

COUNCIL

Monday, 14 October 2013

Present: The Mayor (Councillor Dave Mitchell) in the Chair
Deputy Mayor (Councillor Steve Foulkes)

Councillors	RL Abbey C Blakeley E Boult A Brighouse P Brightmore W Clements A Cox J Crabtree G Davies P Davies WJ Davies D Dodd P Doughty D Elderton G Ellis P Gilchrist P Glasman JE Green R Gregson P Hackett J Hale	T Harney P Hayes A Hodson K Hodson M Hornby M Johnston AER Jones C Jones P Kearney S Kelly B Kenny A Leech I Lewis AR McLachlan M McLaughlin C Meaden B Mooney S Mountney C Muspratt S Niblock T Norbury	C Povall D Realey L Rennie D Roberts L Rowlands J Salter H Smith T Smith W Smith J Stapleton M Sullivan A Sykes J Walsh G Watt S Whittingham J Williamson I Williams KJ Williams S Williams
<u>Apologies</u>	Councillors	L Fraser	P Williams

Prior to the first item of business, in the absence of his chaplain the Revd Beth Glover, the Mayor invited her curate, the Revd Maureen Coats to lead the Council in prayers.

29 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Members of the Council were invited to consider whether they had any disclosable pecuniary and/or any other relevant interests in connection with any matters to be determined at this meeting and, if so, to declare it and state the nature of such interest.

Councillors S Niblock, L Rennie, D Roberts, and J Stapleton declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 11 – Recommendation from the Regeneration and Environment Policy and Performance Committee: Notice of Motion ‘Cuts to Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service’ (see minute 40 post) by virtue of their appointment to the Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority.

Councillor A Sykes declared his non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 6 – Leader's, Executive Members' and Policy and Performance Committee Chairs Reports (see minute 33 post) by virtue of him being a school governor of Thingwall Primary School.

30 MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor referred to the sad news of the recent death Sylvia Hodrien, former Labour Councillor for Upton ward.

He referred also to the sad news of the death of Jim Edwards, former Labour Councillor for Egremont ward in 1972 and who, upon reorganisation, represented Moreton Ward until 1978. Jim was re-elected to the Council in 1980 representing Leasowe Ward and was a former Mayor of Wirral in 1990/1991.

The Council stood in silence, as a mark of respect.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Leah Fraser and Pat Williams.

31 PETITIONS

In accordance with Standing Order 21, the Mayor received petitions submitted by –

- (i) Councillor Les Rowlands on behalf of 74 signatories objecting to the proposal to sell a plot of land at the corner of Boundary Lane and Telegraph Road, Heswall.
- (ii) Councillor Stuart Kelly on behalf of 110 signatories requesting the Council to improve the lighting on the pathway from the Holmlands area to Woodchurch High School and Woodchurch Leisure Centre.
- (iii) Councillor Phill Brightmore on behalf of 237 signatories requesting the renewal of pavements in Heywood Boulevard, Thingwall.
- (iv) Councillor Pat Hackett on behalf of 100 signatories objecting to a proposal to sell off the car park in Field Road, New Brighton.

Resolved – That the petitions be noted and referred to the appropriate Chief Officer in accordance with Standing Order 34.

32 MINUTES

The minutes of the Council meetings held on 15 July and 19 September 2013 had been circulated to Members and, it was –

Resolved – That the minutes be approved and adopted as a correct record

33 LEADER'S, EXECUTIVE MEMBERS' AND POLICY AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE CHAIRS' REPORTS

The Leader of the Council presented his summary report upon matters relevant to his portfolio. He responded to questions from Councillors Green,

Roberts, Kelly, Blakeley, Whittingham, A Hodson and Johnston and made a number of additional comments, including –

- He referred to the success of the recent delegation he had led to Taicang, Wirral's sister city in China, and was confident that Wirral would see considerable investment associated with the International Trade Centre. He was pleased that the Chancellor of the Exchequer had recognised the impact the Chinese economy in the global market and had followed Wirral's example in also sending a recent trade delegation to China.
- With regard to the Scrutiny Review that had been undertaken in relation to the International Trade Centre, he confirmed that the ITC was a key priority for both the Council and Peel. He anticipated that a cross party working group would soon be put in place to take forward the scrutiny recommendations.
- A school teacher exchange was also an element of the recent delegation to China and he would report to a future meeting upon the development of educational links.
- He referred to the protocol of exchanging gifts with Chinese delegates and indicated that a number of gifts that had been unable to be delivered had been returned at no additional cost and would be kept for future visits to Wirral by Chinese officials.
- He confirmed that a report would be presented to an early meeting of the Cabinet upon the support to SME's and the strategic approach to partnerships.
- He was pleased that Members had found the Elected Member Annual Conference to be beneficial and he had been encouraged by positive comments that had been received from a number of speakers.
- In recognising the recent appointment of Esther McVey as Minister for Employment, he hoped that she would endeavour to influence changes to Government policies which had been so damaging to Wirral residents.
- With regard to a question which sought information related to a reported substantial payment to a Member of staff, the Leader indicated that he had nothing further to add to a communication on the matter from the Chief Executive that had been sent to all Members of the Council.

