

ECONOMY AND REGENERATION OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 16 January 2013

Present:

Councillor M Johnston (Chair)

Councillors	J Stapleton	R Gregson
	A Hodson	D Realey
	A Cox	M Sullivan
	P Kearney	

Deputies:

Councillors S Niblock (In place of S Whittingham)
J Salter (In place of J Williamson)

Cabinet Members:

Councillors G Davies and
P Hackett

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

Members were asked to consider whether they had any disclosable pecuniary interests and/or any other relevant interest in connection with any item(s) on this agenda and, if so, to declare them and state the nature of the interest.

Members were reminded that they should also declare, pursuant to paragraph 18 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules, whether they were subject to a party whip in connection with any item(s) to be considered and, if so, to declare it and state the nature of the whipping arrangement.

No such declarations were made.

42 MINUTES

Resolved – That the minutes of the meetings held on 6 (Special) and 14 November and 5 December (Special) 2012, be approved.

43 PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION - MEMBER OF THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY (CETCO)

The Chair introduced Mark Jameson, Regional Director UK and Ireland, of CETCO Europe, who had been invited to give a presentation to Members upon the nature of the business and the factors related to its location and operation in Wirral. Mr Jameson commented that CETCO had been based in Birkenhead Road since 1965 and was the only facility of its kind in the UK. The company produced a high quality needle punched waterproof membrane based on bentonite, a clay mineral formed from volcanic ash that had a variety of uses for the construction industry.

He referred to significant challenges that had been faced by CETCO Birkenhead, which had resulted in a decision being taken by its parent corporation in the USA to close the UK facility in 2011 and to focus its European activities instead on sites in Poland and Spain. However, with the support, advice and technical skills offered by

the Invest Wirral team, a case was made to prove that the Birkenhead facility could be a viable operation. This focused upon the site's excellent location for sea shipments and for easy access to the motorway network and also highlighted the UK market potential. A Business Plan had been drawn up and he commented that funding obtained from Wirral Council and the USA had enabled equipment to be upgraded and automated, which had allowed the business to grow and become profitable, with the development of new products. In response to comments from Members with regard to job losses as a result of increased automation, he indicated that that, although the workforce had reduced by six, 41 jobs had been saved. The Birkenhead facility was now the most efficient of CETCO's sites in Europe and, he was hopeful that more jobs would be created for the local workforce.

Resolved – That Mr Jameson be thanked for his informative presentation and the congratulations of the Committee be accorded to CETCO for the continued success of the Birkenhead facility.

44 BUDGET 2013/2016 - INITIAL PROPOSALS

The Acting Director of Law, HR and Asset Management submitted minute 144 (Cabinet – 20 December 2012), which advised that the Cabinet had agreed in principle, to savings options for 2013/2016 totalling £29.6 million, subject to the outcome of further consultation, where required. The Committee was requested to give consideration to those items, which fell within its remit, viz:

- Re-structure – Regeneration, Housing and Planning
- Marketing and Public Relations
- Destination Marketing
- Charge for pre-planning advice
- Invest Wirral Support
- Home Insulation Programme

Resolved – That the initial savings proposals set out in Cabinet minute 144 be noted.

45 SUB-REGIONAL CHOICE BASED LETTINGS SCHEME

The Interim Strategic Director: Regeneration and Environment provided a detailed update on the transfer, on 2 July 2012, from Wirralhomes to the sub-regional Property Pool Plus (PPP) Choice Based Lettings Service, which was a collaboration between the 5 Merseyside housing authorities Halton, Knowsley, Liverpool, Sefton and Wirral and over 25 Registered Providers. He commented that the new scheme comprised a joint allocations policy, a joint housing register and a shared web-based IT system provided by a third party provider, Abritas. It gave applicants for social housing and existing tenants who wished to move, access to most of the social housing in Merseyside and enabled them to register and bid for available properties electronically. He commented that PPP recognised the housing need of a greater number of applicants than the previous scheme and there was now a finer distinction between types of housing need through the use of 6 priority bands compared with 3 under the previous system. In addition, although the register was open to anyone in housing need, access to a priority band in Wirral was only available to applicants with a local connection to Wirral. However, there was cap of 4% of lettings which could be made to applicants from outside the area and the net movement in and out of Wirral was negligible.

All Wirralhomes applicants had been contacted personally by letter about the change to the new system and had been advised of the need to log on to the system to provide additional information that was required. However, approximately 65% of applicants had not yet updated their details, and all would be reminded to do so during 2013, if they wished to remain on the housing register.

In response to a question from the Chair with regard to those applicants who disagreed with the banding they had been allocated, the Interim Strategic Director provided information in relation to the two stage appeal process.

Resolved –

(1) That the report be noted.

