



## Policy and Resources Committee

<b>Date:</b>	<b>Wednesday, 22 March 2023</b>
<b>Time:</b>	<b>6.00 p.m.</b>
<b>Venue:</b>	<b>Committee Room 1 - Wallasey Town Hall</b>

**Contact Officer:** Dan Sharples  
**Tel:** 0151 666 3791  
**e-mail:** danielsharples@wirral.gov.uk  
**Website:** wirral.gov.uk

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Please note that public seating is limited, therefore members of the public are encouraged to arrive in good time.

Wirral Council is fully committed to equalities and our obligations under The Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duty. If you have any adjustments that would help you attend or participate at this meeting, please let us know as soon as possible and we would be happy to facilitate where possible. Please contact [committeeservices@wirral.gov.uk](mailto:committeeservices@wirral.gov.uk)

This meeting will be webcast at  
<https://wirral.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>

## AGENDA

- 1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION**
- 2. APOLOGIES**
- 3. MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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.

- 4. MINUTES (Pages 1 - 14)**

To approve the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday, 15 February 2023.

## **5. PUBLIC AND MEMBER QUESTIONS**

### **5.1 Public Questions**

Notice of question to be given by noon, Friday, 17 March 2023 to the Council's Monitoring Officer (via the online form here: [Public Question Form](#)) and to be dealt with in accordance with Standing Order 10.

Please telephone the Committee Services Officer if you have not received an acknowledgement of your question by the deadline for submission.

For more information on how your personal information will be used, please see this link: [Document Data Protection Protocol](#)

### **5.2 Statements and Petitions**

Notice of representations to be given in writing or by email by 12 noon, Friday, 17 March 2023 to the Council's Monitoring Officer ([committeeservices@wirral.gov.uk](mailto:committeeservices@wirral.gov.uk)) and to be dealt with in accordance with Standing Order 11.1.

Petitions may be presented to the Committee if provided to Democratic and Member Services no later than 10 working days before the meeting, at the discretion of the Chair. The person presenting the petition will be allowed to address the meeting briefly (not exceeding three minute) to outline the aims of the petition. The Chair will refer the matter to another appropriate body of the Council within whose terms of reference it falls without discussion, unless a relevant item appears elsewhere on the Agenda. If a petition contains more than 5,000 signatures, it will be debated at a subsequent meeting of Council for up to 15 minutes, at the discretion of the Mayor.

Please telephone the Committee Services Officer if you have not received an acknowledgement of your statement/petition by the deadline for submission.

### **5.3 Questions by Members**

Questions by Members to dealt with in accordance with Standing Orders 12.3 to 12.8.

## **SECTION A - KEY AND OTHER DECISIONS**

### **6. ESENTIAL (Pages 15 - 20)**

## **SECTION B - BUDGET AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT**

### **7. STRATEGIC PLANNING AND IMPROVEMENT UPDATE (Pages 21 -**

**SECTION C - WORK PROGRAMME / OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY**

**8. WORK PROGRAMME (Pages 73 - 82)**

**SECTION D - REFERRALS FROM COMMITTEES / COUNCIL**

**9. COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER (Pages 83 - 110)**

**10. DISPOSAL OF THE FORMER MINISTRY OF DEFENCE (MOD)  
LAND ON OLD HALL ROAD, BROMBOROUGH (Pages 111 - 126)**

**11. FUTURE HIGH STREET FUND PROGRAMME - EUROPA  
RESIDENTIAL PHASE 1 (Pages 127 - 148)**

**12. FREEPORTS AND MARITIME INNOVATION AND GROWTH  
PROJECTS (Pages 149 - 180)**

**13. EXEMPT INFORMATION - EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND  
PUBLIC**

**RECOMMENDATION:** That, under section 100 (A) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined by paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A (as amended) to that Act. The Public Interest test has been applied and favours exclusion.

**14. ESENTIAL - EXEMPT APPENDICES (Pages 181 - 240)**

**15. COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER EXEMPT APPENDICES (Pages  
241 - 314)**

**16. FUTURE HIGH STREET FUND PROGRAMME EUROPA PHASE 1 -  
EXEMPT APPENDIX 2 (Pages 315 - 316)**

**17. FREEPORTS AND MARITIME INNOVATION AND GROWTH  
PROJECTS - EXEMPT APPENDICES (Pages 317 - 458)**

**Policy & Resources Committee Terms of Reference**

The terms of reference for this committee can be found at the end of this agenda.

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## POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 15 February 2023

Present: Councillor J Williamson (Chair)

Councillors	T Anderson	P Stuart
	P Gilchrist	H Cameron
	P Cleary	L Rennie
	EA Grey	J Bird
	T Jones	M Booth
	Y Nolan	K Hodson
	J Robinson	J Johnson

### 87 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting as well as those watching the webcast.

### 88 APOLOGIES

No apologies for absence were received.

### 89 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

Councillor Phil Gilchrist declared a personal interest as a governor of a school with a PFI contract.

### 90 MINUTES

**Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 18 January 2023 be approved as a correct record.**

### 91 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

The Chair reported that five questions had been received under Standing Order 10.

Jenny Carter asked the Chair whether the future budget process could be coproduced with Together All Are Able. In response, the Chair acknowledged the importance of ensuring all resident can take part in the budget consultation, and outlined that the exceptional scale of the challenge and timetable for the setting of the 2023/24 budget restricted some of what was able to be achieved. It was intended to better build accessibility into the

timetable for future years and Together All Are Able were thanked for their offer of support, and the work they did in the community.

Brenda Ashton asked the Chair how residents could be assured that street cleansing and issues relating to fly-tipping could be addressed given press coverage around the prospect of a reduction in services. In response, the Chair outlined that the previously proposed reduction in street cleansing had not been included in the budget proposals presented to Policy & Resources Committee and expressed concern at any reduction in such a vital service.

Councillor Angie Davies outlined the community value of the Leasowe Adventure Playground to the local community and asked the Chair whether the Policy & Resources Committee would support the campaign to 'Save the Addy' and support the play scheme remaining open. In response, the Chair outlined her support for the 'Addy' and pledged that her group would support keeping it open, as proposed in the budget for consideration by Policy and Resources Committee.

Councillor Helen Collinson asked the Chair whether the services and facilities in Birkenhead Town Centre such as the Central Library, the Hive and the therapeutic services delivered in the Pilgrim Street Centre would be protected given their positive impact on communities and role in supporting the regeneration of the Town Centre. In response, the Chair welcomed the regeneration programme in Birkenhead and expressed her will to keep the services mentioned open.

Councillor Paul Martin asked the Chair for reassurance to local residents that Wallasey Central Library was being protected now and in the future. In response, the Chair outlined how Wallasey was well served by the Central Library and that her group would be voting to preserve vital services including the Library.

## 92 **STATEMENTS AND PETITIONS**

The Chair reported that two petitions had been received in respect to Wallasey Central Library.

Barbara Hardcastle spoke to her petition of 3,100 signatures which had been collected in a matter of weeks signifying the passionate support to retain a library service within Wallasey Central Library. Barbara outlined all of the services that were delivered to the community within the library above and beyond access to books and computers including clubs and volunteer events, and detailed how accessible the library was as well as its links with local primary schools. A query was raised in relation to Co2 levels and capacity which the Chair indicated a written response would be provided to.

Councillor Sue Powell-Wilde spoke to her petition which she reported had over 2900 signatures across a virtual and paper petition which represented the strong feeling of residents against any potential closure of Wallasey Central Library. Councillor Powell-Wilde outlined the fundamental role libraries played in society and questioned why libraries were originally identified as a potential saving. The Chair thanked Councillor Powell-Wilde for representing the Wallasey community and putting forward a case for why the library should not relocate.

93 **QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS**

The Chair reported that no questions by members had been submitted.

**The order of business was altered to consider Agenda Item 6c next**

94 **BUDGET AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2023/24**

The Director of Finance introduced the report which set out the draft budget for 2023/24 as proposed by the Leader of the Council for approval by Policy and Resources Committee and onward recommendation to Council on 27 February 2023 to fulfil the legal obligation on Members of the Council to set a balanced and sustainable budget for 2023/24.

The Director of Finance outlined that the proposal left the Council with £13m of unearmarked reserves and that it was essential to rebuild those reserves as part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy in future years alongside close monitoring of the budget in-year to avoid overspends, particularly given the limited scope there was within the proposed budget to manage in-year pressures. It was further outlined that the final Local Government Settlement figure had now been arrived at with £135,000 additional funding which was proposed to be added to the reserves.

It was then moved by Councillor Jannette Williamson, seconded by Councillor Jean Robinson, that the officer recommendations as detailed in the report be approved, subject to the following addition to be referred to the Council meeting –

“That the additional funds of £135,000 arising from the final settlement are allocated as follows:

£41k be invested in specialist, complex investigation work to support Children’s social care cases where there are multiple victims or perpetrators.  
£94k be invested by not taking the following four budget options that fall within the Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee in respect of:

- The review of bulky waste (ERIC) collection service £10k
- The Environmental Health Service Review £40k
- The reduction in the recycling promotional budget £20k
- The reduction in Waste & Environmental Services budget £24k”

The Committee debated the motion at length with particular discussion taking place regarding the proposed 4.99% Council Tax increase and the number of other Local Authorities proposing a similar increase. Following questions by members, the Section 151 Officer confirmed that he was satisfied that sufficient allowances had been made for inflationary costs and that the proposals would enable a balanced and sustainable budget for 2023/24.

At 19:38pm, the Chair adjourned the meeting to enable discussion within Political Groups to take place on the proposal.

The Committee resumed at 19:47pm.

The motion was then put to the vote. It was –

**Resolved (9:6) That –**

- (1) Delegated authority be given to the Section 151 Officer, following consultation with the Chair and Group Spokespersons of the Policy & Resources Committee, to do anything necessary – including minor financial adjustments – to give effect to the proposals contained in this report and address any funding changes, if any.**
  
- (2) the response to the financial proposals forming a draft budget for the purposes of consultation under section 65 of the Local Government Finance Act, set out as below be noted:**
  - Appendix 1 Budget Proposals**
  - Appendix 2 Budget consultation**
  - Appendix 3 Policy & Service Committee budget proposals feedback**
  - Appendix 4 The Dedicated Schools Grant Schools Budget**
  - Appendix 5 Provisional Council Tax Statutory Calculations**
  - Appendix 6 Discretionary Rate Relief Policy**
  - Appendix 7 Medium-Term Financial Strategy**
  - Appendix 8 Budget proposal changes since January 2023**
  - Appendix 9 Council Tax Base Calculation Process and Associated Background Information**
  - Appendix 10 Budget Workshop Outcomes**
  
- (3) the measures being developed to moderate the impact of the present economic conditions on the Borough and the people who live and work in Wirral be noted, including the intention to carry forward a sum of £113,000 as part of financial year-end processes to assist the residents of the Borough in dealing with cost-of-living pressures.**

**(4) a Revenue Budget of £366.47m be recommended to Council, noting that the Section 151 Officer in liaison with the Monitoring Officer and Head of Paid Service may need to make adjustments to the Budget estimates before the preparation of final reports for Full Council on 27 February 2023.**

**(5) Accordingly it be recommended that Council:**

**a) Approve the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) set out as Appendix 7**

**b) Approve increases to the Council's fees and charges equal to or above the annual Consumer Price Index reported by the Office for National Statistics in February 2023, unless either of the following conditions apply:**

**i. There is a statutory constraint that prevents such an increase, ii. The Council is operating in a market whereby such an increase would result in the Council being uncompetitive.**

**c) Approve the Discretionary Rate Relief Policy for Business Rates for 2023/24 set out as Appendix 6.**

**d) Approve that Unearmarked Reserves (General Fund Balances) is maintained at a figure not lower than £13.18m for the course of the 2023/24 financial year.**

**e) Authorise, in respect of the Budget Proposals, that the Director with portfolio undertake such actions as they consider necessary to implement the agreed Budget and deliver the savings, income and efficiency proposals developed as part of the formulation process and update Committees accordingly.**

**f) Approve the 2023/24 Schools Budget of £337.017m**

**(6) (subject to a separate vote at Council) that Council:**

**a. Sets the Band D Council Tax at £1,798.48 for the Wirral Borough Council element of the Council Tax, representing a general increase of 2.99% and 2.00% ringfenced increase to Adult Social Care, and the Council Tax requirement for the Council's own purposes for 2023/24 of £171.9m as detailed in Appendix 5.**

**b. Note that the additional precepts from the Police & Crime Commissioner for Merseyside and the Merseyside Fire & Rescue Authority remain in estimated form and delegates authority to the Section 151 Officer to implement any variation to the overall council tax arising from the final notification of the precepts.**

**(7) That the additional funds of £135,000 arising from the final settlement are allocated as follows:**

**£41k be invested in specialist, complex investigation work to support Children's social care cases where there are multiple victims or perpetrators.**

**£94k be invested by not taking the following four budget options that fall within the Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee in respect of:**

- **The review of bulky waste (ERIC)collection service £10k**
- **The Environmental Health Service Review £40k**
- **The reduction in the recycling promotional budget £20k**
- **The reduction in Waste & Environmental Services budget £24k**

## 95 REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING Q3

The Director of Finance introduced the report which set out the financial monitoring information for the Council as at Quarter 3 (31 December) of 2022/23 and provided an overview of budget performance, including progress on the delivery of the 2022/23 saving programme and a summary of reserves and balances, to enable the Committee to take ownership of the budgets and provide robust challenge and scrutiny to Officers on the performance of those budgets.

It was reported that at the end of Quarter 3, there was a forecast adverse position of £12.36m on the Council's net revenue budget, of £330.58m. The position had deteriorated by £1.36m since Quarter 2 due to the continued trend of increasing numbers of children in care, particularly young people placed in high-cost residential settings and the loss of Housing Benefit Subsidy.

A discussion ensued on the number of invoices paid without a purchase order having been raised and the Monitoring Officer's view was sought on the legality of a motion for no payments to be made without a purchase order. Advice was given that the impact could not be substantiated and that statutory services often required invoices to be paid without a purchase order.

It was moved by Councillor Tom Anderson, seconded by Councillor Lesley Rennie, that 'From 1 June 2023, the Council does not pay any invoices without a Purchase Order, with a 6 month exemption for statutory services.'

Further to the motion, the Section 151 Officer explained that the proposed June 2023 deadline would be difficult to achieve without presenting a risk to the operation of the Council and sought the mover of the motion's view on delaying the deadline for a further six month period, to enable the submission of a report back to Committee on this matter. The mover of the motion indicated that he did not wish to amend the original motion.

Councillor Phil Gilchrist indicated that he wished to move an amendment so that officers report back to the Committee on the delivery of the new ERP system before a decision was taken. The Monitoring Officer advised that this risked negating the motion moved by Councillor Anderson.

The motion as originally moved was then put the vote and the motion was lost (6:9).

It was then moved by Councillor Phil Gilchrist, seconded by Councillor Paul Stuart, that further to the recommendations detailed in the report, the following addition be considered, that 'in light of the responses from officers, officers report as early as possible to committee on the way that the new ERP system will correct deficiencies and provide further security to reduce the risk to the Council.'

Councillor Tom Anderson indicated that he was supportive of the motion and proposed a friendly amendment to the motion, so that it included an additional sentence to read "and report to Policy and Resources Committee on a regular basis the amount of invoices paid without a purchase order, with a plan of action to come in no later than September 2023."

Councillor Phil Gilchrist indicated he did not wish to accept the amendment as friendly and that the amendment should be voted on instead.

Councillor Lesley Rennie seconded the amendment. The amendment was then put to the vote and was carried (unanimously).

The substantive motion was then voted on and carried (unanimously). It was therefore –

#### **Resolved – That**

- (1) the forecast adverse position of £12.362m presented at Quarter 3, alongside the proposed mitigation at year end to eliminate the shortfall be noted.**
- (2) the progress on delivery of the 2022/23 savings programme at Quarter 3 be noted.**
- (3) the forecast level of reserves and balances at Quarter 3 be noted.**
- (4) in light of the responses from officers, officers report as early as possible to committee on the way that the new ERP system will correct deficiencies and provide further security to reduce the risk to the Council, and report to Policy and Resources Committee on a regular basis the amount of invoices paid without a purchase order, with a plan of action to come in no later than September 2023.**

The Director of Finance introduced the report which provided an update on the progress of the Capital Programme 2022/23 at the end of December 2022. It recommended that Committee agreed the revised 2022/23 Capital Programme of £86.3m which took account of re-profiling, virements, additional funding requirements and grant variations identified since the Capital Programme was formally agreed on 28th February 2022 and later revised in the Quarter 1 and Quarter 2 monitoring reports.

**Resolved – That**

- (1) Council be recommended to approve the revised Capital Programme of £86.3 million for 2022/23, including the virements of budget referred to in Appendix D of the report.**
- (2) Council be recommended to approve the additional funding for the schemes referred to in section 3.7 of the report from a variety of sources, new borrowing required from the Council, capital receipts, external contributions and the repurposing of previously agreed Council borrowing.**

97 **CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2023-28**

The Director of Finance introduced the report which provided the draft Capital Programme 2023-28 for consideration and referral to Council for approval. It also included information regarding the revenue implications of the Programme and an update on the latest forecast for capital receipts. The 2023-28 Capital Programme represented a combination of schemes originally approved as part of the 2022-27 Programme, updated through the Capital Monitoring reports in 2022-23 and new bids for inclusion as detailed in the report.

It was moved by Councillor Phil Gilchrist, seconded by Councillor Paul Stuart, that the officer recommendations detailed in the report be agreed, subject to the inclusion of:

“Committee also recognises that the capital programme has been put together in the light of the best available information on asset disposals, an estimate of likely capital receipts, the best use of funding allocated by the Government through the Liverpool City Region and the objective of repaying the exceptional financial support received by the agreed date.

A continuing area of concern for our communities is the state of our road and footway network.

The Director of Neighbourhoods, in consultation with the Director of Finance are therefore requested to:

- put together bids for a programme, after annual repayment of the capitalisation directive, to allocate a maximum of 5% of capital receipts and for such receipts to be earmarked for additional investment into our roads/footways, to address the deterioration of the network.
- progress to both frame the future programme and updates on the roll out of the programme, should be reported back to the parent committee.”

The Committee debated the motion within which clarification was sought from the Section 151 Officer on the repayment of the capitalisation directive. It was clarified that any capital receipts generated up to a value of £2.5m would be used to repay the capitalisation directive, and that any value exceeding £2.5m would be within the Committee’s gift to deal with. The preference of the Section 151 Officer would be to repay the capitalisation directive sooner given that it was accruing interest, but the motion on the table if agreed would direct that a maximum of 5% of that value above £2.5m be earmarked roads and footways.

Following the questioning of the Section 151 Officer, the Chair moved to the vote on the motion. The motion was put and carried (13:2). It was therefore –

**Resolved (13:2) – That**

- (1) Council be recommended to approve the new bids as detailed in Appendix B to this report requiring £17.69 million of funding for inclusion in the Capital Programme.**
- (2) Council be recommended to approve of any new bids supported by grant funding do not commence until written confirmation has been received from the granting authority.**
- (3) Council be recommended to approve of the Capital Programme 2023-28 as detailed in Appendix C to this report.**
- (4) Committee also recognises that the capital programme has been put together in the light of the best available information on asset disposals, an estimate of likely capital receipts, the best use of funding allocated by the Government through the Liverpool City Region and the objective of repaying the exceptional financial support received by the agreed date.**

**A continuing area of concern for our communities is the state of our road and footway network.**

**The Director of Neighbourhoods, in consultation with the Director of Finance are therefore requested to:**

- put together bids for a programme, after annual repayment of the capitalisation directive, to allocate a maximum of 5% of capital receipts and for such receipts to be earmarked for additional investment into our roads/footways, to address the deterioration of the network.
- progress to both frame the future programme and updates on the roll out of the programme, should be reported back to the parent committee.

98 **CAPITAL FINANCING STRATEGY 2023/24**

The Director of Finance introduced the report which set out the Capital Financing Strategy, which was an annual requirement of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) 2021 Code of Practice on Treasury Management and the report therefore fulfilled the Council's legal obligation under the Local Government Act 2003 to have regard to the CIPFA Code.

**Resolved – That**

- (1) Council be recommended to approve the Capital Financing Strategy 2023/24.**
- (2) Council be recommended to approve the associated Prudential Indicators to be adopted.**
- (3) Council be recommended to approve the Council's Minimum Revenue Provision policy.**

99 **TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2023/24**

The Director of Finance introduced the report which provided the Treasury Management Strategy for 2023/24. Treasury management was the management of the Council's cash flows, borrowing and investments, and the associated risks. The Council had substantial sums of money both borrowed and invested and was therefore exposed to financial risks including the loss of invested funds and the revenue effect of changing interest rates. The successful identification, monitoring and control of financial risk were therefore central to the Council's prudent financial management.

In response to a query, the Director of Finance undertook to provide a report to a future meeting on benchmarking the Council's risk appetite against other Local Authorities.

**Resolved – That**

**(1) Council be recommended to approve the Treasury Management and Investment Strategy for 2023/2024.**

**(2) Council be recommended to approve the Treasury Management Prudential Indicators.**

100 **INVESTMENT STRATEGY 2023/24**

The Director of Finance introduced the report which set out the Investment Strategy 2023/24 which fulfilled the requirement of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to produce an investment strategy that covers non-treasury activities. The Strategy was produced following updated 'Guidance on Local Government Investments' in February 2018 following an increasing focus on commercial activities for local authorities including but not exclusive to property.

**Resolved – That Council be recommended to approve the Investment Strategy for 2023/2024 which includes potential investment in Service Investments: Loans (including the Approval Limit detailed in Table 1), Service Investment: Shares (non-currently held), Commercial Property and Loan Commitments and Financial Guarantees.**

101 **PAY POLICY 2023-2024**

The Assistant Director for Human Resources/Organisation Development introduced the report of the Director of Resources which outlined the Pay Policy Statement 2023/24, which intended to provide transparency with regard to the Council's approach to setting pay by identifying the methods by which salaries of all employees were determined, the detail and level of the salary package of its most senior staff and the Head of Paid Services' responsibility for ensuring the provisions set out in the statement were applied consistently throughout the Council and recommending any amendments to Full Council.

It was clarified that the Council was a Real Living Wage payer but that some of its suppliers were in a different position, however the aspiration was for all contractors to pay the Real Living Wage with plans in place to achieve that. Following a query in relation to the performance management policy, an update on the policy was added to the Committee's work programme.

It was moved by Councillor Tom Anderson, seconded by Councillor Lesley Rennie, that Council be recommended to approve the Pay Policy Statement for the financial year 2023/2024, subject to an amendment to section 10.3 of the Pay Policy Statement to delete 'Chief Officer' and replace with 'Head of Service or above', and delete '£100,000' and replace with 'is statutory', so that it read 'Any payments upon termination in respect of a Head of Service or above is statutory, (apart from contractual payments, where the Council has no discretion) shall be subject to a vote at Council or relevant Committee or

Panel of Members with delegated authority to approve such payments. Payments upon termination are subject to any legislative requirements or caps.’

The Committee discussed the implications of the motion and sought a way forward to enable further information to be provided. The Monitoring Officer advised that it was a statutory requirement to publish the Pay Policy Statement by 1 April 2023 and that there were no further scheduled meetings of Policy and Resources Committee prior to the final meeting of Council on 20 March 2023 in the current Municipal Year.

The Monitoring Officer suggested to the mover of the motion that the Pay Policy Statement be referred to Council for consideration as presented, and that the Director of Resources be requested to submit a further report to Policy and Resources Committee early in the new municipal year. The mover of the motion indicated the motion should remain as originally proposed.

The motion was therefore put to the vote and was lost (6:9).

Councillor Phil Gilchrist then moved that ‘Council be recommended to approve the Pay Policy Statement for the financial year 2023/24, with the statement to remain under review and dealt with at the earliest possible meeting in light of the facts presented.’ This was seconded by Councillor Jo Bird.

The motion was put and agreed (unanimously). It was therefore –

**Resolved (unanimously) – That Council be recommended to approve the Pay Policy Statement for the financial year 2023/24, with the Statement to remain under review and dealt with at the earliest possible meeting in light of the facts presented.**

## 102 WATER, WASTEWATER & ANCILLARY SERVICES

The Director of Regeneration and Place introduced the report which sought approval for the appointment of a provider of water, wastewater and ancillary services. The report set out how non-domestic customers could enter a contract with a retailer to achieve savings over the default non-contract position which would incur “deemed rates” relating to these services which included the management of bills, leak detection and disconnecting supplies.

A framework managed through direct award by North East Purchasing Organisation provided a compliant route to market for the procurement of water, wastewater, and ancillary services for all public sector bodies. Through the framework agreement after applying the favourable tariff offered by the retailer, it was expected that this would save approximately £80,000 over a 12-month period across corporate and school premises.

Concerns were raised over the discharge of wastewater and officers were urged to undertake close scrutiny of the services.

**Resolved – That**

**(1) Anglian Water Business (National) Ltd (Company Registration Number 03017251) be appointed under a 4-year contract via the North East Purchasing Organisation (Public Buying Organisation) direct award Framework – NEPO311 Framework Agreement for the provision of Water Retail Services.**

**(2) the Director of Law and Governance be authorised to finalise the legal documentation associated with the appointment of Anglian Water Business (National) Ltd.**

Having reached three hours since the commencement of the meeting, it was moved by Councillor Janette Williamson, seconded by Councillor Jean Robinson, that the meeting be extended by a further 15 minutes.

The motion was put and agreed (9:6). It was therefore –

**Resolved – That the meeting be extended to 21:25pm.**

103 **PROCEDURE FOR BUDGET DECISION MEETING OF COUNCIL**

The Director of Law and Governance introduced a report on the assurance process in formulating the draft Council Budget with a recommendation to Council on a process for adoption at the Budget decision making meeting.

**Resolved – That it be recommended to Council, that for the duration of the extraordinary meeting of 27th February 2023 (Budget Council):**

- (a) the procedure attached as Appendix A be followed in respect of the meeting; and**
- (b) Council Standing Order 15.4 (timing of speeches) be suspended together with such other standing orders as may conflict with the Budget Council procedure or the Mayor’s administration of the meeting, in such a manner as the Mayor in his or her absolute discretion dictates, to ensure the objective of Council setting a lawful budget and council tax requirement prevails.**

104 **EXEMPT INFORMATION - EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

**Resolved - That, under section 100 (A) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the**

likely disclosure of exempt information as defined by paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A (as amended) to that Act. The Public Interest test has been applied and favours exclusion.

105 **ACQUISITION OF NATIONAL GRID LAND, NORTHSIDE**

The Head of Regeneration Delivery introduced the report.

**Resolved – That the recommendations as detailed in the report be approved.**

106 **EXEMPT APPENDIX - BUDGET AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2023/24**

Members discussed the detail provided in the exempted appendices and gave consideration to the possibility that information relating to Libraries and Leisure Services had been discussed earlier in the meeting during debates on previous items. It was suggested that the exempt information, as it related to Libraries and Leisure Services no longer needed to be exempt and as such, could be released for public consumption.

On a motion by Councillor Tom Anderson, seconded by Councillor Lesley Rennie, it was –

**Resolved (9:6) That – the appendices remain exempt, with the exception of information relating to Libraries and Leisure Services which should be made available for public consumption.**



WEDNESDAY, 22<sup>ND</sup> MARCH 2023

## POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

<b>Report Title:</b>	<b>EDSENTIAL CIC UPDATE AND ANNUAL BUSINESS PLAN 2023 – 2024</b>
<b>Report of:</b>	<b>DIRECTOR OF FINANCE (SECTION 151 OFFICER)</b>

### REPORT SUMMARY

This report provides an update on Edsential and the proposed Annual Business Plan for 2023 – 2024.

The Wirral Plan 2021 - 2026 sets out the Council's vision to secure the best possible future for the Council's residents and covers the following five themes:

- A thriving and inclusive economy, creating jobs and opportunities for all;
- A sustainable environment, a sustainable borough, leading the way in tackling the environment crisis;
- Brighter futures for all regardless of their background;
- Safe and pleasant communities that our residents are proud of; and
- Healthy and active lives for all, with the right care, at the right time.

This report aligns with the themes of brighter futures for all regardless of their background; safe and pleasant communities that our residents are proud of and healthy and active lives for all, with the right care, at the right time.

This matter affects all wards within the Borough.

This matter is not a Key Decision.

Appendices 1 to 3 of this report are exempt from publication by virtue of paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

### RECOMMENDATION/S

The Policy and Resources Committee is recommended to;

1. Note the draft annual business plan for 2023-2024 submitted by Edsential CIC in accordance with the requirements of the Shareholders Agreement.
- 2 Request that the Director of Finance in consultation with the Director of Law and Governance to engage with the company to establish a deeper understanding of the company's functioning with a view to suggesting revisions to the Annual Business Plan for 2023 – 2024 and to report back to a future meeting of either this committee

or Shareholder Board with recommendations relating to such a revised annual business plan.

## **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

### **1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S**

- 1.1 The Shareholders Agreement requires Edsential to produce an annual business plan for approval by its shareholders. A draft annual Business Plan has been produced, which officers believe should be further reviewed with further engagement with the company. It is anticipated a revised version of the annual business plan will be forthcoming in due course.

### **2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 2.1 Accepting the draft Annual Business Plan as submitted. This option has been rejected as the draft annual business plan submitted requires further investigation and amendment.

### **3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 3.1 Edsential is a Community Interest Company and is jointly owned by Wirral Council and Cheshire West and Cheshire (CW&C) Council. The company provides a range of services to the education sector including school meals, cleaning, residential courses, music tuition, and school governor training amongst other activities. The company in its mission statement states it aims to provide services in a private sector market setting with a public sector ethos. As income is primarily derived from schools and parents its operating model is under normal circumstances to make a modest return after satisfying its financial obligations which can then be reinvested into schools and services as appropriate.
- 3.2 The Council, Cheshire West and Chester Council and the Company are parties to a Shareholders Agreement dated 1 December 2015. This provides that the Company shall provide each shareholder a Business Plan for each financial year for approval. The Shareholders Agreement defines the operating arrangements for the company including the membership of the company board which although having representation from shareholders is not under the majority control of either shareholder.
- 3.3 The company has since inception had an agreed (equal) cashflow facility with both shareholders which is interest bearing. The facility was renewed for a five year term following approval of Policy and Resources Committee on 21st December 2020. The facility being a maximum drawdown of up to £2m per shareholder. CW&C also approved the renewal for their facility on the same terms
- 3.4 The closure of schools and cessation of residential course activity during the pandemic had a significant impact on Edsential's ability to provide services and receive income to cover its costs over the 2020/21 and 2021/22 finance years. Policy and Resources 10th November 2021 agreed that the Director of Resources, be authorised, in consultation with the Director of Law and Governance to approve financial support to the company, in the form of Covid related funding support grant of £643,000 and an interest bearing loan of £857,000.

- 3.5 The 2022/23 business plan was devised to allow the company to reset its activities in a post covid environment and provided time for the company to implement a number of operational changes to reflect the new environment. This would then allow the company to make agreed repayments against the covid recovery loan.
- 3.6 Post pandemic turnover has risen. The company is however operating in challenging market conditions. There is some lag in full recovery to pre-covid levels of activity. This autumn's inflationary spike and particularly in respect of food ingredient prices for school meals, energy and wage costs have impacted levels of return. Inflation is a sector wide issue and the result is that the company has been put under increased financial pressure.
- 3.7 The Annual Business Plan of the Company for 2023 - 2024 (attached at Appendix 2) with associated Budget Commentary (attached at Appendix 1) sets out:
- (a) the objectives, plans and targets for the Company for the financial year commencing 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024;
  - (b) a strategy review; and
  - (c) a financial summary/analysis.
- 3.8 The business plan lays out a number of measures which the company believes will enable it to trade at a level to recover its position. Given the commercial environment the company is operating within the business plan is commercially sensitive as disclosure would provide advantage to those it competes with. In the plan the company is seeking to increase income via a number of avenues whilst changing a number of its operating arrangements.
- 3.9 Officers have reviewed the business plan. Further explanation and analysis is required to gain a better understanding of the assumptions within the draft business plan and the robustness of forecasts, particularly in light of the current economic climate. Further meetings are taking place with the company and information has been requested to assist with the above. The outcome of this work should then be brought back to either this committee or Shareholder Board as appropriate before agreement of a 2023-24 Annual Business Plan.

#### **4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 The company operates independently of its shareholders receiving income from schools and parents. Should the company encounter financial difficulties which threaten its long term viability the Council would have exposure to risk such as any outstanding cash flow and covid recovery loan balances.

#### **5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The Company was established with the appropriate Certificate of Incorporation for a Private Limited Company/Community Interest Company with associated articles on 20 April 2015. The Shareholders Agreement was agreed on the formation of the Company.
- 5.2 The Company was established to provide and carry on activities which benefit all the inhabitants of the administrative areas of Cheshire West and Chester and Wirral Council and elsewhere, and, in particular, schools, educational facilities, children, young people, parents and adults by the provision of educational support services. In

addition, the Company may conduct such other business as is set out in its Business Plan.

- 5.3 The Company is required to produce an Annual Business Plan to the Shareholder Board for approval in accordance with the terms of the Shareholders Agreement.

## **6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS**

- 6.1 There are no direct implications to staffing, ICT or Assets arising from the subject matter of this report.

## **7.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

- 7.1 Without a detailed Annual Business Plan the Council as shareholder does not have a clear set of objectives against which to monitor the performance and effectiveness of the Company generally and in particular against the Shareholders Agreement and the Company's Strategy.
- 7.2 There is a reputational risk for the Council over the performance of its partially owned company.
- 7.3 There is financial risk for the Council in respect of any outstanding loan balances provided and any other financial obligations that may arise.
- 7.4 A comprehensive and deliverable Annual Business Plan is an important tool in mitigating these risks.

## **8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION**

- 8.1 Consultation and engagement has taken place between the company and both shareholders in respect of the proposed 2023-24 business plan.

## **9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 Wirral Council has a legal requirement to make sure its policies, and the way it carries out its work, do not discriminate against anyone. An Equality Impact Assessment is a tool to help council services identify steps they can take to ensure equality for anyone who might be affected by a particular policy, decision or activity.
- 9.2 There are no direct equality implications arising from the subject matter of this report.

## **10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 There are no direct environment and climate implications arising from the subject matter of this report.

## **11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 A well drafted and appropriate Business Plan is one of the hallmarks of a successful company. A well run and successful company and community support organisation will contribute to the development of a resilient local community.

11.2 The company employs Wirral residents providing income and job opportunities. The company strives to offer terms and conditions which are better than private sector competitors.

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## APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Financial Commentary (Exempt)  
Appendix 2 Edsential Draft Annual Business Plan 2023-2024 (Exempt)  
Appendix 3 Edsential Shareholder Agreement (Exempt)

Appendices 1 to 3 of this report are exempt from publication by virtue of paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

## BACKGROUND PAPERS

Shareholders Agreement  
Edsential Financial Monitoring Statements  
Edsential Business Plan

## TERMS OF REFERENCE

This report is being considered by the Policy and Resources Committee in accordance with Section b (v) of its Terms of Reference,

(b) provide a co-ordinating role across all other service committees and retain a 'whole-council' view of performance, budget monitoring and risk management, which includes responsibility for a decision:

(v) regarding companies or limited liability partnerships including acquisition and disposals;

## SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Shareholder Board	25 <sup>th</sup> March 2022
Policy and Resources	10 <sup>th</sup> November 2021
Policy and Resources	21 <sup>st</sup> December 2020



## POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 22 March 2023

<b>Report Title:</b>	<b>STRATEGIC PLANNING AND IMPROVEMENT UPDATE</b>
<b>Report of:</b>	<b>CHIEF EXECUTIVE</b>

### REPORT SUMMARY

Further to receipt of the latest report of the Independent Assurance Panel, as reported to this Committee in January, this report provides an update on the Council's continuing improvement programme. It includes the outcome of the Local Government Association's (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge re-visit conducted in November 2022. It also provides an in-year review of progress delivering against the Wirral Plan and the Council's Improvement Plan which were both agreed at Council on 11 July 2022.

The report underpins the implementation of the Wirral Plan by supporting the Council's continued improvement and financial sustainability.

This matter affects all wards. The report is not a key decision.

### RECOMMENDATION/S

Policy and Resources Committee is recommended to support the progress made and continue its support for collaborative working in support of the Council's on-going improvement.

## **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

### **1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S**

- 1.1 In Summer 2021 an external assurance review of the Council's governance and finances was commissioned by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). This was in response to the Council's request for a capitalisation directive in support of balancing the 2020/21 and 2021/22 budgets.
- 1.2 Following the review, two external assurance reports were published in November 2021. The reports included 23 recommendations to support the conditions for the capitalisation directive and to shape the Council improvement requirements in relation to governance and financial recovery.
- 1.3 Two of these recommendations required the completion of an LGA Corporate Peer Challenge (completed in March 2022) and to appoint an Independent Assurance Panel to act as a critical friend in respect of the Council's improvement. The Panel was appointed in December 2021 and has been meeting regularly since then.
- 1.4 This report updates Members of Policy and Resources Committee on the Council's improvement progress undertaken within that context.

### **2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 2.1 The Corporate Peer Challenge and the Council's Improvement Plan were specific requirements in line with the recommendations of the external assurance review. Reporting progress is good practice in line with the Council's aspiration for improvement and financial recovery. As such, no other options have been considered.

### **3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 3.1 As a result of financial challenges arising from the Covid 19 pandemic, the Council requested a capitalisation directive from the government to balance its budget in 2020/21 and 2021/22. As part of its assessment of the Council, DLUHC commissioned an external assurance review in Summer 2021 to get an independent view on the strength of the Council's financial and governance arrangements. The two external assurance reports were published in November 2021 and included 23 recommendations setting out a range of required improvement measures as conditions of the capitalisation directive being granted. Some of the key recommendations were:

- The appointment of an Independent Assurance Panel, made up of professionals with significant knowledge of local government finance, governance and improvement,
- That the Council requests a Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge,
- The development of an Improvement and Financial Recovery Plan,
- The requirements for a Council decision in support of a move to a Whole Council Scheme of Elections.

## Independent Assurance Panel

- 3.2 An Independent Assurance Panel was appointed by the Chief Executive in December 2021 to act in an advisory and support role whilst also providing assurance to DLUHC on the Council's improvement progress. The Panel, chaired by Carolyn Downs (Chief Executive – London Borough of Brent) has met regularly since its appointment. Some Members of the Panel also conduct regular meetings with Council officers to offer guidance and support. The Panel formally reports every 6 months to DLUHC and the Council. The last report of the Panel was received and presented to Policy & Resources Committee on 18 January.

## LGA Corporate Peer Challenge

- 3.3 An LGA Corporate Peer Challenge was delivered in Spring 2022. The focus of the Corporate Peer Challenge was aligned to the Council's improvement priorities. A challenge panel, led by Jacqui Gedman (Chief Executive – Kirklees Council) spent 4 days on site from 21-24 March 2022 talking to Elected Members, staff and key partners. The outcome of the challenge process was reported to this committee on 27 June 2022 and included a series of recommendations for the Council to:
- Develop a clear and collective vision for the future of Wirral Council and the Borough.
  - Develop a golden thread which cuts across tiers of the organisation regarding this vision.
  - Review the resources, capacity and capability required to support the Council's Regeneration ambitions.
  - Realign the Council's Corporate Core to support financial transformation and wider improvement.
  - Foster a culture of rigorous and constructive challenge within the organisation.
  - Develop a corporate approach to the management of reserves.
  - Proactively engage with external audit to support financial improvements across the Council and the management of risk.
  - Work towards political consensus on shared priorities to engender cross-party support on key issues.
  - Implement proposed governance reforms to support increased effectiveness of the Committee System.
  - Consider additional capacity to support the political and managerial leadership of the Council.
  - Provide dedicated space and time for the Council's Senior Management Team, Committee Chairs, and Group Leads to come together.
  - Further the training and development provided to elected members and managers.
  - Continue to work effectively with the Wirral Improvement Panel, considering the development work that is required over the coming two years.
- 3.4 In line with usual practice, a follow up visit was arranged with Members of the Challenge Panel in November 2022, six months after the original challenge process had been completed. The report of the Peer Challenge re-visit is included as Appendix 1 to this report and provides a narrative on the Council's progress as well as those areas of risk and challenge requiring continued attention and focus. As part of the Council's preparation for the return visit, a self-assessment was drafted against the recommendations set out above. This is included as Appendix 2.

