

# CABINET

Thursday, 24 January 2013

<u>Present:</u>	Councillor	P Davies (Chair)	Finance
	Councillors	G Davies P Hackett AER Jones C Jones B Kenny AR McLachlan C Meaden H Smith T Smith	Housing and Community Safety Regeneration and Planning Strategy Corporate Resources Adult Social Care and Public Health Environment Improvement and Governance Culture, Tourism and Leisure Streetscene and Transport Services Children's Services & Lifelong Learning

## 160 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members of the Cabinet are asked to consider whether they had any disclosable pecuniary or non pecuniary interests in connection with any item(s) on this agenda and, if so, to declare them and state the nature of the interest.

No such declarations were received.

## 161 MINUTES

**Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 20 December 2012 be confirmed as a correct record.**

## 162 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair referred to the Council's proposed response to the Consultation on the National Alcohol Strategy, which he had approved for consideration as an item of urgent business (see minute 178 post) in view of the need to meet the Government's consultation deadline, before the next meeting of the Cabinet.

## 163 FINANCIAL MONITORING - REVENUE

The Interim Director of Finance provided an update on the revenue position for 2012/2013 as at Month 8 (November 2012). The projected revenue forecast for the year showed a potential General Fund overspend of £7.7m, down £1m from the M7 projection, which was due largely to a reduced projected overspend in the Children and Young People Department, plus a number of other departmental variations. His report also prioritised the risks for ongoing management actions, to ensure no overspend at the year-end.

The Chair was pleased that the level of overspend had reduced but noted that the situation remained critical, given there were a number of anticipated adverse changes which would increase the projected overspend in the coming months, including the outcome of the social services care home fees consultation and issues related to debt recovery (see minute 169 post). He commented also that clear guidance was awaited from the Government in relation to various issues including

capitalisation, and a further meeting to clarify matters was due to take place with civil servants. A significant amount of work was also being undertaken in relation to budget options and he referred to the ongoing 'What Really Matters' consultation that was due to end on 31 January, which would be reported to Budget Cabinet on 18 February 2013.

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

**Resolved –**

**(1) That Cabinet notes that:**

- (a) at Month 8 (November 2012), the full-year forecast projected a General Fund overspend of £7.7m;**
- (b) there were no rejected freeze items in the month;**
- (c) a major risk has just recently emerged considering the reliability of fees and charges income, going back many years. Corrective action is being taken to maximise recovery and as better information becomes available, there will be further reports regarding this serious matter.**

**(2) That Cabinet believes that the Government's austerity policy is proving to be profoundly unfair. Authorities with the highest levels of poverty and deprivation are facing the biggest cuts and at the same time, wealthy areas with the lowest levels of poverty pay less.**

**(3) Cabinet notes that Wirral is losing £151 per head in cuts. Liverpool is losing £252, Manchester is losing £209, Newcastle is losing £162, Birmingham is losing £166, and Sheffield is losing £140 per head.**

**(4) Cabinet notes that Milton Keynes is losing just £38 per head. Central Bedfordshire is losing £18 per head. And people in North Dorset are losing just £2 per head.**

**(5) Cabinet also notes that a recent report by SIGOMA (Special Interest Group of Metropolitan Authorities outside London) indicates that out of the 47 SIGOMA authorities Wirral has had the largest cut in its funding from central government (2.62% cut in revenue spending power 2013-2014). This compares with the SIGOMA average of -1.78% and the average for Shire Districts of -1.37%.**

**(6) Cabinet supports the 'Come Together' Campaign launched by the Mayor of Liverpool on 18 January when the Leaders of Core Cities, Merseyside Districts and Faith Leaders met to discuss the impact of the Government's austerity policy.**

**(7) Cabinet supports the on-line petition which has been launched at [www.come-together.co.uk](http://www.come-together.co.uk). This calls on the Government to urgently re-think its policy and to apply the cuts more fairly across the country, protecting those most in need, and making sure those in wealthy parts of the country pay their fair share. We urge all residents to sign this petition.**

