

# ECONOMY AND REGENERATION OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday, 14 March 2011

<u>Present:</u>	Councillor	G Davies (Chair)
	Councillors	J Keeley (In place of J Hale) S Mountney (In place of D Knowles) E Boulton M Johnston S Kelly
		A Pritchard D Roberts J Stapleton I Williams
<u>In attendance:</u>	Councillors	Councillor C Blakeley, Cabinet Member, Housing and Community Safety
<u>Apologies</u>	Councillors	Councillor J Hale Councillor D Knowles

## 72 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST/PARTY WHIP

Members were asked to consider whether they had personal or prejudicial interests in connection with any item(s) on this agenda and, if so, to declare them and state what they were.

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 any item(s) to be considered and, if so, to declare it and state the nature of the whipping arrangement. No such declarations were made.

## 73 MINUTES

The Director of Law, HR and Asset Management submitted the minutes of the meeting held on 24 November, 2010

**Resolved – That the minutes be received.**

## 74 PRESENTATION - HOUSING STRATEGY CONSULTATION

The Interim Director of Corporate Services submitted a report providing members with an update on the borough wide consultation process for Wirral's draft Housing Strategy 2011 - 2026.

The initial stage of the consultation process, to test the draft strategy and obtain specific views on all of the key issues which inform housing policies and initiatives for the future, had ran for a six week period ending on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2010. It involved a wide range of key stakeholders, members of the public, formal Partnerships and Forums, with initially over 340 stakeholders formally contacted directly to ask for their views, and a short questionnaire was also made available on the Council's web site for completion.

Over the six week consultation process, 1,369 responses were received, providing a significant amount of feedback to be considered when developing the strategy further. Significantly, 94% (out of the 1263 respondents) answered that they strongly agreed/agreed with the overall long term vision for housing. There was also a significant majority of respondents who agreed that the seven key issues and priorities identified in the strategy were either very important or important.

The consultation process had also identified a number of key issues which people felt should be included and developed further:

- The general use and understanding of terminology in the strategy.
- the provision of supported housing available and that this should be where people want to live. A range of options would be utilised alongside new provision and existing supply including carrying out home adaptations and providing low level support to help people to maintain independent living.
- the future of social housing in relation to length of tenancies. Since the consultation on the housing strategy commenced the government had launched its approach to social housing reform and the use of fixed tenancies on the basis that a social tenancy should not necessarily be for life. The strategy now included a commitment to produce a strategic tenancy policy for the use and review of fixed tenancies by registered providers to influence how this will be managed locally in Wirral.
- the ability of young people being able to access affordable homes irrespective of tenure. The Strategy had been strengthened to take advantage of opportunities such as the potential for shared tenancies and the use of the private rented sector to give wider choice to young people.
- the development of new homes in relation to the quality of open space, landscaping and space standards. A new section was included within the strategy that focused on the work housing undertakes with development control, the Homes and Communities agency, registered providers and private developers, in relation to ensuring new developments deliver to quality standards and that housing and planning policies are closely aligned.

The Housing Strategy Team had subsequently collated and reviewed all of the responses received and adapted and developed the strategy further to incorporate and respond to the issues the consultation process had raised. All of these issues raised have been incorporated into the strategy to reflect local opinion.

The Chair commented that the existing Housing Strategy had served Wirral well but there were new drivers that triggered the need for a review in response to government policies, changes in the housing market, and future funding.

**Resolved –**

- (1) That the Committee note the results of this consultation process.**
- (2) That the officers be thanked for their work in developing the draft Housing Strategy 2011- 2026.**

75 **PRESENTATION - EQUALITY FRAMEWORK FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT - COUNCIL PROGRESS TOWARDS EXCELLENCE STATUS**

Further to minute 56 (Scrutiny Programme Board – 2/3/2011) Jacqui Cross, Corporate Equality and Cohesion Manager, gave a presentation on the Equality Duty 2010 to ensure that Members were fully equipped to provide effective scrutiny in the areas identified as being necessary for Excellent accreditation by the summer of 2012.

Jacqui Cross outlined the requirements of the new Equality Duty and highlighted the general and specific duties contained within it. She set out the Fairness Agenda contained within the Government's Equality Strategy 2010 and referred in particular to the role of scrutiny to demonstrate that the Council had met its general and specific duties and was able to demonstrate improvements and outcomes as a result of its equality objectives. She also reported that the Council's 'Equality Watch Scheme 2009 – 2012' was due to be refreshed, to take into consideration the Equality Act 2010 and, consultation would take place across the Council, with partner agencies and among members of the Council's equality watch scheme.

Jacqui Cross responded to questions from members regarding the proposed timetable for reaching 'Excellent' status and key milestone dates within the proposed Action Plan, initiatives to more actively engage with staff and increase the declaration rate workforce equality profiling requirements, and liaison with the private and voluntary sector to encourage them to produce this information.

**Resolved – That Jacqui Cross be thanked for her presentation on progress made to date with regard to the Equality Framework for Local Government and Equality Duty 2010.**

76 **PRESENTATION - QUARTER 3 PERFORMANCE REPORT 2010/11**

The Interim Director of Corporate Services presented a report comprising an overview of progress made against the indicators for 2010/2011 and key projects which were relevant to the Economy and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee covering the third quarter, from October to December 2010. Appendix 1 provided the detail of the performance indicators that were reported for the third quarter.

There were 27 indicators that could be reported at this third quarter to this committee. Of these 27, 22 could be compared with the previous year and 24 were reported against target:

- 21 projects were green (all milestones that should have been met at this point had been met).
- 2 projects were amber (critical milestones missed/serious slippage). Corrective action to bring amber projects back on track was provided.

