

ECONOMY AND REGENERATION OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday, 7 November 2011

Present: Councillor M Johnston (Chair)

Councillors A Cox S Niblock
G Ellis D Realey
P Hackett S Whittingham

Deputy: Councillor S Mountney (in place of A Hodson)

Apologies Councillors P Kearney S Kelly

(Councillor Kearney did subsequently arrive for the meeting having been considerably delayed on the motorway because of an incident on the M56)

24 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST / PARTY WHIP

Members were asked to consider whether they had a personal or prejudicial interest in connection with any item on the agenda and, if so, to declare it and to state the nature of such interest.

Members were reminded that they should also declare, pursuant to paragraph 18 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules, whether they were subject to a party whip in connection with the item to be considered and, if so, to declare it and state the nature of the whipping arrangement.

Councillor Hackett declared a personal interest in minute 28 (European Social Fund) by virtue of his employment at the New Brighton Community Centre.

25 MINUTES

Members were requested to receive the minutes of the meeting of the Economy and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 5 September, 2011.

The Chair referred to minute 19 (Fair Trade Update) and that the last sentence of the preamble should read, 'A final, more detailed report would be presented to the November, 2012 meeting of the Committee.'

The Chair also referred to minute 12 (Budget Issues for Economy and Housing in 2012/13) and circulated a copy of an email response from Councillors George and Phil Davies, in which they suggested late January / early February would be the best time for a special meeting of the Committee to consider any budget savings proposals. He thanked them for their response.

Resolved - That subject to the above amendment, the minutes be approved as a correct record.

26 **INVEST WIRRAL**

Paula Basnett, Head of Investment in the Department of Regeneration, Housing and Planning, gave a presentation to the Committee on the work of Invest Wirral which offered a proactive support service by developing client relationships with businesses to provide information and assistance to help sustainability, growth and to create development opportunities.

She outlined the various areas of business support available including SME Project Managers, Micro Business Managers, the Business Angel Scheme and the Social Enterprise Team. An online business forum had also been established for Wirral businesses with 2030 business members, achievements since 1993 included:

- 941 investment projects
- 16,000 jobs – either new or safeguarded
- £248m in related investments for the Borough

During 2010/11 Invest Wirral had secured 552 jobs and £13m investments, averaging 800 company engagements each year. Over the past three years 3,000 jobs had been secured and £50m attracted in project investments. Business Investment Grant of £2,500,000 on 61 projects had supported £26m of investments.

Responding to comments from Members Paula Basnett and her colleague, Graham Maddrell, Investment Manager, reported that businesses listed in the business forum, did receive 6 and 12 monthly checks on their turnover and numbers of employees. The Invest Wirral team were trying to do as much as they could between investors and investees and they highlighted some of the recent investment successes in Wirral, including Teledyne CML Group's new facility in Bromborough which was positioned to become a major supplier of composite components to the aviation, marine and space markets.

Paula Basnett stated that she would be happy to bring a report back to the Committee on the online business forum and how it was helping local businesses. Research was being undertaken on how long companies were staying on the website and where they were then being directed to. An Inward Investment Manager was due to be appointed in the near future and they would be developing a site strategy for the Wirral.

Resolved – That the presentation be noted.

27 **CHILD POVERTY STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN - PROGRESS REPORT**

The Chief Executive submitted a report which set out the work that had been undertaken to date, in accordance with the report to the Cabinet on 14 April 2011 (minute 386 refers), to develop a Wirral Child Poverty Strategy and action plan in partnership with local organisations and agencies, including the voluntary, community and faith sector. This included the contribution of the Wirral Child and Family Poverty Working Group, which had been established to make recommendations to the Council and its partners about a local Child Poverty Strategy and action plan.

The report also provided a progress report on the £10,000 policy option agreed by the Cabinet and Council in February 2010 to invest in targeted engagement with Wirral organisations and local communities and set out the proposed next steps in relation to the further development of the action plan.

The report also detailed the links between Wirral's local approach and the development of a strategy for the Liverpool City Region, which had been shaped by the City Region Commission on Poverty and Life Chances, chaired by Frank Field MP.

At its meeting of 13th October 2011, Cabinet:

“(a) Noted the progress that has been made to date in relation to the development of a child and family poverty strategy for Wirral, including the excellent contribution of the Wirral Child and Family Poverty Working Group, and approves the draft strategy and initial action plan at Appendix 1;

(b) Authorised the Chief Executive to undertake further consultation on the draft strategy and prepare a final version for approval and adoption by the Council and partners;

(c) Authorises the Chief Executive (and any other officer nominated by him) to undertake any other steps and action incidental and conducive to finalising the strategy and progressing the action plan, including working with relevant partners and stakeholders as considered necessary and appropriate;

(d) Agreed that the Wirral Child and Family Poverty Working Group should continue to meet to oversee the further development of the strategy.”

Cabinet further resolved to make tackling child poverty a key priority for 2012/13 and to make sure that all Council strategies and plans were properly amended to include this as a major priority for the Council, with subsequent referral to Council as appropriate.

