	273	187	58	10	8

3. KNOWING OUR COMMUNITIES AND EQUALITY MAPPING (Theme 1)

3.1 Examples of following best practice

- Developed process for quality assuring equality impact assessments (Adult Social Services)
- Implemented, with Council partners, the GIS mapping project for departmental data sets (Children and Young People)
- Further developing and implementing the corporate Customer Profiling Policy (Finance)
- Requesting the inclusion of postcode data in the new customer logging system. Target date to be launched September 2010 (Finance)
- Established an equality and cohesion communications action plan (Corporate Services / Law, HR, Asset Management)

3.2 Examples of innovation

- Identifying those areas, during internal audits which are inadequate in terms of equality mapping and equitable access to services (Finance)

3.3 Examples of opportunities for case studies

- Considering the use of incentives to increase customer questionnaire returns (Finance)
- Co-ordinating the implementation and analysis of regular customer services surveys and VCAW consultation programme (Finance)
- Established a Council / LSP Knowledge & Intelligence Network (Corporate Services / Law, HR, Asset Management)
- Completing a community cohesion mapping report for Wirral (Corporate Services / Law, HR, Asset Management)

- Implementing a Community Asset Transfer scheme (Corporate Services / Law, HR, Asset Management)

3.4 Areas for further improvement

- Review why low levels of Black and Ethnic Minority individuals accessing mainstream services (Adult Social Services)
- Develop process for monitoring ethnicity of service users accessing community based services (Adult Social Services)
- Service areas to make use of available data, where possible and relevant, on community needs. For example, the work conducted by NHS Wirral/Social Services/CYPD on 'Joint Needs Assessment' (Technical Services)
- Identification on committee reports of Equality Impact Assessments seems to be inconsistently applied at present (Technical Services)
- LSP wide shared knowledge / data hub (Corporate Services / Law, HR, Asset Management)

4. LEADERSHIP, PARTNERSHIP AND COMMITMENT (Theme 2)

4.1 Examples of following best practice

- Establishing a working group to drive departmental action plan forward (Adult Social Services)
- Equality impact assessment training being provided to all managers and relevant staff (Adult Social Services)
- Meeting hosted to discuss regional integration of diversity within personalisation programme (Adult Social Services)
- Quarterly updates to strategic leadership team on equality and diversity (Adult Social Services)
- Equality objectives to be included in contracts put out to tender (Children and Young People)
- Review of all existing promotional materials in Children's Social Care in order to ensure that minority groups are fully represented (Children and Young People)
- To work with Biffa, Colas and any other contractors to ensure compliance with equality objectives (Technical Services)
- All members of the Senior Management Team and Operational Management Team receive agenda/minutes from the Departmental Equality Group (Technical Services)
- The Council raised rainbow flags on International Day Against Homophobia (Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Staff Forum)
- Councillor Ian Lewis is now the equality champion for the Council administration (Elected Members)
- The Director for Adult Social Services continues to Chair the Corporate Equality and Cohesion Group (Chief Officers)

4.2 Examples of innovation

- Establishing a Children in Care Council (Children and Young People)
- Developing an LSP wide Wirral Equalities Charter in consultation with the third sector (Corporate Services / Law, HR, Asset Management)
- Young people are invited to shadow the Chief Executive, who is champion for younger people, and the next person to do this will be Leah Cope who last year was one of Wirral's United Kingdom Youth Parliamentarians (Chief Officers)

- The Deputy Chief Executive, as champion for older people, continues to support the Older People's Parliament and Executive Board (Chief Officers)

4.3 Examples of opportunities for case studies

- Highlight reports now presented to the Departmental Equality Group, including service user initiative and staff initiatives (Adult Social Services)
- Procurement Strategy implementation - reviewing and monitoring processes to measure equality outcomes, i.e. following up what actually happens on the ground (Finance)

4.4 Examples of areas for improvement

- Contracts held by community based services to promote best practice in equality and diversity (Adult Social Services)
- Develop awareness of the corporate code on bullying and harassment (Adult Social Services)
- Council Excellence Overview and Scrutiny Committee to develop a robust committee process for integrating equality and cohesion into the scrutiny process (Corporate Services / Law, HR, Asset Management)
- Further develop an equality and cohesion leadership framework for Chief Officers and Elected Members (Corporate Services / Law, HR, Asset Management)
- Build a corporate, outcomes focussed evidence base for equality and cohesion (Corporate Services / Law, HR, Asset Management)
- Establish Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) Working Group to refresh EIA template, monitor annual EIA schedule, monitor low, medium and high EIA actions, monitor Cabinet and Committee reports for EIA's, ensure EIA's are completed during service reviews, develop a consistent quality assurance system for EIA's, and liaise with the Comprehensive Engagement Strategy Steering Group re. consultation arrangements for EIA's (Corporate Services / Law, HR, Asset Management)
- Further develop the Council's Performance Improvement Management System to capture the narrowing of equality gaps (Corporate Services / Law, HR, Asset Management)

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND SATISFACTION (Theme 3)

5.1 Examples of following best practice

- Developing a feedback programme – 'you said / we did' to close the loop on findings from consultation activities (Finance)
- Relaunching the IAMF hate crime reporting process to include refresher training for all customer services staff (Finance)
- Further developing partnerships and processes in order to implement the Comprehensive Engagement Strategy (Corporate Services / Law, HR, Asset Management)
- Completed five access audits to Council buildings (Corporate Services / Law, HR, Asset Management)
- Equality Watch membership scheme nearing 400 members Corporate Services / Law, HR, Asset Management)
- Developing a self-assessment process for access auditing Council buildings (Corporate Services / Law, HR, Asset Management)

- New equality and cohesion pages developed for the Council's website (Corporate Services / Law, HR, Asset Management)
- Developed an action plan for 'English for people who speak other languages' – ESOL (CYPD / Corporate Services / Law, HR, Asset Management)

5.2 Examples of innovation

- Highway Maintenance street light trial in New Brighton – replacing existing lanterns with new 'white light' ones to aid older people (Technical Services)
- Assessing the feasibility of offering concessions for people with disabilities – particularly where there is a positive impact. For example, Vehicle Pavement Crossings which allow better access to a property (Technical Services)
- Progressing digital signage concept in One Stop Shops as a tool to increase customer participation and engagement (Finance)

5.3 Examples of opportunities for case studies

- Pedestrian Forum meets quarterly with WIRED, Merseytravel's Access officer, Wirral Council's Footpaths Access Officer and other groups/interested parties (Technical Services)
- £100,000 per year Disability Discrimination Act funding programme for modifications (Corporate Services / Law, HR, Asset Management / Technical Services)
- Established a Hate Crime MARAC (Corporate Services / Law, HR, Asset Management)

5.4 Examples of areas for further improvement

- Strengthen involvement of all equality strands (Adult Social Services)
- Develop independent feedback mechanisms and monitor feedback from satisfaction surveys (Adult Social Services)
- Develop information gathering processes which respond to and meet the cultural needs of all sections of the community (Adult Social Services)
- Assess the needs of people and support them to assess their own needs. Use the information to inform future business plans (Adult Social Services)
- Record all hate incidents (Adult Social Services)
- Recruit community champions to the Corporate Equality & Cohesion Group (Corporate Services / Law, HR, Asset Management)

6. RESPONSIVE CUSTOMER SERVICES (Theme 4)

6.1 Examples of following best practice

- None reported this quarter

6.2 Examples of innovation

- None reported this quarter

6.3 Examples of opportunities for case studies

- Creating a focus group comprising disabled children in order that they have a say in services designed to deliver safeguarding services to them (Children and Young People)

- New literature to be produced to increase pension scheme membership with logistics being explored on how to target gaps in membership from different groups. Further expansion of road shows and pension surgeries (Finance)

6.4 Examples of areas for further improvement

- None reported this quarter

7. A MODERN AND DIVERSE WORKFORCE (Theme 5)

7.1 Examples of following best practice

- Currently reviewing capacity to increase equality and diversity training to all staff (Adult Social Services)
- Schools and staff are trained to be more aware of the barriers faced by lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people (Children and Young People)
- Staff Equality and Diversity training being commissioned to address the needs of staff in particular a) poverty awareness, and b) safeguarding and conflicts with religion, faith or culture (Children and Young People)
- Developing training for Foster Carers in order that the needs of Asylum seeking children are addressed (Children and Young People)
- Racial Incidents, both in schools and the department, continue to be reported and monitored by the Department (Children and Young People)
- Great strides made to ensure a more consistent approach procedures, for example on absence, capability and disciplinary (Technical Services)
- Staff Survey has been repeated. We are the only department to have completed this. Work on an action plan has begun (Technical Services)
- 100% of office based staff, including new starters, have completed Elumos (Technical Services)
- Appointed officers to deal with issues relating to Dignity at Work - bullying and harassment (Technical Services)
- Encouraging and promoting staff participation in employee forums (Finance)
- Highlighting one Equality and Diversity topic/policy area every two months through the Team Brief (Finance)
- Present statistics of grievance / disciplinary (no. of cases etc.) in team briefs regularly, so that staff can see that things are followed up (Finance)
- Discrimination, harassment and bullying being monitored corporately (Corporate Services / Law, HR, Asset Management)
- Staff survey processes being mapped out at the moment and new internal communications methods also being developed (Corporate Services / Law, HR, Asset Management)
- Three equality and cohesion taster sessions provided at corporate staff inductions (Corporate Services / Law, HR, Asset Management)
- Reasonable adjustments advice available for staff and managers (Corporate Services / Law, HR, Asset Management)
- Developed action plan in order to be assessed for Stonewall's Equality Index and Regional Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Strategy (Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Staff Forum)
- Updated equality and diversity pages of the Council's intranet (Corporate Services / Law, HR, Asset Management)

7.2 Examples of innovation

- Equality Watch Pledge Campaign (Corporate Services / Law, HR, Asset Management)
- A sub-group of the Disability Diversity Forum has been established to look at the issue of Dyslexia in the workplace (Disability Diversity Forum)
- Recently won a North West Employer Equality & Diversity Award for a football event, delivering two separate events one to children in partnership with Tranmere Rovers and the other to adults (Black Workers' Group)

7.3 Examples of opportunities for case studies

- Gathering data from a questionnaire to women staff in Technical Services to see what they think about career development opportunities, barriers etc (Women's Diversity Forum)
- Theatre And diversity training sessions for Managers and frontline staff (Corporate Services / Law, HR, Asset Management)

7.4 Examples of areas for further improvement

- Good data levels of workforce exist but need more focus on sexual orientation, religion or belief. Need to profile equality strands in terms of salary grade also (Adult Social Services)
- Positive action programme implementation (Adult Social Services)
- Ensure staff are kept up to date with all issues concerning religion and culture (Adult Social Services)
- Departmental harassment officers must be competent and training updated annually (Adult Social Services)
- School Crossing Patrol service still awaiting guidance regarding Internet based access to Elumos (Technical Services)
- Workforce 100% mapped and published annually on Council's website (Corporate Services / Law, HR, Asset Management)
- Addressing under-representation to be included within the workforce strategy and implemented (Corporate Services / Law, HR, Asset Management)
- Equal Pay plan to be implemented (Corporate Services / Law, HR, Asset Management)
- Flexible working arrangements to be monitored corporately (Corporate Services / Law, HR, Asset Management)
- Elumos training to be completed by all staff (Corporate Services / Law, HR, Asset Management)
- Corporate approach to positive action required (Corporate Services / Law, HR, Asset Management)

8. Conclusion

8.1 All departmental equality and cohesion action plans progressed well during the first quarter period with 68% of milestones being recorded as 'green'.

8.2 However, when all departmental milestones are mapped against the expectations of the Equality Framework, activity gaps can be identified, i.e. the examples of following best practice and areas for improvement contained within in this report are activities the Council should be undertaking as an 'achieving' council. The examples of

innovation and opportunities for evidence case studies are activities the Council should be generating in order to be considered as an 'excellent' council.

- 8.3 The Council needs to be generating best practice (innovation), not just following best practice generated by others, in order to demonstrate a reduction in inequalities within the workplace, across all service areas and across the Borough. Ensuring the Council builds an outcomes focussed evidence base will also be crucial to being assessed as an excellent council.

9. Recommendations

- 9.1 Overview and Scrutiny Committee members to note progress of the Council's various equality action plans.
- 9.2 This quarter one report to be submitted to the Corporate Equality and Cohesion Group, the Departmental Equality and Cohesion Groups, and the Performance Management Group, in order to generate ideas for developing more innovative activities and ways of documenting case studies.
- 9.3 Departmental Equality and Cohesion Groups to review their current action plans in order to identify where examples of innovation and evidence case studies can be developed. To be presented to the Corporate Equality and Cohesion Group by December 2010.
- 9.4 Departmental equality leads to generate more inter-departmental activity, especially where duplication is taking place, e.g. equality and diversity training, monitoring of hate crimes and hate incidents, developing the role of dignity at work officers.

JIM WILKIE

DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE / DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE SERVICES

WIRRAL COUNCIL

COUNCIL EXCELLENCE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 21st SEPTEMBER 2010

TOTAL PLACE

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. The report provides a briefing note for Members as requested on the Total Place pilot that was conducted across 13 pilot areas between April 2009 and March 2010. It also provides some commentary on what is likely to be its successor, Placed Based or 'Community Budgets'.
- 1.2. "Total Place" was a Communities and Local Government pilot programme that looked at how public money was spent in a local area and how it could be used more efficiently to improve local services.
- 1.3. 13 areas¹ were chosen by the former Communities Secretary Hazel Blears to pilot the initiative following trials in Cumbria and Birmingham. The pilots identified and mapped levels of public spending across a specific theme of work in their area and explored ways to overcome organisational and cultural barriers to improvement.
- 1.4. Following the pilots, Government proposed greater freedoms and devolution of powers. However, these powers were to be reserved for 'high performing' local authorities.
- 1.5. With the change of Government in May 2010, Total Place looks set to evolve into something termed, 'Community Budgets' where there appears to be more emphasis on de-ringfencing funding and providing greater powers of autonomy for all local authorities.

2. TOTAL PLACE CHRONOLOGY

Apr 2009 – Total Place was launched during the April 2009 Budget Report. 13 pilot areas identified to examine spending and efficiencies across individual themes within each area.

Oct 2009 – Interim findings were published during the Pre-Budget Report.

Feb 2010 – Individual pilots reported their final findings.

Mar 2010 – Summary Report published jointly by HM Treasury and the Department for Communities and Local Government.

May 2010 – Change of Government

¹ Birmingham; Bradford; Central Bedfordshire & Luton; Coventry, Solihull & Warwickshire; Croydon; Dorset, Poole & Bournemouth; Durham; Kent; Leicestershire & Leicester City; Lewisham; Manchester City Region & Warrington; South Tyneside, Gateshead & Sunderland; Worcestershire. The details of the 13 pilot areas individual themes can be found at Appendix 1.

Jul 2010 – Eric Pickle’s speech alludes to opportunities and shortcomings of Total Place and indicates that its branding will change to ‘Community Budgets’.

3. SUMMARY OF TOTAL PLACE: A whole area approach to public services

- 3.1. *Total Place: A whole area approach to public services* was published, March 2010 and represented the final report of the Treasury and Communities and Local Government on the Total Place pilot.
- 3.2. Total Place set a new direction for local public services. It demonstrated what could be gained from public authorities putting the citizen at the heart of service design and working together to improve outcomes and eliminate waste and duplication.
- 3.3. The report presented a positive appraisal of the scope of the project and outputs achieved:

“The Total Place approach has been developed over twelve months through the work of 63 local authorities, 34 Primary Care Trusts, 12 fire authorities, 13 police authorities, and a wide range of third sector organisations and service delivery bodies. The 13 pilots serve a combined population of more than 11 million people. Collectively, thousands of public servants from across England have contributed to the work, analysis and understanding which drives these propositions”.

- 3.4. The pilots demonstrated that there are real service improvements and savings to be made from this way of working. The report suggests that 2% savings would be realistically achievable using this approach.
- 3.5. However, there are a number of factors that will effect this:
 - a) Each Total Place pilot focused on a specific theme within their area. The “2%” savings would potentially be achieved across the theme, e.g. alcohol and drug abuse rather than across the budget of the local authority.
 - b) All of the initiatives outlined within Total Place have incurred initial investment and set-up costs. £5million was spent across the 13 pilot areas and *“thousands of public servants from across England”* were involved - all of which took resources away from front-line service delivery for the duration of the pilot at a time when public sector spending is under pressure to identify savings.
- 3.6. The report suggests that the new ways of working pioneered by leading local areas could be replicated everywhere by:
 - Starting from the citizen’s viewpoint to break down organisational and service silos which cause confusion, create wasteful burdens of data collection and management on the frontline, and which contribute to poor alignment of services
 - Providing strong local, collective and focused leadership which supports joined up working and shared solutions to problems with citizens at the heart of service design

4. PROPOSED NEW FREEDOMS

- 4.1. The report suggested that Central Government would look at providing freedoms under two headings: 'The Single Offer' and 'The Innovative Policy Offer'.
- 4.2. The Single Offer represented the main thrust of the freedoms and opportunities that Total Place was to provide and was reserved for 'high performing places'. This offer was to give places a range of freedoms (freedoms from central performance and financial control as well as freedoms and incentives for local collaboration) for working in partnership with central government to co-design services and arrangements to deliver greater transparency, efficiency and value for the citizen and the public purse.
- 4.3. The Innovative Policy Offer recognised that a much wider group of local authorities and their partners have real strengths in delivery of services within a particular policy area. This offer would have devolved responsibility to places within an agreed delivery theme. Local authorities and their partners would co-design this offer comprising freedoms similar to those for the Single Offer but linked only to an agreed policy area, e.g. community safety.
- 4.4. Both offers came with a very explicit expectation of identifying potential savings across the partnership.
- 4.5. The 'Innovative Policy Offer' would have provided Wirral with an opportunity to access some of the greater freedoms offered by Total Place.

5. TOTAL PLACE – WHAT NEXT?

- 5.1. The report identified that much more still needed to be done to identify solutions to efficient and effective service delivery following the Total Place pilots. Actions identified in the report included:
 - Extended field trials to tackle chronic alcohol and drug misuse; working with local areas including Leicester and Leicestershire, Birmingham and South Tyneside and its partners
 - Work with a small number of local areas to co-design approaches to worklessness. This included local authority and Jobcentre Plus joint working on information, advice and one-stop shops to improve customer services.
- 5.2. We are uncertain whether these activities got underway. However, the examples sited from the Total Place pilots highlight the sustained effort necessary to continually improve services and that Total Place is not a 'one off' exercise.
- 5.3. The Department for Communities and Local Government has not provided any detailed update on "Total Place" since the election. In a recent speech by the Secretary of State², July 2010, Mr Pickles referred to place based area budgets or community budgets and implies far more freedoms for local authorities than was ever envisaged under Total Place.

² The Full Speech can be found at <http://www.communities.gov.uk/speeches/newsroom/lgaoffer>

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1. The Coalition Government has already provided for more radical proposals than was contained within Total Place and whilst further details about Community Budgets are yet to emerge from Whitehall, in the current climate there is unlikely to be any prescriptive framework that will govern what councils do.

J. WILKIE

Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Services

This report was prepared by Gareth Latham, who can be contacted on 691 8030.

Appendix 1

Total Place pilot areas and their related themes.

Place	Themes
Birmingham	Alcohol & drug abuse, Mental health services, learning disability services, Improving outcomes for Young People leaving care, demonstration project (community) and guns & gangs
Bradford	Integrating services to manage the transition to independence for young offenders, care-leavers and the elderly leaving hospital
Central Bedfordshire / Luton	family breakdown/divorce; links to crime & drugs
Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire	Children's services linked to health
Croydon	Children's services & links to health 0-7 yrs
Dorset/ Poole/ Bournemouth	Older People's services
Durham	Housing & regeneration
Kent	Kent Gateway & multi-channel access; single asset management strategy; Mending Margate
Leicestershire/ Leicester City	Alcohol & drug abuse (links to Mental Health and crime)
Lewisham	Minimising reoffending; managing ex-offenders in the community; worklessness & young people; procurement project; NHS / Local Authority integration
Manchester City Region and Warrington	0-5s
South Tyneside/ Gateshead/ Sunderland	Health inequality/ safer communities/ teenage pregnancy
Worcestershire	Asset management; shared services; offender management & NEETs; alcohol abuse; road safety; support to most deprived wards

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WIRRAL COUNCIL

COUNCIL EXCELLENCE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

21 SEPTEMBER 2010

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

REVENUES AND BENEFITS

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. This report provides information on the position regarding Council Tax, National Non Domestic Rate, general debt and cash income collection and the payment of benefits.

