

Corporate Plan: **2013-2016**

"Wirral should be a place where the vulnerable are safe and protected, where employers want to invest and local businesses thrive, and where good health and an excellent quality of life is within the reach of everyone who lives here."

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Foreword

Wirral Council is facing unprecedented challenges. Our budget is reducing, while at the same time demand for our services is rising, as are residents' expectations. Equally, it is difficult to remember a time when the opportunities for our Council, our borough and our residents were greater. We are at the national forefront of sector led improvement, we are delivering many consistently excellent services, and we are at the heart of regeneration projects of global significance.

We should be proud of our achievements, unequivocal in our determination to improve and excited about the future. This Corporate Plan provides the platform for how we will do it.

Our priorities for the next three years are clear; you will see that continuous, genuine and comprehensive consultation is at the core of this Corporate Plan – our residents have told us what they expect of us, this plan is designed to make sure we deliver just that.

We will make sure that our first priority is to safeguard and protect as far as possible the most vulnerable among us. We will tackle the unacceptable health inequalities which exist in our borough, and use our new leadership on the public health agenda to drive this work. We will capitalise on the regeneration opportunities before us, opportunities which are the envy of the entire country, and we will make sure they build real, lasting growth in our economy, creating jobs for generations to come.

We are one of the largest Councils in the UK; we are bigger than cities such as Newcastle, Derby and Leicester, and it is time we started to act like it. For too long we have failed to punch our weight and exert our influence at the regional and national level. This must and will be changed in the coming months and years; so we deliver on our duty to get the very best deal possible for Wirral.

Our financial situation is exceptionally difficult, but it is also forcing us to modernise, and to look at everything we do in a new light, become more innovative and totally transform the way we deliver and provide services. Making sure we continue to improve, both our services and the quality of life for our residents, is the key challenge for all public servants. We will take pride in striving to achieve this for our residents.

This is the start of a new journey, towards a high performing Council serving its residents with openness, honesty and pride. We pledge that:

“We will ensure this Council is in the future focussed upon serving and protecting local people and in particular those who are most vulnerable and in need. We will do this through the engagement and empowerment of individuals and communities in both the design and delivery of local services, and by working together with partners in the public, private and the community, voluntary and faith and independent sectors.”

Cllr Phil Davies
Leader of Wirral Council

Graham Burgess
Chief Executive

1. Introduction

This three year Corporate Plan will deliver a new robust approach to the Council's business planning; ensuring that our vision, priorities and resource allocation are based on sound evidence and analysis of community needs. Crucially, it will ensure that the priorities identified in the Corporate Plan will be underpinned by a sustainable budget over the next three years and can be delivered from within available resources.

2. Our Vision for Wirral

Wirral should be a place where the vulnerable are safe and protected, where employers want to invest and local businesses thrive, and where good health and an excellent quality of life is within the reach of everyone who lives here.

We promise to support this vision, and serve our residents, improving our organisation through working in partnership, and becoming the excellent Council that our residents deserve.

3. Our Principles for the future design of services

Genuine, continuous and comprehensive consultation is at the core of this Corporate Plan. Throughout 2012/13, we listened to everyone who relies on our organisation when they told us where our focus and our limited resources should lie.

We Will:

Protect the vulnerable in our borough

by making sure that our systems and procedures help us to always identify and mitigate problems before they develop, safeguard the vulnerable effectively, working together across Council and agency boundaries and delivering our services with empathy at all times.

Tackle health inequalities

by embracing the Council's new leadership role in public health and using the opportunities this brings to focus on improving our residents' health and wellbeing, and reducing the levels of child poverty and the health inequalities that exist in our communities.

Drive growth in our economy

by capitalising on the unprecedented opportunities which are within our grasp; such as Wirral Waters, the International Trade Centre, International Golf Resort and our award-winning Investment Strategy.

3. Context

Wirral – The Place

Wirral is a unique place, home to a growing population of 319,800 people, including 190,000 people of working age and over 8,000 businesses providing employment for 105,800 people.

