

AMENDMENT IN RESPECT OF ITEM 6 – MATTERS REQUIRING APPROVAL BY THE COUNCIL

6a. Cabinet minute 106 (9/12/14) – Council Budget Consultation Findings

AMENDMENT

Proposed by Councillor Phil Gilchrist

Seconded by Councillor Alan Brighthouse

Council notes the lengthy resolution presented by the Cabinet and recognises that it was overtaken, within twenty four hours, by warnings from Ed Balls, as Labour's Shadow Chancellor, that there would be cuts in spending.

The resolution has to be considered in the context of the need for a frank and genuine debate about the scale and pace of deficit reduction, set out by all parties, with a belated recognition by Ed Miliband of the need to tackle the deficit.

It should be pointed out, however, that the Local Government Association has been successful in making the case for local services.

The Cabinet's claims and assertions about the Government also need to be placed in context. The last Labour manifesto repeatedly referred to the tough choices that would have been made.

Nevertheless, the following constructive comments are offered on the Cabinet resolution in the run up to the budget making period:

1. The savings removed from the Chief Executive's proposals, recognising public disquiet, should be welcomed.
2. Despite the fact that, during two consultation processes, our citizens have expressed clear views about certain services, proposals continue to be included in successive years (e.g. school crossing patrols, grit bins and parking charges for Country Parks). This needs to be resolved and the Cabinet should ensure these do not appear in future consultations.
3. The proposed reduction in the hours available at community libraries, down to 18, is so great that it should be rejected. There has been no public consultation in the communities being affected by the proposal. It is substantially less than the hours given detailed consideration at the Transformation and Resources P & P Committee.
4. The proposals to close satellite youth centres have been dropped, along with the reduction of a further night at the hubs. However, doubts were expressed about the impact of the proposed Youth Zone on the financing of the youth service. Concerns have also been raised about the impact of the Zone on youth services in the area. The project should be re-evaluated in the light of these issues.

The Council has, at last, secured the return of £6.7 million of Wirral taxpayers' money from the Merseyside Waste and Recycling Authority. This money has been returned with too many strings attached. To overcome this, officers are requested to work with all Merseyside Authorities and the Waste Authority to enable this funding to be successfully utilised.

The Council further notes the potential for substantial receipts from the sale of land and assets in the next twelve months and the coming years. The projected capital receipts position for 2015/16 is £15,500,000. Council notes the proposed reduction in preventative maintenance of £370,000.

Council believes that the infrastructure of parks and highways requires further investment and a further £2 million should be included in the capital programme to deliver these improvements. Officers are requested to draw up proposals so that investment in the parks takes around 25% of the funding and the remainder is directed to the highways infrastructure. This would augment the Integrated Transport Budget funding received from the Government.

Wirral needs to make more progress with the introduction of 20mph zones and other schemes to improve the health of local people by increasing walking and cycling.

Building on the integration of the Council and Public Health services, the opportunity should be taken to improve the health and wellbeing of residents through the use of Public Health funding to support walking and cycling projects.

As the cost of larger highway safety schemes is beyond the funding presently allocated to Constituency Committees, these Committees should have more resources, responsibilities and the freedom to develop local decision-making and priorities.

To secure additional and continuing resources for the future, the Council has to give a greater priority to the generation of additional and sustainable income. This includes development opportunities that should bring in additional business rates and new house-building that will increase Council Tax receipts.

As Wirral is now, at last, making progress on office accommodation, agile working and securing the efficiencies from re-organisations, the Council is better placed to respond to, and make representations to, the Government on the resources required for local services. Arrangements should, therefore, be made for the Council to respond to the impending Local Government Finance Settlement and any future consultations.

The Cabinet, therefore, is requested to revisit its spending proposals in the light of these considerations prior to finalising the Budget in February.