2. REVENUES COLLECTION

- 2.1. The following statement compares the amount collected for **Council Tax** in the period 1 April 2010 to 31 July 2010 with the amount collected in the same period in 2009/10.

	Actual 2010/11 £	Actual 2009/10 £
Cash to Collect	124,039,519	122,956,423
Cash Collected	47,782,413	47,188,362
% Collected	38.5	38.4

- 2.2. The following statement compares the amount collected for **National Non-Domestic Rates** in the period 1 April 2010 to 31 July 2010 with the amount collected in the same period in 2009-10.

	Actual 2010/11 £	Actual 2009/10 £
Total Collectable (including arrears)	70,175,606	73,786,680
Amount Outstanding	50,509,441	46,927,491
% Outstanding	72.03	63.60
Amount Collectable	64,030,681	66,174,599
Net Cash Collected	23,920,120	25,912,409
% Collected	37.36	39.16

- 2.3. A slight overall improvement in collection levels has been seen so far during 2010-11 and the main reason for the disparity in collection at 31 July 2010 was the earlier internal transfer in 2009-10 of £2.5m for the payment of rates for Council properties.

- 2.4. The following statement provides information concerning collection of local taxes from 1 April 2010 to 31 July 2010.

	Council Tax	Business Rates
Reminders/Final Notices	29,154	1,738
Summonses	8,264	343
Liability Orders	4,638	307
Recovery action in progress		
Attachment of Earnings	571	
Deduction from Income Support	1,416	-
Accounts to Bailiff	2,600	115
Pre-Committal Warning Letters	1,448	-
Committal Orders Issued	1	0
Debtors Committed	0	0

Current Status of Agent Work in respect of Committals for 1 April 2010 to 31 July 2010.

Warrants of Arrest issued by Court (Bail and No Bail)	32
Warrants of Arrest (Bail) to Warrant officer	25
Warrants of Arrest (No Bail) to Warrant officer	12
Returned successful (Bail)	16
Returned successful (No Bail)	8
Returned other reasons (Bail)	3
Returned other reasons (No Bail)	2

2.5. Insolvency cases to 31 July 2010

The following information concerns Council Tax recovery work which involves cases where Insolvency action or charging orders against properties are used.

Bankruptcy cases	284
Charging orders	113
Winding up orders	3

New cases from 1 April 2010 to 31 July 2010

Bankruptcy	13
Charging orders	24
Winding up orders	<u>0</u>

Status of Insolvency cases at 31 July 2010

Winding-up paid	1
Charging orders granted	81
Winding up Order	1
Supporting other petitions	3
Cases paid	90
Bankruptcy orders	105
Cases closed	110
Ongoing cases	<u>46</u>
	<u>437</u>

2.6. Sundry Debtors

	Actual 2010/11	Actual 2009/10
Amount Billed in last 12 months as at 31.07.10	£96,582,910	£79,391,938
Total outstanding as at 31.07.10	£30,614,661	£18,384,955
Net Arrears at 31.07.10	£12,895,653	£9,376,586
Number of invoices in arrears at 31.07.10	12,509	11,530
Number of reminders 01.04.10 to 31.07.10	10,853	9,033

3. INCOME

3.1. The following budgets and income received relate to other sources of cash income generated by the Council:

	2009/10 Budget	Income to 31-Jul-09	2010/11 Budget	Income to 31-Jul-10
i. School Meals	£1,607,800	£472,566	£1,575,100	£578,782
ii. Sports Centres	£3,867,300	£1,073,433	£3,941,300	£1,510,928
iii. Golf Courses	£912,200	£441,978	£939,600	£422,463
iv. Burials and Cremations	£2,429,200	£654,541	£2,502,000	£642,762
v. Building Control Fees	£494,900	£245,300	£494,900	£154,419
vi. Land Charges	£358,300	£101,900	£358,300	£83,928
vii. Car Park (Pay and Display)	£2,496,900	£692,500	£2,496,900	£684,243
viii. Car Park (Penalty Notices)	£1,149,800	£308,900	£1,149,800	£231,644

3.2. Further explanation of the above budgets and income collection performance is provided below:

- (i) School Meals: It is expected that income will be slightly more than the budget.
- (ii) Sports Centres: This is a volatile area and income is being monitored closely. The Invigor8 income is expected to exceed budget.
- (iii) Golf Courses: It is anticipated that income will underachieve against budget by £175,000. The budget for golf income has not been achieved for at least the last three years.
- (iv) Burials and Cremations: Income levels are down when compared to this time last year. It is anticipated that income will underachieve against budget by around £80,000.
- (v) Building Control Fees income is declining and there was a deficit of £91,500 in 2009/10.
- (vi) Land Charges: Fee income is declining and there was a deficit of £61,500 in 2009/10.
- (vii) Car Park Income (Pay and Display Tickets). It is unlikely that the income will be achieved. The deficit in 2009/10 was £285,000.

(viii) Car Park Income (Penalty Notices): The shortfall in 2009/10 was £217,000 and is likely to be similar in the current year.

4. HOUSING BENEFITS

4.1. The following statement details the number of claimants in respect of benefit and the expenditure for Private Tenants and those in receipt of Council Tax Benefit up to 31 July 2010.

	2010/11	2009/10
Number of Private Tenant recipients	29,672	27,974
Total rent allowance expenditure	£39,469,438	
Number under the Local Housing Allowance scheme (<u>included in the above</u>)	8,683 £14,926,584	6,250
Number of Council Tax Benefit recipients	38,972	36,944
Total Council Tax Benefit expenditure	£31,067,694	
Total expenditure on benefit to date	£70,537,132	

4.2. The following statement provides information concerning the breakdown according to client type as at 31 July 2010.

	Private Tenants	Owner Occupiers
Working age and in receipt of J.S.A.	15,154	1,848
Elderly and in receipt of J.S.A.	7,104	5,612
Working age and not receiving J.S.A.	5,414	1,144
Elderly and not in receipt of J.S.A.	<u>2,000</u>	<u>3,250</u>
Total	29,672	11,854

There are **41,526** benefit recipients in Wirral as at 31 July 2010.

4.3. Housing Benefit Fraud and Enquiries To 31 July 2010

New Cases referred to Fraud team in period	636
Cases where fraud found and action taken	39
Cases investigated, no fraud found and recovery of overpayment may be sought	244
Cases under current investigation	211
Surveillance Operations Undertaken	0
Cases where fraud found and action taken:	
Administration penalty	7
Caution issued and accepted	22
Successful prosecution	10
Summons issued for prosecution purposes	5

4.4. Discretionary Housing Payments

4.4.1. Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) may be awarded to provide short term financial assistance to Housing and Council Tax Benefit claimants who are experiencing difficulty meeting a shortfall in their rent or Council Tax because maximum benefit is not being paid.

4.4.2. DHP is not a payment of Housing/Council Tax Benefit and is funded separately from the main scheme. The Government contribution for 2010/11 is £245,200 with an overall limit of £613,000 which the Authority must not exceed. To date I have paid £31,748 and committed a further £33,669 to the end of the financial year.

5. STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

5.1. There are none arising from this report.

6. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

6.1. There are none arising directly from this report.

7. HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

7.1. There are none arising directly from this report.

8. LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

8.1. There are none arising directly from this report.

9. COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

9.1. There are none arising directly from this report.

10. PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

10.1. There are none arising directly from this report.

11. LOCAL MEMBER SUPPORT IMPLICATIONS

11.1. There are none arising directly from this report.

12. BACKGROUND PAPERS

12.1. None were used in the preparation of this report.

13. RECOMMENDATION

13.1. That the report be noted.

IAN COLEMAN
DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

FNCE/ /10

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WIRRAL COUNCIL

COUNCIL EXCELLENCE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

21 SEPTEMBER 2010

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

BUDGET PROJECTIONS 2011-2015

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1. This report updates the projected budgets for the years from 2011 to 2015 in line with the decision of HM Treasury to undertake a four year Spending Review. The report was presented to the Cabinet on 2 September 2010.

2. ASSUMPTIONS UNDERPINNING THE PROJECTIONS

- 2.1. Inflation – HM Treasury is assuming a return to a long term inflation rate of 2%. Therefore prices are assumed to increase by 2% per annum with income to continue to increase by 3% per annum. Pay awards will be limited to those employees earning less than £21,000 per annum for 2011-13.
- 2.2. Capital Financing – HM Treasury is assuming that the level of capital investment will reduce by 50% between 2009-10 and 2013-14. The annual increase in capital financing charges has therefore been reduced to £2.0m.
- 2.3. Pension Fund – the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) has yet to finalise the proposed cost sharing arrangements which are now unlikely to be implemented before 2012-13. In advance of this decision the increase arising from the actuarial valuation currently underway is projected at 1.5% or £2m per annum. In addition the outsourcing of the highways and engineering services contract is likely to increase the contributions by £0.2m per annum.
- 2.4. Waste Disposal – the increase in the levy will be dependent on delivery of the waste disposal strategy. The Landfill Tax will increase by £8 per ton per annum, an increase of 50% between 2010-11 and 2014-15. The levy is assumed to increase by 8% per annum.
- 2.5. Merseytravel – the levy is assumed to increase by 3% per annum.
- 2.6. Private Finance Initiative – the latest projections are included.
- 2.7. Benefits – the Department for Work and Pensions is estimating an annual increase of 1.7% and has announced a review of Benefits.
- 2.8. Schools – it is assumed that the Schools Budget will vary in line with the Dedicated Schools Grant.
- 2.9. Adult Social Services Reform – the Reform Grant of £1.9m will cease in 2011-12 with the assumed implementation of the personalisation agenda.

- 2.10. Personal Care At Home – the Government has now abandoned this policy and reduced the Area Based Grant.
- 2.11. Carbon Reduction Commitment – payment of £1.0m commencing in 2011-12. It is assumed that the Authority will reduce the carbon footprint sufficiently to recover these payments.
- 2.12. National Insurance – the proposed 1% increase in the employers rate will not now be implemented.
- 2.13. Home Insulation – increased cost from 2011 of £1m.
- 2.14. Guinea Gap and Leasowe Recreation Centres – restoration into budget at a cost of £0.6m each.
- 2.15. Other Unavoidable Growth – a number of items of unavoidable growth of less than £0.2m will arise. These usually total about £1m per annum.
- 2.16. Efficiency Investment – in order to continue to deliver efficiencies in future years it will be necessary to continue to invest and therefore £2m per annum has been provided.
- 2.17. Area Based Grant (ABG) – Cabinet on 22 July 2010 agreed to reductions in expenditure for 2010-11 only to meet the £3.9m reduction in ABG.
- 2.18. Government Grants – the DCLG has indicated that Government Grants will be reduced by 30% to 40% over the period 2011-15. I have only assumed a reduction of 30%.
- 2.19. Council Tax – the Government has announced a freeze in Council Tax increases for 2011-12, although Local Authorities could be permitted to increase Council Tax by upto 2.5%. From 2012-13 any proposed increase above the rate of inflation would be the subject of a local referendum.

3. GRANT NEGOTIATIONS

- 3.1. The Government has agreed to the following elements of the Local Government Finance Settlement being reviewed as part of the 2011 settlement:-
 - a. Area Cost Adjustment
 - b. Highways Maintenance
 - c. Day Visitors
 - d. Income Support/Tax Credits
 - e. Students
 - f. Concessionary Fares
 - g. Coast Protection/Flood Defence
 - h. Capital Financing
 - i. Dedicated Schools Grant
 - j. Housing Benefit
 - k. Pensions
 - l. Schools Deprivation.

3.2. The Local Government Finance Settlement due to be announced in December 2010 may cover 2011-15 as HM Treasury intends to deliver a four year Spending Review on 20 October 2010. However there is a possibility that the DCLG will issue a two year settlement covering 2011-13 with a subsequent two year settlement for 2013-15 after the completion of the review of Local Government Finance.

3.3. The Government has announced that it intends to conduct reviews of the following:-

- a) Local Government Finance
- b) Public Sector Pensions
- c) Welfare Benefits

3.4. During the course of this budgeting period the results of the Census 2011 will become available and will be incorporated into the grant distribution formulae. The Office for National Statistics has now released the Mid 2008 estimated populations. The reduction for Wirral is greater than for any other metropolitan or unitary authority. If this is confirmed in the Census 2011 then the reduction in grant receivable could be significant.

4. **BALANCES**

4.1. The budget for 2010-11 includes balances of £6.5m.

4.2. The financial out-turn for 2009-10 was reported to Cabinet on 24 June 2010 and showed an overspending of £1,385,000 offset by increased investment income of £1,185,000 and a contribution from the Collection Fund of £515,000 to produce a net surplus of £315,000.

4.3. The Government has announced that the Personal Care at Home scheme will not be proceeding. The revenue budget for 2010-11 will therefore be reduced by £2.6m with a reduction of £1.6m in Area Based Grant.

4.4. The Government announced on 10 June 2010 that there would be the following grant reductions for 2010-11:-

	£000
Area Based Grant	3,927
LAA Reward Grant	1,400
Local Authority Business Growth Incentive	<u>200</u>
	5,527

Cabinet on 22 July 2010 agreed that the reduced Area Based Grant will be matched by reduced expenditure in 2010-11.

4.5. The Insurance Fund Annual Report was presented to Cabinet on 24 June 2010 including the transfer of £2,471,000 to General Fund balances.

4.6. Cabinet on 24 June 2010 agreed that additional VAT of £240,000 recovered from HM Revenue and Customs should be placed in balances.

- 4.7. The budget for 2010-11 provides for pay awards of 1% totalling £1.7m. No pay award has yet been offered.
- 4.8. The Cabinet has not agreed to any projected overspendings in 2010-11

	£m
4.9. Opening Balances	6.5
Out-Turn 2009-10	0.3
Personal Care at Home	1.0
LAA Reward Grant	- 1.4
LABGI	- 0.2
Insurance Fund	2.5
VAT	<u>0.2</u>
	8.9

5. EFFICIENCIES

- 5.1. The previous Government increased the efficiency target for 2010-11 to 4% which for Wirral equates to £14.9m. The previous Government expected that this saving would be reinvested in order to enable delivery of increased efficiency requirements in 2011 to 2014.
- 5.2. The efficiencies that the Authority will need to deliver for 2011-15 are well in excess of the statutory efficiency target. The main mechanism for delivery of the required efficiencies is the change programme. Cabinet on 14 January 2010 agreed a revised change programme, progress on which was to be reported quarterly to the Cabinet.
- 5.3. Revised governance and programme management arrangements for the change programme were reported to Cabinet on 22 July 2010.
- 5.4. Cabinet has to date agreed a number of efficiencies:-
- a. Cabinet agreed that £1m will be saved from office accommodation from 2011. Progress was reported to Cabinet on 24 June 2010.
 - b. Cabinet on 15 October 2009 agreed to the implementation of an integrated Human Resources IT system with initial projected savings of £254,000 for 2011-12, £220,000 for 2012-13, £100,000 for 2013-14 and £20,000 for 2014-15.
 - c. Cabinet on 22 February 2010 agreed to the creation of an integrated transport unit with projected savings of £130,000 in 2011-12, £340,000 in 2012-13 and £250,000 in 2013-14.
 - d. Cabinet on 18 March 2010 agree to investment in an assistive technology project in Adult Social Services with projected additional savings of £8.8m over 2011-13 after additional investment from the Efficiency Investment Budget of £6.0m.
 - e. Cabinet on 15 April 2010 agreed to investment in family group conferencing to deliver savings of £70,000 in 2011-12 and £130,000 in 2012-13.

- f. Cabinet on 22 July 2010 agreed to proceed with a parks and countryside service procurement exercise with a base case saving of £392,000 in 2011-12 and £392,000 in 2012-13.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. The assumptions outlined above are reflected in the budget projections in the Appendix.

7. STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. There are none arising directly from this report.

8. EQUAL OPPORTUNITY IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1. There are none arising directly from this report.

9. COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. There are none arising directly from this report.

10. HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. There are none arising directly from this report.

11. LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1. There are none arising directly from this report.

12. PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1. There are none arising directly from this report.

13. MEMBER SUPPORT IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1. There are none arising directly from this report.

14. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 14.1. Medium Term Financial Strategy 2010-13 – September 2009
Formula Grant Settlement 2010-11 – DCLG – January 2010
Estimates 2010-11 – March 2010
Budget – HM Treasury – March 2010 and June 2010

15. RECOMMENDATIONS

15.1. That the budget projections be kept under review.

15.2. That further efficiencies be delivered.

IAN COLEMAN
DIRECTOR OF FINANCE.

FNCE/148/10

WIRRAL COUNCIL

BUDGET PROJECTIONS 2011-2015

	2011-12 £M	2012-13 £M	2013-14 £M	2014-15 £M
Base Budget	330.8	315.0	303.7	292.6
Increased Requirements				
Pay Inflation	1.0	1.0	3.5	3.5
Price Inflation	3.7	3.7	3.8	3.8
Capital Financing	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0
Pension Fund	2.2	2.2	2.2	2.2
Waste Disposal	1.4	1.5	1.6	1.7
Merseytravel	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8
Private Finance Initiative	1.0	0.2	0.2	0.2
Benefits	2.4	2.4	2.5	2.5
Home Insulation	1.0	-	-	-
Guinea Gap	0.6	-	-	-
Leasowe Recreation Centre	0.6	-	-	-
Other Unavoidable Growth	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Efficiency Investment	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0
	<u>350.5</u>	<u>331.8</u>	<u>323.3</u>	<u>312.3</u>
Reduced Requirements				
Income Inflation	-1.0	-1.1	-1.1	-1.1
Benefits Subsidy	-2.2	-2.2	-2.3	-2.3
Savings Agreed	<u>-1.8</u>	<u>-1.1</u>	<u>-0.3</u>	<u>-</u>
	345.5	327.4	319.6	308.9
Resources				
Grants	180.5	165.9	151.3	136.7
Council Tax	<u>134.5</u>	<u>137.8</u>	<u>141.3</u>	<u>144.8</u>
Forecast Resources	315.0	303.7	292.6	281.5
Shortfall	30.5	23.7	27.0	27.4

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WIRRAL COUNCIL

COUNCIL EXCELLENCE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

21 SEPTEMBER 2010

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

TREASURY MANAGEMENT QUARTERLY MONITORING

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report presents a review of Treasury Management activities during the first quarter of 2010/11 and confirms compliance with treasury limits and prudential indicators. It has been prepared in accordance with the revised CIPFA Treasury Management Code and the revised Prudential Code. It was presented to the Cabinet on 22 July 2010.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Treasury Management in Local Government is governed by the CIPFA Code of Practice on Treasury Management in the Public Services and in this context is the “management of the Council’s investments and cash flows, its banking, money market and capital market transactions; the effective control of the risks associated with those activities and the pursuit of optimum performance consistent with those risks”.
- 2.2 The Treasury Management Code requires public sector authorities to determine an annual Treasury Management Strategy and as a minimum, formally report on their treasury activities and arrangements to Council mid-year and after the year-end. These reports enable those tasked with implementing policies and undertaking transactions to demonstrate that they have properly fulfilled their responsibilities, and enable those with responsibility/governance of the treasury management function to scrutinise and assess its effectiveness and compliance with policies and objectives.
- 2.3 Cabinet approves the Treasury Management Strategy before the start of each financial year. This identifies proposals to finance capital expenditure, borrow and invest in the light of capital spending requirements, interest rate forecasts and expected economic conditions. At the end of each financial year Cabinet receives an Annual Report which details performance against the Strategy. During 2009/10 the Council Excellence Overview & Scrutiny Committee received quarterly monitoring reports as part of the General Financial Matters report. In 2010/11, in accordance with the revised Treasury Management Code, there will be a separate Treasury Management monitoring report presented to Cabinet and approved by Council on a quarterly basis.

