

WIRRAL COUNCIL

CABINET

24TH NOVEMBER 2011

SUBJECT:	Neighbourhood Plans and Area Forum Funding
WARD/S AFFECTED:	All
REPORT OF:	Chief Executive
RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	Cllr Jean Stapleton, Community and Customer Engagement
KEY DECISION:	Yes

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report provides an overview of the Council's Neighbourhood Plan consultation and proposals to develop action plans for each area forum based on what local communities have told us during the consultation.
- 1.2 This report also sets out the results of the participatory budgeting exercise undertaken in respect of the Empty Shops Fund and Funds for You / Public Health funding.
- 1.3 The report finally outlines proposals for the future development of the area forums including the re-establishment of the chairs' group.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION/S

- 2.1 Cabinet is requested to note the themes that have emerged from the Neighbourhood Plan consultation and that they are used to inform the setting of the Council's budget for 2012/13.
- 2.2 Cabinet is requested to approve the award of the Empty Shops Fund and Funds for You / Public Health funding as set out at appendices 1 and 2 of this report.
- 2.3 Cabinet is requested to agree to delegate authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Community and Customer Engagement, to award funds for any remaining applications for Funds for You / Public Health as set out in paragraph 6.4 of this report.
- 2.4 Cabinet is requested to agree to delegate authority to the Acting Director of Regeneration, Housing and Planning, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Planning Strategy, to approve the award of any additional funds for Empty Shops Fund as set out in paragraph 6.5. This delegated authority is also requested to approve funding recommendations arising from the extension of the Empty Shops Fund opportunity.

3.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 3.1 Cabinet resolved at its meeting on the 23rd June 2011 to develop Neighbourhood Plans. This report sets out recommendations to finalise these plans and to support

and enhance Wirral's 11 area forums and to influence the investment of Council resources through the development of Neighbourhood Plans.

3.2 In line with the Cabinet resolution to distribute area forum funding at the October forum events, this report presents the projects for Cabinet to award funding as required by the Council's decision making process.

4.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

4.1 NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN CONSULTATION

4.1 The objective of developing Neighbourhood Plans is to:

- Accurately reflect the real challenges for the area based on engagement and consultation with local communities
- Set out a vision for a community and identify local priorities within the area
- Robustly influence the way the Council invests resources and delivers services in a local area
- Determine the future distribution of forum funding

4.2 A comprehensive consultation programme has now taken place with local communities. This commenced on the 25th July and concluded on the 7th October 2011. Throughout this period, the Council's Community Engagement Team have been out in the community talking to residents, voluntary organisations, schools, community groups and residents associations – asking them what their priorities are for their neighbourhoods, and what they would like to see changed or improved.

4.3 A range of methods were used to gather residents' opinions across all 11 area forums, including;

- An online and paper questionnaire
- Focus groups and presentations with resident and community groups
- A dedicated Neighbourhood Plan 'hotline' for residents to leave their views
- Events and open days throughout the community
- Attendance at sessions held by Alison McGovern MP which provided 250 responses from local residents

4.4 The consultation received a very positive response with over 1400 people completing the Neighbourhood Plan questionnaire and 173 focus groups held. The Community Engagement Team also held or visited a further 250 events throughout August and September to raise awareness of the Neighbourhood Plan consultation.

4.5 Ward Councillors received regular communication throughout the consultation period and were asked to inform the team of any further community events and meetings for the consultation team to attend. This involvement proved extremely useful to ensure a successful response from all parts of Wirral's communities.

4.6 The October area forum events provided an excellent opportunity to feedback initial findings of the consultation and seek further resident views on the issues and

priorities for their area. Over 500 local people attended these events which is excellent attendance and an improvement from 240 attendees in October 2010.

