

WIRRAL COUNCIL

CABINET – 9TH December 2010

REPORT OF THE INTERIM CHIEF EXECUTIVE

'Wirral's Future: Be a part of it': TASK FORCE OPTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report documents progress in relation to the implementation of the Council's consultation programme 'Wirral's Future: Be a part of it' initiated by Cabinet on 24th June 2010.
- 1.2 The report also presents a series of options and recommendations reports from the four Task Forces established as part of the consultation programme to review service priorities and delivery around four distinct themes that correspond with the Council's corporate objectives: **Economy and Regeneration; Living in Wirral; Adult Social Services** and **Children and Young People's Services**. These options and recommendations are presented to Cabinet by the Task Forces within the context of the budgetary challenges faced by the Council.
- 1.3 Cabinet is requested to note that all information and reports relating to the consultation have been made publicly available on the Council's website at www.wirral.gov.uk/wirralfuture Task Force meetings were also open to the public.
- 1.4 Wirral's approach has generating considerable interest from other Councils. Comparative analysis of similar surveys suggests that Wirral's is one of the most extensive and wide ranging processes with a response rate of 14%.

2. Background

- 2.1 'Wirral's Future' is the largest and most far-reaching consultation exercise ever undertaken by the Council. It was initiated at a meeting of Cabinet on the 24th June 2010 by a resolution that instructed the Director of Corporate Services to "...develop, as a matter of urgency, a consultation programme that will enable us to truly engage with Wirral residents, community and voluntary groups and businesses in the future. The programme will be approved by the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council and should be implemented at the earliest possible opportunity."
- 2.2 This decision reflects the Progressive Partnership Agreement set out by the new Administration which emphasised that "The Partnership will be inclusive in its decision making; committed to meaningful, open and transparent public consultation and to ensuring that no part of Wirral is ignored."
- 2.3 This decision was taken in response to the existing budgetary challenges faced by the Council and the anticipated impact of the Comprehensive Spending Review. This decision was also consistent with the prior agreement

of Council at its meeting on 15th February 2010 where it was requested that the Director of Corporate Services "...bring forward proposals for enhanced community engagement to ensure that major policy decisions include more robust processes of public consultation, as appropriate, before decisions are taken. Such proposals shall encompass a flexible system of engagement and consultation at appropriate points in the process in order to aid decision making."

3. Consultation Programme

3.1. The structure of the consultation programme was determined by the Director of Corporate Services in consultation with the Leader and the Deputy Leader of the Council and founded on the following principles that it must be:

- Innovative using new engagement methods
- Based on comprehensive and accurate data
- To inform the setting of Council priorities and budgets
- Swift and inexpensive but well-executed
- Delivered annually to inform the corporate plan

3.2. The consultation programme has four distinct phases:

- (i) The establishment of independent Task Forces with a remit to review the Council's service priorities and delivery around four distinct themes that correspond with the Council's corporate objectives: **Economy and Regeneration; Living in Wirral; Adult Social Services** and **Children and Young People's Services**. Task Forces were charged with developing options papers to form the basis of the wider public consultation.
- (ii) A wide-ranging public consultation on the options put forward by the Task Forces through, as far as practicably possible, a comprehensive and far-reaching programme of engagement with residents, staff, employers and stakeholders in the voluntary, community and faith sector.
- (iii) Collation of the results of the consultation and reporting this back to the Task Forces in order for them to review and refine their options before these are reported as a series of recommendations to Cabinet.
- (iv) Ensuring that the results of the consultation process are reported back to the public once Cabinet has made decisions on the Council's future direction having had regard to the recommendations put forward by the Task Forces and feedback from the consultation.

4. Project Management

4.1 In order to meet the timeframe to influence the corporate planning and budget setting process for 2011/12, a multi-disciplinary core project team was quickly assembled with the necessary expertise and skills to manage and deliver this programme of work. A detailed project plan and timeframe was developed setting out a 20 week programme of activity with an associated risk assessment and equality impact assessment in line with normal protocols. A

communications and marketing plan was also produced to ensure the widest possible level of public awareness and involvement in the circumstances.

- 4.2 Additional communications and engagement plans were developed in relation to accessing known 'harder to reach' sections of the community including young people, older people, people with physical and learning disabilities and people from black and minority ethnic communities. An initial focus group with representatives from each of these groups was facilitated at the start of the process to ensure that any tailored approaches to maximising engagement could be factored into the overall process.
- 4.3 A full project evaluation will be undertaken further to the end of phase (iv) of the process.

5. Phase (i): Task Forces

- 5.1 The Chairs and individual members of the Task Forces were identified on the basis of having the necessary expertise and experience to ensure a comprehensive review of Council services and the options for change. To emphasise this, invitations were specifically made to individuals and not organisations and this was set out in the terms of reference for the Task Forces which were approved by the Director of Law, HR and Asset Management. Task Force members included service-users, staff and partners in the public, private and voluntary, community and faith sectors.
- 5.2 The Terms of Reference put in place for the Task Forces stated that the Task Forces would make proposals to the Council's Cabinet relating to the future priorities of the Council and options for meeting the budget challenge. The Task Forces were established as independent advisory groups and not decision-making bodies. Given this, the Director of Law, HR and Asset Management advised that those involved were not subject to the Council's Members Code of Conduct or any requirement to register or declare interests.
- 5.3 A series of issues papers were developed to provide background information to the Task Forces. These contained information about services and associated budgets along with the future challenges for the Council. Task Forces also received presentations from Council officers and additional information to support their discussions about the options available and to enable Task Force members to understand the impact of any potential recommendations to address the budget challenge. Issues papers, presentations and additional information presented to the Task Forces are available on the consultation section of the Council website.
- 5.4 Each Task Force met on three occasions to review Council services in depth and to develop a series of options as the basis for public consultation. Options papers were drafted and approved by each of the Task Forces following a consistent format based on what the Council *must* continue doing, *should* consider doing differently and should consider *stopping* doing. These options papers are available on the consultation section of the Council website.

