

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 4 October 2023

Present:

Councillor P Stuart (Chair)

Councillors	J Robinson	H Cameron
	P Gilchrist	S Mountney
	EA Grey	L Rennie
	A Davies	P Cleary
	S Powell-Wilde	H Gorman
	T Jones	J Bird
	JE Green	J McManus (In place of J Williamson)

46 **WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting as well as those watching the webcast. A minute silence was held in memory of those affected by the tragic school bus crash on the M53 the week before.

47 **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received by Councillor Janette Williamson, with Councillor Julie McManus in attendance as a substitute.

48 **MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Members were asked to consider whether they have any disclosable pecuniary interests and/or any other relevant interest in connection with any item(s) on this agenda and, if so, to declare them and state the nature of the interest.

Councillors Jean Robinson and Jeff Green declared personal interests as Directors of Wirral Growth Company.

49 **MINUTES**

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 12 September 2023 be approved as a correct record.

50 **PUBLIC AND MEMBER QUESTIONS**

There were no public questions, statements, petitions or questions by members.

BUDGET REPORT

The Director of Finance introduced the report which provided an update on the budgets within the remit of the Committee and across all the Policy & Service Committees, in respect of the in-year position and the anticipated pressures for future years that were being considered within the Medium Term Financial Plan.

It was highlighted that there was slippage on the delivery of savings as forecast in Q2, but that the revenue budget forecast was a balanced position for Adult Care & Health and Children, Families & Education directorates which was not a position reflected across the country. The Director of Finance further highlighted that Table 5 in the report outlined the assumed budget gap for future years and detailed the potential difficulties in balancing the budget in those future years, but that there was still very limited information available in relation to the future of local government funding, social care grants and business rates retention.

Members discussed the delivery of the savings and welcomed that 93% of the savings were on track. It was requested that savings continually not delivered be reviewed. A further discussion was had in relation to the assumption that the funding gap for the Birkenhead Commercial District would be met from Wirral Growth Company profits in year where the Director of Finance outlined that this was an assumption and the Committee was not being asked to agree the use of that funding at this point.

It was moved by Councillor Paul Stuart, seconded by Councillor Jeff Green, that the recommendations as detailed in the report be agreed.

An amendment was then moved by Councillor Pat Cleary, seconded by Councillor Jo Bird, that the officer recommendations be agreed with the following two further resolutions:

'5. Policy and Resources Committee requests the Director of Finance to assess the lessons to be learned from Wirral Council's experience of governance, costs and benefits of Wirral Growth Company and report back with recommendation to Policy & Resources Committee.

6. Policy and Resources Committee requests the Director of Finance to assess the costs and benefits of Birkenhead Commercial District following project close on 31 March 2024, and report back with recommendations to Audit and Risk Management Committee and Policy and Resources Committee.'

Councillors Jean Robinson and Jeff Green left the room due to their interests as Directors of Wirral Growth Company and took no part in the discussion or vote.

Following a brief discussion, the amendment was put to the vote and lost (4:9).

The officer recommendations as detailed in the report were then put to the vote and carried (13:0). It was therefore –

Resolved – That

- (1) the report be noted.**
- (2) the indicative resources, pressures and required savings be noted.**
- (3) Policy and Services Committees be requested to undertake budget workshops during October to review savings proposals and mitigating actions, with a view to feeding back the outcomes of the workshops to this Committee.**
- (4) the Director with portfolio, in consultation with the Finance Sub-Committee, be authorised to undertake any required service consultations that are linked to budget policy options being brought forward, in line with the timetable to enable a budget recommendation in February 2024.**

52 **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chair introduced the work programme which provided the Committee with an opportunity to plan and regularly review its work across the municipal year. Members considered the proposed items for the following three meetings and noted that there was a significant number of items due for consideration at the 8 November meeting. The Committee therefore requested that Committee Services consider the reordering of items to balance the workload across the forthcoming meetings.

