

WIRRAL COUNCIL

PLANNING COMMITTEE – 15 NOVEMBER 2007

CABINET – 29 NOVEMBER 2007

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF TECHNICAL SERVICES

**OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER - PLANNING DELIVERY
GRANT AWARD 2007/08**

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report outlines the Planning Delivery Grant award to Wirral Council for 2007/08. The amount of grant awarded is due to all three BVPI targets for the determination of planning applications being exceeded, success on appeals, e-Planning criteria and improved performance in development plan preparation.
- 1.2 The grant is to be divided between the Technical Services, Corporate Services and Regeneration Departments and is to be used to improve the standard of planning services, including support for the Housing Market Renewal Initiative.
- 1.3 Members are asked to note the award and recommend to Cabinet that the apportionment of the grant between the three Departments, as outlined in this report, is agreed.

2. The Planning Delivery Grant Award 2007/08

- 2.1 In August 2007, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) set out its award of Planning Delivery Grant (PDG) in Determination 2007 No. 31/585. The grant is awarded according to a formula set out by the former Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) in May 2004, based on performance in the previous financial year on Development Control, plan-making and a series of special allocations for areas of low or high housing demand, Enterprise Areas and for progress on e-government.
- 2.2 The total allocated to Wirral, according to the ODPM formula is as follows:

Wirral receives a total of £319,930 in PDG this year in two tranches. The authority receives £17,433 for having Enterprise Areas in its jurisdiction; £26,789 for its e-planning capabilities; £100,000 for housing considerations; £27,727 for plan-making and £147,981 for Development Control.

3. Allocation between Corporate Services Technical Services and Regeneration Departments

- 3.1 The purpose of PDG is to provide additional support and funding to receiving authorities in England to improve their planning resources and to introduce the many changes which the Government is bringing in as part of its programme to reform the planning system. Local Authorities are encouraged to reinvest the PDG, particularly but not exclusively, in respect of their planning functions.
- 3.2 To encourage this reinvestment, the DCLG have determined once again that 25% of the total amount of grant paid to any individual local authority must be used only to finance capital expenditure in the financial year beginning on 1st April 2007 or to carry forward to finance capital expenditure in subsequent financial years. The remaining three-quarters of the grant may be used to finance either revenue or capital expenditure in the 2007/08 financial year or carried over to finance either capital or revenue in subsequent financial years.
- 3.3 Because of the division of planning functions between the Corporate Services and Technical Services Departments, the PDG award should be divided principally between the two Departments, with the low demand housing element of £100,000 assigned to Regeneration Department, to support the Empty Property Strategy. It is proposed that the award should be divided as follows:

Table 1 Allocation between Corporate Services, Technical Services and Regeneration Departments

	Gross award	Cap recycling adjustment	Award to Corporate Services	Award to Technical Services	Award to Regeneration Dept
(a) Low Demand	£100,000	-	-	-	£100,000
(b) Enterprise Area	£17,433	-	£17,433	-	-
(c) E-planning	£26,789	-	£4,686.50	£22,102.50	-
(d) Development Control	£147,981	-	-	£147,981	-
(e) Appeal Success	-	-	-	-	-
(f) Plan-making	£27,727		£27,727		
(g) Totals	£319,930	-	£49,846.50	£170,083.50	£100,000.00

- 3.4 The PDG allocated to Corporate Services Department totals £49,846.50, the allocation to Technical Services Department totals £170,083.50 and the allocation to Regeneration totals £100,000.

