

COUNCIL

Monday, 7 October 2024

Present:

The Civic Mayor (Councillor C Povall, JP) in the Chair
Deputy Civic Mayor (Councillor B Kenny)

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

7 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Civic Mayor welcomed everyone to the meeting and those watching the webcast. She then asked Members to consider whether they had any disclosable pecuniary and/or any other relevant interest in connection with any matters to be determined at this meeting and, if so, to declare it and state the nature of such interest.

The Director of Law and Corporate Services advised Members that in reference to agenda items 7a and 7b, the winter fuel allowance was referred to several times. As the winter fuel allowance impacted a majority of Members, either by being directly in receipt of the allowance, or by virtue of knowing someone in receipt of the allowance. The Director of Law and Corporate Services advised Members that given the universal nature of the allowance only Members who did not have a family member, acquaintance of were not in receipt of the winter fuel allowance themselves to stand to indicate that they did not have a non-prejudicial personal interest.

All members in attendance at the Council meeting, except for, Councillors Stephen Bennett and Lewis had a non-prejudicial personal interest in the Winter Fuel Allowance.

In addition, Councillor Janette Williamson declared a personal interest by virtue of her employment and advised she would leave the chamber during the debate agenda item 7a.

8 **CIVIC MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Civic Mayor announced that apologies had been received from Councillors Graham Davis, Jones, Martin, Graham McManus, Redfern, Stuart- Laing and Kaitlin Stuart.

Members were then asked to observe a minute's silence to reflect upon the events which had occurred in the Middle East over the previous 12 months.

The Civic Mayor then informed Members that she had undertaken 168 engagements to date, including a recent visit to mark the 90th anniversary of the Landican Cemetery. Members were also informed of recent fundraising activity for Wirral Primary Schools Cross Country Association, thanking Members for their contribution towards award trophies via the Wirral Together fund, as well informing Members of a Murder Mystery Dinner which was due to be held at the Williamson Art Gallery.

9 **MINUTES**

Members were asked to approve the minutes of the Council Meeting held on 29 July 2024. On a motion by the Civic Mayor, seconded by Councillor Paul Stuart, it was –

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 29 July 2024 be approved and adopted as a correct record.

10 **PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

The Civic Mayor informed the Council that four public questions had been received, but that she had rejected three of those question in reliance on standing order 10.5. The rejected questions were substantially the same as a question(s) with had been put at Council meetings held within the last six months.

The Director of Law and Corporate Services then read out a question on behalf of Helen Wilkie, which was directed to the Leader of the Council. Ms Wilkie queried why there had been no ferries to Woodside in 2 years, no trams for 1 year, and no visible work being done to any of these sites. Ms Wilke asked what contingency plans had been made for another summer with no tourism industry in the area and queried if any support had been offered to local businesses who were struggling and what actions would be taken if these projects were to be delayed any further.

The Leader of the Council responded, noting that the Council had embarked on an exercise to update the public on the progress that is being made on the waterfront and the surrounding area. This update will include the Woodside Ferry Terminal and the U-boat story.

10.1 Statements and Petitions

The Civic Mayor informed Members that one statement had been received.

Mr Featherstone presented a statement objecting to agenda item 5a Revisions to the Constitution, regarding reports proposal to limit the number of works in any public question to 100.

10.2 Members' Questions

Councillor Phil Gilchrist asked a question to the Chair of Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee regarding the flow of people from hospitals back into their homes with effective support or new arrangements best suited to their needs. Councillor Gilchrist asked what further steps are needed to ensure that the system can respond to the growing pressures we as a Council face?

Councillor Julie McManus responded to state that work had been undertaken to support the NHS to ensure timely and effective discharge of our residents but noted that assistance from Government was required to support continuing health care, with additional funding required for Discharge to Assess and winter pressures.

Councillor Phil Gilchrist asked a question to the Chair of the Environment, Climate Emergency & Transport Committee regarding the weed spraying contract, querying what work was planned or in hand to improve communities.

