

WIRRAL COUNCIL

CABINET - 27 NOVEMBER 2008

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

TRANSFORMING WIRRAL – DELIVERING THE STRATEGIC ASSET REVIEW

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report sets out a vision for transforming Wirral's use of assets in order to improve service delivery; provide better value for money; and support the regeneration of the Borough, particularly its most deprived parts. It recommends investing £20 million, over four years, to develop a strategic network of 12 state-of-the-art multi-purpose complexes. These will be a mix of brand new buildings and enhancements to existing facilities. It is proposed to develop high quality, energy efficient and well maintained facilities, equipped with modern technology (including free Wi-Fi access) and to consult with local people over extending opening hours to meet service users' needs.
- 1.2 To achieve this level of service improvement, whilst simultaneously controlling overall buildings related costs, requires a strategic review of all the Council's properties and a reduction in the total number of publicly funded premises. The vision for the future is of much improved facilities, but not as many Council maintained buildings: the vision is 'Fewer but Better'. If the Council pays for the running costs of fewer buildings, Wirral residents will be able to enjoy the high quality and efficient modern facilities they deserve whilst the Council Tax can be kept at an acceptable level.

2. OVERVIEW

2.1 Why undertake the Strategic Asset Review ('SAR')?

- (a) Wirral's building stock was largely inherited in 1974 from five district councils, each with their own property portfolio. Whilst much has changed in the 34 years since 1974; many of Wirral Council's assets remain largely unchanged.
- (b) Local people have higher expectations of their Council and demand better standards and more customer friendly and personalised services;
- (c) There is a mounting backlog of major property repairs (currently reported to Cabinet at around £10million) and a rapidly reducing life span for many of the Council's buildings;
- (d) Doing nothing is not a tenable option: it would cost the Council over £45million during the next ten years (which would mean higher Council tax levels and severely affect services), fail to match our asset base to modern service needs and fail to deliver value for money;
- (e) Energy is expensive and elderly buildings are energy inefficient. This costs the Council Tax payer money. It also increases the Council's carbon footprint at a time when the authority has an obligation to work with both the public and private sectors, to reduce energy consumption to mitigate the effects of global warming;

- (f) Wirral's demographics have changed since 1974: new communities have grown up and some longer established communities have shifted their focal points;
- (g) Council buildings should be accessible to all local residents. This means they must be served by transport routes (often very different from 1974) and accessible for customers with impaired mobility. Many current buildings fail both these tests;
- (h) The Government is keen to empower local communities and expects councils to explore transferring many of their assets to community groups. This will give local people greater control over how public assets are used to meet local need; and
- (i) Tax payers will benefit if all parts of the public sector (including the Council, NHS and Police) collaborate and try to develop multi purpose buildings and multi agency solutions.

2.2 Office accommodation

- 2.3 To help fund the costs of delivering the proposed multi-purpose complexes the Council will achieve at least a 20 per cent reduction in its own accommodation costs by 2011. This will mean fewer office buildings which will be achieved through greater use of open plan accommodation; a reduced average floor space per employee; increased desk sharing; and more flexible working (which is also likely to reduce absence levels and thereby further improve efficiency and value for money). By 2011, these measures will save over £1 million a year, which is equivalent to a one per cent reduction in Council Tax.

2.4 New multi-purpose complexes in key community focal points

- 2.5 Over the next four years, the Council will invest around £20million in developing 12 multi-purpose complexes in key community locations across Wirral. These will be a mix of new build and enhanced existing facilities. They will house multiple Council functions and, wherever possible, be co-located with one or more of the Council's public sector partners, including the Police, Fire Authority and Health Service. There may also be partnerships with the private sector aimed at bringing in additional investment to the Borough. These changes will make it easier for members of the public to access a number of different services in one place. Minimum service provision is likely to be the co-location of library facilities, a One Stop Shop, and Community space available to the public, and will include public access to information technology. Many of the multi-purpose complexes are likely to provide substantially more than this level of facilities.
- 2.6 The proposed location of the new complexes takes into consideration where people live, transport routes and the existence of current buildings suitable for extension or adaptation. These complexes will be substantially cheaper to run than a large number of individual buildings. With the benefit of economies of scale and shared costs, the new complexes can be equipped to the highest standards. They will also be designed to be energy efficient and will lend themselves to new energy efficient measures, such as the installation of Combined Heat and Power sources. Wirral's Carbon footprint will also be reduced by the fact that individuals will need to make only one journey where previously they might have had to make several to access the same level of services.
- 2.7 The creation of these new complexes will, however, replace many of the Council's existing buildings. While services will cease to be delivered from some familiar buildings, the provision of services at the new complexes will be improved.

2.8 Proposed locations for multi-purpose complexes:

There will be five major multi-purpose complexes, which will include some facilities (such as a new central reference library) that will serve all the residents of the Borough. These will be located at:

- Bebington Civic Centre;
- Birkenhead (probably centred around Europa Pools and incorporating a new central reference library and a PCT health and wellbeing centre);
- Liscard (a brand new facility);
- Moreton (a brand new facility); and
- West Kirby (centred on a modernised Concourse).

In addition, there will be seven smaller, community focused, multi-purpose complexes located at:

- Eastham;
- Greasby;
- Heswall;
- Leasowe (probably in the Millennium Centre);
- Rock Ferry;
- St James; and
- Woodchurch.

Leasowe and St James are operated by community based development trusts and the Council will explore all opportunities to enhance the present offer to service users at these sites.

2.9 Libraries

2.10 The Library Service will be modernised and reconfigured to take account of current and likely future expectations of users; more customer friendly opening hours; the impact of new technology on accessing services; and recognised best practice. Wirral will have one brand new, state of the art, central reference library, probably located at the Europa Pools site. In addition it is envisaged that there will be 11 area libraries at the other multi-purpose complexes. (As the details for the multi-purpose complex at Liscard are developed, consideration will be given to the inclusion of the central library facility for Wallasey and potential alternative uses for the existing Wallasey Central Library site, which is currently identified for retention).

