



## Business Overview and Scrutiny Committee

<b>Date:</b>	Thursday, 23 January 2020
<b>Time:</b>	6.00 p.m.
<b>Venue:</b>	Committee Room 1 - Wallasey Town Hall

This meeting will be webcast at  
<https://wirral.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>

**Contact Officer:** Andrew Mossop  
**Tel:** 0151 691 8501  
**e-mail:** [andrewmossop@wirral.gov.uk](mailto:andrewmossop@wirral.gov.uk)  
**Website:** [www.wirral.gov.uk](http://www.wirral.gov.uk)

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### AGENDA

1. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**
2. **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.

3. **MINUTES (Pages 1 - 8)**  
  
To approve the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 27 November, 2019.
4. **UPDATE ON LIVERPOOL CITY REGION DEVELOPMENTS (Pages 9 - 14)**
5. **BUSINESS SUPPORT SERVICE (Pages 15 - 20)**

6. **IMPACT OF APPRENTICESHIP LEVY (Pages 21 - 28)**
7. **SICKNESS ABSENCE UPDATE (Pages 29 - 38)**
8. **SCRUTINY REVIEW - NEW FERRY (Pages 39 - 72)**
9. **BUSINESS SCRUTINY BUDGET PROPOSALS FOR 2020/21  
(Pages 73 - 82)**
10. **WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE (Pages 83 - 92)**

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## **BUSINESS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Wednesday, 27 November 2019

Present: Councillor D Mitchell (Chair)

Councillors J Bird K Greaney  
T Cox J Stapleton  
M Collins J Walsh  
G Davies KJ Williams  
S Foulkes S Williams  
A Gardner

Apologies Councillor G Watt

### 24 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

One apology was received from Councillor Geoffrey Watt.

### 25 **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.

### 26 **MINUTES**

Members were requested to receive the minutes of the Business Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings held on 17 September, 2019.

**Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 17 September, 2019, be approved.**

### 27 **2019/20 QUARTER 2 WIRRAL PLAN PERFORMANCE**

The Chair introduced the report which provided the 2019/20 Quarter 2 (July – September 2019) performance report for Wirral Plan pledges under the Business theme. The Quarter 2 report was included as Appendix 1 to the report, and provided an overview of the progress in Quarter 2, including

available data in relation to a range of outcome indicators and supporting measures.

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

## 28 POTHoles AND STREET LIGHTING - UPDATE

Brian Smith, Senior Highway Maintenance Street Light Manager, introduced a report which provided an update on the measures being undertaken to reduce potholes in the carriageway and reduce the number of streetlights not working across the borough. The report also provided information regarding the methods being employed to bring about sustainable reduction improvements.

In response to Members' comments, both Brian Smith and Paul Graves, Street Lighting and Operations Manager, made the following comments:

- All the highways services contracts in respect of repairs to potholes were paid on a price schedule for work which was actually undertaken and on a banded scale so that the more work a contractor received the cost to the Council, per square metre reduced.
- There were multiple ways of supplying the infrastructure for the street lighting columns with the Council having its own underground cable network as well as the Scottish Power network. Faults could sometimes be rectified quickly but some could take longer and problems could sometimes be compounded, if a whole lighting column needed replacing leading to an extended delay in repairs.
- There were guaranteed standards of provision with Scottish Power, regulated by Ofgem, and dependent upon whether or not there was some form of exemption, compensation could be paid.
- In respect of the Penny Bridge roundabout there was a major cable fault and a full infrastructure redesign was currently taking place with installation due to take place, hopefully over the next few months.
- In respect of communications for works being undertaken around the borough, this had been identified as a problem and was currently being addressed, with postings on the website and new simplified standard letters for residents.
- With regard to street light faults, straightforward repairs were carried out as soon as possible, if a full replacement was required and it was part of the LED replacement scheme then there could be a delay.
- A small contract was in place to replace a number of lamp columns which had been damaged by traffic accidents or which were found to be dangerous and structurally unsound and needed to be cut down.

David Armstrong, Assistant Chief Executive, also responded to some comments and referred to proposed general signage which could be put out where the fault was due to underground cabling to alert motorists to the cause. A programme totalling £500,000, over the next two years was also in

place for replacement bollards and reflective signage on traffic islands. Including an external contractor, there were now three teams fixing 600/700 electrical faults each month.

The Chair referred to some particular issues affecting the southern end of the borough and looked forward to these being addressed in the near future and also suggested the need for Scottish Power to be invited back to the Committee.

Members also thanked the officers for their report to the Committee and responses to questions.

On a motion by the Chair, duly seconded it was then –

**Resolved –**

**(1) That the report be noted.**

**(2) That the actions taken to reduce pothole repairs and street lighting outages be supported.**

## 29 **UPDATE ON LIVERPOOL CITY REGION DEVELOPMENTS**

Rose Boylan, Policy and Strategy Manager, introduced a report and gave a presentation which set out a brief overview of the latest developments at the Liverpool City Region (LCR). This included the development of a Local Industrial Strategy; LCR Town Centre Fund; LCR Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan and the first LCR Environmental Summit in November.

In response to comments from Members, Rose Boylan acknowledged that the wording in the draft Local Industrial Strategy was ‘wordy’ and that it would be turned into much more user friendly language when communicated to residents and the general public. The strategy’s aim, whilst acknowledging the distinctive communities and neighbourhoods, was to build strong communities and working as a collective City Region have a single approach to benefit all. Work was being undertaken to help with the revitalisation of town centres regardless of whatever funding streams might be available in the future.

Councillor Jean Stapleton gave an update on the work of the Liverpool City Region Scrutiny Committee and a very informative workshop on the Liverpool Enterprise Partnership which she had attended the previous week.

The Chair commented that Eastham appeared to be missed off some of the literature which came out of the LCR and the need for this to be rectified.

On a motion by the Chair, duly seconded, it was –

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

30 **UNIVERSAL CREDIT - UPDATE REPORT**

The Chair introduced a report which provided an update following the report brought to Committee in September 2018 (minute 17 refers) on the Early Impact of Universal Credit and corresponding workshops. In accordance with Committee Members' request it focused on the ongoing roll-out of Universal Credit, the ending of 'Universal Support' programme and introduction of 'Help to Claim' together with the experience of and any associated impacts upon the operational service delivery teams.

The Assistant Chief Executive apologised on behalf of Lisa Jamieson, Head of Customer Services, who, at very short notice, was unable to be present to answer questions on the report and informed the Committee that written answers would be provided for the Committee.

Members raised questions on the report, which included:

- How many claimants were being directed to the national 'Money Advice Service' by the Authority as expected by the Department of Work and Pensions?
- The report referred to claimants being able to make telephone claims for Universal Credit but a Member understood that claimants were in fact discouraged from making claims over the telephone.

A Member also voiced concerns at the human cost involved with the legislation on Universal Credit and expressed the view that it was fundamentally flawed.

On motion by the Chair, duly seconded, it was –

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

31 **WIRRAL GROWTH COMPANY - PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY**

David Armstrong, the Assistant Chief Executive, introduced a report which set out proposals for the Committee to undertake pre-decision scrutiny of the Wirral Growth Company Partnership Plan and associated Business Cases. This work was time sensitive with a scheduled Cabinet decision early in 2020. The approach set out in the report would enable the Committee to review the proposals and submit any comments to Cabinet to inform the decision.

The Chair referred to the possible time constraints in getting the Committee's feedback report to Cabinet, and requested the Committee's agreement for the report to be approved by the Chair and party spokespersons, if required.

On a motion by the Chair, duly seconded, it was –

**Resolved – That a workshop be convened to review the Wirral Growth Company Partnership Plan and associated Business Cases and, if necessary, the feedback report to Cabinet be approved by the Chair and party spokespersons.**

## 32 UPDATE ON INTERIMS AND CONSULTANTS

Nikki Boardman, Director of Change and Organisational Design, introduced a report which provided an update on the Council's use of interims and consultants. The level of spend on executive interim / consultants in 2017/18 was £1.8m, this had reduced for 2018-19 to £1.2m. However, the expected level of spend for the full year 2019-20 was likely to be the same as 2018-19 at approximately £1.2m.

Responding to comments from Members, Nikki Boardman, commented that within legal services there had been a restructure put in place, as there were a number of interims currently covering vacant positions.

Vicki Shaw, Head of Legal Services, concurred that there were a number of solicitor post vacancies within Legal Services and subject to senior management sign off these were due to be advertised very shortly. The number of trainee solicitor posts was also being increased in order to train future lawyers to meet anticipated recruitment gaps in the most economic and effective way.

A Member suggested the need for regular reports on this matter and that the next report needed to focus on and provide more detail as to the number of interims working within the Business Management area

Responding to further comments, Tony Williams, the Head of HR, stated that there were currently 14 interims on day rates. With regard to end dates, interims could only be appointed for a three month period at a time, and a business case needed to be put forward for each extension to this and approved at director level. Directors were being encouraged to end any interim arrangements as soon as possible so that if the position was linked to recruitment this was undertaken as soon as possible.

On a motion by the Chair, duly seconded, it was –

**Resolved – That the report be noted and a further report be brought back to the Committee with the details requested.**

### 33 **FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT QUARTER 2 2019/20**

Sarah Cox, Principal Accountant, introduced the report of the Director of Finance and Investment which set out the Council's revenue and capital monitoring position for 2019/20 quarter 2. An adverse revenue position of £429,000 was currently forecast, which was a £238,000 increase from Quarter 1 forecast position of £198,000). This was largely due to income targets not being fully met and increased costs from the Coroners Service. Some pressures were forecast to be mitigated by employee vacancy savings.

Responding to comments from Members, Sarah Cox commented that there were ways of checking income targets with Service Level Agreements to ensure that they were achievable.

With regard to mitigation plans for the forecast budget deficit, David Armstrong, Assistant Chief Executive, commented that a series of measures were in place to scrutinise spending even more closely.

The Chair reminded Members that in relation to the budget, plans were in place for all four scrutiny committees to be invited to two scrutiny budget workshops in January, 2020.

On a motion by the Chair, duly seconded, it was –

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

### 34 **HIGHWAYS AND TRAFFIC REPRESENTATION PANEL MINUTES**

The Committee was requested to note the minutes of the Highways and Traffic Representation Panel meeting held on 21 October, 2019, regarding objections received against a proposal to introduce a scheme of proposed accessibility improvements on Lowood Road and Circular Road, Birkenhead. The Panel had recommended that the proposed scheme should not be introduced.

Councillor Steve Williams, Chair of the Panel, addressed the Committee and expressed agreement with a comment which had been made at the Panel by a Ward Councillor for Councillors to have more training and seek professional advice before putting such proposals forward.

Councillor Jean Stapleton commented that both she and former Councillor Phil Davies, had asked the Highways section to look at this matter at the request of residents and follow the normal consultation procedures, and that was what had happened in this case. Officers had given impartial advice and a decision had been reached in a fair and democratic manner.

On a motion by the Chair, duly seconded, it was -

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

35 **BUSINESS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE**

The Committee considered a report from the Scrutiny Officer which explained the process of developing and managing a scrutiny work programme for the current municipal year. The report also updated the Committee on the current status of scrutiny reviews and workshops on a variety of topics.

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

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**Business Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
Thursday, 23 January 2020**

<b>REPORT TITLE</b>	<b>UPDATE ON LIVERPOOL CITY REGION DEVELOPMENTS</b>
<b>REPORT OF</b>	<b>ROSE BOYLAN, POLICY &amp; STRATEGY MANAGER</b>

**REPORT SUMMARY**

This report sets out a brief overview of latest developments at the Liverpool City Region (LCR), including activity underway to implement the City Region devolution deal and the work of the Combined Authority.

This matter affects all Wards within the Borough.

This is not a key decision.

**RECOMMENDATION/S**

Committee is requested to note and comment on latest developments.

## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

### 1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

Scrutiny Committee have requested regular updates and consideration of LCR developments.

### 2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

N/a

### 3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A wide range of activity continues, of which the following is just a small extract. Further detail on all of the most recent developments can be found here <http://liverpoolcityregion-ca.gov.uk/>

#### 3.1 Skills Capital Funding

3.1.1 The Combined Authority recently agreed investment of more than £16 million in skills education at colleges, local authorities and learning providers across the Liverpool City Region.

3.1.2 The funding builds on £30 million already invested in buildings, facilities and equipment for skills training in the city region, aiming to ensure that local colleges and training providers can provide first class skills education to people right across the Liverpool City Region, including Wirral Met College and local training providers.

3.1.3 The focus is on supporting young people to enter the world of work having had the best possible technical and vocational training and matched with employers' needs.

3.1.4 This Skills Capital Funding comes from the Local Growth Fund as part of the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority's Strategic Investment Fund (SIF). Skills Capital Funding is available to provide new sites and premises, learning and skills equipment, improvements to existing facilities, maintenance and investments in low carbon technologies.

#### 3.2 Strategic Investment Fund (SIF) Investment

3.2.1 As previously reported to Committee, ongoing investment continues through the SIF fund. Over the last year the Combined Authority has been able to bring forward many millions of pounds of SIF investment which will help local businesses across the city region as well as supporting more people into high quality employment.

3.2.2 SIF is about inclusive growth – the Combined Authority £75m SME growth programme is not only helping businesses to grow, it is also helping residents find good work in these growing businesses.

3.2.3 SIF funding is helping to deliver a wide range of Wirral's priorities and projects – for example

- Unilever Port Sunlight Materials Innovation Factory
- Tower Road

- Maritime Knowledge Hub
- Riverview Business Park Phase
- Riverbank Road, Bromborough
- Wirral Waters Housing
- Transport infrastructure and improvements
- LCR cycling and walking networks in Wirral
- Wirral is benefitting from the £7.7million Housing First fund to tackle homelessness
- Wirral Borough of Culture 2019
- Tunnel Tolls - £1 fast tag for LCR residents

#### 3.2.4 Eureka Project - LCR £6.4m funding

The national children's museum 'Eureka!' is now under development at Seacombe Ferry Terminal. Expected to attract around 200,000 visitors a year and contribute to the local economy, it has been made possible because of a £6.4m contribution from the Combined Authority as part of the overall project funding package.

### 3.3 Tackling Child and Family Poverty

3.3.1 The Metro Mayor, Steve Rotheram, recently launched the new Standing Action Group on Poverty and Life Chances to address the challenge of child poverty in the Liverpool City Region.

3.3.2 Figures published in May 2019 by 'End Child Poverty' show that 31% of children living in Halton, Knowsley, Liverpool, St Helens, Sefton and Wirral are growing up in poverty. Living in poverty is defined as households (adjusted to account for household size) earning less than 60% of the median income (currently £29,400).

3.3.3 The new standing action group replaces the Child Poverty and Life Chances Commission, which has worked for the last decade highlighting the hardship facing communities across the city region and taking action to improve the life chances of children. It includes key players from across the LCR, and as part of the Combined Authority working closely with The Fairness and Social Justice Advisory Board (FASJAB).

3.3.4 A detailed action plan and focused priorities will shortly be produced, with clear aims to continue to improve the life chances of children and young people and work towards eradicating child poverty from the Liverpool City Region.

### 3.4. LCR HOUSING FIRST

3.4.1 Wirral continues to play a key part of the LCR approach to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping.

3.4.2 Liverpool City Region is one of just three places in England piloting '**Housing First**', which aims to tackle homelessness in a new way, based on international evidence. The approach involves providing an ordinary, settled home as the first response for people with multiple and complex needs beyond housing, offering individualised support with issues such as addictions, mental and physical health issues and the effects of trauma and abuse.

- 3.4.3 The approach was recently the focus of international attention, when housing and homelessness sector professionals from across Europe, Australia and Russia visited the Liverpool City Region, as they completed a three-day “train the trainer” course in the pioneering approach to tackling homelessness.
- 3.4.4 This first phase of the LCR pilot builds on and enhance local approaches and involves staff working to provide homes and individualised support to 60 homeless people across the Liverpool City Region.
- 3.4.5 More information about Housing First at a national level is available at the Housing First England website: <https://hfe.homeless.org.uk/>

### **3.5 Towns Fund**

- 3.5.1 As previously reported, Birkenhead is one of 100 towns that have recently been selected nationally to work towards a Town Deal as part of Government’s £3.6bn Towns Fund to further improve the ability of towns to realise their growth ambitions.
- 3.5.2 Detailed discussions are now underway between the Combined Authority, LCR Local Authorities and Government to develop plans for using the funding, with further detail shortly expected on the scope of interventions, business case development and how Deals will be agreed.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

Further updates on all of the above will be brought back to this Committee as further detail emerges in the coming months. As previously stated, the above is just a short snapshot of LCR activity, and further detail on all of the most recent developments can be found here <https://www.liverpoolcityregion-ca.gov.uk/>

## **4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The devolution of financial resources to LCR means that there are opportunities for Wirral to access additional funding.