## Council Improvement Plan

- 3.5 The Council's Improvement Plan, approved by Council on 11 July 2022, was developed in response to the External Assurance Review and Corporate Peer Challenge recommendations. The Plan was developed across four key themes:
- Financial Stability
  - Effective Organisation
  - Effective Services
  - Resilient Communities
- 3.6 In its report to this committee in January, the Independent Assurance Panel noted the Council's positive progress against the Improvement Plan. However, the panel also noted the need for political collaboration to ensure the approval of a balanced budget for 2023/24 and the need for continued focus on the delivery of the Medium Term Financial Strategy to ensure the Council's financial stability. The Panel has requested that a detailed progress report against the Improvement Plan is provided for its next meeting in May. This report will then be brought to the Policy & Resources Committee at its first meeting in June.

## Wirral Plan

- 3.7 A refresh of the Wirral Plan 2021-26 was undertaken in Spring 2022 and this was referred by this Committee for approval by Council on 11 July 2022. The refreshed Wirral Plan retained its five core themes:
- Brighter Futures
  - Inclusive Economy
  - Sustainable Environment
  - Active and Healthy Lives
  - Safe and Pleasant Communities
- 3.8 The refreshed Wirral Plan also included a number of key priorities for 2022/23 in line with current and emerging issues and challenges. An interim progress report, highlighting the achievement against these priorities is included as Appendix 3. A year end report will be compiled and reported in Summer/Autumn as a new Wirral Plan is refreshed to align with the new Council administration following the local elections in May.

## **4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 There are no financial implications arising as a result of this report. The Council's Improvement Plan seeks to ensure the Council is able to strengthen its financial position after a period of instability.

## **5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 There are no legal implications arising as a result of this report.

## **6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS**

- 6.1 There are no resource implications arising as a result of this report.

## **7.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

7.1 There are no new risks arising as a result of this report. Risks in relation to the successful delivery of the Wirral Plan and Improvement Plan are managed through the Council's Corporate Risk Register and Directorate Plan risk registers.

## **8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION**

8.1 Extensive engagement was undertaken with partners and Elected Members prior to the Wirral Plan 2021 – 26 being approved in September 2021. Political Group Leaders were consulted in advance of this document being refreshed in July 2022.

8.2 Wirral's Improvement Plan has been developed further to the engagement of political leaders and following consultation with the Independent Assurance Panel and the Local Government Association.

## **9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 Wirral Council has a legal requirement to make sure its policies, and the way it carries out its work, do not discriminate against anyone. An Equality Impact Assessment is a tool to help council services identify steps they can take to ensure equality for anyone who might be affected by a particular policy, decision or activity.

9.2 There are no equality implications arising as a result of this report.

## **10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 There are no environment or climate implications arising directly as a result of this report. However, the Wirral Plan theme, Sustainable Environment, is key in determining how the Council and Wirral as a borough respond to the Climate Emergency. Successful delivery of the Wirral Plan is vital in the Council's response to the climate and biodiversity crisis.

## **11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS**

11.1 There are no community wealth implications arising as a result of this report.

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## **APPENDICES**

Appendix 1 – LGA CPC Wirral Progress Review (Final)  
Appendix 2 – Position Paper Nov 2022 – LGA CPC re-visit v3  
Appendix 3 – Wirral Plan Update

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

**External Assurance Review – Governance, Ada Burns September 2021**  
**Local Government Finance Review – Wirral Council November 2021**  
**Wirral Plan 2021 – 26, 2022/23 Refresh**

**Wirral Improvement Plan  
LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Outcome Report May 2022  
Report of the Independent Assurance Panel May 2022 and January 2023**

**TERMS OF REFERENCE**

This report is being considered by the Policy and Resources Committee in accordance with Section 1.2 of its Terms of Reference, to provide strategic direction to the operation of the Council.

**SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)**

<b>Council Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Policy &amp; Resources Committee</b>	<b>30 November 2021</b>
<b>Policy &amp; Resources Committee</b>	<b>8 June 2022</b>
<b>Policy &amp; Resources Committee</b>	<b>22 June 2022</b>

# **Corporate Peer Challenge – Six Month Progress Review**

Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council

December 2022



## 1.0 Executive summary:

Wirral Metropolitan Council (WMBC) undertook a Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) in March 2022. This review took place shortly following the publication of two external assurance reports on the Council (November 2021) which highlighted several significant shortcomings with regards to finance, governance, and culture. These reports also required the Council to establish an Independent Assurance Panel to support and scrutinise their financial recovery and wider approach to improvement.

Given this context, it is important to note that this progress review has been completed just six-months since the publication of the full CPC Report, and the corresponding Improvement Plan which has been developed by the Council. The team found that many of the significant challenges facing the Council, most notably their financial context, are still live and present issues within the organisation. These challenges have been exacerbated by national inflationary pressures and pay awards. This has worsened the Council's in-year position and has created further pressure on the medium-term financial plans of the Authority. However, it is also apparent that the Council has made progress, including improvements to the operation of the Committee System and improved alignment of corporate resources to support the Council's regeneration ambitions.

This scope for this six-month progress review was focused on the original 13 recommendations which were presented to the Council through their CPC. It was not intended duplicate the more in-depth and detailed work which the Council is completing with the support and challenge of Independent Assurance Panel. The Peer Team recognise that the Council is benefiting from the input and expertise afforded to them through the Improvement Panel.

The political make-up of the Council remains No Overall Control following the 2022 electoral thirds, with Labour as the biggest group with 26 Councillors, and the Conservative, Green and Liberal Democrat groups having 23, nine and six respectively. In this context and given the collective leadership responsibilities created by the Council's Committee governance system the peer team noted, as in their initial visit, that it is essential that there is mature cross-party working between groups to take forward the Council's improvement. This issue applies most notably on the development of proposals to support financial recovery.

The ability for groups to work collectively towards will naturally be tested by the move to an all-out election cycle from May 2023. Whilst there will naturally be political differences across groups on key issues, it is important that the Council's financial recovery and improvement are not delayed or hindered over the coming months. To support this, it is essential that Officers provide Members with a clear framework that creates space for political debate. This will include the provision of the appropriate information to facilitate

political discussions and mitigates the risk of shared and collective positions across groups being 'undone'. It is recognised that both officers and members have given a lot of time to key meetings to develop budget proposals, but the team would reiterate to the Council that this process needs to extend beyond formal meetings.

The Team appreciate that the Council have engaged positively with the findings of the CPC, including delivering an 'all-member' briefing on to share the findings. Importantly, WMBC has responded to many key findings, including that *"the council's regeneration ambitions will not address the council's financial challenges and creates further risks regarding deliverability and security"*. It was apparent to the team through this progress review that the Council is viewing regeneration through a broader lens, and that there is now more corporate engagement and support on these issues. This also includes the Council adopting a more realistic, longer-term narrative regarding the contribution of regeneration to the Council's financial challenges.

The Team was also pleased to see many of the positive responses that the Council has made to recommendations, particularly through the work of Democratic and Member Services. This includes the practical reforms that the Council has made to their committee system in reducing the number of forums, reviewing the previous inconsistent approaches to scrutiny, and bolstering the role of Policy and Resources Committee to provide more financial grip. This team have also supported the development of a new Member Development Strategy for 2023-2027 which will be invaluable following the all-out elections and the potential for a significant cohort of new Councillors. These improvements are encouraging. However, it is important that they are used to build momentum for the organisation to continue to address bigger and more challenging historic issues which have existed, particularly on the delivery of financial savings, rather than being seen as the completed milestones. It is also important that the Council recognises that Member development and Member relationships are live issues which will require further time, input and attention over coming years.

Since the Peer Team were last with the Council there have been several new appointments made to key posts, including Section 151 Officer, Monitoring Officer, and Director of Regeneration. The recruitment of a new cadre of officers to these roles presents both the opportunity for new ideas, as well as the risk of new individuals appreciating local issues and nuances in the live environment of budget setting and elections. Therefore, it is essential that the Council considers the support required for individuals in these roles, as well as the approach to working collectively which they want to embed as the new organisational norm.

The Peer Challenge Report from March stated that *"of the challenges which are facing Wirral council, the most significant and urgent are those relating to the Council's finances"* this remains true, with the council's financial position worsening in-year due to inflationary

pressures. Whilst the Council has made good progress in the delivery of saving proposals for 2022-2023, the forecast financial gap for 2023-2024 has grown significantly from £14 million at the start of the year. This figure increased during 2022 because of inflationary pressures to £49 million which was publicly reported in September but was not accompanied by appropriate savings proposals to address the full amount. Since September, this figure has since been revised down to £38.4 million following the revision of assumptions and input of the Independent Panel. The timing of this progress review means that the Council is still working through the development of proposals to bridge this gap, and the accompanying public consultation which needs to be completed at pace. Whilst the scale of this challenge is significant, it is important to note that this is the start of the process for creating a medium-term financial recovery and will only provide headroom for the coming 15 months. The Council will need to maintain this approach and rigour to move towards a sustainable medium-term financial recovery for the organisation from April 2024 onwards, recognising their continued vulnerability in this context due to low levels of financial reserves.

In the context of the scale of the challenges presented at the time of the original Peer Challenge, it is natural that the immediate priorities of the organisation were to review governance, set an appropriate budget, and manage the requirements of all-out elections. As the Council moves forward, the four-year election cycle will provide opportunity to change relationships across Members, improve organisational culture, and move towards a robust medium-term financial plan. With this in-mind, much of the Council's improvement work is still to come, and continued planning, preparation, and commitment is required to take this forward over the coming months and years.

## 2.0 Background:

The six-month progress review is an essential part of the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) process. These reviews are designed to take place approximately six-months from the Council's publication of their original CPC report and supporting action plan. It is appreciated that WMBC's Action Plan was incorporated into their wider Strategic Improvement Plan, alongside the Council's response to recommendations delivered by external reviews commissioned by DLUHC.

It is the intention that this will provide opportunity for feedback on the early progress of the Council and consideration of next steps. It is not proposed that these six-month progress reviews will revisit previous findings or incorporate new lines of enquiry beyond the original CPC.

### 3.0 Peer team, Scope, and Context:

The original CPC in March 2022 was originally supported by eight Officers and Councillors from across. The full report from this Peer Team is available on the LGA Council website [here](#). This revisit was completed by the following four members of the original team on Wednesday 30 November:

- **Jacqui Gedman** (Lead Peer): Chief Executive (Kirklees Council).
- **Cllr Sir Steven Houghton**: Leader (Barnsley Council).
- **Cllr Mike Wilcox**: Conservative Peer (Staffordshire County Council).
- **Matt Dodd**: Peer Challenge Manager (Local Government Association).

This review included the Council developing a self-assessment of their progress to-date and the development of an agreed timetable to maximise the Team's input whilst on site. This included a small number of 1-2-1 interviews, focus groups across key themes, and a facilitated discussion of key findings and feedback with senior political and managerial leadership of the Council.

The original Corporate Peer Challenge made a series of 13 recommendations to support the Council's ongoing improvement journey (these are contained in full in Appendix 1.0 to this report). For the purposes and structure of this report, these have been clustered under the following themes and headings:

- Governance, Finance, and Audit.
- Clarity of Improvement Proposals and Cross-Party Engagement on Process.
- Transformation and Organisational Culture.

Whilst this six-month review focuses on the progress made against the Council's Action Plan, it also allows consideration of changes in the Council's operating environment over this time. This can often mean new opportunities or challenges, or wider changes in context since the team were last onsite. As part of this review the Council provided further information on this context, including the impact of inflation on the organisation and the appointment to several senior officer roles. The team was also made aware of the increased demand that the Council was experiencing for services in response to the cost-of-living crisis, with more residents coming forward for support. The Team also appreciate that the Council has delayed the implementation of a new financial system (ERP) which had previously been due to 'go-live' in summer 2022 but has been delayed 12 months following testing and the recruitment of a new implementation partner. Finally, it was pleasing to hear that the Council has continued to make progress with the development of the Local Plan

which is now with the Secretary of State for review and testing. This is a significant milestone and achievement given that the Council has not had a Local Plan in place since 2000 and it took a concerted effort, prioritisation, and extra resource to ensure its development.

#### 4.0 Governance, Finance, and Audit:

Under this theme, consideration was given to the activity and progress of the Council against the following recommendations. These recommendations are listed in full in Appendix 1.0, but are summarised below at a headline level:

- Implement proposed governance reforms to support increased effectiveness of the committee system.
- Realign the council's corporate core to support financial transformation and wider improvement.
- Develop a corporate approach to the management of reserves.
- Review the resources, capacity and capability required to support the council's regeneration ambitions.
- Proactively engage with external audit to support financial improvements across the council and the management of risk.

The Peer Team recognises the progress that has been made by the Council with regards to improving the effectiveness of their Committee System, with the Council approving a new Constitution in May 2022. This saw the reduction in the number of Policy Committees from seven to six, as well as abolishing the Decision Review Committee and Partnership Committee which had previously presented an inconsistent approach to Scrutiny. The Team was told that this has resulted in the system working more effectively, particularly with the Policy and Resources Committee providing more leadership on budget issues. There will be a need for the Council to consider any wider iterative improvements that they will need to progress following the May 2023 elections. The team also appreciate that whilst this demonstrates progress against the technical issues of governance, there is still a need for the Council's culture of governance to improve, including issues of member / member relationships and conduct. This will be particularly important in the context of agreeing the Council's budget for 2023-2024, and the need for Groups to recognise the collective responsibility to deliver sustainable financial planning for the Council. This will require all Groups to take a shared "Wirral first" approach that prioritizes Council recovery and improvement, and builds on the shared recognition of the Council's context and avoids these issues being undermined by political discourse.

The Council is currently undertaking ongoing work to review and realign their corporate core through a 'strategic review of corporate services', however, the peer team note that the

delivery of savings identified for 2022-2023 are being reported as 'on-track' which is a key indicator. Given the financial context of the Council, it is important that the review of corporate services is not done solely from a cost perspective, as these corporate services will be essential in coordinating, sequencing, and delivering the wider savings required over the medium-term. Therefore, it is essential that the Council assures itself that it will have the necessary capacity for this work and avoids creating a risk for a short-term saving. This was originally highlighted in the full Peer Challenge: "*Central to delivering the necessary improvement for the council will be the corporate capacity of the council and the strength of corporate services.*"

Whilst the team were provided with information regarding corporate oversight of reserves, with the Section 151 officer being responsible for variations and virements, and oversight provided to Full Council. The Team believe that more could be done regarding the centralisation and control of these reserves, this includes them being reported at an Organisation level (rather than Directorate level) to further support control being held corporately, rather than at a service level.

Due to time constraints, it was not possible for the revisit to engage with external audit. However, noting the annual audit Letter (based on 2021) there are a number of significant issues that the Council needs to continue to manage and address, including specifics on regeneration companies and joint ventures. The interdependency between these issues and the Councils' regeneration ambitions is something which the Council will need to assure themselves are being appropriately managed through their Audit and Governance Committee.

Finally, the Peer Team appreciate that the Council's financial recovery remains the most challenging area of their improvement. The immediate challenges of developing a balanced budget for 2023-2024 within the context of all-out elections and inflationary pressure will naturally be a key area of focus for the coming months. However, it will be essential that the Council maintains this momentum into future years as part of the development and embedding of a meaningful MTFP that delivers against the full recommendations of the [CIPFA Assurance Report](#). The Peer Team deliberately did not duplicate the previous findings and recommendations from these assurance report but encourage the Council to quickly transition into their planning for the medium-term following the 2023-2024 budget process, and the central role that an evidence based and accurate MTFP will have in supporting planning over a longer-time period. The move to all-out elections provides an opportunity for this work to be aligned to the Council's four-year election cycle, and a consistent medium-term planning framework. It is important that the Council uses this medium-term timeframe to change the relationship between members, improve organisational culture, and improve financial planning. Therefore, it is important that the Council recognises the majority of this work will need to be completed following the all-out

elections in 2023, and has the appropriate plans, strategies, and processes in place to take this forward with pace.

## 5.0 Clarity of Improvement Proposals and Cross-Party Engagement on Progress:

Under this theme, consideration was given to the activity and progress of the Council against the following recommendations. These recommendations are listed in full in Appendix 1.0, but are summarised below at a headline level:

- Develop a clear and collective vision for the future of Wirral council and the borough.
- Develop a golden thread which cuts across tiers of the organisation regarding this vision.
- Work towards political consensus on shared priorities to engender cross-party support on key issues.

The Council have responded in a structured manner to the findings of the CPC. This includes the development of a Strategic Improvement Plan which was approved in Spring 2022. This Plan is supported with Directorate Business Plans, which have been informed through staff engagement, performance information, and the council's external assurance context. This Plan is designed around four key strands of financial stability, effective organisation, effective services, and resilient communities. The Wirral Improvement Plan can be accessed [here](#).

The Council is planning to update their borough plan following the 2023 elections to reflect the full four year-term of any new administration. This presents as a clear hierarchy of plans and strategies, and clear alignment on their content with a rationale for their future revisions. However, it is important that the refresh of the Wirral Plan in 2023 continues to be aligned with the necessary actions and milestones included in the Council's improvement plan and does not act to dilute focus or attention. The key challenge for the development of this plan will be to align the breadth of activity and ambition into a single and consistent narrative for the borough.

The political make-up of the Council was largely unchanged through the 2022 elections, with the context remaining no-overall control in the context of the committee system. There has been a great deal of time given by all groups towards supporting the Council's approach to budget setting for 2023-2024 and politicians deserve credit for their input and contributions, this must be maintained as the Council approaches the final stages of the budget setting process. This has included fortnightly leader and group leader meetings, and the attendance of Councillors at all member training and briefing sessions on finance and improvement issues. However, given the scale of the challenges facing the Council, it is important that all groups continue to work in-line with the recommendation from the Ada

Burns report “to engage constructively with the plan, and support dialogue with the public”. This will require members to continue to develop proposals collectively, and for officers to design and deliver a budget process that facilitates political discussion, debate, and choices. Finally, it is essential that there is maintained cross-party political focus and commitment to delivering the savings identified in the budget.

## 6.0 Transformation and Organisational Culture:

Under this theme, consideration was given to the activity and progress of the Council against the following recommendations. These recommendations are listed in full in Appendix 1.0, but are summarised below at a headline level:

- Consider additional capacity to support the political and managerial leadership of the council.
- Foster a culture of rigorous and constructive challenge within the organisation.
- Provide dedicated space and time for the council’s senior management team, committee chairs, and group leads to come together.
- Further the training and development provided to elected members and managers.
- Continue to work effectively with the Wirral improvement panel, considering the development work that is required over the coming two years.

Since the Corporate Peer Challenge there have been changes to the structure of political group support – with the introduction of a “Team around the Leader approach” and additional capacity being added to support group offices. This will add will additional capacity and resource to support group Leaders which will be helpful in the run up to and beyond all out elections in 2023. However as with the recommendations in the original peer challenge report the Peer Team believe that the Council would still benefit from additional capacity to support the managerial leadership of the Council. It is essential that there is dedicated capacity to identify and align strategic issues and to enable the timely movement of information across political groups and committees. This additional capacity will help with the facilitation of political discussion, debate, and decision making across the groups and will drive the change programme ensuring focus and attention on improved co-ordination of both political and managerial decision making

WMBC introduced a number of internal processes to support improved challenge within the Council. This has included the creation of a Committee Co-ordination and Oversight Group (including representation from Governance, Risk, Legal and Finance) to quality assure all key decision reports, prior to sign off by the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and act as an important forum for sharing information. This is an encouraging development but will require further work and support with the appointment of new statutory officers. The Council should

consider the support available to these individuals through training, mentoring and development to support their success. Beyond individual support, further work could be completed to consider the working practice that WMBC want to embed in these relationships, looking at a sense of “Team”, and how officers will work collectively to support the Council’s improvement.

To further manage risk effectively, internal governance at the Council has been strengthened through the establishment of a Regeneration Programme Board, reporting through to the Investment and Change Board. This group, chaired by the Chief Executive has also been established to provide scrutiny of the delivery of the regeneration programme and to ensure that corporate input and support is provided to enable that delivery as part of the Improvement Plan priorities. This is a positive development, and an additional check in the system. This forum is important given the breadth of external funding which the Council has attracted for regeneration ambitions, including successful bids to the Future High Street Fund, Town Deal Fund, as well as from Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, and Homes England, and the risk of clawback which will be presented through non-delivery or slippage on key milestones.

There has been increased time and space for the Council’s Senior Leadership Team (SLT) to work collectively. This has included dedicated away days to develop the Strategic Improvement Plan, and strategic sessions focused on budget setting for 2023-2024. Below the ‘top tier’ of the organisation, this has been taken forward through a People Strategy which has been informed through staff conversations. There is now a need for the council to embed reporting processes against these plans, to develop an appropriate feedback loop regarding the impact and progress of the Strategy. There is also potential for the Council to supplement individual focused training and development with collective team development, bringing together key officers and Committee Chairs to consider ways of working and preferred styles. This will be crucial following the 2023 all-out elections.

There has also been a clear renewed focus on issues of Member development at the Council. This has included the development of a long-term Member Development Strategy for 2023-2027, as well as the delivery of dedicated sessions on finance, chairing, corporate parenting, and social media training since the team were on site. It is important that further work takes place to embed this way of working within the organisation’s culture, rather than it being seen as an individual instance or programme.

Finally, the Peer Team recognise that the structure, rhythm, and input of the Wirral Assurance Panel has supported the Council’s progress to-date. It is appreciated that the Panel’s second Assurance Letter has been drafted as a ‘holding position’ with Members seeking further detail on the Council’s 2023-2024 budget position and proposals which remains the central issue to the Council’s challenges.

## 6.0 Summary, Recommendations and Next Steps:

The LGA continues to have a strong and open relationship with Wirral Council, and the council is clearly committed to engagement with sector-led-improvement. This is best illustrated through the input of the Wirral Assurance Panel which includes expertise from across the sector, as well as LGA Peers and Officers. It is hoped that the process for this progress review will support the Council in structuring and presenting information to the Panel.

Given the limited time on-site with the Council through this progress, the primary aim is to consider progress against previous recommendations, however, the Peer Team would encourage the Council to consider the following issues as they continue to move forward:

- **Political Relationships:** The Members of WMBC need to consider and manage councillor / councillor relationships, especially in the context of all-out-elections. This includes ensuring that conduct reflects positively on the Council's reputation, but also appreciating the need for cross-party working to support priority issues including budget setting. This is especially true in the context of the Committee System.
- **Clear Political Leadership:** Group Leaders should ensure that they are visible in their support for cross-party working. This will be central to the 2023-2024 budget being well developed and agreed across groups. This includes maintaining a cross-party commitment to a "Wirral first" approach that prioritises the borough and organisation ahead of political groups.
- **Continued focus on external recommendations:** The Council needs to ensure that there is a maintained focus on the findings and issues identified through the Ada Burns / CIPFA Assurance Reports of 2021. Importantly, this includes the need for further work on the medium-term financial recovery of the Council, following the conclusion of the 2023-2024 budget process.
- **Support New Appointments:** Dedicated support and structure should be given to new appointments in senior roles. This includes making sure that there are working practices to support relationships between these roles, as well issues of personal development for individuals. This should also include consideration of developing a sense of team across these roles, recognising the importance of working relationships to the Council's progress.
- **Post-Election Priorities:** Whilst it is understandable that much of the Council's capacity and resources will be focused on the immediate management and delivery of short-term

issues ahead of the 2023 elections. It is important that the Council takes the opportunity afforded to them by the new election cycle to move towards a more medium-term and structured approach towards improvement beyond their current annual cycle.

It is recognised that senior political and managerial leadership will want to consider, discuss, and reflect on these findings. To support transparency, the council is advised to publish this note. Claire Hogan is the LGA's Principal Adviser for the North West and can be contacted on [Claire.Hogan@local.gov.uk](mailto:Claire.Hogan@local.gov.uk)

## Appendix 1.0. Full list of previous recommendations from Corporate Peer Challenge:

Listed below are the full recommendations from the Wirral Corporate Peer Challenge, beyond the descriptions used in the chapters above:

- 1. Develop a clear and collective vision for the future of Wirral council and the borough:** The council revised the Wirral plan (2021-2026) in July 2021 setting out the priorities for the council for the coming years in a post-covid context. However, the subsequent publication of assurance reports has changed the context of the council. Therefore, there is a need for WMBC to articulate a vision and priorities that brings together the council's budget, strategic improvement plan, organisational structure, culture, regeneration ambitions, and relationship with partners into a single narrative and framework.
- 2. Develop a golden thread which cuts across tiers of the organisation regarding this vision:** There is need to further develop the golden thread associated with this vision into service plans, team plans, and staff appraisals (known locally as "*check ins*"). This will support with the identification of SMART outcomes, and for staff across the organisation to understand the contribution that their teams and roles can make towards them.
- 3. Review the resources, capacity and capability required to support the council's Regeneration ambitions:** The peer team recognise the exciting opportunities that exist within the borough through regeneration. However, WMBC need to assure itself that it has the appropriate skills and resources across the organisation to deliver on its scale of ambition. This includes particular focus on the finance support required to support delivery and manage risk on the council's behalf as a '*client function*'. It is also essential that the council maximises the opportunities to improve outcomes for residents through this work, making sure that this is not just viewed as '*physical regeneration*'.
- 4. Realign the council's corporate core to support financial transformation and wider improvement:** A strong corporate core is essential to coordinating, managing, and monitoring, the council's financial recovery. This core is currently dispersed across a number of directorates, and the council should look to bring this resource into a centralised team as far as possible. The council needs to consider the most appropriate

place for this to sit in the organisation, ensuring that it is aligned to delivering the council's strategic improvement plan and financial recovery, but does not act to dilute the attention required of statutory officers.

- 5. Foster a culture of rigorous and constructive challenge within the organisation:** A key feature of successful organisations is robust internal challenge. This is essential in the development of saving proposals, regeneration propositions, and policy implementation. Wirral needs to ensure that this challenge is a central feature of the organisation's culture, whilst mitigating the risk that challenge escalates into inappropriate behaviours. This can be supported through improved movement of information across the council, and better engagement with councillors through the decision-making process (including improved reports).
- 6. Develop a corporate approach to the management of reserves:** Reserves are currently held at a directorate level which creates challenges of oversight and limits the strategic opportunities regarding their use. The use of earmarked reserves should not be seen as an in-year contingency. The peer team feel that reserves should not be managed within directorates and should be managed corporately and maintained at the appropriate level. This centralisation of reserves is essential for sound budget management and supports their use strategically rather than reactively. This work needs to link the management of reserves to the council's medium term financial strategy and the delivery of the existing budget framework.
- 7. Proactively engage with external audit to support financial improvements across the council and the management of risk:** The delivery of the council's financial recovery and strategic improvement plan should address the statutory recommendations from external audit. However, it is important that the council engages beyond this to support an improved culture of financial reporting and good governance through proactive and regular dialogue on emerging issues.
- 8. Work towards political consensus on shared priorities to engender cross-party support on key issues:** Given WMBC is 'no overall control' there is a need for shared political approaches on priority issues. Therefore, to strengthen the stability of decision-making, the council should work towards political consensus across parties on issues of strategic importance. This should include an ongoing shared understanding of the financial context of the council.
- 9. Implement proposed governance reforms to support increased effectiveness of the committee system:** The council undertook a review of its committee system in December 2021, which included specific recommendations such as reducing the number of committees, refining scrutiny, and reviewing schemes of delegation. The improvement of delegations within the council will both support the pace of decision making but will also act to empower officers across the organisation. The council needs to implement these reforms at the earliest instance and continue to be live to the culture of good governance to support ongoing improvement.

- 10. Consider additional capacity to support the political and managerial leadership of the council:** Within the framework of no-overall control and the committee system it is essential that the leadership of the council is well supported to ensure that their capacity is protected for strategic issues and to enable the timely movement of information across political groups and committees in-line with wider sectoral norms.
- 11. Provide dedicated space and time for the council’s senior management team, committee chairs, and group leads to come together:** It is important that the council recognises the collective teamwork required across members and officers to support improvement. To this end, the peer team would recommend that further ‘top-team development’ work takes place at pace to support key roles both collectively and individually.
- 12. Further the training and development provided to elected members and managers:** Whilst this is being delivered currently, and there are plans for this to be extended, this needs to move to new levels to include a comprehensive plan for elected members covering roles and responsibilities, being a councillor in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and increased learning from across the sector. This should be mirrored with a comprehensive management development programme, but it is essential that these are viewed as ongoing and continuous processes.
- 13. Continue to work effectively with the Wirral improvement panel, considering the development work that is required over the coming two years:** Wirral have made good progress working with the Improvement and assurance panel since December 2021, and this relationship is central to the council’s journey. However, it is important that over the coming two-years the council does not become dependent upon the advice and direction of the panel, and instead fully owns and understands the actions required. This is especially pertinent for ensuring that there is clarity regarding the requirements and milestones that the council must meet to ensure that the panel has confidence that they are committed to and capable of continued improvement without external oversight.

<b>Process Title</b>	Wirral Corporate Peer Challenge Re-visit: Six-month Progress Review
<b>Date</b>	November 2022

## INTRODUCTION

The Local Government Association’s original Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) of Wirral was completed in April 2022, and a revisit is scheduled for 30<sup>th</sup> November 2022, to coincide with six-months from the publication of the Council’s action plan. The progress review following a CPC is an essential part of the CPC process and is in place to support the Council in implementing its action plan following the CPC. The six-month progress review will provide:

- Feedback from the peer team on the early progress made by the Council against the CPC recommendations and action plan.
- The opportunity to discuss the alignment of actions in the action plan to the recommendations and any early impact or learning from the progress made against this action plan.
- Space to discuss and design ways of capitalising or navigating any significant changes in the local operating environment. This includes relevant, new opportunities or obstacles that may have presented themselves since the team were ‘on-site’.

This note sets out an overview of initial progress made in relation to the recommendations of the CPC report since it was produced in April, to help inform planning and focus, in advance of the review visit.

### 1.0 CURRENT CONTEXT

Wirral’s response to the CPC - and the actions to address its recommendations - are set out in the Improvement Plan agreed at Council in July 2022. We know that to deliver it requires political collaboration and the collective will and effort of our staff, management team and political leaders.

The Improvement Plan set out the vision for the organisation we are seeking to create to deliver the outcomes set out in the Wirral Plan to best meet the needs of local residents. The plan details how we will secure the Council’s financial stability and how we will develop an effective organisation with a clear sense of priorities backed up by strong leadership and good governance. It provides a framework and schedule for systematically re-designing our services to ensure they are fit-for-purpose, deliver value for money and secure the best outcomes for Wirral residents.

Since then, good progress has been made in supporting delivery of the Plan and drive forward improvement, particularly in relation to leadership and governance.

However, the budgetary issue is currently our most significant challenge, as it is for most Local Authorities and the public sector. The budget setting process for 2023/24 commenced much earlier than in previous years in order to put the Council in a strong position in terms of its continued improvement and financial recovery. The authority had been on track to bring forward plans for a balanced budget next year despite an expected gap of £14 million.

However, rising energy prices, soaring inflation, and national wage pressures have seriously impacted Wirral Council’s budget setting for 2023-24.

During the Summer, financial monitoring highlighted a range of in-year (2022/23) financial pressures resulting from emerging external, national, and global circumstances. These financial challenges are having a significant impact on:

- Contract inflation,
- Reduced income,
- Energy price increases,

- Pay inflation.

Financial modelling, together with the unforeseen extra cost pressures mean the council now faces a very significant budget gap for 2023/24 that will need action to be taken to prepare and agree proposals for consideration, in advance of the Local Government Finance Settlement to be announced in December.

The scale of the financial challenge that the Council faces cannot be overstated. Setting a budget, especially in the context of largely uncontrollable, macro-economic pressures, emerging at an unprecedented pace, requires difficult decisions to ensure that a balanced position can be presented.

It should be noted that these financial challenges are facing the whole country and Wirral, like most other Councils, is now facing a significantly worsened assumed budget gap for 2023/24.

Like every other local authority, and so many organisations across the country, public and private sector alike, our services are now under a greater level of pressure than we have ever experienced before.

## 2.0 REVIEW VISIT

Against this background and significantly changing context, the six-month review and on-site visit on 30<sup>th</sup> November will consider the original recommendations of the CPC under the following themes:

### 2.1 Clarity of improvement proposals and cross-party engagement on progress

(a) This would include activity against the following recommendations from the original ‘on-site’- work in Wirral in 2022.

- **Develop a clear and collective vision for the future of Wirral council and the borough:** The council revised the Wirral plan (2021-2026) in July 2021 setting out the priorities for the council for the coming years in a post-covid context. However, the subsequent publication of assurance reports has changed the context of the council. Therefore, there is a need for WMBC to articulate a vision and priorities that brings together the council’s budget, strategic improvement plan, organisational structure, culture, regeneration ambitions, and relationship with partners into a single narrative and framework.
- **Develop a golden thread which cuts across tiers of the organisation regarding this vision:** There is need to further develop the golden thread associated with this vision into service plans, team plans, and staff appraisals (known locally as “*check ins*”). This will support with the identification of SMART outcomes, and for staff across the organisation to understand the contribution that their teams and roles can make towards them.
- **Work towards political consensus on shared priorities to engender cross-party support on key issues:** Given WMBC is ‘no overall control’ there is a need for shared political approaches on priority issues. Therefore, to strengthen the stability of decision-making, the council should work towards political consensus across parties on issues of strategic importance. This should include an ongoing shared understanding of the financial context of the council.

#### (b) Points for consideration during the visit

- How to ensure effective engagement (of members, staff and partners) in production and implementation of new 2023 four-year Plan.
- How to build on and enhance formal and informal member engagement and collaboration on key strategic issues. This will be particularly important during 2023, both pre and post-election, in the context of the new election cycle and with the likelihood of what could be a considerable number of new members post-election.

## 2.2 Governance, Finance, and Audit

(a) This would include activity against the following recommendations from the original 'on-site'- work in Wirral in 2022:

- **Review the resources, capacity and capability required to support the council's Regeneration ambitions:** The peer team recognise the exciting opportunities that exist within the borough through regeneration. However, WMBC need to assure itself that it has the appropriate skills and resources across the organisation to deliver on its scale of ambition. This includes particular focus on the finance support required to support delivery and manage risk on the council's behalf as a '*client function*'. It is also essential that the council maximises the opportunities to improve outcomes for residents through this work, making sure that this is not just viewed as 'physical regeneration'.
- **Realign the council's corporate core to support financial transformation and wider improvement:** A strong corporate core is essential to coordinating, managing, and monitoring, the council's financial recovery. This core is currently dispersed across a number of directorates, and the council should look to bring this resource into a centralised team as far as possible. The council needs to consider the most appropriate place for this to sit in the organisation, ensuring that it is aligned to delivering the council's strategic improvement plan and financial recovery, but does not act to dilute the attention required of statutory officers.
- **Develop a corporate approach to the management of reserves:** Reserves are currently held at a directorate level which creates challenges of oversight and limits the strategic opportunities regarding their use. The use of earmarked reserves should not be seen as an in-year contingency. The peer team feel that reserves should not be managed within directorates and should be managed corporately and maintained at the appropriate level. This centralisation of reserves is essential for sound budget management and supports their use strategically rather than reactively. This work needs to link the management of reserves to the council's medium term financial strategy and the delivery of the existing budget framework.
- **Proactively engage with external audit to support financial improvements across the council and the management of risk:** The delivery of the council's financial recovery and strategic improvement plan should address the statutory recommendations from external audit. However, it is important that the council engages beyond this to support an improved culture of financial reporting and good governance through proactive and regular dialogue on emerging issues.
- **Implement proposed governance reforms to support increased effectiveness of the committee system:** The council undertook a review of its committee system in December 2021, which included specific recommendations such as reducing the number of committees, refining scrutiny, and reviewing schemes of delegation. The improvement of delegations within the council will both support the pace of decision making but will also act to empower officers across the organisation. The council needs to implement these reforms at the earliest instance and continue to be live to the culture of good governance to support ongoing improvement.

### (b) Points for consideration during the visit

- The Regeneration Delivery Plan needs to set out a clear programme of project phasing, prioritisation and deliverability.
- How to optimise the design and function of the Council Operating Model in general, and the Corporate Centre in particular, to deliver transformation and improvement.
- Continue to build and enhance financial awareness and training across the organisation.
- Good progress being made with Member development and learning, but how to improve softer cultural relationships – the new election cycle from 2023 presents fresh opportunities for this.

- How can we ensure the budget process remains on track and delivers against the outcomes of the workshops.

### 2.3 Transformation and Organisational Culture

(a) This would include activity against the following recommendations from the original 'on-site'- work in Wirral 2022.

- **Foster a culture of rigorous and constructive challenge within the organisation:** A key feature of successful organisations is robust internal challenge. This is essential in the development of saving proposals, regeneration propositions, and policy implementation. Wirral needs to ensure that this challenge is a central feature of the organisation's culture, whilst mitigating the risk that challenge escalates into inappropriate behaviours. This can be supported through improved movement of information across the council, and better engagement with councillors through the decision-making process (including improved reports).
- **Consider additional capacity to support the political and managerial leadership of the council:** Within the framework of no-overall control and the committee system it is essential that the leadership of the council is well supported to ensure that their capacity is protected for strategic issues and to enable the timely movement of information across political groups and committees in-line with wider sectoral norms.
- **Provide dedicated space and time for the council's senior management team, committee chairs, and group leads to come together:** It is important that the council recognises the collective teamwork required across members and officers to support improvement. To this end, the peer team would recommend that further 'top-team development' work takes place at pace to support key roles both collectively and individually.
- **Further the training and development provided to elected members and managers:** Whilst this is being delivered currently, and there are plans for this to be extended, this needs to move to new levels to include a comprehensive plan for elected members covering roles and responsibilities, being a councillor in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and increased learning from across the sector. This should be mirrored with a comprehensive management development programme, but it is essential that these are viewed as ongoing and continuous processes.
- **Continue to work effectively with the Wirral improvement panel, considering the development work that is required over the coming two years:** Wirral have made good progress working with the Improvement and assurance panel since December 2021, and this relationship is central to the council's journey. However, it is important that over the coming two-years the council does not become dependent upon the advice and direction of the panel, and instead fully owns and understands the actions required. This is especially pertinent for ensuring that there is clarity regarding the requirements and milestones that the council must meet to ensure that the panel has confidence that they are committed to and capable of continued improvement without external oversight.

#### (b) Points for consideration during the visit

- How can we further improve and align the extensive Member Development activity and the emerging People Strategy, as part of a comprehensive and detailed programme of leadership development?
- What should be the focus of Strategic Away Days e.g., with Group Leaders and SLT to embed and improve the culture of transformation and improvement across the Council? A key part of this will be producing a new 4-year Plan for 2023 and preparing for all-out elections?
- As the Panel withdraws from the Council, what more can we do to ensure a meaningful commitment to improvement is maintained and built upon?

### 3.0 SUMMARY OF PROGRESS

Ahead of the on-site visit, the following section provides an overview of progress to date on the '13 recommendations' identified by the CPC and next steps that will be taken to further deliver against the recommendations.