## 164 FINANCIAL MONITORING - CAPITAL

The Interim Director of Finance reported upon the current position regarding the Council's 2012/2013 to 2014/2015 Capital Programme. His report reflected –

- the re-profiled 2012/2013 Capital Programme budget which incorporated previous decisions made by the Cabinet to amend the programme;
- the expenditure to date, which continued to be less than it should be;
- request for a revision to the Capital Programme to reflect slippage of £2.810 million of schemes into the 2013/2014 financial year;
- request for an increase in the programme of £0.530 million for schemes requiring no unsupported borrowing.
- the reduced cost of £0.673 million for the refurbishment of Wallasey Town Hall, of which £0.210 million impacted on 2012/2013;
- the projected outturn figures for 2012/2013, which suggested an underspend of £3.573 million on the revised programme;
- the current funding of the programme and its future affordability.

The Interim Director highlighted that the Capital programme was reliant on the Council generating a limited amount of capital receipts to finance the future Capital Programme schemes. The Capital Receipts Reserve at 1 April 2012 contained £9.2 million of receipts and the current capital programme assumed that £3 million a year would be drawn from this reserve over a three year period

### **Resolved – That Cabinet –**

- (a) Agrees the revised Capital Programme of £49.185 million.**
- (b) Agrees slippage in the programme of £2.810 million from 2012/2013 to 2013/2014.**
- (c) Agrees an increase to the programme of £0.530 million for Birkenhead Girls Academy which does not require unsupported borrowing.**
- (d) Notes the spend to date at Month 8 of £20.200 million, which represents 41.1% of the revised capital budget, with 67% of the financial year having elapsed.**
- (e) Notes the work of the Capital Steering Group to detail the schedule of sites to validate the estimate of capital receipts.**

## 165 COLLECTION FUND 2012/2013

The Interim Director of Finance reported that in accordance with the Local Authority (Funds) (England) Regulations 1992, the Authority was required to estimate annually, on or as close to 15 January as possible, the likely surplus or deficit on its Collection Fund for the current financial year, to cover the period up to 31 March. The Authority was required to notify the precepting Authorities of the Fund within 7 days of 15 January in order for the estimated surplus or deficit to be taken into account by the precepting bodies in setting their Budget and likely precept requirements on the Collection Fund for the following year.

His estimate was that the Collection Fund balance, for the year ending 31 March 2013, would be nil and he commented that Wirral Council would neither receive any additional distribution nor pay an additional contribution on the basis of the estimated 31 March 2013 position.

**Resolved – That the declaration of an estimated nil balance position for the Collection Fund for the year ending 31 March 2013, which is in accordance with current budget assumptions, be noted.**

## 166 COUNCIL TAX DISCOUNTS - ANNUAL REVIEW

The Interim Director of Finance reported that within the Officer Budget Proposals were two items related to Council Tax Discounts and Exemptions and he provided details of potential changes to the exemptions and discounts available following changes introduced by the Local Government Finance Act 2012, in respect of empty property and second homes. The changes from the 2012 Act, if adopted locally with income potential maximised, could raise £2.3m (net of collection losses and administration) and the Interim Director commented that responses to the 'Have Your Say' consultation indicated a clear support for such charges being raised.

