

# **POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

Wednesday, 7 October 2020

Present: Councillor J Williamson (Chair)

Councillors T Anderson A Leech  
C Carubia M McLaughlin  
P Cleary J McManus  
W Clements Y Nolan  
P Gilchrist L Rennie  
JE Green C Spriggs  
EA Grey P Stuart  
A Hodson T Usher

## **1 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the new Policy and Resources Committee and then asked that the committee observe a minute's silence in tribute to the memory of former Councillor Bill Davies who had sadly passed away on 2 October, 2020.

## **2 APOLOGIES**

No apologies had been received.

## **3 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Members were asked to declare any disclosable pecuniary interests and to state the nature of the interest.

Councillor Lesley Rennie declared a non-pecuniary interest in respect of agenda item 7 'Sale of Land at Arrowe Park Road, Upton' by virtue of being a member of Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority.

Councillor Jeff Green declared a non-pecuniary interest in respect of agenda item 6 'Site of Rock Ferry High School – Sale to a Registered Provider' by virtue of being a former director of Magenta Living, which had a joint company with Torus.

## **4 PUBLIC AND MEMBER QUESTIONS**

The Chair reported that no questions from members of the public had been submitted.

Notice of representations had been received and two members of the public, Mr P Harrod and Mr T Watson, addressed the committee speaking against the proposed sale of land at Arrowe Park Road, Upton stating that more traffic, and therefore more pollution would be created at an already busy roundabout, if another supermarket were to be built for which there was no need, and which would be damaging to smaller businesses close by.

## 5 **SALE OF LAND AT ARROWE PARK ROAD, UPTON**

A Report by the Director of Regeneration and Place sought approval to amend a plan attached to an earlier decision to sell land at Arrowe Park Road, Upton.

David Armstrong, Assistant Chief Executive, introduced the report which was purely about the sale of land and did not concern itself with planning issues which would be a matter for another committee.

Prior to debating the item, Councillor Elizabeth Grey informed the committee that she had expressed very strong views about this matter, which could be seen as pre-determination so excused herself from the debate and any vote on the matter.

The Director of Law and Governance explained the matter of pre-determination in which a Member would have gone beyond expressing a strong view to the point at which they would no longer be coming at the issue with an open mind and in effect had said how they would vote.

The Committee then debated the matter at some length during which the Chair agreed to ward Councillor Jean Robinson addressing the meeting, speaking against the proposed sale of land. David Armstrong responded to a number of comments raised by Members.

Councillor Tom Usher moved, and it was seconded by Councillor Paul Stuart, that –

“The recommendations within the report be approved, with the addition of one further recommendation, that the Assistant Chief Executive report back to this Committee with a recommendation on a small amount of the capital receipts from this sale being ringfenced to support local projects in the area.”

An amendment to the recommendation was then moved by Councillor Phil Gilchrist, seconded by Councillor Chris Carubia, that –

“The additional triangular area shown near property 210 be not included in the sale.”

The amendment was put and lost (3:13).

The motion was put and carried (14:2).

**Resolved (14:2) - That:**

- (1) the public open space land edged red on the attached amended plan set out as Appendix 2 to this report at Arrowe Park Road, Upton (“the Site”), be declared surplus to Council requirements;**
- (2) the Director of Regeneration and Place be authorised to agree a sale of the Site to Lidl GB Ltd. at £820,000 plus fees;**
- (3) the Site is appropriated from primarily residential use to planning purposes pursuant to Section 122 of the Local Government Act (LGA) 1972, and disposed of provided no objections are made;**
- (4) if the Site is appropriated as recommended that the Council will advertise the sale of the public open space as required by law;**
- (5) any objections to the appropriation and/or disposal be considered and determined by the Director of Regeneration and Place, in consultation with the Chair of Policy and Resources Committee.**
- (6) the Assistant Chief Executive report back to this Committee with a recommendation on a small amount of the capital receipts from this sale being ringfenced to support local projects in the area.**

The Chair then adjourned the meeting at 7.35pm for 10 minutes.

The meeting resumed at 7.47pm.

**6 SITE OF ROCK FERRY HIGH SCHOOL - SALE TO A REGISTERED PROVIDER**

A report by the Director of Regeneration and Place sought approval of the sale of part of the site of the former Rock Ferry High School, Rock Ferry at a revised sale price, following an earlier decision to sell at Cabinet on 20 January 2020.