## **5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are none arising

## **6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: ICT, STAFFING AND ASSETS**

There are none arising

## **7.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

No direct implications. The Combined Authority is prioritising an increased focus on urgently addressing the climate emergency and accelerating what we can do locally to address this global issue.

## 8.0 RELEVANT RISKS

There are none arising

## 9.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

Wirral, along with City Region partners, continues to engage and communicate widely to brief members and officers; circulate information and raise awareness of LCR developments through a wide range of approaches and communications.

## 10.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The Combined Authority has a duty to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 10.2 Equality and Diversity Implications are comprehensively considered both strategically and at individual project level. Individual decisions, projects and strategies are assessed through project implementation. The overarching strategic goal of the LCR Combined Authority and related strategies and programmes are all centred on tackling inequalities and achieving an inclusive economy for Liverpool City Region.
- 10.3 To ensure this happens effectively, the Combined Authority established the Fairness and Social Justice Advisory Board, to ensure that every policy, every service and every economic initiative is measured against the commitment to deliver a fairer and more equal city region. Established in 2017, the board is the first of its kind in the country and brings together people from a cross section of local communities, reflecting the diversity of the city region. It acts as an independent sounding board, ensuring that issues of fairness and social justice are considered as part of Combined Authority decision making.

**REPORT AUTHOR:** Rose Boylan  
Policy and Strategy Manager  
0151 691 8037  
[rosemaryboylan@wirral.gov.uk](mailto:rosemaryboylan@wirral.gov.uk)

## BACKGROUND PAPERS

### SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Council	13 September 2016
Cabinet	14 November 2016
Council	8 December 2016
Business Overview & Scrutiny Committee	6 December 2016
Business Overview & Scrutiny Committee	24 January 2017
Business Overview & Scrutiny Committee	29 March 2017

Business Overview & Scrutiny Committee	4 July 2017
Business Overview & Scrutiny Committee	19 September 2017
Business Overview & Scrutiny Committee	29 November 2017
Business Overview & Scrutiny Committee	23 January 2018
Business Overview & Scrutiny Committee	27 <sup>th</sup> March 2018
Business Overview & Scrutiny Committee	4 <sup>th</sup> July 2018
Business Overview & Scrutiny Committee	September 2018
Business Overview & Scrutiny Committee	November 2018
Business Overview & Scrutiny Committee	January 2019
Business Overview & Scrutiny Committee	March 2019
Business Overview & Scrutiny Committee	July 2019
Business Overview & Scrutiny Committee	September 2019
Business Overview & Scrutiny Committee	November 2019



## **Business Overview and Scrutiny Committee Thursday, 23 January 2020**

<b>REPORT TITLE:</b>	<b>BUSINESS SUPPORT SERVICE</b>
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>LEAD COMMISSIONER: PLACE &amp; INVESTMENT</b>  <b>ECONOMIC &amp; HOUSING GROWTH</b>

### **REPORT SUMMARY**

This report provides an overview of the Council's Business Support Service contract with Wirral Chamber and a flavour of activities delivered by the organisation outside of the Council's contract to support Members in advance of a presentation to Business Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

### **RECOMMENDATION/S**

Members of the Committee are requested to:

Note the background information to the Business Support Services contract in relation to the services provided in preparation for a presentation from supplier Wirral Chamber.

## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

### 1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

To support knowledge and effectiveness of scrutiny.

### 2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

Not Applicable

### 3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Following review of the Quarter Two Wirral Growth Plan Performance Report, Business Overview and Scrutiny Committee (17.09.19) requested that Wirral Chamber attend a meeting of the Committee to give a presentation on their work. As the supplier of the Council's Business Support Service, Wirral Chamber directly contribute to performance of the Wirral Growth Plan, alongside their wider commercial role as a Chamber of Commerce.

#### 3.1 Council Commissioned Business Support Service

Delivery of effective business growth support is vital in supporting Wirral's economic growth outcome ambitions. In October 2016 Cabinet agreed to outsource the in-house provision of frontline support for local businesses via a 3-year commission (01.06.17 to 31.05.20). The contract, awarded to Wirral Chamber following a competitive tender process, includes a 5% annual price reduction and an option to extend for a further year (to 31.05.21) subject to satisfactory performance. The total value of the contract from 01.06.17 to 31.05.20 is £1,294,535.

- 3.1.1 Frontline business support services procured through this contract are obligated to be open for free universal access; however, suppliers are entitled to commercialise specific elements of activity (eg: through a charging policy, sponsorship, or membership fees) to enable management of the annual contract price reduction requirement. The activities covered by the contract are as follows:

##### Contracted Activities with Free Universal Access:

- Core business growth support
- Entrepreneurship/business start-up support
- Inward investor 'soft landing' offer

##### Contracted Activities in Scope for Commercialisation:

- Sector networks
- Workforce development
- Place shaping: Love Liscard

- 3.1.2 Performance of the contract is measured against key performance indicators. Performance to date is outlined in the table below; note that contractual targets were reviewed and revised at Year 2 end to maintain stretch in areas of overperformance.

Ref	Output	Definition	Original Contract Target	Revised Target at end of Yr2	Cumulative Total Achieved to Date
<b>1</b>	Enterprises Engaged	Businesses newly registered to the service through any activity	<b>1,302</b>	<b>1,434</b>	<b>1,330</b>
<b>2a</b>	Businesses Supported <12 hrs	Enterprises Engaged in receipt of less than 12 hours but more than 2 hours active support within a contract year through any activity	<b>600</b>	<b>784</b>	<b>695</b>
<b>2b</b>	Businesses Assisted >12hrs	Enterprises Engaged in receipt of 12 or more hours active support within a contract year through any activity	<b>90</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>94</b>
<b>3a</b>	Potential Entrepreneurs supported to be enterprise ready	Individuals (16+) in receipt of less than 12 hours but more than 2 hours active support through Activity: Entrepreneurship Offer	<b>252</b>	<b>352</b>	<b>380</b>
<b>3b</b>	Potential Entrepreneurs assisted to be enterprise ready	Individuals (16+) in receipt of 12 or more hours active support through Activity: Entrepreneurship Offer	<b>51</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>168</b>
<b>3c</b>	New Enterprises Created: Direct	New enterprises created (new defined as enterprises trading less than 12 months prior to registration with the service) as a result of Activity: Entrepreneurship Offer	<b>150</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>210</b>
<b>3d</b>	New Enterprises Sustained	New enterprises registered as trading for more than 12 months	<b>105</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>112</b>
<b>3e</b>	New Enterprises Created: Indirect	New enterprises created/relocated in Wirral as result of the service through any activity other than Entrepreneurship Offer	<b>45</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>4a</b>	Jobs Created (FTE): Direct	New permanent, paid, full time equivalent jobs created as a direct result of support from Activity: Entrepreneurship Offer	<b>102</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>4b</b>	Jobs Created/Safeguarded (FTE): Indirect	Jobs created/safeguarded as a result of the service through any activity other than Entrepreneurship Offer	<b>2,001</b>	<b>2,258</b>	<b>1,925</b>
<b>5</b>	Business Sector Intelligence Reports	Business insight reports which provide headline trends by sector, size and location of business	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>9</b>

6	Local Centre Improvements	Liscard Shopping Centre Footfall. Improvement Trend (Range 1-2%)	Improvement Trend	Improvement Trend	-1%
7	Income Targets	As per Commercialisation Plan	£105,400	£105,400	£83,519

### 3.2 Non-Contracted Wirral Chamber Business Growth Activity

As one of Wirral's anchor institutions, the Chamber also feedback on their wider activity delivered outside of the contract as part of their commitment as a partner in achievement of the 2020 Wirral Plan. This additional work contributes updates on the Growth Plan Performance Reports and collation of the overall Wirral Plan Key Performance Indicator: Jobs Created and Safeguarded figures.

#### 3.2.1 Headline Activities:

- Growth Hub/Scale Up Programme: the Chamber is the Growth Hub for Wirral; the first point of contact for SMEs to establish their business requirements to either then support directly or signpost to other agencies who can.
- Birkenhead Improvement District (BID): BID is an initiative run by Wirral Chamber to improve and breathe life in to the CH41 area of Birkenhead. Running from 2016 through to 2021, a team of people work to make a difference in the following areas: Clean and attractive, Safe and secure, Marketing and promotion, Supporting Business.
- Business premises and conferencing: Wirral Chamber run three business centres – Egerton House, Pacific Road and The Lauries. Investment has ensured quality office space for SMEs of varying sizes and fledgling companies begin their business journey from either a desk or shed at Pacific Road and then moving through to larger office space as their company grows.
- Young Chamber and Young Chamber Cadets - Young Chamber has been working with the 22 secondary schools on Wirral for 4 years. We support in a number of ways: Entrepreneurship seminars, talks and events, CV writing and interviewing techniques, 'Meet the CEO' events and Behind the Scenes visits to major companies in Wirral.

#### 4.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Not Applicable

#### 5.0 **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

Not Applicable

#### 6.0 **RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: ICT, STAFFING AND ASSETS**

Not Applicable

#### 7.0 **RELEVANT RISKS**

Not Applicable

## 8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

Not Applicable

## 9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

The potential impact of the commissioned service has been reviewed with regard to equality and links to the existing EIA conducted for Wirral's Growth Plan.

<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/equality-impact-assessments/equality-impact-assessments-2014-0>

## 10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

Wirral Chamber has fully embraced the Council's Climate Emergency Programme; the Energy and Environment Sector Network, delivered as part of the Wirral Business Support Services contract, is key to facilitating the exchange of best practice, information and knowledge transfer of this across the business community.

**REPORT AUTHOR:** **Helen Carney**  
Lead Commissioner: Place & Investment  
0151 691 8421  
email: [helencarney@wirral.gov.uk](mailto:helencarney@wirral.gov.uk)

## APPENDICES

### BACKGROUND PAPERS

### SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date

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## **Business Overview and Scrutiny Committee Thursday, 23 January 2020**

<b>REPORT TITLE:</b>	<b>IMPACT OF APPRENTICESHIP LEVY</b>
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>DIRECTOR FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES</b>

### **REPORT SUMMARY**

This report was produced at the request of the Business Overview and Scrutiny Committee to respond to the following questions:

- Businesses which are paying the apprenticeship levy but which were not actually taking on any apprentices,
- How this impacted on adult learning opportunities.

While the request was to provide information on local businesses eligible for paying the levy but not taking on apprentices, there is no information available regarding specific Wirral businesses. Council officers do not have access to individual businesses digital account system, the portal by which employers pay for apprenticeship training. The Government has not published any reports on individual business use of the levy. However, in this report will highlight the impact the apprenticeship reforms have had on local and Liverpool City Region (LCR) apprenticeship numbers.

Locally and across the LCR there has not been any identified negative impact or displacement of adult learning opportunities. The Council's Lifelong Learning Services, funded by the Combined Authority using Adult Education Budget (AEB) funding, has delivered 1,046 course enrolments between September and November 2019 which is in line with planned delivery. Wirral Met College are similar with all AEB funding being committed for this academic year.

This matter affects all Wards within the Borough.

### **RECOMMENDATION/S**

- 1) That the Committee note the report; and
- 2) Committee supports further close working with employers, Wirral Met College, other local training providers and the LCR Combined Authority with an agreed objective to increase uptake of apprenticeships and maximise use of the apprenticeship levy.

## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

### 1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1.1 Some of the changes impacting on level of apprenticeships on offer could be attributed to the change over from Apprenticeship Frameworks to Standards which has seen some Intermediate Level Apprenticeships (entry level 2) disappear in some sectors as well as the growth and development of Higher Level Apprenticeships.
- 1.2 Feedback from local and LCR employers suggests that firms are using apprenticeship funding to substitute for previously planned workforce development choosing to invest in existing skilled staff rather than train lower skilled workers or new recruits. Non-levy firms are also investing in higher level, often University provided, qualifications for existing staff that are now much more affordable owing to the 5% employer contribution. Many qualification standards have been developed at higher levels to support this. This is in the financial interests of each firm, but the impact on Wirral residents is to further constrain the number of people with level 2 and 3 qualifications.
- 1.3 Non-Levy employers purchase apprenticeship training through a co-investment scheme with employers making a 5% contribution. Anecdotal feedback from some non-levy paying employers across Wirral is that firms have not taken on apprentices due to rise in cost of training, the introduction of 20 percent “off the job” time and apprentices not being “employment ready”.
- 1.4 There are also willing employers, training providers and apprentices ready to start apprenticeships, but no funding to do so.
- This is because demand for apprenticeships from non-levied firms outstrips the available funds.
  - There is consistent feedback from colleges and independent training providers that this is acting as a brake on apprenticeship starts locally. Some have already spent their allocation for 2019/2020.
  - This is exacerbated because much of the demand for non-levy provision is from SMEs in construction and engineering which are high cost courses to deliver.
  - The Combined Authority has been mitigating the full impact of this through helping companies to transfer uncommitted levy funding, with over £400,000 funding transferred to date, supporting the training of 104 apprentices.
- 1.5 This has impacted on the amount of apprenticeship starts across the borough and are reflected in the above figures. It is important to note that this is a national issue and is impacting equally on Wirral.
- 1.6 Some of our foundational sectors who struggle to recruit are not able to offer apprenticeships. Firms with small margins, fixed value public sector contracts, and a high proportion of labour costs cannot afford to pay 100% of salaries for 80% labour (due to the requirement for 20% off the job training time) so are offering fewer apprenticeships than previously.
- 1.7 Some of our high productivity and emerging sectors are unable to offer apprenticeships. Firms with structurally high staff turnover due to contract lengths – such as construction, engineering, and the creative industries – continue to struggle to

offer more apprenticeships because they cannot commit to the length of course required.

- 1.8 The cumulative effect of these four factors is a 35% reduction in the number of apprenticeships starts across the LCR from 2016/17 to 2017/18. This is compared with a 24% fall nationally in the same period (see appendix 1). In 2018/19 Wirral continued the trend with a further reduction of 9% across apprenticeship starts for all age groups. The biggest reduction in 2018/19 Wirral resident apprenticeship starts has been in the under 19 age group (-27%).
- 1.9 The LCR Combined Authority is aware of the issues being faced and is implementing the following actions:
- Raising the awareness of Be More, the apprentice application portal with young people.
  - Investing £4m in a Skills and Apprenticeship brokerage service to help facilitate transfers of funding from levy payers to non-levy payers, and to support firms to identify the right courses and providers to suit their current and future staff needs. Since Spring 2019, over £0.500m has been transferred to support 104 apprentice starts with an aim to double that by the end of the year.
  - Supporting the creation of standards in key sectors across the Liverpool City Region, the Combined Authority have provided £2m funding for the creation of a maritime skills standard and are looking at opportunities to support social care standards.
- 1.10 In addition, LCR local councils have been working with the LCR Combined Authority to collaborate on driving up the number of apprenticeship starts. This has included joint procurement, development of cohorts of learners and sharing effective practice. This has had a beneficial impact, with the number of starts almost doubling in 12 months. This joint work will be continued through the Skills and Apprenticeship Hub and widened to include other public sector organisations such as the NHS and Merseyside Police.
- 1.11 The implementation of these actions will mitigate the impact of the introduction of the reforms, but the system needs to be changed to better reflect the needs of employers and learners locally. Discussions are continuing with Government to ensure that any potential changes to apprenticeship funding will help to address the position locally.
- 1.12 These changes and potential solutions could include:
- Dampening the growth in higher and degree apprenticeships for older workers. Requiring employers to pay some of the costs of apprenticeships at level 4 and above for workers aged 25 and over from outside their levy funds. This is not to say there is no value in this training, but we would not want to see young people and SMEs lose out due to funding being sucked up by higher-level apprenticeships for older workers.
  - Create a more flexible skills levy which allows employers to invest in other forms of high-quality training, not limiting this to apprenticeships, in return for larger contributions.
  - Given employers are more likely to invest in training higher skilled workers, government could also consider wider measures to ensure training is more evenly

distributed, so that young workers and those with lower levels of qualifications will not lose out, and the system will focus both on boosting productivity and on delivering social justice.

## **2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

2.1 There were no further options considered as part of the report. This report is for information only.

## **3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

3.1 In 2017, the government introduced the apprenticeship levy with an aim to boost employer investment in skills and deliver a national target of 3 million apprenticeships by 2020. This target looks likely to be missed and there are issues around how much money is left in the budget to fund additional apprenticeships.

3.2 The number of apprenticeships starts fell sharply following the levy's introduction. There has been a recovery but starts remain a fifth lower than pre-levy levels nationally. At the same time the levy is set to be over-spent next year by £1 billion.

3.3 At first glance, this is paradoxical, but two factors help to resolve these apparently contradictory trends.

3.4 First, apprenticeship standards – which were introduced at the same time as the levy with the aim of ensuring high-quality training – are more costly than anticipated.

3.5 Second, there has been a rapid growth in higher and degree apprenticeships, which tend to be more expensive. Over the past two years, while total apprenticeship numbers fell, starts at levels four and five doubled, and degree apprenticeships (levels six and seven) increased too.