**Resolved –**

- (1) That decisions concerning the level of each discount and exemption be made to ensure that the charges can be levied for 2013/2014 and take account of the Officer Budget Reduction proposals.**
- (2) That for Council Tax discounts and exemptions, each charge be maximised by the following –**
  - (a) Class A Exemption Vacant Dwellings  
Discount awarded for 2013/14 is set at 0%**
  - (b) Class C Exemption Vacant Dwellings  
Discount awarded for 2013/14 is set at 0%**
  - (c) Long Term Empty Property Charge  
50% Premium to be adopted for 2013/14**
  - (d) Second Homes  
0% Discount to be adopted for 2013/14**
- (3) That the Council Tax Base for 2013/2014 be revised accordingly.**

## 167 COUNCIL TAX BASE

The Interim Director of Finance reported that the Authority was required to annually determine its Council Tax-base, in order to determine the appropriate levels for Wirral, the Precepting Authorities (Police and Fire and Rescue) and the Environment Agency (Flood Defence). The Council Tax-base had a direct impact on the Council Tax that would be levied for Wirral for 2013 and the level of Revenue Support Grant received from Central Government. He outlined significant changes in the calculation methodology this year, due mainly to the abolition of Council Tax Benefits and the introduction of a localised Council Tax Support Scheme, which was counted as a discount rather than a payment of benefits, which then would impact upon the taxbase.

The Interim Director provided a calculation with only the Council Tax Support Scheme included and no change to discounts and exemptions from the current levels. He also provided a calculation with discounts and exemptions charges

maximised (see minute 166 ante), and he outlined the collection rate and adjusted Council Tax Taxbase figure. The level of Council Tax would be set at Budget Council on 5 March 2013, however, if the Council Tax base figure was not declared by 31 January 2013, the Council and Precepting Authorities would be unable to make considered budgetary decisions that could delay the Council Tax bills for 2013/2014.

**Resolved – That the Council Tax Base figure including the Council Tax Support Scheme and the discounts and exemptions charges maximised for 2013/2014, detailed in the report now submitted, be approved and recommended to the Council as the Council Tax Base for 2013/2014.**

## 168 SOCIAL FUND REFORM - LOCAL WELFARE ASSISTANCE SCHEME

The Interim Director of Finance presented the proposed year one policy for a new local discretionary support scheme 'Local Welfare Assistance' to be administered by the local authority from April 2013 to replace the crisis loans and community care grants currently administered by the Department for Work and Pensions. He commented that the matter had been previously considered by the Council Excellence Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 27 November 2012 (minute 42 refers) and their views and concerns had been included in his report. The funding provided for the scheme was less than the current DWP spend on Crisis Loans and Community Care Grants and it would therefore be necessary for the scheme to be robust, to maximise the number of awards granted and to prioritise those most in need.

The Policy was intended as a one year scheme, which would be closely monitored to identify any changes and development for incorporation into year two. It had been designed with a view to being able to continue to provide support for a wide range of needs, which were currently supported by the DWP. To do this, it was proposed to avoid cash payments where possible, so as to avoid abuse and make the scheme less appealing for fraudulent applications. The purchase of good quality refurbished or new items on behalf of applicants could also be more cost effective and would ensure that the award was used on what it was intended for.

The Interim Director highlighted the risks associated with the design and implementation of a new scheme and the Chair commented upon the programme funding for the years 2013/2014 and 2014/2015, which was £229,575 less than the DWP's full year expenditure against Crisis Loans and Community Care Grants in 2011/2012. In addition, should awards exceed the DWP grant, the money would have to be found from the Council's current budgets. While all applications would be considered under this policy, officers would be mindful of the impact of awards exceeding grant.

On a motion by Councillor P Davies and seconded by Councillor A McLachlan, it was –

**Resolved –**

- (1) That the Wirral Local Welfare Assistance Scheme Policy 2013/2014, set out at Appendix 1 to the report now submitted, be approved.**
- (2) That a further report be submitted reviewing the first six months of the 2013/2014 scheme, providing analysis and recommendations for the year two policy.**

- (3) That Cabinet believes that the Government should not transfer responsibility for Crisis Loans for Living Expenses and Community Care Grants to local authorities via a local scheme and, in the case of Wirral, cut the funding for these schemes by £229,575. At a time when a range of benefits are being cut by the Government, to reduce the amount of money to help people in crisis and to ask Councils to administer it demonstrates a clear need for this decision to be reviewed.
- (4) That Cabinet believes that together with Council Tax Benefit, it is difficult to see how such decisions by Government are consistent with localism, particularly where adequate resources are not devolved to local Councils to enable them to deliver effective services to local residents.

