

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 28 July 2021

Present:

Councillor J Williamson (Chair)

Councillors	T Anderson	T Jones
	H Cameron	Y Nolan
	P Cleary	L Rennie
	JE Green	J Robinson
	EA Grey	P Stuart
	S Hayes	

Deputies:

Councillors C Carubia (In place of P Gilchrist)
K Greaney (In place of J McManus)
M Jordan (In place of W Clements)

29 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and those watching the webcast.

30 APOLOGIES

The Chair confirmed the apologies of Councillors Wendy Clements, Phil Gilchrist and Julie McManus, with Councillors Mary Jordan, Chris Carubia and Karl Greaney deputising for them respectively.

31 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were asked to declare any disclosable pecuniary interests and any other relevant interest and to state the nature of the interest.

Councillor Tony Jones declared a prejudicial interest in agenda items 11 and 15, 'Wirral Growth Company: Birkenhead Phase 1 Site Development Plan', by virtue of him being a member of the Wirral Joint Venture Board and confirmed that he would leave the meeting whilst the items were under discussion.

32 MINUTES

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 30 June, 2021, be approved and adopted as a correct record.

33 **PUBLIC AND MEMBER QUESTIONS**

The Chair reported that no questions from either members of the public or Members had been submitted. Nor were there any statements or petitions to receive.

34 **THE WIRRAL PLAN 2021-2026**

Carly Brown, Assistant Director – Strategy and Partnerships, introduced a report on The Wirral Plan 2021-26. The Wirral Plan was a key policy document for the Borough, which drove the high level priorities, ambition, and key deliverables for the organisation over a 5-year period from 2021 to 2026. The Plan reflected what people had told the Council was important to them and would be used to help all staff understand their role in helping to deliver the Council's corporate priorities.

The refreshed Plan 2021-26 had been developed to build on the five thematic priorities from the previous Plan whilst also taking account of the changed social, economic, and political landscape brought about by COVID-19 which was having a significant impact on Wirral residents and businesses.

There was a need for a series of delivery plans against each of the Council plan priorities. Delivery plans were being developed which would define how the in-year priorities would be achieved. Delivery plans would need to align with the achievement of in-year budget efficiencies and be cognisant of emerging budget planning for 2022/23. It was proposed that draft delivery plans were reviewed by policy and service committees through dedicated sessions and budget workshops during the summer.

A Member commented upon the Plan being a document to be fine tuned throughout the year and welcomed the opportunity for Policy and Service Committees to review the delivery plans aligned with the Plan, whilst expressing some concern with some changes in respect of environment and transport, as the themes of biodiversity and active travel were critical in the original plan.

On a motion by the Chair, seconded by Councillor Yvonne Nolan, it was -

A. RECOMMENDED –

(1) That the Wirral Plan, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be referred to Council in September.

B. Resolved – That,

- (2) further engagement and discussion with relevant Committees takes place to shape the underpinning delivery plans and work programmes required to implement the Wirral Plan; and**
- (3) the approach for the development of delivery planning and corporate change programme to support implementation, be approved.**

35

COMMUNITY BONDS

Shaer Halewood, Director of Resources, introduced a report which provided an overview of community bonds and their uses, and how Warrington and West Berkshire Councils had used them to fund capital spend. The report assessed their use in Wirral and possible next steps.

Community Bonds/Community Municipal Investments were a form of debt/loan-based crowdfunding. Community Bonds were issued by a council corporate body, with residents and general public investors providing capital on the basis of receiving a financial return. The majority of community bonds were typically linked in some form to environmental or social criteria and provided tangible benefit to the local community beyond just financial.

Community Bond issues were generally related to a specific project. In 2020, West Berkshire and Warrington Councils issued Community Bonds to fund solar projects in their Boroughs. They each issued bonds to the value of £1m and worked with the crowdfunding platform Abundance to administer the bonds.

Community Bonds would support the inclusive economy strand of the Wirral Plan. Ordinarily, the interest that the Council paid on borrowing would be paid back to the lenders, typically outside of the borough. Community Bonds opened up the opportunity for local residents to become investors in the Council, keeping both the investment capital and the interest payments in the local area.

There was also the potential to support the sustainable environment strand of the Wirral Plan if the Council decided to use community bonds to fund a project that tackled the climate emergency, as Warrington and West Berkshire had done.

Community bonds had a higher social value than mainstream borrowing. Social value could be in the form of increased community engagement, as well as directing the cost of borrowing (interest payments) back into the local area. The report noted that Community Bonds were a more expensive means of borrowing, and at the moment, the social value attached to the bonds did not justify the extra costs. This was unsupported by Councillor Pat Cleary as there was no evidence available of this.