3.6 This increase in demand has been driven by large employers seeking to get the most out of the levy, with most upskilling existing workers and those aged over 25, rather than young people starting their careers.

3.7 The levy was designed on the assumption that unspent funds would be used to fund apprenticeships at Small and Medium Employers (SME's). Research from the Learning and Work Institute (Nov 2019) shows that levy-paying employers are using about 80 per cent of the funding – higher than the 60 to 70 per cent the government had anticipated. Less money is therefore left by levy-payers meaning less funding for SMEs.

## **4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

## **5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

## 6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: ICT, STAFFING AND ASSETS

6.1 There are no resource implications arising from this report.

## 7.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Increasing engagement of young people and adults in apprenticeships positively increases their level of education, knowledge and skills. This will better enable their understanding of climate change, encourage challenge and lead to innovation and more sustainable practices.

## 8.0 RELEVANT RISKS

8.1 As stated earlier in this report there is a risk that businesses maximise use of their apprenticeship levy to upskill existing staff which may reduce the amount of apprenticeship funding available nationally for small to medium sized enterprises locally. LCR training providers with 2019/20 Education Skills Funding Agency contracts to deliver apprenticeships for SMEs are indicating their concerns.

## 9.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

9.1 Council officers continue to engage with Wirral employers, Wirral Met College, training providers and the LCR Combined Authority to ensure that concerns are addressed and where possible solutions to barriers can be found.

## 10.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

10.1 Equality and Diversity implications have considered as part of the appraisal process in accordance with the LCR Combined Authorities Investment Strategy. An equality Impact Assessment has been produced as part of the implementation of the Skills and Apprenticeship Hub and necessary actions identified for implementation.

<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/equality-impact-assessments/equality-impact-assessments-2017-1>

## 10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

10.1 This report will have no impact on emissions of CO2.

**REPORT AUTHOR:** *Paul Smith*  
*Head of Service, Learning, Skills and Employment*  
telephone: (0151) 666 5254  
email: [paulsmith@wirral.gov.uk](mailto:paulsmith@wirral.gov.uk)

## BACKGROUND PAPERS SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date

## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1. Summary of Apprenticeship Participation

- 1.1 The Government introduced a series of reforms to apprenticeships in 2017 including: requiring all large employers to pay an apprentice levy, which could then be used for apprentice training; strengthening the requirement for apprentices to spend 20% of their time in off the job training; lowering the employer contribution for non-levy firms; and moving from qualification frameworks to sector determined standards. This year, Government also reduced the amount of funding available to providers for non-levied employers.
- 1.2 The introduction of these reforms has seen apprenticeship starts fall in Wirral compared with pre-levy figures as shown in the tables below. This is also reflected across the Liverpool City Region and nationally. There is also concern over the way in which the Levy is being used with Levy paying employers choosing to spend the majority of the Levy on higher level apprenticeships to upskill current workforce which has seen a rise in management qualifications being delivered. This has meant there has been a shift from Level 2 apprenticeships to Higher and Degree Apprenticeships at Level 4+.

#### Apprenticeship Starts (All Ages) by Local Authority across Liverpool City Region 2016/17 to 2018/19

Local Authority	2016/17 Starts	2017/18 Starts	2018/19 Starts
Halton	1,440	1,030	1,090
Knowsley	2,210	1,360	1,430
Liverpool	5,320	3,430	3,490
Sefton	3,350	2,100	2,060
St Helens	2,310	1,540	1,590
Wirral	4,030	2,770	2,530
<b>Total</b>	<b>18,660</b>	<b>12,230</b>	<b>12,190</b>

Source: Department for Education

Notes: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/fe-data-library-apprenticeships>

- 1.3 Between 2016/17 and 2017/18, Wirral had 1,260, less starts (down from 4,030 to 2,770) which was comparable with our statistical neighbour Sefton.
- 1.4 In 2018/19 there was a further decrease in the amount of starts for this period across the LCR and this was markedly below 2016/17 numbers. Figures for Wirral may show a decrease in number of starts from 2017/18. This may be as a result of the impact of the reforms on SME's given that Wirral is largely made up of Small and Medium employers.
- 1.5 Overall some 6,430 less people started an apprenticeship across the LCR in 2017/18 than during the same period in 2016/17.

## Apprenticeship Starts by Level across the Liverpool City Region 2016/17 to 2017/18

Local Authority	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher	
	2016/17	2017/18	2016/17	2017/18	2016/17	2017/18
Halton	720	380	610	520	110	140
Knowsley	1,130	640	900	550	170	180
Liverpool	2,800	1,570	2,070	1,410	450	450
Sefton	1,640	910	1,350	910	360	330
St Helens	1,150	620	940	690	220	230
Wirral	2,110	1,180	1,600	1,190	320	400
<b>Total</b>	<b>9,550</b>	<b>5,300</b>	<b>7,470</b>	<b>5,270</b>	<b>1,630</b>	<b>1,730</b>

Source: Department for Education

Notes: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/fe-data-library-apprenticeships>

## 2018/19 Apprenticeship starts by Level across the City Region

Local Authority	Intermediate	Advanced	Higher
Halton	390	490	210
Knowsley	610	600	230
Liverpool	1390	1470	630
Sefton	670	970	420
St Helens	630	660	300
Wirral	870	1160	490
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,560</b>	<b>5,350</b>	<b>2,280</b>

Source: Department for Education

Notes: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/fe-data-library-apprenticeships>

- 1.6 While most recent 2018/19 figures for Higher Level apprenticeships show an increase for Wirral, Intermediate Level's are likely to see a decrease. As this is often the entry point for apprenticeships, especially for young people, there is a danger that apprenticeships will not always be an accessible entry point for young people. This is consistent with other authorities across the City Region with total figures revealing that there has been a steady increase in Higher Apprenticeship numbers in the last 3 years and a sharp decrease in Intermediate starts in the same time period.
- 1.7 It could be argued that the increase in higher level apprenticeships is part of the drive to improve quality over quantity as apprenticeships have long been seeking parity with academic programmes and aims to ensure training is in line with producing highly qualified and skilled employers upon completion.

## Apprenticeship Starts by Age across the Liverpool City Region 2016/17 to 2017/18

Local Authority	Under 19		19-24		25+	
	2016/17	2017/18	2016/17	2017/18	2016/17	2017/18
Halton	330	260	380	260	740	520
Knowsley	480	380	580	350	1,150	630
Liverpool	1,010	820	1,330	880	2,970	1,730
Sefton	660	590	870	590	1,820	920
St Helens	460	450	650	410	1,200	680
Wirral	790	740	1,140	760	2,100	1,270
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,730</b>	<b>3,240</b>	<b>4,950</b>	<b>3,250</b>	<b>9,980</b>	<b>5,750</b>

Source: Department for Education

Notes: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/fe-data-library-apprenticeships>

## 2018/19 Apprenticeship starts by Age across the City Region

Local Authority	Under 19	19-24	25+
Halton	240	290	560
Knowsley	350	360	720
Liverpool	790	900	1800
Sefton	460	520	1080
St Helens	350	480	770
Wirral	540	710	1270
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,730</b>	<b>3,260</b>	<b>6,200</b>

Source: Department for Education

Notes: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/fe-data-library-apprenticeships>

- 1.8 There has been a decrease in apprenticeship starts across all ages within the City Region. 2018/19 figures illustrate that apprenticeship starts for those under 19 will have a bigger decrease than the other age groups. Although starts for those over 25 have increased.



**Business Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
Thursday, 23 January 2020**

<b>REPORT TITLE:</b>	<b>SICKNESS ABSENCE - UPDATE</b>
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>HEAD OF HUMAN RESOURCES</b>

**1.0 REPORT SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report has been produced at the request of Business Overview Committee and provides an update on absence levels in the organisation and sets out the steps that are being taken to manage sickness absence in the organisation.
- 1.2 This follows a previous report to the Committee in March 2019.
- 1.3 The Council's current target is 10.75 lost per full time equivalent (fte). The absence levels in 2018/19 were 10.60 days lost per fte. The projection for 2019/20 is currently 10.74 days lost per fte (based on figures submitted up to November 2019). In 2017/18 performance was 11.12 days lost per fte.

**2.0 RECOMMENDATION/S**

- 2.1 That the Committee notes the current position in relation to sickness absence and the approach being taken to manage sickness in the organisation.

## **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

### **3.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S**

- 3.1 The report provides Business Overview and Scrutiny Committee with the update on sickness absence that was requested.

### **4.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 4.0 None

### **5.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

#### **Current position and projection**

- 5.1 Appendix One sets out a summary of the current position in relation to sickness absence figures.
- 5.2 The Council's absence levels in 2018/19 were 10.60 per full time equivalent (fte). The Council's target is 10.75. The projection for 2019/20 is currently 10.74 (based on figures submitted up to November 2019). In 2017/18 performance was 11.12 days.
- 5.3 Across the Council, Children's Services had the highest days lost at 12.80 days per fte in 2018/19. However, this is currently projected to reduce to 11.74 days in 2019/20. Delivery Services which incorporates Parks, Leisure, Libraries, Highway and Streetscene services is projected to be 11.20 average lost days from 11.32 days last year.
- 5.4 In 2018/19 62% of all days lost to absence has been long term (over 20 days) and 37% has been short term.
- 5.5 Stomach 'bugs' and common colds have remained the most common causes of absence since April 2019 with mental health issues as the 3<sup>rd</sup> biggest cause of absence. However, mental health related absence accounts for the highest number of days lost with 37% of all absence being mental health related. These statistics remain broadly consistent with previous years.
- 5.6 The level of mental Health related absence remains the highest cause of concern. The Council's position is similar to other organisations. The CIPD Annual Survey Health and Wellbeing 2019 reported that stress-related absence has increased over the last year in nearly two-fifths of organisations. Just 8% report it has decreased. Nearly three-fifths have seen an increase in the number of reported common mental health conditions, such as anxiety and depression, among employees in the last 12 months.

#### **Strategies to manage absence**

- 5.7 The Council continues to manage sickness through a wide range of different approaches and strategies in line with best practice.
- 5.8 The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) Absence Survey 2019 reports that the most common methods of managing short-term and long term absence are as follows:

<b>Most common methods of managing short-term and long term absence (CIPD)</b>					
<b>Short Term</b>	<b>% of respondents</b>	<b>Council</b>	<b>Long Term</b>	<b>% of respondents</b>	<b>Council</b>
Return to Work Interviews	82%	✓	Return to Work Interviews	74%	✓
Providing leave for family circumstances eg emergency/carer/dependent leave	77%	✓	Changes to working patterns or environment	64%	✓
Trigger mechanisms to review attendance	74%	✓	Occupational Health Involvement	64%	✓
Disciplinary and or capability procedure for unacceptable absence	67%	✓	Trigger Mechanisms to review attendance	63%	✓
Line Manager take primary responsibility for managing sickness	64%	✓	Case management approach	63%	✓
Changes to working patterns or environment eg flexible working	62%	✓	Disciplinary and or capability procedure for unacceptable absence	57%	
Managers are trained in absence handling procedures for absence management	56%	✓	Employee Assistance Programme	56%	
Employee Assistance Programme	56%	✓	Tailored support for line managers (eg Case conference with HR)	55%	✓
Tailored support for line managers eg Case conference with HR	50%		Risk Assessment to aid return to work	54%	✓
Case Management Approach (for example involving HR/OH and Line Manager)	49%	✓	Restricting Sick Pay	47%	x

**Table 1: Most commonly used methods of addressing short term and long term.**

**Source** CIPD Survey 2019

- 5.9 Table 1 shows the Council's methods and approach to managing short-term and long-term absence is consistent with how 742 organisations that responded to the CIPD survey are managing these issues.
- 5.10 The CIPD Absence Survey 2019 reports that the most common methods of managing stress are as follows:

<b>Most Common Method of Managing Stress</b>		
<b>Method</b>	<b>% of respondents</b>	<b>Council</b>
Flexible working options/work life balance	68	✓
Employee Assistance Programme	61	✓
Training for line managers to manage stress in their team.	50	✓
Staff surveys/Focus Groups to identify causes	49	x
Risk Assessments/Stress Audits	48	✓
Trained aimed at building personal resilience such as coping techniques, mindfulness, cognitive behaviour therapy, positive psychology courses	40	✓
Written Stress Policy/ Guidance	31	✓
Greater involvement of occupational health specialists	30	✓
Changes in work organisation such as role adaptations	28	✓
Stress Management Training for the whole workforce	27	x
Health and Safety Executive Management Standards	15	In progress
Other	3	n/a

**Table 2: Most commonly used methods of managing stress Source** CIPD Survey 2019

- 5.11 Table 2 shows the Council's methods and approach to managing stress is consistent with 429 organisations who responded to the CIPD 2019 survey.
- 5.12 Whilst not explicit in the survey findings, the Council also has a legal obligation to make reasonable adjustments to support employees to remain in work. This can include changes to duties, working hours, provision of IT or equipment or adaptations to the physical environment as appropriate. The Human Resources Team work with employees, line managers, Occupational Health and relevant agencies to implement recommendations for reasonable adjustments.

## **SPECIFIC ACTION TAKEN IN RELATION TO MANAGING ABSENCE AND HEALTH AND WELLBEING**

### **Training**

- 5.13 Line Manager Training - as reported previously, HR has now completed a programme of one-on-one line manager training. Designed in response to an internal audit report which raised some issues in relation to line managers compliance with policy and

procedures and accurate recording, this training aimed to ensure managers have the skills and knowledge required to be proficient in use of the HR self-serve system, able to access the data and management information available and to cover the managing attendance policy and procedure. Over 250 sessions were delivered to line managers across the organisation. This has now been incorporated into the induction programme for new managers.

- 5.14 Mental Health First Aid Training - this two-day training was delivered to 64 employees in 2019 at different levels of the organisation. The accredited training provides knowledge and skills on how to identify, understand and help someone who may be experiencing a mental health issue. Further sessions are planned in 2020.

### **HR interventions/Support**

- 5.15 As previously reported some HR resources have been redirected since October 2017 to provide dedicated support on absence. This has focussed primarily on driving down the number of long-term cases and improving the management of long-term cases as well as following up on non-compliance with policy.
- 5.16 In October 2017 there were 18 employees in the Council who had been absent from work for more than one year. An organisation of our size will always carry a number of serious long term serious or complex cases. However, our view was this was too high. By November 2019, through the targeted work undertaken, this had reduced to 5 employees, 3 of whom are expected to return to work in January 2020.
- 5.17 There have been 433 cases managed through the formal absence process since November 2018 and 74 warnings issued under the absence procedures. There have been 18 dismissals in this time (inc ill health).

### **Occupational Health Service and Employee Assistance**

- 5.18 In April 2019, the Council entered a new contract for Occupational Health Services. Line Managers are able to refer employees for advice from specialist advisors in relation to a range of medical conditions. The Council's policy is that any employee absence with stress should be referred on the first day of absence.
- 5.19 The Occupational Health offer also includes an Employee Assistance Programme. All employees (including schools based staff) have free access to a 24/7, 365 days a year helpline where independent and confidential advice can be accessed. This includes access to six sessions of counselling for all employees if required.

### **Workplace Wellbeing Initiatives**

- 5.20 Workplace wellbeing is a key priority within the Council's People Strategy. We have significantly developed the activity in this area over the past 18 months.
- 5.21 It is not always possible to directly correlate the activities undertaken with positive outcomes or with sickness levels but the primary aim is to promote health and wellbeing in the workplace and provide opportunities for staff to look after their physical and mental health. Some of the recent activities are set out below:

*Employee volunteering* – we continue to raise awareness of volunteering opportunities for employees to encourage them to be active for good causes. Volunteering can have a very positive impact for those that participate.

*Employee led activities* – we have implemented an employee led activity scheme, this is a wide range of various activities taking place across the organisation for employees to access. Examples include lunchtime yoga, mindfulness, running clubs and football. There is a Council choir and in January 2020, free self-defence taster sessions were offered. There is a timetable on the intranet with details of different events in Council locations on a daily basis.

*Financial Wellbeing* mental health and stress can often be linked to financial problems or concerns. The Council has arranged a series of financial awareness advice sessions delivered by partners to provide advice and guidance.

*Free flu jabs for all staff* - the Council has for the past two winters offered free flu jabs for all employees to encourage them to cover themselves in the event of flu.

*Public Health Campaigns* – throughout the year we continue to raise awareness of key wellbeing issues in line with the Public Health campaigns through internal communications.

*Wellbeing breakfasts* – we have celebrated mental health week and other events by holding well-being breakfasts to encourage staff to take time out to think about their mental health.

## **Management Information and Data**

5.22 We have continued to develop and improve the data available to line managers and senior managers in the organisation in relation to sickness:

- Every line manager in the organisation has immediate access on their desktop to detailed sickness information the individuals in their teams including whether the employee has breached policy triggers.
- All Directors and Senior Managers have access to absence management for their directorate and service areas. A whole range of sickness reports are available via the self-serve system.
- HR Business Partners attend Departmental Management Teams to present and discuss sickness absence figures and trends.
- The Senior Leadership Team are provided with sickness absence data on a monthly basis broken by directorate.
- There is a monthly Operational Health Report to SLT which sets out latest organisational performance in relation to days lost per FTE and a projection for the financial year.
- Internal Audit routinely audit compliance against policy and also non-reporting of absence.

