

# ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 28 October 2008

<u>Present:</u>	Councillor	D Roberts (Chair)	
	Councillors	A Bridson J Williams	P Johnson J Keeley
<u>Deputies</u>	Councillors	L Rennie (In place of S Moseley) A Taylor (In place of M Redfern)	
<u>Cabinet Member</u>	Councillor	G Gardiner	

## 13 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST/PARTY WHIP

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

Members were reminded that they should also declare, pursuant to paragraph 18 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules, 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.

## 14 PROJECTED BUDGET 2009/2011

The Director of Technical Services reported that at the meeting of the Cabinet held on 16 October 2008 (minute 217 refers) a number of budget savings were proposed in order to close the budget gap and were referred to relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committees for urgent consideration. He reported that the budget savings for the Technical Services Department consisted of six items totalling £1,966,000. However, the proposed budget savings within the remit of this Committee were as follows: -

Introduce £20.00 charge per visit (up to five items) for ERIC Service.	£515,000
Delete publicity budget for Waste Control designed to cover introduction of new bin system which was now bedded in.	£45,000

With regard to the ERIC Service, the Director reported that Local Authorities had a duty to collect bulky household items and he commented that the majority of Councils now charged residents for the service. He indicated that once charges were

introduced, the number of requests for the service would drop substantially and evidence from other local authorities showed that the life of many bulky household items was extended once charges were introduced as residents found alternative ways of getting rid of unwanted items. Items of quality would be directed to a number of social enterprises or charities operating doorstep collections within the borough and Technical Services would need time to consult with those organisations prior to charges being introduced. However, to mitigate the risk of any potential fly tipping, he proposed that a provisional sum of £90,000 be set aside from the budget saving option to facilitate a rapid response to fly tipping should it be required.

He commented that although the emphasis would be on the promotion of reuse and recycling of bulky goods rather than disposal, the new bulky waste service would need to be promoted, in advance of the proposed commencement of charging in April 2009, to encourage the use of the service. This would include marketing and signposting via the website and Streetscene Call Centre of other free means of collection by charities, social enterprises and initiatives such as "Freecycle", where unwanted items were offered for free. Technical Services would also continue to encourage and facilitate local community groups to organise "Community Giveaway Days" or similar initiatives.

He reported also that the cost of the service reflected the charges made by the current service provider and was therefore cost neutral.

Councillor Rennie indicated that the Conservative Group were opposed to the proposed introduction of the charge for the ERIC service and referred to petitions from local residents that had been presented to the Council in 2005 by the Cabinet member for Environment, opposed to the introduction of charges for the ERIC service. She commented upon year on year increases in Council Tax, which some residents could ill afford, and expressed the view that the proposed charge would lead to an increase in fly tipping. In response, the Director indicated that although there had been a small increase in reported calls, the amount of the fly tipped waste had not been recorded. However, he was confident that the provisional sum of £90,000 to be set aside to address fly tipping would be adequate.

The Cabinet Member for Environment commented on the need to take action to address the budget shortfall and referred to the increased numbers of social enterprises and charities who were now operating doorstep collections in the borough. The Director commented that call centre operators always attempted to engage with the public to encourage recycling. However, as the collection service was free, there was little incentive to co-operate with recycling initiatives and the bulk of items collected went to landfill.

With regard to Waste Recycling Education and Awareness, he reported upon the implications of the proposed reduction in funding for the communication of waste and recycling initiatives. The remaining funding for maximising the use of the Wirral's dry and garden waste recycling schemes was sufficient to cover the delivery of an annual garden waste calendar with supporting material to 108,000 households and the delivery of an annual grey/green bin calendar with supporting material. However, any further initiatives or communications would only be possible if the Council continued to be successful in attracting external funding.

He reported that a funding bid had been submitted to WRAP to include the continued employment of the participation officers (until March 2010) although the outcome would not be known until January 2009. However, although external funding would continue to be sought for communication type activities, the uncertainty of funding opportunities restricted the ability to plan strategically over the medium and long-term, in order to maximise and monitor the efficiency of existing recycling schemes.

He emphasised that whilst Wirral had enjoyed early success with the new recycling services, increasing recycling from 14% in 2006/2007 to 32% in 2007/2008, this placed Wirral 226<sup>th</sup> out of a total of 393 local authorities in England. At this stage of the year the target of 34% appeared to be being met and possibly exceeded although a recycling performance of over 40% would have been necessary to achieve top quartile performance in 2007/2008.

Members commented that in some parts of Wirral, it was clear that some people had not engaged in recycling and, for Wirral to continue to meet its recycling targets, it was essential for continued funding of recycling education and awareness.

It was moved by the Councillor Roberts and seconded by Councillor Williams –

“(1) That the proposed budget savings of £560,000 from 2009/2010, be endorsed.

(2) That an allocation of £90,000 be set aside from the £515,000 ERIC Service budget saving option to facilitate a rapid response to fly tipping.”

It was moved as an amendment by Councillor Rennie and seconded by Councillor Keeley –

“That the proposed cuts demonstrate a complete betrayal of the residents of Wirral, particularly by the Liberal Democrat Cabinet Member, aided and abetted by the Labour Group and –

(i) that the proposed introduction of a £20 charge for the ERIC service be not accepted, and;

(ii) that the abolition of the publicity budget be also not accepted and this Overview and Scrutiny Committee informs the Cabinet of this decision and asks them to reconsider.”

The amendment was put and lost (3:4).

The motion was put and carried (4:3), Councillors Bridson, Roberts, Taylor and Williams voting in favour and Councillors Johnson, Keeley and Rennie voting against.

**Resolved (4:3) –**

**(1) That the proposed budget savings of £560,000 from 2009/2010, be endorsed.**

**(2) That an allocation of £90,000 be set aside from the £515,000 ERIC Service budget saving option to facilitate a rapid response to fly tipping.**