

**CABINET PORTFOLIO SUMMARY REPORT**

<b>REPORT OF</b>	<b>Councillor Ann McLachlan</b>
<b>CABINET PORTFOLIO FOR</b>	<b>Governance, Commissioning and Improvement</b>
<b>CO-ORDINATING CHIEF OFFICER</b>	<b>Chief Executive</b>

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report is an update from the Cabinet Portfolio Holder to Members of the Council on matters relevant to her portfolio.

**1. ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT**

A draft of the Councils 2013-14 Annual Governance Statement was considered by the Audit Risk Management Committee on the 23<sup>rd</sup> June. The statement outlines the significant progress made by Council during 2013-14 to address weaknesses in its governance arrangements.

Out of the fifteen significant issues that were identified in the 2012-13 annual governance statement, eight have already been completed, or significant progress has been made during 2013-14; these include improvements to governance arrangements, information assets, procurement, debt, freedom of information requests, managing workforce costs and business planning.

Progress has been made on a further four issues, which are no longer considered to be significant, but will continue to be monitored throughout 2014. These issues include risk management, embedding policies for confidential reporting and grievances, responsibilities in relation to contract procedure rules and ensuring the Council maintains an up to date partnership register. There are three governance issues which are considered to continue to be significant and have therefore been included in the 2013-14 statement to ensure that they are addressed. These issues relate to essential training for staff, asset management and absence management.

On the basis of the work that the Council has undertaken, the Chief Internal Auditor has concluded that a substantively sound system of internal control is in place to meet the Councils objectives. This demonstrates substantial progress over the last 12 months.

A final version of the Annual Governance Statement will be presented to the Audit and Risk Management Committee in September 2014.

**2. SECTOR LED IMPROVEMENT**

The Local Government Association recently published a case study about Wirral Council's sector led improvement journey. Key messages from the case study highlight the rapid progress the Council made to tackle some of our most significant challenges and implement the recommendations made by the former Wirral Improvement Board.

The improvements made with the support of the Improvement Board are being seen as an example of best practice for sector led improvement. Gill Taylor, the LGA's Principal Adviser for the North West, was on the Wirral Improvement Board. She commented: "Along with my fellow Board members, I can say that Wirral has made enormous progress on its improvement, with much to celebrate. The authority is now ahead of the curve in the crucial financial challenges it faces, with the acknowledgement that, along with all authorities, it still faces very difficult decisions. We would like to offer our congratulations and have also let Wirral know that we are available, both as individuals and through our respective organisations, to offer any further support that may be required in future."

### **3. FREEDOM OF INFORMATION SCRUTINY REVIEW**

The Freedom of Information Scrutiny Review findings were presented to Cabinet on Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> June 2014. The findings were endorsed and an action plan has been prepared to progress the recommendations outlined in the scrutiny review.

The scrutiny review acknowledged the considerable improvement the Council has made in dealing with Freedom of Information requests. The Council has consistently achieved a response rate of 85% or above in respect of its Freedom of Information requests since June 2013.

The actions for further improvement include developing a simplified approach to first line contact through the appointment of Freedom of Information Champions and Deputies within Council departments, who will act as single points of contact and ensure the effective management and timely progression of FOI requests

Legal and Member Services will also ensure that the percentage of requests responded to within 20 working days are reported to the Chief Executive's Senior Management team, and that exception reporting will be implemented for departments whose performance is either about to, or actually falls below 85%.

The Council's website will be revised so as to include the Council's performance on dealing with and managing Freedom of Information requests. The website will also include commonly asked Freedom of Information requests together with their respective responses.

These recommendations will enhance monitoring and reporting arrangements, ensuring that they are both robust and transparent.

The review highlights the fundamental role that the Council's policy and performance committee's play and I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the members who have been involved in contributing to this review.

### **4. ICT STRATEGY**

A recent review of the IT at the Council has highlighted a significant number of areas requiring major improvement. As a result a high level action plan has been developed which I regularly monitor progress against. Although significant progress has been made over recent months, the Council still has a way to go before the IT reaches the required standard.

Significant investment has been made, from the existing IT budget, which has greatly improved the underlying infrastructure. In addition the council is currently recruiting a new senior manager to lead the restructured service.

More visibly, preparatory work for the implementation of over 3000 new computers running Windows 7 & Office 2010 across the Council is progressing well, however the directory

services element which caused service problems back in January continues to present challenges with a resultant delay of 3 weeks to the project. Pilot activities will commence on 18 July with a phased rollout in August leading to a full deployment in September, in line with Future Council organisational changes.

## **5. COMMISSIONING**

Due to recent amendments, my portfolio responsibilities have been modified to include the commissioning strategy. We have been developing our commissioning approach to integration through our work with the health economy to deliver our local response to the Better Care Fund. This has meant we are looking to identify further commissioning synergies across the council and partners, and to develop shared outcomes.