

WORKING WIRRAL - WORKING NEIGHBOURHOODS FUND

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This report provides Cabinet members with a progress update on the first round of Working Wirral commissioning since Cabinet considered a report on this issue on the 9th July 2008.

1.2 Cabinet is requested to:

- Note the progress that has been made in the taking forward the first round of Working Wirral commissioning;
- Agree the financial recommendations of the Wirral Economic Development and Skills Partnership (WEDS) in respect of the projects that are proposed for Working Wirral funding.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 Cabinet on 13 March (Item 26 Minute 553 refers) agreed that the Working Wirral resources (including Working Neighbourhoods Fund (WNF), Deprived Areas Fund and the European Social Fund's Complementary Strand) should be used to commission activity to deliver the Investment Strategy priorities of tackling worklessness, improving skills levels and increasing enterprise, business growth and investment.

2.2 The first round of Working Wirral commissioning opened in May 2008 and the Commissioning Brief identified that a maximum of £5 million would be available for this round to allocate to activity that can take place up to 31st March 2011. This figure reflects the fact that the allocations made for WNF for 2009/10 and 2010/11 have yet to be confirmed by the Department for Communities and Local Government.

2.3 Cabinet on 9 July (Item 7 Minute 118 refers) noted that the first round of commissioning had been very heavily oversubscribed – with 117 proposals being received totaling just under £46 million against the £5 million available. A process has therefore been put in place through Wirral's Economic Development and Skills Partnership (WEDS) to address the large number of applications received in order to further prioritise how funding should be allocated.

3.0 WORKING WIRRAL ROUND 1 COMMISSIONING

3.1 The WEDS Partnership meeting on the 14th July considered an update from the WEDS Commissioning Group as to how applications were being progressed. It was noted that a number of applications had not met the eligibility criteria of the commissioning brief and were therefore not being progressed. It was further noted that a number of other applications put forward very similar activity to address the aims of the brief. It was therefore agreed that further work should be carried out by the Commissioning Group to identify priority actions that could be progressed in order to inform the prioritisation of

these applications and to aid assessment. This work will be progressed over the next few months and reported back to the WEDS partnership in October 2008.

- 3.2 The WEDS Partnership meetings of 14th July and 9th September considered and agreed the recommendations from the WEDS Commissioning Group that the following projects should be recommended for approval since they met the aims and outcomes outlined in the commissioning brief :

Greater Merseyside Connexions Partnership – Nextstep Plus

- 3.3 Increasing skills levels for Wirral residents at NVQ level 2 and above is an imperative for Wirral in terms of the Regional Economic Strategy (RES) and the LAA improvement targets agreed with government. The project targets clients who are aged 20+ and plugs a gap in provision for people with skills level 2 but below level 3, who are not currently catered for under the Nextstep programme.
- 3.4 The target groups for this project, Nextstep Plus, are primarily Job Seekers Allowance claimants who are unemployed between 0 and 6 months and are resident in the 53 SOAs which have worklessness levels of 25% and above, but who are ineligible for Nextstep because they have NVQ level 2 and above qualifications. The commissioning group agreed that the project will deliver activity for this target group that is not currently available on Wirral.
- 3.5 In 2008-09 the project will result in 12 people gaining job specific qualifications at NVQ level 2 and above and 65 people gaining a job. In years 2009-11 combined, the project will assist a further 40 people to gain job specific qualifications and 215 people will gain jobs within 6 months of participation. The commissioning group viewed the project's outputs as realistic, achievable and plugging a gap in current mainstream delivery. The project will be delivered by GM Connexions and activities will dovetail with Nextstep provision. Jobcentre plus will be a major referrer of eligible Job Seekers Allowance clients
- 3.6 The WEDS Partnership recommends that this project is funded up to a maximum of £385,822, subject to detailed contracting.

Involve North West – Reach Out / Reach Out Plus

- 3.7 Reducing levels of worklessness and engaging with residents from hard to reach groups is key for Wirral to achieve its targets within its Employment Strategy and the LAA improvement targets agreed with government. The project engages people in their own homes, and acts as a single point of contact for the family, to address the barriers of inter-generational worklessness. Clients are referred on to appropriate training, pre-employment support or employment. Employment Support Workers work with individuals to produce personalised action plans, and a tightly-controlled discretionary fund can be used flexibly to enable clients to overcome final hurdles to employment such as equipment, clothing and certification.
- 3.8 The project offers job clubs in each of the neighbourhoods it operates in, involving Jobcentre Plus, local employers and other local service providers. In addition, a limited out-of-hours service offers support and advice, which is used mostly by clients in work experiencing problems. The retention rate of Reach Out clients in employment at 13 weeks of over 85% is partly attributed to the availability of this service.
- 3.9 In years 2009-11, the project will help 920 clients into employment (either directly or via referral to appropriate services) and progress 880 into training. The project will maintain partnership working with mainstream providers, and will develop close working links with

services such as the Connexions Nextstep and Working Links' delivery of the DWP ESF Co-financed contract.