2.11 Books may be automatically reserved on line (to ensure availability when visiting the user's chosen multi-purpose complex), from home, or from a number of community based IT access points from which information technology can be accessed. These could be located in schools, community centres or other Council buildings, but will need to reflect the views of the local community.

2.12 Sports and recreation facilities.

2.13 There will also be fewer but better sports and recreation facilities. These will be carefully tailored to meet Wirral's health needs. The Council will work closely with its health service partners to meet the needs of all local residents, including both young people and the elderly.

- 2.14 In particular, the Council will work with the Health Service to challenge high levels of obesity and will strive to provide high quality facilities for local people to engage in sporting activities. Key sports and recreation facilities will be located at
- The Oval (recently subject to a £3million plus refurbishment scheme)
 - Europa Pools, (probably with an added Health and Wellbeing centre provided in partnership with the Health Service).
 - West Kirby Concourse fully refurbished and expanded (probably in partnership with the private and public sectors).
- 2.15 In addition, the Wirral Tennis and Sports Centre will remain as a specialist facility. Discussions have taken place with potential public sector partners regarding Leasowe Recreation Centre transferring from the Council to become a community recreation centre which will continue to provide a swimming pool for public and club use. Although Guinea Gap (which is part of an area of Council-owned prime waterfront on the River Mersey) will close, the Council will actively seek to use this extended site to kick start a major Seacombe/Egremont waterfront re-development scheme to regenerate one of Wirral's poorest areas. Whilst this would mean the closure of Guinea Gap recreation centre, it would offer the possibility of modern re-provision as part of a wide ranging re-development scheme that would create jobs and transform the area.
- 2.16 In recent years, the Council has worked with schools and local communities to deliver a significant number of shared new, high quality facilities distributed across the borough. Since 2003, nine new multi purpose sports halls and four new all weather pitches, with floodlighting, have been built on school sites in Wirral.
- 2.17 Seven of the new sports halls are at secondary schools at: Weatherhead High School for Girls; Prenton High School for Girls; Bebington High School; Park High School; Wallasey School; South Wirral High School; and Wirral Grammar School for Girls, where Private Finance Initiative ('PFI') schemes have taken place. Additionally, the existing sports hall at Hilbre remains in use. The other two new sports Halls are at Woodchurch and Pensby High Schools. The Pensby scheme has a new floodlight all-weather pitch and other hard court areas. The Woodchurch sports hall is half as big again as a standard school facility and will include a floodlit all-weather pitch. The other new floodlit all-weather pitches are at: Weatherhead; Oldershaw; and a half-size facility at the Hospital School (Joseph Paxton Campus). The Council have also built three single court Spaces for Sports and Arts at three primary sites: Rock Ferry; Christchurch in Birkenhead; and St Joseph's in Wallasey.
- 2.18 All these facilities are available for community use and the seven PFI schools employ Lettings Officers to manage and support such shared use. As a result, a number of groups have re-located to these new, high quality facilities and the Council have ceased lettings at the old sports hall and gym at Acre Lane which, in turn, has led to staff and other savings.
- 2.19 Arts and Heritage.**
- 2.20 The Council has invested £11.5 million in comprehensively redeveloping the Floral Pavilion in New Brighton. This will provide superb facilities for performing arts and conference activities on Wirral and is an example of the sort of high quality building that local people should expect. Activities from the Pacific Road Arts Centre will

transfer into the Floral Pavilion and alternative uses be sought for Pacific Road. The Williamson Art Gallery and the Priory will be retained and become the focus for future investment, with alternative uses (including transfer to the community and the option of developing a trust with existing voluntary groups) being actively explored for Wirral Museum and the Transport Museum.

2.21 Engaging with the public.

2.22 The public rightly expects the Council to keep increases in Council Tax to a minimum and to use its buildings efficiently. However, the SAR represents a major change in the Council's use of its buildings: whilst £20million will be invested in better facilities, there will also be the consequential loss of many other buildings currently used by the public. It is important that the people of Wirral have a say about how they want things to look in the future, whilst acknowledging the implications for the level of council tax.

2.23 The Council will be talking to local communities through Area Forums about what they want in their communities. The Council will also be engaging with service users who are directly affected by the proposed changes. However, it is also important to consult with all Wirral residents, of all ages, across the borough, about their vision of the wider picture and about what services they believe would be most valuable to them within the new multi-purpose complexes (and how their needs may evolve in the medium and longer terms).

3 BACKGROUND

3.1 In March 2008 the Council agreed a new Corporate Plan. This identifies five strategic objectives for the period 2008-11 and a number of priorities for improvement for 2008-09. One of the five strategic objectives is to create an Excellent Council. One of the priorities for improvement identified as underpinning this strategic objective is to improve the use of the Council's land and assets. A second priority is to create a sustainable and stable budget, providing value for money.

3.2 On 9 July 2008 Cabinet considered proposals for the SAR of the Council's land and buildings. This set out a mechanism of area asset reviews to begin the process of improving the quality and efficiency of the Council's use of assets to ensure that the authority's limited resources are used in the best interest of local people. Cabinet approved the methodology and actions set out in the SAR and endorsed the concept of undertaking seven area-based asset reviews to cover the whole Borough.

3.3 On 16 October 2008 Cabinet considered a further report setting out progress with the SAR and making a number of recommendations for its future delivery. On the same date, Cabinet also considered a report from the Director of Regeneration setting out a Strategic Development Plan for Cultural Services (the 'Cultural Services Review'). In relation to the latter, Cabinet resolved to adopt the future vision for the service identified in the report;

“Through integrated management, the Council will deliver high quality multi-purpose facilities, concentrated on strategic locations to benefit the whole community of Wirral.”

Cabinet also agreed to consultation with user groups and staff on the vision and service outputs; and confirmed that the Cultural Services Review should be integrated into the SAR.