## **Management of Short-Term absence/System Developments**

- 5.23 From February 2019, in house developments to the HR system enabled automatic e-mail alerts to managers if an employee who reports to them has breached a trigger in the absence policy, if they have not recorded that a return to work interview has been undertaken or when a manager reporting to them has entered an employee absence late. These alerts will automatically escalate to the manager's line manager if no action is taken within one week.
- 5.24 As well as reminding managers of their responsibilities for complying with the policy, these measures will support senior managers to manage short term absence which is an area we need to improve and will allow them to more easily monitor the performance of their managers.

## **6.0 CONCLUSION**

- 6.1 This report sets out the current position in relation to sickness absence within the Council.
- 6.2 Overall the Council's absence figures remain higher than we want them to be with a marginal increase currently projected compared to last year. The position is relatively steady and we remain comparable with other local authorities in the region.
- 6.3 This continues to be a challenge and a significant amount of work continues to be undertaken to address sickness absence. The benchmarking information and research from outside the organisation demonstrates that the Council is facing the same challenge as many large organisations, particularly in the public sector and specifically in relation to levels of mental health and wellbeing.

## **7.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 The cost of absence is estimated to be over £3m per year. The impact varies in different service areas as comparatively few roles require cover for short-term absence. However, sickness absence does have an impact on service delivery, particularly in front line services.

## **8.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 The Council is required to manage sickness absence in accordance with relevant policies, national conditions and employment law.

## **9.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: ICT, STAFFING AND ASSETS**

- 9.1 Sickness absence is managed within existing resources. There are resources within the HR Team dedicated to supporting management of sickness.

## **10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 None

## **11.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

11.1 There are risks to service delivery if sickness absence is not managed in accordance with policies. The Council also has a duty of care to employees to provide a safe workplace environment with appropriate arrangement to manage risks to health, safety and wellbeing.

11.2 The Council has a policy framework and provides training to mitigate risks.

## **12.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION**

12.1 There are regular discussions with trade unions about sickness absence levels and the work that is being undertaken to manage this.

## **13.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

13.1 There are no proposals for changes within the report that require an equality impact assessment at this stage. There is a clear equality dimension within the management of sickness and the Council is required to manage sickness in accordance with the provisions of the Equality Act 2010.

**REPORT AUTHOR:** **Tony Williams**  
Head of Human Resources  
telephone: 0151 691 8678  
email: [tonywilliams@wirral.gov.uk](mailto:tonywilliams@wirral.gov.uk)

## **APPENDICES**

**Appendix One**                      Sickness Absence Summary

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

### **SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)**

<b>Council Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Business Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>	<b>5 March 2019</b>

Department	2018/19	April 2019 -November 2019										
	Lost days per FTE	Lost days per FTE	% Long Term	% short Term	Current Projection 2019/20	FTE in Post (Nov)	Highest cause of absence	Days lost to highest Cause	% days lost to highest reason	Most Spells	Spells	% of Total Spells
Adult Care and Health	9.97	6.80	42.3%	57.7%	9.80	96.49	Mental Health	223.83	34.8%	Abdominal (inc Digestive Tract)	13	23.4%
Business Management	8.43	6.14	38.8%	61.2%	8.70	848.91	Mental Health	1,975.93	39.3%	Ear, Nose and Throat	122	24.7%
Childrens' Services	12.80	8.22	33.7%	66.3%	11.74	899.10	Mental Health	3,180.51	44.3%	Mental Health	98	20.6%
Corporate Office	3.62	6.91	14.6%	85.4%	10.03	41.61	Serious illness*	182.00	62.7%	Medical Procedures	2	21.0%
Delivery Services	11.32	7.81	38.8%	61.2%	11.20	829.74	Mental Health	1,859.39	28.3%	Abdominal (inc Digestive Tract)	110	18.1%
Economic and Housing Growth	10.97	5.54	47.5%	52.5%	7.95	166.18	Mental Health	328.00	36.7%	Ear, Nose and Throat	29	32.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>10.60</b>	<b>7.28</b>	<b>37.2%</b>	<b>62.8%</b>	<b>10.74</b>	<b>2,882.03</b>	<b>Mental Health</b>	<b>7,567.66</b>	<b>36.7%</b>	<b>Abdominal (inc Digestive Tract)</b>	<b>348</b>	<b>20.0%</b>

\*the precise nature of the illness has not been included in this report as this is a relatively small service which may mean individual (s) are identifiable

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**Business Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
Thursday, 23 January 2020**

<b>REPORT TITLE</b>	<b>NEW FERRY EXPLOSION SCRUTINY REVIEW</b>
<b>REPORT OF</b>	<b>NANCY CLARKSON, HEAD OF INTELLIGENCE, STATUTORY SCRUTINY OFFICER</b>

**REPORT SUMMARY**

Further to a report on the Council’s response to the New Ferry disaster presented to the Business O&S Committee on 17<sup>th</sup> September 2019 members of the Committee resolved that:

*(2) That a Scrutiny Review Panel be established to look at the lessons to be learnt from the New Ferry incident and that dependent on the results of the review the Panel then look at a major incidents procedure and protocol.*

**RECOMMENDATION/S**

1. The Business Overview & Scrutiny Committee is requested to support the contents and recommendations of the Scrutiny review ‘New Ferry Explosion’.
2. The report be referred to the next appropriate Cabinet Meeting for consideration of the Recommendations made.

## **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

### **1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S**

This report is subject to review by Members of the Committee and is required to be referred to Cabinet for consideration.

### **2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

Not Applicable.

### **3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

3.1 As part of the Business Overview & Scrutiny Committee's work programme, a task and finish scrutiny review into Council's response to the New Ferry Explosion was agreed. The panel consisted of Cllrs. Dave Michell, Jo Bird, Steve Hayes and Mike Collins.

3.2 It was agreed during the scoping meeting that Cllr Dave Mitchell would be the chair of the panel. A cross party panel was convened and at a scoping session held in October 2019 the following review outcomes were agreed.

- To ensure that all necessary steps have been taken to address those residents, traders and other people affected by the incident.
- To consider what improvements can be made by the council and partner organisations in their response to future disasters.

3.3 The panel then agreed to a review approach and over the course of November and December 2019 undertook several interviews and stakeholder sessions. The full report, recommendations and scoping document are attached as appendices to this report.

### **4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There is no direct financial implication as a result of this report or its recommendations. There are financial implications regarding any future regeneration of New Ferry, however, these have been covered in the report.

### **5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

No Direct Implications

### **6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: ICT, STAFFING AND ASSETS**

No Direct Implications.

### **7.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

There are no direct implications as a result of this report or its recommendations. However, the panel agrees that any rebuilding and regeneration of the blast site should take into consideration environment and climate change implications.

## 8.0 RELEVANT RISKS

There are no direct risks as a result of this report or its recommendations. Any indirect risk implications are covered in the report.

## 9.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

The review panel consulted with members of the New Ferry Traders Association, Resident Groups and Community. They also increased engagement with members of the community via mail shot to ensure everyone had a chance to contribute.

## 10.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

Members of the panel have due consideration to the accessibility of focus groups for all members of the community and sought to include their input as part of the review. The suggested recommendations have been made with equality implications in mind.

**REPORT AUTHOR:** *Anna Perrett*  
*Scrutiny Officer*  
telephone: (0151) 691 8564  
email: [annaperret@wirral.gov.uk](mailto:annaperret@wirral.gov.uk)

## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: New Ferry Scrutiny Review

#### Background Papers

#### SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date

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## **New Ferry Explosion Scrutiny Review**

**A report produced by the Business Overview and Scrutiny  
Committee**

**January 2020**



## Contents

1.0	Introduction .....	3
	Members .....	4
2.0	Report Overview .....	5
2.1	Methodology .....	5
3.0	Scrutiny sessions .....	6
3.1	Public meeting .....	6
3.2	Resident and Traders Sessions.....	7
	Residents .....	7
	Traders.....	9
3.3	Stakeholder sessions.....	10
	Communications.....	10
	First Responders .....	11
	Senior officers.....	11
3.4	Elected Representatives .....	14
	Former Ward Councillor .....	14
	Cabinet Member for Finance. May 2017 – Present.....	14
	Former leader of Wirral Borough Council.....	16
3.5	Responses to questions sent to partner agencies. ....	18
5.0	Summary – Lessons learned and suggested recommendations .....	21
6.0	Attendees .....	25
7.0	Appendix #1.....	26
8.0	Appendix #2.....	29

## 1.0 Introduction



On Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> March 2017 a gas explosion injured 81 people, destroyed 6 businesses including a dance school in New Ferry, made 86 people homeless and caused severe damage to hundreds of properties around the Boundary Lane, Bebington Road and Port Sunlight areas.

The blast, heard across Merseyside, instigated a huge response from the emergency services, the Local Authority and partner agencies, on a scale not seen in Wirral during peacetime. The most seriously injured victim was left with brain damage, facial fractures and life changing disabilities. Many others were injured in the blast and have also suffered trauma. There was significant damage done to properties in the area and many have remained uninhabitable since. The original blast site and immediate surrounding area were destroyed.

The blast site was quickly identified as a crime scene and on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2019 Pascal Blasio was unanimously convicted of causing an explosion likely to endanger life or cause serious injury to property and fraud involving an insurance claim. He was sentenced to 20 years imprisonment.

A report brought to Business Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 17<sup>th</sup> September 2019 aimed to answer questions regarding the aftermath and recovery taken by Wirral Borough Council. The report gave an overview of the immediate response and recovery operations. However, Members felt that there were still questions which needed to be asked. The report also aims to highlight the lessons learned and make recommendations based on the findings.

The Committee agreed that an invitation to join the panel should be extended to all non-executive Members and representation should be taken from as many parties as possible. The below panel was agreed which represented a variety of experience and skills.

It was agreed during the scoping meeting that the focus of the review should aim to answer concerns and complaints raised by victims including residents and traders, and the recommendations should focus on assisting victims and communities during future incidents.

A great deal of work has already been done by the community in compiling victim statements. These testimonies and other information can be found on the website [www.newferryexplosion.com](http://www.newferryexplosion.com)

The review panel decided to use this as a point of reference as well as inviting victims to contribute their experiences. The panel would like to extend their gratitude to the community of New Ferry for their assistance in facilitating and contributing to this review during what remains a difficult time.

## Members

**Councillor David Mitchell (Chairperson) – Liberal Democrat, Eastham.**



**Councillor Jo Bird – Labour, Bromborough**



**Councillor Mike Collins – Conservative, Pensby and Thingwall**



**Councillor Steve Hayes – Green Party, Birkenhead and Tranmere**



## 2.0 Report Overview

Further to the report brought to Business O&S Committee on 17<sup>th</sup> September 2019, members highlighted a need to ensure that all lessons had been learned and requested a review into the aftermath of the incident.

The Business O&S Committee on 17th September 2019 resolved:

*(2) That a Scrutiny Review Panel be established to look at the lessons to be learnt from the New Ferry incident and that dependent on the results of the review the Panel then look at a major incident procedure and protocol.*

Members then met in early October to agree to the scope of the review and the proposed outcomes.

Scrutiny Outcomes:

- *To ensure that all necessary steps have been taken to address the needs of residents, traders and other people affected by the incident.*
- *To consider what improvements can be made by the council and partner organisation in their response to future disasters.*

### 2.1 Methodology

It was agreed that the review should be informed by stakeholder sessions and questions submitted to partner agencies. The Panel agreed early on that the Residents and Traders of New Ferry should be included within the review to ensure their concerns are documented and addressed. As such, local ward Councillor Jo Bird invited fellow scrutiny panel Members to observe a Public Meeting she facilitated in New Ferry: 'After the Trial, What Next'?

It was agreed to invite Residents and Traders to individual sessions with the panel to address their individual concerns. However, it should be noted that many of the traders are also residents, so their concerns are highlighted separately in the relevant sections. In order to ensure that the Panel reached as wide a number of people as possible, a mail shot was sent to everyone who received payment from the Hardship Fund. This included several questions on the reverse of the mailshot which enabled those who were not able to attend to contribute.

This was followed with a series of stakeholder sessions with the first responders and senior officers. Members also sought the input of various other stakeholders, partner agencies, officers and Councillors as well as Former Members of staff. Merseyside Police and Merseyside Fire and Rescue were asked to contribute to the review; however, they were unable to attend.

## 3.0 Scrutiny sessions

### 3.1 Public meeting

On 24<sup>th</sup> October 2019 the panel attended a Public Meeting in New Ferry, the agenda of which is attached as an appendix to this report. The meeting was held with an aim of updating residents and traders on the situation. It is notable that the previous day, the 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2019 the defendant Pascal Blasio had received a prison sentence following a retrial.

*“The victims found attending was very difficult and difficulties remain for those who must live in the community and see the effects every day. But we see it as a good result”*

An officer from the Major Growth and Housing Delivery Team was also in attendance to give an update on the regeneration of the area.

They presented an item on the long-term regeneration of New Ferry and gave an update on the various funding allocations. This included a grant from the Metro Mayor which has been allocated to New Ferry and Liscard. He also discussed the New Ferry Community land trust, which LCR are keen to support.

Also discussed was the Strategic Acquisitions programme. Some landlords have sold, but there are issues with absentee and reluctant landlords. Wirral Council will only give market value for premises, which some landlords may not agree with. It was noted that this will impact on the time frame, as WBC may need to resort to CPOs. The officer also discussed the, potential Community garden which could be located at 54 Bebington Road and Griffiths butcher’s site.

One of the agenda items focused on Mental Health Support in the aftermath. An update was provided by the Wirral South Constituency Officer, with the following key points highlighted:

- At the time of the explosion, Inclusion Matters were brought into assist. 38 people were referred with 9 working day to initial assessments. 18 patients were treated via a group therapy session. A stay and play session was also facilitated by social care, students and professionals.
- This is now facilitated by Talking Together Wirral via GP or self-referral. There are no differences between different types of referrals, there is a quick form and service users will be contacted in a few days. New Ferry (if mentioned at referral) will receive priority treatment. Wirral South also has a drop-in service for young people.

This Public Meeting was for the benefit of the public and as such, members of the panel were in attendance to observe. The distress of the residents in attendance was evident including one resident’s experience of talking a victim “down from the bridge”. Apart from Councillor Bird, the panel only spoke to confirm the purposes of the review and were assured that any input would be treated in confidence. Some victims said they were reluctant to spend more time and energy repeating their experiences and concerns that they felt had been previously ignored by the authorities.

The meeting concluded with a statement from a young person on how the incident had affected them: “*The community changed forever.... I would like to see many different things in the aftermath.... Will our ideas be listened to? .... I would like to see the area become a family friendly area*”.

## 3.2 Resident and Traders Sessions

On the 4<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> November 2019 the Panel met with residents and traders in separate sessions. The participants were asked to voice their experiences of the explosion and the aftermath.

### Residents

- Members spoke to a resident who was housed by Port Sunlight Trust in Boundary Road. The front door of the house was blown in by the blast and she was trapped in the property. She was helped out of the property and taken down to the bowling green where she was picked up by a relative. She did not recall any assistance from the local authority, however she felt that she was rehoused quickly by Port Sunlight Village Trust. The Panel noted that she was assisted in taking some personal belonging from the premises, but were not able to remove everything. The police took a statement but that is the only contact they received regarding the incident.
- The resident also advised that she did not use social media or read the local press so the first correspondence she had received since the incident was from her own housing trust, Merseyside police and the mail shot sent out by this review. This led the panel to question how vulnerable or digitally isolated residents could be contacted about services should a similar event happen in the future.
- Another resident was at home when the windows were blown in. Given that it was a week after the Westminster Bridge terror attack, their first thought was that it was a bomb. They ran out of the house and it took a long time for their family to contact them due to the police cordons. The resident has no criticism of emergency services, as they dealt with the situation well.
- The panel asked about reports that Senior Council Officers were giving out their mobile number to residents. They said that giving out mobile number was a supportive move but noted that when you are panicking you don't want to speak to strangers. It was also noted that individual Council officers cannot always answer or have all the answers.
- The resident felt there had been little communication with information given out to victims on recovery, or the Police investigation. They felt they would have liked a contact on regular basis to see how they are getting on.

- Regarding Emergency Funding, residents were aware this existed, and that Council had voted against using it (based on recommendations from cabinet). Residents felt the justification was insulting and unreasonable - "we cannot use this emergency funding; in case something happens in the future." Members of the panel were concerned by this statement and agreed to look into as part of the review. Residents who attended Council felt that there was a lack of communication somewhere along the line, which meant that Elected Members were not being fed information on the disaster.
- Members asked about the immediate handling of the disaster, and it was clear that there was some confusion regarding the categorization of the incident. The residents were later told the fire officer had called a major incident, but there was no strategic coordinating committee. Further conflict arose when in July 2019 a Council Officer conceded in that in hindsight, they would have declared a major incident, as this would have triggered a more receptive response from the government. Residents also felt that the if this had occurred the Council would have had more scope when asking Central Government for assistance.

