



Policy and Performance - Transformation and Resources Committee

Date:	Monday, 1 February 2016
Time:	6.00 pm
Venue:	Committee Room 1 - 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 any disclosable pecuniary interests and/or any other relevant interest in connection with any item(s) on this agenda and, if so, to declare them and state the nature of the interest.

Members are reminded that they should also declare 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. MINUTES (Pages 1 - 8)

To approve the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 3 December, 2015.

3. PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL (Pages 9 - 16)

4. LOCAL WELFARE ASSISTANCE SCHEME (Pages 17 - 62)

5. POLICY INFORM BRIEFING PAPER (Pages 63 - 100)

6. WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE REPORT (Pages 101 - 106)

7. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS APPROVED BY THE CHAIR (PART 1)

8. EXEMPT INFORMATION - EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The public may be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information.

RECOMMENDED:

That in accordance with section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items of business, on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined by the relevant paragraphs of Part 1 of Schedule 12A (as amended) to that Act. The public interest test has been applied and favours exclusion.

9. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS APPROVED BY THE CHAIR (PART 2)

POLICY AND PERFORMANCE - TRANSFORMATION AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Thursday, 3 December 2015

Present: Councillor J Williamson (Chair)

Councillors S Foulkes A Sykes
R Gregson B Berry
B Kenny L Fraser
C Muspratt T Pilgrim
J Salter C Carubia
J Walsh

Deputies: Councillors P Brightmore (In place of M Patrick)
D Burgess-Joyce (In place of T Anderson)

22 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST / PARTY WHIP

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

Members were reminded that they should also declare whether they were 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.

No such declarations were made.

23 MINUTES

Members were requested to receive the minutes of the Transformation and Resources Policy and Performance Committee meeting held on 21 September, 2015.

Resolved –That the minutes of the meeting of 15 July, 2015 be approved.

24 NOTICE OF MOTION - OPEN GOVERNMENT?

The Head of Legal and Member Services reported that at the meeting of the Council held on 12 October 2015 (minute 59 refers), the following Notice of Motion proposed by Councillor Phil Gilchrist and seconded by Councillor Chris Carubia was referred by the Mayor to this Committee for consideration –

OPEN GOVERNMENT?

This Council recognises that the Information Commissioner's Office, as the independent authority set up to uphold information rights in the public interest and to promote openness by public bodies, upheld 13 complaints against Wirral Council in the past year.

Of the 18 notices issued between 29 September 2014 and 24 August 2015, the majority (72%) of complaints were upheld.

Council believes that this is a matter for concern, requiring an explanation to its Members. Council requests that lessons should be learned and applied from these decisions and questions whether Officers have been excessively cautious or defensive in their interpretation of the legislation.

Council, therefore, requests that the legislation is approached with greater regard to the 'public interest test' so that the risk of further reputational damage to Wirral can be reduced.

In accordance with Standing Order 7 (6), Councillor Gilchrist had been invited to attend the meeting in order for him to be given an opportunity to explain the Motion.

The Head of Legal and Member Services had also circulated a Briefing Note which gave details and a breakdown of the number of FoI requests and Information Commissioner's (ICO) Decision Notices.

The Briefing Note also referred to the FoI Scrutiny Review which was published in April 2014 which had made 8 recommendations, 6 of which had been implemented and two of which were in the process of being implemented. The ongoing work to achieve the two remaining recommendations was detailed in the Briefing Note.

Councillor Gilchrist sought clarification as to the status of the Briefing Note to which the Head of Legal and Member Services responded that it provided factual information and context to the Notice of Motion which Members would find relevant.

Councillor Gilchrist stated that the calculations circulated in the Briefing Note regarding Decision Notices issued between 29 September, 2014 and 24 August, 2015 (18 Notices containing 28 decisions of which 67.8% were upheld or partly upheld) and Decision Notices issued between 12 February, 2012 and 26 January, 2015 (43 Notices containing 69 decisions of which 68% were upheld or partly upheld) was not dissimilar to the figure of 72% referred to in his Motion. He referred to a couple of individual cases and the responses received from the ICO and also to comparisons with other Local Authorities and the number of Notices issued and upheld. He welcomed the fact that the

Council was now better organised in terms of dealing with requests though questioned whether the Council was being excessively cautious or defensive in dealing with Fol requests.

The Head of Legal and Member Services stated that the Council had improved in its response rate to Fols and was now consistently achieving above target. He acknowledged that there were areas which needed to be improved upon. The Council did exercise a judgement around what it felt was disclosable and that sometimes the ICO agreed with the Council and sometimes it did not. Valid points had been made regarding lateness of responses though the Council did not ignore what the ICO requested of it, overall performance had come a long way since the previous issues of Fols had been raised. With six of the eight recommendations from the scrutiny review implemented and work in progress on the remaining two the position on Fols would further improve and he would be happy for a further Review to take place.

A Member commented that a Notice of Motion was a fairly blunt instrument for raising an issue such as this. He queried whether a list of names of those submitting Fol requests could be provided to the Committee either in open or closed session. Some Fols were also submitted from Members who could have asked for the information in another way.

The Head of Legal and Member Services, in response, stated that it was not lawful to disclose the names of requestors.

A Member commented that he was pleased that a lot of the recommendations from the review had been put in place but suggested that it would be worth looking into the fact that a number of complaints to the ICO had been upheld. With regard to Members sometimes requesting information through Fols he commented that maybe officers should be a bit more amenable with Members.

A Member suggested that with 3,975 Fols received and 1.1% of these resulting in complaints upheld this was a satisfactory response rate. The Motion gave the impression that the Council's approach to Fols was systemically dysfunctional when this was clearly not the case.

Responding to further comments the Head of Legal and Member Services stated that there were certain individuals who did regularly submit Fol requests but these prolific requestors did not make up the majority as Fol requests came in from a number of individuals and bodies / organisations. Requests were significant but probably not disproportionate to other similar sized Councils. There was a need to ensure that information was readily and easily available. Responses to those Fols which were relatively straightforward were provided well within the 35 day period. The complexity of

certain Fols was sometimes quite challenging when a variety of issues, sometimes sensitive matters, were raised.

It was then moved by Councillor Sykes, seconded by Councillor Muspratt, that –

“Given that the recommendations for improvements to the Fol process are still being implemented, which will hopefully improve the situation, but that this is an important issue to tackle, therefore the Committee asks for a reconvening of the Task and Finish Panel to look at whether further recommendations may be necessary and to review the progress of the current implementation in further detail.”

Councillor Gilchrist, in response to comments made stated that he had brought the matter to Council because he thought it was of sufficient general interest and he would welcome the reconvening of the Task and Finish Panel.

The Chair then moved an alternative motion, which was seconded by Councillor Muspratt, that –

“Committee acknowledges that the number of complaints upheld by the ICO total 1.19% of all Fol requests and that the Council is committed to working towards improving how it responds to Fols and recommends a further ‘task and finish’ review is undertaken.”

At this point Councillor Sykes withdrew his motion and it was then –

Resolved (14:0) – Committee acknowledges that the number of complaints upheld by the ICO total 1.19% of all Fol requests and that the Council is committed to working towards improving how it responds to Fols and recommends a further ‘task and finish’ review is undertaken.

25 **SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY**

The Acting Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development introduced a report which set out proposals for a new Social Media Policy for Council employees.

The Council’s Human Resources policies were subject to an ongoing review to ensure that they remained fit for purpose, legally compliant and provided a valuable and workable resource for employees and managers on employment related issues in the workplace.

The Council used social media sites to proactively promote and market the Council’s communication messages related to campaigns, events and services, as well as interact with its customers and residents. As 87% of Wirral Council staff lived in Wirral, a very high percentage of the Council’s

employees (and in turn their families and friends) were also the Council's customers. Currently, only a limited number of Council employees with a proven business need could access social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter on their council PCs. Another number had permission, based on a business case, to run and manage social media feeds on behalf of council services. This was a historical position but did not reflect how social media had changed.

The Council's Senior Leadership Team had agreed to broaden access to social media sites for all employees. This meant that employees would be able to use their Wirral Council IT equipment to access social media sites, including Council marketing campaigns and promotional information.

The aim of the Social Media policy was primarily to safeguard both Council staff and service users whilst using social media, to protect the Council from the legal risks of social media and also to ensure the reputation of the authority was protected. Many organisations had Social Media Policies to ensure that employees were clear about the rules and that the organisation effectively managed the corporate use of social media. This policy set out what was expected of employees when accessing social media for personal use, whilst at work and also officially on behalf of the Council.

It remained the case that employees should limit their use of social media to their official rest breaks such as their lunch break / times and any serious breaches of the social media policy could result in disciplinary action being taken.

Responding to comments from Members the Acting Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development made a number of points, including:

- Use of the internet and in future of social media sites would be monitored if there were concerns and the Council's IT systems did support the ability to see what pages had been visited by staff.
- Discussions had been held with the Council's IT managers and they had said that increased traffic to social media sites at the peak period of lunchtimes would not present any particular issues.
- The policy wouldn't apply in its entirety to Members as there were separate guidelines and there were also separate processes for use in libraries.

The Chair reminded Members that they were also bound by the Members' Code of Conduct.

Resolved – That this Committee recommends to Council approval of the Social Media Policy.

26 **SECURITY OF ACCESS TO COUNCIL ISSUED DEVICES**

The Head of Financial Services introduced a report regarding Security of Access to Council issued devices. The report detailed the Central Government IT governance frameworks that the Authority operated within and some of the IT security controls applied to council owned and issued devices.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

27 **2015/16 QUARTER 2 DIRECTORATE PLAN PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT**

The Head of Financial Services presented a report which outlined the quarter 2 (July to September 2015) performance against the Directorate Plan for 2015/16.

Whilst the Corporate Plan 2015/16 (and supporting Directorate Plans) had been superseded by the Wirral Council Plan 2020 Vision, they still formed the basis of the in-year performance management framework. A new Performance Management Framework would be developed for the Council Plan once the associated delivery plan had been finalised.

Of the 19 reportable indicators, 10 were rated Green, 2 were rated Amber and 7 were rated Red. For indicators rated Amber and Red, the responsible officer had indicated the corrective action being put in place to get performance back on track. The seven measures rated red were:

- Percentage of Performance Appraisals (PAs) completed by September 2015 (TRCP03)
- Sickness absence: the number of working days / shifts lost due to sickness absence (TRCP04)
- Percentage of suppliers paid within 30 days or payment terms (TRDP06)
- Percentage of client finance recovered by end of month following billing (TRDP13)
- Percentage spend allocation of Discretionary Housing Payment (TRDP16)
- Average number of days to accurately process change in circumstance benefit claims (TRDP23)
- Percentage grant income achieved (TRDP24)

A Member referring to the number of indicators which were red requested that the Strategic Director attend. The Chair suggested that the indicator on PAs should be referred to the Cabinet Member, Councillor Adrian Jones, and that the Strategic Director should be requested to attend the next meeting.

The Acting Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development responding to comments on the PA indicator stated that he understood and accepted all the concerns raised. 84% of managers' appraisals had now been

completed and 60 – 65% of all employees. There were concerns regarding more remote areas of staff such as those in the Ranger service, cleaners and caterers and some issues with data on multiple job holders, whereby they might have had one appraisal completed for one role but not for another.

A Member commented upon the need for a breakdown by department of sickness absence figures.

The Transaction Centre Manager responded to comments on ‘average number of days to accurately process change in circumstance benefit claims’ stated that in April 2015 there were 19,000 transactions to be processed and this was now currently 4,000, the direction of travel of this indicator was certainly showing an improvement and the department was working closely with the Department for Work and Pensions on this and inroads were being made into the backlogs. She would be able to provide further figures on this and acknowledged the need to distinguish between those claims accurately submitted or accurately processed.

Responding to comments from Members the Head of Financial Services stated that more individuals were paying additional sums towards Council Tax this current year following the ending of the local discount for Over 70’s households. This had led to a fall in collection levels early in the year and performance was now improving.

Resolved – That the report be noted and the concerns over the indicators be referred to the Cabinet Member, Councillor Adrian Jones, and the Strategic Director be requested to attend the next meeting.

28 **FINANCIAL MONITORING 2015/16 QUARTER 2 (JULY - SEPTEMBER 2015)**

The Head of Financial Services introduced a report which set out financial monitoring information in respect of the quarter 2 (July to September 2015) budget performance for the Transformation and Resources Directorate. The report gave details of performance against revenue and capital budgets and also against in year efficiency targets, which in 2015/16 were £3.9m.

In respect of the Revenue Budget, the Transformation and Resources Directorate was projecting an underspend of £3m, as at 30 September 2015. The Directorate 2015/16 Capital Programme budget was £3 million with £0.735 million expended at the end of quarter 2.

Responding to comments from Members the Head of Financial Services commented upon the investment of surplus cash to secure the best rates of return in line with the Treasury Management Policy. This included investing with banks, building societies and a number of other local authorities. There

were some savings not fully achieved this year, such as £120,000 in libraries, but these were on track to be delivered.

A Member commented that there were would be other Committees where a surplus would not be so healthy and credit for this underspend should be given when it was due.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

29 **WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE REPORT**

The Committee considered a report from the Chair which updated Members on the current position regarding the Committee's work programme.

Councillor Sykes gave an update on the Disaster Recovery Task and Finish Scrutiny Review, which he was chairing and which had had its initial scoping meeting, further meetings of the Review Panel would take place in the New Year.

Resolved – That with the addition of a Task and Finish Review on Freedom of Information requests, the work programme for 2015/16 be approved.

WIRRAL COUNCIL TRANSFORMATION AND RESOURCES POLICY AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE

1 February 2016

SUBJECT:	Performance Appraisal
REPORT OF:	Joe Blott, Strategic Director, Transformation and Resources
RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	Councillor A Jones
KEY DECISION?	No

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Council set a target of 80 % for the completion of the Performance Appraisal process (2015 – 16) by 30 September 2015.
- 1.2 A series of reports have been submitted to meetings of the Policy and Performance Committee to update Elected Members on the performance against the target.
- 1.3 The current outturn figure at January 2016 for Performance Appraisal 2015 -16 is 72.8%.
- 1.4 There has been regular communication to Managers from the HR/OD function and the Chief Executive outlining the requirements to undertake performance appraisals. However, four months after the completion deadline there are a number of service areas where large numbers of performance appraisals have still not been completed.

2.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

Purpose of Performance Appraisals

- 2.1 The Council is committed to delivering Performance Appraisals with our employees as good practice and to ensure that the Council's vision, priorities and values are communicated effectively throughout the organisation so that, staff know what is expected of them and are supported to deliver.
- 2.2 The Performance Appraisal process provides a framework for Managers to give feedback to individuals on their performance over the whole year, agree expectations (objectives) for the next year, and identify learning and development needs to achieve those objectives. Individuals' contributions are also linked to the Council's priorities in the Council Plan.

Performance Appraisal Process 2015 -16

2.3 A number of improvements were introduced to the Performance Appraisal Process 2015 - 16 including:

- Revised and simplified documentation to provide a clear framework for discussions.
- Introduction of group appraisals to assist Managers who manage large staff groups doing similar roles
- Introduction of an on-line training needs analysis to enable Managers to self-assess themselves against Council's management expectations framework

Performance Appraisal Target & Timetable 2015 – 2016

2.4 The Performance Appraisal Target for 2015-16 is 80% and was to be delivered to the following timetable.

Job Role	Completion date
Strategic Directors/ Directors / HOS and Senior Managers	31 May 2015
Managers/Team Leaders	30 June 2015
Employees	31 July 2015
	31 August 2015
	30 September 2015

2.5 Whilst it is acknowledged that all employees should go through the performance appraisal process, a target of 80% was agreed because it reflected a significant stretch from the 2014/15 performance of 49% which was the first year of delivery of Performance Appraisal across the Council.

Support for the process

2.6 The HR/OD function has supported the organisation to improve the completion of performance appraisals through:

- **Communication** – Managers were briefed on the requirements of the process through One Brief, Intranet and briefings to Senior Leadership Team (SLT), Departmental Management Teams (DMT) and have received regular communication reminding them of the requirement to undertake their appraisals.
- **HR Management Information** – DMT's have received monthly updates on progress towards the agreed Performance Appraisal targets.

Update on progress against target

2.7 The current outturn figure for the organisation is 72.8%. An update on performance against the target has been shared at previous meetings of the Policy and Performance Committee.

- 2.8 At the last meeting the committee asked for more detail of the performance for each directorate, this is attached at Appendix One.
- 2.9 As highlighted within the Performance Appraisal Report (Appendix One) most directorates have now exceeded the 80% completion target, with the exception of Children and Young People, and Transformation and Resources. The outturn figure for Children and Young People of 52.7% falls significantly below the required level which has in turn prevented the Council achieving their target.

Key Issues preventing service areas achieving the target

- 2.10 Committee have been regularly updated on the performance of directorates against the target and have asked for reasons why the target has not been achieved.
- 2.11 It is acknowledged that performance must improve. However, some of the factors that have contributed to delayed achievement or failure to achieve targets are as follows:
- Over past 12-18 months there has been significant remodelling in the Council. Over 2,000 employees have been consulted about changes to their job roles during this process. Managers have conducted 1:1 redundancy consultation meetings. Over 300 employees have left the Council on VS/EVR and 48 employees were redeployed into new roles. Most service areas across the Council's three directorates have restructured. In some cases, this was over a 12 month period due to the complexities of the remodelling process. Significant numbers of employees were placed at risk of redundancy during this time. This clearly has an implication for morale and fears over job security.
 - In CYPD, in particular, there remains high pressure on social care services. There have been significant recruitment and retention issues in front line Social Work Teams. This is a local, regional and national issue. It has led to high use of agency workers to deliver services in some Social Work Teams and at team and middle management level. In addition, there has been a high turnover of employees at Senior Management level. These areas have also had high levels of sickness absence. There has been a restructure and relocation of Social Work Teams as part of a new delivery model which was implemented in July 2015. It should be noted that Social Work Managers are required to carry out regular 'supervision' with their direct reports in which they discuss caseloads and other operational issues which supports monitoring and management of performance. A recent audit of the supervision process confirmed an 80% completion rate of social work supervision within timescale ie monthly, and fortnightly for newly qualified social workers.
 - In Transformation and Resources, there have been some particular issues completing Performance Appraisals in the Transaction Centre which has contributed to the target being missed. The Centre was created in May 2015 and brought together a range of transactional teams from across the Council into one location. This includes Payroll, Council Tax, Revenues and Benefits, Call Centre and Business Support. This has been a complex project, however

significant progress has been made and the work is ongoing. There has been high staff turnover and whilst levels of service delivery have been maintained, there have been significant demands on managerial time.