<b>Recommendation 1 – Develop a clear and collective vision for the future of Wirral Council and the Borough</b>	
<i>There is a need for WMBC to articulate a vision and priorities that brings together the Council's budget, Strategic Improvement Plan, organisational structure, culture, regeneration ambitions, and relationship with partners into a single narrative and framework.</i>	
Progress	Next Steps
<p>In July 2022, the Council agreed the single narrative, comprising the Improvement Plan, alongside the refreshed Wirral Plan 2022/23.</p> <p>The Improvement Plan was developed in response to, and incorporates the recommendations of, the External Assurance Review Reports and the LGA Peer Challenge.</p> <p>It has been developed following engagement with council staff, Chief Officers, and all political Group Leaders. It also follows advice and guidance provided by Wirral's Independent Assurance Panel and the LGA on how best to plan and deliver on our improvement aspirations. The Improvement Plan sets out the vision for the organisation we are seeking to create to deliver the outcomes set out in the Wirral Plan to best meet the needs of local residents.</p> <p>The plan details how we will secure the Council's financial stability and how we will develop an effective organisation with a clear sense of priorities backed up by strong leadership and good governance. It provides a framework and schedule for systematically re-designing our services to ensure they are fit-for-purpose, deliver value for money and secure the best outcomes for Wirral residents.</p> <p>Priorities identified in the Wirral Improvement Plan are outlined in the diagram below.</p>	<p>Review of IP and WP progress report December 2023</p> <p>Strategic planning and engagement to produce new 4-year Plan will start Spring 2023</p>
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; background-color: #f9f9f9; padding: 10px;"> <div style="width: 22%; border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 5px;"> <p style="text-align: center; background-color: #993366; color: white; padding: 5px;"><b>A</b> Financial Stability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Medium term financial plan</li> <li>● Savings plans and monitoring</li> <li>● Reserves strategy</li> <li>● Governance &amp; oversight</li> <li>● Capital &amp; assets</li> </ul> </div> <div style="width: 22%; border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 5px;"> <p style="text-align: center; background-color: #009999; color: white; padding: 5px;"><b>B</b> Effective Organisation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Strong leadership</li> <li>● Committees &amp; decision making</li> <li>● Strategy, policy &amp; planning</li> <li>● New operation model</li> </ul> </div> <div style="width: 22%; border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 5px;"> <p style="text-align: center; background-color: #cc9933; color: white; padding: 5px;"><b>C</b> Effective Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Chief Officer review</li> <li>● Service review programme</li> <li>● Digital transformation</li> </ul> </div> <div style="width: 22%; border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 5px;"> <p style="text-align: center; background-color: #669933; color: white; padding: 5px;"><b>D</b> Resilient Communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Strategic partnerships</li> <li>● VCF sector</li> <li>● Neighbourhood model</li> </ul> </div> </div>	
<p>The Wirral Improvement Plan can be accessed <a href="#">here</a>.</p>	

<p>Complementary to this, the Wirral Plan was refreshed in July 2022 to reflect wider contextual changes and to align with the Council’s Improvement Plan – setting out the vision and priorities for organisational change and improvement. The Wirral Plan is a key document of the Council’s policy framework, setting out the vision and priorities for Wirral as a place, and ensuring the Council is in the best shape to lead Wirral partners to achieve this vision.</p>	
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<p align="center"><b>Recommendation 2 – Develop a golden thread which cuts across tiers of the organisation regarding this vision</b></p>	
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*Further develop the golden thread associated with the collective vision for WMBC into Service Plans, Team Plans, and staff appraisals (known locally as “check ins”). This will support with the identification of SMART outcomes, and for staff across the organisation to understand the contribution that their teams and roles can make towards them.*

<p><b>Progress</b></p>	<p><b>Next Steps</b></p>
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The Wirral Plan is a key policy document and articulates the ambition and key deliverables for the organisation. As part of the implementation of the Wirral Plan, Directorate Business Plans were produced in Spring 2022. This approach was embedded into our strategic planning and financial strategy and ensured that Wirral Plan priorities are at the heart of all corporate underpinning team and staff work plans.

Directorate Business Plans set out key priorities, projects and deliverables for 2022-23; budget savings proposals for 2022/23 as well as the emerging proposals for service change in 2023/24.

The Business Planning process successfully aligns and reflects several related activities including:

**Staff Engagement:**

Ongoing staff engagement and communications took place to shape Business Plans, related Team Plans and individual ‘check-ins’. This included briefing staff to understand Wirral Plan and Improvement Plan aims to ensure everyone in the organisation is working towards a clear set of joint priorities.

**Performance Management & Reporting:**

Embedding SMART objectives and timelines within Business Plans and aligning these with current processes e.g., Performance Insight Packs and Corporate Dashboard.

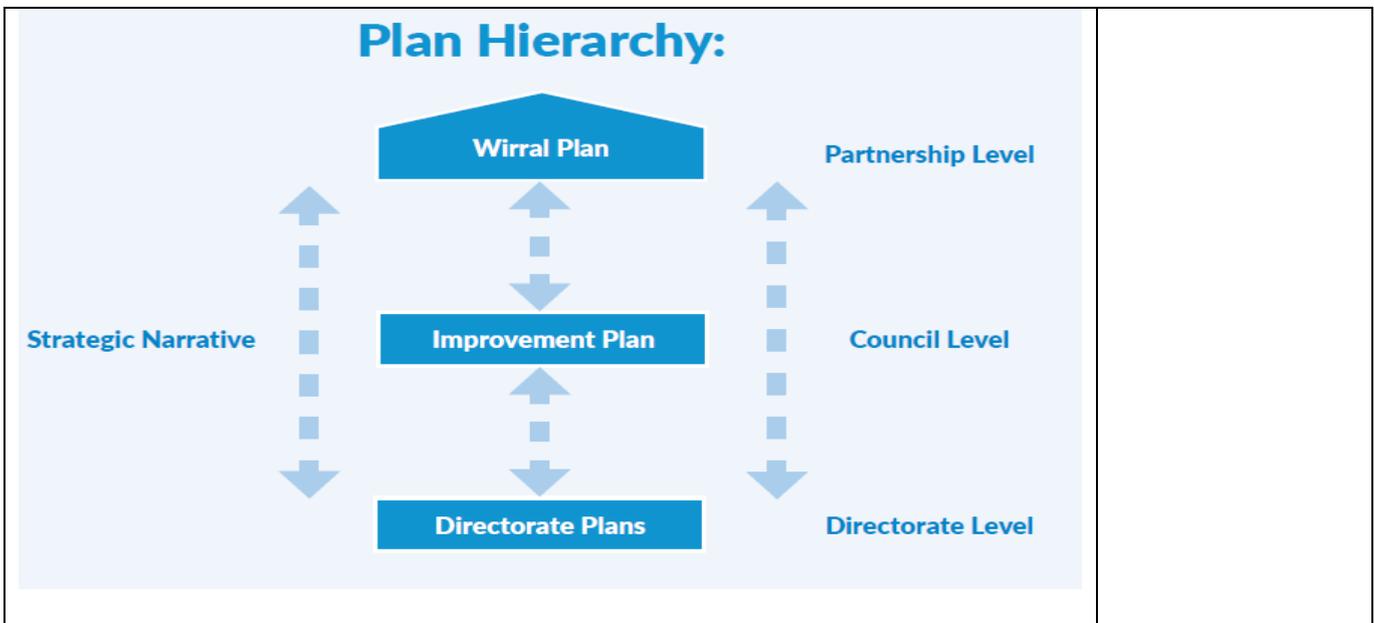
- Supporting performance management at DMT, SLT and OPG and enable CEX bimonthly Director’s meetings to have oversight of Directorate performance.
- Refreshed Performance Management Framework for the Wirral Plan

**Improvement Plan:**

Directorate Business Plans also align with Improvement Plan priorities. The diagram below demonstrates the golden thread between the collective vision for WMBC and a continued strategic narrative across the key strategic documents for WMBC: Wirral Plan, Improvement Plan and Directorate Plans.

As the Council moves to a Whole Council Election scheme in 2023, there is an opportunity to re-set the Wirral Plan as a four-year plan for the full term of the new administration. This work will be conducted during 2023 to enable a new 2023/27 plan to be adopted in Autumn 2023.

A structured schedule of engagement and strategic planning will set out how the 2023 Plan and all underpinning Delivery Plans will be co-produced with members and staff.



**Recommendation 3 –  
Review the resources, capacity and capability required to support the Council’s Regeneration ambitions**

*WMBC need to assure itself that it has the appropriate skills and resources across the organisation to deliver on its scale of ambition. This includes particular focus on the finance support required to support delivery and manage risk on the Council’s behalf as a ‘client function’. It is also essential that the Council maximises the opportunities to improve outcomes for residents through this work, making sure that this is not just viewed as ‘physical regeneration’.*

<b>Progress</b>	<b>Next Steps</b>
<p>The resources, capacity and capability required to deliver the Council’s Regeneration ambitions has been assessed and regular reports are taken to the Wirral Independent Assurance Panel.</p> <p>A dedicated on-site session took place in August 2022, when the Panel considered a comprehensive update on the delivery of the Council’s Regeneration Programme. This included a phasing plan in respect of project delivery; work to date on identifying the most appropriate delivery model for the programme; plus an update on the Regeneration Finance Strategy, with detail on the current resourcing position whilst articulating the work that is underway to deliver a comprehensive finance plan.</p> <p>A Regeneration PMO was established in 2021, together with the allocation of resources to enable a structure to be put in place to deliver the programme. Initial focus for the PMO has been on supporting the delivery of the regeneration programme to meet agreed outcomes and timescales, in line with funding requirements, and alongside a clear risk management approach.</p> <p>A Delivery Plan is currently under development to set out the project phasing and prioritisation of the regeneration programme. The Plan will include an organisation chart and some information about the senior team who are tasked with delivery. The Plan will sit alongside the Regeneration Finance Strategy. The Regeneration Delivery Team, working alongside the Regeneration PMO, is focussed on 5 main programmes (Birkenhead Waterfront, Central Birkenhead,</p>	<p>Delivery Plan will be progressed and finalised by the end of the calendar year.</p> <p>Regeneration Oversight group to scrutinise delivery of the programme.</p> <p>The Business Case for the proposed model of delivery will continue to be shared with key Members and stakeholders prior to its consideration at the Economy, Regeneration and Housing Committee in October 2022 and</p>

<p>Dock Branch Neighbourhood, Hind Street and Wirral Waters), which are a priority because of funding deadlines, and will be set out in a Delivery Plan.</p> <p>Additional external capacity has now been put in place to accelerate the development of the Regeneration Finance Strategy. The Regeneration Finance Strategy sets out the process through which the Council manages the resourcing and financing of individual programmes, such that a robust approach is applied, ensuring sustainability, and that an overarching financial plan can be maintained. The Regeneration Finance Strategy also sets out the current capital programme (an accompanying Capital Investment Strategy will be developed), and the resourcing and financing arrangements, demonstrating the viability of the programme in the next two years, as well as highlighting where funding is still to be secured to deliver the remainder of the programme. The Financing Strategy and Plan will align with the Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2022/23 – 2026/27.</p> <p>To further manage risk effectively, internal governance was strengthened through the establishment of a Regeneration Programme Board, reporting through to the Investment and Change Board. A Regeneration Oversight Group chaired by the Chief Executive has also been established to provide high level scrutiny of the delivery of the regeneration programme and to ensure that corporate input and support is provided to enable that delivery as part of the Improvement Plan priorities.</p> <p>Given the viability challenges facing the regeneration of the LeftBank the Council has critically attracted external funding from public sector sources (Future High Streets, Town Deal, Levelling Up, as well as from LCRC and Homes England) to support private sector investment. In addition, a LeftBank Programme Board has been set up to coordinate funding and ensure delivery against the timescales associated with these funding sources.</p> <p>At the same time the Government awarded Wirral Council funding through its New Development Corporation Competition Programme (NDCCP) thereby enabling work to take place to identify the most appropriate delivery model for this programme. The development of a business case has been progressed collectively with DLUHC with a focus on identifying what works best for the locality. A fundamental principle has been that any delivery model should reflect and inform the Council’s Improvement Plan and be part of that improvement journey – a One Place One Plan approach.</p> <p>It is recognised that in order to progress with the full regeneration programme at the proposed pace that there is likely to be a gap in funding. The submission of the Delivery Partnership proposals to Government will indicate whether additional funding can be secured, and the programme continue at pace or, if this is not the case, then the regeneration phasing plan will need to reflect the progress that can be made with the available resources.</p> <p>The Council is continuing to improve outcomes for residents through regeneration ensuring they benefit from sustainable transport networks, improved access to employment and training opportunities, better housing/living environments, and access to the latest technology through full fibre digital network roll out across the borough. The Regeneration Service is also putting Community Wealth at the heart of activities, supporting the</p>	<p>submission to Government in early 2023</p> <p>The Finance Strategy will continue to be progressed as a key priority with its progress overseen by the Regeneration Oversight group.</p> <p>Delivery of actions outlined in the Wirral Economic Strategy, 2021 – 2026.</p>
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<p>Council’s ambition (as outlined more broadly in the Community Wealth Strategy), to ensure that more of the wealth that is both held and generated in Wirral is retained and controlled locally and flows into the hands of local residents. This will be achieved through examples such as: using planning agreements as part of our developments at Left Bank to secure social value through employment and skills agreements; developing innovative methods to increase meaningful community engagement in project/masterplan designs; and working with our Public Health Team and VCF sector to increase the range and scope of volunteering opportunities.</p>	
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**Recommendation 4 –  
Realign the Council’s Corporate Core to support financial transformation and wider improvement**

*A strong corporate core is essential to coordinating, managing, and monitoring, the Council’s financial recovery. This core is currently dispersed across a number of Directorates, and the Council should look to bring this resource into a centralised Team as far as possible. The Council needs to consider the most appropriate place for this to sit in the organisation, ensuring that it is aligned to delivering the Council’s Strategic Improvement Plan and financial recovery, but does not act to dilute the attention required of statutory officers.*

<b>Progress</b>	<b>Next Steps</b>
<p>In response to the Independent Panel directive; CPC recommendations; and as a key part of the Budget setting process, a strategic and comprehensive review all Corporate Services is currently underway. The Enabling Services Review is a key programme in the Council’s Strategic Change Portfolio. Enabling Services are classed as any service that provides a support function and are sometimes also called support services, corporate services or back office services.</p> <p>As part of the 2023/24 budget setting process, a saving of £3m was agreed over two years, split £2.3m in 2023/24 and £0.7m in 2024/25. The split considers the time lag from the agreement at Full Council to cashable savings being realised. It is recognised that as the Council reduces, the enabling services need to reduce in line and where we can make savings from reducing these types of functions, we can somewhat, protect front line services.</p> <p><b>The aim of this piece of work is to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drive out savings by identifying the most efficient and effective way to structure and organise work of a similar nature across the Council.</li> <li>• Provide assurance that spend on enabling services is proportionate to the Council’s overall budget and workforce size through external benchmarking.</li> </ul> <p>The review will continue during 2023 to redesign strengthening the enabling functions of the Council, namely, developing a strong corporate core promoting professional practice, and efficient/effective processes as recommended by the CPC.</p>	<p>Further work during 2023 to progress this</p>

**Recommendation 5 –  
Foster a culture of rigorous and constructive challenge within the organisation**

*Wirral needs to ensure that internal challenge is a central feature of the organisation’s culture, whilst mitigating the risk that challenge escalates into inappropriate behaviours. This can be supported through improved movement of information across the Council, and better engagement with Councillors through the decision-making process (including improved reports).*

Progress	Next Steps
<p>Following the CPC in April 2022, extensive development has been taking place to embed a strategic approach to challenge across the organisation. This included a review of formal reporting templates, with external legal validation sought. New decision-making pathways were also developed to ensure better understanding of governance requirements across the Council Directorates and engagement with Councillors throughout the decision-making process. From Dec 2021 to Feb 2022 a review of the Committee System was undertaken by the Governance Working Group with support from the Independent Panel which culminated in the adoptions of a revised Constitution In May 2022.</p> <p>A series of dedicated workshops with an external training and development lead has taken place during 2022. This has included an intensive focus on budget and finance decision making.</p> <p>Internal challenge is also a central feature of the organisation and opportunities for challenge have been embedded throughout the report writing process. This has included the creation of a Committee Co-ordination and Oversight Group (including representation from Governance, Risk, Legal and Finance) to quality assure all key decision reports, prior to sign off by the Senior Leadership Team (SLT). All reports must be circulated for review on the refreshed Mod.Gov to enable Officers from Governance, Legal, Finance, Audit, HR, Comms etc. to contribute regardless of whether they are a key or non-key decision. Report authors are encouraged to engage with colleagues in the report formulation stage as much as possible to increase the quality and co-production of reports. Training is also provided on the intranet in respect of the writing of reports (including specific guidance on the management of risk).</p> <p>With regards to further support for Members, all Committees have a clear programme of Chair and Group Spokesperson’s meetings, as well as enhanced agenda management. The Chair of Audit &amp; Risk Management (ARM) Committee wrote to all Policy and Service Committee Chairs in August making them aware of their risk management responsibilities and the risks associated with corporate plans and decision making. Following the last ARM Committee another letter is to be sent asking for an update on actions or plans, in particular the holding of a risk workshop.</p> <p>To further improve information sharing across the Council, a new information bulletin has been created and designed specifically for all Members and is circulated on a weekly basis (every Friday) to provide Members with an overview of key updates.</p> <p>A revised New Member Induction Programme has been developed and</p>	<p>Member Development Strategy 2023 - 27 - members skills audit and training plan.</p> <p>Another letter to be sent to all Policy and Service Committee Chairs to ask for updates on risk actions or plans, as well as on holding a risk workshop.</p> <p>A schedule of strategic learning and development will begin in Spring 2023, ahead of the ‘all-out’ elections.</p> <p>This will be followed by an intense induction programme for what could be a considerable number of new members in May 2023.</p>

<p>implemented in May 22. A survey of new Members was undertaken and received extremely positive feedback. New training opportunities has been enacted for all Members is also available, including Chair’s training, finance, corporate parenting, and social media. The Member Support Steering Group continues to meet quarterly. They recently approved the Member Wellbeing Policy.</p>	
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<p align="center"><b>Recommendation 6 – Develop a corporate approach to the management of reserves</b></p>	
<p><i>The Peer Team feel that reserves should not be managed within Directorates and should be managed corporately and maintained at the appropriate level. This centralisation of reserves is essential for sound budget management and supports their use strategically rather than reactively. This work needs to link the management of reserves to the Council’s medium term financial strategy and the delivery of the existing budget framework.</i></p>	
<p><b>Progress</b></p>	<p><b>Next Steps</b></p>
<p>Earmarked and general reserves have corporate oversight inclusive of direct control by the S151 officer.</p> <p>Earmarked reserves are categorised in line with relevant operational areas, i.e., Directorate specific or corporate/organisation-wide activity. Forecast use of reserves is monitored through the routine budget monitoring process that is in place, which is reported to the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and Policy &amp; Resources Committee (P&amp;R). P&amp;R has responsibility for ensuring that the entire budget remains in balance, including providing mitigating actions to bring the budget back in line from any adverse variance position that may be forecast, which may take the form of providing direction to other Service Committees. Policy and Resources Committee is also responsible for advising Full Council on organisation-wide financial activity, inclusive of reserves.</p> <p>All reserves movements are controlled via an approval process undertaken by the S151 officer at financial year-end, subsequently recommended to full Council for approval, which follows from the in-year monitoring of proposed reserves movements that allows for early intervention to proposals should it be necessary.</p> <p>Under Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003, the Authority’s Chief Financial Officer is required to report on the robustness of the estimates made for the purposes of the Council’s Budget calculations and the adequacy of the General Fund balances and reserves. The Council must have regard to this report when making decisions in respect to the budget. It is also good practice for the Authority to have a policy on the level of its general reserve and to ensure that it is monitored and maintained. This is fulfilled on annual basis through reports to Council as part of budget setting activity.</p> <p>As part of the Council’s approved Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), a Reserves Strategy is in place to provide corporate oversight to matters, deliver a framework to operate within and set a risk assessed minimum level requirement for general reserves.</p>	<p>Continue with the detailed oversight and transparent reporting of proposed reserves activity.</p> <p>Fulfil the requirements set out in the Council’s MTFS in respect of Reserves.</p>

**Recommendation 7 –**

**Proactively engage with external audit to support financial improvements across the Council and the management of risk**

*It is important that the Council engages beyond recommendations from External Audit to support an improved culture of financial reporting and good governance through proactive and regular dialogue on emerging issues.*

<b>Progress</b>	<b>Next Steps</b>
<p>The Council has a professional relationship and open engagement with the External Audit on all levels of finance and governance.</p> <p>There are regular meetings with the Chief Executive and the Finance department to discuss current performance, changes in legislation, budgets and emerging issues and what the Council is doing to address them.</p> <p>The Council engages directly with External Audit on a number of issues and is proactive in providing early intervention proposals, for example in relation to the Council's policy approach to capitalisation of salaries, whereby the Council's intentions were laid out for External Audit's comment and agreement, which was obtained; similarly work was undertaken to engage and seek agreement from External Audit on a proposed approach to the national issue of infrastructure and changes made to the Council's approach ahead of the annual audit process.</p> <p>During the annual audit process there are weekly meetings to ensure we work in an effective way to address and resolve matters quickly.</p> <p>Following the Value for Money (VfM) audit for 20/21 a number of lessons learnt have been identified and we are working closely with the auditors to address these prior to any reports being submitted.</p> <p>An example of improved engagement and outcomes from audit activity, is to ensure that we have clear notes/minutes when interviews are being conducted as part of the VfM work. This avoids any uncertainty about facts and will reduce any misunderstanding and improve the finding reports from the external auditors.</p> <p>During the 20/21 audit process we worked closely with the auditors to resolve a number of areas of concern regarding the guarantees for the regeneration programme, this entailed officers providing detailed evidence of the risks and assessing them and working with the auditors to establish how the risk should be presented both in the accounts and to members. Following this a number of recommendations through the Value for Money audit were made and we worked closely with the auditors on our responses and agreed recommendations which are taken to members annually.</p> <p>A new External Auditor was appointed during 2021, and this has given the Council an opportunity to review and improve engagement. The Value For Money Audit 21/22 is well underway. The ARM Committee has improved learning and development and a strong focus on effective scrutiny and improvement. Memberships of the Committee now included two Independent Members.</p>	<p>Continue to work closely with the external auditors and raise concerns as they arise at a senior level on the Council's performance and necessary steps to improve the Council's finances.</p> <p>Further develop the relationship to improve the financial accounts delivery process and make year-end/audit review processes more efficient.</p> <p>To work with the auditors to ensure infrastructure assets are accounted for correctly. A paper has been issued to them, but we will work to ensure compliance to any statutory changes.</p>

### Recommendation 8 –

#### Work towards political consensus on shared priorities to engender cross-party support on key issues

*Given WMBC is 'no overall control' there is a need for shared political approaches on priority issues. Therefore, to strengthen the stability of decision-making, the Council should work towards political consensus across parties on issues of strategic importance. This should include an ongoing shared understanding of the financial context of the Council.*

Progress	Next Steps
<p>A series of meetings have been established to support the need for shared political approaches on priority issues. This includes fortnightly Leader and Group Leader meetings to continue efforts to achieve political consensus across parties on items of strategic importance. A virtual Office of key Corporate Officers was created in April 2022 and they provide weekly policy updates to the Leader and Deputy Leader and act as a key link between the Leader of the Council and the Senior Leadership Team.</p> <p>All Member training sessions were held focussing on Finance &amp; Budget which also included Bite Size Finance training (on the Member Portal and FLO) to increase Members knowledge and understanding in this area and to enable them to make more informed decisions.</p> <p>In light of the significant challenges relating to the Council's finances and the importance of budget monitoring and delivering a budget strategy for 2023/24, Policy and Resources Committee agreed in July 22 that the work programme of budget development planned to be undertaken by the Finance Sub-committee as a working group, should be undertaken by Group Leaders meeting as a working group. The interim Director of Finance has developed a Forward Plan for the Group Leaders Working Group in relation to budget management to support them in working towards political consensus around the budget.</p> <p>With regards to budget setting for 2023/24, the process commenced much earlier than in previous years in order to put the Council in a strong position in terms of its continued improvement and financial recovery, set against the backdrop of the key principles from the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy. Directors were asked by the Chief Executive in May 22 to work up and present to the Strategic Leadership Team viable budget policy options in order to meet the then forecast budget gap. Proposals (Tranche 1) were brought forward against defined Directorate savings targets and shared with Policy and Service Committees through a series of budget workshops in Summer. A package of Tranche 2 savings will be brought forward, and a further round of budget workshops will be scheduled with Policy Committees during October/ November. The outcomes from all budget workshops and discussions held at Policy &amp; Service Committee meetings will be presented to Policy &amp; Resources Committee in the New Year as part of the ongoing budget setting process.</p>	<p>Member Development Strategy 2023 - 27 - Members Skills Audit and Training Plan.</p> <p>Tranche 2 savings to be considered during budget workshops in October/November and reviewed in conjunction with Tranche 1 policy options, before consideration at P&amp;R Committee in the New Year as part of the budget setting process</p>

<b>Recommendation 9 – Implement proposed governance reforms to support increased effectiveness of the Committee System</b>	
<i>The Council needs to implement governance reforms at the earliest instance and continue to be live to the culture of good governance to support ongoing improvement.</i>	
<b>Progress</b>	<b>Next Steps</b>
<p>A full review of the Committee System was undertaken between November 2021 – February 2022.</p> <p>The review resulted in the number of ‘Policy’ Committees being reduced from seven to six, as well as fourteen other changes including the removal of the Urgency Committee and the two Overview and Scrutiny Committees (Decision Review Committee and Partnerships Committee).</p> <p>In addition, the existing procedures which provide for re-consideration of controversial decisions have been significantly revised to reduce the potentially disruptive effect on decision-making. It was also proposed to prohibit ‘to note’ reports from agendas and to distribute them outside of meetings.</p> <p>Proposed extension of the delegated authority to officers will further reduce the volume of matters being referred to Committees and other amendments to the Policy and Resources Committee Terms of Reference will clarify its lead role in developing and overseeing the budget and policy framework.</p> <p>A new Constitution was approved in May 2022 to take account of these changes.</p>	<p>Governance Working Group made up of Members of the Constitution &amp; Standards Committee meet on a regular basis to monitor changes made to the Constitution and to undertake reviews on specific issues – a live example being the Council Meeting Procedure Rules</p>

<b>Recommendation 10 – Consider additional capacity to support the political and managerial leadership of the Council</b>	
<i>It is essential that the leadership of the Council is well supported to ensure that their capacity is protected for strategic issues and to enable the timely movement of information across political groups and committees in-line with wider sectoral norms.</i>	
<b>Progress</b>	<b>Next Steps</b>
<p>Strategic support is available to the leadership of the Council through a number of mechanisms including a Virtual Leader’s Office and weekly Leader and Deputies meetings to share pertinent information in a timely manner.</p> <p>An effective and improved programme of Member Support includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Creation of Committee Co-ordination &amp; Oversight Group</b> and refresh of the report template. External validation of both the report sign-off process and template was sourced. Operational since April 2022.</li> <li>• <b>Team Around the Leader</b> arrangements initiated in May 22. Head of Democratic Services/Corporate Office/ Comms and Policy support briefing session with the Leader and Deputy on a Thursday morning to provide high level policy updates and horizon scanning.</li> <li>• <b>Comprehensive review of member support.</b> Move away from the Group Office Manager approach. Formal consultation is underway on proposed new model. The model will provide dedicated support to the Leader of the Council and the Leader of the second largest group (and their deputies). To be supported by a pooled arrangement which will provide comprehensive 5 days a week cover for all members of the Council.</li> </ul>	<p>New model – Redesign of Member Support in place by Feb 2023.</p>

Group leaders have been fully engaged and appraised of the new model. Anticipated implementation date is Feb 1st 2023 – allows time for assimilation and necessary recruitment to new posts.

- **Office-member training:** “Working with Members in a Committee System”: Covers Political sensitivity/ report writing/ presenting at Committees, delivered bi monthly . Sessions already held in July and September
- **Member Learning & Development**  
New Member Induction programme successfully implemented in May/June 22.  
Survey of new members undertaken with extremely positive feedback.  
New training opportunities for all members – e.g. Chair’s training/ Finance/ Corporate Parenting and Social Media.
- The Member Support Steering Group continues to meet quarterly. They recently approved the Member Wellbeing Policy.
- **Member Learning and Development Strategy 23-27:** First draft presented to the Working Group for consideration in October. Informed by:
  - Member & Skills Audit/survey
  - Survey of New Members
  - Learning from other Local Authorities
  - Colleagues in OD have fully participated in project Working Group
  - LGA acted as a critical friend and will continue to do so as drafting continues
- The final strategy will be presented to Constitution & Standards Committee in Feb 2023 for approval. This will coincide with the implementation of the new working arrangements for Member Support and will allow for a period of preparedness for implementation of the strategy following the May 23 election.
- LGA mentoring opportunities have also been offered to all Policy Committee Chairs, as well as dedicated diary management support to enable Members in these roles to have the capacity and skills required to fulfil their responsibilities as Chair.
- Service redesign of Member Support is being conducted, with a new model in place for 1<sup>st</sup> Feb 23 – allows for three months of preparation for outcomes of Whole Council Elections in May.

**Recommendation 11 –**

**Provide dedicated space and time for the council’s Senior Management Team, Committee Chairs, and Group Leads to come together**

*The Peer Team would recommend that further ‘top-team development’ work takes place at pace to support key roles both collectively and individually.*

<b>Progress</b>	<b>Next Steps</b>
<p>The extensive member development activity referenced above and below in section 12, is also complemented by the emerging People Strategy and a detailed programme of leadership development.</p> <p>During 2022, a series of Strategic Away Days have taken place with Group Leaders and SLT to shape and sign off several key developments including the Wirral Plan and Improvement Plan. These joint strategic sessions are currently focused on the ongoing Budget-setting process. Further Away Days are scheduled for Spring to include a focus on producing a new 4-year Plan for 2023 and preparing for all-out elections.</p> <p>A strong focus on strategic leadership development with our workforce has also been underway.</p> <p>Focused on #BeTheDifference to help achieve our Wirral Plan vision - to create equity for people and place and opportunities for all to secure the best possible future for our residents, communities and businesses. Whatever role we have, we’re all here to make these a reality, giving us a clear direction and a shared sense of purpose. We also know this can only be achieved through our people, so we’ve spent the last four months listening to and involving our people in development of our people strategy and leadership behaviour framework to ensure we understand the organisational conditions needed to help people thrive.</p> <p>Our People Strategy simply sets out our values in action. It’s built on our pride, ambition and commitment, which is just how we do things around here. This strategy has been developed through conversations with our workforce, through a series of focus groups, organisation wide events and staff survey. We focus on six key strands, which our leaders, managers and colleagues across the organisation have described as being important to them, helping them to be effective and high performing in their roles.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Meaningful Work</li><li>• Great Growth Opportunities</li><li>• Inclusive Work Environment</li><li>• Visible and Supportive Leadership</li><li>• Great People Management</li><li>• Innovation</li></ul> <p>Our People Strategy will shortly be taken through our formal approval process with the aim for it to be agreed in Summer 2023.</p> <p>Our Leadership Behaviour Framework has also been co-designed with our workforce over the Summer of 2022 and sets out the expectations we have of our leaders at all levels. Leading by example, displaying and living our values and promoting trust and autonomy helps people feel a sense of purpose, belonging, connection and valued. Focusing on:</p>	<p>People Strategy and Leadership Behaviour Framework to be developed</p> <p>Schedule of Strategic Away Days 2023</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Our values and culture</li> <li>• The leadership behaviours – Leading self, leading others, leading outcomes and leading in our organisational context.</li> <li>• Leadership and management skills development</li> </ul> <p>Our leadership behaviour framework will also shortly be taken through our formal approval process with the aim for it to be agreed in December this year.</p>	
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**Recommendation 12 –  
Further the training and development provided to elected members and managers**

*This needs to move to new levels to include a comprehensive plan for elected members covering roles and responsibilities, being a councillor in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and increased learning from across the sector. This should be mirrored with a comprehensive management development programme, but it is essential that these are viewed as ongoing and continuous processes.*

<b>Progress</b>	<b>Next Steps</b>
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<b>Progress</b>	<b>Next Steps</b>
<p>A refreshed New Member Induction Programme was implemented in May 22.</p> <p>Lessons learnt from the Programme will contribute to the development of a Member Learning &amp; Development Strategy 2023 – 27. The strategy will be developed based on Member surveys, which will be conducted to identify needs and skills analysis. Support will be provided by Wirral’s Organisational Development Team through the Strategy Working Group, as well as external support from the LGA who will act as a critical friend and will continue to do so as drafting of the strategy continues. Oversight of development also will be provided by the Member Support Steering Group, with the final Strategy ready to be presented to the Constitution &amp; Standards Committee for approval in February 2023. This will coincide with the implementation of the new working arrangements for Member Support and will allow for a period of preparedness for implementation of the strategy following the May 23 election.</p> <p>Training opportunities for all Members have also been extended to include dedicated finance sessions, chairing skills, corporate parenting, and social media.</p> <p>All newly appointed managers are also being supported to undertake a range of bite-size learning opportunities designed to help them meet the expectations that we have of our leaders. In addition to the core Manager and Leadership Essential Programme, we will also support our leaders to undertake an accredited leadership programmes which let them build on their experience, learn about emerging approaches, and further develop your leadership practice.</p> <p>Dedicated member development and induction programmes will be developed in Spring 2023 to ensure sufficient preparation and support ahead of the ‘all-out’ elections.</p> <p>As part of the leadership essentials programme there will be a key link to enabling leaders and managers to understand their role within the council political context and how they can work with and support elected members in their decision-making process whilst maintaining neutrality.</p> <p>Through our online learning system, our manager micros and manager network</p>	<p>Development of a Member Learning &amp; Development Strategy 2023-27. Final Strategy to be approved in Spring 2023 supported by an implementation plan to be managed by the Head of Democratic &amp; Member Services</p>

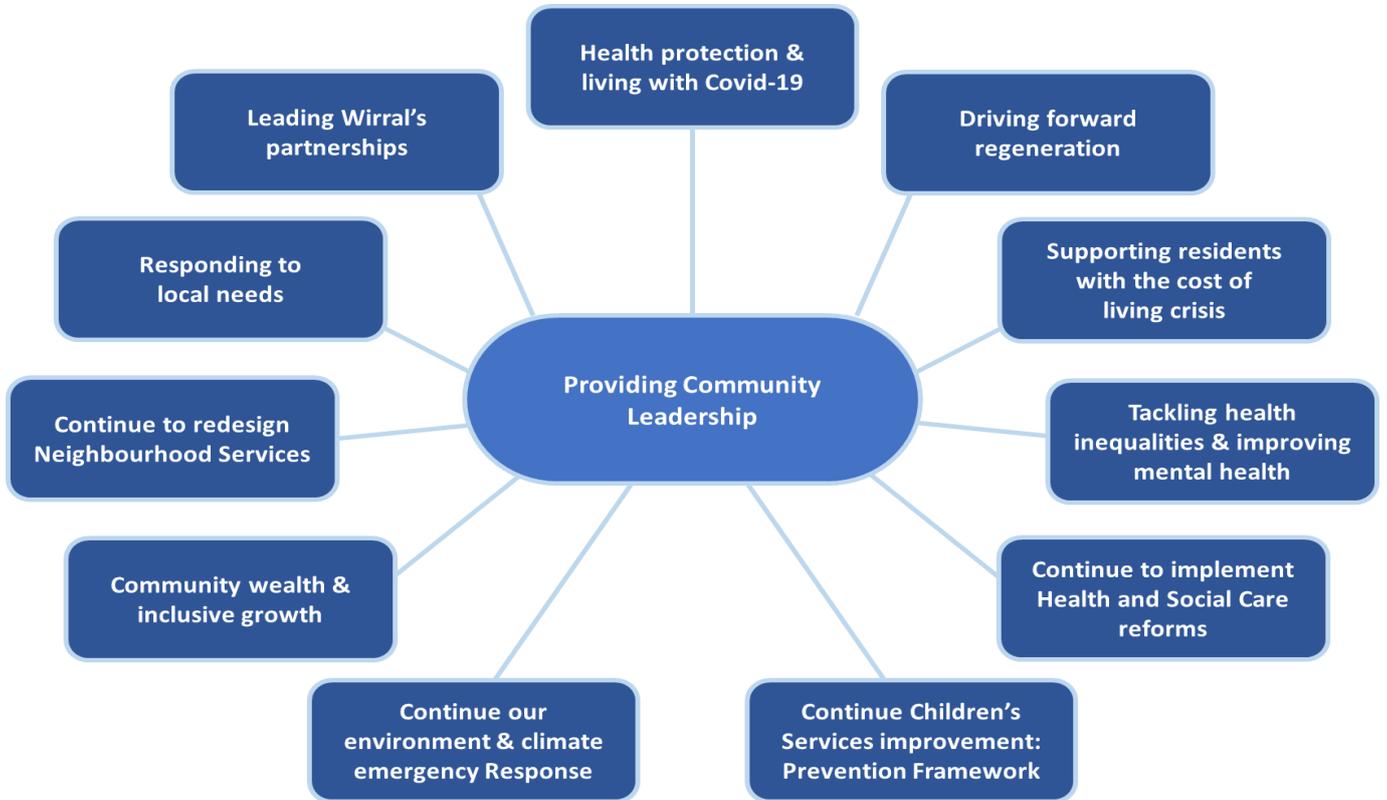
<p>we have introduced a comprehensive leadership development offer which helps our leaders to have the skills, knowledge, and confidence to effectively lead highly engaged, motivated teams who are empowered to deliver service improvement and motivation.</p>	
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<p align="center"><b>Recommendation 13 – Continue to work effectively with the Wirral Improvement Panel, considering the development work that is required over the coming two years</b></p>	
<p><i>It is important that over the coming two-years the Council does not become dependent upon the advice and direction of the Panel, and instead fully owns and understands the actions required. This is especially pertinent for ensuring that there is clarity regarding the requirements and milestones that the Council must meet to ensure that the Panel has confidence that they are committed to and capable of continued improvement without external oversight.</i></p>	
<p><b>Progress</b></p>	<p><b>Next Steps</b></p>
<p>Wirral’s Improvement Plan was agreed at Council in July 2022. This follows advice and guidance provided by Wirral’s Independent Assurance Panel on how best to plan and deliver on our improvement aspirations.</p> <p>Regular updates and progress reports in relation to actions set out within the Plan have been considered by the Panel, in addition to detailed financial updates as part of Budget setting processes.</p> <p>The Plan was developed following engagement with council staff, chief officers, and all political group leaders.</p> <p>The Panel acknowledge the progress being made in delivering improvement, and given this, noted that the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities were already discussing the point at which they would withdraw involvement during 2023.</p>	<p>Continue to deliver the Improvement Plan through the Council’s Strategic Change and Improvement Programme which ensures the Plan is owned and driven by the Council and delivered to the required timeframe and quality requirements.</p> <p>Manage the withdrawal of the Panel whilst still driving forward our Improvement Plan during 2023</p>

## WIRRAL PLAN REFRESH – KEY PRIORITIES: 6 MONTH REVIEW

The diagram below summarises the 11 ‘Big Ticket Items’ for 2022 – 23 that were identified in the Wirral Plan, as key priorities for the year. An update to determine progress against these items has been provided in detail in the tables below and will be utilised to inform the development of the refreshed Wirral Plan.

### BIG TICKET ITEMS



### PROGRESS UPDATE

#### Driving forward regeneration

##### High-level progress update

- The Council submitted its Local Plan for examination on 26th October 2022. This is a major milestone in setting the new spatial policy for the Borough. Inspectors have been appointed and the hearings will begin on 18<sup>th</sup> April 2023.
- LeftBank Programme Board has been set up to coordinate funding and ensure delivery against the timescales associated with the funding sources.
- Government awarded Wirral Council funding through its New Development Corporation Competition Programme to identify options for the delivery of the regeneration programme in Birkenhead.
- Town Deal funding awarded to a range of projects including the Wirral Waters Sustainability Hub.
- Wirral's UK Shared Prosperity Fund Phase 1 Investment Plan (UKSPF) was submitted to the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority.
- Work has also been underway to deliver against the projects. Key highlights include: Start on site of the new offices in Birkenhead Town Centre, construction underway at Wirral Waters for the 500 new apartments at Millers Quay, the Hythe office has opened, and tenants secured, designs progressed for the new Birkenhead market.
- Eureka! Science + Discovery Museum opened 11<sup>th</sup> November 2022 at Seacombe.
- A number of masterplans have been progressed, focusing on; Marine Promenade area of New Brighton, Liscard Town Centre, Woodside, Seacombe Corridor, Hind Street and Hamilton Park.
- Business Support Service: Our Business Support Service has worked with 783 businesses to date this year, offering a wide range of support. Some of our highlights include working with the world's first UN

**2030 hub to support a local business to develop and introduce a Carbon Neutral Plan, supporting a local business with a relocation with an investment of £200k to support growth activity, and supporting a local business in their efforts to scale up.**

- **Work has also continued to deliver and progress housing and regeneration projects. Key highlights include:**
  - **175 households in Wirral have benefitted from improved energy efficiency measures through programmes supported by the Council and via National Grant programme funding secured. A further 157 are underway and due to complete which will result in more homes being thermal efficient and warmer.**
  - **Number of new affordable homes completed up to 25<sup>th</sup> November 2022 total 95, with a further 183 units started on site so far.**
  - **First phase of Redbridge Quay low carbon, modular homes completed at Wirral Waters in December 2022.**
- **Wirral Ways to Work Programme: The Worklessness Support Service, part of the wider Wirral Ways to Work Programme is delivered by Involve Northwest and provides personalised employment support. In the 12 months to October 2022 this service has engaged with 911 residents, supporting 531 into employment, education and training.**

### **Supporting narrative**

The Council submitted its Local Plan for examination on 26th October 2022. This is a major milestone in setting the new spatial policy for the Borough. The first Hearings will start on 18<sup>th</sup> April 2023 with the adoption of the plan in early 2024.