Councillor Grey responded to advise that weed spraying had been behind schedule due to successive periods of heavy rain. The Council's weed spraying contractor was continuing with the operation into October and the Neighbourhoods Investment Fund had allowed the Council to employ temporary staff as part of the 'Grot spot' team and the Alleyways Remediation team and also to invest in weed ripper machines.

Councillor Graham asked the chair of Audit and Risk Management Committee for an update on the scheduling of risk workshops for the Policy and Service Committees.

Councillor Cameron responded to state that workshops were scheduled and encouraged Members attendance at them.

Councillor Allan Brame asked a question to the chair of the Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee asking why the enforcement contract with NSL loses the council money.

Councillor Grey responded to confirm that the parking enforcement contract did cost more than the income raised but noted that the that parking enforcement went beyond raising income through penalty charge notices. The service responded to significant numbers of requests from residents, businesses, elected members and MPs. A number of those requests are for visible presence to help ease congestion on our roads and enhance traffic flow, improving driver behaviour as well as assisting buses and authorised service vehicles.

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

11.1 **REVISIONS TO THE CONSTITUTION**

The first matter for approval was to approve the recommendations from the Constitution and Standards Committee of 1 August 2024 on the revisions to the Constitution in respect of Public Questions and Terms of Reference.

It was moved by Councillor Tony Cox, seconded by Councillor Phil Gilchrist, that the recommendations as detailed in the report be agreed.

It was then moved by Councillor Pat Cleary, seconded by Councillor Jo Bird, that,

Inset additional recommendation (1):

Amend paragraph 3.3 as detailed within section 3 of the Constitution and Standards Report to state that no public question exceeds 200 words'

Insert additional words into original recommendation 1 to:

b. paragraph 3.3 as amended in recommendation (1) above,

Following a number of members speaking to the amendment, the amendment was put to the vote and lost (14:44) (1 abstention). The original motion was then put to the vote and was carried (44:14) (1 abstention). It was therefore –

Resolved – that,

(1) the proposed amendments to the Constitution, as detailed in sections 3.2 to 3.4 of the report as recommended by the Constitution and Standards Committee be endorsed

(2) the revisions to the Constitution be adopted.

11.2 EXTERNAL ANNUAL AUDIT REPORT 2022/23

The second matter requiring approval was in relation to the External Audit Annual Audit Report 2022-23, which presented the Council's external auditors (Grant Thornton) completion of the Council's main audit 2023-23 in January 2023.

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

Resolved (unanimously) – That the External Audit Annual Audit Report 2022/23 be approved.

11.3 SIX MONTH ATTENDANCE RULE S85 (1) OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

The fifth matter for approval was to grant the absence of Councillor James Stuart-Laing from all Council and Committee Meetings be authorised and approved for the remainder of the 2024/25 municipal year, pursuant to Section 85 (1) of the Local Government Act 1972.

It was moved by Councillor Paul Stuart, seconded by Councillor Jean Robinson, that the recommendation as detailed in the report be agreed,

The motion was put to the vote and agreed unanimously. It was therefore –

Resolved – That the absence of Councillor James Stuart-Laing from all Council and Committee Meetings be authorised and approved for the remainder of the 2023/24 municipal year, pursuant to Section 85 (1) of the Local Government Act 1972.

REPORTS AND DECISIONS FROM COUNCIL COMMITTEES AND PARTNERSHIP ORGANISATIONS

12.1 DECISIONS TAKEN SINCE THE LAST COUNCIL MEETING

Councillor Gail Jenkinson asked a question of the Chair of the Economy, Regeneration and Housing Committee in relation to a public question asked the meeting held on 11 September 2024, Minute number 24. Reassurance was given that contact had been made between the New Towns Task Force and communications are ongoing. Councillor Jenkinson asked for further information on the nature of this contact, the information that had been exchanged and what are the next planned steps for this contacting with designating new town stages to Birkenhead.

