

WIRRAL COUNCIL

CABINET 15 MARCH 2012

SUBJECT:	<i>PORTAS PILOTS BID FUNDING</i>
WARD/S AFFECTED:	<i>ALL</i>
REPORT OF:	<i>ACTING DIRECTOR OF REGENERATION, HOUSING AND PLANNING</i>
RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	<i>REGENERATION AND PLANNING STRATEGY</i>
KEY DECISION?	<i>YES</i>

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 In 2011 Mary Portas was commissioned by Government to undertake an independent review of high streets. In December 2011 - The Portas Review was published with a number of recommendations, one of which was to create a series of Town Teams for retail areas.
- 1.2 On 4th February 2012 Government announced 'Portas Pilots - Prospectus: an invitation to become a Town Team' to co-ordinate innovative approaches to the issues raised in the Portas Review. The Government is inviting bids into a £1 million fund, to become a Town Team, from all areas of the country. The Government will select twelve pilots with up to £100,000 funding available for each.
- 1.3 The bids must be submitted in a partnership approach between retailers, landlords, local community, Local Authority and partners. The Local Authority must agree to be the accountable body for the fund and also submit a statement that the project will secure value for money for tax payers.
- 1.4 The Council has received a number of draft bids from local groups. A summary of the draft bids is included in the report (Section 2).
- 1.5 Cabinet is asked to agree the principle of the Local Authority acting as the Accountable Body for any funding which may be granted, if any of the bids are successful, for up to £100,000 per bid.
- 1.6 Cabinet is asked to agree that due to the very tight timescale for the bids; that the Acting Director of Regeneration, Housing and Planning in consultation with the Leader of the Council/ Portfolio Holder, be authorised to finalise the statements on securing value for money for taxpayers in the use of the grant to accompany final bids for submission to Government on 30th March 2012. This is to allow the groups as much time as possible to finalise their bids (including producing a video), within the framework of their draft bids outlined below, before submission to Government.
- 1.7 That the Cabinet agree that should any further bids be submitted to the Council prior to 30th March deadline, the Acting Director of Regeneration, Housing and Planning, in consultation with the Cabinet Portfolio holder/Leader, be authorised to finalise any

additional statements on securing value for money for taxpayers in the use of the grant.

2.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

- 2.1 As part of the Government's initiative to save our high streets, Mary Portas was commissioned to undertake a review of our high streets in 2011. In December 2011 Mary Portas published 'The Portas Review - an independent review into the future of our high streets'. This set out 28 recommendations for overhauling our high streets, one of which was to create "Town Teams", described as a "visionary, strategic and strong operational management team for high streets".
- 2.2 On 4th February 2012 Government announced the 'Portas Pilots – Prospectus: an invitation to become a Town Team' which is inviting bids from groups across the Country to become a Town Team. These must be submitted to Government by 30th March 2012. The Government will support twelve pilots across the Country with up to £100,000 available for each, dependant on the amount sought and Government's assessment of the bid.
- 2.3 The bids are to be submitted in a 'Town Team' approach with retailers, traders, landlords, the local authority, local community and other partners working together. Applications will only be considered from either local partnerships or a consortium with a single lead bidder. The prospectus states that the Local Authority (i.e. Wirral Council) will need to be the accountable body for the funding (which will be paid through s31 unringfenced revenue grant) and any application must be accompanied by a letter confirming that the Local Authority has agreed to be the Accountable Body, along with a statement from the Council on securing value for money for tax payers in the use of the grant.
- 2.4 The prospectus states that a selection of pilots will be chosen by Government based on the following criteria:
 - Mix – a selection which is representative from high streets, town centres, small parades, market towns, villages, larger towns, coastal towns and suburban areas. Also a good geographical spread of areas, as well as areas with both high and low average incomes and high and low shop vacancy rates.
 - Strong Leadership – pilot areas with a transformational vision for their high streets and the backing to make it into a reality. The lead partner should be able to clearly articulate this vision.
 - Commitment – maximum commitment to the Town Team approach amongst retailers, landlords, the local authority and local community. This could be shown through businesses match funding investment or a high proportion of landlords and businesses becoming part of the town team.
 - Potential for improvement – resources will be allocated on a value for money basis. The area must be able to demonstrate potential for improvement. Bids must provide current vacancy rates in the high street and any other information which can demonstrate need and potential.

The pilots will be selected to achieve sufficient diversity to understand the effectiveness of the town team approach, although bids do not have to be restricted to testing proposals in the Portas review.

2.5 Bids have to be submitted on the supplied application form and be accompanied by a short video submission setting out why their pilot should be chosen. The application form requires that it is clear:

- Who will lead the pilot
- Which local authority will be the Accountable Body (confirmation letter from the local authority and an accompanying statement on securing value for money for tax payers in use of the grant)
- How the partnership proposes to use the grant
- An outline of the key priorities for the pilot
- How the pilot meets the criteria, demonstrates its suitability for funding and meets the need for additional impact
- How the pilot will deliver transparency in the use of grant.