4.7 Indicative consultation responses are provided below for each forum area:

Area Forum	Questionnaires Received	Focus Groups and Presentations*
Bebington and Clatterbridge	97	7
Bidston and Claughton	93	21
Birkenhead, Tranmere and Rock Ferry	164	21
Bromborough and Eastham	135	30
Greasby, Frankby, Irby and Upton	132	7
Heswall, Pensby and Thingwall	91	8
Leasowe, Moreton and Saughall Massie	129	17
Liscard and Seacombe	101	10
New Brighton and Wallasey	110	15
Oxton and Prenton	175	26
West Wirral	155	11
NO NEIGHBOURHOOD GIVEN	25	0
Total	1407	173

*Figures do not include the 250 responses provided through the Alison McGovern MP sessions and further issues and suggestions raised by local residents through the dedicated 'Neighbourhood Plan' hotline and area forum events.

**Focus groups and presentations were undertaken with community groups and local residents on direct request and based on suggestions from Ward Councillors.

5.0 DEVELOPING THE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANS

- 5.1 Further to the consultation, a summary findings report has been produced for each area forum and was provided for local residents comments at the October area forum events. The consultation findings have also been placed on the Council's website at www.wirral.gov.uk/neighbourhood and in all One Stop Shops and Libraries across Wirral to provide further opportunities to comment on the findings.
- 5.2 Taking into account any additional feedback from local residents, draft Neighbourhood Plans will be developed for each area and reported to Cabinet to inform the setting of the Council's budget for 2012/13. Neighbourhood Plans will be formally adopted at the areas forums in February.
- 5.3 A summary of the general themes to emerge from the consultation is provided below by Corporate Plan theme.

5.4 Your Economy

- Residents consistently stated that it is very important for Wirral Council to help residents to find work.
- Lack of skills and not enough jobs were the two most perceived barriers to people finding jobs.
- Providing training and support were consistently suggested as something that the Council should be doing. Other suggestions included offering work experience and volunteering opportunities and encouraging and supporting enterprise start-ups.

5.5 Your Family: Children Young People

- Residents emphasised the importance of the availability and accessibility of local parks and open spaces. The provision of local amenities including libraries and leisure centres were also often cited as important factors in what makes their neighbourhood a good place for children and young people to grow up in, as were good local schools.
- More facilities and activities for teenagers were also cited as an important priority for improvement across all neighbourhoods.

5.6 Your Family: Health and Wellbeing

- Generally, people seem happy with the health services available to them.
- There was a general consensus across all areas that the 'top 3' priorities in relation to health were; 'being physically active'; 'a cleaner, greener environment'; and 'access to affordable healthy foods'.
- The findings suggest that there is generally a lack of awareness of what services are available for vulnerable people.
- Better publicising and promotion of services that are already available for vulnerable people, and improving Policing and Community Safety initiatives were commonly suggested themes that residents believed could keep vulnerable people safe and protected.

5.7 Your Neighbourhood

- All areas expressed a high level of satisfaction with their neighbourhood.
- Key features that people like about each area fell into three broad themes; 'community spirit', 'access to local amenities' and 'satisfaction with local parks and open spaces'.
- Issues raised for improvement varied between local areas. Road safety and road maintenance, dog fouling and litter were commonly identified as problems across all areas.

5.8 Your Council: Local Services

- Reducing Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour was universally selected in response to the question "What should the Council's priorities be?". There was less consensus achieved for other areas, but other common themes selected

included; street cleanliness and road maintenance; and rubbish collection and recycling.

- Large percentages of respondents from each neighbourhood felt that communities should have more power in deciding where Council resources are spent. However, there was much more variation in the percentages of people who felt that they themselves would be interested in getting involved with decision making.

5.9 The Neighbourhood Plan for each forum area will identify the local issues and actions that residents want to see taken in their local area. On the basis of analysis undertaken to date, it is expected that these issues and actions will fall into three categories for a response from the Council.

Issue requires	Proposed approach
Cabinet decision for further funding / policy initiative	Ensure issues are raised through inclusion in the Corporate Plan as appropriate to ensure that these inform budget setting process.
Consideration as part of a department's core budget / work programme	Head of Communications and Community Engagement will progress these discussions with relevant department's Chief Officer.
Activity to be funded from targeting use of existing area forum funding allocation	Head of Communications and Community Engagement will progress these discussions with relevant department's Chief Officers and Ward Councillors.

5.10 Where an issue has raised a mix of views or in some case conflicting opinions from local residents, it is proposed that further discussion is held initially with Ward Councillors and relevant departmental officers and, where appropriate, further consultation is taken with local residents.