3. CURRENT ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

- 3.1 With the formation of the Coalition Government comes the creation of the Office of Budget Responsibility (OBR) designed to give a more independent assessment of the economic outlook. Following the Chancellor of the Exchequer's budget on 22 June 2010 the OBR assessment is that the economy will grow by 1.2% in 2010 and by 2.3% in 2011, both of which are a downward revision on past forecasts. The reduced growth figures coupled with the large public sector borrowing figures mean that the deficit will not dissipate without structural changes occurring.
- 3.2 Inflation figures in May stand at 3.4% for CPI and 5.1% for RPI slightly down on April but still above the Bank of England Monetary Policy Committee target range. However, the spare capacity in the economy and the expected reduction in public sector expenditure should ensure that inflation continues to fall to around the 2% level.
- 3.3 The Bank of England (BoE) base rate remains at 0.5% and is forecast to remain at this level throughout 2010. The BoE has now ceased the Quantitative Easing (QE) programme but has not ruled out using more QE in the future if the economy continues to stall. The economy is in a very weak state and until it shows real signs of prolonged and stable growth the base rate will remain low.

4. THE COUNCIL TREASURY POSITION

- 4.1 The table below shows how the Treasury position has changed since 31 March 2010:

Table 1: Summary of Treasury Position

Investments	Balance at 31 March 2010 £m	Maturing Investments £m	New Investments £m	Balance at 30 June 2010 £m
Internal managed investments	106	181	210	135
TOTAL INVESTMENTS	106	181	210	135

Borrowings	Balance at 31 March 2010 £m	Maturing Borrowings £m	New Borrowings £m	Balance at 30 June 2010 £m
Long-term fixed rate	280	2	0	278
Long-term variable rate	0	0	0	0
Temporary borrowing	0	0	0	0
TOTAL BORROWING	280	2	0	278

NET BORROWING	174			143
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5. INVESTMENTS

5.1 The Treasury Management Team can invest money for periods varying from 1 day to 10 years, in accordance with the Treasury Management Strategy, to earn interest until the money is required by the Council. These investments arise from a number of sources including:-

- General Fund Balances
- Reserves and Provisions
- Grants received in advance of expenditure
- Money borrowed in advance of capital expenditure
- Schools' Balances
- Daily Cashflow/ Working Capital

5.2 As at 30 June 2010 the Council held investments of £135m. The table below details these investments;

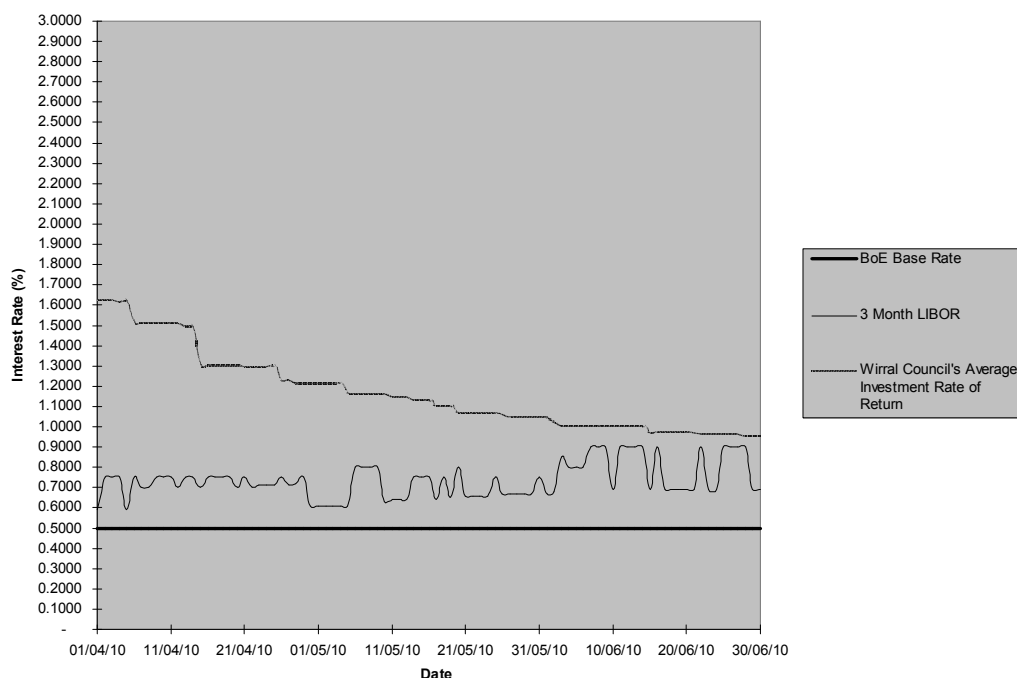
Table 2: Investments as at 30 June 2010

Investments with:	£m
UK Banks	69.8
Building Societies	15.0
Money Market Funds	41.7
Gilts and Bonds	8.5
TOTAL	135.0

5.3 Of the above investments £49m is invested in instant access funds, £75.5m is invested for up to 1 year, £3m is invested for up to 2 years and £7.5m is invested for up to 5 years.

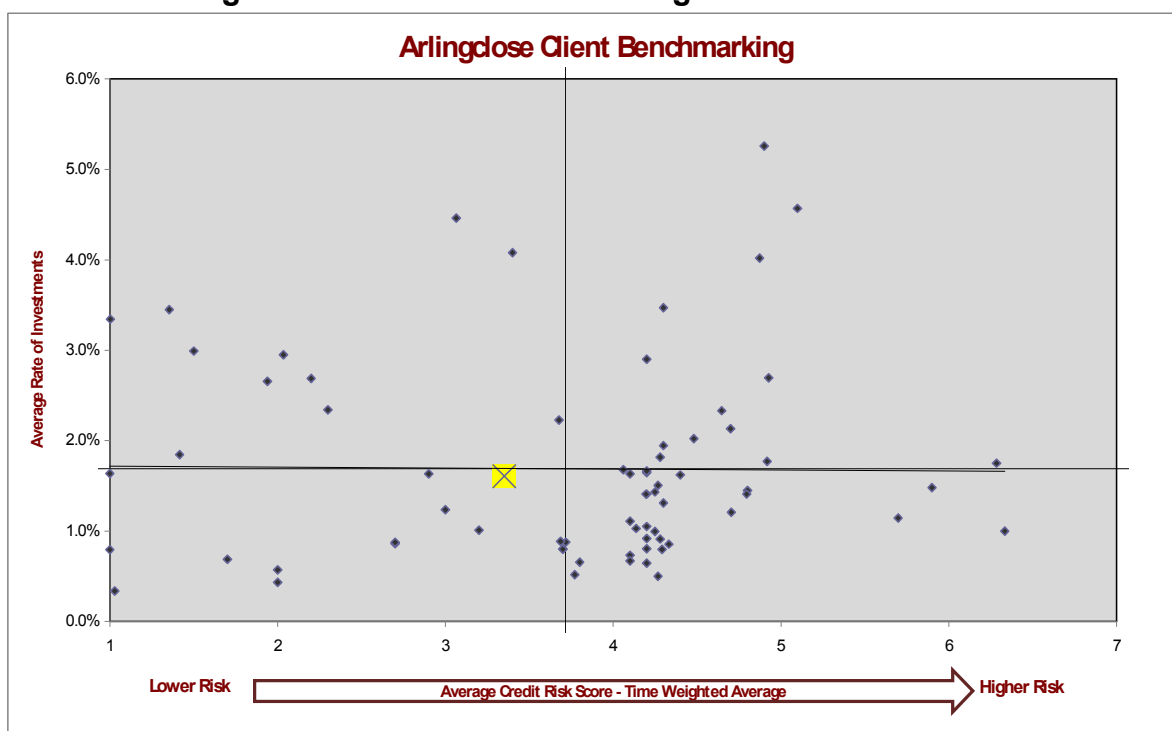
5.4 The average rate of return on investments as at 30 June 2010 is 1.16%. The graph below shows the Treasury Management Team rate of return against the Bank of England base rate and the 3 month LIBOR (the inter bank lending rate);

Chart 1: Investment Rate of Return in 2010/11



- 5.5 The rate at which the Council can invest money continues to be low, in line with the record low Bank of England base rate.
- 5.6 The Council maintains a restrictive policy on new investments by only investing in UK institutions A+ rated or above and continues to invest in AAA rated money market funds, Gilts and bonds.
- 5.7 The 2010/11 investment income budget has been reduced to £0.7m to reflect the low interest rates that are anticipated to continue throughout the financial year. With low interest rates it is unlikely that the Authority will achieve the large surpluses that have been made in the past few years.
- 5.8 In order to provide more context to the investment activities of the Treasury Management Team the treasury management advisors have produced benchmarking data from the 71 public sector clients they work with. The graph below shows the average rate of return from investments in 2009/10 against the perceived risk of the investments. Wirral is represented by a 'x' on the graph while the other 70 authorities are represented by dots.

Chart 2: Average investment rate of return against credit risk



- 5.9 This graph demonstrates how Wirral achieves close to the average rate of return from its investments while maintaining a lower than average risk. This illustrates the Treasury Management Team work in maintaining the security of Council money while providing reasonable investment returns. The security of the investments always takes priority over the returns.

Icelandic Investment

- 5.10 In terms of Icelandic investments, the Council had £2 million deposited with Heritable Bank and Members have received regular updates regarding the circumstances and the latest situation. In March 2009 an Audit Commission report confirmed that Wirral Council had acted, and continues to act, prudently and properly in all its investment activities.

- 5.11 The latest information from the Administrator projects a base case return to creditors of between 79-85p in the £ and the final recovery could be higher. To date £0.7 million has been received with further payments due in 2010/11. If Heritable Bank is unable to repay in full I have also made a pre-emptive claim against Landsbanki Islands HF for the difference. When the original investment was made it was with Landsbanki Islands HF providing a guarantee to reimburse the Council should Heritable be unable to repay. It should be noted that Landsbanki Islands HF is also in administration.

6. BORROWING

- 6.1 The Council undertakes borrowing to help fund capital expenditure. In 2010/11 the capital programme requires borrowing of £14m. However, to date no additional borrowing has been undertaken. The table below shows the total borrowing of the Council as at 30 June 2010.

Table 3: Borrowing as at 30 June 2010

Borrowing	£m
PWLB	104
Market Loans	174
TOTAL	278

- 6.2 The Council is able to borrow from two main sources, either from the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB), which is effectively borrowing from the Government, or from the Market, i.e. direct from the banks.
- 6.3 As the year progresses an assessment will be made as to the best time to borrow money. Currently, as the rate of return from investments remains low it continues to be more appropriate to reduce the level of investment. By not reinvesting as investments mature the Council is able to use this money to fund capital expenditure. This, temporarily, reduces the need to undertake new long term borrowing and also alleviates the difficulty and risk in finding a safe counterparty to invest with. This approach also helps to generate savings as borrowing money long term to fund the capital programme incurs an interest rate of approximately 4.5% while investments are only earning approximately 0.5%. It is recognised that utilising investments in lieu of borrowing clearly has a finite duration; investments are not permanent surplus money but, rather, money set aside for a specific future reason. Future borrowing would be required to support capital expenditure.

7. MONITORING OF THE PRUDENTIAL CODE INDICATORS

- 7.1 The introduction of the Prudential Code in 2004 gave Local Authorities greater freedom in making capital strategy decisions. The prudential indicators allow the Council to establish prudence and affordability within the capital strategy.
- 7.2 Below is a selection of prudential indicators which demonstrate that the treasury management decisions are in line with the capital strategy, which is prudent and affordable.

7.3 Net External Borrowing and Capital Financing Requirement (CFR) Indicator

7.3.1. The CFR measures the underlying need to borrow money to finance capital expenditure. The Prudential Code stipulates that net external borrowing should not exceed the CFR for the previous year plus the estimated additional CFR requirement for the current and next two financial years. Table 4 below shows the cumulative CFR and net borrowing of the Council.

Table 4: Net External Borrowing compared with CFR

	£m
CFR in previous year (2009/10 actual)	387
additional CFR in 2010/11 (estimate)	2
Reduced CFR in 2011/12 (estimate)	-20
Reduced CFR in 2012/13 (estimate)	-20
C0-umulative CFR	349
External Borrowing as at 30 June 2010	278

7.3.2. Net external borrowing does not exceed the CFR and it is not expected to in the future. This is a key indicator of prudence.

7.4. Authorised Borrowing Limit and Operational Boundary Indicators

7.4.1. The Authorised Borrowing Limit is the amount determined as the level of borrowing which, while not desired, could be afforded but may not be sustainable. It is not treated as an upper limit for borrowing for capital purposes alone since it also encompasses temporary borrowing. An unanticipated revision to this limit is considered to be an exceptional event and would require a review of all the other affordability indicators.

7.4.2. The Operational Boundary is the amount determined as the expectation of the maximum external debt according to probable events projected by the estimates and makes no allowance for any headroom. It is designed to alert the Authority to any imminent breach of the Authorised Limit.

Table 5: Authorised Limit and Operational Boundary Indicator

	April 10 £m	May 10 £m	June 10 £m
Authorised Limit	484	484	484
Operational Boundary	469	469	469
Total Council Borrowing	278	278	278

7.4.3. The table above shows that neither the Authorised Limit nor the Operational Boundary was breached between April 2010 and June 2010. This is a key indicator of affordability.

7.5. Interest Rate Exposures Indicator

7.5.1. The Prudential Code also requires Local Authorities to set limits for the exposure to the effects of interest rate changes. Limits are set for the amount of borrowing/ investments which are subject to variable rates of interest and the amount which is subject to fixed rates of interest. Table 6 shows the interest rate exposure as at 30 June 2010.

Table 6: Interest Rate Exposure:

Interest Rate Exposure	Fixed Rate of Interest	Variable Rate of Interest	Total
Borrowings	£278m	£0m	£278m
Proportion of Borrowings	100%	0%	100%
Upper Limit	100%	50%	
Investments	£2m	£133m	£135m
Proportion of Investments	1%	99%	100%
Upper Limit	100%	100%	
Net Borrowing	£276m	£-133m	£143m
Proportion of Total Net Borrowing	193%	-93%	100%

7.5.2. The table above shows that borrowing is mainly at fixed rates of interest and investments are mainly at variable rates of interest. This was considered to be a good position while interest rates were rising as the cost of existing borrowings remained stable and the investments, at variable rates of interest, generated increasing levels of income.

7.5.3. As the environment has changed to one of low interest rates the Treasury Management Team is working to adjust this position. This work is unfortunately restricted by a number of factors:

- the level of uncertainty in the markets makes investing for long periods at fixed rates of interest more risky and, therefore, the Council continues to only invest short term at variable rates of interest;
- Many of the Council loans have expensive penalties for early repayment or rescheduling which makes changing the debt position difficult.

7.5.4. The Treasury Management Team will continue to work to improve the position within these limiting factors.

7.6. Maturity Structure of Borrowing Indicator

7.6.1. The maturity structure of the borrowing has also been set to achieve maximum flexibility with the Authority being able to undertake all borrowing with a short maturity date or a long maturity date. Table 7 shows the current maturity structure of borrowing.

Table 7: Maturity Structure of Borrowing

	Borrowings Maturity (years)	30 June 10	30 June 10
		£m	%
Total Short Term Borrowing	Less than 1 year	14	5
Long Term Borrowing	Over 1 year under 2 years	14	5
	Over 2 years under 5 years	57	21
	Over 5 years under 10 years	28	10
	Over 10 years	165	59
Total Long Term Borrowing		264	94
Total Borrowing		278	100

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Currently all Treasury Management activities are expected to be achieved in line with the 2010-11 budget.

9. STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are none arising out of this report.

10. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are none arising out of this report.

11. COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There are none arising out of this report.

12. LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

12.1 There are none arising out of this report.

13. PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

13.1 There are none arising out of this report.

14. ANTI-POVERTY IMPLICATIONS

14.1 There are none arising out of this report.

15. SOCIAL INCLUSION IMPLICATIONS

15.1 There are none arising out of this report.

16. LOCAL MEMBER SUPPORT IMPLICATIONS

16.1 There are none arising out of this report

17. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 17.1 Code of Practice for Treasury Management in Public Services – CIPFA 2009.
Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities – CIPFA 2009.

18. RECOMMENDATION

- 18.1 That the Treasury Management Quarterly Monitoring Report be noted.

**IAN COLEMAN
DIRECTOR OF FINANCE**

FNCE/135/10

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WIRRAL COUNCIL

COUNCIL EXCELLENCE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

21 SEPTEMBER 2010

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

DELIVERING EFFICIENCY AND MEASURING AND REPORTING VALUE FOR MONEY GAINS IN LOCAL SERVICES

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report presents the Value for Money Gains National Indicator 179 (NI179) which has been submitted to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). It was approved by the Cabinet on 22 July 2010.

2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The Comprehensive Spending Review 2007 (CSR07) released in Autumn 2007 contained a number of value for money targets across the public sector. In October 2007 the DCLG published *Delivering Value For Money in Local Government: Meeting the Challenge of CSR07* which was also known as the VFM Delivery Plan. This outlined the basic measurement and reporting criteria for value for money gains and highlighted differences from the previous Annual Efficiency Statement process.
- 2.2 As part of the CSR a new and significantly reduced number of performance indicators was introduced. These included NI179 which was defined as *Value for money – total net value of ongoing cash-releasing value for money gains that have impacted since the start of the 2008/09 financial year*. In line with the previous Government policy of reducing the administrative burdens on local government the DCLG no longer requires local authorities to produce an Annual Efficiency Statement (AES). Summarised NI179 data is submitted through a website based system called the Data Interchange Hub. An estimate for the year is required each October with the actual figure for the year submitted the following July.
- 2.3 CSR07 originally set a target for local government to achieve, relative to the 2007/08 baseline, total annual efficiency gains of at least £4.9 billion by 2010/11. This equated to cash releasing gains of 3% per annum and unlike the previous system there was no scope to include non-cash releasing items. The target was subsequently increased in the 2009 Budget to £5.5 billion reflecting an increase of in year efficiencies for 2010/11 to 4%. The cash releasing efficiencies are gains where there is a direct financial saving or benefit, with money released that could be spent elsewhere or recycled within a service to deliver better outcomes.

- 2.4 Whilst every council was required to achieve efficiency savings it was not the intention that efficiencies cut services for users but that they were found by operating the business using a best business practice approach. Under CSR07 there is no individual target for each local authority but the requirement is for local government as a whole to produce 3%-4% annual cash releasing gains. DCLG has however provided details of how to calculate the baseline expenditure.
- 2.5 In December 2008 the DCLG issued the Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rating (Demand Notices) (England) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations. These require local authorities to include efficiency information on Council Tax bills and within the accompanying Council Tax booklet from the 2009/10 billing round. This information is based upon the NI179 submission.

3. ASSESSING EFFICIENCY GAINS

3.1 The Baseline expenditure

- 3.1.1 The Baseline expenditure was calculated from the 2007/08 local authority net revenue and capital expenditure forecasts excluding Schools and Benefits expenditure. A share of Passenger Transport Authority and Waste Disposal Authority budgets, based upon the proportionate share of the levies, is included. Under the new efficiency regime capital expenditure is now included within the Baseline.
- 3.1.2. The Wirral Baseline spend was calculated at £351.2 million producing a cumulative efficiency target of £21.4 million for 31 March 2010. The DCLG also allows an alternative calculation based upon the 2007/08 outturn. For Wirral the outturn was £350.7 million which has only a marginal impact on the annual target.
- 3.1.3 In accordance with the projections in CSR07 the cumulative efficiency targets for future years are 6.1% of the Baseline for 2009/10 (equates to £21.4 million) and 10.3% for 2010/11 (equates to £36.2 million).

3.2 Analysis of efficiency gains

- 3.2.1 NI179 does not require efficiency gains to be analysed across prescribed headings as was the case with the Annual Efficiency Statement nor is there a prescribed format for providing any supporting information. The Appendix contains the analysis for Wirral which is broadly in line with the AES format using departments rather than service categories.
- 3.2.2 Efficiency gains from the Passenger Transport and Waste Disposal Authorities have been apportioned in accordance with the levy.

3.3 Assessing efficiency gains

3.3.1 The definition of ongoing cash-releasing gains relates to raising productivity and enhancing value for money. To be eligible, measures must evidence an improvement of outputs compared to inputs and not result in deterioration in the overall effectiveness of the service. Gains can occur through:-

- Reduced inputs for the same or improved outputs.
- Reduced unit costs to meet increased demand for service.
- Increased demand for services and better income collection.
- Reallocation of inputs from a low priority to a high priority area so that the overall service effectiveness for a particular client group improves.
- Asset optimisation and the sale of surplus, formerly operational assets.
- Withstanding the impact of inflation.

3.3.2 Activity not meeting the definition of ongoing cash-releasing gains include:

- Improvements in service quality.
- Any action leading to a reduction in overall effectiveness of a service.
- Imposition of new or increased charges to the public or business.
- Reclassification of activities not changing either inputs or outputs.
- Transfer of costs and subsidies to other public sector organisations.
- Arbitrary cuts in payments to the Voluntary and Community Sector.