David Armstrong, Assistant Chief Executive, introduced the report which would enable a Registered Provider of social housing to develop 186 new affordable homes in the borough.

**Resolved - That the Director of Law and Governance, in consultation with the Director of Regeneration and Place, be authorised to negotiate and finalise a sale of part of the site of the former Rock Ferry High School, as defined at paragraph 3.3 of this report, to Torus62 Ltd**

**(Registered Society No RS007826) for £1,200,000 plus a contribution of £1,500 towards the Council's costs.**

## **7 CAR PARKING CHARGES OPTIONS**

A report by the Director of Neighbourhood Services informed Members of options to be considered for the reintroduction of the current car parking charges policy in Wirral in 2020/21 and alternative options for parking charges in 2021/22 and beyond.

Simon Fox, Assistant Director: Highways and Infrastructure, stated that in a normal year, the Council would receive £35,000 a week, but at current levels of parking of 40%, income would be around £14,200 and if charges were re-instated approximately £300,000 income could be achieved.

Many Members expressed concern at the prospect of re-introducing charges at a time when Covid cases were once again on the rise and many local businesses were struggling.

The Director of Resources commented that the loss of income from parking charges would not be able to be offset against any future possible capitalisation directive which the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government were being asked to approve, and that Members would need to ask officers to bring forward alternative savings to offset this.

On a motion by Councillor Jeff Green, seconded by Councillor Julie McManus, it was -

**Resolved (16:1) - That:**

- (1) this Policy and Resources Committee agrees not to re-introduce car parking charges at this time; and**
- (2) authorisation is given to the Director of Neighbourhoods to consult on the implications of the medium to long term options detailed in Appendix 1 of the report and a further report is brought to the Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee, as a matter of urgency, in the new year, with a particular emphasis on social inequalities and that in the meantime officers seek to find compensatory savings and that business traders are also consulted.**

## **8 APPOINTMENT OF SUB COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

A report by the Director of Law and Governance advised the Committee, in accordance with the relevant statutory provisions and the terms of the Constitution, to appoint Members to the four Sub-Committees of the Policy and Resources Committee for 2020 / 2021, as follows:

- The Senior Officer Appointments and Staffing Sub-Committee
- The Local Plan Sub-Committee
- The Finance and Procurement Sub-Committee
- The Shareholder Board

Councillor Anita Leech suggested that, as with the current Local Plan Advisory Group, all political groups on the Council should be represented on the new Local Plan Sub-Committee. The Director of Law and Governance advised that a unanimous decision of Council would be required if it were to be removed from the political balance requirements.

Following a short debate it was moved by Councillor Anita Leech, seconded by Councillor Pat Cleary and then -

**A. RECOMMENDED (unanimously) – That Council is requested to remove from political balance requirements in accordance with the requirements of the Local Government Housing Act 1989, the Local Plan Steering Sub Committee, at section 1.7 of Part 3(B) of the constitution, so that it be constituted in a manner that reflects the membership of the Local Plan Advisory Group, being one member from each political group on the Council. It is noted that the Chair of the Sub-Committee has been appointed at the Annual Meeting of Council.**

**B. Resolved (unanimously) - That the Policy and Resources Committee:**

- (1) (a) confirm that the Senior Officer Appointments and Staffing Sub-Committee be appointed for 2020-21 with the terms of reference identified and will consist of:
  - (i) the leader (Chair of Policy & Resources Committee), or in their absence the Deputy Leader (Vice-Chair), who shall chair the Sub-Committee;
  - (ii) a member from each of the other Political Groups represented on the Policy & Resources Committee; and
  - (iii) the Chair, or in their absence the Vice-Chair, of the Policy & Services Committee with terms of reference most closely associated with the post concerned (or if that committee concerned is deemed to be the Policy & Resources Committee then the Deputy Leader (Vice-Chair).
- (b) appoint Members to serve on the Senior Officer Appointments and Staffing Sub-Committee in 2020-21, including the appointment of the Chair and named deputies.

- (2) (a) confirm that the Finance Sub-Committee be appointed for 2020-21 with the terms of reference identified with 5 Members of the Policy and Resources Committee.
- (b) appoint Members to serve on the Finance and Procurement Sub-Committee in 2020-21, including the appointment of the Chair and named deputies.
- (3) (a) confirm that the Shareholder Board be appointed for 2020-21 with the terms of reference identified with 3 Members of the Policy and Resources Committee.
- (b) appoint Members to serve on the Shareholder Board in 2020-21, including the appointment of named deputies.
- (4) confirm that the Monitoring Officer as proper officer be authorised to carry out the wishes of the Leaders of Political Groups in allocating Members to membership and substitute membership of these sub-committees and to appoint those Members with effect from the date at which the proper officer is advised of the names of such Members.

