

WIRRAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY 2011-2016

WIRRAL'S INVESTMENT STRATEGY 2011 - 16

Executive Summary

Wirral's Investment Strategy, originally published in 2007, recognises that a successful economy is fundamental to the Borough's future prosperity and to achieve social equity outcomes. The Strategy aims to deliver a Borough founded on a strong, vibrant economy, with high levels of employment and investment, where businesses flourish, and all Wirral residents have the skills and opportunities to work.

Against the backdrop of changing economic conditions and a rapidly shifting national policy landscape, we have now reviewed and updated our original Investment Strategy. This has been informed by:

- The ambition of the Council and our key partners' commitment to the significant investment and regeneration opportunities that exist across the Borough;
- The analysis of changing economic conditions, issues and challenges highlighted by the latest economic evidence ; and
- The result of extensive consultation with businesses and partners to review our economic priorities.

These discussions have contributed to a clearer understanding of Wirral's regeneration requirements, and have resulted in **The Investment Strategy 2011-2016**. The updated Strategy has been developed to set out how Wirral Council and its partners will drive economic growth and increase investment in Wirral over the next five years. It will form the basis of a clear, delivery focused framework that will:

- Provide a strategic context for guiding regeneration and co-ordinating investment in Wirral;
- Further enhance partnership with the Private Sector by setting a clear vision and programme of activity;
- Drive investment marketing;
- Ensure that economic growth is linked to supporting local people into employment;
- Align with existing and emerging key polices and initiatives

The Investment Strategy recognises the pivotal role of the private sector in growing and rebalancing our economy. We will continue to work with local employers to ensure that our plans and services deliver tangible results and transform our local economy for the benefit of all our residents. This will include supporting the newly established Local Enterprise Partnership and Wirral's Investment Board, which enable business leaders to inform and advise on how they believe we should capitalise upon Government initiatives and how the Council can do more to support entrepreneurs and encourage enterprise.

The Strategy sets out a number of drivers that we will use to develop the employment and entrepreneurial skills of Wirral people, and to make Wirral

the most business friendly place to invest and locate. It is focused on three themes: People; Places and Business.

Background and Context

In recent years, Wirral Council, together with our partners, has identified the need to prioritise the economic well being of the Borough through increasing enterprise and reducing economic inactivity. We developed a comprehensive Investment Strategy (2007) and formed a Public/Private Investment Board whose members include significant regional and national players.

Against the backdrop of changing economic conditions and a rapidly shifting national policy landscape, we have now updated our original Investment Strategy. Through in-depth consultation with our partners, we have fully reviewed our existing economic policies and evidence base through the process set out below.

Wirral Council has made steady improvements to its interface with the Private Sector over the last four years, with Invest Wirral being re-configured to be the primary business facing arm of Wirral Council and delivering key support services. This has resulted in the development of relationships with key businesses and is evidenced by the fact that Invest Wirral has engaged over 1800 businesses during the course of the last three years.

The Council has worked with strategic employment and skills partners to ensure that economic growth is linked to tackling worklessness, so that Wirral residents can benefit from sustainable employment opportunities. This approach will become increasingly important as the imminent regeneration developments start to come to fruition.

Wirral's planning function has been subject to a review to improve the services offered by aligning the planning teams to offer a better interface with key developers and the appointment of a major projects officer has seen a significant improvement in how the Council handles large planning applications.

The creation of dedicated Investment Strategy team has also improved the Councils interface with the private sector and along with the appointment of the major projects officer, this investment by the Council is one of the principal reasons why the Council was able to deal efficiently and effectively with the UK's largest planning application to receive approval, the East Float Development at Wirral Waters.

Also, the alignment of strategic economic policy with the delivery of regeneration programmes, including housing, has further enhanced the Councils ability to co-ordinate regeneration activity.

Since the launch of the Investment Strategy in 2007, Wirral Council has targeted its investment within a more co-ordinated strategy to achieve better results. For example, the Business Support activities delivered by Wirral

Council have been highly successful in supporting Wirral companies and promoting growth. However, the development of the Investment Support Services Framework has further aligned the existing activity with the introduction of new interventions to promote business growth by aligning access to finance, business advice and other investment activity to be delivered through Invest Wirral maximising the use of this resource through the co-ordination of these services.

