

APPENDIX 3 – WIRRAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN PROGRESS REPORT

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Wirral's Improvement Plan was drafted in Spring 2022 in response to the External Assurance Review Reports (November 2021) and the Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge (March 2022). The Plan sets out a narrative for improving Wirral Council as a means to Improve Wirral - the Place. The Improvement Plan was signed by all political group leaders and was approved by Council on 11 July 2022. The Plan is broken down into 4 areas:

- Financial Stability
- Effective Organisation
- Effective Services
- Resilient Communities

1.2 This paper sets out progress against the Council's Improvement Plan up to 30 September 2023. The report includes a general narrative in support of progress against the four Improvement Plan themes. It also includes a more detailed review of activities in the Improvement Action Plan. An earlier version of this paper was reported to the Independent Assurance Panel in June 2023. The Panel was appointed by the Chief Executive in December 2021 to act in an advisory role in support of the Council's improvement progress. The Panel provides a report to the Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DLUHC) every six months. The Panel has noted the Council's progress in delivering the Improvement Plan and has requested the Council now focuses on Developing a new Council Plan, Medium Term Financial Plan with clarity on how future saving will be delivered to balance the budget.

2.0 IMPROVEMENT THEME 1 - FINANCIAL STABILITY

2.1 Financial stability continues to be the Council's number one priority. The refreshed Medium Term Financial Strategy highlights the importance for the Council to replenish its general reserve to 5% over the medium term in line with good practice guidance.

2.2 The Council has improved its savings performance with 85% of the £18.2m target being realised in 2022/23. In terms of 2023/24, £26m of the £28m savings target are either delivered or on track to be delivered, representing 93% of the total savings target with a further 7% or £2m anticipated to be delivered through alternative means.

2.3 The Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) has been refreshed to demonstrate there are sufficient savings to meet forecast pressures in the short to medium term. Like all Council's, the one-year budget settlement arrangements with the government limit the scope of longer-term financial forecasting and planning.

- 2.4 From 1 April this year, a new Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system, Oracle Fusion, was launched. This system will enable improved financial planning, management and control.
- 2.5 A new Asset Management Strategy was approved in November 2022 which establishes a Corporate Landlord model to better control and manage the Council's property and land assets. In July Policy & Resources Committee approved a programme of asset disposals that will reduce the estate and realise capital receipts to support service transformation and the payback of the capitalisation loan. In 2024 all office-based staff will move into new accommodation that will enable the Council to divest itself of its old office buildings.

3.0 THEME 2 - EFFECTIVE ORGANISATION

- 3.1 Over the last 18 months, significant steps have been taken to support improvements in governance, strategic planning and leadership. Whole Council elections were held in May 2023 which will provide continuity for four years in support of longer-term planning and strategic decision-making.
- 3.2 The constitution was refreshed in Spring 2022 to streamline the committee system, assert the primacy of Policy and Resources Committee in the budget process and speed up and improve decision-making. Improvements to forward planning, drafting and quality assuring committee reports have delivered more consistency and better information to support key decisions.
- 3.3 A restructure of Member and democratic services has been implemented this year which improves support for the Leader of the Council and all Members. A Member Development Strategy, Induction and Training Programmes, Well-Being Policy and Enquiries Portal have all be introduced over the last 12 months.
- 3.4 A refreshed Council Plan has been developed that provides a new vision and set of priorities for the next four years. The Plan has been developed to align with the refreshed MTFP and performance will be monitored alongside quarterly financial monitoring.

4.0 THEME 3 - EFFECTIVE SERVICES

- 4.1 In the last year, the Chief Executive has implemented a new, senior structure with Directors being appointed to the Law & Governance, Finance and Regeneration & Place and Neighbourhood Services Directorates. This has brought additional experience and capacity into the Strategic Leadership Team (SLT).
- 4.2 Overall service performance is reviewed through an established Operational Performance Group which reports through to the Strategic Leadership Team monthly by exception. Bespoke service performance reports have been developed with and provided for Policy and Service Committees.

- 4.3 The Council's Change Programme has been reviewed to ensure alignment with the Council Plan and MTFP. The Change Programme incorporates all programmes and projects that support improved service efficiency and effectiveness. The Enabling Services Programme will ensure all back-office services provide value for money and are proportionate to front line delivery services.
- 4.4 The Enabling Services programme aims to secure a clearly defined and effectively resourced corporate core in direct response to a recommendation of the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge. It will also drive the Council's IT and digital transformation through the appointment of a digital partner to support the Council deliver increased IT solutions and automation of processes to improve efficiency and cost-effectiveness.
- 4.5 In December 2022, a Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) of Wirral's multi-agency response to children and families was carried out by inspectors from Ofsted, the Care Quality Commission and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS). The inspection feedback highlighted a sophisticated and well-developed early help offer in Wirral to support families early and avoid increased demand on statutory services. There was recognition of the strength of leadership and the positive collaboration and relationships from different agencies across the partnership.

