

COUNCIL

Monday, 10 October 2022

Present: The Civic Mayor (Councillor Jeff Green) in the
Chair
Deputy Civic Mayor (Councillor Jerry Williams)

Councillors	T Anderson	P Gilchrist	P Martin
	S Bennett	H Gorman	D Mitchell
	J Bird	N Graham	S Mountney
	M Booth	K Greaney	Y Nolan
	A Brame	EA Grey	C O'Hagan
	D Burgess-Joyce	J Grier	A Onwuemene
	I Camphor	P Hayes	O Osanlou
	C Carubia	A Hodson	S Percy
	P Cleary	K Hodson	C Povall
	M Collins	J Hoey	S Powell-Wilde
	H Collinson	J Johnson	L Rennie
	C Cooke	C Jones	J Robinson
	A Davies	T Jones	P Stuart
	C Davies	M Jordan	Jason Walsh
	G Davies	S Kelly	S Williams
	T Elzeiny	B Kenny	V Wilson
	L Fraser	D Kenny	G Wood
	S Foulkes	I Lewis	A Wright
	A Gardner	J McManus	J Laing

<u>Apologies</u>	Councillors	H Cameron	T Smith
		P Connolly	Joe Walsh
		T Cox	J Williamson
		E Gleaves	

32 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Civic Mayor welcomed everyone to the meeting and those watching the webcast. He then asked Members to consider whether they had any disclosable pecuniary and/or any other relevant interest in connection with any matters to be determined at this meeting and, if so, to declare it and state the nature of such interest.

Councillor Jason Walsh declared a personal interest in motion 4 "Bank and Cash Services that Meet Local Needs" as an employee of a bank.

Councillors Harry Gorman, Brian Kenny, Lesley Rennie and Gill Wood declared personal interests in motion 5 “The Impact of Inflation on Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority” as members of the Fire and Rescue Authority.

Councillors Sue Powell-Wilde and Tony Jones declared personal interests in motion 6 “Support for Local Green Spaces” due to their associations with the Royal National Lifeboat Institution. Councillor Brian Kenny also declared a personal interest as a resident adjacent to Tower Grounds, New Brighton. Councillor Julie McManus declared a personal interest in motion 6 by virtue of her employment in the community, voluntary and faith sector.

33 **CIVIC MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Civic Mayor announced that apologies had been received from Councillors Helen Cameron, Paul Connolly, Tony Cox, Emily Gleaves, Tony Smith Joe Walsh and Janette Williamson.

The Civic Mayor informed the Council that this was the first meeting since the passing of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and detailed the six visits that she had undertaken within Wirral. The Civic Mayor informed the Council that he had the honour and privilege of reading out the proclamation of Accession for King Charles III at Birkenhead Town Hall and had met residents at the Floral Pavilion where the Queen’s Funeral was televised.

The Civic Mayor noted that the arrangements for the proclamation and other civic events in the week following the Queen’s passing were all key components of Operation London Bridge. Council was advised that officers involved in Operation London Bridge had conducted themselves with the utmost professionalism under challenging circumstances and the Civic Mayor put on record his thanks to the officers involved in delivering the events at such short notice.

It was moved by the Civic Mayor, seconded by the Deputy Mayor, that –

1. On behalf of all the residents of Wirral, the Council places on record our debt of gratitude to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II who throughout her reign demonstrated an extraordinary sense of duty and devotion to our country, its people and to public service; and
2. On behalf of all Members of the Council, the Civic Mayor writes a letter to the Chief Executive and to those Council staff involved in the organisation and implementation of Operation London Bridge, thanking them for their hard work and professionalism.

Following speeches by Councillors Tom Anderson, Phil Gilchrist and Jean Robinson, and an update on the Civic Mayor’s other engagements, the motion was put and agreed by assent. It was therefore –

Resolved – That

- (1) On behalf of all the residents of Wirral, the Council places on record our debt of gratitude to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II who throughout her reign demonstrated an extraordinary sense of duty and devotion to our country, its people and to public service; and**
- (2) On behalf of all Members of the Council, I write a letter to the Chief Executive and to those Council staff involved in the organisation and implementation of Operation London Bridge, thanking them for their hard work and professionalism.**

34 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of Council held on 11 July 2022 had been circulated to Members. On a motion by the Civic Mayor seconded by Councillor Jean Robinson, it was –

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 11 July 2022 be approved and adopted as a correct record.

