



Transformation and Resources Policy and Performance Committee

Date: Monday, 14 April 2014

Time: 6.00 pm

Venue: Committee Room 1 - Wallasey Town Hall

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AGENDA

1. MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST / PARTY WHIP

Members are asked to consider whether they have 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 are reminded that they should also declare whether they are 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.

2. MINUTES (Pages 1 - 8)

To approve the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 29 January, 2014.

3. FREEDOM OF INFORMATION SCRUTINY REVIEW (Pages 9 - 30)

4. LOCAL WELFARE ASSISTANCE SCHEME 2014/15 AND FUTURE SUPPORT OPTIONS (Pages 31 - 52)

5. LOCAL AUDIT AND ACCOUNTABILITY ACT 2014 (Pages 53 - 62)

6. DIRECTORATE PLAN PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT (Pages 63 - 78)

- 7. FINANCIAL MONITORING 2013/14 MONTH 10 (JANUARY 2014)
(Pages 79 - 96)**
- 8. POLICY UPDATE**

A verbal explanation will be given on this item.
- 9. WORK PROGRAMME (Pages 97 - 102)**
- 10. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS APPROVED BY THE CHAIR**

TRANSFORMATION AND RESOURCES POLICY AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 29 January 2014

Present: Councillor S Whittingham (Chair)

Councillors	RL Abbey	M Johnston
	A Hodson	C Muspratt
	P Gilchrist	M Patrick
	P Glasman	J Salter
	R Gregson	A Sykes
	J Hale	J Williamson

Deputies: Councillors C Povall (In place of L Rowlands)
P Hayes (In place of C Blakeley)

In attendance: Councillor A Jones

24 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 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.

25 MINUTES

Resolved – That the minutes of the Transformation and Resources Policy and Performance Committee of 9 December, 2013 be approved.

26 SCRUTINY REVIEW GOOD PRACTICE GUIDANCE

The Head of Policy and Performance presented a report which set out draft guidance for the setting up and operation of Scrutiny Review Panels to ensure there was a consistency of approach to task and finish work across the four Policy and Performance Committees. The draft guidance, appended to the report, had been presented to the Policy and Performance Coordinating

Committee on 15 January 2014 and they had welcomed the fact that there were significantly more scrutiny reviews being undertaken

A Member suggested that at the end of a scrutiny review, and after recommendations had been referred to Cabinet, there needed to be some form of tracking to ensure recommendations agreed by Cabinet were carried through to completion.

Responding to comments from a Member, the Head of Legal and Member Services suggested that a scrutiny review could include a particular caveat to capture any concerns of a Member regarding any particular recommendation(s). With regard to action tracking, actions were generated on the modern.gov system and officers did receive action notifications but there was a need to ensure these were followed through.

Resolved – That, subject to the addition of tracking agreed recommendations being referred to within the Scrutiny Review Guidance, the report be noted.

27 **DIRECTORATE PLAN PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT**

The Strategic Director of Transformation and Resources and Head of Policy and Resources presented a report which outlined the current performance of the Department (as at 30 November 2013) against its Directorate Plan for 2013/14 in a Performance Dashboard. It translated the priorities set out in the Plan into a coherent set of performance outcome measures and targets.

The report also included appendices with exception reports on those three items which had been 'red' rated for non-compliance against the specified target. The 3 measures rated red were:

- Percentage of Adult Care Packages supported by Direct Debit
- Percentage recovery of Personal Finance Unit Charges
- Percentage of Personal Finance Unit Assessments completed within timescale

Responding to comments from Members, the Strategic Director stated that the report concentrated on those 19 high level indicators which were critical to the management of the service. In respect of P29 and the roll out of self serve to schools, which was rated red, the Head of HR and Organisational Development would provide a written response in respect of this indicator.

In respect of the 10 day payment policy to small and medium enterprises (P3) he reported that progress was continuing, performance was at 32 per cent in November, 2013 and he would hope that a significant improvement would be seen within this year, the ambition being to hit performance of 80/90 per cent.

The Head of Legal and Member Services stated that in respect of indicator DP16 and response rates for complaints, there had been lower performance in November when the response rate had risen to 15 days, but he would anticipate the overall rate being on target. He would have to establish with the relevant departments as to why some were taking nearly a month to respond.

In respect of indicator DP11a, the Head of Business Processes outlined the work being undertaken with the Department of Adult Social Services to address outstanding issues and improve performance. The new staff within the Personal Finance Unit were under the Transformation and Resources Directorate and were still undergoing training. The next quarter's indicator would also show separately the historic debt.

With regard to indicator CP2 and the adult care packages to be supported by direct debit, the system was now 'live' and letters would be sent out in the following week inviting people to use it.

The Chair stated that he was pleased to see the improvement in the level of performance of indicator DP12, the response times to Freedom of Information requests.

Resolved - That the Performance Dashboard be noted and the information contained within it be used to inform the Committee's future work programme.

28 **SICKNESS ABSENCE REPORT**

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development submitted a report which set out the current position in relation to sickness absence across the Council.

The report had been requested to identify sickness absence performance across the new directorates following the restructure of the Council, the process for dealing with sickness absence and the impact it had had on capacity within the HR division and the wider organisation in the light of the transformation process and significant organisational change.

Following the Senior Management restructure undertaken in December 2012 the Council was re-organised into three Strategic Directorates; Families and Wellbeing, Regeneration and Environment, and Transformation and Resources. An appendix to the report showed current levels of absence across the Council and Schools up to 30 November 2013. The projected days lost per employee were currently 9.17 compared to 10.23 in 2013/14. This was based on the national Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI). Excluding schools, the current projected performance was 12.13 days which showed a marginal improvement compared to 12.88 days in 2012/13.

Comparisons against other Local Authorities in the region for 2012/13 inclusive and exclusive of schools were attached as appendices to the report.

The report also gave details of strategies to manage absence, including the Employee Assistance Programme, Occupational Health Support and Fit for Wirral.

Responding to comments from Members, the Head of HR and Organisational Development informed the Committee that the Employee Assistance Programme was provided by an external provider and the Council was not provided with any details about individuals contact or interaction. She outlined the work of the dedicated casework team (five staff and one manager) who had been brought together from across the organisation in 2013 to provide support on all individual employee relations cases including absence management cases.

Appendix six to the report provided a snapshot of sickness trends, reasons for sickness, and comparisons of short and long term sickness on a particular day. To look at actual trends one would look at the monthly figures previous to the month on which the snapshot was taken as it could have been taken in the middle of the month. The data provided an illustration of the format and type of data available to managers on a daily basis which would help in improving the management of absence. Long term sickness was defined as sickness lasting more than four weeks.

The number of staff, 854, completing the e-learning course in attendance management was approximately consistent with the total number of managers, which included team leaders across the Council, although this was over a certain time period and was not the latest figure the Council had. The results of the annual staff survey would be shared with Members once they were available.

She also described how the Council engaged with union representatives over both the implementation of the attendance management policy and occupational health matters in relation to specific employees. The policy was designed not to be punitive but to ensure managing attendance was robust and supportive. The breakdown of absence reasons meant that the Council was able to target support more effectively.

The Strategic Director welcomed the use of the 'insight' system which allowed manager's immediate access to live absence data for their teams. The data could be interrogated as to whether absences were a one off or a growing trend.

In respect of further comments, the Head of HR and Organisational Development stated that she would be happy to provide written responses on the following questions and comments:

- Of the 144 Sickness absence cases closed, what were the reasons?
- The proportion of long term and short term absence. At Wirral Council 64% of absence was long term. Is there any benchmarking data to compare this with other organisations?
- Employee Assistance Programme. What feedback does the Council have from staff, what performance measures are in place and is there a breakdown by department of contacts made?
- What is the cost of the flu vaccination?
- In appendices 3 and 4 can the names of the comparator North West authorities be given?
- In appendix 7, is the absence of males aged 20–25 years, a snapshot position or part of a trend?

A Member suggested that the Committee could establish a Task and Finish Group to look at workplace stress and absences.

On a motion by the Chair, seconded by Councillor Williamson, it was –

Resolved –

- (1) That the contents of the report and the Council's current approach to management of absence, be noted.**
- (2) That the Committee establish a Task and Finish Group, in the new municipal year, to look at workplace stress and absences.**

29 **ICT DISRUPTION**

The Interim Head of ICT submitted a report which provided an update on the causes of the ICT disruption of 4th and 5th September 2013. The report also covered the actions taken to prevent a similar recurrence and particularly what had been done to increase resilience of the Members' ICT service.

Although there were many other areas of ICT which the Committee was interested in discussing, the current capacity in ICT had been severely affected by significant staffing reductions and the sickness absence of the most senior manager. The service was, quite understandably having to prioritise very carefully and ensure systems that had most effect on the well being of the public were being maintained and managed. On-going prioritisation of work was in place and an interim advisor had been appointed to assist with the improvement activity required and to manage day to day operations. Further updates could be provided to the Committee as necessary and in a paced and sensible way. There was a balance required between the resource constraints and the high level of demand for ICT services and this was common in all public sector organisations.

Responding to comments from Members, the former Interim Head of ICT elaborated on the risks if the Council did not have a backup generator. With 4,000 users there was a need to invest to minimise risks. He also gave details of the facilities at Cheshire West and Chester Council in the context of a possible future shared service. He acknowledged the need for the ICT Disaster Recovery Plan to be re-written and stated that his successor was now working on this.

The Strategic Director assured the Committee that the ICT Disaster Recovery Plan would be brought to this Committee in due course.

With regard to the recent IT issues the previous week, the Strategic Advisor on ICT gave an update to the Committee on how these issues had been addressed and the timeline in invoking the business continuity process.

The Strategic Director commented that this IT issue was unrelated to the previous ICT disruption in September, 2013. He thanked all the staff involved for all their work in resolving this issue and the effectiveness of the Council's business resilience processes in dealing with the matter.

On a motion by the Chair, seconded by Councillor Abbey, it was -

Resolved -

(1) That this Committee, in recognising the high risks from possible future ICT disruptions, supports the establishment of an appropriate officers group to consider the business case for installing a standby generator and to identify the Council's critical services, which will be served from the more robustly "protected" server room.

(2) That the thanks of this Committee be conveyed to all the staff involved for all their efforts in resolving the recent ICT issues.

30 **TRANSFORMATION AND RESOURCES FINANCIAL MONITORING
2013/14 (MONTH 8)**

The Director of Resources presented the financial monitoring report for Month 8 (November 2013) in respect of the budget performance for the Transformation and Resources Directorate.

The report gave details of performance against revenue and capital budgets and in year efficiency savings for 2013/14. The Strategic Director drew the Committee's attention to the currently forecast underspend of £249,000 in respect of the revenue budget.

In response to comments from Members the Head of Business Processes stated that collection of Council Tax, with the introduction of the Council Tax

Support Scheme and, the billing of people who had previously received benefit at 100 per cent; his expectation was that the Council would do well to stay on target.

He also explained the figures for housing benefit fraud referrals between 1 April and 30 November, 2013, not all of which would have been investigated. Figures were also given for cases which had been investigated and cases under investigation; there were 40 cases where some form of court action had been taken.

With regard to Discretionary Housing Payments, he stated that the Council was on course to spend all the Government grant. A bid for additional funding would be submitted in early February, although there was no guarantee that anymore grants would be given. There had not been any noticeable shift between the social and private rented sector but this was subject to ongoing monitoring.

In respect of the Council Tax Discretionary Relief policy, no awards had as at the end of December, 2013 been made from this £50,000 fund. There were currently just under 100 applications for funding, though grants were only made for exceptional reasons. It was feasible that not all of this money would be used, and then it would be for the Council to decide how it was used.

There was currently a significant underspend in the Local Welfare Assistance support scheme which was supported by a Government grant of £1,345,925. Total awards as at 30 November, 2013 were £292,434 to be used for the provision of pre-payment cards for food and fuel and direct provision of white goods. The scheme was being reviewed and a report would be going to Cabinet which would examine possible alternative options for the use of these discretionary awards. In relation to this scheme a Member suggested that some form of consortium of voluntary sector organisations might be better placed to spend this money being more aware of those vulnerable people in need of help. The Member raised concerns that the grant could remain unspent despite vulnerable Wirral residents requiring support.

The Chair concurred that the idea of a voluntary sector consortium should be investigated with regard to the Local Welfare Assistance support scheme and that there might be a more creative way of allocating these funds.

Resolved – That this Committee notes the report and that a Task and Finish group be established to consider the possibility of a more creative way of allocating funds from the Local Welfare Assistance support scheme, including the idea of some form of voluntary sector consortium.

31 **POLICY UPDATE**

The Head of Policy and Performance submitted a Policy Briefing report which provided the Committee with the opportunity to review new areas of policy and government initiatives that would impact on local government in the short to medium term.

The Chair suggested that a report could be brought to the next meeting on the Local Audit and Accountability Bill.

Resolved – That the report be noted and a report be brought to the next meeting on the Local Audit and Accountability Bill.

32 **WORK PROGRAMME**

Further to minute 17 (23 September 2013), the Head of Policy and Performance presented an update upon the progress made in delivering those items included in the work programme. The four pieces of work were:

- ICT Strategy
- Review of Shared Services
- Review of process for handling Freedom of Information requests
- Review of sickness absence process

A Member suggested that the thanks of the committee should be accorded to the department for the significant improvement in the response rate for dealing with Freedom of Information requests.

Resolved –

(1) That the Transformation and Resources Policy and Performance Committee work programme, set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be approved, subject to the addition of:

- a Task and Finish Group being established in the new municipal year, to look at workplace stress and absences;
- a Task and Finish Group being established before the year end on the allocation of funds from the Local Welfare Assistance support scheme.

(2) That the thanks of the Committee be accorded to the department for the significant improvement in the response rate for dealing with Freedom of Information requests.

WIRRAL COUNCIL

Transformation and Resources Policy & Performance Committee

14 April 2014

SUBJECT:	<i>FREEDOM OF INFORMATION</i>
WARD/S AFFECTED:	<i>ALL</i>
REPORT OF:	<i>MEMBERS OF THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION SCRUTINY REVIEW PANEL</i>

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report (included as Appendix 1) provides the findings and recommendations emanating from the Freedom of Information Scrutiny Review.
- 1.2 The Freedom of Information Act 2000 provides public access to information held by public authorities. Public authorities are obliged to publish certain information about their activities and members of the public are entitled to request information from them.
- 1.3 Members of the Transformation and Resources Policy & Performance Committee are requested to consider the contents of this report and note the recommendations arising from this review.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 At the meeting on 23 September 2013, the Policy & Performance Committee agreed a work programme which included a review of Freedom of Information. Three Members of the Committee volunteered to undertake this work including Cllr Stuart Whittingham, Cllr Adam Sykes and Cllr Christina Muspratt.
- 2.2 At the first meeting of the Review Panel, it was agreed Cllr Adam Sykes would be the Chair of the Panel. The review was conducted over a small number of meetings held with appropriate officers and information was provided as requested by the Review Panel to allow detailed question and answer sessions to be carried out.

3.0 SUMMARY

- 3.1 In January 2013, Wirral Council was subject to a three month period of monitoring action by the Information Commissioner's Office due to the timeliness of responding to Freedom of Information requests. On 14 November 2013, the Information Commissioner's Office notified the Council that it was satisfied performance had improved, resulting in no further monitoring action being taken.

- 3.2 The Review Panel acknowledged and commended the Council in ensuring that response times for Freedom of Information requests are now over the 85% threshold required by the Information Commissioner.
- 3.3 This report provides a number of recommendations which the Review Panel believes should assist the Council moving forward in managing its requirements to meet the Freedom of Information Act and also to become a more open and transparent Council.

4.0 RECOMMENDATION/S

- 4.1 Members of the Committee are requested to note the contents and consider the recommendations arising from this report.
- 4.2 Members of the Committee are requested to consider whether they wish to refer the report to Cabinet.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Freedom of Information Scrutiny Review

Freedom of Information Scrutiny Review

DRAFT

**A report produced by
The Transformation and Resources Policy & Performance Committee**

WIRRAL BOROUGH COUNCIL

Freedom of Information Scrutiny Review

FINAL REPORT

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Freedom of Information Act was passed on 30 November 2000 and came into force in January 2005. It provides individuals or organisations with the right to request information held by a public authority. The main aspects of the Act include:

- Encouraging public bodies to be open and transparent;
- The requirement for requests to be responded to within 20 working days; and
- The requirement to set up and maintain a publication scheme; and

In 2013, Wirral Borough Council came under scrutiny by the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) for the poor response times in responding to Freedom of Information requests within the 20 working day requirement. Following enforced monitoring action by the Information Commissioner, performance has improved significantly to over 85% and this was commended by the Panel during the review. The scrutiny review was conducted to ensure Wirral Council is moving in the right direction to manage Freedom of Information in compliance with the Information Commissioner's Office.

Despite improved performance corporately, Freedom of Information requests are handled across the Council inconsistently and departmental performance figures for 2013 show that not all departments met the 85% for all requests to be responded to within 20 working days. These departmental performance figures would also have included the first three months of monitoring (January 2013 to March 2013) by the ICO. Significantly poorer performing departments reduce the Council's capability to maintain and improve upon the 85% threshold now currently being met and also exceeded, to comply with ICO requirements. The Council is also faced with the potential challenge of the increasing number of requests being received.

Recommendation 1:

Council Directorates should appoint and develop Freedom of Information Champions and Deputies to cover all Council services and to act as a single point of contact between those services and the Freedom of Information Team. The implementation of Champions should be driven by Legal and Member Services, including the provision of the appropriate training and support for the role to be fulfilled effectively and consistently across the Council. Council Directorates should, however, determine which officers should carry out these roles based on staffing resources, number of requests received and of services provided. It is expected that this recommendation should be fully implemented by December 2014.

The Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software application is used for the Council's customer contact records, including recording all Freedom of Information requests received. Only the Freedom of Information Team utilises the software application for recording Freedom of Information requests. If Freedom of Information Champions are to be introduced, the Panel consider that these designated officers should be provided with appropriate access to CRM to ensure that all departmental actions / processes are recorded, including acknowledging the request has been received within an appropriate amount of working days.

Recommendation 2:

If departmental Champions are to be introduced, they should be provided with appropriate access to CRM. It should then be ensured that all departmental actions / processes are fully recorded within CRM, including acknowledging the receipt of the request within 2 working days to allow the Freedom of Information Team to monitor all requests received effectively.

90% of all Freedom of Information requests are received by email and are manually input into CRM. The Council's web based form allows requests input by this method to automatically populate CRM. Requests made from the What Do They Know Website are generated as an email but these require manual input.

Recommendation 3:

Legal and Member Services should investigate whether there is an existing technical solution for the CRM to be automatically populated with all requests made via the What Do They Know website and email. If a technical solution is identified, this should be fully tested to ensure all requests are captured before being implemented.

The review discussed the functionality of CRM in meeting the needs of the Council moving forward. Officers stated that there may be scope for acquiring a case management system that provides more functionality to meet the Council's needs. This was acknowledged by the Panel but the importance of ensuring a proper business case being developed was iterated. This was to ensure that the benefits of any case management system identified are consistent with actual needs of the Council and the cost implications.

Recommendation 4:

Legal and Member Services should determine the desired functionality of the IT software / workflow management system for the Council moving forward in managing Freedom of Information. If the existing CRM system is deemed not fit for purpose or too costly to configure, the feasibility of procuring a new case management system should be investigated. If the Council intends to acquire a new case management system, it should be ensured that a business case, supported by a cost-benefit analysis, is developed accordingly.

The Panel considered how performance is managed by the Council in relation to Freedom of Information. The review identified specific improvements to the performance information presented to both the Chief Executive's Strategy Group and the Transformation and Resources Policy & Performance Committee.

Recommendation 5:

In order to enhance performance management of compliance against Freedom of Information legislation, Legal and Member Services should:

- i) Ensure that the percentage of Freedom of Information requests responded to within 20 working days is reported to the Chief Executive's Strategy Group as part of the monitoring reports submitted, with the performance figure broken down at Council directorate and departmental level; and**
- ii) Liaise with the Performance & Business Intelligence Team to develop a solution for providing exception reporting on directorate and departmental performance where an appropriate threshold tolerance has not been met. This recommendation should be implemented in line with the commencement of the new municipal year.**

The Council's publication scheme is based on the model set by the Information Commissioner's Office. The model sets out the minimum requirements on what information should be published. The Panel believes that the Council should do more to publish information as part of the publication where emerging trends and themes have been identified from Freedom of Information requests received.

Recommendation 6:

Legal and Member Services should implement a process for identifying emerging trends and themes of all Freedom of Information requests received by the Council and to then ensure that the Council's Publication Scheme is appropriately updated with the relevant information.

The Information Commissioner's Office is encouraging public bodies to publish performance information on a regular basis and this has practice has been adopted by a large number of local authorities. Furthermore, other public bodies publish summaries of Freedom of Information requests, such as the NHS. The Panel believes that by adopting these practices, the Council will enhance its directive on being open and transparent.

Recommendation 7:

Legal and Member Services should engage with the Corporate Marketing Team to implement a strategy on using the Council's internet website in order to:

- i) Publish the Council's performance on managing Freedom of Information requests on a periodic basis, including all relevant statistics such as volume of requests received; and**
- ii) Categorise and publish commonly asked Freedom of Information requests received with their respective responses.**

The Panel was provided with 20 recently made Freedom of Information requests, specifically those where the information was already published on the Council website. The Panel attempted to find the information asked for in these requests but concluded that there were difficulties on locating nearly all of them due to the functionality of the search feature on the website.