A large-scale Regeneration Delivery Plan is currently under development to set out the project phasing and prioritisation of the regeneration programme. The Plan will sit alongside the Regeneration Finance Strategy. The Regeneration Delivery Team, working alongside the Regeneration PMO, is delivering on tranche 1 programmes (Birkenhead Waterfront, Central Birkenhead, Dock Branch Neighbourhood, Hind Street and Wirral Waters), which are a priority because of funding deadlines, and 4 tranche 2 programmes (Seacombe, Northside, Cleveland Street Neighbourhood (formerly Britannia) and Scotts Quay), which will be set out in the Delivery Plan. The delivery of regeneration in New Ferry is also being progressed. The Delivery Plan will be finalised early in 2023. A wider version of the Delivery Plan will follow that will look at the delivery of Wirral's wider regeneration programme across the Borough including Liscard.

To support the regeneration of the LeftBank the Council has critically attracted external funding from public sector sources (Future High Streets, Town Deal, Levelling Up, as well as from LCRCA and Homes England) to support private sector investment. In addition, a LeftBank Programme Board has been set up to coordinate funding and ensure delivery against the timescales associated with these funding sources.

At the same time the Government awarded Wirral Council funding through its New Development Corporation Competition Programme (NDCCP) thereby enabling work to take place to identify the most appropriate delivery model for this programme. The development of a business case is being progressed collectively with DLUHC with a focus on identifying what works best for the locality. A fundamental principle has been that any delivery model should be locally led, reflect and inform the Council's Improvement Plan and be part of that improvement journey – a One Place One Plan approach.

In November 2022, Eureka! Science + Discovery Museum opened its doors bringing a new world-class attraction to Seacombe as part of Wirral's transformational regeneration programme along the Left Bank of the River Mersey. This has brought an attraction of national significance to the Wirral waterfront, with the exciting ambition to be the UK hub of science and discovery for young people attracting c.190,000 visitors a year. With content co-created by local young people and businesses, this will help to create the next generation of innovators, encouraging young people's aspirations via arts and creativity for them to explore and interpret broad science-based themes linked to key economic growth sectors.

Worklessness Support: Wirral is benefitting from the upcoming City Region Eurovision event. As part of the planning for this, the City Region hosted a Eurovision Jobs Fair on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2023 which was attended by 43

Businesses and approximately 1,500 people looking for employment and volunteering opportunities. On the day 63 jobs were offered, including 3 Wirral met students who were offered their first ever job. From a local perspective Wirral's Employment Support Service, ReachOut engaged with over 50 Wirral residents and 20 Wirral employers. Wirral Met College actively promoted the Eurovision opportunities to all students and in excess of 50 students attended the event. Feedback from the day was extremely positive, and 32 of the students who attended now have volunteer positions secured.

## Community wealth and inclusive growth

### High-level progress update

- **A Community Asset Transfer Policy has been adopted and is encouraging the set-up of community-based organisations and cooperatives in the local community.**
- **In 2022/23, eleven different assets were considered for potential community asset transfer with positive outcomes agreed for six assets and two currently being developed.**
- **Community wealth building is at the heart of our regeneration:**
  - **Planning agreements as part of Left Bank developments have been reviewed to secure social value through employment and skills agreements.**
  - **Innovative methods to increase meaningful community engagement in project/masterplan designs have been developed.**
  - **Work with the Public Health Team and Community, Voluntary and Faith (CVF) sector is continuing to increase the range and scope of volunteering opportunities.**
- **The Council is working in partnership with anchor organisations in Wirral and across the City Region to focus on Procurement and Fair Employment to embed social value across supply chains to generate economic and social value; apprenticeships for care leavers and employment opportunities.**
- **Wirral Community Health & Care (WCHC) has become the first NHS organisation to obtain the Level 1 Quality Mark for Social Value.**
- **Wirral Met College is working with us to support the regeneration of Birkenhead Town Centre, ensuring access to employment and training for young people.**
- **We know that the Climate emergency means we have to build a sustainable inclusive economy. We have the natural and technological assets to be leaders in the green industrial revolution in Wirral and across the region. Mersey Tidal is one key example, where we are building the case for a globally significant asset that will help the country in moving to predictable, alternative, and long-term energy.**

### Supporting narrative

#### **Community Asset Transfer Policy:**

Wirral's Community Asset Transfer (CAT) approach is giving local people and community groups greater control in the future of their area and enabling local groups with the chance to own or manage community buildings, such as community centres or village halls. It encourages a stronger community spirit by bringing people from different backgrounds together to work towards a shared goal.

In March 2022, Policy & Resources Committee adopted an updated Community Asset Transfer Policy. The Policy directly supports Wirral's Community Wealth Building Strategy by encouraging the setup of community-based organisations and cooperatives in the local community and underpins our ambition to enable communities to become more independent, financially self-sufficient and shape public assets to run them in ways that are beneficial to them. In 2022/23, eleven different assets were considered for potential community asset transfer with positive outcomes agreed for six assets and two currently being developed. One asset is in progress for commercial let and three assets are progressing through business plan stage. In addition, as part of the Assets Strategy other assets are being considered and agreed for transfer to other organisations that are not specifically community organisations. As the asset transfer function moves into business as usual, further assets will come forward to be recommended for transfer.

Policy and Resources Committee on 9 November 2022 agreed the Council's Asset Strategy 2022-27 and this includes priorities for Asset Transfer and Community Asset Transfer.

### **Community Wealth & Regeneration:**

The Council is continuing to improve outcomes for residents through regeneration ensuring they benefit from sustainable transport networks, improved access to employment and training opportunities, better housing/living environments, and access to the latest technology through full fibre digital network roll out across the borough. The Regeneration Service is also putting Community Wealth at the heart of activities, supporting the Council's ambition (as outlined more broadly in the Community Wealth Strategy), to ensure that more of the wealth that is both held and generated in Wirral is retained and controlled locally and flows into the hands of local residents. This will be achieved through: using planning agreements as part of our developments at Left Bank to secure social value through employment and skills agreements; developing innovative methods to increase meaningful community engagement in project/masterplan designs; and working with our Public Health Team and VCF sector to increase the range and scope of volunteering opportunities.

### **Social Value & Health:**

The Cheshire & Merseyside Integrated Care System set an expectation in 2021 that all NHS organisations within the ICS footprint set out their approach to increasing social value by applying for the ICS-specific Social Value Business Charter Mark. Wirral Community Health & Care (WCHC) has gone further by becoming the first NHS organisation to obtain the Level 1 Quality Mark for Social Value. Social value measures have been applied in local authority contracts for many years and are reflected in a number of WCHC's contracts. There is a clear expectation that social value is now also reflected in contracts let by NHS organisations.

## **Continue to implement Health and Social Care reforms Tackling health inequalities & improving mental health**

### **High-level progress update**

- **The Health and Wellbeing Strategy, which is the overarching strategy to reduce inequalities and improve health outcomes on a population-level, was adopted by the Health and Wellbeing Board on 29<sup>th</sup> September 2022 and has since been shared with a range of key committees and groups across Wirral. An Implementation Group has been tasked with ensuring progress across the following 5 priorities:**
  1. **Create opportunities to get the best health outcomes from the economy and regeneration programmes.**
  2. **Strengthen health and care action to address differences in health outcomes.**
  3. **Ensure the best start in life for all children and young people.**
  4. **Create safe and healthy places for people to live that protect health and promote a good standard of living.**
  5. **Create a culture of health and wellbeing, listening to residents and working together.**
- **Reducing inequalities has been embedded in all priorities within the Wirral Place Based Partnership 2022/23 Operational Plan.**
- **Greater partnership working between the NHS and anchor institutions to focus on the 'causes of the causes' of health inequalities.**
- **Wirral Place Group has been established to deliver the 'Core 20 Plus 5' programme.**
- **Cheshire and Wirral Community Mental Health and Wellbeing Alliance has been established to design and deliver community mental health transformation.**
- **Other Wirral strategies have been developed that are contributing to tackling health inequalities and improving mental health e.g. Sports and Physical Activity Strategy.**

### **Supporting narrative**

Reducing health inequalities is a key national and local priority. Tackling health inequalities is high on the national agenda, with Government recently publishing a set of mutually reinforcing reforms:

- The Health and Care Bill and reforms to the health and care system
- Health and Social Care Integration: joining up care for people, places and populations
- The Adult Social Care reform white paper
- Reforms to the public health system

This national focus is replicated at a local level, with the same commitment and desire among local leaders to

reduce avoidable health inequalities. The Wirral Place Based Partnership is committed to ensuring reducing health inequalities becomes a golden thread embedded within all actions. A strategic commitment to tackling health inequalities is also at the heart of the Wirral Plan, with the goal to improve healthy life expectancy and reducing the demand on health and care services.

NHS Cheshire and Merseyside, the ICB for Cheshire and Merseyside, came into being on 1 July 2022 during their inaugural Board meeting (meetings now being held in public and on a monthly basis). These arrangements are statutory under the provisions of the Health and Social Care Act 2022. The ICB will be responsible for implementing the overall NHS strategy in Cheshire and Merseyside, assigning resources, securing assurance, and ensuring partners that the right activities are focused on securing the best outcomes for our communities. Integrated care is delivering better outcomes and experiences for residents, patients, and service users.

Integration will involve providers collaborating, but also entail integration between commissioners, developing pooled budgets between the Council and NHS Cheshire and Merseyside. This will build upon and strengthen the existing relationships and approaches in Wirral.

Wirral's Place Based Partnership will drive a culture towards greater collaboration and joint working and build upon what partners have already worked hard to develop over the years. Governance arrangements will continue to develop over time, with the potential to develop into more formal arrangements as working relationships and trust increases. The first meeting of the Wirral Place Based Partnership Board took place in October 2022. The Wirral Place Based Partnership Board will also incorporate Wirral Council and NHS Cheshire and Merseyside's NHS Act 2006 Section 75 and other joint decision-making arrangements through a Joint Strategic Commissioning Board Sub- Committee.

Whilst there are considerable health and economic challenges, nationally and globally, that we must withstand it is an exciting time for Wirral. We have a unique and timely opportunity to make a big difference.

The programme of regeneration in the borough is one of the biggest in Europe and will create a world class standard of economic opportunity, digital connectivity and growth for Wirral and our residents. The new Integrated Care System offers an opportunity to further improve health outcomes through stronger collaboration between health services and partners.

During 2022 we have continued to lead collaboration and the relationship between partners and with residents has never been stronger being underpinned by a plan for Wirral which aims to drive inclusive economic growth as well as improving services for health and social care, families, the environment and housing.

One example of this is Extra Care Housing. This is a priority set out within the Wirral Plan and the Wirral Housing Strategy. Extra Care Housing is housing that is designed with the needs of frailer older people in mind and with varying levels of care and support available on site. People who live in Extra Care Housing have their own self-contained homes, their own front doors, and a legal right to occupy the property. Extra Care Housing is also known as very sheltered housing, assisted living, or simply as 'housing with care'. It is a popular choice among older people because it can provide an alternative to a care home.

This will contribute significantly to the shift required from residential and nursing care placements to community-based living and will reduce the proportion of adult social care expenditure for people aged 65+ on residential / nursing care, enabling the Borough to reinvest valuable resources into other services.

Using the SHMA (Strategic Housing Market Assessment) analysis alone, the need is for an additional aggregate development of 145 units of extra care and/or sheltered housing each and every year between now and 2037. If the strategy is to reduce the dependence on residential care in favour of specialist housing that supports people in their own homes for longer, it is suggested that this is still a conservative estimate. For the Wirral 2021-26 plan it is suggested that 725 new units of Extra Care Housing and sheltered housing be developed by 2026. The recent success of Poppyfields Extra Care scheme in Saughall Massie offering 78 one and two bedroom flats during a pandemic is testament to what can be achieved in a challenging climate.

Another example of successful collaboration is the Wirral Combatting Drugs Partnership (CDP). This is a nationally mandated forum, bringing together a wide range of key stakeholders, including leaders from Police, Probation, NHS, drug use treatment and recovery services, the Voluntary and Community Sector and local

authority teams. An early priority for the Partnership is to develop lived experience membership.

The CDP leads and co-ordinates work to reduce drug-related harms in Wirral and consists of a Strategic and a Delivery group. The CDP will oversee grant allocations from central Government to tackle drug-related harms as part of the National Drug Strategy which have been confirmed for 23/24. The Wirral Drugs Strategy will be delivered by the Combatting Drugs Partnership (CDP) in Summer 2023. It will serve as the framework for future work tackling drug-related harms in Wirral, against which progress will be reported annually.

Wirral's Health and Wellbeing Strategy has recently been developed by the Health and Wellbeing Board, which is a collective of local organisations including the Council, NHS, Healthwatch, the Community, Voluntary and Faith Sector, Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority, Merseyside Police, the Department for Work and Pensions and Wirral Metropolitan College.

Building on the range of achievements so far, the strategy focusses on the additional gain we can achieve for our residents by identifying innovative ways of working together to address wider population health outcomes and address deep-seated inequalities. The strategy priorities are aligned to the ambitions of the Wirral Plan, along with the recommendations of the evidence-based "All Together Fairer" Marmot team report for Cheshire and Merseyside. It is also a key part of the vision for the Integrated Care System, that has a duty to work closely with the Health and Wellbeing Board.

Significant background work has also been undertaken to ensure that the Community Mental Health (CMH) Transformation programme meets the ambitions of the NHS Long Term Plan and most importantly local population needs. The programme involves the work of many organisations (and patients and carers too) wanting change for others. Cheshire and Wirral Community Mental Health and Wellbeing Alliance is the coproduced name and subsequent 'branding' that has been co-produced by all members of the partners working together in Cheshire and Wirral to design and deliver community mental health transformation.

In addition to local partners, we have also taken on learning from other areas and organisations undergoing CMH transformation. Examples of this are:

- Implementing the Dialog plus outcomes framework developed by East London Foundation Trust
- Developing a primary care mental health system with advice from Cambridge and Peterborough and Coventry and Warwickshire Transformation partnerships
- Developing a voluntary sector alliance based on advice from colleagues in Somerset, Newcastle, and Durham
- Developing our engagement project with information and ideas from Manchester, Leeds, and Newcastle transformation programmes.

The Council also has a number of other strategies that are currently being delivered that are contributing to tackling health inequalities and improving mental health. These include:

- Health Inequalities Strategy
- Sports and Physical Activity Strategy
- Domestic Abuse Strategy

**High-level progress update**

- **Re-established the multi-agency Wirral Health Protection Board which is responsible for the oversight of health protection arrangements in Wirral and providing assurance to the Health and Wellbeing Board that there are safe, effective, integrated arrangements and plans in place across the borough to protect the health of the population.**
- **Partnership work has been undertaken to develop a Wirral Health Protection Strategy 2023-2027. An effective local approach to health protection is vital to improve health and wellbeing, protect the local economy, and reduce health inequalities. The Strategy sets out our collective approach to ensuring we have a resilient health protection system in Wirral to protect people from infectious diseases, environmental hazards and ensure we are prepared for future emergencies.**
- **The Wirral Health Protection Service within the Public Health Team is fully established and ensures a continued sustainable local approach to living with COVID-19 and to build on existing partnerships/working relationships developed during the pandemic.**
- **Activity is underway to assess ventilation within Council buildings and ventilation. This includes:**
  - **Building/ventilation surveys completed**
  - **Phased installation programme of CO2 monitors**
  - **Natural ventilation is being maximised where possible.**

**Supporting narrative**

Wirral's multi-agency Health protection Board has been successfully re-established. The Health Protection Board is chaired by the Wirral Director of Public Health and is a sub-group of the Health and Wellbeing Board, consisting of partners from UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), Integrated Care Board (ICB), Environmental Health, NHS England (NHSE), Local NHS Trusts, Health and Social Care, Emergency Planning and Public Health.

The Wirral Health protection Board has worked collaboratively to develop a Wirral Health Protection Strategy 2023-2027. The agreed vision is to continue protecting people and communities in Wirral from the impact of infectious diseases and environmental hazards in order to improve health and wellbeing, protect the economy, and reduce health inequalities. With the aim Wirral has a high-performing health protection system that works effectively with local, regional, and national partners. The Strategy sets out how through taking a preventative and proactive local approach and identifies the following priority areas for action:

- Ongoing COVID-19 response, including being prepared for new variants;
- Strengthen infection prevention and control;
- Reduce the impact of antimicrobial resistance (AMR);
- Reduce vaccine preventable diseases amongst adults and children;
- Strengthen preparedness, resilience and response to outbreaks, major incidents and emergencies;
- Reduce health harms from climate and environmental hazards;
- Reduce the harmful impact to health of Tuberculosis and blood-borne viruses, including Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C and HIV.

In response to this, Wirral's proposed Health Protection Service will ensure a continued sustainable local approach to living with COVID-19, ensuring future resilience through maintaining capacity that is flexible and adaptable to local needs as required. This will ensure we have sufficient, dedicated local resources and an ability to manage increased demand, for example, as new waves of the pandemic emerge and at key points in the calendar e.g., winter.

The Service will contribute to the delivery of the Wirral Health protection Strategy and Wirral Plan aims, in particular 'Active and Healthy Lives', supporting Wirral residents and communities to live safely with COVID-19 and protect the health of communities from infectious diseases and environmental hazards.

In addition, with regards to Council buildings and ventilation, activity is currently underway to ensure continuity of service to many and varied requirements for the Local authority from office-based use to public realm services. Numerous building surveys have been and are continuing to be carried out to reassess earlier ventilation surveys, to ensure current statutory guidance is being implemented to reduce the risk of viral infection transmission indoors. A phased installation programme of CO2 monitors in buildings is also being progressed and all available existing natural ventilation is being maximised.

## Continue to redesign a wider health and neighbourhood model & Responding to local needs

### High-level progress update

- Work is underway to redesign a wider health and neighbourhood model, based on a 'bottom up' approach to deliver more targeted support to local areas.
- A multi-agency Steering Group is being established to develop a proposed neighbourhood model.

### Supporting narrative

Tackling health inequalities is a priority both for the NHS and the Integrated Care Board and also for Wirral Council. The proposed neighbourhood model will enable the implementation of the priorities within the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and also the Wirral Plan. It will also reflect the priorities within the currently draft Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care Board (ICB) Strategy. Developing a neighbourhood model is a priority work programme of the Wirral Delivery Plan.

The proposed model is to adopt a neighbourhood care model and a 'bottom up' approach. Each neighbourhood will have a core group, chaired by a local community champion, with representation from across their neighbourhood, their health and care providers and local councillors. This group will be supported by Council and ICB managers who will provide population health dashboards to each neighbourhood and support with adopting a quality improvement methodology to their work. Each neighbourhood will agree their own particular priority for addressing their health inequalities using their population health dashboard and also local intelligence. The focus will be on prevention and the wider determinants of health.

## Supporting residents with the cost-of-living crisis

### High-level progress update

- Health and Wellbeing Board is taking strategic responsibility for the borough's response to cost-of-living challenges given the need for a borough-wide response (regular reports are now going to P&R Committee).
- A Cost-of-living Action Group has been established to respond to strategic and operational issues being reported by residents and officers delivering front line services.
- Three-point Communications Plan (along with cost-of-living branding) has been developed to signpost residents to the range of support available across the borough from a wide range of partners.
- We continuing to work with partners on Warm Hubs and have developed a directory of community, voluntary and faith sector organisations and groups providing warm hubs which has been mapped in Infobank and is updated weekly.
- A Cost-of-Living Partnership Summit took place on 16<sup>th</sup> November 2022, which brought together partners to discuss the cost-of-living crisis in Wirral and what more could be done to support residents.
- The Economic Growth Team is aiming to mitigate the impact on businesses and the employment market. The team is working closely with the LCR Growth Hub and our Public Health Team to monitor the impact of the cost-of-living rise on the local economy, coordinate relevant interventions wherever possible and eligible through national funding streams, and manage any immediate requests for support from other Cost of Living workstreams.

### Supporting narrative

There are several schemes in place to support residents with the cost-of-living challenge including both local and national schemes. These include the Government Fuel Rebate scheme, DWP fuel payments, Council Tax Reduction and Hardship schemes, Discretionary Housing Payments and the Household Support Fund funding streams. This is enabling a range of support to residents such as fuel top-ups; and additional support to enable as many people as possible to stay warm for longer.

To ensure residents are aware of this support, a three-point Communications Plan has been developed which aims to showcase and signpost the support available across the borough from a wide range of partners, not just the council. The Plan focuses on: Resources/ signposting for immediate/crisis support, increasing the level of help available and reducing further hardship.

The content of the communications plan will be led by insight work and will promote partner interventions and local, regional, and national policy updates. Given the wide and varied stakeholder group, it is suggested that this is presented as a visual element – not a brand, but more of a ‘stamp.’ This will build on the already established Health & Wellbeing brand of ‘Keep Wirral Well’ and incorporate a cost-of-living strapline.

We are also continuing to work with our partners on Warm Hubs, including the NHS, Police, Fire Service, Community and Faith Sector groups, to establish buildings that can be accessed by residents during the winter months to keep them safe and warm. This includes the production of a directory of community, voluntary and faith sector organisations and groups providing warm hubs – mapped in Infobank and updated weekly, £1.2m of COMF (Contain Outbreak Management Funds) funding made available to the Community Voluntary and Faith sector to support cost of living challenges and can be used to support operation of warm place and libraries being advertised as warm hubs (subject to a review of aforementioned building ventilation which is currently in progress).

A Cost-of-living Officer Action Group has been established to respond to strategic and operational issues being reported by residents and the organisation. In addition, the Health and Wellbeing Board is taking strategic responsibility for the borough’s response to cost-of-living challenges due to the need for a borough wide response and Policy & Resources Committee have received update reports throughout the year (in response to their request for regular updates at the extraordinary meeting on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2022).

A Cost-of-Living Partnership Summit also took place on 16<sup>th</sup> November 2022 which brought together partners from across the borough to discuss the diverse range of activity that partners are collectively working on to support our residents and businesses with the cost-of-living challenge. A number of actions were identified and agreed by partners to take forward and another Summit will be organised in the New Year to focus specifically on the cost-of-living impact on businesses.

### Continue Children’s Services Improvement: Prevention Framework

#### High-level progress update

- **A Joint Targeted Area Inspection of the multi-agency response to children and families who need help in Wirral took place from 12 to 16 December 2022. The inspection was positive, with key headline findings outlined below.**
- **A multi-agency Prevention Steering Group has been established and will provide support to those wishing to apply a preventative approach to services.**
- **A newly commissioned Early Help Alliance has been implemented. Since launching on 4<sup>th</sup> April 22, the Family Toolbox has had over 3,000 unique users viewing over 19,000 pages in its first month.**
- **Prevention programmes in other areas are being progressed.**

#### Supporting narrative

##### Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI)

A JTAI of the multi-agency response to children and families who need help in the Wirral, took place from 12 to 16 December 2022. Headline findings included:

- Children and families are benefiting from a broad/well-coordinated range of family support and early help services that make a positive difference to their lives.
- Cohesive leadership and healthy challenge have enabled the partnership (police, health agencies and the local authority) to develop a strong and effective early help offer to children and their families.
- The partnership has a strong, shared, and often innovative, vision for early help that has been communicated well to their own staff and in which they have also engaged community and voluntary groups, in particular through the Early Help Alliance. This work is underpinned by a commitment to ‘doing with’ rather than ‘doing to’ children and families and by a good understanding of local need.
- Agencies’ strategic and financial investment in early help is helping to ensure that services are increasingly effective at identifying and tackling need at an early point before risk escalates for children and they need more intensive and costly intervention.

Further work will continue to focus on further developing the early help offer (particularly for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities), ensuring effective coordination of multi-agency plans and greater

coordination of early help between education providers and the wider partnership.

### **Prevention Framework**

In taking a preventative approach to policy making and planning, Wirral Council has committed through its Prevention Policy and Framework to improving, for its residents and businesses, quality of life, health, wellbeing, and the economy. Wirral Council is committed to:

- Support partners and communities to work together, as equals, to tackle the biggest issues and risk factors that have a negative impact on health and wellbeing across Wirral.
- Build connections and strong communication across partner agencies and services, driving and enhancing collaboration.
- Support the coordination and creation of a positive eco-system within which individuals and families can thrive.
- Creating a Wirral which is flourishing, active and green.
- Embedding its approach to prevention through a co-productive approach with local communities-only by coming together will we create solutions that will truly help people in Wirral to achieve their goals and aspirations.

A multi-agency Prevention Steering Group has been established and will provide support to those wishing to apply a preventative approach to services. This group will also promote the need for, and establishment of, wider preventative programmes.

Some practical examples of how the Council has been taking forward its preventative approach in Children's Services include the impact of Wirral's Early Help and Prevention Service, which is evidenced in performance data over the last 3 years (January 2019 to January 2022). Most notably, there has been reduced demand for children's social care, which has been accompanied by increasing numbers of early help episodes, thus indicating that more children, young people, and families are now successfully being supported outside of the statutory system.

A newly commissioned Early Help Alliance has also been implemented. Family Toolbox has been instrumental in facilitating a shift in behaviours. The Toolbox gives access to a wide variety of supportive experiences for example online resources, one to one family coaching, grassroots activities, and group support. Since launching on 4<sup>th</sup> April 22, the Family Toolbox has had over 3,000 unique users viewing over 19,000 pages in its first month.

Prevention programmes are also underway and delivering outcomes in other Directorates. These include:

- **PAUSE** - The programme will work with women who have experienced repeated pregnancies that result in children needing to be removed from their care. This will involve the Local Authority and other partners working together to implement an integrated, intensive and systemic model of support tailored to meet women's needs.
- **Drive** - Drive will improve the lives of victims/survivors by working with high-risk, high-harm perpetrators of domestic abuse to challenge and change their behaviour. This will involve a multi-agency panel having oversight of all cases and working together to apply disruption tactics whilst the Case Manager undertakes an intensive behaviour change programme.
- **We Can Talk About Domestic Abuse** - We an additional provision of subject expertise and advocacy to work alongside Social Workers to improve the experience of families affected by domestic abuse. Team includes 3.0 FTE Domestic Abuse Practice Professionals, 3.0 FTE Domestic Abuse Family Advocates, 1.0FTE Team Manager and 1.0 FTE Project Officer. The project is being evaluated by Manchester Metropolitan University.
- **Cradle to Career** - A place-based, collective impact project which aims to improve the life chances of people within the North Birkenhead community, with a specific focus on educational aspiration and attainment.
- **Family Nurse Partnership** - A home-visiting programme for first-time young mums to support a healthy pregnancy, improve child development and health outcomes, and increase family aspiration. Women are recruited onto the programme early in pregnancy and support can be provided until the child is two years of age.
- **ADDER** – Building on this, Wirral Drugs Strategy and new investments to tackle drug-related harms: whole

system approach with collaboration from criminal justice, Council, health and community partners to tackle drug related harms.

- **Get Real Programme** - A bespoke, intensive employability programme for care leavers aspiring to access employment and overcome their personal barriers. The programme is delivered by a Wirral based education provider, Eutopia Project, alongside officers from the Council 14-19 Team.
- **Ways to Work** - Supports young people and adults who are unemployed and have multiple barriers to positive participation. Each participant is supported by a designated coach who will undertake an initially assessment and provide a tailored package of support leading towards employment, education and / or training.

## Continue our environment & climate emergency response

### High-level progress update

Key priority actions were identified for action in 2022/23 to ensure the Council continues the trajectory to keep pace with the carbon budget and meet the net zero target by 2030. These have been outlined below alongside progress made to date:

- **Implement the recommendations and action plan following a detailed audit of the Council's response to the environment & climate emergency declaration - Recommendations from internal audit have been put into a management plan and are being implemented.**
- **Establish a Green Fleet Strategy for the Council – The Green Fleet Strategy is currently in draft form and a Green Fleet Manager post has been established.**
- **Develop an Electric Vehicle (EV) strategy for the borough. This has now gone out to tender.**
- **Establish a decarbonisation plan for building emissions and create a 'project pipeline' to enable funding bids - Tree planting season is underway for 2022/23 with the aim of planting over 21,000 trees. I-trees survey has completed field collection data from over 200 survey sites and household surveys to collect cultural and social value data. The Pollinator strategy has also been approved by ECE&T Committee.**
- **Increasing communication and engagement from residents and communities through a Climate Emergency Communications Strategy - A Community Climate Engagement Strategy is in draft. Proposals have gone to Liverpool City Region Combined Authority for a one stop volunteering hub utilising the UK Shared Prosperity Funding. This will incorporate a community climate champion element, as well as grants for community sustainability projects.**
- **Become a Silver award carbon literate organisation & Increase awareness and action from internal staff - A further 44 staff have attended carbon literacy training and 2 staff members have been trained to deliver the courses in-house to reduce costs in 2023/24. There is also more information available on Flo for staff and a monthly Climate Literacy newsletter.**
- **Increase accountability through a public facing ECEAP (Environment and Climate Emergency Action Plan) introduction and progress report - The ECEAP public facing report has been developed and will be published online.**

### Supporting narrative

Wirral Council declared an Environment and Climate Emergency through an all-party resolution in July 2019. This committed the Council to develop an Environment and Climate Emergency Action Plan (ECEAP) in response to the declaration.

The ECEAP is ambitious and proposes that the Council as an organisation aims to achieve 'net carbon neutrality by 2030'. In doing so it shows leadership and supports progress of decarbonisation across Wirral by 2041 and the Government's legally binding national target of net zero carbon by 2050.

Headline actions that were completed in 2021/22 are:

- Purchase of 'green' electricity.
- Installation of an electric vehicle charging infrastructure pilot project.
- Commissioning of a 'greening the fleet' review to prepare for a transition to low emission vehicles.
- Achieving status as a bronze award carbon literate council.
- Planting of 21,527 trees through community planting sessions.

- Purchase of eCargo bikes to be used for internal deliveries and promote alternative transport.
- Supporting Cool Wirral partners through the facilitation of Cool Wirral partnership.
- Completion of phase 2 of the streetlighting replacement scheme.
- Progress on the Birkenhead Heat Network Project
- Funding acquired to deliver a 'natural curriculum' initiative to teachers in partnership with Liverpool John Moores University.

To build on and maintain this pace, priorities were identified for 2022/23, with key progress points highlighted above.

## Leading Wirral's Partnership

### High-level progress update

- **The Council continues to lead successful partnership working with public, private and community & faith sector partners to improve the borough. Partnership Summit took place on 16<sup>th</sup> November 2022, with further Summits being planned during 2023.**
- **A review of Wirral's Strategic Partnership is underway to propose refreshed partnership arrangements in Summer 2023, building on successful arrangements already in place.**
- **Significant progress during 2022 to establish new Health and Care Partnership working - inaugural meetings of the NHS Cheshire and Merseyside, the ICB for Cheshire and Merseyside, came into being on 1 July 2022.**
- **Wirral Place Based Partnership Board met for the first time on 13<sup>th</sup> October 2022.**
- **The Council is playing a key role in the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, driving Wirral's interests and securing substantial funding to deliver Wirral priorities.**
- **Wirral Chairs the Mersey Dee Alliance (MDA), driving further opportunities to link Wirral, the City Region the wider region and beyond. The MDA is a successful partnership that supports strategic economic growth across North East Wales, West Cheshire and Wirral. Recognised as a single economic sub-region and having a population close to 1 million, the Mersey Dee area is a pivotal location in the UK.**

### Supporting narrative

On 16<sup>th</sup> November, the Leader of the Council chaired a Partnership Summit which focused on the cost-of-living challenge and brought together representatives from partner organisations such as housing, health providers and the fire service to join the community, voluntary and faith sectors to strengthen our working relationships and ensure we are working collaboratively to support our local residents. The aim of the Summit was to learn about existing services and see what more could be achieved by joining up.

All strategic partners committed to build on the Summit and work in collaboration during 2023 on several key joint priorities to improve the borough. In addition to the Summit, a Strategic Partnership Review is underway to consider approaches for how we can successfully lead Wirral's Partnership working.

Partnership arrangements within regeneration are also currently being reviewed to establish a new approach that will better support partnership working to deliver our regeneration programme.

Other partnership arrangements have been developed over the course of the year and are now underway. Inaugural meetings of the NHS Cheshire and Merseyside, the ICB for Cheshire and Merseyside, came into being on 1 July 2022 and the Wirral Place Based Partnership Board met for the first time on 13<sup>th</sup> October 2022 to bring together representatives of the Council, NHS Cheshire and Merseyside, NHS providers and the Community, Voluntary and Faith Sector into a forum for NHS Cheshire and Merseyside to conduct its business in Wirral.

Wirral continues to play a key role in partnership working across the sub-region and beyond. As Chair of Mersey Dee Alliance (MDA), there are real opportunities to link Wirral, which sits on the Left Bank of the River Mersey and also with the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority.

The MDA is a successful partnership that supports strategic economic growth across North East Wales, West

Cheshire and Wirral. Recognised as a single economic sub-region and having a population close to 1 million, the Mersey Dee area is a pivotal location in the UK.

There are also some fantastic opportunities to link to wider regional ambitions - Liverpool City Region is home to the fourth biggest port in the UK and the transatlantic hub for the Irish Sea; we are leading the delivery of the Port City Innovation Hub, which is seeking to transform maritime, freight and logistics.

Building on and delivering skills and employment, infrastructure, embedding innovation in our business base, underpinned through our world-leading innovation specialisms increasingly in net-zero capabilities and maritime. These global capabilities will support our competitive advantages and sustain opportunities.

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## POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 22 March 2023

<b>REPORT TITLE:</b>	<b>WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE</b>
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>DIRECTOR OF LAW AND GOVERNANCE</b>

### REPORT SUMMARY

The Policy and Resources Committee, in co-operation with the other Policy and Service Committees, is responsible for proposing and delivering an annual committee work programme. This work programme should align with the corporate priorities of the Council, in particular the delivery of the key decisions which are within the remit of the Committee.

It is envisaged that the work programme will be formed from a combination of key decisions, standing items and requested officer reports. This report provides 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 is attached as Appendix 1 to this report.

### RECOMMENDATION/S

The Policy & Resources Committee is recommended to comment on and note the proposed Policy and Resources Committee work programme for the 2022/23 municipal year.

## **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

### **1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S**

- 1.1 To ensure Members of the Policy and Resources committee have the opportunity to contribute to the delivery of the annual work programme.

### **2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 2.1 Various formats for the workplan were explored. The current format is open to amendment to match the requirements of the committee.

### **3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 3.1 The work programme should align with the priorities of the Council and its partners. The programme will be informed by:

- (i) The Council Plan
- (ii) The Council's transformation programme
- (iii) The Council's Forward Plan
- (iv) Service performance information
- (v) Risk management information
- (vi) Public or service user feedback
- (vii) Referrals from Council

#### **Terms of Reference**

The Policy and Resources Committee has two main areas of responsibility, which is to provide strategic direction to the operation of the Council, including making decisions on policies and co-ordinating spend not reserved to full Council, and to maintain a strategic overview of outcomes, performance, risk management and budgets.

The Committee is charged by full Council to:-

- (a) formulate, co-ordinate and implement corporate policies and strategies and the medium-term financial plan (budget), which includes responsibility for any decision:
  - (i) that relates to such matters to the extent that they are not reserved to full Council;
  - (ii) on any cross-cutting policies that impact on other committee areas;
  - (iii) on policy matters not otherwise allocated to any other committee; and
  - (iv) to determine any dispute or difference between committees;
- (b) provide a co-ordinating role across all other service committees and retain a 'whole-council' view of performance, budget monitoring and risk management, which includes responsibility for a decision:
  - (i) that has a major impact on a number of Council services or on the Council as a whole;

- (ii) on any virement between Budget funds (revenue) requested by a Committee or officer in excess of **£500,000**;
  - (iii) on any virement between Budget funds (capital) or any amendment to the Capital Programme requested by a Committee or officer in excess of **£500,000**;
  - (iv) regarding land and property including major acquisition and disposals, which includes reserved decision making concerning any purchase, sale or transfer of a value in excess of, or likely to exceed, **£500,000**;
  - (v) regarding companies or limited liability partnerships including acquisition and disposals; and
  - (vi) which is deemed significant in terms of impact on the Council's revenue or capital (to be determined by the Head of Paid Service and/or Section 151 Officer in consultation with the Leader);
- (c) without limiting the generality of responsibility for cross-cutting policies (at (a) above), lead on behalf of the Council:
- (i) in matters concerning relationships with HM Government, the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority and other major public and non-public bodies;
- (d) appoint Council representatives as required;
- (e) nominate councillors and other persons to outside bodies; and
- (f) undertake responsibility for developing and monitoring the enabling corporate services, including, finance and investment, project support and risk management, strategic procurement and commercial strategies, ICT, property and asset management, human resources and organisational development, law and governance, communications and public affairs, emergency planning and business continuity.

#### **4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

**4.1** This report is for information and planning purposes only, therefore there are no direct financial implication arising. However, there may be financial implications arising as a result of work programme items.

#### **5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

**5.1** There are no direct legal implications arising from this report. However, there may be legal implications arising as a result of work programme items.

#### **6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS**

**6.1** There are no direct implications to staffing, ICT or Assets.

## **7.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

- 7.1** The Committee's ability to undertake its responsibility to provide strategic direction to the operation of the Council, make decisions on policies, co-ordinate spend, and maintain a strategic overview of outcomes, performance, risk management and budgets may be compromised if it does not have the opportunity to plan and regularly review its work across the municipal year.

## **8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION**

- 8.1** Not applicable

## **9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1** Wirral Council has a legal requirement to make sure its policies, and the way it carries out its work, do not discriminate against anyone. An Equality Impact Assessment is a tool to help council services identify steps they can take to ensure equality for anyone who might be affected by a particular policy, decision, or activity.

This report is for information to Members and there are no direct equality implications.

## **10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1** This report is for information to Members and there are no direct environment and climate implications.

## **11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING**

- 11.1** This report is for information to Members and has no direct community wealth implications.