Similarly, the alignment of employment and skills activity under the stewardship of the Wirral Economic Development and Skills (WEDS) Partnership has seen the co-ordination of significant amounts of European Social Fund (ESF) resources matched by Council resources.

Wirral's refreshed Investment Strategy sets out the key programmes and projects that form the direction of travel from 2011 through to 2016. However, it also sets out key principles to build on the significant progress made over the last four years to further enhance the responsiveness of the Council to working in partnership with key Private Sector partners and to achieving maximum value from the investment made in economic regeneration.

Consultation

Over the last 12 months, Wirral Council has reviewed our economic priorities with our strategic partners, including Wirral Economic Development and Skills (WEDS) Partnership; the Investment Board; and Wirral's Business Forum. In addition, the Wirral's Future consultation (2010) included a review of the three Working Wirral priority themes of People, Place and Business. Through this process, there was an additional bespoke survey to engage with businesses and gauge their views about future economy and regeneration priorities.

Economic Performance

Alongside these extensive consultations, we have also carried out in-depth analysis of Wirral's current economic profile, using a number of key indicators of economic performance. A full economic profile has also been produced.

Refreshed Investment Priorities

Building on the economic analysis, the work of the previous four years and our extensive consultation with partners and stakeholders, our updated Investment Strategy (2011-16) sets out how Wirral Council and its partners will radically drive up economic growth and increase investment in Wirral over the next five years. The Strategy sets out a number of drivers that we will use to develop the employment and entrepreneurial skills of Wirral people, and to make Wirral the most business friendly place to invest and locate. It is focused on three themes: People, Places and Business. The key priorities for each theme are set out in the following sections.

PART 1 INVESTING IN WIRRAL PEOPLE

CURRENT POLICY CONTEXT

The Coalition Government has set out a number of key policy areas to drive welfare reform and the delivery of employment and skills programmes. This provides the context within which the Council and its partners will work to ensure that mainstream provision delivers maximum opportunities for Wirral residents to gain employment and increase their skills. Also that any additional resources obtained by partners are aligned with this investment to provide complementary and targeted support.

Work Programme

The new Work Programme replaces existing Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) back to work schemes, and provides a programme designed to support a wide variety of benefit customers back into sustained employment. Specialist delivery partners from the public, private and voluntary sector will have the flexibility to design support based on customer need, incorporating a model of payment by results. The Work Programme was introduced nationally in June 2011.

Get Britain Working

Get Britain Working is a DWP initiative supporting businesses, public and voluntary sector service providers to help people into work. These include:

- Work Clubs to encourage people who are out of work to share skills and experience;
- Work Together to develop skills through volunteering;
- Work Experience to provide young people with the opportunity to gain an insight into the world of work;
- New Enterprise Allowance being trail blazed in Merseyside to help unemployed people start their own business;
- Service Academies to offer sector-specific pre-employment training and work placements.

Welfare Reform

The White Paper: 'Universal Credit: Welfare that Works', published on 11 November 2010, sets out the Coalition Government's plans to introduce legislation to reform the welfare system by creating a new Universal Credit. It identifies two key problems with the current Welfare system in that work incentives are poor, and the system is too complex. People claiming benefits will be automatically moved on to Universal Credit from 2013. The aim of reform is to radically simplify the system to make work pay and combat worklessness and poverty.

Skills for Sustainable Growth – National Skills Strategy

'Skills for Sustainable Growth' sets out the direction of skills policy for the life of this parliament. The strategy supports the removal of Government determined targets for the number and type of qualifications to be delivered, which has been a key driver of publicly funded skills delivery to date. The current system of entitlements for Level 2 and Level 3 training will reduce,

with public funding prioritised for learners with low level skills. There will be greater expectations that individuals and employers will co-invest to meet the costs of intermediate and higher level training. Those on active benefits will be supported to access state subsidised, accredited, labour market relevant training; whilst apprenticeships will form the priority 'in work' adult skills offer.

City Employment Strategy

There is a strong history of partnership working across the Liverpool City Region. Collaborative relationships have grown through the development of the City Employment Strategy and the LCR Employment and Skills Board which includes representatives of the City Region's business, civic and executive bodies. More recently, the City Region produced its Employment and Skills Strategy (2010) setting out some key objectives to improve integrated employment and skills across the area, and to ensure that employment and skills continues to be central to economic growth.