Resolved – That the report of Councillor Phil Davies be noted

Councillor Chris Jones presented her Cabinet portfolio report on Adult Social Care. Her response to questions from Councillors Kelly, Mountney, Leech and Gilchrist included the following comments –

- There had been a significant improvement in services through transformational changes in the way that services in Adult Social Care were delivered and commissioned and she commented that the improvements had been largely as a result of the hard work and commitment of officers. She confirmed that it was intended that the service would be delivered without the use of zero hour contracts.
- She was pleased that changes to a number of residential and day services agreed by the Cabinet in June had been delivered on time and within budget and she confirmed that those people affected by the

- development of a smaller service at Moreton, who had been relocated to other services, had settled well.
- With regard to the impact of the new domiciliary contracts, there was a significant emphasis to support the principles of the "Ethical Care Charter" and appropriate monitoring would be undertaken.

Resolved – That the report of Councillor Chris Jones be noted.

Councillor Adrian Jones presented his Central Services portfolio report and agreed to provide written responses to questions from Members concerning –

- Further information requested upon the implementation of the Welfare Reform Programme (Councillor Walsh)
- Following a number of recent IT outages, what action is to be taken to avoid further disruptions to Members IT services (Councillor Blakeley)
- To provide additional information in relation to pay increases to the top ten Council officers from 2010/2011 to the present, as part of an overall saving (Councillor Ellis)
- To provide assurance that office accommodation will continue to be provided for trade union staff in the light of a forthcoming Cabinet report on asset management (Councillor Mooney)

In response to a question from Councillor Sykes with regard to the site of the former Stanley School in Thingwall, Councillor Jones affirmed that he would be pleased to work with the adjacent Thingwall Primary School to ensure the Stanley School site was put to good use.

Resolved – That the report of Councillor Adrian Jones be noted.

Questions were then invited to Councillor Tony Smith on his Children's Services portfolio report and his responses to questions from Councillors W Smith, Sykes and Brightmore included the following comments –

- He was very pleased to report that, once again, this year Wirral schools and colleges had attained excellent results, particularly those in inner city areas. He praised the hard work of students, parents and staff and commented that the achievements in Wirral were set against a decline elsewhere in the country.
- He welcomed the additional early years funding for 2 year olds and hoped that it would contribute to continued improvement in educational standards.
- He provided a summary of the impact of Wirral's intensive family intervention programme, the main focus of which was to improve school attendance, reduce youth crime and anti-social behaviour and increase the number of parents in employment. He referred to a recent visit by Louise Casey, national lead for the Troubled Families programme who had recognised that progress was good, with a large number of families achieving positive outcomes.

Resolved – That the report of Councillor Tony Smith be noted.

Councillor Hackett then presented his Economy portfolio report and his responses to questions from Councillors Elderton, Gregson, Watt, Doughty and Blakeley included the following comments –

- An increase in parking charges had been as a result of government cuts to local authority funding. However, the impact of parking charges upon the viability of town centre businesses was part of scrutiny work being undertaken and he noted that there had been no involvement in the scrutiny work by Conservative Group members.
- Approval for the continued delivery of the Apprenticeship Programme was given in August and he was pleased to report that 55 placements in Wirral businesses had been secured for young people not currently in education, employment or training.
- In the light of reports that the provision of superfast broadband in Wirral was put back to 2014/2015, he reported that a contract had been signed with BT to deliver the Broadband UK project across Merseyside. The detailed implementation was now being finalised and the project would focus on those areas where superfast broadband was not provided by the private sector.

Resolved – That the report of Councillor Pat Hackett be noted.

Questions were then invited for Councillor Brian Kenny on his Environment and Sustainability portfolio report. His responses to questions from Councillors Rennie, Doughty, Gilchrist, Williamson and Norbury included the following comments –

- Tackling dog fouling, smoking related litter and litter arising from fast food outlets would be a key focus of the Litter Reduction Strategy. However, cuts forced upon the Council by the government had impacted upon the number of dog wardens and upon the number of prosecutions. Nevertheless, each of the new Constituency Committees would be allocated £10k to tackle litter reduction in their areas as they considered appropriate.
- Some 35000 households had signed up to the garden waste scheme, which had been praised by other local authorities for its operation and cost effectiveness. He commented that considerable work had been undertaken to encourage home composting and he advised that tenders would soon be sought for the removal of unwanted brown bins. He proposed to provide a written response (to Councillor Gilchrist) in relation to the brown bin collection contract as it progressed.
- The long term planning for the defence of the coastal environment and associated infrastructure was an important part of the Council's responsibilities as a maritime authority. The Council could not afford not to implement the Coastal Strategy and the Strategic Director: Regeneration and Environment had been requested to explore funding opportunities to maximise government grants and other income to undertake the important works.
- He was pleased to report that following a public meeting in the Reeds Lane area of Leasowe, which had been subject to flooding during severe weather, United Utilities had allocated £5m to address the problem.

Resolved – That the report of Councillor Brian Kenny be noted.