**REPORT AUTHOR:** **Steve Fox, Head of Democratic and Member Services**  
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## **APPENDICES**

Appendix 1: Policy and Resources Committee Work Plan

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

The Council Plan  
The Council's transformation programme  
The Council's Forward Plan

Subject History (last three years)

<b>Council Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
Policy and Resources Committee	7 October 2020
Policy and Resources Committee	11 November 2020
Policy and Resources Committee	21 December 2020
Policy and Resources Committee	20 January 2021
Policy and Resources Committee	17 February 2021
Policy and Resources Committee	17 March 2021
Policy and Resources Committee	9 June 2021
Policy and Resources Committee	30 June 2021
Policy and Resources Committee	28 July 2021
Policy and Resources Committee	01 September 2021
Policy and Resources Committee	07 October 2021
Policy and Resources Committee (Special Meeting)	25 October 2021
Policy and Resources Committee	10 November 2021
Policy and Resources Committee (Special Meeting)	30 November 2021
Policy and Resources Committee	01 December 2021
Policy and Resources Committee	17 January 2022
Policy and Resources Committee (Budget)	15 February 2022
Policy and Resources Committee	16 March 2022
Policy and Resources Committee	8 June 2022

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# POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

## WORK PROGRAMME 2022/23

### KEY DECISIONS TO BE TAKEN BETWEEN APRIL 2023 AND JULY 2023

Item	Brief Description	Approximate timescale	Lead Departmental Officer

### STANDING FORWARD PLAN ITEMS (AS REQUIRED)

Item	Brief Description	Approximate timescale	Lead Departmental Officer
Strategic Asset Acquisitions	Approval to acquire key assets as part of the Council's growth strategy	As required	Director of Regeneration and Place
Property and Land Disposals		As required	Director of Regeneration and Place
Loan / Loan Facility Application	To agree a business loan application relating to a local business	As required	Director of Finance
Treasury Management	To report and agree any significant new investments and or loan arrangements including refinancing	As required	Director of Finance
Capital Monitoring	To agree changes including new schemes, funding and any major variations relating to the Capital Programme.	As required	Director of Finance
Revenue Monitoring	To agree any revisions to the revenue budget including re-profiling, virements, additional funding requirements and grant variations.	As required	Director of Finance
Financial Support	Proposed financial	As required	Director of

Packages	support packages in response to additional government support funding and additional Wirral fuel support fund.		Finance
Household Support Fund Winter 2022/23	Receipt and distribution of financial support to assist households in Wirral.	As required	Director of Finance

### ADDITIONAL AGENDA ITEMS – WAITING TO BE SCHEDULED

Item	Brief Description	Approximate timescale	Lead Departmental Officer
Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) – SmartBusiness	To approve the full business case for delivery of phase 2 of the project (Human Resources & Payroll).	April 2023	Director of Finance
Strategic Change Programme	This report provides an overview of the Council's emerging change programme.	Between March 2023 and June 2023	Director of Resources
External Audit Report Action Progress	To report progress on the implementation of the Auditors recommendations	September 2023	Director of Finance
Household Support Fund		Between March 2023 and June 2023	Director of Finance
Performance Management Policy Update		TBC	Director of Resources
Benchmarking Council's Risk Appetite		TBC	Director of Finance
Pay Policy Statement Review		TBC	Director of Resources
Introduction of ERP and Payment of Invoices		TBC	Director of Finance

### STANDING ITEMS AND MONITORING REPORTS

<b>Item</b>	<b>Reporting Frequency</b>	<b>Lead Departmental Officer</b>
Performance Monitoring	TBC	Director of Finance
Financial Monitoring	Quarterly	Director of Finance
Work Programme Update	Every Meeting	Director of Law and Governance

**WORK PROGRAMME ACTIVITIES OUTSIDE COMMITTEE**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Format</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Lead Officer</b>	<b>Progress</b>
<b>Working Groups/ Sub Committees</b>				
<b>Task and Finish work</b>				
<b>Spotlight sessions / workshops</b>				
<b>Briefing Notes</b>				

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## POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Wednesday 22 March 2023

<b>REPORT TITLE:</b>	<b>COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER</b>
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>DIRECTOR OF LAW AND GOVERNANCE</b>

### REPORT SUMMARY

This report makes recommendations in relation to the Community Asset Transfer (CAT) of Higher Bebington Library, former Woodchurch Library and the former Hoylake Library.

It builds upon the CAT reports approved by this committee at its meetings on 16 June 2022 and 25 October 2022, considers the Council's approved Asset Strategy 2022-27, approved by Policy and Resources Committee on 9 November 2022, the priorities of the Wirral Plan 2021-26 and the emerging Local Plan with its "brownfield first strategy".

The Tourism, Communities, Culture & Leisure Committee authorised the Director of Resources to enter into negotiations on the basis of the re-submitted business plans contained in the exempt Appendix 2 of this report to agree Heads of Terms for the transfer of the former library asset at Higher Bebington Library to the Co-op Academy Bebington. It also authorised the Director of Resources to market the site of the former Hoylake Library for sale or commercial leasing on the basis that it is surplus to the requirements of the Committee, and agreed to the removal of the former Woodchurch Library asset from the CAT process.

It therefore subsequently recommended that Policy & Resources Committee agree that Higher Bebington and Woodchurch Libraries be appropriated by the Council for educational purposes, and that the site of the former Hoylake Library be marketed for sale or commercial leasing.

This report meets the following priorities in the Wirral Plan 2021-26

- Safe, vibrant communities where people want to live and raise their families.
- A prosperous inclusive economy where local people can get good jobs and achieve their aspirations.

This matter has the potential to affect all wards.

This is a Key Decision.

All the business plans, expressions of interest and the C.co report referred to in this report were submitted confidentially for commercial reasons. Therefore, Appendices 1 - 7 of this report are exempt from publication by virtue of paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

## **RECOMMENDATION/S**

The Policy and Resources Committee is asked to consider the request from the Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee that:

- (a) Higher Bebington Library be appropriated by the Council for educational purposes.
- (b) The former Woodchurch library asset be appropriated by the Council for educational purposes.
- (c) The site of the former Hoylake Library be marketed for sale or commercial leasing

## **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

### **1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S**

- 1.1 To enable Policy and Resources Committee to determine the future use of the sites following the decision of Tourism, Communities, Culture & Leisure Committee.

### **2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 2.1 Other options have been considered and are included within the minutes of the Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee and the appended report.

### **3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 3.1 As part of the 2022/23 budget, the Council resolved that several assets be considered for CAT. These were nine libraries, two municipal golf courses and one leisure centre. Expressions of interest were received for seven of the nine libraries. On 16 June 2022 this Committee agreed to progress several expressions of interest in a CAT transfer to the business planning stage.
- 3.2 Following this decision, a timescale was set to produce the business plans. An inception meeting took place with each of the organisations which submitted Expressions of Interest (EOI) progressing to the business planning stage. Information to support business planning was provided and regular check-ins with each organisation were undertaken as the business plans were being prepared. Support in the preparation of business plans was made available by the Chamber of Commerce and the Council signposted to other appropriate organisations who give advice and support with asset transfer.
- 3.3 The business plans were submitted to the Council on 25 August 2022. These were reported to the Committee on 25 October 2022 as an exempt item.
- 3.4 The Council is required, to meet its legal duties and fiduciary responsibilities, to consider several matters in making decisions in relation to CAT. In summary these include fit with the CAT policy, assessments of the business plans, strategic fit, alignment with Council priorities (including the Local Plan), due diligence on the organisations seeking a transfer, any property related matters, any legal requirements, financial implications and community benefit. In addition, it must also consider all relevant matters and options before coming to a decision.
- 3.5 The Council employed C.co (a company associated with CIPFA) to undertake an independent assessment of the business plans based on the information submitted. This document is attached as Appendix 7 to this report. Appendix 7 is exempt from publication by virtue of paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.
- 3.7 The paragraphs below, summarise the position at the time in relation to each asset and provide the basis for the recommendations contained in this report.

#### **3.8 Woodchurch Library**

Positivitree, the organisation that submitted the original business plan have now withdrawn from the CAT process. The Council has therefore had further discussions with the school and the school are bringing forward proposals to use this asset as a warm hub and then for pupils with special educational needs. This appears to be a very beneficial use for this building and therefore it is recommended that this asset is removed from CAT so that these other uses can be taken forward.

### **3.9 Higher Bebington Library**

The Co-op academy submitted a revised business plan (Appendix 2 of this report) which is now assessed as viable. They also confirmed, in writing, that the Co-op would meet, in full, the capital cost of the building and that they were only seeking revenue funding support. On this basis, it is recommended that negotiations commence for a transfer of this asset. The alternative use for this asset would be for a single residential development subject to planning permission and the agreement of Leverhulme Estates in relation to the covenant. The community benefits resulting from the transfer would outweigh the alternative use of this site.

### **3.10 Hoylake Library**

The Life Tree submitted a revised business plan but, unfortunately, following assessment by officers, this is still unviable. The detail is set out at Appendix 3 of this report. As no viable business plan has been produced it is recommended that the property should be marketed for commercial purposes given its location in the retail area of Market Street in Hoylake.

- 3.11 The Tourism, Communities, Culture & Leisure Committee authorised the Director of Resources to enter into negotiations on the basis of the re-submitted business plans contained in the exempt Appendix 2 of this report to agree Heads of Terms for the transfer of the former library asset at Higher Bebington Library to the Co-op Academy Bebington. It also authorised the Director of Resources to market the site of the former Hoylake Library for sale or commercial leasing on the basis that it is surplus to the requirements of the Committee and agreed to the removal of the former Woodchurch Library asset from the CAT process.
- 3.12 It therefore subsequently recommended that Policy & Resources Committee agree that Higher Bebington and Woodchurch Libraries be appropriated by the Council for educational purposes, and that the site of the former Hoylake Library be marketed for sale or commercial leasing.

## **4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 Financial implications are detailed in the main report.

## **5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 In accordance with Part 3B of Constitution (Committee Terms of Reference), the Policy and Resources Committee has two main areas of responsibility, which is to provide strategic direction to the operation of the Council, including making decisions

on policies and co-ordinating spend not reserved to full Council, and to maintain a strategic overview of outcomes, performance, risk management and budgets.

- 5.2 The Policy and Resources Committee is charged by full Council to provide a co-ordinating role across all other service committees and retain a 'whole-council' view of performance, budget monitoring and risk management. In particular, this includes specific responsibility for developing and monitoring the enabling corporate services, including, property and asset management.
- 5.3 As part of the matter of business that was the subject of the report to Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee falls under that responsibility reserved to the Policy and Resources Committee, the Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee's resolution is presented as a recommendation.
- 5.4 As the decision in this matter is the subject of a recommendation from another Committee, the Policy and Resources Committee must take into account the resolution of that Committee and give due regard to the guidance and comments made by its members. The Policy and Resources Committee must not, however, consider itself bound by that Committee's recommendations or otherwise fetter its discretion; its Members must come to their own decision. In doing so, the Committee must satisfy itself that it has been provided with all relevant information or a suitable précis to enable it to comply with its duties and make a lawful decision.
- 5.5 Other legal considerations are as set out in the appended report.

## **6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS**

- 6.1 Resource implications are covered in the original report submitted to the Committee.

## **7.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

- 7.1 The relevant risks are covered in the original report submitted to the Committee.

## **8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION**

- 8.1 Engagement and Consultation are covered in the original report submitted to the Committee.

## **9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 Wirral Council has a legal requirement to make sure its policies, and the way it carries out its work, do not discriminate against anyone. An Equality Impact Assessment is a tool to help council services identify steps they can take to ensure equality for anyone who might be affected by a particular policy, decision or activity.
- 9.2. Whilst there are no equality implications arising from this report, the associated actions arising from the delivery may need to assess any equality issues and mitigate any negative impact that may emerge.

## **10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 Environmental implications are covered in the original report submitted to the Committee.

## **11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS**

11.1 Community wealth implications are covered in the original report submitted to the Committee.

### **REPORT AUTHOR:**

**Polly Price**

Senior Democratic Services Officer

### **APPENDICES**

Appendix 1 Minute Extract

Appendix 2 Full Report

### **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

This report is being considered by the Policy and Resources Committee in accordance with Section (f) of its Terms of Reference undertake responsibility for developing and monitoring the enabling corporate services, including, property and asset management.

### **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Community Asset Transfer Policy 2022

### **SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)**

<b>Council Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee	2 <sup>nd</sup> February 2023

## COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER

The Assistant Director - Special Projects introduced the report of the Director of Resources which made recommendations in relation to the following Community Asset Transfer (CAT) matters: Former Libraries, Brackenwood Golf Course, Bromborough Civic Centre, and in addition to an Asset Transfer (AT) matter: Former Public Toilets in Moreton

Members thanked officers for their hard work throughout the Community Asset Transfer Process.

Members considered the recommendations individually.

It was moved by the Chair, seconded by Councillor Mike Collins that the Director of Resources be authorised to conclude the transfer of assets of Pensby Library to Pioneer People and Prenton Library to St. Stephens Church on the basis of the terms reported in the exempt appendix 1 to the report. This was agreed by assent.

Members discussed that this was a good use of a community asset being introduced and re-opened to the community.

It was moved by the Chair, seconded by Councillor Jenny Johnson that the Director of Resources be authorised to enter into negotiations on the basis of the re-submitted business plans contained in the exempt Appendix 2 of this report to agree Heads of Terms for the transfer of the former library assets at Wallasey Village to the Wallasey Village Library and Community Centre, Irby to the Friends of Irby Library, and Higher Bebington library to the Co-op Academy Bebington. Once agreed these Heads of Terms are to be reported back to this Committee for a decision or onward recommendation to Policy and Resources Committee. This was agreed by assent.

The Chair noted that the additional 9 weeks that had been added to the timeline had been beneficial for small businesses as creating a business plan could be a daunting task. Members noted the importance of keeping as many libraries open as possible and welcomed this recommendation.

It was moved by the Chair, seconded by Councillor Mike Collins that the Director of Resources be authorised to market the site of the former Hoylake Library for sale or commercial leasing on the basis that it is surplus to the requirements of the Committee. This was agreed by assent.

It was moved by the Chair, seconded by Councillor Tony Smith that the removal of the former Woodchurch Library asset from the CAT process be approved. This was agreed by assent.

It was moved by the Chair, seconded by Councillor Judith Grier that Policy and Resources be recommended to agree that Higher Bebington Library be appropriated by the Council for educational purposes. This was agreed by assent.

It was moved by the Chair, seconded by Councillor Tony Smith that Policy and Resources be recommended to agree that the former Woodchurch Library asset be appropriated by the Council for educational purposes. This was agreed by assent.

It was moved by the Chair, seconded by Councillor Jenny Johnson that Policy and Resources be recommended to agree that the site of the former Hoylake Library be marketed for sale or commercial leasing. This was agreed by assent.

A discussion ensued around officer recommendation 5, where Members agreed that both interested parties for the Bromborough Civic Centre should be invited to bring a business plan.

It was moved by the Chair, seconded by Councillor Jenny Johnson that both interested parties for the Bromborough Civic Centre, Neo and Bromborough Community Group, be invited to bring business plans on the basis of their submitted expression of interest, incorporating their vision for the library element. This was agreed by assent.

It was moved by the Chair, seconded by Councillor Ivan Camphor that the former public toilets in Moreton which had been declared surplus to requirements be transferred to Moreton in Bloom, based on the information in the exempt appendix 7 of the report. This was agreed by assent.

It was moved by the Chair, seconded by Councillor Paul Martin that £52,000 of the surplus revenue amount allocated to Community Asset Transfer be used to meet the holding costs of the former libraries in 2023/24 prior to transfer. This was agreed by assent.

It was moved by the Chair, seconded by Councillor Sue Percy that the remaining revenue balance of £62,417 be retained to support the library element of Bromborough Civic Centre if members decide to transfer this asset at a future point in the financial year 2023/24. This was agreed by assent.

The Assistant Director – Special Projects outlined that in relation to Brackenwood, two business plans had been submitted and there was one that could potentially be taken forward, the considerations around the Council's local plan and brownfield strategy were set out in the report. It was reported that the work done so far on Brackenwood was preliminary due it being part of the CAT process.

A discussion on officer recommendation 1c around Brackenwood Golf Course ensued with Members querying the suitability of the land for sports pitches and the competing priorities of the brownfield first strategy and Biodiversity Net Gain. The Assistant Director - Special Projects clarified that whilst not all of Brackenwood could be used for playing pitches due to the slopes of the land and existing drainage issues, parts of the site were suitable, and the idea was to provide a hub of playing pitches with one centralised changing and servicing facility. Members made it clear that they were not in support of the officer recommendation.

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

**Resolved – That under section 100 (A) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined by paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A (as amended) to that Act. The Public Interest test has been applied and favours exclusion.**

Following the exempt session, the press and public were invited back into the meeting.

The Chair moved a motion, seconded by Councillor Naomi Graham that the Director of Resources be authorised to start negotiating with Brackenwood Community Golf Club Ltd on the basis of their business plan, to seek to agree Heads of Terms to transfer the course and report back on the outcome of the negotiations and options, which support Local Plan priorities for decision by this committee. This was agreed by assent.

**Resolved - That**

- (1) the Director of Resources be authorised to conclude the transfer of assets of Pensby Library to Pioneer People and Prenton Library to St. Stephens Church on the basis of the terms reported in the exempt appendix 1 to this report.**
- (2) the Director of Resources be authorised to enter into negotiations on the basis of the re-submitted business plans contained in the exempt Appendix 2 of this report to agree Heads of Terms for the transfer of the former library assets at Wallasey Village to the Wallasey Village Library and Community Centre, Irby to the Friends of Irby Library, and Higher Bebington library to the Co-op Academy Bebington. Once agreed these Heads of Terms are to be reported back to this Committee for a decision or onward recommendation to Policy and Resources Committee.**
- (3) the Director of Resources be authorised to market the site of the former Hoylake Library for sale or commercial leasing on the basis that it is surplus to the requirements of the Committee.**
- (4) the removal of the former Woodchurch Library asset from the CAT process be approved.**
- (5) Policy and Resources be recommended to agree that Higher Bebington Library be appropriated by the Council for educational purposes.**
- (6) Policy and Resources be recommended to agree that the former Woodchurch Library asset be appropriated by the Council for educational purposes.**
- (7) Policy and Resources be recommended to agree that the site of the former Hoylake Library be marketed for sale or commercial leasing.**

- (8) both interested parties for the Bromborough Civic Centre, Neo and Bromborough Community Group, be invited to bring business plans on the basis of their submitted expression of interest incorporating their vision for the library element.**
- (9) the former public toilets in Moreton which had been declared surplus to requirements be transferred to Moreton in Bloom, based on the information in the exempt appendix 7 of this report.**
- (10) £52,000 of the surplus revenue amount allocated to Community Asset Transfer be used to meet the holding costs of the former libraries in 2023/24 prior to transfer.**
- (11) the remaining revenue balance of £62,417 be retained to support the library element of Bromborough Civic Centre if members decide to transfer this asset at a future point in the financial year 2023/24.**
- (12) the Director of Resources be authorised to start negotiating with Brackenwood Community Golf Club Ltd on the basis of their business plan, to seek to agree Heads of Terms to transfer the course and report back on the outcome of the negotiations and options, which support Local Plan priorities for decision by this committee.**

**TOURISM, COMMUNITIES, CULTURE & LEISURE COMMITTEE****Thursday, 2 February 2023**

<b>REPORT TITLE:</b>	<b>COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER FORMER LIBRARIES BRACKENWOOD GOLF COURSE BROMBOROUGH CIVIC CENTRE ASSET TRANSFER FORMER PUBLIC TOILETS IN MORETON</b>
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES</b>

**REPORT SUMMARY**

This report makes recommendations in relation to the following Community Asset Transfer (CAT) and an Asset Transfer (AT) matter:

Former Libraries (CAT)  
Brackenwood Golf Course (CAT)  
Bromborough Civic Centre (CAT)  
Former Public Toilets in Moreton (Asset Transfer)

It builds upon the CAT reports approved by this committee at its meetings on 16 June 2022 and 25 October 2022, considers the Council's approved Asset Strategy 2022-27, approved by Policy and Resources Committee on 9 November 2022, the priorities of the Wirral Plan 2021-26 and the emerging Local Plan with its "brownfield first strategy".

A report on the transfer of Hoylake Municipal Golf Course will come to a future meeting of this Committee once the proposal has been considered alongside the future arrangements for the Open Championship at Royal Liverpool Golf Club in Hoylake.

A report on the transfer of Woodchurch leisure Centre will come to a future meeting of this committee.

This report meets the following priorities in the Wirral Plan 2021-26

- Safe, vibrant communities where people want to live and raise their families.
- A prosperous inclusive economy where local people can get good jobs and achieve their aspirations.

This matter has the potential to affect all wards.

This is a Key Decision

All the business plans, expressions of interest and the C.co report referred to in this report were submitted confidentially for commercial reasons. Therefore, Appendices 1 - 7 of this report are exempt from publication by virtue of paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

## **RECOMMENDATION/S**

The Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee is recommended to:

- (1) Authorise the Director of Resources to:
  - (a) conclude the transfer of the assets of Pensby library to Pioneer People and Prenton Library to St. Stephens Church on the basis of the terms reported in the exempt appendix 1 to this report;
  - (b) enter into negotiations on the basis of the re-submitted business plans contained in the exempt Appendix 2 of this report to agree Heads of Terms for the transfer of the former library assets at Wallasey Village to the Friends of Wallasey Village Library, Irby to the Friends of Irby Library, and Higher Bebington library to the Co-op Academy Bebington. Once agreed these Heads of Terms are to be reported back to this Committee for a decision or onward recommendation to Policy and Resources Committee.
  - (c) explore other options for Brackenwood Golf Course which support the Council's Local Plan priorities and report back on these to this Committee in June 2023.
  - (d) market the site of the former Hoylake Library for sale or commercial leasing on the basis that it is surplus to the requirements of the Committee
- (2) approve the removal of the former Woodchurch library asset from the CAT process
- (3) Recommend to Policy and Resources Committee that
  - (a) Higher Bebington Library be appropriated by the Council for educational purposes.
  - (b) The former Woodchuch library asset be appropriated by the Council for educational purposes.
  - (c) The site of the former Hoylake Library be marketed for sale or commercial leasing.
- (5) Invite a business plan from Neo for the Bromborough Civic Centre on the basis of their submitted expression of interest and the officer assessment in the exempt appendix 6 of this report.
- (6) transfer the former public toilets in Moreton which have been declared surplus to requirements, to Moreton in Bloom, based on the information in the exempt appendix 7 of this report.

- (7) use £52,000 of the surplus revenue amount allocated to Community Asset Transfer to meet the holding costs of the former libraries in 2023/24 prior to transfer
- (8) retain the remaining revenue balance of £62,417 to support the library element of Bromborough Civic Centre if members decide to transfer this asset at a future point in the financial year 2023/24

## **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

### **1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S**

- 1.1 The recommendations within this report enable Committee to make decisions on the assets that are in scope for Community Asset Transfer (CAT). As part of the 2022/23 budget Council agreed the closure of 9 libraries, two municipal golf courses and a leisure centre. As part of the amendment to that budget, a Community Asset Transfer process was proposed to determine if any of these assets could be transferred in advance of being disposed of as surplus to requirements.
- 1.2 The report makes recommendations for transfer where the information supports that approach.
- 1.3 Where business plans are unviable, officers have re-engaged, with all those groups to explore if there are further steps that can be taken to create viable business plans based on the principle of exploring all options to secure CAT. The detail of this is set out in the report.
- 1.4 The recommendations contain suggested actions to be taken if viable business plans cannot be achieved so that members have all the information and options to make informed decisions on these assets.
- 1.5 Bromborough Civic Centre is at an expression of interest stage and the recommendation made reflects that.
- 1.6 The surplus public toilets at Moreton are a very local asset and it is recommended that they are dealt with under the Asset Transfer category (not Community Asset Transfer) as set out in the approved Asset Strategy 2022-27, approved by P&R Committee on 9 November 2022. This is because the former toilets will be used for storage to facilitate community activity in Moreton. Therefore, there is no community asset transfer as no community group will be occupying the former toilets.
- 1.7 All the business plans and expressions of interest have been submitted on a confidential basis for commercial reasons and therefore they are included in exempt appendices to this report.

### **2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 2.1 The CAT process has been a primary consideration for this report which follows on from resolutions agreed by this Committee at its meeting of 16 June 2022, 25 October 2022 and by Policy and Resources Committee on 9 November 2022.
- 2.2 The Council, to meet its legal duty and fiduciary responsibilities, has to fully consider all relevant matters and options in making any decision, Therefore this report sets out these matters and options to ensure that Members have all the relevant information to make a fully informed decision.

### **3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 3.1 As part of the 2022/23 budget, the Council resolved that several assets be considered for CAT. These were nine libraries, two municipal golf courses and one leisure centre. Expressions of interest were received for seven of the nine libraries. On 16 June 2022 this Committee agreed to progress several expressions of interest in a CAT transfer to the business planning stage.
- 3.2 Following this decision, a timescale was set to produce the business plans. An inception meeting took place with each of the organisations which submitted Expressions of Interest (EOI) progressing to the business planning stage. Information to support business planning was provided and regular check-ins with each organisation were undertaken as the business plans were being prepared. Support in the preparation of business plans was made available by the Chamber of Commerce and the Council signposted to other appropriate organisations who give advice and support with asset transfer.
- 3.3 The business plans were submitted to the Council on 25 August 2022. These were reported to this Committee on 25 October 2022 as an exempt item.
- 3.4 The Council is required, to meet its legal duties and fiduciary responsibilities, to consider several matters in making decisions in relation to CAT. In summary these include fit with the CAT policy, assessments of the business plans, strategic fit, alignment with Council priorities (including the Local Plan), due diligence on the organisations seeking a transfer, any property related matters, any legal requirements, financial implications and community benefit. In addition, it must also consider all relevant matters and options before coming to a decision.
- 3.5 The Council employed C.co (a company associated with CIPFA) to undertake an independent assessment of the business plans based on the information submitted. This document is attached as Appendix 8 to this report. Appendix 8 is exempt from publication by virtue of paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.
- 3.6 This Committee, at its meeting on 25 October 2022 made a series of recommendations which, in summary, enabled negotiations to progress for a transfer of Pensby and Prenton libraries and set a timescale for unviable business plans to be re-considered by the groups and re-submitted by 9 December 2022.
- 3.7 The paragraphs below, summarise the current position in relation to each asset and provide the basis for the recommendations contained in this report. The table at paragraph 4.2 of this report sets out the indicative capital and revenue requests received from each organisation to support the transfer of the former library assets on the basis of the initial business plans (Pensby and Prenton) and on the revised business plans (Higher Bebington, Irby, Wallasey Village). Woodchurch Library and Hoylake are showing no funding requirement subject to the recommendations of this report being agreed. These sums will be reviewed and confirmed as these matters progress.

### 3.8 **Pensby Library**

Heads of Terms for a transfer of this asset have now been agreed with Pioneer People along with agreement of the capital and revenue sums to support that transfer. It is now recommended that this asset is transferred on the terms set out in Appendix 1 of this report. The alternative use for this asset would be a small residential development following demolition of the asset, but this would not result in the community benefits which will result from a transfer of this asset.

### 3.9 **Prenton Library**

St. Stephen's Church submitted a business plan to provide a range of community facilities in the library building. The outcome of the assessment is that this asset should proceed to transfer based on the business plan and the community benefits. In doing so, Committee are reminded that this asset is not owned by the Council but leased from Magenta Living by the Council and further discussions around these matters have been held with Magenta Living. The capital and revenue sums to support this transfer have now been agreed with St, Stephens Church. Discussions have taken place with Magenta Living regarding assignment of the lease to St. Stephen Church and this matter is progressing positively. It is therefore recommended that this asset is transferred on the terms agreed in Appendix 1 of this report. The alternative would be for the Council to exercise its power under the Lease to give notice of termination to Magenta Living so that the latter can negotiate directly with the Church.

### 3.10 **Woodchurch Library**

Positivitree, the organisation that submitted the original business plan have now withdrawn from the CAT process.

The Council has therefore had further discussions with the school and the school are bringing forward proposals to use this asset as a warm hub and then for pupils with special educational needs. This appears to be a very beneficial use for this building and therefore it is recommended that this asset is removed from CAT so that these other uses can be taken forward.

### 3.11 **Irby Library**

The Friends of Irby Library (FOIL) submitted a business plan for a range of community uses and a cafe in this building. While there are positive community benefits, the business plan was not viable.

Following further discussions with FOIL, they have submitted a revised business plan which is viable and therefore it is recommended that negotiations commence with them regarding a transfer of this asset based on the business plan at appendix 2 of this report.

As the former toilet block, adjacent to the library building, is secured and not causing any issues, it is recommended that this remains in place as it may be of some use in the future for community purposes if the transfer is successful. This will also save the CAT resources being used for demolition. The alternative option for this asset is a small residential/commercial development following demolition of the asset. The community benefit resulting from a transfer of this asset will bring greater community benefits.

### **3.12 Higher Bebington Library**

The Co-op academy submitted a revised business plan (Appendix 2 of this report) which is now assessed as viable. They also confirmed, in writing, that the Co-op would meet, in full, the capital cost of the building and that they were only seeking revenue funding support. On this basis, it is recommended that negotiations commence for a transfer of this asset. The alternative use for this asset would be for a single residential development subject to planning permission and the agreement of Leverhulme Estates in relation to the covenant. The community benefits resulting from the transfer would outweigh the alternative use of this site.

### **3.13 Hoylake Library**

The Life Tree submitted a revised business plan but, unfortunately, following assessment by officers, this is still unviable. The detail is set out at Appendix 3 of this report.

As no viable business plan has been produced it is recommended that the property should be marketed for commercial purposes given its location in the retail area of Market Street in Hoylake.

### **3.14 Wallasey Village Library**

A revised business plan has been submitted and the details of this are contained in Appendix 2 of this report. This has been assessed by Officers as viable and it is recommended that negotiations commence for a transfer of this asset. The alternative use for this asset following its demolition would be a small residential development. The financial benefits of this would not outweigh the community benefits resulting from a transfer for the local community.

### **3.15 Brackenwood Golf Course**

As Members may recall it was not possible to report on this asset to the December meeting of this committee, as further information and clarifications were required from Love Golf Manchester and Brackenwood Community Golf Limited (This is a new company that has been set up for the transfer of the golf course as advised in the latest clarification from R&M Estates/Brackenwood Golf Club. Details of this and the company structure are set out in Appendix 4 of this report), the organisations that had submitted business plans. This information has now been received and is set out in Appendix 4 of this report.

Officers, after considering the C.co report at Appendix 8 of this report, and informed by the additional information and clarifications received, have now assessed both business plans in line with the CAT policy. In addition, other factors which have been considered in making the officer recommendation are set out in the paragraphs below.

Members will be aware that following a review of the Council's municipal golf offer and as part of the 2022/23 budget process, Policy and Resources Committee on 22 March 2022 took a decision to close Brackenwood and Hoylake Municipal courses

from 1 April 2022 and to focus the Council's municipal golf offer on the two courses at Arrowe Park and The Warrens.

These decisions have resulted in the municipal golf offer, which has operated at a significant deficit for many years (£423,000 per annum between 2015-20), now operating at a profit projected to be £56,000 this financial year. The increased income targets have been exceeded and the surplus is currently supporting the Council's adverse variance in year and will continue to support budget savings in 2023/24 and beyond.

Most of the golf clubs previously operating from Hoylake have successfully re-located to Arrowe Park Golf course. The clubs formerly playing at Brackenwood have relocated out of Borough to the course at Hooton.

With the investment that has now been made at Arrowe Park and The Warrens, and with the capacity available at these courses, there are further opportunities to improve the performance and income generation at these sites which will support the Council's financial position.

It is also the case that Wirral has a significant number of golf courses in private ownership which are available to golfers in the Wirral.

Alongside these decisions, Members agreed to consider a Community Asset Transfer of Brackenwood Golf Course and Hoylake Municipal Golf Course following the 2022/23 budget setting process. (Hoylake Municipal will be the subject of a future report to this committee and therefore the comments below just relate to Brackenwood Golf Course).

For Brackenwood Golf Course, both business plans submitted, are seeking to re-open the course and they outline community benefits that could result from this. The business plans and additional details and clarifications on the business plans are in Appendix 4 of this report. Both organisations have been given the opportunity to provide any additional information on Biodiversity Net Gain associated with their proposals and any information received will be circulated to Members prior to the meeting.

From the business plans submitted by both organisations it is clear that re-opening Brackenwood Golf Course would bring a competitor back into the golf market which would have a direct impact on the Council's golf courses and also on private courses both in Wirral and Cheshire West and Chester. In terms of the impact on the Council courses there would be a direct adverse financial impact which would create significant risks to the decisions previously taken by the Council. In summary it is considered that Wirral is adequately endowed with golf courses that are available to the relevant communities and that the re-opening of Brackenwood Golf Course would not bring sufficient community benefits to offset the likely adverse financial impact on the Council's remaining municipal courses. The likely outcome would be that all three courses would run at a loss, the situation that the Council sought to avoid by closing two out of its four courses. That outcome would benefit nobody.

In March 2022, Full Council resolved to submit its Local Plan for examination. This follows a brownfield first strategy. To support the delivery of this option, the Council

must identify sites for Biodiversity Net Gain and playing pitch provision. Currently, there is a significant deficit of playing pitches for all sports, of all types, in all areas of the Borough as identified in the Playing Pitch Strategy and limited sites on which they can be provided. Without identified sites for pitches, the delivery of brownfield housing in the Borough would be put at significant risk. It should be noted that representations have been made to the Local Plan consultation stating that there is no evidence that the larger brownfield regeneration sites can meet the requirements to provide land for playing pitches and this matter will need to be addressed in the examination hearings taking place later this year.

In addition, in November 2022, the Council agreed its Asset Strategy for 2022 to 2027. As part of this work, the significance of Council sites to support the above objectives of the Council became clearer.

In December 2022, the Council received seven major planning appeals against its decisions to refuse residential development on various Green Belt sites.

Unfortunately, there are competing priorities and uses for limited Council owned land assets and therefore decisions must be made in relation to maximising the objectives of the Council. While a CAT of Brackenwood Golf Course would meet certain objectives of the Council, it is considered on balance, that the higher priority is supporting the delivery of the Local Plan and the brownfield first strategy to enable housing delivery and protection of the Green Belt. Therefore, it is recommended that Brackenwood Golf Course should be used to provide playing pitches and Biodiversity Net Gain in order to deliver Local Plan objectives. If Members support this approach funding is available from developer contributions and external organisations to deliver on this priority and a report could be brought back to the June committee for consideration.

### **3.16 Bromborough Civic Centre**

This asset was put into consideration by Policy and Resources Committee at their meeting on 9 November 2022.

Expressions of interest were invited by 20 December 2022. Two were received. One from Neo and the other from Bromborough Local Community Group Limited and these are at Appendix 5 of this report. Officers have assessed these based on the CAT policy and the outcome is also included in Appendix 5. In overall terms, the Neo submission scored 74.6 out of 100 and the other 39.6 out of 100. There is a significant difference in the scores because (1) the Neo bid is very detailed, (2) it confirms the financial and staffing resources they have immediately available to support a transfer, (3) they have set out in detail the community benefits, (4) they are proposing to use the whole of the building and (5) they have indicated their commitment to including the Friends of Bromborough Library in the proposal.

Based on the information submitted, it is recommended that a business plan is invited from Neo approval (a period of 8 weeks is allowed to develop the business plan in the approved CAT policy) and assessment by officers (approximately four weeks), it is reported to a future meeting of this Committee for consideration.

As part of that report, Officers will provide information on the commercial opportunities for the site as this will need to be considered by Members as part of the Council's duty and fiduciary responsibilities prior to any decisions being made about the future of the asset.

If Members of this committee are minded to recommend a transfer of this asset, at a future point, the final decision must be taken by Policy and Resources Committee as the value of the asset is above £500,000.

### 3.17 Former Public Toilets in Moreton

This asset was declared surplus by this Committee at its meeting on 25 October 2022.

Following the approval of the Asset Strategy by Policy and Resources Committee on 9 November 2022, this matter can now be considered for transfer under the Asset Transfer category.

Moreton in Bloom have submitted an expression of interest in this asset which is at Appendix 6 of this report. They want to use it for storage for their Christmas lights and environmental work in the area. They have the financial resources to take on this asset on a full, repairing and insuring lease for a term of 25 years. There are no alternative uses for this asset apart from demolition and landscaping the site.

## 4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The following table sets out the capital value of each asset

<b>ASSET</b>	<b>Estimated Asset Value</b>	<b>Estimated Capital Investment Costs</b>
Hoylake Library	£250,000	£224,000
Irby Library	£400,000	£95,475
Pensby Library	£175,000	£141,000
Prenton Library	Not applicable - the Council do not own this asset	Not applicable - the Council do not own this asset
Wallasey Village Library	£400,000	£160,250
Woodchurch Library	Not applicable - school site	Not applicable - school site
Brackenwood Golf Course	£500,000-£1,000,000	Nil
Higher Bebington library	Nominal value as the restriction on use potentially	Not assessed

	negates any value.	
Woodchurch Leisure Centre	Nominal value	Up to £330,000
Moreton Toilets	£40,000	N/A
Bromborough Civic Centre	£600,000	Not yet assessed

4.2 This table provides information on the estimated value of each asset.

4.3 The estimated capital investment cost come from previous surveys which have been updated. Such investment is required over several years. It is given for information purposes.

<b>Indicative Funding Table for the former libraries</b>				
<b>Area</b>	<b>Capital - Condition</b>	<b>Capital - Change of Use</b>	<b>Total Capital</b>	<b>Revenue</b>
Higher Bebington	0	0	0	60,000
Hoylake	0	0	0	0
Irby	20,000	0	20,000	20,000
Pensby	67,000	0	67,000	44,583
Prenton	28,000	24,000	52,000	21,000
Wallasey Village	53,500	24,000	77,500	22,000
Woodchurch	0	0	0	0

**Total**

**216,500 167,583**

<b>Available</b>	<b>500,000</b>	<b>282,000</b>
<b>Difference</b>	<b>283,500</b>	<b>114,417</b>

- 4.4 Post any decision of this Committee, to transfer an asset, there will be a period of negotiation around the Transfer Agreement along with a period required for any capital works to be undertaken. During this period, for the libraries, there will be continued basic security and insurance costs as the libraries referred to in this report closed on 31 October 2022.
- 4.5 Costs will continue to be incurred by Asset Management from 1<sup>st</sup> November 2022 in relation to the libraries whilst the CAT process is finalised. At present there is uncertainty around how long this will be, and costs have been estimated at £0.062m up to the end of March 2023. However, there are risks associated with this figure and costs will continue into next financial year for some sites. Costs could also increase depending on utility bills and additional security requirements. The estimated sum post 1 April 2023 is £52,000. It is proposed that this is funded by using some of the surplus revenue resources currently allocated to the CAT process so that it does not put any unfunded pressures on the Council budget for 2023/24. This would leave £62,417 of revenue funding for the Bromborough library element of Bromborough Civic Centre should this be required if Members decide at a future point to transfer this asset.
- 4.6 If Brackenwood golf course is not transferred, there will be no additional cost for the Council as the course does not need to be maintained as it is closed. Alternative options will be considered, and these are likely to be funded by grant and/or developer contributions which will require no Council funding.
- 4.7 Any transfers will be on a full repairing and insuring lease ensuring there are no future costs for the Council. Leases will be monitored on an annual basis to ensure that repairs and maintenance are being undertaken. Evidence will be required that the asset is being insured.

## **5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The terms of reference for the Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee are to consider applications for transfers of assets to organisations that will provide community benefits e.g., main uses which would further the social well-being and interests of the local community. Examples would include cultural, recreational and sporting uses. Outside the definition would be use that was predominantly educational. Any appropriation of land from use as a library to educational use would require the approval of Policy and Resources Committee. The Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee should refer to Policy and Resources Committee surplus assets for which the Committee saw no alternative community use.
- 5.2 In general the Committee in reaching a decision must consider all relevant considerations and disregard irrelevant considerations and come to a reasonable conclusion. That would include considering any potential uses for the assets which are alternative to those being proposed by the applicants for CAT transfers. Not to consider alternative uses would expose any decision to legal challenge.