5.11 A number of the issues and priorities will require joint partnership working between the Council and its partner organisations such as the Police, Fire and Rescue Service and NHS Wirral. It is proposed that the Local Strategic Partnership Executive receives a report on the Neighbourhood Plan consultation when it next meets in January 2012, and that further action planning sessions take place based on the issues that have emerged from the consultation.

5.12 Each area forum has £20,000 You Decide funding, £20,000 Improving Road Safety funding (which can be used for improvements such as drop kerbs and cycling lanes) and £5,000 Winter Resilience funding to spend according to local priorities. Cabinet resolved at its meeting in June to allocate this funding in accordance to the area forum priorities that emerge through the neighbourhood plans.

You Decide:	£20,000 per forum
Improving Road Safety:	£20,000 per forum
Winter Resilience	£5,000 per forum

Total: **£45,000 per forum**

- 5.13 It is proposed that the Improving Road Safety fund is spent according to the findings of the Neighbourhood Plan consultation specifically related to road safety and travel issues. This information will be provided to the Technical Services department to provide an assessment of each issue including work required, priority level and associated costs in order to enable the Ward Councillors to make an informed decision regarding where funding is to be awarded.
- 5.14 It is proposed that the You Decide and Winter Resilience funding together with underspend from the Funds for You and Public Health resources is made available for Ward Councillors in each forum area to commission services or activities that will have a positive impact on the priorities identified within the forum's Neighbourhood Plan. It is suggested that this will create a single neighbourhood fund to use flexibly according to the Neighbourhood Plan priorities and that this approach be adopted for the future distribution of all forum funding. Public Health underspend will be specifically allocated to have a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of Wirral residents. This approach will delegate the decision making for allocation of forum funding to Ward Councillors and ensure that funding follows priorities identified within the area based on consultation with local residents.

6.0 AREA FORUM FUNDING ALLOCATION

- 6.1 Cabinet resolved on 23rd June 2011 to distribute Empty Shops Funding and Funds for You / Public Health funding through participative budgeting at the October area forums. All applications were initially reviewed by an officer panel against the funding criteria agreed by Cabinet.
- 6.2 Applicants meeting the funding criteria were invited to attend and present their proposed project at the October forum events, with local residents attending given the opportunity to vote for the projects which they would like to see funded. Protocols were developed for the events and shared with Ward Councillors as well as published on the Council's website. Applications made to the Leasowe, Moreton and Saughall Massie area forum were considered by the Ward Councillors in this area.
- 6.3 The following funding was available for allocation at the October forum events:

Funds for You:	£15,500 per forum
Public Health:	£10,000 per forum ¹
<u>Empty Shops:</u>	<u>£17,500 per forum²</u>
Total:	£43,000 per forum

¹Includes an additional investment from NHS Wirral for 2011/12 announced following the advertisement of the funding.

²Additional funding from the Government's National Empty Shops initiative is also available for to be allocated to three specific centres through the relevant area forums as follows:

- Liscard and Seacombe Area Forum: King Street / Brighton Street £17,500
- Bromborough and Eastham Area Forum: New Ferry £17,500, Bromborough £17,500

- 6.4 The voting results for the Bromborough / Eastham area forum will be considered at a further meeting of Ward Councillors. The results for this area forum were marginal in relation to a high number of projects and it was agreed that in this instance the votes would be referred to elected members. It is requested that Cabinet agree that the award of funding for this area forum and all multiple applications will therefore be approved under delegated authority by the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Community and Customer Engagement.
- 6.5 Additionally, as there remains £33,500 Empty Shops Fund for the Bromborough / Eastham area forum the Ward Councillors will have a further opportunity to consider awarding remaining funds to applications that were not supported by the local people attending the October area forum event. This is in line with the protocol developed to distribute forum funding through participatory budgeting. Also, there are further projects that are requesting additional funds due to changes in circumstances from their original application, for example increased costs related to a change in the property applied for. It is requested that Cabinet agree that any additional award of Empty Shops Fund is approved under delegated authority by the Acting Director of Regeneration, Housing and Planning, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Planning Strategy.

