

# ECONOMY REGENERATION & HOUSING COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 12 March 2025

Present:

Councillor T Jones (Chair)

Councillors	GJ Davies	A Gardner
	A Davies	J Bird
	M Skillicorn	E Lamb
	A Hodson	E Tomeny
	A Gardner	H Raymond

## 139 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

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

## 140 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Gill Wood. Councillor Paul Stuart was in attendance as a substitute.

## 141 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

Councillor Helen Raymond declared a personal but non prejudicial interest in relation to item 8. Housing Standards Enforcement Policy as she was a landlord with property in Wirral.

Councillor Ed Lamb declared a personal but non prejudicial interest in relation to item 13. Regeneration Programme Update as he had a business client related to the Northside Master Plan development area.

Councillor Mark Skillicorn declared a personal but non prejudicial interest in relation to item 8. Housing Standards Enforcement Policy as he was a landlord with property in Wirral.

Councillor Jo Bird declared a personal but non-prejudicial interest as she lived near the Woodside area.

142 **MINUTES**

**Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 20 January 2025 be approved as a correct record.**

143 **PUBLIC AND MEMBER QUESTIONS**

143.1 **Public Questions**

Anthony Wright submitted a question, which was read out by the Lead Principal Lawyer on his behalf which asked:

“What is the cost to taxpayers and the projected time scale for the work on Birkenhead Market? As a local resident who visits frequently and witnesses the rapid decline of shops closing weekly or monthly, I question whether the cost and timeline justify the market’s ongoing decline.”

The Chair responded that Information on the cost to taxpayers was set out in the decision made by the ER&H committee on the 27<sup>th</sup> March 2024. The project used Grant Funding provided by central government. The timeline for the completion of the physical works to the new market was early 2026.

John Heath asked the following question on behalf of the Wirral Green Space Alliance:

“In the light of the Council's current financial difficulties and its possible temptation to either encourage or allow by default, early Green Belt release to boost revenues, will the Committee assure us that the Council will continue both to make every effort to:

1. demonstrate it has a robust 5-Year Housing Supply, and also
2. pursue by all means at its disposal, its Urban Regeneration Strategy, as set out in the Local Plan, given this is the only foreseeable opportunity there will be to regenerate Birkenhead?”

The Chair responded that the Council fully intended to robustly maintain a 5-year housing supply of land to support the delivery of the Local Plan and was therein committed to delivering the regeneration of Birkenhead.

Mr Heath asked a supplementary question which queried when the Council was going to deliver projects as planned, to cost and on time in order to build public confidence.

The Chair responded that an answer would be provided to Mr Heath in writing.

Rodd Tann asked the following question on behalf of the Wirral Green Space Alliance:

“The Wirral Regeneration Partnership Board (WRPB) is set to meet on a quarterly basis. If its role is set to be a key part of a dynamic structure to approve bringing multiple projects, it seems this would slow rather than accelerate delivery.

What progress is being made in completing the WRPB Membership in accordance with its Terms of Reference, which makes provision for - a) a Voluntary Organisation representative, and b)...other members to be recruited, quote ToR...' to support the Board in areas of business, placemaking, inward investment & communications?”

The Chair responded that the Wirral Regeneration Partnership met in shadow form in March 2024, following this a thorough recruitment process was undertaken resulting in the appointment of a highly experienced regeneration professional. There had now been three meetings of the Partnership the focus has been on the development of the Outline Business Case being presented to the Policy and Resource Committee next week at its meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> March. The Partnership recognise the need to undertake further recruitment to complete its membership and will commence this process following consideration of this report next week.

Whilst the Terms of Reference set out regularity of meetings being quarterly, this is a minimum and the partnership are committed to a dynamic approach to business, additional meetings will take place in response to business need.

Mr Tann asked a supplementary question which asked whether it was essential for Wirral Council to follow Liverpool City Council's lead in establishing a private sector led regeneration partnership and Urban Development Corporation to advise on how best to deliver the many regeneration opportunities set out in the Birkenhead 2024 document and to safeguard the greenbelt.

The Chair responded that an answer would be provided to Mr Tann in writing.

#### **143.2 Statements and Petitions**

Dean Paton delivered a statement on behalf of Big Heritage regarding agenda item 10. Simplification Pathfinder Pilot Programme – Review of the Programme. He stated that he felt Big Heritage was on target and within budget to create a once in a generation scheme with the creation of an International Battle of the Atlantic Museum at one end of Woodside, and a new Transport Museum at the other.

