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ECONOMY REGENERATION & HOUSING COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 20 June 2023

Present: Councillor A Hodson (Chair)

Councillors GJ Davies A Gardner
R Pitt J Bird
M Skillicorn E Lamb
G Wood E Tomeny
J Robinson (for T Jones) S Kelly (for H Raymond)

1 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Councillor Hodson opened the meeting. He explained that Councillor Jones (Chair of the Committee) had submitted his apologies for the meeting so he as Vice Chair of the Committee would chair the meeting. He reminded everyone that the meeting was being webcast and a copy would be retained on the Council's website for two years.

2 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Tony Jones who was substituted by Councillor Jean Robinson. Apologies were also received from Councillor Helen Raymond who was substituted by Councillor Stuart Kelly.

3 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 item on the agenda and, if so, to declare them and state the nature of the interest.

Councillor Stuart Kelly declared a prejudicial interest in item 12 as Chair of the Planning Committee and member of the Strategic Applications Sub Committee. He noted that any planning proposal arising from any decision on this this item would likely be determined by the Strategic Applications Sub Committee of which he would be a member. He would therefore leave the chamber for this item.

Councillor Jean Robinson declared a personal interest as a Joint Venture Board Member of the Wirral Growth Company in relation to items 5.2 and 6. It was clarified that as no decisions were due to be taken directly relevant to the Wirral Growth Company, Councillor Robinson would not be required to leave the chamber for any items on the agenda.

4 **MINUTES**

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 8 March 2023 be approved as a correct record.

5 **PUBLIC AND MEMBER QUESTIONS**

5.1 **Public Questions**

The Chair indicated that 4 public questions had been received from 3 members of the public.

Arthur Shaw asked a question regarding Redbridge Quay on the Wirral Waters development and the lack of fencing at the edge of the water.

In response the Chair explained that the landowner had previously been offered grant funding for the installation of a cycle route around the dock edge and if this was to be installed there had been a recommendation to include a railing at the water's edge. The developer did not submit an updated design to include a barrier and the offer of grant funding had been withdrawn. The Council's view was that installation of a barrier along the dock edge was an appropriate response, however the decision in this respect was a matter for the landowner.

Arthur Shaw asked a supplementary question, querying what had changed during the development process as sections of the dock edge next to Redbridge Quay did have barriers.

The Chair noted that he sympathised with the issue and stated that the Council would ensure that Peel Holdings were made aware of Arthur Shaw's representations.

William Alan Featherstone on behalf of the Birkenhead Market Tenants Association asked two questions. The first question asked if Councillors would agree to release information previously requested of the Market Manager and whether Councillors would meet with members of the Birkenhead Market Tenants Association.

The Chair explained that the Committee was not the appropriate body to decide whether the information should be released or not and the appropriate route was via the Freedom of Information process which had already been

lodged with the Council's information governance team. Regarding meeting with the market traders, the Chair suggested that the Birkenhead Market Tenants Association should meet with the Market Manager.

Williams Alan Featherstone asked a supplementary question seeking clarity on the Freedom of Information process and that his understanding was that for a subject to be deemed financially sensitive, the onus was on the Council to prove that this was the case.

The Lead Principal Lawyer, at the request of the Chair, clarified that there were set internal procedures to challenge Freedom of Information Request responses and which could be further escalated to the Information Commissioner.

William Alan Featherstone's second question related to the number of unused stalls at Birkenhead Market and he asked whether the Committee felt that there was a deliberate policy to degenerate the market by raising vacant rents.

The Chair reported that rental values for the stalls at Birkenhead Market had been benchmarked against similar markets in the region and Birkenhead remained one of the most affordable. He noted that the Council had not increased market rents but had maintained current rental values over recent years. He stated there was very little evidence that rental values were a reason that stalls were not being used.

William Alan Featherstone asked a supplemental question regarding whether Birkenhead Market rents had not been increased between October and November 2021.

The Chair responded that he did not have those facts available to him and William Alan Featherstone would receive a response in writing within 10 working days.

David French asked a question relating to negotiating with the Market Manager for a stall at Birkenhead Market and whether the Council were trying to keep stalls empty.

The Chair stated that the Council had supported and would continue to support businesses at Birkenhead Market. He noted that commercial negotiations were confidential, and the Committee was not a suitable forum to discuss them. He referred the questioner back to the officers responsible for such discussions.

5.2 Statements and Petitions

The Chair informed the committee that no statements or petitions had been received.

5.3 Questions by Members

Councillor Ewan Tomeny asked a question relating to reported slippages in schedule within the Future High Streets Scheme and wanted to know when the combined Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) Stage 3 report was expected to be completed and when the demolition of the House of Fraser site in Birkenhead would begin.

The Chair responded that the combined RIBA Stage 3 draft report for Birkenhead Market had been received for review on 5 June 2023. He noted that this document was in excess of 900 pages and that officers were working through it with a view to providing feedback by the end of June 2023. In regard to the House of Fraser site, the Chair stated that subject to the completion of a tender appraisal and contract completion with the successful part, the winning tenderer required a minimum of 4 weeks to begin works.

Councillor Tomeny had a supplementary question asking when the planning application for the new Birkenhead Market was likely to be submitted.

The Chair responded that the planning application can be submitted once the RIBA Work Stage 3 review is completed.

