

ECONOMY REGENERATION & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 26 October 2021

Present: Councillor T Jones (Chair)

Councillors P Martin D Mitchell
G Wood E Gleaves
D Burgess-Joyce M Booth (In place of
A Gardner C Povall)
A Hodson KJ Williams (In
place of T Smith)

40 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

The Chair opened the meeting and reminded everyone that the meeting was being webcast and a copy is retained on the Council's website for two years.

41 APOLOGIES

Councillor Tony Smith gave apologies for absence and was substituted by Councillor Jerry Williams.
Councillor Cherry Povall gave apologies for absence and was substituted by Councillor Max Booth.
Councillor Karl Greaney gave apologies for absence.

42 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. There were no declarations of interests.

43 MINUTES

**Resolved (by assent) –
That the minutes of the meeting of Economy, Regeneration and
Development Committee held on 29 September 2021 be approved and
adopted as a correct record.**

44 PUBLIC AND MEMBER QUESTIONS

No questions, statements or petitions from the public or Councillors had been received.

REGENERATION STOCKTAKE

The Director of Regeneration and Place presented his report on the breadth of the Council's regeneration programme for about the next 4 years, which was one of the largest such programmes in the country. New staff had been appointed to drive forward the programme. The Wirral Growth Company, a partnership between the Council and Muse Developments, had begun the programme in March 2019. The Government's Housing Infrastructure Fund provided £6 million which started the housing developments in the previous industrial areas in Nov 2019 as part of a 'brownfield first' strategy. Extra funding, including the Future High Street Fund, helped drive the regeneration agenda and enabled possibilities for regeneration where Council funding alone would be insufficient, including removing the flyovers to the South of Birkenhead. In total in 2021 £88.71 million funding had been secured for over 130 projects, and additional funding of £130 million had been applied for. There were challenges from increasing costs of all materials, the expectations of sustainable development including the developing guidance and the changing property market following the Covid-19 pandemic.

It was intended that the physical development would enable communities to connect and develop themselves and improve quality of life, community cohesion and the environment, with low carbon developments and housing where active and public transport was encouraged.

Councillor Hodson raised concerns regarding the LGA Planning Peer Review Update report, produced in July 2020 and referred to in the presentation slides, and read out passages from it, which included the statement that "There appears to be a lack of support from Legal Services which has the potential to de-rail the growth agenda. The investors and partners describe ... the attitude, tone and approach of the Council's Legal Service is combative and inefficient".

The Director of Law and Governance, in answer to Members' concerns, explained that the comments in the report about legal services being a potential risk to the progress of the projects had been accepted and acted upon as later presented to Members. This had included the implementation of investment and a restructure going through at the time, including the appointment of a Lead Principal Lawyer who is the advisor to the Committee normally present plus a programme the ongoing training of post-graduates to develop the in-house expertise and capability. There had been commissioned a review of the service conducted by external advisors over the summer of 2020. This had led to a procurement exercise to appoint a strategic legal partner for the regeneration portfolio of legal work. This had recently been completed with the appointment of Trowers and Hamlins. There remained, however, a recruitment issue within the Planning and Property Law Team which was operating at 60% vacancy levels, which had proved difficult to

overcome despite HR recruitment best efforts over the intervening months and resulted in additional costs as expertise was purchased.

Councillor Tony Jones suggested having a standing item on future agendas to note the progress of legal services improvement plan.

Councillor Dave Mitchell requested a report to a future meeting on the ability to bring to the Chair and Spokespersons attention major issues that could cause a bottleneck could be progressed outside of the Committee cycle to see how Members could assist.

Councillor Andrew Hodson proposed an addition to the recommendations as a proposal, which was to refer inform the Audit and Risk Management Committee of the risk of legal services holding up the development programme.

This was seconded by Councillor Tony Jones.

Councillors then asked questions of the presentation and programme which established:

- That a summary of the presentation, and a briefing note on the new methods of sustainable construction being used, would be sent to all Members of the Council.
- The highest environmental standards were used in the design of office buildings and housing.
- Expertise and services are shared amongst the Liverpool City Region.
- Future reports on the programme could note the issues which could potentially derail progress.
- The proposed Maritime Knowledge Hub was intended as a resource an innovation site for the development of the maritime industry, including its decarbonisation.

Councillor Tony Jones moved the recommendations together with the additional referral.

These were seconded by Councillor Jerry Williams.

Resolved – That:

- (1) the transformation and progress made in Wirral’s regeneration to date and the next steps be noted; and**
- (2) whilst we consider the Council’s legal department to be a risk with regard to the comments made with regard to derailing the regeneration programme, this should be passed to the Audit and Risk Management Committee for continued scrutiny whilst this is still a risk to the Council.**

46 **THE WIRRAL PLAN 2021-2026 DRAFT DELIVERY PLANS**

Director of Regeneration and Place introduced the report of the Chief Executive which presented the Wirral Plan 2021-26 Draft Delivery Plans. The Plans had been approved at Council on 6 September 2021, together with the recommendation that engagement and discussion with relevant Committees would take place to further shape the underpinning delivery plans and work programmes required to implement the Wirral Plan. Updates would be provided via the dashboard, with a 'traffic light system for monitoring progress and reporting by exception.

**Resolved –
That the draft Delivery Plans, as they relate to the Economy,
Regeneration and Development Committee set out in Appendix 1 to this
report be noted.**

47 **WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE**

The Economy, Regeneration and Development Committee was responsible for proposing and delivering an annual committee work programme. This work programme was to align with the corporate priorities of the Council, in particular the delivery of the key decisions which are within the remit of the Committee.

**Resolved – That the content of the Economy, Regeneration and
Development Committee work programme for the remainder of the
2021/22 municipal year, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be
approved.**