He noted that he was dismayed that the council's regeneration team no longer felt that Big Heritage could deliver the scheme and that they were recommending the reallocation of funding from the scheme to other projects such as Birkenhead Market.

He felt that the people of Birkenhead deserved to see Big Heritage's projects come to fruition as they would benefit the area with what he described as 'Gold Star Regeneration'. He stated that if Members agreed the recommendations in agenda item 10 he would not accept the funding being offered to Big Heritage.

### 143.3 Questions by Members

The Chair informed the committee that no questions had been received by Members.

### 144 **ADOPTION OF BIRKENHEAD CENTRAL MASTERPLAN AND NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK, AND ST WERBURGH'S QUARTER MASTERPLAN**

interim regeneration strategy for Wirral in March 2022. This document set out that delivery of the Birkenhead 2040 Framework would be supported by more detailed Neighbourhood Frameworks and Masterplans setting out the regeneration objectives and strategies for specific areas. Policy WS6.3 of the emerging Local Plan also required Masterplans to be approved for specified areas to ensure that development was coordinated at neighbourhood level and comprehensively planned.

Two of these documents were detailed in the report, both of which were recommended for adoption:

1. Birkenhead Central Masterplan and Neighbourhood Development Framework, and;
2. St Werburgh's Quarter (Birkenhead) Masterplan

The adopted Masterplans would be a material consideration in the consideration of any planning applications submitted within the masterplan boundary. The Masterplans were a dynamic long-term planning document that offers a vision and theoretical layout to 'guide' future regeneration and growth within a neighbourhood, making the connection between buildings, social settings, and their surrounding environments.

Members thanked officers for the report and were enthused by the work that was happening. They queried whether there were any plans to develop a new strategy for the Scott's Quay site after the Neighbourhood Framework was withdrawn for it.

The Assistant Director, Chief Regeneration Officer responded that there was no requirement for a Masterplan at this site, however, this did not preclude further development work there.

Members raised that they had a lot of feedback from local businesses about the level of disruption some of the work in Birkenhead had created and highlighted the importance of good communication. They mentioned that the Masterplans were excellent but Members were keen to see physical work starting so that the public could start to see the benefits of the regeneration plans.

**Resolved – That the adoption of the following documents be approved as the Council’s dynamic long-term planning and regeneration strategy for the relevant areas:**

- 1. Birkenhead Central Masterplan and Neighbourhood Development Framework; and**
- 2. St Werburgh’s Quarter (Birkenhead) Masterplan**

145 **APPENDICES TO ADOPTION OF BIRKENHEAD CENTRAL AND NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK AND ST WERBURGH'S QUARTER MASTERPLAN**

The Committee noted the appendices to the Adoption of Birkenhead Central and Neighbourhood Development Framework and St Werburgh’s Quarter Masterplan.

146 **LISCARD LEVELLING UP FUND 3 PROGRAMME**

The Assistant Director, Chief Regeneration Officer presented the report on behalf of the Director of Regeneration and Place which stated that the purpose of the report was to seek approval to progress with the Liscard Levelling Up Fund (LUF3) programme as a standalone programme and to seek authority for the Director of Regeneration & Place to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding which included the Liscard Levelling Up Fund allocation within its scope.

If the proposals set out in this report were ultimately approved by Policy and Resources Committee this would have the effect of negating the previous resolution of Policy and Resources Committee to submit the addendum to the Simplification Pathfinder Investment Plan to the UK Government for approval and include the Liscard Levelling Up Fund programme within the Simplification Pathfinder Pilot Board’s remit (20 March 2024, Minute 126, resolutions 2 and 4 refer).

Members queried whether the Liscard representative on the Pathfinder Board would be removed from the Board as the Liscard Levelling Up fund was now outside the Pathfinder Project.

The Lead Principal Lawyer responded that the terms of reference for the Pathfinder Board were within the control of the Policy and Resources Committee who would need to review them to make such changes.

Members asked about the uncertainty within the report on whether a new community hub would be viable and asked for further detail.

The Assistant Director – Chief Regeneration Officer responded that officers were still working on the options for how a community hub might be delivered, she noted that they were looking at a number of locations within Liscard and options for who the operator might be.