The Wirral peninsula extends to 60 square miles, with 25 miles of coastline. It is an area of outstanding natural beauty, packed full of spectacular scenery, with a rich mixture of culture and heritage. Strategically located between the economic centres of Liverpool and Chester, Wirral benefits from an infrastructure that presents significant opportunities for development.

Most people who live in Wirral enjoy an outstanding quality of life, with excellent housing, schools and a high quality environment. However, there is a strong contrast between the older, highly urbanised areas of Birkenhead and Wallasey, which contain some of the poorest communities in England and the wealthier commuter settlements in the west of Wirral. Wirral's neighbourhoods range from some of the most deprived in the country (around St James Church in Bidston) to one of the most affluent, or least deprived, in South West Heswall less than six miles away. 21 areas in Wirral fall into the highest 3% in England in terms of levels of child poverty, with a total of 58 areas in the highest 20%. This results in serious quality of life issues and health inequalities, including a completely unacceptable difference in life expectancy of 9.7 years for females and 14.6 years for males depending on where a person lives in Wirral.

Wirral's economy

The global economic downturn presents challenges for all economies. Wirral is no different, but at the same time is at the heart of ambitious regeneration opportunities of global significance.

Wirral Waters is a £5 billion, jobs driven investment proposal for Birkenhead Docks. It is the largest regeneration scheme to have received planning permission in the UK, and the entire area is now designated as an Enterprise Zone, which brings the benefit of Business Rates Relief and Enhanced Capital allowances on part of the site. There are several strategic proposals developing at pace such as the Advanced Manufacturing Supplier Park and International Trade Centre (ITC).

Work is now underway on the International Trade Centre, which is one of the most exciting developments in the Wirral economy for many years. Working alongside our Private Sector partners, Peel Holdings, the project has secured major investment from China and is continually accessing new international markets.

These opportunities will be harnessed to ensure we are in a position to overcome the economic challenges we face. Wirral has the lowest job density ratio in the Liverpool City Region, with 57 jobs per 100 residents, as well as the lowest GVA per resident in England and Wales. 39% of all jobs in the borough also come from the public sector, which is much higher than the national average. Although performing well against the Liverpool City Region

authorities, Wirral continues to have a higher percentage of people claiming out-of-work benefits than the regional and national averages.

Our Investment Strategy, winner of the Local Government Chronicle Economic Development Award in 2012, will help to drive and embed developments to ensure these challenges are overcome. The strategy will position Wirral as a leading vibrant global location for businesses and visitors, improve access to employment and skills, and tackle barriers to work. Driven by the need to reduce and eliminate poverty and inequality in Wirral by providing accessible employment opportunities for local people; the strategy is geared towards achieving major investments in strategic sites such as Birkenhead Docklands and Wirral Waters Enterprise Zone.

Ensuring that local housing meets the needs of the current and future workforce is also vital if the Investment Strategy is to be achieved. Increasing Wirral's housing supply and making best use of existing housing stock is fundamental to attracting new economic growth and supporting existing businesses to develop. In its plans for housing and land development, the Council will also take into account issues such as the protection of Wirral's Green Belt and improving the quality of the environment.

Our Investment Strategy is in fact already showing results.

- In contrast to 2009, when Wirral was highlighted as one of the areas most likely to be hit by recession, research by NESTA (National Endowment for Science, Technology and Arts) in 2011 identified Wirral as an area of great growth potential. Birkenhead was found to have a higher concentration of fast growing companies than cities including London, Cardiff and Edinburgh.
- The visitor economy in Wirral is strong; and was estimated to be worth £289 million in 2011, up by 3% since 2010. The total number of visits to Wirral rose by 4% to 6.8 million during 2011, of which 753,000 were staying visits – the highest out of any other Merseyside district outside Liverpool.
- Wirral currently has the lowest rate of Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) claimants in the Liverpool City Region at 3.9%, and is the only local authority in the LCR to be performing better than the regional average of 4.2%. The number of young people claiming JSA is also reducing in Wirral with a 12% reduction since December 2011, there are now 2,445 young people claiming the benefit in the borough, a rate of 9.4%.
- Between 2011 and 2012 Wirral has seen an increase in its business base of 3.8%, which is higher than Liverpool City Region (2.7%), the North West (2.3%) and UK averages (3.4%).
- Latest full year provisional data shows that Wirral increased its overall numbers of Apprentice starts by 13% from 2010/11 to 2011/12; this is the second highest in the Liverpool City Region and outperforms the regional average of 7.6%.