- Some services areas have experienced difficulty in arranging appraisals with some remote workers and workers who work a very small number of hours per week e.g. Cleaners in Public Buildings, Bus Escorts. Specific days were arranged for group appraisals but if they were missed it was logistically difficult to catch up.

3.0 NEXT STEPS

- 3.1 It is acknowledged that the Council's performance has fallen short in this area in 2015/16.
- 3.2 Chief Officers are following this up with managers where appraisals have not been undertaken and will take appropriate action.
- 3.3 From April 2016, the Council will commence the process of performance appraisal for 2016/17.
- 3.4 It will be clearly communicated to managers that they are required to undertake appraisals within the timeframes set out and from the outset it will be explicit that failure to comply with this requirement may lead to action under the Council's disciplinary or capability policies. Chief Officers will be accountable for performance in their service areas.

4.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 4.1 If Performance Appraisal is not embedded within the organisation this could have a direct effect on the Council delivering its corporate priorities. It is a fundamental element of a manager's role to manage the performance of others to ensure they meet job requirements.

5.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 5.1 None

6.0 CONSULTATION

- 6.1 Consultation with the Senior Leadership Team, Departmental Management Teams and Trade Unions has taken place on the revised Performance Appraisal framework.

7.0 OUTSTANDING PREVIOUSLY APPROVED ACTIONS

- 7.1 None

8.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS

- 8.1 None

9.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS

9.1 None

10.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 None

11.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

11.1 Has the potential impact of your proposal(s) been reviewed with regard to equality?

No, an Equality Impact Assessment was completed when Performance Appraisal was introduced to the Council in 2013-14

12.0 CARBON REDUCTION AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

12.1 None

13.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

13.1 None

14.0 RECOMMENDATION/S

14.1 To note the content of the report

15.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

15.1 None

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APPENDICES

	Appendix
1	Performance Appraisal Report 2015 – 16

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TRANSFORMATION AND RESOURCES POLICY AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE
 1 February 2016
 PERFORMANCE APPRAISALS REPORT 2015/16

	Total People	Target Number (Managers)	PA Done	PA %
Adult Social Services	573	64	62	96.9%
Children & Young People's Department	1216	174	114	65.5%
Families and Wellbeing	273	34	32	97.1%
Neighbourhoods and Engagement	35	5	5	100.00%
Public Health	38	12	11	91.7%
Regeneration and Environment	662	124	112	90.3%
Transformation and Resources	1285	172	169	98.3%
Total	4086	585	506	86.5%
All Staff Levels	Total People	PA Done	PA %	Target
Adult Social Services	576	482	83.7%	✓
Children & Young People's Department	1216	641	52.7%	✗
Families and Wellbeing	273	227	83.1%	✓
Neighbourhoods and Engagement	35	30	85.71%	✓
Public Health	38	34	89.50%	✓
Regeneration and Environment	662	577	87.2%	✓
Transformation and Resources	1285	1002	78.0%	✗
Total	4085	2973	72.8%	N/A

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POLICY AND PERFORMANCE TRANSFORMATION AND RESOURCE COMMITTEE
1 FEBRUARY 2016

REPORT TITLE	LOCAL WELFARE ASSISTANCE SCHEME
REPORT OF	JOE BLOTT - STRATEGIC DIRECTOR OF TRANSFORMATION AND RESOURCES

REPORT SUMMARY

This report sets out the changes to the operation of Wirral's Local Welfare Assistance scheme and associated financial position to date, following the implementation of a number of the recommendations made by Cabinet on 29 June 2015. The matter affects all wards within the Borough.

RECOMMENDATION/S

Members are asked to acknowledge the progress made and recommend to Cabinet that the actions introduced in respect of 2015/2016 are continued and that Wirral's Local Welfare Assistance Support Scheme is therefore maintained, albeit on a moderated basis during 2016/2017 utilising the projected residual funding of £414,820.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1.1. Cabinet's direction of 29 June 2015, that as part of its 2016/2017 work programme, Transformation and Resource, Policy and Performance Committee undertakes a review of the capacity to offer continued Welfare Assistance Support during 2016/2017.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1. The report is intended to support Members undertake the directed review of provision and the scope for continued or a similar level of provision during 2016/2017. At the point of review any other options may then be considered

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 On 10 February 2015 Cabinet agreed as part of its budget resolutions that a total of £900,000 would be released from reserve to support the continuation of the scheme for the duration of 2015/2016. The £900,000 being funded through the previous two years underspent Government Grant specifically allocated for the provision of Local Welfare Assistance. Central funding was withdrawn from 1 April 2015 with the Government recommending that local authorities should consider funding future schemes from their general fund.
- 3.2. Transformation and Resources Policy and Performance Committee agreed to form a Task and Finish Scrutiny Panel to review Wirral's scheme. Their findings and recommendations to Cabinet being detailed in their Local Welfare Assistance Scheme Scrutiny Review report of June 2015, with consideration of a revised scheme being effective from 1st August 2015.
- 3.3. Following consideration of this report, in its meeting of 29 June 2015, Cabinet set out its findings and recommendations to be actioned, or otherwise considered, by the Head of Business Processes.
- 3.4. Activity together with the present position with regard to each recommendation is detailed below. With specific regard to the feasibility of referring successful applications for support to Wirral Food Bank, Officers have detailed a small number of logistical considerations which ought to be included in any further deliberations around this option and through any residual 2016/2017 scheme, which might be funded through any unspent amount remaining of the £900,000 reserve.

3.5. Recommendation 1 – The Review Panel recommends that Wirral Council continues to administer and maintain the Local Welfare Assistance Scheme with the remaining budget available in line with the officer proposal but with consideration to:

- i. Reviewing and redefining what items constitute an essential need with a view to excluding from the scheme or reducing the circumstances in which they are provided;

Actions:

- Officers reviewed all expenditure items and on the basis of findings it was proposed that the only essential items were food and fuel for the general application group. Those applicants presenting with exceptional requirements would however need to continue to be considered on a case by case basis with regard to appropriate awards.
- Applicants with exceptional needs were determined as those referred for assistance from the Council’s Housing Priority Panel and some applicants who were in the process of establishing their place and home within the community, for example, those leaving institutions, or perhaps ending a custodial sentence would, through necessity, be considered for the wider range of assistance available.

- ii. Excluding washing machines as an award provided from the scheme directly, except in exceptional circumstances, and referring these applications to Energy Projects Plus:

Action:

- Awards of washing machines dropped from 656 in 2014/15 to 15 from April – December 2015/16 with only 1 award after 1 August 2015. Referrals to Energy Projects Plus were then made for those applicants who were in need, although not necessarily assessed as having exceptional need.

- iii. Referring applications for white goods which have been assessed as not meeting the Council’s criteria and where a potential fuel debt issue has been identified to Energy Projects Plus.

Action:

- All applicants who had fuel debt were signposted to Energy Project Plus .Referrals were additionally made for those applicants who were assessed as having a requirement for white goods (but where their presenting need was not necessarily exceptional).

3.6. Recommendation 2 - The Emergency Utility Credit which is available to British gas customers who have fallen into debt and are on prepayment meters should be effectively promoted by the Council. Applicants identified through The Local Welfare Assistance Scheme as being eligible should be signposted to Energy Projects Plus for an assessment and application to be made.

Actions:

- All applications for Local Welfare Assistance whether the application is declined, or an award is made are sent details of a variety of sources of help, including links to the Council's own webpages and those of other organisations.
- Applicants visiting a One Stop Shop will be given appropriate advice on the options of support available which does include the opportunity to attend a personalised debt advice meeting. This is consistent with the core Local Welfare Assistance Scheme application process and broader Corporate Customer Contact/Access Strategy.
- Members may however now wish to consider whether this response ensures that those who are the most vulnerable and /or perhaps not able to navigate web based services are not disadvantaged and perhaps might, in future, be offered a direct, personalised referral service.

3.7. Recommendation 3 - Officers should explore the feasibility of referring successful applications for essential food to Wirral Food Bank, or any identified food bank that can service all of Wirral, with an appropriate donation being made from the remaining budget to help cover some operational costs. The Review Panel suggest that how this is achieved should be determined by officers to ensure that actual benefits can be identified and delivered and to ensure that the Council's Contract Procedure Rules are complied with.

Actions:

- Based on awards made during 2014/2015, Officers estimated that this proposal would result in increasing referrals to Wirral Food bank by around 9,500 annually.
- Wirral Food Bank generally allows awards of foodstuff for a three day period. This differs from the current Local Welfare Assistance Scheme which basis' it's award on individual need and can therefore, often just cover one day where circumstances dictate that this is appropriate and meets the applicants presenting need.
- In order to estimate the value of an appropriate donation from the fund to Wirral Food bank, without making any linked recommendation about its operational arrangements, a calculation was made assuming 9,500 awards would be made for a three day period. This would suggest that a donation of around £65,723.00p.a would be required.
- Investigations into the Corporate Procurement Process revealed that there are an additional two food banks operating on Wirral, although Wirral Food bank does appear to be the only service operating across the Borough.
- Following a period of investigation and review, the complexities of initiating changes in response to this specific recommendation which would be operable within the initial timeframe, covering the period 1 August 2015 to 31 March

2016, was deferred operationally with the specific intent that Members would be briefed with regard to findings and then able to more fully consider this option, perhaps making use of any residual funding , for the year 2016/2017.

- In lieu of further consideration by Members, the scheme continues to meet demand for assistance with food in the original manner and in accordance with the original scheme. In doing so it is not apparent that any related need has either not been met, or insufficiently met, although Members may of course wish to seek the view of local food bank provision.

3.8. Recommendation 4 - Publicity and communication plans should be reviewed to ensure there is take up and understanding of the scheme from all those who need it. This should include a broadcast to partner agencies to provide an update on the key aspects of the scheme from 1st August 2015.

Actions:

- The Local Welfare Assistance scheme is publicised through Wirral Council's new website, which was temporarily amended to advise of emergency provision arrangements during the Christmas period. This is consistent with the original scheme and with specific decisions made at that time around access to and operation of the scheme.
- Additional avenues for publicity are limited and whilst officers have given further consideration to the arrangements in place, any broader marketing of the scheme has to be balanced against the diminishing fund underpinning the extension of the scheme.
- Regular Liaison meetings with Local Registered Social Landlords routinely include an update on the Local Welfare Assistance scheme, other stakeholder organisations, such as the DWP and our private sector landlord g group are aware of provision and any changes in scope. Customer Service Advisors, together with our Welfare Rights provision are able to offer appropriate advice and sign post those who they feel are in need to such support accordingly.
- Officers are as such able to express, with a fairly high level of confidence that those in need and, or their advocates, landlords or other representing third party stakeholders are sufficiently aware of the scheme and how it is accessed.
- In considering this matter, whilst being appropriately aware of the need to ensure the schemes accessibility, Officers have had to be mindful of any excessive demand linked to such publicity which could significantly impact on the financial capacity of the residual, or any future scheme together with the service area's staffing resource in administering it.

3.9. Recommendation 5 – Cabinet is requested to support a further review of the Local Welfare Assistance Scheme as part of the Transformation and Resources Policy and Performance committee's work programme for the 2016/17 municipal year. The objective of the review would be to identify any strategies for providing local welfare assistance once the budget set aside for local welfare assistance has been depleted.

Actions:

- This report is intended to support further consideration of the feasibility of a 2016/2017 Local Welfare provision. The tables shown in Appendix 3 is a comparison in the number of successful awards between 2014/2015 and the present year to 31 December 2015, together with the spend profile year to date. On the basis of activity it is estimated that the remaining financial provision will be in the region of £414,820k.
- Comparisons with awards made in 2014/15 to year to date 2015/16 show both volumes of applications and awards have decreased. With the successful awards remaining very stable at 43% of all applications in both years for food and fuel.
- Awards for non- essential items have dropped from 6396 in 2014/15 to 2228 April –December 2015/16

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1. With effect from 1 April 2015 direct Government support in respect of Local Welfare Support schemes was withdrawn leaving local authorities to consider whether they wished to continue to support any future schemes through their General Fund.
- 4.2. Since 1 April 2015 Wirral has been able to support continued , albeit, revised provision, by making use of residual funding awarded by the DWP in respect of the previous two years.
- 4.3. The present and year end projected financial positions are set out above. It is expected that of the original £900,000K made available some £414,820k will remain unspent at 31 March 2015.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There is no specific duty on local authorities as to how or if they meet this provision as government views authorities need to be able to be flexible to provide this support in a way that is suitable and appropriate to meet the needs of local communities.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: ICT, STAFFING AND ASSETS

- 6.1 Applications in respect of support through Wirral's Local Welfare Assistance Scheme continue to be administered by a small group of officers within the Housing Benefit service who also administer the Discretionary Housing Payment Scheme, Free School Meals and benefit applications specifically in respect of Hostel accommodation. The team is managed by an experienced Team Leader, in turn supported by the Benefits Operational Manager who closely monitors administration of the provision and any issues arising out of the same. These arrangements will continue through until year end , with the scope in respect of resource and skill-set then being further accessible should a decision be made to continue this provision during 2016/2017.

6.2 Issues previously reported at a practical level, with which staff have to contend do continue, albeit at a lower level. Our one stop shop staff routinely deal with customers who are upset, angry or worried and they face difficulties with customers who are struggling to meet escalating financial commitments or who are refused an LWA award. It is anticipated that this trend is likely to continue as staff contend with an increasingly difficult role as the adverse impacts of welfare reform are seen. Training to support staff is in place while we keep under review the balance of security in place to support our staff whilst not impacting on site environment.

6.3 ASSETS & IT : There are none arising out of this report.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

8.1. In undertaking the directed review it is expected that all relevant risks associated with either the withdrawal of any level of support or the provision of support which is of a different nature will be duly considered.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

9.1. Consultation and engagement took place with a variety of key partner organisation and stakeholders during the development of the original Local Welfare Assistance Scheme. A small representative group joined Officers and Members in the more recent Scrutiny Review Engagement Workshops

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

9.1. A specific Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) was undertaken as part of Wirral's scheme development and design, and is at the following link; <http://www.wirral.gov.uk/my-services/community-and-living/equality-diversity-cohesion/equality-impact-assessments/eias-2010/finance>

9.2. A national EIA for Welfare Reform can be assessed at the following link: <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/policy/welfare-reform/legislation-and-key-documents/welfare-reform-act-2012/impact-assessments-and-equality/>

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APPENDICES

1. Local Welfare Assistance Scheme Scrutiny Review Report
2. Local Welfare Assistance Scheme for 2015/16 (from 1 August 2015).
3. Comparison Tables for number of successful awards

REFERENCE MATERIAL: None

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting		Date
Cabinet	(min 8)	29 June 2015
Policy and Performance (T&R)	(min 24)	4 February 2015
Council Excellence Overview and Scrutiny	(min 36)	14 April 2014
Cabinet	(min 164)	13 March 2014
Cabinet	(min 168)	24 January 2013
Council Excellence Overview and Scrutiny	(min 42)	27 November 2012
Cabinet	(min 51)	19 July 2012
Council Excellence Overview and Scrutiny	(min 98)	26 March 2012
Council Excellence Overview and Scrutiny	(min 138)	17 November 2011
Cabinet	(min 118)	22 September 2011



**LOCAL WELFARE ASSISTANCE SCHEME
SCRUTINY REVIEW**

A report produced by
**THE TRANSFORMATION AND RESOURCES
POLICY & PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE**

*June 2015
FINAL REPORT*

WIRRAL COUNCIL
LOCAL WELFARE ASSISTANCE SCHEME
SCRUTINY REVIEW
FINAL REPORT

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1. INTRODUCTION

As part of the Transformation and Resources Policy & Performance Committee's work programme, Members agreed to undertake a Task & Finish Scrutiny Review of the Council's Local Welfare Assistance Scheme following news that there would be no further funding from central government from 1st April 2015. As the Local Welfare Assistance Scheme provides awards to people who are in severe need, this contributes to meeting the corporate priority of protecting the vulnerable in Wirral.

On 10th February 2015, Cabinet agreed as part of its budget resolutions that £900,000 would be held in a reserve to determine how this should be allocated after the current scheme expires at the end of July 2015. A scoping meeting for the review was convened on 25th February with an evidence day held on 9th April to inform recommendations to Cabinet.

An Executive Summary of the findings follows, together with the recommendations arising from this Review. The Report then sets out the background to the original brief, as well as the methodology adopted for gathering the evidence. This is followed by the main body of the Report which details the key findings and recommendations of the Task & Finish Panel Members.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Local authorities no longer receive direct central government funding for local welfare assistance, effective from 1st April 2015. In February 2015, Cabinet agreed that the £600K underspend from 2013/14 and the anticipated £300K underspend from 2014/15 would be held in a reserve for this Task and Finish Review Panel to make recommendations on how the resource should be allocated for 2015/16.

This review is a good example of pre-decision scrutiny which was undertaken through an evidence day. The Review Panel not only engaged with relevant Council officers but with representatives from WIRED, Energy Projects Plus, Citizens Advice Bureau and Wirral Foodbank to help inform the recommendations made in this report. The Review Panel took the opportunity to learn how Wirral Council administered the scheme, including the determination and provision of awards made, and analysed a number of information sources presented during the evidence day.

As Members considered all the evidence and findings, it became evident that the most appropriate option would be for Wirral Council to continue to administer the scheme. The Review Panel was complimentary of how Wirral Council has been delivering the scheme since 2013, and in particular, the thoroughness of the application assessment process with access to Benefit and Council Tax records which only the Council has access to. It was generally felt that if the scheme was to be made more stringent, the Council would be best placed to administer it and to ensure that there was no significant service disruption to the scheme, impacting the immediate provision of awards to people who are in crisis.

A proposal by officers to continue to administer the scheme - potentially up to April 2017 - was endorsed by the Review Panel. This proposal allows food and fuel, considered as the priority areas, to be provided for whilst decreasing what is spent on white goods. The British Gas Energy Trust has funding for people in crisis and access to this fund is through Energy Projects Plus as an organisation who delivers the Trust's scheme. The Trust can help clear fuel debts as well as provide financial assistance for white goods. To reduce the Council's expenditure on white goods, it was proposed that referrals for washing machines could be made to Energy Projects Plus to access funding from the British Gas Energy Trust. The rationale for this is that awards for washing machines account for the biggest expenditure in terms of item and overall cost.

The Review Panel was also keen to refer applicants who have been identified as having a fuel debt along with any other application for white goods that did not meet the Council's Local Welfare Assistance Scheme criteria. Additionally, the Review Panel learned that emergency utility credit awards are also available to British Gas customers. Referrals are made by Energy Projects Plus and other organisations to customers of British Gas who have a financial crisis and specific health needs.