The recent national evaluation of the LCR Employment Strategy highlights some of the good practice and successes that have been established through the CES. These include:

- Strong partnership working at both strategic and delivery level;
- Examples of aligned funding to better meet the needs of the customer;
- Responsiveness to employer and individual demand, driven by an increased understanding of the employment and skills landscape;
- Success of specific programmes - such as the Future Jobs Fund - which built on strong partnership working and resulted in supporting 6,746 people into jobs.

HOW HAVE WE SUPPORTED WIRRAL PEOPLE?

In recent years, the Council has worked extensively with partners to bring a focused and co-ordinated approach to tackling worklessness and improving skills levels. Utilising national regeneration programmes and resources we have supported Wirral's Economic Development and Skills Partnership (WEDS) to develop and commission activity that complements mainstream provision, avoids duplication and adds value to existing services. Building on this strong partnership approach has enabled us to focus the Working Wirral programme to align investment and to ensure that partners from all sectors have been involved in delivering services, thereby ensuring maximum impact from the interventions.

As one of the largest employers in the borough, Wirral Council has also worked hard to improve its economic influence and to maximise accessible employment and skills opportunities for Wirral people. Internal policies on procurement and human resources have been redesigned to create opportunities for targeted employment and stronger inter-departmental linkages have been forged to embed the Investment Strategy's influence.

Worklessness Programmes

This approach has enabled us to focus on addressing some of the fundamental problems associated with worklessness and to tackle barriers so that people move from benefits into employment. This has included funding a range of projects that have provided effective outreach and engagement activity in order to directly target those people and groups who may be 'hard to reach', who may not access mainstream services or who may have specific multiple barriers to accessing employment.

We have also worked with partners such as Job Centre Plus and the National Apprenticeship Service to deliver the **Wirral Apprentice Programme** which supports businesses and ensures that young people leaving school can access a job or training. There has been a particular focus on supporting NEET and other vulnerable young people and the Wirral Apprentice Programme has been commended as a model of good practice nationally and regionally, and is increasingly being recognised as an exemplar of effective partnership working. Most recently, in May 2011, the Programme received a number of awards at the NW Regional finals of the National Apprenticeship Awards. These included one Wirral Apprentice employer winning the Small Business Award; another Wirral Apprentice Employer achieving a commendation; and the Council itself won a Special Recognition Award for its innovative model and approach.

FUTURE PRIORITIES

Building on our economic analysis and extensive consultation and review with partners and stakeholders **we have confirmed that improving access to employment and skills opportunities and tackling barriers to work remains a key priority for Wirral.** Partners have agreed priorities to tackle worklessness, improve skill levels; and increase enterprise, business growth and investment. It is important to have a strategic and coordinated approach to economic regeneration, tackling worklessness and related child and family poverty. Tackling child and family poverty is particularly pertinent to Wirral's economic regeneration, given the borough's persistent concentrations of high levels of worklessness and low income households.

Our work over the past few years has illustrated the importance of targeted activity delivered by a range of service providers, often from the voluntary, faith and community sectors. This approach forms the basis of the Council's current Worklessness programme, where we have also maximised the use of the available resources by moving from services delivered by individual organisations to commissioning a consortium of voluntary and private sector organisations. Known as **the Reach Out Programme**, the £2.4m programme targets workless residents who are furthest from the labour market, with a particular focus on those with a health condition or disability. Delivery through a consortium allows the effective co-ordination of the range of specialist support services that are needed to address the complex multiple problems that are often associated with long term benefit dependency. This includes support such as dealing with mental health issues, drugs and alcohol

dependency, low self esteem and confidence, with the programme also providing support for under-represented groups in the labour market such as residents from Wirral's Black and Racial Minority community.

Delivered from 1st April 2011 to 31st May 2012 the programme will engage 1755 workless residents and support 702 back into employment. It will include a range of Work Clubs delivered across Wirral in a number of outreach locations and use innovative approaches to engage workless households by taking the service to their home. Reach Out guidance workers knock on doors, engage residents in the familiar surrounding of their own home and promote the value of being in work. In addition to support achievement of these targets **the Wirral ILM (Intermediate Labour Market) programme** will provide 100 opportunities with local employers commencing August/September 2011.