Questions were then invited for Councillor Ann McLachlan on her Governance and Improvement portfolio report and her responses to questions from Councillors Rennie, Blakeley, W Davies, Stapleton and Lewis included the following comments –

- It was anticipated that the increased openness and transparency across the Council would result in a reduced number of Freedom of Information requests. For the months of July and August, the targets set by the Information Commissioner had been met and a review was underway to ensure that necessary resources were made available to ensure that the Council continued to build on the improvements made in addressing the significant number of FoI requests it received.
- The Improvement Board was undertaking a review to consider the progress that the Council had made against the original priorities for the Board and how best to support continued improvement against strategic outcomes. She was pleased to report that the Board had recognised that considerable improvement had been made in Wirral and a report on the outcome of the review would be made publicly available following its consideration by the Improvement Board.
- The recently established officer led Information Governance Board would review the Council's information governance arrangements and would provide advice and guidance to all staff and elected Members to ensure they had a clear understanding of their obligations so as to help ensure that information held by the Council was managed, secured, and used properly.

In response to a question in relation to a failure by officers to provide information requested by a Member, which then resulted in a FoI request, Councillor McLachlan proposed to investigate the matter and to provide a written response (Councillor Blakeley).

In response to a further question regarding the appointment of Assistant Cabinet Members, Councillor McLachlan agreed to provide a written response with those details (Councillor Lewis).

Resolved – That the report of Councillor Ann McLachlan be noted.

Questions were then invited for Councillor Chris Meaden on her Health and Wellbeing portfolio report and her responses to questions from Councillors Elderton, Povall and Cox included the following comments –

- The issue of charging for car parking in Wirral's Country Parks would be addressed in the ongoing 'What Really Matters?' consultation and would be considered in due course when the priorities identified at the conclusion of the consultation were known.
- Libraries in Wirral were a key part of local communities and there was no proposal at the present time for any to be closed.

In response to a question concerning an open letter to Wirral Council by Diane Asher of Wirral Autistic Society, in respect of Wirral's progress in the implementation of the Autism Act 2010, Councillor Meaden proposed to

provide a written response (Councillor Povall), as the question related to a matter not included within her report.

Resolved – That the report of Councillor Chris Meaden be noted.

Questions were then invited for Councillor Harry Smith on his Highways and Transportation portfolio report. His responses to questions from Councillors Sullivan, Rennie and Green included the following comments –

- He was pleased to advise that the Dock Bridges Scheme, for the full replacement of two bridges on the Dock Road ('A' and 'C' bridges) were in the top 12 projects approved, as part of the Local Transport Body Major Schemes prioritisation exercise, to go forward to full major scheme business case development. He outlined the serious concerns regarding the continual deteriorating condition of the bridges, which formed part of a key route to the M53 and Mersey Tunnels.
- That any reduction in relation to winter maintenance arrangements would be in direct response to government budget cuts. However, operational arrangements, including winter gritting were expected to be handed over to the new contractor with a smooth transition from April 2014.

In response to a comment made at the recent Annual Council Conference in relation to Highways Maintenance Funding and the role of Constituency Committees, Councillor Smith indicated that a report had not yet been prepared and he would provide a written response in due course (Councillor Green).

Resolved – That the report of Councillor Smith be noted.

Questions were then invited for Councillor George Davies on his Neighbourhoods, Housing and Engagement portfolio report. His responses to questions from Councillors Kelly, Lewis, Glasman and Blakeley included the following comments –

- He provided an update on the Private Sector Stock Condition Survey and outlined the reasons for the delay in the production of a final report detailing the findings of fieldwork and analysis. However, progress was being made and an update report would be presented to the Cabinet in due course.
- He confirmed that he would be pleased to attend a meeting with residents and Ward Councillors in Leasowe and Moreton East to discuss energy efficiency activity and to provide details in relation to slippage in the window replacement scheme.
- He referred to the Alcohol Strategy, which aimed to tackle problems associated with the misuse of alcohol, particularly amongst young people, and commented upon a proposal by Merseyside Police to designate parts of Birkenhead as alcohol-free, in relation to street drinking. He supported the proposal and hoped to secure Home Office funding to help address alcohol misuse and underage drinking.
- Revised Neighbourhood Plans were being worked on to support the process of commissioning activity for the £50,000 that had been

allocated to each of the Constituency Committees. He indicated that the funding would be increased with contributions from the Police, Fire and Health and he anticipated that funding would be increased in future years, so as to allow the Constituency Committees to operate similarly to the local Committees in Sunderland.

Resolved – That the report of Councillor George Davies be noted.

The Mayor referred to the Policy and Performance Committees that had met since the last meeting and indicated that reports of the Committee Chairs were set out in a covering report of the Head of Policy and Performance/Director of Public Health.

Questions were invited for Councillor Stuart Whittingham, Chair of the Coordinating Committee. No questions were posed and it was then –

Resolved – That the report of Councillor Whittingham be noted.

Questions were then invited for Councillor Wendy Clements, Chair of the Families and Wellbeing Policy and Performance Committee. Her response to questions from Councillors Green and Niblock included the following comments –

- Given the scope and remit of the Committee and it only having six meetings during the year, including two budget meetings, the Chair was concerned at the ability of the Committee to be able to effectively scrutinise decisions and hold the Cabinet to account in relation to Adult Social Services, Children and Young People and Sport and Recreation.
- Discussions had been held with colleagues from Health in relation to risks associated with electronic cigarettes. Although there was limited evidence at present, the matter would be kept under review.

Resolved – That the report of Councillor Clements be noted.

Questions were invited for Councillor Alan Brighouse, Chair of the Regeneration and Environment Policy and Performance Committee. No questions were posed and it was then –

Resolved – That the report of Councillor Brighouse be noted.

