

ECONOMY AND REGENERATION OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 5 December 2012

<u>Present:</u>	Councillor	M Johnston (Chair)	
	Councillors	J Stapleton A Hodson A Cox	R Gregson D Realey M Sullivan
<u>Deputies:</u>	Councillors	E Boulton (In place of P Kearney) J Salter (In place of S Whittingham)	
<u>Cabinet Member:</u>	Councillors	G Davies	P Hackett
<u>Apologies</u>	Councillor	J Williamson	

39 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST/PARTY WHIP

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

40 BUDGET OPTIONS

The Chief Executive presented for Members' consideration the 'What Really Matters?' Budget Options questionnaire, together with the Budget Options summary papers for both Regeneration and Environment and Transformation and Resources, which had been developed by Council Officers. The questionnaire had informed the option papers, which had been published to indicate where savings might be found for Councillors, Partners, staff and the public to consider.

The Committee considered a presentation on the two stage budget consultation process, which indicated that the initial process had the highest level of consultation response in the UK and had guided the development of the savings options. As part of stage two of the budget consultation, over 70 budget options had been published, which included 25% more savings than was needed, in order to give genuine choice. So far, some 4000 responses had been received.

The Chair commented that this was an opportunity for the Committee to inform the Cabinet of its views, to seek further information on the options and to make suggestions for alternative and/or additional savings. Specific Options with associated savings/income generation from the summary papers, which fell within the remit of the Economy and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee, had been highlighted for consideration by Members, viz:

Regeneration and Environment	
Pre Planning Advice	£10,000
Members indicated their general agreement to the option to introduce a fee, to cover staff time, for all pre-planning advice, in line with most of the local authorities in the Merseyside area.	
Apprentice Programme	£500,000 or £420,000
Members commented upon the value of the Apprenticeship Scheme and expressed a view that consultation should be undertaken to ascertain whether the scheme would remain viable with reduced wage incentives. Members were also pleased that an option remained for the Cabinet to retain the scheme in part, by way of the development of a scheme for the Liverpool City Region.	
Handy Person Service	£209,400
Members noted that the Council would explore ways in which the service might be available, for example, through the establishment of a social enterprise or through links to the Wirral Traders Scheme. Members noted also that a reduced number of staff would still facilitate the fast track hospital discharge service through DCLG funding, which would continue until 2015, and that options would be explored to continue the service beyond 2015.	
Restructure of Regeneration, Housing and Planning Department	£338,900
In response to a comment from a Member that the stage one questionnaire did not provide sufficient detail in relation to the proposed saving, the Director indicated that more detail had been included in both the summary paper and detailed paper. He outlined the rationale for the proposed savings and commented that the proposal included the deletion of seven posts, of which two were currently vacant. Members indicated that with duties being shared amongst reduced teams, increased staff workloads would have to be considered. Members also noted the comments of the Director in relation to the availability of funding and, specifically, that the proposal would continue to allow sufficient resource to deal with deliverable projects seeking some form of external resource.	
Home Insulation Scheme	£985,600 or £925,600
Members considered two options in relation to the future of Council-funded home energy efficiency activity in Wirral; either to remove the budget for the programme, or to reduce the budget and still allow some work related to energy efficiency and fuel poverty. The Director indicated that at the end of March 2013, the Insulation Programme would have reached 59% of the target at year 3 of the seven year programme. He set out the impact of the two options and referred also to the common approach being developed in the Liverpool City Region to deliver the Green Deal, which would provide a mechanism for households to obtain insulation either at no up front cost or through subsidies. Members indicated that their preferred option was to reduce the budget to ensure the continuation of work related to energy efficiency and fuel poverty, but not to fund insulation works.	

BME Support Programme	£100,000
Members noted the proposed option to cease delivery of the Council's Black, Minority and Ethnic (BME) support service in the light of other community based organisations now providing this type of service.	
Supporting People Service	£2,000,000
Members noted that the proposed option would involve a reduction of the Supporting People budget, from 2014/2015, through the renegotiation of contracts, tendering services, remodelling services and closing services. The Director outlined the wide-ranging services delivered by the Supporting People programme and commented that the impact of the proposal would be mitigated by the remaining resources being more closely focused on the most vulnerable.	
Invest Wirral	£352,000
In response to questions from Members, the Director of Regeneration, Housing and Planning commented that the North West was doing very well and bucking the national trend in relation to investment. He was pleased to report that Wirral had the highest rate of business growth in the UK and, in the light of new opportunities expected to come on stream as a result of the new European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) Business Support programme in the new year, proposed to restructure the Council's business support offer. Members noted that the proposals would impact on the Council's ability to invest to support new businesses but would be mitigated by working closely with regional and national organisations to secure the provision of replacement funding.	
Transformation and Resources	
Marketing and Public Relations	£52,000
Members considered a proposed reduction by 50% in the core marketing budget, which would result in fewer resources being invested in the promotion of the Council's services and key messages. Members noted that although its use had been very successful, the remaining resources would be focused on a smaller set of key priorities.	
Destination Marketing	£95,000
Members noted that the proposed option was to take the entire Core and Supported Events Budget as a budget saving, which would result in a new process to support both local and national event organisers, by the provision of more detailed information for event delivery and helping to secure private sector sponsorship and other funding streams. The value of tourism to Wirral currently stood at £289m and Members noted that the economic impact of significant numbers of visitors attracted to events in Wirral would be affected if the budget was withdrawn. Members referred to some of the excellent schemes that had benefited from Council support and questioned whether some funding could be retained to be focused upon key schemes; and/or whether it would be feasible to seek matched funding.	

Tranmere Rovers Sponsorship	£135,000
Members referred to the promotion of Wirral on a national basis and to the significant local community benefit associated with the Council's sponsorship of Tranmere Rovers Football Club, which was now proposed to cease, leaving the Club to seek an alternative sponsor. However, other local football clubs were also involved in Wirral and Members expected that Tranmere would continue to connect with the local community without the Council's sponsorship.	

In response to a comment from a Member with regard to the use of increased Business Rates associated with the International Trade Centre that would be available to the Council for Economy and Regeneration as a result of the Enterprise Zone status, the Director indicated that discussions were ongoing with the LEP for the Council to access those resources. However, there was already a significant call on what would be a limited resource and it was not appropriate to budget for such funding availability at the present time.

The Chair sought assurance from officers that the agreed savings would be realised. The Director confirmed that on a departmental basis, Economy and Regeneration savings had always been delivered within agreed timescales and he met on a regular basis with the Cabinet Members for Regeneration and Planning Strategy and Housing and Community Safety to discuss budget savings and other issues. He anticipated that savings agreed by the Cabinet would be achievable and the appointment of three Strategic Directors to work across Departments should ensure that targets were met.

Resolved –

- (1) That the views of the Committee in relation to each of the savings options within the remit of Economy and Regeneration be presented to the Cabinet for consideration.**
- (2) That information be provided to Members direct, upon the numbers of apprentices kept on by employers at the end of their placement.**
- (3) That the proposed reduction in the Supporting People budget with effect from 2014/2015 be added to the Committee's scrutiny work programme.**