3.3.3 Eligible gains need to be ongoing for at least two years after first implemented and represent the potential to release resources for use elsewhere. Although improvements to service quality may be beneficial to Council Taxpayers, these cannot be counted. The NI179 calculation should be certified, and approved, by the Leader, the Chief Executive and the Chief Financial Officer of the Council. The DCLG expects that the principal measure of scrutiny will be through internal audit and assurance processes. However gains may be subject to external assessment by the Audit Commission.

3.4 Key dates in delivering and reporting

3.4.1 The timetable relating to NI179 reporting for 2009/10 was:-

Date	Action
23 October 2009	Authorities submit forecast cumulative gains for 2009/10
23 July 2010	Authorities submit actual cumulative gains

4. NATIONAL INDICATOR 179 2009/10 FORECAST

4.1 The basic principles within the NI 179 framework are:-

- When setting the annual budget the Council must identify actions to improve efficiency and quantify the estimated expected gains;
- After the end of the financial year the Council must identify the impact of the actions taken for the year in question.
- Claimed efficiency gains will only be valid if service quality has been maintained.

4.2 The forecast for 2008/09 of £24,634,000 was submitted to the Data Interchange Hub in October 2009. This is substantially above the baseline requirement as it comprised cash releasing efficiencies within 2008/09 plus a large element relating to previous efficiencies.

4.3 In recognition of the significant gains made within the 2004 Spending Review period the DCLG allowed authorities who exceeded the 2004 cash releasing efficiencies target to carry forward the amount of the excess above the target into the CSR07 period.

4.4 The cash releasing efficiencies for 2009/10 were based upon those included within the 2009/10 revenue budget adjusted for those items (e.g. increases in fee income) which although producing benefits did not meet the defined criteria under NI179. The figures were refined in line with the predicted likelihood of achievement as per the monthly summary financial monitoring statement for September 2009.

4.5 In determining the impact upon service delivery the Authority has used available performance data. However, the new national indicator set from 2008/09 means that direct comparability between years has not always been possible.

5. NATIONAL INDICATOR 179 ACTUAL 2009/10

5.1 The Appendix sets out the Council strategy and provides details of the efficiencies achieved during the year. It also explains the linkages with partner agencies both through the Local Area Agreement, and through the provision of joined up customer services. It states the Council commitment towards improving its priority areas as well as keeping Council Tax at affordable levels with service re-engineering the key to identifying resources for re-allocation.

5.2 The cumulative efficiencies at 31 March 2009 are £26.9 million. These are above the forecast figure and also well ahead of the target of £21.4 million essentially because the first year performance was boosted by the inclusion of the surplus efficiencies from the previous efficiency regime.

5.3 The key areas and issues for 2009/10 were:-

- a. The various budget options included efficiencies from working with others as well as savings packages that encompassed increased income or the use of Government grants. The latter items, and some of the savings identified, were outside the scope of eligible efficiencies.
- b. Retendering of a number of contracts produced significant efficiencies in the year including social care provision and gas and electricity contracts.
- c. Continuing progress on Risk Management and Treasury Management initiatives again resulted in significant resources being released during the year.

6. FINANCIAL AND STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The calculated cumulative target for Wirral was to achieve efficiency savings of £21.4 million by 31 March 2010.

6.2 The 2009/10 cash releasing efficiency gains total £9.1 million. These are added to the 31 March 2009 declared efficiencies of £17.8 million (including allowable gains of £8.1 million brought forward from the previous efficiency regime). This produces a cumulative total at 31 March 2010 of £26.9 million of cash releasing efficiency gains.

6.3 There are no staffing implications arising directly from this report.

7. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are none arising directly from this report.

8. HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are none arising directly from this report.

9. COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no specific implications arising from this report.

10. LOCAL MEMBERS SUPPORT IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no specific implications for any Member or Ward.

11. LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There are none arising directly from this report.

12. PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

12.1 There are none arising directly from this report.

13. BACKGROUND PAPERS

13.1. Delivering Value for Money in Local Government: Meeting the Challenge of CSR07 – DCLG October 2007.

13.2. Measuring and Reporting Value for Money Gains – DCLG October 2008.

13.3. Council Tax and Non Domestic Rating Demand Notices England Amendment Regulations – DCLG December 2008.

14. RECOMMENDATIONS

14.1. That the Value for Money Gains National Indicator 179 submission be noted.

14.2. That a further report be brought to Cabinet on the 2010/11 NI 179 estimate which will be due for submission in October 2010.

IAN COLEMAN
DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

FNCE/138/10

WIRRAL COUNCIL

NATIONAL INDICATOR (NI 179) – 2009/10 ACTUAL

Strategy

The Council's overall strategy is directly influenced by the citizens of the borough and driven to improving customer service and customer access. This is being achieved through linking with partner agencies in the provision of One Stop Shops, the continuing enhancement of the Corporate Call Centre and the developing of web-based channels of service delivery.

The Council is committed towards improving the identified priority areas as well as keeping Council Tax at affordable levels. The use of available resources is being maximised and targeted towards key front-line services.

Great importance is placed upon partnership working. A new multi-partner Local Area Agreement commenced during 2008/09, which included a shared Vision of Place for Wirral. With the Local Strategic Partnership setting the overall vision and opportunities are taken within specific service areas. This includes Adult Social Services and joint commissioning with the health sector and the relationship with Wirral Partnership Homes following the transfer of the Council housing stock in 2005.

Actions taken during 2009/10

In delivering the targets the Council expanded upon the actions taken in the previous years and achieved further efficiencies through the following actions which have helped keep the Council Tax affordable and improve customer services.

The overall Wirral Council Tax for 2009/10 represented a rise of 4.46% being below the prevailing rate of inflation and below the 5% maximum set by Government. This saw the sums allocated to the priority areas including £5.1 million to schools, £690,000 to support increased child protection demands following the baby Peter case, £280,000 of bridging finance for residential care for children and a range of policy options tackling crime, environmental and social issues.

Inflationary rises of for 2% prices and contracts were built into the 2009/10 estimates with 1% percentage increase built in for pay awards. A number of contracts in activity areas such as waste and Social Care saw increases beyond the inflation provision resulting in the need to deliver efficiencies to maintain existing services. The demands for care continue to grow from an increasingly elderly population, from increasing numbers with complex needs and increasing numbers of looked after children. Whilst additional resources were input into these areas working with external agencies, particularly in respect of adults, delivered efficiencies to maintain services.

A series of cost reduction options totaling £12.7m were agreed as part of the 2009/10 budget. The cost reduction figures were reduced during the year following decisions regarding the Strategic Asset Review. Not all of reductions qualify under the strict 'efficiency' criteria required for the NI 179 definition. The sums included here in the return therefore reflect only those eligible.

Included are savings from reduced residential and nursing fees and savings from a number of retendered Adult Social Services Contracts. Children's residential care costs have also been reduced and savings made within the administration of Children and Young People services. The Central Procurement Support Unit continued to support the delivery of efficiencies through purchasing and further efficiencies were realised through Information Technology reviews.

Information received from both Merseyside Integrated Transport Authority and the Merseyside Waste Disposal Authority regarding the apportionments to Wirral where received is incorporated within the return.

The Council continues to secure benefits from the release of assets for disposal through asset management and also through pro-active risk and insurance claims management. The latter continued to produce significant savings in previous years with further reductions realised in 2009/10 in releasing both sums set-aside for potential claims as well as for annual premium costs.

Significant savings were again made in the year from treasury Management activities. Proactive management of our investments despite poor market conditions meant that investment returns were again above budget. Continued improvements in cash flow forecasting and management resulted in savings from the virtual elimination of temporary borrowing costs. However under the NI 179 regime whilst benefitting the authority and council tax payers many of the Treasury management savings are not eligible for inclusion within the indicator.

	Total net value of ongoing cash-releasing Value for money gains that have impacted since the start of the 2008/09 financial year (£)	Further ongoing cash-releasing value for money gains achieved in 2009/10 (£)	Further ongoing cash-releasing value for money gains achieved in 2010/11 (£)	Cumulative gains as at end of 2010/11 (£)	
Adult Social Services	2,420,600	4,610,700	-	7,031,300	
<p>Key actions undertaken to achieve efficiency gain:</p> <p>2008/09 The continuing changes in the provision of domiciliary care achieved a net savings of £700,000 from the expansion of the home assessment and reablement team (HART) and a further £500,000 from the take up of assistive technology care by 533 service users in the year. The more efficient use of support services produced a further £400,000 of efficiencies by the re-organisation of the finance and performance branch. By working with the private sector gains of £130,000 from renegotiated care contracts were achieved. Reassessments and use of supported living arrangements rather than residential care produced efficiencies of £250,000 which were complemented by a further £170,000 net saving through re-provision from an in-house residential home to providing the service via the private sector. The level of pay inflation built into the budget for 2008/09 an efficiency gain of £270,600.</p> <p>2009/10 Assistive Technology has produced savings of £1,300,000 in year. The renegotiation of Residential and Homecare contracts with providers has produced savings of a further £1,900,000. Efficiencies of £600,000 arose from renegotiated rates with Supporting Living providers with a further £400,000 from an invest to save scheme for care services. Transport tendering has produced £180,000 of savings and a further £100,000 arose from the review of administrative support. The departmental share of the 2009/10 savings from the Council wide renegotiated gas and electricity contracts was £130,700.</p> <p>Quality crosscheck notes:</p> <p>2008/09 Key areas where the time taken from referral to completed assessment increasing from 76.4%</p>					

	<p>in 2007/08 to 78% for 2008/09. People supported to live independently through Social Services (Adults) reached 2,842 against target of 2,186. Carers receiving needs assessment or review and a specific carers service, or advice and information 25.46% versus target of 18.0%.</p> <p>2009/10 All age mortality rates for both men and women (NI120 a/b) have improved between 2008/09 and 2009/10. There was an increase in people being able to live independently through Social Services. The national indicator for carers receiving needs assessments or review and a specific carer's service or advice and information continued to improve. The timeliness of the arrangement of care packages after assessment also showed good progress.</p>				
Children's and Young People	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	TOTAL	
	2,068,700	316,200	-	2,384,900	
	<p>Key actions undertaken to achieve efficiency gain:</p> <p>2008/09 The reposition of services through working with the private sector realised a transfer from in house provision which realised efficiencies of £525,000. In terms of reviewing support the review of operational support and Family Support Teams released efficiencies of £190,000 and £173,000 respectively whilst the rationalisation of the planning and resources support service released a further £421,000. Reductions in admin support and in contracts support allowed efficiencies of £119,100 to be achieved. The reconfiguration of the behavioural review programme generated £200,000 of efficiencies, Re-organising Youth offending services provided an additional £70,000 and a review of Social Welfare and play services commissioning provided savings of £123,000. The level of pay inflation built into the budget for 2008/09 an efficiency gain of £247,600.</p> <p>2009/10 Efficiencies were achieved by reconfiguration of the Youth Service £150,000, facilities management savings of £25,000 and administration savings £80,000 from vacant posts. The departmental share of the 2009/10 savings from the Council wide renegotiated gas and electricity contracts was £61,200. A number of additional efficiencies were also achieved within this area, which do not score against the NI 179 criteria. These included insurance reallocations on a claims basis to schools of £400,000 and fee income from music tuition.</p> <p>Quality crosscheck notes:</p>				

	<p>2008/09 The progress made in transferring looked after children from the most expensive care through to lesser costing care continued. However, events elsewhere in the country in the latter part of the year resulted in an additional number of referrals such that the progress made was not sustained to the year-end.</p> <p>2009/10 Significant improvements on previous years occurred both in the timeliness and stability of looked after children placements. Percentage of schools offering extended services to young people continued to increase. General educational standards continue to improve with the percentage of both those earning 5 or more A*-C grades at GCSE including English and Maths improving and those achieving 2 or more A*-C grades in sciences increasing on the previous year.</p>				
Regeneration (including Culture and Sport)	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	TOTAL	
	284,700	845,700	-	1,130,400	
	<p>Key actions undertaken to achieve efficiency gain:</p> <p>2008/09 A number of efficiencies within this area are not eligible under the criteria as they involve either reductions in service provision, increases in income or the use of grant income from other public bodies. Efficiencies were obtained by better use of IT (£28,700), a review of the finance function (£27,500) and the reorganization of supported housing (£14,300) The level of pay inflation built into the budget for 2008/09 an efficiency gain of £214,200.</p> <p>2009/10 A number of efficiencies were achieved in year. These included a review of administration releasing £138,000 Of savings, revised Supporting People contracts saving £86,300 and grant maximization of £107,000. Revised toilet cleansing operations released a further £70,000. The remaining £48,000 came from reducing administration in areas such as training, conference attendance and advertising. The departmental share of the 2009/10 savings from the Council wide renegotiated gas and electricity contracts was £336,400. A £60,000 efficiency was achieved through an invest to save scheme at the Wirral Tennis Centre.</p> <p>Quality crosscheck notes:</p>				

	<p>2008/09 The year saw the refurbished Oval sports Centre and the new Floral Pavilion Theatre & Conference Centre opened with the latter winning a Best practice award at the Northwest Regional Construction Awards in 2009.</p> <p>2009/10 Percentage of vulnerable people achieving independent living increased Confirmation of the continued operation of the Guinea Gap Sports Centre (since extended further) occurred in the year. The national indicator for Adults undertaking exercise of 30 minutes or more at least 3 times per week continued to be within the target range. There was an increase in use of library facilities during the year.</p>				
Technical Services	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	TOTAL	
	1,105,000	724,100	-	1,829,100	
	<p>Key actions undertaken to achieve efficiency gain:</p> <p>2008/09 The Environmental Streetscene Services contract which commenced in August 2006 continues to be further progressed through close working with the appointed contractor. A review of the waste contract and of contractual management released £186,600 whilst recycling rates continued to improve. The limited inflation awarded to the waste contract meant that efficiencies of £257,200 were generated to maintain the service level. Reviews of highways maintenance produced efficiencies of £358,000, whilst the ongoing rationalisation of support services and administration processes through the use of IT contributed a further £80,000. Reviews of traffic management, health and safety and building and control functions released efficiencies of £115,000. Extensions to streetscene contracts and energy conservation initiatives provided a further £35,000 of efficiencies. The level of pay inflation built into the budget for 2008/09 an efficiency gain of £73,200.</p> <p>2009/10 Highways Engineering retendering produced savings of £320,000 in the year. The street lighting contract provided a further £317,000 of savings The departmental share of the 2009/10 savings from the Council wide renegotiated gas and electricity contracts was £42,100. The remaining £45,000 relates to administration and publicity savings.</p>				

	<p>Quality crosscheck notes:</p> <p>2008/09 The % of household waste sent for recycling increased from 20.8% in 2007/08 to 22.6% in 2008/09. In terms of highways the number of killed or seriously injured road casualties decreased from 171 in 2007/08 to 145 in 2008/09</p> <p>2009/10 Percentage of waste sent for reuse, recycling and composting continued to rise. Improved rates for those killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents was achieved for both children and the general population.</p>				
Corporate Services, Law, HR and Asset Management	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	TOTAL	
	392,500	230,200	-	622,700	
	<p>Key actions undertaken to achieve efficiency gain:</p> <p>2008/09 Essentially around support a series of reviews were undertaken within Corporate Services to achieve efficiencies. These included the areas of strategic development staffing (£75,000), restructuring administration functions (£60,000), a similar exercise reviewing central services (£50,000). A restructuring the tourism and marketing and transformational change functions released £60,000 and £30,000 respectively whilst changes to the management and operation of legal and democratic services released a further £40,000. The level of pay inflation built into the budget for 2008/09 an efficiency gain of £77,500.</p> <p>2009/10 Efficiencies were achieved by implementing the outcome of a series of reviews. These included reduced administration of employee administration and recruitment and payroll worth £125,000 and of legal and democratic services contributing a further £40,000. The departmental share of the 2009/10 savings from the Council wide renegotiated gas and electricity contracts was £65,200.</p> <p>Quality crosscheck notes:</p> <p>2008/09 The nature of these areas is essentially the provision of 'back-office' support to front-line services.</p>				

	2009/10 The authority achieved level 3 of the Equality Standard. There also a positive direction of travel for a number of HR indicators such as sickness and proportions of employees who are have a disability or are from a minority ethnic background.			
Finance Department	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	TOTAL
	1,550,400	1,006,700	-	2,557,100
	<p>Key actions undertaken to achieve efficiency gain:</p> <p>2008/09 The continuing review of Housing and Council Tax functions and improvements in controls resulted in efficiencies of £600,000. The creation of the Corporate IT Unit was further developed through increased integration and this resulted in £100,000 of savings. As the IT investment of previous years is developed additional benefits are achieved and the benefit of integrated systems provided further cash releasing efficiencies of £380,000 through reduced staffing and contract costs. A further £200,000 was achieved through systems support and new technology savings and £80,000 from reductions in call centre staffing. The content of the Corporate Procurement Strategy remains under annual review and the Procurement Unit continues to support departments in the delivery of efficiencies. This includes the use of e-auctions and the national solution operated by the Office of Government Commerce Buying Solutions. The level of pay inflation built into the budget for 2008/09 an efficiency gain of £190,400.</p> <p>2009/10 A further review of Housing and Council Tax functions and improvements in controls resulted in efficiencies of £600,000 being released. The creation of the corporate IT unit and economies arising resulted in a further £100,000 of savings. Continued partnership working with Wirral Partnership Homes released another £140,000 of efficiencies. Procurement savings have continued to be been achieved by Corporate Procurement. These though have been reflected within individual departments savings. The reorganisation of student awards has contributed £50,000 of efficiencies. A further £50,000 has been saved from retendered insurance contracts for motor and engineering insurances and £10,000 from revised cash handling arrangements. The departmental share of the 2009/10 savings from the Council wide renegotiated gas and electricity contracts was £56,700.</p> <p>Quality crosscheck notes:</p>			

	<p>2008/09 Despite the economic downturn Council Tax collection continued to improve with the 2008/09 rate of 96.7% slightly above the 2007/08 rate of 96.6%. The Audit Commission review of Access to Services rated the Council as good with promising prospects for improvement whilst their annual assessment of Use of Resources saw an improvement to performing well from adequate performance.</p> <p>2009/10 The 2009/10 collection rate improved further to 96.8% despite the continuation of a difficult economic climate. Housing benefit processing times showed a slight decrease despite an increased caseload. Contacts via the call centre increased and improvements in waiting times at the One Stop Shops were achieved. The percentage of suppliers paid within 30 days also increased.</p>				
Miscellaneous	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	TOTAL	
	746,300	462,200	-	1,208,500	
	<p>Key actions undertaken to achieve efficiency gain:</p> <p>2008/09 Further improvements in the cash flow forecasting resulted in a permanent reduction in the resources allocated towards the need for temporary borrowing allowing efficiencies to be delivered and re-invested into other services. A total of £550,000 being made available. The proactive approach to insurance and claims management produced further efficiencies. The property insurance retendering produced like for like savings of £101,800. This was then reinvested to provide increased coverage of areas previously not catered for such as flood damage from burst pipes. The year saw an increased focus on the management of the asset base which will deliver substantial efficiencies in future years. During 2008/09 the sale of surplus assets generated capital receipts of £1.8 million. Equating this to the cash flow savings this amounts to £94,500.</p> <p>2009/10 Application of the notified inflation rates to previous years on-going savings produced additional efficiencies of £390,700. The retendering of insurance contracts for motor and engineering insurances has been saved from a further £50,000 during the year. Interest earned on surplus capital receipts contributed £21,500 in the year.</p> <p>Quality crosscheck notes:</p>				

	<p>2008/09 The improvements in Treasury Management received external recognition by the Local Government Chronicle as Wirral received the investment Officer of the Year Award 2008.</p> <p>2009/10 The insurance fund was also able to contribute monies to the general fund balances at year end although this itself does not constitute an NI 179 Efficiency.</p>				
Merseyside Waste Disposal Authority	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	TOTAL	
	0	-	-	0	
	<p>Key actions undertaken to achieve efficiency gain: Figures still awaited from Merseyside Waste Disposal Authority.</p> <p>Quality crosscheck notes: None.</p>				
Merseyside Transport Authority	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	TOTAL	
	919,600	880,700	-	1,800,300	
	<p>Key actions undertaken to achieve efficiency gain: Figures provided by Merseyside Integrated Transport Authority and apportioned in accordance with the levy figures..</p> <p>Quality crosscheck notes: 2008/09 None. 2009/10 None.</p>				

Brought Forward from SR04	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	TOTAL
	8,351,200	-	-	8,351,200
	<p>Key actions undertaken to achieve efficiency gain:</p> <p>2008/09 Under NI179 criteria any cash releasing efficiencies achieved as part of the previous efficiency regime (as part of SR2004 and reported through the Annual Efficiency Statement process to the Government) are allowed to be carried forward into the new regime (as part of CSR 2007).</p> <p>Quality crosscheck notes:</p> <p>2008/09 The Annual Efficiency Statement Backward Look 2007/08 included cumulative cashable efficiencies of £33,748,000 compared to the target of £25,600,000.</p>			
Total NI 179 Efficiency Gains	17,839,000	9,076,500	-	26,915,500

CERTIFIED AND APPROVED BY:-

Councillor Jeff Green
Leader

Stephen Maddox
Chief Executive

Ian Coleman
Director of Finance

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WIRRAL COUNCIL

COUNCIL EXCELLENCE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

21 SEPTEMBER 2010

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

CUSTOMER SERVICE FOCUS GROUP

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report details the work undertaken by Customer Services to ensure service standards are maintained and reviewed at the One Stop Shops, the Call Centre, and on the Web. A number of ways are employed to do this and one undertaken in 2009/10 was the use of a Customer Focus Group. The Council Excellence Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 8 July 2010 (Minute 21) asked for more details on the Focus Group which this report provides.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Customer Services provide three main access channels, face to face (via the One Stop Shop network), Call Centre and Web.
- 2.2. In order that both users and Members can have a measure of service quality there are Customer Care service standards. These set timescales for responses and quality in handling enquiries which then have to be monitored. In order to minimise monitoring and ensure resources are maximised at the front line a variety of monitoring methods are used, ensuring a wide representation of views and results.
- 2.3. Timescales can in many cases be system monitored but quality is harder to measure. This can be measured by using on site exit surveys, peer review (by another body), benchmarking with other local authorities, mystery shopping and responses from the Residents Survey. Alongside this I use independent accreditation such as Charter Mark (now Customer Service Excellence standard), Investors in People, and Equality Framework for Local Government (Level 3) the latter two being achieved as part of a corporate project.
- 2.4. A further option is to access a small group of customers to be asked by an independent person for their detailed views which can sit alongside the exercises above.

