

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise of the outcome of the Audit Commission's most recent assessment of the delivery of Housing Market Renewal in Merseyside, with particular attention given to how Wirral has been delivering housing market renewal in Tranmere. The views of Committee are sought in response to the report and its findings.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 As part of their scrutiny role, the Audit Commission inspect the performance of all nine HMRI Pathfinders across England in their delivery of housing market renewal. The Audit Commission has assessed the Newheartlands Pathfinder on four occasions, including two local Strategic Reviews (at Anfield-Breckfield in February 2006 and Tranmere in September 2006). The Commission followed up these previous Strategic Reviews during its visit in April 2007 and its findings are summarised in this report. A full copy of the report is contained in Appendix I. Members are requested to note the findings made and provide any comment.

3.0 KEY FINDINGS FROM SEPTEMBER 2006 PERFORMANCE REVIEW

3.1 The Performance Review carried out in September 2006 scrutinised Wirral's delivery of housing market renewal in Tranmere. It concluded that the Council is making good progress in implementing housing market renewal. It highlighted that:

- The Council has sought to secure good quality design.
- There is generally good alignment between the HMR programme for Tranmere and wider Wirral area and the relevant local spatial planning and housing policies.
- Current achievements on the ground in Tranmere since the start of the HMRI Programme in 2003/4 have been good.
- There are good examples of community involvement and a good level of mutual trust and respect between the local developer for Tranmere, Lovell and the Council in spite of the negotiations over development agreements continuing to be protracted and there are key areas where the Authority needs to firm up its stance as part of developer negotiations.
- The Council has sought to add value through its procurement and partnering arrangements and there is evidence that HMR funding has been regarded by elected Members and officers alike as an addition to the existing capital programme rather than a substitute for it.

4.0 KEY FINDINGS FROM THE APRIL 2007 PERFORMANCE REVIEW

4.1 The Performance Review carried out in April 2007 followed up previous reviews in order to assess what progress has been made where the Audit Commission has previously identified there needed to be further action. In particular, relation to Wirral and Tranmere, the Audit Commission have highlighted strengths and areas for improvement.

5.0 INFLUENCING TRENDS AND MEETING ASPIRATIONS

5.1 The Audit Commission have concluded that good progress has been made since the September 2006 review in developing the Pathfinder's Sustainability Index. This Index is a GIS based tool being operated as part of the Wirral Area Mapping Project to monitor trends, evaluate impact of investment and to plan future interventions. The Review also advises that Wirral is at the forefront of developing a new tool called the Neighbourhood Options Appraisal (NOA) to plan its HMRI programme. The NOA combines good principles from Neighbourhood Renewal Assessment and Masterplanning methodologies. The Review recommends that Wirral improve its use of Implementation Plans which translate visions and objectives into operational programmes. This is already being addressed through refinements being made to the HMRI Team's Programme and Project Management arrangements. The Review commends Wirral's fully developed methodology of using Design and Access Statements to support planning applications and set parameters for development programmes.

6.0 STRATEGY CONTEXT

6.1 The Review reports that progress is being made in progressing Wirral's Local Development Framework including improving relevant evidence bases to inform planning policies for housing such as the forthcoming Housing Needs and Market Assessment report. The Review concludes that the interim Planning Policy for Housing appears to be sufficiently robust to continue to serve the purpose for which it was developed.

7.0 IMPLEMENTATION

7.1 The Review recognises the good, visible and measurable progress which the Council is making in Tranmere. It is particularly positive about the amount of funding which the Council has levered in as 'match finding' alongside HMR investment. Since 2003, for every £1 of HMR invested in Tranmere a further £1.05 has come from other public sector sources and 90 pence from the private sector. In total the £11.7 million HMR invested has been matched by £12.3 million from other public sources and £10.6 million from the private sector. The measurable outputs for Tranmere since 2003 are also recognised (161 demolitions, 156 new homes, 400 homes refurbished to Decent Homes Standard).

7.2 The Review does identify the challenging issue of retail and commercial business relocations resulting from HMR intervention and states that Wirral is at a disadvantage in this respect compared to Liverpool and Sefton who have secured joint Local Enterprise Growth Initiative (LEGI) funding to tackle this issue.

7.3 It is also reported that Wirral needs to develop a clear strategy and implementation plan to harness the ongoing multi-million investment in construction within the Borough to benefit the local economy and create local employment opportunities. This should be treated as a corporate policy for Wirral Council to ensure it is a fully co-ordinated strategy which encompasses all capital construction investment, of which housing investment is one part.

7.4 It is also recommended that the Council also seek to conclude, as a priority, the legal process to appoint Lovell as its private developer partner for Tranmere and Rock Ferry. This is now moving closer to conclusion and will be reported to Members in due course.

8.0 **CONCLUSION**

8.1 The report is welcomed by Officers and presents a generally positive view of how Wirral is performing in its delivery of housing market renewal.

9.0 **FINANCIAL & STAFFING IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 The scrutiny role of the Audit Commission is considered nationally in determining the future funding of HMRI. Therefore it is important to receive positive feedback from the Audit Commission in order to add strength to Wirral's, and Merseyside's, case for future market renewal funding.

9.2 There are no direct staffing implications arising from this report. If any staffing implications arise from the implementation of recommendations from the Performance Review then these will be reported to Members accordingly.

10.0 **EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 Wirral's Housing Market Renewal Programme will have a positive impact on some of the most socially and economically deprived areas of Wirral.

11.0 **LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS**

11.1 Housing Market Renewal will improve the quality of living environments and environmental standards throughout many parts of Wirral. New high quality, decent homes with enhanced energy efficiency standards and better use of renewable building materials will contribute towards Local Agenda 21 priorities.

12.0 **LOCAL MEMBER SUPPORT IMPLICATIONS**

12.1 The HMRI areas are within the following Wards: Bidston and St James; Birkenhead and Tranmere; Rock Ferry; Seacombe; Liscard; Claughton; Oxton and Bromborough.

13.0 **HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS**

13.1 There will be Human Rights Implications under Article 8 and Article 1 of the first protocol, both of which concern the protection of private property. Article 8 of the convention on Human Rights requires a Local Authority to respect a person's homes. A Local Authority may only affect a person's right to respect for his home if is necessary, eg. in the interests of economic wellbeing, for the prevention of crime or the protection of health. Having access to a decent home is a basic human right to which HMRI contributes significantly.

14.0 **COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

14.1 HMRI will result in some clearance of poorly designed, unsafe or obsolescent areas and the creation of safer, more secure living environments.

15.0 **PLANNING IMPLICATIONS**

15.1 HMRI aims to bring about a fundamental change in the character of some of the most deprived areas of the Borough. Proposals for new development will be brought forward with the assistance of the preferred private developer and Registered Social Landlords and will be integrated with the Council's Local Development Framework, as either Supplementary Planning Documents or Development Plan Documents. Residential redevelopment is in conformity with Policy HS4 of the Unitary Development Plan, whilst mixed use development incorporating retail use will be considered against retail policy including Policy SH4 of the Unitary Development Plan. Other uses will be considered against UDP Policy HS15.

16.0 **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

16.1 Appendix I – Newheartlands Performance Review Report (April 2007).

17.0 **RECOMMENDATION**

17.1 Members note the content of the Newheartlands Performance Review report (April 2007).

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