- 3.4 The same Cabinet also considered a report from the Director of Adult Social Services on progress towards the transformation of Adult Social Services. This explained the need for significant changes in the way services are commissioned and delivered. This will be likely to have significant consequences for the asset base and lead to a programme of review and consultation that is likely to result in further change over the next few years. Similarly the report elsewhere on this agenda from the Director of Children's Services on the Youth Service will have significant asset related implications that will need to be integrated with the SAR.
- 3.5 Cabinet welcomed the SAR as an opportunity to enhance service delivery for local people through fewer but better, more fit-for-purpose, facilities that are more energy efficient and less costly to operate. In particular, Cabinet noted the very substantial impact on the Council's finances of increased energy costs. Cabinet also noted that the current property repairs backlog is around £10m. Members requested Officers to complete the seven area reviews of the whole Borough and report to Cabinet with their proposals in order to allow strategic decisions to be taken. Cabinet also recognised the need to expedite the review of the Council's administrative buildings as part of the overall SAR.
- 3.6 Cabinet resolved to adopt the following principles in delivering the SAR:
- 3.6.1 **Assets must be fit for purpose.** This will mean that assets should:
- Provide high quality facilities meeting the needs and expectations of local people;
 - Be well maintained, clean and safe, with all repair and maintenance requirements met in a risk assessed, planned and adequately resourced manner;
 - Use modern technology and good design to optimise energy efficiency; and
 - Be located in the right place so as to be accessible by local people (by public and private transport) and be Disability Discrimination Act ('DDA') compliant.
- 3.6.2 **The Council must use its land and buildings strategically and where appropriate collaborate with its partners.** This will mean that:
- Assets are used to promote delivery of the Sustainable Community Strategy and the Council's priorities;
 - Assets are used to promote the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of local people;
 - Multi purpose buildings and multi agency solutions are employed where practicable to optimise (a) accessibility and ease of use by local people; (b) value for money; and (c) cross-agency service delivery;
 - Assets are transferred to the community where appropriate;
 - Asset acquisition, investment and disposal decisions are based on option appraisals and whole-life costing to optimise value for money; and
 - Benchmarking is used to evaluate the effectiveness of asset use/management compared with other local authorities.
- 3.6.3 **Consultation and community engagement is essential.** This will mean:
- Consultation to assess the needs, expectations and priorities of local people;
 - Seeking the views of users as to the facilities they would like and the opinions of the wider community as to optimum value for money for all local people;
 - Recognising that some exceptional buildings may contribute significantly to local people's 'sense of place'; and that not all asset related decisions can be determined by financial factors alone; and
 - Understanding that changes to the Council's assets portfolio may have challenging consequences for the staff employed at the existing buildings.

3.6.4 It is important that the fundamental principles underpinning the SAR are applied consistently and fairly across the Borough to achieve the overall transformation in the management of the Council's assets that is necessary in the wider public interest.

4. STRATEGIC ASSET REVIEW – THE VISION FOR THE FUTURE

4.1 This report sets out the recommendations of the cross-directorate Strategic Asset Review Group ('the Review Group'). It includes officers' conclusions in relation to the Council's office buildings and the Cultural Services Review. The recommendations are intended to be a coherent package of borough-wide proposals based on the vision of Fewer but Better assets and optimum value for money for local people.

4.2 The approach taken

4.3 The Review Group examined the whole of the borough using seven geographical areas, in line with the principles previously endorsed by Cabinet. Critically, the Council's asset base should support the delivery of its priorities and the strategic direction of its services. The Review Group has therefore been guided in its work by the direction being taken for future service delivery.

4.4 The Review Group has concentrated on public-facing assets for the area based reviews but recognised that more specialist DASS and CYPD assets need to be integrated into the ongoing process of review. The approach taken has had regard to the overall best interests of all local people: not just the views of current users of existing facilities. It has applied consistent principles across the Borough to recommend holistic transformation in the management of the Council's assets.

4.5 The Review Group did not consider in detail the shared use of school assets, where reviews of secondary and primary provision are currently under way. The delivery of the Children and Young People's Plan, overseen by the Children and Young People's Partnership Board, creates opportunities to strengthen services at community level. There are significant issues here for the corporate asset base. For example, the Extended Schools agenda can deliver a wider range of public services and community benefits using schools which are located in the heart of communities, linking with the PCT and other services. Already, however, the Council has worked with schools and local communities to deliver a significant number of new, high quality facilities distributed across the borough. Since 2003, nine new multi purpose sports halls and four new all weather pitches, with floodlighting, have been built on school sites in Wirral.

4.6 Seven of the new sports halls are at secondary schools at: Weatherhead High School for Girls; Prenton High School for Girls; Bebington High School; Park High School; Wallasey School; South Wirral High School; and Wirral Grammar School for Girls', where Private Finance Initiative schemes have taken place. Additionally, the existing sports hall at Hilbre remains in use. The other two new sports Halls are at Woodchurch and Pensby High Schools. The Pensby scheme has a new floodlight all-weather pitch and other hard court areas. The Woodchurch sports hall is half as big again as a standard school facility and will include a floodlit all-weather pitch. The other new floodlit all-weather pitches are at: Weatherhead; Oldershaw; and a half-size facility at the Hospital School (Joseph Paxton Campus). The Council have also built three single court Spaces for Sports and Arts at three primary sites: Rock Ferry; Christchurch in Birkenhead; and St Joseph's in Wallasey. All these facilities are

available for community use and the seven PFI schools employ Lettings Officers to manage and support such shared use. As a result, a number of groups have re-located to these new, high quality facilities and the Council have ceased lettings at the old sports hall and gym at Acre Lane which, in turn, has led to staff and other savings.