4. Use of Planning Delivery Grant

Development Control

- 4.1 In previous years, PDG has been used to fund improved electronic service delivery, improvements in the determination of planning applications with all BVPI targets exceeded and improvements to both the Conservation and Enforcement services. The Planning Teams have seen a reduction in the number of planning applications submitted to the authority for determination over the past year. The Enforcement Team has continued to see an increase in workload and continues to be responsible for determining applications made for High Hedges under the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003, together with licensing queries. Previous use of PDG resources has resulted in significant improvements in service delivery both in Enforcement and in the determination of planning applications but the use of further resources from the 2007/08 PDG for these purposes is not as yet considered necessary. A review of the Authority's 589 Tree Preservation Orders is long overdue and many of them are out of date. 278 TPO's are in need of some review in order to more accurately reflect what is now protected and it is hoped that some funding from the 2007/08 PDG award can be used to employ consultants to do much of the ground and surveying work that is required during the review, although at the time of writing this report an exact cost for funding specialist consultants is not known.
- 4.2 BVPI219a relates to the total number of Conservation Areas in the local authority area, BVPI219b relates to the percentage of Conservation Areas in the local authority area with an up-to-date character appraisal and BVPI219c relates to the percentage of Conservation Areas with published management proposals. The introduction of these new BVPIs for 2006/07 has resulted in additional pressures for the Conservation Team and a sum of £100,000 from a previous PDG Award has been used to fund specialist consultants and this work is currently underway. Although it is not anticipated at this stage that further investment from the 2007/08 PDG award will be required for the Conservation Service, there is the potential that additional management plans for those Conservation Areas not already covered in the current review will need to be completed at an additional cost.
- 4.3 Over the past 18 months there has been a significant increase in the number of complex planning applications received and this is likely to continue, particularly having regard to the potential for proposals and applications by Peel Holdings for Wirral Waters. Technical Services currently provide detailed advice on Highway matters. The ability to

provide a speedy response is however critical and due to other work commitments that is not always possible. In order to improve service delivery it is therefore proposed to fund additional posts within Technical Services the costs of which will initially be met from the PDG.

- 4.4 As stated in this report a quarter of the 2007/08 PDG total must be used for capital investment. For development control, the sum is £42,520.75 and as with previous years this should be rolled forward and to ensure a clear and transparent audit trail be specifically identified with a separate cost code.

Forward Planning

- 4.5 Planning Delivery Grant has been essential to the progress of the Council's Local Development Framework, in funding consultancy support and specifically to fund the Merseyside Joint Waste Development Plan Document, which is being prepared by the Merseyside Environmental Advisory Service, on behalf of the five Merseyside Local Authorities and Halton Council. For 2007/2008, Wirral's contribution to the Waste Development Plan Document is £61,994. Last year this sum was, to be divided on the basis of the PDG allocation between Corporate Services, Technical Services and Regeneration Departments. This year, I have advised the Director of Corporate Services that I am unable to fund the Technical Services element of the £61,994 on that basis due to conflicting budget requirements. Officers in Technical Services and Corporate Services are now examining how the Joint Waste DPD can be funded this year and in 2008/09.

- 4.6 At its meeting on 15th March 2007 (Minute 284 refers) Cabinet agreed funding for a series of individual consultancy studies to assess evidence required for the development of the Local Development Framework Core Strategy. Total funding of £165,000 was agreed by Cabinet and studies are now being commissioned on Employment Land and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment. Pre-tender documentation is being prepared on retail and commercial leisure and local wildlife sites and biodiversity. Cabinet had agreed the preparation of a Cultural Facilities Development Plan at its meeting on 24th January 2007 (Minute 232 refers) and this will provide much of the required evidence for the leisure and recreational elements of the Local Development Framework Core Strategy. Further Government guidance is awaited on Habitats Regulations Assessment, whilst social and community infrastructure requirements are being progressed in-house.

- 4.7 Initial evidence gathering has been carried out on the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment but progress on this study will be integrated with development of a Brownfield Land Strategy.

- 4.8 In order to advance production of the Local Development Framework Core Strategy and other Development Plan Documents, Cabinet

agreed (at its meeting of 20th June 2007, Minute 108 refers) to the use of £38,000 from the Corporate Services element of PDG, for the purchase of bespoke software, from Limehouse Publisher. This purchase qualified as capital expenditure, which has to comprise 25% of PDG.

