

WIRRAL COUNCIL

CABINET – 7 JUNE 2007

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF REGENERATION

BEACON COUNCIL ROUND NINE 2008

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1.1 This report is to advise Members of the forthcoming Beacon Scheme 2007 Round 9 and seeks endorsement of the proposal of the Merseyside Local Transport Plan (LTP) Partnership to submit an application under the Beacon Scheme Round 9, theme of Improving Accessibility. The Merseyside LTP Partnership consists of Merseytravel and the five local authorities of Liverpool, St Helens, Sefton, Knowsley and Wirral.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 The Beacon Scheme was established to spread the benefits of innovative, high quality services being delivered by local authorities in rewarding the best and sharing best practice. The Beacon Scheme is now in its ninth year.

2.2 In Round 9 of the scheme there are 10 new themes ranging from education and crime, to climate change and empowering communities. There is a specific theme of improving accessibility. All of the themes reflect the vital role local government plays in improving the quality of life for communities and individuals up and down the country.

2.3 The potential to look for Beacon Council status has been carefully considered by the Council's Corporate Management Team; in the context of the agenda for change being developed as part of the Council's Efficiency Plan and to respond to what is expected to be a challenging year for Wirral. Whilst the services provided to Wirral people covered by the themes can be favourably compared with any other local authority, the way the themes are structured this year does not identify an obvious category for Beacon Status for Wirral to apply for alone.

2.4 However, partnership bids are encouraged reflecting proposals in the recent White Paper, 'Strong and Prosperous Communities'. The Beacon Scheme emphasises the importance of effective partnership working and community and customer engagement and both form part of the assessment criteria.

3.0 LTP PARTNERSHIP PROPOSAL

3.1 The Accessibility theme of the Beacon Council Scheme for 2008 has been developed by the Department for Transport with the Department for Communities and Local Government specifically to highlight schemes that are being developed and delivered through Accessibility Strategies submitted as part of second Local Transport Plans.

3.2 The Merseyside Accessibility Strategy developed by the LTP partnership is a strong candidate to be put forward for Beacon status. It is therefore proposed to submit a joint

Beacon Scheme application under the accessibility theme on behalf of the LTP partnership subject to approval by partner local authorities.

- 3.3 Merseytravel will be the applicant organisation as the lead authority for Accessibility Planning and current chair of the LTP Access Priority Group. The application will be co-ordinated by the LTP Support Unit on behalf of the Group.
- 3.4 It should be noted that in previous rounds, only the applicant organisation would become the Beacon Council. In Round 9, this has been changed so that partners involved in the application should it be successful would automatically become Beacon Councils for Accessibility.
- 3.5 All completed application must be submitted by 5pm on 29 June 2007.

4.0 **BENEFITS OF BEING A BEACON COUNCIL**

- 4.1 The Beacon Scheme provides an innovative way of recognising excellence and achievement within authorities. Achieving Beacon status will enhance the profile of partner authorities nationally among other local authorities and will place partners at the forefront of Accessibility Planning and the opportunity to shape future policy at a national level.
- 4.2 At the local level, achieving Beacon status can, within authorities, recognise the commitment and delivery of good practice within the individual service area. It has also been found that the scheme can strengthen morale, confidence and motivation among officers and the community.
- 4.3 The Beacon Scheme provides authorities with the opportunity to work closely and in partnership with other authorities at a national level. This two-way exchange of information and knowledge affords the opportunity to learn from other authorities in order to develop our own practices whilst sharing best practice.

5.0 **THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS**

- 5.1 The table below highlights key dates within the assessment process:

Assessment timeline

Deadline for the receipt of applications: 5pm, Friday 29 June 2007

Stage 1: Short-listing

- The specialist panel advisor and government theme lead review application forms in July and August 2007.
- The proposed short-list of applications is scrutinised and moderated by the Advisory Panel in September 2007.
- The Advisory Panel will announce the short-list in early October 2007.

Stage 2: Assessment visits

- Assessment visits by the specialist panel advisor; government theme lead and IdeA consultant to short-listed authorities will take place between 1 November and 7 December 2007.

Stage 3: Presentations in London

- Short-listed authorities will give presentations to members of the Advisory Panel on their applications in London between 7 and 19 January 2008.

Stage 4: Assessment decisions

- Panel members will meet to decide their recommendations to Ministers shortly after the presentations; this will include the panel's recommendations to Ministers for the Beacon Place-Shaper award/s.
- Ministers will announce and hand out the new Beacon awards at the prestigious award ceremony in March 2008.

