

ECONOMY REGENERATION & HOUSING COMMITTEE

Monday, 14 October 2024

Present: Councillor T Jones (Chair)

Councillors GJ Davies J Johnson (for A
A Davies Gardener)
M Skillicorn J Bird
P Martin (for G E Lamb
Wood) E Tomeny
A Hodson H Raymond

107 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

The Chair opened the meeting and reminded everyone that the meeting was being webcast, and a copy was retained on the Council's website for two years.

108 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Gill Wood and Andrew Gardener. Councillors Paul Martin and Jenny Johnson were in attendance as substitutes.

109 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

Councillor Andrew Hodson gave a personal explanation with regard to item 6. Commissioning Plan for Homeless Accommodation / Support Services, that he was on the Board for the YMCA, but on advice from the Lead Principal Lawyer, was not declaring a personal or prejudicial interest.

Councillor Paul Martin declared a prejudicial interest in item 6. Commissioning Plan for Homeless Accommodation / Support Services, by virtue of his employment. He indicated that he would leave the chamber during the debate on this item.

Councillor Ed Lamb declared a prejudicial interest in item 9. Freeport Seed Capital Funding, by virtue of his business links. He indicated that he would leave the chamber during the debate on this item.

110 **MINUTES**

Resolved –That the minutes of the meeting held on 16 September 2024 be approved as a correct record.

111 **PUBLIC AND MEMBER QUESTIONS**

No questions, statements or petitions from the public or Councillors had been received.

112 **COMMISSIONING PLAN FOR HOMELESS ACCOMMODATION / SUPPORT SERVICES**

The Supported Housing and Homelessness Senior Manager presented the report of the Director of Regeneration and Housing. The report noted that the Commissioning Plan for Homeless Accommodation/Support Services sought to prevent homelessness through the commissioning of a range of services that met individual needs of people, and which enabled long term independence. The aim was to improve outcomes for some of the borough's most vulnerable residents and would proactively respond to how inequalities impact people's lives, and commission services to reduce the inequalities gap. The Council's approach to commissioning would be outcome focused and evidence-based, underpinned by a strong commitment to partnership and collaborative working.

The report explained that the proposals set out in the Commissioning plan were intended to cover the period August 2024 to January 2026 and were intended to enable essential homeless services to continue to be delivered, whilst the five-year statutory review of homelessness within the borough was undertaken, the findings of which would inform future commissioning activity in the longer term.

Members thanked the Supported Housing and Homelessness Senior Manager for the report. They noted that the report stated that more people requiring housing were presenting with complex issues and were glad that this would be the focus of review.

Members asked for further information on the procurement of service providers and were assured that all providers had been through the Council's tendering processes. The Supported Housing and Homelessness Senior Manager noted that some contracts had been extended rather than re-tendered for due to uncertainty in the market but all contracts had been out to tender originally.

Members raised that the report stated the number of cases of homelessness had fallen in Wirral and queried if that was the current picture and whether things were improving overall.

The Supported Housing and Homelessness Senior Manager responded that finding affordable accommodation for single people was difficult with social landlords reporting the lowest available stock in recent history,

Members discussed their preference for mixed accommodation with a diverse range of people in properties.

The Director of Regeneration and Place stated that while going through the Masterplan process in various areas, a key point that was being discussed was how the Council would develop the best tenant/occupier mix. He noted that this was something officers were looking at in further detail.

Resolved – That

- 1. The Commissioning Plan for Homeless accommodation/support services as set out in Appendix 1 to this report be approved; and**
- 2. The Director of Regeneration and Place be authorised to proceed with procurement exercises in relation to the service types currently carried out by Service Providers B, C, D, E, F, G, H and I as set out in Annex B to the Commissioning Plan for Homeless accommodation / support services.**

113 EXEMPT INFORMATION - EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Resolved – That, under section 100 (A) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the following item be deemed to be exempt from publication on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined by paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A (as amended) to that Act.

