

## WIRRAL COUNCIL

CABINET – 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2009

### REPORT OF THE DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

#### A SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY FOR WIRRAL – FINAL DRAFT

##### 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report sets out the progress to date in developing a Sustainable Community Strategy for Wirral and presents a final draft of the strategy for consideration by Cabinet.
- 1.2 Given the Council's leadership role in relation to strategic planning at a borough-wide level through the Wirral's Strategic Partnership, Cabinet is recommended to approve the strategy and refer to Council in accordance with the Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) Regulations 2000/2853.

##### 2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Local Government Act 2007 requires every local authority to develop a 'sustainable' community strategy.
- 2.2 The development of Wirral's Local Area Agreement for 2008-11 was a robust prioritisation and negotiation process aimed at ensuring that partners and stakeholders clearly identified the right improvement areas for Wirral. The outcomes of this process were central to the drafting of a broader Sustainable Community Strategy setting out Wirral's story of place and a shared understanding of local needs. Consultation was undertaken throughout 2008 with a variety of partnership groups, key stakeholders and the community to develop a consensus on the proposed delivery themes for the Sustainable Community Strategy, for example through the Area Forums.
- 2.3 Progress on developing the Sustainable Community Strategy was reported to the Local Strategic Partnership and Local Area Agreement Partnership Boards during the course of 2008, and a report was presented to Cabinet on 25<sup>th</sup> September 2008 seeking approval for a proposed public consultation process and consultation draft. The public consultation period relating to the draft Sustainable Community Strategy began in October 2008 and ended in January 2009. Revisions have been made following the consultation and in response to other factors such as the additional challenges presented by the economic downturn. A final draft of Wirral's Sustainable Community Strategy, Wirral 2025, is now presented at **Appendix 1**.
- 2.4 It should be noted that, in line with the need to align the Community Strategy with the Local Development Framework identified in the Cabinet report of the 25<sup>th</sup> September, there has been a short delay between the close of the public consultation period and presenting the final draft. This was to ensure that any major findings of the recent

consultation relating to the Core Strategy element of the Local Development Framework could be reflected in the Sustainable Community Strategy vision.

- 2.5 This final draft of the Sustainable Community Strategy should be viewed alongside Wirral's Local Area Agreement (the 2009-11 refresh of which can be found at **Appendix 2**). It details the current improvement priorities for Wirral's Strategic Partnership and related targets and is therefore considered the medium-term delivery plan for the Sustainable Community Strategy.

### **3. SUMMARY OF PUBLIC CONSULTATION RESPONSES**

- 3.1 A broad range of responses were received from partners and statutory agencies, Council departments and the public. In summary, the key issues raised by respondents were as follows:
- 3.1.1 Turley Associates responded on behalf of Peel Holdings, and welcomed the support given to Wirral Waters within the strategy. It saw the identification of Wirral Waters as a key investment project as a reflection of the Council's commitment to deliver the transformational regeneration required in inner Wirral. Peel also detailed some of the projected outcomes of Wirral Waters and requested that this text be included in the strategy. Peel also commented on energy and climate change as key issues for the communities of Wirral and saw a need to establish commitments at all levels for renewable energy, fuel poverty and carbon reduction.
- 3.1.2 Several individual respondents also requested that climate change issues be further emphasised in the strategy, and gave legislative and national evidence to support this, for example in relation to the Climate Change Act. This issue was reinforced by comments from Wirral Wildlife, Wirral Environmental Network, and Transition Towns West Kirby.
- 3.1.3 There were also comments on the need to balance the economic and community focus of the strategy with environmental concerns, particularly the use of natural resources and biodiversity which came mostly from Natural England as a statutory consultee, and Wirral Wildlife (Cheshire Wildlife Trust). The responses outlined the importance of Wirral's unique natural assets, with its nationally and internationally significant sites, to residents, to health, to tourism and to the economy.
- 3.1.4 The Chief Executive of Merseytravel raised issues of transport and accessibility and argued that these were not given enough weight in the strategy, since they are topics that are always raised as being of prime concern to residents. Several individuals also raised points relating to sustainable transport and cycling facilities.
- 3.1.5 Other respondents included English Heritage, which advocated using the planning system to ensure sympathetic design, and the inclusion of heritage within the culture offer, and Wirral Partnership Homes, which wanted more recognition of the role and contribution to the delivery of the Sustainable Community Strategy by registered social landlords.

