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ECONOMY REGENERATION & HOUSING COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 4 December 2024

Present:

Councillor T Jones (Chair)

Councillors	GJ Davies	A Gardner
	A Davies	J Bird
	M Skillicorn	E Lamb
	G Wood	E Tomeny
	A Hodson	H Raymond

118 **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.

119 **APOLOGIES**

No apologies had been received.

120 **MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Members were asked to consider whether they had any disclosable pecuniary interests and/or any other relevant interest in connection with any items on this agenda and, if so, to declare them and state the nature of the interest.

Councillor Helen Raymond gave a personal explanation, in respect of Agenda item 7, that she owned three properties in Wirral as a landlord, although none were within the areas covered by the report.

Councillor Jo Bird declared a personal interest, in respect of Agenda item 6, as she lived close to the Woodside Masterplan area being discussed.

Councillor Jo Bird declared a personal interest, in respect of Agenda item 7, as she lived within one of the Selective Licensing areas.

Councillor Ewan Tomeny declared a personal interest, in respect of Agenda item 7, as he lived near one of the Selective Licensing areas.

121 **MINUTES**

The Chair informed the committee of the following corrections to the minutes of the previous meeting:

In Paragraph 4 of Minute 115, the minutes referred to a Policy & Resources Committee held in March 2024, this should have read “22nd March 2023”.

In Paragraph 6 of Minute 115, the minutes referred to the Gateway Authority, this should have read “Freeport Gateway Policy”.

With those corrections accepted, it was:

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 14 October 2024 be approved as a correct record.

122 PUBLIC AND MEMBER QUESTIONS

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

123 ADOPTION OF MASTERPLANS (WOODSIDE AND WALLASEY TOWN HALL QUARTER)

The Chief Regeneration Officer presented the report of the Director of Regeneration and Place. The report noted that the Council had been developing its regeneration strategy for Wirral Left Bank for a number of years. The Birkenhead 2040 Framework was endorsed by this Committee as the interim Regeneration strategy for Wirral in March 2022. The report set out that delivery of the Birkenhead 2040 Framework would be supported by more detailed Neighbourhood Frameworks and Masterplans setting out the regeneration objectives and strategies for specific areas. Policy WS6.3 of the emerging Local Plan also required Masterplans to be approved for specified areas to ensure that development was coordinated at neighbourhood level and comprehensively planned.

Two of these documents were detailed in the report, both of which were recommended for adoption:

1. Woodside Masterplan; and
2. Wallasey Town Hall Quarter Masterplan

The adopted masterplans would be a material consideration in the consideration of any planning applications submitted within the masterplan boundary. The Masterplans were a dynamic long-term planning document that offered a vision and theoretical layout to ‘guide’ future regeneration and growth within a neighbourhood, making the connection between buildings, social settings, and their surrounding environments.

Members noted that during consultation there had been an objection from United Utilities and asked what changes had been made to the masterplan since it had been consulted on.

The Chief Regeneration Officer responded that although both United Utilities and Historic England had made some objections to the plans, officers had been able to work with them to resolve their concerns without having to make any significant changes to the masterplan.

Members stated that the report described there being an opportunity for Woodside Ferry Terminal to become a major new cultural attraction and asked if there was a strategy or any expressions of interest on this site and sought assurances that there were high ambitions for the masterplan area.

The Chief Regeneration Officer responded that the masterplan was designed to set out the ambition of the site and were not a commitment to specific details at this stage. She described the masterplan as a catalyst to further regeneration in the area with very high ambitions for the regeneration of the site.

Members noted that there were mentions of consultations throughout the report and asked for assurances that the results of the consultations would be listened too and taken note of.

The Director for Regeneration and Place answered that consultations were a legal requirement and that he felt strongly that doing them properly and listening to the views that they brought was important and that this needed to be balanced with the Council's aspirations for regeneration. He noted that the masterplans were a core component of those aspirations.

Members raised that the report mentioned the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) having concerns for aspects of the Woodside Masterplan and asked if those concerns had been dealt with and if they had been spoken to.

The Director for Regeneration and Place noted that the DWP was based in an office within the Woodside Masterplan which was leased through the Government Property Agency. He stated that he was in dialogue with both of these parties to review how the Council could work with them. The Chair also highlighted that the DWP had not asked for any amendments to the current masterplan.