- 4.7 As schools move to Foundation status and assets transfer to school Governing Bodies, it will be important to ensure the continuing development of community use.
- 4.8 The Review Group is clear that, to maximise benefit and value for money, all such programmes must be developed in a corporate context. The newly appointed Head of Asset Management will build on existing relationships with Children and Young Peoples Services to further integrate these asset groups with corporate planning and, where possible, to use opportunities arising from new building programmes to enhance local service delivery.
- 4.9 DASS assets have been considered by the Review Group. Cabinet approval of the report referred to in paragraph 3.4 above is likely to result in early closure and/or release of some assets, with service consultation and further change to follow in the short to medium term. It is important that as asset modernisation and consolidation is driven forward corporately, opportunities are taken to share facilities where appropriate and to 'join up' service delivery. There are opportunities, for example, to consider how modernised services can make greater use of the wider portfolio of general community facilities. Again, the Head of Asset Management will work with the Director of Adult Social Services to ensure an integrated, corporate approach.
- 4.10 The Review Group has applied the vision of Fewer but Better assets and reviewed the Council's portfolio of properties with the aim of providing for future use based on a strategic framework where:
- Some facilities and services are of borough-wide significance, serving the whole peninsula (and, in some cases, are of regional or wider significance);
 - Some services will be provided centrally for the areas they serve, in locations that are readily accessible, but with users being expected to travel to them; and
 - Planning must allow for both specialist and general assets.
- 4.11 The Review Group has applied the principles that:
- All assets are 'corporate' (in the sense of being 'owned' by the Council, rather than by individual departments);
 - Asset use should be focused on the delivery of the Council's priorities; and
 - Every opportunity should be taken to join up and share the use of publicly owned assets (unless there are compelling reasons not to do so).

The Review Group has also reviewed future asset need in the context of value for money and affordability.

- 4.12 On 16 October 2008, Cabinet endorsed the principle of community asset transfer. The Review Group has considered the opportunities this may offer for the retention in community use of a wider range of assets than those that the Council alone will be able to afford to maintain. The recommendation of the Review Group is that if an asset would not be retained by the Council as part of its future asset base then transfer must ultimately mean the full transfer of costs and liabilities to a 'fit and proper' body. If this cannot be achieved the alternative will be closure.

- 4.13 A programme of asset transfer is to be developed and implemented over an anticipated period of two years as an alternative to the immediate closure of neighbourhood facilities. This scale of change is necessary to create a sustainable high quality asset base. For this reason, if transfer is not achieved within the programmed timescale those assets will be closed and disposed of and/or demolished, as appropriate.
- 4.14 As agreed by Cabinet on 16 October 2008, a further report will be submitted recommending a policy to support community asset transfer. The Review Group recommends that, during the two year transitional period, financial support is sought from the Community Fund for those premises identified for transfer.
- 4.15 The Review Group's recommendation is that core provision of customer facing services and certain community facilities is developed in the form of multi-purpose complexes. These will be sited in accessible locations across the borough. Their final location, size and content will be developed in a programmed approach across the borough involving consultation with users, stakeholders and partners. The multi-purpose complexes will vary in their details but at their heart each will offer:
- Advice and assistance or access to online information on Council services similar to that currently provided by One Stop Shops;
 - Shared space for use by Council services and generally by a range of community and interest groups and voluntary sector partners;
 - Library facilities, including free IT/internet access for local people; and
 - Suitable facilities and dedicated space, as appropriate, to support the delivery of the widest range of public services (for example health services and police)
- 4.16 One Stop Shop ('OSS') provision will be through the new multi-purpose complexes. In addition, the OSS provision currently provided in Department of Work and Pensions buildings at Bromborough, Hoylake, Liscard and Upton will continue. This is because provision of these facilities imposes no cost burden on the Council, having regard to the present overall Government funding arrangements. However, it is recommended that the position is reviewed in the event that the present funding arrangements are changed by the Government or if the DWP withdraws from any of its buildings where there is OSS provision.

5. OPTION APPRAISAL

- 5.1 The Review Group has considered three broad options and the costs and benefits associated with each.
- 5.2 **No Change.** Previous reports on the SAR have made clear why the Council cannot continue to maintain its current estate in anything other than a state of decline, given the Council's financial position, the drive for service transformation and customer expectations. Incremental rationalisation (often determined by structural deterioration) and inadequate improvement of existing assets is unsustainable and inconsistent with best practice. Over ten years, this option will cost over £45million more than the preferred option and is not recommended.
- 5.3 **Minimal provision.** This approach would be driven by the maximisation of financial savings. It would only retain a small number of specialist assets; would not provide for any transitional arrangements and would not allow for any extension to existing opening hours. In particular this option would radically reduce the cultural services

offer to a core of five libraries, one leisure centre, and one cultural facility. It would only support multi-purpose complexes (and thus face-to-face customer contact) in five of the seven areas reviewed; and would move to the immediate closure of community centres, instead of working with local groups to deliver a programme of asset transfer. Whilst such a radical approach to the rationalisation of the asset base would deliver the greatest financial savings the Review Group does not consider that it would provide a proportionate and strategic approach to service delivery. For this reason it is not recommended. This option would be likely to result in savings of around £5.7 million per annum (i.e. around £2million above the level of annual savings achievable through the recommended option of strategic consolidation). A further substantial seven figure sum would also be saved over the next ten years due to reduced maintenance liabilities.

5.4 **Strategic consolidation.** This is the Review Group's recommended approach and is based on the strategic direction being taken by the Council to transform services and deliver the outcomes prioritised in the Corporate Plan.

5.5 This option will provide 12 multi-purpose complexes located strategically across the borough. There will be five major multi-purpose complexes, which will include some facilities (such as a new central reference library) that will serve all the residents of the Borough. These will be located at:

- Bebington Civic Centre;
- Birkenhead (probably centred around Europa Pools and incorporating a new central reference library and a PCT health and wellbeing centre);
- Liscard (a brand new facility);
- Moreton (a brand new facility); and
- West Kirby (centred on a modernised Concourse). Previous proposals (considered by the Executive Board on 12 July 2006, with subsequent progress reports) will be extended to include the library and leisure centre.

In addition, there will be seven smaller, community focused, multi-purpose complexes located at:

- Eastham;
- Greasby;
- Heswall;
- Leasowe (probably in the Millennium Centre);
- Rock Ferry;
- St James; and
- Woodchurch.