2.6 Officers have already been working with known local trader groups as part of the ongoing work on the Action Plans following the Town, District and Local Centre study and delivery framework (Cabinet 21st July 2011, minute 75 refers). Officers circulated the Portas Prospectus to all local Members, existing trader groups of which officers are aware, and other relevant organisations, as well as using the Invest Wirral Business network. The information was also advertised on the Council's website and via social media.

2.7 The Council has received details of five potential draft bids from:

- Liscard
- New Ferry
- Hoylake
- New Brighton
- Moreton

2.8 The Council has been supporting organisations to develop their bids and encourage them to work together in line with the Town Team approach. A summary of the five potential bids developed to date is set out below:

2.9 **Hoylake Village Life Community Interest Company** – Bidding for up to £100,000. The Town Team are looking to continue to generate new ideas and innovation with the local community. A wide range of partners and organisations have shown support for the Town Team approach such as traders, communities groups and organisations.

2.10 The vision for Hoylake is to create high street which will be vibrant and thriving with a mix of uses and businesses alike, which will attract new business to grow and expand with independent, individual retailers which attract a wide range of the community to be involved. Also to celebrate the heritage and history of the area and the existing cultural and art offer. The innovative approaches for the bid will include things such as community forums, developing a volunteer network, marketing Hoylake, providing business support, building on the neighbourhood plan status for the vision for the area, exploring opportunities for youth initiatives, family facilities, markets, shop front improvements etc.

- 2.11 **New Ferry Regeneration Action Group (NFRAG)** – Bidding for up to £100,000. The Town Team approach has a wide range of partner support for the approach going forward including the farmers market, traders and community groups.
- 2.12 The vision for New Ferry is to build on the pride and heart of the centre, to create a sustainable future, at the hub of the community. New Ferry Town Team wants to build on the existing innovative ideas in the centre such as the successful farmers' market and use a partnership approach to make it easier to do business on the high street and nurture start-up businesses. Potential to pilot Retail Business Incubator space, utilising empty properties, with a champion for the centre to provide assistance and expertise. They also wish to look at skill and training opportunities to link to this approach.
- 2.13 **Moreton Cross Town Team (Leasowe Development Trust)** – Bidding for up to £100,000. The approach has support from a number of partners including community groups, RSL's and Community Trusts.
- 2.14 The vision and approach for Moreton is to use innovative technology and software to establish and support a local traders association. The strategy will create a unique approach between traders and residents, the idea being that it creates a social cohesion between the communities and traders by using an innovative way to earn and learn. The software provided an on-line village where members can present and find offers of good, service skills, courses, projects and media productions. As they do this their choices are rewarded in an alternative 'debt free' currency called 'L' for Local, Loyalty, Life long learning, Leisure and Liquidity. The 'L' is used alongside the £ sterling as discounts to attract customers into the shops that accept it in the town. To generate their currency residents use this system to exchange skills and talents in their own communities.
- 2.15 **New Brighton Community Partnership** – bidding for up to £100,000. The Town Team has a range of partners and organisations who support the approach of the team including trader groups, communities and other organisations.
- 2.16 The Vision for Victoria Road is part of the overall strategy for the regeneration of New Brighton. The aspiration for the road is to become a hub activity with an emphasis on leisure and entertainment. Potential opportunities to look at a 'Town Square' concept which could be used for a variety of public uses and would provide a focal point for visitors and families. Also the opportunity to look at reactivating Victoria Parade as a creative quarter with sporting activities, public events etc. All of these innovative approaches will be used to create a sense of place, ownership, pride and identity to the centre. These will be driven by the Town Team to create the right environment and business creation for the centre through some capital works and collaborative partnership working.
- 2.17 **Liscard Town Team** – up to £100,000. The Town Team is drawn from the Central Liscard Area Residents' Association (which is developing a Neighbourhood Plan for Liscard under the Government's Front Runner pilot project) and Liscard Traders, which includes the major commercial landlord, the operator of the Cherry Tree Centre. The proposal therefore co-ordinates action within and around Liscard's main shopping area. A series of innovative approaches to revitalising the retail area are proposed,

bringing in new uses but reflecting the need to protect the amenities of residents in the area immediately around the centre.

- 2.18 Members will be aware that Cabinet (21st February 2012, minute 317 refers) agreed to a budget element of £500,000 in 2012/13 towards work with local Trader groups to revitalise Wirral's shopping areas. Bids for this Council funding will work alongside and be complementary to any Portas Pilot bids that might be successful.