The Panel noted residents' comments on this and agreed to ask further questions.

- Residents were asked to look at what was positive about the incident. It was agreed that the community and officers did work together. People were looked after, but there could have been improvements made. They would have welcomed Councillors from all over the borough attending the public meetings to assist and use their own areas of expertise.
- Residents mentioned the letters sent from the Council for scaffolding and boarding the premises. The letters sent demanded money within 7 days or they faced recovery action. They felt this had been handled in an insensitive manner and the Council should have sent the letters directly to the insurance companies. Members noted these concerns and endeavored to ask further questions regarding this as part of the review.

The review panel received written evidence via [www.newferryexplosion.com](http://www.newferryexplosion.com). Responses from victims differ in circumstances and effects. Some residents have found that the short-term impact was acute, with immediate housing issues being identified, others had to take paid or unpaid leave from work or were not able to access essential equipment due to damage to properties. Most victims and traders questioned found themselves out of pocket. This ranged from short term expenditures to significant financial loss for businesses.

Some residents advised that whilst the council were able to provide accommodation quickly, it was information that they had problems accessing. One resident noted that,

*" Without getting into a discussion about what constitutes a "disaster", I feel we were badly let down by the Government who 1) avoided the area when they had the opportunity to visit 2) found resource very quickly for other disasters/incidents (Grenfell/Salisbury)."*

Residents and traders also confirmed the explosion has had a significant impact on their mental health and that of their families. The Panel resolved to look at these concerns as part of the review.

## Traders

The panel met with traders at a second evening session in November 2019. Many of the Business owners are also residents and their experiences as residents are recorded above. However, there are key issues which have affected them as business owners, and these have been captured below.

- Those in attendance confirmed they felt the explosion and aftermath had been underreported as a major incident and as such, they had not received sufficient support to help rebuild the businesses. Examples of this ranged from the lack of 'Business as usual' signage along the New Chester Road to feeling that there was a lack of strategic support from the Council at a point when they needed this the most. They did not feel like they had been consulted about what they wanted or needed going forward and there had been a fragmented approach to funding. They noted that £300k had been spent by the council in the aftermath on remedial work to secure properties, but this had been spent on fixing the properties from a health and safety perspective and was not used to assist the traders, some of whom had lost 95% of profit.
- Traders highlighted the complexity of the issues they faced, from language barriers to landlords (often based in the south), not understanding the severity of the damage to their premises and the impact it had on trade. What is apparent is that the disaster had a far wider impact on the trading community in New Ferry than those directly affected by the incident, with a downturn in profits extending to the New Chester Road shopping areas. Damage to properties further afield was also underreported – with one trader advising that there was damage to doors and windows as far afield as the New Ferry by-pass. There is significant upset within the trading community that Wirral Council has the money for large projects, but not to assist in New Ferry.
- The traders also felt strongly that some hardship fund payments had gone to the wrong people and they reported premises which had not been maintained by the landlords, but which had been further damaged by the explosion. In some cases, the payments went directly to the landlords who reportedly did not use the money to make repairs to the premises. Often traders were left with an unusable premise but were still liable for rent and rent payments which has caused significant hardship and the threat of legal action. There was also confusion regarding available funding and support from Wirral Council and the Chamber Of Commerce. There were offers of support which were then retracted with both organisations saying the other could do more to help. Traders felt they could have been better supported to pursue insurance and legal claims.
- Traders repeatedly raised concerns regarding communications. They felt that they received the most information through the media and that they could not contact the Council through the normal channels or via individual officers. Jake Berry MP visited as a representative of the Department for Homes, Local Government and Communities, but traders felt this visit was stage-managed and he did not spend time speaking to residents. Notably, the traders highlighted the difficulties they felt they faced getting their personal stories heard; they felt dismissed at public meetings. One attendee felt that the personal impact of the disaster was not

felt until impact statements were accumulated but also did not feel that this information was being fed back to the Council.

### 3.3 Stakeholder sessions

#### Communications

Concerns had been raised by some panel members regarding inconsistencies between council releases and statements and articles published in local newspapers. In order to clarify why this may be the case, the panel requested that officers from the communication team attend a session to discuss how the Council works with the press during incidents of this nature.

- The Communications team do not respond to enquiries with a statement, or issue any proactive press release, unless it has been signed off by a senior officer.
- *It was noted that in this instance no figures originated from the authority; if they had received a request, they would have referred the query to the relevant department or partner agency and any response would be signed off by officers. In most critical incidents the Emergency Services are the lead agency and will ratify numbers. However, the emergency services can also be reticent to release full details, especially if there is a criminal investigation underway. It is also worth noting that in some incidents the situation and numbers do evolve over time.*
- *It was accepted by the panel that the nature of free press means that journalists and news agencies will collate information from several sources when writing articles and because of this not all the information they publish may be correct or accurate all the time. The Local Authority has no influence over the alternate sources of information used by Journalists.*
- *Concerns were raised about under reporting. Officers did not feel that was the case locally, but it was noted that the number of news crews in attendance naturally decreased as the weeks went on. Nationally, it may have been under reported, but the Local Authority have little control as to what major news agencies choose to cover.*
- *Officers acknowledged that the Authority used social media channels less in 2017 to convey information. The natural evolution of this communication tool means that this would be utilised much more should an incident of this nature occur in the future, although all messages will still be approved and consistent with what partner agencies are saying.*

## First Responders

- The panel met with first responders from community patrol and an officer from safer Wirral services was on call that night as an emergency responder. It was confirmed to the panel that the first line of contact is via the duty mobilisation officer who then contact officers. The first responders advised that Oval Leisure Centre in Bebington is a designated centre for emergency situations and officers went there in the first instance. It quickly became apparent that the Life Centre was being used as a meeting place, however this was still an unconfirmed base at the time and officers kept the Oval open in case they needed to use it. It was quickly decided that the Life Centre should be the Hub as they had provisions such as hot drinks available to residents. It was noted at that stage that they were reliant on volunteers to assist.
- The duty response confirmed that she was aware of the explosion via social media before she received a phone call and was already en route. As soon as she was on site, she saw the extent of the disaster and called the safer Wirral manager.
- Once the extent of the disaster became apparent there was a phone call for building control to attend the scene as the police needed access to certain buildings. At this point the Assistant Director for Housing was called out and attended the scene.
- Members were advised during this session that Council Officers and the emergency services attended hourly updates at a central hub in the life church. At this point, the first responders felt like everything was in hand, officers were helping residents contact insurance companies and secure accommodation. They also updated the Community Patrol contact centre as they were experiencing a high number of queries from the public. The emergency duty officer stood down at 4:00am, returning to work at 8:00am. Members of the panel were also informed that officer from Children's services and the homeless team attended the scene of their own volition to help residents.
- The panel queried the Council's response to aiding with essentials and clothing in the immediate aftermath. First responders noted that most residents' urgent needs were provided for and that it simply wasn't realistic to offer (as an example) money for clothes within the first 24 hours. Their perception was that it was the weeks and months after where residents did not feel their needs had been fully met.
- Officers in attendance confirmed that there was a professional response phase debrief in June 2017, followed by recovery phase debrief in February 2018. Details of these can be found as appendices of this report.

## Senior officers

Members of the panel met with key senior officers who were first responders and who also dealt with the recovery and aftermath phases. Members of the panel also noted the officer's comments as recorded in the review of the incident brought to committee in September 2019.

### **Council Response**

- Members queried the current all hazards incident plan, as this had not been updated since 2011 and then 2018 . Members were advised that a revamped version was in development and will be launched soon. Officers also confirmed that at the time of the explosion on 2017, there were no lead officers 'on call', but there were response officers available.
- The panel asked whether there was a database of contacts that could be utilised in situations such as this. Officers confirmed that there was, however, it had not been fully updated over the years as officers moved or left the authority. It was acknowledged as an excellent resource, but it must be regularly updated to be useful. Officers agreed that this was not the case in 2017 but reassured the panel that this has now been overhauled.
- Since 2017, there is always now a director on duty, with a weekly Rota. The Council plans to extend this Rota to Assistant Directors and officers who report directly to the Strategic Leadership Team.
- The panel were concerned that the former chief executive had not had much involvement in the disaster and wanted reassurance that this would not be the case should a similar incident occur again. It was noted by officers that the current chief executive wishes to be directly involved in any further incidents.

### **Financial support**

- Members of the panel queried why the council had not applied for funding via the Bellwin Scheme. This has been a bone of contention with residents and traders who had been given different reasons why not, and do not feel this has been properly addressed by the Council.
- Officers confirmed that this was discussed shortly after the incident with the former Director of Finance & Investment who has now retired from the authority. The application was looked at closely and the view was that Wirral would not have qualified under the criteria. Wirral Borough council were in constant contact with the relevant Civil Service departments and the Rt Hon Jake Berry MP who was the parliamentary under- secretary of state for the Northern Powerhouse and Local Growth. Wirral Borough Council asked central government for 500k in the weeks following the incident, but this was rejected.
- It was noted by officers that whilst Wirral council adhered to the rules for application of grants, this was not reciprocated by the Government. Later incidents such as flooding in Yorkshire and the Salisbury Poisoning did not meet the criteria, yet they received financial support from central Government. There is an emergency fund held by the Council but there had been a political decision not to use it.

The Panel also asked why residents had been sent letters from the Council Requesting Payment. Officers confirmed that bills had been sent for scaffolding, hoarding, demolition etc. The erection of scaffolding was essential to assist residents in gaining access to the premises. There had been a number of meetings convened to explain the options to residents and insurance companies. It was explained to the Panel that there were two options delivered; the first option was for the insurance companies to install their own scaffolding, the second option was to retain the scaffolding already installed by the council and the insurers would pick up the bill. Senior officers said the second option was agreed to by the residents and insurers during the meetings as being the most cost effective. In addition to this, some residents were not insured. Officers confirmed that individual conversations would be needed to assist residents in discharging payments.

The main issue lies with billing and the language used within in the demands sent to residents. For audit reasons residents had to be formally billed, however officers relied on the automated billing systems to get the notifications out as they were busy on-site. Officers confirmed that residents had been advised that the notification of payments would be issued and that they should be passed to the insurers, however It is acknowledged that this could have been managed better.

**Classification of incident** Officers referred to their report which had been brought to committee in September 2019. Members of the Panel emphasised concerns that a Major Incident had not been called by the Local Authority, given that officers who attended the scene found an 'acute blue light incident'. Officers confirmed that any organisation can declare a major incident and in this case, it was the fire service who made that call. The Council were initially there in a supportive role for the community, and fire service and then to assist the police in the investigation. Calling a major incident would normally activate a corporate response and calls together the Strategic Leadership team. However, the assistant director was on site in the aftermath, as well as the relevant senior managers so it was not seen as essential.

In regard to a Gold Command meeting, this would normally activate a response from the fire chief and held off site, however the former Merseyside Fire and rescue Fire Chief was also in situ and held frequent meetings on site. Officers argued that an official gold command meeting was not called as they were already holding regular meetings and briefings in practice.

It was noted by the panel that these situations are often very fluid and do not always follow a textbook pattern. However, the panel were keen to emphasise that the residents had felt the decision by officers not to call a Major Incident had caused upset in the community, as they felt this decision had downplayed the severity of the incident. It was also felt that this may also have had a detrimental impact on the lack of support from central government. The panel suggested that future incidents of a similar nature should be classed as a major incident in the first instance, as they can be stepped down if needed. However, it is difficult to retrospectively claim a major incident. The Panel also agreed that the same should be done when claiming government support.

### 3.4 Elected Representatives

#### Former Ward Councillor

Members wanted to meet with a former ward Councillor, who in 2017 was one of the elected members in Bebington. As such, a meeting was arranged with the chair and scrutiny support.

They confirmed that they had arrived within 25 Minutes of the explosion and went directly to the emergency centre to assist. They had initially found out about it through social media and then called the Emergency Team immediately.

At the scene they found some 60-70 residents displaced from their homes and Wirral Council organised appropriate accommodation for those who required it (some chose to stay with family). This was noted as being organised quickly and efficiently. The council went as far as assisting residents to get their possessions back. Concerning this, he felt the Council went above and beyond to facilitate.

Regarding Council officers, it was noted that the Council was not always on the scene every day, but a lot of work was being done off-site. Several of the officers involved took a very hands-on approach and they were always contactable. At this point they had total trust in the officers and focused their efforts on helping the community. In retrospect he feels that there were not enough officers visible on the ground to assist the community. It was noted that on occasion the priority looked to be focused on the premises and less on the victims.

It was noted that the Council should be working together better in situations such as this, with a task force chaired by the chief exec. It was suggested that there should be a dedicated phone line and information with relevant contacts in. It was noted that the council was not at its best at a senior level during the aftermath of this incident. The ex-chief executive was not seen to have visited the site and they were only granted a 30-minute meeting to discuss the disaster.

Also highlighted during this conversation was the confusion and upset felt over demands for payments sent to residents. The Council were sending letters to pass on to insurance companies, but it was felt there was no explanatory letter to act as a buffer and this caused unnecessary upset within the communities. It was agreed that the review panel should look at this later as part of the review.

One question raised was support for Councillors and Council officers during incidents such as this. Often, they went from highly charged and difficult meetings with the community to Council Meetings. It was picked up on that there should be more mental health support available to those in supportive roles during this time.

#### Cabinet Member for Finance. May 2017 – Present

Members of the Panel requested a meeting with the current Cabinet Member for Finance to discuss the Council's financial response in the aftermath. However, it should be noted that the cabinet member did not hold her portfolio at the point of the explosion, so could not comment on the aftermath until she

came into position in May 2017. Also, it should be mentioned that the cabinet member lives in the vicinity of the explosion site, so was also able to offer her perspective as a resident.

Until the full Council in December 2018, the only financial support provided by the council was for Council Tax and Business Rates and through Local Welfare assistance. All Council Tax and Business rates accounts effected by the explosion had holds placed on the accounts until they had been assessed by the valuation office, where the most seriously damaged were taken out of rating. Any direct debits received during this period were reversed and refunded by the Local authority whilst the Rating office made their decision.

During this period, Local Welfare Assistance (LWA) paid out approximately £8,000 to 25 Applicants. The capacity of LWA was discussed and had been documented below.

In December 2018, Council unanimously agreed to release 200k via a hardship fund to residents and traders of New Ferry. The criteria for awarding this was down to the Cabinet Member, however they did consult with the Director of Finance and Investment and local ward Councillors and a formula was agreed.

As of December 2019, all hardship fund payments had been made leaving a total of (£12,800?) left for the community fund. There is one appeal still active, however the Cabinet Member has removed herself from this decision to avoid influencing any decision.

The cabinet member noted that unlike incidents such as the Grenfell Tower tragedy, there was no culpability, so payments made were goodwill gestures which the Local Authority was happy to grant in its capacity as a paternalistic organisation.

Members of the panel queried the bills sent for scaffolding etc. and why some residents felt they were issued without the correct communication. One Member also asked what would happen if they couldn't pay. It was acknowledged that there are different systems used by finance which do not necessarily talk to each other. Notification of sundry debts are sent out automatically. There is also a difficulty striking a balance between those who have insurance and those who haven't. Simply writing off the debt is complex as further impacts could arise by taking this action. The authority is also facing a £12million pound in-year budget gap, which puts huge strain on available resources.

The Council's priority, at that point was to lobby central government for assistance which has subsequently been forthcoming for other incidents such as Salisbury or the flooding in Yorkshire.

One key issue the panel queried was the emergency fund and its capacity. This is a fixed financial reserve and is also used to fund and facilitate Local Welfare Assistance in Wirral. This scheme provides a safety net for Wirral Residents in case of a disaster or emergency. Due to the limited pool of funds for this it is a one-off payment in extreme circumstances and only one award should be granted in a two-year period. There was criticism that the application for funding from this reserve had been refused 'in case of another emergency' which had understandably caused great upset to members of the community. However, it must be noted that this fund is not just used to facilitate one off payments in time of emergency, but also to assist residents across the borough with individual financial emergencies. As such, consideration must be made as to the strain on this fund as it does not replenish.

Members concluded the session by asking what, as a resident, the Cabinet Member thought Wirral Council had done well and what could be improved.

Positive aspects included giving credit to the officers who attended and assisted victims into accommodation quickly. Other Cabinet members, such as the former portfolio holder for Children and Families worked Closely with Age UK to help assist older members of the community. Victims were also directed to Mental health support and fast tracked. As a Member of the cabinet they felt they were briefed regularly and given updates.

However, it was noted that the clear up on the site should have been done as a matter of urgency.

