

# ECONOMY AND REGENERATION OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 15 September 2010

<u>Present:</u>	Councillor	G Davies (Chair)	
	Councillors	E Boulton J Hale M Johnston S Kelly D Knowles	A Pritchard D Roberts J Stapleton I Williams
<u>In attendance:</u>	Councillor	A Hodson	
<u>Apologies</u>	Councillors	C Blakeley	

## 51 WELCOME

The Chair welcomed Kevin Adderley in his new position as Interim Director of Corporate Services.

## 52 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST/ PARTY WHIP

Members were asked to consider whether they had a personal or prejudicial interest in connection with any item on the agenda and, if so, to declare it and to state the nature of such interest. Members were reminded that they should also declare, pursuant to paragraph 18 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules, whether they were subject to a party whip in connection with the item to be considered and, if so, to declare it and state the nature of the whipping arrangement.

No such declarations were made.

## 53 MINUTES

Members were requested to receive the minutes of the meeting of the Economy and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 17 June, 2010.

**Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 17 June, 2010, be approved as a correct record.**

## 54 HOUSING STRATEGY - PRESENTATION

The Head of Housing and Regeneration gave a presentation on the Housing Strategy 2005-2010 which had four key aims:

- Improving the urban areas of Wirral through tackling low demand
- Providing affordable homes to maintain balanced communities
- Delivering Decent Homes

- Providing support for those who need it

In the presentation he also referred to some key issues, influencing factors, and priority choices.

In addition he circulated a briefing note on the new 15 year Housing Strategy 2011-2026 which outlined a number of significant changes which had occurred and which impacted on its development. These included the revocation of the Regional Spatial Strategy and regional housing targets, no spatial priorities and no firm direction of travel yet with regards to guidance on determining local housing targets. There was a need to re-establish the position with regards to housing numbers through the Core Strategy and he gave details of a two part consultation programme. A further report on the Draft Strategy would be brought to the Committee on 24 November.

The Interim Director responded to a number of comments from Members regarding:

- The work of the Empty Property Team in bringing empty properties back into use, of which there were now 6000 a rise from 5000 over 12 months. The Empty Property Strategy gave a breakdown of the different factors which led to properties being empty.
- Affordability which was a national issue and the need to lobby financial institutions to be more responsive in making finance available to first time buyers.
- Work to be done with RSLs for rented homes.
- The challenges of bringing the 3400 or so planning permissions for housing to completion.
- The factors affecting the bringing back into use of those empty properties which had had a different use and, which, although suitable for housing, did not now have planning permission as housing.

The Chair referred to the need for a fuller debate on the issue at the meeting of the Committee on 24 November to take account of both the Housing Strategy and the Strategic Housing Land Availability Strategy.

**Resolved – That the presentation be noted and a further report on the Housing Strategy be brought to the meeting on 24 November, 2010.**

## 55 QUARTER1 PERFORMANCE REPORT 2010/11

The Head of Housing and Regeneration gave a presentation on the first quarter performance and upon key activities which were relevant to the Economy and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

He gave details of what was working well, including:

- Invest Wirral had successfully supported 35 projects for businesses within Wirral.
- Good progress continued to be made to create and safeguard jobs in Wirral with 90 jobs created and 241 safeguarded in the first quarter.
- Total number of homes acquired, demolished, refurbished or built as a result of HMRI investment had exceeded its 1st Quarter target (100) by another 143 properties.
- Over £1 million generated at tourism events so far this year.

He also referred to some of the key risks, including:

- The fragile state of the wider economy which continued to be a significant source of uncertainty for local businesses. Initiatives such as Wirral Waters, Invest Wirral, "Think Big Grants" and the wider Economic Recovery Plan were helping to offset the impact to some degree. However, the response to the budget deficit was also now presenting a significant threat to priorities in this field in terms of changes to the welfare benefits system, the abolition of Regional Development Agencies in March 2010 and possible reductions in staff and services in the public sector. The 'Working Wirral' initiative, coherent activity by the partners and the Invest Wirral programme might help to counter some of the impact but it remained a major risk.
- A significant area of uncertainty was the future of programmes such as the National Affordable Housing Programme and the Housing Market Renewal Initiative. A review of housing market needs and housing strategy was to be undertaken to inform bids for the more limited funding that might be available.
- There was also uncertainty about funding for the Warm Front initiative. Eligibility criteria for this could also be narrowed, so that fewer households qualified for it. There was thought to be little that the Council and its partners could do to mitigate these risks.

With regard to the financial position, the Interim Director reported that there were currently no significant variations identified, relevant to this Committee.

Responding to Members' comments, the Interim Director stated that he would confirm the number of local Wirral businesses that had taken part in the recent Wirral Food Festival. He would also be happy to provide a breakdown of the various categories of apprenticeships which were being funded.

**Resolved – That the presentation be noted.**

56 **LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK FOR WIRRAL - RETAINED RETAIL CONSULTANCY**

The Interim Director of Corporate Services reported that, under his delegated powers, GVA Grimley had been appointed as Retained retail consultants in June this year following a request for quotation process.

The Council had made budgetary provision of up to £5,000 per year to cover the retained consultancy commission which would be funded from the Corporate Services Forward Planning budget.

**Resolved - That the Committee notes the appointment under delegated powers of GVA Grimley as the Council's retained retail consultants.**

57 **UPDATED WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee received an update on its work programme including reports to be scheduled for the next two meetings.

**Resolved – That the work programme be noted.**

58 **FORWARD PLAN**

The Committee had been invited to review the Forward Plan prior to the meeting in order for it to consider, having regard to the Committee's work programme, whether scrutiny should take place of any items contained within the Plan and, if so, how it could be done within relevant timescales and resources.

**Resolved – That the forward plan be noted.**

59 **ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS APPROVED BY THE CHAIR (PART 1)**

The Chair raised two items of urgent business:

(1) He drew Members' attention to a consultation event on the Choice Based Lettings document in the Civic Hall on 23 September from 9.00am to 1.00pm.

(2) He asked for more information on the establishment and work of the Economy and Regeneration and Living on Wirral Task Forces and specifically requested from the Interim Director of Corporate Services the following:

- (i) A standing item of the regular minutes of the Living in Wirral and the Economy and Regeneration Task Forces on this agenda for the duration of its existence.
- (ii) A report which sets out the process that was followed in the selection and appointment of the Task Force members.
- (iii) A copy of any register or declaration of interests by Task Force members.
- (iv) A presentation from officers on the element of the presentation that was originally given to the Task Force on housing, which has informed the questions on this area within the consultation questionnaire and a presentation that mirrors the presentation given to the Economy and Regeneration Task Force.
- (v) A detailed explanation from officers on the exact meaning and implication of each question concerning housing and of the implications of the statements in the Economy and Regeneration section.
- (vi) Any potential costings that may have been drawn up as part of the options being considered.

60 **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 item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined by the relevant paragraphs of Part I of Schedule 12A (as amended) to that Act. The public interest test had been applied and favoured exclusion.**

61 **REGENERATION UPDATE**

The Interim Director of Corporate Services provided an update on major development schemes within the borough.

**Resolved - That the report be noted.**