Members raised that the report mentioned that regeneration within the masterplan areas would create the opportunity for biodiversity net gain and asked for assurances that this would be of the minimum 10% for all development, while keeping to 20% net gain for any council owned land.

The Chief Regeneration Officer responded that those biodiversity targets would be dealt with at the planning stage for any redevelopment on these sites. She noted that where those targets might be difficult in some areas, they could be offset in other areas.

Members questioned whether the masterplan reference to “Brownfield first” was an indication of a move from the Local Plan’s “Brownfield only” policy.

The Director for Regeneration and Place noted that they had been used interchangeably but would ensure that future reports matched the wording of the Local Plan.

Members raised an email that they had received from a resident and former employee that raised questions about a boundary change withing the Wallasey Town Hall Quarter Masterplan area and asked officers for an explanation.

The Chief Regeneration Officer reassured Members that any changes to the masterplan boundary had been done legally with all relevant parties consulted and changes agreed with group leaders and the planning inspectors.

Members asked about the progress of Riverside Primary School and the progress made towards a new building. The Chair noted that this was a matter for the Director of Children, Families and Education, and stated that he would request this information from them.

Members asked about the parking provision around the Woodside Masterplan area and noted that additional parking may not be needed if better public transport was offered.

The Chief Regeneration Officer responded that the Masterplan did not offer an operating model and that would be something covered by later phases.

Resolved – That the following Masterplans be adopted as the Council’s approved dynamic long-term planning strategy for the relevant areas:

- 1. The Woodside Masterplan; and**
- 2. The Wallasey Town Hall Quarter Masterplan.**

124 **APPROVAL OF BUSINESS CASE AND CONSULTATION FOR SELECTIVE LICENSING SCHEME**

The Assistant Director for Housing and the Housing Investment Team Leader presented the report on behalf of the Director for Regeneration and Place. The report set out a proposal to approve the Business Case for consulting on a further Selective Licensing Scheme in Wirral. Using a robust evidence base for selection, the proposed scheme involved:

1. re-designating two Selective Licensing areas that had been in place since 2020 and were due to end on 30th September 2025;
2. extending the scheme to include two further new areas;
3. re-introducing the scheme into one former area; and
4. re-introducing the scheme into part of one former area.

The six Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) listed below were proposed to be included in a new scheme (referred to as Scheme 5) which would start on 1st October 2025:

- Tranmere Lairds – LSOA Code E01007291 / Wirral 021D (existing area)
- Egremont South – LSOA Code E01007275 / Wirral 005E (existing area)
- Lower Tranmere – LSOA Code E01007293 / Wirral 027C (new area)
- Tranmere North – LSOA Code E01007130 / Wirral 021A (new area)
- Birkenhead Central – LSOA Code E01007128 / Wirral 016C (former area)
- Hamilton Square B – LSOA Code E10034839 / Wirral 016G (part of former area)

Selective Licensing was a scheme to improve private rented sector homes within specific designated neighbourhoods by requiring private landlords to obtain a licence and comply with certain agreed conditions. A Business Case which supported the extension of the scheme and relevant appendices was attached to the report. Members were asked to agree that this evidence was the subject of a 12-week statutory consultation exercise to seek wider views on the proposal.

Members thanked officers for the report and asked whether there had been much opposition to the licensing condition from landlords.

The Housing Investment Team Leader replied that there had been more acceptance from landlords in the most recent round of consultation. He accepted that there would always be some that did oppose it, but that the majority accepted it.

The Assistant Director Housing noted that the report sought approval for new areas that had not previously had a selective licensing scheme and that views would be asked for from everyone, including landlords within these areas.

Members agreed that ensuring tenants had access to quality housing was a huge benefit.

They asked further questions on the effectiveness of the empty property premium that charges owners of properties that have remained empty between 1-5 years a total of 200% of the standard Council Tax charge, 300% for properties that have remained empty for 5-10 years and 400% total payable Council Tax for those empty for more than 10 years.

The Housing Investment Team Leader noted that a lot of work was done to try and reduce the number of empty homes but that the figure was generally stable at around 2,000 each year. He indicated that he would send Members some statistics on how the empty property premium has affected the number of empty homes.

The Assistant Director for Housing added that it can be the case that people do not declare that a property is empty to avoid paying the premium and that through work related to the selective licensing scheme, officers were knocking on doors and were more likely to discover empty properties.