35 **PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

The Civic Mayor informed the Council that one public question had been received from Ruth Molyneux, who was in attendance and put the question to the Leader of the Council. Ruth stated that 3,600 people had signed a petition to save Bromborough Library and that Bromborough Civic Centre had not been put into scope for Community Asset Transfer, and asked whether the Council or a community group would be able to offer a warm hub in Bromborough Library or Civic Centre.

In the absence of the Leader of the Council, Councillor Jean Robinson responded to state that Bromborough Library or Civic Centre was not being considered to be reopened by the Council as a warm hub as the revenue costs associated with the running of the building had been taken as savings to address the Council budget gap therefore no funding existed for utilities and other expenditure in addition to the capital investment required to address issues with ventilation and options for the future of the building would be considered by the relevant Committee. It was further reported that the Council was working with the community, voluntary and faith sector in relation to community warm spaces and further information on this and the use of Council buildings would be reported back to Policy and Resources Committee.

A supplementary question was put, asking when the Civic Centre would be considered for Community Asset Transfer. In response, Councillor Jean

Robinson undertook to provide more information, but outlined that work had been ongoing with other organisations in Bromborough to establish hubs, and that no expressions of interest for Community Asset Transfer had been received for Bromborough Library.

It was moved by Councillor Jo Bird, seconded by Councillor Pat Cleary, that the matter be referred to Policy and Resources Committee.

The motion was put and lost (19:39) (1 abstention).

On a motion moved by Councillor Steve Foulkes, seconded by Paul Stuart, it was then –

Resolved (58:0) (1 abstention) – That the matter be referred to the Tourism, Culture, Communities and Leisure Committee.

36 STATEMENTS AND PETITIONS

The Civic Mayor informed the Council that no requests to make statements or present petitions had been received.

37 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

The Civic Mayor reported that two questions from members had been received in accordance with Standing Orders 12.

The first question was from Councillor Allan Brame, addressed to the Deputy Leader of the Council in the absence of the Leader of the Council, regarding complaints about phone calls not being answered by the Council and seeking a solution to ensure that residents who were digitally excluded were able to raise their concerns.

In response, Councillor Jean Robinson undertook to provide a written response to Councillor Allan Brame.

The second question was from Councillor Dave Mitchell, addressed to the Chair of the Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee, asking what steps had been taken to monitor excessive effluent waste entering the Mersey, Dee and other river courses in Wirral from the many sewage treatment plants that feed returned fluids and the assessment of the impact of the discharges on beaches.

In response, Councillor Liz Grey reported that the Environment Agency had responsibility for the monitoring of discharges from wastewater treatment works and enforcement against water undertakers in relation to sewage spills, and outlined the monitoring process for bathing water in Wirral's 4 designated bathing water sites and its shellfish beds in the Dee estuary. It was reported

that there had been no recent notifications of any issues with shellfish harvesting and the results from monitoring the water quality at Wirral's bathing water sites for 2017 to 2021 were all either 'excellent' or 'good'.

38 **TREASURY MANAGEMENT ANNUAL REPORT 2021-22**

The first matter requiring approval was the Treasury Management Annual Report 2021-22, which fulfilled the Authority's legal obligation under the Local Government Act 2003 to have regard to both the CIPFA Code and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) Investment Guidance. The Authority's treasury management activity was underpinned by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Code of Practice on Treasury Management ("the Code"), which required the Authority to approve treasury management semi-annual and annual reports.

On a motion by Councillor Jean Robinson, seconded by Councillor Paul Stuart, it was –

Resolved (unanimously) – That the Treasury Management Annual Report for 2021/22 be approved.

39 **CAPITAL MONITORING QUARTER 1 2022/23**

The second matter requiring approval was in relation to the Capital Monitoring Quarter 1 2022/23 which sought approval of a revised 2022/23 Capital Programme of £147.6 million taking account of re-profiling, virements, additional funding requirements and grant variations identified since the Capital Programme was formally agreed on 28 February 2022.

On a motion by Councillor Jean Robinson, seconded by Councillor Paul Stuart, it was –

Resolved (unanimously) – That the revised Capital Programme of £147.6 million for 2022/23, including the addition of the new grant funding referred to in section 3.4 of the report be approved.

40 **ANNUAL AUDIT AND RISK MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE REPORT 2021-22**

The third matter requiring approval was in relation to the Annual Audit and Risk Management Committee Report 2021-22, which summarised the work undertaken by the Committee in the previous year in accordance with best professional practice.