Shaer Halewood responded to a number of comments from Members and suggested that it could be an administratively heavy scheme to implement at the start and that more work could be undertaken to develop some guidance on it with some information gained from Warrington and West Berkshire Councils, with a view to a possible start on 1 April, 2022, if the Committee wished for it to go ahead.

On motion by Councillor Tom Anderson, seconded by Councillor Lesley Rennie, it was -

Resolved – That,

- (1) it be agreed that guidance is developed to help assess if Community Municipal Bonds are a suitable funding stream for future capital bid projects, and;**
- (2) before a recommendation is made to Council that Community Bonds be added to the Treasury Management Strategy as an alternative form of debt financing, a further report be brought before this Committee once officers have had the opportunity to fully scope the risks and issues involved.**

36 TREASURY MANAGEMENT ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21

Shaer Halewood, Director of Resources, introduced a report on the Authority's treasury management activity which was underpinned by CIPFA's Code of Practice on Treasury Management ("the Code"), which required the Authority to approve treasury management semi-annual and annual reports.

The report fulfilled the Authority's legal obligation under the Local Government Act 2003 to have regard to both the CIPFA Code and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) Investment Guidance.

As projected in the Treasury Management Mid-Year Report, there was an overspend on Treasury activities which was attributable to 2020/21 budget savings that were not achieved due to implementation delays emanating from COVID response activity and significant changes in interest rates on investments. This overspend was incorporated into the Revenue Outturn report.

The level of Capital Financing debt held on the balance sheet, including the Merseyside Residuary Body debt managed by the Council on behalf of the constituent authorities, was £166 million at 31 March 2021. This was a reduction of £3 million since 1 April 2020 and reflected policies to minimise and delay borrowing costs which adversely impacted upon the revenue budget.

The Council had complied with the Treasury Management Indicators as set out in the agreed Treasury Management Strategy for 2020/21.

In response to Members' comments, Pete Molyneux, Senior Finance Manager, gave an explanation as to those 'unrated' components of the Council's investment portfolio. Shaer Halewood, agreed to provide more detail in respect of the investment portfolio and the names of organisations and sums involved.

On a motion by the Chair, seconded by Councillor Yvonne Nolan, it was -

RECOMMENDED - To Council, that the Treasury Management Annual Report for 2020/21 be agreed.

37 **WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE**

Philip McCourt, Director of Law and Governance, introduced a report which advised how this Committee, in co-operation with the other Policy and Service Committees, was responsible for proposing and delivering an annual committee work programme.

The work programme was formed from a combination of key decisions, standing items and requested officer reports. The report provided the Committee with an opportunity to plan and regularly review its work across the municipal year and was attached as an appendix to the report.

A Member suggested that with regard to a number of assets to be disposed of over the next 12 months, a report could be brought back to the Committee on a possible percentage of the capital receipts being reinvested in to some form of community fund to benefit the wards where assets were disposed of.

In response to a Member's comment on the One Wirral Change Programme, Shaer Halewood, Director of Resources, stated that the Delivery Plan for the Wirral Plan would merge into one Change Programme.

On a motion by the Chair, seconded by Councillor Yvonne Nolan, it was -

Resolved – That the Policy & Resources Committee work programme for the 2021/22 municipal year, be agreed, with the addition of a report on Asset Disposals as above.

38 **REFERRAL FROM CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE - PREVENTION POLICY**

Simone White, Director of Children's Services, introduced a report on the Children, Young People and Education Committee's recommendations, from its meeting on 15 June, 2021 in respect of prevention approach.

Prevention was a cross-cutting theme of significance in Children's Services, Adult Social Care and Health, and Public Health. It was therefore essential that there was cross-Council agreement to prioritise preventative activity and to outline the expectations and delivery methodology for preventative approaches.

The report to the Children, Young People and Education Committee had provided an overview of the prevention approach recommended for adoption by the Council, including a Prevention Policy Statement and Prevention Framework. In addition, the report detailed the Breaking the Cycle programme, which sought to demonstrate how a collaboration of preventative activity could maximise opportunity and lead to better outcomes for people, services, and organisations.

The matter was being referred to the Policy and Resources as it was a cross-cutting policy that impacted on Adult Social Care and Public Health as well as Children, Young People and Education.

Simone White responded to a number of comments from Members and stated that with regard to support for children's mental health and wellbeing, her department and partner organisations were working on the creation of a single point of contact for such services.

The Chair and Members commended the detailed report and policy documents and expressed thanks to Elizabeth Hartley, Assistant Director, Early Help and Prevention.

A suggestion was made to receive regular updates on the policy.