Councillor Tony Jones had given apologies for the meeting, but the Leader of the Council was able to confirm that council offices were in regular contact with officers in the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). As a key function of the World Regeneration Partnership, they were to be developing a five -year Business Plan outlining priorities and investments requirements for delivering the Birkenhead 2040 framework. This will be submitted to MHCLG following consideration at Policy and Resources Committee in spring of 2025.

Councillor Helen Cameron asked a question of the Chair of Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee in relation to the meeting held on 19 September 2024, Minute number 24. Councillor Cameron asked for an update on the community asset transfers of libraries previously and also any proposed changes to Wallasey Central Library.

Councillor Lewis confirmed that the Community Asset Transfer of Pensby and Prenton Libraries had been finally completed, with Irby Library due to be agreed at a future Committee meeting. Councillor Lewis then provided Members with an update on Wallasey Village and Wallasey Central Libraries.

Councillor Simon Mountney asked a question of the Chair of Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee in relation to the meeting held on 13 September 2024, Minute number 13 in regard to proposed car parking charges.

Councillor Elizabeth Grey responded to state that she would ask all residents to complete the consultation so that that their thoughts and ideas could be reviewed before a decision is made.

Councillor Naomi Graham asked a question of the Chair of Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee in relation to the meeting held on 13 September 2024, Minute number 13, asking if the car parking strategy

could be shared highlighting that the findings were based on resident feedback, and the evidence had been provided on the impact on businesses.

Councillor Elizabeth Grey confirmed that she would be happy to reshare the document.

Councillor Tony Murphy asked a question of the Chair of Health and Wellbeing Board in relation to the meeting held on 18 July September 2024, Minute number 9 regarding the medical optimisation programme, asking if the Health and Wellbeing Board could raise the subject of medication reviews to avoid issues with incorrectly prescribed medication.

Councillor Jean Robinson responded to say that she had raised the matter and it was under review with the NHS primary care service.

Councillor Richie Pitt asked a question of the Chair of Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee in relation to the meeting held on 13 September 2024, Minute number 6, highlighting concerns that the Council were cutting down the healthy trees that line Liscard Road to make way for a proposed active travel route. Councillor Pitt asked for assurances that all healthy trees were safe from just being cut not just on this road but across the borough.

Councillor Grey responded to confirm that both the tree team and the active travel team would liaise over all active travel schemes. Unless diseased or dangerous in some way, keeping mature trees was considered be an absolute priority.

12.2 JOINT ARRANGEMENTS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

The Civic Mayor announced that no questions on joint arrangements and external organisations had been received.

13 MOTIONS ON NOTICE

Four motions had been submitted in accordance with Standing Order 13.1

14 MOTION 1. CHANGES TO THE WINTER FUEL ALLOWANCE AND PROTECTING PENSIONERS FROM FUEL POVERTY

Councillor Janette Williamson left the chamber for the duration of this debate.

Councillor Jeff Green moved and Councillor Lesley Rennie seconded a motion submitted in accordance with Standing Order 13.

In moving the motion, Councillor Green confirmed that he was happy to accept the Green Group amendment, which was moved by Councillor Gail Jenkinson, and seconded by Councillor Naomi Graham as follows:

Insert an additional bullet point under section “Council believes:”

- *Minimising energy use is a highly effective way to tackle fuel poverty. Improved insulation is essential to create more warm, healthy homes*

Insert an additional bullet point after bullet point 1 in section “Council resolves to:”

- *As part of the above letter, urge the Chancellor to make funds available for an accelerated roll out of home insulation prioritising those residents currently experiencing high levels of fuel poverty.*

Following a debate, and Councillor Green having replied a recorded vote was then taken and the Council divided as follows:

For the motion (33) - Baldwin, G Bennett, Bird, Booth, Brame, Cameron, Carubia, Cleary, Cooke, Gardner, Gilchrist, Gorman, Graham, Green, Grier, Hodson, Hodson, Jenkinson, Johnson, Jordan, Kelly, Lamb, Lewis, Molyneux, Mountney, K Murphy, Onwuemene, Raymond, Rennie, Tomeny, C Walsh-McDonald, J Walsh-McDonald, Wilson.

