



POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 20 March 2024

REPORT TITLE:	NEIGHBOURHOODS PROJECT INVESTMENT FUND 2024/25
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

REPORT SUMMARY

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.

This report considers the specific improvement activities that these funds will be used for in 2024-25.

This is a key decision which affects all Wards within the Borough.

The report contributes to the Wirral Plan 2023-2027 in supporting the organisation in meeting all Council priorities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Policy and Resources Committee is recommended to:

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

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 Following approval of the investment funds at Council on 26 February 2024, Policy & Resources Committee was asked to consider and agree the specific improvement activities that these funds will be used for.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 The Policy & Resources Committee has previously considered a series of budget proposals as part of the 2024-25 budget setting process.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 As part of the 2024-25 Revenue Budget setting, Council on 26 February 2024 agreed to the creation of a £1.246m revenue project investment fund. This fund is to be targeted at specific improvement activities that are universal in nature and have a visible impact across the Borough.
- 3.2 At the same Council meeting, the Capital Programme 2024-29 approved a £1m capital scheme for environmental improvements. This capital funding is aimed at expanding the financial allocation to support all members' priorities around environmental improvements, including modest enhancements to the public realm, standards of cleanliness and green spaces, investment in gully-cleaning machinery, and any other suitable investment in accordance with the Council's priorities and policies.
- 3.3 Council agreed that the specific improvement activities be considered at this Policy and Resources Committee to determine how best these funds could be used.
- 3.4 Following discussions with Group Leaders and Finance Sub-group, it was proposed that all investments must provide additionality and either be of direct benefit to all residents across the Borough, or be scalable across the Borough, and demonstrate one or more of the following: -
- Improve service standards;
 - Improve infrastructure;
 - Improve visual amenity;
 - Improve environmental standards.

The investments should result in no material ongoing financial liabilities or obligations.

- 3.5 Using the above criteria, the proposed list of improvement activities, with associated indicative costs, to utilise the Neighbourhoods Investment Project funds can be found in appendix 1.

- 3.6 Further activities will be determined once the actual costs of the initially proposed activities have been determined and reviewed by the Finance Sub-group. These may include improvements to footpaths and accessibility depending on the level of funding remaining.
- 3.7 These investment funds are for one year only initially due to the lack of certainty around future funding settlements and demand. Once the specific improvement activities have been agreed by Policy and Resources committee, oversight of the progress will be delegated to Finance sub-committee due to the currently temporary nature of the funding.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The £1.246m of revenue monies and £1m of capital monies to fund the improvement activities have been identified and approved in the respective revenue and capital budgets.
- 4.2 Estimated costs of the improvement activities has been based on the best available information and has used reasonable assumptions. The Finance sub-committee will consider the allocation of any remaining funds once the costs of the initially agreed measures has been confirmed.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Any contract award for works would be made on most economically advantageous tender basis or through an approved Framework route. The Council's Contract Procedure rules set out how contracts are to be awarded by the Council in accordance with its Procurement Strategy requirements.
- 5.12 There is a particular requirement to take into consideration the Council's fiduciary duty and the public sector equality duty in coming to its decision.
- 5.13 The public sector equality duty is that a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to: (1) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010; (2) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and (3) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 5.14 Any decision made in the exercise of any function is potentially open to challenge if the duty has been disregarded. The duty applies both to Full Council when setting the budget and to the Policy and Services Committees when considering decisions.
- 5.15 Once a budget is in place, Council has delegated responsibility to the Policy and Services Committees to implement it. The Committees may not act contrary to the Budget without consent of Council other than in accordance with the Procedure Rules set out at Part 4(3) of the Constitution.

5.16 It is essential, as a matter of prudence that the financial position continues to be closely monitored. In particular, Members must satisfy themselves that sufficient mechanisms are in place to ensure that new expenditure is contained within the available resources. Accordingly, any proposals put forward must identify the realistic measures and mechanisms to achieve the desired outcomes.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

6.1 There are no direct staffing, ICT and asset implications arising from this report.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

7.1 A delay in agreeing these improvement activities may put the timetable for delivering the required works at risk. If works are not completed in 2024/25 this may result in the available funds not being utilised in 2024/25.

7.2 There is also a risk that agreed activities will not be delivered or will be delayed. Progress on delivery of agreed activities will be monitored by the Policy and Resources Finance Sub Committee.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

8.1 Initial consultation has taken place in respect of the priorities and views of the public in formulating the draft budget, as set out in this report.

8.2 Statutory budget consultation took place in January 2024.

8.3 Policy and Services Committees reviewed and debated the draft 2024/25 budget publicly during January 2024. The minutes from the Committees is provided in Appendix 3 for the consideration of the Policy and Resources Committee in respect of the recommendations set out in this report.

8.4 The Policy and Resources Finance Sub-Group have met on a regular basis during recent months to review budget proposals and assumptions.

8.5 The budget was determined by Council on 26 February 2024

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Wirral Council has a legal requirement to make sure its policies, and the way it carries out its work, do not discriminate against anyone. An Equality Impact Assessment is a tool to help council services identify steps they can take to ensure equality for anyone who might be affected by a particular policy, decision or activity.

9.2 The equality implications have been considered within the proposal via the completion of equality impact assessments.

- 9.3 Any implications will be considered and any negative impacts will be mitigated where possible.
- 9.4 Equality implications will be assessed during planning, decision and implementation stages and will be recognised as an ongoing responsibility. Equality issues will be a conscious consideration and an integral part of the process.

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The environment and climate implications have been considered within the individual improvement activities.

11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 The community wealth implications have been considered for the improvement activities taking account of matters across headings such as the following:
- Progressive Procurement and Social Value - How we commission and procure goods and services. Encouraging contractors to deliver more benefits for the local area, such as good jobs, apprenticeship, training & skills opportunities, real living wage, minimising their environmental impact, and greater wellbeing.
 - More local & community ownership of the economy - Supporting more cooperatives and community businesses. Enabling greater opportunities for local businesses. Building on the experience of partnership working with voluntary, community and faith groups during the pandemic to further develop this sector.
 - Decent and Fair Employment - Paying all employees a fair and reasonable wage.
 - Making wealth work for local places.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Neighbourhood Project Investment Improvement Activities

BACKGROUND PAPERS

2024/25 Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy
Capital Programme 2024-29
Wirral's Local Plan

TERMS OF REFERENCE

This report is being considered by the Policy & resources Committee in accordance with Section (B)(i) of its Terms of Reference.

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Full Council	26 February 2024
Policy and Resources Committee	13 February 2024

Appendix 1 – Neighbourhood Project Investment Improvement Activities

Description	Revenue	Capital
Additional weed control measures to improve visual amenity	£80k	-
Alleyway remediation. Resources to remediate alleyways that are in a condition which does not allow for the normal ongoing maintenance and cleansing.	£160k	£220k
Two 'Clean Teams' to tackle 'grot spot' areas.	£300k	
Conversion of rewilding areas to pollinator areas. Target of 10% of current rewilding areas.	£300k	
Increase seasonal Grounds Maintenance capacity across the Borough to increase maintenance standards.	£150k	
Gully cleansing, investigation, remediation and repair.	£100k	£260k
Street furniture	-	£100k
Contingency / funds to be allocated following confirmation of costs	£156k	£420k
Total	£1,246k	£1,000k