Recommendation 1

The Review Panel recommends that Wirral Council continues to administer and maintain the Local Welfare Assistance Scheme with the remaining budget available in line with the officer proposal but with consideration to:

- i) Reviewing and redefining what items constitute an essential need with a view to excluding them from the scheme or reducing the circumstances in which they are provided;*
- ii) Excluding washing machines as an award provided from the scheme directly, except in exceptional circumstances, and referring these applications to Energy Projects Plus; and*
- iii) Referring applications for white goods which have been assessed as not meeting the Council's criteria and where a potential fuel debt issue has been identified to Energy Projects Plus.*

Recommendation 2

The Emergency Utility Credit which is available to British Gas customers who have fallen into debt and are on prepayment meters should be effectively promoted by the Council. Applicants identified through the Local Welfare Assistance Scheme as being eligible should be signposted to Energy Projects Plus for an assessment and application to be made.

The evidence day included discussions with Trustees from Wirral Foodbank, a charity providing emergency food for people in crisis. It was proposed that Wirral Council could reduce the maximum number of days' award for essential food from seven to four and refer applicants to Wirral Foodbank for the remaining three days. As the Council would be increasing the number of referrals for essential food, the Review Panel considered that a small donation to Wirral Foodbank could be made from the scheme's budget to help cover its operational expenses.

Recommendation 3

Officers should explore the feasibility of referring successful applications for essential food to Wirral Foodbank, or any identified food bank that can service all of Wirral, with an appropriate donation being made from the remaining budget to help cover some operational costs. The Review Panel suggest that how this is achieved should be determined by officers to ensure that actual benefits can be identified and delivered and to ensure that the Council's Contract Procedure Rules are complied with.

The Review Panel did not have any significant concerns regarding take up of the scheme but did acknowledge comments made by the Operations Manager for the Citizens Advice Bureau that some of their clients' awareness of the Local Welfare Assistance Scheme was by 'word of mouth'. Additionally, the Review Panel acknowledged comments made that there may be some confusion conveyed by the DWP in relation to the number of awards that can be made from the scheme. As such, the Review Panel recognised that it would now be beneficial to review how the scheme can be effectively publicised from August 1st 2015 should the scheme be extended and amendments made.

Recommendation 4

Publicity and communication plans should be reviewed to ensure there is take up and understanding of the scheme from all those who need it. This should include a broadcast to partner agencies to provide an update on the key aspects of the scheme from 1st August 2015.

If the existing scheme is maintained and is consistent with the office proposal, the Council is faced with the prospect of not having any direct funding for local welfare assistance from 1st

April 2017. The Review Panel considered that it would be beneficial to undertake a further Task & Finish Scrutiny Review of the scheme in 2016. This review could consider making recommendations to amend the scheme to enhance the lifetime of the budget, consider potential options to continue the provision of local welfare assistance in the longer-term and identify any additional funding or grants that are accessible.

Recommendation 5

Cabinet is requested to support a further review of the Local Welfare Assistance Scheme as part of the Transformation and Resources Policy & Performance Committee's work programme for the 2016/17 municipal year. The objective of the review would be to identify any strategies for providing local welfare assistance once the budget set aside for local welfare assistance has been depleted.

The Review Panel considers that funding for local welfare schemes is vital in providing crucial support to communities, specifically to those people who are most vulnerable and are suffering through crisis. The Review Panel is opposed to the Government's decision to withdraw direct funding to provide support for those who need it.

Recommendation 6

That Cabinet lobbies Central Government against the withdrawal of Local Welfare Assistance Funding from April 2015 and the impact that this has on local communities.

3. MEMBERS OF THE TASK & FINISH GROUP

Councillor Janette Williamson (Chair)



CHAIR'S PERSONAL STATEMENT

I would like to thank the members of the Review Panel who participated in this Task and Finish Scrutiny Review. I felt this was a really important piece of work to undertake, especially as the funding for the Local Welfare Assistance Scheme has now ceased. I feel that the Review Panel has identified a number of ways of maximizing what funding is left in order to help as many vulnerable residents as possible.

I would like to thank the representatives from Citizens Advice Bureau, Wirral Foodbank, WIRED and Energy Projects Plus for their attendance and expert knowledge. I would also like to thank Council officers involved in the Scrutiny Review including Malcolm Flanagan, Head of Business Processes, Trish Hughes, Operational Manager and Wendy Neil, Team Leader, for all their hard work in making this an informative and valuable piece of scrutiny work.

Other Panel Members were:

Councillor Tom Anderson



Councillor Phil Gilchrist



Councillor Mathew Patrick



Councillor Paul Doughty



Councillor Joe Walsh



4. BACKGROUND AND ORIGINAL BRIEF

The Local Welfare Assistance Scheme has been in place for two years since 1st April 2013 following the abolition of the Social Fund. The Department for Work and Pensions had previous responsibility for administering the Social Fund. From April 2013, the discretionary Crisis Loans for Living Expenses and Community Care Grant elements of the Social Fund administered by the Department for Work and Pensions were abolished. All local authorities were subsequently given funding to develop and administer their own schemes for Local Welfare Assistance.

Direct funding has now been withdrawn by central government effective from 1st April 2015 with the recommendation that local authorities should consider funding schemes from their general fund. Additionally, the government has informed Wirral Council that its indicative sum for the provision of local welfare support expenditure is £1.1M.

On 10th February 2015, Cabinet agreed as part of its budget resolutions that £900,000 would be held in a reserve.

“This fund provides financial assistance to people in dire need. The government transferred responsibility for administering this from DWP to the Council together with a grant of £1.1m. The government announced that this grant was being cut with effect from March 2015. The Council has £600,000 in a reserve for this fund. Cabinet intends to make this available together with the anticipated underspend in 2014/15 of £300,000 to create a fund totalling £900,000 available for 2015/16. This will provide a local scheme to fill the gap left by the government’s unwillingness to assist the most vulnerable in our communities. It is proposed that the 2014/15 policy be continued until the end of July 2015. In the interim, Cabinet asks the Scrutiny Review Group which has been set up to look at this fund to meet in order to make recommendations as to how this resource should be allocated.”

The Scope Document for the Scrutiny Review is attached as **Appendix 1** to this Report.

5. METHODOLOGY FOR THE REVIEW

An evidence day was conducted on 9th April 2015 as the approach to carry out the scrutiny review and a number of methods were used to gather evidence. This included a question and answers session with key officers from the Council, including the Head of Business Processes, The Housing Benefit Operational Manager and the Processing Group Team Leader. The emphasis was on understanding the context of the Local Welfare Assistance Scheme and to discuss potential options on how the £900k fund could be used to deliver local welfare assistance from August 1st 2015 when the current scheme expires.

To facilitate this, a number of information sources were provided to the Review Panel which included a breakdown of applications to the scheme, a breakdown of awards made against specific categories, details of award expenditure and the costs to administer the scheme.

A number of representatives from key third sector organisations were also invited to the session to help inform the Review Panel to make recommendations moving forward. These organisations work directly with people who are vulnerable or suffer through crisis and were considered by the Review Panel to be able to contribute to this review.

These organisations were:

- Citizens Advice Bureau (Operation's Manager)
- WIRED (Executive Officer)
- Energy Projects Plus (Chief Executive)
- Wirral Foodbank (Project Manager and Trustee)

6. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Scheme Overview

Wirral Council's Local Welfare Assistance Scheme was introduced in April 2013 and its aim is to provide emergency support to people in short term need resulting from an emergency or a crisis. It also supports people to become established or remain in the community after leaving care.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) made available a grant of £1,345,925 per annum for both 2013/14 and 2014/15. This is significantly less than the previous DWP full year expenditure against Crisis Loans and Community Care Grants.

The Local Welfare Assistance Scheme Policy, revised and approved by Cabinet for 2014/15, stipulates all the criteria to be met in order to be eligible to access the scheme.

The criteria are:

- Aged 16 or over
- Be a Wirral resident or, in the case of those who are homeless or leaving an institutional establishment, have established links with Wirral.
- Support is required to address essential needs of the individual and/or their dependents
- It is demonstrated that there are no other resources or other ways of meeting this need which are considered reasonable.

The table below gives a summary of applications made for 2013/14 and 2014/15

	2013/14	2014/15
Total Applications made*	8222	8349
Successful Awards	8345	12718
Unsuccessful Awards	3328	23267

**Each application can contain several different types of claim*

Access to the scheme increased in year 2 (2014/15) as more people became aware of it compared to year 1 (2013/14) in which there was an approximate underspend of 40% of the budget. Officers believe that if the scheme was to continue, it is projected that access to the scheme would increase further if the scheme provides the same level and range of support.

6.2 Scheme Administration

Application and Assessment

The scheme is administered by the Housing Benefits Team and all applications are completed online through Wirral's website. Most One Stop Shops provide self-access kiosks for anyone without computer or internet access and some assistance can be provided by front-line staff to complete the application correctly.

The Review Panel was informed that applications are normally dealt with on the day they are received and prioritised by a team leader before being assessed by a team of 6-7 assessment officers. These assessment officers also process housing benefit and council tax support applications.

Generally, awards are made for essential food, fuel payments where applicants have a pre-paid utility meter, clothing, furniture, white goods and some household items such as bedding. There are different levels of access to the scheme and each applicant is assessed against the criteria, with household composition and income being considered holistically (e.g. checking why benefit payments have not been made). Verification of all details supplied within the applications is made using Housing Benefit / Council Tax records, DWP records and through speaking with the applicant if necessary before making a final assessment. As the team deal with Housing Benefit and Council Tax, they would also have access to all other benefits that could be claimed by the applicant to maximise benefits, such as free school meals and Council Tax benefits. This was welcomed by the Review Panel for the thoroughness taken through the assessment process.

As part of the scrutiny review, Members requested a breakdown of awards given against assistance type for the 2014/15 financial year. These are detailed below.

Assistance type	Awards	% of total awards	Total sum
Clothing/Bedding	990	7.8%	£48,748.47
Expenses	10	0.1%	£359.20
Food	2723	21.4%	£131,144.46
Furniture	2259	17.8%	£193,003.88
Other Assistance	67	0.5%	£1,486.58
Utilities	3599	28.3%	£59,173.97
White Goods	3070	24.1%	£427,074.38
Grand Total	12718		£860,990.94

The analysis shows that nearly 50% of all awards are for assistance with food and utilities but this makes up only 22% of the total expenditure. Officers stated that food and fuel are considered the priority areas to ensure those who do not have the financial means do not needlessly go without and these applications are prioritised ahead of other requests. This view was shared by the Review Panel which considered that these should remain as the key priority areas moving forward with any proposals.

The Review Panel learned that for both essential food and fuel awards, the maximum award provided is for up to seven days. Essential food awards are made with a range of £6 per day for a single person to £17 per day for a family with three or more children. Fuel payments are based on a rate of £5 per day but these are to be subject to a fresh review by officers who will look at all national organisations that monitor fuel costs to determine the rates. In relation to white goods, officers explained that single people will generally only get microwaves and not cookers because they are considered more transient and families will normally receive a cooker to ensure that children can be provided for. Additionally, washing machines are also not provided to single people unless there were mobility issues identified in using a laundrette.

The breakdown of awards made in 2014/15 against white goods is provided below.

Item	Awards made	Total value	Average cost per item
Washing machines	656	£146,125.06	£222
Fridge Freezers	947	£128,489.47	£135
Cookers	570	£114,714.08	£201

Members noted that washing machines are the highest item of expenditure out of white goods provided and this also constitutes the highest cost per item.

Officers stated that awards would not be simply awarded for general wear and tear. The team receive many applications with no underlying crisis being stated or items that are not essential and these are refused. However, Council officers have now built up considerable experience in determining the appropriateness of making awarding against the stated needs.

In respect of applications made for food awards, referrals to food banks would be made if an applicant doesn't meet the Council's criteria or has had a maximum amount of award. These referrals are dealt with at One Stop Shops who issue the appropriate vouchers for food items to be provided.

The Review Panel raised an issue regarding the administrative resource dealing with serial applicants making repeated false or unsubstantiated applications. However, Members agreed with the approach taken by officers that the Council shouldn't stop these applications coming in, but to use the knowledge and experience gained to determine if there is a crisis or an essential need that should be assessed against.

Although the policy states that only one claim can be made in a two year period, it is understood that some flexibility has been applied operationally as the policy was written without an understanding of what the demand would be and the impact of welfare reform changes since April 2013.

Provision of awards / items

Wirral Council uses two contracted suppliers who provide, deliver and install items at low cost. Awards for household white goods, such as refrigerators are procured through Furniture Resource Centre and they normally deliver within seven days. David Philips Furniture is used for all other furniture items such as beds and mattresses. Members learned that the Council has been able to develop strong relationships with the contractors and this has allowed any discrepancies or issues to be resolved promptly. However, if there is an intention for the Council to continue to deliver the scheme, it is understood that new tenders will have to be issued for 1st August 2015.

The Council works with a payment service company to allow awards for food, fuel and small household goods to be made on pre-loaded cards with a PIN to make payments. Text messages are sent to successful applicants to say they are successful and to pick up their card from a specific One Stop Shop at a certain time. The Review Panel had concerns that these cards could be used inappropriately, such as in gambling premises or Off Licenses. However, it was explained by officers that these cards can only be used at pre-approved merchants and at PayPoints for utilities.

It was explained that opportunities for cards to be used on inappropriate items are identified on an ongoing basis, including through meetings with the card provider. The team is able to review card redemption records through the merchant codes provided by the card provider. Applicants are required to sign a document to declare that the award is only to be used for what was claimed for and that non-compliance may affect future awards. Members were positive about these processes but acknowledged that in some establishments where you can buy food, you can also buy alcohol so there is a limit on policing. Members also welcomed the approach to not limit access to certain supermarkets, which some other local authorities have implemented, as this limits the availability of local options.

The Review Panel clarified that the team does signpost people to the Department for Work and Pensions Budgeting Loans as a potential avenue for financial support if they meet the necessary criteria. These interest free loans have to be paid back but can help people to buy

furniture or household equipment, pay for travel costs or even to pay for items to look for or start work.

The Review Panel was interested in how successful the scheme was in helping people in the longer term with a concern that they are simply back in crisis a month later. The Review Panel heard that there are difficulties with this as there is no additional monitoring within available resources. It was explained that many people will always be subject to DWP sanctions due to behaviour and will always return to the scheme. However, Members were pleased to hear from officers that the scheme has had a positive impact on the lives of young people who have been or are homeless and are trying to get started again. Positive feedback has also been received from some people who were in desperate need and couldn't have managed without the scheme. Officers also stated that the scheme has been critical for vulnerable people who move in and out of hostels due to family conditions.

Appeals against refused applications

Claimants can appeal against an unsuccessful application and these are looked at by the Team Leader. These include appeals against a refusal to give an award due to an award already being made in the same two year period. Since April 2013, 2508 appeals have been made and the success rate is 45%. If applicants are unsuccessful, the Council will signpost these to other third sector organisations such as charities or those that provide specialist support.

Scheme administration costs

The costs to administer the scheme for 2014/15 were made available to the Review Panel and are shown below:

Total award expenditure	£862,857
Text local	£1,715
Allpay admin (card transactions)	£5,308
Staffing costs	£125,387
Total	£995,267

The staffing costs amounting to £125,387 have been apportioned to the costs of the salaries of the six assessment officers, one administration officer, a senior clerk, a Team Leader and elements of the Operations Manager and the Head of Business Processes. However, it was acknowledged by the Review Panel that these costs do not include the recharge for the time spent at One Stop Shops to provide payment cards, explain elements of the award and to ascertain what further welfare advice can be given. Officers stated that this is reducing as we move towards a more appointments based system.

Communication of the scheme

The Review Panel was informed that the Local Welfare Assistance Scheme was low key during year one but relevant partner organisations were notified of the scheme in order to signpost applicants in the right direction. As well as being advertised on the Council's website, the scheme was promoted on Housing Benefit notification letters and through Discretionary Housing Payments applications. These have ceased from April 1st 2015 until a decision is made on the scheme's future.

The table below details the percentage of applications for awards across age bands ranging from 16 to over 65 for 2014/15.

Age Band	16-25	26-35	36-50	51-65	65+
% of Applicants	27%	31%	29%	12%	1%

The analysis shows that fewer applications are

made from older people (51-65 and 65+). Older people may be unaware of the scheme but could be struggling financially and could be entitled to a grant through the scheme. However, the Review Panel was informed that that the age demographic figures for Wirral mirror closely those figures for the DWP when it administered the previous scheme.

6.3 Third Sector Organisations

As part of the scrutiny review, representatives from a number of third sector organisations were invited to attend the evidence day to further understand the needs in the community, the potential to signpost or refer applicants to other schemes / grants and to also identify the potential for alternate delivery models moving forward.

Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)

The Citizens Advice Bureau provides free, independent, confidential and impartial advice to everyone on their rights and responsibilities. It also receives many applications for clients to get assistance for items such as white goods or for advice around debt. The key observations from the Operations Manager for CAB are detailed below.

- The number of people coming to the Citizens Advice Bureau in relation to the Local Welfare Assistance Scheme has decreased as the perception from clients is that there isn't any help. Some clients are being informed by the DWP that if they have had already received one award they are then not entitled to another. Clients are also being told that they can't claim if they have received DWP sanctions. Officers did clarify that in both cases this may be due to other local authorities adopting these policies and the DWP not differentiating between them.
- Clients who come in relation to the Local Welfare Assistance Scheme state they are only aware of its existence through word of mouth as it's not very well advertised. Clients are unsure when is the right time to make an application with the belief that only one award would be given regardless of reasons for any future claims.
- Wirral's scheme would not always be the first point of contact for referrals so Wirral Council may only be dealing with a small proportion of people who are in need. The Citizens Advice Bureau sources other available avenues such as grants for energy payments for those that use British Gas as part of their scheme. These grants have not been well publicised, even with British Gas.
- The Citizens Advice Bureau is very responsive to the fact that there is some funding still available to carry on due to the clear demand in the community and that there will likely be an increase in essential need with more DWP sanctions being applied and changes in welfare reforms. The Operations Manager stated it is imperative that essential support is provided only to those who really need it and that essential items should be limited to food, heating and lighting. The Citizens Advice Bureau believes the DWP sanctions to be unfair which is affecting more and more clients who consequently have nowhere else to turn.
- As the Citizens Advice Bureau is impartial and independent it would not be appropriate for them, and other similar advisory organisations, to administer Local Welfare Assistance and make decisions on awards. However, it was put to the Review Panel that the Council may wish to consider allocating some funding moving forward to any organisation that

could provide preventative advice to help clients in the future and reduce the numbers accessing the scheme.

