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ECONOMY AND REGENERATION OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 14 November 2012

Present: Councillor M Johnston (Chair)

Councillors J Stapleton M Sullivan
A Cox S Whittingham
P Kearney J Williamson
D Realey

Cabinet Members: Councillors G Davies and
P Hackett

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

Members were asked to consider whether they had any disclosable pecuniary interests and/or any other relevant interest in connection with any item(s) on this agenda and, if so, to declare them and state the nature of the 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 any item(s) to be considered and, if so, to declare it and state the nature of the whipping arrangement.

Councillor S Whittingham declared his interest in agenda item 5 – Welfare Reform and Under Occupation Draft Scrutiny Review Scope Document (see minute 34 post) by virtue of his membership of the Board of Wirral Partnership Homes.

31 MINUTES

At the request of the Chair, the Director of Regeneration, Housing and Planning provided an update in relation to the activities of the Green Economy Working Group, in the light of the Budget Options referred to in the Scrutiny Recommendations not being taken forward at the present time. He commented also that the reporting timetable had meant that the Q2 Performance Monitoring Report had not been available in time for submission to this meeting. However, no issues had been identified and the report would be presented, together with the Q3 report, to the next meeting of the Committee.

Resolved –

- (1) That, in the light of the Green Growth Scrutiny Report not being taken forward and, having regard to the effective use of Members and officers time, the activities of the Green Economy Working Group be suspended.
- (2) That the minutes of the meeting held on 5 September 2012, be approved.

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION - MEMBER OF THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY

The Chair advised that he had invited Rebecca Owens, Marketing manager of Recipro UK, to give a presentation to Members, to highlight the issues that affected the business and to indicate the factors that led to its location and continued operation in Wirral.

Ms Owens commented that Recipro was launched in 2008 and was essentially a free to use online exchange for the re-use of surplus building material. She indicated that the construction industry was the single largest producer of waste in the UK, creating 90 million tonnes of waste each year, of which up to 25 million tonnes was sent to landfill. It had been estimated that 13% of all construction materials arriving on site ended up as surplus and were never used. Those goods alone were valued at £1.5 billion per annum and, there were further large volumes of reusable second hand materials and products generated by the construction industry.

The Waste Regulations 2011 was a significant driver for change that had led to client pressures in relation to corporate responsibility and the need for added value, particularly with regard to carbon savings and waste avoidance. Users of Recipro included construction companies, builders and trades people, charities, DIY enthusiasts and community projects – essentially, anyone who used building materials.

Since 2011, Recipro Managed Services had worked with principal contractors to manage surplus and leftover building materials and products, with the expressed goal of enabling green building, better resource management and benefit for community projects and charities. The service involved surplus materials being collected and delivered to ReciproCity centres, then sold at discounted rates to community projects. The costs to construction companies of the collection of surplus were lower than the costs of disposal and she commented that ReciproCity in Wirral, since February, had seen 92 tonnes of waste diverted, 108 tonnes of carbon saved with a value of £148k. Since July, the centre in Cardiff had seen 12 tonnes of material diverted, 24 tonnes of carbon saved with a value of £46k. Reporting was presented back to clients upon the carbon and waste reductions and community projects that had benefited. Local case studies in Wirral highlighted approximately 30 tonnes of waste that had been avoided and 15 tonnes of carbon saved.

In response to a number of questions from Members, Ms Owens indicated that the impact of the economic downturn on construction had placed a greater value in tenders of the added benefit of carbon and waste reduction. Marketing was undertaken primarily by direct contact with the construction industry, with particular support from Travis Perkins, who had also improved engagement with charities. She commented also that Recipro had received good support and advice from Invest Wirral, particularly upon how best to grow the business and the provision of funding. The company had also benefited from the Wirral 100 Apprenticeship Scheme, with one of the original apprentices now a key member of the team.

Resolved – That the thanks of the Committee be accorded to Rebecca for her informative presentation and best wishes for the continuing success of Recipro.

33 TRADE CENTRE SCRUTINY REVIEW

The Chair presented the Scrutiny Review of Preparations for the International Trade Centre in Wirral, which had been prepared by the Trade Centre Scrutiny Panel, following a Notice of Motion accepted by the Council (minute 154 (16 April 2012) refers).

The Panel comprised Councillors Mark Johnston (Chair), Andrew Hodson and Jean Stapleton and was supported by a Scrutiny Support Officer, Alan Veitch. The Scope of the Review was agreed at the last meeting of the Committee (minute 19 (5 September 2012) refers) and the Chair commented upon the evidence gathering, which had informed the Final Report. The document contained 19 recommendations and he requested the Committee to support the document being referred to the next appropriate meeting of the Cabinet.

Members commented specifically upon the significant work being undertaken with schools in relation to foreign language learning as a skill for future job seekers and also, the need for planning to take place regarding the requirements of children moving to Wirral from overseas as result of the Trade Centre opening. In response to further comments from Members with regard to the support packages to be put in place for companies and employees relocating from overseas to Wirral, the Director of Regeneration, Housing and Planning reported that the increased business rates that would be available to the Council as a result of the Enterprise Zone status could be used to support and facilitate the work of the support team.