#### Former leader of Wirral Borough Council

Both the former Chief Executive and Leader of the Council were invited to attend the stakeholder session. The former Leader of the Council during this period was unable to attend the scheduled session but was happy to answer written questions. The response to these is documented below. The former Chief Executive of Wirral Borough Council did not respond to the submitted questions.

#### **What lessons do you think the council should learn from the disaster? What do you think was done well? And what do you think could/should be done differently in the future?**

In terms of learning lessons from the disaster, it is difficult to plan for something so out of the ordinary and devastating. That being said, the positives include the excellent support from a range of Council staff and very good partnership working with other agencies. It was also a good idea to have a senior officer in the Council who was the main conduit for dealing with all aspects of the disaster including recovery and plans to regenerate the town, links to residents, businesses, MPs and briefing elected members on a regular basis. With regard to what could be done differently in future, in terms of the Council I think that with the benefit of hindsight it would have been better to have had cross-party briefings on all aspects from day one. This would have avoided the issue becoming a political football. Nationally, I believe that the government needs to review their thresholds for funding under the Bellwin scheme. It cannot be right that disasters such as New Ferry don't qualify for national emergency funding and that almost the entire financial responsibility falls on the Council.

#### **How effective do you feel the council's response was to the tragedy. Do you feel the incident should have been classified differently, i.e. a serious incident?**

I think the Council's response to the disaster in New Ferry was good. In the immediate aftermath of the explosion in March 2017, the Council agreed to allocate £300,000 from its reserves to assist residents and businesses in New Ferry who had suffered; it set aside an additional £200,000 in the 2019/20 budget to be used once again to help residents and businesses; and in December 2018 Cabinet agreed to allocate £1.3 million from the Strategic Acquisitions Capital Programme to acquire a number of key sites in New Ferry to facilitate the town's regeneration. For the Council to find such significant sums of money to assist New Ferry at a time when it was experiencing unprecedented budget cuts demonstrated the priority which the Administration placed on this issue. Finally, as Leader, I lobbied

Steve Rotheram (Metro Mayor) to allocate £500,000 from his town centers fund to help New Ferry. This was approved.

I firmly believe that the tragedy should have been classified as a serious incident by the government and that they should have provided emergency funding from the national public purse.

**Do you feel that the recovery of the disaster was dealt with correctly? Were victims given the correct support at the correct time?**

I believe that the disaster was dealt with correctly. The Council worked extremely well with other agencies such as the police, local churches, Wirral Chamber of Commerce etc. to ensure that there was support in place to help residents and businesses. I vividly recall visiting the Life Church in Old Chester Road the day after the explosion and was extremely impressed with the help which Council staff were providing for residents who had to leave their homes. This 'hands-on' support continued in the days following the disaster. I would also particularly highlight the fantastic support provided by the assistant director for housing who was the Council's main conduit with local residents and businesses for many months following the disaster. They always went the extra mile to ensure that local people were kept informed about all aspects of the work to help New Ferry get back to some sort of normality. They also regularly briefed myself as Leader and worked with local ward members and residents on moving things forward. I believe that the Council was extremely fortunate to have someone as dedicated as them to carry out this role.

**When were you aware that Officers had not applied for the Bellwin Scheme?**

In a letter dated the 17th July 2017, the Council was informed by Jake Berry MP, Minister for the Northern Powerhouse and Local Growth, Department for Communities and Local Government, that the explosion in New Ferry was not serious enough to qualify for funding under the Bellwin scheme. In his letter the minister states: "While I understand that recovering from the New Ferry explosion requires funding, for an incident of this size and impact we would expect these costs to be covered using existing local resources." I was shocked by the minister's response, especially because I had accompanied Mr. Berry when he visited New Ferry and met with residents and businesses affected by the disaster. In summary, therefore, an application was not submitted for funding under the Bellwin scheme because the minister explicitly ruled it out. I recall challenging this view particularly in the light of the financial assistance given by government to residents in other disasters, e.g. Grenfell and Salisbury. Sadly, during my time as Leader, despite numerous requests by the Council, the local MP (Alison McGovern) and others, the government consistently refused to provide financial assistance to New Ferry.

**When were you made aware that residents were sent bills demanding payment for scaffolding?**

I don't recall the precise date when I heard this, however, I do remember that residents did receive advice on how they could get help with meeting a variety of costs, working with insurance companies and other agencies.

**Why did the Labour group decide/vote against spending emergency funding recourses in July 2017 to assist with the recovery?**

At the meeting of full Council on the 10th July 2017 the following motion, moved by former Bromborough Councillor, Warren Ward, and seconded by myself, was carried with 60 votes in favour, none against and one abstention:

“Following the devastating explosion in New Ferry, hundreds of Wirral residents and businesses have been affected. Residents’ homes have been destroyed or badly damaged and local businesses have had to close, forcing many local people into unemployment, along with hundreds of residents who were injured, including the tragic case of a 21 year-old man who almost lost his life.

On behalf of the people of New Ferry and Port Sunlight, this Council agrees to write to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government and also the Prime Minister to urge the government to provide New Ferry with urgent financial support and to meet with community leaders and residents affected on site in New Ferry for them to see first-hand the absolute devastation caused by the explosion.”

An amendment to the above was moved by the Conservative Group which asked for the Council to ‘urgently assess whether a formal application for emergency financial assistance under the Bellwin scheme is required’ and ‘to assess whether individuals affected need assistance from the £770,000 held by the Council for ‘Support and Assistance to Public in Need.’”

The Labour Group voted against this amendment, firstly, because we felt that the need for emergency financial assistance for New Ferry was adequately covered by the wording of the motion moved by former Councillor Ward. Secondly, using the £770,000 budget for ‘Support and Assistance to Public in Need’ was felt not to be appropriate in the light of advice from officers that there was likely to be heavy demands on this budget from November 2017 with the roll out of Universal Credit to all benefit claimants in Wirral and the anticipated significant cuts in benefits to certain claimants as well as delays in payments following any new claims.

### 3.5 Responses to questions sent to partner agencies.

The panel produced questions to be sent to the relevant partner agencies who were directly involved in the incident. Below is a summary of the responses provided by the NHS, Cadent Gas and HSE plus Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service.

Victim Support did not respond.

#### **Cadent Gas were asked what lessons had been learnt by the industry following on from the explosion.**

*“In relation to the New Ferry incident in particular, a key lesson that has been learnt by the industry as a whole is the importance of accurate data. The process that applies to disconnecting redundant gas supplies involves a number of different parties. We are reliant upon information provided by others in order to complete our work in this area. Unfortunately, in relation to the New Ferry incident, the information provided to us was inaccurate.”*

#### **The HSE have confirmed the following procedures in the aftermath of the explosion.**

*“The Police retained primacy of the ongoing investigation, HSE supported this investigation including looking at the gas supply pipe system. The Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998 (GSIUR)*

*place a duty on the last gas supplier to take certain actions following removal of a meter to reduce any risks from the gas pipe which is no longer used. In reality the gas supplier also requires assistance from the gas transporter to complete some of these actions. HSE investigated the action taken by both Contract Natural Gas (the gas supplier) and National Grid Gas (the gas transporter) in relation to the gas supply at New Ferry. Following this CNG were issued with a “notice of contravention” requiring them to take action to improve their management of meter removal/service isolation. CNG confirmed the action they had taken in line with the timescales required by HSE. No action was taken against NGG.*

*As described above the legal duty is on the gas supplier to cut off the gas service however HSE acknowledges that other parties are critical in this process, this includes the gas industry Central Data Service Provider and the gas transporters. HSE provided advice to the police on the investigations undertaken into the actions of both CNG and NGG and the relevant health and safety law. The failings of CNG directly led to NGG not fulfilling their obligations, and the evidence indicated that had CNG provided accurate information on the meter removal that, based on NGG’s existing arrangements, NGG would have taken suitable action. “*

### **NHS Mental Health Providers**

*’Senior clinical staff from Talking Together Wirral and employed by the previous provider Inclusion Matters Wirral (IMW) at the time of the incident, are not aware of any contact with the council. The service worked in conjunction with the CCG in order to prioritise clients, and to present workshops and psycho-education sessions at the local church hall. The service also offered information regarding how to access Inclusion Matters.*

*As senior clinical staff are not aware of any contact with the council, it is not possible to comment with regards to the LA doing anything differently.*

*From the senior clinicians’ perspective, it is believed that services were well signposted regarding the sessions put on by the service. However, it is not possible to comment on the wider signposting as they have no knowledge of how this was completed.*

*The psycho-education groups were arranged and took place immediately after the event. Practitioners also attended an event approximately a year after, where there was a local Councillor present. Both events were very poorly attended, and so the service (now Talking Together Wirral) would wonder about the advertising strategy for this.*

*Resource packs were made available for the residents of New Ferry and were provided at each support session.*

*Such events were delivered in evenings, and at least one weekend, in the local area. Residents affected were given priority treatment. A suggestion for the future would be that all services and providers meet regularly, have clear communication pathways, and a clear action plan.”*

### **Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service**

*Hello all,*

*We have been approached by Samantha Jagger of BBC News Online regarding the New Ferry gas explosion (retrial begins this Monday 23rd). they have received information that Mark Camborne, Head of Corporate and Community Safety at Wirral MBC apologised for the fact that a major incident was not declared (her words) in a council meeting. Samantha requested information on whether a Major Incident was declared. After discussion with senior officers and looking at the log I have been asked to provide the following statement to Samantha by our Chief Fire Officer.*

*'At 21.15hrs on 25 March 2017 Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service responded to an explosion in New Ferry, Wirral. The first attending crews were on scene within 6 minutes of the first call. A detailed informative message was passed at 21:39hrs following an initial assessment of the scene. A Major Incident was declared at 21:58hrs with the accompanying multi agency METHANE message passed, the Rendezvous Point was confirmed at 22:06hrs .*

*A Multi Agency Tactical Co-ordinating Group (TCG) meeting sometimes referred as a Silver Meeting was conducted on scene at 22.30hrs, 23.30hrs and ran hourly during the dynamic phase of the incident.*

*TCG Meetings were held throughout the night in order to progress the effective resolution of the incident.*

*A Multi Agency Strategic Co-ordinating Group (SCG) meeting was held at 0900hrs at the Joint Fire / Police Command & Control Centre in Bootle, where strategic objectives were agreed and future priorities established.*

*Following the SCG a Recovery Co-ordinating Group (RCG) was established in order to support the long term recovery of the area and those immediately affected by the incident.*

*The Local Authority Chair the RCG. Merseyside Police Chaired the SCG. The Fire Incident Commander Chaired the TCG.'*

*This should hopefully clarify any issues around the nature and location of the TCG, SCG and RCG meetings and also give the clear message that a Major Incident was declared very quickly. I will be sending this statement to Samantha Jagger this morning. If you have any queries, please let me know, many thanks,*

*Regards,*

*Corporate Communications Manager*



REQUEST	RESPONSE
<p>I was interested to read in the Echo last week that a Strategic Co-ordinating Group / Gold Command meeting was held on Sunday 26 March 2017, regarding the New Ferry explosion. Please could you email me a copy of the minutes without delay?</p>	<p>No information held.</p> <p>Searches have established that Merseyside Police do not hold a copy of any minutes of the specified meeting.</p> <p>In the interests of efficiency and effectiveness, the Force does not routinely record minutes of meetings, particularly those which are spontaneous in nature and in direct response to an incident and it would appear that no minutes were formally recorded in this instance.</p>

## 5.0 Summary – Lessons learned and suggested recommendations

Members of the panel would like to extend their thanks to the community of New Ferry and Port Sunlight for their participation in this review. The Panel understands and acknowledges the distress felt by some residents and traders when recalling the incident and aftermath. Thanks, are also extended to officers, elected members past and present, stakeholders and partner agencies.

The scope of this review was to ascertain which lessons could be learned from the incident and to put in place recommendations based on the outcome of the review. These have been detailed below.

### Action

Regarding the council's responsibility to ensure all necessary steps had been taken, it is apparent that the council followed its duties under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and its All Hazards Emergency

Policy in most areas. The response was quick and immediate assistance was provided to victims, officers and ward members worked 24/7 to assist residents in the aftermath, going as far as to hand out personal phone numbers and pay for supplies out of their own pockets. However, clear concerns remain regarding the council not declaring a major incident. The Panel acknowledges the benefit of hindsight and the unprecedented nature of the accident and pressures it puts on officers in the front line. One key recommendation will be that major incidents should be declared early on as it is easier to step this down than do it retrospectively.

In addition to this, the fact that the All Hazards Emergency Plan and list of contacts had not been updated will also form a significant part of the recommendations.

### **Communication**

It is clear that there were communication problems all the way through this incident. Both the Public and Councillors have advised that they did not feel they were kept updated or informed by the Council. One trader advised the panel that 'they just did not know who to turn to, we just needed one point of contact'. For the avoidance of doubt, it is also clear that there was assistance out there, but it came from different channels, sometimes only in verbal English at public meetings, which made it difficult for residents and traders who were distressed and confused in the aftermath.

In addition to this, Councillors who were not directly involved in the incident have subsequently advised that they did not feel they were kept up to date with key pieces of information.

Both of these aspects will be covered by the recommendations made by the panel.

### **Co-ordination**

It has been difficult to ascertain certain aspects of the co-ordination led by the emergency services and the Council. Members have requested minutes from meetings; however, these have not been supplied by the emergency services who instead referred members to previously published documents.

It is agreed that whilst there were regular briefings and meetings held on site, there had been no official confirmation of a gold command meeting held off-site. This has proved difficult to the panel, as all recommendations need to be evidence led. They acknowledge the complexity of the incident however they have concerns over the coordinated response and recording of the disaster. The panel have emphasised the need for this should an incident of this size occur again.

### Suggested Recommendations

The panel have agreed to submit the following recommendations for approval by the Business Overview and Scrutiny Committee, after which they will be submitted to cabinet for decision making.

The perpetrator of the crimes which led to the event has now been prosecuted and is serving a lengthy custodial sentence. The Panel would like to express their gratitude to everyone who worked in the response and recovery phases. In this instance there have been lessons to be learned and the Council always strives to improve procedure and responses. The review panel recognise that some residents and traders feel that some things could have been done better and subsequently would like to apologise for any perceived shortcomings.

1. The Council should focus on putting people directly affected first. For example, making hardship payments to victims as soon as the scale of a disaster and needs of the victims has been fully identified. In certain urgent circumstances, the Local Authority should consider making these payments without the approval of full Council. Bespoke support should also be included, through the NHS, housing services and Victim Support or other advocacy providers.
2. The Panel notes that some residents and traders felt they didn't know who to turn to. Contacts numbers for the public to use should be coordinated, up to date and available for the public to use immediately, via a centralized 0800 number. This should be publicised online and through the media as well as in paper copies. Translators and British Sign Language should be made available for those who need them. Social media to be used to convey information and updates and special information channels to be created such as text messaging. Key numbers such as victims, injuries and property damage should be put out by communications to avoid any media under reporting.
3. Any future incidents that involve significant damage to a site or area, the local authority should ensure that the site is 'made good' and landscaped once they are able to access it legally. This could be through grassing, hoardings or involving the local community with murals. Where possible the area should be screened to reduce the visual impact of the site on the community. The council should also actively attempt to improve the sites before we have legal access to the properties. Once the site is available for regeneration, the wider community should be consulted as much as possible to include their ideas and should be delivered.
4. There should be pro-active support for traders, as stated in the All Hazards Emergency Plan. More communication, promotion and marketing with council support. Open for business signs should be installed as soon as the area is secure. National government should be approached and requested to make payments for loss of trade to businesses consistent with other places affected by disasters such as Salisbury and Whalley Bridge.
5. The authority should delay billing until insurance companies are taking claims and/or ensure that bills go with a sensitive cover letter to explain who to contact and advice on payment.

Vulnerable victims should not be threatened with legal action by the Council as the impact can be particularly damaging to mental health. Proper organised advice should be given to victims regarding recovery via legal means (their own solicitor, CAB) and single point of contact should be utilised. If the site is classified as a crime scene bills should be held back until after court proceedings have concluded.

6. Ensure that the emergency response file is updated on a regular basis and seeks feedback from people directly affected by incidents so that all points are covered. and reported to the relevant committee on an annual basis (to include updates on all significant incidents that have occurred that year such as flooding). The Council's All Hazards Emergency Plan was last updated in 2011 and then 2018. Officer should also ensure that the all hazards recovery plan is regularly reviewed and after incidents. Formal lines of communication should be kept open between officers and all councillors. Every councillor should have a contact number for emergency situations, with council wide briefings sent to all members.
7. [Bellwin Scheme](#) to be applied for in the first instance as per its own recommendation; *"It is wise to report the incident even if spending is not likely to exceed the threshold. In the event of a later scheme taking total spending for the year above the threshold, the earlier spending would not be counted towards the threshold unless the relevant incident was reported at the time"*.

