

REGENERATION AND PLANNING STRATEGY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 18 March 2009

Present: Councillor S Mountney (Chair)

Councillors	RL Abbey	B Kenny
	A Jennings	S Niblock
	J Keeley	L Rowlands

32 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST/PARTY WHIP

Members were asked to consider whether they had personal or prejudicial interests in connection with any item(s) on this agenda and, if so, to declare them and state what they were.

Members were reminded that they should also declare, pursuant to paragraph 18 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules, whether they were subject to a party whip in connection with any item(s) to be considered and, if so, to declare it and state the nature of the whipping arrangement. No such declarations were made.

33 MINUTES

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 19 January, 2009 be accepted as a correct record.

34 PRESENTATION - THE ECONOMIC DOWNTURN - IMPACT ON WIRRAL

The Director of Corporate Services gave a presentation outlining the impact of the current recession on Wirral's economy, the package of support measures and programme interventions, including the Business Support Programme using the £50,000 identified within the Council budget resolution to support local companies during the current economic downturn, in conjunction with £800,000 p.a. of Working Wirral funds.

There was a general discussion regarding priorities within the Business Support Programme, which was linked to the use of the Working Wirral funding (see also minute 35 post).

Members noted with concern the decision of Tulip to close its Bromborough meat processing factory resulting in the loss of 300 local jobs. The efforts made by all of the interested parties in supporting an alternative proposal were acknowledged and the Director and his team were thanked for their work with Tulip.

The Director reported that he would present a monthly update report to Cabinet and this committee on the state of the local economy. He emphasised the importance of a co-ordinated approach working with the business networks, the main public sector agencies, and the voluntary sector, to develop collective responses to the current situation, and invited members to participate in this process and raise any particular issues with him or the senior management team.

Resolved: - That the Director be thanked for his presentation.

35 PRESENTATION - WORKING WIRRAL

The Director of Regeneration gave a presentation outlining proposals for the use of the Working Neighbourhood Fund (WNF) to commission activity to deliver the investment strategy priorities of tackling worklessness, improving skills levels and increasing enterprise, business growth and investment.

Wirral had been allocated £28.4m of WNF resources (subject to confirmation for 2010/11). Cabinet (minute 334 – 15/1/09) had agreed that consultants should be appointed to further develop the investment framework to enable targeted commissioning of the Working Wirral Programme to be taken forward to deliver activity against the three priority areas set out in the investment framework (Competitive Wirral People, Competitive Wirral Places and Competitive Wirral Businesses), and to also consider the implications of the economic downturn. This work would be completed by the end of March 2009 and reported to a future Cabinet meeting.

The Director gave a brief outline of the allocations progressed through Working Wirral round 1 commissioning and total commitments to date. He reported that there was £13m of WNF still to be allocated, and he listed some emerging priorities for consideration in the next round of commissioning:

- (i) IT Capacity and Connectivity – faster broadband to meet the needs of businesses and improve capacity
- (ii) Power supply for key development sites
- (iii) Business Support - funding for Wirral Biz had been extended until the end of June . The new Regional Business Start Programme would then take on this role.
- (iv) Land assembly – gap funding to assist firms in overcoming difficulties in lending money from banks
- (v) Branding – promoting key development sites and branding and promotion of Wirral
- (vi) Skills and Enterprise – improving the skills of Wirral people to enable them to access new employment opportunities.
- (vii) Construction Integrator and Apprenticeships – training to assist people into employment.

The Investment Strategy Board had identified a number of areas of activity that would support the investment strategy outcomes and should therefore be progressed through Working Wirral Funding. These included:-

(a) Support for Business (sustainability) – supporting small and medium-sized enterprises in Wirral was the key objective of the investment strategy and was a key priority for the Invest Wirral Team. The programme of support would be through a mixture of capital grant and also access to consultancy support. Capital grant would be offered to Wirral businesses that have viable project proposals to support the sustainability or growth of the company.

The consultancy support would assist with financial planning and developing a relevant business plan for current market conditions and businesses would receive up to three days consultancy free of charge. The total Working Wirral allocation would be £800,000 pa over a two-year period and it would be used to provide grant and consultancy support. This project would work in tandem with an ERDF project to provide support for micro-businesses via three business advocate posts, which would be provided a third party. The activity would be fully in line with the support services available regionally and the principles of business support simplification programme. The project would be marketed using the Wirral Business Forum.