Wirral Foodbank

Wirral Foodbank was established in November 2011 and is part of The Trussell Trust, a Christian charity that provides “emergency food for local people in crisis” as well as debt, benefit and employment advice. The key observations from discussion with the Trustees are detailed below.

- There are fourteen food bank distribution centres across Wirral with over two hundred volunteers who give time regularly and many more who volunteer at one-off events. Food is generally donated by local people churches, schools, supermarket collection days and local businesses across Wirral. There are also collection boxes in Tesco, Asda, Coop and Sainsbury’s. Tesco also makes a monetary donation of up to 30% of the value of the food collections.
- Wirral Foodbank does not make any assessment to determine who is in need of food as these are carried out by one of the eighty four voucher-holding agencies such as the Citizens Advice Bureau and Ones Stop Shops.
- A voucher is exchanged for three days’ supply of food at one of the fourteen distribution centres across Wirral. Due to food hygiene regulations, only non-perishable food items such as tinned products, rice and fruit juices are given. The amount of food allocated is dependent on whether the client is single or is supporting a family and guidance to referring agencies is that a maximum of three vouchers should be issued but this can be flexible subject to the agreement of the Foodbank.
- In 2014, 12,503 people received emergency food, of which 4498 were children. Low income, benefit delays and benefit changes were the main reason why people were referred to food banks during that year.
- Wirral Foodbank’s biggest expense is the operation of their two vans and the associated insurance and fuel costs to ensure food can be delivered to one of the fourteen distribution centres and collected from the various supermarket locations across Wirral. One of these vans is leased from the Council and the other is rented.
- If Wirral Council was to increase the number of referrals to Wirral Foodbank as part of any future strategy for delivering the Local Welfare Assistance Scheme, there should not be any significant issues in sourcing additional food items to meet this demand. This would be subject to review based on the number of actual referrals received.

WIRED

WIRED is a registered local charity that works within the voluntary and community sector in Wirral providing information, advice and support. Historically, WIRED has provided a lot of advocacy work but now a key objective is to support carers through the provision of carers’ support services. WIRED has extensive experience of administering grants, including carers’ grants. WIRED delivers the Carers’ Grant Service and this is jointly commissioned by the CCG and Wirral’s Department of Adult Social Services. The key observations from the Executive Officer for WIRED are detailed below.

- If anyone came to WIRED for essential items (eg. Food, fuel or household items), they would go to grant-making trusts that can provide people with emergency support to look at the best way forward for them. It is not always about the provision of cash as a solution to meeting a need.
- There may be other national schemes that the Council may not be aware of that people could access. However, the issue could be that the individual may not have

the capacity to apply for them themselves and organisations don't have the resources to deal with individual applications.

- Wirral Council could try to reduce the number of applications coming in and signpost to other schemes or funding elsewhere to try and enhance the lifetime of the budget. However, the Council should still ensure that the scheme is adequately promoted to ensure that anyone who is eligible can access it.
- To further enhance the lifetime of the LWAS, a proportion of the budget could be retained and used to enable awards to continue to be made beyond the lifetime of the available budget. This would require a lot more exploration outside of this Scrutiny Review to identify investment opportunities and is an exercise that third sector organisations could be involved in.

Energy Projects Plus

Energy Projects Plus is an independent charity and social enterprise which aims to reduce fuel poverty and carbon emissions across Merseyside and Cheshire. The key observations from discussion with the Chief Executive of Energy Projects Plus are detailed below.

- Energy Projects Plus provides a number of services including 'Save Energy Advice Line' which is a free and impartial service to provide energy efficiency advice to clients.
- Energy Projects Plus is one of a number of organisations that delivers the British Gas Energy Trust Fuel Debt Advice Service through the provision of a grant. Free and impartial money and debt prevention advice is provided through the service, emphasising on the relief and prevention of fuel poverty.
- The Fuel Debt Advice Service can help clients access funding from the Trust to clear fuel debts as well as 'Further Assistance Payments' for white goods, boiler repairs and replacement or funeral arrears. To be eligible, applicants must be in need, hardship or other distress. Referrals are normally received from third party organisations or from the Save Energy Advice Line.
- Clients that apply for awards are subject to an income/expenditure analysis before the applications are sent online to the Energy Trust and it can be 8-12 weeks before the financial assistance is received. Cases are prioritised but needs cannot be met where there is an emergency but attempts to expedite the process are made.
- Energy Projects Plus received 111 applications in the first three financial quarters of 2014/15 but received 101 in the last financial quarter so there has been a spike in demand. Approximately 60-70% of all applications are made for white goods.
- Wirral Council has started to make some referrals to Energy Projects Plus for white goods and there is capacity for Wirral Council to make more referrals moving forward. However, it is not clear how much funding has been made available for organisations to access from the Trust to deliver the scheme and how long this will last.
- Emergency utility credit awards are available to British Gas customers referred by Energy Projects Plus and other organisations to customers of British Gas who have a financial crisis and specific health needs. The awards available are dependent on the availability of funds from the British Gas Energy Trust and could be withdrawn at any time. The awards available are:
 - £28 for an individual; and
 - £45 for a family (two or more people living within the property)

6.4 Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations

The Review Panel considered a number of potential options for providing local welfare assistance from 1st August 2015 based on information presented during the evidence session. These included extending the existing scheme with consideration to enhancing the lifetime of the available funding, whether loans could be provided instead of or in addition to grants and considering the role of the voluntary sector for either signposting or administering the scheme.

The clear outcome from the evidence session was the strong rationale for the Council to continue to administer and extend the existing scheme that is in place and signpost to other organisations where necessary. This rationale included:

- The importance of retaining the existing knowledge base and experience of staff who understand welfare benefit and the effects of welfare reform;
- The importance of having access to both Council records and DWP data through data share arrangements which may not be available to third party providers to check the financial legitimacy of applications or to identify fraud;
- Control to review and amend the scheme and make it more stringent if required to further enhance or maintain the lifetime of the available budget;
- Existing partnership arrangements with Energy Projects Plus which can now be expanded in line with BGET funding made available to them;
- Existing partnership working with other third parties, such as Tenancy Support Officers, other advocacy services and local hostel managers;
- The likelihood of identifying a third sector organisation who could administer the scheme effectively without infringing their remit of providing impartial advocacy;
- The significant time and resource that could be required to determine if third party administration would actually be viable and cost effective for the finite money available;
- The risk of service destabilisation during any transfer of administrative control to a third party, impacting the ability to deal with applications effectively and efficiently; and
- The requirement for robust monitoring procedures to be developed for third party organisations which may negate any savings on administrative costs.

In addition to the above, the Review Panel welcomed a proposal by officers which would potentially allow the scheme to be extended from August 2015 to the end of March 2017 with the available £900k budget. Members also learned from the evidence session that this was also consistent with all other Merseyside local authorities who have also extended their scheme for 2015 onwards. However, it is not known whether these schemes are funded through unspent balances or from allocated budgets.

It was explained that this proposal ensures would require slight amendments to the criteria for awards to accommodate for an expected increase in demand for direct assistance with food and fuel.

However, this would see amounts allocated for white goods and other essential awards decrease through more stringent assessment of applications and amendments to the criteria of awards. The indicative figures below show the full allocation of the anticipated budget of £900k.

Assistance Type		% Change to 2014/15 scheme
Food and fuel	£97,500	35 % increase
White goods and furniture	£240,000	8.5 % decrease
Other essential awards	£22,500	10 % decrease
Total	£360,000	

2016/17

Assistance Type	
Food and fuel	£146,250
White goods and furniture	£360,000
Other essential awards	£33,750
Total	£540,000

These figures will also include the expected costs for running the scheme, such as elements of salary costs and provision of payment cards. The Review Panel acknowledged that as the demand for the scheme is only estimated, the scheme could end earlier than March 2017 or even extend further.

The Review Panel agreed that to reduce spending on white goods, furniture and other essential items, there would be a need to clearly redefine what is classed as an essential need. Members considered that there could be potential to exclude awards being provided for floorings and furniture (such as wardrobes and chest of drawers) but agreed with officers that some exceptions should be made for those who are most vulnerable, such as people leaving care.

The Review Panel identified the opportunity for the Council to utilise the British Gas Energy Trust funding available to Energy Projects Plus to help with fuel debts or to provide white goods. To reduce expenditure on white goods, it was considered that any application for a washing machine could be referred to Energy Projects Plus to provide from funding available to them. The rationale for this is that it the biggest expenditure in terms of cost and is not considered as essential as cookers or fridge freezers. Additionally, Energy Projects Plus has the same eligibility criteria as Wirral. However, there was an acknowledgement that some funding should remain to allow the Council to provide washing machines in exceptional circumstances. It was also suggested that any applications for white goods that do not meet Wirral's criteria could also be referred to Energy Projects Plus to access funding from the British Gas Energy Trust.

The Review Panel did not consider that providing loans instead of / inclusive of grants would be appropriate to increase available funds for 2015 and onwards. It was the opinion that awards made reflect the vulnerability of applicants so any repayment of the loan would be difficult as their income would have been assessed as already being at a low level. Additionally, officers and Members of the Review Panel acknowledged that it would not be cost effective to administer the loans considering the relatively small value. The DWP was able to recover payments from ongoing entitlement to benefits but this is not possible for local authorities and would result in an invoice having to be raised on each occasion with little prospect of recovery.

Recommendation 1

The Review Panel recommends that Wirral Council continues to administer and maintain the Local Welfare Assistance Scheme with the remaining budget available in line with the officer proposal but with consideration to:

- i) Reviewing and redefining what items constitute an essential need with a view to excluding them from the scheme or reducing the circumstances in which they are provided;*
- ii) Excluding washing machines as an award provided from the scheme directly, except in exceptional circumstances, and referring these applications to Energy Projects Plus; and*
- iii) Referring applications for white goods which have been assessed as not meeting the Council's criteria and where a potential fuel debt issue has been identified to Energy Projects Plus.*

Recommendation 2

The Emergency Utility Credit which is available to British Gas customers who have fallen into debt and are on prepayment meters should be effectively promoted by the Council. Applicants identified through the Local Welfare Assistance Scheme as being eligible should be signposted to Energy Projects Plus for an assessment and application to be made.

A key outcome from the evidence session was the potential for the Council to work with Wirral Foodbank in providing essential food items to applicants. As Wirral Foodbank confirmed it would be possible to source additional food items if required, the Review Panel considered the viability of making a small donation to the charity from the budget for operational expenses, such as a one year lease on a van. In return, it was suggested that Wirral Council could reduce its maximum award from seven days to four days. Wirral Foodbank would then provide the remaining three days where an applicant has been assessed as requiring the full seven days of essential food. In all cases, an applicant would still receive up to one week of essential food items.

The Review Panel considered that this could create the opportunity to extend the lifetime of the fund as well as providing a benefit to Wirral Foodbank to enhance its operations in Wirral. Although Wirral Foodbank was invited to attend the evidence session as a result of covering the whole of Wirral, the Review Panel is mindful of the Council's Contract Procedure Rules should any donation be made.

Recommendation 3

Officers should explore the feasibility of referring successful applications for essential food to Wirral Foodbank, or any identified food bank that can service all of Wirral, with an appropriate donation being made from the remaining budget to help cover some operational costs. The Review Panel suggest that how this is achieved should be determined by officers to ensure that actual benefits can be identified and delivered and to ensure that the Council's Contract Procedure Rules are complied with.

The Review Panel did not have any significant concerns regarding take up of the scheme but did acknowledge comments made by the Operations Manager for the Citizens Advice Bureau that some of their clients' awareness of the Local Welfare Assistance Scheme was by 'word of mouth'. Additionally, the Review Panel acknowledged comments made that there may be some confusion conveyed by the DWP in relation to the number of awards that can be made from the scheme. As such, the Review Panel recognised that it would now be beneficial to review how the scheme can be effectively publicised from August 1st 2015 should the scheme be extended and amendments made.

Recommendation 4

Publicity and communication plans should be reviewed to ensure there is take up and understanding of the scheme from all those who need it. This should include a broadcast to partner agencies to provide an update on the key aspects of the scheme from 1st August 2015.

The Review Panel acknowledge that the remaining £900k funding made available to provide local welfare assistance is finite and that there is no certainty that the removal of government funding for local welfare schemes from 1st April 2015 would be reversed in the future. It was agreed that it would be critical to identify any opportunities to continue the provision of local welfare assistance nearer to April 2017 when it is anticipated that the budget will have been depleted. This would provide an opportunity to further amend the scheme's policy in light of what budget remains as well as identifying the availability of any central or local government grants, identifying other schemes which could provide a source of funding or retaining some funding to help build the capacity of the voluntary sector to operate schemes directly.

Recommendation 5

Cabinet is requested to support a further review of the Local Welfare Assistance Scheme as part of the Transformation and Resources Policy & Performance Committee's work programme for the 2016/17 municipal year. The objective of the review would be to identify any strategies for providing local welfare assistance once the budget set aside for local welfare assistance has been depleted.

The Review Panel considers that funding for local welfare schemes is vital in providing crucial support to communities, specifically to those people who are most vulnerable and are suffering through crisis. The Review Panel is opposed to the Government's decision to withdraw direct funding to provide support for those who need it.

Recommendation 6

That Cabinet lobbies Central Government against the withdrawal of Local Welfare Assistance Funding from April 2015 and the impact that this has on local communities.

***This Report was produced by the Transformation and Resources Task & Finish Panel
(which reports to the Transformation and Resources Policy & Performance Committee)***

Appendix 1

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Scope Document

Review Title: Local Welfare Assistance Scheme

Date: 9th April 2015

1. Contact Information:	
Scrutiny Panel Chair: Cllr. J. Williamson	Panel Members: Cllrs Tom Anderson, Phil Gilchrist, Paul Doughty, Mathew Patrick, Joe Walsh
Scrutiny Officer(s): Michael Lester, 691 8628 michaellester@wirral.gov.uk	Departmental Link Officers: Malcolm Flanagan, Head of Business Processes 666 3260 malcolmflanagan@wirral.gov.uk
Other Key Contacts: Trish Hughes, Operational Manager 666 3222 triciahughes@wirral.gov.uk	
2. Review Aims:	
What are the main issues?	
<p>The Government has announced that local welfare funding for schemes effective from April 2015 is to be withdrawn. The Council has a budget totalling £900k which is a result from a shortfall in spend from 2013/14 and the likely underspend from 2014/15. This is to be made available in 2015/16 to provide a local scheme. It is not anticipated that any other direct funding will be made available.</p> <p>Members were interested in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understanding how effective the Council has been in administering the scheme to ensure that awards are made to those who are eligible.• The potential to work with third sector organisations to help administer a local scheme.• Identifying opportunities to signpost people to other schemes / funding.• Considering any strategies for delivering a local scheme once the £900K budget has been depleted. <p>As the Local Welfare Assistance Scheme provides awards to people who are in severe need, this contributes to meeting the corporate priority of protecting the vulnerable in Wirral.</p>	
The Panel's objectives in doing this work: To determine how the ring-fenced funding of £900k agreed by Cabinet in February 2015 could be allocated after the discontinuation of the 2014/15 policy at the end of July 2015.	
The desired outputs/outcomes: That the budget is maximised to meet the immediate needs of vulnerable people in the community.	
3. Review Approach	

How will the Panel engage with the Executive?

The final report will be presented to Cabinet to consider the recommendations made.

Who will the Panel be trying to influence as part of its work?

Cabinet Members
Third sector organisations

Duration of review?

The review is to be conducted through an evidence day with a final report presently directly to Cabinet in June 2015.

What category does the review fall into?

Policy Development

Extra resources needed? Would the investigation benefit from the co-operation of an expert witness?

Not applicable

4. Sources of Evidence:**Secondary information (background information, existing reports, legislation, central government documents, etc).**

- Wirral's Local Welfare Assistance Scheme Policy
- Relevant media release articles

Primary/new evidence/information

- Reflect on the views of officers on suggested options
- Costs of administering the scheme
- Number of applicants who have applied across the two years
- Anecdotal breakdown of the income of applicants
- Anecdotal breakdown of applicants average age across the scheme
- Breakdown of awards made against specific categories (i.e. against food, fuel, furniture etc) and the average award made against each category
- Breakdown of awards against electoral wards
- Statistics on claimants who received awards on multiple occasions
- Statistics of applicants who have had benefit sanctions or were waiting for a DWP payment
- A summary of the potential options for how the scheme could be delivered after July 2015 with details of benefits / implications
- What other Local Authorities implemented/decide

Who can provide us with further relevant evidence? (Cabinet portfolio holder, officer, service user, general public, expert witness, etc).

1) Representatives from:

- Citizen's Advice Bureau
- WIRED
- Wirral Foodbank
- Energy Projects Plus

2) Council officers, including:

- Head of Business Processes
- Operational Manager, Revenues, Benefits & Customer Services, Housing Benefit
- Team Leader, Revenues, Benefits & Customer Services.

What specific areas do we want them to cover when they give evidence?

Officers:

- Background information on local welfare funding
- How the scheme is administered including information on applications and awards.
- Officer advice on any feasible suggestions for allocating the ring-fenced funding

Third sector representatives:

- Respective organisation overview
- Information/data on who uses their service, including numbers, trends etc.
- Advice on other schemes or grants that may be accessible to applicants

What processes can we use to feed into the review? (site visits/observations, face-to-face questioning, telephone survey, written questionnaire, etc).

Face-to-face questioning

Desk top analysis/research

In what ways can we involve the public and at what stages? (consider whole range of consultative mechanisms, local committees and local ward mechanisms).