Recommendation 8:

Legal and Member Services is requested to note the views of the Panel on the search functionality of the Council's website, when using detailed search criteria. These views should be forwarded to the Corporate Marketing Team to ensure that they can be considered as part of the Council's ongoing development of the Council's website.

2. INTRODUCTION

At the meeting of the Transformation and Resources Policy & Performance Committee on 23 September 2013, Members approved a work programme which included a review of how the Council manages Freedom of Information. A Scrutiny Review Panel consisting of three Members of the Committee was established and a series of meetings were held. The purpose of the review was for the Panel to receive assurances that the Council is moving in the right direction in managing Freedom of Information.

3. BACKGROUND

The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) is an independent public body set up to promote access to official information and to protect personal information by promoting good practice, ruling on eligible complaints, providing information to individuals and organisations, and taking appropriate action when the law is broken. The Information Commissioner enforces and oversees the Data Protection Act, the Freedom of Information Act, the Environmental Information Regulations, and the Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations.

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 is defined as “An Act to make provision for the disclosure of information held by public authorities or by persons providing services for them and to amend the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Public Records Act 1958; and for connected purposes”.

The Act affords any person to make a request for information to a public authority and is entitled to be informed in writing by the public authority whether it holds information of the description specified in the request, and if that is the case, to have that information communicated to him/her subject to any exemptions on disclosure.

4. ORIGINAL SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 Scope

A scoping meeting was convened with the Review Panel, the Head of Legal and Member Services and the Information and Central Services Manager in November 2013. The agreed scoping document is included as Appendix 1. It was agreed that the focus of the review would concentrate on the following three key areas:

1. The Council's overall performance in meeting the requirements of the Information Commissioner's Office to respond to Freedom of Information requests.
2. The strategic approach to managing information and making information readily available as part of the Council's Publication Scheme.
3. The review of procedures and processes in place to manage Freedom of Information requests in ensuring that they are efficient and effective.

4.2 Methodology

In order for the Panel to understand the principles of Freedom of Information, a briefing paper was prepared by the Scrutiny Support Officer. This briefing paper provided a summary of the requirements for public authorities to comply with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and to assist in developing the scope of the Task & Finish scrutiny review. A document entitled Information Commissioner's Office Guidance which provides guidance on request handling was also provided to the Panel.

It was determined that the scrutiny review would fall under the category of a short review with the focus being maintained on a small number of key areas in which Members believed scrutiny could add value. Two detailed 'question and answer' sessions were subsequently held with the Head of Legal and Member Services and the Information and Central Services Manager. To support Members in these sessions, the Panel requested or it was suggested by officers that further information and specific data analysis should be considered as part of the review. Information / analysis included:

- Benchmarking the volume of Freedom of Information requests received by Wirral Council against other comparably sized local authorities;
- An analysis of Council performance since April 2012 and a breakdown of departmental performance;
- Process maps for the lifecycle of a Freedom of Information request; and
- Examples of Freedom of Information requests that have recently been received and closed and where the information was already made available in the public domain.

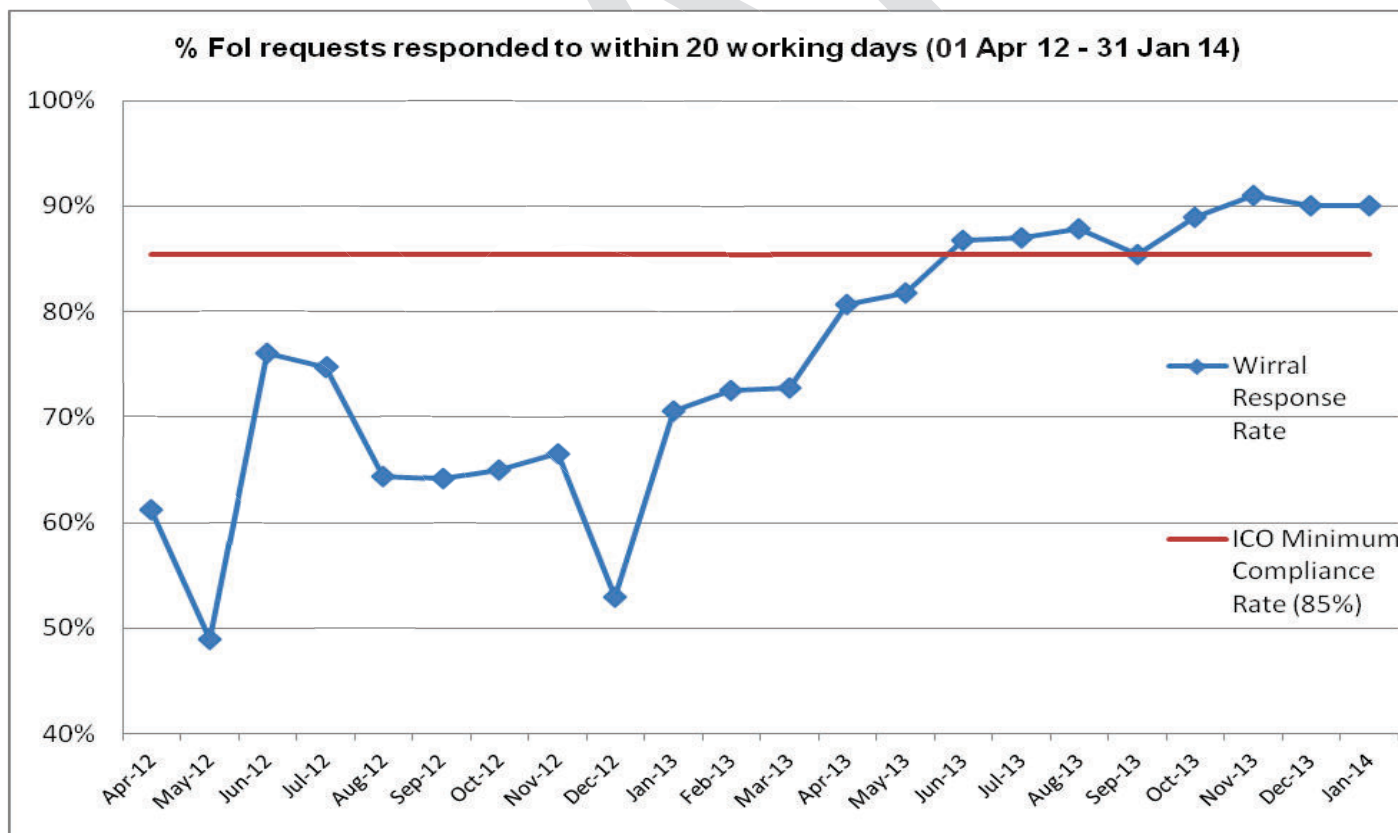
5. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Information Commissioner's Office Monitoring Action

In December 2012, Wirral Borough Council was contacted by the Information Commissioner over the timelines of responding to Freedom of Information requests within 20 working days being consistently under the 85% required. The Council was subsequently monitored over a three month period from 1 January 2013 and it was found that despite improvements, the responses were still less than 75%. Wirral Borough Council was required to formally sign an 'Undertaking' which detailed specific actions that were to be complied with.

A further three month monitoring period was established from 1 July 2013 as one of the terms detailed in the Undertaking. This required Wirral Borough Council to provide the ICO with monthly updates on its performance as well as a list of all overdue Freedom of Information requests, commencing with requests made on 1 July 2013 and ending with those made on 30 September 2013. The Panel was informed that all actions detailed in the Undertaking had been implemented and that, as of 14 November 2013, the ICO was satisfied that performance had improved based on the details of outstanding requests / reviews through receipt of a confirmatory email from the ICO.

The graph below shows the level of performance by Wirral Borough Council on responding to Freedom of Information requests from April 2012 to January 2014. The ICO requires at least 85% of all Freedom of Information requests to be responded to within 20 working days.



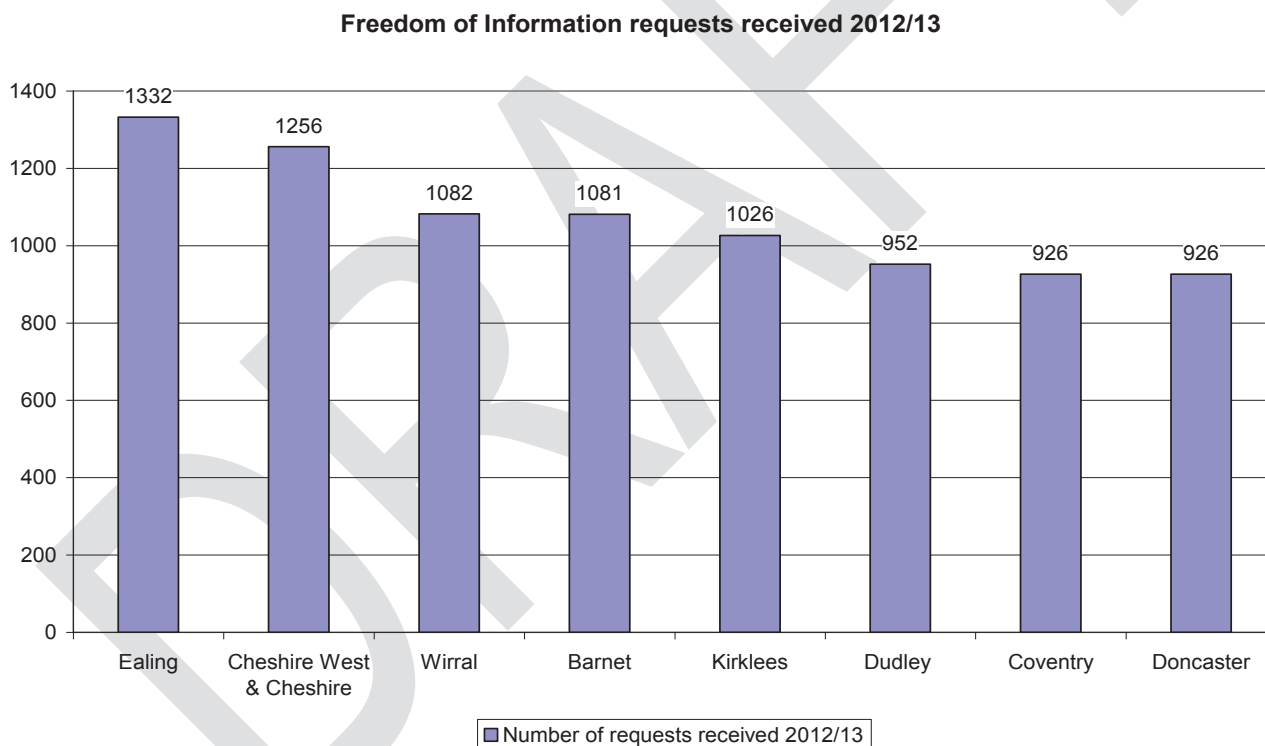
Looking at the performance information in the graph, it is clear to see that Wirral Borough Council is now performing significantly better since both monitoring periods were introduced by the ICO (January 2013 – March 2013 and July 2013 September 2013). Members of the Panel were pleased that current performance had now reached 90% (as of January 2014) but the Panel conveyed that the Council must continue to identify and manage emerging

challenges efficiently and effectively to avoid further ICO monitoring action and to also ensure that the Council's desire for openness and transparency is continually realised. Some of these issues and challenges are detailed elsewhere within this report.

5.2 Handling Freedom of Information requests

The Panel was informed by officers that previously, responsibility for managing Freedom of Information requests lied predominantly with Legal and Member Services, despite information being held across the Council. There has now been 'buy in' from Council Directorates and resources deployed across the departments to ensure responses are provided as required. This has seen improvement in response rates, resulting in no further monitoring by the ICO. The Panel and officers acknowledged that risks to performance still existed around (i) key officers not being available through sickness, annual leave or other reasons, and (ii) the volume of requests received.

In terms of the volume of Freedom of Information requests made to Wirral Borough Council, a benchmarking exercise was carried out against a number of similar sized local authorities to see if there were any consistencies. The benchmarked local authorities were derived from the Local Government Boundary Commission for England, based on numbers of constituents. The results of the exercise are included below.



From the results of the exercise, The Panel was assured that in terms of volume received, Wirral Borough Council was not receiving significantly more or less requests than the comparable local authorities, with the average number of requests coming in as 1073. Wirral Borough Council received 1082 requests in the 2012/13 financial year which is around the average amount received for all eight local authorities benchmarked.

It was stated by officers that there is a 30% increase in requests received by the Council from last year, averaging out at about 5-6 requests per day. An increase in requests received would impact resources within the Freedom of Information Team and across the Council to respond efficiently and effectively in line with ICO requirements.

To put the cost of the Council dealing with Freedom of Information into context, an exercise was carried out for this purpose. A template was sent out to Council departments asking

them to provide details of staff in their structure who deal with Freedom of Information and what hours were spent on average per week dealing with them. Responses were received and the Council's Finance Section calculated actual costs against hours stated based on pay grade. These costs also included an additional 20% to include employers pension costs (12%) and Employers N.I. contributions (8%). A table showing the results of the exercise is shown below.

Service Area	Total hours per week dealing with Fol (Average)	Total Cost per week (Average)
Children and Young People	70	£1590
Department of Adult Social Services	20	£678
Finance	9	£217
Human Resource / Organisational Development	22	£703
Regeneration and Environment	22	£466
Neighbourhoods and Engagement	9	£252
Policy, Performance and Public Health	8	£210
Legal Section	166	£3335
TOTAL PER WEEK	326	£7451

The Panel acknowledged that the figures are indicative only, as the Department had to estimate the time spent dealing with FOI matters in the absence of specific time recording systems. For true costs to be calculated, a more analytical, scientific method would need to be applied.

Looking at the table, there is an indicative cost of £7,451.00 spent on average per week across the Council against 326 hours of officer time. The hours and respective costs for Legal Services also includes:

- The Information and Central Services Manager and the two Freedom of Information Officers;
- The additional time and resources expended by solicitors dealing with Internal Reviews; and
- Providing legal advice and guidance on FOI matters, particularly the more complex and sensitive matters.

The improved performance experienced by the Council shows that resources are being deployed (as required by the ICO) but these come at a cost as demonstrated by the exercise and this was acknowledged by the Panel as part of the review process. The reason for variance in costs against similar hours spent is due to different officers on different pay grades having involvement in the process.

The process of how Freedom of Information requests are coordinated was explained to the Panel. Currently, requests are coordinated centrally by the Freedom of Information Team (Consisting of the Information and Central Services Manager and two other officers). Requests received for information already known or published are responded to without any further assistance from departments. For all others, the respective service area is identified and the request is emailed to one of a number of nominated officers or to the officer that the Freedom of Information Team believes would hold that information. Departments are required to identify responsible officers and to then provide the information relating to the

request in the required timeline. Additionally, some Heads of Service would be copied into the initial email, but in general, there is no consistent approach to how departments action and respond to requests.

If a departmental officer is off for whatever reason, an 'Out of Office' notification would be received so the Freedom of Information Team can identify a solution. They are also given ten working days in which to provide a response, after which point a member of the Freedom of Information Team will intervene and chase up the department by telephone and will escalate it up the Director if necessary.

The Panel had concerns over the reliance of an 'Out of Office' notification being set up by departmental officers and felt that the ten working days was too long to wait before intervention took place for a response to the request. The Panel also commented that there seems to be significant reliance on the Freedom of Information Team to build up the knowledge of where information is held and establishing who the key contacts are for requests, causing a potential impact on efficiency within the team. Additionally, the Panel remarked that there was no existing requirement to record all actions taken in the processing of requests across the Council in the CRM software application to enable effective monitoring, although it is acknowledged that all responses/actions confirmed to the FOI team are recorded on the CRM system.

The Panel was interested in how departments dealt with disclosing information that could be deemed sensitive or damaging. Officers explained that if any exemptions to information being disclosed were to be applied, as defined by the Freedom of Information Act, these could be made by departments. Advice from either the Information and Central Services Manager or the Head of Legal and Democratic Services is available if required. The Council has a legal duty to disclose information and reputational damage does not enter into the equation. There is a quality assurance process by Legal and Member Services and, where appropriate, Press and Public Relations.

It was stated that this may simply be a training issue in reiterating to departments the importance of having the confidence to give the Freedom of Information Team the information to make a decision on what information can be released and what can't, what needs legal input and what needs press input. Officers remarked that departments are improving but there will always be some uncertainty given the complexity and sensitivity of some requests made.

The Panel was informed that not all requests have to go back to the Legal Section before disclosure, only those which required legal input or review by a solicitor or the Monitoring Officer. This gives departments confidence that the reply going out is not going to breach any other legislation. Despite more advice, support and resources being provided by Legal Section, the Panel believed that further training provided to departments may help in reducing the number of requests being forwarded to the Legal Section and reduce the potential for unnecessary delays.

All responses are released by the Freedom of Information Team to ensure the language and jargon is removed, apply any exemptions and to supplement the request with the appeals and complaints process as part of the template. The Panel agreed that this central control process was important to ensure consistency, integrity and clarity of responses released.

Department performance figures from 1 January to 2013 to December 2013 were requested as part of the review to identify how performance was split across all Council departments. These figures were extrapolated from CRM which still retains the previous Council structure's

departmental names. As Law, HR and Asset Management no longer exist, a separate table was provided that breaks down the main service areas.

Departmental Analysis of Responses Rates (2013)

Department	Fol Requests Received	Responded to Within 20 days	%
Children and Young People	234	220	94
Department of Adult Social Services	101	49	48
Finance	305	279	91
Law, HR and Asset Management	391	296	76
Regeneration, Housing and Planning	114	98	86
Technical Services	175	163	93

Law, HR and Asset Management Response Rates (2013)

Area	Fol Requests Received	Responded to Within 20 days	%
Asset Management	32	27	84
Community Safety	21	20	95
Environmental Health	34	33	97
Human Resources	153	93	61
Legal	103	75	73
Licensing	26	26	100

From a review of the figures, actual performance across departments is varied. The Panel commented on the consistently excellent performance by the Children & Young People Department (CYPD) considering the volume of requests received. It was explained that CYPD has dedicated staff with good training to deal with Freedom of Information and complaints, have built up knowledge to expedite responses and are getting used to enquiries.

The Panel endorsed the approach taken by CYPD and believed that having FOI Champions across Council directorates / departments would benefit the Council going forward in managing Freedom of Information matters. Officers did confirm that this was initially discussed as part of the structure moving forward when the Freedom of Information Act was introduced but was never followed through.

The panel discussed the potential benefits of FOI Champions, namely, a single point of contact to whom all requests could be sent; knowledge of information relating to directorates / departments providing greater efficiency; to provide greater consistency across the Council and the potential to be more cost effective. For strong FOI Champions, the Panel iterated that if they were to be introduced, adequate support and training would be required to enable the role to be fully realised. Officers stated that Departmental Complaints Coordinators are in place across the Council and that these roles could be ideal to embed the roles of FOI Champions. Furthermore, the Panel was aware that the use of FOI Champions has been adopted in other local authorities and has been seen as effective in the drive to meet legislation and make best use of resources.

Recommendation 1:

Council Directorates should appoint and develop Freedom of Information Champions and Deputies to cover all Council services and to act as a single point of contact between those services and the Freedom of Information Team. The implementation of Champions should be driven by Legal and Member Services, including the provision of the appropriate training and support for the role to be fulfilled effectively and consistently across the Council. Council Directorates should, however, determine which officers should carry out these roles based on staffing resources, number of requests received and of services provided. It is expected that this recommendation should be fully implemented by December.

Recommendation 2:

If departmental Champions are to be introduced, they should be provided with appropriate access to CRM. It should then be ensured that all departmental actions / processes are fully recorded within CRM, included acknowledging the receipt of the request within 2 working days to allow the Freedom of Information Team to monitor all requests received effectively.

5.3 Application of Customer Relationship Management for Freedom of Information

Officers stated that approximately 90% of requests arrive by email through to an email address specifically designated for the purpose of processing them and to provide the required response. Email requests are also generated from the "What Do They Know" website, a site established to assist the public in accessing information from public bodies. All requests are manually input into the Customer Relationship Management software application, used to record all customer contacts across the Council. The Council's website also has a web based form for requests and these automatically populate CRM when they are submitted. The use of the web based form system is promoted over all others as it is more efficient for the Council to process. The Panel believed that there maybe an improvement for efficiency if all requests from the What Do They Know Website, which makes up 35% of total Freedom of Information requests, could automatically populate the CRM application as this is a typically standard feature for a support desk system.

Recommendation 3:

Legal and Member Services should investigate whether there is an existing technical solution for the CRM to be automatically populated with all requests made via the What Do They Know website and by email. If a technical solution is identified, this should be fully tested to ensure all requests are captured before being implemented.

The Panel discussed the functionality of the CRM moving forward and whether it meets the needs of managing Freedom of Information processes. Specific case management systems generally provide a simplified process for managing information requests. Benefits of a case management system include capturing incoming requests from emails and web forms, redaction tools and managing fees, exemptions and appeals. Officers stated CRM doesn't meet the ideal requirements for managing Freedom of Information but there is scope for looking at getting a case management system for obtaining better efficiencies if there are staffing resource issues. It was highlighted that Liverpool City Council has a case management system in place and is effective, but there is a larger Freedom of Information Team in place.

Recommendation 4:

Legal and Member Services should determine the desired functionality of the IT software / workflow management system for the Council moving forward in managing Freedom of Information. If the existing CRM system is deemed not fit for purpose or too costly to configure, the feasibility of procuring a new case management system should be investigated. If the Council intends to acquire a new case management system, it should be ensured that a business case, supported by a cost-benefit analysis, is developed accordingly.