Leasowe and St James are operated by community based development trusts and the Council will explore all opportunities to enhance the present offer to service users at these sites.

5.6 The location of the multi-purpose complexes in town/district centres will ensure reasonable levels of public transport accessibility, particularly by bus. Four of the districts where multi-purpose complexes will be located (Bebington, Birkenhead, Eastham and West Kirby) are also served by the Merseyrail network.

- 5.7 As part of the detailed work that will lead to the delivery of the multi-purpose complexes, accessibility mapping software (available in the Technical Services Department) will be used to determine the degree of accessibility to the proposed facilities and identify where improved transport provision might be required. This is very important because, if trips from residential areas to the multi-purpose complexes involve more than one bus journey, this can be difficult for some people, particularly those with mobility issues.
- 5.8 The Library Service will be modernised and reconfigured to reflect current and likely future expectations of users; the impact of new technology on accessing services; and recognised best practice. Wirral will have a new, state of the art, central reference library, probably located at Europa Pools, in a multi-agency redevelopment scheme, ideally involving the PCT and the Police site. In addition it is envisaged that there will be 11 area libraries at the other multi-purpose complexes. (As the details for the multi-purpose complex at Liscard are developed, consideration will be given to the inclusion of the central library facility for Wallasey and potential alternative uses for the existing Wallasey Central Library site, which is currently identified for retention).
- 5.9 Books may be automatically reserved on line (to ensure availability when visiting the user's chosen multi-purpose complex), from home, or from a number of community based IT access points from which information technology can be accessed. These could be located in schools, community centres or other Council buildings but will need to reflect the views of the local community. Further consideration will also be given to these issues in the report to Cabinet on Community Asset Transfer (requested by Cabinet at the meeting on 16 October 2008).
- 5.10 Consolidation and new development at the multi-purpose complexes presents a real opportunity to secure additional investment from public and private sector partners. Discussions are already taking place with key partners including the PCT, Police, Fire Service and registered social landlords on opportunities for co-operation and collaboration. The SAR will provide a robust framework for these discussions. Once the outcome of this first review stage is agreed it is intended to consult with partners and develop more detailed proposals for asset use. Where the Council no longer has use for some of its assets partners will be asked if they are of interest to them.
- 5.11 A strategic redevelopment programme of this nature would also enable the Council to offer an attractive procurement package to the market and seek a development partner who could bring innovation and efficiency to what will be a planned programme to be implemented over a number of years. If the Council makes the recommended commitment to a vision for change and the resulting programme of investment, this would be likely to represent a very attractive opportunity to the development market. If the Council moves quickly it will maximise the chances of reaching agreement with other public sector bodies. In addition, the present depressed state of the market provides an opportunity to get financially attractive proposals from the private sector that is eager to obtain public sector contracts: this is likely to optimise Value for Money. However, this will need to take account of present proposals (which are at an advanced stage) in relation to the Concourse.
- 5.12 Finally, this approach of strategic consolidation has identified in each area assets whose retention is not required for future service delivery and which do not appear to lend themselves to community transfer. It is recommended that these assets are closed and disposed of. In some cases services previously delivered from them will be re-provided through the new multi-purpose complexes.

6. OFFICE REVIEW

- 6.1 The Council currently holds administrative space that falls into three broad categories:
- 8 core administrative buildings;
 - 14 area administrative buildings; and
 - 22 additional administrative buildings or part administrative buildings located across the borough (often within larger facilities).
- 6.2 The Review Group has initially focused on 'front line' customer and service assets, and detailed work on office space will now begin. Nevertheless, in its recommendations for strategic consolidation, the Review Group has identified seven administrative assets that will be programmed for closure and disposal in 2009/10. Savings are contained in the overall financial implications.
- 6.3 A preliminary review of the offices has revealed substantial areas where more effective use can be made of existing space. By working to the Council's space planning guideline of 10 sq.m. per person, additional capacity can be freed up in the Council's core buildings to accommodate existing staff currently occupying other buildings, which could, in turn, then be released.
- 6.4 Expenditure on office accommodation is approximately £5m per annum. With a programme of workspace change it would be reasonable to expect to save at least 20 per cent of these annual costs (i.e. £1 million per year) through the rationalisation of the estate by 2011. For this to happen, however, there will need to be:
- Central control and management of administrative accommodation and FM budgets;
 - Consistent compliance with the corporate space planning standard of 10 m. sq. per person;
 - Co-ordination of property, IT and HR inputs focused on delivering workplace change; and
 - A roll-out of agile working, underpinned by substantial investment in IT and a strong programme management of workplace change.
- 6.5 To achieve this scale of savings significant initial investment will be required, both to create new and more efficient working environments (for example, by removing existing non-structural internal partitions) and to provide the necessary IT infrastructure and equipment.
- 6.6 Cabinet approval will be sought to fund the necessary work from the Efficiency Investment Budget when scheme details are available.
- 6.7 It is further recommended that the Director of Law, HR and Asset Management reports to a future meeting of Cabinet on more detailed proposals for accommodation change, including the centralisation of current facilities management arrangements.

7. THE RECOMMENDED CHANGES BY AREA

- 7.1 The following specific recommendations are made in relation to the seven areas (in the order set out in Appendix 2 to the report to Cabinet on 9 July 2008).

7.2 Area 1: West Wirral

7.3 As mentioned above, proposals by Cabinet have previously been discussed for the redevelopment of West Kirby Concourse. It is recommended that these are extended to include the library and leisure centre and the development of the Concourse as the multi-purpose complex for West Wirral.

7.4 The review recommends the closure of Hoylake Library and (in line with the recommendations for all community centres) that Hoylake Community Centre and Westbourne Hall are transferred to community management. The existing One Stop Shop in the Hoylake DWP offices will be retained.

