

# ECONOMY AND REGENERATION OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday, 16 January 2012

Present:

Councillor	M Johnston (Chair)	
Councillors	A Cox	S Kelly
	G Ellis	S Niblock
	P Hackett	D Realey
	A Hodson	S Whittingham
	P Kearney	

## 36 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATION 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 Niblock declared a prejudicial interest in the item, 'Outcome of Wirral's Housing Market Renewal Transitional Funding Bid Including Proposed Exit Plan and Suggested Amended Housing Investment Programme for 2011/12' by virtue of him living in one of the areas referred to (see minute 40 post).

## 37 MINUTES

Members were requested to receive the minutes of the meeting of the Economy and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 7 November, 2011.

In respect of minute 29 (Department for Work and Pensions Work Programme) the Chair asked if there had been any developments with regard to the release of confidential performance data by the DWP. In response the Acting Director informed the Committee that information was still embargoed as the DWP had not changed its approach.

**Resolved - That the minutes be approved as a correct record.**

## 38 PRESENTATION - WIRRAL WATERS

Richard Mawdsley, Development Manager with Peel gave a presentation on the proposed development of Wirral Waters. He outlined some background on Peel Holdings and the various Peel groups, including energy, ports and Media City UK before going into further detail on the proposed Wirral Waters development and in particular the International Trade Centre.

Responding to questions from Members, Richard Mawdsley's comments included:

- Peel would work with current business occupiers of buildings on the docks estate who may need to be relocated to new premises.
- The tidal power project for the Mersey estuary would be a £3.5bn project for which Government approval would be needed and talks were ongoing with possible long-term investors.
- Remediation works were due to take place between March – November, 2012 on clearing up the site for the International Trade Centre. This was a joint venture with Chinese companies as they were looking at it as a springboard into the rest of Europe.
- He assured the Committee that the Wirral Waters project was one of Peel's priority projects.
- There were no firm details on the retail/leisure element in the yet to be developed proposals for Bidston, but this would be subject to its own retail studies and planning consents.

**Resolved – That the presentation and comments be noted.**

### 39 CORPORATE PLAN 2012/13

In accordance with Council minutes 77 and 78 (12 December, 2011), the Committee considered those parts of the Corporate Plan within its remit. The Committee had also had sight of a motion which had been referred to all Overview and Scrutiny Committees by the Council at its meeting on 12 December, 2011 (minute 76 refers) and which was considered in connection with the Corporate Plan.

The Draft Corporate Plan and report of the Chief Executive which had been considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 8 December were considered by the Committee and the Chair invited comments from the Committee.

Responding to comments from Members, the Acting Director of Regeneration, Housing and Planning stated that the Corporate Plan would have targets and these would be expanded on in more detail in the Departmental Plan. There would be measures in place for ongoing monitoring.

Members made the following suggestions for inclusion in the Corporate Plan:

- Addressing child poverty needs to be one of the main priorities. The Chair confirmed that the Working Group on Child Poverty would report to this Committee as well as to the Children and Young People O&S Committee.
- Housing – Make one of the targets around the issue of affordable housing and mortgage support schemes for first time buyers.
- 'Improve access to employment and skills....' - there was a need to be more specific with an emphasis on level 3 attainment in apprenticeship schemes and at least a level 2 in functional skills regarding employment readiness.
- 'Position Wirral as a leading, vibrant global location....' – need to refer to being committed to the Liverpool City Region and Local Enterprise Partnerships.

- Wirral Waters – there was a need to plan for the effects on existing retail and industrial areas of activity in the peripheral parts of Birkenhead which could suffer rather than just rely on a ‘trickle down’ effect from the Wirral Waters developments and make sure these areas benefit too.
- Retail – some centres are under stress and there was a need to plan ahead for interventions.
- The current draft plan gave no indication of the targets reached from the previous years’ plan and there was a need for headline priorities with start and end dates through a three year cycle with budgeting year on year.
- Looking at the phraseology used such as, ‘Ensuring that our young people have excellent skills and opportunities into employment,’ this could be re-phrased, ‘Ensuring that our young people have the best qualifications for whatever employment they want to go into...’
- ‘Continuing to improve our relationships with the private sector....’ – could these sectors be listed?
- Need for a measure of those co-ordinated resources for all business support services through Invest Wirral.
- ‘An increasing role for social enterprises in Wirral’s economy’ should be shown as a percentage.
- Wirral was over-dependent on the public sector for employment opportunities and there was a need for a re-balancing of this.
- There was a need to refer to the growth in the elderly population and the impact of this on every sector.
- Too many units of a certain type of housing stock.
- No sense of which priority was the driving force for the Council.
- No mention of the Council’s public health role, where it would sit within the Council structure and how it would be scrutinised.

The Chair suggested that it was also difficult to view the document in isolation without seeing any budget proposals or the Departmental Plan.

**Resolved – That the comments of the Committee be referred to the Cabinet.**

40 **OUTCOME OF WIRRAL'S HOUSING MARKET RENEWAL TRANSITIONAL FUNDING BID**

(Councillor Niblock, having declared a prejudicial interest, left the meeting during consideration of this item).

The Acting Director of Regeneration, Housing and Planning submitted a report which updated the Committee on the outcome of the Housing Market Renewal Initiative (HMRI) Transitional Funding bid and outlined amendments to the Council’s Housing Investment Programme for 2011/12 to incorporate the HMRI Transitional Funding. The report also advised Members on proposals to prepare the exit plan for Wirral’s Housing Market Renewal Programme.

In response to Members’ comments, the Acting Director of Regeneration, Housing and Planning explained the reduction in the original bid for £3.9m to £2.9m and the fact that capital funding was conditional upon 100% match funding from the Council. The HMRI Transitional bid had been successful, with Wirral receiving £2.7m additional capital funding. Although slightly less than anticipated, this funding, when

combined with match funding would enable the completion of most of the existing clearance commitments throughout the former HMRI area. It might be possible to make up the shortfall with New Homes Bonus to complete the programme.

The Acting Director was confident that most of the outstanding purchases could be achieved with Compulsory Purchase Orders always being a last resort. With regard to the exit strategy plans were also in place should other funding become available. Wirral had taken a very measured approach to HMRI making it easier to address exit plans.

**Resolved –**

**(1) That the contents of the report be noted.**

**(2) That the proposed changes to the Housing Investment Programme for 2011/12 be reported to Cabinet.**

**(3) That the thanks of this Committee be accorded to all the officers involved in securing this funding and for their ongoing work.**

#### 41 **SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**

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

The Chair suggested the following additions to the Work Programme:

- Child Poverty Strategy – March meeting
- Inward Investment presentation – June meeting
- Mortgages for first time buyers
- Options for business start-ups

The Chair also referred to a special meeting which was pending to scrutinise any possible savings which the Cabinet might propose.

**Resolved – That the Work Programme be agreed with the above additions.**

#### 42 **FORWARD PLAN**

The Director of Law, HR and Asset Management reported that the Forward Plan for the period January to April 2012 had been published on the Council's intranet/website. Members had been invited to review the Plan prior to the meeting in order for the Economy and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider, having regard to the 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.**

43 **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.**

44 **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.**