6 2022/23 BUDGET MONITORING FOR QUARTER FOUR

The Director of Regeneration and Place introduced his report which set out the financial monitoring information for the Economy Regeneration and Housing Committee as at year end (31st March 2023) of 2022-2023. The report provided Members with an overview of budget performance, including progress on the delivery of the 2022-2023 saving programme and a summary of reserves to enable the Committee to take ownership of the budgets and provide robust challenge and scrutiny to officers on the performance of those budgets.

Members queried the Council's commitment to active travel, raising an example of funding having to be returned. The Director of Regeneration and Place noted that the scheme in question was not approved at the previous meeting of the Economy Regeneration and Housing Committee, however further funding had been sought and approved for active travel schemes in the borough.

Members noted that at the Policy and Resources Committee held on 14 June 2023, it was agreed Wirral Growth Company Profit be moved from Regeneration and Place reserves to Resource reserves and that this was not

reflected in this report to Economy Regeneration and Housing Committee. The Director noted that the decision by Policy and Resources Committee took place after the agenda for Economy Regeneration and Housing Committee was published and that the recommendation related to the Quarter 4 Outturn which pre dated the Policy and Resources Committee meeting.

Resolved – That

- 1. The revenue position presented at Quarter 4 Outturn be noted.**
- 2. The delivery of the 2022-2023 savings programme at Quarter 4 Outturn be noted.**
- 3. The level of reserves at Quarter 4 Outturn be noted.**
- 4. The Capital position of £17.474m at Quarter 4 Outturn be noted.**

7 2023/24 BUDGET AND BUDGET MONITORING PROCESSES

The Director of Regeneration and Place introduced his report which set out how the 2023-2024 budget would be monitored through the Committee System, which will facilitate the Policy and Services Committees (the Committees) to take ownership of their specific budgets and present appropriate challenge and scrutiny of Officers on the management and performance of those budgets.

Members asked a question on the requirement for a Homelessness Review every five years as stated in 2.1 of Appendix B to the report and queried when that review was next due. The Director of Regeneration and Place noted that the last review had been undertaken for 2019-20 which meant that the current strategy was robust up until 2025 with the review to be started in 2024.

Resolved – That

- 1. The process for in-year monitoring of the 2023/2024 budget be noted; and**
- 2. A Budget Monitoring Panel be established comprising of the Committee Chair and Spokespersons, with sessions led by the relevant Director/Assistant Director**

8 APPOINTMENT TO ACTIVE TRAVEL WORKING GROUP

The Lead Principal Lawyer introduced the report of the Director of Law and Governance which set out to enable the Committee to review the continuing need for the Active Travel Working Group and, subject to that, to appoint Members to serve on it.

Members noted that the appendix to the report made reference to the Membership of the Active Travel Working Group being appointed having regard to the political balance of the Council as a whole. If proportionality were applied this would mean that the Working Group would be comprised of 4 Labour Members, 2 Conservative Members, 1 Green Party Member and 1 Liberal Democrat Member. Members noted that for the past 2 years the Active Travel Working Group had disregarded political proportionality in favour of an equal split of 1 representative of each party from each of the parent committees (being Economy Regeneration and Housing Committee and Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee). Members requested that this arrangement be continued for the 2023-2024 municipal year. This would give 8 Members with 2 Labour, 2 Conservative, 2 Green Party and 2 Liberal Democrat Councillors sitting on the Working Group. Members unanimously backed this suggestion.

Resolved – That the Monitoring Officer be authorised as proper officer to carry out the wishes of the Group Leaders in allocating Members to membership of the Active Travel Member Working Group and to appoint those Members with immediate effect from the date at which the proper officer is advised of the names of such Members with 4 Members from Economy Regeneration and Housing Committee and 4 Members from Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee with 1 Member from each political group from each committee.

9 ESTABLISHMENT OF REGENERATION PROGRAMME WORKING GROUP

The Lead Principal Lawyer introduced the report of the Director of Law and Governance which enabled the Economy Regeneration and Housing Committee to review the continuing need for the Regeneration Programme Working Group and, subject to that, to appoint Members to serve on it.

Members noted that the group had only met once during the 2022-2023 municipal year.

Resolved – That

- 1. The Monitoring Officer be authorised as proper officer to carry out the wishes of the Group Leaders in allocating Members to membership of the Regeneration Programme Working Group and to appoint those members with effect from the date at which the proper officer is advised of the names of such members; and**
- 2. Councillor Tony Jones be appointed Chair of the Regeneration Programme Working Group**

3. Councillor Andrew Hodson be appointed Vice-Chair of the Regeneration Programme Working Group

10 WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Lead Principal Lawyer introduced the report of the Director of Law and Governance which reminded members that the Economy Regeneration and Housing Committee was responsible for proposing and delivering an annual committee work programme. This work programme was to align with the corporate priorities of the Council, in particular the delivery of the key decisions which were the remit of the Committee.

Members stated that they felt more items should be on the work programme and specifically requested that they would like to see a project delivery plan added for the next meeting.

Resolved – That the work programme be noted.

11 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.

12 HIND STREET DELIVERY

The Head of Regeneration Delivery presented the report of the Director of Regeneration and Place.

Resolved – That the recommendations as detailed in the report be approved.

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