### **Resolved – That**

#### **1. Policy and Resources Committee be requested to recommend that:**

**a. the Liscard Levelling Up Fund programme be progressed as a standalone programme and not incorporated into the remit of the Simplification Pathfinder Pilot Board; and**

**b. the Director of Regeneration and Place be authorised to:**

**i. enter into a Memorandum of Understanding regarding the Liscard Levelling Up Fund allocation, in consultation with the Director of Law and Corporate Services;**

**ii. progress delivery of the Liscard Levelling Up Fund Programme, in line with the Grant funding provision and the Approved Project as described under paragraph 3.5 of this report; and**

**iii. implement any necessary change control process in consultation with Economy, Regeneration & Housing Committee's Chair and group spokespersons.**

**2. the update regarding the Town Centre Regeneration and Public Realm Interventions and the Community Hub be noted.**

## **147 HOUSING STANDARDS ENFORCEMENT POLICY**

The Strategic Housing Services Senior Manager presented the report on behalf of the Director of Regeneration and Place which stated its purpose was to seek approval of a revised Wirral Borough Council Housing Standards Enforcement Policy, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report. The Council's

current overarching enforcement policy was approved by Policy and Resources Committee on 17th July 2024.

The policy provided guidance to Members, officers, property businesses, and the public, on:

- the Council's objectives;
- options available to achieve compliance; and
- criteria to be considered by the Council when deciding the appropriate response to a breach of housing standards.

The revised policy also provided the Council's Housing Standards service with a strategic delivery framework, which included working with third parties, internal and external agencies, with the expectation of establishing enhanced procedures and resourcing to deliver the requirements of the Policy.

The Housing Standards Enforcement Policy had been drafted to be read alongside the Council's Corporate Enforcement Policy providing more technical detail.

Members asked whether the rent repayment orders mentioned in the report were available to private renters and those on benefits.

The Strategic Housing Services Senior Manager replied that it was available to all renters. She noted that the Council would intervene with landlords that were paid via benefits, whereas private renters would have recourse to make their own applications for rent repayment and the housing team were available to give advice to this. She explained that for those renters that paid via benefits, the rent repayment would be received by the local authority as the payer.

Members questioned whether Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) received a special focus regarding enforcement activity.

The Housing Standards Manager responded that HMOs did receive a special focus in the same way that those properties within a Selected Licensing area and schools did. They receive a 3 year license and officers aimed to inspect all properties covered by this license so that they could intervene if any contraventions were found.

Members queried whether the enforcement policy would put additional workload on the housing team and if they had the capacity for this.

The Strategic Housing Services Senior Manager responded that the enforcement policy allowed for the issuing of civil penalty notices instead of more time consuming and costly court cases, she also noted that any profits made via penalty notices could be reinvested into the team.

Members noted that the Renters Rights Bill had not been passed into statute at this point and queried whether the enforcement policy might need to be redrafted if amendments were made to the Bill.

Strategic Housing Services Senior Manager replied that the Renter Rights Bill was due to be enacted within first half of 2025 and the first aspects to be brought into law were likely to be around tenancy protections. They were confident that the team could adapt as needed.

The Director and Members thanked those officers involved with the Housing Enforcement Policy for their work and for bringing it forward so quickly.

**Resolved – That the Housing Standards Enforcement Policy and associated Civil Penalty, Rent Repayment and Banking Order policies as contained within appendix 1 of the report be approved.**

#### 148 **UK SHARED PROSPERITY FUND**

The Assistant Director, Chief Regeneration Officer presented the report on behalf of the Director of Regeneration and Place which provided an update in respect of the Liverpool City Region UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) programme, the Council's 2025/26 allocation of £2,029,068 and sought approval of the Wirral Programme 2025/26.

The report also sought approval for the 12-month extension of the Worklessness Support Service contract delivered by Involve Northwest, funded from UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Public Health Grant of a contract value of £993,291.

It explained that the recommendations were considered to be urgent as there was a need to mobilise delivery of the worklessness support contract from 1 April 2025.

Members thanked officers for the report and noted that Involve Northwest had exceeded their contract performance expectations. They queried the figures on the number of people that had gone into training as it below target.

The Head of Economic Growth responded that this was started as a one-year contract which was unusual and that it was hard to ramp up delivery within a year. She noted that the targets on training were starting to be achieved and they had supported the council through recruitment companies and jobs fairs.

Members queried the capital funding aspect of the finances and asked for more detail on the community safety interventions and town centre infrastructure report.

The Head of Economic Growth responded that within the current program there was a capital budget for community safety initiatives such as alley gating and CCTV and that this would be continued at a lower level. She stated that the town centre infrastructure was for small scale public realm improvements such as new or improved street furniture or planting arrangements to improve the street scene.