7.5 Area 2: Heswall, Pensby and Thingwall.

7.6 Heswall Library and One Stop Shop will provide the multi-purpose complex for this area. Pensby Library will close and Ivy Farm, Pensby Community Centre, Kylemore Community Centre, and Alexander Hall will transfer to community management. Heswall Hall currently operates without a joint management committee, but has excellent potential for alternative management arrangements and this will be explored.

7.7 Area 3: Greasby, Frankby, Irby, Upton and Woodchurch.

7.8 This area offers particular challenges in the transition period whilst new multi-purpose complexes are developed. Greasby Library will be developed as a multi-purpose complex. The libraries in Upton and Irby will close, as will Woodchurch Leisure Centre and Community Centre. There may be an opportunity to deliver community activities and services from the redevelopment of Woodchurch High School. However, it is important to maintain a service delivery presence on the eastern side of this area, which contains pockets of serious deprivation.

7.9 Having regard to the corporate priority of 'improving health and well being for all, ensuring people who require support are full participants in mainstream society'; it is recommended that Woodchurch Library is retained and forms the nucleus of a multi-purpose complex, notwithstanding current relatively low levels of usage. This recommendation is justified by the level of needs of local people in the Woodchurch area and illustrates the sort of multi-dimensional complexities involved in the SAR: simply looking at library usage levels would have been too simplistic and resulted in an inequitable outcome. The OSS located in the Upton DWP office will be retained.

7.10 Area 4: Leasowe, Moreton and Saughall Massie .

7.11 Moreton Library would provide the base for the multi-purpose complex for the area. This would incorporate Eastway Community Centre, Moreton Youth Club and Moreton One Stop Shop. Leasowe Recreation Centre, Leasowe Community Centre and Moreton Community Centre will transfer to community management. Significantly, discussions have taken place with potential public sector partners regarding Leasowe Recreation Centre transferring from the Council to become a community recreation centre which will continue to provide a swimming pool for public and club use.

7.12 Area 5: New Brighton, Wallasey, Liscard and Seacombe.

7.13 The multi-purpose complex for this area will be developed within Liscard Town Centre at a location to be agreed. It will incorporate the services presently provided by the Seacombe OSS and Liscard Community Centre, (and will include library provision linked to Wallasey Library). Linked to this multi-purpose complex and to the

accommodation review, it is recommended that the Council begins to free up its existing land and buildings around and near to Wallasey Town Hall with a view to using its assets – a superb waterside site – to promote the regeneration of the ‘Seacombe/Egremont Corridor’ and the concept of a new ‘Seacombe Village’ development. The existing One Stop Shop in the Liscard DWP office will be retained.

- 7.14 The new Floral Pavilion will incorporate access to the OSS services presently located in the New Brighton Community Centre. Grosvenor Ballroom, now a well established community centre, and Vale House will transfer to community management. Seacombe and Wallasey Village Libraries will close. Although Guinea Gap (which is part of an area of Council-owned prime waterfront on the River Mersey) will also close, the Council will actively seek to use this extended site to kick start a major Seacombe/Egremont waterfront re-development scheme to re-generate one of Wirral’s poorest areas. Whilst this would mean the closure of Guinea Gap recreation centre, it would offer the possibility of modern re-provision as part of a wide ranging re-development scheme that would create jobs and transform the area.
- 7.15 Area 6: Bebington, Clatterbridge, Bromborough and Eastham.**
- 7.16 Bebington Civic Centre will be developed as a multi-purpose complex incorporating the OSS. A smaller complex will be based around Eastham Library and OSS.
- 7.17 Bromborough Library and Civic Centre will close as will Higher Bebington and New Ferry Libraries. The existing One Stop Shop in the Bromborough DWP office will be retained. The refurbished Oval Swimming Pool and Sports Complex, due to re-open at the end of November, will be a key facility for Wirral and an example of good practice in its provision of warm water facilities for public swimming, the first on Merseyside. New Ferry Village Hall, Delamere Community Centre and Victoria Hall will be transferred to community management.
- 7.18 Area 7: Birkenhead, Tranmere and Rock Ferry; Bidston and Claughton; and Oxtan and Prenton.**
- 7.19 The proposed multi-purpose complex will probably be at Europa Pools which will be remodelled in collaboration with the PCT to provide a Healthy Living centre. This will incorporate improved provision for physical activity, a café and demonstration area for healthy eating and accommodation for health advisors and specialist organisations such as Brook Advisory Clinic and Help the Aged. In addition, discussions have taken place with Merseyside Police who would like to work with the Council to explore the benefits of collaboration and sharing accommodation in Central Birkenhead. This will, initially, involve an examination of the effectiveness of the existing police presence in the Pyramids Shopping Centre and the potential for replacement in Europa Pools in association with Council and health services.
- 7.20 It is also proposed that Birkenhead Central library will close at its present site and the service relocated to Europa Pools, further extending opportunities for joint provision with the PCT and other agencies. It will be important that the centre has a single access and that facilities management is centrally controlled. If the proposal is agreed, then more detailed plans and costings will be prepared. It may also be possible to relocate the OSS from the Conway Centre, although this will need more analysis to ensure Europa Pools could cope with the resulting increased footfall whilst maintaining the current high levels of service delivery at the Conway Centre.

- 7.21 All of the Borough museums are within this area. The recommendation of the Review Group is that the Williamson Art Gallery and the Priory are retained and become the focus for future investment, with alternative uses (including transfer to the community and the option of developing a trust with existing voluntary groups) being actively explored for Wirral Museum and the Transport Museum.
- 7.22 Libraries at Prenton, Ridgeway and Beechwood will close as will Grange Road West Sports Centre. The Wirral Tennis and Sports Centre will be retained in recognition of its specific provision. The community centres at Beechwood, Gautby Road and Livingstone Street and Noctorum will transfer to community management. Deprivation issues around Beechwood will mean that particularly careful consideration will need to be given to this transfer to ensure that the needs of local people are appropriately met.
- 7.23 The new Floral Pavilion, which will open shortly and which has been developed at a cost of £11.5m. will provide a borough-wide centre for arts and conference provision in Wirral. This is an example of the sort of modern, fit for purpose facility that the Council should aspire to deliver for local people. Consequently it is proposed that activities will transfer from the Pacific Road Arts Centre and that Pacific Road will close, although efforts will be made to establish alternative uses for the facility.
- 7.24 Appendix 1 sets out a detailed breakdown of recommended changes for each building. Assets identified for community asset transfer or closure are highlighted.