We are also ensuring that local businesses capitalise on opportunities which will be created by the return of the Open Golf Championship in 2014 and a focus is being given to supporting our town and district retail centres which

face major challenges. Our opportunities for growth and development far outweigh our challenges, and if harnessed and driven in the right way will deliver long lasting economic growth for generations to come.

Wirral – The Council

Improving Corporate Governance

Wirral Council is at the forefront of developing a new approach to sector led improvement. In partnership with the Local Government Association we are driving forward the much needed step change in the Council's performance and corporate governance following the significant failures of the past. We have the potential to be the future model for peer improvement, achieving changes that could not have been delivered via the old model of intervention.

The Council's Improvement Board, an innovative partnership with the Local Government Association, ensures that appropriate challenge and expertise is in place to ensure lasting improvements are made. The core purpose of the Board is to assure our Improvement plans, particularly where they relate to issues of corporate governance and leadership.

The Improvement Board has worked in partnership with the Council to develop an Improvement Plan, which highlights specific areas of focus for the Council in the light of a series of critical external reports. Those areas include:

- Leadership: political and managerial
- Corporate governance and decision-making
- A Corporate Plan with priorities that reflect customers' views
- A budget that delivers financial stability

Improvements to governance and transparency are becoming apparent. Our recent LGA Peer Review provided an independent assessment of the Council's strategic approach to improvement. The review team gave a very positive feedback report which, whilst confirming the scale of problems faced by the Council, strongly concluded the Council's strategic approach was correct and that there were no alternatives. Continued focus on the Improvement Plan is essential if the Council is to deliver tangible improvements over the coming three years, delivery of which will be embedded in the implementation of this Corporate Plan.

To help to ensure this focus is maintained the LGA Peer Review team have been invited back later in the year to further assess progress.

Achieving financial stability

The implementation of the necessary improvements to Corporate Governance is made more challenging due to the Council's significant budget deficit – this will result in our net budget reducing by a third - £109 million over the next three years. The Corporate Governance failings of the past have contributed to this resulting in a further challenge from previous failure to collect debt and a considerable number of 'bad budgets' that, in the past, were funded from one-off resources that are no longer available.

Rapid increases in demand due to changing demographics in our borough, usually funded through government grant, is also adding pressure to our

financial situation. This challenge will remain a priority for a number of years, and will be particularly acute over the three year time period of this Corporate Plan.

A clear vision and approach, strong leadership, effective and efficient use of resources and innovative ways of working are essential and will be in place to ensure we overcome the challenges we face.

The Council has made rapid progress in strengthening the Council's corporate leadership structure through the permanent appointment of a Chief Executive and three Strategic Directors. The formation of these cross-cutting Directorates will enable the Council to modernise services through a programme of transformation and improvement, ensuring that they are delivering the best possible outcomes for our residents.

Significant savings in buildings, senior management, IT, procurement and terms and conditions are planned, and the Council is quickly moving towards a model of shared back office services with neighbouring Authorities, with Internal Audit, procurement and information technology services likely to be the first to realise savings.

Ensuring financial stability will remain a key priority and we will deal with these challenges head on, through making tough decisions while getting our own house in order, and making sure that Wirral residents get the very best value for every penny we spend. Services will be reviewed ensuring that the following principles are adhered to:

- Spend less on ourselves: Savings should primarily be taken from the back office administration of the Council while trying to mitigate the impact on the front line.
- Protect the vulnerable: Where savings do impact on the front line, either through introducing or raising charges, or reducing service standards, then every step should be taken to mitigate the impact of this on the poorest and most vulnerable of our residents.