#### 169 FAILURE TO RECOVER SOCIAL SERVICES BAD DEBT

Further to minute 146 (20 December 2012), the Chief Executive gave a verbal update upon the position in respect of bad debts, particularly those related to Adult Social Care.

He commented that a revised system of debt collection and pursuance had been introduced to ensure that the build up of unrecoverable bad debts did not continue and that a small team of staff had been set up to proactively pursue all outstanding bad debts, where there was a possibility of recovery. In spite of this, the initial indication of the level of unrecoverable bad debts of approximately £10m still stood at the present time. However, with a bad debt provision of £4m, the impact on the current year's budget would be £6m. This would probably need to be written off and would impact upon the Council's overall budget.

To establish how the level of unrecoverable bad debt had come about, the Chief Executive had appointed Eugene Sullivan, who until a month ago had been the Chief Executive of the National Audit Commission, to undertake an investigation. His brief was to look at the history of the matter, to establish the reasons for the policies that the Council appeared to have in place regarding the collection of debts, to validate the likely amount that could be recovered and to make any recommendations he felt appropriate for future action to ensure there was no repeat of the problem. Mr Sullivan had indicated that he would complete the investigation by mid February and his report would be available initially to the Cabinet and publicly shortly afterwards

**Resolved – That the report be noted.**

#### 170 NEIGHBOURHOOD WORKING

The Chief Executive reported upon the development of a neighbourhood working approach across constituencies in Wirral, in order for services and community engagement to be more effectively and efficiently configured, targeted and delivered.

The Chair commented that the proposed neighbourhood working approach would help to develop a closer relationship between the Council and residents, promote improved partnership working across the public sector and ensure future service delivery reflected an improved understanding of resident views through consultation and participation. The proposal also potentially offered a more cost-effective approach to the future delivery of services by joining front line delivery and tackling issues at their source. It was about changing ways of working for all public, private, social sector providers to deliver improvements for neighbourhoods. He commented that it would not be possible to adopt a new model of working utilising the existing 11

Area Forum boundaries because of the costs of administration and the Area Forum footprints being too small for services to be more effectively co-ordinated.

It was proposed that the neighbourhood working structure would be based upon Wirral's four Parliamentary Constituency boundaries, with staff and services being located within Constituencies and a Constituency Committee established for each area. Each Constituency would have a Public Service Board that would bring together bodies including the Council, Police, Fire and Health, to co-ordinate the strategic delivery of a Constituency Plan that would outline priorities for each area.

The Chair indicated that he had received support for the proposals from the Council's partners and that feedback from a recent visioning event had been very positive. The Cabinet Member for Improvement and Governance commented that the proposal had the potential to be a very effective way of engaging with local communities. She hoped that all members would engage with the process and commented that more detailed work would be undertaken by the Democracy Working Party.

**Resolved –**

- (1) That the proposals to establish a new neighbourhood working approach across constituencies in Wirral, be endorsed and the report be referred to the Council for consideration and agreement.**
- (2) That a special meeting of the Democracy Working Group be held, on 31 January 2013, to discuss the report and make comment prior to the referral of the recommendation to Council on Monday 11 February 2013.**

#### 171 **BUDGET COUNCIL PROCEDURE**

The Acting Director of Law, HR and Asset Management presented a proposed procedure for the Budget meeting of the Council, scheduled to take place on 5 March 2013, which had been prepared following consultation with all three Political Group Leaders.