5.3 Performance Management

The Panel identified performance management as a core component of effective governance over complying with Freedom of Information requirements. Officers explained that on a weekly basis, the Chief Executives Strategy Group (CESG) receives a report covering the number of requests received and statistics on requests outstanding, specifically highlighting those which are close to and have exceeded the 20 working days. Reports come with a brief narrative to allow concerns to be flagged up quickly. These reports are broken down into the respective directorates so each Strategic Director can review and monitor their own area.

The Panel believed that these reports only allow monitoring at an operational level, where specific requests for information can be reviewed and targeted. The panel proposed that performance figures should be included as part of the CESG reports, with these broken down not only at the directorate level, but departmentally to identify departments that are not meeting the target required. This would then allow targeted strategic intervention to identify any issues contributing to the under achievement of the target.

The Panel commented that at Committee level, it would be beneficial for Members of the Transformation and Resources Policy & Performance Committee to have better performance information as part of the Performance Management Framework. Currently, a corporate performance figure is provided to this committee and, as of recently, the performance figure of those directorates that have exceeded the 85% compliance has also been included under the comments area of the Performance Report. For more effective scrutiny, the Panel considered that it would be useful to be provided with performance information on directorates / departments that did not meet an appropriate tolerance threshold.

Recommendation 5:

In order to enhance performance management of compliance against Freedom of Information legislation, Legal and Member Services should:

- iii) Ensure that the percentage of Freedom of Information requests responded to within 20 working days is reported to the Chief Executive's Strategy Group as part of the monitoring reports submitted, with the performance figure broken down at Council directorate and departmental level; and**
- iv) Liaise with the Performance & Business Intelligence Team to develop a solution for providing exception reporting on directorate and departmental performance where an appropriate threshold tolerance has not been met. This recommendation should be implemented in line with the commencement of the new municipal year.**

5.4 The publication scheme and information management

The Panel was aware that all public authorities are required to have a Publication Scheme, approved by the ICO and to publish information in accordance with the Scheme as part of Freedom of Information legislation. The Scheme has to set out the commitment to make certain classes of information routinely available, including policies, procedures, minutes of meetings, annual reports and financial information.

Officers informed the Panel that Wirral's Publication Scheme is based on the model provided by the ICO and that it was re-launched 12 months ago in collaboration with Corporate Marketing. The categories of the Publication Scheme were reviewed and the local authors for each information asset are responsible for updating it as appropriate.

The Panel looked at the Publication Scheme as a method of potentially reducing the number of Freedom of Information requests being made. The review identified that there wasn't any formal process in place to identify any emerging trends or themes from requests received, which if carried out, could facilitate in updating and improving the Council's Publication Scheme and potentially reduce the number of requests being made. Additionally, the Panel was aware that a number of public bodies publish a summary of commonly asked requests on their website, not only to reduce the number of requests, but also to promote greater transparency. The Panel was keen for this to be introduced by Wirral Borough Council moving forward.

The ICO also encourages public bodies to publish performance information on a regular basis and this is taken up by a number of Councils across the country. The Panel is keen for Wirral Borough Council to adopt this practice and demonstrate the intent to be accountable for its performance and to act on the Council's desire to be more transparent.

Recommendation 6:

Legal and Member Services should implement a process for identifying emerging trends and themes of all Freedom of Information requests received by the Council and to then ensure that the Council's Publication Scheme is appropriately updated with the relevant information.

Recommendation 7:

Legal and Member Services should engage with the Corporate Marketing Team to implement a strategy on using the Council's internet website in order to:

- i) Publish the Council's performance on managing Freedom of Information requests on a periodic basis, including all relevant statistics such as volume of requests received; and**
- ii) Categorise and publish commonly asked Freedom of Information requests received with their respective responses.**

As part of the review, the Panel requested a number of recently made Freedom of Information requests where the information was already made available on the Council website to form a view of the search system for locating specific information. The Panel concluded that they found it difficult to locate the information that was requested from the majority of the Freedom of Information requests sampled using the search tool. Multiple pages had to be accessed and there was no real clarity on which Council department or section a specific piece of information would sit with. Although it was considered that the operation of the search functionality on the Council's website may sit outside the scope of

Freedom of Information, the Panel conveyed that this is something that could be considered as part of the Council's ongoing development of the Council's website.

Recommendation 8:

Legal and Member Services is requested to note the views of the Panel on the search functionality of the Council's website, when using detailed search criteria. These views should be forwarded to the Corporate Marketing Team to ensure that they can be considered as part of the Council's ongoing development of the Council's website.

6. CONCLUSION

The Panel applauds the Council's improving Freedom of Information performance but believes that it is important to ensure this is maintained moving forward. The Panel also believes that by implementing these proposed recommendations, it will assist the Council on performance gains going forward.

As part of the scrutiny process, it is intended that the recommendations made in this report will be followed up in the new municipal year.

7. MEMBERS OF THE REVIEW PANEL

Chair's Statement:

As we began this Review, Wirral Borough Council had already taken steps to improve FOI response times. Following enforced monitoring action by the Information Commissioner, the Council had responded and response times are now significantly over 85%, for which the Council can be commended.

It is, however, important to keep striving for improvement towards being an even more open and transparent council, and to recognise that the Council is now in a good starting position to move forward.

This Scrutiny Panel has investigated the current issues faced by the Council, regarding FOI requests, and I would like to thank the officers involved for their engagement in this process.

The recommendations that have come out of this investigation aim to help to improve the Council's FOI performance, through improving availability of information to the public, from the outset. Secondly, progress is sought through a more robust and consistent process, involving designated FOI champions across the Council, with better training and clear accountability. Finally, by investing in better monitoring both throughout the individual requests and more corporately, we can always be looking for further development.

Panel Membership

Councillor Adam Sykes (Chair)



Councillor Christina Muspratt



Councillor Stuart Whittingham



***This Report was produced by the Freedom of Information Scrutiny Review Panel
(which reports to the Transformation and Resources Policy & Performance Committee)***

Appendix 1:

Draft Scope Document

Date: 27th November 2013

Review Title: Freedom of Information

Scrutiny Panel Chair: Cllr. Adam Sykes, 0151 324 286, adamsykes@wirral.gov.uk ,
Panel members: Cllr. Stuart Whittingham, 0151 653 5539, stuartwhittingham@wirral.gov.uk Cllr. Christina Muspratt, 0151 645 8864, christinamuspratt@wirral.gov.uk
Scrutiny Officer(s): Michael Lester, 0151 691 8628, michaellester@wirral.gov.uk
Departmental Link Officers: Surjit Tour, 0151 691 8569, surjittour@wirral.gov.uk Jane Corrin, 0151 691 8645, janecorrin@wirral.gov.uk
Other Key Officer contacts: None identified at this stage
2. What are the main issues? <ul style="list-style-type: none">Concerns were raised about the Council's overall performance in meeting the requirements of the Information Commissioner's Office to respond to Freedom of Information requests. This is in light of recent monitoring action taken by the Information Commissioner until recently. There is a risk that Council may not move to where it wants to be.Concerns were raised on the strategic approach to managing information and making information readily available as part of the Council's Publication Scheme. There is a risk that Freedom of Information requests may be unnecessarily made due to lack of transparency and governance in making appropriate information available.There are risks that the procedures and processes in place to manage Freedom of Information requests may be ineffective and inefficient in line with existing and future strategies.
3. The Committee's overall aim/objective in doing this work is: <p>For the panel to receive assurances that the Council is moving in the right direction in managing Freedom off Information.</p>
4. The possible outputs/outcomes are: <ol style="list-style-type: none">That the Council achieves and sustains a desired level of performance.That the number of requests made for information is reduced to make better use of resources.That the Council will be subject to less external criticism and therefore improving it's overall reputation.

5. What specific value can scrutiny add to this topic? Scrutiny can provide assurance to the Council that it is operating adequately and moving in the direction it wants to achieve.	
6. Who will the Committee be trying to influence as part of its work? Council officers responsible for information management.	
7. Duration of enquiry? This is considered to be a short review, based on a small number of meetings with key officers to review evidence presented.	
8. What category does the review fall into? Performance	
9. Extra resources needed? Would the investigation benefit from the co-operation of an expert witness? None identified at this stage.	
10. What information do we need?	
10.1 Secondary information (background information, existing reports, legislation, central government documents, etc). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Freedom of Information legislation. Documented procedural documentation and relevant process maps to understand and appraise the system. Best practice documents issued by the Information Commissioner or other public bodies. 	10.2 Primary/new evidence/information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Performance benchmarking data against other similar sized Local Authorities A report of all Freedom of Information requests made in the last twelve months where information to respond to theses requests was publicly available at the time. A report illustrating how time is spent and resources are deployed in managing Freedom of Information requests across the Council.
10.3 Who can provide us with further relevant evidence? (Cabinet portfolio holder, officer, service user, general public, expert witness, etc). council officers to include: Not applicable at this stage.	10.4 What specific areas do we want them to cover when they give evidence? Not applicable at this stage.
11. What processes can we use to feed into the review? (site visits/observations, face-to-face questioning, telephone survey, written questionnaire, etc). <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Face-to-face questioning 2) Sampling a number of Freedom of Information requests made for the transparency of information that is made publicly available. 3) Comparison of procedures and processes employed against best practice 	
12. In what ways can we involve the public and at what stages? (consider whole range of consultative mechanisms, local committees and local ward mechanisms). Not applicable for the subject.	

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WIRRAL COUNCIL

TRANSFORMATION AND RESOURCES POLICY AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE

14 APRIL 2014

SUBJECT:	LOCAL WELFARE ASSISTANCE SCHEME 2014/15 & FUTURE SUPPORT OPTIONS
WARD/S AFFECTED:	ALL
REPORT OF:	HEAD OF BUSINESS PROCESSES
RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER	COUNCILLOR PHIL DAVIES

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 Cabinet approved the updating of Wirral's local discretionary support scheme "Local Welfare Assistance" introduced in April 2013 on 13 March 2014 (minute 164). Wirral's scheme was approved by Cabinet on 24 January 2013 and a small number of specific scheme amendments for 2014/15 were made. The background to the scheme and those changes are set out below from the March Cabinet report.
- 1.2 This specific grant funding is only being available for 2014/15 and will not be available thereafter. An authority has no statutory requirement to have a scheme and locally specifies its own scheme. Members are asked to consider if they wish to propose options for going forward given the short term period now available with this grant.

2.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

- 2.1 The Government published the White Paper "Universal Credit: welfare that works" on 11 November 2010 which set out proposals to reform the welfare system and which included reform plans for the Social Fund. The subsequent Welfare Reform Act 2012 included powers to end the discretionary elements of the Social Fund. From April 2013 the discretionary Crisis Loans for Living Expenses and Community Care Grant elements of the Social Fund administered by the Department of Work and Pensions were abolished. Funding was transferred to Local Authorities for them to provide a replacement local scheme.
- 2.2 Crisis Loans were intended for people unable to meet their immediate short term needs in an emergency or as a consequence of disaster, and were awarded for immediate living expenses in order to avoid serious damage to the health and safety of the applicant or a member of their family. Community Care Grants were primarily intended to help vulnerable people live as independent a life as possible in the community and were dependant on receipt of income related benefit.
- 2.3 The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) continues to administer the discretionary Crisis Loan Alignment and Budgeting Loans which they are gradually replacing with new national schemes for Short Term Advances and Budgeting Advances. The DWP also continues to administer the regulated elements of the Social Fund (such as Funeral Payments, Cold Weather Payments, Winter Fuel Payments and Sure Start Maternity Grants).

- 2.4 Following consultation Wirral Council developed a policy for the provision of a Local Welfare Assistance Scheme aimed at supporting those most in need. The Policy was approved by Cabinet on 24 January 2013 (minute 168) and the scheme in place aims to meet the presented needs of the applicant through provision of goods or items rather than cash. A longer term aim of the scheme is to support applicants in identifying and addressing the underlying causes giving rise to the application, such as drug or alcohol abuse or poor budgeting skills.

LOCAL WELFARE ASSISTANCE SCHEME 2013/14

- 2.5 Residents apply for Wirral's LWA scheme via on-line application available on the Council's website. Whilst it was anticipated that many potential applicants may have difficulties in accessing the scheme in this way, and the service made provision to support those needing assistance, in reality an overwhelming majority of applicants have been able to complete the application process unassisted.
- 2.6 Two self access kiosks have been installed in the Conway Centre in central Birkenhead, the busiest one stop shop. 3,971 people have used these kiosks to find out about the scheme, and 2,946 people have used a kiosk to make an application. Most other one stop shops have ready access to the library public access PC's, and there are plans to install kiosks in Seacombe and Bebington to provide access to the scheme from these sites.
- 2.7 The call centre recruited a small number of temporary staff to help respond to telephone enquiries relating to the scheme and at the same time promote self access via online application. Over 5,500 calls have been received since the scheme's inception and 95% have been handled at the first time of offering.
- 2.8 The assessment and processing part of the scheme is administered by housing benefit staff, and there have been significant advantages to placing the scheme within this service including:
- Staff are experienced in making discretionary assessments, have a key knowledge of the benefits system and can establish what benefits should be in payment and when they are likely to be due.
 - Staff have access to benefits information so they can establish identity and residency without the need for the customer to provide additional supporting documentation which minimises complexity and delay.
 - Staff consider other awards such as a discretionary housing payment and council tax discount where appropriate, which helps the applicant with a view to maximising any other support or entitlement not being accessed or claimed.
 - Staff identify anomalies in applications when reviewing the information held in housing benefit claims, and can ensure that LWA funds are protected from abuse and focussed on those in real need. This was shown in a prosecution which resulted in an LWA applicant pleading guilty to the offence of fraud, and being sentenced to 60 hours' unpaid work plus costs.
 - Staff similarly identify anomalies in housing benefit applications arising from information provided in the LWA application and are thus able to detect fraud and error in housing benefit claims.

- 2.9 Assessment staff give consideration to a number of factors in determining whether an award should be made. These are;
- Whether the support requested is available under the scheme
 - Whether the criteria outlined in the policy have been met
 - Whether a benefit payment is due and, if so, when
- 2.10 Where it is considered a LWA award is appropriate to the applicant's circumstances, an arrangement will be made to either;
- Deliver the item(s) requested to the person's home, or
 - Provide a purchase card for collection at a one stop shop of the applicant's choosing. The card is used to purchase the item(s) required.
- 2.11 The scheme has been successful in meeting the needs of the most vulnerable, and has received a number of positive comments and thus far no complaints have been received about the scheme and its administration.

FINANCIAL REVIEW

- 2.12 The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) allocated Wirral Council programme funding of £1,345,925 for the provision of awards under this scheme. This was less than the amount spent by the DWP on awards under the Social Fund scheme for the elements no longer administered by them. In spite of this, and in common with other local authorities, significantly less has been awarded under the scheme in the first nine months than had been predicted. This has enabled us to redefine 'essential items' to include more items such as floor covering, clothing and footwear.
- 2.13 Financial support has also been extended to the Emergency Duty Team based in Families & Wellbeing, as well as the use of supermarket vouchers issued to support vulnerable people outside of normal office opening hours. Closer working with the Supporting People team in Regeneration & Environment has been developed to ensure applications from hostel dwellers are processed quickly and effectively. This allows residents to be moved on more quickly and reducing the service's expenditure on hostel accommodation.

ANALYSIS OF APPLICATIONS

- 2.14 In the first nine months of the scheme, the Council received 5,552 applications for support. This compares to 12,880 Social Fund applications for crisis loan items, crisis loan living expenses, crisis loan alignments and community care grants made to the DWP for the same period in 2011. The figures for 2012 are not available although our figures show an increase in applications with figures at the end of February 2014 having risen to 7,308. It is also noteworthy that the DWP scheme was a loan which was then repaid through ongoing benefit whereas the authority scheme is an award.
- 2.15 This significant reduction in numbers of applications is not easy to explain given the increasingly difficult economic situation and the impact of the welfare reforms. This may reflect the work of local authority's looking at a wider range of options that people making claims have available rather than under the previous scheme of cash payments. It is evident that a non cash system has proven to be not as attractive to

a number of previous applicants alongside the more robust checking and verification process the authority undertakes that better identifies real need as well as alternative options. The scheme is applied in such a way that applicants are offered access to longer term solutions on financial difficulties and are pointed to money debt advice which the authority has actively supported through the Voluntary Sector.

- 2.16 However, this experience has been mirrored across the country, and the anticipated numbers of applications have not materialised to the same level as under the DWP loan scheme. An informal comparison on Merseyside shows that this is a similar picture in neighbouring authorities. An updated figure for Wirral shows 41% of grant spent with others reporting between 15% and 39%. As this report later highlights a number have looked to now support options wider than a direct support scheme. These are hoped to provide a base for ongoing support infrastructure once this government grant funding is withdrawn in 2015 and this options needs to be considered for its relevance in Wirral.
- 2.17 The age brackets of applicants closely relate to the age demographic of Wirral applicants under the old scheme administered by the DWP, which would indicate that the majority of applicants are still those that would have qualified under the old scheme.

Age Band	% of Applicants Wirral LWA Scheme	% of Applicants DWP Social Fund Scheme
65+	1	1
55-64	5	5
45-54	15	16
35-44	21	22
25-34	31	27
18-24	26	28
16/17	1	1
u/16	0	0

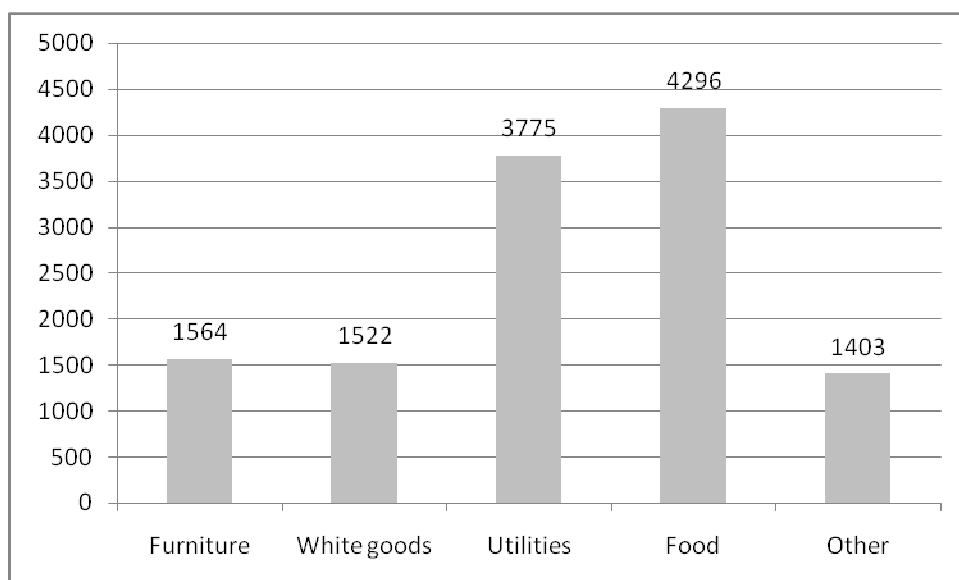
- 2.18 88% of the applications received have been from single applicants and only 12% from couples. 45% of applicants have dependant children and 55% do not.
- 2.19 17% of applications came from people living in hostels or homeless, with a further 2% living with parents or friends. 36% of applications came from tenants of registered social landlords, and 40% from private tenants. Only 3% were owner occupiers and the remaining 2% classified themselves as 'other'.
- 2.20 The reasons behind the applications are requested in the application process. The reasons provided by the applicant have been analysed, and identified as:

Reason for application	%
Interruptions or delays to DWP benefit payments	17
Crisis	59
Disaster	1
Homeless or leaving care / detention	4
Other	18

2.21 A significant number of applications for support are due to benefit suspensions or delays in getting benefits into payment. The DWP does make some provision for those who are adversely affected in this way, but access to this provision is very severely restricted and the majority of people affected are not able to access any of the DWP hardship payments.

2.22 A further analysis of the reasons in the table above under the title “crisis” shows that the majority of applicants need support as they are struggling to cope with the limited budget available to them. Many of these people are at risk of exacerbating their financial problems by accessing funds at very high interest rates, either from legitimate or illegal money lenders. Some have already used loan sharks. Repayment has left them with no money to buy food or heat or light their homes. 77% of the applicants requested help to buy food, and 68% needed help to pay for gas and / or electricity.

The table below shows a breakdown of the reasons for application in the first nine months of the scheme;



DETAILS OF AWARDS MADE

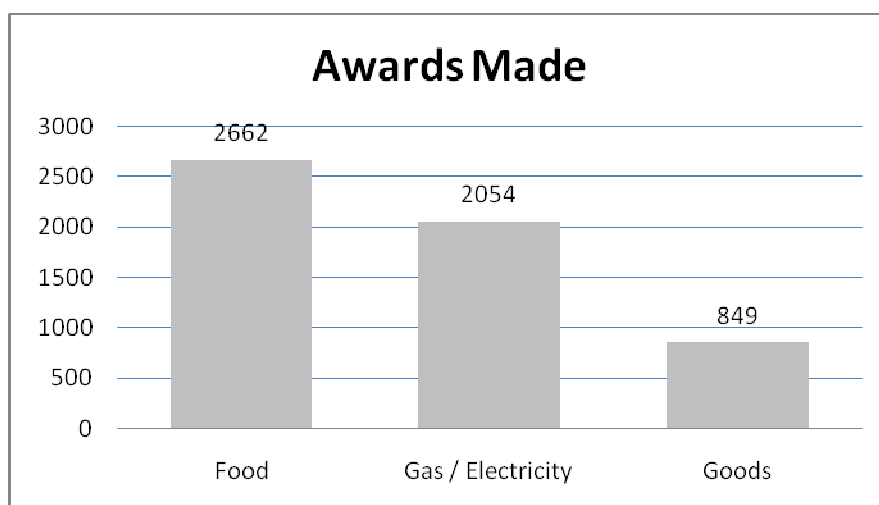
2.23 During the first nine months of the scheme 59% of applications were successful and 41% were refused because they did not meet the basic criteria set out in the policy.

