

COUNCIL

8TH DECEMBER 2014

CABINET PORTFOLIO SUMMARY REPORT

REPORT OF	Councillor Phil Davies
CABINET PORTFOLIO	Leader of the Council
CO-ORDINATING CHIEF OFFICER	Chief Executive

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

1. CORPORATE PLAN

The Council's 2013-16 Corporate Plan has been refreshed for its final year 2015-16 and reaffirms the Council's vision for Wirral to 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".

The purpose of the Plan is to ensure that the Council is investing its resources appropriately and in line with agreed priorities; to protect the vulnerable, to drive growth in our economy and to tackle health inequalities.

2. FINANCIAL OUTLOOK

Like many other authorities across the country, Wirral Council is dealing with unprecedented cuts to its funding, together with increasing demand for its services. We have already made savings of £151 million since 2010 and still require further savings of approximately £70 million by the end of 2018, as a result of Government austerity measures; by 2017 our Government grant will have reduced by 57%

We have made strong progress to respond to the financial challenges that we face and our recent audit report confirmed that we have appropriate arrangements in place to manage our financial risks and challenges. However, difficult decisions will continue to be required in order that we are able to deliver services that meet our Corporate Plan priorities and the needs of our residents.

The Local Government Association and HM Treasury have predicted that there will be significant further cuts to local government funding following the election. A recent report by the National Audit Office has also warned of the impact of budget cuts in local authorities in England and highlights that over half of upper tier authorities are not well placed to provide services over the next three to five years.

3. PUBLIC SECTOR TRANSFORMATION

The Council continues to work with our partners to drive public service transformation across the Borough. A key strand within this agenda is Wirral's role in the national Public Service Transformation (PST) Network, bringing local public service providers to work together to meet local needs. Driven by a strong multi-agency approach via the Public Service Board (PSB), latest activity includes:

- **Better Food Wirral: a Food Plan for Wirral:** how to develop a healthy and vibrant food culture in Wirral. The project will help to increase access to good food, support the local food economy to thrive and support people to make healthy food choices;
- **Increasing Neighbourhood Resilience:** Constituency Committees have funded a number of small-scale behaviour change projects including: a community based advice service; a behaviour change campaign targeted at young people; Increasing support networks for older people; and reducing the impact of child poverty;
- **Tackling Health Related Worklessness:** The aim of this project is to reduce the long term, persistently high levels of health (including mental health) related worklessness in Wirral, with a particular focus in Birkenhead.

We have also submitted a funding application to the Government's Transformation Challenge Award (TCA) to help support delivery of the worklessness project, and expect to hear the outcome of our bid in December.

4. COMBINED AUTHORITY DEVOLUTION

The latest meeting of the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (CA) took place on 21st November, when a number of significant decisions were taken in relation to economic growth and transport improvements – building on the extensive partnership work already taking place across the City Region. Members agreed to amend the CA Constitution to enable Associate Membership, and a number of neighbouring local authorities have already expressed interest in closer working with us, including West Lancs who will now become an Associate Member.

Wirral also took a report to the Combined Authority meeting which set out the case for why a strong package of powers and budgets should be devolved to the City Region. Members agreed that the CA should approach central government as a matter of urgency to discuss these proposals and how they can be progressed. As Chair of the Combined Authority, I have written to the Chancellor of the Exchequer requesting a meeting as soon as possible to progress this work.

5. INVESTMENT STRATEGY

The Investment Strategy focuses on key sectors within Wirral's economy including Offshore Energy, Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering. Officers are working with UKTI and other agencies to promote Wirral for investment and also support indigenous businesses to access new opportunities.

Working with the Wirral Chamber of Commerce and the Local Enterprise Partnership, the Council is working to develop a growth hub to support Wirral businesses, securing new resources to support business growth. Invest Wirral continue to support businesses by offering advice and support.

Significant progress has been made in securing new investment into Wirral Waters. In October, work started on the development of a new campus for Wirral Met College on Tower Road South, a key gateway of Wirral Waters. The new £8.5m campus will open in September 2015.

Adjacent to the new college campus, work is now underway on Tower Wharf to build a new 60,000 sq ft office development which is expected to complete in late summer 2015. Officers continue to work a number of other projects within the Enterprise, including key infrastructure development.