Members queried if the town centre infrastructure support was available to any town.

The Head of Economic Growth replied that nothing had been agreed as yet and that the normal governance process would be used to determine which areas would receive the most focus.

Members asked about the support that was available to people that may struggle to hold down a job due to mental health issues.

The Head of Economic Growth responded that there was a distinction between those that were unemployed and economically inactive. Those that were economically inactive due to health reasons were not required to seek employment. She noted that there were no specific programmes to support people that were in work but struggled to maintain employment but would continue to look at all options the government offered.

#### **Resolved -That**

- 1. The Wirral allocation of UKSPF Funding from the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority of £2,029,068 be noted and the Wirral Programme as set out in section 3.9 of the report be approved;**
- 2. The Director of Regeneration and Place be authorised to negotiate final outputs and outcomes associated with the Wirral UKSPF Programme and commence delivery of the grant funding agreement outcomes and change control process;**
- 3. The 12-month extension of the Worklessness Support Service contract delivered by Involve Northwest funded from UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Public Health Grant of a contract value of £993,291 be approved; and**
- 4. The above decisions be deemed urgent and therefore not subject to the procedure for re-consideration.**

The Assistant Director, Chief Regeneration Officer presented the report on behalf of the Director of Regeneration and Place which stated that, further to the commitment by the Director of Regeneration and Place at the December 2024 meeting of this Committee, a review of projects within the Simplification Pathfinder Programme had been undertaken to further understand deliverability of schemes and to provide further assurance that the grant funding would be spent by the end of March 2026, in line with the Memorandum of Understanding between the Council and The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). Seven projects were selected to be reviewed as they presented a higher level of risk to delivery. Projects included in the review either forecast over the allocated budget or reported completion after the planned delivery date.

On 31st October 2024, MHCLG informed the Council of an opportunity to extend the end date of the Programme to March 2027. Ministerial approval was required. Extensions to projects would be by exception only. The potential for an extended delivery window had been considered in the review process to identify where an extension request would be required.

Progress had been made on delivery of the programme with £19m spent to date. Nonetheless, inflation on build cost and the overall economic position had an implication on the overall cost profile. As a consequence, it was imperative that more focus was provided on schemes that were already in delivery and had a prospect of being delivered.

The report set out a requirement for additional funding for:

1. Charing Cross & Grange Road, Conway & Europa Boulevard;
2. Birkenhead Market project, and
3. New Ferry Public Realm.

In addition, further to correspondence from Big Heritage CIC in December 2024 requesting an amendment to the scope of the Transport Museum project was considered, an updated Business Case was submitted on 12th January 2025. This Business Case was one of the seven projects included in this review process. This report considered that business case, the outcome of the review, and set out recommendations for reductions and reallocations within the programme

The Director of Regeneration and Place proposed a change to the recommendations published in the agenda. He proposed an additional paragraph under recommendation 7.C which read:

“c. re allocate funds up to the value of £1,500,000 into the Simplification Pathfinder Pilot programme for future re-allocation should a revised business case for the delivery of the renovation of Wirral Transport Museum not be submitted by 23 April 2025 and allocate such funds for other existing and eligible Simplification Pathfinder Pilot projects.”

Thus, making recommendation 7.C in the published agenda now recommendation 7.D and to include the word 'other' before the word 'funding' so that it would now read:

“d. re allocate any other funding that becomes available up to a value of £500,000 to ensure projects in delivery are provided with timely funding as appropriate.”

On a motion by Councillor George Davies, seconded by Councillor Paul Stuart, it was -

**Resolved (8 - 3) – That under section 100 (A) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item of business on the grounds that it involved 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 had been applied and favoured exclusion.**

Following a debate on the matter, on a motion by the Chair and seconded by Councillor George Davies, it was –

**Resolved (8 - 3) – That**

- 1. The resolution of Economy Regeneration and Housing Committee of 16th July 2024 to allocate £4,500,000 to Big Heritage CIC be rescinded.**
- 2. The award of grant funding in the sum of £750,000 to the Charing Cross & Grange Road, Conway & Europa Boulevard project be approved.**
- 3. The award of grant funding in the sum of £2,000,000 to the Birkenhead Market project be approved.**
- 4. The award of grant funding in the sum of £3,447,288 to the New Ferry Public Realm project be approved.**
- 5. The withdrawal of grant funding to the sum of £2,000,000 from the Price Street Car Park project be approved.**
- 6. The Transport Museum/Ticket to Ride proposed revised business case submitted by Big Heritage CIC not be approved.**
- 7. The Director of Regeneration and Place be authorised to:**