2.24 An analysis of awards made against the support requested shows that;

- 62% of applications that included a request for help with the provision of food were successful,
- 54% of applications that included a request for help with gas and electricity costs were successful,
- 61% of applications that included a request for help with the provision of essential items were successful.

2.25 Of the awards made for the period April to December;

- 82% included an amount for food,
- 63% included an amount for gas and / or electricity, and
- 26% included the provision of essential items (eg of furniture)



2.26 These awards reflect the general principles of the scheme; that awards are to be made where there is a risk to the health or wellbeing of the applicant and/or any dependants.

2.27 84% of applications are being processed within a day, and this includes awards where there is no eligibility and non urgent awards, for example for furniture items required for a person to move out of hostel accommodation.

2.28 234 applications were reviewed on appeal in the first nine months of the scheme. These appeals are handled internally within Housing Benefits by separate officers. A significant number of appeals result from a refusal for a budgeting advance from the DWP.

ADMINISTRATIVE AND STAFFING IMPACT

2.29 The implementation and ongoing administration of the scheme has had a significant impact on the Housing Benefit assessment function, at a time when handling a significant increase in work via the massive changes under Welfare Reform. This has seen Benefits work increase and at the same time additional support has been focused in addressing the requirements of the Personal Finance Unit assessment and recovery work.

2.30 Customer Service staff have also been significantly impacted upon by the cumulative effects of all welfare reforms. LWA applicants awarded a payment card collect it from a one stop shop. Those who are not eligible for support from the LWA scheme may also be referred to one stop shops for a food bank voucher in certain circumstances. Food Bank voucher issues have increased massively since these changes and we continue to work closely with the charity for the benefit of people who need to access this service.

2.31 The successful implementation of the scheme has been due to the flexibility and commitment shown by staff in these areas.

- 2.32 The application process, mainly on line, has proven to be accessible and easy to use.
- 2.33 The number of applicants each week has increased as the year has progressed. Weekly payments starting at around £4,500 per week in April 2013 and are now up to an average £24,000 per week in February 2014. This is as a result of the ongoing publicity work targeting potential claimants and partners in the voluntary and housing sectors who work with likely applicants.

COMMUNICATION OF THE SCHEME

- 2.34 In common with other local authorities, the launch of the Local Welfare Assistance scheme was low key in year one. We did ensure that partner organisations were aware of the scheme and made information available on the Council's website. We also liaised closely with the Job Centre Plus, so they could signpost social fund applicants in the right direction.
- 2.35 Analysis has shown that there are few applications from older people, who may be struggling financially but are unaware of the scheme. Similarly the majority of applications come from those out of work, whilst we know many low paid employees also find it difficult to make financial ends meet. We will look to work more closely with key partner organisations to ensure as many vulnerable residents are aware and can access the scheme to be supported through difficult times.
- 2.36 Funding is only guaranteed for 2014/15 and government have reviewed this and this funding is not to be maintained after this. The authority will have to decide what if any support scheme is in place in 2015/16 and from where it is funded. Therefore, it is imperative that the grant funding is used to maximise ongoing support that will allow the most vulnerable to be best supported going forward.

POLICY REVIEW

- 2.37 Following a review of the policy in the light of the first nine months' of the scheme, a revised policy has been drafted for 2014/15 and is appended to this report (Appendix 1). Only a small number of amendments have been made to the scheme and the main changes are;

For a request for support to remain or become established in the community:

- There is no longer a requirement for a referral from an organisation which supports vulnerable people
 - There is no longer a requirement that the applicant is due to leave a care home, hospital or prison within six weeks
- 2.38 These amendments allow the scheme to be used to support people moving out of hostel or other temporary accommodation, thus reducing the cost to the Council of temporary accommodation.
- 2.39 There is also an amendment in Section 3 of the policy, adding paragraph 3.5 which outlines action to be taken in the event of an under spend of the budget, looking at wider ways of supporting the principles of the scheme.
- 2.40 Cabinet approved these revisions to the policy for 2014/15.

FUTURE OPTIONS AND PROPOSALS

- 2.41 The grant that has been given to the authority is guaranteed for this year and 2014/15, after which central government have formally made clear that it will not be separate and will form part of settlement considerations. No specific sum will be identifiable and all authorities will have to consider what if anything they do in this regard from within reducing resources from 2015/16. 2014/15 is therefore an opportunity to identify and decide on support for any initiatives that may in the long lasting in supporting Wirral's most vulnerable residents.
- 2.42 Recent benchmarking activity has identified a number of examples of innovative practices and partnership working already being put forward elsewhere. This includes possible support for families and/or the homeless, working closer with Job Centre advisors, working with the Voluntary sector on budgeting advice & support and added to this is potential support for local Credit Unions, Food Banks or other such organisations:
- 2.43 There is no obligation on an authority to have a scheme and it can decide not to extend its activity and use the grant for other authority purposes. If Members are minded such areas could be reviewed corporately and reported on which offer a feasible proposal, the implications of each and how best any could be implemented. Cabinet is asked to support a further report detailing which, if any, options can best be proposed to taken forward.

3.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS

- 3.1 The authority continues to engage with partner organisations to provide a scheme that responds to immediate crises and helps address underlying issues identified.

4.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS

4.1 FINANCIAL:

- 4.1.1. The grant funding is only available for the years 2013/14 and 2014/15 and is £1,345,925 per annum. This was £229,575 less than the DWP full year expenditure against Crisis Loans and Community Care Grants in 2011/12 however the DWP scheme was largely a loan scheme reclaimed back through ongoing benefits. It is not a legal requirement to have an assistance scheme of this type and the grant is not ring fenced to this specific area, thus any under spend remains in the authority. Given the uncertainty of demand levels the policy as amended allows for prioritisation of applications in order to protect the finite funding available for the scheme.
- 4.1.2. As at 31st December 2013 £389,815 had been spent in respect of 3,489 awards. As at the end of February 2014 this had increased to £561,913 in respect of 4,417 separate awards which reflects the ongoing increase in awards and applications being handled. Awards may include elements for one or more of the scheme areas (food fuel or white goods).

- 4.2 IT: There are none arising out of this report.

4.3 STAFFING:

- 4.3.1. To ensure this scheme was properly and fully administered Housing Benefits have had two experienced team leaders manage the scheme, one undertaking reviews under the appeals process, and the other addressing day to day operational arrangements. The Housing Benefits Operational Manager has also had to give considerable time to ensure this totally new scheme was up and running in time and that it continues to work effectively. Supporting this there are two full time equivalent assessors undertaking assessment and award functions and includes liaising with suppliers, customers and partners. As scheme applications continue to increase this has required additional support which has been by utilising housing benefit staff.
- 4.3.2. There have been a number of practical issues for staff to contend with, spending considerable time in contact with many applicants, supporting them through their crises and helping explore alternative options for support.
- 4.3.3. One stop shop staff report an increase in customers who are upset, angry or worried and they face increasing hostility from customers who are struggling to meet escalating financial commitments or who are refused an LWA award. It is anticipated that this trend is likely to continue as staff contend with an increasingly difficult role as the adverse impacts of welfare reform are seen. Training is being organised to support staff while we keep under review the balance of security in place to support our staff whilst not impacting on the overall environment at sites.

4.4 ASSETS: There are none arising out of this report.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There is no specific duty on local authorities as to how or if they meet this provision as government views authorities need to be able to be flexible to provide this support in a way that is suitable and appropriate to meet the needs of local communities.

6.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 A specific Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been undertaken as part of Wirral's scheme development and design, and is accessed through the following link <http://www.wirral.gov.uk/my-services/community-and-living/equality-diversity-cohesion/equality-impact-assessments/eias-2010/finance>
- 6.2 A national EIA for Welfare Reform can be assessed through the following link: - <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/policy/welfare-reform/legislation-and-key-documents/welfare-reform-act-2012/impact-assessments-and-equality/>

7.0 CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are none arising out of this report.

8.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are none arising out of this report.

9.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 That Members consider the Cabinet approved authority Local Welfare Assistance Scheme for 2014/15 as outlined in Appendix 1 and consider proposing other measures that may be used to support vulnerable residents for proposals to be brought before a future meeting as to how they may be progressed.

10.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 Members can view the changes to the policy and consider if additional areas of support for vulnerable people should be considered in the light of the ending of this specific grant from central government at the end of this financial year.

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APPENDIX: Wirral Local Welfare Assistance Scheme Policy 2014/15

REFERENCE MATERIAL: None

SUBJECT HISTORY:

Council Meeting		Date
Cabinet	(min 164)	13/03/14
Cabinet	(min 168)	24/01/13
Council Excellence Overview & Scrutiny	(min 42)	27/11/12
Cabinet	(min 51)	19/07/12
Council Excellence Overview & Scrutiny	(min 98)	26/03/12
Council Excellence Overview & Scrutiny	(min 138)	17/11/11
Cabinet	(min 118)	22/09/11
Council Excellence Overview & Scrutiny	(min 64)	16/03/11

**WIRRAL LOCAL
WELFARE ASSISTANCE
SCHEME
POLICY
2014/15**

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- 2. Purpose of the Scheme**
- 3. Financial Constraints**
- 4. Eligibility & Assessment Criteria**
- 5. Accessing the scheme**
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- 7. Appeals**

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The discretionary Crisis Loans for Living Expenses and Community Care Grant elements of the Social Fund administered by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) were abolished with effect from April 2013. Funding has been allocated to Local Authorities for the provision of a replacement local scheme.
- 1.2 Crisis Loans were intended for people who were unable to meet their immediate short terms needs in an emergency or as a consequence of disaster, and they were awarded for immediate living expenses in order to avoid serious damage to the health and safety of the applicant or a member of their family. Community Care Grants were primarily intended to help vulnerable people live as independent a life as possible in the community and were dependant on receipt of income related benefit.
- 1.3 The DWP continues to administer the discretionary Crisis Loan Alignment and Budgeting Loans which are being replaced with new national schemes for Short Term Advances and Budgeting Advances. The DWP also continues to administer the regulated elements of the Social Fund (Funeral Payments, Cold Weather Payments, Winter Fuel Payments and Sure Start Maternity Grants).
- 1.4 The DWP intended that Local Authorities would need to consider the scheme's original purpose when developing local schemes, and that they would develop schemes that were flexible to meet the needs of local communities.
- 1.5 The funding provided for the scheme was less than the previous DWP spend on Crisis Loans and Community Care Grants, and the new local schemes therefore need to address issues of reliance on the scheme and prioritise those most in need. The DWP expected the funding to be concentrated on those facing greatest difficulty in managing their income and to enable a more flexible response to unavoidable need.
- 1.6 Following analysis and consideration of the issues identified during the first six months of delivering the local scheme, this document sets out the revised year one policy of the Council's provision. This policy will continue to be reviewed and further developed for subsequent years.

2. Purpose of the scheme

- 2.1. The scheme aims to provide emergency support to people who have insufficient resources to meet their own or their family's immediate short term needs, which if not met would pose a serious risk to their health and wellbeing, or would put at risk their ability to remain or establish themselves in the community.
- 2.2. The scheme will not be appropriate where the authority considers that the applicant has alternative means of addressing those needs.
- 2.3. Consideration will also be given to those applicants with an identified immediate need that cannot be met through any other channel, and which the applicant cannot reasonably be expected to fund themselves.
- 2.4. The scheme will only be appropriate where the support required is not available through any other provision. Where we consider it reasonable to expect the applicant to use that alternative provision, the application will be refused and the applicant will be appropriately signposted and supported to access that provision.
- 2.5. The scheme intends to avoid cash payments - the intention is to meet the presented needs through the provision of goods or services rather than with cash awards. Cash will only be considered as a last resort where there is no other way of meeting the need.
- 2.6. Support will be targeted at those most in need through consideration of the circumstances of each application, as explained in section 4.
- 2.7. In the longer term, the scheme will aim to provide long term solutions where applicable by addressing any underlying issues identified during the application process. Working with partner organisations we aim to develop a network of support which can be accessed by referral via the scheme.

3. Financial Constraints

- 3.1 Government funding of the scheme is finite and may not be adequate to support all applications for support through this scheme.
- 3.2 Close and regular financial monitoring of the scheme will take place to understand the pressures on the scheme and to inform the extent to which the scheme can support applications.
- 3.3 The eligibility criteria in section 4 define the basic criteria required in order for an application to be considered. Having met those basic criteria, decisions on support or awards which can be provided from this scheme will be dependant on the level of resources available.
- 3.4 Should the levels of applications meeting basic eligibility criteria significantly outweigh available funding then the basic eligibility criteria may need to be amended.
- 3.5 In the event of an under-spend of the LWA budget, consideration will be given to extending financial support to third party partner organisations whose work supports the principles and intentions of this scheme.

4. Eligibility & Assessment Criteria

4.1 The eligibility criteria for support under this scheme is focused upon the circumstances, presenting need and level of risk rather than focusing on eligible groups of people.

4.2 To be eligible for access to the scheme **all** of the following criteria must be met:

- Aged 16 or over
- Be a Wirral resident or, in the case of those who are homeless or leaving an institutional establishment, have established links with Wirral
- Support is required to address essential needs of yourself and/or your dependants
- It is demonstrated that there are no other resources or other ways of meeting this need which are considered reasonable

4.3 In order to be eligible for essential immediate support the applicant would also need to be able to demonstrate that there would be a serious risk to the health and wellbeing of the applicant and/or his or her dependants if those needs are not met.

4.4 Examples of essential immediate support needs are:

- Essential food
- Heat/electricity
- Essential supplies associated with infants/children

This list is not exhaustive and applications for other needs claimed as essential and immediate will be considered.

4.5 To be eligible for support to remain or become established in the community where the applicant cannot reasonably be expected to fund items themselves, the following criteria must be met:

- The applicant has essential items or costs associated with establishing or maintaining residence in the community, **and**
- It is demonstrated that there are no other resources or other reasonable ways of meeting this need
- If funding constraints apply, priority will be given to applicants who are supported or who have been referred to the scheme by an organisation which supports vulnerable people

Or

- The applicant has to replace essential items (this could be following a disaster or unforeseen event), **and**
- It is demonstrated that there are no other resources or other reasonable ways of meeting this need

4.6 Examples of items or costs that would be considered are:

- Essential domestic appliances¹
- Essential domestic furniture²
- Essential bedding

This list is not exhaustive and applications for other items or expenses claimed as being required to maintain health and wellbeing in the home or in the community will be considered.

4.7 Applications for support to meet essential travel costs may be considered under this scheme. Travel costs will only be considered for travel within the United Kingdom; overseas travel will not be considered due to the financial constraints of this scheme. Examples of travel that would be considered are:

- Travel to attend the funeral of a close relative³
- Travel to visit a close relative³ in care or another institution

This list is not exhaustive and applications for other travel costs will be considered.

4.8 The scheme will not be considered for the following:

- Those applicants who have an income or savings or a member of their household has an income or savings which could be used to meet their needs
- To buy (or repair) TV or satellite equipment
- To meet contract costs for TV packages, mobile phones, broadband etc

¹ ie a microwave or cooker, a washing machine for those with dependant children or a disability which increases laundry requirements, a fridge for those applicants who cannot shop on a daily basis or who need to store medication in a fridge.

² A bed and a form of comfortable seating e.g. sofa/arm chair are considered essential, other furniture such as dining table and chairs, and storage will also be considered but will be given a lower priority.

³ A close relative is defined as a spouse, parent, grandparent, sibling, child or grandchild or the spouse of any of these relatives.

- 4.9 If the basic eligibility criteria are met then an application will be assessed to quantify the level of priority of the need. This assessment will be based upon the severity of the likely impact if the need is not met.
- 4.10 Outcomes from assessments will be utilised if legitimate demand levels for support from the scheme outweigh the finite level of support available through the schemes budget. There may therefore be instances where the basic eligibility criteria above are met but an application may be refused because the priority of that application is lower than the scheme's budget can accommodate.
- 4.11 In the longer term an element of the assessment process will be the identification of the underlying causes of the crisis. Applicants will be offered a range of services to support them including benefit maximisation, energy efficiency, debt management and support in finding work or accessing training.

5. Accessing the Scheme

- 5.1 Applications and referrals will be available through a number of channels to maximise accessibility.
- 5.2 Applications to access the scheme will be accepted by referral from a range of partner organisations and Council services where an applicant either has an existing relationship with that organisation, or has approached them for guidance and support.
- 5.3 Applicants will need to provide evidence of their identity and residency and, where appropriate, evidence that they meet the eligibility criteria and presenting circumstances.
- 5.4 Initial screening questions will be asked to determine whether
 - an exceptional need has occurred,
 - the basic eligibility criteria are met, and
 - some support can usefully be put in place
- 5.5 Those applicants who meet the eligibility criteria will have their application reviewed with priority given to those requiring emergency support. The scheme will aim to provide a same day decision and award for such emergency cases.
- 5.6 Where appropriate an appointment will be made to review the application, the circumstances of the applicant and the potential options available.
- 5.7 This service will not be available out of hours. However the Council's Emergency Duty Team will continue to respond to the needs of vulnerable adults and children out of hours, and will be supported to do so through the scheme's funding.

6. Methods of Award

- 6.1 Where a need is identified that cannot reasonably be met by any other scheme, consideration will be given to the provision of goods and / or services to meet that need.
- 6.2 In order to maximise the number of people that can be supported by this scheme, where goods are required we will look to provide second hand refurbished furniture and white goods where appropriate rather than new items.
- 6.3 Where goods cannot be provided directly, consideration will be given to payment cards or vouchers to enable the purchase of such goods. These payment cards or vouchers must be used for the purpose for which they have been requested.
- 6.4 Where a voucher is issued, this may not offer a choice of providers / stores. However the Council will work to ensure that the goods offered by any provider it specifies are of acceptable quality and offer good value to the customer.
- 6.5 Cash will only be issued where there is no identifiable alternative to meeting the need of the applicant.
- 6.6 Where cash is awarded, the sum provided will be sufficient to meet the minimum needs of the applicant and his or her dependants for the period until the applicant's circumstances can reasonably be expected to have changed. This sum will be calculated according to a schedule of rates determined by the Council and will be reviewed at regular intervals.
- 6.7 Repeat applications within 2 years will generally be denied unless the reason for the application is unrelated to the previous award. Where a repeat application is awarded then consideration may be given to providing the award as a loan rather than grant depending on the applicant's ability to repay the award value. The value of the loan will be the cost of the goods and / or service provided by the Council, or the amount of the cash awarded where applicable.
- 6.8 It is unlikely that any further loans will be made whilst a previous loan has an outstanding balance payable, however we will consider the individual circumstances of the application including whether there has been an effort to repay the loan and the amount outstanding.

- 6.9 Where a loan has been made to a couple, both partners will be deemed to be liable for the repayment of the loan.
- 6.10 Where it is likely that an applicant's circumstances will quickly and significantly improve (e.g. a person whose access to bank funds has been temporarily suspended), the first award may be designated as repayable.
- 6.11 Awards may be made to a person other than the applicant where they are:
- Enduring Power of Attorney
 - Lasting Power of Attorney for Property and Affairs
 - Department for Work and Pensions Appointee
 - Housing benefit appointee provided there is no conflict of interest

7. Appeals

- 7.1 Applicants will have a right of appeal if they do not agree with a decision made as to their eligibility. They will also be able to appeal against a decision not to make an award due to budgetary constraints.
- 7.2 All appeals will need to be made at the time of receiving the decision, and will be considered by a more senior member of staff.
- 7.3 Those appeals of decisions where the need is immediate (i.e. food, essential provisions or heating) will be prioritised, and we will aim to make decisions within one working day of receipt of the application.
- 7.4 Where the need is for essential items of furniture or support with travel costs, we will aim to review the decision within 5 working days.
- 7.5 There will be no further right of appeal. However any complaints received by the Council about this process will be handled according to the Council's complaint policy, and used to inform future amendments to arrangements, training and communication requirements with our staff, partners and partner services.
- 7.6 Applicants will not be able to appeal against the amounts laid down in the schedule of rates, or about any other matter laid out in this policy. Any disputes relating to the content of this policy will be treated as a complaint and handled according to the Council's complaint procedure.

WIRRAL COUNCIL

POLICY AND PERFORMANCE TRANSFORMATION AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

14 APRIL 2014

SUBJECT:	LOCAL AUDIT AND ACCOUNTABILITY ACT 2014
WARD/S AFFECTED:	ALL
REPORT OF:	STRATEGIC DIRECTOR FOR TRANSFORMATION AND RESOURCES

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of the key provisions of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 ("the Act") and explains the impact on the Wirral Council, specifically in relation to the appointment of a local auditor (external auditor) and the establishment of an independent audit panel to advise the Council on the appointment of a local auditor.
12. This report was considered by the Audit and Risk Management Committee on 14 March 2014.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 On 13th August 2010, the Government announced its intention to abolish the Audit Commission and put in place new decentralised arrangements for the audit of local public bodies, allowing local public bodies to appoint their own auditors from an open and competitive market, with appropriate safeguards to ensure the continuation of high standards of local public audit, whilst ensuring that local people will be able to hold local public bodies to account for local spending decisions.
- 2.2 The Act received Royal Assent on 30 January 2014.