The programme is fully complementary with the Department for Work and Pensions' Work Programme and aims to support workless residents prior to a mandatory referral to this national programme.

Ensuing that business growth is linked to increased employment opportunities for local people requires our workforce to have the necessary skills to meet the needs of investors and businesses. We will continue to work to promote strong connections between our businesses and our education institutions and training providers and also to develop our **Construction Employment Integrator model and Wirral Apprentice programme** to maximise the opportunities for all our residents to develop skills to achieve their full potential and to address economic inactivity.

We will also continue to build and capture robust intelligence about Wirral's economy. This will inform employment and skills development programmes, but also ensure that the opportunities created by regeneration projects such as Wirral Waters are maximised for the benefit of local people and also contribute to attracting and retaining talented and skilled people within the Borough.

Delivering the priorities set out in this section will support local residents to be in a position to access the employment opportunities that will be generated through the range of priorities/actions outlined in the 'Places and Business' sections of this Investment Strategy. In addition the priorities will also contribute to attracting and growing investment in the Borough through ensuring that the workforce's skills base matches the requirements of new and existing businesses.

Wirral Investment Strategy PEOPLE Priorities for 2011-2016

Our vision is to improve access to employment and skills opportunities, and tackle barriers to work

What is the challenge?	Key Policy Statements	Strategic Actions
<p>The main challenge for Wirral's workforce is to overcome the high levels of economic inactivity in disadvantaged groups and in the most deprived parts of Wirral</p> <p>Overall the borough performs well in terms of skill levels, however, there are pockets of the borough with concentrations of low skills and young people not participating in education, employment and training</p> <p>There is a need to engage with the long term unemployed</p> <p>There is also a need to ensure the skills base of the existing workforce is developed to match the emerging employment opportunities in high growth sectors</p>	<p>We will tackle barriers to work and low skills in parts of Wirral and within disadvantaged groups</p> <p>We will increase the number of jobs and employment opportunities for Wirral residents</p> <p>We will ensure our young people have excellent skills and are able to access opportunities into employment</p> <p>We will ensure that economic growth is linked to tackling worklessness</p>	<p>Continue to develop Employment and Skills Strategies and Programmes that will train, attract and retain talented, skilled and knowledgeable people in the Borough</p> <p>Use of European Social Fund (ESF) and Integrated Labour Market (ILM) initiatives</p> <p>Ensure that business growth is linked to increasing employment opportunities through targeted Recruitment and Training, including Wirral's Apprentice Programme</p> <p>Co-ordinate effective outreach and engagement employment and skills activity to directly target hard to reach people and groups</p> <p>Continue to build economic data and robust intelligence about Wirral's economy, to inform and develop effective policy and projects</p> <p>Continue to speak to businesses about their recruitment and skills requirements to inform delivery of key services</p>

PART 2 INVESTING IN WIRRAL PLACES

CURRENT POLICY CONTEXT

Essential for the delivery of economic regeneration in Wirral is the need to develop a place where business can thrive and which is attractive to both domestic and international inward investment. Central to achieving this is the need to increase the stock of high quality sites and premises fit for modern business needs. There is also a need for complementary investment in the associated infrastructure in terms of power supply, transport and the ICT (broadband) network, supported by a comprehensive inward investment strategy that positions Wirral as a quality location to invest.

The Council has a key role to play in enabling investment through delivering the appropriate strategies and programmes, but also through ensuring that it has robust and responsive processes in place. Key to this is the development of the Local Development Framework (LDF).

The Local Development Framework will gradually replace the Unitary Development Plan over the next five years and its 'Core Strategy', due for adoption in 2012, will provide the vision and spatial strategy for the social, economic, and environmental regeneration of the Borough. A Land Allocations Development Plan Document will then be used to set out site-specific proposals.

HOW HAVE WE SUPPORTED WIRRAL PLACES?

The Council has worked hard to improve its interface with the private sector in order to ensure that the services it provides maximise the opportunities for investment within the Borough. Wirral Council's planning teams have been aligned and the creation of a dedicated Investment Strategy team, together with the appointment of the major projects officer, has resulted in a streamlined offer to the private sector.

