

ECONOMY AND REGENERATION OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 7 June 2012

<u>Present:</u>	Councillor	M Johnston (Chair)	
	Councillors	J Stapleton A Hodson R Gregson D Realey	M Sullivan S Whittingham J Williamson
<u>Deputies:</u>	Councillors	D Elderton (In place of P Kearney) L Rowlands (In place of A Cox)	
<u>Cabinet Member:</u>	Councillor	P Hackett	
<u>Apologies</u>	Councillor	G Davies	

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

Members were asked to consider whether they had personal or prejudicial interests in connection with any item(s) on this agenda and, if so, to declare them and state what they were.

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 any item(s) to be considered and, if so, to declare it and state the nature of the whipping arrangement.

No such declarations were made.

2 MINUTES

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 8 March 2012 be approved.

3 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

On a motion by Councillor Johnston and seconded by Councillor Hodson, it was –

Resolved – That Councillor Jean Stapleton be appointed Vice-Chair for the 2012/2013 municipal year.

4 PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION - MEMBER OF THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY

The Chair advised the Committee that he proposed, for each meeting, that a representative of Wirral's business community would be invited to attend in order to give a brief presentation to Members, in order to showcase products and to highlight the factors affecting their business and what support the Council could give, particularly in the present difficult economic climate.

He introduced David Furlong and Lisa Thompson from Mole Group, which was the collective name for Mole Engineering UK and Furlong Innovations. Mole Engineering had been based in Wirral since 1990 and specialised in moling technology, both in commercial and domestic underground pipe and cable installations. David explained that he also had an interest in energy saving products and had, over the last three years, developed a low cost energy saving device, CombiSave®, which could be retro-fitted to save water and fuel costs on all conventional domestic combination boilers. Lisa gave a brief presentation on the fitting and operation of CombiSave® and commented that following extensive testing by energy companies, there was considerable national interest in the device. It was being fitted to boilers supplied by both British Gas and NPower and discussions were also taking place with boiler manufacturers Worcester-Bosch and Potterton. At a local level, the device was being trialed by Wirral Partnership Homes and it was hoped that it would soon be available to purchase for DIY installation.

Members referred to other providers of social housing in Wirral, whose residents would benefit from the product, and suggested also that it be presented to the Landlords Forum.

Resolved – That the best thanks of the Committee be accorded to David and Lisa for their presentation, together with congratulations for the success of CombiSave® and hope for the continuing success of Mole Engineering UK.

5 TERMS OF REFERENCE - PRESENTATION

The Acting Head of Strategic Development and Regeneration gave a brief presentation, primarily for new Members, on the terms of reference of the Economy and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The economy was a key area within the Committee's remit. It was a vitally important area of the Council's work and was a Corporate Priority, driven by the Investment Strategy. It was important for Members to see Wirral in its geographical context, both locally and regionally, as part of the Liverpool City Region and Mersey Dee Alliance. However, considerable work was also being undertaken to develop Wirral's global context with investment from China, India and Korea. Key projects included Wirral Waters, the Enterprise Zone and International Trade Centre, which would seek to maximise investment from Chinese Companies following the recent signing of a trade agreement. The focus of the Committee was always on people and the creation and retention of employment opportunities in Wirral and he commented also upon the importance of the Rural Economy, Green Growth and support for retail centres.

Other key areas for the Committee were Strategic Land Use Planning including the Local Development Framework, protection of the Green Belt, Neighbourhood Planning and the National Planning Policy Framework. The Committee also played a key role in the Council's Tourism Strategy and the Housing Strategy.

Resolved – That the presentation be noted.

6 ROLE OF SCRUTINY - PRESENTATION

Primarily for the benefit of newly elected Members, the Committee's Scrutiny Support Officer gave an overview presentation on the Role of Scrutiny in Wirral and how it operated in line with a Strong Leader and Cabinet Model of Governance. He indicated that scrutiny had a role in formulating Council policy, but did not determine it. Scrutiny was a process which reviewed decisions, policies and performance and, in its role as "critical friend" suggested by the Centre for Public Scrutiny, it gave Members an opportunity to influence decision makers and to assess, probe, question and dig beneath the surface.

He set out the key functions of scrutiny and highlighted the main responsibilities associated with each of Wirral's Overview and Scrutiny Committees. It was vital that scrutiny was a Member led process and that Committees agreed a work programme for the year that was achievable within timescales and available resources. He offered guidance as to how priorities could be set for the work programme and suggested that Members should have regard to matters of public interest, the Council's priorities and external factors.

He also offered guidance as to how best in-depth scrutiny reviews could be undertaken by groups of Members outside the normal Committee schedule. In determining which topics should be the subject of in depth reviews, Members should also ensure that the tasks to be undertaken could be finished, the findings evaluated and a report be presented to appropriate Scrutiny Committees and to the Cabinet within the municipal year. The Committee should also have regard to the impact of its work and to have clear objectives as to what could be achieved by a scrutiny review.

In response to questions from Members as to how scrutiny could be improved and how it could have a greater influence in the decision making process, the Chair welcomed suggestions from Members as to what matters should be included in its work programme and what topics could be the subject of in-depth scrutiny reviews. There was also an opportunity for the Committee to undertake pre-decision scrutiny of any key decisions that were identified in the Forward Plan.

Resolved – That the presentation be noted.

7 GREEN GROWTH IN WIRRAL

The Chair commented that the Cabinet (minute 384 (12 April 2012) refers), had considered a report on Green Growth in Wirral, which had followed the Scrutiny Review that had been undertaken by Members of the Committee during 2011/2012. The report had acknowledged the importance, vibrancy and potential of the 'Green Economy' to create enterprise, jobs and help Wirral to become environmentally sustainable. The report set out proposals to develop the recommendations of the Scrutiny Review in order to respond to the needs of Wirral businesses and therefore, to stimulate economic growth and create new jobs for the residents of Wirral.

