



Scrutiny Programme Board

Date:	Wednesday, 18 August 2010
Time:	4.15 pm
Venue:	Committee Room 2 - Wallasey Town Hall

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AGENDA

1. MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST/PARTY WHIP

Members are asked to consider whether they have personal or prejudicial interests in connection with any item(s) on this agenda and, if so, to declare them and state what they are.

Members are reminded that they should also declare, pursuant to paragraph 18 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules, whether they are subject to a party whip in connection with any item(s) to be considered and, if so, to declare it and state the nature of the whipping arrangement.

2. ALLOCATION OF CALL-IN NOTICES (Pages 1 - 4)

The views of the Scrutiny Programme Board are sought in relation to the allocation of the following Call-In Notices, both of which have been submitted by the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Labour Group, Councillor S Foulkes and Councillor P Davies –

- (i) Cabinet Minute 68 (22 July 2010)
Area Based Grant
- (ii) Cabinet Minute 84 (22 July 2010)
Parks and Countryside Service Procurement Exercise (PACSPE)

It is entirely a matter for the Board whether Members choose to consider Call-In Notices themselves, or to refer them to one or more of

the themed Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

In anticipation of the Board allocating the call-in notices to the Council Excellence Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Area Based Grant) and the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee (PACSPE), consultations have taken place with the relevant Chairs and spokespersons for those meetings to take place.

Minute no 68. Area Based Grant. Reasons for Call In

The report is misleading and plays down the actual impact of the cuts recommended.

Cutting over half a million pounds, for example, from the School Development Grant, which is used to raise the standards of teaching and learning in schools cannot be said to have no impact on front line services.

Children's Services last year used £900,000 of uncommitted Area Based Grant to help reduce an overspend of £1.9m, of which £1.7m was due to increased spending on independent residential care for children. Cutting uncommitted grant will remove this flexibility and in so doing will have a direct impact on key frontline services.

There is a clear credibility gap between the priorities it says it is setting out to protect and the reality of what the Cabinet recommendations will mean.

A cut of 1.6m in the Working Neighbourhood Fund, for example, which is higher even than the cut recommended by the government, is in direct conflict with maintaining the Corporate Priorities both of mitigating the impact of the recession and reducing worklessness and of reducing the numbers not in employment, education or training.

Despite the much trumpeted dedication of this administration to consultation of all kinds, with staff, service users and the general public, there has been no consultation on these cuts at all, or any debate about their true impact. The reverse is true, with every effort being made to hide that impact.

It is not made clear that the way in which this report is written, and the recommendations are framed, means that the administration has now added a further £3.9m of additional cuts to be made to close the 2011/12 budget gap, which has already reached £24m and is rising fast, taking the total so far to nearly £28m, and this is before the full impact of the Comprehensive Spending Review is added to it..

The cuts in this year's grant are fundamentally unnecessary, as recent growth figures have demonstrated, and a result of political dogma from the national Conservative Liberal Democrat coalition which puts ideological commitment to a smaller state above the interests of the nation and is prepared, in so doing, to jeopardise the country's economic recovery by cutting too sharply too soon in order to achieve its ends over the course of a single parliament.

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Minute 84 Parks and Countryside Service Procurement Exercise.
Reasons for Call In.

Failure to consult fully with the public on the way they see this service developing and how they would want to see it run.

Failure to consult adequately with the Parks and Countryside staff.

In the light of the statement by the Deputy Chief Executive on behalf of the administration that they are “committed to regular, open and honest communication with employees and the Trade Unions through a variety of channels” and that they recognise that “only people who work for the authority have the detailed knowledge necessary to make suggestions on how services can continue to be delivered to a high standard with less money,” **an abject and total failure to take proper account of staff representations on ways of saving equivalent amounts of money in house.**

In the light of the above again, **a draconian refusal to allow an in house bid for these services to be considered, on grounds that could potentially rule out any in house bid for any Council services in the future** and deny Council Staff the opportunity they deserve to demonstrate they can run services effectively in the public interest.

Denying access to Labour members to a crucial meeting of the working party which decided to recommend ruling out the in house bid by calling the meeting at short notice in working hours and refusing to change its time despite strong and repeated representations by both Labour members on the working party.

A failure to review all the evidence carefully of a business case which locks the Council into a 10 year contract based on a best case 7.5% saving, in the light of recent information about the scale of cuts in resources to Local Government which may reach 30 to 40%,and **which, given the commitment of this administration to full public consultation, should have formed part of the brief for the Task Force on Living in Wirral without any prior decisions being taken.**

In short, this decision, which will lead to the transfer of the maintenance and administration of Wirral’s parks, gardens, open spaces, crematoria, beach lifeguard services, war memorials and countryside into private hands, was an ideal case for the Administration to demonstrate their genuine commitment to consultation with staff, Trade Unions, service users and the general public. **When the crunch comes, and real decisions are at stake, this administration has failed at every point to consult properly or take account of any views expressed, even in an area of very high public interest**

This demonstrates that their commitment to consultation is a total sham, designed only as a cynical public relations exercise to hide the reality of the devastation that is to come and find ways of blaming the public for the destruction of their own services.

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