

WIRRAL COUNCIL

CABINET

21 JUNE 2012

SUBJECT:	PORTAS PILOTS ROUND 2
WARD/S AFFECTED:	ALL
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF REGENERATION, HOUSING AND PLANNING
RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	REGENERATION AND PLANNING STRATEGY
KEY DECISION?	YES

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 the 30th March 2012 Government announced a further round of Portas Pilot Town Team bidding – Round 2. This second round followed a first round, announced by Government on 4th February 2012 and for which the bidding closed on 30th March. Some 360 plus applications were submitted to Government, including five from Wirral (reported to Cabinet 15th March 2012, minute 346 refers).
- 1.3 Members are asked to note that Government has stated that any bids which are unsuccessful in Round one will be considered automatically in Round 2.
- 1.4 As per the first round, the bids must be submitted in a partnership approach between retailers, landlords, local community, Local Authority and other partners. The Local Authority must agree to be the accountable body for the fund and also submit a statement securing value for money for the tax payer.
- 1.5 The Council has received 2 draft bids from local groups. A summary of these is outlined in section 2 of the report.
- 1.6 Members are asked to agree that the Local Authority will be the Accountable Body for any funding which maybe be granted, if any of the bids are successful, for up to £100,000 per bid.
- 1.7 Members are asked that as per Round 1 of the Portas Pilots, to agree that due to the very tight timescale for the bids; that the Director of Regeneration, Housing and Planning in consultation with the leader of the Portfolio Holder, agrees the final bids for submission to Government on 30th June 2012. This is to allow more detailed work to be undertaken by the groups on their final bids including a video, within the framework of their draft bids outlined below, before submission to Government.

- 1.8 The Acting Chief Executive fully supports the proposal to waive call in for this report due to the very close proximity of Cabinet to the date for submission of the bids. Members are asked to agree that call in for this report is waived.

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 her review was 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.
- 2.2 As Members will recall the first Round of Portas Pilot Town Team closed on the 30th March and Wirral had 5 Town Teams which applied for the funding to Government (Cabinet 15th March, minute 346). The outcome of the first round was expected in May 2012. Members will be advised at Cabinet of the outcome of the first round bids, if the decision is available.
- 2.3 Over 360 Applications were made nationally for the funding to Government and on the 30th March, Government announced a further Round of funding would be available. Government will support a further 12 bids across the Country with up to £100,000 available for each, dependant on the amount sought and Government's assessment of the bid.
- 2.4 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. The prospectus states that the Local Authority (i.e. Wirral Council) will need to be the accountable body for the funding 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 securing value for money for tax payers in the use of the grant.
- 2.5 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, markets 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. 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.

2.6 The Town Teams must submit the application form as well as 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.

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

2.8 We have received draft bids from:

- Wirral Chamber of Commerce – representing Birkenhead and Oxton Road
- Seabank Road Town Team

2.9 A short summary of the bids is outlined below:

2.10 **Birkenhead and Oxton Road Town Team approach**

2.11 Working together, Wirral Chamber of Commerce and Celex Business Development are putting in a bid working with major landowners from the Pyramids to become a Pilot area. The application will be for up to £100,000 to support a more formalised Town Centre Manager for the Birkenhead area and to provide business support for businesses in the area. The funding will also be used to find innovative approaches to the use of empty shops with events being held, using the businesses to showcase their ideas and promoting the events.

2.12 The proposal has strong local business support from landowners, businesses and the Chamber. The Town Team will work together to provide business support and advice, utilise Empty shops, create a network via social media to encourage businesses to work together and market the Birkenhead area.

2.13 Any appointment of a Town Centre manager through the fund would not be paid for or managed by the Council and would be an independent process undertaken Town Team. The Council would need to be satisfied that the appropriate procedures and practices had been followed and are reported to Wirral Council as the accountable body.

2.14 Seabank Road Town Team

- 2.15 The Town Team will be led by the Seabank Road Residents and Tenants Association and has strong support from the businesses in Seabank road. The proposal will be for approximately £97,000 and will look to create a community hub and local business and enterprise forum. It will also look to create a community engagement and communication strategy, provide IT training and support and promotion for apprenticeships.
- 2.16 The proposal wants to build on the increased number of visitors to New Brighton and maximise visitors to Seabank Road whilst helping the unemployed in the area and supporting the elderly population with access to local shops and amenities.
- 2.17 As the accountable body, the Council would support the promotion of apprenticeships, skill support and recruitment initiatives within the Town Team Programmes inline with our priorities to support skills and employment. If successful, further support and resource may be required to ensure the development of a sustainable, quality apprenticeship offer and to embed linkages to Wirral's existing retail skills networks.

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 costs liability at this stage 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 successful from 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 2 – Prospectus: an invitation to become a Town Team'.

5.0 CONSULTATION

- 5.1 If Members wish to support the submission of the 2 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 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 pilots' 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. 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. There will be staffing implications in supporting the Portas pilot groups but this will be absorbed within existing work programmes, which aim to support economic development and the promotion of Wirral's town centres.

7.2 Any staff appointed as a result of a successful Town Team bid would not be funded or managed by the Council. This would be the responsibility of the organisation submitting the bid. The Council would need to be satisfied that appropriate recruitment procedures and practices had been followed and are agreed and reported to Wirral Council as the accountable body.

8.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 The Council will be the accountable body for the funding and will have to submit a supporting letter which will state that the Council will secure value for money for the taxpayer. 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.

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/regeneration-housing-planning>

(b) No because there is no relevance to equality.

(c) No because of another reason which is

** Delete the two answers above which don't apply.*

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 RECOMMENDATION/S

12.1 (1) That Cabinet endorses the submission of the 2 'Portas Pilot' bids to the Department of Communities and Local Government to Government on 30th June 2012.

(2) That Cabinet agrees to the Director of Regeneration, Housing and Planning in consultation with the 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 for the Local Authority to be 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 Director of Regeneration, Housing and Planning in consultation with the portfolio holder to prepare a statement for submission to CLG which stating 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 bids be submitted to the Council prior to 30th June deadline, that the Director of Regeneration, Housing and Planning in consultation with the portfolio holder/leader has the delegated authority to allow the bids to be submitted provided the bid is will secure value for money for the tax payer in the use of the grant.

(6) That Cabinet agree to waive call-in of this decision.

13.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

13.1 (1) To allow the 2 bids from the various organisations to be submitted to the Department of Communities and Local Government.

(2) That a very tight timescale have 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 Director of Regeneration, Housing and Planning would 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 to be considered by CLG in line with the timescale set out in the Portas Pilots.

(6) Because of the very tight timetable set by Government for the submission of Round 2 of the Portas pilots.

REPORT AUTHOR: *Hayley Crook*
Investment Strategy
telephone: (0151) 691 8297
email: hayleycrook@wirral.gov.uk

APPENDICES

(List and, if not attached, specify location – e.g. website and/or Group rooms.)

REFERENCE MATERIAL

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

High streets at the heart of our communities: The Government's response to the Mary Portas Review

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Cabinet Meeting – Portas Pilots Bid Funding (minute 346)	15th March 2012
Cabinet Meeting – Wirral Town Teams Funding (minute 380)	12th April 2012