

# **POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

Thursday, 7 October 2021

Present: Councillor J Williamson (Chair)

Councillors T Anderson J Robinson  
P Gilchrist P Stuart  
P Cleary H Cameron  
S Hayes W Clements  
EA Grey JE Green  
T Jones L Rennie  
Y Nolan

Deputy: Councillor K Greaney (In place of J McManus)

## 54 **WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and those watching the webcast.

The Chair announced that in respect of item 9b, on the agenda, 'Sale of Land at Cross Lane, Wallasey', following consideration of the item at the Economy, Regeneration and Development Committee, which had determined not to approve the recommendations, the item was now withdrawn.

## 55 **APOLOGIES**

The Chair confirmed the apologies of Councillor Julie McManus, with Councillor Karl Greaney deputising.

## 56 **MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Members were asked to declare any disclosable pecuniary interests and any other relevant interest and to state the nature of the interest.

No such declarations were made.

## 57 **MINUTES**

**Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 1 September, 2021, be approved and adopted as a correct record.**

58 **PUBLIC AND MEMBER QUESTIONS**

The Chair reported that no questions from either members of the public or Members had been submitted. Nor were there any statements or petitions to receive.

59 **USE OF COUNCIL BUILDINGS FOR CIVIC, COUNCIL AND COMMITTEE MEETINGS - UPDATE**

Further to minute 8 (9/6/21) the Assistant Chief Executive, introduced a report which provided an update in respect of proposed arrangements for the safe operation of Council meetings for the administrative year 2021/22 giving due consideration to guidance and regulations arising from Covid-19.

At the request of the Committee, a further assessment had been completed to determine the work and processes required to enable access and operation of Wallasey Town Hall beyond the limited capacity arrangements currently in place. This included inspection by qualified technical service providers. Following early soft market testing, the forecast investment required to install mechanical ventilation across all floors of the building with central air handling plant was significant, costing approximately £2.4m, before additional site management fees or other costs associated with the buildings' listed status.

A similar exercise had been undertaken for Birkenhead Town Hall. The forecast investment required to install mechanical ventilation across all floors of the building with a central air handling plant was also significant at this site, costing approximately £1.3m before any site management fees or other costs associated with the buildings listed status.

A number of options with costings were set out in the report which were considered together with the financial implications of the continuing use of the Floral Pavilion site.

In response to a number of comments, the Assistant Chief Executive stated the duty the Authority had as an employer, to its staff in providing a safe working environment and the need to comply with public health guidelines on Covid. The report did cover arrangements up until May 2022, but he acknowledged the need to know as much as possible about the buildings to facilitate a wider discussion on the future use of both Town Halls. He assured Members of the security of the buildings and that both were currently in use to a limited extent, with a notice of the maximum numbers allowed per room.

The Director of Regeneration and Place responded to a comment on the development of new Council offices in Birkenhead, with work due to start on site in the next few weeks, but there would be no civic use for the new office building. Plans were being developed for the regeneration of Seacombe from Seacombe Ferry up to and including the Town Hall and its annexes.

Some Members highlighted examples of recent events they had attended both at Wirral Council and at Liverpool City Council where guidance on Covid health and safety would appear to have been not as strictly adhered to as that which was being followed for meetings at the Floral Pavilion.

The Chief Executive agreed that he would look into the matter raised with regard to Birkenhead Town Hall once provided with further information on the event.

After a lengthy discussion on the issue of the continued use of the Floral Pavilion and whether or not either of the two Town Halls could be brought back into use for meetings, there was a consensus of opinion on the need for more information to be provided for a long term strategy to be agreed upon.

On a motion by the Chair, seconded by Councillor Tony Jones, it was -

**Resolved – That -**

- (1) it be agreed that the arrangements for the safe operation of Council and Committee meetings continue at the Floral Pavilion for the remainder of the Municipal Year, and to be reviewed sooner as required;**
- (2) surveys be undertaken on the investment proposals for both the Town Halls as set out in the report and request that the Assistant Chief Executive submits an update report to a future meeting of the Committee as soon as possible.**

60 **LOCAL BOUNDARY COMMISSION: PROPOSED WARD BOUNDARY REVIEW**

The Director of Law and Governance, introduced a report on a proposed ward boundary review. He reported upon receipt of a letter by the Chief Executive on 25 August, 2021 from Jolyon Jackson, Chief Executive of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England which informed that the Commission had now decided to undertake an electoral review of Wirral Council.

The purpose of an electoral review was to consider the number of councillors elected to the council, the names, number and boundaries of the wards, and the number of councillors to be elected to each ward. The last electoral review of Wirral Council was undertaken in 2003. Accordingly, the Commission considered that a review of Wirral Council should start within the next one to three years. The Commission were asking for initial views on when the Council would prefer for this review to take place within that period.

The report detailed the process which would be followed and the context in which the review would take place, with 15 other Metropolitan Authorities which had not had a review since 2003, also to be reviewed.

On a motion by the Chair, seconded by Councillor Yvonne Nolan, it was -

**Resolved - That this Committee requests the Chief Executive to formally respond on behalf of the Council to the Local Government Boundary Commission informing that the Council would like the proposed review to commence in 2023/2024 with a view to any changes being implemented at the 2026 Local Government Elections.**

## 61 **WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE**

The Director of Law and Governance introduced a report which advised how this Committee, in co-operation with the other Policy and Service Committees, was responsible for proposing and delivering an annual committee work programme.