The Council's costs were £573,778, after hardship payments were made to all victims in August 2019. The panel noted that this was more than enough to have met the Bellwin threshold for government reimbursement. Applying for the Bellwin scheme in a major incident within the given deadline also emphasizes the seriousness of the incident. It is then up to the National Government Authority to determine what resources can then be provided.

8. A major incident should be called early on, even if another agency has already declared one. This can always be stepped down, however in accordance with the Council's All Hazard's Emergency Plan, an off-site gold command meeting should have been called and minutes should also be taken at all meeting and made available to the public. The chief executive or their nominee should be directly involved in the recovery and gold command meeting, in accordance with the All Hazards Emergency Plan. They should also visit the site and listen to the community. Briefings should also be sent to all elected members to ensure they are kept up to date with the event as it unfolds.

## 6.0 Attendees

### **Panel**

Cllr David Mitchell (Chair)

Cllr Jo Bird

Cllr Steve Hayes

Cllr Mike Collins

### **Scrutiny support**

Anna Perrett

### **Officers**

David Armstrong (Assistant Chief Executive)

Mark Camborne (Lead Commissioner Community Services and Resilience)

David Ball (Assistant Director, Major Growth Projects and Housing Delivery)

Sally Clark (Communications and Engagement Manager)

Alan Creevy (News and Content Officer)

Carolyn Hooper (Anti-Social Behaviour Manager)

Fergus Adams (Constituency Manager)

### **Contributors**

Warren Ward

Phil Davies

Cllr Jeanette Williamson

HSE

Cadent Gas

Supporting Lives

### **New Ferry Community**

Justice for New Ferry

New Ferry Residents Association

New Ferry Traders Association.

## 7.0 Appendix #1

### Scope

**Review Title: New Ferry**

**Responsible Committee: Business Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

**Date: 10/10/2019**

<b>1. Contact Information:</b>	
<b>Panel Members:</b> Cllr David Mitchell Cllr Jo Bird Cllr Steve Hayes Cllr Mike Collins	<b>Key Officers:</b>  Alan Evans David Ball David Armstrong Mark Camborne  <b>Other Contacts:</b>  Fergus Adams
<b>2. Review Aims:</b>	
<b>Review Objectives:</b>  The Business O&S Committee on 17 <sup>th</sup> September 2019 resolved that:  <i>(2) That a Scrutiny Review Panel be established to look at the lessons to be learnt from the New Ferry incident and that dependent on the results of the review the Panel then look at a major incidents procedure and protocol.</i>	
<b>Scrutiny Outcomes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To ensure that all necessary steps have been taken to address those residents, traders and other people affected by the incident.</li><li>• To consider what improvements can be made by the council and partner organisation in their response to future disasters.</li></ul>	

**Risk Implications:**

The review aims to look at the steps taken by WBC in response to the disaster and consider improvements to be put into place for any future emergency responses required by the Council. It must be acknowledgement that these sorts of incidents are rare and will differ in circumstances and severity each time. As such, the outcomes of this review will need to consider this and allow for variance.

**Environmental Implications:**

No direct Implications

**3. Review Plan****Review Approach:**

Public Meeting – New Ferry on 24<sup>th</sup> October 6-8pm [Winsor Close, New Ferry, CH62 5BX](#)

Session with Traders/Victim Groups – Monday 4<sup>th</sup> November 10:00am at Winsor Close. (40 mins x 2)

Email/letter representations from residents of New Ferry

Session with First Responders & Council Officers – (TBC)

**Review Duration:**

First Draft to call-over board on 25<sup>th</sup> November.

**Scheduled Committee Report Date:** 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2019

**Scheduled Cabinet Report Date:** 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2019

**4. Sources of Evidence:****Key Witnesses:**

Former Leader of the Council – Phil Davies

Former Chief Executive – Eric Robinson

New Ferry Traders Association

Justice for new Ferry

Email Representations from Residents of New Ferry

Warren Ward

First Responders, such as community patrol.

Merseyside Fire and Rescue

## 5. Key Communications and timings:

### **Cabinet Member:**

Cllr Julie McManus (Community Services).

### **Press Office:**

Press office to be advised of outcomes.

## 8.0 Appendix #2

### **Witness Statements**

As part of the review, Members of the panel asked the community to participate via email or letter to share their experiences. Below are a number of witness statements which have been published with the consent of the authors.

#### **How did the disaster effect you?**

The disaster immediately effected our family income,  
it had a devastating effect on my wife's mental health, she now has chronic bouts of depression,  
two months after the explosion I contracted double pneumonia and was off work for 6 weeks.

My wife subsequently left the family home and now we are divorced, it's had an emotional impact on our three children, we stopped having family holidays, various children's clubs and music lessons came to an end due to lack of funds,

We were under insured, so we were not covered for the explosion,

I borrowed £50k on our house to buy the business,

we had to sell the land to the council to cover the demolition charge,

from having a thriving business, owning the building freehold to having nothing but still owing the bank,

Recently I lost my Mom and Dad, I looked after my Dad over the last two years as he fought cancer, undeclared but my mental health has suffered,

**What were the short-term effects?**

See above

**What were the long-term effects?**

See above

**Steps the council could have taken.**

I have nothing but praise for the work of the council, I thought David Ball, Neil Mitchell, Sab Spina and others were brilliant, they were sympathetic, generous with their time & supportive throughout, please pass on my appreciation to these fine people.

**How did the disaster affect you?**

Initially, there was a financial impact. We left the house in the clothes that we were wearing. We didn't know what was going on, so we made a quick departure (through the living room window as the front door was wedged shut). We left all our personal belonging behind, including car keys, cash etc. Thankfully, my partner did have her bank card on her. Initially we had to purchase day-to-day items (toiletries, clothes etc.) I was unable to drive for work and my work laptop was also in the house. We were not allowed to re-enter the house as it was deemed unsafe, so I was forced to take a few days off. For the first few days we were couch-hopping and relying our families to provide shelter. After around 4 days, the council found us accommodation at the Black Lion guest house in Rock Ferry.

My company was very supportive, and I was back in work within a week as they provided a replacement car. I put the absent days through as holidays so that we wouldn't be out of pocket. My partner returned to work after 2 weeks but was not paid during this period. We were also allowed to briefly enter the house to collect essentials. Although we "got on with it" almost immediately, I would be lying if I said that this hasn't had some psychologic impact on both of us. My partner still jumps when she hears a bang and I am still trying to reconcile why someone would commit such an act.

**What was the short-term impact**

As above, there was a considerable financial impact and we were unable to work. In addition, whilst we didn't sleep on the streets, we were homeless and couch-hopping was unsettling. The owner of the guest house was amenable, but he didn't see us as paid guests and continued to take bookings, moving us from room-to-room (I did report this to the council after we moved out). Thankfully, we

found permanent (rented) accommodation after 4 weeks, incurring further costs for moving and replacing items that were damaged in the blast (TV/fridge etc.).

**What was the long-term impact**

Mixed – Despite the recent payout, my credit card took a battering and I’m still paying this off. We were more fortunate than many in this situation: I have supportive employers, so I was back in work fairly quickly and didn’t have time during the day to “dwell on it”. We’re now living in a nicer house in a quieter location so there’s an upside here.

**What steps do you feel the council could have taken to support residents affected in the aftermath of this event?**

I found getting any information was a challenge, particularly in the early days. That said, the council found us accommodation within a fairly short space of time, and this was fully funded, including an evening meal. Without getting into a discussion about what constitutes a “disaster”, I feel we were badly let down by the Government who 1) swerved the area when they had the opportunity to visit 2) found resource very quickly for other disasters/incidents (Grenfell/Salisbury).



**Business Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
Thursday, 23 January 2020**

<b>REPORT TITLE:</b>	<b>BUSINESS PROPOSALS FOR 2020/21</b>	<b>SCRUTINY</b>	<b>BUDGET</b>
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>DIRECTOR OF INVESTMENT</b>	<b>OF</b>	<b>FINANCE AND</b>

**REPORT SUMMARY**

This report is part of the Council’s formal budget process, as set out in the constitution and in accordance with the legal requirements to set a balanced and sustainable budget for 2020/21.

This report also presents an update on the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) covering the period from 2021/22 to 2024/25.

**RECOMMENDATION/S**

That committee be requested to:

- (1) Review and comment on the financial proposals for 2020/21 that will be subject to consultation and further consideration by the Cabinet in February 2020; and
- (2) Note the financial challenges facing the Council in setting a sustainable and balanced budget for the MTFP period from 2021/22 to 2024/25.

## **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

### **1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S**

- 1.1 The Council has a legal requirement to set a balanced budget in March 2020 for the 2020/21 financial year. This report sets out the proposals relating to Business portfolio in order to set a balanced budget for 2020/21.

### **2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 2.1 The Council has a legal obligation to set a balanced budget in March each year for the following financial year and this report sets out proposals and initiatives that increase income or reduce expenditure to assist in decisions regarding budget setting within Business Portfolio. The Cabinet could however choose alternative options to delivering a balanced budget before the budget is finalised in March 2020.

### **3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 3.1 In September 2019, the Government announced the Local Government Finance Settlement for 2020/21 budgets, in the form of a single year Spending Round. A multi-year Spending Review will now follow in 2020.

- 3.2 This single year Spending Round forms the basis for updating the MTFP and sets out a 4.3% real-term increase in overall Government funding for Local Authorities - against a backdrop of consistent cuts in the previous three Spending Reviews since 2010 and continuing pressures in social care.

- 3.3 Details of how the overall announcement will affect the specific funding settlements for individual Local Authorities have not yet been received at the time of this report being written.

- 3.4 The Spending Round settlement for 2020/21 represents an improvement in funding in comparison to previous assumptions for 2020/21, given:

- No loss of the Council's equivalent of the Revenue Support Grant or Public Health Grant;
- A £6.4m increase in funding for Adult and Children's Social Care;
- A proposed £2.8m increase in Council Tax - resulting from permission to include a 2% Adult Social Care Precept in 20/21, over and above an inflationary increase of up to 2%;
- A (£0.8m) reduction in Council Tax due to the Council's review of the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme; and
- A new round of the New Homes Bonus allocations for 2020/21 only.

3.5 The latest MTFP position for 2020/21 to 2024/25 – which takes into account changes in funding assumptions and actions taken in 2019/20 – is set out in the table below:

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
<b>MTFP gap</b>	-	28	30	29	28

3.6 The full Council position for 2020/21 is now balanced and includes pressures of £34.9m, offset by savings of £32.9m, the individual components of these are included in Appendices 2 and 3.

3.7 The pressures and savings relating to Business portfolio are summarised in Appendix 1.

#### **4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 Any proposed reduction or withdrawal of a savings plan or increase to a pressure may result in either:

- Services within other portfolios having their budgets cut.
- A potential overall budget shortfall.

#### **5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 The Council is required to agree a budget for 2020/21 by March 2020. As part of agreeing the budget, the Chief Financial Officer is required under Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003 to produce a report on the robustness of the estimates made for the Council budget.

5.2 The duty of the Council is to avoid a budget shortfall. The Chief Financial Officer of a Local Authority has a personal duty, under the Local Government Finance Act 1988 Section 114A, to make a report to the Executive if it appears that the expenditure of the authority incurred (including expenditure it is proposed to incur) in a financial year is likely to exceed the resources (including sums borrowed) which are available to meet that expenditure.

#### **6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS**

6.1 No additional resource requirements directly result from this report.

#### **7.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

7.1 There is a risk that the agreed savings will not be delivered or will be delayed. Progress on delivery of agreed savings will be monitored using Budget Monitoring reports presented to Cabinet. As such the Council continues to hold a General Fund reserve of £10m. This represents a minimum level of contingency to support the

organisation if savings cannot be delivered and no other options for mitigation can be identified.

7.2 The Council's ability to use one-off funding to bridge funding gaps has reduced significantly over recent years and is only a temporary solution.

## **8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION**

8.1 Views are being sought on the Council's future budget and spending priorities, which will be delivered through an extensive programme of community and stakeholder consultation.

8.2 The majority of this year's financial proposals can be implemented without changing existing Council policies and procedures, as they do not impact on public facing services and do not require wider public consultation.

8.3 Should any financial proposals agreed by Cabinet require specific consultation, the Council will commence appropriate consultation directly with any service users and stakeholders who are affected and will feedback their views before final decisions are taken.

8.4 The Council will work with staff and Trade Unions where required to ensure obligations in relation to statutory staff consultation is delivered appropriately and within agreed guidelines.

## **9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 It is recognised that some of the developing proposals could have equality implications. Any implications will be considered, and any negative impacts will be mitigated where possible.

9.2 Equality implications will be assessed during planning, decision and implementation stages and will be recognised as an ongoing responsibility. Equality issues will be a conscious consideration and an integral part of the process

## **10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 The content and/or recommendations contained within this report are expected have no impact on emissions of CO2

**REPORT AUTHOR:** **Vikki Gregorich**  
**Senior Finance Manager**  
Telephone: (0151) 666 3104  
email: [vikkigregorich@wirral.gov.uk](mailto:vikkigregorich@wirral.gov.uk)

## **APPENDICES**

APPENDIX 1 – Proposed financial proposals for OSS Business Scrutiny

APPENDIX 2 – Total Organisational proposed Savings and Pressures

APPENDIX 3 – Budget Gap

## BACKGROUND PAPERS

### SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
<b>Council:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Wirral Plan</li></ul>	13 July 2015
<b>Cabinet:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Medium Term Financial Strategy 2019-20 – 2022/23</li></ul>	16 July 2018
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Revenue Budget 2019/20 &amp; Medium Term Financial Strategy 2019/20 to 2022/23</li></ul>	19 February 2018
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Council Budget 2020/21 &amp; Medium Term Financial Strategy</li></ul>	23 December 2019
<b>Council:</b>	4 March 2019
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Revenue Budget 2019/20 &amp; Medium Term Financial Strategy 2019/20 to 2022/23</li></ul>	

## APPENDIX 1

### 2020/21 Savings Proposals - OSS Business Scrutiny

Directorate	Lead Director	Title of savings proposal	Description of savings proposal	2020/21 Budget saving £m
Organisation wide	Nikki Boardman	New Council Model	Delivery of a new organisational structure and operating model through the review of systems, processes, structures and spans of control in an effort to remove duplication and waste, and streamline operations using digitisation and lean processing where possible.	5.00
Business Management	Shaer Halewood	Cost Reduction from reprofiling MRP repayments	This proposal to change the method of calculation results in a re-profiling of MRP charges (rather than a permanent reduction in MRP charges) and flows from the inclusion of long-term debtors and deferred charges in the calculation for the first time, as now permitted under statutory guidance. Working with external advisory services, the potential to reprofile the MRP annual charges has been analysed, with the aim of reducing financing costs in the near term and repaying the balance over the longer term.	2.59
Business Management	Shaer Halewood	Cost Reduction from refinancing lender option borrower option (LOBO) loans	Working with external advisory services, there is the potential to refinance the LOBO debt portfolio, with the aim of reducing financing costs. These loans are long term and at interest rates higher than existing market rates.	2.00
Business Management	Shaer Halewood	Income from New Investments	Working with external advisory services, the potential to earn more income from investments is to be explored. As with any investment scenario there is the risk/reward relationship to be aware of. In order to try and achieve higher returns the Authority will have to consider its risk appetite and the potential for investment losses should investments fail.	2.00
Organisation wide	Shaer Halewood	Zero Basing – Budget line review	A holistic review of organisational budget lines. Savings will be made up of 1. identification and centralisation of expenditure (ability to procure better) and; 2. identification and elimination of inefficient financial resourcing, through close alignment of financial resources to expected outcomes of the services.	1.12
Organisation wide	Shaer Halewood	Employer's Pensions Valuation	This is not a savings proposal, but an agreed change in the valuation to employers pension contributions following the triennial	7.29
Organisation wide	Shaer Halewood	Pensions Strain charged to flexible use of capital receipts	Capitalisation of pension strain costs from Voluntary Redundancy / Early Retirement offer, dependent on numbers taking up the offer	1.18
Organisation wide	Shaer Halewood	Capitalisation of Salaries	Maximisation of salary costs to capital projects. This reduces the reliance on revenue budgets. There is small associated cost of capital, which contributes, in part, to the identified organisational pressure for capital financing costs.	1.12
Organisation wide	Graham Hodkinson	Review of Council Contracts	Reduction in cost from renegotiating / ceasing council wide contracted supply	5.00