## **4. OVERVIEW OF CHANGES**

- 4.1 As set out in the report of the 25<sup>th</sup> September 2008, the consultation draft provided a starting point for debate with partners and the community and it was anticipated that the content of the strategy would evolve to reflect contributions from a wide range of stakeholders. The key ways which the strategy has been further developed are as follows:
- 4.1.1 All amendments and suggestions for additional narrative made by partner organisations responding to the public consultation have been included in the strategy as appropriate.
- 4.1.2 More emphasis has been given to the Partnership's commitment and approach to addressing issues of climate change adaption and mitigation in line with comments raised by a number of statutory and other consultation respondents.
- 4.1.3 Contextual factors such as the recession and the publication of new guidance in relation to Comprehensive Area Assessment have also necessitated appropriate additions to be made to the strategy to ensure that it fully reflects the challenges faced by the Council and its partners. The delivery framework for the strategy has also been updated to ensure, for example, that it reflects recent changes to partnership governance.
- 4.1.4 The structure, language and presentation of the document have also been reviewed to ensure that it is accessible. For example, abbreviations have been removed and / or explanatory notes provided. The strategy is now structured in four parts:
- Wirral's Story of Place;
  - Wirral 2025 – Vision and Strategy;
  - Partnership Principles;
  - Delivering the Strategy.

## **5. PROCESS FOR ADOPTING THE STRATEGY**

- 5.1 The final draft of Wirral's Sustainable Community Strategy is now being circulated to members of Wirral's Strategic Partnership for adoption through the governance arrangements of partner organisations as appropriate.
- 5.2 The Council is required to formally adopt the strategy in accordance with the Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) Regulations 2000/2853. It is therefore proposed that Cabinet refer the final draft of Wirral's Sustainable Community Strategy (Appendix 1) to the next full Council meeting for formal adoption. It is also proposed, given the partnership nature of the document, that Cabinet and Council give delegated authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Chair of Wirral's Strategic Partnership to make any minor changes to the strategy identified by members of the partnership prior to its publication and launch (see 5.3 below).

5.3 As agreed at the Local Strategic Partnership away day in March 2008, plans for a formal launch of the Sustainable Community Strategy and 'sign up' by partners are now underway. Resources are being identified through the Partnership for publishing the document and a summary version, including illustrative maps and other images as appropriate.

## **6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report other than those identified in relation to publishing the Sustainable Community Strategy. Partner contributions are being sought in this respect.

## **7. STAFFING IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 There are no additional staffing requirements arising from this report.

## **8. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 The views of Wirral's diverse communities have been sought as part of the consultation process through existing engagement mechanisms and Wirral's Voluntary and Community Sector Network (VCAW).

## **9. COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 There are none arising from this report.

## **10. LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 The role of the Sustainable Community Strategy is to set out long-term sustainable solutions for the area.

## **11. PLANNING IMPLICATIONS**

11.1 There are none directly arising from this report. The development of the Sustainable Community Strategy has been aligned with the emerging Local Development Framework as far as possible.

## **12. ANTI-POVERTY IMPLICATIONS**

12.1 There are none directly arising from this report. Addressing issues of poverty and deprivation is, however, central to the vision for the Sustainable Community Strategy.

## **13. LOCAL MEMBER SUPPORT IMPLICATIONS**

13.1 The Sustainable Community Strategy refers to the role that Area Forums will take in identifying local priorities and action in line with Wirral 2025's delivery themes.

### **13. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- Cabinet, 25<sup>th</sup> September 2008, Proposed Sustainable Community Strategy Consultation

### **14. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 14.1 Cabinet is recommended to approve the strategy and refer to Council in accordance with the Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) Regulations 2000/2853.
- 14.2 Cabinet and Council are also recommended, given the partnership nature of the document, to give delegated authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Chair of Wirral's Strategic Partnership to make any minor changes to the strategy identified by members of the partnership prior to its publication and launch.

**JIM WILKIE**

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