Not applicable

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**WIRRAL LOCAL
WELFARE ASSISTANCE
SCHEME
POLICY
2015/16**

(effective from 1st August 2015)

CONTENTS

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. Purpose of the Scheme**
- 3. Financial Constraints**
- 4. Eligibility & Assessment Criteria**
- 5. Accessing the scheme**
- 6. Methods of award**
- 7. Appeals**

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The discretionary Crisis Loans for Living Expenses and Community Care Grant elements of the Social Fund administered by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) were abolished with effect from April 2013. Funding has been allocated to Local Authorities for the provision of a replacement local scheme.
- 1.2 Crisis Loans were intended for people who were unable to meet their immediate short terms needs in an emergency or as a consequence of disaster, and they were awarded for immediate living expenses in order to avoid serious damage to the health and safety of the applicant or a member of their family. Community Care Grants were primarily intended to help vulnerable people live as independent a life as possible in the community and were dependant on receipt of income related benefit.
- 1.3 The DWP continues to administer the discretionary Crisis Loan Alignment and Budgeting Loans which are being replaced with new national schemes for Short Term Advances and Budgeting Advances. The DWP also continues to administer the regulated elements of the Social Fund (Funeral Payments, Cold Weather Payments, Winter Fuel Payments and Sure Start Maternity Grants).
- 1.4 The DWP intended that Local Authorities would need to consider the scheme's original purpose when developing local schemes, and that they would develop schemes that were flexible to meet the needs of local communities.
- 1.5 The funding provided for the scheme was less than the previous DWP spend on Crisis Loans and Community Care Grants, and the new local schemes therefore need to address issues of reliance on the scheme and prioritise those most in need. The DWP expected the funding to be concentrated on those facing greatest difficulty in managing their income and to enable a more flexible response to unavoidable need.
- 1.6 Following analysis and consideration of the issues identified during the first six months of delivering the local scheme, this document sets out the revised year one policy of the Council's provision. This policy will continue to be reviewed and further developed for subsequent years.
- 1.7 After Central Government withdrew direct grant funding from April 2015 Wirral has reviewed its Local Welfare Assistance Scheme and has made a number of amendments alongside using a one off budget to allow a further period where this scheme will be available prior to a future funding review.

2. Purpose of the scheme

- 2.1. The scheme aims to provide emergency support to people who have insufficient resources to meet their own or their family's immediate short term needs, which if not met would pose a serious risk to their health and wellbeing, or would put at risk their ability to remain or establish themselves in the community.
- 2.2. The scheme will not be appropriate where the authority considers that the applicant has alternative means of addressing those needs.
- 2.3. Consideration will also be given to those applicants with an identified immediate need that cannot be met through any other channel, and which the applicant cannot reasonably be expected to fund themselves.
- 2.4. The scheme will only be appropriate where the support required is not available through any other provision. Where we consider it reasonable to expect the applicant to use that alternative provision, the application will be refused and the applicant will be appropriately signposted and supported to access that provision.
- 2.5. The scheme intends to avoid cash payments - the intention is to meet the presented needs through the provision of goods or services rather than with cash awards. Cash will only be considered as a last resort where there is no other way of meeting the need.
- 2.6. Support will be targeted at those most in need through consideration of the circumstances of each application, as explained in section 4.
- 2.7. In the longer term, the scheme will aim to provide long term solutions where applicable by addressing any underlying issues identified during the application process. Working with partner organisations we aim to develop a network of support which can be accessed by referral via the scheme.

3. Financial Constraints

- 3.1 Government funding of the scheme has now ended and will not be adequate to support all applications for support through this scheme.
- 3.2 Close and regular financial monitoring of the scheme will take place to understand the pressures on the scheme and to inform the extent to which the scheme can support applications.
- 3.3 The eligibility criteria in section 4 define the basic criteria required in order for an application to be considered. Having met those basic criteria, decisions on support or awards which can be provided from this scheme will be dependant on the level of resources available.
- 3.4 Should the levels of applications meeting basic eligibility criteria significantly outweigh available funding then the basic eligibility criteria may need to be amended as has been done from August 2015.
- 3.5 In the event of an under-spend of the LWA budget, consideration will be given to extending financial support to third party partner organisations whose work supports the principles and intentions of this scheme.

4. Eligibility & Assessment Criteria

4.1 The eligibility criteria for support under this scheme is focused upon the circumstances, presenting need and level of risk rather than focusing on eligible groups of people.

4.2 To be eligible for access to the scheme **all** of the following criteria must be met:

- Aged 16 or over
- Be a Wirral resident or, in the case of those who are homeless or leaving an institutional establishment, have established links with Wirral
- Support is required to address essential needs of yourself and/or your dependants
- It is demonstrated that there are no other resources or other ways of meeting this need which are considered reasonable

4.3 In order to be eligible for essential immediate support the applicant would also need to be able to demonstrate that there would be a serious risk to the health and wellbeing of the applicant and/or his or her dependants if those needs are not met.

4.4 Examples of essential immediate support needs are:

- Essential food
- Heat/electricity
- Essential supplies associated with infants/children

This list is not exhaustive and applications for other needs claimed as essential and immediate will be considered.

4.5 To be eligible for support to remain or become established in the community where the applicant cannot reasonably be expected to fund items themselves, the following criteria must be met:

- The applicant has essential items or costs associated with establishing or maintaining residence in the community, **and**
- It is demonstrated that there are no other resources or other reasonable ways of meeting this need
- If funding constraints apply, priority will be given to applicants who are supported or who have been referred to the scheme by an organisation which supports vulnerable people

Or

- The applicant has to replace essential items (this could be following a disaster or unforeseen event), **and**
- It is demonstrated that there are no other resources or other reasonable ways of meeting this need

4.6 Examples of items or costs that would be considered are:

- Essential domestic appliances¹
- Essential domestic furniture²
- Essential bedding

This list is not exhaustive and applications for other items or expenses claimed as being required to maintain health and wellbeing in the home or in the community will be considered.

Items of essential need will from August 2015 exclude washing machines as an award provided from the scheme directly, except in exceptional circumstances, and referring these applications to Energy Projects Plus;

This will include referring applications for white goods which have been assessed as not meeting the Council's criteria and where a potential fuel debt issue has been identified to Energy Projects Plus

4.7 Applications for support to meet essential travel costs may be considered under this scheme. Travel costs will only be considered for travel within the United Kingdom; overseas travel will not be considered due to the financial constraints of this scheme. Examples of travel that would be considered are:

- Travel to attend the funeral of a close relative³
- Travel to visit a close relative³ in care or another institution

This list is not exhaustive and applications for other travel costs will be considered.

4.8 The scheme will not be considered for the following:

¹ ie a microwave or cooker, a washing machine for those with dependant children or a disability which increases laundry requirements, a fridge for those applicants who cannot shop on a daily basis or who need to store medication in a fridge.

² A bed and a form of comfortable seating e.g. sofa/arm chair are considered essential, other furniture such as dining table and chairs, and storage will also be considered but will be given a lower priority.

³ A close relative is defined as a spouse, parent, grandparent, sibling, child or grandchild or the spouse of any of these relatives.

- Those applicants who have an income or savings or a member of their household has an income or savings which could be used to meet their needs
- To buy (or repair) TV or satellite equipment
- To meet contract costs for TV packages, mobile phones, broadband etc

4.9 If the basic eligibility criteria are met then an application will be assessed to quantify the level of priority of the need. This assessment will be based upon the severity of the likely impact if the need is not met.

4.10 Outcomes from assessments will be utilised if legitimate demand levels for support from the scheme outweigh the finite level of support available through the schemes budget. There may therefore be instances where the basic eligibility criteria above are met but an application may be refused because the priority of that application is lower than the scheme's budget can accommodate.

4.11 In the longer term an element of the assessment process will be the identification of the underlying causes of the crisis. Applicants will be offered a range of services to support them including benefit maximisation, energy efficiency, debt management and support in finding work or accessing training.

5. Accessing the Scheme

- 5.1 Applications and referrals will be available through a number of channels to maximise accessibility.
- 5.2 Applications to access the scheme will be accepted by referral from a range of partner organisations and Council services where an applicant either has an existing relationship with that organisation, or has approached them for guidance and support.
- 5.3 Applicants will need to provide evidence of their identity and residency and, where appropriate, evidence that they meet the eligibility criteria and presenting circumstances.
- 5.4 Initial screening questions will be asked to determine whether
 - an exceptional need has occurred,
 - the basic eligibility criteria are met, and
 - some support can usefully be put in place
- 5.5 Those applicants who meet the eligibility criteria will have their application reviewed with priority given to those requiring emergency support. The scheme will aim to provide a same day decision and award for such emergency cases.
- 5.6 Where appropriate an appointment will be made to review the application, the circumstances of the applicant and the potential options available.
- 5.7 This service will not be available out of hours. However the Council's Emergency Duty Team will continue to respond to the needs of vulnerable adults and children out of hours, and will be supported to do so through the scheme's funding.

6. **Methods of Award**

- 6.1 Where a need is identified that cannot reasonably be met by any other scheme, consideration will be given to the provision of goods and / or services to meet that need.
- 6.2 In order to maximise the number of people that can be supported by this scheme, where goods are required we will look to provide second hand refurbished furniture and white goods where appropriate rather than new items.
- 6.3 Where goods cannot be provided directly, consideration will be given to payment cards or vouchers to enable the purchase of such goods. These payment cards or vouchers must be used for the purpose for which they have been requested.
- 6.4 Where a voucher is issued, this may not offer a choice of providers / stores. However the Council will work to ensure that the goods offered by any provider it specifies are of acceptable quality and offer good value to the customer.
- 6.5 Cash will only be issued where there is no identifiable alternative to meeting the need of the applicant.
- 6.6 Where cash is awarded, the sum provided will be sufficient to meet the minimum needs of the applicant and his or her dependants for the period until the applicant's circumstances can reasonably be expected to have changed. This sum will be calculated according to a schedule of rates determined by the Council and will be reviewed at regular intervals.
- 6.7 Repeat applications within 2 years will generally be denied unless the reason for the application is unrelated to the previous award. Where a repeat application is awarded then consideration may be given to providing the award as a loan rather than grant depending on the applicant's ability to repay the award value. The value of the loan will be the cost of the goods and / or service provided by the Council, or the amount of the cash awarded where applicable.
- 6.8 It is unlikely that any further loans will be made whilst a previous loan has an outstanding balance payable, however we will consider the individual circumstances of the application including whether there has been an effort to repay the loan and the amount outstanding.

- 6.9 Where a loan has been made to a couple, both partners will be deemed to be liable for the repayment of the loan.
- 6.10 Where it is likely that an applicant's circumstances will quickly and significantly improve (e.g. a person whose access to bank funds has been temporarily suspended), the first award may be designated as repayable.
- 6.11 Awards may be made to a person other than the applicant where they are:
- Enduring Power of Attorney
 - Lasting Power of Attorney for Property and Affairs
 - Department for Work and Pensions Appointee
 - Housing benefit appointee provided there is no conflict of interest

7. Appeals

- 7.1 Applicants will have a right of appeal if they do not agree with a decision made as to their eligibility. They will also be able to appeal against a decision not to make an award due to budgetary constraints.
- 7.2 All appeals will need to be made at the time of receiving the decision, and will be considered by a more senior member of staff.
- 7.3 Those appeals of decisions where the need is immediate (i.e. food, essential provisions or heating) will be prioritised, and we will aim to make decisions within one working day of receipt of the application.
- 7.4 Where the need is for essential items of furniture or support with travel costs, we will aim to review the decision within 5 working days.
- 7.5 There will be no further right of appeal. However any complaints received by the Council about this process will be handled according to the Council's complaint policy, and used to inform future amendments to arrangements, training and communication requirements with our staff, partners and partner services.
- 7.6 Applicants will not be able to appeal against the amounts laid down in the schedule of rates, or about any other matter laid out in this policy. Any disputes relating to the content of this policy will be treated as a complaint and handled according to the Council's complaint procedure.

COMPARISON TABLES

SPEND PROFILE YEAR TO DATE

Sum of Total	Period Name										Projection	Projection	Projection	Projected Total
	Apr-15	May-15	Jun-15	Jul-15	Aug-15	Sep-15	Oct-15	Nov-15	Dec-15	Grand Total	Jan-15	Feb-15	Mar-15	Total
11201 - Fixtures and Fitting				1,499						1,499	0	0	0	1,499
32001 - Office equipment			1,463	453	397		524	503		3,340	0	0	0	3,340
32052 - Computer Equipment					8,400					8,400	0	0	0	8,400
36110 - Grants to be Allocated		16,373		24,559		50,000				90,932	0	0	0	90,932
46291 - Bank Charges	363		1,147	290	312	270		242	219	2,843	219	219	219	3,498
56315 - Discretionary Relief	24,194	48,483	19,050	21,117	49,687	22,850	94,454	11,610	21,515	312,960	21,515	21,515	21,515	377,505
Grand Total	24,557	64,856	21,660	47,919	58,796	73,120	94,978	12,355	21,734	419,973	21,734	21,734	21,734	485,174

Funding Available in Reserve

-900,000

Projected Funding Available for 2016/17

-414,826

NUMBER OF SUCCESSFUL AWARDS BETWEEN 2014/15 AND 2015/16 TO 31.12.15

	2014/15	2015/16 to 31.12.15
Total Applications	8,295	4,917
Total successful applications	12718	5967
Successful awards for food& fuel	6322 (43%)	3739(43%)
Successful applications for other items	6396	2228

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WIRRAL COUNCIL

TRANSFORMATION AND RESOURCES POLICY AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE

1ST FEBRUARY 2016

SUBJECT:	POLICY INFORM BRIEFING PAPER – JANUARY 2016
WARD/S AFFECTED:	ALL
REPORT OF:	STRATEGIC DIRECTOR TRANSFORMATION AND RESOURCES
RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	TRANSFORMATION AND IMPROVEMENT
KEY DECISION?	NO

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This report presents Committee Members with the January Policy Inform Briefing paper which outlines the key features of the Autumn Statement and the Spending Review, which was announced on 25th November 2015. As a continuum the Policy Inform papers include any relevant policy developments that have emerged over the past 3 months.

2.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

2.1 The policy briefing papers are intended to provide Members with the latest position on emerging policy and legislative developments to support the committees work programme and future scrutiny work.

2.2 During the course of the 2015-16 municipal years, the Council's Policy and Strategy team will prepare four policy briefing papers which will be reported to the Policy and Performance Committees for consideration. The following table outlines the timetable for the preparation and reporting of policy briefing papers:

Policy & Performance Committee Briefings	
July 2015	The first policy briefing will focus predominately on the Queen's Speech, which will establish the Government's legislative programme for the parliamentary year ahead.
September 2015	The second policy briefing will be produced in September and will focus on the Chancellor's July 2015 Budget Statement. The policy briefing will provide an update on policy and legislation and will

	consider relevant implications for Wirral.
January 2016	The third policy briefing will focus on the local government finance settlement which informs the annual determination of funding to local government. The policy briefing will provide an update on policy and legislation and will consider relevant implications for Wirral.
March 2016	The fourth policy briefing will focus upon the 2016 Chancellor of Exchequers Budget. The policy briefing will provide an update on policy and legislation and will consider relevant implications for Wirral.

2.3 The January Policy Inform briefing outlines the key features of the Autumn Statement and the Spending Review, which was announced on 25th November 2015. The Policy Inform briefing also alludes to any potential implications for Wirral Council, and elaborates on any legislation or policy updates that have been implemented, or developed since the last policy briefing in September. It is expected that the March Briefing Paper will focus on the Chancellor of Exchequer's Budget, which will be published on 16th March 2016. Due to Policy and Performance Committee's taking place at the beginning of March it will not be possible to take the next Policy Inform papers to Committee's, however these papers will be circulated to Members for their reference.

2.4 The Committee may wish to identify specific policy areas to focus upon which are in line with the Committee's work programme. Detailed briefing papers can be prepared for these subject matters at the request of the Committee which would be in addition to the regular policy briefing papers outlined above.

3.0 RELEVANT RISKS

3.1 No specific risks identified.

4.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1 None considered.

5.0 CONSULTATION

5.1 Not applicable.

6.0 OUTSTANDING PREVIOUSLY APPROVED ACTIONS

6.1 Not applicable.

7.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS

7.1 There are none arising directly from this report. Any implications identified in ongoing and recent national legislation and policy will require further consideration by the Council to identify the appropriate action that will be taken.

8.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS

8.1 There are none arising directly from this report. Any implications identified in ongoing and recent national legislation and policy will require further consideration by the Council to identify the appropriate action that will be taken.

9.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are none arising directly from this report. Any implications identified in ongoing and recent national legislation and policy will require further consideration by the Council to identify the appropriate action that will be taken.

10.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

10.1 Has the potential impact of your proposal(s) been reviewed with regard to equality?

(c) No because of another reason which is

The policy briefing is intended to provide Committee Members with an overview of ongoing and recent national legislation, bills presented to Parliament, emerging policies and upcoming consultations.

The local implementation of any policy or legislation will require an individual equality impact assessment.

1.0 CARBON REDUCTION AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There are none arising directly from this report. Any implications identified in ongoing and recent national legislation and policy will require further consideration by the Council to identify the appropriate action that will be taken.

12.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

12.1 There are none arising directly from this report. Any implications identified in ongoing and recent national legislation and policy will require further consideration by the Council to identify the appropriate action that will be taken.

13.0 RECOMMENDATION/S

13.1 Committee Members are requested to note the contents of the Policy Briefing papers and identify any area of focus for further detailed policy briefings to be provided.

14.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

14.1 To provide Committee Members with an overview of ongoing and recent national legislation and emerging policy developments.

APPENDICES

1. Policy Papers – January 2016

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Not applicable	N/A

POLICY INFORM: TRANSFORMATION AND RESOURCES

Policy Inform- January 2016

The Directorate Policy briefings will provide an overview of ongoing and recent national legislation, bills presented to Parliament, emerging policies and upcoming consultations. The Directorate Policy briefing will be produced specifically to inform Portfolio Holders and Elected Members and will be taken to Policy & Performance Committees for discussion.

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Introduction

The policy briefing paper is intended to provide Members of the Policy and Performance Committee with the latest position on emerging policy and legislative developments to support the Committee's work programme and future scrutiny work.

The following table outlines the timetable for the preparation and reporting of policy briefing papers:

Policy & Performance Committee Briefings	
July 2015	The first policy briefing will focus predominately on the Queen's Speech, which will establish the Government's legislative programme for the parliamentary year ahead.
September 2015	The second policy briefing will be produced in September and will focus on the Chancellor's July 2015 Budget Statement. The policy briefing will provide an update on policy and legislation and will consider relevant implications for Wirral.
January 2016	The third policy briefing will focus on the Autumn Statement and the Spending Review which sets out how Government money will be allocated. The policy briefing will provide an update on policy and legislation and will consider relevant implications for Wirral.
March 2016	The fourth policy briefing will focus upon the 2016 Chancellor of Exchequers Budget. The policy briefing will provide an update on policy and legislation and will consider relevant implications for Wirral.

The January policy briefing outlines the key features of the Autumn Statement and the Spending Review, which was announced on the 25th November 2015. The policy briefing also alludes to any potential implications that have been highlighted by relevant Officers for Wirral Council, and elaborates on any legislation or policy updates that have been implemented or developed since the last policy briefing in September.

The Committee may wish to identify specific policy areas to focus upon which are in line with the Committee's work programme. Detailed briefing papers can be prepared for these subject matters at the request of the Committee which would be in addition to the regular policy briefing papers outlined above.