7.0 EMPTY SHOPS FUND

- 7.1 The Empty Shops fund is available to businesses, voluntary, community or faith sector groups and 'not for profit' organisations to deliver activities that bring empty shops back into use and contribute to one or more of the following aims:
- Lead to the re-use of empty shops as a result of the grant;
 - Increase the vitality of a local shopping centre;
 - Encourage more people to visit a local shopping centre;
 - Lead to the provision of local employment opportunities.
- 7.2 These aims were informed by consultation with a number of traders groups and reflected the understanding that there are a range of activities that can contribute to bringing empty shops back into use and therefore benefit local shopping centres. The range of projects applying to the Fund therefore include temporary, semi-permanent and sustainable solutions with some projects relating to the setting up of businesses with others involving increasing the vitality of an area on a more temporary basis.
- 7.3 The projects to be awarded funding subject to Cabinet approval are set out in Appendix 1 of this report. Cabinet are requested to approve payments to these applicants subject to detailed contracting including a formal offer letter, which will set out the terms and conditions of the fund, and also any necessary statutory approvals being in place. Should Cabinet approve the projects in Appendix 1 it is proposed that those area forums with small allocations of funding remaining, which will be insufficient to fund a further empty shops project, should be able to use this remaining funding in line with the emerging Neighbourhood Plan priorities.
- 7.4 The funding available for bringing empty shops back in to use was extensively advertised and the response for the funding was high. However, following consideration of the applications by the officer panel, in terms of eligibility criteria,

and then by local residents at the area forum meetings, significant funding remains available in six of the area forum areas:

- Heswall, Pensby and Thingwall
- Bebington and Clatterbridge
- Bidston, St James and Claughton
- New Brighton and Wallasey
- Oxton and Prenton
- Bromborough and Eastham

7.5 It is therefore recommended that a further opportunity should be given to generate interest in the Fund across these forum areas and that a focused and targeted approach is taken to seek applications to bring empty shops back into use. In order to enable applications resulting from this extension to be allocated funding within this financial year, it is proposed that after assessing their eligibility they should be considered by the elected ward members of the relevant area forums and if supported then it is requested that authority is delegated to the Acting Director of Regeneration, Housing and Planning, in consultation with the Cabinet member for Regeneration and Planning Strategy to approve them.

7.6 It is also proposed that any funding that remains unallocated at the end of this extended opportunity should remain available to be used by the relevant area forums in line with their Neighbourhood Plan priorities.

8.0 FUNDS FOR YOU / PUBLIC HEALTH

8.1 Funds for You and Public Health funding is available to voluntary, community or faith sector groups and 'not for profit' organisations to fund projects and activities that will have a positive impact in Wirral's communities and health and wellbeing of local residents.

8.2 Groups that applied to three or less area forums were invited to present at the October area forum events. A number of groups made funding applications to four or more area forums and in these instances the applications were considered separately by the Ward Councillors in appropriate areas.

8.3 There is currently a £14,585 underspend available from previous year's funding allocation. It is proposed that this underspend is utilised to fund multiple applications considered by Ward Councillors and the 2012 Big Lunch events.

8.4 The projects to be awarded funding subject to Cabinet approval are set out in appendix 2 of this report. Cabinet are requested to approve payments to these applicants subject to a formal offer letter which will set out the terms and conditions of the fund.

9.0 FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF AREA FORUMS

9.1 The October area forum events attracted well in excess of 500 residents; an increase of over 100% on the October 2010 meetings. During this Neighbourhood Plan consultation process the Community Engagement Team has also met with over 170 community groups across the borough.