5.0 THEME 4 - RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

- 5.1 The Council provides strong place leadership through statutory forums the Health and Wellbeing Board and Integrated Care Partnership. A range of partnership strategies are in place that support the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and other strategic priorities such as regeneration. A partnership summit was convened in Autumn 2022 to review Wirral's collective response to cost of living challenges. A new Voluntary, Community and Faith (VCF) Sector Infrastructure Contract has been commissioned with Wirral CVS to support continued improvement and engagement with our third sector partners.
- 5.2 A new model of Neighbourhood working is being brought forward through the Integrated Health Partnership. Neighbourhoods are based upon a population of 30-50,000 people and there are 9 identified across Wirral. Two locations defined as Birkenhead A and Wallasey C have been identified as trailblazer neighbourhoods where local VCF partners have been encouraged to lead on community engagement to define local priorities with the aim of improving population health outcomes through reducing inequalities. The Health and Care system also continues to work in tandem to respond to demand pressures in hospital care and to redesign the system to improve flow through the hospital into the community.
- 5.3 The Council is recognised for its innovation in respect of the Cradle to Career project that has been supported by DLUHC who wish to use this as an example of good practice in their Supporting Families Review. This pilot targets one of Wirral's most deprived neighbourhoods Bidston and St James and puts residents at the heart of planning local services with community and faith groups. Its effectiveness

has been evidenced through inspection and the impact it is having on children in need performance data locally. This work is now gaining wider recognition and the intention is to roll this out more widely across the borough and the City Region.

6.0 CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT PLANNING

- 6.1 The Improvement Plan, approved in July 2022 has now largely been implemented. However, it is recognised that improvement is a continuous process and should now be embedded as part of the new Council Plan. To achieve this, a dedicated theme – Efficient, Effective and Accessible Council – is included in the Council Plan. Any outstanding elements of the Improvement Plan will be incorporated in the Council Plan alongside the implementation of continuous improvement and transformation through the Change Programme.

IMPROVEMENT ACTION PLAN PROGRESS

ACTIVITY	MILESTONE	COMMENT
Theme A – Financial Stability (Financial Recovery Plan)		
Priority 1 – Strengthen Medium Term Financial Planning		
1.1 Robust financial planning & forecasting	MTFS in place to inform financial planning	MTFS refreshed in 2022. Further refresh drafted for 2023/24.
	Funding projections and analysis	All elements now incorporated as standard as part of the MTFP review and annual budget build process.
	Financial scenario planning	
	Review of pressures	
	Enterprise Resource Planning Financials roll out	ERP roll out commenced from 01/04/23.
1.2 Improved Member financial oversight	Primacy of P&R in budget planning process	Adopted as part of the Spring 2022 governance review.
	Dedicated finance sub-committee	Finance sub-committee in place annually.
	Regular Group Leader briefings	Monthly Group Leader briefings and Finance Sub-Committee meetings.
1.2 Improved Member financial oversight	All Member briefings	Provided as required. 2024/25 budget briefings are being provided to all groups and Policy Committees.
	Star Chamber oversight of savings	This role is adopted by the Finance Sub-Committee.
1.3 Better knowledge / understanding of Local Gov Finance	Programme of Training for Members	Training delivered 2022 and 1 June 2023
	Programme of officer training	Officer training aligned with ERP roll out from April 2023.
1.4 Improved financial assurance	Recruit Financial Assurance Manager	Financial Assurance Manager recruited in Spring 2022.
	Re-fresh Corporate Governance Group	Officer Group refreshed in Spring 2023.
	Compliance with CIPFA financial management code	Review of compliance completed summer 2022, further review by January 2024.
	Report Audit findings report to Policy & Resources Committee	Grant Thorntons 21/22 Audit report went to A&RM Committee on 24 October 2023. The Value for Money Statement is to follow. Both will be reported to P&R committee 13 December 2023.
	Implement programme of internal review & assurance	Directorate challenge sessions to inform budget process and quarterly

