

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 9 November 2022

Present: Councillor J Williamson (Chair)

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|-------------|-------------|-----------|
| Councillors | T Anderson | P Stuart |
| | P Gilchrist | H Cameron |
| | P Cleary | L Rennie |
| | EA Grey | J Bird |
| | T Jones | M Booth |
| | Y Nolan | K Hodson |
| | J Robinson | J Johnson |

In attendance: Councillors C Davies I Lewis
S Percy

63 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting as well as those watching the webcast.

64 APOLOGIES

No apologies for absence were received.

65 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 declarations were made.

66 MINUTES

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 5 October 2022 be approved as a correct record.

67 PUBLIC AND MEMBER QUESTIONS

The Chair reported that there were no public questions, statements, petitions or questions by members.

68 CAPITAL MONITORING QUARTER 2 2022/23

The Assistant Director – Finance introduced the report of the Director of Resources which provided an update on the progress of the Capital Programme 2022/23 at the end of September 2022, and recommended that

the Committee agreed to the revised 2022/23 Capital Programme of £98.7 million which took account of re-profiling, virements, additional funding requirements and grant variations identified since the Capital Programme was formally agreed on 28th February 2022 and later revised in the Quarter 1 monitoring report.

The Committee discussed the schemes with significant budget deferrals in Quarter 2 including the Maritime Knowledge Hub and the wider Birkenhead regeneration programme, noting that progress would be reported to the Economy, Regeneration and Housing Committee. Following queries on a number of schemes it was clarified that there was ongoing prioritisation work underway to assess the deliverability of capital projects and those schemes discussed would be reviewed accordingly. Further discussions took place in relation to capital receipts including projected revenue return.

Resolved – That

(1) Council be recommended to approve the revised Capital Programme of £98.7m for 2022/23, including the virements of budget referred to in Appendix D.

(2) Council be recommended to approve the additional funding for the schemes referred to in section 3.7 of the report.

69 **ASSET STRATEGY**

The Assistant Director Special Projects and Interim Assistant Director for Assets introduced the report of the Director of Regeneration and Place which sought approval of the draft Wirral Council Asset Strategy 2022-2027. The Asset Strategy was one of five strategies that shape the Council's new operating model and delivery of the Improvement Plan.

The Assistant Director Special Projects and Interim Assistant Director for Assets outlined how the strategy brought about a new way of managing council assets under the corporate landlord model as support by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy to help deliver the maximum benefits of the Council's priorities. The proposal was to broaden out asset transfers beyond community asset transfers to allow a greater degree of flexibility in dealing with assets, as well as to report annually to Policy and Resources Committee on the delivery of the performance measures in the strategy.

Members welcomed the strategy and sought further information on how it contributed to the Council's priorities, in particular the environmental benefits as well as the impact on health outcomes.

It was moved by the Chair, seconded by Councillor Jean Robinson, that –

- (1) the Asset Strategy 2022-27 attached as Appendix 1 to the report be approved.
- (2) further to the decision of the Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee on 25 October 2022 in relation to Bromborough Library expressions of interest in community asset transfer in relation to the Bromborough Civic Centre including the former library be invited before considering any other alternative options for the asset. Such expressions of interest to be submitted by 20th December 2022, and the Director of Regeneration and Place be requested to report back to the relevant service committee in January 2023 on any expressions of interest received.
- (3) the Chief Executive be requested to ensure that sufficient officer resources remain in place to assist and support any group seeking to submit a bid and to incorporate asset transfer into business as usual moving forward.

The following amendment was then moved by Councillor Jo Bird, seconded by Councillor Pat Cleary –

At paragraph 2.

1. Delete: *before considering any other alternative options for the asset*
2. Insert: The asset not be considered for any other alternative options, until after the Community Asset Transfer process has been fully exhausted.

The Committee discussed the amendment and sought clarification on the Community Asset Transfer process and at what point the process would be considered as fully exhausted. Following clarification from the Assistant Director Special Projects and Interim Assistant Director for Assets the amendment was put and lost (3:12).

The original motion was then put, and it was –

Resolved (9:6) – That

- (1) the Asset Strategy 2022-27 attached as Appendix 1 to the report be approved.**
- (2) further to the decision of the Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee on 25 October 2022 in relation to Bromborough Library expressions of interest in community asset transfer in relation to the Bromborough Civic Centre including the former library be invited before considering any other alternative options for the asset. Such expressions of interest to be**

submitted by 20th December 2022, and the Director of Regeneration and Place be requested to report back to the relevant service committee in January 2023 on any expressions of interest received.