3.0 LOCAL AUDIT AND ACCOUNTABILITY ACT 2014

- 3.1 The Act abolishes the Audit Commission and establishes new arrangements for the audit and accountability of local public bodies in England. The Act amends the legislative framework for council tax referendums and provides measures which can ensure local authority compliance with the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity. Section 39 of the Act gives the Secretary of State power to direct a local authority to comply with the Code of Practice, and comes into force on 30 March 2014.
- 3.2 The Act requires the Council to establish of an independent auditor panel to advise the Council on the appointment of a local auditor.
- 3.3 The Act also introduces greater transparency and openness to meetings of local government bodies by allowing local residents to film, blog, tweet and access

information relating to the decisions made in those meetings. Section 40 of the Act gives the power to the Secretary of State to make Regulations allowing persons to film, photograph or make sound recordings of proceedings. This power to make Regulations also comes into force on 30 March 2014.

- 3.4 It is therefore essential that the Council puts in place appropriate measures to ensure the provisions of the Act are adhered to.
- 3.5 Grant Thornton has been appointed as the Council's external auditor until 2017.
- 3.6 Appendix 1 to the Report provides a more detailed summary of the Act and its implications.

4.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 4.1 While the eligibility requirements around 'independence' will help ensure suitable people are appointed to the auditor panel, it is important that the role is seen as sufficiently attractive to ensure there is adequate interest.
- 4.2 If the Council appoints a majority of independent members to the Audit and Risk Management Committee (ARMC) in order to comply with the Council's Improvement Plan, prior to the Local Audit and Accountability Regulations and guidance being implemented, these appointments may be non-compliant. It is not yet known when the Regulations will be brought into effect and the draft Regulations may be altered following consultation.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS

- 5.1 There are none arising from this report.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS

- 6.1 There are none arising from this report.

7.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are none arising from this report.

8.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Has the potential impact of your proposal(s) been reviewed with regard to equality? Yes.

An EIA will be prepared once the relevant Regulations have been issued.

9.0 CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are none arising from this report.

10.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are none arising from this report.

11.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 11.1 That the Committee notes the Report and Appendix 1 concerning the changes being introduced by the Audit and Accountability Act 2014 and its implications.

12.0 REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 12.1 To ensure the Council complies with the provisions of the Act.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Explanatory note on the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014

REFERENCE MATERIAL

Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014
Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 – Explanatory Notes
Draft Local Audit and Accountability Regulations
Government Consultation papers

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Audit and Risk Management Committee	18 March 2014

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EXPLANATORY NOTE

Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Explanatory Note relates to the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 which received Royal Assent on 30 January 2014. This Explanatory note focuses on the key provisions of the Act.

2. Summary and Background

2.1 Summary

- 2.1.1 The Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 abolishes the Audit Commission and establishes new arrangements for the audit and accountability of local public bodies in England.
- 2.1.2 Under the new arrangements public bodies will be required to appoint an external and independent auditor on the advice of an independent auditor panel.
- 2.1.3 Each relevant authority is required to have an auditor panel to exercise the functions conferred on auditor panels by or under the Act. The Panel must consist of a majority of independent members (or wholly of independent members), and must be chaired by an independent member.
- 2.1.4 The Act amends the legislative framework for council tax referendums and provides measures which can ensure local authority compliance with the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.
- 2.1.5 The Act also introduces greater transparency and openness to meetings of local government bodies by allowing local residents to film, tweet and blog and access information relating to the decisions made in those meetings.

2.2 Background

- 2.2.1 On 13th August 2010, the Government announced its intention to abolish the Audit Commission and put in place new decentralised arrangements for the audit of local public bodies, allowing local public bodies to appoint their own auditors from an open and competitive market, with appropriate safeguards to ensure the continuation of high standards of local public audit, whilst ensuring that local people will be able to hold local public bodies to account for local spending decisions.
- 2.2.2 Since the announcement in 2010, the Government has consulted widely and worked with a range of partners and bodies affected by these changes to develop and refine the proposals.
- 2.2.3 The Government introduced the Local Audit and Accountability Bill (the Bill) into Parliament on 9 May 2013. The Bill set out the Government's vision for the new local audit framework, and contained additional measures which are

complementary to existing initiatives to increase transparency and enable local scrutiny of public bodies.

2.2.4 The Act received Royal Assent on 30 January 2014. However, the provisions of the Act will come into force at different times.

3. Overview of the Structure of the Act

3.1 The main provisions of the Act are as follows:

- The repeal of legislation under which the Audit Commission operates (the Audit Commission Act 1998) and provision to transfer assets, liabilities and continuing functions to other bodies.
- A requirement for relevant authorities to keep accounting records and to prepare an annual statement of accounts, which must be audited.
- A requirement on relevant authorities to appoint an external and independent auditor on the advice of an independent auditor panel and to publish information about the appointment within 28 days of appointment.
- A requirement that an audit of a relevant authority (referred to in the Act as a “local audit”) must include a value for money element (replicating the definition set out in existing legislation).
- The creation of a regulatory framework for local audit which applies, with modifications, Part 42 of the Companies Act 2006, whereby the Financial Reporting Council and professional accountancy bodies regulate the provision of local audit services.
- The transfer of responsibility for setting the code of audit practice and supporting guidance to the National Audit Office, and provisions for how the code should be approved by Parliament.
- The transfer of the Audit Commission’s data matching powers for the purposes of assisting in the prevention and detection of fraud to the Secretary of State or the Minister for the Cabinet Office. It was announced on 15 July 2013 that the data matching powers would transfer to the Cabinet Office.
- A power for the Secretary of State to commission an inspection of a best value authority, mirroring powers in other legislation.
- The Act amends the National Audit Act 1983 to broaden the powers of the Comptroller and Auditor General to enable the National Audit Office to undertake examinations of thematic value for money issues relating to groups of relevant authorities (with some exclusions), and to access information held by the latter where the National Audit Office needs it to fulfil its responsibilities.
- The Act also extends existing powers for the Secretary of State to issue codes of practice concerning the publication of information by certain authorities, so that such codes may apply to relevant authorities classified as ‘smaller authorities’ for the purposes of the Act, and to require those authorities to publish that information.

- The Act amends the Local Government Act 1986 to ensure that local authorities comply with some or all of a code of recommended practice on local authority publicity.
- The Act amends the council tax referendums provisions in Chapter 4ZA of Part 1 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 to provide that increases set by levying bodies are taken into account when local authorities determine whether they have set an excessive amount of council tax each year. It also provides for measures which can ensure local authority compliance with the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.
- The Act allows the Secretary of State to make regulations to allow the public to film, blog and tweet at the public meetings of local government bodies, and to require written records to be kept of certain decisions taken by officers of these bodies.

4. Auditing of Public Bodies

- 4.1 On the 5 March 2012 the Audit Commission announced the award of contracts for the work currently undertaken by the Audit Practice for the period 2012/13 to 2016/17.
- 4.2 The current contracts were let in 2012 and will run until 2017 (with the possibility of extension until 2020). As the Commission will have been abolished before that date, the contracts will transfer to other bodies so they can run for their full duration:
 - The National Audit Office will be responsible for the codes of audit practice and guidance, which set out the way in which auditors are to carry out their functions.
 - Recognised supervisory bodies (accountancy professional bodies) will register audit firms and auditors. They will be required to have rules and practices in place that cover the eligibility of firms to be appointed as local auditors and also the qualifications, experience and criteria that individuals will need to have to sign an audit report. They will also monitor and enforce audit standards. This will all be supervised by the Financial Reporting Council. This mirrors the arrangements under the Companies Act 2006.

- 4.3 The key milestones table below sets out the implementation dates of the new framework:

Financial Year	Key Milestones in implementing the new framework
2014/15	Final Year of Audit Commission Framework Residual Audit Commission closes)
2015/16	New regulatory regime is introduced Outsourcing contracts are transferred to another body to run their remaining two years
2017/18	Local bodies appoint their own auditors from the start of the financial year

5. Appointment of the Local Auditors

- 5.1 Auditors must be appointed by the end of 31st December in the financial year before the financial year which will be covered by the accounts to be audited. The appointment may last for more than one year but a new appointment must be made at least once every five years. The Secretary of State is empowered to alter this period of time by regulations.
- 5.2 The auditor must be eligible to audit the authority's accounts and must be independent from the body being audited. Two or more local auditors may be appointed to audit the accounts of an authority, and those auditors may be appointed:
- (a) to act jointly in relation to some or all parts of the accounts;
 - (b) to act separately in relation to different parts of the accounts;
 - (c) to carry out different functions in relation to the audit.
- 5.3 Local Authorities operating executive arrangements (i.e. Leader and Cabinet or Mayor and Cabinet) the full council, not the executive, must appoint the auditor, following advice from an auditor panel providing the panel has a majority of independent committee members.
- 5.4 To support transparency of the appointment, the authority must publish a notice within 28 days of making the appointment that states it has made the appointment, the term of that appointment, who the appointed auditor is, sets out the auditor panel's advice; and if that advice has not been followed, the relevant authority's reasons for not following it.

6. Requirement to have Auditor Panel

- 6.1 The Act requires each relevant authority to have an auditor panel to exercise the functions conferred on auditor panels by or under the Act.

- 6.2 The auditor panel can be a panel appointed as such, a shared auditor panel appointed by one or more other authorities, or an existing committee that complies with provisions applying to auditor panels.
- 6.3 The auditor panel:
- (a) must consist of a majority of independent members (or wholly of independent members), and
 - (b) must be chaired by an independent member.
- 6.4 A member of the auditor panel is “independent” at any given time if:
- (a) the panel member has not been a member or officer of the authority within the period of 5 years ending with that time;
 - (b) the panel member has not been an officer or employee of an entity connected with the authority within that period; and
 - (c) the panel member is not at that time a relative or close friend of a member or officer of the authority or an officer or employee of an entity connected with the authority.
- 6.5 An Elected Mayor of a relevant authority is not independent of that authority for the purposes of paragraph 6.4.
- 6.6 Where the authority has determined that a committee of the authority should be its auditor panel, the panel when acting as such is not to be treated as a committee of the authority for the purposes of any enactment.

7. Appointment of the Auditor Panel

- 7.1 The new audit framework is intended to take effect for the financial year 2015/16, albeit that the local auditors will initially be those currently working under out-sourcing arrangements made by the Audit Commission. Local authorities are expected to make the first appointment of auditors by the end of 31 December prior to the financial year which will be covered by the accounts to be audited, which in Wirral Council’s case is the financial year 2017/18.
- 7.2 Grant Thornton are currently working under out-sourcing arrangement made by the Audit Commission to audit Wirral Council’s accounts to 2016/17, therefore the auditor for Wirral Council will need to be appointed prior to 31 December 2016.
- 7.3 If Wirral Council chooses to appoint a new auditor panel it must comply with the provisions of the Act applying to auditor panels (See reference paragraph 6 for details).
- 7.4 The auditor panel will need to be set up prior to April 2016, to allow sufficient time to complete the procurement exercise. Although it is anticipated that necessary arrangements will be made well in advance of this date.
- 7.5 The Audit and Risk Management Committee has previously agreed that the membership of the Committee be amended to include the majority of

independent members in readiness for the next Municipal Year (2014/15). This is also consistent with the Council's Improvement Plan.

- 7.6 However, DCLG has issued consultation on draft Regulations, namely The Local Audit (Auditor Panel Independence) Regulations 2014, which will amend and add to the definition of independence in the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, in addition to the definition given in 6.4 above.
- 7.7 The draft Regulations provides that a panel member must have no relevant interest in an authority. A person will have a relevant interest in the relevant authority if at any given time:
- Any contract has been made between the person (or a body in which the person has a beneficial interest and the relevant authority-under which goods or services are to be provided or works are to be executed, which has not been fully discharged;
 - Is a person who has been appointed to act as the relevant authority's current auditor;
 - Is a person who has made a bid which has not been declined or withdrawn for a contract of appointment as the relevant authority's current auditor; or
 - Is an employee of a current or prospective auditor or a partner in a current or prospective auditor that is a firm.
- 7.8 There is therefore a risk that if the agreed action set out at paragraph 7.5 above to appoint independent members is taken forward prior to the Regulations and guidance being issued, these appointments may be non-compliant under the Act/Regulations. It is not yet known when the Regulations will be brought into effect and the draft Regulations may be altered following consultation.
- 7.9 The Act allows the ARMC to be used as the audit panel for the purposes of the Act, providing the committee complies with the provisions of the Act applying to auditor panels (See paragraph 6 above).
- 7.10 It should be noted that the Secretary of State is empowered to amend the definition on independence.

WIRRAL COUNCIL

TRANSFORMATION AND RESOURCES POLICY AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE

14TH APRIL 2014

SUBJECT:	DIRECTORATE PLAN PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT
WARD/S AFFECTED:	ALL
REPORT OF:	JOE BLOTT (STRATEGIC DIRECTOR OF TRANSFORMATION AND RESOURCES)
RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDERS:	CLLR ANN MCLACHLAN, DEPUTY LEADER AND PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR GOVERNANCE & IMPROVEMENT CLLR ADRIAN JONES, PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR CENTRAL SERVICES CLLR CHRIS MEADEN, PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR HEALTH AND WELLBEING
KEY DECISION?	NO

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The aim of this report (Appendix 1) is to outline the current performance of the Transformation and Resources (as at 31st January 2014) against its Directorate Plan for 2013/14.
- 1.2 The report translates the priorities set out in the Directorate Plan into a coherent and measurable set of performance outcome measures and targets. These are used to evaluate the achievement of Directorate priorities over the next year of the plan.
- 1.1 The development of the Directorate Plan will be an iterative process during 2013/14 based on the feedback and requirements of elected members and portfolio leads. Therefore, the latest version of the report contains:
 - Key finance information
 - Year-end forecast position
 - Key risk information

- Exception reports for (a). Adult care packages supported by direct debit (b). Percentage recovery of personal finance unit charges (c). Percentage recovery of personal finance unit charges (historic charges) (d). Percentage of personal finance unit assessments completed within timescales (e). Replace Windows XP with Windows 7

2.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

- 2.1 The Directorate Plan links directly to the Corporate Plan and sets Directorate objectives in national and local context. The indicators contained within the Directorate Plan form a hierarchy underneath the high level indicators specified in the Corporate Plan.
- 2.2 The Strategic Director for Transformation and Resources (Joe Blott) has signed off the indicators contained within the performance report and agreed the following parameters which underpin their on-going performance management:
 - 2013/14 Plan
 - 2013/14 Plan trajectory
 - 2013/14 Performance tolerance levels (determine RAG [Red, Amber, Green] status)
 - Head of Service responsible for delivery of target
- 2.3 Directorate Plan performance (includes Corporate Plan targets) will be monitored on a monthly basis against the parameters agreed as part of the business planning process (e.g. RAG tolerance levels). A number of indicators are only available on a quarterly basis, in line with the availability of data.
- 2.4 The outputs from this monitoring process will be performance managed proactively on an exception basis. The system is designed to promote a “no surprises” approach to performance management.
- 2.5 Heads of Service responsible for the delivery of targets must complete an exception report and delivery plan for all indicators which are under performing (e.g. red RAG rated indicators).
- 2.6 Monthly Directorate Plan performance reports will be produced and made available (to support corporate challenge) in line to support:
 - Monthly DMTs
 - Monthly Portfolio Lead briefings
 - Quarterly Audit, Risk, Governance and Performance meetings
 - Quarterly Policy and Performance Committees

3.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 3.1 The performance management framework policy is aligned to the risk management strategy. The next version of the report will include risk information for performance targets which are RAG rated as red.

4.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1 N/A

5.0 CONSULTATION

5.1 The Corporate plan was drafted based on the feedback generated by the What Really Matters public consultation. The Directorate plan underpins this plan.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS

6.1 N/A

7.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS

7.1 Financial implications of undertaking the actions to deliver the Directorate Plan will be addressed by Directorate as appropriate.

8.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Legal implications of undertaking the actions to deliver the Directorate Plan will be addressed by Directorate as appropriate.

9.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The Directorate Plan has a clear focus on supporting those who are disadvantaged, including the delivery of specific services and through ensuring that all of Wirral's diverse communities are equally able to access services.

9.2 Equalities implications relating to the actions set out in the Directorate Plan will be addressed by the Directorate as appropriate, and details set out in individual Directorate plans. This work is also monitored by the Corporate Equalities and Cohesion Group and the Council Excellence Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

10.0 CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

10.1 N/A

11.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

11.1 N/A

12.0 RECOMMENDATION/S

12.1 Committee are requested to use the information contained within this report to inform its future work programme.

13.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

13.1 To ensure that the report provides elected members with the information required to evaluate the delivery of the key priorities identified by the Directorate Plan.

REPORT AUTHOR: **Tony Kinsella**
Head of Performance
Telephone: 07717156941
Email: tonykinsella@wirral.gov.uk

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Directorate Plan Performance Report (13/14)

Appendix 2 - Adult care packages supported by direct debit (exception report).

Appendix 3 - Percentage recovery of personal finance unit charges (exception report).

Appendix 4 - Percentage recovery of personal finance unit charges (historic charges) (exception report).

Appendix 5 - Percentage of personal finance unit assessments completed within timescales (exception report)

Appendix 6 – Replace Windows XP with Windows 7

REFERENCE MATERIAL





N/A

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Transformation and Resources Policy and Performance Committee	30th July 2013 23rd September 2013 29th January 2014



No.	Description	Data Source	Performance 2012/13	North West 2012/13	Target/Plan 2013/14	YTD Target 2013/14	YTD Performance	Forecast Outturn	Overall Status	Monthly Trend	Reporting Period	Accountable Officer	Comments
Domain 3: Transformation and Resources													
Financial Services													
CP1	Chargeable Services (% achievement versus best practice)	KPMG	TBC	N/A	Upper Middle Quartile (Feb 2014)	-	-	Upper Middle Quartile	G		Apr - Jan	V Quayle	KPMG study complete. Wirral approach is ok and improvements are being implemented where practicable. Fees and charges to be taken to Cabinet in February 2014. Reviews of charges / income to be developed in 2014/15. Funding streams have changed and more reliance placed on economic factors at local level.
CP2	Adult Care Packages supported by Direct Debit (as a %)	Accounts Receivable Ledger	NIL	N/A	30%	25%	0%	10%	R		Apr - Jan	M Flanagan	System went live in January 2014. Only existing residential care users canvassed for Direct Debit for February 2014 start. Domiciliary care service users can only be considered for inclusion during 2014/2015 in agreement with Adult Social Services agreeing billing periods.
CP3	Establishment reduction compared to savings assumption	Establishment List	N/A	N/A	100%	100%	85%	100%	A		Apr - Jan	V Quayle / C Hyams	Year to date performance is 85%. A major data matching exercise has been undertaken and a number of differences and queries identified and resolved. Transformation & Resources, Regeneration & Environment and Chief Executive's office are complete. A small number of queries outstanding in these areas relate to 'normal' timing issues between datasets. Work is now commencing to resolve Families and Wellbeing queries. Human Resources and Finance colleagues are working together to resolve these. This project was dependent upon restructures being finalised. This work now falls under the Future Council project and will link to the project timetable.
CP4	Budget savings achieved (£m)	General Ledger	N/A	N/A	£48.40	£33.20	£38.36	£48.40	G		Apr - Dec	V Quayle	As per Month 9 budget monitor reported to Cabinet 12th February 2014.
Human Resources / Organisational Development													
CP5	Agency/Consultancy costs	General Ledger	£2,000,000	N/A	£1,500,000	£1,366,667	NYA		G		Apr - Jan	C Hyams	The current reduction to date on Agency Spend, compared to January 2013, is £555,655.
CP6	Sickness absence: The number of working days/shifts lost due to sickness absence (cumulative)	M44 Form	10.50days	N/A	10.50days	7.70	6.77	9.48	G		Apr - Dec	C Hyams	The cumulative sickness absence (April to November) was 6.32 days, below the target of 6.82 days and an improvement on the actual for April to November 2012 which was 6.62 days. December's provisional cumulative sickness absence rate of 6.93 days remains below the 7.70 day target and the rate for December 2012 which was 7.47 days.
Business Processes													
DP8	Percentage recovery of Council Tax.	Rev Ben system	96.8%	N/A	95.1%	92.0%	91.4%	95.1%	G		Apr - Jan	M Flanagan	Percentage recovery equates to £123,929 collected of £135,524 payable. Performance is 2.3% below the collection rate at January 2013, which was 93.7%, but is on track to meet the year end target.
DP9	Percentage recovery of National Non Domestic Rates (NNDR).	Rev Ben system	95.3%	N/A	95.4%	92.0%	94.2%	96.0%	G		Apr - Jan	M Flanagan	Percentage recovery equates to £65,636 of £69,648 payable. Performance is on track to reach the year-end target.