- 5.3 A relevant consideration is the Council's fiduciary duty to the Council Taxpayer to take account of their interests in maximising income or savings and obtaining the best price reasonably obtainable for the disposal of any asset. The Committee should therefore take into account any income or capital receipt forgone as a result of donating an asset for community use. Any financial loss would have to be clearly outweighed by the strength of the community benefits. The Council's current financial position is a relevant factor.
- 5.4 If the community benefits are unlikely to be realised by a CAT transfer because, for example, of a lack of financial viability or necessary expertise, then they should be given little or no weight in the decision-making process, particularly if the CAT transfer would commit the Council to capital or revenue support which would be wasted if the community benefits were not realised.
- 5.5 The Council is under an additional duty to obtain the best price reasonably obtainable for the disposal of any interest in its land unless the disposal is for a lease for less than seven years. If the proposed lease is for a longer term, then a less than market rent would be lawful if the value of the community benefits outweighed any loss of income. If, however, the value of the land free of any restrictions imposed by the Council would be £2million or more, then the Secretary of State's consent would be required.
- 5.6 A further consideration is the Subsidy Control Act 2022 which prohibits subsidies by public bodies to an enterprise (even if not for profit) that offers goods or services on a market. If the financial assistance (e.g. charging a below market rent in a lease) conferred an economic advantage on the selected enterprise that might distort competition with other providers, it would be unlawful unless the advantage were below the "de minimis" level of £315,000 (measured over the length of the proposed lease) or the rigorous requirements for a lawful subsidy under the Act were satisfied.
- 5.7 Any proposed disposal by the Council of an interest in land that is public open space (i.e. land held for the purpose of public recreation such as public parks or golf courses that are open to the public and not restricted to a private membership) must be advertised in local newspapers for two successive weeks. Any objections received would have to be considered by the Committee before any decision were made on the disposal.
- 5.8 The grant of a lease to a CAT transferee would confer exclusive possession of the land to the organisation. The Council could impose covenants on the lessee e.g. to keep the property in good repair or not to use it for any purposes other than those specified. Those covenants would be enforceable but any decision by the Council to forfeit the lease for non-compliance could be overturned by the Court in its discretion if the lessee sought relief from forfeiture. The Council would in effect lose control of the land for the duration of the lease (and the lessee would have the right to a renewal of the lease on its expiry unless its right were excluded pursuant to the Landlord and Tenant Act 1954).
- 5.9 Any disposal of the land for a different use than the one formerly established by the Council would have to be compliant with any legally enforceable covenants imposed

by previous owners or current landlords and with any requirements for planning permission.

- 5.10 If the Committee were to agree in principle to a CAT transfer, Asset Management would negotiate heads of terms with the transferee. Those terms would then be referred to the Tourism Committee for approval and to Policy and Resources Committee if the value of the land exceeded £500,000) whereupon the legal documentation and processes would be undertaken. Any capital works by the Council would have to be completed prior to the grant of the lease. Pending completion of the CAT transfer, any costs incurred in maintaining the asset would have to be met by the Council.
- 5.11 If the Committee decided not to proceed with a CAT transfer, the property would either be considered for an alternative use by the Council or put on the market for sale or rent in accordance with the Council's Asset Disposal Strategy.
- 5.12 If the Director of Resources considers that a viable business plan for educational use of the Higher Bebington library is submitted, then the report proposed that the matter would be referred to the Policy and Resources Committee with a recommendation that the site be appropriated by the Council for educational purposes but subject to the prior consent of the Leverhulme Estate in accordance with the covenant imposed on the land when it was purchased.

## **6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS**

- 6.1 The Council has existing resources in place to progress the recommendations set out in this report.
- 6.2 However, as new surplus assets are added to the CAT process and as it becomes "business as usual" activity, the Council will need to address specific resource requirements in terms of staffing, project management support and any financial resources that Members may wish to make available to support the transfer of any assets.

## **7.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

- 7.1 Transferring any asset carries a risk that it may not be successful. To reduce this risk, the Council has undertaken a very thorough process in terms of assessing each business plan, the funding required and considering all other relevant factors as detailed in this report.
- 7.2 In addition, under the CAT proposals the Council would be leasing the assets to the relevant organisation and if any transfer failed the asset would return to the Council but only after possible litigation and the Court or the lessee agreeing to the forfeiture of the Lease. Consideration could then be given to the options. Most of the assets have a prospect of an alternative use, so the Council could market the sites to realise a rent or capital receipt after any court process has been completed.
- 7.3 There are individual risks associated with the different CAT options, taking each in turn these are:

## **Library Transfer**

- 7.4 Former library assets are continuing to incur holding costs to ensure the buildings remain in a safe satisfactory standard before transfer. Any delay in the transfer of libraries past the assumed date will incur additional holding costs that are not budgeted and put the council's 2023/24 financial position at risk. This would mean that alternative savings from elsewhere in the Council would need to be found next year, within an already difficult financial scenario.

## **Brackenwood Golf Course Transfer**

- 7.5 As part of the 2022/23 budget process, a £382k saving was agreed by full Council on 28 February 2022 to review the Council's golf offer. This saving included the closure of Hoylake and Brackenwood Golf Courses and included an element of displacement income into Arrowse Park Golf Club from members of the closed clubs moving there to play.
- 7.6 The rationale for the two golf course closure included within the business case was stated as 'in terms of municipal golf provision, the two remaining golf courses should provide adequate facilities for the demand in the area based on current and historic footfall. Reducing the number of facilities will also allow the authority to focus resources and much needed investment in the remaining sites to ensure long term sustainability of a municipal golf offer'.
- 7.7 If either of the two courses currently closed were to re-open under an external organisation, there is a risk that there will be an over provision in the Borough. This may mean that additional income targets agreed as part of the 2022/23 budget process would no longer be met as the assumed displacement would no longer be available. The risk to the Council if this happens would be:
- Budget overspends resulting in other savings needed to be made elsewhere.
  - Focus on resources and much needed investment in the remaining sites may no longer be available and may not support the long-term sustainability of a municipal golf offer
  - The operation of the two remaining sites at Arrowse Park and the Warrens may no longer be viable, and they may have to close.
- 7.8 If the Council cannot identify sites to meet the requirements for playing pitches and Biodiversity Net Gain requirements, then there is a significant risk that it will not be able to deliver its Local Plan Brownfield first strategy.
- 7.9 To mitigate these risks, this report recommends not transferring Brackenwood Golf Course and using this site for playing pitches and Biodiversity Net Gain. This would also ensure the sustainability of the remaining two municipal courses.

## **Other Risks**

- 7.10 A communications strategy is in place to manage any reputational risks associated with the CAT project.

- 7.11 Any post transfer risks (e.g. ensuring compliance with the lease, maintaining the property etc) will be dealt with by lease provisions and regular annual monitoring of these matters.
- 7.12 A register of all assets transferred will be kept by the Asset Management Team. The annual report to members on the Asset Strategy 2022-27 will report progress on CAT.

### **Local Plan Risk**

- 7.13 If the Council cannot identify sites to meet the requirements for playing pitches and Biodiversity Net Gain requirements, then there is a significant risk that it will not be able to deliver its Local Plan Brownfield first strategy. To mitigate this risk, this report recommends not transferring Brackenwood Golf Course and using this site for playing pitches and Biodiversity Net Gain.

## **8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION**

- 8.1 Engagement has taken place with each of the organisations as they prepared their business plans. Following the assessment process, further engagement took place with each group to provide feedback and to discuss the issues and options as set out in this report. Each organisation has been advised of the officer recommendation prior to the publication of this report. They have also been offered an opportunity to receive any further information from the lead officer should they require this after reading this report.
- 8.2 Following the decision of this Committee, the outcome will be discussed further with each organisation as appropriate.

## **9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 Wirral Council has a legal requirement to make sure its policies, and the way it carries out its work, do not discriminate against anyone. An Equality Impact Assessment is a tool to help council services identify steps they can take to ensure equality for anyone who might be affected by a particular policy, decision or activity.
- 9.2 As part of the due diligence the Council has checked that each of the organisations recommended to receive a transfer of the asset has all the relevant policies in place or will have them in place prior to any Transfer Agreement being signed.

## **10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 The assets referred to in this report are existing and vary in age and construction. In considering the business plans consideration was given to reduce carbon emissions and securing environmental improvements where this was possible, Discussions have taken place about the possibilities and benefits of carbon reduction from building retrofit and low carbon heating systems.

10.2 The Council has provided energy certificates and Energy performance Certificates as we are obliged to do when leasing a property. These detail potential interventions to reduce energy consumption.

## **11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS**

11.1 Transferring the library assets has several community benefits. A number of new organisations will be formed to run the assets and this will provide new opportunities within those communities for community wealth building. The local focus of activity within those communities will complement existing facilities and create new economic opportunities for local groups.

**REPORT AUTHOR: David Ball**

Assistant Director Special Projects and Interim Assistant Director

for Assets

email: davidball@wirral.gov.uk

## **APPENDICES**

Appendix 1 Pensby Library agreed Heads of Terms (Exempt)  
Appendix 1a Prenton Lease Agreements (Exempt)  
Appendix 2 Higher Bebington Business Case (Exempt)  
Appendix 2a Higher Bebington Cash Flow December 2022 (Exempt)  
Appendix 2b Wallasey Village three year Cash Flow Forecast (Exempt)  
Appendix 2c Irby FOIL – Cashflow Year 1 (Exempt)  
Appendix 2d IRBY FOIL – Statutory Compliance Checks Table (Exempt)  
Appendix 2e Irby FOIL Business Plan (Exempt)  
Appendix 2f Irby FOIL Capex Request (Exempt)  
Appendix 2g Irby FOIL Cashflow Year 1 Assumptions (Exempt)  
Appendix 2h Irby FOIL Irby Motors Ltd (Exempt)  
Appendix 2i Irby FOIL Library Floor Plan (Exempt)  
Appendix 2j Irby FOIL Petition (Exempt)  
Appendix 2k Irby FOIL Risk Analysis (Exempt)  
Appendix 2l Irby FOIL Statutory Compliance Checks Table (Exempt)  
Appendix 3 Life Tree CAT Stakeholder Analysis (Exempt)  
Appendix 3a Life Tree CAT Community Need and Support (Exempt)  
Appendix 3b Life Tree CAT Cash Flow (Exempt)  
Appendix 3c Life Tree CAT SWOT Analysis (Exempt)  
Appendix 3d Life Tree CAT Risk Log (Exempt)  
Appendix 3e Life Tree CAT Capital Finance (Exempt)  
Appendix 3f Life Tree CAT Cost Benefit Analysis (Exempt)  
Appendix 3g Life Tree CAT – Hoylake Library Condition List (Exempt)  
Appendix 3h Life Tree CAT Bank Account (Exempt)  
Appendix 3i Life Tree CAT Business Plan (Exempt)  
Appendix 4 Brackenwood – Love Golf MCR – CSR report (Exempt)  
Appendix 4a Brackenwood – Love Golf MCR – Resubmission Narrative (Exempt)  
Appendix 4b Community Golf – A vision for Community Benefit (Exempt)  
Appendix 4c Community Golf – Cash flow 3 Year Amended (Exempt)  
Appendix 4d Community Golf – Response to questions submission (Exempt)  
Appendix 5 Bromborough CIVIC EOI Scoring and Summary (Exempt)  
Appendix 5a CAT Expression of Interest – Bromborough Community Group (Exempt)

Appendix 5b CAT Expression of Interest – NEO (Exempt)  
Appendix 5c NEO Community Plan (Exempt)  
Appendix 6 Asset Transfer Expression of Interest - Moreton (Exempt)  
Appendix 7 Wirral CAT Evaluation Report September 2022 (Exempt)

Appendices 1 to 7 of this report are exempt from publication by virtue of paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

1. Community Asset Transfer Policy 2022

## **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

This report is being considered by the TOURISM, COMMUNITIES, CULTURE & LEISURE COMMITTEE in accordance with Section C of its Terms of Reference, “In considering options and develop proposals for neighbourhood arrangements, including capacity building, use of assets and devolving powers and services to neighbourhoods;”.

## **SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)**

<b>Council Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
Tourism Communities Culture and Tourism Committee Report on CAT (stage 1)	16 June 2022
Report on CAT	25 October 2022



## POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

22<sup>nd</sup> March 2023

<b>REPORT TITLE:</b>	<b>DISPOSAL OF THE FORMER MINISTRY OF DEFENCE LAND ON OLD HALL ROAD, BROMBOROUGH.</b>
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>DIRECTOR OF LAW AND GOVERNANCE</b>

### REPORT SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to set out a route for the disposal of the former Ministry Of Defence (MOD) land on Old Hall Road Bromborough. The land previously formed part of a portfolio of sites that were bound by an option to purchase in favour of the Wirral Growth Company but under revised arrangements the Council has full unfettered control over the site.

The site has the benefit of an outline residential planning consent which was granted by the Strategic Applications Sub-Committee on 10<sup>th</sup> November 2022. The use of the MOD land for residential purposes is a change of use from its current employment Unitary Development Plan designation and is aligned with the Council's commitment to use previously used land, where appropriate, to support its Local Plan brown field first aspirations.

The proposal will also play a key part in the Council's ambitious plans for the Borough as set out in the Wirral Plan 2021- 2026, as the redevelopment of brownfield land for new housing development will help to protect Wirral's Green Belt whilst supporting its ambition to create a prosperous inclusive economy where people can get good jobs and fulfil their potential.

As the report is regarding disposal of land which is likely to be sold for more than £500,000, the matter has been referred to the Policy and Resources Committee in line with its Terms of Reference.

The matter affects the Bromborough Ward and is a key decision.

The associated Report of the Director of Regeneration and Place and the full Minutes of the Economy, Regeneration and Housing Committee meeting on 8 March 2023 are appended to this report.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

That Policy and Resources Committee is recommended to declare that the former Ministry of Defence, Old Hall Road Bromborough site is surplus to the Council's requirements and that authority be given to the Director of Regeneration and Place to secure its disposal on the best terms achievable.

## **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

### **1.0 REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 1.1 The recommendations within this report will enable the sale of the MOD site and will facilitate its development for a residential use as per the outline planning consent that has been granted for the land, subject to any subsequent owner securing appropriate reserved matters approval.

### **2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 2.1 Other options have been considered and are included within the minutes of the Economy, Regeneration and Housing Committee and the appended report.

### **3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 3.1 The former MOD land in Bromborough was originally acquired and reclaimed by the Council in 2005 using a combination of European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and what was then English Partnership grant funding for employment purposes. It later formed part of a portfolio of sites that was to be brought forward for development by Wirral Growth Company. Over the last two years Wirral Growth Company worked up a number of different schemes for the site but given the market failure for employment development across Merseyside, whereby the cost of development is greater than its end value on completion, the projects were unviable without significant grant support. One of the key principles of Wirral Growth Company activity was that profits generated from commercial projects would be recycled back through the company to support sub-commercial projects in other parts of the Borough. Wirral Growth Company applied for outline planning consent for residential use on the site.
- 3.2 On 10<sup>th</sup> November 2022 the Strategic Applications Sub-Committee granted an outline residential planning consent for up to 248 houses on the land subject to a requirement that any development of the site be accompanied by a section 106 agreement securing amongst other things affordable housing, provision and management of open space enabling highway works and bio-diversity net gain.
- 3.3 The Committee is being asked to give support to declaring the asset surplus to allow it to be sold and re-developed for its consented use.

### **4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 In accordance with the Council's Constitution the Policy and Resources Committee is charged by full Council to provide a co-ordinating role across all other service committees and retain a 'whole-council' view of performance, budget monitoring and risk management, which includes responsibility for a decision regarding land and property including major acquisition and disposals, which includes reserved decision making concerning any purchase, sale or transfer of a value in excess of, or likely to exceed, £500,000.

## **5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 In accordance with Part 3B of Constitution (Committee Terms of Reference), the Policy and Resources Committee has two main areas of responsibility, which is to provide strategic direction to the operation of the Council, including making decisions on policies and co-ordinating spend not reserved to full Council, and to maintain a strategic overview of outcomes, performance, risk management and budgets.
- 5.2 The Policy and Resources Committee is charged by full Council to provide a co-ordinating role across all other service committees and retain a 'whole-council' view of performance, budget monitoring and risk management, which includes responsibility for a decision regarding land and property including major acquisition and disposals, which includes reserved decision making concerning any purchase, sale or transfer of a value in excess of, or likely to exceed, £500,000.
- 5.3 As part of the matter of business that was the subject of the report to Economy, Regeneration and Housing Committee falls under that responsibility reserved to the Policy and Resources Committee, the Economy, Regeneration and Housing Committee's resolution is presented as a recommendation.
- 5.4 As the decision in this matter is the subject of a recommendation from another Committee, the Policy and Resources Committee must take into account the resolution of that Committee and give due regard to the guidance and comments made by its members. The Policy and Resources Committee must not, however, consider itself bound by that Committee's recommendations or otherwise fetter its discretion; its Members must come to their own decision. In doing so, the Committee must satisfy itself that it has been provided with all relevant information or a suitable précis to enable it to comply with its duties and make a lawful decision.
- 5.5 Other legal considerations are as set out in the appended report.

## **6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS**

- 6.1 This report is for information only and does not contain any direct resource implications.

## **7.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

- 7.1 The relevant risks are covered in the original report submitted to the Committee.

## **8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION**

- 8.1 Engagement and Consultation were covered in the original report submitted to the Committee.

## **9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 The Council has a legal requirement to make sure its policies and the way it carries out its work, do not discriminate against anyone. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is a tool to help Council Services identify steps that they can take to ensure

equality for everyone who might be affected by a particular policy, decision or activity.

- 9.2 A copy of the EIA for Wirral's Economic Strategy were provided in the original report submitted to the Committee.

## **10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 Environment and climate implications were covered in the original report submitted to the Committee.

## **11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 Community Wealth implications are covered in the original report submitted to the Committee.

### **REPORT AUTHOR: Bryn Griffiths**

Senior Democratic Services Officer

### **APPENDICES:**

Appendix 1 Minute Extract

Appendix 2 Full Report

### **BACKGROUND PAPERS:**

Wirral Plan 2021-26

Wirral Unitary Development Plan

### **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

This is a referral report to be considered by the Policy and Resources Committee in accordance with Section B(iv) of its Terms of Reference:

'(b) provide a co-ordinating role across all other service committees and retain a 'whole-council' view of performance, budget monitoring and risk management which includes responsibility for a decision:

... (iv) regarding land and property including major acquisition and disposals, which includes reserved decision making concerning any purchase, sale or transfer of a value in excess of, or likely to exceed, £500,000, unless the Committee has delegated this function in relation to a specified area or business plan as Committee may determine.'

### **SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)**

<b>Council Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Cabinet sign-off to Partnership Business Plan for Wirral Growth Company</b>	April 2020
<b>Strategic Applications Sub-Committee</b>	10 November 2022



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## **MINUTE EXTRACT**

### **ECONOMY REGENERATION AND HOUSING COMMITTEE**

**8 MARCH 2023**

#### **DISPOSAL OF THE FORMER MINISTRY OF DEFENCE LAND ON OLD HALL ROAD, BROMBOROUGH.**

The Birkenhead Portfolio Regeneration Lead introduced the report of the Director of Regeneration and Place which set out a route for the disposal of the former Ministry Of Defence (MOD) land on Old Hall Road Bromborough.

It was reported that the land previously formed part of a portfolio of sites that were bound by an option to purchase in favour of the Wirral Growth Company but under revised arrangements the Council has full unfettered control over the site.

In response to Member questions on the site, assurances were given that the land was no longer considered contaminated, and that surveys to show this would be available to developers. It was also noted that the land had the benefit of outline planning consent and there was a related planning obligation. Subsequent reserved matters approval would be accompanied by further detailed on the planning obligation requirements. Example planning obligation requirements were a minimum of 20% affordable homes, enhancements to open space within the country park as well as provision of cycle ways and footpaths as part of a detailed travel plan along with new bus stops on Old Hall Road and an agreement to enhance biodiversity on site or to make an off-site contribution.

Members sought clarity and were given assurances that by allowing this site to be developed, it would reduce the pressure to build further property elsewhere such as on the green belt.

On a motion by Councillor G Davies and seconded by Councillor P Martin, it was -

#### **Resolved – That**

- 1. Policy and Resources Committee be recommended to declare that the former Ministry of Defence, Old Hall Road, Bromborough site is surplus to the Council's requirements and that authority be given to the Director of Regeneration and Place to secure its disposal on the best terms achievable; and**
- 2. Delegated authority be given to the Director of Law and Governance, in consultation with the Director of Regeneration and Place, to secure the associated legal documentation that will be required to finalise the disposal of the site.**

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## ECONOMY REGENERATION AND HOUSING COMMITTEE

8<sup>th</sup> March 2023

<b>REPORT TITLE:</b>	<b>DISPOSAL OF THE FORMER MINISTRY OF DEFENCE LAND ON OLD HALL ROAD, BROMBOROUGH.</b>
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>DIRECTOR OF REGENERATION AND PLACE</b>

### REPORT SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to set out a route for the disposal of the former Ministry Of Defence (MOD) land on Old Hall Road Bromborough. The land previously formed part of a portfolio of sites that were bound by an option to purchase in favour of the Wirral Growth Company but under revised arrangements the Council has full unfettered control over the site.

The site has the benefit of an outline residential planning consent which was granted by the Strategic Applications Sub-Committee on 10<sup>th</sup> November 2022. The use of the MOD land for residential purposes is a change of use from its current employment Unitary Development Plan designation and is aligned with the Council's commitment to use previously used land, where appropriate, to support its Local Plan brown field first aspirations.

The proposal will also play a key part in the Council's ambitious plans for the Borough as set out in the Wirral Plan 2021- 2026, as the redevelopment of brownfield land for new housing development will help to protect Wirral's Green Belt whilst supporting its ambition to create a prosperous inclusive economy where people can get good jobs and fulfil their potential.

The matter is being reported to this Committee as the potential sales receipt is anticipated to be more than the threshold for delegated decisions.

The matter affects the Bromborough Ward and is a key decision.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

That Economy, Regeneration and Housing Committee is requested to approve that:

- (1) Policy and Resources Committee be recommended to declare that the former Ministry of Defence, Old Hall Road Bromborough site is surplus to the Council's requirements and that authority be given to the Director of Regeneration and Place to secure its disposal on the best terms achievable; and

- (2) Delegated authority be given to the Director of Law and Governance, in consultation with the Director of Regeneration and Place, to secure the associated legal documentation that will be required to finalise the disposal of the site.

## **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

### **1.0 REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 1.1 The recommendations within this report will enable the sale of the MOD site and will facilitate its development for a residential use as per the outline planning consent that has been granted for the land, subject to any subsequent owner securing appropriate reserved matters approval.

### **2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 2.1 The only other option to be considered is to retain the land for employment purposes. Given the fact that the site has been regularly marketed since 2007 following its acquisition and reclamation from the Ministry of Defence without generating viable developer interest the land has been re-allocated for residential use through the emerging Local Plan to support the Council's brown field first agenda.

### **3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 3.1 The former MOD land in Bromborough was originally acquired and reclaimed by the Council in 2005 using a combination of European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and what was then English Partnership grant funding for employment purposes. It later formed part of a portfolio of sites that was to be brought forward for development by Wirral Growth Company. Over the last two years Wirral Growth Company worked up a number of different schemes for the site but given the market failure for employment development across Merseyside, whereby the cost of development is greater than its end value on completion, the projects were unviable without significant grant support. One of the key principles of Wirral Growth Company activity was that profits generated from commercial projects would be recycled back through the company to support sub-commercial projects in other parts of the Borough. Wirral Growth Company applied for outline planning consent for residential use on the site.
- 3.2 On 10<sup>th</sup> November 2022 the Strategic Applications Sub-Committee granted an outline residential planning consent for up to 248 houses on the land subject to a requirement that any development of the site be accompanied by a section 106 agreement securing amongst other things affordable housing, provision and management of open space enabling highway works and bio-diversity net gain.
- 3.3 The Committee is being asked to give support to declaring the asset surplus to allow it to be sold and re-developed for its consented use.

### **4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 If the recommendations within this report are approved a marketing and disposal strategy will be developed for the site to allow a capital receipt to be generated from its sale at the earliest convenience.
- 4.2 As the MOD land was originally acquired using a combination of ERDF and what was then English Partnership, now Homes England, funding a portion of the receipt

will need to be retained to repay clawback to both funding bodies. The exact sums are still being negotiated. A financial sum will also need to be identified from the land sale to fund the Council's Section 106 obligations that have been negotiated as part of the residential planning consent.

## **5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The disposal will require the preparation of appropriate legal documentation related to the disposal.
- 5.2 A full marketing exercise will be undertaken by the Council's to be appointed property consultants as this is deemed to be the best way of achieving full market price for the land which satisfies Section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972.
- 5.3 This report will also require a decision of Policy and Resources Committee in accordance with the Committee's Terms of Reference 1.2 (b)(iv) regarding 'land and property including major acquisition and disposals which includes reserved decision making concerning any purchase, sale or transfer of a value in excess of, or likely to exceed £500,000, unless the Committee has delegated this function in relation to a specified area or business plan as the Committee may determine.

## **6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS**

- 6.1 There are no direct resource implications arising from the disposal of this land.

## **7.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

- 7.1 The risk is that there will not be developer interest in the land. This risk is being managed by the development of a marketing and disposal strategy that will seek to publicise the development opportunity on offer to a UK audience. The Council has already received unsolicited enquiries from a range of developers expressing an interest in the site and so this risk is expected to be minimal.
- 7.2 Members agreeing to declare the MOD asset surplus will help to de-risk the delivery of the Local Plan as it will allow the site to be marketed and disposed of for residential use in a timeframe that evidences the Council's commitment to the re-use of brownfield land for new housing development thereby helping to protect the Borough's greenbelt.

## **8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION**

- 8.1 There are no consultation implications arising from the proposals within this report.

## **9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 The Council has a legal requirement to make sure its policies and the way it carries out its work, do not discriminate against anyone. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is a tool to help Council Services identify steps that they can take to ensure equality for everyone who might be affected by a particular policy, decision or activity.

- 9.2 A copy of the EIA for Wirral's Economic Strategy, which has been checked and is still valid, can be viewed at:  
<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/equality-impact-assessments/equality-impact-assessments-2021-0#overlay-context=communities-and-neighbourhoods/equality-impact-assessments/equality-impact-assessments-2021>

## **10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 The sale of the MOD land with outline planning consent for a residential use supports the Council's emerging Local Plan aspiration of targeting previously used land to support the Borough's housing needs.
- 10.2 The planning approval secured on the land includes for the provision of new public open space as well as new cycleways and footpaths connecting the site to the wider area including Eastham County Park.
- 10.3 The development will also be required to deliver a bio-diversity net gain either through on-site works or a financial contribution to deliver the provision off-site.
- 10.4 A detailed travel plan is also being developed for the scheme to help reduce residents' reliance on their cars and the Section 106 Agreement will secure a financial contribution to support local transport provision in the area.

## **11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 The delivery of housing on the former MOD site will help to revitalise Bromborough by ensuring that more wealth is invested and stays in the local area. Attracting and retaining people in the Borough will help to build the wealth of our communities and help the Council to strive to maximise social value activity by encouraging local spend to maximise the Wirral pound.
- 11.2 The travel plan that will be generated as part of the Section 106 agreement linked to the planning consent will help to promote more active travel in the area encouraging less use of the private car thereby helping to reduce local congestion and improve safety for vulnerable road users.

**REPORT AUTHOR: Ray Squire**  
(Economic Projects Manager)  
Telephone: 0151 691 8096  
Email: raysquire@wirral.gov.uk

**APPENDICES:** Appendix 1: Plan 1

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS:**

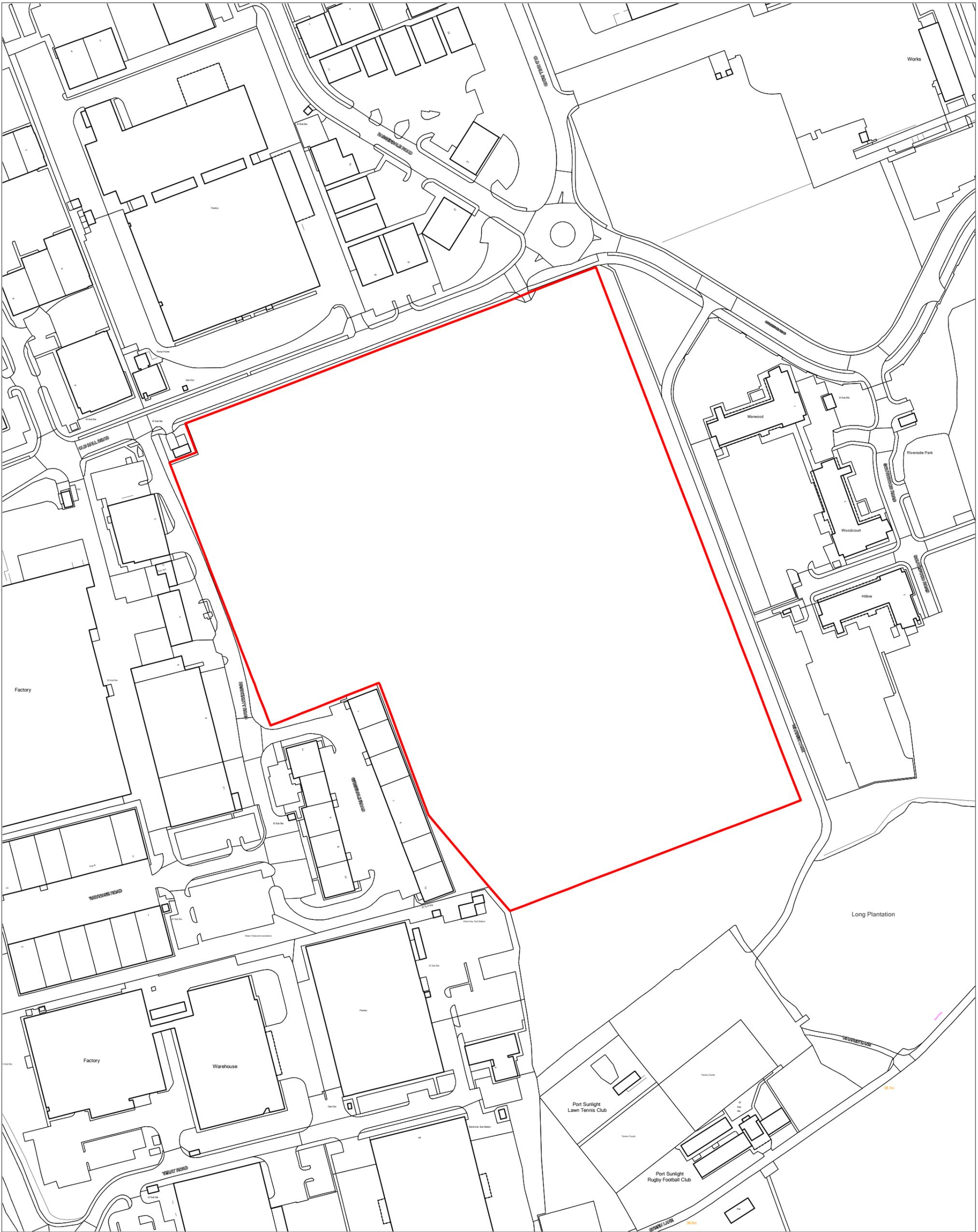
Wirral Plan 2021-26  
Wirral Unitary Development Plan

## TERMS OF REFERENCE

This report is being considered by the Economy, Regeneration and Housing Committee accordance with Section G of its Terms of Reference, 'overseeing the progress of major project (including major building, infrastructure or other projects involving the erection or significant alteration of major structures or landmarks) undertaken by the Council directly or as an enabler, funder or joint enterprise partner, including but not limited to the Wirral Growth Company LLP'.

## SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

<b>Council Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Cabinet sign-off to Partnership Business Plan for Wirral Growth Company</b>	April 2020
<b>Strategic Applications Sub-Committee</b>	10 November 2022



Former MOD Land  
 Old Hall Road  
 Bromborough  
 Wirral

# PLAN 1

Scale:  
 1:2000

Date:  
 26.01.2023



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## **POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

**Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2023**

<b>REPORT TITLE:</b>	<b>FUTURE HIGH STREET PROGRAMME – EUROPA RESIDENTIAL PHASE 1, BIRKENHEAD</b>
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>DIRECTOR OF LAW AND GOVERNANCE</b>

### **REPORT SUMMARY**

On 26 December 2020, the Council received notification of the outcome of two submissions it had made to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) Future High Street Fund (FHSF). This announcement set out that Birkenhead had received its full requested allocation of £24.6m.

This report sets out the activities undertaken to develop one element of the Birkenhead Future High Street programme, namely the Europa Residential scheme. Committee is asked to delegate the decision to appoint a delivery partner to the Director of Regeneration and Place.

Town centre regeneration is a long-standing priority for the Council and is reflected in the Wirral Council Plan 2021 – 26, through the requirement to deliver inclusive economic growth, working for a prosperous, inclusive economy where local people can get good jobs and achieve their aspirations.

This matter affects the ward of Birkenhead and Tranmere.

This is a key decision owing to the significance in terms of the effect on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards in the Borough, as well as being in excess of £500,000 in monetary value.

### **EXEMPT INFORMATION**

Appendix 2 of the referred report contains exempt information as defined in Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972. It is in the public interest to exclude the press and public under Paragraph 3 'Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding the information).'

The associated Report of the Director of Regeneration and Place and the full Minutes of the Economy, Regeneration and Housing Committee meeting on 8 March 2023 are appended to this report.

## **RECOMMENDATION/S**

Policy and Resources Committee is recommended to authorise the Director of Regeneration to:

1. progress the appointment of a delivery partner for the Europa Residential Phase 1 project further to the on-going mini-tendering process via the Homes England Housing Delivery Partner Dynamic Purchasing System in consultation with the Director of Law and Governance; and
2. pursue and accept other avenues of funding and proceed to award of contract in the event that a suitably appraised and acceptable bid exceeds the Future High Street Fund allocation for this project.

## **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

### **1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S**

- 1.1 The Future High Street Fund (FHSF) is time limited to March 2024 and will support the Council by enabling access to significant funding to support the regeneration of Birkenhead including that of private sector investment.
- 1.2 The deadline for outline scheme proposals to be submitted to the Council from shortlisted prospective delivery partners (i.e. developers) is 10<sup>th</sup> March 2023. The earliest opportunity for Committee to consider these proposals and make a decision is likely to be circa June 2023 due to the upcoming elections and associated pre-election period. This timescale is likely to seriously compromise the ability to appoint a delivery partner, secure planning consent, achieve a start on site and defray FHSF deficit funding (should this be required) by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024.

### **2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 2.1 Other options have been considered and are included within the minutes of the Economy, Regeneration and Housing Committee and the appended report.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

### **3.0 Overview of Birkenhead Future High Street Fund**

- 3.1 The Birkenhead FHSF application outlined that the high street is blighted by vacant shop frontages, with the market also hosting considerable empty units; both experiencing a reduction in footfall. There is little or no diversity in terms of office, leisure and residential uses and outside of trading hours the core is largely deserted. There is little in the way of green space and infrastructure, with low quality and dated public realm and vehicle dominated, over engineered roads which provide a poor-quality pedestrian/cycle environment and have a poor road safety record.
- 3.2 To seek to resolve these challenges, the Birkenhead Future High Street Fund application identified five objectives:
  - An improved retail core and market;
  - A diversified and mixed-use town centre;
  - A walkable and sustainably connected centre;
  - An attractor of visitors; and
  - An investable proposition.
- 3.3 Alongside Wirral Growth Company investment, the Birkenhead application set out a vision for a diversified, mixed-use town centre with an improved retail core/market. This included the demolition of the old market and a smaller more modern and sustainable new build.
- 3.4 In addition a series of highways and connectivity projects would address the over-engineered highway routes around the town centre and simplify and enhance pedestrian and cycle access at key gateway entry points to the retail core and improve road safety. These include Conway Street/Europa Boulevard, Charing

Cross/Grange Road West and Birkenhead Central Gyratory. The high street itself would also see enhanced public realm improvements on Grange Road.

- 3.5 Accelerated residential development on Europa Boulevard will provide new homes and bring added diversification in the town centre, increasing and enhancing its catchment. This will also contribute to the maturing of the local housing market making later phases of development more viable and support early brownfield residential delivery which is critical to the Council's emerging Local Plan.
- 3.6 The FHSF submission by the Council envisaged this important town centre site being developed as an exemplar residential scheme of the highest design quality with a particular focus on larger family homes. In order to guide investment and to clarify the Council's aspirations for this site the 'Birkenhead Exemplar Housing Design Feasibility Study' has been produced. The objectives of the feasibility study are;
- To provide Architectural and viability information relating to high quality family dwellings to enable the Whole Plan Viability Assessment to be completed;
  - To provide a comparative design and viability study for the Europa Phase 1 residential project in Birkenhead Town Centre;
  - To provide evidence of viability and developer appetite to deliver high quality non-standard high density family dwellings in Birkenhead;
  - To test emerging Local Plan design and parking, and open space related policies;
  - To set out innovative exemplars and design principles for delivering high-quality, high-density family dwellings in Birkenhead to inform the Birkenhead Design Guide;
- 3.7 The positive outcome from the feasibility study has triggered the next stage in the delivery process, namely the procurement of a delivery partner. To this end the Council has employed best practice in this field and has utilised the Homes England Housing Delivery Partner Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS). An initial Expression of Interest was sent to approximately 30 housing developers registered on the Dynamic Purchasing System. From this long-list a short-list of prospective developers has been drawn up and have been invited to submit their detailed proposals for this site. The deadline for submissions is 10<sup>th</sup> March 2023.
- 3.8 Shortlisted developers have been invited to prepare submissions which address the following objectives;
- To secure scheme proposals that balance high standards of design quality with the best land value offer achievable;
  - For its selected Delivery Partner to build out its consented scheme in the shortest timeframe possible (and which, in any event, cannot exceed 31 months);
  - The site developed as an exemplar residential scheme of the highest design quality with a particular focus on larger family homes;
  - Facilitate a high quality, mixed tenure development of housing;
  - Achieve a minimum of 189 residential units within the development;
  - The development must be able to demonstrate that it has adopted, and applied, the principles set out in the Birkenhead Exemplar Housing Design Study;

- The development should adhere to Building for Healthy Life standards;
- A minimum of 10% of the total number of homes developed should be affordable;
- The project must promote sustainability and embrace to Council's emerging Wirral Climate Change strategy.
- Development which is distinctive and respects the local identity;
- Promote high quality standards of planning and urban design; create a modern and attractive place to live;
- Provide a safe, secure and pleasant environment; minimising opportunities for anti-social behaviour;
- Provide housing which is accessible and adaptable by observing Barrier Free and Housing for Varying Needs principles;
- To bring forward proposals that meet the housing needs of the area (which may entail a mix of tenure types across the development);
- Be in accordance with the emerging Birkenhead Town Centre masterplan and
- Recognises aspirations, affordability and value for money.

3.9 'Preferred Developer' status for this project will be awarded on the assessment of the following criteria;

- Scheme plans and house type details;
- Design quality;
- Planning and management;
- Marketing & disposal strategy;
- Project risks and programme;
- Financial appraisal;
- Resources and expertise;
- Social value contribution;
- Price.

## **4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 The Council has been awarded £24,589,011 from the government's Future High Street Programme towards a package of projects for Birkenhead Town Centre. Of this sum, the Europa Residential Project currently has an allocation and has received upfront payments as set out in the exempt Appendix 2 of the referred report. The grant funding agreement sets out a Section 31 non-ring-fenced grant transfer with yearly up-front payments. These upfront funds will be utilised to progress detailed project design and delivery. The balance of funding will be paid once prior funding has been defrayed.

## **5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 In accordance with Part 3B of Constitution (Committee Terms of Reference), the Policy and Resources Committee has two main areas of responsibility, which is to provide strategic direction to the operation of the Council, including making decisions

on policies and co-ordinating spend not reserved to full Council, and to maintain a strategic overview of outcomes, performance, risk management and budgets.

- 5.2 The Policy and Resources Committee is charged by full Council to provide a co-ordinating role across all other service committees and retain a 'whole-council' view of performance, budget monitoring and risk management, which includes decisions regarding land and property including major acquisition and disposals, which includes reserved decision making concerning any purchase, sale or transfer of a value in excess of, or likely to exceed, £500,000, The value of the land is considered to be in excess of £500,000 and the appointment of a development partner will involve the development and onward transfer of the land in accordance with the objectives set out in paragraph 3.8 of this report.
- 5.3 As part of the matter of business that was the subject of the report to Economy, Regeneration and Housing Committee falls under that responsibility reserved to the Policy and Resources Committee, the Economy, Regeneration and Housing Committee's resolution is presented as a recommendation.
- 5.4 As the decision in this matter is the subject of a recommendation from another Committee, the Policy and Resources Committee must take into account the resolution of that Committee and give due regard to the guidance and comments made by its members. The Policy and Resources Committee must not, however, consider itself bound by that Committee's recommendations or otherwise fetter its discretion; its Members must come to their own decision. In doing so, the Committee must satisfy itself that it has been provided with all relevant information or a suitable précis to enable it to comply with its duties and make a lawful decision.
- 5.5 Other legal considerations are as set out in the appended report.

## **6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS**

- 6.1 Resource implications are covered in the original report submitted to the Committee.

