

# **POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

Tuesday, 21 November 2023

Present:

Councillor P Stuart (Chair)

Councillors	J Robinson	JE Green
	J Williamson	H Cameron
	P Gilchrist	S Mountney
	EA Grey	L Rennie
	A Davies	P Cleary
	S Powell-Wilde	H Gorman
	T Jones	J Bird

## 67 **WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION**

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

The Chair then proposed a change to the order of business. In order to allow Members to discuss agenda item 6, Community Asset Transfer in an exempt session and to create as little disruption to the meeting as possible, he proposed that this item be considered last. This was agreed by assent.

## 68 **APOLOGIES**

There were no apologies for absence.

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

Councillor Tony Jones and Councillor Pat Cleary declared a non-prejudicial interest by virtue of their membership on the Town Team Board.

## 70 **STATEMENTS AND PETITIONS**

Statements were received from Lynne Howe and Matt Gibbs relating to the closure of Woodchurch Leisure Centre.

## 71 **NEW COUNCIL PLAN**

The Head of Corporate Office presented the report which set out a new Council Plan for the four-year electoral term 2023 to 2027, following the local government elections in May 2023

The Council Plan is the primary document in the Council's Policy framework and had been developed to align with the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).

In this regard, it supported the Council's progress towards financial stability and continuous improvement in response to the External Assurance Review commissioned by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) in November 2021 and Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge in April 2022.

The new Council Plan built upon and replaced the existing Wirral Plan 2021-26 which was approved by Council 6 September 2021 and refreshed on 11 July 2022. It superseded the Council's Improvement Plan as approved by Council 11 July 2022. The new plan acted as a single plan for the organisation, articulated a vision and priorities for the upcoming four years and delivered in line with the needs of residents. Members were informed that the new Council Plan transformed and modernised the Council to maximise opportunities for greater efficiency and effectiveness.

Members queried the measurability of the framework for Community Wealth Building and were assured that all the measures contained within the Community Wealth Building Strategy would be brought forward as part of the Council Plan. Also discussed was the progress made in regards to the Council's improvement plan which had been noted by the Independent Assurance Panel. Members wished it noted their thanks to officers and all Members for their hard work, engagement, and collaboration during the development of the Council Plan.

**Resolved – that the new Council Plan be recommended to Council for approval at its next meeting on 4 December.**

72 **BIRKENHEAD, WALLASEY AND NEW FERRY SIMPLIFICATION PATHFINDER PILOT BOARD**

The Director of Regeneration and Place introduced the report which provided an update on progression to establish a successor to the Town Deal Board, which reflected the wider role of the Simplification Pathfinder Pilot and built upon the positive role of the Town Deal Board to date.

This was further to and a requirement of the submission of the Councils Investment Plan ancillary the DLUHC Simplification Pathfinder Pilot. The successor body was to be known as the Birkenhead Wallasey and New Ferry Simplification Pathfinder Pilot Board.

Members were informed that Councillor Pat Cleary wished to move an amendment.

Councillor Cleary spoke to his amendment and discussed the value of the previously established Town Deal Board, noting that it was an effective forum for scrutinising and improving proposals and that the expansion due to the pathfinder pilot was a positive step. Councillor Cleary commented that there was a good template in the Town Deal Board but felt it should be extended to include new areas now included within the levelling up funds.

A discussion was had on the guidance surrounding the Town Deal Board, and the merits of a private chair, conflicts of interest for board Members and additional funding awarded for Liscard Town Centre. Also discussed was the need for all parties on the Council to be represented on the Pathfinder Pilot Board, given that the Council would be an accountable body.

To consider the motion, the meeting adjourned at **6:52pm**

The meeting reconvened at **7:00pm**

A motion was then formally put by Councillor Pat Cleary, seconded by Councillor Jo Bird

*'Committee recognises the positive work of the Towns Deal Board to date. Taking account of the clear guidance from DHLUC in establishing a successor Pathfinder Board this committee agrees;*

- *The successor body would be known as the Wirral Pathfinder Pilot Board*
- *To retain the existing membership of the Towns Deal Board within the Wirral Pathfinder Pilot Board;*
- *To expand the membership of the new Board to include new geographic areas;*
- *To delegate to the Director for Regeneration and Place in consultation with the Chair and spokespersons of P&R the additional membership of the Wirral Pathfinder Pilot Board and the selection of Chair from the private sector membership of the new Board as per guidance from DHLUC'*

The motion was then put and lost (4:11).