Autumn Statement and Spending Review

25th November 2015

The Spending Review sets out how £4 trillion of government money will be allocated over the next five years. The key announcements outlined in the statement have been divided into themes:

Local Councils

- The main grant to local government will be phased out. Other sources of income such as council tax and business rates are forecast to grow in cash terms by £6.3 billion by 2019-20.
- From 2016/17 local councils will be able to add 2% to council tax bills that can be spent exclusively on adult social care in their areas. This is intended to raise £2 billion a year by 2019-20.
- From April 2016, police forces will be able to increase the amount they require from council tax collections by 2%.
- Extension of the doubling of small business rate relief (SBR) in England for 12 months to April 2017.
- The government will allow local authorities to spend up to 100% of their fixed asset receipts (excluding Right to Buy receipts) on the revenue costs of reform projects.
- The government will deliver its commitment to a £12 billion Local Growth Fund between 2015-16 and 2020-21.

Housing

- The housing budget will be doubled to £2m a year. Stamp duty will be 3pc higher, raising almost £1b by 2020.
- 400,000 new homes by 2020.
- The right-to-buy scheme will be extended to housing association tenants, with a new pilot in five housing associations.
- A series of other schemes, including Help to Buy: Shared Ownership to help people get on the housing ladder.
- From April 2016 people purchasing additional properties will pay an extra 3% in stamp duty. Money raised will be used to help those struggling to buy their first home.
- 300,000 homes will be better protected from flooding by 2021, with £2.3 billion for over 1,500 flood defence schemes.
- A cap on the amount of rent that Housing Benefit will cover in the social sector. The reform will apply to tenancies signed after 1 April 2016, with Housing Benefit entitlement changing from 1 April 2018 onwards.

Planning, Transport and Regeneration

- Further reforms to the planning system, including establishing a new delivery test on local authorities, to ensure delivery against Local Plans.
- Support for the availability of appropriate land for housing, including by releasing public sector land with capacity for 160,000 homes.
- Support for the regeneration of previously developed brownfield sites in the green belt by allowing them to be developed in the same way as other brownfield land, providing it contributes to Starter Homes, and subject to local consultation.
- Consultation on updating the Transparency Code to require all local authorities to record details of their land and property assets in a consistent way on the government's e-PIMS.
- The Roads Investment Strategy will see £15 billion of investment.
- HS2 will go ahead.
- Commuters will soon be able to claim compensation if their train is more than 15 minutes late.

David Armstrong- Project Sponsor
for Good quality housing that meets the needs of residents

David Armstrong- Project Sponsor
for Transport and Technology Infrastructure fit for the future

Digital Government

- £1.8 billion invested in digital technology and transformation projects across the public sector.
- £450 million to support the Government Digital Service's role as the digital, data and technology centre for government.
- DCLG will work closely with the Valuation Office Agency to digitise the collection of local taxes.

Community Cohesion

- Current levels of funding for community integration programmes will be maintained. This funding will be targeted to support the recommendations of Louise Casey's review of opportunity and integration in isolated and deprived communities.

DCLG

- 20% reduction in the department's paybill, with total savings of £94 million by 2019-20.
- At least £74 million of funding for the Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme.
- DCLG will operate the £12 billion Local Growth Fund.
- Continue to oversee delivery of devolution deals.

David Armstrong- Project Sponsor for Transport and Technology Infrastructure fit for the future



Arts and Sport

- Funding for museums and galleries will be maintained so they remain free to the public.
- The government will fund capital investments in culture across the country through a total of £1.6 billion by 2020-21.
- £5 million of the Northern Powerhouse investment fund will go to Manchester museum to create a new South Asia gallery in partnership with the British Museum, and £150 million to help make oyster style ticketing a reality across the whole of the North.
- The government will support the Rugby League World Cup bid for the UK in 2021 so matches can be held across the North.

Clare Fish- Project Sponsor for Leisure and Cultural Opportunities for all



Businesses

- The business budget has been slashed by 17 per cent. This is partly achieved by offering £165million of loans to companies, rather than the current grants.
- Universal rates scrapped in favour of devolving powers to local councils who will now collect 100pc of the tax, which brought in £23bn this year.
- The government is creating 26 new Enterprise Zones, including expanding 8 Zones on the current programme. These include 15 Zones in smaller towns and rural areas.
- A £400 million Northern Powerhouse investment fund will be created to help small businesses to grow.

Paula Basnett- Partner pledge led for Thriving Small Businesses

Devolution

- Councils will be allowed to cut business rates to boost growth and elected city-wide mayors allowed to raise them for specific projects.
- There will be further commitment to the Northern Powerhouse, including: investment of £13 billion on transport in the North by 2020, a range of investments in scientific research, and supporting further Northern Powerhouse trade missions to key emerging economies.
- In 2017-18 the government will devolve and reform increased funding for managing temporary accommodation, giving local authorities 'more control and flexibility'.
- In 2016 DCLG will shortly consult on changes to the local government finance system to pave the way for the implementation of 100% business rate retention. As part of these reforms, additional responsibilities will be devolved to local authorities.

Tax Credit

- The government will borrow £8 billion less than forecast – making faster progress towards eliminating the deficit.
- Because of the improvement in public finances, the £4.4 billion of proposed cuts will no longer happen.
- Tax credits are being phased out as we introduce universal credit.
- The government will propose no further changes to the universal credit taper, or to the work allowances beyond those that passed through Parliament.

Families & Childcare

- Spending levels on homelessness services will be maintained.
- £40 million will be allocated for services for victims of domestic abuse.
- Continued investment into the Troubled Families programme with the aim of better outcomes for 400,000 families by 2020.
- Doubling the free childcare entitlement- 15 hours to 30 hours a week for working families with 3 and 4 year olds from Sept 2017.
- Tax-Free Childcare from early 2017, providing up to £2,000 a year per child.
- From 2017-18 an investment of £300 million to increase the average hourly rate childcare providers receive, and at least £50 million of capital funding to create additional places in nurseries.

John Martin- Partner pledge lead for Zero Tolerance to Domestic Violence & Julia Hassall- Project Sponsor for Vulnerable children reach their full potential

Environment

- The current Energy Companies Obligation runs until March 2017. This will be replaced from April 2017 with a new cheaper energy supplier obligation to reduce carbon emissions which will run for five years. The changes will mean that on average 24 million households will save £30 a year on their energy bills from 2017.
- The Warm Home Discount scheme will also be extended to 2020-2021. This currently gives certain low-income households a one-off reduction of £140 on their electricity bill.

Our Partners:



NHS

- The NHS will become a 7-day service in primary care and in hospitals. £750 million of investment and a new national voluntary contract for GPs .
- £300 million per year will be invested in diagnostics by 2020 to fund new equipment and additional staff capacity, including 200 additional staff trained to perform endoscopies by 2018.
- £150 million will be invested in a new Dementia Research Institute .
- £4.8 billion allocated for health every year for the next 5 years. This includes funding for a shift in the way urgent and emergency care services are provided and improving out of hospital services to deliver more care closer to home. New investment of £1 billion in technology will support this transformation and integrate patient records across health and social care by 2020. Over the next 5 years, at least £500 million will be invested in building new hospitals.
- £10 billion extra a year in real terms. £6 billion of which will be delivered in 2016, particularly to mental health services.
- This will fund:
 - 800,000 more operations and treatments
 - 5.5 million more outpatient appointments
 - 2 million more diagnostic tests
 - access to GP services in the evenings and at the weekend
 - 7-day access to hospital services by 2020
 - Whilst the NHS is receiving increased funding, there is also a commitment to find a further £22 billion in efficiency savings.

John Develing- Pledge lead for Wirral Residents Live Healthier Lives



Police

- No cuts to the police budget. The government will protect overall police spending in line with inflation – an increase of £900 million by 2019-20. "The police protect us and we are going to protect the police."
- Additional funding will be provided for forces that have strong proposals to support efficiency and reform.
- The National Crime Agency's budget will also be protected in cash terms to help cut organised crime.

John Martin- Pledge lead for Zero Tolerance to Domestic Violence



Schools and Apprenticeships

- Schools funding will be protected in line with inflation. £23 billion will be invested in school buildings, creating 600,000 extra school places and 500 free schools.
- Sixth form colleges will now be able to become academies.
- Savings of £600million will be made from the education services grant that goes to local authorities as more schools become academies. - "We will make local authorities running schools a thing of the past".
- The current 'unfair' school funding system will be phased out and replaced with a new national Funding Formula from 2017.
- Funding for adult education will not be cut.
- The government will spend twice as much on apprentices- 3 million apprentices by 2020.
- A new apprentice levy of 0.5 per cent will be introduced for employers. The levy will raise £3 billion a year to fund three million apprenticeships. Less than 2% of UK employers will pay the levy.
- Maintenance loans will be available to higher education students who study part time from 2018.

John Martin- Pledge lead for Zero Tolerance to Domestic Violence

Further Analysis & Impact on Local Government and Partners

Local Government:

Funding

- There has been a £4.1 billion funding cut over this Spending Review period and this comes on top of almost £10 billion in further demand-led cost pressures facing councils by the end of the decade. Local communities will suffer as a result.
- The general government grant to local councils will be removed completely by 2020.
- Even if councils stopped filling in potholes, maintaining parks, closed all children's centres, libraries, museums, leisure centres and turned off every street light they will not have saved enough money to plug the financial black hole they face by 2020.
- The Local Government Association (LGA) warn that the spending review represents a 24% reduction in real terms to the local government grant, including the £1.5bn increase to the Better Care Fund.

Business Rates

- Retaining 100% of business rates will, nationally, add up to an estimated £26 billion. As part of the 'devolution revolution' local authorities will also be able to lower business rates to attract business investment in their area. It is hoped that this will correct the 'geographical imbalance' and encourage local authorities to become more competitive and focus their attentions on attracting private investment into their own areas.
- Changes will hit the poorest parts of the country hardest, where there are fewer businesses and taxpayers to make up for lost Whitehall grants. Rich councils will get richer at the expense of already struggling councils.

Social Care

- From 2016/17, local councils will be able to add 2% to council tax bills that can be spent exclusively on adult social care in their areas. This will go some way to allowing a number of councils to raise the money needed to offset some of the cost of social care.
- The new care precept will generate very different levels of revenue across the country, with no equalisation system planned.
- The additional Better Care Funding will not be available until 2017 leaving a shortfall to be addressed between now and 2017.

Local Growth Fund

- DCLG will operate the £12 billion Local Growth Fund, which is more than double the size of equivalent funds in the last Parliament. This will empower local communities to deliver growth by giving them greater control of public spending, allowing them to target their own priorities.
- Secretary of State for DCLG, Greg Clark: "On top of building the homes our country needs across the nation we are devolving powers to local people who know their communities best to drive jobs, nurture businesses and improve local services."

Housing

- Increased investment in schemes to help people to rent or buy has weighted in favour of private developers, at the expense of opportunities to deliver affordable social housing for communities. Tackling local housing need would also help to regenerate local economies and provide jobs and skills. ASPE argue councils are best placed to address specific local housing need.
- Under the new reform, Housing Benefit will no longer fully subsidise families to live in social houses that many working families cannot afford, and will better align the rules in the private and social rented sectors. It will also ensure that Housing Benefit costs are better controlled and will help prevent social landlords from charging inflated rent for their properties
- In areas of Wirral where the Local Housing Allowance rate for the Borough is below the rent charged by housing associations, prospective tenants, particularly those on out-of-work benefits, may be unable to fund the difference between rent and Housing Benefit. The profile of tenants may shift further away from single, younger households on lower incomes or welfare benefits. It may also have implications on the property type and financial appraisals for new-build social housing in the pipeline.

Our Partners:

NHS

- The NHS will become a 7-day service in primary care and in hospitals, this means that by 2021 everyone will be able to access GP services in the evenings and at weekends with an extra 5,000 doctors in general practice.
- An additional £600 million invested in mental health services will mean that significantly more people will have access to talking therapies every year by 2020.
- Investment into the new Dementia Research Institute will accelerate the pace of research and tackle the progression of the disease. This is the government's latest step in a long term strategy to combat dementia.
- Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt: "For doctors and nurses working harder than ever on the frontline this upfront investment means we can implement the NHS's own ambitious plan to transform services for the future." "This new money will help us finish the job."

Police

- Protecting police funding will allow forces to adapt to changing crime threats and train more firearms officers to make sure the country can be protected from terrorist threats.
- £1 billion will be spent on 4G communications for police forces and other emergency services, allowing officers to take mobile fingerprints and electronic witness statements. This will free up officers' time, saving around £1 million a day when fully operational.

Schools and Apprenticeships

- The Education Services Grant helps ensure that children are getting the education they deserve including help to provide speech, physiotherapy and occupational therapies. Last year, £815 million was spent on the ESG. The LGA say urgent clarification is needed on how the £600 million cuts will be achieved, and how quickly, without impacting on welfare and standards.
- Currently a child from a disadvantaged background in one school can receive half as much funding as a child in identical circumstances in another school. The changes to the allocation of school funding will set a national rate for each pupil, with extra funding for those with additional needs.
- Introducing a new system will mean some schools will face relative budget reductions. LGA recommend changes should be introduced in a phased way to protect these schools. Government should also allow for local discretion to be applied to take into account individual local needs.
- 250,000 students will benefit from extra loans. This will include tuition fees for students studying for higher level skills in further education, part-time students and postgraduates.

Queen's Speech 2015- Designation to Policy and Performance Committees

On Wednesday 27th May 2015, the Queen unveiled the Government's legislative plans for the year ahead. Below is a list of each individual Bill which will have implications for local government that were announced during the speech. The list identifies the Policy and Performance committee with whose remit the legislation most closely aligns:

Legislative Plans	Policy and Performance Committee
National Insurance Contributions Bill/ Finance Bill	Transformation and Resources
Full Employment and Welfare Benefits Bill	All Policy and Performance Committees
Trade Unions Bill	Transformation and Resources
Housing Bill	Regeneration and Environment
Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill	Regeneration and Environment
Buses Bill	Regeneration and Environment
High Speed Rail Bill	Regeneration and Environment
Childcare Bill	Families and Wellbeing
Energy Bill	Regeneration and Environment
Education and Adoption Bill	Families and Wellbeing
Enterprise Bill	Regeneration and Environment
Policing and Criminal Justice Bill	Families and Wellbeing Transformation and Resources
Draft Public Service Ombudsman Bill	Transformation and Resources
Psychoactive Substances Bill	Families and Wellbeing

Additional bills that have been announced are outlined below. These will be monitored in relation to any emerging implications for Local Government and reported to the relevant Policy and Performance Committee as appropriate.

Additional Legislative Plans
EU Referendum Bill
Scotland Bill
Immigration Bill
Extremism Bill
Investigatory Powers Bill
Charities Bill
Armed Forces Bill
Bank of England Bill
Northern Ireland (Stormont House Agreement) Bill

Wales Bill
Votes for Life Bill

The bills relevant to the Families and Wellbeing Committee are discussed in further detail below. The information provided has been sourced predominately from the LGiU, as well as SOLACE and the LGC and therefore solely represents a fact-based introduction to the bills.

Queen's Speech 2015- Developments and Implications

Draft Public Service Ombudsman Bill

Synopsis and Key Points:

Synopsis:

- The aim of this Bill is to reform and modernise the Public Service Ombudsman sector to provide "a more effective and accessible final tier of complaints redress within the public sector". It would absorb the functions of the Parliamentary Ombudsman, the Health Ombudsman, and the Local Government Ombudsman and potentially the Housing Ombudsman.

Key Points:

- Allow the Public Service Ombudsman to absorb the functions of the Parliamentary Ombudsman, the Health Ombudsman, the Local Government Ombudsman and potentially The Housing Ombudsman.
- Ensure a robust process for accountability and reporting. The new Ombudsman will be independent of Government and directly accountable to Parliament.
- Establish the relevant powers for a modern ombudsman organisation.

Further Developments:

- There are no further developments at this time. The Draft Public Service Ombudsman Bill will be kept under review and developments will be outlined in future Policy Inform briefings.

Wirral Implications:

- There are no immediate issues arising. The impact of the Bill will be procedural rather than financial or increasing duties and responsibilities on the Council.

National Insurance Contributions (Rate Ceilings) Bill

Synopsis and Key Points:

Synopsis:

- The Bill is designed to set a ceiling on the main and additional percentages, the secondary percentage and the upper earnings limit in relation to Class 1 national insurance contributions.

Further Developments:

- The Bill's Second Reading at the House of Lords took place on 10 November 2015. The Committee Stage of the Bill is scheduled to take place on 30 November 2015.

Wirral Implications:

- There are no direct implications for Wirral arising from this bill. This bill is mainly concerned with Income and Corporate taxation which does not apply to local authorities. There are changes to Employer's National Insurance contributions, coming into effect in April 2016, which will have a significant effect upon Wirral as an employer. These changes have already been legislated for and built into budget forecasts.

Finance Bill

Synopsis and Key Points:

Synopsis:

- The Bill is design to grant certain duties, to alert other duties, and to amend the law relating to the National Debt and the Public Revenue, and to make further provisions in connection with finance.

Further Developments:

- Following agreement by both Houses on the text of the Bill it received Royal Assent on 18 November 2015. The Bill is now an Act of Parliament.

Wirral Implications:

- There are no direct implications for Wirral arising from this bill.

Policing and Criminal Justice Bill

Synopsis and Key Points:

Synopsis:

- This legislation is intended to continue the reform of policing with the aim of enhancing protections for vulnerable people

Key Points:

- The Bill would ensure 17 years olds who are detained in police custody are treated as children for all purposes under PACE.
- In particular, the amendments to the provisions of PACE concerning 17 year olds include:
 - Ensuring an appropriate adult is present for drug sample taking;
 - Ensuring appropriate consent is granted by both the 17 year old and parent/ legal guardian for a range of interventions, including intimate searches; and
 - The ability to impose conditional bail to ensure the welfare and interests of the 17 year old.
- Reforming legislation in relation to the detention of people under sections 135 and 136 of the Mental Health Act 1983 to ensure better outcomes for those experiencing a mental health crisis.
 - Prohibiting the use of police cells as places of safety for those under 18 years of age and further reducing their use in the case of adults;
 - Reducing the current 72 hour maximum period of detention; and
 - Extending the power to detain under section 136 to any place other than a private residence.

Further Developments:

- There are no further developments at this time. The Policing and Criminal Bill will be kept under review and developments will be outlined in future Policy Inform briefings.