On a motion by Councillor Simon Mountney, seconded by Councillor Stuart Kelly, it was –

Resolved (unanimously) – That the Annual Audit and Risk Management Committee Report for 2021-22 be approved.

41 **EXTERNAL AUDIT ANNUAL AUDIT REPORT 2020-21, AUDITORS REPORT COMPANY GOVERNANCE 2020-21 AND MERSEYSIDE WASTE VALUE FOR MONEY REPORT 2020-21**

The fourth matter requiring approval was in relation to the External Audit Annual Audit Report 2020-21, Auditors Report Company Governance 2020-21 And Merseyside Waste Value for Money Report 2020-21, which presented the Council's external auditors (Grant Thornton) completion of the Council's main audit 2020-21 Accounts in January 2022. The auditors Annual Audit Report of the key issues/findings from their audit was attached, including two further reports, the Value for Money report on Merseyside Waste and the review of the Governance of Companies and other investments.

On a motion by Councillor Jean Robinson, seconded by Councillor Paul Stuart, it was –

Resolved (unanimously) – That the External Audit Annual Audit Report 2020-21, the Auditors Report Company Governance 2021-21 and Merseyside Waste Value for Money Report 2020-21 be approved.

42 **APPOINTMENT OF MONITORING OFFICER**

The fifth matter requiring approval was in relation to the appointment of the Council's Monitoring Officer.

On a motion by Councillor Jean Robinson, seconded by Councillor Paul Stuart, it was –

Resolved (unanimously) – That

(1) Jill Travers be appointed as the Council's Monitoring Officer under Section 5 of the Local Government & Housing Act 1989 as amended with effect from their commencement of employment with the Council.

(2) Vicki Shaw be appointed as the Council's interim Monitoring Officer for the period until Jill Travers takes up her employment with the Council.

43 **APPOINTMENT OF SECTION 151 OFFICER**

The sixth matter requiring approval was in relation to the appointment of the Council's Section 151 Chief Finance Officer.

On a motion by Councillor Jean Robinson, seconded by Councillor Paul Stuart, it was –

Resolved (unanimously) – That Matthew Bennett be appointed as the Council's Chief Finance Officer under Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended with effect from their commencement of employment with the Council.

44 **APPOINTMENT TO OUTSIDE BODIES**

The seventh matter requiring approval was in relation to the appointment of members to outside bodies and organisations.

On a motion by the Civic Mayor, seconded by Councillor Jean Robinson, it was –

Resolved (unanimously) – That

(1) Councillor Leah Fraser be appointed to the Merseyside Police and Crime Panel for the 2022-23 municipal year, in replacement of Councillor Mary Jordan.

(2) Councillor Sue Powell-Wilde be appointed to the Wirral Community Safety Partnership for the 2022-23 municipal year, in replacement of Councillor Julie McManus.

45 **SIX MONTH ATTENDANCE RULE S85 (1) OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

The eighth matter requiring approval was in relation to the permission for the absence of Councillor Joe Walsh to be absent from all Council and Committee Meetings for the remainder of the 2022/23 municipal year, pursuant to Section 85 (1) of the Local Government Act 1972.

On a motion by the Civic Mayor, seconded by Councillor Jean Robinson, it was –

Resolved (unanimously) – That the absence of Councillor Joe Walsh from all Council and Committee Meetings be authorised and approved for the remainder of the 2022/23 municipal year, pursuant to Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972.

46 **REPORTS AND DECISIONS FROM COUNCIL COMMITTEES AND PARTNERSHIP ORGANISATIONS**

The Civic Mayor reported that in accordance with Part 4, Section 4, paragraph 6(a)(ii) of the Constitution, Council's attention was drawn to three officer

decisions which had been taken and excluded from removal of delegation and reconsideration by Policy and Resources Committee.

47 **DECISIONS TAKEN SINCE THE LAST COUNCIL MEETING**

The Civic Mayor introduced the minutes of the various Committees which had met from 17 June 2022 to 16 September 2022 and asked for questions to Committee Chairs on any of the minutes being received.

Councillor Steve Foulkes asked a question of Councillor Liz Grey, in respect of minute item 16 of the Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee, seeking an update on the meeting of the Active Travel Working Group. In response, Councillor Liz Grey outlined that the Working Group had met in the previous week, and that the meeting was very positive with all matters agreed unanimously. Councillor Grey detailed the schemes that were discussed during the meeting and placed on record her thanks to the Conservative members for working closely with her on the consideration of the schemes.