114 DOCK BRANCH LINE - AQUISITION UPDATE

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Regeneration and Place which gave an update on the acquisition of Dock Branch Line.

After a debate and the Director having responded to questions from Members, it was –

Resolved – That both options listed within the recommendations of the report be referred to the Policy and Resources Committee for consideration.

115 FREEPORT SEED CAPITAL FUNDING

The Head of Regeneration Delivery presented the report of the Director of Regeneration and Place. The report provided an update on the proposal for Freeport Seed Capital funding, for which the Liverpool City Region (LCR) Combined Authority was the accountable body. Peel Waters had developed an Outline Business Case which would be considered by the LCR Innovation Zone and Freeport Management Board for potential allocation of circa £8m of Freeport Seed Capital funding. If successful, this would result in key enabling and infrastructure works being delivered at the proposed MEA Park West site in Wirral Waters. Completion of those enabling works would ultimately enable Peel to bring forward over 170,000 square feet of new industrial employment floorspace at that site in future.

The report sought support, in principle, for Peel Waters taking forward an Outline Business Case for consideration by the LCR Innovation Zone and Freeport Management Board as the first stage in progress towards securing Freeport Seed Capital funding. Freeport Seed Capital Funding would bring about key enabling and infrastructure works at the MEA Park West site.

Members discussed the way that business rates within the Freeport Zone in Wirral was required to stay within the zone and could not be used elsewhere in the borough.

The Principal Lead Lawyer stated that the methodology for the use of non-domestic rates had been set by the Policy and Resources Committee in March 2024, which had agreed that business rates from within the Freeport Zone would be held in ring-fenced reserve, which would deal with investment in approved projects, future repayment of capital borrowing for investments, annual costs to resource the administration and management of the Freeport Investment Fund and the pro-rata annual contribution to the LCR Combined Authority.

Members approved of the potential increase in employment the Freeport would create and the links that it was making with Wirral Metropolitan College. They raised concerns that some of those jobs might displace jobs from elsewhere in the borough.

The Head of Regeneration Delivery assured Members that a key principle of the Gateways Authority was to avoid displacing jobs.

Members queried whether any new jobs created could be guaranteed to pay the living wage.

The Head of Regeneration Delivery noted that the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority was the responsible body in terms of employment requirements.

Resolved – That the progression of the Peel Waters Outline Business Case due to be considered by the LCR Innovation Zone and Freeport Management Board as the first stage in progressing towards securing Freeport Seed Capital funding be supported in principle.

116 **COUNCIL PLAN PERFORMANCE REPORT QUARTER 1 2024-25 THEME: PEOPLE FOCUSED REGENERATION**

The Director of Regeneration and Place presented a report which provided a quarterly performance report in relation to the Council Plan: Wirral Working Together 2023-27.

Following the approval of the Council Plan a performance management framework was developed through working group activity with members from all Policy Committees and Planning and Resources Committee between February and April 2024. A reporting approach was approved providing quarterly reporting on the measures identified in the framework. Each Policy Committee would receive a report related to their key theme, for Economy Regeneration and Housing Committee this is the 'People focused regeneration' theme. In the reporting cycle once individual Policy Committees had reviewed their key theme reports they would then be referred up to Policy and Resources Committee to provide that committee with one complete performance report for all themes of the Council Plan. The reporting provided the most recent performance for the measures and included performance context and mitigations in place where underperformance is identified.

Members discussed the highlights and concerns of the regeneration programme. The Director of Regeneration and Place noted that he was pleased with the work undertaken by his services and that real progress had been made on a number of key areas.

Resolved – That the report be noted and referred to the Policy and Resources Committee,

117 **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Lead Principal Lawyer presented the report on behalf of the Chair of the Committee. Members were informed that the work programme should align with the corporate priorities of the Council, in particular the delivery of the key decisions which are within the remit of the Committee.

Resolved - That the Economy Regeneration and Housing Committee work programme for the remainder of the 2024/25 municipal year be agreed.