Wirral Implications:

- **Appropriate Adult Provision-** The Youth Offending service is in support of this change and we have been anticipating it for over a year. For many years 17 year olds have not been treated as Youths in the Police custody suite / Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE) arena, which is inconsistent with other youth justice parameters. Therefore this change supports and recognises 17 years olds as still being youths and not adults during PACE interviews, processing and charging stages of detention.

Our **Appropriate Adult** (AA) services are already in place and will accommodate this wider age group. YOS provides this service by day and EDT by night. This may involve an increase in workload, however some 17 year olds who are detained in custody can be deemed to be Vulnerable Adults and the existing AA service covers youths and vulnerable adults anyway, so the increased workload may not be large.

We will monitor any increase in use of AA in respect of 17 years olds but this extension of age group now represents the same 10-18 year age group YOS and the youth courts accommodate, so this is more in line and consistent with other such youth justice services.

Wirral Implications Continued:

• **Identification of Accommodation for those Young People detained-** The Merseyside Criminal Justice Board **Youth Detention Protocol** may also need to include 17 year olds and this may have an impact on the requirements for Local Authorities to find accommodation for 17 year olds who have been refused Police Bail and the LA has a duty to accommodate them. The compliance of this protocol is monitored by the Police Crime Commissioner and the existing Policy may change to include 17 years olds, and this would then have an impact on CYPS Specialist Services and demands to accommodate 17 year olds at short notice who have been refused Bail. I have attached the existing protocol as this currently only covers 10-16 year olds but maybe amended.

High Speed Rail Bill

Synopsis and Key Points:

Synopsis:

- The aim of this Bill is to provide the Government with the legal powers to construct and operate phase 1 of the High Speed 2 (HS2) railway.

Key Points:

- Give the Government deemed planning permission for the railway between London and the West Midlands.
- Give the Government compulsory purchase powers and the power to temporarily take possession of land required to construct and operate the railway.
- Help rebalance the UK economy and free up space on the UK rail network, improving connections between London, the Midlands, the North and Scotland.

Further Developments:

- Further updates on plans to bring forward the timescales for High Speed (HS) 2 were recently announced by the Chancellor, George Osborne, in his Spending Review and Autumn Statement on the 25th November. Construction of HS2 will now begin in the current parliament, with the route expected to open from London to Birmingham in 2026 and to Leeds and Manchester by 2033.
- Shortly before the summer recess, the Committee rejected calls for the line to be placed in a tunnel across the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. HS2 Ltd wrote to the Committee in October, setting out a package of measures which they believe provides substantial noise mitigation for Wendover. If supported by the Committee, these changes are likely to be brought forward as part of amendments to the Bill in December.
- The Committee has also rejected calls from the London Borough of Hillingdon for a tunnel in the Colne Valley in place of the viaduct which is currently proposed.
- In September, the Government published amendments to the Hybrid Bill, Additional Provision no.3 (AP3), which remove the HS2-HS1 link from the Bill and set out revised proposals for Euston. These include the construction of 11 new high-speed platforms on the western side of the station.
- These plans were heavily criticised by Camden Council, they argue that the plan gives no guarantees on timescales or funding for a full development of the station in the future.
- It has subsequently been reported that the work at Euston would require a six year closure of one lane in either direction on the A400 Euston Road. In its most recent petition, Camden calls for HS2 to temporarily terminate at Old Oak Common to allow more time to get the design of Euston Station right. HS2 Ltd has responded by stating that it is their intention to maximise the full benefits of the new railway from the outset and that the AP3 proposals for Euston should be supported as they are the result of over several years of detailed work.

Further Developments Continued:

- Euston Action Group have proposed locating the main HS2 terminus at Old Oak Common with a link to Euston for a few HS2 trains using a link to the West Coast mainline in the vicinity of Queens Park. The petition argues that this route would be cheaper and less disruptive than the Hybrid Bill scheme. HS2 Ltd argue that this would not be viable. The Committee will start hearing evidence relating to Euston at the end of November.

Wirral Implications:

- The passing of this Bill confirms the start of the construction of Phase 1 of HS2. The significant investment in infrastructure should unlock growth but ensuring that these benefits are fully realised within the city region will require the progression of HS3 linking the key cities across the north including Liverpool.

Trade Union Bill

Synopsis and Key Points:

Synopsis:

- The aim of this bill is to bring forward legislation to reform trade unions to ensure hardworking people are not disrupted by little-supported strike action and to pursue the Governments ambition to become the most prosperous major economy in the world by 2030.

Key Points:

- Introduction of a 50% voting threshold for union ballots turnouts (and retain the requirement for there to be a simple majority of votes in favour).
- In addition to the 50% minimum voting turnout threshold, introduction of a requirement that 40% of those entitled to vote must vote in favour of industrial action in certain essential public services (health, education, fire, transport).
- Tackling intimidation of non-striking workers during a strike.
- Introduction of a transparent opt-in process for the political fund element of trade unions subscriptions. This will reflect the existing practice in Northern Ireland.
- Introduction of time limits on a mandate following a ballot for industrial action.
- Making changes to the role of the Certification Officer

Further Developments:

- The Trade Union Bill had its first reading in the House of Lords on 11 November 2015. The second reading is yet to be scheduled.

Wirral Implications:

- The main implication for the Council is the ceasing of employer 'check off' facilities. We expect this means that we will no longer be able to offer the facility to deduct trade union subscriptions from Payroll. However, it is not yet clear what the specific requirement of the bill will be in relation to this. The legislation also places requirements on trade unions to meet certain conditions before industrial action is taken. There are no implications for the Council as an employer directly from those aspects'

Welfare Reform and Work Bill

Synopsis and Key Points:

Synopsis:

- The overriding aim of the Bill is to reduce expenditure and “help to achieve a more sustainable welfare system.” A related aim is to support efforts to increase employment and “support the policy of rewarding hard work while increasing fairness with working households.”

Key Points:

- It is essentially a Bill of three parts. First, it will introduce a duty to report to Parliament on:
 - Progress towards achieving full employment.
 - Progress towards achieving 3 million apprenticeships in England.
 - Progress with the Troubled Families programme (England).
- Second, it will repeal almost all of the Child Poverty Act 2010 and introduce a new duty for the Secretary of State to report annually on “life chances”: children living in workless households and educational attainment at age 16, in England.
- Finally, the Bill allows for the introduction of extensive changes to welfare benefits, tax credits and social housing rent levels. These will account for around 70% of the £12-13 billion in welfare savings identified in the Summer Budget 2015. The welfare/housing measures include:
 - Lowering the benefit cap threshold and varying it between London and the rest of the UK.
 - A four year benefits freeze.
 - Limiting support through Child Tax Credits/Universal Credit.
 - The abolition of Employment and Support Allowance Work-Related Activity Component.
 - Changes to conditionality for responsible carers under Universal Credit.
 - Replacing Support for Mortgage Interest with Loans for Mortgage Interest.
 - Reducing social housing rent levels by 1% in each year for four years from 2016-17.

Further Developments:

- A number of changes were made to the Welfare Reform and Work Bill at report stage. The Bill passed its third reading in the House of Commons on Tuesday, 27 October 2015. The Bill had its second reading in the House of Lords on 17 November. The committee stage is scheduled to begin on 2 December.

Wirral Implications:

- **Freeze Working Age Benefits** - This will impact on household disposable income, not previously frozen albeit uprating has been nominal 2013/14. This will potentially increase the strain on Wirral’s Council Tax Support, Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP), Local Welfare Assistance (LWA) schemes, as more people apply; more people become entitled to support. With consequential harder to collect charges, key revenue streams such as Council Tax, charges in respect of adult social care, Benefits overpayments will be detrimentally affected. Rent arrears locally are expected to increase as with all cuts and will continue at least whilst (social) landlords maintain rent levels and annual increases in lieu on the 12% target reduction by 2020-21.

Wirral Implications Continued:

- This will increase pressure on LA Housing Benefit services from Social Landlords which is evident already via the rent shortfall in Bedroom Tax and insufficient DHP. The recent judgement at the Upper Tier Tribunal, supporting the DWP position in Social Sector Size Criteria cases confirms that the activity to reduce the impacts of this reform have ultimately had little effect on a case by case basis at local level. In the private sector is may see a freezing of Local Housing Allowance rates which will give Private sector landlords further issue with taking on tenants who rely on HB. This is likely to have a consequential impact on the levels of people being threatened with homelessness in the Borough.
- **Cutting Household Benefit Cap-** This will certainly impact locally, regrettably we cannot identify how many within present caseload will be affected, nor by how much in monetary terms on a weekly basis, as DWP consider circumstances of household benefits in payment that LA are unable to identify from records held. The Percentage reduction to the total maximum in Benefits that can be paid are relatively high, with the maximum for couples reducing from 26k per annum and for a single claimants reducing from 20k to £13,400. The LA's HB service administers the Cap not the DWP who advise us of each situation. There are currently 60 cases live (but cases go on and off and DWP projected our numbers would be 130). The change would bring some case with a consequential impact on resources, both front and back of house. Those affected would have an increased reliance on other means of support, financial, Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP – annual cash limited budget) or the Local Welfare Assistance potentially (LW – finite residual budget as scheme no longer nationally funded). Likely impact will see increased problems for those in temporary accommodation with large families and again, for LA, placing the homeless or those at risk etc., then reliance on the limited discretionary schemes (DHP).
- **General Issues for Wirral/Benefits Service-** As a consequence of these changes, as impacts emerge, which will be ongoing, there will be a need to make provision for continued review of local schemes and policies with an increased reliance on any discretion the authority can, within its local policies and resources, exercise (again for example its LWA/DHP fund). The definition of 'vulnerable' will need review given the ratio of those reasonable deemed to be vulnerable which are those financially at risk, including dispossession. This will impact on key grant limited local schemes such as Council Tax Support Scheme which currently awards £27m pa in respect of 35, 230 recipients. This will provide a significant challenge for officers reviewing the Council Tax Support Scheme for 2016/17 onwards and will see collection issues increase as more people face difficulty paying, coupled with more strain on the scheme impacting on its capacity and ultimately having their national benefits reduced at source to pay Council Tax. Many people will be affected by more than one of the reforms outlined, which will present complexities, uncertainly and increased need for advocacy and advice, particularly if we are to ensure that their income, often translating to the Wirral Pound, is to be maximised. Broadly we can expect from these changes increased contact to service, both front facing public contact and back of house processing (including the Welfare Right Unit) and decision making services with an increased need and reliance on knowledgeable, experience, skilled resources, ensuring accessibility, thereby support where at all possible anti-poverty measures.

Wirral Implications Continued:

- **Remove Housing Benefit from Young People-** 18-21 year olds, this will see more remain at home where it may not be appropriate to do so which will see issues for householder with Housing Benefits non dependant charges being applied and more rent to pay (as adult is meant to contribute as resident). These cases which will increase provide issues for the LA with collection of information and provision of evidence of household occupants. There is also a risk of young people going missing from benefit record, with difficulties operationally in determining their primary place of residence which will be key given the increasing drive of the DWP to reduce level of error and fraud within Welfare Benefits.

The Draft Investigatory Powers Bill, 2015

Synopsis and Key Points

- The Bill seeks to collate all new rules concerning government surveillance powers under a single law. This includes:
 - The ability to retrain and acquire communications data to be used as evidence in court and to advance investigations;
 - The ability to intercept the contents of communications in order to acquire sensitive intelligence to tackle terrorist's plots and serious and organised crimes;
 - The use of equipment interference powers to obtain data covertly from computers;
 - And the use of these powers by the security and intelligence agencies in bulk to identify the most serious threats to the UK from overseas and to rapidly establish links between suspects in the UK

Further Developments

- The Draft Bill was introduced to Parliament by Home Secretary Theresa May on 4 November. The bill will be subject to scrutiny by a Joint Committee of Parliament before proceeding further. The Committee will seek views and submission from the public. Current proposals include:
 - Oversight**
 - The work of the Interception of Communications Commissioner, the Chief Surveillance Commissioner and the Intelligence Service Commissioner will be brought together under a single investigatory Powers Commissioner (IPC).
 - The IPC will be a senior Judge. S/he will be supported by a team of Judicial Commissioners, who will also be former or serving High Court Judges. They will authorise the use of investigatory powers, audit compliance, undertake investigations and inform Parliament and the public about the need for, and use of investigatory powers.
 - Interception**
 - The right to intercept information will be limited to the nine agencies currently authorised to carry it out – these include the Armed Forces, intelligence agencies and a small number of law enforcement bodies, but no local authorities. Warrants will only be issued in the interests of national security; for the prevention and detection of serious crime; or in the interests of the economic well-being (EWB) of the United Kingdom where it is connected to national security.
 - Currently warrants have to be authorised by the Secretary of State or Scottish Minister. In future they will also have to be authorised by a Judicial Commissioner.
 - The Investigatory Powers Commissioner will oversee and audit the work of the nine agencies in this regard and publish his/her findings.

•Communication data

- At present Communication Service Providers can be required to retain communication data for up to a year. This includes information on when, how and with whom a person communicated, rather than what was said.
- In future rules governing retention of communication data will be brought together under one act
- The definition of communication data will be widened
- There will be a new offer of 'wilfully and recklessly acquiring communications data
- A Single Point of Contact (SPoC) for each of the designated security and intelligence agencies will channel requests to Communication Service Providers, to ensure requests are proportionate and consistent. A Designated Person, independent of the investigation, will sign off requests.
- Communication Service Providers will be required to retain Communication Data Records – not the data itself, or a person's browsing but details of services a device has accessed, for a maximum of 12 months.
- The process will be overseen by the Investigatory Powers Commissioner

•Equipment Interference

- The Draft Bill introduces a specific legal regime for agencies who wish to interfere with electronic equipment in order to obtain communication data. Interference with electronic equipment can reveal what was said, as well as who, when and where the person communicated with
- The nine designated agencies will have to make a specific request to intercept equipment and will not be able to use other powers
- Equipment interference will only be permissible to prevent serious crime
- A Judicial Commissioner will be required to authorise warrants, in addition to the Secretary of State and a Chief Constable, as at present.

•Bulk Personal Datasets

- These are datasets containing information about large groups of people. Examples include the electoral roll or telephone directory.
- At present these may be obtained from public or private bodies by the Intelligence and Security Services.
- The Secretary of State and Judicial Commissioner will have to approve warrants for a class of information. These will last up to six months. If the Security and Intelligence service require information that falls outside these classes, a separate warrant will have to be obtained and approved.

•Obligations on Communications Service Providers

- The draft bill brings together all existing obligations on Communication Service Providers.
- The Government will issue notices to Communication Service Providers detailing the information they should retain. However this will only be accessed with a warrant.
- Appeal routes will be strengthened.
- For overseas companies, enforcement will be limited to communication data acquisition and (targeted and bulk) interception powers only. The courts will have to take into account any potential conflict of laws.
- A separate code of practice will outline how security services obtain, store, and dispose communication data.
- The Investigatory Powers Commissioner will oversee this process.

How will this effect the Wirral?

- The Investigatory Powers Act will allow local authorities to retain some investigative powers, such as surveillance of those suspected of benefit fraud, but they will not be able to access internet connection data

Policy Developments

Briefing: Re-use of public sector information

This briefing looks at new regulations that came into force in July 2015 that will make obtaining public bodies information for re-use easier. Since 2005 public bodies have been encouraged to make information available for re-use; most public bodies are now required to make information available for re-use.

Under new regulations public bodies are required to:

- Make information available at marginal cost.
- Establish an internal complaint procedure and deal with complaints within a “reasonable time”.
- Escalate any unresolved complaints to the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO) and in specific circumstances to the First-tier Tribunal.

Regulations have now been extended to include public sector museums, libraries and archives. These bodies are not required to permit re-use, but may choose to do so.

Source: [Mark Upton, Briefing: Re-use of public sector information, LGiU, 17th September 2015](#)

Briefing: Managing provider failure – National Audit Office

The National Audit Office (NAO) explores the principles Whitehall departments should use to manage service provider failure and how this is relevant to commissioning across the public sector, including local government.

Service provider failure can have serious consequences which must be managed effectively; though provider failure should not be avoided, it can be the necessary price of innovation and effective competition.

Managing failure requires prior planning to minimise negative impact and swift action to respond to changing external pressures. Planning starts with deciding how a service will be provided and is informed by how much risk of failure is to be tolerated. It is recognised that the political implications of failure will be of particular importance in the context of local government.

Commissioner’s appetite for failure may change over time as priorities and delivery environments change. What is considered to be failure is also likely to change over time. Plans for managing failure may therefore have to be continuously reviewed and updated.

The NAO observe that in central government, while failure regimes have often been established there have been very few occasions when government has allowed providers to actually fail.

Source: [Mark Upton, Briefing: Managing provider failure – National Audit Office, LGiU, 5th October 2015](#)

Briefing: Income generation – general: a policy in practice briefing

This briefing is the first of a pair of briefings on how local authorities are generating income to fund services, the first focusing on bringing money in for revenue services.

Due to cuts in government grants, local government is set to face a funding gap of £9.5 to 10 billion by 2020. Alongside this are constraints on council tax rates and rising demand. Local government's current financial position is 'unsustainable without radical change'.

The briefing draws on the most recent Revenue Outturn (RO) data from 2013-14 to illustrate areas where Councils could generate additional income.

Following the introduction of Business Rate Retention and the New Homes Bonus, Councils can generate income by facilitating housebuilding and helping to increase their business rates base. Specific examples of how Councils have done this are provided.

A number of ways in which service income can be generated, other than through charging and trading are identified. These include:

- Providing staff to other councils and partner organisations.
- Capital investment in cultural and recreational assets.
- Working with partners to build for private rental.
- Turning waste into revenue.

Source: [Alan Weaver and Tom Lawrence, Briefing: Income generation – general: a policy in practice briefing, LGiU, 13th October 2015](#)

Briefing: Income generation – Charging & Trading: policy in practice briefing

This is the second of a pair of briefings on how local authorities are generating income to fund services. This briefing focuses on commercial approaches to generating income, in particular the use of charging and trading.

The current financial position of local government is 'unsustainable'. Commercial approaches are becoming increasingly important in helping councils to generate income.

It is said that income generation from commercial activity now plays a role in the vast majority of councils' 2015/16 budgets. Examples of authorities who have taken such 'corporate' commercial approaches are highlighted.

The briefing explores good practice surrounding charging, local authority charging arrangements and lessons to be learnt from these.

Examples of innovative and experienced local authority trading organisations are also highlighted. The challenges presented by trading are outlined and key lessons and guidance for local authorities are provided.