3. CUSTOMER FOCUS GROUP

- 3.1 The Group was set up by Mott McDonald an independent market research agency in Liverpool which includes the former Merseyside Information Service. Their role was to set up the Group, administer it and report back. They were supported by one member of the Customer Service Team who acted as link and set out what needed to be covered by the Group.
- 3.2. The people used were members of the public who on contact with the Council had given their name as being willing to be contacted further. When contacted by Mott McDonald they agreed to attend a one off meeting to air their views on Customer Services. A total of six unidentified people were used to help form the report. This was felt by the facilitators to be an appropriate number in being able to bring out each person's own view and not to be lost in a larger group.
- 3.3. The idea behind this information is to understand customer needs and preferences. This group of local residents was used to explore and define what constitutes good customer service. The independent facilitator helped generate discussion and responses on subjects such as general views on good and poor customer service, experience of contacting the Council (ease of doing so and quality), and ongoing preferences in methods of contact.
- 3.4. The intention is to use such direct consultation, supported by customer feedback analysis, satisfaction surveys and exit interviews to provide the services customers require, at the appropriate time and using the most relevant delivery channel.
- 3.5. The small number of people used was sufficient to create a detailed report. However it is accepted that such a small number cannot drive a strategy but is a useful addition to help balance, reinforce or counterpoint results from other methods.

4. REPORT SUMMARY AND OUTCOMES

- 4.1 I have attached as an appendix the report which details the views of the Group on general customer service and what was thought of the Wirral Council contacts.
- 4.2. The key outcomes can be summarised as:
 - 4.3.1. One Stop Shops – were felt to generally respond to expectations.
 - 4.3.2. Telephone responses (Council wide not Call Centre specific) - overall there was felt to be a need to improve handling of calls as people were passed around and had to explain their issue again. This was linked to having well trained and knowledgeable call handlers.

- 4.3.3. Website had thus far seen little direct use by the Group and they identified that whilst easy to find they would want information to be up to date and to have it as a tool to follow up their own enquiry or complaint thus reducing direct contact. This replicates some of the work already done for example in Revenues and Benefits where a person can log in and see their own information. This then needs to extend to being able to follow up other service enquiries. Currently the most likely way forward is via the Customer Relationship Management system or on a system by system basis. Suggestions were made in regard of how the website could be made more user friendly and since this report was prepared the new website has been launched.
- 4.4. Key customer service improvements the Group suggested were:
- Keeping customers informed;
 - Reducing the number of times customers explain their problem when being passed around between departments;
 - Better overall communication between customer and Council;
 - Improve follow up care to contacts.
- 4.5. On Customer Care standards the Group acknowledged the breadth of enquires the Council dealt with which may affect the time taken to respond but in general a 15 day response time to either an enquiry or a complaint was now felt to be too long and this should be a maximum with an earlier acknowledgement provided.

5. NEXT STEPS

- 5.1. This Group was set up as a one off to assist Customer Services to balance the range of information received. Should it be necessary to run the Group again then it would be annually or more likely two yearly. Any reconstitution of the Group would almost certainly not involve any previous participants.
- 5.2. These views will prove helpful in delivering customer services in the best way possible, identified areas that need to be reconsidered under the Customer Care Standards and how they may be addressed.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. The cost of the focus group was £1,625. This was funded from the Customer Services budgets.

7. STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. There are none arising out of this report.

8. EQUAL OPPORTUNITY IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1. There are none arising directly from this report.

9. HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

9.1. There are none arising directly from this report

10. LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

10.1. There are none arising directly from this report.

11. COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

11.1. There are none arising directly from this report.

12. PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

12.1 There are none arising directly from this.

13. LOCAL MEMBER SUPPORT IMPLICATIONS

13.1. There are none arising directly from this report.

14. BACKGROUND PAPERS

14.1. Wirral Council Customer Service Focus Group Findings – Mott MacDonald – January 2010.

15. RECOMMENDATION

15.1. That the report be noted.

IAN COLEMAN
DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

FNCE/152/10



Wirral Council Customer Service Focus Group Findings 2010

Qualitative Findings

January 2010

Wirral Council

Wirral Council Customer Service Focus Group Findings 2010

Qualitative Findings

January 2010

Wirral Council

Town Hall, Brighton Street, Wallasey, Wirral, CH44 8ED

Issue and revision record

Revision	Date	Originator	Checker	Approver	Description
A	27/01/2010	Sarah Swan	Nick Godbehere	Kate Spicer	Wirral Council Customer Service Focus Group Findings 2010

Sarah Swan *N. Godbehere* *K. Spicer*

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Executive Summary

Mott MacDonald was commissioned by Wirral Council to carry out qualitative research with users of Wirral Council contact points. Users had contacted Wirral Council either in person at the One Stop Shops or by telephone.

The main purpose of this research was to determine what customers perceived as good and bad customer service, how this relates to the service received by Wirral Council and what improvements could be introduced.

Main Findings

The following outlines the findings from the focus group:

Customer service in general was discussed in terms of what constitutes good and bad service.

Participants felt that good service they had experienced was staff orientated, specifically, where there was well-trained staff with a personable and friendly attitude.

Participants listed their key factors for good customer service – all linked to staff:

Key factors to good customer service:

1. Providing good reliable information
2. Aware of everyone's needs e.g. visual
3. Sufficient numbers of staff to deal with customers
4. Knowledgeable staff
5. Identifiable staff
6. Positive attitude of staff e.g. sympathetic, patient

Recollections of bad service centred on the length of time participants have spent waiting for assistance or information.

Participants highlighted the key factors that are associated with bad customer service:

Key factors to bad customer service:

1. Bad attitude
2. Indifference to customers' needs
3. Unclear information
4. Passed around from department to department
5. Excuses for non service
6. Lack of knowledge/information
7. Waiting times
8. Keeping to dates given

Wirral Council:

The focus of the discussion then shifted to Wirral Council. With regards to the ease of contacting Wirral Council opinion was positive and participants discussed their experiences of contact.

Face to face:

Participants attended the One Stop Shops local to themselves. One Stop Shops that they visited were found to be easily accessible, were well-placed on bus routes or easy to get to by car and most of the One Stop Shops had car parks.

The opening times of the One Stop Shops were not a great concern as it was assumed that the One Stop Shops were open between 9-5 Monday to Friday at the very least. Participants would always make sure they would go between these times and were happy to do so.

Via telephone:

Participants considered finding the right council number to call straightforward and easy, with it available in One Stop Shop information, letters received from the council or in the yellow pages. It was felt that problems arise when attempting to “go in cold” without prior information. Receptionists/switchboard workers often do not know how to respond to a query that is not simple or obvious.

Via Web:

Few participants had attempted to access the Wirral council website. However, those that had found it easy to find through Google and felt that website was functional and easy to use and locate the information needed.

Something that participants were all interested in seeing on the website was a tool where they could login to see the progress of queries, complaints or repairs that were due to take place. If this could be provided they felt it would reduce the need to call the council to ask where their query is up to etc.

Those participants who were willing to use the website more often felt that the following would make it more attractive:

- A job number assigned for any query submitted so they have something concrete and that is recorded for proof;
- A timescale for a response so customers can be sure that something will be done;
- Up to date information and advice that they could access as a first port of call;
- Correct contact numbers and emails for staff in different departments that participant may need to contact without accessing through a central point.

Effects of Past Experiences:

The group discussed their previous experience of council contacts:

Good experiences clearly improved the relationship between the customer and the council; resulting in the customer feeling more confident in the Council which participants felt can help undo the reservations that result from a negative experience.

However participants reacted to bad service from the council by simply giving up; the relationship between customer and council may be damaged as they feel that the council is incompetent and that it is not worth fighting for their cause:

"I'd just think oh it's not worth it"

Participants conceded that the council generally provide an excellent service as much as it can provide a 'not so good' service and it really was dependent on the issue and the member of staff they encounter.

Improvements

To improve customer services the following approaches were suggested by participants:

- Keep customers informed;
- More training for staff;
- Reduce the times the customer have to explain themselves when passed around;
- Improve communication both within the Council and with the customer;
- Go the 'extra mile';
- Improve follow up care to contacts.

Customer Care Standards

None of the participants were aware of specific customer care standards and each participant was given a copy of the customer care standards of Wirral Council to discuss;

Timescales

In terms of whether the Council were prompt in dealing with issues opinion was split with the group recognising that every issue is different and will, therefore, evoke a different response from the council.

The timescale of 15 days was felt to be too long to wait for a response, however as it stated 'within 15 days' if 15 days would be the maximum – this was considered acceptable if some acknowledgment was made earlier.

Complaints

All participants felt that if they were unhappy with the service they received by the council then they would complain about it. They felt that they would want a response to complaints (or at least acknowledgement of) their complaint within the day and would not find it acceptable to wait 15 days. It was felt that rather than waiting for a service to be received a complaint is a negative on the part of the council and they should want resolve it as soon as possible. Ultimately, participants had high expectations about how their complaints should be dealt with. It was clear that acknowledging a complaint quickly can help in diffusing situations and '*buying the council time*' – again good staff are key to this acknowledgment.

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Mott MacDonald was commissioned by Wirral Council to carry out qualitative research with users of Wirral Council contact points. Users had contacted Wirral Council either in person at the One Stop Shops or by telephone.

The main purpose of this research was to determine what customers perceived as good and bad customer service, how this relates to the service received by Wirral Council and what improvements could be introduced by Wirral Council.

1.2 Background Information

This research follows on from a quantitative survey in which past customers of One Stop Shops and the telephone contactees were interviewed. The survey was designed to provide information relating to people's enquiries to the Council including methods of contact, enquiry details, satisfaction with the service received and suggestions for improvements.

1.3 Methodology

One focus group discussion took place on the 20th January 2010. All participants were drawn from the quantitative research sample who had agreed to take part in follow up research.

The group lasted 1.5 hrs and was held at the Laurie's Centre in Birkenhead.

Each participant received £25 as a thank you for their time and to cover any expenses incurred.

1.4 Topic Guides

The topic guide (available in appendix A) was designed by Mott MacDonald staff in conjunction with staff from Wirral Council. The topic guides were designed to discuss all aspects of required topics and ensure thorough information was collected for analysis. The focus groups used a skilled facilitator to steer the conversation and ensure all topics were covered, without introducing bias and make sure that everybody 'had their say'.

1.5 Analysis of data

Each of the focus groups was moderated by Mott MacDonald staff and audio recorded in order to preserve a verbatim record of responses that could be collated during data analysis. All recordings were treated as confidential including names and addresses of participants. Throughout this report no comments are attributed to individual participants.

The analysis procedure involved thorough scanning of the recordings, drawing out the thoughts, experiences and reasoning of the participants to understand the key themes and arguments of each discussion. A round table discussion was then held by the project team where these key themes were further discussed and analysed.

2. Findings

The following outlines the findings from the focus group:

2.1 Customer Service

Customer service in general was discussed in terms of what constitutes good and bad service.

2.1.1 Good

Interestingly perceptions of good service centred on staff and staff attitudes, indicating that positive interaction can lead customers to overlook other issues. Participants felt that good service they had experienced was staff orientated, specifically, where there was well-trained staff with a personable and friendly attitude.

It was noted that often the attitude of staff members is dependent on 'your own attitude' as a customer – a two way communication:

"If you are nice they are usually nice."

Participants could not recall any specific companies that provided particularly good service; although one participant felt that ASDA provided good service as they open more tills to keep queues down and even open tills at one end of the store for school children as they are often in a hurry to be served during their lunch break. The participant felt that this was an example of good service as the store is being responsive and considerate of the customers' needs.

Participants listed their key factors for good customer service – all linked to staff:

Key factors to good customer service:

1. Providing good reliable information
2. Aware of everyone's needs e.g. visual
3. Sufficient numbers of staff to deal with customers
4. Knowledgeable staff
5. Identifiable staff
6. Good attitude of staff e.g. sympathetic, patient

Ultimately, positive, enthusiastic and personable staff were considered THE key to good customer service and well-trained and helpful staff can circumvent many other problems and issues.

2.1.2 **Bad**

Participants found recalling and discussing bad service much easier suggesting they may encounter bad service more regularly and that bad service is more memorable.

Participants found that timings can influence the type of service they received. For example, they felt they often received bad service at the weekend rather than in the week. It was felt this was due to the higher volume of customers that staff have to deal with. Also it was felt that at the weekend they often encountered young part-time staff who are uninterested in their work and customers' needs.

It was agreed that in America customer service was "fantastic" and that "they could not so enough for you" while in the UK this was not the case. The reason for this was felt to be the tip culture that is popular in America and not in the UK; as a result it was felt that many members of staff have no incentive to go the 'extra mile' for customers.

Recollection of bad service centred on the length of time participants have spent waiting for assistance or information. As an example of bad service encountered, most participants mentioned long queues in banks and no apology from most counter staff. It was felt this was often due to the staff spending too long with each customer offering (selling) the many different services on available.

Another frustration was staff chatting to customers that they know for a length of time causing other customers to wait for longer.

These issues were further exacerbated by the insufficient numbers of staff on the counters – something that many felt had gradually impacted more and more over the years.

Accessibility to banks was also regarded as poor customer service, it was noted that few banks have a dedicated car park and many customers dislike having to pay for parking for a quick trip into the bank, highlighting the importance of accessibility for customers.

Participants highlighted the key factors that are associated with bad customer service:

Key factors to bad customer service:

1. Bad attitude

2. Indifference to customers' needs
3. Unclear information
4. Passed around from department to department
5. Excuses for non service
6. Lack of knowledge/information
7. Waiting times
8. Keeping to dates given

Again it was clear that poor customer service is strongly influenced by staff and their responses.

2.2 Wirral

The focus of the discussion then shifted to Wirral Council. With regards to the ease of contacting Wirral Council opinion was positive and participants discussed their preferred methods of contact.

Many preferred contact face-to-face. Those who visited the One Stop Shops as the first point of contact felt that when contacting by phone the discussion/communication can feel protracted and stilted and that, as a result, it is considered easier, more effective and less lengthy to go in person to the One Stop Shop.

Contact at the One Stop Shop was felt to be 'fairly easy' if you have got the time to wait – which can become an issue – and the One Stop Shops were praised for the amount of information that they have available:

"If you can't get it there you can't get it anywhere!"

Others, who usually contacted by phone, had a view that phone contact was fine and they often got straight through and had their matter resolved efficiently.

Phoning the council or visiting the One Stop Shop were the most preferable methods of contact, one participant had contacted the council in writing feeling it to be more official while one other participant had used the website to obtain some information.

Most participants tended to contact the council 'as and when' they needed to rather than on a regular basis. The average contact being twice a year to 3-4 times a year.

Each contact route was then examined in more detail.

2.2.1 In person

Participants attended the One Stop Shops local to themselves. These included Moreton, Rock Ferry, Bebington, Wallasey, Heswall and Conway Park.

All participants felt that the One Stop Shop that they visited was very easily accessible and were well-placed on bus routes or easy to get to by car. They were also commended for having car parks at most of the One Stop Shops:

"I'd much rather go the One Stop Shop than a bank 'cos they all have car parks outside so it's really easy"

When thinking about whether there are enough One Stop Shops to serve Wirral most agreed that there were, one participant was concerned about the outer lying areas of Wirral, Moreton to Upton, and whether there were enough 'out that way'. However, in general the group felt well-served by the number of One Stop Shops in Wirral:

"Everyone lives within a decent distance to one"

The opening times of the One Stop Shops were not spontaneously known by any participants. However this was not a great concern as it was assumed that the One Stop Shops were open between 9-5 Monday to Friday at the very least. Participants would always make sure they would go between these times and were happy to do so.

It was felt that late nights/weekends would be beneficial to other users and is something that the Council should consider introducing and promoting.

A majority had found it very straightforward to find the right person to speak to in One Stop Shop; you approach the reception and the receptionists filter you on to the right advisor. Participants could not see a better system than this and were very satisfied with the arrangement:

"I don't think there is any other way that they could do it"

However, the waiting times at One Stop Shops were often criticised, as highlighted as an important aspect of bad customer service. Participants felt that at One Stop Shops there is no limit on waiting times and felt that if an advisor is going to need to spend a long time with a customer they should delegate other cases to shorted waiting times. However, and despite this

concern, most felt that they do not mind waiting if they receive a thorough service and have their query resolved.

2.2.2 By phone

Participants considered finding the right council number to call straightforward and easy, with it available in One Stop Shop information, letters received from the council or in the yellow pages. However, it was a concern that if using directory enquiries they sometimes give the incorrect numbers as these often end up at the wrong department resulting in frustration.

If they have received a letter from the council to call they are confident this number is always right. However, when attempting to “go in cold” without prior information problems can arise when trying to find the right department. Receptionists/switchboard workers often don’t know how to respond to a query that is not simple or obvious.

Participants did have examples of being ‘passed around’ when calling – often leading to explaining themselves a number of times. An example of which was given by one participant who called Adult Social Services and got passed around six different people who did not know how to deal with her query. Eventually the customer found the information needed off the internet, from a central government website not the Wirral Council website.

Opening times were considered fine and none in the group had never come across a closed service indicating opening times fit in with their lives. The only negative was that one participant stated that once they had called and the number had been engaged and had to keep recalling until the number was free – however this was likely to be expected at certain times.

2.2.3 By internet

Few participants had attempted to access the Wirral council website. However, those that had found it easy to find through Google.

Those who had accessed the website did so to obtain information on planning permission and bin collection and both participants stated this information was found with no need to then call the council. They found the website functional and easy to use and locate the information needed.

Something that participants were all interested in seeing on the website was a tool where they could login to see the progress of queries, complaints or repairs that were due to take place. If this

could be provided they felt it would reduce the need to call the council to ask where their query is up to etc:

"I'd like to just go on and check when my repairs are coming and things like that"

Those who do not access the website chose not to mainly due to having no easy access to the internet and not being computer literate enough to be confident to do this. These participants stated that they would rather go in person and be sure that their query will be resolved or information was correct by seeing someone.