Questions were then invited for Councillor Stuart Whittingham, Chair of the Transformation and Resources Policy and Performance Committee. In response to a question from Councillor Blakeley he included the following comment –

- That, in the light of recent problems with the Council's IT system, and in particular with Members' email, he agreed to bring forward a report on the impact of IT failure and upon measures to prevent recurrence.

Resolved – That the report of Councillor Whittingham be noted.

34 MATTERS FOR NOTING

On a motion by Councillor Phil Davies, seconded by Councillor McLachlan, it was –

Resolved – That minute 49 (Cabinet – 19 September 2013) – Financial Monitoring 2013/2014, be noted.

35 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

In accordance with Standing Order 10 (2)(b), notice had been given of a question from Councillor Phil Gilchrist to the Leader of the Council in respect of the 'What Really Matters?' consultation.

Councillor Phil Davies responded accordingly.

36 MATTERS REFERRED FROM POLICY AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEES

A referral was made from the former Council Excellence Overview and Scrutiny Committee (minute 76 – Elected Member Development (26 March 2013) refers), which requested the Council to reaffirm its commitment to the training and support of elected Members. It was then –

Resolved – That the recommendation of the former Council Excellence Overview and Scrutiny Committee be endorsed and the Council's commitment to the training and support of elected Members be reaffirmed.

37 NOTICES OF MOTION

Notices of Motion submitted in accordance with Standing Order 7(1) were reported to the Council. The Mayor, having considered each Motion, in accordance with Standing Order 7(4) had decided that the Motions would be dealt with as follows –

- (i) Tackling Financial Exclusion – to be debated
- (ii) Bedroom Tax – to be debated
- (iii) Improving Wirral's Sites for Jobs – referred to the Regeneration and Environment Policy and Performance Committee

Resolved – That the Notice of Motion 'Improving Wirral's Sites for Jobs' be referred to the Regeneration and Environment Policy and Performance Committee.

38 MOTION - TACKLING FINANCIAL EXCLUSION

Proposed by Councillor Stuart Kelly
Seconded by Councillor Alan Brighouse

Council notes that many Wirral people, particularly those on low incomes, cannot easily access mainstream financial services such as bank accounts, low cost loans and cash withdrawal facilities.

This lack of access results in financial exclusion for people and can mean that the cost of many of their financial transactions are higher, resulting in stress, poor health and increased risk of debt and poverty and the need to access short-term credit by sub-prime or payday lenders.

Council, therefore, calls on Cabinet and the Chief Executive to put in place a strategy to promote financial inclusion, such a strategy to include measures to:

1. Highlight the issue of access to automatic cash machines (ATMs) to enable people to withdraw money without being charged a fee (ranging from £1.50 to £2.00 per withdrawal), effectively a tax on withdrawing money, by working in partnership with other organisations, including those representing retailers, to promote ways of expanding the network of free ATMs and to examine the possibility of providing free ATMs in Council offices (One Stop Shops/Libraries) in areas of high deprivation.
2. Raise awareness and promote the use of Credit Unions as a means of building savings and accessing low cost credit, including:
 - an evaluation of a scheme being introduced by Glasgow City Council which aims to support financial education by depositing £10 in a community Credit Union account for every new secondary school student each year.¹
 - consideration of how Wirral MBC can contribute to the Archbishop of Canterbury's initiative to build up Credit Unions to help people with financial problems keep away from usurious payday money lenders.²
3. Work with the new 'Move Your Money' organisation to encourage residents and businesses to move their bank accounts to get better terms.³

Council further welcomes changes made by the Government to make it easier to create new banks and notes the possibility of the creation of a 'Bank of Liverpool' by Liverpool CC with a long-term aim to expand to become a retail bank in which local residents and businesses from the City Region can invest and use the services of and asks Wirral officers to ensure Wirral is able to contribute and benefit from such a development.⁴

Links

¹ Link to Glasgow City Council scheme –

<http://www.glasgow.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=10084>

² Link to Arch Bishop of Canterbury initiative –

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-23433955>

³ Link to Move your Money UK Organisation –

<http://www.moveyourmoney.org.uk/>

⁴ Link to Liverpool City Council minutes –

<http://councillors.liverpool.gov.uk/mgAi.aspx?ID=93553>

An amendment was then submitted in accordance with Standing Order 12(1) and (9), which had been circulated around the Chamber.

Proposed by Councillor Phil Davies
Seconded by Councillor Ann McLachlan

Add the following after final paragraph:

"Whilst supporting the measures listed above, Council believes that the Liberal Democrats should accept responsibility for a number of the measures implemented by the coalition government, of which they are part, which have directly contributed to financial exclusion and poverty that they now seek to mitigate. These include the following –

- trebling of tuition fees for higher education
- abolition of Education Maintenance Allowance
- reorganising the NHS which puts profits before patients
- introduction of the Bedroom Tax and other benefit cuts
- unprecedented cuts to local government funding
- introducing a tax cut for millionaires

Council calls on local Liberal Democrats to lobby their national leaders to do more to stand up to the increasingly extremist agenda being proposed by the Tory-led government."

