

COUNCIL

Monday, 26 February 2024

Present: The Civic Mayor (Councillor Jerry Williams) in the
Chair
Deputy Civic Mayor (Councillor Cherry Povall, JP)

Councillors	A Ainsworth	JE Green	J McManus
	C Baldwin	EA Grey	R Molyneux
	P Basnett	J Grier	S Mountney
	G Bennett	B Hall	K Murphy
	S Bennett	A Hodson	T Murphy
	J Bird	K Hodson	A Onwuemene
	M Booth	P Jobson	R Pitt
	A Brame	G Jenkinson	S Powell-Wilde
	H Cameron	J Johnson	H Raymond
	C Carubia	T Jones	L Rennie
	P Cleary	M Jordan	M Redfern
	C Cooke	S Kelly	J Robinson
	T Cox	B Kenny	M Skillicorn
	A Davies	J Stewart Laing	K Stuart
	GJ Davies	T Laing	P Stuart
	G Davies	E Lamb	M Sullivan
	S Foulkes	I Lewis	E Tomeny
	A Gardner	L Luxon-Kewley	J Walsh
	P Gilchrist	P Martin	J Williamson
	H Gorman	C McDonald	V Wilson
	N Graham	G McManus	G Wood

Apologies Councillors D Kenny

76 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Civic Mayor welcomed everyone to the meeting and advised that he had been informed in advance of a number of Members who had a personal interest in agenda item 4b 2024/25 Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy, related to the schools budget element by virtue of holding positions as school governors: Councillors Brame, Carubia, Cleary, Cooke, Angie Davies, George Davies, Foulkes, Gilchrist, Grey, Jobson, Julie McManus, Raymond, Robinson, Sullivan, Wilson and Wood.

The Civic Mayor also reported following personal interests insofar as they related to the school's budget element, by virtue of those Members either themselves or having close family members working in either Schools or the

Council's Children, Families and Education Directorate: Councillors George Davies, Julie McManus, Graham McManus and Povall.

The Civic Mayor then asked for further declarations of interest. Councillor Mountney declared an interest relating to the school's budget. Councillor Naomi Graham declared a non-pecuniary interest by virtue of her husband's employment.

77 **CIVIC MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Civic Mayor then asked for any apologies, and this was given for Councillor Daisy Kenny.

The Civic Mayor welcomed Cllr Gill Wood to the Council Meeting, after a prolonged absence.

Since the last Council meeting, the Civic Mayor announced he had attended 15 events over the Christmas period. He had also attended events at Wirral Mind, Birkenhead Library, Rathbone Studios, Caldys Manor as well as attending a 100th Birthday celebration and two citizenship ceremonies. The Civic Mayor had opened Upton library, attended 3 Chinese New Year celebrations, visited the Malay Community and Northwest Air Ambulance Service. Other notable events included the Wirral Borough of Culture Launch Event, the 10th anniversary of the Equilibrium Hub, a visit to the Future Year, The Autism Together Staff Awards, Woodchurch Family Hub, Wirral Arch, a game at Tranmere Rovers and a visit to the Merseyside Air Training Corps, a Civic event for the Mayor of Neston and Birkenhead Rotary Club dinner. The Civic Mayor also refereed the New Brighton tug of war on New Years Day. A further highlight was hosting the Peruvian ambassador at a commemorative naming event of the esplanade at Monks Ferry.

78 **PROCEDURE FOR BUDGET DECISION MEETING OF COUNCIL**

The Council was then invited to consider the recommendation from the Policy and Resources Committee meeting of 13 February 2024, in respect of the procedure to be adopted for the budget debate at this extraordinary meeting of the Council.

On a motion by Councillor Paul Stuart, seconded by Councillor Jean Robinson, it was –

Resolved – That, for the duration of the extraordinary meeting of 26 February 2024 (Budget Council):

(a) the procedure attached as Appendix A be followed in respect of the meeting; and

(b) Council Standing Order 15.4 (timing of speeches) be suspended together with such other standing orders as may conflict with the Budget Council procedure or the Mayor's administration of the meeting, in such a manner as the Mayor in his or her absolute discretion dictates, to ensure the objective of Council setting a lawful budget and council tax requirement prevails.

79 **MATTERS REQUIRING APPROVAL OR CONSIDERATION BY THE COUNCIL**

Seven matters had been referred by the meetings of Policy and Resources Committee on 17 January and 13 February 2024

80 **COUNCIL TAX 2024/25 LOCAL COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME, DISCOUNTS AND EXEMPTIONS**

The first matter requiring approval was in relation to proposed Council Tax 2024/25 Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme, Discounts and Exemptions, the motion for which was moved by Councillor Paul Stuart and seconded by Councillor Jean Robinson.