In terms of encouraging these participants little was suggested, possibly showing that for some participants habits and lack of computer literacy mean that behaviour change is likely to be difficult:

"I haven't got a computer and don't know how to use one so I'll just go for face to face"

Some participants were willing to use the website more often and felt that the following would make it attractive:

- A job number assigned for any query submitted so they have something concrete and that is recorded for proof;
- A timescale for a response so customers can be sure that something will be done;
- Up to date information and advice that they could access as a first port of call;
- Correct contact numbers and emails for staff in different departments that participant may need to contact without accessing through a central point.

2.3 Past contact

The group discussed the good and bad experiences of contact with the council that they had had in the past:

2.3.1 Good

A number of examples of good customer service were highlighted. For example, one participant went to a One Stop Shop and saw an advisor. The advisor was considered very knowledgeable and enlightened on the subject and saw the issue through until the end. It was felt to be good service because the customer saw one advisor who was very helpful and interested in the case. Again staff had a very positive effect on the customers' experience:

“A nice attitude goes a long way”

One participant phoned the council about a neighbour’s wheelie bins; they had three wheelie bins all overflowing into the road. An advisor told the participant that an inspector would be out to visit by a specific date. The inspector came out and the situation was resolved promptly. This was deemed good service as it took only one phone call and the action was completed within the given time schedule.

Another participant highlighted that when they phoned the council their query was dealt with in one call and the advisor was very knowledgeable, although the action promised did not take place this participant still considered the service to be good.

Another example was when a participant visited a One Stop Shop without their correct forms and the advisor was very patient and allowed the participant to go to the front of the queue when they returned. This consideration really made the service experience good for this participant and they appreciated this.

These good experiences clearly improved the relationship between the customer and the council; resulting in the customer feeling more confident in the Council which participants felt can help undo the reservations that result from a negative experience.

2.3.2 Bad

A number of bad experiences were also noted. For example, one participant phoned the council about an overgrown hedge that was causing a blind corner on the road. No action was taken until there was an accident involving a police car. In this case the participant felt that their phone call was dismissed and it took an accident for the council to listen.

Another participant in Wirral Partnership Homes asked the council for help with gardening as it was too much for them to take care of. In response they received a letter saying “Sorry your leaving Wirral Partnership Homes” this was deemed bad service as the communication had clearly broken down and the information was wrong.

Participants react to bad service from the council by simply giving up; the relationship between customer and council is harmed as they feel that the council is incompetent and that it is not worth fighting for their cause:

“I’d just think oh it’s not worth it”

However, even in this small group good and bad experiences were discussed and participants conceded that the council generally provide an excellent service as much as it can provide a 'not so good' service and it really was dependent on the issue and the member of staff they encounter.

2.4 Improvements

To improve customer services the following approaches were suggested by participants:

- Keep customers informed of progress of claims/issues and not leave progress chasing to the customer to do;
- More training for staff to be more knowledgeable – as an unknowledgeable, badly trained member of staff is a key source of bad customer service;
- When passing the caller to different departments rather than the customer having to explain themselves too many times; put them on hold and pass the information on to colleagues;
- Improve communication both within the Council and with the customer;
- Go the 'extra mile'; do not just stop helping at the first obstacle;
- Improve follow up care to contacts; ensure the customer is happy with the outcome before the case is signed off.

In addition, participants were not aware if any organisations work within the One Stop Shop setting, however they were interested in seeing the following services in One Stop Shops:

- Police – some felt this would be beneficial as in a One Stop Shops there is less intimidation to approach the police about issues than in a police station
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Social Services
- Job Centre

To promote these organisations it was suggested that putting some information in the local newspaper would raise awareness, alongside information on the website which would also reach some people.

2.5 Customer Care Standards

None of the participants were aware of specific customer care standards and each participant was given a copy of the customer care standards of Wirral Council to discuss;

2.5.1 Timescales

In terms of whether the Council were prompt in dealing with issues opinion was split with the group recognising that every issue is different and will, therefore, evoke a different response from the council.

The timescale of 15 days was initially felt to be too long to await a response. However, upon consideration participants recognised that the council would need to do a lot of “*behind the doors*” work before providing a customer with an answer. It was also recognised that the care standards state ‘within 15 days’ so 15 days would be the maximum – this was considered acceptable. Furthermore if the member of the public is kept up-to-date on the progress of their issue then they would not be waiting ‘*in the dark*’.

It was suggested that the timescale should be two weeks rather than three (15 days), or if the issue is urgent it should be dealt with in one week.

Participants would also like to see issues prioritised so that more urgent issues are dealt with faster than less urgent ones. An example given was that if there are issues that are structural and potentially hazardous should be dealt with quickly and minor issues can wait a little longer.

2.5.2 Complaints

All participants felt that if they were unhappy with the service they received by the council then they would complain about it. They felt that they would go to the manager or higher level member of staff:

“I’d ask for their manager”

They felt that they would want a response to (or at least acknowledgement of) their complaint within the day and would not find it acceptable to wait 15 days for a complaint to be resolved. It was felt that a complaint is a negative on the part of the council and they should want resolve it as soon as possible. A reasonable timeframe given to resolve a complaint was 5 working days, 1 week, as long as it is acknowledged within 1-2 days:

“I’d want it sorted that day! Not in three weeks!”

It was hoped that the council took complaints on board, but it was felt that it is very dependent on the department and member of

staff who deals with it and, in the main, the group were quite cynical as to whether it is truly taken on board.

The group agreed that other organisations do take complaints more seriously, e.g. banks, and often sort them out there and then. It was felt that this was because customers of banks can take their custom elsewhere while customers of a council cannot. As a result many customers *'grin and bear'* the bad service as they have nowhere else to go and council staff are aware of this:

"You've only got one council and they know that. It's where the incompetence comes in"

Ultimately, participants had high expectations about how their complaints should be dealt with. It was clear that acknowledging a complaint quickly can help in diffusing situations and *'buying the council time'* – again good staff are key to providing this acknowledgment.

Appendices

Appendix A. Topic Guide

15

Appendix A. Topic Guide

Wirral Council Customer Service Focus Group – Discussion Guide (Draft)

Introduction:

Introduce self and Mott MacDonald, an independent market research agency, we have been asked by Wirral Council to discuss the subject of customer service. Remind everyone that they took part in a survey recently either upon exiting a One-stop-shop or via telephone.

Stress independence, confidentiality, MRS code of Conduct and Data Protection Act.

Ask permission to record group.

- Participants to introduce themselves: name, age, work, family

Customer service:

*Let's start generally...thinking about other services, **NOT Wirral Council**, e.g. banks, retail, telephone, media etc.*

- Have you experienced **good** customer service?
- When did you receive good service?
- Who did you receive good service from?
- What about that did you feel created a sense of good service? *Spontaneous first then prompt if required: the person dealt with, the help offered, help completing forms, the follow up care etc.*
- What format do you feel you get good service in? *Probe: face-to-face, telephone, web*
- Has this good service had an effect on your relationship with the organisation involved? In what way?
- What about **bad** service? Have you experienced bad customer service?
- Tell me about that? When was it, where was it, what format was it in?
- What made it bad service? *Spontaneous first then prompt if required: the person dealt with, the help offered, help completing forms, the follow up care etc.*
- How did you react to the bad service? How did you feel?

- Has this bad service had an effect on your relationship with the organisation involved? In what way?
- Can you tell what, to you, is good customer service? *Let's list 5-10 things that we think make good customer service?*
- Can you tell what, to you, is bad customer service? *Let's list 5-10 things that we think make bad customer service?*

Use flip chart to record lists

Wirral Council:

Let's think about Wirral Council – I know you all had contact with Wirral Council in the last 12 months, let's talk about that.

- How easy is it to contact Wirral council?
- How often do you tend to contact the council? How do you feel about the number of times you contact the council? (too often/ok?)
- How do you tend to contact Wirral council? Does this vary with the issue? In what way?
- How do/would you prefer to contact the Council? What makes you say that?

If contact in person:

- Where do you go?
- Is this close enough to access?
- Are there enough places/venues to go to?
- Are these located in the right place/area?
- How about opening times? Are these easy to find? Are they the right times? Do they fit with life? When do they need to be?
- How easy was it to find the person you wanted to talk to?

If by phone:

- How easy was it to find the right number?
- When you rang was it the right number?
- How easy was it to find the person you wanted to talk to?
- Tell me about the opening times for the helplines – are the right times? Do they fit with your life?

If by internet:

- How easy was it to find the right website? How did you find the right website? Google etc
- How easy was it to find the right information/resolve your enquiry using the website?
- Was the issue resolved? Did you need to re-contact either in person or over the phone?
- Tell me what you liked or disliked about the website?
- Was there anything missing that you would have liked to see on the website?

- What services would you like to see on the website?

If not used internet:

- Why not?
- Government are trying to push for websites major route of contact; what stops you from contacting the council this way?
- What would encourage you to use the website?
- What would you use it for? What makes you say that?
- What services would you use if they were on the web? What makes you say that

Past contact

- Thinking about your past experiences with Wirral council;
- Tell me about the contact, do you think you received **good service**? What makes you say that? (refer to 'homework sheets')
- Have you experienced good customer service from Wirral Council?
- When did you receive good service?
- Who did you receive good service from?
- What about that did you feel created a sense of good service? *Spontaneous first then prompt if required: the person dealt with, the help offered, help completing forms, the follow up care etc.*
- What format do you feel you get good service in? *Probe: face-to-face, telephone, web*
- Has this good service had an effect on your relationship with the organisation involved? In what way?
- What about **bad service** from Wirral Council? Have you experienced bad customer service?
- Tell me about that? When was it, where was it, what format was it in?
- What made it bad service? *Spontaneous first then prompt if required: the person dealt with, the help offered, help completing forms, the follow up care, accessibility, opening hours*
- How did you react to the bad service? How did you feel?

- Has this bad service had an effect on your relationship with the organisation involved? In what way?

Improvements:

- What could be done to make the service better/help you?
Examine specific issues to provide detail
- Do you think any of these contacts could/should have been avoidable? Tell me about these. How could they have been avoided? *Information available on the internet, sharing of information between departments etc. E.g. 's to prompt:*
 - Unnecessary clarification required by customer
 - Duplicate information requested
 - Poor signposting at the original contact
 - Premature closure of original contact
 - Progress chasing

Would you like to see different organisations working from the One Stop Shop e.g. Pensions

Thinking about your contacts with Wirral Council:

- Do you feel your issues get dealt with promptly? *Probe: examples/anecdotes*

Introduce Customer Care standards doc and use as basis of discussion, e.g.

- Are the timescales reasonable?
- What would be reasonable?
- Would you make a complaint if you had received bad service? Why/not? Who to?
- As the CC Standards state any complaints will be responded to within 15 working days, which is three weeks. What do you think of this? Is this your experience?
- Do you think the council would use your feedback about bad service? Why/not?
- Do you know of any other organisations that do use feedback to improve services? Who?

Sum up:

Ok you now have the chance to pass on to Wirral Council your concerns/issues regarding customer service. Let's list the top 5 good and bad.

Thanks participants and close.

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WIRRAL COUNCIL

COUNCIL EXCELLENCE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

21 SEPTEMBER 2010

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

PUBLICATION OF PAYMENTS TO SUPPLIERS - WORKLOAD IMPACT

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. As requested by the Committee this report informs Committee of the increase in workload as a consequence of implementing the proposal to publish monthly, all Council third party expenditure over £500, from the 1 April 2010, to demonstrate the Council commitment to be open and transparent with residents.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Council on 2 November 2009 approved Notice to Motion item 62:
- This Council notes the recent campaign by the Taxpayers Alliance and George Osborne MP to provide greater disclosure to the public of what their money is being spent on.
 - Council also notes the recent move by the London Mayor to publish online details of all Greater London Authority (GLA) expenditure over £1000, detailing all payments for goods and services.
 - Council believes that the publication of all Council items of revenue expenditure of £1,000 and above; and capital expenditure of £10,000 and above will increase transparency and therefore accountability.
 - Therefore, Council resolves to instruct the Director of Finance to bring forward proposals to publish online from the start of the 2010 financial year, details on all such items of Council expenditure on a monthly basis within three months of the transaction.
- 2.2 In response to the Notice of Motion it was agreed, following a report to Cabinet on 14 January 2010, that the Director of Finance would publish monthly, from April 2010, payment details of all third party expenditure, excluding grants and personal payments, over £1000. Cabinet acknowledged that there would be a possible increased demand on staffing resources as a result of queries arising from the publication of this information.
- 2.3 The Council therefore published, on its website, expenditure over £1000 for both April and May 2010.

- 2.4 In June 2010 the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government wrote to the Leader of the Council recommending that all expenditure over £500 be published from January 2011 in the interests of local transparency. As a consequence, with effect from June 2010, all data published, including a description of the reason for the expenditure, is for expenditure over £500.
- 2.5 At the meeting of the Council Excellence Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 8 July 2010, in response to a question from a Member with regard to the impact on workload of the requirement to publish information in relation to items of expenditure over £500, the Director of Finance commented that it had not, as yet, been quantified. Monitoring would be undertaken and I agreed to present a further report to a future meeting of the Committee.
- 3. REPORT PRODUCTION AND ENQUIRY WORKLOAD**
- 3.1 A monthly report is published on the Council website which lists the total payments to suppliers, with a value over £500. The report is produced from the corporate financial information system and is reviewed to establish the reason for the expenditure and to ensure that there is no grant or personal data showing. A contact point is provided, on line, so that residents can access further information if, for example, they would like to know more about the type of business conducted with these suppliers. The Council aims to provide a response within five working days.
- 3.2 Since the data has been published from April queries have emanated from a number of sources: the public, the press and media and Councillors. This has resulted in over “190 line” enquiries i.e. individual transactions that have had to be explained. In order to respond to the complexity of enquiries it is necessary to contact individual officers within different departments. This has proved to be time consuming.
- 3.3 The aim is to be as open and transparent as possible but in some cases there will be a need to respect information that could be seen as commercially sensitive.
- 3.4 As no additional resource has been identified to cover this work, at present the duties have been split between the Procurement Manager and an Administrative Officer. They have taken on this role in addition to their existing duties. The consequences of this are that other elements of work, such as consolidating and letting contracts, are being delayed.

4. IMPROVEMENTS IN DATA QUALITY

- 4.1. I am planning to develop this initiative further by making improvements to the information that is made available on the Council web-site. This will include reviewing the descriptions provided when detailing the types of goods and services obtained from the expenditure and build upon the comments and responses received to date. The intention is to provide more relevant information through the web-site and therefore reduce the need for individuals/organisations to contact the Council.
- 4.2. I am also looking at improvements to the usability of this information by others. Further recommendations from the Government ensure that any published information is made available in a format that can be re-used by third parties. At present Wirral publishes this information in a Portable Document Format (PDF) i.e. the data cannot be easily downloaded for analysis. It is anticipated that, with further work, this published information will include the underlying data in an open standardised format called Comma Separated Values. This is simple text file format used for moving data between programmes that cannot read each other's native format.

5. FINANCIAL AND STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Although the current operation of the procedure is occupying the equivalent of one officer it is hoped that the improvements in data quality will reduce the additional workload.

6. EQUAL OPPORTUNITY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. There are none arising directly from this report.

7. COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. There are none arising directly from this report.

8. HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1. There are none arising directly from this report.

9. LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. There are none arising directly from this report.

10. PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. There are none arising directly from this report.

11. **MEMBER SUPPORT IMPLICATIONS**

11.1. There are none arising directly from this report.

12. **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

12.1. None

13. **RECOMMENDATION**

13.1. That Members note the report.

IAN COLEMAN
DIRECTOR OF FINANCE.

FNCE/154/10

Managing Attendance

Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council

Audit 2009/10

July 2010



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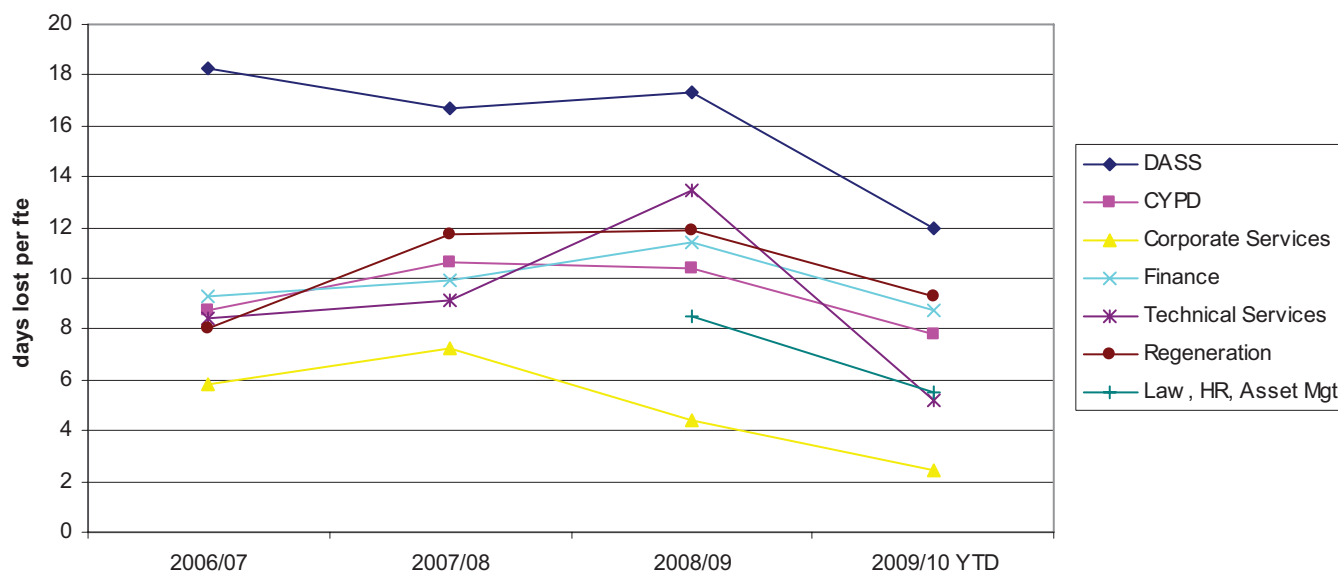
Status of our reports

The Statement of Responsibilities of Auditors and Audited Bodies issued by the Audit Commission explains the respective responsibilities of auditors and of the audited body. Reports prepared by appointed auditors are addressed to non-executive directors/members or officers. They are prepared for the sole use of the audited body. Auditors accept no responsibility to:

- any director/member or officer in their individual capacity; or
- any third party.

Introduction and background

- 1 Preventing people from falling ill at work and getting them back sooner, as well as discouraging abuse of absence, is a key component of public sector cost efficiency and change agendas.
- 2 However, effective management of sickness absence is not just about reducing costs. Staff sickness also results in 'lost time' which can have a particularly negative impact on the quality of frontline services. Employers also have legal duties to protect their staff from work-related stress and illness.
- 3 Wirral Council has struggled to meet its sickness absence targets in the past but the situation is now starting to improve. The Council's target for sickness absence in 2009/10 was 10 days. This target was higher than that set by other metropolitan authorities in the North West and most of the other Merseyside councils. During the year, actual sickness levels for the organisation as a whole were consistently better than this target, and by December 2009 had fallen to 9.01 days.
- 4 Nevertheless, the overall sickness absence figure masks some variations between Directorates. These are illustrated in the chart below.



- 5 The Council is now working to strengthen arrangements across the organisation for managing attendance to help it achieve further improvements.

Audit objectives and approach

- 6 We agreed to carry out a short review to support the Council in its work to strengthen organisational arrangements for managing attendance. This would, in turn, link to the Council's broader objectives of improving the quality of services and securing value for money.
- 7 The purpose of the review was to assess the extent to which corporate arrangements are being implemented within Directorates, but also to identify any examples of good practice within services which could be shared across the organisation.
- 8 The audit aimed to evaluate the Council's:
 - procedures for managing short and long-term sickness absence;
 - training and support for managers on managing attendance within their area of service;
 - the use of management information on sickness absence; and
 - systems to support staff welfare.
- 9 The review was carried out in two stages. To gain an understanding of corporate arrangements, we started with a brief review of Council documents and data on sickness absence levels. We discussed our findings from this review with the Head of HR and Organisational Development. We then agreed to carry out further work in two 'tracer' Directorates.
 - Technical Services.
 - Of all the Council Directorates, Technical Services has seen the most significant rate of improvement in staff attendance since 2008/09. In March 2009, the Directorate's sickness absence levels were 13.5 per cent which was the second worst figure recorded for the Council. By December 2009, sickness absence levels had fallen to 5.22 per cent placing the Directorate second best in the Council. Over this period, the Directorate has made some significant changes in the way a number of its services are provided which may have contributed to this improvement. Nevertheless, we felt that the approach taken by the Directorate to managing attendance warranted further investigation.
 - Regeneration.
 - In 2006/07 sickness absence levels within Regeneration were the second best in the Council, but increased markedly in 2007/08 and did not improve the following year. This increase may have resulted from the addition of services to the Directorate's portfolio around this time. Since 2008/09 there has been a strong push on improving staff attendance within Regeneration. This is reflected in a marked increase in the number of managers within the

Audit objectives and approach

Directorate receiving absence management training. However, the rate of improvement in staff attendance has not been as rapid as in other Directorates. In March 2009, the Directorate's sickness absence levels were 11.88 per cent which was the third worst figure recorded for the Council. By December 2009, sickness absence levels had fallen to 9.3 per cent, but the Directorate's comparative position in the Council had deteriorated to the second worst. The varied and geographically dispersed nature of services provided by the Directorate coupled with significant changes it has faced will have undoubtedly made attendance management a more challenging issue to address.