Jane Morgan, Corporate Policy Manager in the Department of Regeneration, Housing and Planning, responded to comments from Members and informed the meeting that a more detailed 3 year action plan would be brought back to meetings of the Cabinet and this Committee in the new year, once more work had been undertaken.

Resolved –

(1) That this Committee notes the progress made to date on the draft child poverty strategy.

(2) That regular updates on progress on the implementation of the recommendations as agreed by Cabinet on the 13th October 2011 be brought to this Committee particularly in relation to:

- **Workstream 2: Targeting our efforts to make work the best route out of poverty for Wirral families and;**

- **Workstream 5: Recognise and support the role that safe and high quality neighbourhoods and thriving communities can have in transforming lives**

28 EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND

The Acting Director of Regeneration, Housing and Planning submitted a report which had been requested by Members of the Committee which gave an analysis of progress against delivery of Wirral's European Social Fund (ESF) activity, including:

- Progress on the contract with the Reachout (Involve Northwest) consortia
- Comparisons with arrangements/results at other local authorities.

Responding to comments from Members, David Ball, Interim Head of Strategic Development and Regeneration, informed the Committee that the Management Information System, which the Council was required to use in its contract with the Reachout Partnership, would provide a much richer source of performance data once fully operational. He also went on to outline the situation in respect of the Intermediate Labour Market posts and that discussions were being held regarding a possible extension to the programme.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

29 DEPARTMENT FOR WORK AND PENSIONS WORK PROGRAMME

The Acting Director of Regeneration, Housing and Planning submitted a report which had been requested by Members of the Committee with an analysis of progress against delivery of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Work Programme, including comparisons with arrangements / results at other local authorities.

In response to Members' concerns, David Ball, Interim Head of Strategic Development and Regeneration, reported that discussions were taking place with the DWP over the release of performance data and that they might release some information on a confidential basis as it was important from the Council's point of view to understand what was happening in the locality.

Resolved – That the details of the DWP Work Programme be noted and that if agreement is reached with the DWP for the release of information on a confidential basis, the information is reported to this Committee.

30 PERFORMANCE AND FINANCIAL REVIEW - SECOND QUARTER 2011/12

The Acting Director of Regeneration, Housing and Planning reported upon the performance of the Council's Corporate Plan 2011-2014 for July to September 2011 in relation to economy and regeneration. He provided an overview of performance, resource and risk monitoring and highlighted what was working well, future challenges and risks.

Responding to comments from Members, Ian Platt, Acting Head of Housing, stated that work was being undertaken with existing tenants and Registered Social Landlords on a pilot basis to address the issue of under occupation of social housing. Once the impact of the Welfare Reform Bill was fully detailed then further work would be undertaken on this issue.

The Chair suggested that a further report on the final situation with HMRI would be useful.

Some Members queried the need for the report to contain information on corporate performance outside the remit of the Committee.

It was then moved by the Chair and seconded by Councillor Hackett that –

“Future reports on performance only contain information on performance indicators relevant to the work of this Committee.”

The motion was put and lost (4:4).

Resolved – That the report be noted and a further report on the final situation with HMRI be added to the work programme.

31 **FUTURE PLANS FOR THE BUSINESS START PROGRAMME**

David Ball, Interim Head of Strategic Development and Regeneration gave an update on the future plans for the Business Start Programme. He informed the meeting that the North West Development Agency was winding up many of its contracts by the end of December, 2011 and this was the decision of the agency themselves, although there may have been some instruction from central Government.

The Acting Director would bring a report back to a future Committee on business start ups.

Responding to Members' comments the Interim Head of Strategic Development and Regeneration referred to the constantly changing scene of business funding initiatives and these would be signposted in reports to the Committee. He would also circulate a briefing note on the DWP funded New Enterprise Allowance scheme.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

32 **SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee received an update on its work programme including the reports to be scheduled for the January meeting.

Councillor Niblock declared a prejudicial interest and left the meeting during consideration of the Chair's question, due to him living in a HMRI area.

In response to a question from the Chair, Ian Platt, Acting Head of Housing, informed the Committee that with the ending of the HMRI, the results of the transition funding application should be available to bring to the January meeting.

Resolved – That, subject to the addition of a report on HMRI transition funding, the work programme be agreed.

33 **FORWARD PLAN**

The Committee had been invited to review the Forward Plan prior to the meeting in order for it to consider, having regard to the Committee's work programme, whether scrutiny should take place of any items contained within the Plan and, if so, how it could be done within relevant timescales and resources.

Resolved – That the forward plan be noted.

34 **EXEMPT INFORMATION - EXCLUSION OF MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

Resolved – That in accordance with section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined by the relevant paragraphs of Part 1 of Schedule 12A (as amended) to that Act. The public interest test has been applied and favours exclusion.

35 **REGENERATION UPDATE**

The Acting Director of Regeneration, Housing and Planning provided an update on major development schemes within the Borough.

Resolved – That the report be noted and Lindsay Ashworth, of Peel Holdings, be invited to give a presentation on the International Trade Centre to a future meeting of the Committee.