To enable consideration of the amendment by the political groups; and to also enable consideration of an amendment circulated in relation to the Bedroom Tax Motion (minute 39 post) –

The Mayor adjourned the meeting at 8.35pm for 10 minutes

The meeting resumed at 8:50pm

The Mayor requested the movers of the motion and amendments to speak to their proposals followed by seconders. Following a debate and Councillor Kelly having replied, the amendment proposed by Councillor Phil Davies was put and carried (36:25) (One abstention).

There being no further amendments, the substantive motion was put and carried (61:0) (One abstention)

Resolved (61:0) (One abstention) –

Council notes that many Wirral people, particularly those on low incomes, cannot easily access mainstream financial services such as bank accounts, low cost loans and cash withdrawal facilities.

This lack of access results in financial exclusion for people and can mean that the cost of many of their financial transactions are higher, resulting in stress, poor health and increased risk of debt and poverty and the need to access short-term credit by sub-prime or payday lenders.

Council, therefore, calls on Cabinet and the Chief Executive to put in place a strategy to promote financial inclusion, such a strategy to include measures to:

1. Highlight the issue of access to automatic cash machines (ATMs) to enable people to withdraw money without being charged a fee (ranging from £1.50 to £2.00 per withdrawal), effectively a tax on withdrawing money, by working in partnership with other organisations, including those representing retailers, to promote ways of expanding the network of free ATMs and to examine the possibility of providing free ATMs in Council offices (One Stop Shops/Libraries) in areas of high deprivation.
2. Raise awareness and promote the use of Credit Unions as a means of building savings and accessing low cost credit, including:
 - an evaluation of a scheme being introduced by Glasgow City Council which aims to support financial education by depositing £10 in a community Credit Union account for every new secondary school student each year.¹
 - consideration of how Wirral MBC can contribute to the Archbishop of Canterbury's initiative to build up Credit Unions to help people with financial problems keep away from usurious payday money lenders.²
3. Work with the new 'Move Your Money' organisation to encourage residents and businesses to move their bank accounts to get better terms.³

Council further welcomes changes made by the Government to make it easier to create new banks and notes the possibility of the creation of a 'Bank of Liverpool' by Liverpool CC with a long-term aim to expand to become a retail bank in which local residents and businesses from the City Region can invest and use the services of and asks Wirral officers to ensure Wirral is able to contribute and benefit from such a development.⁴

Links

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⁴ Link to Liverpool City Council minutes –

<http://councillors.liverpool.gov.uk/mgAi.aspx?ID=93553>

Whilst supporting the measures listed above, Council believes that the Liberal Democrats should accept responsibility for a number of the measures implemented by the coalition government, of which they are part, which have directly contributed to financial exclusion and poverty that they now seek to mitigate. These include the following –

- **trebling of tuition fees for higher education**
- **abolition of Education Maintenance Allowance**
- **reorganising the NHS which puts profits before patients**
- **introduction of the Bedroom Tax and other benefit cuts**
- **unprecedented cuts to local government funding**
- **introducing a tax cut for millionaires**

Council calls on local Liberal Democrats to lobby their national leaders to do more to stand up to the increasingly extremist agenda being proposed by the Tory-led government.

39 **MOTION - BEDROOM TAX**

Proposed by Councillor Phil Davies
Seconded by Councillor George Davies

This Council believes that the Bedroom Tax introduced by the Tory/LibDem coalition government is morally wrong as well as being financially inefficient.

Council therefore welcomes the recent announcement by Ed Miliband that one of the first acts of the next Labour Government will be to repeal the Bedroom Tax. This will be paid for by reversing George Osborne's recent tax cut for hedge funds announced in Budget 2013; reversing George Osborne's shares for rights scheme which has been rejected by business, has opened up a tax loophole and will lead to £1bn being lost to the Exchequer according to the Office for Budget Responsibility; and tackling disguised employment in the construction industry.

In Wirral 3,800 Registered Provider tenants are affected by the Bedroom Tax.

Council is concerned that the Government has never carried out a proper financial analysis of the hidden costs of the Bedroom Tax. Forcing people to move from a socially owned property to a privately owned property costs more in housing benefit. Chasing people for small debts can cost a lot more than it brings in. Evicting people for not paying rent and re-housing them is extremely expensive. Some Councils and housing associations are no longer able to let out three bedroom properties and this is reducing rental income and our ability to finance more property building.

Council notes that the Bedroom Tax is disproportionately hitting disabled people, 420,000 people who need space for carers, washing space and equipment are being affected by it. People are getting into arrears which is causing them anguish. They are forced to move out of their neighbourhoods and away from their support base because there is a shortage of one-bedroom properties – a situation that has built up because Councils listened to governments of all parties and built properties big enough for families.

The Government gave local authorities discretionary housing payments but that money only covers £1 in every £5 cut from the benefit changes and in many Councils it has already run out.

The Bedroom Tax is forcing people who cannot work and those on low incomes out of their homes and into debt. It is hitting the most vulnerable in society the hardest and is forcing people to loan sharks and food banks. At the same time, the Tory/Lib Dem Government is giving a tax cut to millionaires.

Council calls for urgent action in Wirral to deal with the growing demand on advice services and one stop shops by residents affected by the Bedroom Tax which is approaching crisis point and agrees to allocate an additional £25,000 to Wirral advice agencies to be paid for by the under-spend identified in the month 3 monitoring report.