The Chair commented that the Green Growth Review was an example of effective scrutiny and he was pleased that the recommendations had been agreed by the Cabinet. He indicated that a Member from each political group would be represented on the Green Economy Working Group, which was formed to support the development of Wirral's Green Economy and to ensure that the reports recommendations were implemented.

Resolved –

(1) That the report be noted.

(2) That the membership of the Green Economy Working Group be as follows

- **Councillor Stuart Whittingham (Chair)**
- **Councillor Mark Johnston**
- **Conservative Group nominee to be advised**

8 WIRRAL TRADE CENTRE

The Chair referred to a Notice of Motion 'Getting Wirral Trade Centre Ready' that had been approved by the Council (minute 154 (16 April 2012) refers). He provided an overview of what the Motion sought to achieve and reported that a Working Party had been established, comprising Councillors Jean Stapleton, Andrew Hodson and Mark Johnston, with scrutiny support provided by Alan Veitch. The aim of the Working Group was to ensure that Wirral was as ready as possible to fully embrace the business opportunities that would be available as a result of the development of the International Trade Centre. The Chair presented a draft scoping document for the scrutiny review and requested that, should any Member have any observations in relation to the document, they be forwarded to him direct as a matter of urgency.

Resolved –

- (1) That the Notice of Motion approved by the Council be noted.**
- (2) That the draft scoping document for the International Trade Centre Scrutiny Review be agreed, subject to any minor amendment, as a result of observations that may be received by the Chair.**

9 AFFORDABILITY AND MORTGAGES INCLUDING FIRST-TIME BUYERS

Further to minute 50 (8 March 2012), the Chair referred to the response of the Cabinet (minute 413 (12 April 2012) refers) to the request of the Committee for the establishment of a Local Authority Mortgage Scheme to assist first time buyers in Wirral. The Cabinet had thanked the Committee for its referral and instructed the Director of Regeneration, Housing and Planning to undertake further work on this matter and to report back to a future meeting of the Cabinet, taking on board lessons learned from pilot areas operating Local Authority Mortgage Schemes. The Head of Housing indicated that work was ongoing and that a report would be presented to the Cabinet in July 2012.

Resolved –

- (1) That the minute be noted.**
- (2) That the issue of Affordability and Mortgages for First Time Buyers be retained on the Committees Work Programme.**

10 BUSINESS SUPPORT

Further to minute 51 (8 March 2012), the Chair referred to the response of the Cabinet (minute 386 (12 April 2012) refers) to the Committee's referral with regard to the expansion of the Invest Wirral service to compliment the New Enterprise Allowance (NEA) and to expand current business support to pre-start businesses. The Senior Investment Manager from Invest Wirral referred to the operation of Business Support and outlined the levels and nature of support that had been provided to businesses in Wirral. The Chair thanked the officers for the work undertaken to expand the service and indicated to Members that they should consider visiting the Invest Wirral offices, where staff would be able to provide greater detail of the work undertaken.

Resolved – That the response of the Cabinet and the work undertaken by Invest Wirral, be noted.

11 **EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENTS**

At its meeting held on 28 February 2012 (minute 33 refers), the Scrutiny Programme Board considered the report of the Director of Law, HR and Asset Management, which summarised the Centre for Public Scrutiny's Policy Briefing 'Equality Impact Assessments'.

The report highlighted the Council's legal requirement under the Equalities Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty to have due regard to the impact of its policies and decisions on people who shared protected characteristics (race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, age, religion/belief, gender re-assignment, marriage/civil partnership, pregnancy/maternity).

As part of the Independent Corporate Governance Review report, AKA had highlighted 'shortfalls in the way the Council evaluated the impact of its policies both prior to execution and in response to evidence about the impact'. Subsequently the report had identified 'Equalities' as an area for improvement. The Scrutiny Programme Board had referred the report to all Overview and Scrutiny Committees for consideration.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

12 **FORWARD PLAN AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2012/2013**

The Director of Law, HR and Asset Management reported that the Forward Plan for the period June to September 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 its 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.

The Chair commented that the Committee had completed its work programme for the 2011/2012 municipal year and he sought the views of Members as to what issues should form the basis of the work programme for the ensuing municipal year. He requested that should Members identify any additional topics following the meeting that they be included in a direct email to him.

Resolved –

(1) That the Forward Plan be noted.

(2) That the following matters be included in the work programme for the 2012/2013 municipal year –

- **Affordability and Mortgages including First Time Buyers**
- **The impact on Housing in Wirral of Welfare Reform (Bedroom Tax)**
- **Any additional matters notified to the Chair**

13 **REGENERATION TOUR**

The Head of Regeneration and Planning informed Members that the Regeneration Tour would take place on 3 July 2012. He outlined the itinerary from last year and indicated that the tour would be tailored to suit Members' requirements as to whether specific locations or businesses should be included. The Chair strongly

recommended Members to attend if it was possible for them to do so and indicated that it would also be open for all Members of the Council to attend.

Resolved – That the arrangements for the Regeneration Tour be noted and any specific requests for inclusion in the itinerary be forwarded direct to the Head of Regeneration and Planning.

14 **REGENERATION UPDATE**

The Head of Regeneration and Planning provided an update on major development schemes within the Borough and referred specifically to the trade agreement signed by the Group Leaders during a recent visit to China, which would see the development of the Wirral Trade Centre and Wirral Waters project.

He commented also upon the recent decision by General Motors with regard to the security of jobs and increased employment opportunities at Vauxhall Motors in Ellesmere Port.

Resolved – That the report be noted.