(b) Infrastructure Support – Addressing infrastructure constraints was a key focus for Liverpool’s City Region partners with several key employment sites suffering from significant power supply issues. Additionally, digital access was also an issue for many areas across the north-west region. The Investment Board had identified investment in infrastructure in Wirral as an area that needed specific focus over the next twelve months, particularly in view of the difficult economic climate. Officers were currently exploring the possibility of undertaking work on identifying the issues and the exact infrastructure requirements in order to promote Wirral as a key investor location.

There was a general discussion regarding future WNF priorities during which members highlighted the importance of the construction integrator and apprenticeships, issues around IT capacity and connectivity, and infrastructure improvements in anticipation of the economic upturn.

Resolved: -

- (1) That the Director be thanked for his presentation
- (2) That the items relating to IT capacity and connectivity, and power supply, be referred to the next meeting of this committee for further consideration.
- (3) That this committee endorse the Business Support Programme and ask that it be regularly reviewed with a view to utilising further WNF to expand the scheme.

36 LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK - EVIDENCE BASE - STRATEGIC FLOOD RISK ASSESSMENT

The Director of Corporate Services reported concerning a small increase in the cost of the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (part of the evidence base for the emerging Local Development Framework for Wirral) of £1,650, due to the need to accommodate a variation in the specification. This cost increase, together with a previously agreed variation in cost of £750 was within the ten per cent margin for cost variations which the Contract Procedure Rules indicate could be authorised under delegated powers. The report recommended that the Committee note the

expenditure of a further £1,650 excluding VAT on the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, such sum to be met from existing resources within the Corporate Services Department.

Resolved - That the Committee notes the expenditure of a further £1,650 excluding VAT on the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, such sum to be met from existing resources within the Corporate Services Department.

37 THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMEN SPECIAL REPORT ON TELECOMMUNICATIONS MASTS

The Director of Technical Services submitted a report outlining the findings and recommendations of The Local Government Ombudsmen Special Report on Telecommunication Masts (published in June 2007), and the implications arising from it. He highlighted the initiatives implemented, and changes made within the Council's Development Control division over the last 18 months to align with the Ombudsmen's recommendations and achieve good practice in processing antennae applications.

The Director also highlighted areas for further discussion and development in order to meet the key recommendations of the Ombudsmen Special Report.

Resolved –

(1) That the Committee note the findings and recommendations of the Ombudsmen Special Report on Telecommunication Masts.

(2) That the Committee note the various changes and process improvements made within Development Control over the last 18 months, and the effectiveness of these changes in improving the determination of Telecomm Mast applications.

(3) That this Committee endorse the areas for further improvement outlined in paragraphs 6.1 and 6.2 relating to the scheme of delegation and liaison with local mobile operators.

(4) That with regard to the Council's position as landlord, this Committee recommend that the existing approach whereby each individual Telecomm Mast application is treated on its merits should be continued.

38 PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO DELEGATION SCHEME - DETERMINATION OF PLANNING APPLICATIONS

The Director of Technical Services submitted a report outlining proposed amendments the current Scheme of Delegation relating to the determination of planning applications and other associated planning matters including enforcement action (Appendix B refers).

Resolved – That the Committee endorse the proposals and recommend to Council that the amendments to the Scheme of Delegation be adopted, as set out in Appendix B to the report.

39 VALIDATION OF PLANNING APPLICATIONS - PROPOSED CHANGES

The Director of Technical Services submitted a report informing Members of the changes proposed to the Local Planning Authority Validation Checklist to comply with latest government guidance.

He further advised members of the statutory consultation period required prior to the adoption of the revised Validation Checklist.

Resolved – That the Committee note the proposed changes to the Validation Checklist and agree to the commencement of the public consultation process .

40 PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT - QUARTER THREE

The Director of Corporate Services submitted a report providing an overview of progress against performance indicators and key projects which are relevant to the Regeneration and Planning Strategy overview and scrutiny committee.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

41 EXEMPT INFORMATION - EXCLUSION OF MEMBERS OF THE 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 ground that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined by the relevant paragraphs of Part I of Schedule 12A (as amended) to that Act.

42 REGENERATION UPDATE

The Director of Corporate Services provided an update on major development schemes within the borough.

Resolved - That the report be noted.