Regeneration

- 4.9 The PDG awarded on the basis of Low Housing Demand can also be assigned to the preparation of an Empty Property Strategy. A comprehensive Empty Property Strategy will reduce the amount of vacant land and property in the Borough, increasing the rate of land recycling and reducing the demand for greenfield development. With the help from the Planning Delivery Grant, the Empty Property Strategy, through the work of the Empty Property Team, has been able to deliver successful solutions to over 200 empty properties across the whole of Wirral since April 2006. It is therefore an integral element of planning strategy.

Capital:Revenue Split

- 4.10 The allocation of PDG will also have to take account of the 25:75 capital:revenue split and also to the need to safeguard funds for future years. Further reports will be brought to Members as appropriate.

Future Allocation of PDG

- 4.11 If Members agree, the exact allocation of PDG to individual elements of the planning service in the Borough can be addressed in future reports to Regeneration and Planning Strategy Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Planning Committee and Cabinet.

5. Conclusions

- 5.1 Members will be aware that awards of PDG have been variable and have been vulnerable to variations in performance, both in Development Control and plan-making. In 2003/04 a PDG award of £267,697 was received, in 2004/05 the PDG award was £51,895, in 2005/06 the award was £912,000 and for 2006/07 the award was £447,060.49. The award for 2007/08 is £319,930
- 5.2 Despite all planning related BVPI targets being met or exceeded, the PDG award for 2007/08 was significantly reduced from 2006/07. This is however due to the fact that the total PDG amount allocated for all authorities was significantly reduced. It is important for Members to note that the PDG award is time limited and this is the last year the PDG will be awarded in its current form. It is likely that 2008/09 will see the introduction of a new Housing and Planning Delivery Grant in line with recommendations suggested by the Barker Review. The purpose of the new HPDG is to provide an incentive to local authorities

to respond more effectively to local housing pressures and become actively involved in the delivery of additional housing to meet local demands and to incentivise improvements in the planning system. It will also continue to support new plan making and the frontline work of the planning system.

- 5.3 The Corporate Services, Regeneration and Technical Services Departments are committed to improvement in service delivery and this will be closely scrutinised through the management of the Local Development Scheme and by the Council's Performance Management Framework. However due to uncertainties over future year's allocations it is essential that any underspend of PDG should be carried forward for future years.
- 5.4 There is also a need to provide a clear audit trail for PDG spend and the Corporate Services, Technical Services and Regeneration Departments will discuss the appropriate budget measures with the Director of Finance.

6. Financial and Staffing Implications

- 6.1 The financial implications of the Planning Delivery Grant award are as set out in this report. Any further financial and staffing implications arising from the award of PDG will be reported to Members in due course.

7. Equal Opportunity Implications

- 7.1 There are no equal opportunity implications arising directly from this report.

8. Community Safety Implications

- 8.1 The development of an Empty Property Strategy will lead to a reduction in vacant land and buildings and a consequent reduction in anti-social behaviour associated with such sites.

9. Local Agenda 21 Implications

- 9.1 The award of Planning Delivery Grant will allow for improvement in the provision of planning services to Wirral's residents. These will enable due account to be taken of environmental issues in plan-making and development control.

10. Local Member Support Implications

10.1 This report has no specific ward member implications.

11. Human Rights Implications

11.1 There are no human rights implications arising directly from this report.

12. Anti-Poverty Implications

12.1 There are no known anti-poverty implications arising directly from this report.

13. Social Inclusion Implications

13.1 There are no known social inclusion implications arising directly from this report.

14. Background Papers

14.1 The following background paper was used in the preparation of this report:

The Planning Delivery Grant Determination 2007, No. 31/585, Department for Communities and Local Government August 2007.

15. Recommendation

15.1 Members are asked to note the award of Planning Delivery Grant 2007/08 and to recommend to Cabinet that the apportionment of the grant between the three Departments is agreed as outlined in the report.

D Green

Director of Technical Services

This report was prepared by Matthew Davies of the Development Control Section in Technical Services Department who can be contacted on 606 2246 and Richard Lewis of the Forward Planning Section in Corporate Services Department who can be contacted on 691 8222.