This has increased the ability of the Council to deal effectively and efficiently with granting approval to large scale planning applications such as **the East Float development at Wirral Waters** and to support the development process of a further planning application for **an International Trade Centre** at the West Float.

A dedicated focus on the delivery of the Investment Strategy has also enabled the Council to carry out a range of activity that supports the offer to the private sector which reinforces the message that Wirral is a place for businesses to invest and grow. This also helps to ensure that the underlying conditions to attract investment are in place by facilitating opportunities whilst still fulfilling statutory obligations. This has included :

The Birkenhead and Wirral Waters Integrated Regeneration Study (BIRS)

This sets out the strategic framework to ensure that the regeneration activity taking place within the Wirral Waters site is integrated with that of other key

development opportunities and that benefits are maximised across the wider area, including improving the housing offer.

The Employment Land and Premises Study. As part of the LDF process the Council has undertaken a masterplanning exercise that has identified a shortfall in the quantity and quality of employment sites and premises needed to meet the economic growth targets of the Investment Strategy and puts forward a number of recommendations including the need for a successor to the Wirral International Business Park, ideally in the East of the borough, with Wirral Waters being the key opportunity.

The Town, District and Local Centres Study and Delivery Framework. The Council has been able to deliver a comprehensive framework that sets out the current role, health and performance of Wirral's Centres (excluding Birkenhead which is covered by the BIRS) and which will form part of the LDF consultation process. This will inform the development of a series of centre action plans to support the future management and sustainability of our town centres.

At a time of constrained resources officers have also explored new and innovative ways of using available resources and assets to act as a catalyst for investment and new development. This includes:

- Better use of council owned assets, including land holdings to stimulate regeneration activity
- Influence the local investment plans of strategic partners such as the HCA
- Exploring new delivery models and developing understanding of initiatives such as Tax Incremental Finance (TIF).

FUTURE PRIORITIES

Building on economic analysis, and our extensive consultation and review with partners and stakeholders, we have now developed Wirral's updated Priorities to support Wirral Places. These set out how Wirral Council will position Wirral as a leading, vibrant, global location for businesses and visitors.

The work that we have done as a council to develop a more co-ordinated approach to renewal and regeneration places us in a strong position to capture the benefits arising from the major development at Wirral Waters.

Wirral Waters: In 2010, Planning permission was given to Peel Holdings' Wirral Waters East Float development, which is the UK's largest regeneration project to have been given planning approval. The £4.5 billion regeneration scheme will take place over the next 25 years and will create in excess of 20,000 new jobs. Peel Holdings is beginning to promote the development on an international basis using a renowned team of property specialists to build a strong and recognisable brand for Wirral Waters, specifically identifying key investment projects within the short, medium and long term. Accessing new markets to bring investment to the Wirral Waters site will require a strong partnership between Peel Holdings and Wirral Council to secure international opportunities.

The Council's co-ordinated approach has strengthened its dialogue with Government which in turn has contributed to the designation of the Wirral Waters site as an Enterprise Zone.

Enterprise Zone: The whole of the Wirral Waters site has been designated as one of the four named 21st Century Enterprise Zones (EZ) by central government. EZ status will assist businesses through tax incentives, superfast broadband, improved infrastructure and simplified planning rules.

The EZ provides a clear opportunity to promote the Borough as a preferred location for inward investment and it is anticipated that Wirral will receive an increased number of investment enquiries, which needs to be secured by being able to offer a high quality investment product. It also provides an opportunity for the Council to maximise its investment in business support. For example through working smarter to align the business grant programme with the EZ businesses rate relief scheme, to encourage businesses to develop and invest in growth related projects where appropriate.

The Council will also work to maximise the opportunities created by the recent planning application from Peel Holdings to develop an International Trade Centre at the West Float site of the Wirral Waters development and support the co-ordination of this opportunity with other sector development proposals.

Peel International Trade Centre: The four-phased development totals in excess of 2.5 million square feet and plans to enable up to a 1,000 separate companies from China, India, South Korea or other emerging economies, to exhibit, sell, assemble and distribute their goods into the UK, Irish and European markets. The ITC will be the first of its kind in the United Kingdom and the largest and most sustainable Trade Centre in Europe.