6. Phase (ii): Public Consultation

- 6.1 A questionnaire was developed based on the options put forward by the Task Forces. In order to gain as diverse and informative range of responses as possible, the questionnaire sought to elicit both quantitative and qualitative information about the options. Respondents could give a simple yes/no answer, and also had an opportunity to provide additional comments throughout.
- 6.2 To make it widely accessible, the questionnaire was made available on-line and in paper format. Provision was put in place to make the questionnaire available in alternative formats on request. In consultation with Adult Social Services an easy read version of the questionnaire was also produced.
- 6.3 A full programme of activities and events was delivered to raise awareness of the consultation through face-to-face contact with the public and stakeholder groups and forums. An outreach team of over 30 staff was assembled to deliver this programme of work. This includes outreach work at a range of Council facilities such as libraries, one-stop-shops and leisure centres but also includes locations and events such as supermarkets, coffee mornings, day centres, schools and shopping centres. Events were also delivered in conjunction with our partners through existing engagement processes and to access hard to reach groups through facilitated group discussion and workshops. The outreach team attended over 120 events, speaking to over 10,000 people.
- 6.4 Additional promotion of the consultation was undertaken at minimal cost. For example, LCD screens in Wirral's One Stop Shops were programmed with Wirral Future messages, posters were sent to more than 800 businesses and a direct mailshot of the questionnaire to more than 1,500 Council contacts. The consultation was promoted extensively online using the Council's website, e-mail and social networking websites.
- 6.5 Members of staff were encouraged to take part in the consultation in a variety of ways, including through emails from the Leader and Interim Chief Executive, the launch of a new One Brief system, articles in Council and departmental newsletters as well as a highly visible placement on the intranet for the duration of the period.
- 6.6 More details about how phase (ii) of the programme was delivered can be found in the consultation reports on the website.

7. Phase (iii): Consultation Results

- 7.1 The consultation closed on 31st October 2010. 2,687 questionnaires were completed on-line and 2,972 paper questionnaires were returned, giving a total response of 5659. 40,482 questionnaires were distributed, which gives a total return rate of 14%. The sample of respondents is representative of Wirral's neighbourhoods and diverse communities. More detailed information on the geographical location, age range and ethnicity of respondents can be found in the results result relating to Section A. 11.7% of respondents stated that they considered themselves to be disabled.

- 7.2 Analysis of the questionnaire responses resulted in a series of consultation reports, which were presented to the Task Forces at a series of meetings on 10th, 11th and 12th November. These reports can be found on the consultation website.
- 7.3 Further to receiving the consultation outcomes, each Task Force reviewed and refined the options paper developed earlier in the process to inform the public consultation. Final options and recommendations papers as approved by Cabinet are now presented to Cabinet as Appendices A, B, C and D. These have also been published on the consultation website.
- 7.4 Cabinet is asked to note that further analysis and dissemination of the consultation results will be undertaken to ensure that the concerns and issues highlighted by residents are taken into account by services as appropriate.

8. Financial Implications

- 8.1 The options and recommendations papers prepared by the Task Forces are presented to Cabinet to inform the Council's financial planning and decision-making.

9. Staffing Implications

- 9.1 The options and recommendations papers prepared by the Task Forces are presented to Cabinet to inform the Council's workforce planning and decision making.

10.1 Equal Opportunities Implications / Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

- 10.1 The options and recommendations papers prepared by the Task Forces are presented to Cabinet to inform the Council's planning and decision making processes, which are subject to equality impact assessment in line with the Council's corporate approach.

11. Other Implications

- 11.1 The options and recommendations papers prepared by the Task Forces are presented to Cabinet to inform the Council's planning and decision making in the delivery of services, including those for example relating to Wirral's environment and community safety.

12. Planning Implications

- 12.1 The options and recommendations papers prepared by the Task Forces are presented to Cabinet to inform the Council's planning and decision making.

13. Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Implications

- 13.1 The options and recommendations papers prepared by the Task Forces are presented to Cabinet to inform the Council's planning and decision making. The Task Forces were concerned to ensure that vulnerable groups would be taken into account in the Council's planning and decision making.

14. Human Rights Implications

- 14.1 The options and recommendations papers prepared by the Task Forces are presented to Cabinet to inform the Council's planning and decision making processes, which are subject to consideration on the basis of Human Rights.

15. Local Member Support implications

- 15.1 The options and recommendations papers prepared by the Task Forces are presented to Cabinet to inform the Council's financial planning and decision-making, which may have implications for Local Member support.

16. Recommendations

- 16.1 Cabinet is requested to note the options and recommendations presented by the Task Forces at Appendices A, B, C and D in respect of the Council's future plans.
- 16.2 Cabinet requests a review of the consultation process and instructs Officers to ensure that it is embedded within the Council's business planning processes for all future years including the development of a new Corporate Plan.
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