Working in partnership

Never before has partnership working in Wirral been more important to the delivery of tangible outcomes for residents and businesses. The public sector can no longer afford to work in isolation, and we will utilise every opportunity to save time and resources, and to improve services for our residents, by removing duplication across agencies wherever it exists, joining up front line delivery and developing a shared understanding of the needs of local people. The Council will lead by example, bringing together all those with a stake in the future of Wirral to deliver better and more joined up services to our residents.

A Wirral Public Service Board has recently been established to drive this work forward. The Board brings together senior representatives from the health sector, as well as Merseyside Police, Merseyside Fire and Rescue, Wirral Metropolitan College, Job Centre Plus, Health organisations and Wirral Partnership Homes etc. The Board will focus on bring the public sector together to realise efficiencies and integrate services in order that all can better focus on outcomes. This important work will help to mitigate, where

possible, the impact of public sector funding cuts whilst maintaining the best services possible for local people.

We will refresh Wirral's Local Strategic Partnership, ensuring that we work closely with partners across all sectors to develop a longer term vision for Wirral, and to consider future opportunities for working together.

We will embrace our new public health responsibilities to ensure that we are doing all that we can to improve the health of our residents. The Council will play a key leadership role through the Health and Wellbeing Board by developing and delivering a health and wellbeing strategy for Wirral which builds on a shared understanding of local needs. We will strengthen the role of our communities in health protection, and continue to work closely with our partner organisations to reduce the stark health inequalities that exist within Wirral.

Wirral will play an active part in the wider Liverpool City Region, ensuring that the benefits of our proximity to the increasingly vibrant City Centre are realised and that the future plans of the Liverpool Local Enterprise Partnership reflect both the needs of Wirral businesses and the massive economic opportunities presented by our Investment Strategy.

We will actively seek partnerships with other Local Authorities, including across Cheshire, the Northwest, North Wales, nationally and internationally with organisations that have the potential to deliver improved and more efficient shared services for our residents.

Neighbourhood working

The nature of local government is changing at almost unprecedented pace; financial challenges, increased demand and increased expectations from our residents mean that we must always look to new and more innovative methods of providing the services people rely on.

Nevertheless, our residents expect, and deserve, their Council to conduct its business in a fashion that ensures they get the very best level of service possible. To ensure this, Wirral Council will guarantee that all Council services, business and future plans will have the following principles embedded within them:

- **Focus on Residents.** Wirral Council will never invest resources into any project without clear evidence that the outcome will be what our residents want and need.
- **Be open and transparent:** Governance, decision making and the operation of Wirral Council will be open to, and welcome, scrutiny from all stakeholders.
- **Be accountable:** We will welcome scrutiny into all aspects of Council business, particularly performance. We will report on progress towards our vision, and we will ensure that Council Officers and Members alike are accountable for our successes and failures.

The localism agenda means local government has a unique role to co-ordinate and support local communities to deliver the services they need, and

to achieve the outcomes they want. In Wirral, that means an innovative plan to create new models of neighbourhood engagement based within the borough's four Parliamentary constituencies.

Alongside these, we will see the establishment of local public service boards – whose membership, aside from Health, will include representatives from the Council, Police and education.

By decentralising power from Whitehall and our own Town Hall, and placing it in the hands of local people with local knowledge and understanding, communities will be strengthened by the power to develop bespoke local solutions to local problems.

Local neighbourhoods, given their own budget to spend, utilising skills, knowledge and experience of people on the ground, will make better use of their resources because they can redesign them to fit local problems. It is clearer than ever that when it comes to public services, one size does not fit all.

4. What we will deliver over the next three years:

A coherent set of performance measures and targets are being developed to ensure priorities are achieved over the three year period. A delivery plan will be in place that will include measures and targets subject to regular and rigorous review. This will form the basis of robust performance management and monitoring arrangements for the three year period.