**Resolved – That Cabinet approves the Budget Council Procedure set out at Appendix 1 to the report now submitted and recommends it to Council for adoption.**

#### 172 **COMMITTEE CALENDAR 2013/2014**

The Acting Director of Law, HR and Asset Management presented a proposed calendar of meetings for Council, Cabinet and Committees for the municipal year 2013/2014. It had been prepared on the basis that in 2013/2014, there would be the same number of Regulatory Committees and Overview and Scrutiny Committees and, as in previous years these would meet in 5 cycles through the year. A date has also been set aside for the Youth Parliament/Council meeting and dates for Cabinet meetings had been agreed with the Leader in accordance with Executive Procedure Rule 1.6. It was proposed that the Cabinet had eight ordinary meetings and three budget meetings during the year and he commented that this would be subject to an amendment to the Council's Constitution Executive Procedure Rules.

In addition to the Council, Cabinet and Standing Committees, the Acting Director had also included dates set aside for pre-Council group meetings and Area Forums. Dates had been included in the calendar for Member training, for which a programme would be drawn up by the Member Training Steering Group.

He had received only one representation from a Member of the Council, who had requested that Panel dates should also be included in the published calendar. However, it was not always possible to identify in advance when Panels would be required and, out of necessity, were often arranged at comparatively short notice.

**Resolved –**

- (1) That the calendar of meetings for the municipal year 2013/14, attached at Appendix A to the report now submitted, be approved.**
- (2) That the Council's Constitution be amended to reduce the number of Cabinet meetings to 8 ordinary meetings, plus 3 budget meetings during the municipal year.**

**173 VACANT LAND AND BUILDING REVIEW  
- RANGERS COTTAGE, THURSTASTON**

The Acting Director of Law, HR and Asset Management reported that a review had been undertaken in respect of the Council's vacant land and buildings to determine whether they were required or were surplus to requirements. As part of the review, it had been established that the Rangers Cottage No. 2, Wirral Country Park, was a surplus asset and was considered appropriate for the freehold interest to be disposed of at auction.

The auction reserve price was set out in an exempt appendix (see minute 180 post) and he commented that its publication could affect the sale price achieved, if known by potential purchasers.

**Resolved – That the asset, Rangers Cottage No. 2, Wirral Country Park, Thurstaston, be declared surplus and authority be given to its disposal by auction on the basis described in the report now submitted.**

**174 LOCAL SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT FUND (LSTF)  
- PURCHASE OF PUBLIC TRANSPORT TICKETS**

Further to minute 112 (18 October 2012), the Interim Director of Technical Services reported upon the proposed funding of two projects (Travel Solutions and Community Travel Hub) from the Local Sustainable Transport Fund, which aimed at removing or lowering transport barriers for individuals to offer them support to access employment. He outlined the interventions that were delivered by the schemes and commented that the Travel Solutions scheme involved the bulk purchase of Travelcards from Merseytravel, which would be issued to eligible individuals who met the agreed criteria. The travelcards were only available to be purchased in bulk from Merseytravel as they were Merseytravel products.

The Interim Director proposed the purchase of public transport tickets valued at up to £30k for the remainder of 2012/2013 and up to £55k for 2013/2014 and up to £55k for 2014/2015 from Merseytravel in accordance with Contract Procedure Rule (CPR) 21 "Exceptions to Procurement Procedure". He proposed also the purchase of rail only passes to a maximum value of £10,000 over the three financial years 2012/2013 – 2014/2015 from Merseyrail in accordance with Contract Procedure Rule (CPR) 19.1 "Procurement valued at less than £50,000".



The reason for procuring the tickets from Merseytravel and Merseyrail outside of normal procurement procedures was because it was not possible to purchase the public transport tickets, the rail only passes or other comparable travel tickets, from any other source and therefore there was no genuine competition. Even so, Merseytravel and Merseyrail operated successfully within a competitive market environment.

The Cabinet Member for Streetscene and Transport Services indicated his support for the schemes, which would assist people in accessing employment.