- 3.10 It is proposed by the WEDS Partnership that this project is funded up to a maximum of £1,685,079 subject to detailed contracting.

4.0 WORKING WIRRAL FUNDING

- 4.1 The Working Wirral programme includes the resources of the Working Neighbourhoods Fund, the Deprived Area Funds and the European Social Fund's (ESF) Complementary Strand as reported to Cabinet on 23 July 2008 (Item 11 Minute No 149 refers). The ESF funding has been awarded for the period of 2008-11. The WNF resource allocation is for 2008/09 as the allocations for 2009/10 and 2010/11 have yet to be confirmed by the Department for Communities and Local Government. The total available confirmed funding is £10,810,845.

- 4.2 As agreed by Cabinet, the first commissioning round now has available £6,760,000. This includes an allocation of £5 million of WNF together with the recently approved £1.67 million of ESF resources. Subject to the agreement of the recommendations in this report allocations against this sum to date are as follows:

Commissioned Projects	£
Wirralbiz	1,069,000
Connexions – Nextstep Plus	385,822
Involve NW – Reachout and Reachout Plus	1,685,079
Total committed to date	3,139,901

- 4.3 In addition there are a number of projects that are still being assessed by the WEDS Partnership as part of the Round 1 commissioning process. These projects total some £3.7 million and, should they be assessed as meeting the criteria for funding, then they will be brought forward to future Cabinet meetings for approval.

- 4.4 In respect of commitments against the total available Working Wirral funding, Cabinet agreed on 13 March 2008 allocations to the Neighbourhood Renewal transitional programme, to delivery costs including posts to support the engagement of both the voluntary and private sectors and to projects contributing towards business growth. This expenditure totals £4,089,522 which, taken together with the £6.76 million commissioning round, totals £10,759,522.

- 4.5 Any remaining funding from this year's allocation together with the further two years WN funding (once it is confirmed by the Government) will be allocated through the processes agreed by Cabinet, namely through the WEDS Partnership and the Investment Strategy Board with recommendations being taken to Cabinet.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Wirral has been allocated £28.3 million of Working Neighbourhoods Fund resources (including the DAF resources and subject to confirmation of the exact allocations for 2009/10 and 2010/11) and this covers the period 1st April 2008 to 31st March 2011. The allocation is paid through the LAA's Area Based Grant.

6.0 STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are none arising directly from this report

7.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The implementation of Working Wirral will reflect the Council's commitment to equal opportunities.

8.0 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Projects proposed to be funded through Working Wirral are likely to have positive community safety benefits.

9.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no specific implications arising directly from this report.

10.0 PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are none arising from this report.

11.0 ANTI-POVERTY IMPLICATIONS

11.1 Working Wirral will have significant future benefits for this area.

12.0 SOCIAL INCLUSION IMPLICATIONS

12.1 Working Wirral will have significant future benefits for this area.

13.0 LOCAL MEMBER SUPPORT IMPLICATIONS

13.1 This report will be of interest to all Members of the Council.

14.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

14.1 The Working Neighbourhoods Fund Statement – DCLG and DWP Paper November 2007

Sub National Review of Economic Development – Report to Cabinet 6.09.07

Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2007 – DCLG December 2007

Area Based Grant 2008/09 to 2010/11 – Report to Cabinet 10.01.08

Working Neighbourhoods Fund – Report to Cabinet 23.01.08

European Social Fund Complementary Strand – Report to Cabinet 07.02.08

Working Neighbourhoods Fund – Report to Cabinet 13.03.08

Working Neighbourhoods Fund – Report to Cabinet 09.07.08

15.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

15.1 Cabinet as accountable body agrees the recommendations of the WEDS Partnership and approves Working Wirral expenditure for:

- The Nextstep Plus project to a maximum of £385,822 for the period 2008 to 2011;
- The Reach Out / Reach Out Plus project to a maximum of £1,685,079 for the period 2009 to 2011.

15.2 Cabinet notes the action taken by the WEDS Partnership and by officers in the allocation of these funds.

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