

**2008/09 PRIORITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT – QUARTER ONE PROGRESS REPORT**

---

**1. Executive Summary**

- 1.1. This is a supplementary performance report to provide Cabinet with the progress made towards delivering the Council's nine 2008/09 priorities for improvement, and to consider the remedial action that is being taken to address areas of underperformance.

**2. Background**

- 2.1. Cabinet received a detailed quarter one performance report at the 4<sup>th</sup> September 2008 Cabinet meeting. The report provided an overview of the authority's performance at quarter one and a series of appendices gave a more detailed break down against performance, capital and revenue budgets and risks.

- 2.2. Further to discussion of this report, Cabinet agreed the following:

*Cabinet asks that a brief supplementary report be produced for its next meeting which details each priority for improvement and the progress made against that priority in lay terms, so improvements made can be easily understood in terms of their overall benefit to Wirral, and that areas where improvements are not being achieved be spelt out in the same way with the actions being taken to remedy the position.*

This report outlines the progress that has been made towards delivering the 2008/09 priorities for improvement and the ongoing work which is being undertaken.

**3. 2008/09 priorities for improvement – quarter one progress report**

**3.1. Reduce worklessness**

*Progress made:*

Wirral's overall reduction in worklessness broadly reflects the national average. There have been significant reductions in Incapacity Benefit claimants which are double the national average; however these have been negated by increases in Jobseeker Allowance which go against the national trend.

Working Wirral has commissioned several strands of activity. The Reach Out project has been continued and is successfully engaging and supporting workless households from Wirral's most deprived communities to access employment opportunities that they may otherwise be unaware of. Since its launch in 2006,

Reach Out has knocked on over 57,000 doors in and engaged 9832 residents providing initial information or signposting.

The programme has achieved impressive outcomes which include supporting 1016 workless residents from Wirral's most deprived communities into employment.

*Ongoing work:*

In May 2008, Wirral developed an Employment and Enterprise Investment Framework which has been taken forward by the Wirral Economic Development and Skills Partnership (WEDS) and conducted through consultation with a range of partners to ensure activity adds value and compliments other mainstream delivery.

The Investment Framework has provided the context for Working Wirral commissioning priorities which uses a range of resources including, Working Neighbourhood Fund, Deprived Area Fund and the European Social Fund Complementary Strand.

### **3.2. Increase enterprise**

*Progress made:*

Wirral has developed an Investment Framework for Employment and Enterprise.

The Wirralbiz programme has significantly increased the number of business starts in the borough and is expected to achieve Wirral's LAA stretch target for business starts which will attract £0.818m performance reward grant.

*Ongoing work:*

Working Wirral has only commissioned enterprise related activity until March 2009. This is to ensure that any Wirral activity integrates with Regional enterprise activity, in line with the Business Support Simplification Agenda.

Wirral continues to work towards the objectives of the Enterprise Strategy (2006) and has worked with Merseyside partners to develop a Merseyside Enterprise and Growth Strategy.

### **3.3. Increase levels of recycling**

*Progress made:*

Big increases in recycling have led to a reduced amount of waste going to landfill. This means the Council pays less Landfill Tax helping to balance budgets.

Recycling rates continue to improve with figures for April – June 2008 at 39.57%. Performance for this period is better than expected because of unusually high amounts of garden waste in May.

*Ongoing work:*

Further increases in recycling rates are expected during the next quarter as a result of a new campaign to roll out the scheme to flats and other multi-occupancy buildings. We have followed up our successful pilot of recycling schools' rubbish by extending the scheme to all schools in Wirral, and we anticipate that this scheme will be successful in increasing the rates still further.

Surveys have been conducted in those areas where less recycling takes place to find out what we can do to improve recycling rates.

**3.4. Reduce the council's carbon footprint**

*Progress made:*

It was reported to Cabinet on 4<sup>th</sup> September 2008; that additional initiatives introduced in 2007/08 led to a 22% CO<sub>2</sub> reduction against our baseline position. This is ahead of target and this means a reduction of 11,800 tonnes in our carbon footprint since 2003/04 including a 937 tonne reduction due to energy efficiency savings from Phase 1 of our Investment Energy Efficiency Programme in 2007/08.

*Ongoing work:*

Cabinet agreed to the establishment of a Sustainability Unit to drive further energy efficiency and sustainability initiatives, and to work with Businesses and the Community to raise awareness of the urgent need to reduce Wirral's Carbon footprint. This will be done by working with our local partners to take action to reduce Carbon emissions.

The Council is working closely with partners to deliver the new national indicators and over the coming months will explore with them how we can learn together to improve performance.

**3.5. Reduce the number of people killed and seriously injured in road accidents**

*Progress made:*

Numbers of people killed or seriously injured continue to fall. The figure for April – June 2008 is 40, this equates to a monthly average of 13.3 which is a significant reduction from the 2006 figure of 14.2.

*Ongoing work:*

Partners continue to work closely to monitor progress of this priority for improvement.

**3.6. Promote greater choice independence and choice**

*Progress made:*

The number of carers receiving a specific carer's service, or advice and information is currently performing better than expected. The number of people supported to live

independently through social services is also exceeding its target for April – June 2008.

*Ongoing work:*

The number of clients receiving direct payments is falling and performance is not currently on target. An operational manager has been identified as the lead for this target. A task group has been established to monitor performance and take appropriate action.

**3.7. Raise overall educational attainment, particularly lower achieving young people**

*Progress made:*

Figures indicate that we are narrowing the gap at foundation stage between the lowest achieving pupils and all other pupils.