Councillor Stuart spoke to this motion, highlighting key points including the continuation of discounts to Wirral Women's Aid, Care Leavers and the Discretionary Hardship Relief Scheme.

It was then

Resolved – that that the level and award of each local discount for 2024/25 be as follows: -

1. Wirral Women's & Children's Aid

To continue to award Wirral Women & Children's Aid 100% discount. This remains unchanged from 2023/24.

2. Care Leaver's Discount

To award Care Leavers the requisite discount to reduce their Council Tax liability to zero until they are 25. This remains unchanged from 2023/24.

3. Empty Property Discounts 2024/25

Discount category D = 0% Full charge on properties undergoing renovations. Discount category C = 0%

Full charge on empty properties from date they become unoccupied. Both to remain unchanged from 2023/24, and to include an exception for

properties requiring adaptations to meet the need of a disabled person who will be occupying the property as soon as the adaptations are complete.

This also applies to properties awaiting renovations prior to being occupied by someone under Ukraine resettlement scheme.

To reduce the Empty Property Premium from 2024/25 to properties that have been empty for more than one year (Currently Two). So that the following apply: - 100% (200% Council Tax) for unfurnished properties empty for more than one year. 200% (300% Council Tax) for unfurnished properties empty more than five years. 300% (400% Council Tax) for unfurnished properties empty more than ten years.

4. Council Tax Discretionary Hardship Relief Scheme

The Council Tax Discretionary Hardship Relief Scheme, approved by Cabinet in October 2013, to continue in its current format for 2024/25. The Scheme offers help and assistance in exceptional cases of hardship. Appendix 1

5. Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (LCTRS) The current Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme to remain unchanged from 2023/24 apart from the following:

- a. The scheme to be aligned to all the Department of Work and Pensions uprating's and changes for Housing Benefit and Universal Credit.
- b. There to be no loss of entitlement due to payments made under government defined compensation schemes.

6. Changes to the treatment of second homes (dwellings that are furnished but are not someone's sole or main residence)

From 1st April 2025 the council to charge an additional 100% council tax (200% Council Tax) for any person with a second home within Wirral

81 2024/25 BUDGET AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

The Mayor announced that it was his intention to run one single debate on the motion but then take separate named votes at the end of discussion on the 2024/25 Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy recommendations 1-4 and 6 and on the statutory calculations for the Council Tax precept (recommendation 5).

Councillor Paul Stuart formally moved the Motion, which was seconded by Councillor Jean Robinson, and which was set out as a recommendation of the Policy and Resources Committee of 13 February 2024, minute 111.

The motion having been formally moved and seconded, Councillor Paul Stuart spoke to his motion.

Councillor Jeff Green, as Leader of the Conservative Group, then addressed the Council on the budget proposals.

Councillor Pat Cleary, as Leader of the Green Group, then addressed the Council on the budget proposals.

Councillor Phil Gilchrist, as Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, then addressed the Council on the budget proposals.

The budget proposals were then debated.

The Council were then invited to vote on the 2024/25 Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy recommendations 1-4 and 6

The Council voted as follows:

For the Motion (64) – Councillors A Ainsworth, C Baldwin, P Basnett ,G Bennett, S Bennett, J Bird, M Booth, A Brame, H Cameron, C Carubia, P Cleary, C Cooke, T Cox, A Davies, GJ Davies, G Davies, S Foulkes, A Gardner, P Gilchrist, H Gorman, N Graham, JE Green, EA Grey, J Grier, B Hall, A Hodson, K Hodson, P Jobson, G Jenkinson, J Johnson, T Jones, M Jordan, S Kelly, B Kenny, J Stewart Laing, T Laing, E Lamb, I Lewis, L Luxon-Kewley, P Martin, C McDonald, G McManus, J McManus, R Molyneux, S Mountney, K Murphy, T Murphy, A Onwuemene, R Pitt, C Povall, S Powell-Wilde, H Raymond, L Rennie, M Redfern, J Robinson, M Skillicorn, K Stuart, P Stuart, M Sullivan, E Tomeny, J Walsh, J Williamson, V Wilson, G Wood

Against the motion – none

Abstention – Councillor J Williams

It was therefore resolved – that

Resolved (64 for, 1 abstention) - That,

1. Authority be delegated to the Section 151 Officer, following consultation with the Chair and Group Spokespersons of the Policy & Resources Committee, to do anything necessary – including minor financial adjustments – to give effect to the proposals contained in this report and address any funding changes, if any.