- 10 Our work within Technical Services and Regeneration comprised:
 - focus group sessions with a sample of line managers; and
 - meetings with the key HR contacts for these Directorates.
- 11 The outputs from the two focus group sessions are included as an appendix to this report.

Main conclusions

- 12 The Council recognises that there is scope for it to strengthen its corporate approach to managing attendance. Whilst some work has been done at an organisational level, responsibility for establishing arrangements which underpin good attendance has been devolved to the Directorates.
- 13 This, in itself, is not necessarily a weakness. It is appropriate that Directorates should be encouraged to 'own' attendance issues rather than seeing them as being of concern only to corporate HR. At the same time, arrangements need to reflect local circumstances and service needs.
- 14 However, the degree of devolution has made it difficult for the Council to be assured that appropriate action is being taken within Directorates or, indeed, to share learning and good practice across the organisation.
- 15 The Council is now taking steps to address this.
 - The Council has had an organisational absence management policy for some time and some Directorates have supplemented this with locally relevant procedures to good effect. The Council is now working to strengthen the corporate policy as part of a scheduled review.
 - All training on attendance management has so far been delivered within the Directorates. The organisational absence management policy is used as a framework for training and corporate support is available on request. The Council is now developing an e-learning package to ensure consistency. However, levels of ongoing support available to managers on sickness absence issues have varied. Some Directorates have developed the role of their in-house support functions to provide managers with a point of contact for more routine queries. Others are still reliant on the corporate HR function which does not always represent a good use of HR managers' skills and expertise.
 - Some high level analysis of sickness absence data has been undertaken at a corporate level, but more detailed analysis has been carried out by the Directorates. This has resulted in duplication of effort and different approaches to presenting this information being adopted across the organisation. The Council is now implementing a new information system which will improve efficiency and the consistency of reports. However, there may be scope for Directorates to make more effective use of the information they receive on sickness absence as part of their overall performance management arrangements.

Main conclusions

- 16 The challenge for the Council now is to establish a better balance and linkage between corporate and Directorate arrangements which, at once:
 - provides clear direction; but also
 - empowers managers across the organisation to deal with attendance issues within their area of service.
- 17 The Council is also now working to adopt a more strategic approach to staff welfare and well-being. This provides a good opportunity for the Council to rationalise the support services currently available and ensure that managers and staff are more clearly signposted to interventions appropriate to individual needs.
- 18 Our detailed findings and conclusions from the work are set out in a later section of this report.

Recommendations

19 Our recommendations to the Council are as follows.

Recommendations	
R1	<p>To strengthen the overall policy framework for managing attendance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • consider and address the specific opportunities for improving the corporate policy raised by managers in our focus group sessions; • ensure that the revised policy clarifies respective roles and responsibilities for managing attendance; • where appropriate, supplement the corporate policy with additional local procedures which have been formally agreed with staff and their representatives; • take steps to ensure that a summary of the corporate policy and any supplementary procedures is made available to and understood by all staff.
R2	<p>Strengthen the approach to absence management training by, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • making absence management training a mandatory requirement for all managers in the organisation; • rolling out the corporate e-learning package on absence management and establish arrangements to ensure that all managers complete this; • revising the approach to delivering absence management training across the Council to ensure that managers receive consistent messages concerning the corporate policy and detail of any supplementary procedures where it has been agreed that these need to be in place; • taking steps to ensure that Directorates have arrangements for monitoring the take-up of absence management training delivered locally, and for following up any non-attendance.
R3	<p>To improve levels of ongoing support for managers on absence management issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • work with Directorates to identify and address any opportunities where the roles of support or other staff within the Directorate could be further developed to deal with more routine enquiries relating to attendance issues; • following on from this, draw up service level agreements which specify the respective roles and responsibilities of the Directorate and of corporate HR. These should be consistent with the roles and responsibilities set out in the corporate policy (R1).

Recommendations

R4 To improve the use of management information on sickness absence:

- consider how the new HR information system may be utilised to ensure that key aspects of the corporate absence policy (e.g. completion and timeliness of return to work interviews) are monitored and reported, both corporately and at a Directorate level;
- following on from this, work with Directorates to ensure that there are no gaps or duplication in the information which is being collected and reported;
- work with Directorates to ensure that, as part of their overall approach to performance management, they have arrangements which allow managers to routinely and collectively identify factors which may account for sickness absence figures and explore opportunities for improvement.

R5 As part of work to strengthen the strategic approach to promoting staff welfare and well-being:

- review and rationalise services so that managers and staff are clear on the pathways of support which are available and know how to access these.

Detailed findings and conclusions

Policies and procedures

20 The Council is currently reviewing its corporate policy for managing absence and recognises that there is scope for this to be strengthened. As part of our focus group sessions, managers from both Directorates highlighted some specific opportunities for improvement. These were around:

- Accessibility
 - The Council's approach to sickness absence is referenced in not only the policy itself, but within several other corporate policies. Managers report that this can make it difficult for them to locate the information they need.
 - Information is held on the intranet but managers report that they are experiencing some difficulties in navigating through this.
- Clarity
 - How do managers distinguish between long and short term absences?
 - How do they manage absence in cases of staff who work shifts, part time hours or flexible working arrangements?
 - How soon should return to work interviews be carried out? Managers recognise that these should be done as soon as possible, but the time limit is not currently specified in the policy.
 - Managers feel that they need to take action with staff as soon as they detect patterns of absence emerging, but that the policy does not make this clear or set out what action they can take.
 - Managers feel that clarity is needed on 'triggers', including more guidance on how to apply them.
- Controls and incentives
 - Managers feel that the wording of the policy needs to be strengthened to provide a greater imperative (ie 'should' needs to be substituted with 'must').
 - Managers suggest that additional controls could be added to escalate staff through the capability procedures if they are abusing sickness absence (eg if staff have already reached stage 1 and have any additional absence within a defined period for which they are unable to produce a doctor's note, they will automatically be referred to stage 2). However, this suggestion indicates that further guidance is needed on the policy; managers already have provision to escalate staff through capability procedures as part of action plans agreed following capability hearings.
 - Managers feel that cases in the later stages of capability procedures could be heard by an independent panel to ensure objectivity and convey the 'right' message to staff.

Detailed findings and conclusions

- Managers suggest that some provision could be made corporately for rewarding good attendance (eg two additional days' leave).

21 Our review has found some significant differences in the approach which has been taken by the two tracer Directorates to implementing the corporate policy. These are summarised in the table below.

Table 1 Directorate approach to implementing policy

Technical Services	Regeneration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate policy supplemented by departmental procedures agreed with Unions - makes the organisational policy 'real' for services. • Guidance on departmental procedures issued to staff including a 'wallet card' which summarises the action staff need to take in the event of sickness - staff are clear on what is expected of them. • Staff required to report their absence from work to the department's central admin function and this is then followed up by a call from their line manager - managers feel that having to report to a third party initially has acted as a deterrent to staff who might otherwise abuse sickness absence, and also report that the incidence of text messaging has reduced as a result. • The department's admin function produces reports for senior managers on all absences within their section - enables them to check that absences are being followed up by line managers. • Corporate and local procedures supported by forms which managers are required to complete and return to the department's central admin function - facilitates monitoring of timeliness of return to work interviews, completion of paperwork etc which is then reported to the departmental management team. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate policy. • Staff issued with periodic reminders on the procedures which they should be following. • Absence is reported to individual line managers. Managers report problems with incidence of text messaging and staff getting colleagues to relay messages. • Departmental absence co-ordinator produces reports for managers.

22 Technical Services has been proactive and established arrangements to help it implement the policy in a very systematic and co-ordinated way. Key to this has been the assignment of a dedicated officer to lead on the work, and a revision of the duties of the Directorate's administrative function to make optimal use of available support staff in the new arrangements. There is also a very strong element of collaboration between managers within the Directorate on sickness absence issues.

- 23 Managers within Regeneration have been working to implement the corporate policy, but they have been doing this more in isolation from each other than in Technical Services. This has made it more difficult to ensure that absences are managed in a consistent way across the Directorate.

Recommendations

- R1** To strengthen the overall policy framework for managing attendance:
- consider and address the specific opportunities for improving the corporate policy raised by managers in our focus group sessions;
 - ensure that the revised policy clarifies respective roles and responsibilities for managing attendance;
 - where appropriate, supplement the corporate policy with additional local procedures which have been formally agreed with staff and their representatives;
 - take steps to ensure that a summary of the corporate policy and any supplementary procedures is made available to and understood by all staff.

Training and support for managers

- 24 The Council has recognised that it needs to adopt a more corporate approach to absence management training. All of the absence management training which has so far been provided has been developed and delivered by the Directorates themselves. Whilst an element of this is clearly needed to ensure proper coverage of local procedures where these exist, the absence of any central training makes it difficult for the Council to ensure that the corporate policy is being correctly interpreted across the organisation. At the same time, the Council has not made absence management training a mandatory requirement for managers. This presents a risk of some managers in the organisation not being aware of either the corporate or local procedures which they should be following with their staff. The Council is now looking to develop an e-learning package on attendance management which will help promote greater consistency.
- 25 Optimal use is not consistently being made of available support resources. This is resulting in some inconsistencies in the nature and level of support available to managers on managing attendance within the two 'tracer' Directorates. Both Directorates have access to specialist advice from the corporate HR function. An HR Manager is nominally assigned to Technical Services (as well as Finance), whilst Regeneration has part funded an HR Manager post to provide support to the Directorate as part of a business partner relationship with the HR function. Both Directorates also have an absence co-ordinator post within their staffing structure, but this resource is being utilised in different ways.
- 26 In Technical Services, the absence co-ordinator has been involved in establishing the Directorate's arrangements for managing attendance, and their role has also evolved to incorporate a greater element of advice and assistance. Managers value and make good use of this local source of support with the result that fewer demands are placed on the HR Manager's time.

Detailed findings and conclusions

- 27 In Regeneration, the absence co-ordinator has dealt with referrals to occupational health, and supported managers on home visits and capability meetings. However, in terms of advice and dealing with queries, managers report that they are dependent on the HR Manager and greatly value this source of support. We acknowledge that the extremely complex and sensitive nature of some of the cases within the Directorate are likely to require this level of input. Nevertheless, establishing arrangements to promote a more co-ordinated approach to absence management (as referenced in the previous section) whilst making better use of the available resource within the Directorate would ensure that such cases are more effectively 'triaged'.
- 28 The Council is now considering how HR functions may be delivered in the future under its corporate priority of 'Excellent Council'. This provides a good opportunity to consider how existing resources are being used to ensure an appropriate balance between the ongoing support which managers clearly value as well as more specialist advice.

Recommendations

- R2** Strengthen the approach to absence management training by, for example:
- making absence management training a mandatory requirement for all managers in the organisation;
 - rolling out the corporate e-learning package on absence management and establish arrangements to ensure that all managers complete this;
 - revising the approach to delivering absence management training across the Council to ensure that managers receive consistent messages concerning the corporate policy and detail of any supplementary procedures where it has been agreed that these need to be in place;
 - taking steps to ensure that Directorates have arrangements for monitoring the take-up of absence management training delivered locally, and for following up any non-attendance.
- R3** To improve levels of ongoing support for managers on absence management issues:
- work with Directorates to identify and address any opportunities where the roles of support or other staff within the Directorate could be further developed to deal with more routine enquiries relating to attendance issues;
 - following on from this, draw up service level agreements which specify the respective roles and responsibilities of the Directorate and of corporate HR. These should be consistent with the roles and responsibilities set out in the corporate policy (R1).

Management information

- 29 The Council has recognised that it has not been making efficient and effective use of sickness absence data. Sickness absence data is collected centrally for the whole organisation. However, whilst some corporate analysis is undertaken (e.g. sickness absence rates by directorate, reasons for absence), more detailed analysis is presently carried out by the Directorates themselves. This represents a duplication of effort. It also increases the likelihood of inconsistencies in the nature of reports made to managers on sickness absence in their service area. For example, during our focus group session with Regeneration, Libraries reported that they have adopted the 'Bradford System' to help them identify problem cases of short term absence, but other managers in the Directorate were not aware of this system.
- 30 The Council is now working to address this situation. It is implementing a new HR management system. As part of this, template reports on sickness absence are being developed which will be automatically generated by the system. This will help improve efficiency, as well as the timeliness and accessibility of information at both a corporate and service level.
- 31 Some aspects of corporate reporting which needed strengthening are also being addressed. For example, the corporate management team is responsible for providing an executive overview of workforce issues across the Council but in the past has only received annual reports on sickness absence levels and performance against the corporate target. Quarterly reports are now going to be made, and we note that the first of these has also included information on sickness absence levels in other Merseyside and metropolitan councils. This will help senior managers to better monitor progress and take remedial action where it is needed. It will also provide the Council with a clear measure of its performance relative to other organisations.
- 32 The findings of our review suggest that there may be scope to make better use of absence information in Directorate performance management arrangements.
- 33 Attendance management forms part of core business within Technical Services. Sickness absence rates and performance against the policy (eg timeliness of return to work interviews) are reported and discussed on a monthly basis by section to the Directorate and Operational Management Team meetings. These measures are also posted on notice boards around the Directorate. This enables managers to make comparisons and encourages an element of healthy competition between sections. Although not reported regularly, the costs of sickness absence are understood to have been included in Directorate performance reports to raise awareness of the financial impact of poor attendance. Managers report that attendance issues are also considered at the Directorate Health and Safety and Equality and Diversity Groups. In overall terms, these arrangements are helping the Directorate to better understand some of the factors which may be affecting attendance and to identify ways of addressing them in a proactive way.

Detailed findings and conclusions

- 34 Sickness absence rates have similarly been reviewed at Directorate Management Team meetings in Regeneration, but reports to this group have been made on a quarterly basis. Absence statistics have also been reported and discussed as part of Senior Management Team fortnightly meetings and locally within sections. At our focus group session, managers expressed concern about the lack of forums within the Directorate for them to work together to 'get underneath' absence figures, and reported that our session with them was the first opportunity they had had to consider attendance issues as a group. They went on to report that the Directorate Health and Safety Group does review absences, but only when these have resulted from an accident at work.

Recommendations

- R4** To improve the use of management information on sickness absence:
- consider how the new HR information system may be utilised to ensure that key aspects of the corporate absence policy (eg completion and timeliness of return to work interviews) are monitored and reported, both corporately and at a Directorate level;
 - following on from this, work with Directorates to ensure that there are no gaps or duplication in the information which is being collected and reported;
 - work with Directorates to ensure that, as part of their overall approach to performance management, they have arrangements which allow managers to routinely and collectively identify factors which may account for sickness absence figures and explore opportunities for improvement.

Staff welfare

- 35 The Council recognises that there is scope for it to strengthen its strategic approach to staff welfare and well-being.
- 36 At a corporate level, the Council already has a number of key services to support its staff. These include:
- an occupational health service, currently provided by Aviva; and
 - an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) which was introduced in April 2009.
- 37 At the same time, a wide range of other work has been carried out across the organisation to promote well-being. Examples of this include:
- a pilot of training for managers on managing stress which was delivered in conjunction with NHS Wirral;
 - a pilot project undertaken within the Children's and Younger People Directorate to help people with mental health problems back into work;
 - programmes of health checks within services; and
 - surveys of work-based stress carried out within individual services.

- 38 The Council and its partners have established a new initiative (Wirral Working4Health) to help local people who have been on long term sickness or are at risk of going off stay in work or get back into employment. They are now working on another initiative (Fit4Wirral) to better co-ordinate welfare and well-being activities across the borough. This is still at a very early stage of development.
- 39 As part of our focus group sessions, managers expressed no concerns around access to existing corporate welfare services, but highlighted a number of opportunities where they felt these might be improved.
- 40 The Council is already aware of some of these opportunities for improvement. For example, managers believe that the EAP is currently under-utilised, but the Council is already planning to run further marketing exercises later this year to raise awareness of this service.
- 41 Nevertheless, feedback from managers suggests that there may be scope for the Council to make more efficient and effective use of its corporate welfare services. Under present arrangements, managers report that any member of staff who has been off work with stress is automatically referred to occupational health on their return and may then be referred for counselling. However, managers are aware that counselling services are also available through EAP and can be readily and directly accessed by staff. This means that the Council could, in effect, be paying for the same service twice. Managers also report that staff can sometimes find it difficult to stop having counselling sessions arranged through occupational health once they have started. This suggests that there may be scope to strengthen arrangements so that individuals only receive counselling for as long as they need it and are supported in 'stepping down' from full counselling sessions. Doing this may also help the Council to achieve some savings. Under the present contract, staff can access a maximum of six sessions but once this number has been exceeded the Council incurs additional cost.
- 42 The Council's contract for occupational health services is due to end this year and future options for delivery are presently being assessed. This presents a timely opportunity for the Council to consider:
- how the points raised by managers in our focus groups might be addressed in the specifications for a new occupational health service; and
 - how this service, in turn, could link into other services provided under the Wirral Working4Health and Fit4Wirral initiatives.

Recommendations

- R5** As part of work to strengthen the strategic approach to promoting staff welfare and well-being:
- review and rationalise services so that managers and staff are clear on the pathways of support which are available and know how to access these.

Appendix 1 – focus group outputs

WMBC Managing Attendance - Technical Services Focus Group

15 April 2010

Short term/long term – there was some discussion about when short term becomes long term absence. The Councils' distinction – 10 days of absence.

Monitoring systems are in place to graph out individual service areas and are produced on a monthly basis.

Sickness absence rates are currently slightly higher (fluctuations in different seasons) and the main reason has been colds and flu. Staff who had not been off for years were taking a few days to recover following sickness during Dec/Jan/Feb.

Some areas of service have experienced a spate of people having operations – 4-6 weeks off. All previously programmed in but number of staff off at same time.

Majority of absence within the directorate is short term, self certified (less than 7 days). Long term can skew stats.

Since April 09 sickness absence figs have been better – the directorate compares well with the Council as a whole. They are now applying capability procedures more consistently – in past this has not happened. Absences are reported centrally now. The directorate has been more prescriptive in terms of what they expect of staff (telephone in and speak to someone or leave a message – no text messaging or third party messages).

HR policies suggest people 'should' do this but thoughts in the room are that the wording of the policies should be strengthened to say people 'must'.

Senior managers are informed of the staff who are off sick so they are able to check that managers are following absences up – a calendar of absences is now routinely issued.

Managers are wary of centralising HR too much – local knowledge of what's happening within services is important and could be lost. They are also keen to ensure that the implementation of the new system does not result in additional tasks for them to do. The spreadsheets they currently receive are generated automatically for them.

Spreadsheets shows sickness dates on a calendar, type of sickness and number of days for individuals. ADs and services mgrs get a report after 12 days absence. The local spreadsheets help managers to detect patterns of absence sooner and it is good for staff to be shown this as sometimes it comes as a surprise to see this info in front of them.

The directorate has sent out a clear message to staff that action is taken on sickness absence. There is now consistency of actions around trigger points. Now if someone hits trigger formal action is taken. Clear process now. Removes any subjectivity.

Staff have become aware that they are approaching the triggers and are given the opportunity to take action. No longer a surprise when they hit them. Return to work interviews are being completed quickly, on the day of return or as near to the date on which they returned to work but this is not Council policy. Information on the timeliness of RTWs is reported to the directorate's joint OMT and SMT.

Sickness absence is covered in team briefs. Team briefs were used to do a push on long term absence which has aided the recent improvement.