Councillor Daisy Kenny asked a question of Councillor Stuart Kelly, in respect of minute item 64 of Planning Committee, seeking an explanation as to how a notice of planning consent was issued in error for an application that had been deferred by Planning Committee and how the error would be rectified. In response, Councillor Stuart Kelly outlined that the decision notice had been issued in error on 23 September and that officers had advised that safeguards were now in place to ensure it doesn't happen again, with the outcome of the investigation as to how the error occurred to be shared with all members at the conclusion of the investigation.

In the absence of the Leader of the Council, Councillor Pat Cleary asked a question of Councillor Jean Robinson, in respect of minute item 21 of Policy & Resources Committee, raising concerns in relation to delays to the implementation of active travel schemes and seeking views as to how Councillors from all parties could unblock the logjam and progress the schemes. In response, Councillor Jean Robinson undertook to provide a written response.

Councillor Steve Foulkes asked a question of Councillor Stuart Kelly, in respect of minute item 72 of Planning Committee, asking about the implications of the announcements made as part of the Government's mini budget on planning policy and seeking assurances that members would be fully briefed about the dangers for Wirral Council about these. In response, Councillor Stuart Kelly acknowledged the notices of motions in relation to planning policy and undertook to liaise with the Chair of Economy, Regeneration and Housing Committee to be briefed by officers on the implications of the policies announced by the Government and would expect a

full briefing for all members of the Council.

Councillor Chris Cooke asked a question of Councillor Andrew Hodson, in respect of minute item 6 of the Regulatory and General Purposed Committee, seeking an update on when the Charitable Trust Sub-Committee would next meet. In response Councillor Andrew Hodson outlined that the Sub-Committee was due to meet in February 2023 to receive the Mayor's Charity accounts and Democratic Services would soon be contacting members to make the arrangements for that meeting.

48 **MOTIONS ON NOTICE**

Eight motions had been submitted in accordance with Standing Order 13.1 and were determined as detailed in minutes 49 to 56 below.

49 **MOTION - COST OF LIVING CRISIS AND FAIR FUNDING FOR WIRRAL COUNCIL**

Councillor Paul Stuart moved and Councillor Sue Percy seconded a motion submitted in accordance with Standing Order 13.

In moving the motion, Councillor Stuart confirmed that he was happy to accept the Liberal Democrat Group amendment, which was moved by Councillor Phil Gilchrist and seconded by Councillor Allan Brame as follows:

Insert after final paragraph:

'The letter should be accompanied by the table presented to Leaders on 22 September 2022 which clearly set out how Officers had tracked the pressures facing the Council throughout August and September, along with sufficient commentary on the pressures, to fully and properly make the case for a settlement that recognises local needs.'

Following a debate, and Councillor Stuart having replied, the motion was put and it was –

Resolved (30:18) (1 abstention) – That

Council notes that Wirral Council has made huge improvements in its finances since 2021 and was on course to set a balanced budget for 2023/24, despite 10 years of austerity and a loss of £224m to its budget.

However, the Cost of Living crisis has now resulted in a funding gap for 2023/24 of potentially £49m.

The current dire budgetary forecast is a result of factors beyond the Council's control, namely:

- Inflation
- Rise in energy costs
- Wage pressures

Wirral is not on its own and the LGA and CIPFA has expressed in the strongest terms their concerns to Government about the financial sustainability of the majority of local councils in England as a result of the Cost of Living crisis.

Council notes that Rishi Sunak, ex-Chancellor of the Exchequer, recently admitted to diverting central government funding from 'deprived urban areas' like Wirral to affluent Conservative areas like Royal Tunbridge Wells. Wirral residents deserve better than this.

Council notes that the tax cuts in the 'mini budget' and the lifting of the cap on bankers' bonuses will punish the public sector and send the wrong message at a time when most people are struggling between heating and eating and striving for a fair wage. This was a budget for the rich and was underpinned by the much discredited ideology of 'trickle down' economics.

This Government has cut taxes for the richest while ordinary people cannot afford to feed their children or turn on the heating. Now it is starving local councils of funding so that we cannot help our residents when they need us most.

Council notes that the 'mini budget' of 23rd September 2022 did not set out a package of measures for local councils. Without Government intervention, councils such as Wirral will be forced to cease all non-essential services that are so vital and cherished by our residents. Without appropriate funding, Wirral and many other councils could be forced to file for bankruptcy.