- a. submit to MHCLG an application for timescale extensions for the Waterfront Infrastructure and New Ferry projects;
- b. allocate by way of grant funding of up to a value of £1,500,000 to Big Heritage CIC for the delivery of the renovation of Wirral Transport Museum upon the submission of a revised business case; and
- c. re allocate funds up to the value of £1,500,000 into the Simplification Pathfinder Pilot programme for future re-allocation should a revised business case for the delivery of the renovation of Wirral Transport Museum not be submitted by 23 April 2025 and allocate such funds for other existing and eligible Simplification Pathfinder Pilot projects; and
- d. re allocate any other funding that becomes available up to a value of £500,000 to ensure projects in delivery are provided with timely funding as appropriate.

150 **2024/25 BUDGET MONITORING FOR QUARTER THREE (THE PERIOD TO 31 DECEMBER 2024)**

The Finance Manager (Place) presented the report on behalf of the Director of Regeneration and Place which set out the financial monitoring information for the Council as at Quarter 3 (31 December) of 2024/25. The report provided Members with an overview of budget performance, including progress on the delivery of the 2024/25 saving programme and a summary of reserves and balances, to enable the Committee to take ownership of the budgets and provide robust challenge and scrutiny to Officers on the performance of those budgets.

At the end of Quarter 3, there was a forecast favourable position of £450k against the £16.726m committee budget, by managing the use of grants and reserves to address the pressures being faced. This position was based on activity to date, projected trends in income and expenditure and changes to Council funding.

Members discussed the level of borrowing that the council would need to pay back as well as the costs involved in demolishing buildings, and asked how much of the Regeneration Capital Programme was funded by loans.

The Finance Manager (Place) replied that for the 2024-25 period, a little under £3m was from grants from the total budget for the programme of £41m. The remainder was from grant funding.

The Director of Regeneration and Place also noted that while there was cost up front for demolitions, once a property or asset was demolished, the council made revenue savings.

**Resolved – That**

**1. The Committee forecast of a £450k favourable position against a budget of £16.726m at Quarter 3, managed by utilising grants and earmarked reserves be noted;**

**2. The progress on delivery of the 2024/25 savings programme at Quarter 3 be noted;**

**3. the forecast level of reserves at Quarter 3 be noted; and**

**4. the capital position at Quarter 3 be noted.**

151 **COUNCIL PLAN PERFORMANCE REPORT QUARTER 3 2024-25 THEME PEOPLE FOCUSED REGENERATION**

The Director of Regeneration and Place presented a quarterly performance report in relation to the Council Plan: Wirral Working Together 2023-27 for the Theme people focused regeneration. The report provided an update on measures that have changed in the Quarter 3 period, October to December 2024.

Following the approval of the Council Plan a performance management framework was developed and 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 was the 'People focused regeneration' theme. The reporting provided the most recent performance for the measures and included performance context and mitigations in place where underperformance was identified.

**Resolved – that the report be noted and referred to the Policy and Resources Committee.**

152 **REGENERATION PROGRAMME UPDATE**

The Assistant Director, Chief Regeneration Officer presented the report on behalf of the Director of Regeneration and Place which provided the latest programme monitoring information for the Regeneration and Place Directorate. The design and content of the report was developed following an agreement to provide regular monitoring reports this Committee on an informative basis back in February 2024. The last report was presented to this Committee in September 2024.

The Assistant Director, Chief Regeneration Officer suggested holding a workshop for Members to further discuss the Regeneration Programme. This was agreed by Members.

Members debated the scope of the regeneration programme for areas of Birkenhead.

**Resolved – The report be noted.**

153 **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.

Members raised the Mass Transit Update item and asked for this to be arranged as soon as was possible.

The Director of Regeneration and Place agreed to find a date as quickly as possible.

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

154 **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 paragraphs 3 and 4 of Part I of Schedule 12A (as amended) to that Act. The Public Interest test had been applied and favoured exclusion:**

155 **SIMPLIFICATION PATHFINDER PILOT PROGRAMME - REVIEW OF THE PROGRAMME - EXEMPT APPENDIX**

The Committee noted the exempt appendix to the Simplification Pathfinder Pilot Programme – Review of the Programme.