The delivery of the Corporate Plan will be supported by key strategic documents including the Wirral Investment Strategy, Children and Young People's Plan and Child Poverty Strategy. The Council's three Strategic Directors will develop three year plans that underpin the Corporate Plan and set out in more detail how the activities identified within the plan will be delivered together with the agreed resources required.

This Corporate Plan will continuously be reviewed and refreshed throughout the three years based upon research, policy, economic development and the feedback and engagement of our communities.

Families and Wellbeing

The Council's role as a champion and protector for children, families and vulnerable people is changing significantly. The current economic climate, combined with rapidly changing demographic patterns, aspirations and expectations is driving the Council to rethink our services entirely; what should be delivered, how should they be delivered and who should deliver them and how they can mitigate the effect of the economic climate.

We have much to be proud of, and reports from Ofsted and other bodies regularly rate our children's services as excellent and outstanding following inspections, something which again occurred in 2012. Comparison with similar Council's however, highlights that certain services for young people in Wirral are expensive.

The creation of the strategic directorate area for Families and Wellbeing provides new opportunities to truly design services with the family at the centre. Ensuring that every possible opportunity for shared working is maximised, both across the Council, the wider public sector and our partners in the private, voluntary, community and faith sectors. Duplication will be removed wherever it exists, with a focus on improving and streamlining residents' experiences of the services we provide and deliver.

At all times we will maintain a focus on safeguarding children and vulnerable people.

We will focus on developing coherent preventative services with partner agencies, which build on universal provision, so that we target interventions with children and families in order to improve outcomes and reduce the number of children requiring expensive and frequently reactive specialist services. Our role in the direct provision of universal services for children should be significantly diminished, or provided on a full cost recovery basis, since other agencies and communities may be better placed to provide these services. This will enable the Council to target our resources working with more vulnerable children and families who need our support the most.

Our social care services for adults are improving. These improvements have been made within a challenging environment of increasing demand from a growing older population and reducing Council resources. In 2010, the Care Quality Commission rated Wirral 'poor' in terms of both safeguarding and learning disability services, which led to the development and implementation of a major improvement programme for 2010-2013.

During 2012, a Peer Challenge focussed on Safeguarding as well as a Peer Review of all social care services for adults was completed – and showed real progress, improvement and key achievements across the service. The outcomes were more recently endorsed by a national board (Towards Excellence in Adult Social Care) in February 2013.

Personalised services continue to be strengthened; personal budgets and self directed assessments were rolled out for the benefit of all people using services; as well as an increased focus on improving the choice of accommodation available; including supported living and extra care housing. We will work to further develop the capacity of the market to ensure that the quality of services are maintained.

Moving forward our focus will be shifted away from crisis management towards tackling problems early, through a prevention and early intervention – promoting health and wellbeing and quality of life.

The services available to people will be completely transformed; we will commission services based on sound evidence, so that we know we are providing the best and most appropriate levels of care and support that is possible. This will help to deliver more personalised services, and make sure that people can control their own circumstances, meet their own needs and stay independent for as long as they can.

Sport and leisure facilities, and the programmes of activity that use them, play a significant part in the health of the community and in increasing the self-confidence of people. We will work towards adopting a more integrated

approach to wellbeing in the future which will enable the role of sport and leisure to be reviewed and perhaps redefined.

We have clear priorities for the coming year; underpinned by consultation and engagement with our residents, partners and staff. This year, we will:

- Redesign our preventative and early intervention services to ensure that they are targeted at those most in need and to safely reduce the numbers of children in our care
- Work with schools to ensure resources are used and shared effectively
- Focus on improving how we commission services, particularly by working with partners in the NHS
- Focus on commissioning for improved quality outcomes across the domiciliary, residential and nursing home sector
- Make sure our transport policies are fair, accessible and provide value for money for all residents
- Transform our day, residential and respite services to ensure they are fit for purpose, modern, and attractive to the people who rely on them
- Review the support we provide to carers, to ensure that the vital contribution they make is accurately and adequately resourced
- Transform our universal youth services; consolidating services from our key sites and investing in a state of the art youth zone
- Make sure our leisure offer is fit for purpose, and delivering the best value for money possible as we seek to improve the health and wellbeing of our borough

Despite the demographic and financial challenges we face, our duty to champion the needs of children, families and vulnerable people to make sure that people are protected, and ensure that services are in place to improve, protect and inspire all Wirral people remains as important as ever.