Resolved – that the following be approved:

- 1. the draft proposal for Selective Licensing in the following six areas from 2025 until 2030 based on the robust evidence base:**
 - **Tranmere Lairds – LSOA Code E01007291 / Wirral 021D (existing area);**
 - **Egremont South – LSOA Code E01007275 / Wirral 005E (existing area);**
 - **Lower Tranmere – LSOA Code E01007293 / Wirral 027C (new area);**
 - **Tranmere North – LSOA Code E01007130 / Wirral 021A (new area);**
 - **Birkenhead Central – LSOA Code E01007128 / Wirral 016C (former area);**
 - **Hamilton Square B – LSOA Code E10034839 / Wirral 016G (part of former area);**
- 2. the Business Case set out in Appendix 1 to the report as the basis for the rationale for wider consultation on Selective Licensing;**
- 3. the consultation plan as set out in Appendix 1.3 to the report; and**
- 4. that the Director of Regeneration & Place be authorised to undertake any minor amendments to the Business Case should further evidence be made available which should be included in the consultation.**

125 2024/25 BUDGET MONITORING FOR QUARTER TWO

The Head of Finance – Place presented the report on behalf of the Director of Regeneration and Place. The report set out the financial monitoring information for the Council as at Quarter 2 (30 September) of 2024/25. The report provided Members with an overview of budget performance, including progress on the delivery of the 2024/25 saving programme and a summary of reserves and balances. It enabled the Committee to take ownership of the

budgets and provide robust challenge and scrutiny to Officers on the performance of those budgets.

At the end of Quarter 2, there was a forecast favourable position of £450k against the £16.194m committee budget, by managing the use of grants and reserves to address the pressures being faced. This position was based on activity to date, projected trends in income and expenditure and changes to Council funding.

Members thanked officers for the report and asked about a reported £0.4m shortfall from planning income and whether that was likely to be repeated in the following financial year.

The Head of Finance – Place responded that this related to an income target for the Planning department that had been set too high. She noted that for the 2025-26 financial year the target would be lowered.

The Interim Director for Regeneration and Place clarified that this shortfall was not due to performance issues with the Planning department. It was related to an unrealistic target that had been set by a national context.

Members sought clarity on the aids and adaptations for the disabled facilities grant and what the report meant by describing this grant as having peaked.

The Assistant Director for Housing clarified that demand had not peaked but was still exceptionally high. She noted that cases for children were generally more complex and therefore cost more.

Councillor asked a question about the capitalisation of staff salaries and what it meant.

The Head of Finance – Place responded that it related specifically to staff that were delivering the capital programme, in particular in relation to the Pathfinder programme. She noted that it was currently funded via council borrowing.

Resolved – That

- 1. The Committee forecast of a £450k favourable position against a budget of £16.194m at Quarter 2, managed by utilising grants and earmarked reserves be noted;**
- 2. The progress on delivery of the 2024/25 savings programme at Quarter 2 be noted;**
- 3. The forecast level of reserves at Quarter 2 be noted; and**
- 4. The capital position at Quarter 2 be noted.**

126 **COUNCIL PLAN PERFORMANCE REPORT QUARTER 1 2024-25 THEME: PEOPLE FOCUSED REGENERATION**

The Director of Regeneration and Place presented a report which provided a quarterly performance report in relation to the Council Plan: Wirral Working Together 2023-27 for the Theme people focused regeneration. The report provided a focus on updating on measures that had changed in the Quarter 2 period, June to September 2024.

Following the approval of the Council Plan, a performance management framework was developed through working group activity with members from all Policy and Service Committees and Policy and Resources Committee between February and April 2024. A reporting approach was approved providing quarterly reporting on the measures identified in the framework. Each Policy and Service Committee would receive a report related to its key theme, for Economy Regeneration and Housing Committee this was the 'People focused regeneration' theme. In the reporting cycle, once individual Policy and Service Committees had reviewed their key theme reports they would then be referred up to Policy and Resources Committee to provide that committee with one complete performance report for all themes of the Council Plan. The reporting provided the most recent performance for the measures and included performance context and mitigations in place where underperformance was identified.

Resolved – that the report be noted and referred to the Policy and Resources Committee.

127 **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Lead Principal Lawyer presented the report on behalf of the Chair of the Committee. Members were informed that the work programme should 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 Economy Regeneration and Housing Committee work programme for the remainder of the 2024/25 municipal year be agreed.