JESSICA/Merseyside Urban Development Fund

Wirral officers have led the development of the Merseyside Urban Development Fund to create a more sustainable development fund for capital regeneration schemes. JESSICA is a private sector led initiative that provides development finance to viable development schemes that are unable to borrow from frontline banks or financial institutions. Its aim is to stimulate investment by filling a gap in the market place but its repayable nature, as opposed to grant, will allow the European funds to be re-invested over the medium term, leveraging private sector resources into Merseyside.

Wirral has a number of specific investment opportunities that have been developed since the inception of the Investment Strategy in 2007. The quality of these opportunities and products are now recognised as extremely high, particularly for promotion internationally. These opportunities include:

Wirral International Business Park: One of the region's most impressive regeneration success stories is Wirral International Business Park (WIBP). However, there is over 70 hectares of employment land still to be developed at WIBP and its strategic importance is higher than ever in terms of its ability

to support the opportunities of key sector developments, such as the ones outlined below, due to the technical specifications of the available sites.

The business park will also benefit from the **Next Generation Access** project which aims to deliver high speed broadband access to this and other key employment sites along the Eastern Employment corridor to provide Wirral businesses with competitive advantage. Fast and reliable internet connectivity is an important influence on business decisions on where to locate and relocate and Wirral has been able to make a £12 million commitment to develop a world class ICT Next Generation Access (NGA) network to support future development activity and increase investment into the area.

Offshore Energy opportunities: The port related facilities of the Eastern end of the Borough offer a unique opportunity of available land, skilled workforce, port and harbour facilities and access to an established supply chain to serve the West coast, East coast and Scottish West coast offshore renewable energy markets. Cammell Laird offers the offshore wind industry an excellent range of opportunities for both manufacturing and pre-assembly as well as operation and maintenance bases for the wind farms. At the heart of the UK economy's shift to low carbon, by 2020 the offshore wind industry alone could be worth £75bn and support up to 70,000 jobs in the UK and the uniqueness of the Cammell Laird offer, alongside high quality port related land, is a key investment offer for Wirral as a place to target appropriate investment to support this sector.

Research and Development: Wirral's R and D sector is a crucial part of the Council's enterprise and employment plans for the future and has seen considerable growth in recent years with notable investments made in research facilities by Bristol-Myers Squibb and Biofortuna. The biomedical sector is an important employer in Wirral and Research and Development across all fields is hugely important to Wirral and forms part of the investment offer that exists in the Borough.

This co-ordinated offer will be promoted via domestic and international markets through a targeted approach to businesses. The delivery of these products will support the priorities and actions outlined in the investing in Wirral's People and in Wirral's Businesses sections of this Investment Strategy and support the underlying conditions for growth.

Wirral Investment Strategy PLACE Priorities 2011-2016

Our vision is to position Wirral as a leading, vibrant, global location for businesses and visitors

What is the challenge?	Key Policy Statements	Strategic Actions
<p>The key challenge is to address the shortfall in the quantity and quality of employment land and premises to meet the economic growth targets of the Investment Strategy, maximising the opportunities that Wirral's geography provide</p> <p>There is a need to radically increase levels of inward investment and increase jobs</p>	<p>We will promote and expand our portfolio of high quality opportunity employment sites</p> <p>We will support the development of key sectors by facilitating investment into specific key projects, such as the infrastructure for Offshore Wind</p> <p>We will continue to improve our interface with the private sector to attract key investment</p>	<p>Develop and Implement the Wirral Waters Enterprise Zone to support the Wirral Waters proposals</p> <p>Support local businesses to access new or alternative opportunities to create exciting investment opportunities such as JESSICA and the Regional Growth Fund</p> <p>Identify and facilitate the delivery of a number of priority projects including: Wirral Waters; International Trade Centre; Woodside; and new Town Centre redevelopments.</p>

PART 3 INVESTING IN WIRRAL BUSINESS

CURRENT POLICY CONTEXT

Securing Wirral's economic future is dependent upon attracting investment and delivering business growth that leads to sustainable employment for local people. The priorities and actions set out in the previous two sections – Investing in Wirral's People and Places - are fundamental to supporting the underlying conditions that will enable this investment and growth to take place.