Council also calls on all parties to write to the relevant minister to request an immediate suspension of the Bedroom Tax to allow for independent research to be undertaken to assess its impact on the most deprived parts of the country.

An amendment, which had been circulated in advance of the meeting, was submitted in accordance with Standing Order 12(1) and (9), as follows –

Proposed by Councillor Phil Gilchrist
Seconded by Councillor Stuart Kelly

“Delete paragraphs 1 and 2

In (new) paragraph 5, delete final sentence (“At the same time, the Tory/Lib Dem Government...”) and delete (new) paragraphs 6 and 7

After (new) paragraph 5 (ends “.....and food banks.”), add the following new paragraphs:

Council recognises that the steps taken to reduce under occupancy in recent years, affecting tenants in both the private and social sector, when combined with changes to benefit levels, are affecting the most vulnerable in society. Changes for help with housing costs in the private sector, equivalent to a bedroom tax, were introduced when Labour was last in Government.

Council notes that:

- (a) delegates at the recent Liberal Democrat Conference called for an immediate evaluation of the impact of the policy and
- (b) the Leader of the Labour Party has announced that, in the event of a Labour Government being elected, the policy would be repealed
- (c) the savings envisaged with the introduction of the bedroom tax are not likely to be achieved.

Council is aware of evidence that the reduction of help with housing costs, based on under occupancy, is leading a high proportion of tenants of social housing into debt.

In addition to this Council, recognises that:

- (i) the range of local housing stock that would allow people to move to smaller properties does not exist and
- (ii) the increase in the funds for Discretionary Housing Payments from £60m in 2012/13 and £155m in 2013/14 may assist tenants, but the additional funding at a local level is unlikely to meet local need.

Accordingly, Council believes that the case for changing a policy that is damaging and not achieving its objectives must now be developed.

Council believes that Wirral's political parties have a responsibility to make the relevant Government Ministers aware of the local impact with as accurate information as can be put together.

Council, therefore, considers that the work of the Liverpool City Region Strategic Housing and Planning Board and any successor body should be informed by an immediate impact assessment on how the bedroom tax affects vulnerable tenants in both social and private rented housing and the extent to which smaller properties are available, this assessment to be drawn up in consultation with those representing vulnerable groups such as the poor, the disabled, the elderly and children. This would enable the region to respond to the failure of successive governments to meet the demand for housing and bid for future funding.

In the meantime, Council agrees

1. to allocate an additional £25,000 to Wirral advice agencies to ensure that affected tenants are able to access advice, to be paid for out of the projected under-spend of £320,000 reported in the Month 5 revenue monitoring report.
2. to immediately lobby Government ministers to ensure that any household where someone lives with a severe disability is exempted from the bedroom tax".

A further amendment was then submitted in accordance with Standing Order 12(1) and (9), which had been circulated around the Chamber

Proposed by Councillor Jeff Green
Seconded by Councillor Lesley Rennie

"Delete paragraphs 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 9

Replace 'Bedroom Tax' with 'Spare Room Subsidy'

Keep (new) paragraph 1 'In Wirral 3,800 Registered.....etc

Insert (new) paragraph 2: 'There are around a quarter of a million over crowded households in England and 1.8 million households * on the social housing waiting list. Council believes that this is not acceptable while there are approaching a million extra bedrooms being paid for by working age Housing Benefit in the social sector alone. Lack of alternative accommodation is part of this problem and Council welcomes Government action to redress

this balance by encouraging better use of social housing stock and the building of appropriately sized housing.'

Keep (new) paragraph 3: 'Council calls for urgent action.....etc'

Insert (new) paragraph 4: 'Council notes that prior to the removal of the Spare Room Subsidy it was subject to full Impact and Equality Impact Assessments'.

* figure from DWP"

The Mayor advised that, in accordance with the Council's Constitution, each amendment would be dealt with in turn. He requested the mover of the Motion (Councillor Phil Davies) and the mover of the first amendment (Councillor Phil Gilchrist) to speak to their proposals, followed by seconders.

Following a debate and Councillor Davies having replied, the amendment proposed by Councillor Phil Gilchrist was put and lost (4:56) (Two abstentions).

The Mayor then requested the mover of the second amendment (Councillor Jeff Green) to speak to his proposal followed by his seconder.

Following a further debate and Councillor Davies having replied, he, along with four other Members asked that a 'card vote' be recorded in respect of the amendment moved by Councillor Green. The Council then divided as follows

—

For the amendment (19) Councillors C Blakeley, E Boult, W Clements, T Cox, D Elderton, G Ellis, J Green, P Hayes, A Hodson, K Hodson, M Hornby, P Kearney, S Mountney, C Povall, L Rennie, SL Rowlands, A Sykes, G Watt and S Williams

Against the amendment (42) Councillors R Abbey, A Brighouse, P Brightmore, J Crabtree, G Davies, P Davies, W Davies, D Dodd, P Doughty, S Foulkes, P Gilchrist, P Glasman, R Gregson, P Hackett, T Harney, M Johnston, A Jones, C Jones, S Kelly, B Kenny, A Leech, I Lewis, A McLachlan, M McLaughlin, C Meaden, B Mooney, C Muspratt, S Niblock, T Norbury, D Realey, D Roberts, J Salter, H Smith, PA Smith, W Smith, J Stapleton, M Sullivan, J Walsh, S Whittingham, I Williams, KJ Williams and J Williamson