		budget monitoring.
Theme A – Financial Stability (Financial Recovery Plan)		
Priority 2 – Implement Robust Planning & Monitoring of Savings		
2.1 Better planning / QA of savings	Strengthen formulation of business cases	Improved governance arrangements of new business cases by Chief Officers through Investment and Change Board.
	Financial assurance and QA	Savings proposals reviewed and validated by Assurance Manager.
2.2 Improved financial accountability	P&R oversight of service committee financial performance	Regular reporting of financial performance through all committees.
2.3 Timely budget planning	Budget process as part of Committee work programmes	Regular reporting of budget performance through committees.
	Budget workshops	Budget workshops incorporate as standard element of the annual budget process.
	23/24 timetable and plan in place	Plan implemented and legal budget agreed to timeframe.
	Budget consultation	23/24 budget consultation implemented in line with statutory requirements.
Theme A – Financial Stability (Financial Recovery Plan)		
Priority 3 – Reserves		
3.1 Appropriate earmarked reserves in place	Review of earmarked reserves	Reviewed as part of annual MTFP build and assumptions.
	Reserves Strategy	Incorporated as part of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.
3.2 General fund balance replenished to 6% by 2025	Policy defined in MTFS	Incorporated as part of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.
	4% of net budget in 2022/23	Allocated in 2022/23 budget by £2.5m
	5% of net budget in 2023/24	Paused in 23/24 due to scale of the budget gap.
Theme A – Financial Stability (Financial Recovery Plan)		
Priority 4 – Improve Financial Governance & Oversight		
4.1 Improve reporting of financial implications	Committee Coordination & Oversight Group (CCOG)	CCOG introduced to support report consistency and quality.
	Section 151 oversight of key decisions	Reviewed through Committee Coordination & Oversight Group and through SLT.
4.2 Commercial risk exposure independently verified and reported	Review of Council companies and associated risks	Review completed in July 2023, further governance work to commence.
	Review of risks relating to financial investments	External commission completed and reported to Audit & Risk Management Committee October 2023.

Theme A – Financial Stability (Financial Recovery Plan)		
Priority 5 – Capital & Assets		
5.1 Assets optimised to support Council business	Asset Strategy renewed and implementation Plan agreed	New Asset Strategy approved by P&R committee in November 2022.
5.2 Disposal opportunities fully realised	CBRE Commissioned	CBRE commissioned following disposals programme update reported to P&R 12 July 2023.
5.2 Disposal opportunities fully realised	Disposals Strategy and Programme	Disposals programme approved by P&R committee in July 2023.
5.3 Capital financing optimised	Regeneration financing and resourcing model in place	Model developed in 2022 and currently being reviewed and refreshed and will be reported to committee.
	Regeneration delivery model business case development	Partnership Delivery Model to be reported to P&R committee Autumn 2023.
	Capitalisation of salaries process and method agreed by External Auditor	Process agreed Spring 2022.
	Updated Flexible Use of Capital Receipts policy	Policy reviewed and applied.
	Review of treasury management and funding sources	Treasury management update to be reported to P&R committee in Autumn 2023, new strategy will be updated in Spring 2024.
	Review of capital programme	Capital Programme reviewed annually as part of budget process. 24/25 challenge to be completed by 31 December 2023.
Theme B – Effective Organisation		
Priority 1 – Strong Political and Officer Leadership and Accountability		
1.1 Improved support for Council Leader and political groups	Review / refresh arrangements for Member support	New structure and arrangements implemented Spring 2022.
	New Leader briefing group arrangements	New arrangements implemented Spring 2022.
1.2 Improved Member / Chief Officer collaboration & relationships	Group Leaders' Strategy & Planning Sessions	Programme of sessions implemented post-election 2023
	Joint Member / Officer development programme (including Group Leaders, Committee Chairs and SLT).	LGA committee chair's training Summer 2023 LGA Top Team sessions Autumn 2023.
1.3 Improved Member effectiveness	Develop Member Support Steering Group	Steering Group refreshed Spring 2023
	Member Induction Programme	Induction programme designed and implemented 2022 and 2023.

	Member Development Strategy 2023 - 27	Member Development Strategy developed approved at Constitution and Standards Committee February 2023.
1.4 Strong Corporate Leadership & Accountability	LGA Review of Resources, Legal & Assets	LGA review completed Spring 2022. Restructures implemented Autumn 2023.
	Leadership Development Programme (People Strategy)	Officer Leadership Programme implemented Autumn 2023.
	SRO training for Chief Officers	Delivered by Elite Training Spring 2021. Refresh to be scheduled Autumn 2023.
1.5 Improved Risk Management	Audit & Risk Management committee training programme	Annual training delivered by CIPFA, last session was 7 June 2023.
	ARM committee improvements - Forward Plan	Annual forward plan agreed from start of new municipal year.
	Independent ARM Members appointed	Independent Members appointed January 2022. Currently a vacancy exists and recruitment is in train.
	All Member Risk Management Training	Delivered by CIPFA in January 2022. The session was recorded and is available on the Member portal.
	Risk Register Reporting to P&R from 2022/23	A risk workshop was conducted with P&R on 1 November 2023 and quarterly reporting will be provided to align with budget/performance reporting.
	Reporting on Regeneration and Investment risks in line with external audit guidance	Completed and reported to Audit & Risk Management October 2023.
Theme B – Effective Organisation		
Priority 2 – Improved Governance & Decision-Making		
2.1 Streamlined Committee System	Committee system review reported to Standards and Constitution Committee	Review completed and implemented Spring 2022.
	Constitution refreshed and reported to Council Annual Meeting	Review completed and implemented Spring 2022.
2.2 Move to Whole Council Elections	Council decision to move to Whole Council Election Scheme	Council decision March 2022. Whole Council elections May 2023.
2.3 Improved Committee Reporting	Committee Coordination & Oversight Group	CCOG introduced to support report consistency and quality.
	Officer Training	Report writing and presenting training delivered and available as on line resources.
Theme B – Effective Organisation		
Priority 3 – Defined Strategic Plans and Priorities in Place		