Regeneration and Environment

The quality of Wirral's local environment and health of our economy are significant factors affecting the quality of life of our residents. This is confirmed through many public consultations which have been completed during the past few years; residents are clear that we should focus on services which ensure that Wirral is a place where businesses flourish and people have access to jobs and quality, affordable, homes.

In order to achieve this, it is vital that the Council continues to support a thriving local economy which provides the bedrock for social, economic and environmental well being amongst all of our Communities. We want to continue to support business growth, but to do so in a more focused manner that works with and utilises the experience and resources of other key stakeholders. We will support the creation of jobs by the private sector through providing a supportive and enabling environment, not only through the day to day support provided by the Council, but also through speedy and appropriate use of the Council's planning powers.

Having a quality and affordable place to live is important to ensure that all our residents live in a safe and appropriate home that allows them to gain

maximum benefit for access to jobs, leisure, amenities, education and to gain associated social and economic benefits that they both desire and deserve. We will continue to work with landlords in the social and private sector to maximise the number and range of quality homes for rent. We will continue our programmes to restructure the housing market and work with house builders to increase the number of new homes built in Wirral.

We will support local people to 'place shape' their communities through the implementation of new ways of engaging and working with Neighbourhoods. This will include support for the four neighbourhood planning vanguards and support for local groups who wish to become involved in the planning of their local services.

The importance of Birkenhead as Wirral's key economic centre will be recognised with refreshed town centre plans and a focus on integrating the Wirral Waters Enterprise Zone into the wider town.

In what are tough economic times for both the Council and the nation as a whole, we must ensure that the limited resources we have are targeted solely at opportunities to achieve our vision for Wirral. We have to make some difficult decisions as we simply do not have the resources to continue spending the same amounts to achieve these goals. However, the Council will continue to allocate its resources into activities that will help support business, create jobs, allow access to those jobs for Wirral residents and encourage people to live in safe, affordable and relevant housing.

Wirral Council has a responsibility for commissioning or delivering a range of near-universal services to all households and neighbourhoods in their area. These include, amongst others, waste and recycling, street cleansing, highway maintenance and traffic management, road safety, leisure services, parks and open spaces.

Increasingly, these functions have been carried out in various partnership or collaborative arrangements with other public agencies (e.g. police and fire service) or, where appropriate, with volunteer or other community groups.

It is recognised that there is projected to be a steady decline over the foreseeable future in national resources to support these types of services.

Increasingly, there will be a clear need to manage demand and, more generally, to manage public expectations of what the Council can and cannot do. The role of community and other groups will increase in significance as the Council itself diminishes its activities in the more discretionary areas where it is not required by statute to provide services or functions.

Many of what are now universal services are provided as a result of statutory requirements but where the actual level or quality of service is not closely defined. Other services which people are used to seeing as universal have a greater or lesser degree of discretion as to whether they are provided at all and to what level of provision.

It will be necessary to identify service areas that are not, as such, universal across the community but meet particular needs. These more targeted service areas are often those where council provision sits alongside or competes with other providers.