5.2 The Beacon application and assessment process is designed to be rigorous. Beacon status will only be awarded to those authorities that demonstrate innovation or excel within their theme and are prepared to share their best practice with others.

6.0 PARTNER RESPONSIBILITIES

6.1 The Beacon application will be steered by the LTP Access Priority Group and co-ordinated through the LTP Support Unit. The Access Group has established an editing group that will be responsible for completion and submission of the application form by the June 2007 deadline.

6.2 If short-listed, the partnership will host a half day visit by an assessment team that is comprised of a specialist panel advisor, a government theme lead and the IdeA. These visits are expected to take place from 1 November through to 7 December.

6.3 The partner authorities will set the agenda for the visit. This is an opportunity for the assessment team to:

- See the key elements of practice and factors underpinning our success.
- Hear about our shared commitment to disseminate our best practice with others.
- Have the opportunity to meet front line staff, senior officers, elected members, service users and partners in order to explore issues with them in an open and honest manner.

6.4 Partner authorities will need to identify and fully brief appropriate senior officers, elected members and other relevant partners to participate in the visit.

6.5 Following visits, short listed authorities will be invited to give presentations to the assessment team in January 2008. Partners need to give consideration to appropriate officers and members who may wish to be involved. It is anticipated that the

presentation will be lead by the LTP Support Unit as the overall co-ordinator of the bid on behalf of the LTP Partnership and Merseytravel as the application authority.

7.0 **RESPONSIBILITIES AS A BEACON COUNCIL**

- 7.1 Once the Beacons are awarded, they are expected to share their experience and expertise with other authorities. Beacons work with the IdeA, their sponsoring government department and each other to develop a co-ordinated programme of learning events and peer support activities.
- 7.2 In the past, the Beacon learning and improvement programme has supported large scale learning exchange events, series of open day events and tailored mentoring, following the learning continuum.
- 7.3 From round eight onwards, the Beacons Advisory Panel has implemented a more flexible programme. This is in direct response to the changing direction of the Beacon Scheme and recognising that in some respects the scheme has moved beyond big events and case studies into a more intimate arena where long-standing culture changing relationships are developed between Beacons and other learning authorities.
- 7.4 Beacons will be encouraged to look for appropriate sector events they can 'piggy-back' on to make best use of established events and networks. With this approach, Beacons will be able to showcase their good practice at a much higher number of events and conferences. They will, if they so choose, still be able to host their own Beacon events.
- 7.5 The Beacons will also be encouraged to develop close mentoring relationships with other authorities in order to help drive improvement in these authorities. These peer support relationships have been shown, through extensive research, to deliver good results. It is on the back of these close mentoring relationships that the Beacons will be invited to apply for further funding from the peer support fund towards the end of their Beacon tenure.
- 7.6 The peer support fund is designed to offer further funding to build on the ability that Beacon authorities have demonstrated to deliver excellence in new and effective ways and in helping others to do so. The peer support fund invites bids that fall within these broad criteria:
- Detailed work with one authority or a group of authorities to deliver specific improvements in performance.
 - Work with the relevant government department to inform, develop or test national policy.
- 7.7 It is the second of these criteria that provides another focus for learning and improvement in the Beacon Scheme. It is recognised by both local and central government that Beacons can play a large role in helping to shape and test national policy. Beacons will continue to be encouraged to build on the policy influence and joint working that Beacons' links with government departments have already afforded them.

8.0 FINANCIAL & STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

8.1 The submission of a Beacon Council Bid by the LTP Partnership will be co-ordinated by LTP Support Unit on behalf of Merseytravel. It is expected that there will be a call on Partner authorities for contributions and support which will need to be met from existing resources.

9.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The Beacon Council application will showcase positive application of equal opportunity policies and services.

10.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

10.1 None arising from this report.

11.0 LOCAL MEMBER SUPPORT IMPLICATIONS

11.1 The Beacon Council Bid for accessibility would be a Merseyside-wide initiative.

12.0 HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

12.1 None arising from this report.

13.0 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

13.1 None arising from this report.

14.0 PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

14.1 None arising from this report.

15.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

15.1 None.

16.0 RECOMMENDATION

16.1 That the submission of a Partnership Bid for Round Nine Beacon Council status under the theme of Improving Accessibility, by Merseytravel on behalf of the LTP Partnership be endorsed.

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This report was prepared by Alan Stennard who can be contacted on 691 8395.