(2) That the officers be requested to include within future update reports –

- (a) details of the number of lets that are available within each area, and**
- (b) details of applicants current area of residence, compared with their First Area of Preference.**

46 YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN WIRRAL

Further to minute 24 (5 September 2012), the Interim Strategic Director Regeneration and Environment provided Members with an overview of the scale of youth unemployment locally and current initiatives available to support young people into employment. He commented that Wirral had the lowest rate of Jobseekers Allowance claimants in the Liverpool City Region, the second lowest rate for 18-24 year olds and had outperformed regional and national averages for the reduction in numbers over the last year. The comparative good performance could be attributed to a multitude of factors and he commented that during the period, notable employment led regeneration projects had come to fruition, including the £60m mixed use development in New Brighton, which created 700 jobs across the construction and end user phases.

The Interim Strategic Director provided details of the scale of youth unemployment in Wirral and outlined the impact of Government policy changes on the recorded number and claim duration of 18-24 year olds in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance. He set out also the range of national, Liverpool City Region and Wirral Council interventions that were in place to support young people in Wirral into employment which, combined, had contributed to mitigating the effects of the overall economy on youth unemployment locally.

Resolved – That the report be noted and a further update be presented in six months.

47 TOWN CENTRES UPDATE

Further to minute 22 (5 September 2012), the Interim Strategic Director Regeneration and Environment provided an update at the request of the Chair on Wirral's retail centres and the initiatives that were being pursued to support them. He also gave a presentation, which provided information on the development of the Trader Toolkit and Town Centre Action Plans. Empty Shops were both a local and national problem and he referred to the significant impact on town centres of the reported closures or threatened closures of Comet, Jessops, HMV and Blockbuster stores.

The Interim Strategic Director referred also to the approval by the Council on 15 October 2012 of the Proposed Submission Draft Core Strategy for Consultation, which proposed a network of 23 centres in the Borough that had provided the basis of the Strategy and Action Planning work. He reported upon progress with the first phase of the detailed action planning work and indicated that each Action Plan would follow a common format. Detailed maps would be produced for each area and he set out the range of issues that would be addressed by the action plans. Members referred to changing shopping trends, in particular the increase in online shopping and commented that if shopping centres were to contract, as seemed inevitable, it was important for this to be effectively managed.

Resolved –

- (1) That the report be noted.**
- (2) That a report be presented to the next meeting of the Committee upon the development of the Trader Toolkit and upon progress in relation to the following centres that are the subject of the first phase of detailed action planning work –**
 - **Liscard**
 - **New Ferry**
 - **Seacombe (Poulton Road/Borough Road)**
 - **New Brighton (Seabank Road)**
 - **Wallasey Village**
 - **Irby**

48 PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORTS Q2 AND Q3

The Interim Strategic Director Regeneration and Environment set out the performance of the Council's Corporate Plan 2011/2014 for July – September 2012 (Q2) and for October – December 2012 (Q3) and provided an overview of performance, resource and risk monitoring. The reports highlighted the performance of projects and performance indicators that were relevant to the Economy and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee, under the Corporate Plan themes of 'Your Economy' and 'Your Neighbourhood' and they provided details of what was working well and performance against Corporate Plan targets.

Resolved –

- (1) That the reports be noted.**
- (2) That the officers be requested to delete the Red milestone in relation to the delivery of recommendations further to the Green Growth Scrutiny Review, as the funding for it has been taken as part of the budget savings.**

49 REVIEW OF SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

Further to minute 35 (14 November 2012), the Chair provided an update of the Committee's work programme, having previously sought the views of Members as to what issues should form the basis of it. He outlined the issues that had already been

identified for scrutiny and asked Members whether any new items should be added to the programme.

In response to a comment from the Chair regarding a Motion that had been previously agreed by the Council (minute 154 (16 April 2012) refers), which called for the establishment of a Member Working Party in respect of the Wirral Trade Centre, the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Planning Strategy agreed to provide an update to the Chair direct.

The Chair referred also to the work programme item 'Supporting People – Future Service Provision' and advised the Committee that it was proposed to work with the Supporting People team to undertake a desktop review, which would then form the basis of a scrutiny review exercise to be undertaken by Members.

Resolved –

- (1) That the Scrutiny Work Programme be noted.**
- (2) That those Members who are able to undertake the scrutiny review in relation to Supporting People, contact the Chair/spokespersons direct.**

50 **FORWARD PLAN**

The Acting Director of Law, HR and Asset Management reported that the Forward Plan for the period January to April 2013 was published on the Council's intranet/website. Members had been invited to review the Plan prior to the meeting in order for the Economy and Regeneration 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.

Resolved – That the Forward Plan be noted.

This page is intentionally left blank