One abstention – Councillor D Mitchell

The amendment was therefore lost (19:42) (One abstention)

In respect of the substantive motion, Councillor Phil Davies along with four other Members asked that a 'card vote' be also recorded. The Council then divided as follows –

For the motion (38) Councillors R Abbey, P Brightmore, J Crabtree, G Davies, P Davies, W Davies, D Dodd, P Doughty, S Foulkes, P Glasman, R Gregson, P Hackett, M Johnston, A Jones, C Jones, B Kenny, A Leech, I Lewis, A McLachlan, M McLaughlin, C Meaden, B Mooney, C Muspratt, S Niblock, T

Norbury, D Realey, D Roberts, J Salter, H Smith, PA Smith, W Smith, J Stapleton, M Sullivan, J Walsh, S Whittingham, I Williams, KJ Williams and J Williamson

Against the motion (23) Councillors C Blakeley, E Boult, A Brighouse, W Clements, T Cox, D Elderton, G Ellis, P Gilchrist, J Green, T Harney, P Hayes, A Hodson, K Hodson, M Hornby, P Kearney, S Kelly, S Mountney, C Povall, L Rennie, SL Rowlands, A Sykes, G Watt and S Williams

One abstention – Councillor D Mitchell

The motion was therefore carried (38:23) (One abstention)

Resolved ((38:23) (One abstention) –

This Council believes that the Bedroom Tax introduced by the Tory/LibDem coalition government is morally wrong as well as being financially inefficient.

Council therefore welcomes the recent announcement by Ed Miliband that one of the first acts of the next Labour Government will be to repeal the Bedroom Tax. This will be paid for by reversing George Osborne's recent tax cut for hedge funds announced in Budget 2013; reversing George Osborne's shares for rights scheme which has been rejected by business, has opened up a tax loophole and will lead to £1bn being lost to the Exchequer according to the Office for Budget Responsibility; and tackling disguised employment in the construction industry.

In Wirral 3,800 Registered Provider tenants are affected by the Bedroom Tax.

Council is concerned that the Government has never carried out a proper financial analysis of the hidden costs of the Bedroom Tax. Forcing people to move from a socially owned property to a privately owned property costs more in housing benefit. Chasing people for small debts can cost a lot more than it brings in. Evicting people for not paying rent and re-housing them is extremely expensive. Some Councils and housing associations are no longer able to let out three bedroom properties and this is reducing rental income and our ability to finance more property building.

Council notes that the Bedroom Tax is disproportionately hitting disabled people, 420,000 people who need space for carers, washing space and equipment are being affected by it. People are getting into arrears which is causing them anguish. They are forced to move out of their neighbourhoods and away from their support base because there is a shortage of one-bedroom properties – a situation that has built up because Councils listened to governments of all parties and built properties big enough for families.

The Government gave local authorities discretionary housing payments but that money only covers £1 in every £5 cut from the benefit changes and in many Councils it has already run out.

The Bedroom Tax is forcing people who cannot work and those on low incomes out of their homes and into debt. It is hitting the most vulnerable in society the hardest and is forcing people to loan sharks and food banks. At the same time, the Tory/Lib Dem Government is giving a tax cut to millionaires.

Council calls for urgent action in Wirral to deal with the growing demand on advice services and one stop shops by residents affected by the Bedroom Tax which is approaching crisis point and agrees to allocate an additional £25,000 to Wirral advice agencies to be paid for by the under-spend identified in the month 3 monitoring report.

Council also calls on all parties to write to the relevant minister to request an immediate suspension of the Bedroom Tax to allow for independent research to be undertaken to assess its impact on the most deprived parts of the country.

40 RECOMMENDATION FROM THE REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT POLICY AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE

At its meeting held on 15 July 2013 (minute 21 refers), the Mayor had referred a Notice of Motion 'Cuts to Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service' to the Regeneration and Environment Policy and Performance Committee. The motion was duly considered at the meeting of the Committee held on 17 September 2013 (Regeneration and Environment – minute 15 refers).

In accordance with Standing Order 7(5), the Council was invited to consider the recommendation of the Regeneration and Environment Policy and Performance Committee, which advised that it fully supported the Notice of Motion and had invited the Chief Fire Officer to attend the Committee to highlight the potential impact of Government proposals on residents of Wirral.

The Mayor indicated that any debate should take place on the recommendation of the Committee and there should be no separate debate on the motion itself.

With regard to a further motion 'Local Investment in Rail – High Speed2 and Borderlands Railway', that had been referred by the Mayor to the Leader of the Council, the Leader advised that he would present a report to the next meeting of the Council.