On a motion by the Chair, seconded by Councillor Yvonne Nolan, it was -

Resolved – That,

(1) the Prevention Policy Statement and Prevention Framework, be approved;

(2) the Breaking the Cycle programme approach, be approved.

39 **REFERRAL FROM ECONOMY REGENERATION AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE - WIRRAL GROWTH COMPANY: BIRKENHEAD PHASE 1 FINAL SITE DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

Having previously declared a prejudicial interest, Councillor Tony Jones vacated the room during consideration of this item (minute 31 refers).

Sally Shah, Assistant Director- Chief Regeneration Officer, introduced a report on the Economy Regeneration and Development Committee's recommendations, from its meeting on 26 July, 2021 in respect of Wirral Growth Company: Birkenhead Phase 1: Final Site Development Plan (SDP). A supplement to the agenda had been circulated with the minute of the Economy and Regeneration Committee.

The implementation of the SDP would directly support the regeneration of Birkenhead which had been a long-term priority for the Council. It supported the Council's ambitions around sustainable development and the generation of a prosperous inclusive economy where people could get good jobs and achieve their aspirations regardless of their background or where they lived.

Specifically, the delivery of Phase 1 of the plan would result in the construction of circa 150,000 sq.ft (13,900 sq.m) of Grade 'A' office accommodation in two buildings referred to as A1 and A2 with associated quality public realm. The larger of the two buildings A1 measuring 89,591 sq.ft (8,323 sq.m) would be occupied by Council employees while the second building A2 measuring 58,176 sq.ft (5,405 sq.m) would be let on the open market to commercial occupiers.

Through taking the head lease on the first two office buildings and relocating up to 800 administrative staff into the Birkenhead Commercial District the Council would intervene to unlock and drive forward the regeneration of Birkenhead Town Centre.

This matter was being referred to Policy and Resources Committee because in accordance with the Council's Constitution any issue regarding land and property including major acquisition and disposals, which included reserved decision making concerning any purchase, sale or transfer of a value in excess of, or likely to exceed, £100,000; was reserved to the Policy and Resources Committee.

On a motion by the Chair, seconded by Councillor Yvonne Nolan, it was -

Resolved – That the Formal Site Development Plan for Birkenhead Commercial District Phase 1, be approved.

40 **MINUTES OF THE SHAREHOLDER BOARD**

On a motion by the Chair, seconded by Councillor Jeff Green, it was -

Resolved – That the minutes of the Shareholder Board held on 1 July, 2021, be noted.

41 **MINUTES OF THE SENIOR OFFICER AND APPOINTMENTS STAFFING SUB-COMMITTEE**

On a motion by the Chair, seconded by Councillor Tony Jones, it was -

Resolved – That the minutes of the Senior Officer and Appointments Staffing Sub-Committee meeting held on of 13 July, 2021, be noted.

42 **EXEMPT INFORMATION - EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

On a motion by Councillor Janette Williamson, seconded by Councillor Yvonne Nolan, it was -

Resolved – That, under section 100 (A) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined by paragraphs 3 and 5 of Part I of Schedule 12A (as amended) to that Act. The Public Interest test has been applied and favours exclusion.

43 **WIRRAL GROWTH COMPANY: BIRKENHEAD PHASE 1 FINAL SITE DEVELOPMENT PLAN - EXEMPT APPENDICES**

Having previously declared a prejudicial interest, Councillor Tony Jones vacated the room during consideration of this item (minute 31 refers).

Resolved – That the exempt appendices to the Wirral Growth Company: Birkenhead Phase 1 Final Site Development Plan, be noted.

44 **HOYLAKE GOLF RESORT DEVELOPMENT AGREEMENT - URGENT ITEM**

The Chair had agreed to consideration of a referral item from the Economy, Regeneration and Development Committee of 26 July, 2021, as a matter of urgent business to enable this Committee to make a decision on the report of the Director of Law and Governance in relation to the Hoylake Golf Resort Development Agreement.

Philip McCourt, Director of Law and Governance, introduced a report on the matter, which also provided commentary from the Economy, Regeneration and Development Committee.

Following a lengthy and considered debate, and after an adjournment of 20 minutes, it was then, on a motion by the Chair, seconded by Councillor Yvonne Nolan,

Resolved (8:7) – That the recommendations within the report be approved.

Councillor Tom Anderson then proposed that a vote be taken on removing this matter from the Committee's delegation, in accordance with Article 7.3 of the Constitution.

Philip McCourt confirmed that removal from delegation would require 40% of those Members present and voting to vote in favour of such removal, in this case being 6 Members. The matter would then be referred to a meeting of the full Council for consideration, if successful.

With six Members voting in favour of removal, the matter then became a referral to Council for a decision, the resolution above having in effect been rescinded.

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