Against the motion (23) - Ainsworth, P Basnett, S Bennett, Cooper, Davies, G Davies, Foulkes, Grey, Hall, Jobson, Kenny, Laing, Luxton-Kewley, J McManus, T Murphy, Pitt, Powell-Wilde, Robinson, Skillicorn, P Stuart, Sullivan, J Williams, Wood.

Abstention (1) – Povall

The substantive motion, as amended, was therefore –

Resolved (23:33) 1 Abstention –

Council notes:

- **That, in Opposition, Sir Keir Starmer and Labour pledged to maintain Winter Fuel Payments and to freeze energy bills.**
- **That, in Opposition, the Labour Party commissioned the Joseph Rowntree Foundation to report on the likely effects of means-testing Winter Fuel Payments. It found that some 4,000 pensioners across the country could die if the Winter Fuel Payments are effectively scrapped.**

- Labour’s decision, after the election, to scrap Winter Fuel Payments for 10 million pensioners, includes 1.6 million pensioners with a disability and 1.2 million pensioners in absolute poverty.
- Data from the Department for Work and Pensions showing 58,800 pensioners in Wirral who received Winter Fuel Payments in 2023 (including 18,620 pensioners aged 80 or above), and who do not receive Pension Credit, are expected to lose the payment.
- The remarks by Caroline Abrahams CBE, Charity Director at Age UK: ‘There are also about a million pensioners whose weekly incomes are less than £50 per week above the poverty line, who will also be hit hard by the loss of the Payment. Older people in this group often tell us they really struggle financially; the proposed change will make it even harder for them to afford to stay warm when it gets chilly.’

Council believes:

- That the Winter Fuel Payment has been a lifeline for many older people across Wirral and that restricting its availability solely to those on Pension Credit risks leaving many pensioners in financial hardship, including those with disabilities and long-term ill health.
- The impact of removing Winter Fuel Payments and the 10% increase in the Energy Price Cap will have a devastating impact on many pensioners in the Borough, particularly those who have incomes just above the threshold for Pension Credit.
- The decision to means-test Winter Fuel Payments, at such short notice, is deeply unfair and will disproportionately affect the health and well-being of our poorest older residents.
- The government’s approach fails to consider the administrative barriers and stigma that prevent eligible pensioners from claiming Pension Credit, leaving many without the support they desperately need.
- Minimising energy use is a highly effective way to tackle fuel poverty. Improved insulation is essential to create more warm, healthy homes. Council resolves to:
 - Request that all four Group Leaders write a joint letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and copied to Wirral’s four Labour MPs, urging a review of the decision to means-test the Winter Fuel Payment and asking the government to ensure that vulnerable pensioners, particularly those who do not claim Pension Credit, are protected from fuel poverty.

- As part of the above letter, urge the Chancellor to make funds available for an accelerated roll out of home insulation prioritising those residents currently experiencing high levels of fuel poverty.
- Request the Mayor, on behalf of the Council, to sign the ‘Save the Winter Fuel Payment for Struggling Pensioners’ petition being run by Age UK and circulate to all Members offering them the opportunity to sign the petition themselves.
- Instruct the Chief Executive to write to all voluntary, community and faith organisations supporting pensioners and those in fuel poverty inviting them to meet with the Council’s Senior Leadership Team.

15 **MOTION 2. WIRRAL STATEMENT OF UNITY**

Councillor Elizabeth Grey moved and Councillor Angie Davies seconded the following motion submitted in accordance with Standing Order 13.1.