No.	Description	Data Source	Performance 2012/13	North West 2012/13	Target/Plan 2013/14	YTD Target 2013/14	YTD Performance	Forecast Outturn	Overall Status	Monthly Trend	Reporting Period	Accountable Officer	Comments
DP10	Percentage collection rate on additional debit re: impact of Council Tax Support Scheme, Discount and Exemption Changes and increased costs in respect of the additional £9m raised.	Rev Ben system	N/A	N/A	66.0%	52.00%	50.60%	63.00%	A		Apr - Jan	M Flanagan	Percentage recovery equates to £1.6m of £3.1m payable. An additional £30,000 was paid in January 2014 moving this indicator from Red to Amber. Assuming the shortage of payments is attributed to Christmas, as tends to happen with the majority of Revenue streams, the Year End collection rate is forecast at 3% below the target.
DP11	Percentage recovery of Personal Finance Unit (PFU) charges.	Oracle AR	90.0%	N/A	90.0%	88.0%	60.0%	65.0%	R		Apr - Dec	M Flanagan	£5.26m raised during Q3, with a total reduction of £3.44m. New debt processes now operational. Management information in development and outcomes to be monitored. Benefits Team Leader seconded to Collection & Recovery Team as senior resource returned to Adult Social Services. Direct Debit facility now available to those in residential care, current service users canvassed. January 2014 showed improved collection rates at 67%. Performance against this indicator is progressively improving, but is forecast to remain below target (red) for 2013/14.
DP11a	Percentage recovery of Personal Finance Unit (PFU) charges (historic charges).	Oracle AR	90.0%	N/A	90.0%	88.0%	52.0%	65.0%	R		Apr - Dec	M Flanagan	Cumulatively at Q3, £4.34m processed to date of original headline debt £6.9m. Benefits Team Leader seconded to Collection & Recovery Team as senior resource returned to Adult Social Services. Whilst close working initiated with Legal Services to further refine processes for debt referral, associated Legal response currently awaited. Unit continuing to work through complex cases to resolve client capacity issues on behalf of Adult Social Services. Key is team is reliant on input of external colleagues and ongoing resource pressures suggest these delays impact on progress. Performance against this indicator is progressively improving, but is forecast to remain below target (red) for 2013/14.
DP11a	Percentage of Personal Finance Unit (PFU) assessments completed within timescale.	Civica	72.8%	N/A	80.0%	75.0%	48.0%	55.0%	R		Apr - Dec	M Flanagan	The unit continues to progress with newly trained staff in place. The outstanding fairer charging assessments are significantly improved, with the average time to undertake new assessments at 70% for January 2014. In reducing older, outstanding assessments, the average time to process all assessments is inflated. This position will continue until the ratio of older assessments to new assessments is minimal. Older outstanding property cases and the assessment of new property cases require confirmation of initial Legal advice to take these cases forward. Q4 will reflect these issues, and see performance against this indicator progressively improving, but remaining below target (red) for 2013/14.

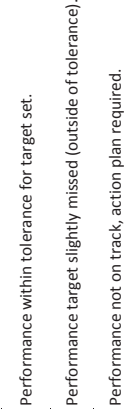


No.	Description	Data Source	Performance 2012/13	North West 2012/13	Target/Plan 2013/14	YTD Target 2013/14	YTD Performance	Forecast Outturn	Overall Status	Monthly Trend	Reporting Period	Accountable Officer	Comments
Legal and Member Services													
DP12	Percentage of current Freedom of Information (FOI)/Information Requests (IRs) dealt with within the statutory timescale.	CRM system	67%	N/A	85%	85%	90%	86%	G		Jan	S Tour	The 85% return rate for the Council to respond to FOIs and IRs within the statutory timescales by September 2013, set by the Information Commissioners Office (ICO), has been exceeded, with a 10% increase in responses dealt with within the statutory timescale compared to April 2013. January 2014: Directorate responses within the statutory timescale: Families & Wellbeing - 81% (DASS-Access and assessment responded to 4 contacts out of target in average of 38 days), Transformation & Resources - 93%, Regeneration & Environment - 97%, Chief Executive's Office / Team - 100%.
DP16	Average Number of days to respond to complaints recorded under the corporate process.	CRM system	12	N/A	11	11	12	11	A		Jan	S Tour	Performance dropped from 13 days in April and remained consistently at 9 days for May to August 2013. It rose to 15 days in November 2013 and has fallen from 13 days in December 2013 to 12 days in January 2014. It is still within publicised corporate target of 15 working days. January 2014: Transformation & Resources took an average of 13 days to respond, an improvement of 3 days compared to December 2013. Benefits service took an average of 21 days to respond; call centre 23 days (single contact) one stop shops and libraries 25 days; revenues 31 days (single contact).
Information Technology Services													
DP13	To replace Windows XP with W7 (complete 500 machines in 2013/14)	Silver Project reports	N/A	N/A	500	20	0	0	R		Jan	D Curtis	Work is progressing but will not meet the 8 April 2014 deadline for Microsoft withdrawing Windows XP support. Work on the core infrastructure is progressing and due to be complete before the end of March 2014. Procuring equipment and services is challenging and is unlikely to be completed before September 2014 at the earliest, with the first batch of 250 to be rolled out during June 2014.
DP14	To obtain Compliance with external codes of connection including IG Toolkit: April 2014	CoCo process	GCSx accreditation	N/A	PSN plus IG Toolkit accreditation	-	-		A		Jan	D Curtis	The Annual PSN Accreditation was achieved in December 2013. The next PSN health check is due in June 2014, with a significant amount of work required to ensure compliance. The IG Toolkit accreditation will be subject to resourcing within Public Health, and current plans indicate September 2014 for accreditation.
DP15	To support the Delivery of Agile working with users: 2013/14	Asset plan	N/A	N/A	see Asset mgmt. plan	-	-		A		Jan	D Curtis	IT are undertaking a number of supportive initiatives, including, new PCs; increased wifi deployment; increased internet bandwidth; new security devices suitable for agile working. Awaiting organisational direction and an overall coordinated plan.



No.	Description	Data Source	Performance 2012/13	North West 2012/13	Target/Plan 2013/14	YTD Target 2013/14	YTD Performance	Forecast Outturn	Overall Status	Monthly Trend	Reporting Period	Accountable Officer	Comments
FINANCE													
F1	Revenue	General Ledger	-	N/A	£17.577m	TBD	£29.522m	£17.300m	G	↑	Apr - Dec	V Quayle	As per Month 9 monitor reported to Cabinet 12th February 2014
F2	Capital programme	General Ledger	-	N/A	£1.974m	TBD	£1.285m	£1.974m	G	↑	Apr - Dec	V Quayle	The Capital Programme has been reprofiled in December 2013. As per Month 9 budget monitor reported to Cabinet 12th February 2014.
F3	Savings	General Ledger	-	N/A	£31.2m	TBD	£23.971m	£31.2m	G	↑	Apr - Dec	V Quayle	

RISK: Remaining significant risks to achievement of non-compliant target													
	Objective	Risk Description	Risk Category	Existing Control Measures			Current Net Scores			Risk Review Frequency	Reporting Period	Accountable Officer (Head of Service)	Additional control measures planned
				Likelihood	Impact	Total	Likelihood	Impact	Total				
R - DP11	Percentage recovery of Personal Finance Unit charges.	Team capacity and economic downturn could lead to reduced rates of collection and assessment of charges and deliver service efficiencies.	People / Operational	3	3	9	3	3	9	Y	Apr - Jul	M Flanagan	Regular report to DMT. Detailed scrutiny of performance Additional staff resource starting in this area in early September to address this issue Reviewing with DASS changes to processes to reduce requirement to contact post billing.
R - DP11a	Percentage of Personal Finance Unit assessments completed within timescale.	Failure to manage fluctuations in volumes and quality of work.	Financial	3	3	9	3	3	9		Apr - Jul	M Flanagan	



Performance is improving
Lower is better

Performance is improving
Higher is better

Performance is deteriorating
Lower is better

Performance is deteriorating
Higher is better

Performance sustained
in line with targets set

Performance within tolerance for target set.

Performance target slightly missed (outside of tolerance).

Performance not on track, action plan required.



No.	Project/Activity	Delivery Date	Project Status	Reporting Period	Accountable Officer	Comments
Financial Services						
To develop a robust process for effectively dealing with, monitoring and managing our financial challenges.						
P1	Produce a 2014/15 budget and proposals for 2015/17 that are sustainable, matched to agreed need and aligned to the Council priorities.	01/03/2014	Green	Jan-14	V Quayle	Cabinet 12 February 2014 recommended 2014/15 Budget to Council on 25 February 2014. The same meetings also considered and agreed the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2014/17. Budget has to be set by 10th March 2014.
To enhance and develop our risk management process to ensure that we effectively manage risks.						
P2	Revised Corporate Risk Strategy.	Mar-14	Green	Jan-14	J Blott	The Corporate Risk Management Policy was approved by the Audit & Risk Management Committee on 28 January 2014, and is scheduled to be taken to Cabinet on 13 March 2014 for formal adoption.
Procurement						
Improving Corporate Governance by managing the Council finances, achieving long term financial stability, imbedding and promoting strong governance arrangements.						
P3	Implement no purchase order no pay policy.	31/03/2014	Amber	Jan-14	R Williams	A key element of these projects is the centralisation of the purchasing co-ordinator function and this must be in place when the No Purchase Order / No Pay scheme becomes effective.
P4	Centralisation of procurement function.	31/03/2014	Amber	Jan-14	R Williams	There have been further delays in the recruitment of the six staff required to fill these positions. Earliest start date, pending successful recruitment will be April 2014.
Internal Audit						
To ensure that risks are identified and measures put in place to mitigate these.						
P5	Deliver Strategic Internal Audit Plan.	31/03/2014	Green	Jan-14	M Niblock	79% of planned audits have been completed which is in line with expected output for this time of year, and is on target for year end completion.
Legal and Member Services						
To improve Corporate Governance and decision making arrangements through the review / revision of the Constitution						
P6	Make changes to the Constitution under delegated powers.	Sep-13	Green	Jan-14	S Tour	Head of Legal & Member Services has reviewed the Constitution. Linked to Project P7 below.
P7	Standards and Constitution Oversight Committee recommends changes/revisions to Council.	Sep-13	Green	Jan-14	S Tour	The Committee considered proposed changes to the Constitution at its meeting in November 2013 and made a recommendation to Council. Council on 16 December 2013 resolved that further information and details be provided in relation to the proposed amendments and referred the matter back to the Committee. The Committee on 6 January reviewed the proposed amendments and the further details and agreed that the proposals be circulated to all members for their comments (by way of survey). Two Surveys have been completed: (1) Amendments to the Constitution; (2) Experiences and Perceptions of the new Governance Arrangements. The results of Survey (1) have been considered and recommendations have been made to Council for approval at its meeting on 10 March 2014. Survey (2) is being considered by the Standards Working Group who will report its findings, conclusions and recommendations to the Committee on 28 April 2014.
P8	Issue Reporting writing Guidance and Timetable for report authors.	Jun-13	Amber	Jan-14	S Tour	Draft Guidance for Report has been prepared and will be considered by CESC on 18 March 2014.
P9	Provide training during session scheduled for June 2013.	Jun-13	Amber	Jan-14	S Tour	
To implement appropriate arrangements to support the delivery of Neighbourhood Working by assessing additional legal and committee support requirements and development of a protocol to support and assist the Constituency Committees.						
P10	Provide a Resource Plan outlining the additional legal and committee support required for Constituency Committees.	Sep-13	Amber	Jan-14	S Tour	Resource Plan will be prepared once the working arrangements for the Constituency Committees have been fully determined.
P11	Prepare protocol for governing the operation of Constituency Committees.	Sep-13	Green	Jan-14	S Tour	Protocol/governance framework to be prepared once the working arrangements for the Constituency Committees have been determined. Various task and finish groups have been set up by the Constituency Committees which are defining their respective working arrangements. Toolkits for Constituency Committees have been prepared and approved defining their operating arrangements.
Implement appropriate arrangements to support the Health and Well-being Board by assessing additional legal and committee support requirements to assist the Board.						
P12	Assess additional legal and committee resources required to support and assist the Health and Well-being Board.	Jun-13	Completed	Jan-14	S Tour	This project was completed in May 2013
P13	Deliver specific Political Awareness Training to transferred NHS staff.	Jun-13	Completed	Jan-14	S Tour	Individual training needs requirements were assessed with the NHS staff, and found not to be required.

No.	Project/Activity	Delivery Date	Project Status	Reporting Period	Accountable Officer	Comments
Improve the Council's Freedom of Information (FOI) responses and Data Protection Act (DPA) arrangements through the implementation and issuing of revised FOI/IR/ICO contact procedure and practice protocol to ensure that requests are handled and monitored correctly, effectively and efficiently within statutory timescales.						
P14	Deliver FOI/IR/ICO contact procedure and practice protocol.	Jul-13	Completed	Jan-14	S Tour	This project was completed in May 2013
P15	Update existing monitoring and reporting arrangements.	Jun-13	Completed	Jan-14	S Tour	This project was completed in May 2013
P16	Prepare a briefing note for senior management outlining current DPA arrangements and proposed course of action.	Jun-13	Completed	Jan-14	S Tour	This project was completed in May 2013
P17	Develop and implement an action plan to improve DPA awareness understanding and information handling, including the provision of training.	Aug-13	Red	Jan-14	S Tour	The initial Action Plan was prepared and Information Governance Board (IGB) established to improve Information Governance within the Council. Initial actions were agreed in order to progress improvements in information governance and develop a more detailed action plan. The IGB has been set up and Info Gov training has been undertaken in Oct/Nov 2013. Over 400 staff attended the training sessions. An information governance checklist and guidance was sent to all departments for completion (returned mid Dec 2013). Responses have been analysed which have helped inform priorities and an action plan to improve information governance across the Council. Specialist support has been secured to ensure the Council meets the NHS Information Governance Toolkit (level 2) accreditation. The principles and approach will also be applied to the wider Council to ensure the Council's information governance arrangements are improved.
P18	Develop a DPA procedure and practice protocol.	Jul-13	Amber	Jan-14	S Tour	The Council has set up an Information Governance Board. Preliminary actions have been agreed to enable/facilitate a more detailed action plan to be prepared that will deal with DPA procedure and practice protocol, ICT security, data management and control etc. Linked to Project P17 above.
Merseyside Pension Fund						
To provide secure pensions, effectively and efficiently administered at the lowest cost to the contributing employers through the Merseyside Pension Fund.						
P19	To review and consult on the Merseyside Pension Fund's actuary and prepare the Funding Strategy Statement and Statement of Investment Principles for approval by the Pensions Committee in November.	Nov-13	Completed	Jan-14	P Wallach	The Fund worked closely with actuary and investment consultants to agree basis of data exchange which has been completed. Report was taken to the Pensions committee on 19th November 2013.
P20	To implement Local Government Pension Scheme 2014 reform.	01/04/2014	Green	Jan-14	P Wallach	Project status overall is GREEN but the direction of travel is deteriorating. Transitional Regulations released by Department for Communities & Local Government mid-March (3 months late) - has had a significant negative impact on completion of processes and calculations, and associated training material. Meeting on 19th February 2014 between Merseyside Pension Fund and Cheshire Pension Fund refocused the plan on immediate priorities. This has also significantly delayed the system update releases
Human Resources / Organisational Development						
To ensure that the Council has the leadership and managerial capacity in place to deliver its priorities and that the behaviour of leaders reflects the vision and values of the organisation.						
P21	To design, deliver and evaluate the new Wirral Leadership Development Programme.	Feb-14	Green	Jan-14	C Hyams	Cohort 1 has been completed. Cohort 2 has commenced. Cohort 3 is due to commence in May 2014. Evaluation is underway.
P22	To roll out the new Management Development Programme to all managers across the organisation.	Sep-14	Green	Jan-14	C Hyams	The Management Development Programme was launched in September 2013. Although managers are attending the constituent workshops we are currently developing the reporting & monitoring process in order to outline who has completed which of the 16 mandatory sessions. Data will be available in March 2014.
To ensure that performance appraisal is consistently applied across the whole of the Council and to improve the delivery of council services.						
P23	To roll out Performance Appraisal and Development across the organisation to Senior Manager Level.	Sep-13	Completed	Jan-14	C Hyams	The Performance Appraisal training was rolled out to Senior Manager level in September 2013. 70% (73 out of 104) were completed as at November 2013. The Chief Executive's Strategic Group (CESG) have requested that a strategy and action plan for the 2014/15 roll out be presented to them for consideration on 4th February 2014.
P24	To support the completion of Key Issue Exchanges across the entire organisation.	Sep-13	Completed	Jan-14	C Hyams	Support for the completion of Key Issues Exchange (KIE) was provided, but 27% of the KIE returns across the organisation were realised. The Chief Executive's Strategic Group (CESG) have requested that a strategy and action plan for the 2014/15 roll out be presented to them for consideration on 4th February 2014.
To implement Learning and Development interventions to deliver organisational and departmental improvement.						
P25	To ensure that external inspections reflect that staff are receiving the required statutory learning and Development.	Apr-14	Green	Jan-14	C Hyams	There are no outstanding actions from inspections with regards to statutory learning & development.
P26	To deliver programme of support in response to Welfare Reform around Conflict & Aggressions skills training in targeted areas (Libraries, Contact Centres, front line services) to affected staff.	Apr-14	Completed	Jan-14	C Hyams	This project has been completed. Training in these areas is still available via The Skills for Wirral Programmes if required.
P27	To design, deliver & evaluate the new Wirral "Change Agent" Programme	Feb-14	Green	Jan-14	C Hyams	The 1st and 2nd Change Agent Cohorts have been completed. Evaluation for Cohort 1 is underway and Cohort 2 evaluation will be carried out with the Leadership Cohort 2 evaluation in June 2014.
P28	To deliver an Employee Engagement Survey.	Sep-13	Completed	Jan-14	C Hyams	The survey was completed in December 2013, with a 42% response rate. The results are being analysed and will be reported once this has been completed.

WIRRAL COUNCIL
Transformation & Resources Directorate
Transformation and Resources Performance, Finance & Risk Report as at 31st January 2014: Projects



No.	Project/Activity	Delivery Date	Project Status	Reporting Period	Accountable Officer	Comments
To continue to implement HR/Payroll Self Serve to realise savings and implement changes required to ensure that managers are able to effectively analyse workforce data and implement changes required.						
P29	To continue to roll out the first phase (basic details) Self Serve to schools.	Dec-13	Red	Jan-14	C Hyams	Need to consider revisiting roll out of self serve to schools. Due to capacity it has not been possible to consider a further action plan, which has been scheduled for March 2014.
P30	To implement the absence and expenses modules across the Council.	Dec-13	Completed	Jan-14	C Hyams	The absence and expense modules went live and were rolled out across the Council in November 2013.
P31	To implement the timesheet module across the Council.	Dec-13	Amber	Jan-14	C Hyams	The plan has been amended to commence roll out in March 2014.
P32	To implement a Managers reporting dashboard 'Insight'.	Dec-13	Completed	Jan-14	C Hyams	The managers reporting dashboard 'Insight' went live and was rolled out across the Council in November 2013.
To improve efficiency and deliver a high quality Human Resources Service for Schools through the review of Schools HR Service Level Agreement (SLA) for the provision of Integrated HR/Payroll Admin.						
P33	To agree the level of Buyback and roll out of Self Service to schools.	Apr-14	Green	Jan-14	C Hyams	This is subject to schools buy-in of payroll/pensions/staffing admin service which has been extended for a further 12 months (with effect from April 2014).
To ensure the Council meets its legal requirements under the Equality Standard 2010, through recording the relevant information about our employees.						
P34	To review the Employee Equality data source and target the areas where information is currently unavailable, to ensure that equality data meets the statutory requirements under Equality Act 2012.	Dec-13	Amber	Jan-14	C Hyams	Further modules of Self Service have been implemented across the Council in Nov/Dec 2013 and this exercise has been used as a vehicle to encourage employees to enter any missing equality data to their own records. The data will be reviewed in March 2014 to decide whether a targeted approach will be required to collect missing information.
To effectively support and guide Managers in dealing with key Human Resource issues.						
P35	To review, revise, develop and approve key HR policies (Disciplinary, Capability, Redundancy & Redeployment, Restructure and Dignity at Work).	Sep-13	Amber	Jan-14	C Hyams	All preliminary work now undertaken and draft policies out for consultation. Report submitted to the Chief Executive's Strategic Group with an update in February 2014.
P36	To implement the roll out a training and development programme on the revised key HR policies to managers.	Dec-13	Amber	Jan-14	C Hyams	A new programme will be implemented, as part of management essentials, when policies have been agreed.
A programme will be implemented, as part of management essentials, when policies have been agreed.						
P37	To undertake consultation with the key managers and trade unions on annualised hours policy.	Sep-13	Amber	Jan-14	C Hyams	Work has been undertaken to analyse options and a progress report was submitted to the Chief Executive's Strategic Group in January 2014. This work will now be undertaken within future council project.
P38	To seek agreement from trade unions and seek appropriate approval on annualised hours policy	Oct-13	Amber	Jan-14	C Hyams	
To identify and make recommendations on potential savings that can be made in relation to staffing issues and support the implementation of any proposed budget savings relating to staff approved by the Council.						
P39	To carry out a review of Council Services in partnership with Trade Unions and APSE	Oct-13	Amber	Jan-14	C Hyams	Savings have not been identified, ongoing discussions are being held with Trade Unions & APSE.
Business Processes						
Business Processes						
P39	To merge the staffing of these areas and then review service delivery for implementation of proposals to improve sustainability of network.	Oct-13	Completed	Jan-14	M Flanagan	The staff merge has been completed. The branch network sustainability linked to officer budget options will be implemented 2014-2016
To manage our finances in respect of vulnerable people who have been assessed for payment contributions for services delivered in respect of domiciliary and non residential care.						
P40	To address the historic Personal Finance Unit charges and maximise recovery by use of all available methods	Mar-14	Amber	Jan-14	M Flanagan	Ongoing developmental work and enhancement of practices has been set-up to address issues around Personal Finance Unit charges and the maximisation of debt collection. Management information being further developed with the support of IT services. Legal processes for court action cases has been delayed and awaiting legal response. New debt process is now operational and direct debit payment facility now available to those in residential care.
To support vulnerable people who need access to the authority's Local Welfare Assistance scheme.						
P41	To review the Local Welfare Assistance scheme and propose amendments for future year schemes.	Nov-13	Completed	Jan-14	M Flanagan	Report setting out scheme recommendations for 2014/2015 to be presented to Cabinet in March 2014. Scheme funding will end March 2015.
To promote digital inclusion via use of self access facilities						
P42	To significantly increase the percentage of service requests available and made on-line.	Dec-13	Completed	Jan-14	M Flanagan	This project to be taken forward as part of the Future Council Project, which will be ongoing for a number of years. Progress on the ongoing development of on line forms and take up will be monitored as part of the Future Council Project.

