

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 11 December 2024

Present:

Councillor	P Stuart (Chair)	
Councillors	G Jenkinson	T Jones
	J Robinson	J McManus
	JE Green	I Lewis
	P Gilchrist	S Mounthey
	P Cleary	L Rennie
	EA Grey	J Bird
	A Davies	S Bennett

61 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting as well as those watching the webcast.

62 APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence. The Chair informed Members that Councillor Gail Jenkinson had replaced Councillor Harry Gorman as a permanent member of the Committee.

63 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 item on the agenda and, if so, to declare them and state the nature of the interest.

Councillor Jean Robinson and Councillor Jeff Green both declared an interest as members of Wirral Growth Company.

64 MINUTES

The Chair informed Members that he had a question relating to minute 53 of the Budget Monitoring Report, which referred to ongoing discussions with the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) in relation to addressing the Council's in-year budget challenges. The Chair asked the Director of Finance to update Members on the discussions with MHCLG.

The Director of Finance informed Members that a submission for exceptional financial support had been completed, which included a provisional request for up to £20m of financial support for the 2024/25 financial year. This request was subject to approval by MHGLC.

Members discussed the budget pressures and request for financial support. The Chair noted his thanks to Group Leaders for attending the finance working group and by supporting the Director of Finance with his conversations with MHGLC.

On a Motion by Councillor Paul Stuart, Seconded by Councillor Jeff Green it was,

Resolved – that Committee resolves to support Section 151 officer in the Council’s application to MHCLG in seeking exceptional financial support to address the in-year budget position.

The Chair then asked Members to approve the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 6 November 2024

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 6 November 2024 be approved as a correct record.

65 PUBLIC AND MEMBER QUESTIONS

The Chair advised that one Member question had been received.

66 QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS

Councillor Liz Grey asked a question relating to an increase in service charges proposed by the Social Landlord Magenta Living. Cllr Grey noted residents’ concerns who had never faced service charges before or an increase in fees, which they can ill afford and stated that the proposed increase was disproportionate to inflation and may impact Wirral’s more vulnerable residents.

Councillor Grey asked the Chair if he could contact Magenta Living to seek clarification on the proposed charges and ask that they limit any total cost increases to reflect government guidelines. Councillor Grey also asked if the Leader could make enquires with the Head of Revenues and Benefits regarding any cost implications for the Council via Housing Benefit Support.

The Chair confirmed he would write to Magenta Living and share any responses with Members and MPs. Members were also informed that the letter would be co-signed by the Chair of Economy, Regeneration and Housing Committee who spoke to comment that no consultation with elected Members had been received.

67 **MOSSLANDS SCHOOL NEW BUILD UPDATE**

The Chair informed Members that in order to assist with the order of business, he proposed that agenda item 7,9 & 10 be considered first and agenda item 6 & 8 be considered last to allow the Committee to move into exempt session, if required.

The Director of Children, Family and Education introduced this report, which was further to a successful application to the Department for Education (DFE) as part of the priority school build programme to rebuild the Mosslands High School.

The DFE had taken responsibility for the new build programme for the school through this approach but would not invest in any works which sat outside of the red line boundary of the school.

The existing school did not have sufficient dedicated outside space and playing facilities and had made use of part of the adjacent Wallacre site for grass sports.

The report outlined the investment required in the surrounding green spaces and associated financial implications.

In order to reinstate the playing pitch provision on the remaining Wallacre land, that sat to the south of the proposed new school, and to address the ongoing issues with flooding in this area, groundworks were required to the remaining section of the Wallacre site.

The report outlined the requirement for funding to support the re-purposing of the Wallacre and Cross Lane sites to enable a new-build Mosslands School.

At this stage a cost estimate of £3.09m was in place, across the 2025/26 and 2026/27 financial years and the report set out a request for funding for this amount.

Members discussed the report and queried several aspects including the location of the playing pitches, the capital funding and level of public consultation undertaken.

On a motion by Councillor Paul Stuart, duly seconded, it was,

Resolved – that,

- 1. That the Policy and Resources Committee recommends to Council the approval of provisional funding of £3.09 million to be earmarked to deliver the works required at the land adjacent to Cross Lane and the remaining Wallacre site to the south of the proposed new Mosslands school.**
- 2. Subject to confirmation that the draft local plan position is maintained, P&R committee will allow the decision to proceed. If this proves not to be the case, officers will liaise with chair, P&R spokespersons and Wallasey Ward Councillors.**

68 COUNCIL PLAN PERFORMANCE REPORT QUARTER 1 2024-25

The Head of Corporate Office presented this 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. The Policy and Resources Committee would receive a full report on all six themes of the plan and each Policy Committee would receive a report related to their key theme. The reporting provided the most recent performance for the measures and included performance context and mitigations in place where underperformance was identified.