Council demands fair funding for Wirral. Council requests a fair, long-term funding settlement for Wirral by central government in December 2022.

Council instructs the Leader to write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer Kwasi Kwarteng as a matter of urgency, asking for the support Wirral needs and deserves in order to maintain and deliver much needed services to our residents.

The letter should be accompanied by the table presented to Leaders on 22 September 2022 which clearly set out how Officers had tracked the pressures facing the Council throughout August and September, along with sufficient commentary on the pressures, to fully and properly make the case for a settlement that recognises local needs.

50 **MOTION - PROTECTING WIRRAL'S GREEN BELT**

Councillor Mike Collins moved and Councillor Tom Anderson seconded the following motion submitted in accordance with Standing Order 13:

'Council notes that under The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act of 2004, all local councils were required to have a clear Local Plan for development. This Plan would clearly state the areas to be protected and conserved, such as Wirral's Green Belt, and those areas which would be earmarked for development for housing and commercial use.

Council further notes that in March 2018, the then Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government wrote to the then Leader of the Council signalling his intention to intervene in Wirral's Local Plan process.

Council finally welcomed a draft Local Plan in May 2022. The draft Local Plan, which received all Party support, does not designate any Green Belt for development and, instead, requires developers to invest and regenerate the eastern side of the Borough.

Council notes one of Wirral's largest landowners has submitted seven planning applications for 788 houses and has indicated its intention to submit a further application for another 240 houses, all to be built on Wirral's precious Green Belt land.

Council is disappointed that representatives acting on behalf of the landowner have so far refused invitations from local councillors to attend any public meetings organised to discuss these applications.

Council therefore wishes to reaffirm its commitment to protecting Wirral's precious Green Belt and urges all Wirral landowners to work with our local communities and the Council to do the same.'

Councillor Orod Osanlou moved and Councillor Stuart Kelly seconded the following amendment, submitted in accordance with Standing Order 13.3:

Insert after final paragraph:

'Council expresses its concern over recent speeches by government ministers which, if enacted, pose a threat by the Conservative Government to Wirral green belt land.

Council believes the Conservative Government has broken their 2019 manifesto pledge to maintain the moratorium on fracking, unless proven scientifically to be safe. The resumption of fracking could have irrevocable effects on the environment, including effects upon Wirral's green belt land.

Council requests the Government to stop this damaging policy and reinstate the moratorium on fracking in order to protect Wirral's green belt.

Council further believes the Conservative Government is breaking another 2019 manifesto pledge to protect the green belt by proposing the relaxation of planning policies, including in 'investment zones' (within which habitat regulations may be less enforceable), which will facilitate development within Wirral Greenbelt without adequate regulation. Council therefore calls on the Government to cease this damaging policy that will result in the permanent loss of green belt land during a climate emergency, and which is contrary to the aim of the draft Wirral Local Plan to protect the green belt.'

Following a debate, and Councillor Mike Collins having replied as mover of the original motion, the amendment was put and agreed (38:20) (1 abstention).

Following a further debate on the substantive motion, as amended, the motion was put and it was –

Resolved (unanimously) – That

Council notes that under The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act of 2004, all local councils were required to have a clear Local Plan for development. This Plan would clearly state the areas to be protected and conserved, such as Wirral's Green Belt, and those areas which would be earmarked for development for housing and commercial use.

Council further notes that in March 2018, the then Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government wrote to the then Leader of the Council signalling his intention to intervene in Wirral's Local Plan process.

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Council notes one of Wirral's largest landowners has submitted seven planning applications for 788 houses and has indicated its intention to submit a further application for another 240 houses, all to be built on Wirral's precious Green Belt land.

Council is disappointed that representatives acting on behalf of the landowner have so far refused invitations from local councillors to attend any public meetings organised to discuss these applications. Council therefore wishes to reaffirm its commitment to protecting

Wirral's precious Green Belt and urges all Wirral landowners to work with our local communities and the Council to do the same.

Council expresses its concern over recent speeches by government ministers which, if enacted, pose a threat by the Conservative Government to Wirral green belt land.

Council believes the Conservative Government has broken their 2019 manifesto pledge to maintain the moratorium on fracking, unless proven scientifically to be safe. The resumption of fracking could have irrevocable effects on the environment, including effects upon Wirral's green belt land. Council requests the Government to stop this damaging policy and reinstate the moratorium on fracking in order to protect Wirral's green belt.