Figures also indicate that we are narrowing the achievement gap at key stage two between pupils eligible for free school meals and their peers. 2007/08 key stage 2 figures for English and Maths continue to show improvement compared to the previous year. Significant progress has been made with educational achievement of looked after children at key stage two with results showing English has improved from 36% in 2006 to 61% in 2008 and Maths has improved from 28% in 2006 to 64% in 2008.

Provisional results for 2007/08 GCSE A\* -C is 66% which shows an improvement on the previous year's figures.

*Ongoing work:*

There are significant national data quality issues for key stage three figures which need resolving. At present the 2007/08 figures demonstrate a stable result for level 5 Maths and English compared to the previous year and a deterioration for level 5 Science figures.

**3.8. Safely reduce the number of looked after children**

*Progress made:*

Numbers of looked after children have reduced from 671 to 607 during 2007/08 and currently remain at 607.

*Ongoing work:*

There are currently more than 20 children placed for adoption and whilst no orders have been granted during the first quarter the picture will change as the year progresses.

Referrals for initial assessment are slightly below target for April – June 2008. However, they are in line with the tolerance band that was agreed by GONW. This is

an area where improvements are expected to occur during the year as a result of changes in practices that have already been agreed.

### **3.9. Improve the use of the Council's land and assets**

#### *Progress made:*

Since 2005, assets totalling £13,263,908 have been disposed of.

#### *Ongoing work:*

At the 9<sup>th</sup> July 2008 Cabinet meeting, Cabinet agreed the Strategic Asset review. This included a number of geographical area reviews which will focus initially on the following areas:

- Birkenhead, Tranmere and Rock Ferry; Bidston, Cloughton and Oxton and Prenton
- West Wirral
- Leasowe, Moreton and Saughall Massie
- New Brighton, Wallasey, Liscard and Seacombe

A further report on the Strategic Asset review will be provided to Cabinet on 16<sup>th</sup> October 2008.

### **3.10. Create a sustainable and stable budget, providing value for money**

#### *Progress made:*

Regular updates by the Director of Finance to Cabinet to provide assurance that the budget of the Council remains viable

There are now over 1,000 users accessing the electronic "Procure to Pay" system. In 2007/08 the total number of purchase order transactions was 28,000 (representing 41% of all orders placed), a financial value in excess of £25m. The work of the Procure to Pay section implementing and developing the new system has been recognised nationally by the Local Government Chronicle Award 2007.

A refined Council Tax recovery programme is now in place with arrangements monitored automatically. The collection rate has seen an increase to 96.6% at the end of March 2008 with improved figures expected.

#### *Ongoing work:*

There is a slight underperformance in respect of the corporate savings targets in relation to procurement efficiencies. This position is expected to improve and performance will meet the year end target once a number of high value contracts are let.

Reviews being carried out of high spending areas as identified by the Audit Commission "spend profiles" and Value for Money initiatives (as reported to Cabinet in July 2008) such as Looked After Children and Social Care.

Regular liaison meetings between Cabinet and Chief Officers to assess the current position and on-going implications including strategies and proposals for addressing the projected gap between likely spend and resources.

### **3.11. Improve the Council's budgeting process to fully reflect its priorities**

#### *Progress made:*

Wirral's Medium Term financial, Capital and Risk Management Strategies have been refreshed and were approved by Wirral Cabinet on 23 July 2008

Any increased spending that is approved reflects the agreed priority areas of the Council.

#### *Ongoing work:*

Enhanced financial monitoring reports, including monthly summary statements, are now produced for Cabinet and Committee Chairs to aid decision making

Budget resolution includes references / linkages to the priorities.

Financial support to a number of departments has improved - including seconding staff and supporting decisions on new contracts. The budget process for 2008/09 has been improved to make it more focused for Members and Officers. This has enabled the service to reach an earlier production of the budget, with more focus on the changes in the budget.

## **4. Financial implications**

- 4.1. The financial implications for the council were reported fully in the detailed quarter one performance report reported to cabinet on the 4<sup>th</sup> September 2008. Any financial implications related to the progress of the 2008/09 priorities for improvement are detailed in section three of this report.

## **5. Staffing implications**

- 5.1. Any staffing implications related to the progress of the 2008/09 priorities for improvement are detailed in section three of this report.

## **6. Equal Opportunities implications**

- 6.1. There are no direct equal opportunity implications associated with the report.

## **7. Community Safety implications**

- 7.1. There are no direct community safety implications associated with the report.

## **8. Local Agenda 21**

- 8.1. There will be a positive impact for the environment as a result of the improvements the Council is making to increase recycling and reduce the Council's carbon footprint

**9. Planning implications**

9.1. There are no direct planning implications associated with the report.

**10. Anti-poverty implications**

10.1. There are no direct anti-poverty implications associated with the report.

**11. Social inclusion implications**

11.1. There are no direct social inclusion implications associated with the report.

**12. Local Member Support implications**

12.1. There are no direct local member support implications associated with the report.

**13. Background Papers**

13.1 Wirral Corporate Plan 2008-11

13.2 Corporate Plan Financial and Performance Monitoring Summary – Cabinet Report, 4<sup>th</sup> September 2008.

**14. Recommendations**

That

- (1) the report be noted; and
- (2) the views of Cabinet are requested on the format of this report.

**J. WILKIE**

Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Services

This report was prepared by Lucy Beed, who can be contacted on 0151 691 8006.