## APPENDIX 2

### FULL ORGANISATION FINANCIAL PRESSURES

Item	Description	Value £m	Perm/ Temp
<b>Adult Care &amp; Health</b>			
Demand Factors	Increasing demand and acuity in care packages in Adult Social Care	3.80	P
Contract Increases	Agreed increase for contracts with Cheshire & Wirral Partnership	0.17	P
Contract Increases	Agreed increase for contracts with Wirral Community Foundation Trust	0.27	P
Demographic Growth	Additional demand associated with increasing population	1.91	P
Fee Rate Increase	Increased provider free rate associated with the actual cost of care	3.00	P
Specialist Fee Rate Increase	Increased provider free rate associated with the actual cost of care	0.65	P
ACH reserve	Replacing adult care & health one off reserves	4.00	P
<b>Total Adult Care &amp; Health</b>		<b>13.80</b>	
<b>Children &amp; Families</b>			
EDT	Increased costs relating to the resourcing of the Emergency Duty Team (out of hours service)	0.14	P
EHPHA	Contractual increased for Environmental Port Health Authority	0.09	P
Residential Placement numbers & rate	Increased costs of additional forecast looked after children and fee increases	2.97	P
Troubled Families	Grant reduction to support Troubled Families programme	1.61	P
<b>Total Children &amp; Families</b>		<b>4.81</b>	
<b>Delivery Services</b>			
Assisted Travel	Costs associated with growth in demand for assisted travel	0.37	P
Market Income	Reduction in income from Birkenhead Market	0.20	P
Barrowman	Street cleansing barrowman	0.20	P
Car Parking	Reduction in income from supermarket car parking	0.35	P
Energy	Increased energy costs of Council owned buildings	0.50	P
Garden Waste Recycling	Decreased income from household for garden waste recycling take-up	0.20	P
Golf Courses	Reversal of the transfer of two golf courses to expert provider	0.11	P
Enforcement	Loss of income from termination of enforcement contract	0.50	P
Leisure Income	Reduction of income from take up of leisure centre facilities	0.54	P
Waste Contract Inflation	Contractual inflation on waste management contract	0.30	P
Winter Maintenance	Additional costs of winter gritting	0.20	P
Waste Levy	Contractual increases on the Merseyside Waste Development Levy	0.90	P
Health and Safety	Additional works required to ensure Health & Safety standards are met	0.10	P
PFI Support	Additional resources to support PFI contract	0.05	P
<b>Total Delivery Services</b>		<b>4.52</b>	
<b>Business Management</b>			
Coroners Service	Additional demand and legacy cost increases	0.27	P
New Committee System	Additional cost associated with moving to a Committee System	0.10	P
Housing Benefit Grant	Reduction in Government Housing Benefit Administration Grant	0.60	P
Grads & Apprentices	Funding for graduates and apprenticeship scheme for cohort II	0.39	P
Traded Services Income	Legacy of unachievable income from traded services	0.42	P
Communications	Unachievable income from advertising	0.16	P
<b>Total Business Management</b>		<b>1.94</b>	
<b>Economic and Housing Growth</b>			
Wirral Growth Company	Re-phased income from regeneration developments	3.48	P
Planning Posts	Additional posts in Planning Department	0.30	P
Regeneration Growth	Investment for regeneration to generate future income	0.50	P
Regen Posts	Funding for new posts	0.30	P
Local Plan	Posts associated with local plan	0.40	P
Culture Events	Underpinning of cultural events programme following Borough of Culture Year	0.50	P
<b>Total Economic &amp; Housing Growth</b>		<b>5.48</b>	
<b>Cross Cutting &amp; Corporate</b>			
Welfare Assistance	Additional resource for the Local Welfare Assistance Scheme	0.20	P
Climate Emergency	Investment to support Climate Emergency Declaration	0.25	P
Staff Pay	Increased resources to meet the staff pay rise	2.88	P
Capital Financing	Cost of financing the Capital Programme	1.00	P
<b>Total Cross Cutting &amp; Corporate</b>		<b>4.33</b>	
<b>Total Pressures</b>		<b>34.88</b>	

## FULL ORGANISATION FINANCIAL SAVINGS PROPOSALS

Item	Description	Value £m	Perm/ Temp
<b>Adult Care &amp; Health</b>			
New Housing	Housing for Independence including Extra Care Housing	0.50	P
Better use of technology	Use of Technology to increase Independence and reduce falls	0.50	P
Review of Care	Care Package Review for Independence	2.30	P
Provider efficiencies	Wirral Evolutions increasing employment and reducing cost	0.50	P
Financial Assessment	Use of Electronic Financial Assessments to ensure accelerated income collection times	0.20	P
<b>Total Adult Care &amp; Health</b>		<b>4.00</b>	
<b>Children &amp; Families</b>			
Looked After Children reductions	Managed movement of looked after children from high cost services to lower cost/better outcomes	1.27	P
<b>Total Children &amp; Families</b>		<b>1.27</b>	
<b>Delivery Services</b>			
3G Pitches	Additional income from use of new 3G pitches	0.10	P
Marine Lake	Lease of Marine Lake food and drink offer	0.10	P
LED Lighting	Reduction in energy costs from low energy LED Street Lighting	0.13	P
<b>Total Delivery Services</b>		<b>0.33</b>	
<b>Economic and Housing Growth</b>			
Release of Leases	Cost reduction as a result of exiting leased office accommodation	0.03	P
<b>Total Economic &amp; Housing Growth</b>		<b>0.03</b>	
<b>Cross Cutting &amp; Corporate</b>			
Minimum Revenue Provision	Reduction in the amount set aside for the future repayment of debt	2.59	P
Pensions Valuation	Reduction in employers pension contributions following the triennial	7.29	P
Cash Flow Investments	Investing in ethical and commercial opportunities	2.00	P
Pension Strain	Capitalisation of pension strain from exits	1.18	P
Lobo refinancing	Interest rate savings from refinancing of high interest legacy loans	2.00	P
New Council Model	Council wide structural modernisation model	5.00	P
Contracts review	Reduction in cost from renegotiating/ceasing council wide contracted supply	5.00	P
Zero based budgeting		1.12	P
Capitalisation of salaries		1.12	P
<b>Total Cross Cutting &amp; Corporate</b>		<b>27.29</b>	
<b>Total Savings</b>		<b>32.92</b>	

**APPENDIX 3  
2020/21 BUDGET GAP**

		<b>£m</b>
<b>2019/20 Baseline Budget</b>		<b>285.21</b>
<b>2020/21 Funding:</b>		<b>£m</b>
	2020/21 Council Tax	146.66
	Adult Social Care Precept	2.85
	Change in CTRS	(0.80)
	Business Rates	70.73
	Section 31 Grants	12.47
	Top up Grant	34.40
	BCF	16.87
	New Homes Bonus	0.65
	Capital receipts	4.50
<b>Total 2020/21 Funding</b>		<b>288.33</b>
<b>2020/21 Budget:</b>	Budget 19/20	285.21
	Add: 20/21 Pressures	34.88
	Less: 20/21 Savings	(32.92)
	Less: Social Care Grant income	(6.38)
	Plus:	
	2019/20 unachieved savings	6.03
	BCF grant	1.50
<b>Total budget 20/21</b>		<b>288.33</b>
<b>Budget Gap/(Surplus)</b>		<b>(0.00)</b>

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**Business Overview and Scrutiny Committee**  
**Thursday, 23 January 2020**

<b>REPORT TITLE:</b>	<b>BUSINESS OVERVIEW &amp; SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE</b>
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>NANCY CLARKSON, HEAD OF INTELLIGENCE STATUTORY SCRUTINY OFFICER</b>

**REPORT SUMMARY**

This report explains the process of developing and managing the scrutiny work programme for the municipal year. The Business Overview & Scrutiny Committee, in cooperation with the other three Overview & Scrutiny Committees, is responsible for proposing and delivering an annual scrutiny work programme. This work programme should align with the corporate priorities of the Council, in particular the delivery of the Wirral Plan pledges which are within the remit of the Committee.

**RECOMMENDATION/S**

Members are requested to:

1. Note the contents of the Committee’s Work Programme for 2019/20.
2. Consider any additional items to be included on the Committee’s work programme for 2019/20 and prioritised as appropriate.

## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

### 1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

To ensure members of the Business Overview & Scrutiny Committee have the opportunity to contribute to the delivery of the annual work programme.

### 2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

Not Applicable

### 3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

#### 3.1 THE SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME AND STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

The work programme should align with the priorities of the Council and its partners.

The programme will be informed by:

- The Wirral Plan pledges
- The Council Plan
- The Council's transformation programme
- The Council's Forward Plan
- Service performance information
- Risk management information
- Public or service user feedback
- Referrals from Cabinet / Council

The Wirral Plan pledges and strategies of particular relevance to the Business Overview & Scrutiny Committee are:

<b>Pledge</b>	<b>Plans &amp; Strategies</b>
Greater job opportunities in Wirral	Wirral Growth Plan
Workforce skills match business need	Wirral Growth Plan Skills Strategy (In development)
Increase inward investment	Wirral Growth Plan
Thriving small Businesses	Wirral Growth Plan
Vibrant tourism economy	Growth Plan Wirral Visitor Economy Strategy
Transport & technology infrastructure fit for the future	Transport Strategy Digital Strategy

### 3.2 PRINCIPLES FOR PRIORITISATION

Good practice suggests that, in order to maximise the impact of scrutiny, it is necessary to prioritise proposed topics within the work programme. Members may find the following criteria helpful in providing a guideline towards ensuring that the most significant topics are prioritised:

<b>Principles for Prioritisation</b>	
Wirral Plan and Council Plan Priorities	Does the topic have a direct link with one of the 2020 pledges?
	Will the review lead to improved outcomes for Wirral residents?
Public Interest	Does the topic have particular importance for Wirral Residents?
Transformation	Will the review support the transformation of the Council?
Financial Significance	Is the subject matter an area of significant spend or potential saving?
	Will the review support the Council in achieving its savings targets?
Timeliness / Effectiveness	Is this the most appropriate time for this topic to be scrutinised?
	Will the review be a good use of Council resources?

By assessing prospective topics using these criteria, the Committee can prioritise an effective work programme that ensures relevance and the highest potential to enhance outcomes for residents.

### 3.3 DELIVERING THE WORK PROGRAMME

It is anticipated that the work programme will be delivered through a combination of:

- Scrutiny reviews undertaken by task & finish groups
- Evidence days and workshops
- Committee reports provided by officers
- Standing committee agenda items, for example, performance monitoring and financial monitoring
- Spotlight sessions
- Standing panels (where deemed necessary)

As some of the selected topics may cut across the Wirral Plan themes and Council Priorities, it is anticipated they may be of interest to members of more than one committee. In these circumstances, opportunities for members of more than one committee to work jointly on an item of scrutiny will be explored.

Regular work programme update reports will provide the committee with an opportunity to plan and review its work across the municipal year.

## **4.0 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME ITEMS**

### **4.1 Camper Vans Task & Finish Scrutiny Review**

The Task & Finish group met with senior officers in October to evaluate the initial effectiveness of the Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO) introduced to prohibit overnight parking of recreational vehicles in the Kings Parade/Coastal Drive area of Wallasey. This order has proven to be a successful response to problematic campervan parking, and a similar order will now be introduced to Pilots Way and parts of Portland Street in New Brighton. The Review Panel will also be looking to engage with residents and stakeholders in due course to address wider issues and solutions regarding campervan parking in the Borough.

### **4.2 New Ferry Task and Finish Scrutiny Review**

The review panel met with residents and traders who received the hardship fund at a public meeting in October. They have also met with residents, traders and senior officers over the last few months. In order to ensure as much feedback from partner agencies, the panel also sent questions to enable them to feed into the review. The full report is included as an agenda item.

### **4.3 Scrutiny Workshop – Key Regeneration Projects**

A workshop will be held in February 2020 to give members the opportunity to undertake pre-decision scrutiny of the Wirral Growth Company Partnership Plan and associated Business Cases. This work is time sensitive with a scheduled Cabinet Decision in late February 2020. The report brought to Committee in November and subsequent workshop will enable Members to review the background papers and submit any comments to Cabinet to inform the decision.

### **4.4 **FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF THE SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME****

The governance arrangements of the Council have recently been reviewed and as of May 2020, the current scrutiny model and committee structure will change. The Chairs of all four current Overview & Scrutiny Committees have worked collaboratively to address cross-cutting matters and ensure that the necessary prioritisation and scheduling of Committee work programme items has taken place.

## **5.0 LCRCA OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY**

### **5.1 The role of the LCRCA Overview and Scrutiny Committee is to:-**

- Scrutinise the decision and actions taken by the Combined Authority or the Metro Mayor;
- Provide a 'critical friend to policy and strategy development;
- Undertake scrutiny reviews into areas of strategic importance for the people of the Liverpool City Region; and
- Monitor the delivery of the Combined Authority's strategic plan

### **5.2 The Committee is made up of 3 elected Members from each of the constituent Local Authorities of the LCR Combined Authority, along with one elected Member from both the Liverpool City Region Liberal Democrat Group and the Liverpool City Region**

Conservative Group. The three Members from Wirral Council are Cllrs. Jean Stapleton, Adrian Jones and Helen Cameron.

- 5.3 The LCRCA Overview & Scrutiny Committee will meet five times during the municipal year with all meetings now webcasted. The work programme for the municipal year will be agreed at the first meeting of the Committee on 19<sup>th</sup> June. Work programme updates and copies of relevant scrutiny reports will be sent to all Committee Members for information. For information, the meeting schedule and agenda details are available on the link below:

[LCRCA O&S Meeting Schedule and Agenda](#)

## **6.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

This report is for Members information and there are no direct financial implications

## **7.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

Not Applicable

## **8.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: ICT, STAFFING AND ASSETS**

The delivery of the scrutiny work programme will be met from within existing resources.

## **9.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

Not Applicable

## **10.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION**

Not Applicable

## **11.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

This report is for information to Members and there are no direct environment implications

## **12.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

This report is for information to Members and there are no direct equality implications.

**REPORT AUTHOR:** **Anna Perrett**  
Scrutiny Officer  
telephone: (0151) 691 8564  
email: [annaperret@wirral.gov.uk](mailto:annaperret@wirral.gov.uk)

**APPENDICES:**

**Appendix 1: Business Overview & Scrutiny Committee – Work programme**

**Background Papers**

**SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)**

<b>Council Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>

**BUSINESS OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
WORK PROGRAMME**

**AGENDA ITEMS – January**

Item	Format	Officer
Minutes from Business OSC	Minutes	
LCR update	Report	Rose Boylan
Budget Scrutiny	Report	Finance
Chamber of Commerce	Report	TBC
Impact of Apprenticeship Levy	Report	Paul Smith
New Ferry Scrutiny Review	Report	Anna Perrett
Staff Sickness Update	Report	Tony Williams
Work Programme Update	Report	Anna Perrett

**STANDING AGENDA ITEMS**

Item	Format	Officer / Councillor
2019/20 Quarterly Finance Monitoring Report	Report / Presentation	Finance to present report
2019/20 Quarterly Wirral Plan Performance Report	Report	Shaer Halewood - Director of Finance and Investment  David Armstrong - Corporate Director for Delivery Services / Assistant Chief Executive
Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Update	Report / Presentation	Rosemary Boylan, Policy and Strategy Manager (External)

**WORK PROGRAMME ACTIVITIES OUTSIDE COMMITTEE**

Item	Format	Timescale	Lead Departmental Officer	Progress / Comments
Camper Vans Scrutiny Review	Task & Finish	January 2020	Mark Smith	Focus groups to be arranged with relevant stakeholders.
New Ferry Scrutiny Review	Task & Finish	January 2020	Mark Camborne	Completed

Review of Scrutiny Arrangements	TBC	September 2020	TBC	Completed
Celtic Manor Golf Resort	Workshop	June 17 <sup>th</sup> , 2019	Shaer Halewood	Completed
Budget Scrutiny	TBC	December 2018 / January	TBC	Completed
Reality Check Visits	Site Visit	TBC	TBC	

#### **SPECIAL MEETINGS / CALL-IN MEETINGS CONVENED**

Item	Format
Celtic Manor Golf Resort 27 <sup>th</sup> June, 2019	Special Meeting

#### **ADDITIONAL AGENDA ITEMS TO BE SCHEDULED**

Item	Format	Approximate timescale	Lead Officer
NNDR	Report	TBC	Shaer Halewood/Lisa Jamieson
Commercialisation Developments	Report	TBC	Stuart Bellerby
Regular Update on Interims and Consultants	Report	TBC	Tony Williams

#### **LIVERPOOL CITY REGION COMBINED AUTHORITY O&S COMMITTEE – WORK PROGRAMME**

Item	Format	Timescale	Progress / Comments
Local Enterprise Partnerships	Task & Finish	September 2019	Review Panel of three Members confirmed
Bus Services Act and bus Ticketing	Workshop	September 2019	Workshop established with a further Task & Finish review undertaken if required.

Air Quality Action Plan Update	Committee Report	September 2019	
Year of the Environment	Committee Report	September 2019	
Mersey Tidal Power Project	Committee Report	September 2019	
Housing Strategy Update	Committee Report	November 2019	
Housing First Update	Committee Report	November 2019	
Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Financial Performance Report 2018/19, 2019/20	Committee Report	January 2020	
Liverpool City Region Budget for 2021/21	Committee Report	January 2020	
Apprenticeships	Committee Report	January 2020	
Digital Connectivity Update	Committee Report	January 2020	
Skills Investment Strategy	Committee Report	January 2020	

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