**Resolved –**

- (1) That the purchase of Travelcards up to a maximum value of £140,000 in total over three financial years 2012/2013 – 2014/2015 from Merseytravel in accordance with Contract Procedure Rule (CPR) 21 “Exception to Procurement Procedure”, be approved.**
- (2) That the purchase of Rail Only passes up to a maximum value of £10,000 over the three financial years 2012/2013 – 2014/2015 from Merseyrail in accordance with Contract Procedure Rule (CPR) 19.1 “Procurement Valued at Less than £50,000 Procedure”, be approved.**

175 **LOCAL TRANSPORT CAPITAL FUNDING AND THE INTEGRATED TRANSPORT BLOCK (ITB) PROGRAMME 2013/2014**

Further to minute 342 (15 March 2012), the Interim Director of Technical Services reported that the indicative figures, previously notified, for the Local Transport Capital Settlement for 2013/2014 and 2014/2015, had been confirmed by the Department for Transport in March 2012. He presented the budget for 2013/2014 in accordance with the March 2012 settlement letter, and sought Cabinet approval for the £1,136,000 Integrated Transport Block (ITB) programme. The determination of suitable schemes and projects within the 2013/2014 Capital Programme and the budget allocation for the ITB outlined in the Interim Director’s report were prioritised in line with the Council’s vision of creating a greener society that worked to reduce carbon emissions and protect the environment; a healthy society where children and adults could walk or cycle safely to schools, to work and to reach leisure activities; and to have a safe and well maintained highway network for all users and to reduce the number of people killed or seriously injured on the roads in the Borough. Schemes and projects identified in the report would also contribute to the objectives and priorities contained in the current LTP3.

The Interim Director commented also that the schemes detailed within his report that formed the ITB directly addressed the Council’s Statutory Duties as set out in the Highways Act 1980, Road Traffic Regulations Act 1984. Road Traffic Act 1988, Local Government Act 2000 and the Traffic Management Act 2004.

The Cabinet Member for Streetscene and Transport Services endorsed the schemes contained within the report and was pleased that they enhanced the Council’s commitment to a greener society.

**Resolved – That Cabinet:**

- (1) Approves the proposed allocation of the Local Transport Plan Capital Programme 2013/2014 Integrated Transport Block between the four identified headings of**

- Improving Road Safety
  - Promoting Active Travel and Health
  - Reducing Congestion and Carbon Emissions
  - Transportation – General
- (2) Approves delegated programmes of schemes and projects under each of the four identified headings of the combined Integrated Transport Block (ITB) Capital Programme for 2013/2014 set out in Sections 3 to 6 (and summarised in Appendix A) to the report now submitted.
- (3) Delegates authority to the Interim Director of Technical Services, in conjunction with the Cabinet Member for Streetscene and Transport Services and Party Spokespersons, to make necessary adjustments to the priorities within the programme should the need arise due to financial conditions or other factors.

176 **HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE FUNDING AND STRUCTURAL MAINTENANCE PROGRAMME 2013/2014**

Further to minute 252 (12 January 2012), the Interim Director of Technical Services reported that the Chancellor's Autumn Statement on 5 December 2012 announced an additional £333 million for a dedicated fund to provide for additional maintenance to renew, repair and extend the life of the highway network in England. Wirral had been allocated £0.522m in 2013/2014 and £0.279m in 2014/2015 for priorities such as road resurfacing, maintenance to bridges or repairing damage to highway infrastructure caused by severe weather events.

The maintenance of highways was a statutory duty for the Council under the Highways Act 1980 (as amended) and the Interim Director's report presented both the proposed breakdown of that highway maintenance funding between the Bridges (£800,000), Street Lighting (£200,000) and Roads and Footways (£1,864,000) elements of the network and the proposed Highway Structural Maintenance Programme 2013/2014, for approval.