128 **SIMPLIFICATION PATHFINDER PILOT PROGRAMME - REALLOCATION OF UNSPENT FUNDING**

The Chief Regeneration Officer presented the report of the Director of Regeneration and Place. The report provided details on the proposed reallocation of unspent funds within the Simplification Pathfinder Pilot Programme, including a proposal for the redevelopment of Woodside Ferry Village.

A total of £3,126,821 was available for reallocation, due to Transport Shed (£1,394,321) and Sustainability Central (£1,732,500) projects no longer progressing. Reallocation of funding was essential to ensure that the grant was fully spent before the deadline of March 2026. If funding was not spent, it would be returned to government. The funding could not be used for new projects and needed to be allocated to existing projects in the programme.

Following its meeting on 28 October the Simplification Pathfinder Pilot Board agreed the proposal made by officers (as set out in Appendix 1 to the report) that the funding was reallocated to 7 existing projects in the programme (International Battle of the Atlantic, Future Yard, JOY Health and Wellbeing Hub, Start Yard, Birkenhead Priory, Woodside Ferry Village and New Ferry Public Realm and Highways), as detailed in the Summary Table of reallocation commitments (as set out in Appendix 1 to the report) and in the exempt Appendices 2 to 7 to the report.

The redevelopment of Woodside Ferry Village aimed to greatly enhance the existing visitor attraction and provide a high-quality food and beverage / leisure offer to maximise the opportunity afforded by the wider transformational public realm investment in that locality. The proposal met the outputs of the grant funding and would ensure that the building was sustainable and fit for purpose for generations to come.

The Chief Regeneration Officer notified Members' her recommendation was amended to the effect that recommendation 3b be withdrawn and that officers undertake a review of the program with the intention presenting the findings to the Pathfinder Board on 27th January 2025. The Interim Director of Regeneration and Place further explained the reasoning for removing the final recommendation as a precaution to ensure that money was not being promised for projects that could not be delivered. He wished to reassure Members that the program was being managed in the correct manner.

Members stated the importance of the regeneration and public realm work need in New Ferry and their hope that by removing recommendation 3b, it would not jeopardise the work that needed to be carried out there.

The Interim Director of Regeneration and Place responded that the removal of this part of the recommendation did not preclude it from being presented to committee in future. He noted that he could not recommend recommendation 3b to Members at this meeting given that they could not be sure that the money could be used. He stated that once a review had been undertaken a any recommendations arising from that review would be brought to the Simplification Pathfinder Pilot Board, with subsequent reporting to the Committee seeking a decision.

Members asked if money was still going to be used for public realm in New Ferry if approved the revised recommendation.

The Chief Regeneration Officer stated that the total cost required for New Ferry was £5.2m. She said that £2m had been secured but that there was a shortfall to reach the full amount, this would be brought back to the Simplification Pathfinder Pilot Board to consider in January 2025.

Members queried whether the Council was facilitating discussions between the relevant parties to help move along the refurbishment of the Woodside Ferry Terminal building,

The Chief Regeneration Officer noted that it was not the Council's role to mediate those discussion but that they were working with both Mersey Ferries and Woodside CIC to ensure that conditions were known and that there was encouragement for them to reach a mutually agreeable position.

Resolved – That:

- 1. Unspent sums from Transport Shed and Sustainability Central projects be re-allocated to 7 projects within the Simplification Pathfinder Pilot as set out in the proposed allocation column table in Appendix 1 to the report;**
- 2. The project at Woodside Ferry Village as set out in the Full Business Case attached as exempt Appendix 7 of the report be approved; and**
- 3. The Director of Regeneration and Place be authorised to re-allocate funds into the Simplification Pathfinder Pilot programme for future re-allocation. should the conditions of the relevant grant funding not be complied with by 20 January 2025.**

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

Resolved – That, under section 100 (A) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the following items be deemed to be exempt from publication 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.

Simplification Pathfinder Pilot Programme – Re-allocation of Unspent Funding Exempt Appendices as follows:

- Appendix 2: Birkenhead Priory Business Case;**
- Appendix 3: International Battle of the Atlantic Business Case;**
- Appendix 4: Future Yard Business Case;**
- Appendix 5: New Ferry Public Realm and Highways Business Case;**
- Appendix 6: Start-Yard Business Case; and**
- Appendix 7: Full Business case for Woodside Ferry Village.**