Councillor Jo Bird requested that a report be brought to a future meeting on the cost of paying the Real Living Wage to all staff who provide Council services. It was highlighted that a briefing note had already been provided on this matter, but that this request was for a figure on how much it would cost. The Chief Executive outlined that due to the significant number of contractors involved, the work to acquire this figure may be complex and take some time to complete.

Following a discussion, the proposal was formally moved by Councillor Jo Bird and seconded by Councillor Pat Cleary. The motion was put the vote and lost (4:11). The Chair then sought the Committee's agreement to note the work programme. It was therefore –

Resolved – That the work programme be noted.

53 **BIRKENHEAD COMMERCIAL DISTRICT AND CHESHIRE LINES**

The Chair introduced the item and outlined that some of the information pertaining to it was exempt and therefore sought the Committee's consent to proceed with a public debate until the point at which questions needed to be raised in relation to exempt information.

The Director of Regeneration and Place then introduced the report, which provided recommendations to enable delivery of the phase 2 internal fit out works of the two new office buildings in central Birkenhead following the handover on 1st September 2023, and the exiting of the Council current main office at Cheshire Lines Building. The report also set out options for the future location of the Records and Archives Service and the data centre.

The Committee discussed the future of the archive service and encouraged its continued accessibility for members of the public. Members further discussed the reasons for the exemption of some of the information, where the Director of Regeneration and Place outlined that the information was the subject of commercial negotiations for fit out and marketing.

On a motion by Councillor Paul Stuart, seconded by Councillor Angie Davies, 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 paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A (as amended) to that Act. The Public Interest test has been applied and favours exclusion.

The matter was then debated in the exempt session. On a motion by Councillor Jo Bird, seconded by Councillor Paul Stuart, it was –

Resolved – That

- (1) the projected maximum capital costs for the full programme of works in relation to the Birkenhead Commercial District and the potential relocation of the Archives, Records Management, and other services within the Cheshire Lines building as summarised in Table 1 within the exempt Appendix 1 to this report be noted.**
- (2) the Director of Regeneration and Place be authorised to award and agree a Joint Contracts Tribunal (JCT) contract and execution of:**

- a. Associated CAT B (fit out) capital works for building A1 and A2 within Birkenhead Commercial District with Overbury PLC at an indicative value as set out in Table 1 to the exempt Appendix 1 of this report with a works period of on or about 16 weeks commencing on or about 4th November 2023;
- b. Delivery of any further necessary IT Infrastructure or other works within the same contract subject to any required approvals under the Council's Contract Procedure Rules

(3) the Director of Regeneration and Place in consultation with Director of Finance and Director of Law and Governance b authorised to:

- a. Negotiate and enter a lease of the basement space at Cheshire Lines building for the Archive & Record Management Service and Council Data Centre with the parameters set out at paragraph 3.2 of the exempt Appendix 1 to this report;
- b. In the event that the lease of the basement space at Cheshire Lines building does not progress, approve immediate implementation of a secondary serviced option to decant the Archives and records service to a verified external storage company;

(4) Authorise the Director of Regeneration and Place with the Director of Finance to negotiate and enter into subleases for space at the Birkenhead Commercial District sites.

54 **URGENT ITEM - PATHFINDER INVESTMENT PLAN**

The Chair agreed that an urgent item of business could be considered as the item required an urgent decision in the public interest which could not be dealt with by other means.

It was reported that the deadline for submission of the Pathfinder Investment Plan to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities was 20 October 2023, and that due to the complexity of the work, the Director of Regeneration and Place had been unable to bring a report to the Committee.

Members were asked to consider whether they wished to hold an additional meeting of Policy & Resources to consider this item urgently, or delegate authority to the Director of Regeneration and Place in consultation with Group Leaders to finalise and submit the Investment Plan prior to bringing a further report back in November 2023.

On a motion by Councillor Paul Stuart, seconded by Councillor Jeff Green, it was –

Resolved (12:3) – That

The Director of Regeneration and Place, in consultation with Group Leaders, be given delegated authority to submit the Pathfinder Investment Plan to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities by 20 October 2023.