Clearly the recession has impacted upon business growth at both a national and international level, but the actions that the Council has taken to address the economic downturn have both minimised the negative effects upon the Borough and ensured that it is well placed to take advantage of new and emerging opportunities. Wirral's economic recovery plan has put in place a number of actions that have delivered financial planning assistance, targeted resources through a grant programme, business advice and project management support.

Changes to the national Business Start and support programmes are currently being introduced by Government, but the work that has taken place through the Council will mean that Wirral is in a strong position to ensure that businesses continue to receive targeted advice and support to develop and grow sustainably.

HOW HAVE WE SUPPORTED WIRRAL BUSINESSES?

Whilst tackling the effects of the global downturn, Wirral Council provided support to businesses focusing on activity that supports the underlying conditions for growth. The Council has invested in and improved its functions which enable investment and business growth and we have worked hard to improve our linkages with business to maintain the momentum for delivering our economic goals. We have seen developing the interface with the private sector as one of the Borough's competitive strengths which will help position the Borough for future sustainable recovery and long term resilience and growth.

Another notable facilitation activity has been the development and operation of a strong private / public sector Board. We have worked to ensure that our **Investment Strategy Board** has members with significant experience and expertise to provide the important oversight and guidance to comment upon, future proof and endorse our Investment Strategy action planning.

We have also ensured that this extensive experience in public-private partnership supports the development of the Local Enterprise Partnership as a key driver for accelerating business growth across the city region.

Business Support Services

The Council has made steady improvements to its interface with the private sector over the last four years with Invest Wirral being re-configured to be the primary business facing arm of Wirral Council and delivering key support services. This has resulted in the development of relationships with key businesses and is evidenced by the fact that Invest Wirral has engaged over 1,800 businesses during the course of the last three years. The support measures have also captured inward investment projects which have generated an investment value of over £23 million into the local economy.

In addition funding support has been provided through the Think Big and Big Business investment grants with 179 investment projects being supported in 2010/11. This included supporting companies to access regional and national funds.

FUTURE PRIORITIES

Building on economic analysis, and our extensive consultation with partners and stakeholders, we have now further enhanced Wirral's offer to businesses with the ambition of making Wirral the most business friendly and supportive Borough in the country.

Wirral Council has committed significant resources to support investment growth and to continue business support services with funding of £1.625m being made available for the delivery of investment support services in 2011/12. We will build on our previous successful approaches and ensure that we maximise the available resources by aligning our business support activities. This will be achieved through the operation by Invest Wirral of the recently agreed Investment Support Services Framework.

The Investment Support Services Framework provides the opportunity to offer new support products and to align existing investment activity to deliver a series of comprehensive business support services with access to advice, finance and project development support. The Framework will reflect the targeted approach that has been tried and tested within Wirral over the past few years and ensure that the council is able to provide a single contact point for businesses whether they are looking to grow within Wirral or whether they are seeking inward investment opportunities. Actions will include:

Supporting Business Growth

- Business growth is linked with the delivery of jobs for local people;
- Support is targeted at our small and medium sized businesses which together employ some 65,000 people and at our micro businesses (3 or less staff and/or a turnover below £100,000) to encourage development and job creation;
- A 'Business Angels' network is developed to provide investment in fast growing enterprises so that new business opportunities and new markets can be accessed and developed;
- Support mechanisms are set up to promote and develop social enterprise in Wirral;

- Growing the Wirral Business Forum – membership is growing month by month with a targeted figure by the end of March 2012 of 2,500 members. Sector based networking events will be held to encourage collaboration and intertrading between indigenous businesses as it is recognised that Business to Business networking is essential to developing Wirral's business base.

Supporting Inward Investment

Securing new inward investment to the Borough is a key priority and Wirral Council will work with its strategic partners, including intermediaries, to maximise the use of key resources to target specific companies in countries that are interested in the UK as an investment location and use the products and opportunities on offer to generate interest and where possible, secure investment for Wirral. These products have been set out in our 'Investing in Wirral People and Places' sections of this strategy. Based on this, Wirral will seek to deliver inward investment activity based on the following four key principles:

1. Attract new successful businesses, particularly those in key growth sectors and matching the requirements our key investment products
2. Promote strategies and develop technical specifications that will help provide the appropriate environment to encourage investment
3. Link to strategies that help train, attract and retain talented, skilled and knowledgeable people in the Borough
4. Position Wirral as a leading, vibrant global business location with a gateway to the UK and mainland Europe.