- 9.2 It is intended to capitalise on this increase in engagement through a redevelopment of the area forums, and investigating methods of reinvigorating the meetings by looking at their purpose, frequency, promotion and membership.
- 9.3 The first step in achieving this will be to re-establish the 'Chairs Group'; comprising Council officers together with the members acting as Chairs for each forum area for 2011/12. It is proposed that the Chairs' Group should hold their first meeting by January 2011, in advance of the February 2012 round of forum meetings.
- 9.4 As indicated earlier in this report, the findings from the Neighbourhood Plan consultation are currently being analysed, with a view to being shared with Departments before being developed into an action plan for each area forum. Progress against these actions will then, it is proposed, become the main driver for area forum agendas in the future, in consultation with the Chair.
- 9.5 It is also proposed that the Chairs' Group will look at other issues around the management of the Forums, namely; frequency of meetings, the membership of the Forum and the role of community representatives, any possible 'sub-groups' or committees of residents to work on specific issues, and the location and venues of meetings.
- 9.6 The promotion and identity of the area forum meetings will also be considered by the Chairs Group, with input from Council officers, in an effort to further increase the numbers of attendees at the meetings.

10.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 10.1 Project and risk planning is in place in relation to the approach set out in this report and will be regularly reviewed to ensure that key risks are addressed through mitigating action.
- 10.2 A funding agreement will be put in place between the Council and each of the approved projects and this will outline that the funding should be used solely for the purpose for which it was given. With regards to the Empty Shops funding, project owners will be required to provide financial records and receipts for all claimed expenditure in line with council procedures. However, where necessary to assist with cashflow, it is proposed that payments can be made in advance subject to:
- the organisation clearly evidencing in writing, and to the satisfaction of the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Finance, a need for advance funding, and
 - The provision of financial receipts against each advance before any further advances are made.
- 10.3 A number of the empty shops projects may require change of use consent. These projects have been identified by officers and discussed with the applicants and with planning officers to ensure that the appropriate approvals can be put in place prior to any projects proceeding.

11.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 11.1 Not applicable

12.0 CONSULTATION

- 12.1 The consultation approach has been developed to initiate the widest possible consultation and engagement with local communities. Consultation plans were drawn up for each forum area and included consultation events and a targeted programme for engagement with Wirral's Communities.
- 12.2 Consultation has taken place on the draft findings with local residents and ward councillors at the October forum events and also made available on the Council's website and local libraries and One Stop Shops to provide a further opportunities for local residents to review and comment on the draft consultation findings.

13.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS

- 13.1 The report provides details of projects that have been submitted by Wirral's voluntary, community and faith groups to be funded through the area forums.

14.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS

- 14.1 There is a £5,000 policy option allocation per forum area to develop the Neighbourhood Plans, and this has partially been used for the consultation process.
- 14.2 Existing staffing resources will be used during the continued development of the Neighbourhood Plans. The policy option will allow for effective communication of the plans to local communities.

15.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 15.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

16.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 16.1 Funding identified within this report has been advertised widely to enable all groups across Wirral to apply for funding. The consultation included targeted actions to engage minority communities and target groups. The Neighbourhood Plans will be further developed in consultation with all of Wirral's diverse communities.
- 16.2 An initial equality impact assessment is attached as appendix 3 of this report. Each plan will have an equalities statement informed by the consultation programme referred to in this report.

17.0 CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

- 17.1 There are no carbon reduction implications arising from this report.

18.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 18.1 The report outlines proposals to enable communities to develop a vision for their community through the development of a 'Neighbourhood Plan'. An important influence on this work will be the take-up of Neighbourhood Development Plans and Orders introduced by the Coalition Government in autumn 2010 and to be brought into law through the Localism Bill, currently in Parliament. Neighbourhood

Development Plans in this context are to give constituted neighbourhood organisations (such as Residents' or Business Associations) the right to prepare a Neighbourhood Development Plan or Neighbourhood Development Order for their area to control development, outside the provisions made in the Council's Local Development Framework.

- 18.2 The Council's area forums are also an ideal opportunity for Neighbourhood Planning Front Runners to communicate and engage with local residents about planning development, and where appropriate provide further support to groups considering submitting proposals for Neighbourhood Development Plans. In Wirral, Devonshire Park Residents' Association (Prenton Ward), Hoyle Village Life (Hoyle and Meols) and Central Liscard Area Residents Association (Liscard / Seacombe) have been accepted by Government and funding of £20,000 per proposal has been granted to the Council to support the Front Runners and fund the referendum for each proposal.
- 18.3 Some Empty Shops Fund projects may require change of use applications to be made.

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