3.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 3.1 The principal risk for the pilot proposals is that the bids for the 'Portas Pilots' Town Teams funding is rejected by Government, due to over-subscription or that the pilots submitted are not seen by Government as fulfilling their criteria.
- 3.2 The Council's financial liability should be restricted at this stage to the potential £100,000 per pilot which will only be payable to the Council from Government if the pilot proposals are approved by Government. If the pilots are not taken forward by Government then there is no liability on the Council for the funding.

4.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 No other options have been considered, as this report sets out a response to proposals that have been called for by Government and responded to by local organisations, as called for in its Portas Pilots – Prospectus: an invitation to become a Town Team'.

5.0 CONSULTATION

- 5.1 If Members wish to support the submission of the six bids for the 'Portas Pilots' to Government, officers will work with the groups to develop their proposals. This will include facilitating consultation with local people and organisations. Appropriate targeted support will be provided as appropriate to ensure engagement with the widest possible number of local residents through the existing communication mechanisms.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS

- 6.1 The development of the pilot proposals if successful, may require additional skills and expertise that may be lacking in some organisations. Whilst some organisations may have the necessary skills and experience some may need support and may not have the resources to 'buy in' those skills.

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

- 7.1 In accordance with the criteria set out in the Portas Pilots, the Local Authority must agree to be the Accountable Body for the funding for the bids. Funding for successful bids will be paid through s31 unringfenced revenue grant. The Local Authority must also provide an accompanying statement on securing value for money for the taxpayers in the use of the grant. The Local Authority must prepare and submit a letter and accompanying statement which will be submitted to Government with each bid going forward.

- 7.2 As the Council is to be the accountable body for this project, consideration will need to be given to the staffing implications of managing the pilot proposals so as to ensure that the Council's procedures for effective financial management are complied with.
- 7.3 At this stage there are no IT or asset management implications. If submissions propose individual projects with additional implications, these will be reported to Members as appropriate.

8.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The Council will be the accountable body for the funding and will have to submit a supporting letter on how the pilot project submission secures value for money for the tax payer. Advice from The Department of Communities and Local Government states that the Council will have to accept and allocate the funding in line with local accounting practices.
- 8.2 A funding agreement will have to be entered into by the Council with each successful Portas Pilot project, setting out that the project funding will be managed in accordance with the Council's procurement and accounting practices.

9.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Has the potential impact of your proposal(s) been reviewed with regard to equality?
- (a) Yes and impact review is attached – (*insert appropriate hyperlink*).

<http://www.wirral.gov.uk/my-services/community-and-living/equality-diversity-cohesion/equality-impact-assessments/eias-2010-0>

10.0 CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The Town Team plans must be in conformity with national policy in terms of sustainable development.

11.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 The proposals for Town Team bids may involve the need for planning applications for change of use to any buildings which are proposed to be used, dependant on the use classification.

12.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 12.1 (1) That Cabinet endorses the submission of the five 'Portas Pilot' bids to the Department of Communities and Local Government to Government on 30th March 2012.

(2) That Cabinet agree to the Acting Director of Regeneration, Housing and Planning, in consultation with the Cabinet Portfolio holder to have delegated authority to agree the submission of the final bids to Government, within the framework of the draft bids summarised in this report (section 2).

(3) That Cabinet agrees that the Local Authority will be the Accountable Body for the funding of up to £100,000 for each bid, if successful and the money be allocated in line with the Council's accounting policies.

(4) That Cabinet agrees to the Acting Director of Regeneration, Housing and Planning, in consultation with the Cabinet Portfolio holder preparing a statement for submission to CLG which states that the Council will secure value for money for the tax payer in the use of the grant.

(5) That the Cabinet agree that should any further bids be submitted to the Council prior to 30th March deadline, the Acting Director of Regeneration, Housing and Planning, in consultation with the Cabinet Portfolio holder/Leader, be authorised to finalise any additional statements on securing value for money for taxpayers in the use of the grant.

13.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

13.1 (1) To allow the 5 bids from the various organisations set out in Section 2.0 of this report to be submitted to the Department of Communities and Local Government.

(2) That a very tight timescale has been put in place for the draft bids to be prepared in order for officers to report the details of this initiative to Cabinet. Allowing delegated authority to the Acting Director of Regeneration, Housing and Planning will allow Town Teams to continue working on the details of their bids, inline with the framework submitted with their draft bids.

(3) The 'Portas Pilot' stipulates that the Local Authority must be the accountable body for any bids submitted to the Department of Communities and Local Government.

(4) To allow the appropriate supporting statement to be submitted with the bids in order for the submission to meet the criteria set out in the 'Portas Pilot Prospectus'.

(5) To allow any additional bids brought to the Council's attention after this Cabinet, to be considered by CLG in line with the timescale set out in the Portas Pilots.

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APPENDICES

None

REFERENCE MATERIAL

Portas Pilots: Prospectus - an invitation to become a Town Team

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/regeneration/portaspilotsprospectus>

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date