Source: [Tom Lawrence and Alan Weaver, Briefing: Income generation – Charging & Trading: policy in practice briefing, LGiU, 14th October 2015](#)

Briefing: The National Living Wage and Tax and Benefits Changes: Economic and Distributional Impacts

This briefing deals with the likely economic impacts of the National Living Wage (NLW) and the combined distributional impacts of the NLW, benefits cuts, and tax changes announced in the July 2015 Budget.

Despite the defeat of the relevant regulations for tax credits in the House of Lords, this briefing remains relevant first because it was the distributional implications of the July Budget that prompted the Lords' opposition and second because the analyses presented will help in the assessment of further changes to be announced in the Autumn Statement.

There is considerable uncertainty about the economic impacts of the NLW; however, the central forecasts produced by the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) suggest that the macroeconomic effects will be small.

The Resolution Foundation calculates that the largest rises in the wage bill as a result of the NLW will be in the catering, cleaning, hotels, residential care, and retail sectors.

Estimating the distributional impacts of the combined tax and benefit changes and the NLW is complex because of the wide variation in work and family circumstances across households. However, it is clear that the cumulative effect of this re-distribution is regressive; some types of working families will lose substantially.

Source: [Andrew Jones, Briefing: The National Living Wage and Tax and Benefits Changes: Economic and Distributional Impacts, LGiU, 27th October 2015](#)

Briefing: The National Living Wage and Tax Benefits Change: Economic and Distributional Impacts

This briefing deals with the likely economic impacts of the National Living Wage (NLW) and with the combined distributional impacts of the NLW, benefit cuts, and tax changes announced in the July 2015 Budget.

The briefing draws in particular on commentary and analyses produced by the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR), the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS), the Resolution Foundation, and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF).

There is considerable uncertainty about the economic impacts of the NLW; however, the central forecasts produced by the OBR suggests that the macroeconomic economic effects will be small; they include an increase in unemployment of 60,000 by 2020 beyond that in the absence of the NLW, and a small reduction of 0.1 per cent in GDP by 2020.

The Resolution Foundation calculated that the largest rises in the wage bill as a result of the NLW will be in catering, cleaning, hotels, residential care, and retail sectors.

Estimating the distributional impacts of the combined tax and benefit changes and the NLW announced in the July Budget is complex because of the wide variation in work and family circumstances across households.

Source: [Andrew Jones. Briefing: The National Living Wage and Tax Benefit Change: Economic and Distributional Impacts. LGiU. 27th October 2015](#)

Briefing: Scotland and England: local government devolution – lessons and issues

The briefing seeks to describe the 2010-15 ‘devolution story’ in England, its prospective developments over 2015-20, and potential implications and insight the might provide for Scottish LAs. It also considers the case for further collaboration between England and Scottish LAs to progress shared ambitions and address shared concerns.

Overall, the paper argues that English LAs now have a very full ‘menu’ of devolution options that they may choose to pursue. However, the outcomes of these pursuits, and indeed the preconditions for enhanced devolution success, remain fragile and problematic.

The Glasgow and Clyde Valley City Deal, and three further recent Scottish city-anchored ‘devo-deal’ proposals mean that Scottish LAs are now major players in the process. The case for understanding and learning from English experience, and for inter-LA collaboration is strong – both for the four ‘deal’ areas and for those outside the deals. The challenge may be mediating and resourcing purposeful and sustained exercise.

Source: [David Marlow. Briefing: Scotland and England: local government devolution – lessons and issues. LGiU. 29th October 2015.](#)

Briefing: Business Rates Devolution

On 5th October 2015, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced a forthcoming package of reforms to business rates and local authority funding. There will be a move to local government retaining

100% business rate collected by 2020, with an end to Revenue Support Grant. Also, there will be changes to the rate at which tax is levied. LAs will be able to cut rates as much as they like. Directly elected mayors will be able to add a premium to businesses to pay for infrastructure - subject to a vote on the Local Enterprise Partnership.

A related announcement was made by the Deputy First Minister of the Scottish Government on the 16th October. This stated that Scottish LAs will be able to lower rates bill for business in their area from October 31, based on a criteria they choose, such as the type of property, its location, occupation or activity.

This briefing sets this announcement in context of legislation on Business Rate Supplements and Business Rate Reliefs and recent and current reviews of the business rates system. It reproduces the relevant excerpts on the announcement from the Chancellor's speech and comments on them.

Source: [Tom Lawrence, Briefing: Business Rates Devolution, November 4th 2015](#)

Briefing: The English Indices of Deprivation 2015

The latest Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) for England was released on 30 September 2015.

The IMD is a huge dataset, ranging across the domains of employment, income, health, crime, environment, education, and skills, and housing and access to services; these various domains are combined to create various composite indicators. The IMD can be used at neighbourhood level or for a local authority area as a whole.

This briefing sets out the background and methodology of the IMD and presents a selection of results.

A preliminary analysis indicates a persistence of deprivation in parts of the north and midlands and parts of London, although London appears to be improving in relative terms; there appears to have been some deterioration in the position of some coastal areas.

Data produced from the IMD is of crucial importance for planning, targeting resources, and preparing funding bids.

Source: [Andrew Jones, Briefing: The English Indices of Deprivation 2015, LGiU, 12th November 2015](#)

Briefing: Work and Pensions Committee Report: A Reconsideration of Tax Credit Cuts

This report, by the Work and Pensions Committee (WPC), is the result of an inquiry into the changes to Tax Credits proposed in the July 2015 budget.

In particular, the WPC investigated the likely impacts on household incomes of proposals to reduce the earnings threshold for Tax Credits and raise the rate at which Tax Credits are withdrawn as income rises; these proposals are examined alongside any compensatory effects of a higher National Living Wage, a higher personal income tax threshold, and an extension of free child care.

The WPC argue that the proposed changes to Tax Credits will result in very substantial cuts to the incomes of working families which will not be fully compensated for by the other measures announced in the July Budget.

The report also considers possible ways of mitigating the impacts of the cuts to Tax Credits; it concludes that altering the income threshold or the rate at which income is withdrawn cannot simultaneously meet the objectives of protecting the incomes of low income households, maintaining work incentives, or reducing expenditure.

The report concludes by suggesting that a limit has been reached to cuts in working age benefits and states an intention to investigate the generational balance of welfare expenditure over the course of this Parliament.

Source: [Andrew Jones, Briefing: Work and Pensions Committee Report: A Reconsideration of Tax Credit Cuts, LGiU, 19th November 2015](#)

Briefing: High Speed Rail Update: Autumn 2015

This briefing reports on recent key developments on the HS2 project and other related activities. It includes details of the interim evaluation report for HS1, published in October 2015, focusing particularly on the section of the report which deals with the local economic impacts.

The briefing also reports on progress on the HS2 Hybrid Bill. This includes recent developments relating to the route in Chilterns and proposals for Euston Station. A brief overview of other recent developments relating to HS2 and HS3, the proposed east-west high-speed rail link, is provided.

Opponents of the scheme continue to highlight concerns about the project, focusing particularly on reports of the spiralling costs. However, it is pointed out that with the Government having recently begun the process of appointing companies to construct HS2, they are clearly determined to press ahead with the project.

Source: [Ruth Bradshaw, Briefing: High Speed Rail Update: Autumn 2015, LGiU, 24th November 2015](#)

Briefing: Preventing Violent Extremism

The briefing summarises the Counter Extremism Strategy, launched by the Government on the 19th October 2015. The strategy assess threat from extremists, outlining the Government's strategic response and sets out proposals for challenging extremist ideology and disrupting terrorist activity through strengthened partnership working and community cohesion.

The strategy argues that British values such as respect for democracy and the rule of law have evolved over centuries in response to the damage and bloodshed caused by religious intolerance and discrimination. The strategy also outlines concerns regarding the separation of some communities; the adoption of harmful and illegal practices like Female Genital Mutilation; and alternative judicial processes such as Sharia councils which have been known to restrict women's right to divorce and protected violent male partners.

In response the Government will:

- Counter extremist ideology
- Work in partnership with organisations that are against extremism
- Disrupting extremists
- Building Cohesive Communities

[Source: Rachel Salmon, Briefing: Preventing Violent Extremism, LGiU, 25th November 2015.](#)

Briefing: Impact of funding reductions on fire and rescue services – NAO report

The briefing summarises the 'Impact of the funding reductions on fire and services' report published by the National Audit Office. The report examines the comparative patterns of change in income, spending and financial and service sustainability across fire and rescue authorities since 2010-11.

Fire and Rescue authorities have absorbed reductions to their funding ranging from 26% to 39% since 2010-11, while maintaining the long-term downward trend in fire casualties. However, some are beginning to experience greater challenges. But while improvements to reducing casualties are slowing down in some areas, the NAO did not find a correlation between casualties' figures and funding reductions.

The report complements, and coincides with the publication of a separate the NAO's value-for-money report on the approach taken by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) to fire and rescue authority funding. A separate LGiU member briefing on that particular report will be published shortly.

[Source: Mark Upton, Briefing: Impact of funding reductions on fire and rescue services – NAO report](#)

Useful Sources

Autumn Statement and Spending Review

Key Announcements:

[Chancellor George Osborne's Spending Review and Autumn Statement 2015, Government website, speech, 25th November 2015](#) – *Full speech*

[Spending Review and Autumn Statement 2015: key announcements, Government website, 25th November 2015](#) – *Key announcements emerging from the statement*

[Department of Health's settlement at the Spending Review 2015, Government website, 25th November 2015](#) – *Impacts of the spending review for the Department of Health*

Briefing: Autumn Statement and spending review 2015, APSE, November 2015 – *Analysis of the Autumn Statement and Spending Review and the impact local council frontline services*

[Department for Education's settlement at the Spending Review 2015, Government website, 25th November 2015](#) – *Impacts of the spending review for the Department for Education*

[Department for Communities and Local Government's settlement at the Spending Review 2015, Government website, 25th November 2015](#) – *Impacts of the Spending Review for DCLG*

[Lauren Lucas, Briefing: The Spending Review and Autumn Statement, LGiU, 25th November 2015](#) – *Key points emerging from the statement*

Further Analysis and Impact on Local Government and Partners:

[LGA Responds to 2015 Spending Review, Lord Porter, Chairman of the Local Government Association, 25th November 2015](#) – *LGA response to the spending review*

[Home Office's settlement at the Spending Review 2015, Government website, 25th November 2015](#) – *Impacts of the spending review for the Home Office*

[Department of Health's settlement at the Spending Review 2015, Government website, 25th November 2015](#) – *Impacts of the spending review for the Department of Health*

[LGA responds to Education Services Grant announcement, Cllr Roy Perry, Chairman of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, 26th November 2015](#) – *Outlines the Education Services Grant announcement and highlights concerns*

Briefing: Autumn Statement and spending review 2015, APSE, November 2015 – *Analysis of the Autumn Statement and Spending Review and the impact local council frontline services*

[LGA responds to national schools funding announcement in Spending Review, LGA, 26th November 2015](#) – *Brief outline of the impact of the new national funding formula*

[Laura Sharman, Spending Review: Warning that councils at financial tipping point, LocalGov, 26th November 2015](#) – *Impacts of the Spending Review for council budgets and services*

[William Eichler, Spending Review: Local authorities to retain 100% of business rates, LocalGov, 25th November 2015](#) – *Outlines Business Rates Retention for councils*

[Department for Communities and Local Government's settlement at the Spending Review 2015, Government website, 25th November 2015](#) – *Impacts of the Spending Review for DCLG*

Draft Public Service Ombudsman Bill

There are no further developments at this time. The Draft Public Service Ombudsman Bill will be kept under review and developments will be outlined in future Policy Inform briefings.

National Insurance Contributions (Rate Ceilings) Bill

[National Insurance Contributions \(Rate Ceilings\) Bill, Parliamentary website](#) - *Previous debates on all stages of the National Insurance Contributions (Rate Ceilings) Bill and any latest updates*

Finance Bill

[Finance Bill, Parliamentary website](#) - *Previous debates on all stages of the Finance Bill and any latest updates*

Policing and Criminal Justice Bill

There are no further developments at this time. The Policing and Criminal Justice Bill will be kept under review and developments will be outlined in future Policy Inform briefings.

High Speed Rail Bill

[High Speed Rail Bill, Parliamentary Website](#) - *Brief analysis of the High Speed Rail Bill*

[Ruth Bradshaw, High Speed Rail Update: Summer 2015, LGiU, 23rd July 2015](#) – *Update on key developments and other related proposals since April 2015.*

[Ruth Bradshaw, High Speed Rail Update: Autumn 2015, LGiU, 24th November 2015](#) – *Update on key developments and other related activities since July 2015*

Welfare Reform and Work Bill

[House of Commons, Briefing Paper- Welfare Reform and Work Bill, 16th July 2015](#) – *Brief analysis of the Welfare Reform and Work Bill*

[Welfare Reform and Work Bill, Parliamentary website](#) - *Previous debates on all stages of the Childcare Bill and any latest updates*

[Andrew Jones, The Welfare Reform and Work Bill: Welfare Reform Update, 20th August 2015](#) – *Brief overview of the Bill and any latest updates*

WIRRAL COUNCIL

TRANSFORMATION AND RESOURCES POLICY & PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE

01 February 2016

SUBJECT:	<i>WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE REPORT</i>
REPORT OF:	<i>THE CHAIR OF THE COMMITTEE</i>

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This report updates Members on the current position regarding the work programme for the Transformation and Resources Policy & Performance Committee.

2.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

2.1 The Transformation and Resources Policy & Performance Committee is responsible for proposing and delivering an annual work programme. This work programme should align with the corporate priorities of the Council and be informed by service priorities and performance, risk management information, public or service user feedback and referrals from Cabinet or Council.

2.2 In determining items for the Scrutiny Work Programme, good practice recommends the following criteria could be applied:

- Public Interest – topics should resonate with the local community
- Impact – there should be clear objectives and outcomes that make the work worthwhile
- Council Performance – the focus should be on improving performance
- Keeping in Context – should ensure best use of time and resources

2.3 The work programme is made up of a combination of scrutiny reviews, standing items and requested officer reports. This provides the committee with an opportunity to plan and regularly review its work across the municipal year. The current work programme for the Committee is attached as **Appendix 1**.

3.0 TRANSFORMATION AND RESOURCES POLICY & PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

3.1 At the previous Transformation and Resources Policy & Performance Committee meeting held on 3rd December, Committee agreed to convene a Task & Finish scrutiny review on Freedom of Information. A request for volunteers has been issued to Members to form the scrutiny review panel and a scoping meeting will be scheduled once the panel membership has been confirmed. It is hoped that this review will commence in February 2016.

- 3.2 It was agreed to request an update report regarding the progress of the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, for presentation at the March Committee meeting. This has been added to the work programme.

4.0 PREVIOUS / CURRENT SCRUTINY REVIEWS – UPDATE

4.1 Disaster Recovery Scrutiny Review

A single evidence session for the Task & Finish scrutiny review on the Council's disaster recovery arrangements is to be arranged and it is anticipated that this will be held in February.

4.2 Libraries Scrutiny Review

A Task & Finish scrutiny review on libraries has been deferred until early 2016 to allow Panel members to receive a number of reports which, it is hoped, will inform the scope of the review. These reports include information from the Leisure and Culture Review, the impact of the Savings Programme and the impact of reduced opening hours. As libraries are also subject to further service changes as part of the 2016/17 budget proposals, it was further agreed by the Chair and Party Spokespersons that the scrutiny review of libraries should take place after internal scrutiny and public consultation of the latest budget proposals. The work programme has been updated to reflect this and it is hoped that this work will commence in March 2016.

5.0 WIRRAL PLAN WORKSHOPS

- 5.1 Members will be aware that three workshops were held in early November to enable members to consider the delivery of the Wirral Plan. The workshops covered each of the three themes: People, Business and Environment. The outcomes of the workshops were consolidated into a single report and presented to a meeting of the Coordinating Committee on 10th December 2015. Feedback from the workshops has been provided to the authors of the appropriate strategy documents as they are developed and finalised.

6.0 2016/17 BUDGET SCRUTINY WORKSHOPS

- 6.1 A series of scrutiny workshops for each of the three Policy & Performance Committees to consider the Council's budget proposals for 2016/17 have now been held. The workshop for the budget options within the Transformation & Resources remit was held on Thursday 14th January. The outcomes from all workshops will form the basis of a single report which will be presented to Coordinating Committee on 16th February.

7.0 PROGRESS IMPLEMENTING PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Local Welfare Assistance Scheme

A full report detailing the progress made on implementing the recommendations from the scrutiny review is to be presented to this committee meeting and is included as a separate item on this agenda.

8.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Members are requested to approve the Transformation and Resources Policy & Performance Committee work programme for 2015/16 and to determine the prioritisation of Task & Finish Scrutiny Reviews.

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2015-16 Transformation and Resources Policy & Performance Committee Work Programme

Key Activities	Lead Member / Officer	Reason for Review	May 2015	June 2015	July 2015	Aug 2015	Sept 2015	Oct 2015	Nov 2015	Dec 2015	Jan 2016	Feb 2016	Mar 2016	April 2016	Outcome
Committee Dates					15th		21st		4th	3rd		1st	22nd		
Scheduled Reviews															
Libraries	Cllr Chris Meaden	Requested by Members													
Disaster Recovery arrangements	Cllr Phil Davies	Requested by Members													
Wirral Plan - Development of delivery plan	Cllr Moira McLaughlin	Proposed by Spokespersons													Complete - Referred to Coordinating Committee
Freedom of Information															
Potential Reviews															
Disaster Recovery processes	Cllr Phil Davies	Requested by Members													
Impact of Implementation of Universal credit / Removal of Housing Benefit for under 25s	Cllr Phil Davies	Requested by Members													
Notice of Motion															
Freedom of Information															Task & Finish Review
Reports Requested															
Reconfiguration of library services	Joe Blott	Requested by Members													Complete
Asset management Strategy	Joe Blott	Requested by Members													Complete
Performance Appraisals	Joe Blott	Requested by Members													Task & Finish Review
Disaster Recovery Arrangements	Joe Blott	Requested by Members													Complete
Customer Relationship Management	Joe Blott	Requested by Members													Complete - update report requested for March
Security access to Council issued devices	Joe Blott	Requested by Members													Complete
Local Welfare Assistance Scheme Scrutiny Review - Update Report	Joe Blott	Requested by Members													
Community Safety Partnership	Joe Blott	Requested by Members													
Spotlight Sessions															
Standing Items															
Performance Dashboard															
Financial Monitoring															
Policy Inform															

Key Activities	Lead Member / Officer	Reason for Review	May 2015	June 2015	July 2015	Aug 2015	Sept 2015	Oct 2015	Nov 2015	Dec 2015	Jan 2016	Feb 2016	Mar 2016	April 2016	Outcome
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