Members discussed how the data sets were presented within the packs, requesting that future versions be presented with more benchmarking detail. Also queried was the age of some of the data presented. Members were informed that some of the data comes from outside organisations such as the Office of National Statistics.

Members also requested that future performance reporting also included risk performance and that Members feedback be included in future reports.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

69 **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chair presented the report, and informed Members that the Committee was responsible for proposing and delivering an annual committee work programme. It was reported 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.

It was envisaged that the work programme would be formed from a combination of key decisions, standing items and requested officer reports. The report provided the Committee with an opportunity to plan and regularly review its work across the municipal year. The work programme for the Policy and Resources Committee was attached as Appendix 1 to the report.

The Chair requested that the Risk Register be added to the work programme.

Resolved – That Policy and Resources Committee notes the proposed Policy and Resources Committee work programme with the above addition.

70 **STRATEGIC ASSET DISPOSAL UPDATE**

The Director of Regeneration and Place introduced this report, the purpose of which was to provide and update on the current disposal programme which was approved at Policy and Resources committee on 12 July 2023.

The report sought approval to declare further assets as surplus to requirements and to add them to the disposal programme. The disposal programme would generate capital receipts which would help the council in delivering a number of the priorities of the Wirral Plan 2021-26.

At a meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee on 9th November 2022, the Council approved the Asset Strategy 2022-2027. The strategy identified the need to establish a 5-year strategic property asset disposal programme.

To demonstrate to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government that the Council had sufficient assets for disposal, the Council had to demonstrate that it could meet the capitalisation sum. The Capitalisation Directives of 2020/21 and 2021/22 were granted following an application to permit the use of capital streams to fund revenue expenditure incurred by the Council in respect of the pressures or income losses emanating from financial pressures.

In response to this, a review was undertaken of the Council's assets and a list of assets was prepared for disposal to the Policy and Resources Committee at its meeting of 12th July 2023. At that meeting, Members approved the disposal of 24 assets. In addition, the report also identified assets which were already in the disposal programme.

Members discussed various aspects of the report, specifically Europa Boulevard, the Vue Cinema, Pyramids and Grange Shopping Centre.

At this point in the discussion it was suggested that these assets were subject to commercial sensitivity and therefore should be discussed in a closed session.

It was therefore, 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.

Following a discussion, it was confirmed that whilst it had been assumed that the purchase price for these assets had yet to be publicly released, they had been included in the Treasury Management Report presented to the Policy and Resources Committee in February 2024.

Members then discussed various assets such as Bromborough Library, Pennant House and Old Hall Road Sites as well as querying the balance remaining on previous capitalisation loans.

The meeting returned to public session, and the Committee apologised to Councillor Bird and a Member of the press for the misunderstanding.

Resolved – That,

- (1) the position of the current disposal programme be noted.**
- (2) The following assets be declared surplus to requirements;**
 - Conway Centre, Conway Street, Birkenhead**
 - Ivy Farm Cottage, Arrowe Park**
 - Pennant House, The Village, Bebington**
 - Land at Upton Bypass, Upton**
 - Former Laser Engineering Centre, Campbeltown, Birkenhead**

- (3) **The Director of Regeneration and Place, in consultation with the Director of Law and Corporate Services, be authorised to:**
- (a) **Consider and determine any responses or objections to the sale of any of the assets listed at recommendation 2 above which are considered to be open space as defined by Section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972 and progress and conclude sales of the assets on the best terms reasonably possible;**
 - (b) **Consider and determine any responses or objections to the sale of the land comprising open space at Old Clatterbridge Road, Bebington as defined by Section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972 and to progress the sale of the land at Old Clatterbridge Road, Bebington to the residents on the terms set out in paragraph 3.14 of the report; and**
 - (c) **Progress with a procurement process for the appointment of a development partner to deliver affordable housing on Bebington Town Hall and former Council offices, Seaview Road, Liscard, and appoint the best performing bidder(s).**

71 **COMMERCIAL PROPERTY UPDATE**

The report of the Director of Regeneration and Place provided an update on the performance of the Council's commercial estate.

The report sought to present a review of the performance of the facilities, namely the Grange and Pyramids Shopping Centre, the Europa Centre, the Vue Cinema and the Mallory and Irvine Buildings.

Resolved – That Policy and Resources Committee notes the update report on the performance of the Council's commercial estate.

72 **EXEMPT INFORMATION - EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

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.

73 STRATEGIC ASSET DISPOSAL UPDATE - EXEMPT APPENDICES

Resolved – That Policy and Resources Committee notes the exempt appendices to the report.

74 COMMERCIAL PROPERTY UPDATE - EXEMPT APPENDICES

Resolved – That Policy and Resources Committee notes the exempt appendices to the report.