PERFORMANCE ACTION PLAN TEMPLATE

This template is to be completed for ALL measures showing **RED** status of non-compliance against the specified target.

INDICATOR OVERVIEW	
Indicator Title	% Adult Care Packages supported by Direct Debit – CP2
Strategic Director Lead	Joe Blott
Departmental Lead	Malcolm Flanagan
Target	30%

CURRENT SITUATION: Detail what the performance is for this measure and reason/s for non-compliance		
Performance this Period	0%	+ / - Target : -25%
Non-compliance reason	System package first available January 2014 with work required to ensure operation thus DD deadline for January (28 th) instalment could not reasonably be achieved. Limits capacity to introduce DD arrangements to February / March. Positively, following proactive canvass of existing residential users, circa 50 response / mandates received and accepted by banks for February payment collection.	

ACTIONS: This describes what's necessary or how to achieve a 'green' score. This way everyone is clear on what is required and when; knows the expected outcome and how to achieve it .	
What (is required)	Need for ongoing publicity of DD option to encourage and promote awareness and encourage take-up. Reliance on service users to elect to take-up option of making payment in this way influences out turn against PI target
How (will it be achieved)	Publicity and use when agreeing care packages with people residential cases only in agreement with DASS. Post April 2014 will look to develop for domiciliary care. From discussion with other local authorities these debts have a low take up of direct debit
Who (will be responsible)	PFU service manager and Team Leaders on a day to day operational basis. Senior Benefits manager to whom service manager reports
When (will results be realised)	Ongoing from initially targeting existing residential care users. Developing to wider client group during 2014/2015 if feasible to do so (care charge billing cycles against mandatory requirements of DD)

PERFORMANCE ACTION PLAN TEMPLATE

This template is to be completed for ALL measures showing **RED** status of non-compliance against the specified target.

INDICATOR OVERVIEW	
Indicator Title	Percentage recovery of Personal Finance Unit charges – DP 11
Strategic Director Lead	Joe Blott
Departmental Lead	Malcolm Flanagan
Target	90%

CURRENT SITUATION: Detail what the performance is for this measure and reason/s for non-compliance		
Performance this Period	67%	+ / - Target : -21%
Non-compliance reason	Two secondees returned to DASS during January 2014 impacting on the resource available for collection and recovery work which has also limited reporting / data analysis capacity for debt recovery work	

ACTIONS: This describes what's necessary or how to achieve a 'green' score. This way everyone is clear on what is required and when; knows the expected outcome and how to achieve it .	
What (is required)	<p>Enhanced system reporting (progress made with support of IT colleagues in January) and this would be complimented by the introduction of a more appropriate debt cycle.</p> <p>Staff resources have been transferred to work on new debt, although this needs to be consistently applied by maintaining resources. Client side response needs to be timely to not to delay case action.</p> <p>Sufficient resource to balance the number of priorities remains key with current debt progress being linked to the performance of the Units financial assessment work. To assist this one senior FTE has recently been seconded to this work from Benefits with our benefit work having to be adversely affected.</p> <p>Given the inroads into the initial batch of debt, recovery work is now required on the next batch of debt again this will be a call on staffing requirements as work needs to continue on both older and newer debts simultaneously to rectify this long standing position.</p>
How (will it be achieved)	Revision of debt cycle for Personal Finance Charges debt was projected for April 2014. Sufficient staff resource is again required to be maintained to address all recovery work and to ensure personal care charging assessment work is timely and accurate. Effective legal processes are required to be maintained alongside sufficient legal resource. Timely DASS administration of electronic social care records is also a necessary requirement to achieve this.
Who (will be responsible)	PFU service manager and Team Leaders on a day to day operational basis. Senior Benefits manager to whom service manager reports
When (will results be realised)	This work will be ongoing for the rest of the financial year and see this PI stay red for that period with progressive improvement.

PERFORMANCE ACTION PLAN TEMPLATE

This template is to be completed for ALL measures showing **RED** status of non-compliance against the specified target.

INDICATOR OVERVIEW	
Indicator Title	Percentage recovery of Personal Finance Unit charges (historic charges) DP11 / 1
Strategic Director Lead	Joe Blott
Departmental Lead	Malcolm Flanagan
Target	90%

CURRENT SITUATION: Detail what the performance is for this measure and reason/s for non-compliance		
Performance this Period	58%	+ / - Target : -36%
Non-compliance reason	<p>Resources seconded from DASS onto collection team returned to DASS this month significantly impacting on resource available. However, payments received during January encouraging and evident of response to collection activity by team.</p> <p>Legal input / response required following meetings to refine practice and agree scope in terms of potential for prosecution.</p> <p>Client side response outstanding in some areas, eg complaints, disputes which delay action until clarified</p>	

ACTIONS: This describes what's necessary or how to achieve a 'green' score. This way everyone is clear on what is required and when; knows the expected outcome and how to achieve it .	
What (is required)	Sufficient staff resource to be retained to complete clearance of the original £6.9m ring fenced debt and to then embark in the next oldest batch of debt. Timely Client side response to individual case matters alongside Legal responses.
How (will it be achieved)	Through the application of clearly defined processes, agreed policy and debt cycle, providing requirements detailed above are consistently met
Who (will be responsible)	PFU service manager and Team Leaders on a day to day operational basis. Senior Benefits manager to whom service manager reports
When (will results be realised)	Work will be ongoing for the rest of the financial year and see this PI stay red for that period with it progressively improving.

PERFORMANCE ACTION PLAN TEMPLATE

This template is to be completed for ALL measures showing **RED** status of non-compliance against the specified target.

INDICATOR OVERVIEW	
Indicator Title	Percentage of Personal Finance Unit assessments completed within timescale - DP11a
Strategic Director Lead	Joe Blott
Departmental Lead	Malcolm Flanagan
Target	80%

CURRENT SITUATION: Detail what the performance is for this measure and reason/s for non-compliance		
Performance this Period	70%	+ / - Target : -5%
Non-compliance reason	Achievement is based on completion of financial assessment. The unit continues to work through remaining older, outstanding assessments as final residual, fairer charging and assessment backlogs cleared. Progress with remaining outstanding (newer) property assessment cases on hold pending Legal response. Overall times to process these cases will as a result negatively impact on PI, although the ratio of new to older assessments is clearly reversed and helps negate overall impact to some extent. Positively and almost without exception, newly referred assessments continue to be dealt with by our staff in a timely manner.	

ACTIONS: This describes what's necessary or how to achieve a 'green' score. This way everyone is clear on what is required and when; knows the expected outcome and how to achieve it .	
What (is required)	Newer staff continue to gain experience. Sufficient resource required to be retained and there will be impacts in Q4 by the loss in March of one senior manager to DASS. Full compliance by DASS is required in responding to all information requests. Annual review will additionally impact on progress at this time. Future risk is operational and resource impacts as a result of major IT software change scheduled.
How (will it be achieved)	Continue to clear backlog of work and ongoing timely response of other service areas , as required , Legal services and client side
Who (will be responsible)	PFU service manager and Team Leaders on a day to day operational basis. Senior Benefits manager to whom service manager reports
When (will results be realised)	Q4 will reflect the balance of clearing aged assessments and improved times of new case assessments undertaken by PFU staff following procedures designed and implemented using key experience in this type of work. These issues will see this PI stay red for the rest of the financial year with it progressively improving

PERFORMANCE ACTION PLAN TEMPLATE

This template is to be completed for ALL measures showing **RED** status of non-compliance against the specified target.

INDICATOR OVERVIEW	
Indicator Title	DP13 Replace Windows XP with Windows 7
Strategic Director Lead	Joe Blott
Departmental Lead	Steve Sankey
Target	500 PC's in 2013/14 (revised to 250 PC's rolled out - June 2014 Remaining PC's rolled out November 2014)

CURRENT SITUATION: Detail what the performance is for this measure and reason/s for non-compliance		
Performance this Period	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Progressing with infrastructure upgrade 2. Progressing procurement of equipment & services. 	+ / - Target : On schedule, based on revised plans
Non-compliance reason	Will not achieve rollout before Microsoft ceases support for XP, Office 2003, and Outlook 2003 in April.	

ACTIONS: This describes what's necessary or how to achieve a 'green' score. This way everyone is clear on what is required and when; knows the expected outcome and how to achieve it .	
What (is required)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensure infrastructure is upgraded 2. New equipment purchased 3. New Software purchased 4. Deployment company engaged 5. Systems packaged up for deployment 6. Rollout new equipment and software 7. Remedial work for non-compliant old systems
How (will it be achieved)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Work continuing on upgrading infrastructure 2. Work with procurement to enable new equipment and software to be purchased 3. Work to agree scope and cost for deployment 4. packaging up applications to meet needs of key groups of staff 5. Engage external company to rollout new equipment 6. Undertake remedial work for non Windows 7 compatible systems
Who (will be responsible)	Project team led by Steve Sankey
When (will results be realised)	Subject to procuring the equipment and the services of an external company, the first 250 PC's will be rolled out by June, with the remaining by October/November (except for any that have non-compliance issues)

WIRRAL COUNCIL

TRANSFORMATION & RESOURCES POLICY & PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE

14 APRIL 2014

SUBJECT	FINANCIAL MONITORING 2013/14 MONTH 10 (JANUARY 2014)
WARD/S AFFECTED	ALL
REPORT OF	DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report sets out the financial monitoring information for this Committee in a format consistent across the Policy and Performance Committees. The report aims to give Members sufficient detail to scrutinise budget performance for the Directorate. Financial information for Month 10 (January 2014) reported to Cabinet on 13 March is included.

2 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

- 2.1 Members of formed Policy and Performance Committees have requested that financial monitoring information is provided as a standard item at each Committee.
- 2.2 Since September 2012 monthly revenue and capital monitoring reports have been submitted to Cabinet as a means of providing regular, detailed updates on budget performance.
- 2.3 The Coordinating Committee agreed that in order to fulfil its corporate and strategic scrutiny role, it will continue to review the full versions of the most up to date monitor reports at its future scheduled meetings.

3 REPORTING TO POLICY & PERFORMANCE COMMITTEES

- 3.1 The relevant sections from the most recent revenue and capital monitoring reports reported to Cabinet are summarised into a bespoke report for each Policy and Performance Committee. This will include the following:
- Performance against revenue budget
 - Performance against in year efficiency targets
 - Performance against capital budget
- 3.2 The following sections have been extracted from the Financial Monitoring reports presented to Cabinet on 13th March 2014.

PERFORMANCE AGAINST REVENUE BUDGETS MONTH 10 (JAN 2014)

3.3 CHANGES TO THE AGREED BUDGET

3.3.1 2013/14 Original & Revised Net Budget £000's

	Original Net Budget	Approved Budget Changes Prior Mths	Approved Budget Changes Month 10	Revised Net Budget
Transformation & Resources	12,424	5,275	-420	17,279
Net Cost of Services	12,424	5,275	-420	17,279

3.3.2 Changes to the Budget agreed since the 2013/14 Budget was set

Items	£m
Corporate and Democratic Services to be grouped within the Transformation and Resources Directorate where Direct management control for these areas lies	+4.639
A support post has also been transferred from Transformation and Resources to the Chief Executive's Directorate.	-0.037
A number of training and legal posts have been transferred from Children and Young People to Transformation and Resources	+0.353
Transfer of staffing budgets from DASS in Families & Wellbeing to Financial Services within Transformation & Resources	+0.170
Transfer from Transformation and Resources to the Chief Executive for community engagement	-0.025
Realigning of the call centre recharge relating to the new garden waste service from Environment & Regulation to Transformation and change.	+0.009
Staff transfer from CYPD to Financial services following recent restructure.	+0.044
Transfer of advertising budget from Transformation and Resources to Chief Executive Dep.	-0.020
Movement of Chief Executive non pay budget from Transformation and Resources to Chief Executive Dep.	-0.008
Strategic Director post moved to Transformation and Resources from Chief Exec Dep.	+0.150
Allocation of 4 day unpaid leave saving/Hrs and overtime saving.	-0.504
Allocation of T&C Car allowance saving 13-14 Part Year	-0.016
Welfare Advice budget allocation.	+0.100

3.3.3 All of the budget changes have been virements to reflect the re-alignment of functions, and the related budgets, between the Transformation & Resources Directorate and other Directorates the Chief Executive's Department. There have been no changes approved by Cabinet which increase the Directorate and Council spending.

3.3.4 A number of budget virements were made in month 10 across the council. These reflect the allocation to directorates (where applicable) of a number of previously centrally held budgets. Changes include allocations for terms and conditions savings, market supplements, slippage and constituency committee budgets. As these adjustments were virements the overall impact of the month 10 allocations did not alter the net cost of services for the council as a whole.

3.4 VARIATIONS

3.4.1 The report will use RAGBY ratings that will highlight under and overspends and place them into 'risk bands'. The 'risk band' classification is:

- Extreme: Overspends - **Red** (over +£301k), Underspend **Yellow** (over - £301k)
- Acceptable: Amber (+£141k to +£300k), Green (range from +£140k to - £140k); Blue (-£141k to -£300k)

3.4.2 2013/14 Projected Budget variations £000's

Directorates	Revised Budget	Forecast Outturn	(Under) Overspend Month 10	RAGBY Classification	Change from prev mnth
Transformation & Resources	17,279	16,859	-420	Y	-21
TOTAL	17,279	16,859	-420		-21

3.4.3 RAGBY full details

Department	Number of Budget Areas	Red	Amber	Green	Blue	Yellow
Transformation & Resources	7	1	0	3	2	1
Total	7	1	0	3	2	1

3.4.4 A £420,000 under spend is currently forecast (£399,000 under spend in Month 9). This under spend is due to insurance fund contract and capital financing savings plus further savings are now forecast in relation to employee costs.

3.4.5 The red rated business area relates to Transformation and Resources Business Processes. This is currently forecast at £700,000 overspent (net of any other compensatory saving measures) due to forecast unachieved savings of £1.3 million relating to court costs income. The £700,000 will be funded from savings within other staffing and Treasury Management budgets within Transformation and Resources.

3.5 IMPLEMENTATION OF 2013/14 SAVINGS

3.5.1 Budget Implementation Plan 2013/14 Transformation only £000's

BRAG	Number of savings Options	Approved Budget Reduction	Amount Delivered at Jan	Still to be Delivered
B - delivered	10	12,448	12,448	0
G – on track	11	11,701	6,602	5,099
A - concerns	3	4,620	3,570	1,050
R - failed	1	2,429	1,129	0
P – replacements for Red	1	0	1,083	217
Total at M10 Jan	26	31,198	24,832	6,366

- 3.5.2 The Savings Tracker is Annex 5 of the Cabinet report and appended to this report details those areas classed under Transformation & Resources which are actually wider than the Directorate's area of responsibility and cover a number of cross-authority savings such as the Terms & Conditions savings.

The red rated option is:

- Council Tax: Court Costs

Amber rated options relate to:

- Transforming Business Support
- Procurement
- Workforce Conditions of Service

The directorate is forecasting an underspend with savings elsewhere covering any budgetary shortfall from any non-delivery of savings options.

3.5.3 Budgetary Issues £000's

Description	£000	Action
Facilities Management	250	Agreed can be met from permanent budget reduction
Market Supplements funding from central budget for pay growth (page 7) Budget Book	490	Funding from central budget for pay growth (page 7) Budget Book
Terms & Conditions 2012/13	200	Part funding from central budget for pay growth (page 7) Budget Book
Terms & Conditions 2012/13 part £100k, Transforming Business Support £300k Terms & Conditions 2013/14 £472k	872	Funded from increased balances forecast in M8 monitor
Council Tax Court Costs	1,300	2013/14 compensatory savings from T&R staffing and treasury Management, growth request/budget adjustment 2014/15 +

- 3.5.4 At this stage the issues that have been identified of concern are reported at Annex 12 Budgetary Issues of the Cabinet report and this identifies solutions to those savings where delivery is not anticipated in 2013/14.

3.6 INCOME AND DEBT

- 3.6.1 The Transformation & Resources Directorate includes Business Processes which collect income on behalf of the Council. This is detailed in Annex 9 of the Cabinet report and appended to this report. Revenue and Income falls into the four broad areas shown below for reporting purposes:-

Amount to be collected in 2013/14 £000's

	2013-14	2013-14	
	Collectable	Collected	%
	£000	£000	
Council Tax	135,524	123,929	91.4
Business Rates	69,648	65,636	94.2
Fees and charges – Adults	61,687	40,889	66.3
Fees and charges – all other services	48,050	42,183	87.8

3.6.2 A high risk income item is that required from residents who previously paid no Council Tax. The Council Tax Support Scheme was introduced in April. As this involves billing a large number of properties who have not previously paid Council Tax, having previously received benefit at 100%, an overall collection rate of 75% generating £2.25 million has been assumed. The forecast is that £1.98 million (66%) will be collected by 31 March with recovery actions post 31 March increasing the collection to the target figure. At 31 January 2014 collection was 50.6%% which equates to £1,560,000

3.6.3 Recovery from non Council Tax Support recipient debtors is continuing as normal. Action taken to recover from those of Working Age that previously received Council Tax Benefit is ongoing. Repayment plans offering weekly/fortnightly instalments were offered to those contacting the Council 6,007 applications for Deduction of Benefits have been made since July, 73% higher than last year.

3.6.4 Business Rates income collection was 94.2% during January. This is higher than the 92.3% collected at the equivalent period in 2012/13. Comparisons are difficult as large increases/decreases in Rateable Values are reflected in the collectable amount. The taxbase changes have resulted in an extra £1 million to be collected in the first eight months of this financial year. The timing and amounts of refunds may also affect the comparison. Recovery procedures have been tightened with debt being pursued earlier and the position is being closely monitored.

3.6.5 Issues regarding the collection of sundry debt were reported to Cabinet on 23 May 2013.

3.7 PERFORMANCE AGAINST CAPITAL BUDGETS MONTH 10 (JAN 2014)**3.7.1 Table 1: Capital Budget**

	Capital strategy	Changes approved by Cabinet	Reprofile to be approved	Other changes to be noted or approved	Revised Capital Programme
Trans & Res -Finance	210	0	0	0	210
Trans & Res - Asset Mgt	315	1,449	0	0	1,764

Significant variations to be approved or noted by Cabinet for Period 10 are set out in Table 1. The majority of changes approved are made up of slippage from 12/13.

3.7.2 Table 2: Spend to date November (10/12 = 83.3%)

	SPEND TO DATE		COMMENTS ON VARIATION RAG
	£000	%	
Trans & Res -Finance	55	26	Green -acceptable
Trans & Res - Asset Mgt	1,304	74	Green -acceptable

Expenditure on capital to date is compared to budget in Table 2.

3.7.3 Table 3: Projected Outturn compared to Revised Budget £000's

	REVISED	PROJECTED	VARIATION
	BUDGET	OUTTURN	
Trans & Res – Finance	210	210	0
Trans & Res - Asst Mgt	1,764	1,764	0

3.7.4 Spend is at 74% of its 2014/15 programme budget (£1.3 million). The largest spend areas relate to the Wallasey Town Hall and Rock Ferry centre schemes.

4 RELEVANT RISKS

4.1 There are none relating to this report.

5 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

5.1 Any option to improve the monitoring and budget accuracy will be considered.

6 CONSULTATION

6.1 No consultation has been carried out in relation to this report.

7 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS

7.1 There are no implications arising directly from this report.

8 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL, IT, STAFFING AND ASSETS

8.1 In respect of the Revenue Budget the Transformation & Resources Directorate is projecting an under spend of £2420,000 as at the 31 January 2014.

9 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no implications arising directly from this report.

10 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The report is for information and there are no direct equalities implications at this stage.

11 CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There are no implications arising directly from this report.

12 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

12.1 There are no implications arising directly from this report.

13 RECOMMENDATIONS

13.1 Members are requested to review the information presented to determine if they have any specific questions relating to the budget for the Transformation & Resources Directorate.

14 REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

14.1 To ensure Members have the appropriate information to review the budget performance of the directorate.

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APPENDICES

Extracted from the Revenue Monitoring report to Cabinet on 13th March 2014:-

Annex 5	Savings Tracker
Annex 9	Income And Debt
Annex 12	Budgetary Issues

SUBJECT HISTORY

Council Meeting	Date
Monthly financial monitoring reports for Revenue and Capital have been presented to Cabinet since September 2012.	