Council further believes the Conservative Government is breaking another 2019 manifesto pledge to protect the green belt by proposing the relaxation of planning policies, including in 'investment zones'(within which habitat regulations may be less enforceable), which will facilitate development within Wirral Greenbelt without adequate regulation. Council therefore calls on the Government to cease this damaging policy that will result in the permanent loss of green belt land during a climate emergency, and which is contrary to the aim of the draft Wirral Local Plan to protect the green belt.

51 MOTION - ENERGY EFFICIENCY / RESIDENTIAL

Councillor Naomi Graham moved and Councillor Judith Grier seconded a motion submitted in accordance with Standing Order 13.

In moving the motion, Councillor Graham confirmed that she was happy to accept the Labour Group amendment, which was moved by Councillor Liz Grey, and seconded by Councillor Sue Powell-Wilde as follows:

In first bullet point, delete line “ - over 1-4 households in Bidston and St James ward (25.2%) compared to 1 in 12 in Heswall ward (8.3%) (1)”

Before the last paragraph, insert:

‘Council recognises that no adequate retrofit of insulation is possible without adequate Government funding, and that in 2013 David Cameron axed the home insulation and renewable energy funding established by the previous Labour Government, thereby reducing loft insulation rates by 92% and cavity wall insulation rates by 74% almost overnight, depriving thousands of people warm homes and lower bills as well as failing to reduce associated greenhouse gas emissions. In fact, a study by Carbon Brief in January 2022

has suggested that this move is currently costing £2.5 billion a year for UK Households.'

In the last paragraph to delete 'To support this, Council asks...' and replace with 'Council recognises that national changes are needed but, in the meantime, asks officers to work with...'

Having applied the guillotine in accordance with Standing Order 9.1, the Council did not debate this matter, and having agreed to the Labour amendment, the substantive motion, as amended, was put and it was –

Resolved (Unanimously) – That

Council welcomes the national and local financial support to help residents with energy bills.

But rising energy costs are not a one off. To protect against future energy price increases and maximise the return on expenditure, Council believes all housing in our borough should be insulated to a minimum of Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) 'C' standard with good quality loft insulation, cavity wall insulation, double-glazing and draught exclusion.

Council notes

- **The insight from Wirral Intelligence service that almost 1 in 7 households in Wirral were estimated to live in fuel poverty in 2020, with large inequalities between wards. The report to Policy and Resources Committee in August 2022 which outlined that the proportion of households in England living in fuel poverty could rise to 42% of households after October 2022(2).**
- **The Fuel Poverty, Cold Homes and Health Inequalities report which highlights the 'dangerous consequences' of living in a cold home to a child's health and future life expectancy (3)**
- **The Great Homes Upgrade report identifying that one in four pounds spent on heating is wasted (4) and the Energy Saving Trust Report from December 2020 commissioned by Wirral Council, highlighting that our existing housing stock is less energy efficient than the UK average.**
- **The Energy Efficiency Infrastructure Group (EEIG) estimate that if all homes were upgraded to the EPC C efficiency band, households would save on average £400 per year (5).**
- **The economic benefits of retrofitting with the potential for high-value local jobs in retrofitting. The UK Energy Research Council (UKERC) estimate that for every £1 invested by in domestic energy efficiency, GDP could be increased by £3.20 and tax take by £1.27.**
- **The Government target to upgrade all housing to Energy performance certificate (EPC) level C or above by 2035. To achieve that target, 7,095 homes on the Wirral need to be insulated per year.**

- **Cool 2 Wirral's Climate Strategy to reduce the overall demand for energy in Wirral across residential, commercial, and industrial sectors making sure all homes currently below Energy Performance Certificate Band C that can be upgraded are improved to this level or better by around 2030".**

Council acknowledges the work already being done as outlined in the Update on the Low Carbon Housing Retrofit Programme to Wirral's Housing Committee in November 2021 (6) but commits to increasing the pace of delivery. Council appreciates the scale of this challenge but at the same time makes a commitment to end fuel poverty, poor health and excess carbon emissions from poorly insulated homes.

Council recognises that no adequate retrofit of insulation is possible without adequate Government funding, and that in 2013 David Cameron axed the home insulation and renewable energy funding established by the previous Labour Government, thereby reducing loft insulation rates by 92% and cavity wall insulation rates by 74% almost overnight, depriving thousands of people warm homes and lower bills as well as failing to reduce associated greenhouse gas emissions. In fact, a study by Carbon Brief in January 2022 has suggested that this move is currently costing £2.5 billion a year for UK Households.