Resolved – That, in the light of the views of the Regeneration and Environment Policy and Performance Committee, the motion in relation to 'Cuts to Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service' be supported in the following terms –

- (1) Wirral Council recognises the excellent work undertaken by Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service and applauds the commitment of its frontline and support staff. This Council also notes that those individuals' ability to protect the people of Wirral is being jeopardised by the Government cuts to funding as well as undermining staff morale.**

- (2) This Council is deeply concerned by the findings of the Ken Knight review of fire and rescue services which makes the case for further huge cuts, mergers with other Authorities or Police Crime Commissioners and most worryingly privatisation. The Ken Knight review gives very little recognition of the very difficult decisions taken by Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority to date in managing the deepest cuts inflicted on any Authority in the Country and instead advocates its replacement by a PCC without any evidence whatsoever to prove that this would improve the service delivered to the residents of this city region.
- (3) This Council notes with serious concern the Government's alarming proposals to privatise part if not all functions of the fire and rescue service, along with yet further cuts to their grant funding which will impact on their ability in protecting residents from fire, road traffic collisions and other emergencies within the Borough of Wirral.
- (4) This Council is deeply worried that the Government has lost sight of the fire service's main purpose, to protect residents from fire, road traffic collisions and other emergencies and their devastating impact on our communities and that it threatens to put private profit ahead of the need to save lives and help people feel safe in their homes and community.
- (5) This Council further notes that the Government's proposals are in the context of a programme of ill-conceived efficiencies to fire and rescue services. The impact this will have on the communities of Merseyside is extremely worrying and places vulnerable residents in danger.
- (6) This Council also notes due to Government cuts which has seen Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service suffer cuts totalling £19.2m over the 4 year spending review with 180 fire-fighters posts deleted and a reduction in Fire engines from 42 to 28 by 2015.
- (7) The Government's proposal for further huge cuts in 2015 will have devastating effects on operational response and the community safety and prevention work delivered by the Authority to such an excellent standard.
- (8) This Council therefore calls on the Government, in particular the Secretary of State for Local Government and the Chancellor's department to cease their ill conceived and irresponsible cuts to our fire and rescue services and pledge instead to protect the public from further risk of fire by protecting this front line emergency service from further cuts and threats of privatisation.

41 VACANCIES

The Council was requested to deal with the following matters in respect of appointments to Committees and outside organisations.

COMMITTEES

(i) Pensions Committee

Councillor Paul Doughty to replace former Councillor Sylvia Hodrien

(ii) Transformation and Resources Policy and Performance Committee

Vacancy to replace former Councillor Sylvia Hodrien

(iii) Licensing, Health and Safety and General Purposes Committee

Councillor Phill Brightmore to replace former Councillor Sylvia Hodrien as deputy

(iv) Families and Wellbeing Policy and Performance Committee

Councillor Anita Leech to replace former Councillor Sylvia Hodrien as deputy

(v) Birkenhead Constituency Committee (18 Councillors)

Bidston and St James Ward Councillors –

Jim Crabtree, Ann McLachlan, Harry Smith

Birkenhead and Tranmere Ward Councillors –

Phil Davies, Brian Kenny, Jean Stapleton

Claughton Ward Councillors –

George Davies, Steve Foulkes, Denise Roberts

Oxton Ward Councillors –

Alan Brighouse, Stuart Kelly, Pat Williams

Prenton Ward Councillors –

Paul Doughty, Tony Norbury, Denise Realey

Rock Ferry Ward Councillors –

Bill Davies, Chris Meaden, Moira McLaughlin

(vi) Wallasey Constituency Committee (18 Councillors)

Leasowe and Moreton East Ward Councillors –

Ron Abbey, Anita Leech, Ian Lewis

Liscard Ward Councillors –

Darren Dodd, Bernie Mooney, Janette Williamson

Moreton West and Saughall Massie Ward Councillors –

Chris Blakeley, Simon Mountney, Steve Williams

New Brighton Ward Councillors –

Patricia Glasman, Rob Gregson, Pat Hackett

Seacombe Ward Councillors –

Adrian Jones, Chris Jones, John Salter

Wallasey Ward Councillors –

Leah Fraser, Paul Hayes, Lesley Rennie

(vii) Wirral South Constituency Committee (15 Councillors)

Bebington Ward Councillors –

Christina Muspratt, Walter Smith, Jerry Williams

Bromborough Ward Councillors –

Steve Niblock, Joe Walsh, Irene Williams

Clatterbridge Ward Councillors –
Peter Kearney, Cherry Povall, Adam Sykes
Eastham Ward Councillors –
Phil Gilchrist, Tom Harney, Dave Mitchell
Heswall Ward Councillors –
Andrew Hodson, Kathryn Hodson, Les Rowlands

(viii) Wirral West Constituency Committee (15 Councillors)

Greasby, Frankby and Irby Ward Councillors –
Wendy Clements, Tony Cox, Mike Hornby
Hoylake and Meols Ward Councillors –
Eddie Boult, Gerry Ellis, John Hale
Pensby and Thingwall Ward Councillors –
Phillip Brightmore, Mark Johnston, Michael Sullivan
Upton Ward Councillors –
Tony Smith, Stuart Whittingham and Vacancy
West Kirby and Thurstaston Ward Councillors –
David Elderton, Jeff Green, Geoffrey Watt

In respect of the above Constituency Committees, the Council was requested to approve that a maximum of up to six community representatives may be appointed on a co-opted basis.

OUTSIDE BODIES

(i) ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY

Liverpool Airport Consultative Committee

Councillor Steve Niblock to replace Councillor Rob Gregson

(ii) HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Tam O'Shanter Cottage Trust

Councillor Chris Meaden to replace Councillor Jim Crabtree

Resolved –

- (1) That the appointments and amendments to the membership of the Committees and outside bodies, listed above, be approved.**
- (2) That each of the Constituency Committees be authorised to appoint up to a maximum of six community representatives on a co-opted basis.**