## **7.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

- 7.1 The relevant risks are covered in the original report submitted to the Committee.

## **8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION**

- 8.1 Engagement and Consultation were covered in the original report submitted to the Committee.

## **9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 The Council has a legal requirement to make sure its policies and the way it carries out its work, do not discriminate against anyone. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is a tool to help Council Services identify steps that they can take to ensure equality for everyone who might be affected by a particular policy, decision or activity.
- 9.2 A copy of the EIA for Wirral's Economic Strategy were provided in the original report submitted to the Committee.

## 10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

10.1 Environment and climate implications were covered in the original report submitted to the Committee.

## 11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS

11.1 Community Wealth implications are covered in the original report submitted to the Committee.

**REPORT AUTHOR: Bryn Griffiths**  
**Senior Democratic Services Officer**  
Email: [bryngriffiths@wirral.gov.uk](mailto:bryngriffiths@wirral.gov.uk)

## APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Minute Extract

Appendix 2 Full Report

## BACKGROUND PAPERS

MHCLG Future High Streets Fund Call for Proposals, December 2018  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/future-high-streets-fund-call-for-proposals>

MHCLG Future High Streets Fund Business Case Guidance, 2019 (Copy available on request)

MHCLG Future High Street Fund Announcement, December 2020  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/830-million-funding-boost-for-high-streets>

## TERMS OF REFERENCE

This is a referral report to be considered by the Policy and Resources Committee in accordance with Section B(iv) of its Terms of Reference.

## SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Economy Regeneration and Housing Committee	8 March 2023

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## **MINUTE EXTRACT**

### **ECONOMY REGENERATION AND HOUSING COMMITTEE**

**8 MARCH 2023**

#### **FUTURE HIGH STREET FUND PROGRAMME – EUROPA RESIDENTIAL PHASE 1, BIRKENHEAD**

The Birkenhead Portfolio Regeneration Lead introduced the report of the Director of Regeneration and Place which set out the activities undertaken to develop one element of the Birkenhead Future High Street programme, namely the Europa Residential scheme.

The report noted that the Future High Street Fund (FHSF) was time limited to March 2024 and will support the Council by enabling access to significant funding to support the regeneration of Birkenhead including that of private sector investment.

On a motion by Councillor G Davies and seconded by Councillor P Martin, it was -

#### **Resolved – That**

- 1. The current Future High Street Fund Allocation for this project as set out in the exempt Appendix 2 to the report be ring fenced for this purpose.**
- 2. Policy and Resources Committee be recommended to approve that the Director of Regeneration and Place be authorised to:**
  - a. In consultation with the Director of Law and Governance, progress the appointment of a delivery partner for the Europa Residential Phase 1 project further to the ongoing mini-tendering process via the Homes England Housing Delivery Partner Dynamic Purchasing System; and**
  - b. pursue and accept other avenues of funding and proceed to award of contract in the event that a suitably appraised and acceptable bid exceeds the Future High Street Fund allocation for this project.**
- 3. The Director of Law and Governance be authorised to finalise the legal documentation arising out of the implementation of the above recommendations.**

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**ECONOMY REGENERATION & HOUSING COMMITTEE****Wednesday, 8 March 2023**

<b>REPORT TITLE:</b>	<b>FUTURE HIGH STREET PROGRAMME – EUROPA RESIDENTIAL PHASE 1, BIRKENHEAD</b>
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>DIRECTOR OF REGENERATION AND PLACE</b>

**REPORT SUMMARY**

On 26 December 2020, the Council received notification of the outcome of two submissions it had made to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) Future High Street Fund (FHSF). This announcement set out that Birkenhead had received its full requested allocation of £24.6m.

This report sets out the activities undertaken to develop one element of the Birkenhead Future High Street programme, namely the Europa Residential scheme. Committee is asked to delegate the decision to appoint a delivery partner to the Director of Regeneration and Place.

Town centre regeneration is a long-standing priority for the Council and is reflected in the Wirral Council Plan 2021 – 26, through the requirement to deliver inclusive economic growth, working for a prosperous, inclusive economy where local people can get good jobs and achieve their aspirations.

This matter affects the ward of Birkenhead and Tranmere.

This is a key decision owing to the significance in terms of the effect on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards in the Borough, as well as being in excess of £500,000 in monetary value.

**EXEMPT INFORMATION**

Appendix 2 of this report contains exempt information as defined in Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972. It is in the public interest to exclude the press and public under Paragraph 3 'Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding the information).

**RECOMMENDATION/S**

Economy Regeneration and Housing Committee is recommended to

1. Approve that the current Future High Street Fund allocation for this project as set out in the exempt Appendix 2 to this report be ring-fenced for this purpose.

2. Recommend to Policy and Resources Committee that the Director of Regeneration and Place be authorised to:
  - a. in consultation with the Director of Law and Governance, progress the appointment of a delivery partner for the Europa Residential Phase 1 project further to the on-going mini-tendering process via the Homes England Housing Delivery Partner Dynamic Purchasing System; and
  - b. pursue and accept other avenues of funding and proceed to award of contract in the event that a suitably appraised and acceptable bid exceeds the Future High Street Fund allocation for this project
3. Authorise the Director of Law and Governance to finalise the legal documentation arising out of the implementation of the above recommendations.

## **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

### **1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S**

- 1.1 The Future High Street Fund (FHSF) is time limited to March 2024 and will support the Council by enabling access to significant funding to support the regeneration of Birkenhead including that of private sector investment.
- 1.2 The deadline for outline scheme proposals to be submitted to the Council from shortlisted prospective delivery partners (i.e. developers) is 10<sup>th</sup> March 2023. The earliest opportunity for Committee to consider these proposals and make a decision is likely to be circa June 2023 due to the upcoming elections and associated pre-election period. This timescale is likely to seriously compromise the ability to appoint a delivery partner, secure planning consent, achieve a start on site and defray FHSF deficit funding (should this be required) by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024.

### **2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 2.1 The fundamental issue to be addressed is that of the time sensitivity associated with expenditure of Future High Street Funding. One option is to delay making a decision on the selection of a delivery partner until Committee has had chance to consider these proposals. This option has been discounted for two reasons.
- Firstly, shortlisted proposals are not due to be submitted until 10<sup>th</sup> March 2023 and there are no further scheduled Committee meetings until following the local elections; and
  - Secondly, the FHSF process has been lengthy and protracted, taking 2 years to date from the launch of the programme. Despite these delays the original spend profile of March 2024 remains, so it is imperative to avoid further delay and commence activity to develop and deliver the projects.

### **3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

#### **Overview of Birkenhead Future High Street Fund**

- 3.1 The Birkenhead FHSF application outlined that the high street is blighted by vacant shop frontages, with the market also hosting considerable empty units; both experiencing a reduction in footfall. There is little or no diversity in terms of office, leisure and residential uses and outside of trading hours the core is largely deserted. There is little in the way of green space and infrastructure, with low quality and dated public realm and vehicle dominated, over engineered roads which provide a poor-quality pedestrian/cycle environment and have a poor road safety record.
- 3.2 To seek to resolve these challenges, the Birkenhead Future High Street Fund application identified five objectives:
- An improved retail core and market;
  - A diversified and mixed-use town centre;
  - A walkable and sustainably connected centre;
  - An attractor of visitors; and

- An investable proposition.
- 3.3 Alongside Wirral Growth Company investment, the Birkenhead application set out a vision for a diversified, mixed-use town centre with an improved retail core/market. This included the demolition of the old market and a smaller more modern and sustainable new build.
- 3.4 In addition a series of highways and connectivity projects would address the over-engineered highway routes around the town centre and simplify and enhance pedestrian and cycle access at key gateway entry points to the retail core and improve road safety. These include Conway Street/Europa Boulevard, Charing Cross/Grange Road West and Birkenhead Central Gyratory. The high street itself would also see enhanced public realm improvements on Grange Road.
- 3.5 Accelerated residential development on Europa Boulevard will provide new homes and bring added diversification in the town centre, increasing and enhancing its catchment. This will also contribute to the maturing of the local housing market making later phases of development more viable and support early brownfield residential delivery which is critical to the Council's emerging Local Plan.
- 3.6 The FHSF submission by the Council envisaged this important town centre site being developed as an exemplar residential scheme of the highest design quality with a particular focus on larger family homes. In order to guide investment and to clarify the Council's aspirations for this site the 'Birkenhead Exemplar Housing Design Feasibility Study' has been produced. The objectives of the feasibility study are;
- To provide Architectural and viability information relating to high quality family dwellings to enable the Whole Plan Viability Assessment to be completed;
  - To provide a comparative design and viability study for the Europa Phase 1 residential project in Birkenhead Town Centre;
  - To provide evidence of viability and developer appetite to deliver high quality non-standard high density family dwellings in Birkenhead;
  - To test emerging Local Plan design and parking, and open space related policies;
  - To set out innovative exemplars and design principles for delivering high-quality, high-density family dwellings in Birkenhead to inform the Birkenhead Design Guide;
- 3.7 The positive outcome from the feasibility study has triggered the next stage in the delivery process, namely the procurement of a delivery partner. To this end the Council has employed best practice in this field and has utilised the Homes England Housing Delivery Partner Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS). An initial Expression of Interest was sent to approximately 30 housing developers registered on the Dynamic Purchasing System. From this long-list a short-list of prospective developers has been drawn up and have been invited to submit their detailed proposals for this site. The deadline for submissions is 10<sup>th</sup> March 2023.
- 3.8 Shortlisted developers have been invited to prepare submissions which address the following objectives;
- To secure scheme proposals that balance high standards of design quality with the best land value offer achievable;

- For its selected Delivery Partner to build out its consented scheme in the shortest timeframe possible (and which, in any event, cannot exceed 31 months);
- The site developed as an exemplar residential scheme of the highest design quality with a particular focus on larger family homes;
- Facilitate a high quality, mixed tenure development of housing;
- Achieve a minimum of 189 residential units within the development;
- The development must be able to demonstrate that it has adopted, and applied, the principles set out in the Birkenhead Exemplar Housing Design Study;
- The development should adhere to Building for Healthy Life standards;
- A minimum of 10% of the total number of homes developed should be affordable;
- The project must promote sustainability and embrace to Council's emerging Wirral Climate Change strategy.
- Development which is distinctive and respects the local identity;
- Promote high quality standards of planning and urban design; create a modern and attractive place to live;
- Provide a safe, secure and pleasant environment; minimising opportunities for anti-social behaviour;
- Provide housing which is accessible and adaptable by observing Barrier Free and Housing for Varying Needs principles;
- To bring forward proposals that meet the housing needs of the area (which may entail a mix of tenure types across the development);
- Be in accordance with the emerging Birkenhead Town Centre masterplan and
- Recognises aspirations, affordability and value for money.

3.9 'Preferred Developer' status for this project will be awarded on the assessment of the following criteria;

- Scheme plans and house type details;
- Design quality;
- Planning and management;
- Marketing & disposal strategy;
- Project risks and programme;
- Financial appraisal;
- Resources and expertise;
- Social value contribution;
- Price.

## 4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The Council has been awarded £24,589,011 from the government's Future High Street Programme towards a package of projects for Birkenhead Town Centre. Of this sum, the Europa Residential Project currently has an allocation and has received up front payments as set out in the exempt Appendix 2 of this report. The grant funding agreement sets out a Section 31 non-ring-fenced grant transfer with

yearly up-front payments. These upfront funds will be utilised to progress detailed project design and delivery. The balance of funding will be paid once prior funding has been defrayed.

## **5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The Director of Law and Governance ensure compliance of the Future High Street Fund projects and the onward flow of funds with the Subsidy Control Act 2022. It is not possible to provide a more detailed position statement in this regard.
- 5.2 The Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (“the 2015 Regulations”) provide at paragraph 33 (8) that a framework agreement shall be performed in the following way:
- (c) where not all the terms governing the provision of the works, services, and supplies concerned are laid down in the framework agreement, through reopening competition amongst the economic operators which are party to the framework agreement” (i.e. a mini / further competition).
- 5.3 Carrying out a mini completion will ensure compliance with the 2015 Regulations.
- 5.4 Recommendation 1 is directed ultimately for Policy and Resources Committee for a decision given that the value of the land is considered to be in excess of £500,000 and the appointment of a development partner will involve the development and onward transfer of the land in accordance with the objectives set out in paragraph 3.8 of this report.

## **6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS**

- 6.1 The Birkenhead Future High Street Fund programme will be managed by existing staff from within the Place and Investment Team, within the Regeneration and Place Directorate. This resource can be supplemented using external consultancy resources where necessary.

## **7.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

- 7.1 A programme Risk Register has been developed as well as individual Risk Registers for each of the individual projects including that of Europa Residential. These are updated throughout the programme/project lifecycle in order to assist the Council in identifying, controlling and managing risk. These are reported within the Council’s Corporate Risk Management structure. Current key risks to this project include;
- Failure to appoint a delivery partner would mean that there would be no project for Europa Residential. This would result in the loss of a minimum of 189 new residential units for this part of Birkenhead. This could also lead to the clawback of some/all of the FHSF allocation. However the Council has embarked upon a procurement exercise via Homes England’s Housing Delivery Partner Dynamic Purchasing System. A shortlist of prospective delivery partners have been invited to submit proposals for this site. Should these proposals prove to be unacceptable to the council, an alternative delivery partner procurement route is being prepared.

- Construction costs increase due to inflation. The impact of this risk materialising is that the build rate will slow and it will take longer to deliver the anticipated outcomes for the site. This could have an adverse impact on the wider town centre area. However the council will safeguard its position by scrutinising project costs in advance by experienced independent cost consultants and requiring a contingency budget identified for unforeseen events. Further to this, forecasts suggest that inflation will fall over the next few years.

- 7.2 As outlined elsewhere within this report the Future High Street Fund application process has been subject to delay and taken more than 2 years to date. However the final date for spend has not been extended and remains at March 2024. Failure to meet this deadline could leave the Council subject to clawback of the grant. To mitigate any risk of not delivering and spending within this timescale Committee is asked within this report to authorise the Director of Regeneration and Place to appoint a delivery partner (subject to acceptable scheme proposals being received).
- 7.3 This project can make a positive contribution to the wider Local Plan housing target for Central Birkenhead and in doing so help mitigate the council's risk of non-delivery.

## **8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION**

- 8.1 The Future High Street Fund programme and projects support and add value to the previous Birkenhead Town Centre consultation conducted by Wirral Growth Company in 2021.
- 8.2 Stakeholders are currently being consulted (December 2022/January 2023) on a new/refreshed masterplan for the town centre (which includes the Europa Residential site) following recent realignment of the Wirral Growth Company.
- 8.3 As the Europa Residential project is developed further, proposals will also go through engagement and consultation as part of the statutory planning process.

## **9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 Wirral Council has a legal requirement to make sure its policies, and the way it carries out its work, do not discriminate against anyone. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is a tool to help council services identify steps they can take to ensure equality for anyone who might be affected by a particular policy, decision or activity.
- 9.2 The potential impact of the Future High Streets Fund has been reviewed with regard to equality and links to the existing EIA conducted for Wirral's Growth Plan and no material amendments have been made.

<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/equality-impactassessments/equality-impact-assessments-2014-0>

- 9.3 A copy of the EIA for Wirral's Economic Strategy, which has been checked and is still valid, can be viewed at:  
<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/equality-impact-assessments/equality-impact-assessments-2021-0#overlay-context=communities-and-neighbourhoods/equality-impact-assessments/equality-impact-assessments-2021>

## **10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 The content and recommendations contained within this report are expected to reduce the emissions of greenhouse gases. This will include, as appropriate, energy efficient buildings within new developments; infrastructure improvements to reduce car dominance and create a safer environment for road users and pedestrians, and environmental and climate considerations within the Council's Social Value strategy to be used within the procurement of a delivery partner.

## **11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 Regeneration of Birkenhead is the backbone of the Birkenhead 2040 Framework and emerging Local Plan. In this context this FHSF project is part of a wider regeneration programme to deliver a prosperous, inclusive economy to benefit local residents and communities.
- 11.2 Community Wealth Building reorganises local economies to be fairer and stops wealth flowing out of communities. The principles of the FHSF to deliver a diversified and mixed-use town centre, with a wider catchment of people living and working in the area and a major transformation of Birkenhead market to make it more appealing, sustainable and fit for modern market trading conditions will support economic, social and health outcomes, the community and many small and medium enterprises.
- 11.3 Within the FHSF programme Council land and assets are being used as a base to build community wealth, revitalising the town centre and maximising opportunities for local people. Future procurement exercises will build the wealth of our local communities where we will strive to maximise social value activity through the creation of local employment/training opportunities and local labour/spend to maximise the Wirral pound.

**REPORT AUTHOR:** Ian Greaves  
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## **APPENDICES**

Appendix 1: Europa Residential, Birkenhead – Site Plan

Appendix 2- Confidential further information - Appendix 2 of this report contains exempt information as defined in Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972. It is in the public interest to exclude the press and public under Paragraph 3 'Information relating to the

financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding the information).

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

MHCLG Future High Streets Fund Call for Proposals, December 2018

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/future-high-streets-fund-call-for-proposals>

MHCLG Future High Streets Fund Business Case Guidance, 2019 (Copy available on request)

MHCLG Future High Street Fund Announcement, December 2020

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/830-million-funding-boost-for-high-streets>

## **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The report is being considered by the Economy, Regeneration and Housing Committee in accordance with section 4.2(a) and (g) of its Terms of Reference:

(a) formulation and delivery of the Council's strategic development objectives for planning, sustainability and transportation;

(g) overseeing the progress of major projects (including major building, infrastructure or other projects involving the erection or significant alteration of major permanent structures or landmarks) undertaken by the Council directly or as enabler, funder or joint enterprise partner, including but not limited to the Wirral Growth Company LLP;

## **SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)**

<b>Council Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>

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# APPENDIX 1

## FUTURE HIGH STREET PROGRAMME - EUROPA RESIDENTIAL, BIRKENHEAD PHASE 1 - SITE PLAN



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## POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2023

<b>REPORT TITLE:</b>	<b>FREEPORTS AND MARITIME INNOVATION AND GROWTH PROJECTS</b>
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>DIRECTOR OF LAW AND GOVERNANCE</b>

### REPORT SUMMARY

This report seeks approval to establish a Wirral Freeport Investment Fund. Government arrangements for Freeports allows for any growth in business rates above an agreed baseline within the designated Freeport Tax Site area to be retained by the Council as Billing Authority over a guaranteed 25-year period and re-invested to stimulate further development. The Council will be able to use this growth to fund borrowing to increase investment within the Tax Site and bring forward regeneration more quickly and promote further growth

A Business Case has been endorsed by Economy Regeneration and Housing Committee which sets out the strategic, economic, financial and commercial case for establishing the Fund, as well as the proposed governance and management arrangements required to enable operation and oversight of the Fund. Proposals for funding will be subject to a full and robust appraisal process and considered and decided on a case-by-case basis as they come forward.

The LCR Freeport represents a significant regeneration opportunity for Wirral and the wider city region. The Wirral Freeport Tax Site supports the economic and regeneration ambitions of the Wirral Plan 2021-26, Birkenhead 2040 Framework, and Wirral Economic Strategy 2021-26. The proposals contained in this report directly supports the following key theme within the Wirral Plan:

- A thriving and inclusive economy, creating jobs and opportunities for all.

Appendix 2 to this report contains a report to Economy Regeneration and Housing Committee of 8 March 2023, appendices 1 to 3 of which are exempt from publication by virtue of paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

This matter is a Key Decision and affects the wards of Seacombe and Bidston & St James.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Policy and Resources Committee is recommended to agree that:

1. the Wirral Freeport Investment Fund is established from 1 April 2023 (or as soon as regulations designate the Wirral Waters Tax Site for business rates retention purposes) and is managed and operated according to the arrangements detailed within this report and accompanying Business Case and the principles set out in the draft Retained Business Rates Strategy which forms a component of the Memorandum of Understanding.
2. growth in business rates above the baseline within the Wirral Freeport Tax Site is held to a ring-fenced reserve which would fund:
  - Investment in approved projects and the future repayment of capital borrowing for investments made by the Wirral Freeport Investment Fund;
  - The annual costs required to resource the administration and management of the Wirral Freeport Investment Fund from financial year 2023/24; and
  - Wirral Council's pro-rata annual contribution to the Liverpool City Region Freeport Management Team costs from financial year 2024/25

## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

### 1.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1.1 The LCR Freeport represents a significant regeneration opportunity for Wirral and the wider city region. The implementation of a programme of investment for the designated Wirral Freeport Tax Site through Seed Capital Funds and other policy levers available to the Council such as the proposed Wirral Freeport Investment Fund supports the economic and regeneration ambitions of the Wirral Plan 2021-26, the Birkenhead 2040 Framework and the Wirral Economic Strategy 2021-26.

### 2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 Other options have been considered and are included within the minutes of the Economy, Regeneration and Housing Committee and the appended report.

### 3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

#### Freeports

- 3.1 Freeports are specific geographic areas with streamlined planning processes, a package of tax reliefs, simplified customs procedures and duty suspensions on goods. The Government's Freeport policy has 3 core objectives to:

- Establish national hubs for global trade and investment across the UK.
- Promote regeneration and job creation; and
- Create a 'hotbed' of innovation.

- 3.2 In the Budget on 3rd March 2021, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced a range of Freeport tax incentives and reliefs for eligible businesses proposed for Freeports. Freeport areas will not have uniform rules for the entire area, but will contain tax sites, customs sites and, where applicable, joint tax and customs sites. The relevant tax and customs incentives will therefore be applicable to the relevant 'site' within a Freeport area.

#### Freeport Tax Site Incentives

- 3.3 Businesses will be able to claim reliefs from key business taxes within the bounds of a Freeport Tax Site which include:

- Stamp Duty Land Tax Relief applied up to March 2026 on land purchases within tax sites, subject to qualifying commercial activity;
- Enhanced Capital Allowances which are reliefs for qualifying new plant and machinery assets investments up to September 2026;
- Enhanced Structures and Buildings Allowance, which are reliefs for construction or renovation of non-residential structures at tax sites up to September 2026;
- Employment tax incentives and National Insurance Contribution rate relief with a 0% rate per employee who spends at least 60% of their time at the tax site, applied for up to 3 years on earnings up to £25,000. The relief is intended to be available for up to 9 years from April 2022. Part way through this period, the government intends to review this relief and decide whether it should be continued up to its end date in 2031. The relief will end no earlier than April 2026;

- Business Rate Relief comprising up to 100% relief for newly formed businesses and businesses relocating to a tax site available up to September 2026 and applied for 5 years. The cost of this relief will be fully reimbursed to the local authority by central government; and
- Local Retention of Business Rates Uplift, enabling councils to retain business rates growth within the tax site above an agreed baseline. This will be guaranteed for 25 years, giving councils the certainty needed to borrow to invest in regeneration and infrastructure that will support further growth.

### **Freeport Customs Site Incentives**

3.4 Businesses operating within Freeport customs sites will receive tariff benefits that can be applied for as follows:

- Duty deferral while goods remain on site;
- Duty inversion meaning that if finished goods exit the site at a lower tariff rate than their component parts duty will be paid at the lower rate;
- Simplified declaration requirements; and
- Customs duty exemption meaning that goods imported into the site, processed into finished goods then re-exported will not trigger VAT or duty.

### **Liverpool City Region Freeport Business Case**

3.5 Following a call for Expressions of Interest, the Chancellor of The Exchequer announced in the March 2021 Budget that the Liverpool City Region had been selected to progress to the next stage of bidding along with 7 other areas in England.

3.6 The awarding of Freeport status by Government has been subject to the submission and approval of a robust business case, which started with the Outline Business Case which was submitted to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities ('DLUHC') by the LCRCA on 10th September 2021. Following appraisal, designation of LCR Freeport status took effect from 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2022, with a final Full Business Case then submitted to DLUHC on 14<sup>th</sup> April 2022 which was endorsed by the LCRCA.

3.7 On 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2022, Government gave final approval to the Full Business Case, as announced on 10<sup>th</sup> January 2023. The LCR Freeport is now operational as the three components of an operational Freeport are now met, these are:

- an approved full business case;
- published tax site maps; and
- a published designation order for a Primary Customs Site.

3.8 The LCR Freeport business case is underpinned by a common set of values with the aim of making a key contribution to the LCR's inclusive economy ambitions by virtue of:

- Collaboration on efforts to drive social mobility, equality, and inclusion;
- Continuous assessment of core skills requirements and a proactive collaborative approach with key skills providers;
- Consideration of activities in line with Fair Employment Charter / Real Living Wage;

- Effective promotion of job opportunities to all communities via local recruitment channels; and
- Promotion of low carbon initiatives and helping deliver the Net Zero ambitions of the LCR.

3.9 The purpose behind the LCR Freeport is to support the future success of key sectors and prime businesses including:

- Logistics, including smart or advanced logistics;
- Manufacturing, including suppliers to Civil Nuclear;
- Automotive;
- Health & Life Sciences, including manufacturing, Research and Development ;
- Maritime;
- Low carbon transport;
- Food and Fast-Moving Consumer Goods;
- Low carbon energy, including hydrogen, tidal and offshore;
- Research and innovation;
- Skills and further education providers; and
- Business involved in freeport related global trade.

3.10 The Freeport offers significant inward investment and regeneration opportunities for the LCR. Government has provided an indicative Seed Capital Funding investment award of £25m to the LCR Freeport to support major projects, with an additional £300k of revenue per annum for operational management capacity for up to four years. £8m of the Seed Capital Funding will be allocated to projects in the Wirral Waters Tax Site area with the intention that this is focused on supporting regeneration of the area and in particular infrastructure works focused on projects to address significant constraints to development, the allocation of which is subject to full appraisal and approval of project business cases via an assurance process to be overseen by the LCRCA as Accountable Body and must be invested in a suitable project by March 2025. Other benefits will include a Skills and Innovation Package to enable local people to better access employment opportunities and support the development of local SME businesses to innovate and address the LCR Freeport Innovation Grand Challenges.

3.11 The three LCR Freeport tax sites are:

- Parkside which is a strategic employment site in St Helens;
- 3MG Widnes which is a Mersey Multimodal Gateway in Halton; and
- Wirral Waters which comprises a significant dockside area in Wirral.

The LCR Freeport Tax Site boundaries can be viewed here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/maps-of-liverpool-city-region-freeport-tax-sites>

3.12 Several customs sites across advanced and bio-manufacturing, and logistics locations are undergoing an approval process with Government/HMRC. The first Customs Site Operator to have gained authorisation via this process is located in St Helens and became operational on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2022. Prospective Customs Site Operators can access specialist support via the LCR Freeport Team.

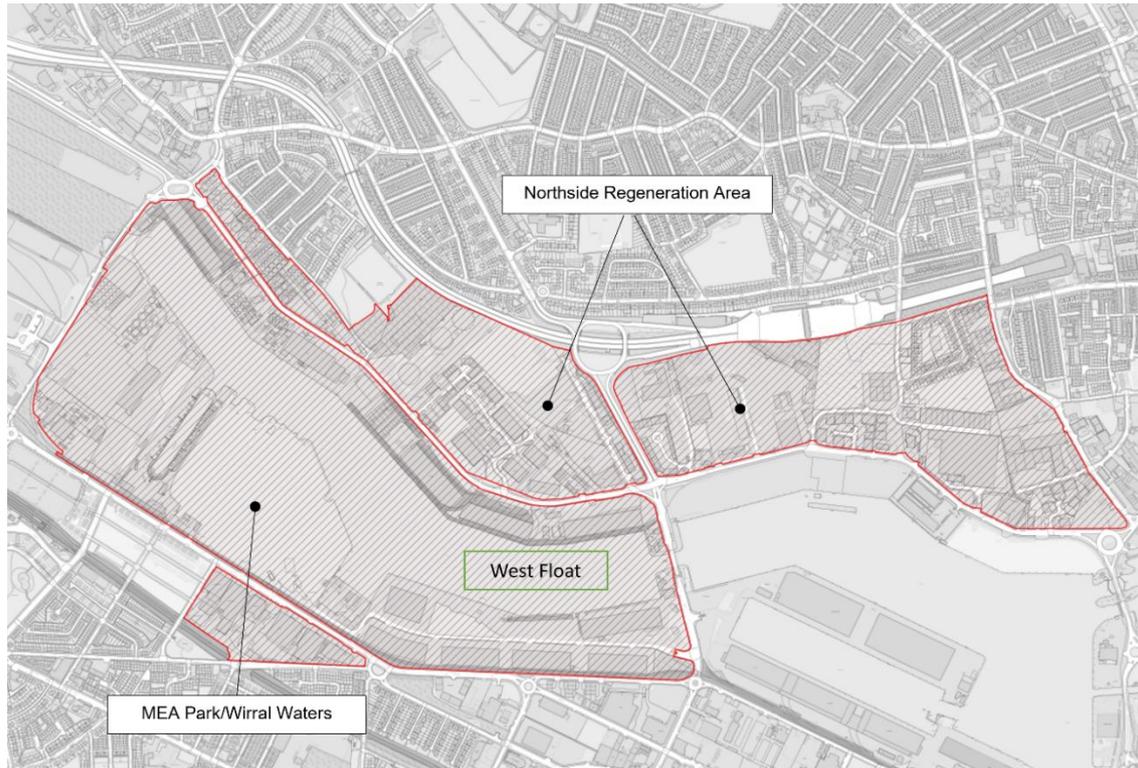
### **LCR Freeport Governance**

- 3.13 Full details of the governance arrangements of the Liverpool City Region Freeport are set out in paragraphs 3.13 to 3.17 of the appended report to Economy, Regeneration and Housing Committee.

### **Opportunities for Investment: Wirral Freeport Investment Fund**

- 3.14 The designation of a Freeport Tax Site in Wirral presents an opportunity to support inward investment in Wirral in line with the key sectoral and spatial priorities of the Birkenhead 2040 Framework. In addition, Government policy and legislation for Freeport Zones in England provides for any uplift in business rates within the Tax Site area to be invested through borrowings based on expected growth in business rates in the Site, which the Council will fully retain over a guaranteed 25-year life of the Freeport with the aim of stimulating further development and growth. This uplift is calculated against a government approved baseline position set as at March 2022.
- 3.15 An Investment Fund is one way of funding new growth in the Freeport, alongside other Government backed incentives to developers and investors. The Government introduced tax increment financing schemes, founded on the Business Rates Retention Scheme introduced in 2013-14. Under these schemes, local authorities may borrow for infrastructure projects, against the future growth in business rate receipts which will result from the projects. This provides the Council with the ability to invest to support the development of commercial premises and infrastructure within the Freeport Tax Site to both grow the scale of the investment fund (more business rates equals more funds to invest) and deliver investment in support of regeneration, innovation, jobs and opportunities for local people.
- 3.16 In summer 2022, Wirral Council commissioned Amion Consulting to support officers in the preparation of a detailed business case for establishing a Wirral Freeport Investment Fund which is attached to the appended report to Economy Regeneration and Housing Committee as Appendix 1. Appendix 1 of the referred report is exempt from publication by virtue of paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972. A working group of officers from Economic Growth, Regeneration Delivery, Finance and Treasury Management has inputted into its development which sets out the strategic, economic, financial and commercial case for establishing the Fund, as well as the proposed governance and management arrangements required to enable effective operation and oversight of the Fund.
- 3.17 The Wirral Freeport Tax Site covers approximately 170 hectares encompassing the Northside Regeneration Area (area north of Dock Road) and the western areas of the Birkenhead Dock Estate centred around West Float, including Peel Land and Property's proposed Maritime, Energy and Automotive Park (MEA Park) as shown in by the hatched areas in Figure 1. (The illustration below shows a red line plan of the Northside Regeneration Area and West Float at Wirral Waters. It may not be suitable to view for people with disabilities, users of assistive technology or mobile phone devices. Please contact Stephen Chapman – [stephenchapman@wirral.gov.uk](mailto:stephenchapman@wirral.gov.uk) if you would like this document in an accessible format)

Figure 1:



3.18 The Freeport Tax Site in Wirral includes undeveloped land which overlaps with, and already forms part of, the existing Wirral Waters Enterprise Zone area, which has been supported by an established Council-led tax instrument financing instrument named the Wirral Waters Investment Fund (WWIF), which is operable up to 1st April 2037. The design of the proposed new fund draws on the Council's 10-year experience of managing the WWIF and could support a range of activities including:

- Upgrading infrastructure within the Freeport Tax Site;
- Addressing poor site conditions arising from former dock and industrial uses;
- Viability gap support for new commercial premises that attracts inward investment; and
- Measures that promote sustainability and enhanced community wealth.

3.19 It is intended that the WWIF will be superseded by the Freeport Investment Fund which once established will provide a single financial instrument for new investments. Residual funding commitments made through WWIF to date will be incorporated into the financial model for the new Freeport Investment Fund. In practice, this means new investment in projects through WWIF will be discontinued, whilst repayment of borrowing commitments made through WWIF will continue as profiled over the remaining life of the Enterprise Zone to 2037. This approach will enable effective financial management of the respective retained rates accounts through a single framework which can inform future investment decisions based on business rates monitoring data and regularly updated development pipeline forecasts.

- 3.20 The value of the investment fund available depends on the scale of new development occurring on the Wirral Tax Site. Through detailed modelling undertaken, it is estimated in a central case scenario that development could support a Wirral Freeport Investment Fund of an indicative £15m to invest over the next 5 years, supported by predicted future business rate growth. This could lead to the creation of nearly 800 new jobs and once developed, this level of activity would contribute nearly £50m of economic value to Wirral annually. It would also grow the business rates income to Wirral Council by about £1.2m per annum.
- 3.21 It is important to note that proposals to the Freeport Investment Fund will be considered for funding on a case-by-case basis as they come forward and will be subject to a full and robust appraisal process. Projects satisfying the appraisal process will, dependent on their value, be recommended to this Committee for approval of funding or otherwise approved in accordance with the existing scheme of delegation.
- 3.22 The Fund will operate on an Expression of Interest, Business Case and Funding Agreement basis. This will enable the Council to determine the broad alignment of proposals with Freeport and wider policy objectives, confirm the scale of the allocation and potential funding strategy and establish parameters for any detailed application. At Business Case Stage the proposer will be required to demonstrate compliance with HM Treasury Green Book principles, including the proportionality principle - that larger projects are required to provide a greater level of detail and evidence to support their project proposal.
- 3.23 Applications/business cases received to the Freeport Investment Fund will be subject to a proportionate application fee payable to the Council. This will contribute to the costs of securing independent expertise in relation to technical elements of the bid appraisal process. This will relate to areas that may lie outside of the specialism of Council officers or where further due diligence needs to be performed to manage the Council's risk exposure.
- 3.24 Exempt Appendix 1 of the appended report to Economy, Regeneration and Housing Committee sets out the detailed business case for establishing the Wirral Freeport Investment Fund. In summary, there is a clear rationale for the Council to create a fund to promote investment and economic growth within the Freeport to:
- Support the strategic objectives of Wirral Council, with Wirral Waters and Northside representing key economic areas and catalysts for the wider regeneration of Birkenhead and the Leftbank;
  - Ensure that opportunities to embed the key principles of sustainability and community wealth building within new development are maximised in the delivery of new commercial activity;
  - Address specific barriers acting as a constraint to the development of sites at Wirral Waters and Northside, associated with the dockside location and legacy of former industrial uses, ensuring that this zone is able to fulfil economic requirements in accordance with emerging Local Plan policies;

- Complement financial levers established through the Freeport designation to secure inward investment and growth opportunities, particularly within target sectors linked to maritime, energy, advanced manufacturing and logistics; and
- Promote investment in support of wider regeneration, creating opportunities for employment and training adjacent to some of the most deprived communities within England.

#### **4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 In accordance with the Council's Constitution the Policy and Resources Committee is charged by full Council to provide a co-ordinating role across all other service committees and retain a "whole-council' view of performance, budget monitoring and risk management and retain a performance, budget monitoring and risk management, which includes responsibility for a decision.... that has a major impact on ... the Council as a whole."
- 4.2 Other financial considerations are as set out in the appended report.

#### **5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 In accordance with Part 3B of Constitution (Committee Terms of Reference), the Policy and Resources Committee has two main areas of responsibility, which is to provide strategic direction to the operation of the Council, including making decisions on policies and co-ordinating spend not reserved to full Council, and to maintain a strategic overview of outcomes, performance, risk management and budgets.
- 5.2 The Policy and Resources Committee is charged by full Council to provide a co-ordinating role across all other service committees and retain a 'whole-council' view of performance, budget monitoring and risk management and retain a performance, budget monitoring and risk management, which includes responsibility for a decision.... that has a major impact on ... the Council as a whole. The Freeport Investment Fund will be managed by Wirral Council in partnership with the LCR Freeport as described in the Wirral Freeport Investment Fund Business Case attached as Appendix 1 to the referred report.
- 5.3 As part of the matter of business that was the subject of the report to Economy, Regeneration and Housing Committee falls under that responsibility reserved to the Policy and Resources Committee, the relevant part of the Economy, Regeneration and Housing Committee's resolution is presented as a recommendation.
- 5.4 As the decision in this matter is the subject of a recommendation from another Committee, the Policy and Resources Committee must take into account the resolution of that Committee and give due regard to the guidance and comments made by its members. The Policy and Resources Committee must not, however, consider itself bound by that Committee's recommendations or otherwise fetter its discretion. Its Members must come to their own decision. In doing so, the Committee must satisfy itself that it has been provided with all relevant information or a suitable précis to enable it to comply with its duties and make a lawful decision.

5.5 Other legal considerations are as set out in the appended report to Economy, Regeneration and Housing Committee.

## **6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS**

6.1 The relevant resource implications are covered in the appended report to Economy, Regeneration and Housing Committee.

## **7.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

7.1 The relevant risks are covered in the appended report to Economy, Regeneration and Housing Committee.

## **8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION**

8.1 Engagement and Consultation were covered in the appended report to Economy, Regeneration and Housing Committee.

## **9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 The Council has a legal requirement to make sure its policies and the way it carries out its work, do not discriminate against anyone. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is a tool to help Council Services identify steps that they can take to ensure equality for everyone who might be affected by a particular policy, decision or activity.

9.2 A copy of the EIA for Wirral's Economic Strategy were provided in the appended report to Economy, Regeneration and Housing Committee.

## **10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 Environment and climate implications were covered in the appended report to Economy, Regeneration and Housing Committee.

## **11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS**

11.1 Community Wealth implications are covered in the appended report to Economy, Regeneration and Housing Committee.

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## **APPENDICES**

Appendix 1 Minute Extract

Appendix 2 Full Report to Economy Regeneration and Housing Committee of 8 March 2023 (appendices 1 to 3 of that report are exempt from publication on the grounds that they

involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined by paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A (as amended) to that Act.).

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

### **LCR Freeport Full Business Case**

[LCR Combined Authority, 29th April 2022](#), Agenda Item 12, Page 277 of reports pack.

### **LCR Freeport Outline Business Case**

[LCR Combined Authority, 24th September 2021](#) Agenda Item 9 - p.235 of reports pack.

[Birkenhead 2040 Framework](#)

[Wirral Economic Strategy 2021- 2026](#)

## **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

This is a referral report to be considered by the Policy and Resources Committee in accordance with Section 1(2)(b)(i) of its Terms of Reference.

## **SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)**

<b>Council Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
Economy Regeneration and Housing Committee – Freeports and Maritime Innovation and Growth Projects	08 March 2023
Policy and Resources Committee - Capital Programme 2023-28	15 February 2023
Policy and Resources Committee - Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2023/24 Appendix 6 Discretionary Rates Policy 2023-2024, item 6c	15 February 2023
Officer Decision Notice - Freeports & Maritime Innovation and Growth Projects	13 April 2022
Policy and Resources Committee – Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2022/23 Appendix 10 Discretionary Rate Relief Policy, item 129	15 February 2022

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## **MINUTE EXTRACT**

### **ECONOMY REGENERATION AND HOUSING COMMITTEE**

**8 MARCH 2023**

#### **FREEPORTS AND MARITIME INNOVATION AND GROWTH PROJECTS**

The Head of Economic Growth presented the report of the Director of Regeneration and Place. The report provided Members with an update regarding the status of Liverpool City Region Freeport ('LCR Freeport') and sought authorisation for the Director of Law and Governance to negotiate, finalise and sign the Memorandum of Understanding ('MoU') between the Council, The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA), Liverpool City Region Freeport Governing Body, Halton Borough Council, and St Helens Borough Council. The MoU sets out the terms, principles and practices that will apply to the working relationship between the parties in respect of the delivery and administration of the Liverpool City Region Freeport.