Departmental charts are produced showing sickness absence rates for each section which allows for comparisons with other members of service. This has decreased occurrences of sickness absence. Encourages managers to act quicker to improve their team's absences and raises awareness.

Managers feel that they receive a good level of support. Internal HR contacted more or less daily for advice. Managers feel that they have to be careful about what to say and do about sickness absence with staff so feel that advice is needed. One member of staff had odd days off so looked at working arrangements/work pattern and things have improved. This person is now off the trigger. They feel that they are better able to have a dialogue with staff about absence.

They feel that there has been a change the culture. It's ok for people to seek advice from Occupational Health. Occupational (Occ) Health no longer a stigma, now a positive thing. Managers also feel that they benefit from having H&S based in the directorate and the same building as them – used them for risk assessments on improving work stations to help staff. Managers are required to manage H&S in the workplace (IOSH).

Regular work place inspections take place.

Absence regularly discussed at the departmental H&S working group and Equality Group – these forums for discussion help them to proactively identify issues.

Absence management isn't part of the KIE unless it's an issue. Policies are in intranet and staff are now required to confirm their understanding of sickness absence policies.

Managers have received absence and performance capability training. Focuses on what policy is, useful to gets answers to questions, half day course and refresher courses available.

Training is 'spot on'. Internal HR provides post-training support.

Managers feel that training should be compulsory as aids understanding of process and gives more consistency. Before training managers and staff unsure of what to say or saying the right thing. All staff should have the training. Culture at Council is not to have compulsory training. Only Quality & Diversity training is compulsory as is statutory requirement. If someone ended up at tribunal and manager not had training – problem. Absence management training has been made more or less compulsory within the directorate.

Council policy gives timescales, sets expectations, provides letter templates.

Policy can be a little bit vague in places and sometimes contradictory Eg 12 working days lost, then look at patterns. Somewhere else says action could be taken if patterns emerge before 12 days absence.

Problems about applying the policy with part-time working and pro-rata. Confusing if people work only a few hours each day – difficult to determine what time has been taken off. Needs to take account of flexi-working arrangements. Staff and managers are all confused by this and cannot find guidance.

Also Policy does say 'working days lost' but people have been counting weekends – this requires clarification.

Not one policy eg absence management is mentioned in a few places which can contradict each other. – code of conduct, HR Hand book etc. Also problems about how

Appendix 1 – focus group outputs

these different sources of information are laid out on the intranet – makes it difficult to navigate to the information managers need.

Directorate has issued a card to each member of staff giving bullet points of what needs to be done and which number to phone in the event of absence to clarify expectations.

In terms of staff wellbeing, managers contact staff, Home visits follow, then back-to-work. If someone off with stress there is an immediate referral to Occ Health.

Wellbeing days are held throughout the Council.

Referral to Occ Health can be done before sickness absence triggers hit.

NB some uncertainty now re EAP. Should staff be referred here before Occ Health (EAP covered by fixed contract but payment for Occup Health is by visit)

Managers like the fact that EAP can be accessed by staff and all family members, but not sure if staff are aware of that or of the range of services provided. A seminar was held on EAP but the service needs to be promoted more. Also need to raise awareness that staff can access Occ Health as a preventative measure i.e. before a person goes off sick.

Departmental drive for staff to complete display screen equip questionnaires as preventative measures re back problems.

WMBC Managing Attendance - Regeneration Focus Group

15 April 2010

Regeneration has just been split up so comments from them with comments also from individual area. Regeneration 2nd from bottom on absence so could do better.

Main reasons for absence – person off for operation (91 days) in a small team so had impact. Also ear/nose/throat took similar length of time. Stress has been an issue for some but not all sections. Ongoing treatment for cancer has skewed figs, also DDA illnesses (diabetes, epilepsy). Lifestyle stress eg bereavement can be difficult to manage.

Long term sickness is difficult to resolve and is time consuming and drawn out process. Managers feel that they receive conflicting advice from Occupational (Occ) health. Occ Health gives advice that is not easy to work with on a practical level eg a person may be able to do some duties but not the job which they are employed to do.

Staff can access counselling through Occ Health – this is supposed to be short term but view that staff get on counselling ‘treadmill’ and can’t get off.

Managers feel they ask OH specific questions but don’t get specific answers. Information can be ambiguous and different officers can reach different conclusions. Small percentage can be exceptionally complex and time consuming.

Doctors can withhold specific information and this is within their rights to do so. Individual has discretion whether to disclose so Dr not obliged to do so – this can make things difficult.

Managers feel that an increasing amount of physical stress put on managers to deal with intense staff cases of problems and stress and feels way out depth with area of expertise. They feel they don’t know how to help the person and give the right pastoral care. Occ health is a fantastic tool but more clarity is needed from them and more support for managers.

Occ Health

The Directorate has an Absence Support Officer.

The Directorate has a dedicated HR person – this has been a master stroke, he provides exceptional levels of support and some managers feel that they can’t do without him. NB recognition that the HR person is under pressure so limited resource. Some managers are known to feel isolated and unable to cope.

EAP though AVIVA has been useful – has prevented absence in some areas of service. Managers do signpost staff to EAP at RTW but don’t know if this is taken up.

‘Trigger dodgers’ - triggers are not realistic and staff work a way around the triggers.

Managers don’t feel that the policy enables them to address patterns of absence at an early stage.

Managers feel that there is scope to tighten up on the policy. For example, could say that at stage 1, if the member of staff has any further absences in next 3 months, they will automatically reach stage 2. Or they could ask for docs note for any sickness absence.

Appendix 1 – focus group outputs

Need something for persistent offenders. Individuals are known to have 30 days off each year and managers feel that nothing can be done. Managers see the same people coming through on stage 1 and stage 2 proceedings but feel unable to do anything about this.

At the same time, people who are never off sick year in year do not receive any recognition for good attendance apart from a 'well done' from managers. People who are off routinely takes up a disproportionate length of managers time. Each stage has 'routine offenders'. Perception by junior staff is that managers are doing nothing. No lateness procedure guidance. Are they absent or late? How much time is considered as an absence? Corporate policy is used by unions but is not always the best for local departments to fit with – local arrangements could be better used. Leave arrangements produce problems with everyone having same leave year and using up excess leave in March.

Local management meeting have not debated this before - this is first time a forum like this has happened for managers to discuss sickness absence. EMT looks at headline figures but deep issues are not discussed. Locally common problems are not discussed. Sickness absence does not feature at H&S meetings. Libraries have own senior managers strategy group (4x mgrs) discuss absence at weekly meetings. Absence only discussed if happened because of accident. Sport and Rec report to Head of Service monthly.

Reports locally produced each month gives breakdown of figures and this gives profile of last 12 months. Sickness always goes up at Christmas and during school holidays. Large majority of staff keep holidays.

View that some staff treat managers with contempt - cited examples of staff not turning up for capability meetings.

Staff have to phone in by 10.00am and speak to someone. They keep having to remind staff that they shouldn't be texting or speaking to a third party. Staff want to text as avoids proper explanation or possible confrontation. In libraries staff must phone in as near to 9.00am as possible and speak to the manager in the building and not leave a message.

Absence Coordinator responsible for co-ordinating Occ health referrals and speaking to occ health if manager has an issue of concern that they do not want to put in writing. They assist with difficult process and provide support for managers at each stage. They sit in and support in disciplinary discussions or accompany managers on home visits. HR contact is invaluable. Can phone him for advice and gives credible answers. Managers feel that there is a grey area in terms of when they should move from sickness to capability proceedings.

People have no penalty to not turning up to meetings etc, showing contempt for system. Has negative affect on the 'good guys'.

Policy is here but needs to be tighter. Lateness and calling in can be a problem. No calling in procedure.

Policy needs revision, eg no triggers – 3 absence only with 6 months.

Managers feel that there is some tension in applying the policy when they know sickness is genuine. Managers don't want to be over zealous with genuine cases. Note there was

some discussion around the table about the need for applying the policy consistently so not show favouritism. Recognition for the need to be pragmatic – bring people in for stage 1 but if their absence record has been exemplary in the past and they've then just had a bout of illness, do they really need to issue a warning..

Managers aware of positive things are going on. Health and Wellbeing Group at strategic level etc. Make use of the Council's good greenspaces, sport centres, incentives.

'Bradford System' being used by Libraries to highlight problem cases of short term absence. Very useful but not used across the directorate. Designed to tackle short term absence. Picks up on frequency and not patterns.

Suggestion made that cases of absence after stage 2 are appraised by independent panel.

View that the Council needs to reward good attendance – 2 days holiday?

Appendix 2 – Action Plan

Page no.	Recommendation	Priority 1 = Low 2 = Med 3 = High	Responsibility	Agreed	Comments	Date
12	<p>R1 To strengthen the overall policy framework for managing attendance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider and address the specific opportunities for improving the corporate policy raised by managers in our focus group sessions; Ensure that the revised policy clarifies respective roles and responsibilities for managing attendance; Where appropriate, supplement the corporate policy with additional local procedures which have been formally agreed with staff and their representatives; 	3	Head of HR/OD	Yes	<p>Managing Attendance Policy is currently being reviewed by a working group consisting of representatives from all departments as part of the Council's People Strategy. Draft policy does address the issued raised at the focus groups.</p> <p>Policy clarifies roles and responsibilities for managing attendance including: HR, Occupational Health, Managers and employees</p> <p>Audit Commission report will be shared at Chief Officers Management Team (COMT) where it will be recommended to Chief Officers to supplement corporate policy with local procedures.</p>	September 2010

Page no.	Recommendation	Priority 1 = Low 2 = Med 3 = High	Responsibility	Agreed	Comments	Date
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take steps to ensure that a summary of the corporate policy and any supplementary procedures is made available to and understood by all staff. 		Head of HR/OD & Departmental Chief Officers	Yes	As part of the launch of revised managing Attendance Corporate policy, provision will be made for training managers and resource allocated to the internal communication of the new policy. Departments are responsible for ensuring the effective communication of supplementary, local procedures.	From September 2010
13	<p>R2 Strengthen the approach to absence management training by, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> making absence management training a mandatory requirement for all managers in the organisation; rolling out the corporate e-learning package on absence management and establish arrangements to ensure that all managers complete this; revising the approach to delivering absence management training across the Council to ensure that managers receive consistent messages concerning the corporate policy and detail of any supplementary procedures where it has been agreed that these need to be in place; taking steps to ensure that Directorates have arrangements for monitoring the take-up of absence management training delivered locally, and for following up any non-attendance. 	3	Head of HR/OD Head of HR/OD & Departmental Chief Officers Head of HR/OD & Departmental Chief Officers Head of HR/OD & Departmental Chief Officers	Yes Yes Yes Yes	<p>Training will form part of Managers Toolkit and will be recommended to COMT that it is compulsory for all managers to attend.</p> <p>It will be recommended that an E-learning package will be rolled across the Council and will be compulsory for all managers to complete. Records of training will be held centrally.</p> <p>Training will form part of Corporate Managers Toolkit to ensure consistency of message. Departmental, local procedures to be cascaded to managers by departments.</p> <p>Records of management training for absence will be maintained centrally. Non-attendance will be reported to COMT for action by Departmental Chief Officers.</p>	From September 2010 From September 2010 From September 2010 From September 2010

Appendix 2 – Action Plan

Page no.	Recommendation	Priority 1 = Low 2 = Med 3 = High	Responsibility	Agreed	Comments	Date
13	<p>R3 To improve levels of ongoing support for managers on absence management issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> work with Directorates to identify and address any opportunities where the roles of support or other staff within the Directorate could be further developed to deal with more routine enquiries relating to attendance issues; following on from this, draw up service level agreements which specify the respective roles and responsibilities of the Directorate and of corporate HR. These should be consistent with the roles and responsibilities set out in the corporate policy (R1). 	3	<p>Head of HR/OD & Departmental Chief Officers</p> <p>Head of HR/OD & Departmental Chief Officers</p>	<p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p>	<p>HR will discuss were support can be utilised within departments.</p> <p>Service level agreements considered. Role & responsibilities will form part of the policy update.</p>	<p>December 2010</p> <p>October 2010</p>
15	<p>R4 To improve the use of management information on sickness absence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> consider how the new HR information system may be utilised to ensure that key aspects of the corporate absence policy (eg completion and timeliness of return to work interviews) are monitored and reported, both corporately and at a Directorate level; following on from this, work with Directorates to ensure that there are no gaps or duplication in the information which is being collected and reported; 	3	<p>Head of HR/OD</p> <p>Head of HR/OD</p>	<p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p>	<p>HR and Payroll system team will ensure that optimum use of the functionality of the new system will be made on the attendance management workflow.</p> <p>The reporting system implementation will be brought forward.</p> <p>An evaluation of the arrangements in place will be made to ensure that no gaps or duplication in information is reported.</p>	<p>January 2011</p> <p>2011</p>

Page no.	Recommendation	Priority 1 = Low 2 = Med 3 = High	Responsibility	Agreed	Comments	Date
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> work with Directorates to ensure that, as part of their overall approach to performance management, they have arrangements which allow managers to routinely and collectively identify factors which may account for sickness absence figures and explore opportunities for improvement. 		Head of HR/OD Head of Policy and Performance	Yes	This will form part of our overall approach to attendance management including, launch of policy, training etc. All of which will be evaluated as above.	2011
16	<p>R5 As part of work to strengthen the strategic approach to promoting staff welfare and well-being:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> review and rationalise services so that managers and staff are clear on the pathways of support which are available and know how to access these. 	3	Head of HR/OD	Yes	<p>This work is currently being reviewed as part of the Council's Fit4Wirral Initiative. As part of this an internal communication strategy will be developed to ensure a clear understanding from managers and employees.</p> <p>Work in conjunction with NHS Wirral.</p>	October 2010

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UPDATE ON WORK PROGRAM : COUNCIL EXCELLENCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 21/09/10

Reports to assist in monitoring the Committee's work programme

It was agreed by the Scrutiny Chairs Group in September 2008 to use the following reports to monitor the work programme for each Scrutiny Committee. The last item on each Scrutiny Committee agenda should be 'Review of the Committee Work Programme'.

Report 1 - Monitoring Report for Scrutiny Committee Work Programme

This report will list all items that have been selected by the Committee for inclusion on the work programme for the current year.

It will also include items, such as previous Panel Reviews, where recommendations have been made to Cabinet. It is important that the implementation of these recommendations is monitored. Otherwise there is no measure of the success of scrutiny.

For each item on the work programme, the report will give a description, an indication of how the item will be dealt with, a relative timescale for the work and brief comments on progress.

Report 2 - Suggestions for Additions to Work Programme

The Work Programme for the Committee should be reviewed at each meeting. This will enable members to ask for new Items to be added to the programme. This report will list any newly suggested items. Committee will then have the opportunity to agree (or not) for them to be added to the programme.

Report 3 - Proposed Outline Meeting Schedule for the Municipal Year

The report will, for each scheduled Committee meeting, list those items which are likely to be on the meeting agenda. This will give the opportunity for Committee members to take a greater lead in organising their work programme.

Report 4 - Progress Report on In-Depth Panel Reviews

This report will give a very brief update on progress / timescales for in-depth panel reviews which are in the 'ownership' of the Committee.

REPORT 1
MONITORING REPORT FOR SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME
COUNCIL EXCELLENCE : 2010 / 2011

Date of New item	Topic Description	How the topic will be dealt with	Estimated Complete Date	Comments on Progress	Complete?
17/03/10	Community Cohesion	Officer Report (Carolyn Curr)		Council Excellence Committee meeting of 17 th March 2010 requested that this item be included on the Committee's work programme for 2010/11.	
17/03/10	Freedom of Information Act	Officer Report (Ian Coleman)		Follow-up report (from meeting held on 17 th March 2010) presented to 8 th July meeting. No further actions requested.	
08/07/10	Future of Performance Management / replacement of CAA: - How will performance management operate once the CAA and statutory Performance Indicators have been removed? - Who collects the current PI data, how much effort is involved, and what use is made of it? - Which Performance Indicators are relevant and should be retained? - What information do members need to monitor the local authority effectively?	Officer Report (Carolyn Curr)		A verbal report on the current view of the future for performance monitoring in the authority will be provided at the meeting on 21 st September.	
08/07/10	Performance Monitoring (Quarterly updates on existing performance indicators – 'Exceptions' only will be reported).	Officer Reports (Carolyn Curr)		Quarterly Performance Monitoring Reports will be included on each agenda from September onwards.	
08/07/10	Change Programme: - Regular updates on proposed savings; - Monitor the effectiveness of the Change Programme;	Officer Reports (Dave Green)		Suggested report on the progress of the Strategic Change Programme Board to be provided for the meeting 18 th November	
08/07/10	Common Administrative Processes	Officer Reports (Dave Green)		Suggested report on progress of the project at the meeting on 18 th November.	

Date of New item	Topic Description	How the topic will be dealt with	Estimated Complete Date	Comments on Progress	Complete?
08/07/10	Financial Reporting / Budget: - Monitoring the financial statements - How the authority performs against savings targets; - Review the impact on local residents where savings are made; - Impact of the Comprehensive Spending Review on the borough;	Officer Reports (Ian Coleman)		Financial / Budget Monitoring reports will be included on each meeting agenda.	
08/07/10	'Total Place': - What is the role for the concept of 'Total Place' in the borough?; - What is happening with partners to establish areas for cooperation, for example, how will DASS and NHS work together to streamline 'elderly' care?	Officer Reports (Carolyn Curr)		Report on the background to 'Total Place and successor arrangements – Community Budgets' to be provided at the meeting on 21 st September.	
08/07/10	Office Accommodation: - The EC Harris report was referred to the Council Excellence Committee by Cabinet (24 June 2010); - Need to understand the Cabinet timetable; - What are the implications for the Council's Data Centres?; - Future role for agile working	Officer reports plus site visits. (Bill Norman / Ian Brand)		Special meeting of the Committee arranged for 24 th August 2010. Further report will be provided at the meeting on 21 st September.	
08/07/10	Future of Cultural Services: - Where should Cultural Services fit in the organisation?; - How can the service be best managed?;	Possible joint work with Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee		Suggested report at the meeting on 31 st January 2011.	
08/07/10	Monitoring of items of expenditure exceeding £500: - How does the system operate?	Officer report to a future meeting (Ian Coleman)		Issue initially raised by a member at the Committee meeting on 08/07/10. Report on 'Publication of Expenditure' at the meeting on 21 st September.	

REPORT 2
SUGGESTIONS FOR ADDITIONS TO WORK PROGRAMME
COUNCIL EXCELLENCE : 21/09/10

Topic Description	Topic suggested by	How the topic will be dealt with	Estimated Completion Date
None			

REPORT 3
PROPOSED OUTLINE MEETING SCHEDULE FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR
COUNCIL EXCELLENCE : 2010 / 2011

Meeting Date	Topic Description
08/07/10	Financial Monitoring Housing Benefit / Council Tax Benefit Annual Report Customer Services Annual Report Treasury Management Annual Report Audit Commission Performance Management Review Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy Freedom of Information requests (follow-up report from meeting held on 17 th March 2010) Forward Plan Office Accommodation Work Programme Update Forward Plan
24/08/10	Office Accommodation (Special Meeting)
21/09/10	Financial Monitoring Tax, Income & Benefits Budget Projections 2011-15 Treasury Management Customer Services Focus Group Publication of Expenditure Managing Attendance IRRV Conference – Harrogate Catering tenders Delivering efficiency and measuring and reporting Value for Money gains in local services Q1 Performance Monitoring – Report concentrating on red / amber ‘exceptions’ plus a verbal update on the future plans for performance monitoring ‘Total Place’ and successor arrangements – Community Budgets Office Accommodation Work Programme Update Forward Plan

Meeting Date	Topic Description
18/11/10	Financial Monitoring, General Financial Matters and Budget Projections Impact of the Comprehensive Spending Review Q2 Performance Monitoring – Report concentrating on red / amber ‘exceptions’ Progress of Change Programme Common Administrative Processes Work Programme Update Forward Plan
31/01/11	Financial Monitoring, General Financial Matters and Budget Projections Q3 Performance Monitoring – Report concentrating on red / amber ‘exceptions’ Future of Cultural Services Work Programme Update Forward Plan
16/03/10	Financial Monitoring, General Financial Matters and Budget Projections Work Programme Update Forward Plan

**REPORT 4
PROGRESS REPORT ON IN-DEPTH PANEL REVIEWS
COUNCIL EXCELLENCE : 21/09/10**

Title of Review	Members of Panel	Progress to Date	Date Due to report to Committee
None at present			

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