8. NEXT STEPS

- 8.1 The strategic consolidation recommended by the Review Group is based on robust and consistently applied principles. The first step towards transformation will be to consult with local people on the vision and recommended approach and following this, implement a change programme. A series of actions then follows.
- 8.2 First, extensive consultation will be undertaken to inform the development of the new facilities and the improvement of the assets to be retained and enhanced. A resulting development programme will then be implemented.
- 8.3 Secondly, a closure programme will be implemented for those assets identified in Appendix 1. The more rapidly this is implemented the greater the financial savings that will be realised. Buildings will be disposed of as quickly as possible but, where appropriate, provision will need to be made for 'mothballing' and/or demolition.
- 8.4 The development and refurbishment programme will take place over several years. In some cases it may be necessary to phase closures and to provide alternative service delivery options in the short term whilst the asset base in a particular area is changed. The programme will also need to be flexible to take account of new initiatives that arise. Where some facilities are closed there may be opportunities to develop a network of access points in other facilities using information technology in line with the customer access strategy. These will be assessed on an area-by-area basis. Unless alternative funding is identified, such transitional or additional provision will reduce or delay savings arising from the change programme.
- 8.5 At the same time the community asset transfer programme will be implemented.

- 8.6 These are major asset change programmes. Stakeholders will be consulted as they are taken forward, but once the nature and scale of change in each area is agreed their performance and delivery will need to be effectively project managed. They will only be successful if they are embraced corporately and adequately resourced. If the Review Group's proposals are accepted it is recommended that a further report is brought to Cabinet on the programme for development and improvement of facilities to advise in more detail on, programming, resourcing and integration with the Council's wider Change Programme.

9. CONSULTATION

- 9.1 It is recommended that the first stage of consultation focuses on the proposed direction for consolidation and modernisation of the asset base and the immediate recommendations for change. When these aspects are agreed then, as indicated above, extensive consultation will be required to develop the change programme. This offers an important opportunity to engage local communities, partners and other interested groups and parties in shaping service provision and the public sector asset base for the 21st Century.
- 9.2 There will be major implications for staff working at the facilities affected, and it is very important that they are kept appropriately informed of emerging proposals. It is intended to begin consultation with these staff immediately.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 Savings

There are revenue savings to be achieved by vacating assets. Primarily these relate to the actual running costs of buildings (e.g. rates, energy, water, insurance) and from the savings in staff costs that arise when direct service delivery ceases.

- 10.2 The initial estimates of savings in building and staff costs, of those buildings identified in this report for closure or community transfer, total approximately £3.7m. This is an annual figure. For it to be realised for 2009/10 all those buildings identified would have to be closed or transferred to community groups by 31 March 2009 and the staff affected removed from the Council's payroll. There would also be a gap between the closure of existing facilities and the completion of new developments or the refurbishment and improvement of retained facilities. In reality the full year's savings will not be realised in 2009/10. Wherever closure is delayed, or phased, or transitional provisions are put in place pending the development of new facilities, or alternative (albeit reduced) service provision is provided, total savings will be reduced, unless alternative funding sources are identified. The exact amount of the reduction will depend on the individual arrangements for each asset.
- 10.3 This estimated saving has taken into account all the income that might be lost to the Council when services from these assets are discontinued (although, in reality, some income at least will be redirected to the retained and enhanced facilities). However, once facilities are closed it may not be possible to dispose of them immediately and therefore the Council may incur additional expenditure in respect of:

- (a) **Demolition costs** - As part of this process, it may be necessary to demolish certain buildings after they have been closed. This is because, under recent Government legislation, the Council will only have three months' grace before it has to pay full business rates on any vacant property. It is also likely that buildings in certain locations may require substantial expenditure on security to prevent break-ins and vandalism. It is estimated that the cost of dealing with properties that may be recommended for demolition will be in the region of £800,000. This will be a one-off cost and may be capitalised.
- (b) **Decommissioning costs** - There may also be buildings which need to be mothballed while certain decisions are made regarding their future. Estimated mothballing costs total in the region of £850,000. There will also be other non-recurring decommissioning costs, which cannot be quantified at this stage. Mothballing costs will recur for each building until such time as it is sold, transferred or demolished. It is recommended an initial £200,000 is allocated from the Efficiency Investment Fund to meet these costs as they arise.

10.4 The other potential saving to the Council is in expenditure that it will not incur if assets are closed and sold. This relates to immediate expenditure on repair and maintenance, and mechanical and electrical work necessary to bring the assets up to a satisfactory standard to maintain service delivery. The estimate for the immediate expenditure required on the buildings identified for closure or transfer is £6.2 million.

10.5 Thereafter a 10 year programme of 'life cycle' expenditure on these assets has been developed and costed. This would be required to secure the long term delivery of service from those buildings identified for closure or transfer. If the assets were to be retained the estimated future costs of these works is estimated (coincidentally) at an identical £6.2 million.

10.6 **Re-Provision**

10.7 The provision of high quality multi-purpose complexes will carry a significant cost. Only when the scale and phasing of change is agreed and the precise content of the multi-purpose complexes is defined can final costs be ascertained. Nevertheless, based on current construction costs elsewhere an estimated total cost of multi-purpose complexes provision is likely to be around £20m. This level of investment will produce outstanding facilities that would have very low operating costs.

10.8 It is recommended that Council is requested to include a provision of £5m per annum in the Capital Programme for four years commencing in 2009/10 to cover these costs of reprovision.

