

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 20 March 2024

Present:

Councillor P Stuart (Chair)

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

119 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

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

120 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Pat Cleary. Councillor Gail Jenkinson was in attendance as substitute.

121 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 interests were declared.

122 MINUTES

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 13 February 2024 be approved as a correct record.

123 PUBLIC AND MEMBER QUESTIONS

The Chair advised that no Public Questions, Statements or Petitions had been received.

The Chair read out a statement in regards to disruption by protestors at Pensions Committee held on 19 March 2024, voicing concerns about the behaviour and language exhibited towards Members and Officers, noting that

a lessons learnt review would be undertaken. The wellbeing of both Members and Officers was a priority for both the Leader and the Chief Executive.

The Chief Executive updated Members on a recent meeting of the Internal Assurance Panel. The Panel, chaired by Carolyn Downes congratulated Wirral Council on the progress made by Wirral Council over the past two years. The Chief Executive advised that it would be the panel's last meeting, subject to future report being presented to the Policy and Resource Committee and the Department for Levelling up, Housing and Communities. The Chair noted his thanks to Carolyn Downes and the Panel, as well as Group Leaders, the Chief Executive and officers for their hard work in implementing the improvement plan.

124 **ALLOCATION OF IMPROVEMENT PROJECT FUND**

The Director of Neighbourhood Services presented the report. Members were informed that as part of the 2024-25 budget setting, Council on 26 February 24 approved the creation of a £1.246m revenue project investment fund and a £1m environmental improvement capital fund for investment into specific improvement activities that will have a visible impact across the Borough. The report considered the specific improvement activities that these funds will be used for in 2024-25.

Members noted their appreciation of the improvement project fund, nothing that the improvement activities highlighted in the report were the main areas of concern for residents across the borough.

Resolved – that,

- 1. The use of Neighbourhoods Project Investment Funds can be used for the improvement activities, detailed in appendix 1 be agreed.**
- 2. Delegate monitoring of delivery of these projects, and the determination of arrangements for doing so be delegated to the Policy and Resources Finance Sub Committee.**

125 **REGENERATION DELIVERY RESOURCING**

The Assistant Director for Property and Regeneration Investment presented the report of the Director of Regeneration and Place. Members were informed that, the report sought approval to fund additional resourcing requirements that had been identified following a comprehensive review of regeneration projects and processes.

The requirement was for a mix of internal fixed-term roles and externally procured disciplines over a period of 2 years. Funding had been identified from Wirral Growth Company profits and where possible, capitalisation of costs. The Regeneration Programme was a core part of the Council Plan supporting Brownfield First and the Local Plan. The Council had been successful in securing over £150 million of funding for the regeneration of the borough. As a result, there was a need to prioritise delivery of numerous projects by March 2026 which required additional skills and capacity. The Birkenhead 2040 Framework detailed a comprehensive regeneration vision that would deliver 21,000 new homes and 6,000 new jobs in Birkenhead over the next 20 years and transform Birkenhead and parts of Wallasey and New Ferry.

This builds on Government funding support secured over the past 3 years to support infrastructure improvements and town centre intervention, creating new neighbourhoods, and driving economic growth. A Framework of this scale and the emerging Masterplans required a joined-up approach to a number of regeneration-based activities.

As the Council moves into delivery it is imperative to have the appropriate resources in place to deliver this programme of work to March 2026, and beyond. By shifting to an Intelligent Client model (which refers to the capability and capacity to translate policy to outcomes), existing teams need to be strengthened and technical design teams, need to be procured where appropriate, to support the Council's vision and delivery programme.

The Council Plan 2023-2027 had been developed and the recommendations within this report support the delivery of the following themes: People focused regeneration. The recommendations in this report focus on the Birkenhead 2040 Framework. This meant that the matter more immediately affected Birkenhead and Birkenhead & Tranmere, Bidston & St James, Seacombe and Liscard Wards, but in the longer term may potentially impact on other wards in the Borough.

Members discussed the complexity and pressures of regeneration and building projects, especially keeping to prescribed timescales and possible clawback of funding. Members were assured that the report contained a prioritisation matrix applied against projects based on investment confidence, legal commitment, strategic value, and delivery confidence. Members noted their appreciated that the report included regeneration in New Ferry and sought further assurance regarding funding arrangements and the use of Wirral Growth Company funding.

It was noted that the regeneration programme in Wirral was one of the largest in the Country and officers provided assurance that it was an attractive borough to work in.

Resolved – that

1. the Director of Finance be authorised to allocate Council reserves arising from Wirral Growth Company profits and/or Capitalisation totalling £2.7m for the use of additional Regeneration Delivery resources to March 2026.

2. the use and impact of the newly allocated additional resources (up to £2.7m) will be overseen by the Economy, Regeneration and Housing Committee.

126 **LEVELLING UP FUND 3 LISCARD - INCLUSION IN SIMPLIFICATION PATHFINDER PILOT**

The Assistant Director: Chief Regeneration Officer presented the report of the Director of Regeneration and Place, which sought approval for the amendment of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) Simplification Pathfinder Investment Plan, and the inclusion of the Liscard Levelling Up Fund allocation.

The report also sought authority for the Director of Regeneration & Place to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding which includes the Liscard Levelling Up Fund allocation within its scope.

This report was intended to be taken to the Council's Economy, Regeneration and Housing Committee, with recommendations given to a subsequent Policy & Resources Committee. However, due to the timetabling of the Council Committees, and to prevent delays to programme delivery, the Director of Regeneration & Place had consulted with the Economy, Regeneration and Housing Committee Chair and Party Spokespersons prior to this Committee.

Members noted their approval of the report and noted that the community attended the meetings on the project and looked forward to progress updates, especially around the Community Wealth Building implications. Members also sought clarity around the governance of the project.