We have clear priorities for the coming year; underpinned by consultation and engagement with our residents, partners and staff. This year, we will:

- Ensure that the distribution of Regional Growth Fund resources are of maximum benefit to Wirral's economy.
- Actively support the development of the International Trade Centre and the Wirral Waters Enterprise Zone.
- Support the development of the growth of the offshore wind supply chain.
- Ensure that Wirral's profile continues to be raised with Government and other Agencies to secure support for our Investment priorities including the City deal.
- Progress targeted inward investment activities to support the growth of Wirral's economy.
- Develop a workforce for the future through designing an apprenticeship scheme with our partners in the Liverpool City Region
- Develop a clear master plan for Birkenhead Town Centre
- Establish alternative delivery arrangements for a range of universal functions; ensuring that Wirral residents see their services maintained or improved while achieving better value for money

We will face our challenges head on, and ensure that we use the opportunities before us to build lasting growth in our economy and to improve the quality of life enjoyed by our residents.

Transformation and Resources

The new Strategic Directorate has a crucial role in ensuring the Council's corporate centre both supports and drives transformational change across the organisation.

Good governance, transparency and accountability are essential for the Council and a cornerstone for improving public services. The Council is accountable for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards. We must also ensure that public money is safeguarded, properly accounted for and used economically, efficiently and effectively.

Transforming services

We will only deliver our vision through a programme of radical and sustained change. We will review all of our services over the course of this three year plan to ensure that we have explored the most appropriate method of delivery, and to ensure that we are meeting the needs of our residents.

We will determine and be clear about which services and facilities should be delivered by third parties, making sure that the Council only delivers directly where we can be certain that it is providing the best value for money for our residents.

We are currently investigating alternative delivery arrangements for services, including exploring a range of different options. We will ensure that any decision

the Council takes to transform services and deliver them through alternative ways is based on solid evidence, and subject to robust monitoring, contract management and evaluation.

Leadership and culture change

Essential to the implementation of the Corporate Plan is the need to ensure that the Council has the leadership and managerial capacity in place to deliver. A key priority is the strengthening of the Council's governance arrangements, ensuring that a clear scheme of delegation is in place to enable effective decision making. A Leaders' Board has been established to enable all political group leaders to meet regularly with the Chief Executive to debate and discuss key corporate issues. Elected Members from all political groups are represented on the Council's Working Democracy Party which is currently developing a view on a new approach to Scrutiny, in order that this can shape and influence Council decisions.

A series of visioning events have been held with Elected Members, senior officers and partner organisations and will continue. These events have provided the opportunity to hear from external speakers and to facilitate discussions on the future shape of the Council. We are visiting other local authorities to look at best practice as part of our commitment to learn from others that have made progress in areas which we are seeking to make changes.

Support for Members

We are working towards strengthening the support that our Elected Members receive. We have established a dedicated independent Policy Unit to more effectively co-ordinate policy support.

Our Elected Members are central to developing a vision which reflects the best interests of Wirral residents and ensuring that the Council delivers this. As the Council changes from directly providing services to commissioning services for other parties to provide on our behalf, the role of local Councillors will become more important than ever. We will ensure that we support our local Councillors in this vital role and equip them with the necessary skills and training.

We are enhancing our IT systems to provide Elected Members with better accessibility and more flexible equipment. We are also introducing a casework management system to enable Members to manage contacts from residents more efficiently and track progress on issues.

The new approach to neighbourhood working will also present greater opportunities for our Councillors to play an important leadership role, and to influence local services by ensuring that they are responsive to local needs.

All three political parties are committed to working towards the Elected Member Development Charter. This year work a Strategy and Action Plan will be developed with the objective of the Council receiving the Charter in 2014.

The Wirral Elected Member Development Programme enables Officers and Members to work together, with external expertise and support when required, to develop both policy and organisational capacity. In addition a Leadership Programme for Elected Members will be in place later in the year.

Focussing on performance

A new Performance Appraisal & Development programme has commenced which starts with the Chief Executive, Strategic Directors, Directors and Heads of Service that will be rolled out to Senior Managers across the Council in the coming year.

New leadership behaviours and expectations have been developed that underpin this programme. They are -:

- 1) Personal Performance
- 2) Creating "Followship" and Leading Others
- 3) Maximising People Potential
- 4) Building Robust Relationships
- 5) Leading Organisational Excellence

A practical training programme is now in place that will ensure improvements are made across these key areas. Linked to the Improvement Plan we can now ensure that learning is targeted and meeting organisational needs.