2. the response to the financial proposals forming a draft budget for the purposes of consultation under section 65 of the Local Government Finance Act, set out as below be noted:

Appendix 1 Budget Proposals
Appendix 2 Budget consultation
Appendix 3 Policy & Service Committee budget proposals feedback
Appendix 4 The Dedicated Schools Grant Schools Budget
Appendix 5 Provisional Council Tax Statutory Calculations
Appendix 6 Discretionary Rate Relief Policy
Appendix 7 Medium-Term Financial Strategy
Appendix 8 Budget proposal changes since November 2023
Appendix 9 Council Tax Base Calculation Process and Associated Background Information.

3. a Revenue Budget of £399.603m be approved, noting that the Section 151 Officer in liaison with the Monitoring Officer and Head of Paid Service may need to make adjustments to the Budget estimates before the preparation of final reports for Full Council on 26 February 2024.

4. Accordingly it was resolved that:

a) the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) set out as Appendix 7 be approved

b) increases to the Council's fees and charges equal to or above the annual Consumer Price Index reported by the Office for National Statistics in September 2023 be approved, unless either of the following conditions apply:

- i. There is a statutory constraint that prevents such an increase,**
- ii. The Council is operating in a market whereby such an increase would result in the Council being uncompetitive.**

c) the Discretionary Rate Relief Policy for Business Rates for 2024/25 set out as Appendix 6 be approved.

d) the creation of a £1m project fund within the budget for 2024-25 as set out in section 3 and that oversight of the project fund be retained by the Finance Sub-Committee be approved.

e) the Unearmarked Reserves (General Fund Balances) is maintained at a figure not lower than £13.18m for the course of the 2024/25 financial year.

f) the Budget Proposals as set out in Appendix 1 be approved and authorise, in respect of the Budget Proposals, that the Director with portfolio undertake such actions as they consider necessary to implement the agreed Budget and deliver the savings, income and efficiency proposals developed as part of the formulation process and update Committees accordingly.

g) the 2024/25 Schools Budget of £378.552m be approved

6. the reinstalment of the one-off Saving of £400k from the temporary closure of Wallasey Town Hall, in full, until April 2025 be authorised and add the additional £246k saving this produces to the £1m investment fund for activities linked to visible improvements in services across the borough.

The Council were then invited to vote on the 2024/25 Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy recommendation 5.

The Council voted as follows:

For the Motion (64) – Councillors A Ainsworth, C Baldwin, P Basnett ,G Bennett, S Bennett, J Bird, M Booth, A Brame, H Cameron, C Carubia, P Cleary, C Cooke, T Cox, A Davies, GJ Davies, G Davies, S Foulkes, A Gardner, P Gilchrist, H Gorman, N Graham, JE Green, EA Grey, J Grier, B Hall, A Hodson, K Hodson, P Jobson, G Jenkinson, J Johnson, T Jones, M Jordan, S Kelly, B Kenny, J Stewart Laing, T Laing, E Lamb, I Lewis, L Luxon-Kewley, P Martin, C McDonald, G McManus, J McManus, R Molyneux, S Mountney, K Murphy, T Murphy, A Onwuemene, R Pitt, C Povall, S Powell-Wilde, H Raymond, L Rennie, M Redfern, J Robinson, M Skillicorn, K Stuart, P Stuart, M Sullivan, E Tomeny, J Walsh, J Williamson, V Wilson, G Wood

Against the motion – none

Abstention – Councillor J Williams

It was therefore resolved (64 for, 1 abstention) – that

a) the Band D Council Tax be set at £1,888.22 for the Wirral Borough Council element of the Council Tax, representing a general increase of 2.99% and 2.00% ringfenced increase to Adult Social Care, and the Council Tax requirement for the Council's own purposes for 2024/25 of £181.3m as detailed in Appendix 5.

b) that the additional precepts from the Police & Crime Commissioner for Merseyside and the Merseyside Fire & Rescue Authority remain (be noted) in estimated form and authority be delegated to the Section 151 Officer to implement any variation to the overall council tax arising from the final notification of the precepts.

The third matter requiring approval was in relation to the capital monitoring for quarter 3 2023/24.

On a motion by Councillor Paul Stuart, seconded by Councillor Jean Robinson it was –

Resolved – that,

1. the additional funding for the schemes referred to in section 3.7 in this report be approved.

2. the changes to the programme detailed in section 3.8 be approved.

3. the revised Capital Programme of £97 million for 2023/24, including the virements of budget referred to in Appendix C of this report be approved.