The report also sought approval to establish a Wirral Freeport Investment Fund. The arrangements for Freeports allow for any growth in business rates above an agreed baseline within the designated Freeport Tax Site area to be retained by the Council as Billing Authority over a guaranteed 25-year period and re-invested to stimulate further development. Proposals for funding would be subject to a full and robust appraisal process and considered and decided on a case-by-case basis.

Members queried the finances of the project and the way that funds were allocated. They were provided with a breakdown of Seed Capital funding for the Liverpool City Region and Wirral's share of this.

In response to concerns raised by Members on the possible impacts to Wirral business that fall outside of the Freeport zone, The Head of Economic Growth assured them that the project was trying to attract businesses to invest in vacant property and that any business that was looking to expand would be eligible if they wished to move into the Freeport site.

A further discussion was had regarding assurances that businesses moving into the site would share Wirral's values and targets such as the net-zero target, as well as offering support to the Metro Mayor, employment charter and investment strategy. Members were told that there were strong gateway policies, and that businesses would have to demonstrate that they meet the criteria for which would include fair employment, net zero targets for the Liverpool City Region as well as the equivalent policies for each local site.

Councillor J Robinson noted that she had a question that related to one of the exempt appendices and therefore on a motion by Councillor P Martin and seconded by Councillor J Robinson, it was –

**Resolved – That, under section 100 (A) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item of business on the grounds it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined by paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A (as amended) to the Act. The Public Interest test had been applied and favoured exclusion.**

On a motion by Councillor D Mitchell and seconded by Councillor P Martin, it was -

**Resolved (10:1) – That**

- 1. Authority be delegated to the Director of Law and Governance (in consultation with the Director of Regeneration and Place, and the Director of Finance):**
  - (a) to negotiate, finalise and sign the Memorandum of Understanding (substantially in accordance with the draft set out in the exempt Appendix 2 to the report) relating to the terms, principles and practices that will apply to the working relationship between the parties regarding the delivery and administration of the Liverpool City Region Freeport.**
  - (b) To negotiate and complete any associated legal documentation which aligns with the principles set out in the proposed Memorandum of Understanding.**
- 2. The Business Case for establishing the Wirral Freeport Investment Fund be endorsed.**
- 3. Policy and Resources Committee be recommended to approve that :**
  - (a) the Wirral Freeport Investment Fund is established from 1 April 2023 (or as soon as regulations designate the Wirral Waters Tax Site for business rates retention purposes) and is managed and operated according to the arrangements detailed within this report and accompanying Business Case and the principles set out in the draft Retained Business Rates Strategy which forms a component of the Memorandum of Understanding.**
  - (b) growth in business rates above the baseline within the Wirral Freeport Tax Site is held to a ring-fenced reserve which would fund:**

- **investment in approved projects and the future repayment of capital borrowing for investments made by the Wirral Freeport Investment Fund;**
- **the annual costs required to resource the administration and management of the Wirral Freeport Investment Fund from financial year 2023/24;**
- **the Council's pro-rata annual contribution to the Liverpool City Region (LCR) Freeport Management Team costs from financial year 2024/25;**

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**ECONOMY REGENERATION & HOUSING COMMITTEE****Wednesday, 8 March 2023**

<b>REPORT TITLE:</b>	<b>FREEPORTS AND MARITIME INNOVATION AND GROWTH PROJECTS</b>
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>DIRECTOR OF REGENERATION AND PLACE</b>

**REPORT SUMMARY**

This report provides Members with an update regarding the status of Liverpool City Region Freeport ('LCR Freeport') and seeks authorisation for the Director of Law and Governance to negotiate, finalise and sign the Memorandum of Understanding ('MoU') between Wirral Council, The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA), Liverpool City Region Freeport Governing Body, Halton Borough Council, and St Helens Borough Council. The MoU sets out the terms, principles and practices that will apply to the working relationship between the parties in respect of the delivery and administration of the Liverpool City Region Freeport.

This report also seeks approval to establish a Wirral Freeport Investment Fund. Government arrangements for Freeports allows for any growth in business rates above an agreed baseline within the designated Freeport Tax Site area to be retained by the Council as Billing Authority over a guaranteed 25-year period and re-invested to stimulate further development. The Council will be able to use this growth to fund borrowing to increase investment within the Tax Site and bring forward regeneration more quickly and promote further growth. A Business Case has been produced which sets out the strategic, economic, financial and commercial case for establishing the Fund, as well as the proposed governance and management arrangements required to enable operation and oversight of the Fund. Proposals for funding will be subject to a full and robust appraisal process and considered and decided on a case-by-case basis as they come forward.

The LCR Freeport represents a significant regeneration opportunity for Wirral and the wider city region. The Wirral Freeport Tax Site supports the economic and regeneration ambitions of the Wirral Plan 2021-26, Birkenhead 2040 Framework, and Wirral Economic Strategy 2021-26. The proposals contained in this report directly supports the following key theme within the Wirral Plan:

- A thriving and inclusive economy, creating jobs and opportunities for all.

This matter is a Key Decision and affects the wards of Seacombe and Bidston & St James.

Appendices 1 to 3 of this report are exempt from publication by virtue of paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Economy, Regeneration and Housing Committee is requested to:

- 1 Delegate authority to the Director of Law and Governance (in consultation with the Director of Regeneration and Place, and the Director of Finance):
  - (a) to negotiate, finalise and sign the Memorandum of Understanding (substantially in accordance with the draft set out in the exempt Appendix 2 to this report) relating to the terms, principles and practices that will apply to the working relationship between the parties regarding the delivery and administration of the Liverpool City Region Freeport.
  - (b) To negotiate and complete any associated legal documentation which aligns with the principles set out in the proposed Memorandum of Understanding.
- 2 Endorse the Business Case for establishing the Wirral Freeport Investment Fund.
- 3 Recommend to Policy and Resources Committee:
  - (a) that the Wirral Freeport Investment Fund is established from 1 April 2023 (or as soon as regulations designate the Wirral Waters Tax Site for business rates retention purposes) and is managed and operated according to the arrangements detailed within this report and accompanying Business Case and the principles set out in the draft Retained Business Rates Strategy which forms a component of the Memorandum of Understanding.
  - (b) that growth in business rates above the baseline within the Wirral Freeport Tax Site is held to a ring-fenced reserve which would fund:
    - investment in approved projects and the future repayment of capital borrowing for investments made by the Wirral Freeport Investment Fund;
    - the annual costs required to resource the administration and management of the Wirral Freeport Investment Fund from financial year 2023/24;
    - the Council's pro-rata annual contribution to the Liverpool City Region (LCR) Freeport Management Team costs from financial year 2024/25;

## **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

### **1.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION/S**

- 1.1 The LCR Freeport represents a significant regeneration opportunity for Wirral and the wider city region. The implementation of a programme of investment for the designated Wirral Freeport Tax Site through Seed Capital Funds and other policy levers available to the Council such as the proposed Wirral Freeport Investment Fund supports the economic and regeneration ambitions of the Wirral Plan 2021-26, the Birkenhead 2040 Framework and the Wirral Economic Strategy 2021-26.
- 1.2 The Memorandum of Understanding ('MoU') will formalise the key commitments made by all signatories, including Wirral Council, to agree to work together and co-operate in good faith to deliver and realise the strategic objectives of the Freeport and honour their obligations as articulated in the approved LCR Freeport Full Business Case and the MoU.

### **2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 2.1 Members could decide not to agree to the MoU. This is not considered to be appropriate as it could significantly jeopardise the intended delivery of the LCR Freeport in accordance with the Full Business Case, which has recently been approved by Government. It could also put at risk the receipt of £25m Seed Capital grant allocated to the LCR Freeport by Government, of which £8m is notionally allocated to the Wirral Waters Tax Site area for potential investment.
- 2.2 Members could decide not to endorse the Business Case to establish a Wirral Freeport Investment Fund, however this would present a significant opportunity cost to the Council in not utilising the tax increment finance instrument that is available for a guaranteed 25 years to accelerate investment, growth and job creation and other benefits. This position would also be contrary to the LCR Freeport Full Business Case, as well as the ambitions of the Wirral Economic Strategy and Birkenhead 2040 Framework. The Council currently retains 100% of its business rates growth under the pilot LCR Business Rates Retention Scheme. The pilot is however a temporary arrangement renewed on an annual basis and unlike the proposed Freeport proposal provides no guarantee for future retention nor incentives for businesses.

### **3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

#### **Freeports**

- 3.1 Freeports are specific geographic areas with streamlined planning processes, a package of tax reliefs, simplified customs procedures and duty suspensions on goods. The Government's Freeport policy has 3 core objectives to:
- Establish national hubs for global trade and investment across the UK.
  - Promote regeneration and job creation; and
  - Create a 'hotbed' of innovation.
- 3.2 In the Budget on 3rd March 2021, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced a range of Freeport tax incentives and reliefs for eligible businesses proposed for Freeports. Freeport areas will not have uniform rules for the entire area, but will

contain tax sites, customs sites and, where applicable, joint tax and customs sites. The relevant tax and customs incentives will therefore be applicable to the relevant 'site' within a Freeport area.

### **Freeport Tax Site Incentives**

3.3 Businesses will be able to claim reliefs from key business taxes within the bounds of a Freeport Tax Site which include:

- Stamp Duty Land Tax (SDLT) Relief applied up to March 2026 on land purchases within tax sites, subject to qualifying commercial activity;
- Enhanced Capital Allowances which are reliefs for qualifying new plant and machinery assets investments up to September 2026;
- Enhanced Structures and Buildings Allowance, which are reliefs for construction or renovation of non-residential structures at tax sites up to September 2026;
- Employment tax incentives and National Insurance Contribution rate relief with a 0% rate per employee who spends at least 60% of their time at the tax site, applied for up to 3 years on earnings up to £25,000. The relief is intended to be available for up to 9 years from April 2022. Part way through this period, the government intends to review this relief and decide whether it should be continued up to its end date in 2031. The relief will end no earlier than April 2026;
- Business Rate Relief comprising up to 100% relief for newly formed businesses and businesses relocating to a tax site available up to September 2026 and applied for 5 years. The cost of this relief will be fully reimbursed to the local authority by central government;
- Local Retention of Business Rates Uplift, enabling councils to retain business rates growth within the tax site above an agreed baseline. This will be guaranteed for 25 years, giving councils the certainty needed to borrow to invest in regeneration and infrastructure that will support further growth.

### **Freeport Customs Site Incentives**

3.4 Businesses operating within Freeport customs sites will receive tariff benefits that can be applied for as follows:

- Duty deferral while goods remain on site;
- Duty inversion meaning that if finished goods exit the site at a lower tariff rate than their component parts duty will be paid at the lower rate;
- Simplified declaration requirements; and
- Customs duty exemption meaning that goods imported into the site, processed into finished goods then re-exported will not trigger VAT or duty.

### **Liverpool City Region Freeport Business Case**

3.5 Following a call for Expressions of Interest, the Chancellor of The Exchequer announced in the March 2021 Budget that the Liverpool City Region had been selected to progress to the next stage of bidding along with 7 other areas in England.

- 3.6 The awarding of Freeport status by Government has been subject to the submission and approval of a robust business case, which started with the Outline Business Case which was submitted to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities ('DLUHC') by the LCRCA on 10th September 2021. Following appraisal, designation of LCR Freeport status took effect from 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2022, with a final Full Business Case then submitted to DLUHC on 14<sup>th</sup> April 2022 which was endorsed by the LCRCA.
- 3.7 On 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2022, Government gave final approval to the Full Business Case, as announced on 10<sup>th</sup> January 2023. The LCR Freeport is now operational as the three components of an operational Freeport are now met, these are:
- an approved full business case;
  - published tax site maps; and
  - a published designation order for a Primary Customs Site.
- 3.8 The LCR Freeport business case is underpinned by a common set of values with the aim of making a key contribution to the LCR's inclusive economy ambitions by virtue of:
- Collaboration on efforts to drive social mobility, equality, and inclusion;
  - Continuous assessment of core skills requirements and a proactive collaborative approach with key skills providers;
  - Consideration of activities in line with Fair Employment Charter / Real Living Wage;
  - Effective promotion of job opportunities to all communities via local recruitment channels; and
  - Promotion of low carbon initiatives and helping deliver the Net Zero ambitions of the LCR.
- 3.9 The purpose behind the LCR Freeport is to support the future success of key sectors and prime businesses including:
- Logistics, including smart or advanced logistics;
  - Manufacturing, including suppliers to Civil Nuclear;
  - Automotive;
  - Health & Life Sciences, including manufacturing, Research and Development ;
  - Maritime;
  - Low carbon transport;
  - Food and Fast-Moving Consumer Goods;
  - Low carbon energy, including hydrogen, tidal and offshore;
  - Research and innovation;
  - Skills and further education providers; and
  - Business involved in freeport related global trade.
- 3.10 The Freeport offers significant inward investment and regeneration opportunities for the LCR. Government has provided an indicative Seed Capital Funding investment award of £25m to the LCR Freeport to support major projects, with an additional £300k of revenue per annum for operational management capacity for up to four years. £8m of the Seed Capital Funding will be allocated to projects in the Wirral Waters Tax Site area with the intention that this is focused on supporting regeneration of the area and in particular infrastructure works focused on projects to

address significant constraints to development, the allocation of which is subject to full appraisal and approval of project business cases via an assurance process to be overseen by the LCRCA as Accountable Body and must be invested in a suitable project by March 2025. Other benefits will include a Skills and Innovation Package to enable local people to better access employment opportunities and support the development of local SME businesses to innovate and address the LCR Freeport Innovation Grand Challenges.

3.11 The three LCR Freeport tax sites are:

- Parkside which is a strategic employment site in St Helens;
- 3MG Widnes which is a Mersey Multimodal Gateway in Halton; and
- Wirral Waters which comprises a significant dockside area in Wirral.

The LCR Freeport Tax Site boundaries can be viewed here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/maps-of-liverpool-city-region-freeport-tax-sites>

3.12 Several customs sites across advanced and bio-manufacturing, and logistics locations are undergoing an approval process with Government/HMRC. The first Customs Site Operator to have gained authorisation via this process is located in St Helens and became operational on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2022. Prospective Customs Site Operators can access specialist support via the LCR Freeport Team.

### **LCR Freeport Governance**

3.13 Liverpool City Region Combined Authority is the Accountable Body for Liverpool City Region Freeport and is accountable to DLUHC for the use of public money including the Seed Capital and Capacity Funding grants, and for ensuring the good functioning of the Freeport through a governing body which is the newly established LCR Freeport Management Board. The role of the LCR Freeport Management Board is to be accountable for ensuring the achievement of the Freeport's strategic objectives and effective delivery in line with the expectations of the Full Business Case agreed by government. Through its Chair, the Board will be responsible to the Combined Authority. Operational matters will be overseen by a newly established LCR Freeport Management Team. This team will be funded directly by Government for the first 3 to 4 years with a revenue grant of £300K per annum. Beyond this funding it is proposed that a proportion of business rate uplift achieved by the Tax Site Authorities related to Freeport development is collected with a view to funding the Freeport Management Team.

3.14 All businesses within the Freeport boundary will be entitled to the HMRC Benefits as they apply. An LCR Freeport Gateway Policy has been developed to mitigate displacement issues and ensure the flexible elements of HM Treasury benefits effectively target Freeport policy ambitions. This policy relates to the application of business rates relief and tax increment finance awards. The Gateway Policy sets out the LCR Freeport Objectives as:

- To establish a hub for global trade and investment in Liverpool City Region;
- To deliver local regeneration, levelling up and inclusive quality jobs to communities of need;

- To create a hotbed of innovation; and
  - Deliver the LCR Freeport Net Zero Ambition.
- 3.15 The Freeport Board will manage the operation of the Gateway Policy and award qualifying status recommendations for business applications to Tax Site Authorities. In summary the Gateway Policy will require a business to fulfil the sectoral and core values of the LCR Freeport as laid out in Section 3.8 and 3.9 of this report. In addition, to mitigate displacement effects, if the proposal represents a relocation, the prospective developer/occupier will need to clearly demonstrate how the new operation represents incremental investment and employment with proof that no appropriate expansion space is available at the previous site.
- 3.16 The relevant local council and landowner/developers will be notified by the Freeport Management Board of the decision relating to the occupier proposed for the Tax Site. If approved as a qualifying business by the Freeport Management Board, the relevant local council then has the authority to determine if the occupier should receive 100% Business Rates Relief for 5 years in addition to the other tax and national insurance reliefs and capital allowances that can be applied for direct from HMRC.
- 3.17 In the event the occupier is not approved as a qualifying business, the landowner developer or occupier will have the right to appeal to the Freeport Appeals Panel administered by the LCR Combined Authority.

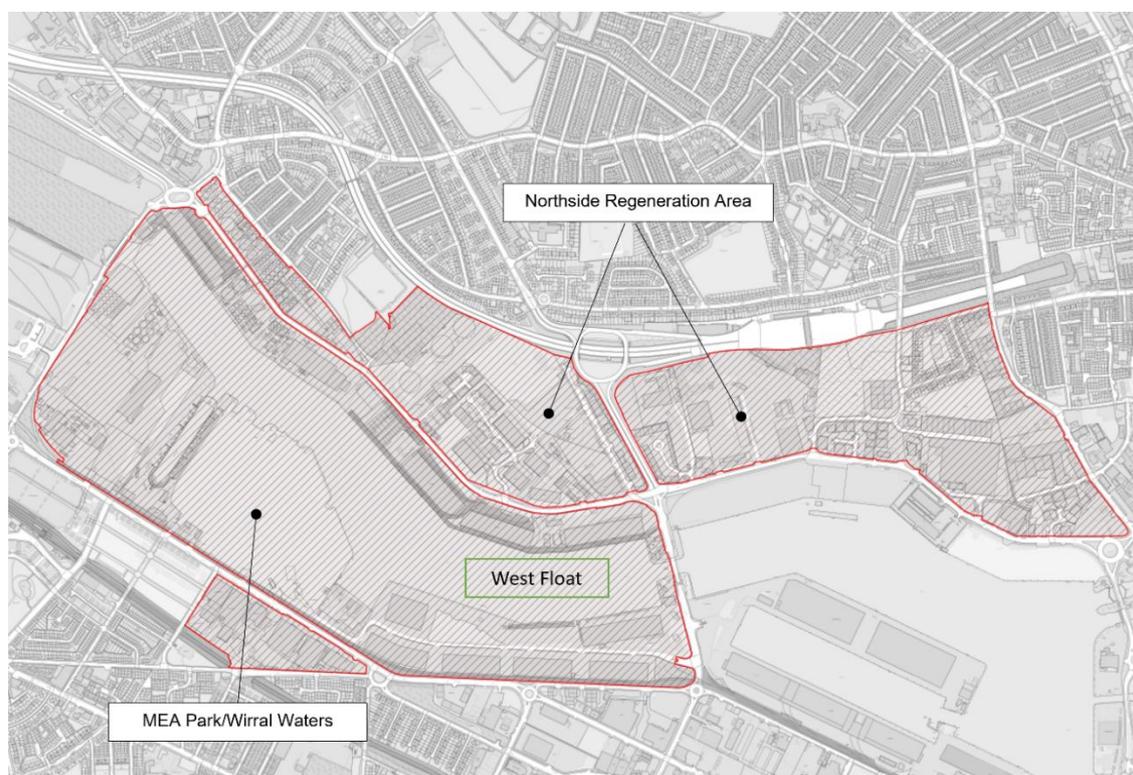
### **Opportunities for Investment: Wirral Freeport Investment Fund**

- 3.18 The designation of a Freeport Tax Site in Wirral presents an opportunity to support inward investment in Wirral in line with the key sectoral and spatial priorities of the Birkenhead 2040 Framework. In addition, Government policy and legislation for Freeport Zones in England provides for any uplift in business rates within the Tax Site area to be invested through borrowings based on expected growth in business rates in the Site, which the Council will fully retain over a guaranteed 25-year life of the Freeport with the aim of stimulating further development and growth. This uplift is calculated against a government approved baseline position set as at March 2022.
- 3.19 An Investment Fund is one way of funding new growth in the Freeport, alongside other Government backed incentives to developers and investors. The Government introduced tax increment financing (TIF) schemes, founded on the Business Rates Retention Scheme introduced in 2013-14. Under these schemes, local authorities may borrow for infrastructure projects, against the future growth in business rate receipts which will result from the projects. This provides the Council with the ability to invest to support the development of commercial premises and infrastructure within the Freeport Tax Site to both grow the scale of the investment fund (more business rates equals more funds to invest) and deliver investment in support of regeneration, innovation, jobs and opportunities for local people.
- 3.20 In summer 2022, Wirral Council commissioned Amion Consulting to support officers in the preparation of a detailed business case for establishing a Wirral Freeport Investment Fund which is attached to this report as Appendix 1. Appendix 1 of this report is exempt from publication by virtue of paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972. A working group of officers from Economic

Growth, Regeneration Delivery, Finance and Treasury Management has inputted into its development which sets out the strategic, economic, financial and commercial case for establishing the Fund, as well as the proposed governance and management arrangements required to enable effective operation and oversight of the Fund.

- 3.21 The Wirral Freeport Tax Site covers approximately 170 hectares encompassing the Northside Regeneration Area (area north of Dock Road) and the western areas of the Birkenhead Dock Estate centred around West Float, including Peel Land and Property's proposed Maritime, Energy and Automotive Park (MEA Park) as shown in by the hatched areas in Figure 1. (The illustration below shows a red line plan of the Northside Regeneration Area and West Float at Wirral Waters. It may not be suitable to view for people with disabilities, users of assistive technology or mobile phone devices. Please contact Stephen Chapman – [stephenchapman@wirral.gov.uk](mailto:stephenchapman@wirral.gov.uk) if you would like this document in an accessible format)

Figure 1:



- 3.22 The Freeport Tax Site in Wirral includes undeveloped land which overlaps with, and already forms part of, the existing Wirral Waters Enterprise Zone area, which has been supported by an established Council-led TIF instrument named the Wirral Waters Investment Fund (WWIF), which is operable up to 1st April 2037. The design of the proposed new fund draws on the Council's 10-year experience of managing the WWIF and could support a range of activities including:

- Upgrading infrastructure within the Freeport Tax Site;
- Addressing poor site conditions arising from former dock and industrial uses;

- Viability gap support for new commercial premises that attracts inward investment; and
- Measures that promote sustainability and enhanced community wealth.

- 3.23 It is intended that the WWIF will be superseded by the Freeport Investment Fund which once established will provide a single financial instrument for new investments. Residual funding commitments made through WWIF to date will be incorporated into the financial model for the new Freeport Investment Fund. In practice, this means new investment in projects through WWIF will be discontinued, whilst repayment of borrowing commitments made through WWIF will continue as profiled over the remaining life of the Enterprise Zone to 2037. This approach will enable effective financial management of the respective retained rates accounts through a single framework which can inform future investment decisions based on business rates monitoring data and regularly updated development pipeline forecasts.
- 3.24 The value of the investment fund available depends on the scale of new development occurring on the Wirral Tax Site. Through detailed modelling undertaken, it is estimated in a central case scenario that development could support a Wirral Freeport Investment Fund of an indicative £15m to invest over the next 5 years, supported by predicted future business rate growth. This could lead to the creation of nearly 800 new jobs and once developed, this level of activity would contribute nearly £50m of economic value to Wirral annually. It would also grow the business rates income to Wirral Council by about £1.2m per annum.
- 3.25 It is important to note that proposals to the Freeport Investment Fund will be considered for funding on a case-by-case basis as they come forward and will be subject to a full and robust appraisal process. Projects satisfying the appraisal process will, dependent on their value, be recommended to this Committee for approval of funding or otherwise approved in accordance with the existing scheme of delegation.
- 3.26 The Fund will operate on an Expression of Interest, Business Case and Funding Agreement basis. This will enable the Council to determine the broad alignment of proposals with Freeport and wider policy objectives, confirm the scale of the allocation and potential funding strategy and establish parameters for any detailed application. At Business Case Stage the proposer will be required to demonstrate compliance with HM Treasury Green Book principles, including the proportionality principle - that larger projects are required to provide a greater level of detail and evidence to support their project proposal.
- 3.27 Applications/business cases received to the Freeport Investment Fund will be subject to a proportionate application fee payable to the Council. This will contribute to the costs of securing independent expertise in relation to technical elements of the bid appraisal process. This will relate to areas that may lie outside of the specialism of Council officers or where further due diligence needs to be performed to manage the Council's risk exposure.
- 3.28 Exempt Appendix 1 of this report sets out the detailed business case for establishing the Wirral Freeport Investment Fund. In summary, there is a clear rationale for the

Council to create a fund to promote investment and economic growth within the Freeport to:

- Support the strategic objectives of Wirral Council, with Wirral Waters and Northside representing key economic areas and catalysts for the wider regeneration of Birkenhead and the Leftbank;
- Ensure that opportunities to embed the key principles of sustainability and community wealth building within new development are maximised in the delivery of new commercial activity;
- Address specific barriers acting as a constraint to the development of sites at Wirral Waters and Northside, associated with the dockside location and legacy of former industrial uses, ensuring that this zone is able to fulfil economic requirements in accordance with emerging Local Plan policies;
- Complement financial levers established through the Freeport designation to secure inward investment and growth opportunities, particularly within target sectors linked to maritime, energy, advanced manufacturing and logistics; and
- Promote investment in support of wider regeneration, creating opportunities for employment and training adjacent to some of the most deprived communities within England.

#### **4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 Up to 100% Business Rate Relief may be applied by Tax Site Authorities for newly formed businesses and businesses relocating to a tax site, available up to September 2026 and applied for 5 years. The cost of applying this relief will be fully reimbursed by central government. Relief will be determined in each case having reference to the LCR Freeport governance arrangements and government guidance provided to local authorities covering Freeports Business Rate Relief.
- 4.2 The Freeport tax sites are to be classed by government as a designated area for the purpose of the local retention of non-domestic rates with effect from 1 April 2023 for a fixed term of 25 years from the date the tax site was designated for the purposes of tax relief. Wirral Council is one of the three Billing Authorities in the LCR Freeport with a designated Tax Site. As such, Wirral Council will retain 100% of the collectible business rates above the March 2022 baseline agreed with DLUHC and be accountable to DLUHC for the management of the retention of business rates in line with the Local Government Accountability System. The Council currently retains 100% of its business rates growth under the pilot LCR Business Rates Retention Scheme. The pilot is however a temporary arrangement renewed on an annual basis and unlike the proposed Freeport proposal provides no guarantee for future retention.
- 4.3 The Billing Authorities and the Freeport Management Board will ensure that decisions relating to the use of collected business rates will be made in accordance with the forthcoming Liverpool City Region Freeport Retained Rates Framework (or equivalent), including the Liverpool City Region Freeport Eligibility Framework. A draft Summary Retained Business Rates Strategy, attached as Appendix 3, will be provided to DLUHC as part of next step actions within the MoU and this will outline the intended approach. Appendix 3 of this report is exempt from publication by virtue of paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972. A more

detailed Retained Rates Investment Strategy Framework is to be prepared in the summer of 2023 to provide DLUHC with an updated retained rates model based on the approved position of the LCR Freeport and the expected development programme across the three tax sites.

- 4.4 The costs of resourcing the LCR Freeport Management Team (£300,000p.a. in 2022/23 prices) is being met by government capacity grant funding until end of financial year 2023/24. The LCR Freeport Full Business Case and LCR Freeport Retained Rates Strategy set out how the LCR Freeport Management Team costs are to be funded by retained rates uplift generated by the three billing authorities from financial year 2024/25 and is calculated on a pro-rata contribution basis which will depend on the scale of retained rates collected across the three LCR Freeport Tax Sites. The LCR Freeport is seeking further revenue support of £500,000 from DLUHC to meet LCR Freeport Management Team revenue costs for financial year 2024/25 given that not all three billing authorities are expected to be generating an uplift by this point. If this additional revenue funding is secured, then billing authorities will start their pro-rata contribution towards LCR Freeport Management Team costs from 2025/26. If funding from DLUHC is not secured to cover 2024/25 then each Freeport billing authority will be asked to make a contribution that year based on the level of retained rates collected in 2023/24 with the LCR CA meeting any unfunded elements. Based on development and growth projections across all three tax sites, a prudent assumption of Wirral Council's contribution is currently estimated to be in the region of up to £150,000 in 2024/25 (prior to significant development completing at other Tax Sites), and thereafter for the remainder of the designated term contributions of between £30,000 - £50,000p.a. These are best current estimates and exact contribution amounts will be determined by relative business rates growth across the designated LCR Tax Sites.
- 4.5 The retained rates can also support Wirral Council's internal management and administration costs, noted in 6.1 of this report, in relation to delivering the proposed Wirral Freeport Investment Fund and from financial year 2023/24 and are estimated to be c£82,000p.a. subject to annual uprating which includes £20,000 contingency for additional pre-development, professional or specialist appraisal costs not covered by externally levied application fees.
- 4.6 It is proposed that a reserve account is established to ringfence the annual growth in retained business rates income generated within the designated Wirral Freeport Tax Site. This reserve would fund investments and service the future repayment of capital borrowing (and borrowing costs) drawn down for investments made through the Wirral Freeport Investment Fund. Such repayments will be profiled in accordance with the financial model for the Fund and overseen by the Treasury Management and Capital team and monitored and reported as part of the Capital Programme and Treasury Management monitoring arrangements. The reserve account will also fund the annual resource costs referred to in 4.4 and 4.5 of this report.

## **5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The Designation of Freeport Tax Sites (Liverpool City Region Freeport) Regulations 2022 came into force on 22 March 2022. These Regulations designate the Liverpool City Region Freeport Tax Sites as locations within which certain tax reliefs are

available. A Freeport for these purposes is an area where special tax and customs rules will apply, as described in section 3 of this report.

- 5.2 Under paragraph 39(1) (designation of areas) of schedule 7B to the Local Government Finance Act 1988 – local retention of non-domestic rates, the Freeport tax sites are to be classed as a designated area with effect from 1 April 2023 for a fixed term of 25 years from the date the tax site was designated for the purposes of tax relief.
- 5.3 Following announcement by government on 10<sup>th</sup> January 2023 of its approval of the LCR Freeport Full Business Case, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has been prepared by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). The MoU (exempt Appendix 2 of this report) sets out the terms, principles and practices that will apply to the working relationship between DLUHC, LCRCA (as Accountable Body) the LCR Freeport Board (Governing Body), St. Helens Borough Council, Halton Borough Council and Wirral Council.
- 5.4 In respect of the proposed Wirral Freeport Investment Fund, each application/business case that is considered for funding will be subject to a comprehensive appraisal process during which appropriate legal advice will be sought to ensure the Council is compliant with the Subsidy Control Act 2022 and satisfies any other legal requirements regarding its considerations and decision-making in respect of the Fund.
- 5.5 Freeport business rates relief is subject to the UK's subsidy control legislation. Legal advice will be sought as appropriate to ensure the Council is compliant with subsidy control obligations in considering applications for relief which will be administered under the Council's Discretionary Rate Relief Policy arrangements.

## **6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS**

- 6.1 To provide effective management and administration of the Wirral Freeport Investment Fund, internal officer resource cost of c£62,000p.a. subject to annual uprating will be required from 2023/24. If the Fund is approved, apportioned staff costs as set out in exempt Appendix 1, will be reimbursed from the ring-fenced retained rates account to the appropriate service area's staffing budgets annually.

## **7.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

- 7.1 The creation of Freeport Tax sites gives rise to the potential for displacement impacts on other local, sub-regional or UK wide economic activity, due to the presence of tax sites and the benefits to businesses they provide. The LCR Freeport has been designed to ensure benefits flow across the region and will not negatively impact existing opportunities. It will target activities that are complementary to, rather than duplicating what already exists. Strong Freeport governance and management arrangements ensure control and discretion when it comes to associated funds underpinned by the Freeport Gateway Policy managed by the LCR Freeport Board.
- 7.2 Risk implications arising from establishing the Wirral Freeport Investment Fund are set out in more detail in exempt Appendix 1 of this report. In summary, the key risks to the Council relate to financial, economic, commercial and project level risks. A risk

management strategy will be employed to evaluate, monitor and mitigate identified risks, overseen by the proposed internal governance and management arrangements.

## **8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION**

8.1 The regenerative impact of the operation of a Freeport Zone within the Wirral Waters neighbourhood is consistent with the principles of the Council's strategies for economic growth and place-based regeneration. These strategies have been subject to extensive consultation process.

8.2 As the Accountable Body, the LCR Combined Authority has led the engagement in the development of the LCR Freeport Business Case. This has included:

- Stakeholder engagement with private, public and academic sectors through working groups;
- Local Authority engagement at officer level through LCR Growth Directors, Finance Directors, LCR Chief Executives; and
- at Member level through LCR Cabinet and Leaders & Mayors.

8.3 Discussions are ongoing with landowners to establish the investment pipeline potential and the LCR Freeport Team will issue an advisory notice to existing businesses occupying the area once formal Government designations are approved. An engagement strategy with landowners, developers as key stakeholders, particularly in the Northside area will be developed by the Council this year in line with the MoU actions.

8.4 Members of the Economy Regeneration and Housing Committee have been consulted on this proposal during a workshop session on 17<sup>th</sup> February 2023 and the views expressed arising from that process have been considered in drafting this report.

## **9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 Wirral Council has a legal requirement to make sure its policies, and the way it carries out its work, do not discriminate against anyone. An Equality Impact Assessment is a tool to help council services identify steps they can take to ensure equality for anyone who might be affected by a particular policy, decision or activity.

9.2 The LCR Freeport and Wirral Freeport Zone is identified as a key opportunity as part of the Council Economic Strategy and development will be delivered and monitored with regard to the associated Equality Impact Assessment: - [The Wirral Economic Strategy 2021-2026 Equality Impact Assessment](#)

9.3 A draft LCR Freeport Equality and Diversity Statement is being prepared and will be refined and agreed by the Freeport Management Board. This is an important consideration in ensuring that representation across the governance structure reflects the diverse communities, groups, and needs of residents. Furthermore, it is envisaged that there will be an Equality and Diversity sub-group as part of the formal governance structure.

## **10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 The LCRCA has considered seriously its role in ensuring the mitigation of any environmental impacts in the development of the LCR Freeport proposals, and opportunity to use the Freeport concept design to support the emerging LCR Net Zero Strategy.
- 10.2 The stated intention for the LCR Freeport is to ensure that:
- new assets within the Freeport are designed to be zero carbon where possible, with a minimal/zero-fossil approach as standard.
  - all investments are appraised against a value framework that includes environmental, social and economic values.
  - there is a commitment to monitoring progress and annual reporting on carbon, greenhouse gas emissions and corporate social responsibility (CSR).
- 10.3 The Freeport will allow LCR to reshape disused industrial sites to create exemplar new developments constructed using the latest sustainable technologies. Key to the innovation ambitions of LCR Freeport will be a focus on the key challenges for the Maritime Sector, not least Net Zero Maritime ambitions. In Wirral, investment to this effect is already underway through the Port City Innovation project in partnership with University of Liverpool and the Low Carbon Eco Innovatory.
- 10.4 The Cool 2 Strategy outlines the Council's approach to accelerating the investment required to meet key commitments – reaching 'net zero' performance standards and promoting a climate resilient economy. The creation of The Wirral Freeport Investment Fund has the potential to support both objectives. Development of new premises will increasingly need to incorporate measures to mitigate the impact of climate change. It can also contribute to raising the expected design quality and performance of new commercial premises, ensuring that development meets the highest possible standards while continuing to meet the needs of a growing economy.

## **11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 The growth of a truly inclusive economy is central to LCR's long-term economic ambitions. The LCR Freeport is committed to safeguarding rights for workers, real living wages and equality, diversity and inclusion.
- 11.2 Equally, community wealth is a cornerstone of the Wirral Economic Strategy 2021-26, identified as one of 3 Working Principles, with associated actions and performance outputs. As a key programme to be developed as part of the Economic Strategy, investment in projects at the Wirral Freeport Zone will be in line with the strategy ambitions and appropriate systems will be employed to ensure performance monitoring and evaluation.
- 11.3 The Wirral Freeport Investment Fund will support Wirral Council's Community Wealth Building Strategy outcome ambitions to deliver a more inclusive economy in the borough to address inequality and ensure that all residents in the borough feel the benefits of economic growth through for example agreement with projects which receive funding to ensure good and fair quality employment, training and

apprenticeships, and by aiming to maximise social value opportunities in relation to progressive procurement of goods and services and use of local supply chains.

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## **APPENDICES**

Appendix 1 Wirral Freeport Investment Fund Business Case  
Appendix 2 Memorandum of Understanding  
Appendix 3 Draft LCR Freeport Retained Business Rates Strategy

Appendices 1 to 3 of this report are exempt from publication by virtue of paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

LCR Freeport Full Business Case  
[LCR Combined Authority, 29th April 2022](#), Agenda Item 12, p.277 of reports pack.

LCR Freeport Outline Business Case  
[LCR Combined Authority, 24th September 2021](#) Agenda Item 9, p.235 of reports pack.

[Birkenhead 2040 Framework](#)

[Wirral Economic Strategy 2021- 2026](#)

## **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

This report is being considered by the Economy, Regeneration and Housing Committee in accordance with Section 4.2 (e) and 4.2 (f) of its Terms of Reference.

## **SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)**

<b>Council Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
------------------------	-------------

Officer Decision Notice - Freeports & Maritime Innovation and Growth Projects	13 April 2022
Policy and Resources Committee - Capital Programme 2023-28	15 February 2023
Policy and Resources Committee - Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2023/24 Appendix 6 Discretionary Rates Policy 2023-2024, item 6c	15 February 2023
Policy and Resources Committee – Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2022/23 Appendix 10 Discretionary Rate Relief Policy, item 129	15 February 2022

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## Policy and Resources Committee – Terms of Reference

The Policy and Resources Committee has two main areas of responsibility, which is to provide strategic direction to the operation of the Council, including making decisions on policies and co-ordinating spend not reserved to full Council, and to maintain a strategic overview of outcomes, performance, risk management and budgets.

The Committee is charged by full Council to:-

- (a) formulate, co-ordinate and implement corporate policies and strategies and the medium term financial plan (budget), which includes responsibility for any decision:
  - (i) that relates to such matters to the extent that they are not reserved to full Council;
  - (ii) on any cross-cutting policies that impact on other committee areas;
  - (iii) on policy matters not otherwise allocated to any other committee; and
  - (iv) to determine any dispute or difference between committees;
- (b) provide a co-ordinating role across all other service committees and retain a 'whole-council' view of performance, budget monitoring and risk management, which includes responsibility for a decision:
  - (i) that has a major impact on a number of Council services or on the Council as a whole;
  - (ii) on any virement between Budget funds (revenue) requested by a Committee or officer in excess of **£500,000**;
  - (iii) on any virement between Budget funds (capital) or any amendment to the Capital Programme requested by a Committee or officer in excess of £500,000
  - (iv) regarding land and property including major acquisition and disposals, which includes reserved decision making concerning any purchase, sale or transfer of a value in excess of, or likely to exceed, **£500,000**, unless the Committee has delegated this function in relation to a specified area or business plan as the Committee may determine
  - (v) regarding companies or limited liability partnerships including acquisition and disposals; and
  - (vi) which is deemed significant in terms of impact on the Council's revenue or capital (to be determined by the Head of Paid Service and/or Section 151 Officer in consultation with the Leader);
- (c) without limiting the generality of responsibility for cross-cutting policies (at (a) above), lead on behalf of the Council:
  - (i) in matters concerning relationships with HM Government, the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority and other major public and non-public bodies;
- (d) appoint Council representatives as required;
- (e) nominate councillors and other persons to outside bodies; and

- (f) undertake responsibility for developing and monitoring the enabling corporate services, including, finance and investment, project support and risk management, strategic procurement and commercial strategies, ICT, property and asset management, human resources and organisational development, law and governance, communications and public affairs, emergency planning and business continuity.