Investment Marketing

The www.investwirral.com website and accompanying marketing literature and advertising has attracted significant interest from overseas, notably the United States and China. This will be further developed to encourage increased investment and deliver new employment opportunities over the next decade.

The Investment Support Services Framework will also enable us to ensure that we attract, support and develop successful businesses particularly those in growth sectors that will build on existing local specialisms and offer the most growth potential. These include:

- Research and Development
- Offshore Energy
- Low carbon
- Advanced technology and manufacturing
- Biomedical

The focus on key growth sectors and high profile projects will be underpinned by a range of effective support services and enabling measures to attract new investment; to support businesses and to ensure that people have access to the right employment and skills services to benefit from these new opportunities.

Wirral Investment Strategy BUSINESS Priorities for 2011-2016

Our vision is to make Wirral Council the most business friendly and supportive in the country

What is the challenge?	Key Policy Statements	Strategic Actions
<p>The key challenge to growing Wirral's economy is to improve Wirral's business base and increase jobs.</p> <p>There is a need to increase the number of business start-ups, levels of self-employment.</p> <p>There is also a need to speed up rebalancing our economy, and achieve significant growth in higher value sectors.</p>	<p>We will maximise the available resources by co-ordinating all business support services through an Investment Support Services Framework delivered by Invest Wirral</p> <p>We will enable an increasing role for social enterprises in Wirral's economy</p> <p>We will play a lead role promoting Wirral as an investment location on an international stage and we will support Wirral businesses in accessing new markets and opportunities</p> <p>We will attract and support the development of successful businesses, particularly those in key growth sectors</p>	<p>Develop a streamlined and efficient single contact point for business</p> <p>Deliver a series of comprehensive business support service with access to advice, finance and project development</p> <p>Targeted Investment marketing to specific international markets and support for Wirral businesses to access new international markets and opportunities</p> <p>Target the following key growth sectors that (i) build on existing local business specialisms and; (ii) offer most growth potential:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research and Development • Offshore Wind • Low carbon • Advanced technology and manufacturing • Biomedical

Conclusion

Wirral's updated Investment Strategy demonstrates that Wirral is a Borough with enormous potential and opportunity. We will continue to engage our local businesses through our Business Forum and networking activities to promote economic growth. Wirral has seen significant improvements in its delivery activities since the inception of the Investment Strategy and whilst the global recession has had effects in Wirral, the Council has ensured its strategy has supported businesses and individuals through targeted support. However, it has also been able to continue to improve its ability to respond to investment opportunities, working with strategic partners and enhancing its interface with the private sector during difficult economic conditions.

We are clear that much still remains to be done to deliver the significant opportunities available to the Borough. Co-ordinated and effective actions are required to achieve this and to provide the necessary uplift in economic performance. Our refreshed Investment Strategy shows that achieving this uplift will require activity that both:

- supports the underlying conditions for economic growth and tackling worklessness. These are set out in the strategic actions of the Investing in Wirral's People and Places themes;
- enables investment and business growth that plays to the Borough's competitive strengths – Investing in Wirral's Business.

However, this approach has also been built upon a number of principles that underpin the delivery of our Investment Strategy, namely:

- A greatly improved interface between council departments and the private sector to capture investment resulting from the co-ordination of activity through the Investment Strategy team and Invest Wirral;
- The prioritisation of key regeneration activity to ensure a focused approach to investment;
- More effective use of resources through a targeted approach to interventions;
- Greater internal co-ordination to enable more efficient engagement with government on renewal and regeneration matters.

Wirral is in a strong position to capitalise on the significant investment opportunities that are likely to arise over the period 2011-16. Whilst the majority have been outlined in this Investment Strategy, the work being done by Wirral Council and its partners may well result in other exciting projects and activities being brought forward. **The delivery of this Investment Strategy will require the joint commitment of our partners working with us,** to allow Wirral to capitalise not only on existing developments but also on future opportunities.