10.9 Improving service delivery is not just about better buildings: it is also about tailoring services to the needs of users, rather than the convenience of providers. The precise shape of this tailoring will be heavily influenced by the consultation with service users and the wider public. However, the Library Service might better meet users' needs if:

- The libraries at the 12 multi-purpose complexes open on Wednesday afternoons;
- Birkenhead Central Library opens on Sundays; and
- Free Wi-Fi internet access is provided at the 12 multi-purpose complexes.

Such changes will need to be cost neutral unless additional alternative funding sources can be identified.

10.10 In the event that Members wished to allow for some service re-provision in the areas where existing libraries are recommended for closure, a mobile Library/One Stop Shop service could be established at a projected annual cost of in the region of £200,000. However, given the Council's present overall financial position, this option is, on balance, not recommended.

10.11 No account or estimates have been made as regards the market or potential for generating capital receipts at this stage. The staffing implications alluded to below may also have a financial impact if staff numbers are to be reduced.

11. STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

11.1 Changes to the Council's asset portfolio will have significant implications for staff affected by those change. Given the present global economic problems this is a matter of extra seriousness. At times of change, the Council recognises that employees can be concerned, unclear or unsettled about their future job roles or employment. In view of this, the Council has developed a set of workforce change policies, in consultation with the trade unions, which are designed to support employees at times of organisational change.

11.2 Through this good practice the Council ensures that affected employees are consulted as soon as the need for change is identified and that steps are taken to minimise the impact of change on the workforce. The policies provide for a clear and transparent restructuring process, a firm commitment to re-skill employees for the changing and newly emerging jobs in the Council and comprehensive steps to seek to redeploy affected employees. Whilst it is also recognised that, at times of significant change, it may not be possible to redeploy all affected employees, the Council will take all reasonable steps to avoid compulsory redundancies.

11.3 Most staff are likely to be affected by the Office Review described in section 6.

12. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

12.1 There are no Equal Opportunity implications as a result of this report.

12.2 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

12.3 There are no direct Community Safety implications as a result of this report.

13. LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

13.1 The SAR will have positive Agenda 21 implications as the Review will help reduce energy costs across the Authority. More efficient and flexible use of administrative and training accommodation, and new ways of working, have potential to significantly reduce CO₂ emissions.

14. PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

14.1 The Strategic Asset Review has implications both in terms of the location of new facilities and in the uses that existing sites, that are to be released, can accommodate.

- 14.2 The use of land and buildings within Wirral is subject to the broad policy framework of Regional Spatial Strategy (North West of England Plan Regional Spatial Strategy to 2021, RSS) and the Council's own development plan (the Unitary Development Plan (UDP), which is to be replaced by the Local Development Framework (LDF)).
- 14.3 Regional Spatial Strategy vision is for sustainable development, leading to a higher quality of life for all and reduced social, economic and environmental disparities. The need to travel should be reduced and carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions reduced. Policies for the Liverpool City Region focus priority on the regional centre of Liverpool, whilst its surrounding area (which includes the Housing Market Renewal Initiative Area in Wirral) is a second priority.
- 14.4 Specific policies of RSS are DP1-9, which set out sustainable development principles; RDF1, which sets out spatial priorities; L1, which sets out policy for health, sport, recreation, cultural and education services provision; RT1-4 and RT9-10, which set out transport policies; EM3, Green Infrastructure; EM5, Water Management; EM15 Sustainable Energy; EM16, Energy Conservation and Efficiency; EM18, Decentralised Energy Supply; LCR1-LCR4, Liverpool City Region policies.
- 14.5 Alongside the RSS policies, the UDP (and the emerging LDF) policies continue the theme of urban regeneration, seeking to focus investment into the existing urban areas of the Borough, to maximise the re-use of previously developed land and buildings and to support the regeneration and re-development of the older, run-down areas mainly situated in the east of the Borough.
- 14.6 UDP policies of particular importance to the Strategic Asset Review are those for sport and recreation, green space, tourism and leisure, heritage and conservation, transport and shopping.
- 14.7 Re-use of sites, which become surplus to Council requirements and are not to be retained in their current use, will be assessed at that time for any requirement for planning permission. In determining planning applications, the development plan (RSS and the UDP/LDF) is the starting point and applications will be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless other material considerations indicate otherwise. The RSS and UDP/LDF policies, against which applications will be determined, will be considered at the appropriate time.

15. ANTI-POVERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 15.1 There are no direct Anti Poverty implications as a result of this report.

16. HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

- 16.1 There are no direct Human Rights implications as a result of this report.

17. SOCIAL INCLUSION IMPLICATIONS

- 17.1 There are no direct Social Inclusion implications as a result of this report.

18. LOCAL MEMBER SUPPORT IMPLICATIONS

- 18.1 Although there are no immediate direct Local Member support implications as a result of this report, adopting the review's eventual proposals will affect citizens in many wards and thereby have implications for Local Members.

19. HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 19.1 Members will be aware that a programme of health and safety compliance has been undertaken across the Council's premises. These audits have concentrated on ensuring legislative compliance against a number of key high risk areas – fire safety, asbestos control, water services (the control of legionellosis), electrical safety and building/complex security. There has been tremendous progress made against all these areas of risk and facility managers and budget holders have greatly appreciated this piece of continuing work.
- 19.2 It is vital that the information for this audit programme is considered as part of the overall Strategic Asset Review, as compliance is not optional and there is a potential high risk to the Council without adequate investment. As with backlog maintenance and life cycle works the more assets the Council retains, the more costs it will incur in this area.

20. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Cabinet Report 16 August 2007 - Planned Maintenance 2007/08
- Cabinet Report 13 March 2008 - Property Performance Management
- Cabinet Report 9 July 2008 - Strategic Asset Review
- Cabinet Report 16 October 2008 - Strategic Asset Review

21. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 21.1 It is recommended that:

The proposals set out in this report for the strategic consolidation of the Council's asset base across the borough are agreed in principle and then subjected to public and staff consultation as described, with the results of that consultation brought to a future meeting of Cabinet.

STEPHEN MADDIX

Chief Executive