83 CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2024-29

The fourth item requiring approval was in relation to the capital programme for 2024-29. Councillor Phil Gilchrist spoke to this item, highlighting the inclusion of funding in the budget to help deal with the condition of the road network, via grants through the Liverpool City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement. Councillor Gilchrist stressed the importance of aligning the programming of the works, selection of contractors and progress of surfacing work.

On a motion by Councillor Paul Stuart, seconded by Councillor Jean Robinson it was –

Resolved – that

1. the new bids as detailed in Appendix B to this report, requiring £3.3 million of funding for inclusion in the Capital Programme be approved.

2. the Capital Programme 2024-29 as detailed in Appendix C to this report be approved.

84 CAPITAL FINANCING STRATEGY 2024/25

The fifth item requiring approval was in relation to the Capital Financing Strategy 2024/25.

On a motion by Councillor Paul Stuart, seconded by Councillor Jean Robinson it was –

Resolved – that

- 1.the Capital Strategy for 2024/25 be approved.**
- 2. the associated Prudential Indicators be adopted, as detailed within this report.**
- 3. the Council's Minimum Revenue Provision policy as set out in Appendix A of this report be approved**

85 TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2024/25

The sixth item requiring approval was in relation to the Treasury Management Strategy 2024/25.

On a motion by Councillor Paul Stuart, seconded by Councillor Jean Robinson it was –

Resolved – that

- (1) the Treasury Management Strategy for 2024/2025 be approved**
- (2) the Treasury Management Prudential Indicators for 2024/2025 be approved**
- (3) the Treasury Management Policy Statement be approved**

86 INVESTMENT STRATEGY 2024/25

The seventh item requiring approval was in relation to the Investment Strategy 2024/25.

On a motion by Councillor Paul Stuart, seconded by Councillor Jean Robinson it was –

Resolved – that the Investment Strategy for 2024/2025 which includes potential investment in the following activity areas be approved:

- 1. Commercial Property**
- 2. Service Investments: Loans;**
- 3. Service Investment: Shares (non-currently held); and**
- 4. Loan Commitments and Financial Guarantees be approved**

87 REVISION TO THE APPOINTMENT OF COMMITTEES

The Mayor requested Members to consider the report of the Director of Law & Corporate Services concerning a revision to the allocation of committee places to political groups. Inclusion of this item in this extra-ordinary council meeting, meant that effect could be given to change in political balance for the next cycle of committee meetings.

The Chair informed Members that any debate held on this item was to be held under joint debate procedure in common with all council meetings.

Councillor Paul Stuart moved and Councillor Jean Robinson seconded the motion the recommendations detailed in the report .

Councillor Pat Cleary moved and Councillor Gail Jenkinson seconded the following amendment, submitted in accordance with Standing Order 14.g

(1) Agree that the overall number of seats be reduced from 114 to 113 as set out in paragraph 3.1.7.

*(2) agree the revised proportionality in the political composition of membership of ordinary committees of the Council as set out in the **revised** Appendix A detailed below.*

(3) agree that the Director of Law and Corporate Services be authorised to act on the instruction of the relevant Group Leaders in relation to the members appointed to the revised committee places.

<i>Policy and Resources</i>	15	7	4	3	1
<i>Adult Social Care and Public Health</i>	11	4	3	3	1
<i>Children, Young People and Education</i>	11	5	3	2	1
<i>Economy, Regeneration and Housing</i>	11	5	2	3	1
<i>Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport</i>	11	5	3	2	1
<i>Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure</i>	11	5	3	2	1
<i>Audit and Risk Management</i>	7	3	2	1	1
<i>Pensions</i>	11	5	3	2	1
<i>Planning</i>	11	5	3	2	1
<i>Regulatory and General Purposes</i>	14	6	3	4	1
Total	113	50	29	24	10

In this amended scenario, it was proposed by the Green Group that the seat vacated by the Labour Group be allocated on the Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee rather than as proposed on the Regulatory and General Purposes Committee.

Council then debated the motion and amendment. The amendment was then put to the vote and was lost (14:44) (7 abstentions).

The original motion was therefore put to the vote, and it was –

Resolved (44:14) (7 abstentions) – That

(1) the overall number of seats be reduced from 114 to 113 as set out in paragraph 3.1.7 be agreed

(2) the revised proportionality in the political composition of membership of ordinary committees of the Council as set out at Appendix A be agreed.

(3) that the Director of Law and Corporate Services be authorised to act on the instruction of the relevant Group Leaders in relation to the members appointed to the revised committee places be agreed.