

COUNCIL

10th MARCH 2014

CABINET PORTFOLIO SUMMARY REPORT

REPORT OF	COUNCILLOR PHIL DAVIES
CABINET PORTFOLIO	LEADER
CO-ORDINATING CHIEF OFFICER	GRAHAM BURGESS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is an update from the Cabinet Portfolio Holder to Members of the Council on matters relevant to his portfolio.

1. FUTURE COUNCIL

Elected Members met on the 18th February 2014 at an all party member event to discuss the future shape of Council services in Wirral. This event follows the annual visioning conference in October 2013 attended by Councillors, Senior Officers and partner organisations.

The Council's financial position for 2014/15 is now agreed, it has been a massive challenge and we are lobbying the government very strongly to realign its thinking to reverse or slow down the cuts in areas of greatest need. We continue to have the biggest challenge so far to balance our books as we move into 2015/16 and beyond. We are not alone in this challenge but it is one that will require the public and our stakeholders to engage in a different dialogue with us - about what we can all do to reduce the cost to the public purse. The level of available funding and new demands on local authorities means that the really difficult decisions are still to be taken; we can no longer guarantee that treasured services will be saved and the messages need to change so that we are able to help Wirral residents work with us to agree how to prioritise in a financial climate not familiar to most people

The Future Council project will review all of the Council's services and consider their future design and staffing requirements to deliver the savings that we must make. At the end of 2017, the Council will still have a budget of approximately £250 million to invest in services. It is therefore essential to ensure that we invest our remaining resources in the most effective and efficient ways to provide services for Wirral residents.

The Elected Members' event on 18th February 2014 also highlighted the importance to develop the Council's commissioning approach as an important part of the Future Council project. I will personally have oversight of the Future Council project given the fundamental impact that this work will have on the Council and its services. To ensure that there is clear leadership for the Council's commissioning agenda, I have taken the decision to extend the Governance and Improvement portfolio to include progression and oversight of the Council's commissioning strategy and approach. Councillor Ann McLachlan will take the lead on this.

A report will be presented to Cabinet in March to outline the approach for delivering this project.

2. COMBINED AUTHORITY

Proposals are well advanced to establish a Combined Authority for the Liverpool City Region which will improve strategic decision making in the areas of transport, housing, economic development and skills, maximising funding opportunities from Central Government. The orders have been laid before Parliament and will be considered by MPs on 14th March 2014.

The Department for Communities & Local Government (DCLG) have confirmed the name as Halton, Knowsley, Liverpool, St Helens, Sefton and Wirral Combined Authority. This is despite all Merseyside local authorities, along with many of our local partners, all indicating during the consultation period that they would prefer to use 'Liverpool City Region' as the name, due to the fact it is already well established.

The clear position of the DCLG when deciding upon names for combined authorities, appears to be not to name the largest city alone in their title therefore we are being treated in the same way as other areas. Examples of this approach is the Sheffield City Region called the 'Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham and Sheffield Combined Authority' and the Leeds area known as the West Yorkshire Combined Authority.

The name of Halton, Knowsley, Liverpool, St Helens, Sefton and Wirral Combined Authority will only be used for statutory purposes. Publicly, it will be referred to as the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority.

3. LIVING WAGE BOROUGH

In the recent budget resolution agreed by Council for 2014/15 we are committed to becoming a Living Wage borough. Wirral Council was one of the first authorities in the country to pay its employees the minimum wage and has since taken significant steps to become a Living Wage borough. This includes a commitment to ensuring that new contracts for social care providers demonstrate they will follow the Council's ethical care charter and fair wage approach which asks providers, among other requirements, not to employ staff on zero hours contracts.

Wirral Council is hosting an inaugural meeting on 7th March 2014 of a regional network of Councils who are committed to paying the Living Wage to discuss how we can work collectively on this important agenda. The Council is also jointly hosting a regional Living Wage conference with the North West TUC on 4th April 2014 which will involve MPs, Leaders and Chief Executives from North West authorities, trade unions and businesses.

4. LOCAL GROWTH PLAN

On 27th February 2014, I attended a meeting with ministers to discuss the Liverpool City Region growth plan. The meeting involved Lord Heseltine and Greg Clark MP to provide an opportunity to discuss the projects that the City Region is seeking funding for from the Local Growth Fund.

The City Region was represented by members of the Liverpool City Region Local Enterprise Partnership and included key business representatives to present a strong argument for our request for £126m to fund transport projects that will enable job creation in the City Region including Enterprise Zones.

5. BEDROOM TAX

A second meeting has taken place of the panel I have established (involving Cllrs Gilchrist and Lewis) to discuss how we might mitigate the impact of the Bedroom Tax on Wirral residents. Key issues discussed included the role of Social Landlords and the use of Discretionary Housing Payments. The Group next meet on the 6th March. Key items for discussion are: DHP, the pre-1996 loop-hole and the impact of recent Tribunal judgements.