After a discussion where Members spoke to the motion, it was put to the vote and,

Resolved (Unanimously) – that,

Along with our fellow residents, the Council were appalled to hear about the terrible attack that targeted the children at the Southport dance studio on 29th July this year.

The Council expresses its heartfelt sympathy to the families & friends of Bebe King, Elsie Dot Stancombe and Alice Dasilva Aguiar, who were murdered that day, and all those others who were injured in this attack. Our thoughts remain with everyone affected and their families.

The Council were no less appalled at the hijacking of this tragedy and the violent disorder that spread across various places in the country.

The attacks on police and emergency workers, the malicious vandalism, the arson and the looting were horrifying, and harmed and frightened so many people. They were scenes that no[1]one should ever witness or have to endure. The Council pays tribute to everyone involved in dealing with these events and expresses its gratitude to the emergency service workers, local community leaders, residents, local council workers, businesses and other organisations. True community spirit always shines through.

As councillors and residents in Wirral, Council denounces all forms of prejudice, hatred and violent disorder. Council resolves to stand in unity with people across the country, against those who seek to divide us,

and within our wards and across the borough, and will continue to work to promote unity, tolerance and respect for all.

16 **MOTION 3. ETHICAL ADVERTISING**

Councillor Judith Grier moved and Councillor Pat Cleary seconded a motion submitted in accordance with Standing Order 13.

Councillor Liz Grey moved and Councillor Chris Carubia seconded the following joint Labour and Green Group amendment, submitted in accordance with Standing Order 13.3.

Insert additional sentence at the end of paragraph 7

Council therefore welcomes the Labour Government's promises to ban advertising of junk food to children online and on TV and seeks to align with this ambition to improve public health through greater restriction of advertising.

Delete the following words from resolution 1

~~1) commit to introducing an Ethical Advertising Policy to support the Council's objectives regarding climate change, air pollution and public health issues to include at the very least, prohibition of advertisements and sponsorships for: vehicles powered by fossil fuels, including hybrids and all SUVs given the additional risks that these pose to public safety; Airlines, airports, or any content that can reasonably be seen to promote flying; Fossil fuel companies and their financiers; High Fat Salt Sugar products; and~~

The Council debated the motion and the guillotine was applied at 9:30pm.

The joint amendment was then put to the vote and was lost on the Civic Mayors casting vote (28:28) (1 abstention).

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

It was therefore resolved that the motion was lost (14:43) (1 abstention)

17 **MOTION 4. PROTECTING WIRRAL'S SERVICES WITH THE FUTURE FUNDING REQUIRED**

Councillor Phil Gilchrist moved and Councillor Stuart Kelly seconded a motion submitted in accordance with Standing Order 13.

The motion was put to the vote and it was -

Resolved (33:24) 1 abstention

Council supports the submission made by the Local Government Association to the Government on 13th September 2024. and in particular highlights:

- the benefits of investing in preventative services rather than a reactive, demand-led model to service spending**
- ending the reliance on council tax and the social care precept as a key means for funding adult social care**
- and providing long-term financial certainty through multi-year funding settlements linked to outcomes agreements, which includes an appropriate level of revenue funding.**

Council believes that, should the Government take full account of the hopes expressed in that document, there would be a positive impact on the lives of Wirral's residents. Currently residents are struggling to come to terms with services that are under financial stress, the prospect of further decline in services and the state of the borough, and the prospect of higher council taxes and new and increased charges for services.

In addition, residents do not understand the Government's determination to make damaging changes to the Winter Fuel Allowance which will leave many vulnerable people in fuel poverty this winter; along with rumours of changes to the single person discount; these key issues have been causing distress and uncertainty which could have been avoided. In the light of these concerns, Council requests the Director of Law and Corporate Services to forward a copy of this motion to Wirral's MPs with a request that such damaging changes flowing from Government policies, as currently understood, should not be proceeded with and that the Budget on 30th October 2024 should recognise the needs of Wirral residents.