EXTRACT FROM FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT MONTH 10 (JAN 2014)

Annex 5 SAVINGS TRACKER

TRANSFORMATION AND RESOURCE

Saving	Target £000	Comments / progress on implementation	BGAR	Amount delivered at M10 Jan 14 £000	To be delivered £000
Efficiency Investment Fund	4,400	Savings achieved	B	4,400	0
Treasury Management	1,700	Savings achieved	B	1,700	0
Revenues and Benefits	550	Savings achieved	B	550	0
Information Technology Service	210	Savings achieved	B	210	0
Marketing and Public Relations	167	Savings achieved	B	167	0
Tranmere Rovers Sponsorship	135	Savings achieved	B	135	0
Power Supplies - Contract Saving	11	Savings achieved	B	11	0
Area Forum Funding	391	Savings achieved	B	391	0
Council Tax Increase	2,600	Savings achieved	B	2,600	0
Council Tax: Discounts and Exemptions	2,284	Savings achieved	B	2,284	0
Reduction in External Audit Fees	140	The budget has been reduced to reflect the new contract and is expected to be fully realised in year.	G	0	140
Local Council Tax Support Scheme	2,785	Scheme introduced and progress being monitored as per section 7.3 above	G	0	2,785
Reducing Council Management	5,000	Savings profile weighted towards increased delivery in 2nd half of year reflecting date of leavers Vacant posts are being pro rata'd over the year.	G	3,548	1,452
Trade Union funding	-270	The funding for the Trade Unions has been built in with the costs to still be recharged across business areas at the end of the year.	G	-270	0

Reducing the Cost of Democracy	100	The cost of the Members Allowances has been reduced and the saving is expected to be achieved in this area.	G	0	100
The Mayor of Wirral	50	It is expected that Civic Services will be able to achieve this saving from June 2013 and there will be a drive to reduce overtime and supplies to achieve the saving.	G	0	50
Libraries and One Stop Shops	391	Staff savings at the budget level are evident in April monitoring.	G	391	0
Housing Benefits – Maximisation of Grant	2,000	Saving has been incorporated into the budget and is expected to be achieved.	G	2,000	0
Service Restructures	905	Broken down as:		333	572
		£50k Asset Mgmt – delayed restructure but the full £100k should be achieved during 2013-15	G		
		£292k HR delayed restructure but it is envisaged that the full saving of £584k will be achieved over the course of 2013-15.	G		
		£263k related to RHP	G		
		£300k for Legal Services, of which £100k relates to employees which is expected to be achieved through compensatory budgets with the restructure helping to achieve the £200k that is currently set aside Legal/Court costs which are a very volatile area.	A		
Better Use of Buildings	100	Details as to how this saving will be achieved are to be finalised as there are also savings that have rolled forward from previous years relating to assets.	G	100	0

Reducing the numbers of Agency workers	500	Spend up to December is £2.788 with a projection of £3.9M until the end of the year. This shows an overall saving of £600K compared to last year. A significant number of contacts have ended since the beginning of the year. Challenge is around how savings are allocated across the departments	G	500	0
Transforming Business Support	500	Saving has been incorporated into the budget. Staff savings are expected and some have already been achieved. Further work is taking place to develop saving.	A	169	331
Procurement	320	This saving has not progressed as anticipated, but compensatory savings are expected to be made during the year.	A	320	0
Workforce Conditions of Service	3,800	Negotiations with TUs are concluding. Target saving likely to be £3.7 million. Slippage depending upon agreement is likely. Challenge is around how savings are allocated across departments.	A	3,081	719
Council Tax: Court Costs	2,429	Current projections show full saving will not be delivered. £1.3M Compensatory savings will be made from staffing budgets (0.8M) and Treasury Management Budgets (0.5M) within Transformation and Resources.	R	1,129	1,300

EXTRACT FROM FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT MONTH 10 (JAN 2014)

Annex 9 INCOME AND DEBT

Council Tax

The following statement compares the amount collected for **Council Tax** in the period 1 April 2013 to 31 January 2014 with the amount collected in the same period in 2012/13:

	Actual 2013/14 £	Actual 2012/13 £
Cash to Collect	135,524,000	125,457,000
Cash Collected	123,929,000	117,563,000
% Collected	91.4%	93.7%

Council Tax benefits has been abolished and replaced by Council Tax support and the numbers and awards as at 31 January 2014 are as follows:

Number of Council Tax Support recipients	38,049
Number of pensioners	16,153
Number of vulnerable	7,371
Number of working age	21,896

The level of collection reflects the increased charges to those charge payers now in receipt of Council Tax Support and having to pay a minimum of 22% of the annual charge as well as the increase charges in respect of reduced discounts and exemptions. Overall there is an extra £10 million to be collected for 2013/14 of which £6.4m has been collected to date. Council Tax Support claimants of Working Age total 21,896 this includes 7,371 who receive maximum support leaving 14,525 paying at least 22%. This Council Tax Support debt is £3.083m.

A Council Tax Discretionary Relief policy was agreed by Cabinet in October and funded to a maximum of £50,000. An application form has been placed on the web. No awards have been made to date. 96 applications are currently under consideration.

Business Rates

The following statement compares the amount collected for **National Non-Domestic Rates** in the period 1 April 2013 to 31 January 2014 with the amount collected in the same period in 2012/13:

	Actual 2013/14 £	Actual 2012/13 £
Cash to Collect	69,648,000	68,213,000
Cash Collected	65,636,000	62,982,000
% Collected	94.2%	92.3%

Accounts Receivable

The table below shows the departments and the amount of debt at each recovery stage:

Description	Less than 28 days	1st reminder	2nd reminder	3rd reminder	Total at 30.11.13
Chief Executive	£75,240	£13,298	£11,736	£588,373	£688,647
Neighbourhood	£7,914	£1,133	£0	£21,347	£30,394
Transformation	£1,830,235	£914,035	£21,056	£895,653	£3,660,979
Families	£4,975,389	£1,329,943	£809,757	£9,340,523	£16,455,612
Regeneration & Environment	£847,488	£52,088	£169,626	£631,400	£1,700,602
Policy and Performance	£0	£0	£192,168	£9,120	£201,288
Totals	£7,736,266	£2,310,497	£1,204,343	£11,486,416	£22,737,522

The above figures are for invoices in respect of the period up to the end of January 2014. Payments as well as amendments such as write-offs and debts cancellations continue to be made after this date on all these accounts. There is a further deduction of £382,955 to be made for unallocated payments leaving a balance of **£22,354,527**

BENEFITS

The following statement details the number of claimants in respect of benefit and the expenditure for Private Tenants and those in receipt of Council Tax Support up to 31 January 2014:

	2013/14	2012/13
Number of Private Tenant recipients	32,146	31,597
Total rent allowance expenditure	£116,255,399	
Number under the Local Housing Allowance Scheme (<i>included in the above</i>)	12,389	11,972
	£47,407,205	
Number of Council Tax Support recipients	38,049	
Total Council Tax Support expenditure	£28,047,580	
Total expenditure on benefit to date	£144,302,979	

The following statement provides information concerning the breakdown according to client type as at 31 January 2014 and gives the early year numbers to show the shift in sector by benefit claimants during the year.

	31.01.14	01.05.13
Claimants in the Private Rented Sector	14,821	14,451
Claimants in the Social Rented Sector	17,325	16,765

Owner Occupiers	10,324	10,738
Total claimants by age group		
- under 25 years old	2,513	2,728
- 25 – 60 years old	22,547	21,741
- over 60 years old	17,410	17,623

There are **42,470** benefit recipients in Wirral as at 31 January 2014.

Under Occupancy regulations

From 1 April 2013 property size criteria was introduced to working age tenants of social housing (Registered Providers). Where a claimant is deemed to be occupying accommodation larger than they reasonably require, Housing Benefit (HB) levels have been restricted as follows:

- One “spare” bedroom incurs a 14% reduction. In Wirral the current average is £12 weekly and there are 2,827 households affected;
- Two or more spare bedrooms incurs a 25% reduction – the Wirral average is currently £21 weekly and there are 659 affected;
- Out of a total social sector HB caseload of 17,325 - 3,486 are currently affected by this. Numbers have reduced slightly as the reduction has, in some cases, been overridden due to the claimant's circumstances;
- We are also starting to see a reduction in numbers as we identify and make the necessary adjustments to those exempt tenancies i.e. pre 1996, without a break in claim, following the recent government announcement.

Housing Benefit Fraud and Enquiries – 01 April 2013 to 31 January 2014

New Cases referred to Fraud team in period	1,134
Cases where fraud found and action taken	90
Cases investigated, no fraud found and recovery of overpayment may be sought	433
Cases under current investigation	227
Surveillance Operations Undertaken	0
Cases where fraud found and action taken:	
Administration penalty	7
Caution issued and accepted	11
Successful prosecution	38
Summons issued for prosecution purposes	35
Local Welfare Assistance Fraud Prosecution	1

Discretionary Housing Payments

The tables below profile the position of Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) administration and associated spend. DHP is not a payment of Housing Benefit and is

funded separately from the main scheme. Whilst traditionally it was seen as a short term measure to financially assist those who had difficulty in meeting a rental shortfall, increasingly the nature of awards is changing as the impacts of Welfare Reform roll-out. The Department for Work and Pensions see such awards, for which the Government contribution has increased, in many cases as supporting people through the transition of reform, allowing them time to rebudget, increase their income or to secure a DHP award to help with moving costs.

The Government contribution for 2013/14 is £917,214 with an overall limit of £2,293,035 which the Authority must not exceed. In direct recognition of the impacts of the Reforms, the DWP also made a further £10 million Transitional Funding available for 2013/2014, of which Wirral's share is £64,000. Spend is closely monitored, with year end spend forecasted on a monthly basis. Whilst the percentage spend to date, at 83% is lower than this time 2012/2013, the escalating impacts of reforms such as Social Sector Size Criteria and wider increase in people struggling to manage financially as a result of a myriad of change, means that it is expected that Wirral will use up the full government contribution by year end. Over the last two months the work undertaken by officers on these applications has seen the expenditure almost double. £35,000 has been allocated to Housing Options to meet rent deposits to enable people to move into sustainable tenancies and they have allocated £16,198 of this to date.

Data @ 31/12/13										
Month	Claims Considered			DHP Awards in Payment	Current Awards	Committed awards up to 31/03/2014	% spent (committed) of Govt cont	Forecasted Y.E. spend	Annual Total Cont.	Cont remaining
	Total considered	Awarded	Refused							
April	62	26	36	65	£11,674	£16,883	2%	£198,794	£917,214	£888,655
May	228	103	125	136	£27,093	£41,845	5%	£242,440	£917,214	£875,368
June	296	122	174	230	£51,067	£79,329	9%	£314,732	£917,214	£837,884
July	358	143	215	355	£80,470	£122,073	13%	£371,305	£917,214	£795,140
August	387	210	177	680	£188,198	£257,560	28%	£598,786	£917,214	£659,653
September	158	86	72	785	£241,429	£306,388	33%	£611,101	£917,214	£610,825
October	114	78	36	880	£289,841	£351,393	38%	£611,101	£917,214	£565,821
November	371	269	102	1192	£392,925	£492,303	54%	£733,431	£917,214	£424,911
December	253	237	16	1600	£547,799	£670,044	73%	£882,910	£917,214	£247,170
January	309	269	40	1847	£659,790	£759,723	83%	£921,260	£917,214	£157,491
Totals	2,536	1,543	993					Additional	£64,000	£64,000
									£971,214	£221,491

We continue to look at those claims which have been refused, to determine whether or not a full or partial award may now be considered appropriate.

DHP Payment Type	As at 31.01.14
Baby Due	18
Benefit Cap	19
Change of Address	8
Combination of reforms	10
Disability	24
Income Tapers	31
Increase in work related expenses	3
Legislation change	48
LHA reforms	115
NDD	10
Reduced HB entitlement	57
Removal Costs	3
Rent deposit	38
Rent restrictions	449
Social Size criteria	730

Local Welfare Assistance

From April 2013, the discretionary Crisis Loans for Living Expenses and Community Care Grant elements of the Social Fund were abolished and replaced in Wirral by our new Local Welfare Assistance Support Scheme (LWA). For 2013/14 Wirral's scheme is supported by a £1,345,925 Government Grant. Wirral's scheme replaces cash payments in favour of suitable alternatives where at all possible e.g. through the provision of pre payment cards for food and fuel and direct provision of white goods. The scheme is to be reviewed to see how implementation has gone and for possible scheme alterations. The number of applications is rising on a week by week basis.

LWA details for period from 02 April 2013 to 31 January 2014:

Number of awards granted for food	3,068	value	£144,731
Number of awards granted for fuel	2,364	value	£53,477
Number of awards granted for goods	1,142	value	£273,041

Total number of households receiving an award	3,819	value	£471,249
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Number of claims not qualifying	2,519
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We continue to raise awareness of the scheme, particularly to help people experiencing crisis or financial difficulty over the winter months.

A report on approving the scheme for 2014/15 will be presented to Cabinet in March 2014.

EXTRACT FROM FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT MONTH 10 (JANUARY 2014)

Annex 12 BUDGETARY ISSUES

	Service area	Issue	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	Resolution
Transformation							
	Market Supplements	Single Status is unimplemented. Until then, grade mismatches can only be 'fixed' by market factors. Estimated has reduced from £1m in M1 to £490k excluding any additional cover.	490	450	450	0	Reduced from £1m M1 Monitor based on latest estimates. From pay growth budget M8
	2012-13 T&C's	Non-achievement; count as part of 2014-15 target	300	0	0	0	2013-14 from forecast savings in M8
	2012-13 Trans Bus S	Non-achievement; count as part of 2014-15 target	300	150	0	0	2013-14 from forecast savings in M8
	2013-14 T&Cs	Shortfall in achievement; count as part of 2014-15 target	472	0	0	0	2013-14 from forecast savings in M8
	Facilities Management	Shortfall in achievement on closure of buildings; count as part of 2014-15 target	250	0	0	0	Agreed can be met from permanent budget reduction
	Council Tax Court Costs	Shortfall on 2013/14 savings option (Red Rated)	1,300	1,300	1,300	1,300	Compensatory savings from T&R in 2013/14, options being evaluated 2014/15 including possible growth request
Totals			3,112	1,900	1,750	1,300	
Solutions			2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	
	Agreed redns	Facilities Management	-250	0	0	0	Agreed can be met from permanent budget reduction
		Market Supplements funding from central budget for pay growth (page 7) Budget Book	-490	-450	-450	0	Funding from central budget for pay growth (page 7) Budget Book
		T&Cs 2012/13 part funding from central budget for pay growth (page 7) Budget Book	-200	0	0	0	
	Council Tax Court Costs	Shortfall on 2013/14 savings option (Red Rated)	-1,300	-1,300	-1,300	-1,300	Compensatory savings from T&R in 2013/14, options being evaluated 2014/15 including possible growth request
		Remaining issues relating to 2013-14	-872	-150	0	0	Funded from increased balances forecast in M8 monitor
Current additional resource required from savings			0	0	0	0	

PROPOSED CAPITAL PROGRAMME AND FUNDING CABINET MARCH 2014

Department	Total Programme	Borrowing	Receipts	Revenue / Reserves	Grants	Total Funding
Transformation & Resources Finance						
West Kirby and Heswall OSSs	210			210	-	210
Transformation & Resources Finance Total	210	-		210	-	210
Transformation & Resources Asset Management						
The Priory	25	25			-	25
Rock Ferry Centre	456			456	-	456
Arrowe Park Changing Pavilion	300	300			-	300
West Kirby Concourse Roof	159	159			-	159
Wallasey Town Hall	810	810			-	810
Liscard Hall	14			14	-	14
Transformation & Resources Asset Management Total	1,764	1,294	-	470	-	1,764
Grand Total	1,974	1,294		680		1,974

WIRRAL COUNCIL

Transformation and Resources Policy & Performance Committee

14 April 2014

SUBJECT:	WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE REPORT
WARD/S AFFECTED:	ALL
REPORT OF:	Director of Public Health/Head of Policy & Performance
RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	Cllr Ann McLachlan (Governance and Improvement)
KEY DECISION?	NO

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report updates Members on progress delivering the items included in the Work Programme for this committee, agreed at the meeting in September 2013.

2.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

- 2.1 At their first and second meetings held in July and September, all four Policy and Performance Committees discussed and agreed their work programmes for the municipal year.

3.0 PROGRESS WITH TRANSFORMATION AND RESOURCES WORK PROGRAMME

- 3.1 A Work Programme for the Transformation and Resources Policy & Performance Committee was approved on 23 September 2013 and is included as Appendix 1. This proposed four pieces of work under the following headings:

- ICT Strategy
- Review of Shared Services
- Review of process for handling Freedom of Information requests
- Review of sickness absence process

- 3.2 A brief summary of the work against these topics is summarised below.

ICT Strategy

- 3.3 The Committee received the report from the Interim Head of ICT and a presentation on the Council's ICT Strategy and Strategic Implementation Plan was made at the Transformation and Resources Policy & Performance Committee on 23 September 2013. Pre-decision scrutiny was carried out prior

to submission to Cabinet for approval. The main elements of the ICT Strategy were developed around providing overall ICT leadership across a number of themes.

3.4 Recommendations were made by the Committee, including recommending Member involvement in the proposed Senior Board, to be determined by Cabinet, as part of the ICT governance proposals.

3.5 Other recommendations included:

- Ensuring that part of the Senior Board's remit is horizon scanning to identify new technologies that improve service quality and deliver efficiencies.
- In terms of implementing the Strategy, a management dashboard approach is taken to monitoring performance and that this is reviewed by this committee.

Freedom of Information

3.6 The Task and Finish scrutiny review on Freedom of Information has now been completed and the final report is covered elsewhere on the agenda. The review was conducted through a number of question and answer sessions held with the Head of Legal and Member Services and the Information and Central Services Manager.

Shared Services

3.7 A scoping meeting on the Shared Services scrutiny review was convened on 6 February 2014 to inform the direction of the review. However, following on from this meeting, it was subsequently decided to suspend the process of developing shared professional and transactional services with Cheshire West & Chester and Cheshire East. This decision was approved by Cabinet on 13 March 2014.

3.8 In light of this decision, the Task & Finish panel has now been disbanded and any future scrutiny work will now be determined at an appropriate time in line with how the Council decides to progress the shared services arrangements.

Sickness Absence

3.9 This was included on the Scrutiny Work Programme to:

- Explore the process for dealing with sickness absence and the impact it has on capacity with the HR division and the wider organisation in the light of the transformation process; and
- Review the effectiveness of re-integrating people back into the workplace and whether employee assistance programme is effective in reducing / addressing sickness absence.

3.10 At the Transformation and Resources Policy & Performance Committee on 29 January, the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development submitted a report which set out the current position in relation to sickness absence across the Council. It was agreed that the Committee should

establish a Task and Finish panel to look at workplace stress and absences in the new municipal year.

4.0 TRANSFORMATION AND RESOURCES POLICY & PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE – OFFICER REPORT UPDATE

- 4.1 In addition to the scheduled reviews, the Committee requested an Officer Report on the Local Welfare Assistance Support Scheme. This is covered elsewhere on the agenda. The purpose of the report is to determine the need for any further scrutiny work to be carried out as part of the work programme in the new municipal year.

5.0 PROGRESS IMPLEMENTING PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 During the municipal year, Members have expressed their concerns about the lack of sufficient monitoring of previous scrutiny recommendations and reporting back on the progress in terms of their implementation. Officers have developed a mechanism to address this which programmes the monitoring of recommendations across the annual committee meeting cycle
- 5.2 Recommendations will now be allocated an appropriate review date and a schedule developed which aligns with Policy and Performance Committee Meetings. This will include recommendations arising from Scrutiny Reviews as well as those recommendations arising from debate at Committee Meetings.
- 5.3 It is proposed that this commences from those Scrutiny Reviews completed in 2012/13, of were there were none directly relevant to the Transformation and Resources Policy & Performance Committee.
- 5.4 In relation to the ICT Strategy, a progress report will be brought to the next meeting of this Committee in July 2014 to update Members regarding progress on implementation of relevant recommendations.

6.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 6.1 There are none directly relating to this report.

7.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 7.1 N/A

8.0 CONSULTATION

- 8.1 N/A

9.0 OUTSTANDING PREVIOUSLY APPROVED ACTIONS

- 9.1 N/A

10.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS

- 10.1 N/A

11.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS

11.1 N/A

12.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

12.1 N/A

13.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

13.1 Has the potential impact of your proposal(s) been reviewed with regard to equality?

(c) No because of another reason which is

The report is for information to Members and there are no direct equalities implications at this stage.

14.0 CARBON REDUCTION AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

14.1 N/A

15.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

15.1 N/A

16.0 RECOMMENDATION/S

16.1 Members are requested to approve the Transformation and Resources Policy & Performance Committee work programme as set out in Appendix 1 and make any necessary amendments.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Transformation and Resources Policy & Performance Committee Work Programme

2013-14 Transformation & Resources Committee Work Programme

Key Activities	Lead Member / Officer	Reason for Review	May 2013	June 2013	July 2013	Aug 2013	Sept 2013	Oct 2013	Nov 2013	Dec 2013	Jan 2014	Feb 2014	Mar 2014	April 2014	Outcome
Committee Dates					Tues 30th		Mon 23rd		Wed 6th	Wed 4th	Wed 29th			Mon 14th	
Scheduled Reviews															
ICT Strategy	Tony Glew	Requestd by members													
Review of Shared Services	Joe Blott	Requestd by members													
Review of process for handling Freedom of Information requests	Surjit Tour	Requestd by members													
Review of sickness absence process	Chris Hyams	Requestd by members													
Potential Reviews															
Reports Requested															
Sickness Absence															
Disruptions															
Local Welfare Assistance Support Scheme															
Standing Items															
Performance Dashboard															
Financial Monitoring															
Policy Update															
Special Budget meeting															

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