3.1 Business plans reflect priorities	2022/23 Directorate Plans in place	Directorate Plans in place and reported on through Operational Performance Group.
	Wirral Plan refreshed with 22/23 priorities	Wirral Plan refreshed July 2022.
	Supporting staff engagement & communications plan	Roll out of refreshed plan through management and staff forums Autumn 2022.
	2023/24 Wirral Plan 4 year refresh timetable developed	New Council Plan being developed to timeline for approval December 2023.
	Corporate Performance Framework in place	To be in place quarter 4 for reporting from 1 April 2024.
3.2 Wirral Plan Delivery strategies	Review Wirral Plan delivery strategies	Strategies to be reviewed in Spring 2024 along with Wirral Place Plan/Strategy.
	Defined schedule for strategy refresh	Will be completed along with Place Strategy in Spring 2024.
Theme B – Effective Organisation		
Priority 4 – Optimise Council Operating Model		
4.1 Member support for Strategic Change and new operating model	Regular reporting on progress	Change Programme being refreshed to align with Council Plan and MTFP. To be reviewed through Finance Sub-Committee.
	P&R committee approval of change programme	To be approved alongside MTFP November 2023.
	Defined committee reporting arrangements	Regular reporting through Finance Sub-Committee.
4.2 Strategic capability defined and in place	Operating model principles agreed	Operating model principles approved with Change Programme update to P&R committee, December 2021.
	Operating model strategies developed: MTFS	MTFS refreshed 2022 and currently as part of revised MTFP.
	Operating model strategies developed: Customer Experience Strategy finalised	Strategy approved through Tourism, Communities, Culture & Leisure Committee March 2023
	Operating model strategies developed: Asset Strategy	Strategy approved by P&R committee, November 2022.
	Operating model strategies developed: People Strategy	People Strategy completed Spring 2023.
Theme C – Effective Services		
Priority 1 – Chief Officer Structure		

1.1 Chief Officer structure optimised to support corporate priorities	LGA DMA review completed	Review completed Spring 2022.
	New Chief Officer Structure	New structure and appointments 2023.
Theme C – Effective Services		
Priority 2 – Prioritised Service Review Programme		
2.1 Services re-designed to deliver better outcomes and efficiencies	Service review methodology developed	Methodology developed and piloted with Revenue and Benefits service.
	Revenues and Benefits prototype delivered & evaluated	Re-design and restructure completed Spring 2023.
	Programme prioritisation finalised	Change Programme reported to P&R committee December 2021. Change programme refresh Autumn 2023 to align with new Council Plan and MTFP.
	Programme Initiated	Subject to approval of MTFP November 2023.
Theme C – Effective Services		
Priority 3 – Digital Strategy and Transformation Programme		
3.1 Digital strategy and priorities defined	Digital Strategy in place	Digital strategy and roadmap to be developed in partnership with a strategic partner to be confirmed. Paper to P&R in November 2023.
	Digital Transformation Programme scoped and planned	To be implemented through the Enabling Services Programme and the appointment of an external digital partner.
	Strategic Partner procurement	To be appointed Spring 2024.
	2023/24 quick wins identified and delivered	These will now be delivered in 2024/25.
Theme D – Resilient Communities		
Priority 1 – Strategic Partnership Framework		
1.1 Effective strategic partnerships	Review of existing arrangements	Review completed Autumn 2022.
	New model / arrangements agreed by SLT	To be determined alongside new Place Plan/Strategy Spring 2024.
	Wirral Partnership Summit	Completed November 2022.
1.1 Effective strategic partnerships	Strategic partnership - new arrangements launched	To be rolled out alongside new Wirral Place Strategy Spring 2024.

Theme D – Resilient Communities		
Priority 2 – Voluntary Community & Faith Sector		
2.1 Compact with VCF sector	VCF collaboration framework developed	New infrastructure contract let with Wirral CVS who are now developing this framework and arrangements.
2.1 Compact with VCF sector	Implement new arrangements	Implementation through new contract.
Theme D – Resilient Communities		
Priority 3 – Working with Communities		
3.1 Developing resilient communities' model	Implement Neighbourhood Model	Neighbourhood Model being brought forward as a strategic programme under the Integrated Care Partnership.