In terms of risks, it was noted that the main risks to the achievement of performance targets was the current economic situation and the availability of external grant funding.

The report highlighted some of the key achievements:

- Work was now underway on the new Asda store in Birkenhead, a development which would result in a £30million investment in the town centre.
- The seaside resorts of New Brighton, Hoylake and West Kirby were getting funding to drive forward economic regeneration. A total of £200,000 had now been agreed by Government to help the towns build on their heritage and take advantage of new opportunities to develop strong economies and communities for the future.
- Invest Wirral continued to support Wirral business initiatives such as the Think Big Grant
- Wirral's performance in Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) rates had been excellent over the last year with a reduction of 2312 claimants in 2010. Wirral had also been the top performing authority for JSA rates for four successive months to December 10.
- The successful Wirral Apprentice programme was set to receive further funding after the Council had confirmed it would invest a further £1 million (possibly matched by ESF). With this latest commitment, the Council will have helped employers to create more than 300 apprenticeships.

The Director responded to questions from members regarding the following indicators:

NI 156 (Holmless households living in temporary accommodation)

Local 6272 (Opportunities to view investment messages)

He also agreed to circulate the latest available information regarding Wirral's youth unemployment figures compared with the regional cohort.

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

## 77 OUTCOMES FROM EXISTING REGENERATION PROJECTS AND PROGRAMMES AND AN OUTLINE OF FUTURE PROGRAMMES

The Interim Director of Corporate Services presented a report setting out key outcomes that have been achieved to date as a result of the following regeneration programmes:

- Working Neighbourhoods Fund (WNF) – WNF was allocated £30.5 million from April 2008 and was planned to run only until the end of March 2011. Activities progressed through WNF had resulted in a range of outcomes which had a beneficial impact on the Borough. Outcomes from the programme up to the end of December 2010 were set out in paragraph 5.3 (Table 2).
- Business Start and Business Support programmes - A key priority for use of WNF resources had been to ensure that a comprehensive business start and support service was in place. Branded as WirralBiz the programme had outperformed other areas of the north west and details of its achievements were set out in paragraph 6.3
- Future Jobs Fund (FJF) - The Future Jobs Fund (FJF) was launched in 2009 with the aim of creating 150,000 jobs nationally, either for young people unemployed for over 6 months or for those in unemployment 'hotspots'. A successful Liverpool City Region bid secured funding for Wirral to provide 719 six month job placements.

The programme was planned to finish at the end of September 2011. At the end of February 2011 the programme had created 581 posts and was on target to fill the remaining 138 by the end of March 2011. Of the jobs created to date, 29% were in administrative and secretarial occupations, 20% were for Teaching Assistant posts in schools and the remainder were spread across a wide range of activities including environmental work, marketing, IT, maintenance and caretaking, catering, sports coaching and nursery work.

A number of council departments had utilised FJF to pilot new services such as the Dog Foul Warden posts and the Assistant Recycling Officers both of which had now secured core funding to allow continuation of these services.

- Housing Market Renewal (HMRI) - Wirral's HMRI programme which began in 2003 had resulted in the development of 473 new homes and the outputs from the programme were set out in paragraph 8 (Table 5). The Government had announced that there would be no further funding for the HMRI programme, but that resources could be accessed from sources such as the Regional Growth Fund or the New Homes Bonus. Officers were currently discussing these options with the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA). However, the original objectives of the HMRI programme would be reviewed to determine whether they were still relevant or deliverable given the changes in Government policies.

The report also outlined the Government's proposed future regeneration programmes which were being progressed to provide opportunities for addressing local priorities within the borough.

In terms of the Council's response to the changing funding mechanisms, the Council had agreed that additional funding would be made in the budget for 2011/12 to:

- Continue to support the Wirral Apprentice Programme;
- Provide dedicated business advice and support to Wirral businesses;
- Provide grants to businesses to support growth;
- Support the development of social enterprises and mutuals in Wirral;
- Continue to support investment in housing through a range of energy efficiency measures;
- Enable posts funded through WNF to be made permanent;
- Support further housing investment through the capital programme.

There was a general discussion highlighting the need for analysis of outputs from the Council's increased investment in regeneration activities to ensure the expected improvements; funding of the new Apprenticeship Programme; the support currently being given to the different levels of qualification within the Apprenticeship Programme, ways of encouraging the attainment of Level 3 qualifications and access to higher paid employment opportunities; improving the current support for apprentices 19 or over; ways of building on the successes of the Apprentice Programme e.g. Open Days, case studies, mentoring, and an apprentice award scheme.

**Resolved –**

**(1) That the Committee note the progress made in the delivery of the regeneration programmes and projects and also note the outline of the Government's future regeneration programmes.**

**(2) That the Director report back to the next meeting on the issues raised by Members relating to the development of the Apprentice Training Programme.**

#### 78 **WORK PROGRAMME 2010/11**

The Committee received an update report on its work programme.

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

#### 79 **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.**

80 **LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK - APPOINTMENT OF CONSULTANTS TO CARRY OUT A WATER CYCLE STUDY**

Further to minute 176 (Cabinet – 14/10/2010) the Interim Director of Corporate Services reported concerning the appointment of consultants under his delegated powers to undertake a joint Water Cycle Study with Liverpool City Council as part of the evidence base for the Local Development Framework Core Strategy.

**Resolved - That the appointment of Scott Wilson for the sum of £27,800 (excluding VAT) under the delegated powers of the Interim Director of Corporate Services be noted.**

81 **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.

82 **REGENERATION UPDATE**

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

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