(3) the Chief Executive be requested to ensure that sufficient officer resources remain in place to assist and support any group seeking to submit a bid and to incorporate asset transfer into business as usual moving forward.

70 **2023/24 BUDGET SETTING PROCESS**

The Interim Director of Finance introduced the report of the Director of Resources which provided a further update on the preparation of the 2023/24 budget further to the previous report highlighting the worsening gap position due to external factors leading to increased inflation, energy prices and pay cost pressures. The report set out the work undertaken and currently in progress to address the forecast gap position and enable a balanced budget to be set in February 2023.

The national financial position was outlined where it was clarified that the local government settlement figure was still to be determined. The process for setting the 2023/24 budget was outlined in detail to the Committee, part of which was the legal requirement to undertake service impact consultations, staff impact consultations and statutory budget consultation and the report sought approval from the Committee to delegate authority to the relevant directors to undertake this activity once budget policy options had been developed.

Assurances were provided to the Committee that any decisions to consult on options would be done in consultation with the Group Leaders Budget Working Group.

Resolved – That

(1) the ongoing work to prepare for the 2023/24 budget be noted.

(2) the Director with portfolio, in consultation with the Budget Working Group, be authorised to undertake any required service consultations that are linked to budget policy options being brought forward, in line with the timetable to enable a budget recommendation in February 2023.

71 **COST OF LIVING ACTION GROUP UPDATE**

The Director of Public Health introduced the report which provided an update on actions undertaken by the Cost-of-Living Action Group following a series of

recommendations agreed by Policy and Resources Committee on 31 August to address the impact of the increase cost of living on residents and businesses in the Borough.

An overview was provided of the financial support available to residents to help with cost-of-living pressures, including the Emergency Financial Hardship Fund and supplementary Discretionary Housing Payments, for both of which Wirral was an outlier in terms of the extent of the support available. It was reported that the Department for Work and Pensions had updated its guidance to address the issue of residents in receipt of housing benefits only not being able to access other government support, where it was estimated approximately 1,500 Wirral residents were affected and funding would be required to support this cohort.

Following queries from members, the Director of Public Health undertook to review the communications plan to ensure hard to reach residents such as those who had never had to access support and those digitally excluded were engaged. It was further clarified that the public health spend would be reviewed to ensure it was delivering effective public health outcomes.

Following advice from the Monitoring Officer, it was moved that by the Chair, seconded by Councillor Jean Robinson, that the recommendations as detailed in the report be moved subject to the amending of recommendation 3 so that delegated authority be given to the relevant Director with portfolio rather than the Senior Leadership Team. This was put and agreed by assent. It was therefore –

Resolved – That

- (1) the actions completed by the Cost-of-Living Action Group in addressing the recommendations of the Committee of 31 August 2022 be noted.**
- (2) further reports on actions to address cost of living challenges for residents be reported to the Health and Wellbeing Board to ensure that there is strategic oversight from partners on action being taken to mitigate cost of living challenges.**
- (3) authority be delegated to the relevant Director with portfolio to manage the allocation of the Household Support Fund via Officer Decision Notices based on insight from local people.**

72 **WARM HUBS**

The Director of Public Health introduced the report which provided an update on work undertaken to understand the need for warm hubs within the borough to support residents struggling to heat their homes due to the increase in

energy costs. Warm hubs relate to any building that is or could be open to the public to enable them to keep warm.

It was reported that a review of actions by other councils had been undertaken and showed a range of approaches being explored and implemented, many of which were already in place in Wirral including a directory of warm spaces clearly marketed, the offering of grants to the Community, Voluntary and Faith Sector and the marketing of Council buildings already open as warm hubs offering refreshments and free access to Wi-Fi.

The Committee discussed the availability of warm hubs, where it was clarified that the existing 32 on offer was due to be increased to 62 following planned further discussions with the Contain Outbreak Management Fund Working Group the following day. Members urged officers to ensure that the additional investment was achieving value for money in keeping residents warm, and that due diligence had taken place to ensure safety and deliverability of the hubs.

Resolved – That

- (1) the availability of warm hubs across the Borough be noted.**
- (2) the work being undertaken with the Community, Voluntary and Faith sector in identifying the support required by residents to address cost of living challenges be noted.**
- (3) further reports on actions to address cost of living challenges for residents be reported to the Health and Wellbeing Board to ensure that there is strategic oversight from partners on action being taken to mitigate cost of living challenges.**

73 REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING QUARTER TWO 2022/23

The Assistant Director – Finance introduced the report of the Director of Resources which set out the financial monitoring information for the Council as at quarter 2 (30 September) of 2022/23. The report provided Members with an overview of budget performance, including progress on the delivery of the 2022/23 saving programme and a summary of reserves and balances, to enable the Committee to take ownership of the budgets and provide robust challenge and scrutiny to Officers on the performance of those budgets. It was reported that at the end of Quarter 2, there is a forecast balanced position on the Council's net revenue budget, of £330.6m. This position was based on activity to date, projected trends in income and expenditure and potential mitigation to offset areas of adverse variance.