The new Council structure clarifies management levels and responsibilities across the organisation. Managers have clear accountabilities and will receive appropriate training targeted on ensuring expectations relating to good workforce management, governance and sound financial management are met and subject to performance appraisal.

The Employee Engagement Survey completed in May 2012 has resulted in an Action Plan detailing suggested activity across the whole organisation as well as within specific Departments. This survey will be repeated in the autumn of 2013 to ensure that progress can be monitored and any ongoing issues speedily addressed.

A centralised approach to performance management will also ensure that we deliver what we say we will and continuously look at ways in which we can improve the services that the Council provides.

Organisational values

Data gathered from across the organisation including; the Corporate Governance Survey and the full Employee Engagement Survey, will be used to develop clear and concise organisational values which will reflect current good practice and provide Wirral with a contemporary framework within which to take the Improvement Plan forward. The values will underpin all future training and development across the organisation and will be vital in the roll out of Performance Appraisal and Development.

Culture Development Programme

A programme to roll out the new Organisational Core Values will commence this year. Workshops will be underpinned by an e-learning module and supporting communications and promotional features that demonstrate how

current employees are already delivering the values of the organisation, in their everyday work. In addition the values will be underpinned by a set of Employee and Managers Expectations that outline what is expected in terms of activity and behaviours at all levels across the organisation.

Managing our finances

We have taken significant steps to improve the way we manage our budget. A Budget Steering Group has been established with representatives from all Council departments to undertake a review of base budgets and to prepare regular financial monitoring information.

Monthly monitoring has also been introduced to ensure that our Members are kept fully informed of the Council's financial position and to enable effective decisions to be taken.

In relation to the 2013/15 budget, the approach has been developed which fully engages with Elected Members at both Executive and Scrutiny level. The Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy will provide a solid foundation for determining how the Council spends its money over the course of this Corporate Plan, ensuring that resources are fully aligned to the Council's priorities.

We will significantly strengthen our approach to commissioning through the establishment of a combined intelligence, performance management and commissioning based in the corporate centre of the organisation. This will ensure that the services the Council spends money on are based on robust evidence of community needs and subject to regular evaluation.

Addressing the challenge of welfare reform

The Welfare Reform Act represents the biggest change to the benefits system for over 60 years. These changes, including the introduction of universal credit and changes to council tax and housing benefit, will be challenging for many our residents and we are committed to supporting them through these changes by providing appropriate advice and guidance.

We are working with partners to ensure that we are playing a key leadership role to ensure that Wirral is fully prepared for the changes, and to plan what advice and support is needed for local residents. Additionally, we are hosting a welfare reform event on behalf of the Liverpool City Region to ensure that we are working closely with other Merseyside Authorities to understand the impact of the changes.

Access to online services will be crucial for our local residents ahead of the changes to the benefits system. We are therefore also taking steps to increase internet access across Wirral through the launch of 'Go ON Wirral' and other initiatives to support digital inclusion.

There are clear priorities in place for the coming year; underpinned by consultation and engagement with our residents, partners and staff. This year, we will:

- Deliver 2013/14 savings through a clearly defined programme management approach
- Develop a robust process for dealing with our financial challenges in 2014-16, ensuring service transformation and innovative delivery is at the heart
- Develop a corporate approach for commissioning services
- Improve governance and decision making through adopting a revised constitution and scheme of delegation
- Establish new arrangements for neighbourhood working
- Review the Council's assets maximising both efficiency and savings
- Establish business unit functions to support strategic directorates and transform business support
- Put in place a robust system to make sure that where we charge for services, those charges are assessed fairly and equitably, ensuring people are able to pay and we are able to collect

Through clear direction, innovation, learning, scrutiny and challenge, a culture of high performance, accountability and continuous improvement will be embedded across the organisation.