The work programme was formed from a combination of key decisions, standing items and requested officer reports. The report provided the Committee with an opportunity to plan and regularly review its work across the municipal year and was attached as an appendix to the report.

In response to a Member's comment, the Director of Resources stated that a workshop was to be arranged on the Change Programme. Items in the Change Programme did form part of the savings programme and budget process which the Committee had agreed to at its meeting on 17 March, 2021, (minute 87 refers). Income generation items would also come back to this Committee once they had been considered at the individual policy committees as part of the Wirral Plan delivery plans. A further workshop for this committee would be scheduled to bring these items to.

**Resolved – That the Policy & Resources Committee work programme for the 2021/22 municipal year, be agreed.**

## 62 **PROPERTY DISPOSALS**

The Director of Law and Governance introduced a report on the Economy Regeneration and Development Committee's recommendations, from its meeting on 29 September, 2021 in respect of proposed property disposals at three sites.

Councillor Tony Jones, as Chair of Economy, Regeneration and Development Committee, commented that no issues had been raised about these proposals at the Committee.

The report was before the Committee because in accordance with the Council's Constitution any issue regarding land and property including major acquisition and disposals, which included reserved decision making concerning any purchase, sale or transfer of a value in excess of, or likely to exceed, £100,000; was reserved to the Policy and Resources Committee.

Responding to Members' comments on the use of capital receipts from property disposals, the Director of Resources reminded Members that there was a capital receipts target which had to be used to offset the Capitalisation directive agreed with the former Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. With regard to the state of dangerous pathways within Plymyard Cemetery, she would look at what was available within the capital programme to address these possible health and safety concerns.

With regard to a previous suggestion (minute 37 (28/7/21) refers) on the use of a percentage of capital receipts for the benefit of local communities, the Director of Resources suggested that although the use of capital receipts was currently curtailed for such schemes, a report would be brought back to the December meeting on using an identified block of money on a ward or constituency basis to enable bids on the use of such monies for the benefit of specific local projects within communities.

On a motion by the Chair, seconded by Councillor Tony Jones, it was -

**Resolved – That -**

- (1) 27 Balls Road, Oxtou be declared surplus to requirements and authority be given to the Director of Law and Governance, in consultation with the Director of Regeneration and Place, to arrange for its marketing by auction and subsequent sale on the terms described in paragraphs 3.2 and 3.3 of the report;**
- (2) Plymyard Cemetery Lodge, 996 New Chester Road, Eastham, be declared surplus to requirements and authority be given to the Director of Law and Governance, in consultation with the Director of Regeneration and Place, to arrange for its marketing through a local estate agency on the terms described in paragraphs 3.4 and 3.5. of the report;**
- (3) in the event that a sale of Plymyard Cemetery Lodge through an estate agency is not achieved expeditiously, the Director of Law and Governance, in consultation with the Director of Regeneration and Place, be authorised to arrange for its marketing by auction and subsequent sale on the terms described in paragraphs 3.4 and 3.5. of the report;**

- (4) the Director of Law and Governance, in consultation with the Director of Regeneration and Place be authorised to secure the sale of the Laser Engineering Centre, Birkenhead to the current tenant, for £340,000 (excluding VAT) plus fees of £1,500.

63 **SALE OF LAND AT CROSS LANE, WALLASEY**

Item withdrawn (see minute 54 above).

64 **REFERRAL FROM CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE - CHILDREN'S RESIDENTIAL TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME**

The Director of Law and Governance introduced a report on the Children, Young People and Education Committee's recommendations in respect of the Children's Residential Transformation Programme.

Councillor Wendy Clements, as Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee, spoke to the report, which had been considered in detail at the Committee on 4 October, 2021.

In June 2021, the Children, Young People and Education Committee had considered a report which requested approval for a financial investment of £1,000,000 by way of a commercial loan to support the development of up to four new children's homes in Wirral. The Committee had given an in-principle agreement to the proposal, subject to due diligence being carried out and requested that the Director for Children, Families and Education bring a further report back to the Committee at an appropriate date. The further report had presented a summary of the external due diligence work carried out and outlined the proposed loan arrangements for the investment.

The report was before the Committee as the decision was deemed significant in terms of impact on the Council's revenue or capital.

Prior to discussion on the report, a Member suggested the need to move the exemption so that the details of the exempt appendix could be discussed.

On a motion by Councillor Janette Williamson, seconded by Councillor Yvonne Nolan, it was -

**Resolved – That, under section 100 (A) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of this item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined by paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A (as amended) to that Act. The Public Interest test has been applied and favours exclusion.**

Following a lengthy and considered debate, having heard responses to comments from the Directors for Children, Families and Education; Law and Governance; and Resources, and after a short adjournment at 7.50pm for 10 minutes, it was then, on a motion by Councillor Wendy Clements, seconded by Councillor Jeff Green -

**Resolved – That,**

- (1) the issue of a commercial loan facility to We Are Juno CIC, in terms approved by the Director of Resources, in consultation with the Director of Law and Governance, as set out in section 5 of this report, in the sum of up to £1,000,000, be approved;**
- (2) the Director of Resources be authorised, in consultation with the Director of Law and Governance, to:**
  - (a) settle and perfect such security for the performance of the borrower’s obligations under the commercial loan facility as is offered by We Are Juno CIC to the Council; and**
  - (b) agree such minor variations in the terms of the commercial loan facility as are necessary to reflect any changes in circumstances arising during the term of any loan agreed, including any security pursuant to recommendation 2(a) above.**