The Chair then moved the recommendations as set out in the report with some minor additions to recommendations 1 and 2, this was due to the fact that the final template document from DLUCH is still awaited.

On a motion by Councillor Paul Stuart, seconded by Councillor Jean Robinson it was,

Resolved – that,

- 1. the draft addendum to the Simplification Pathfinder Investment Plan included in Appendix 1 to this report be approved;**
- 2. the Director of Regeneration and Place be authorised to submit the final addendum to the Simplification Pathfinder Investment Plan to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and enter into a Memorandum of Understanding which includes the Liscard Levelling Up Fund allocation within its scope, in consultation with the Director of Law and Corporate Services;**
- 3. the renaming of the Birkenhead Wallasey and New Ferry Simplification Pathfinder Pilot Board to the Simplification Pathfinder Pilot Board be approved; and**
- 4. the inclusion of the Liscard Levelling Up Fund programme within the Simplification Pathfinder Pilot Board's remit be approved.**

127 **COUNCIL CHANGE PROGRAMME**

The Head of Corporate Office presented the report of the Director of Finance. The report informed Members that the Change Programme was the Council's vehicle for developing and implementing the required projects that support the delivery of the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP).

The Change Programme had been reviewed and refreshed to ensure it directly supported the refreshed Medium-Term Financial Strategy and Plan (approved by Council in February) and the implementation of the new Council Plan (approved by Council in December 2023).

The re-set of the Council's Change Programme ensured there was a single, organisational approach to transforming the business that was effectively resourced, controlled and monitored to deliver the Council's strategic priorities and outcomes, as defined in the Council Plan and the required efficiencies as set out in the MTFP. The report provided Members with an update on progress since the Change Programme was last reported to Policy and Resources Committee in December 2021. The report also provided an overview of the refreshed Change Programme and the rationale for the various elements within it.

Members discussed the progress of change within the Council, noting lessons learnt and benefits realisation of the improvement projects, also noted was the increase in public and Member oversight in recent years.

Resolved – that,

- 1. the Council’s Change Programme as presented in this report be supported.**
- 2. the Elected Member oversight arrangements for the programme as set out in paragraph 8.1 be supported.**

128 **COUNCIL PLAN PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK**

The Head of Corporate Office presented the report of the Director of Law and Corporate Services. The new Council Plan: Wirral Working Together 2023-27 was approved by Council in December 2023. Members were informed that this report set out a draft Performance Management Framework (PMF) that would ensure the implementation of the Plan is effectively monitored and reported over the next 4 years.

The PMF had been developed to ensure there is rigour in measuring the Council’s progress towards delivering the priorities in the plan and specifically outcomes identified under each of the plan themes. The PMF had been co-produced following engagement with all Policy Committees which provided an opportunity to share an early draft and for Members to input into the final design.

The report supported the implementation of the Council Plan: Wirral Working Together 2023- 27. Adoption of the PMF or similar ensures effective monitoring and performance management arrangements are in place to evidence progress against each of the Council Plan themes.

Members discussed the workshops undertaken by Committee Members, noting that some feedback had not been incorporated. Members were assured that the feedback would be incorporated once the plan had been further developed, noting that this report had been drafted to work within the time frames required by the Independent Assurance Panel meeting in March 2024.

Resolved – that,

- 1. the content of this report and associated appendices be noted and**
- 2. further feedback or comments be highlighted in advance of the Performance Management Framework being implemented in the new financial year.**

129 **BIRKENHEAD COMMERCIAL DISTRICT UPDATE**

The Assistant Director for Property and Regeneration Investment presented the report of the Director of Regeneration and Place.

Members were informed that the Birkenhead Commercial District (“BCD”) programme was reaching a major milestone in that the phase 2 – CAT B (fit out) capital programme was completing for official handover between our appointed contractor and Wirral Borough Council on Friday 22nd March 2024.

The Council was to be taking full occupation across 3.5 floors with phased occupation dates from Monday 8 th April 2024 at Building A (2 Alice Ker Square - Mallory). The Council will partially exit Cheshire Lines Building and retain a lease of the basement to support archive storage, Police and Criminal Evidence (“PACE”) room and data centre.

The Council was working with agency partners to market the remaining vacant spaces in both new buildings. The outcome of the pandemic had resulted in changes for a lot of organisations looking for new office accommodation, resulting in smaller and more flexible space requirements. This paper provided an update on the BCD programme, including appendix 1 providing updates on revenue and capital costs, along with tenant demand and concept for fit out on Building B (Irvine building).

Members queried the environmental credentials of the building and were informed that they had been built to BREEAM excellence standards, which is the longest established method of certifying the sustainability of buildings. Also discussed the procurement processes and lessons learnt on completion of the project.

Resolved – that,

- 1. the update as set out in this report be noted; and**
- 2. the intended approach to fit out of Building B as referred to in Appendix 1 be endorsed.**

130 **WORK PROGRAMME**

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

Members requested the Community Asset Transfer be added to the Work Programme, to include timelines and legal process.

Resolved – That the work programme, with the inclusion of a report on Community Asset Transfer, be noted.

131 **MINUTES OF THE SENIOR OFFICER AND STAFFING SUB-COMMITTEE**

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 6 February 2024 and 7 February 2024 be approved be noted.

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

The Chair moved the exemption, seconded by Councillor Jean Robinson at which point Councillor Joe Bird queried why the report was exempt. The Lead Lawyer advised that the appendix contained information that was commercially sensitive in relation to vacating Cheshire Lines building and also supply chain works.

Resolved (2:13) that,

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 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.

133 **BIRKENHEAD COMMERCIAL DISTRICT UPDATE - EXEMPT APPENDIX**

Resolved – that the exempt appendix be noted.