The Committee was advised of the budget pressures that the Council was facing in-year, including the recently agreed pay award which presented a estimated budget pressure of £3.4m but had been built into the 2023/24 budget planning. Further pressures outlined included inflationary costs associated with children's services, including increased numbers of children in care and increased costs of assisted transport for children with special education needs and disabilities.

Resolved – That

(1) the balanced forecast revenue position presented at Quarter 2 be noted.

(2) the progress on delivery of the 2022/23 savings programme at Quarter 2 be noted.

(3) the forecast level of reserves and balances at Quarter 2 be noted.

74 **TREASURY MANAGEMENT MID-YEAR REPORT 2022/23**

The Assistant Director – Finance introduced the report of the Director of Resources which provided the mid-year position for the Council's Treasury Management activity. The Council's treasury management activity was underpinned by CIPFA's Code of Practice on Treasury Management which requires the production of an annual Treasury Management Strategy Statement on likely financing and investment activity and recommended that Members were informed of treasury management activities at least twice a year. The report fulfilled the Council's legal obligation under the Local Government Act 2003 to have regard to both the CIPFA Code and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) Investment Guidance.

It was reported that at the Mid-Year point the Treasury Management budget forecast for the current year was for an overspend of £0.1 million. The forecast overspend was due to an increase in the interest rate environment, which would impact upon the borrowing costs of the Council. Some of the increase in interest cost would be offset by higher interest generated on Treasury Management investments. This position was incorporated into the Quarter 2 Revenue Monitoring report.

In response to a query, the Assistant Director of Finance clarified that the investment in the Public Sector Investment Fund was in accordance with treasury management best practice and expected to yield financial benefits on a long-term basis.

Resolved – That the Treasury Management Mid-Year Report for 2022/23 be noted.

75 **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Head of Legal Services introduced the report which provided the Committee with an opportunity to plan and regularly review its work across the municipal year.

Resolved – That the work programme be noted.

76 **ACTIVE TRAVEL FUNDING - TRANCHE 3**

The Director of Regeneration and Place introduced the report which sought approval for the amendment to the Capital Programme so that the £2,225,000 grant funding allocated to Wirral Council by Liverpool City Region Combined Authority from the Active Travel Fund Tranche 3 be allocated to the Conway Street/Europa Boulevard Movement Scheme. The budget secured from the Tranche 3 Programme would enable the scope of the proposed Conway Street / Europa Boulevard Movement Scheme to be extended as set out in Appendix 1 of this report.

The report had been considered by Economy, Regeneration and Housing Committee at its meeting on 19 October 2022 and recommended for approval by Policy & Resources Committee. In accordance with the Council's Constitution any amendment to the Capital Programme requested by a committee or officer in excess of £500,000 is reserved to Policy & Resources Committee.

Resolved – That the Capital Programme be amended so that the £2,225,000 grant funding allocated to Wirral Council by Liverpool City Region Combined Authority from the Active Travel Fund Tranche 3 be allocated to the Conway Street/Europa Boulevard Movement Scheme.

77 **DEVELOPMENT FUNDING FOR TRANSPORT PIPELINE - BIRKENHEAD CENTRAL GATEWAY**

The Director of Regeneration and Place introduced the report which sought approval to amend the Capital Programme so that the £2,674,629 grant funding allocated to Wirral Council by Liverpool City Region Combined Authority be allocated to the development of the Birkenhead Central Gateway Programme. The report also noted the approved slippage of £1,092,129 from 2021/22 development funding grant award. The development funding would support key regeneration projects including Argyle Street, Dock Branch Park, Hind Street and Woodside.

The report had been considered by Economy, Regeneration and Housing Committee at its meeting on 19 October 2022 and recommended for approval by Policy & Resources Committee. In accordance with the Council's

Constitution any amendment to the Capital Programme requested by a committee or officer in excess of £500,000 is reserved to Policy & Resources Committee.

Resolved – That the Capital Programme be amended so that the £2,674,629 grant funding allocated to Wirral Council by Liverpool City Region Combined Authority be allocated to the development of the Birkenhead Central Gateway Programme.