The Interim Director also provided the following summary of the proposed allocations, subject to confirmation of the Council funded Capital Maintenance Allocation –

<b>Funding Source</b>	<b>£</b>
Local Transport Plan Capital Programme 2013/2014 Maintenance Block	1,864,000
Capital Maintenance Allocation (£1m)	
• Unclassified and Residential Roads	500,000
• Non Principal Roads	500,000
Additional Local Highways Maintenance Funding	522,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3,386,000</b>

**Resolved –**

- (1) That the proposed allocation of the Local Transport Plan Capital Programme 2013/2014 Maintenance Block between Street Lighting, Bridges and Roads and Footways, be approved.**
- (2) That the Detailed Highway Structural Maintenance Programme for 2013/2014 be approved.**
- (3) That the Interim Director of Technical Services, in conjunction with the Cabinet Member for Streetscene and Transport Services and Party Spokespersons, be able to make necessary adjustments to the priorities within the programme should the need arise due to financial conditions or other factors.**
- (4) That the additional highways maintenance funding be expended on those highway schemes specifically referred to in Appendix 1 to the report of the Interim Director of Technical Services.**

**177 THE EMPLOYMENT CONTRACT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND HEAD OF PAID SERVICE**

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development submitted a report in relation to the employment contract of the Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service, which proposed that Graham Burgess be offered the post on a permanent basis. He had commenced employment on 3 September 2012 and his fixed-term appointment was due to expire in August 2014.

The Leader of the Council referred to the significant progress that had been made against the Improvement Plan and indicated that having the corporate leadership to deliver the improvement and change agendas was fundamental. He commented that the Council required stability and leadership at Senior Management Level over a longer period of time which would allow the focus to remain on addressing the financial challenge facing the organisation while delivering the essential improvements required to the Council's corporate governance.

**Resolved – That, having considered the issues raised in the report of the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development, Cabinet recommends to the Employment and Appointments Committee that a recommendation be made to the Council at its meeting on 28 January that: Graham Burgess be offered the post of Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service on a permanent basis with immediate effect from 28 January 2013.**

**178 ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS APPROVED BY THE CHAIR  
- RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION ON THE NATIONAL ALCOHOL STRATEGY**

The Chair advised that he had approved consideration of this matter as an item of urgent business, in view of the need for a decision to be taken to allow a consultation response to be sent before the next meeting of the Cabinet. He commented also that the Chief Executive had agreed both that the decision proposed was reasonable and to it being treated as a matter of urgency in for call-in to be waived.

The Director off Policy, Performance and Public Health reported that in March 2012, the Government published a National Alcohol Strategy, which set out proposals to tackle 'binge drinking', cut alcohol fuelled violence and disorder and reduce the

number of people drinking to damaging levels. A consultation exercise, due to close on 6 February 2013, had sought views on the following policy areas –

- A minimum unit price for alcohol
- A ban on multi-buy promotions in the off trade
- Reviewing the mandatory licensing conditions
- Health as a licensing objective for cumulative impact policies
- Freeing up responsible businesses

The Director commented that the impact of excess alcohol consumption was of local concern, as reported in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and action to tackle alcohol misuse had been prioritised by the shadow Health and Well Being Board. The local alcohol strategy had recently been updated and she indicated that work had taken place at a regional and local level to develop a response to the consultation.

The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health endorsed the comments of the Director and indicated her agreement with the proposed response to the Government consultation.

**Resolved –**

- (1) That the response to the consultation on the National Alcohol Strategy, set out the Appendix to the report now submitted, be approved.**
- (2) That, in view of the urgency in relation to the consultation response deadline, call-in be waived.**

**179 EXEMPT INFORMATION - EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

**Resolved – That, in accordance with section 100 (A) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined by paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A (as amended) to that Act. The Public Interest test has been applied and favours exclusion.**

**180 EXEMPT APPENDICES**

The Cabinet noted the detail of the exempt appendix to Agenda Item 14 – Vacant Land and Building Review – Rangers Cottage, Thurstaston (see minute 173 ante).