On a motion by Councillor Jeff Green, Seconded by Councillor Leslie Rennie it was,

**Resolved – that the indicative Birkenhead Wallasey and New Ferry Simplification Pathfinder Pilot Board membership and terms of reference as set out in Appendix 1 to this report be approved with the following additions,**

- (a) membership of the board be adjusted to include ex-officio Members from the Conservative and Liberal Democratic groups. Membership of the board should also be extended to Liscard Ward Members should that become appropriate.**
- (b) the Director of Law and Governance to review the terms of reference in relation to the declaration of interest in consultation with the chair and group spokespersons.**

## 73 **DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION PARTNER**

The Head of ICT and Digital presented the report. Members were informed that Digital transformation supported a customer focussed, digital-first approach to customer experiences, business processes and operations.

Digital transformation was about embedding and adopting technologies across the Council to deliver change and efficiencies.

Members were reminded that on 1 December 2021, the Policy and Resources Committee approved the Strategic Change Programme which had set out the Council's plans for delivering the objectives within the Wirral Plan and the required efficiencies to deliver the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP). As detailed within the report for Policy and Resources Committee in December 2021, digital transformation was one of the key components of the Strategic Change Programme.

Since the approval of the Strategic Change Programme, digital transformation had started across the Council but as part of the new Council Plan, IT and digital transformation sought to further improve automation of processes and customer access.

Approval was requested to progress with a competitive tender to procure a partner to support the acceleration of the IT and digital transformation. This partner was referenced in this report as the 'Digital Transformation Partner'.

Members queried how this would benefit residents and were assured that core to digital transformation was better communication and engagement between residents of the council and vice versa. A discussion was had in regards to digital exclusion and retaining access to existing telephone or face to face services, as well as querying the numbers of people currently accessing services and effectively managing and overseeing the work of the Digital Transformation Partner. Members were assured that this had been considered as part of the business plan, and effective digitisation also helped free up call centre telephone lines for people who required this service. It was noted that in 2021, 25.4% of people in Wirral did not have access to fixed internet services, however that number was reduced when taking into consideration smart mobile phones.

**Resolved - that**

- 1. Director of Finance in consultation with the Committee Chair and Group Spokespersons be authorised to commence the competitive commission of a Digital Transformation Partner for a period of up to 3 years with the option of two one-year extensions. The expenditure will not exceed £5m for the first 3 years.**
- 2. The Director of Finance be authorised to appoint the successful bidder following the commissioning process.**
- 3. the Director of Law and Governance in consultation with the Director of Finance be authorised to finalise the associated legal documentation associated with the commission.**
- 4. Following appointment of the successful bidder, the Director of Law and Governance, in consultation with the Committee Chair and Groups Spokespersons be authorised to formulate options to oversee the work of the bidder and present a report to the Committee accordingly**
- 5. That the Director of Finance be authorised to finalise the associated legal documentation associated with the commission.**
- 6. Following appointment of the successful bidder, the Director of Law and Governance, in consultation with the Committee Chair and Groups Spokespersons be authorised to formulate options to oversee the work of the bidder and present a report to the Committee accordingly**

**74 2024/25 BUDGET REPORT UPDATE**

The Director of Finance presented the report which set out progress made by the Council to deliver a balanced budget.

The Council was required to set a balanced budget each year and set a Medium-Term Financial Plan which considered the future pressures and savings options that were taken forward to result in a balanced budget position.

The report was an officer assessment of the capability of achieving balance and did not address itself to, nor pre-empt, the political decision making that must properly take its course moving forward including consideration of the Budget at Policy & Resources Committee and Full Council in February 2024.

The Council faced a challenging financial outlook due to inflationary and demand pressures alongside the previous significant reductions in Government funding and uncertainty around the future financial settlements.