## 9 2020/21 & 2021/22 COVID-19 BUDGET POSITION STATEMENT

A report by the Director of Resources provided a summary of the Council's financial position following the Covid-19 pandemic. The report highlighted the impact on the Council's 2020/21 and 2021/22 budget following the onset of Covid-19 and the actions in place to mitigate the deficit. The report also described the support available from HM Treasury in mitigating the deficit and asked the Committee for approval to submit a formal application for support and highlighted the options available if this support was not forthcoming.

The report provided information on the additional government funding provided to support the Council's emergency response to Covid-19.

The Director of Resources responded to a number of comments and confirmed that each of the six policy committees would receive a budget report, though no proposals would be included as these were not fully formed yet. The report would contain the budget for each individual committee. There was a need to demonstrate to the MHCLG that the Council had a robust sustainable plan to mitigate any future losses including the staff to deliver on these, so not all non-statutory services would be put forward as potential savings.

Members expressed the view that a very bleak outlook was being painted in the report and of the need to protect communities against potentially

damaging cuts. There was also a need to be very cautious in the approach to how decisions on savings were made whilst the funding settlement figures from government were as yet unknown. There was a need to work together to support civic society.

The Chair referred to her meetings with other Combined Authority leaders and that they were all united in making representations to central government to help local government in giving the support to residents that they needed.

**A. RECOMMENDED (unanimously) - To Council that an additional £99,731,884 be added to the budget for 2020/21 as a result of additional one off Government funding received since the 2020/21 budget was set on 2 March 2020 to either be spent or passported to support the emergency response to Covid-19 or returned to the Government by 31 March 2021, as described in Section 5 of the report.**

**B. Resolved (Unanimously) – That the Policy and Resources Committee supports the formal application to MHCLG to request a capitalisation directive from HM Treasury on the Council's behalf, as described in Section 6 of the report.**

## 10 **2021/22 BUDGET PROCESS**

A report by the Director of Resources informed of the process for budget setting as a transition year for 2021/22 in the Committee Process. The report described the financial position for 2021/22 which as at Quarter 1 forecast a deficit of £45m, and the actions being put in place to mitigate the gap. The Director updated the Committee that since the report was written the forecast deficit could potentially be as much as £60m.

The report detailed how these actions included a phased approach of 5 stages and included the timeline for the 2021/22 budget setting process of when individual budget proposals were presented to the Policy and Services Committees to the recommendation for approval by the Policy and Resources Committee in February, to Full Council to set the 2021/22 budget.

**Resolved - That the Policy and Resources Committee note the transition process for the 2021/22 budget setting process.**

## 11 **BUDGET AND PERFORMANCE MONITORING**

A report by the Director of Resources advised that through the development of Wirral Council's new Governance arrangements and the approval of the Wirral Plan 2025 (currently being refreshed to reflect strategic priorities, as a result of Covid-19) the Authority had committed to developing a budget and performance monitoring framework, which honoured the Council's dedication

to a more accountable, transparent way of conducting business, policy formation and decision making.

The report proposed that the Performance Framework was modelled on the Covid Dashboard set up at the start of the Coronavirus pandemic. The Committee were advised how this would enable clear and accessible data to be presented in a timely and meaningful way.

The report informed that there were a very wide range of data sets that could be included in the Dashboard, and it was proposed that the specific selection would be co-created with members to ensure it was of most relevance and benefit to members.

**Resolved - That the Policy and Resources Committee request the Director of Resources to schedule a Members' Workshop to enable members to identify, shape and own the performance data and information presented in future reports.**

## 12 **WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE**

A report by the Director of Law and Governance, advised how the Policy and Resources Committee, in co-operation with the other Policy and Service Committees was responsible for proposing and delivering an annual committee work programme. The work programme should align with corporate priorities of the Council, in particular the delivery of the key decisions that were in the remit of this Committee.

It was envisaged that the work programme would be formed from a combination of key decisions, standing items and requested officer reports. The report provided the Committee with an opportunity to plan and regularly review its work across the municipal year. The work programme for the Policy and Resources Committee was attached as an appendix to the report.

**Resolved - That the proposed Policy and Resources Committee work programme for the remainder of the 2020/21 municipal year, be noted.**