Resolved –

- (1) That the contents and recommendations of the Trade Centre Scrutiny Review be supported.**
- (2) That the Trade Centre Scrutiny Report be referred to the next appropriate meeting of the Cabinet.**
- (3) That further reports be presented to the Economy and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee to update members regarding the progress being made towards the implementation of the recommendations.**
- (4) That the thanks of the Committee be accorded to the Members of the Scrutiny Panel for the significant work undertaken in the review of preparations for the International Trade Centre and also to Mr A Veitch, Scrutiny Support Officer.**

34 WELFARE REFORM AND UNDER OCCUPATION - DRAFT SCOPE DOCUMENT FOR FUTURE SCRUTINY REVIEW

Further to minute 24 (5 September 2012), the Chair provided an update on progress with the Benefit Reforms and Under-Occupation Scrutiny Review and presented a detailed Scope for the review, which was agreed by a Task and Finish Group of Members of the Scrutiny Committee on 18 October 2012. The proposed focus of the review was to investigate the impact of changes to housing benefit and the welfare

reforms specifically related to under occupation in both the public and private housing sectors. Key issues for the review would be:

- The impact of the introduction of the Housing Benefit Cap;
- The impact of changes to the Local Housing Allowance, with special reference to the Shared Accommodation Rate for under-35's;
- The allocation process for Discretionary Housing Benefit;
- The impacts of the reforms relating to Under-occupation and how this affects households and communities;
- The impact of the reforms on the Social Housing sector (Housing Associations).

The Chair commented also upon the Select Committee-style of evidence gathering that was to be used for the Scrutiny Review and he set out proposed guidelines to be adopted for the Evidence Gathering Days, which he envisaged would be held in January 2013. Additional evidence-gathering would take place in late January and early February 2013, if necessary, with a final report presented to the Economy and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee on 7 March 2013, prior to its referral to Cabinet. In response to comments from Members on the impact of Universal Credit, the Chair indicated his willingness for additional people to be added to the list of invitees to the Select Committee sessions. However, so as to ensure that the scrutiny review was completed before the end of the municipal year, he believed that the review should focus upon its previously agreed scope. At the present time, full details of Universal Credit were not known and he suggested that it could form the basis of a separate scrutiny review, when more precise information was available.

Resolved –

- (1) That the Scope for the Benefits Reform and Under-Occupation Scrutiny Review, as detailed in Appendix 1, be approved and the progress to date, be noted.**
- (2) That the proposed guidelines for the Evidence Day(s) and the indicative timescale for the review, be noted.**
- (3) That, in addition to the list of invitees to the Select Committee Session, the Task and Finish Group be requested to obtain evidence from representatives of the following organisations –**
 - **The Probation Service**
 - **Wirral Homes**
 - **HM Armed Forces**
 - **The Adaptation s Team**
 - **The Director of Wirral YMCA (to be accompanied by a client affected by the Government proposals)**
- (4) That officers be requested to undertake further planning of the review, in consultation with members of the Task & Finish Group and that an easy to use questionnaire be developed to facilitate evidence gathering.**

35 REVIEW OF SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

Further to minute 24 (5 September 2012), the Chair provided an update of the Committee's work programme, having previously sought the views of Members as to what issues should form the basis of it. He outlined the issues that had already been identified for scrutiny and asked Members whether any new items should be added to the programme.

He commented also that, by March 2013, the Council was required to submit to the Secretary of State the Local Development Framework for Wirral. The Director of Regeneration, Housing and Planning reported that, as part of the LDF, a Housing Needs Assessment was being undertaken and he outlined the implications of such an assessment to the Council.

Resolved –

- (1) That the work programme and outline meeting schedule for the municipal year be approved, subject to the deletion from it of the following items –**
 - **Deep Clean Scheme in town centres**
 - **The operation of the Free after Three parking scheme**
 - **An evaluation of projects for Empty Shops funding**
- (2) That an update report on the Housing Needs Assessment be presented to the next meeting of the Committee.**

36 FORWARD PLAN

The Acting Director of Law, HR and Asset Management reported that the Forward Plan for the period November 2012 to February 2013 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.

37 REGENERATION UPDATE

The Director of Regeneration, Housing and Planning provided an update on major development schemes within the Borough. He was pleased to report also that, in addition to Wirral having the highest rate of business growth in the UK, the recent publication of the latest Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) figures indicated that the level of JSA for Wirral had reduced and was now better than the city-region and indeed, the North West average.

Members commented that, as part of a pilot, new JSA claims would need to be made online, as would all claims for Universal Credit. Members expressed their concern that the Council was not fully prepared for potentially large numbers of online claimants, who may also require assistance in the use of computers in One Stop Shops and libraries.

Resolved –

- (1) That the report be noted.**
- (2) That the officers be requested to give a presentation on digital inclusion to a future meeting of the Committee.**

**38 ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS APPROVED BY THE CHAIR
- SPECIAL MEETING**

The Chair referred to the Special Meetings of Scrutiny Committees that were to take place in early December 2012 to give consideration to the options for savings that had recently been published. The Economy and Regeneration Special Meeting would take place on Wednesday 5 December and the Chair requested that, where possible, advance notice be given to officers of any detailed questions, with officer replies to be sent to all Members of the Committee.