The Council was developing a change programme which supported delivery of the medium-term financial plan and expected savings required to deliver a balanced budget. Members were informed that the Change Programme was aligned to the overall priorities within the Council Plan, focussing on delivering operational efficiencies and better outcomes for residents through promoting independence and improving outcomes.

Members queried whether income could be generated from recently acquired assets the Europa Centre, the Grange and the Pyramids, as well as holding costs associated with assets that are no longer in use to due to be transferred under that Community Asset Transfer process. Assurance was made that the pressure caused by the closure of the Wilkinson's site within the Europa Centre and loss of rent was being mitigated by the sale of profit-making council assets. With regard to the Grange and Pyramids sites, Members were informed that any profit from was ringfenced in a sinking fund which could be used to mitigate any pressures caused by running retail sites.

Also discussed were the costs of ensuring that Real Living Wage be paid to care workers. Assurances were made that this was being worked through by the Director of Adult Social Care and would factor in inflationary pressures. In response to a query about repayment of the Capitalisation Directive, Members were assured that repayment was assessed annually and relied on capital receipts for sale of assets were received.

**Resolved – that the indicative resources, pressures and required savings as detailed in the report be noted.**

## 75 **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chair introduced the work programme which provided an opportunity to plan and regularly review its work across the municipal year.

**Resolved – That the Policy and Resources Committee work programme for the 2023/24 municipal year be noted.**

## 76 **COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER - BRACKENWOOD GOLF COURSE WOODCHURCH LEISURE CENTRE**

The Director of Finance presented the report, which considered, a variation of the Heads of Terms for the transfer of Brackenwood Golf Course to Brackenwood Community Golf Limited to enable the transfer to progress and a decision on the transfer of Woodchurch Leisure Centre. Members agreed to consider the two recommendations separately.

### **Brackenwood**

Members were informed that more work had been undertaken by Brackenwood Community Golf Limited who advised that they could only provide two-full size pitches, changing facilities and car parking, without impacting significantly on the operation of the 18-hole golf course. Provision of the 2 mini-5-a-side pitches was still possible.

Council officers concurred with this view and advised Members that space for the other two full-sized pitches could be accommodated on other sites and therefore, this will not impact on the Council's Brown Field First Strategy as set out in the Local Plan. It was therefore recommended that the Heads of Terms is varied from four full-size playing pitches to two full-sized playing pitches (11-a-side). This would enable the transfer to progress.

**Resolved – that the Heads of Terms for transferring Brackenwood Golf Course to Brackenwood Community Golf Limited be varied to two full-sized playing pitches (11-a-side), rather than four full-sized pitches to enable the transfer to progress.**

### **Woodchurch**

Members advised they wished to discuss the exempt items in a closed session and moved the exemption.

**It was therefore, resolved - That, under section 100 (A) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items of business on the grounds that they involve 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.**

Members agreed during the exempt session, that the resolution would be published to allow members of the public to view the decision.

On a motion by Councillor Janette Williamson, Seconded by Councillor Paul Stuart it was,

**Resolved (14:0, 1 abstention) – that,**

- 1. Woodchurch Leisure Centre is not transferred to Woodchurch Wellbeing.**
- 2. The Director of Finance be authorised to procure the demolition of Woodchurch Leisure Centre and to accept the most economically advantageous tender provided he is satisfied that the cost can be met within the Council's budget.**

**3. That the Director of Neighbourhoods be requested to,**

**a. undertake a comprehensive review of future opportunities for the use of the Woodchurch Leisure centre site in the context of the wider Leisure Strategy Review and**

**b. Make sure that the leisure review addresses the leisure needs of the Woodchurch residents including swimming.**

**77 EXEMPT INFORMATION - EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

**Resolved – That, under section 100 (A) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item of business on the grounds 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.**

**78 COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER WOODCHURCH LEISURE CENTRE - EXEMPT APPENDICES**

**Resolved – That the exempt appendices be noted.**

**79 2024/25 BUDGET UPDATE REPORT - EXEMPT APPENDICES**

**Resolved – That the exempt appendices be noted.**