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ECONOMY AND REGENERATION OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday, 15 March 2010

<u>Present:</u>	Councillor	J Hale (Chair)	
	Councillors	AR McLachlan A Jennings P Johnson A Pritchard RL Abbey	B Kenny S Niblock A Taylor J Keeley (In place of K Wood)
<u>In attendance:</u>	Councillors	G Davies R Moon	
<u>Apologies</u>	Councillors	K Wood	

36 **MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

Councillors S Niblock and A Taylor declared a personal interest in respect of minute 38 (Destination Marketing - Update) by virtue of their involvement in the Wirral Farmers Market

Councillor T Pritchard declared a personal interest in respect of minute 39 (Presentation – Housing Options and Choice Based Lettings) by virtue of him being a private landlord

Members were reminded that they should also declare, pursuant to paragraph 18 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules, whether they were subject to a party whip in connection with any item(s) to be considered and, if so, to declare it and state the nature of the whipping arrangement. No such declarations were made.

37 **MINUTES**

Members were requested to receive the minutes of the meeting held on 12 January, 2010.

RESOLVED – That the minutes be received.

38 **DESTINATION MARKETING - IMPLEMENTATION PLAN UPDATE (JANUARY TO MARCH 2010)**

The Director of Corporate Services presented a progress report updating Members on the activities of the Destination Marketing office, during the first quarter of 2010, and highlighted the support being provided to Wirral's tourism businesses.

The Director referred to the successful launch of the new "Wirral Good Food Guide" and to the full year's programme of activity for the Wirral Year of Food (YOF). He responded to questions from members regarding the production of the Good Food Guide and publicity for the Wirral Farmers Market.

RESOLVED –

(1) That the Committee note the contents of this progress report.

(2) That arrangements be made for the committee to visit to some of the establishments listed in the 'Good Food Guide'.

39 **PRESENTATION - HOUSING OPTIONS AND CHOICE BASED LETTINGS**

Catherine Green, Rehousing Manager, gave a presentation on the Council's Homelessness Services. She outlined the legislative requirements; the aims and objectives of the Homeless Strategy and Action Plan with key partner agencies to develop homelessness services; the current situation in Wirral with figures and performance data; and the use of the Wirralhomes Choice Based Letting system to provide accommodation for those people who were in serious housing need.

Wirral's Homeless Strategy emphasised the need for timely intervention to reduce overall homeless levels and this was delivered through a range of policies and initiatives including involvement at an early stage to identify support for specific needs, the provision of debt management or financial advice, and working with residents to reduce the threat of homelessness. In addition, the role of the Council's Homelessness and Housing Advice Team provided a housing options service using a range of assessment and prevention tools to ensure that residents receive advice and support to meet their individual needs. However, it was acknowledged that despite effective prevention tools, homelessness would continue to occur and the strategy therefore offered housing choices for homeless people and support for people to access appropriate homes through Choice Based Lettings.

In terms of achievements, the investment in the staff team to improve access and support had produced positive outcomes with fewer statutory homelessness cases. It was also noted that Choice Based Lettings had increased the number of properties available and this meant that people who were bidding had more properties to choose from.

The Director of Regeneration responded to questions for members regarding the Council's involvement in the development of a Sub-Regional Choice Based Letting System and the purchase of a new computer system with other local authorities, which would be the subject of a report to Cabinet.

Councillor G Davies, Cabinet Member, commented on the emphasis given to the prevention of homelessness, in line with government guidance, indicating that this approach was proving to be very successful. Members endorsed these remarks.

RESOLVED –

(1) That the reports be noted.

(2) That Catherine Green be thanked for her presentation and that she be asked to convey the Committee's appreciation to the staff concerned.

40 **PRESENTATION - QUARTER 3 PERFORMANCE REPORT**

The Director of Regeneration gave a presentation comprising an overview of progress against performance indicators and key projects during the third quarter which were relevant to this Overview and Scrutiny Committee. He set out progress of key projects, provided a direction of travel and target summary and highlighted those performance indicators that had either deteriorated, were not on target, were over-performing or were awaiting data.

The Director responded to questions from members regarding potential job opportunities and apprenticeships created by Neptune Development scheme, the sectors of employers involved in The Wirral Apprentice scheme, current economic trends and the Council's response through a wide range of initiatives to support, maintain and develop businesses, and bring forward major new investment decisions.

Councillor George Davies, Cabinet Member, referred to the recent announcement of major new investment in the Vauxhall Motors Car Plant, Ellesmere Port, which would protect jobs and safeguard the long term future of the plant.

RESOLVED –

(1) That the report be noted.

(2) That the management and staff at Vauxhall Motors be congratulated following the news that its future is secure.

41 **COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME - MONITORING REPORT**

The Director of Law, HR and Asset Management, submitted an updated Monitoring Report on the Committee's Work Programme.

RESOLVED – that the report be noted.

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

RESOLVED –

That, under section 100 (A) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined by the relevant paragraphs of Part I of Schedule 12A (as amended) to that Act. The public interest test has been applied and favours exclusion.

43 **REGENERATION UPDATE**

The Director of Regeneration provided an update on major development schemes within the borough.

RESOLVED - That the report be noted