Council recognises that national changes are needed, but, in the meantime, asks officers to work with the Economy Regeneration and Housing Committee, to include as part of its' work programme, actions to enable the Council to

- **Have an ambitious stated year on year insulation or EPC target for Wirral.**
 - **Develop a plan by the end of financial year to help realise the target.**
 - **Actively identify potential sources of funding (within current budgets and via external funding) to enable improvements to start this winter.**
- 1 <https://www.wirralintelligenceservice.org/state-of-the-borough/> (all wards at https://wirral.communityinsight.org/?indicator=fuel_pov_alt_11_dr_20200101#)**
- 2 <https://democracy.wirral.gov.uk/documents/s50093142/Cost%20of%20Living%20Crisis.pdf>**
- 3 <https://www.instituteoftheequity.org/resources-reports/fuel-poverty-cold-homes-and-health-inequalities-in-the-uk>**
- 4 <https://greathomesupgrade.org/housingCampaign/campaign>**
- 5 <https://greathomesupgrade.org/about/faq>**
- 6 <https://democracy.wirral.gov.uk/documents/s50083141/Update%20on%20Low%20Carbon%20Housing%20Retrofit%20Programme.pdf>**

52 **MOTION - BANK AND CASH SERVICES THAT MEET LOCAL NEEDS**

Councillor Phil Gilchrist moved and Councillor Dave Mitchell seconded a motion submitted in accordance with Standing Order 13.

Having applied the guillotine in accordance with Standing Order 9.1, the Council did not debate this matter, and it was –

Resolved (unanimously) – That

Council recognises that, over a number of years, there has been a marked reduction in the number of bank branches in Wirral. This process has continued in the face of concerns raised by the communities facing the impact of those closures.

In 2022, the closure of over 400 bank branches was either announced or implemented, despite concerns raised by the affected communities including, most recently, the facilities in Port Sunlight.

Council appreciates that the Post Office network has been, by arrangement with the banking sector, able to take on a number of the functions and services relating to deposits. In a further step, access to cash has continued with the provision of cash machines in many retail locations.

Council understands that, in order to try to meet the gaps in services where communities have lost banking facilities with no reasonably convenient and accessible services nearby, banking ‘hubs’ have developed in a number of locations, though the roll-out of these has been on a small scale. The ‘hubs’ require a degree of co-operation between the major banks and the Post Office.

Council aims to secure the regeneration of Wirral and believes that no communities should be left behind.

In view of this, Council requests that the Group Leaders should write a joint letter to the Link organisation asking them to look at the pattern of services in Wirral. The organisation can be asked to consider the creation of a ‘hub’ or ‘hubs’ in Wirral with a view to securing the long-term future of accessible local services.

The response from the Link organisation should then be considered by the Policy and Resources Committee at an appropriate time.

Council notes that relevant information and statistics have been included in reports compiled by the researchers at the House of

Commons library and requests that Wirral's MPs pursue the issues raised here in the interests of Wirral's residents.

53 MOTION - THE IMPACT OF INFLATION ON MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

Councillor Brian Kenny moved and Councillor Gill Wood seconded a motion submitted in accordance with Standing Order 13.

Having applied the guillotine in accordance with Standing Order 9.1, the Council did not debate this matter, and it was –

Resolved (unanimously) – That

Wirral Council notes that the Home Office and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) have recognised the magnificent work Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority (MFRA) carried out to support the country's response to the COVID-19 and the work it does to protect the local community and businesses from fire risk.

That challenge has been made all the more difficult by the impact of global and national economic factors in recent months that have far exceeded the inflationary assumptions within the current Budget and Financial Plan approved in February 2022.

Council notes that the MFRA is committed to facing these challenges positively and constructively. However, Council recognises the real current impact of inflation on their ability to deliver much-needed services for local people and businesses, including in Wirral.

The highest levels of inflation for four decades are now driving up the costs of the raw materials, labour, energy and other costs which the Authority must pay for in order to provide essential public services and capital investment in the Service.

The Authority's budget for 2022/23 was set in February 2022 based on estimates that price inflation and wage growth would both be in the region of 2% to 3% in 2022/23. These were not unrealistic assumptions as they reflected the Government's own forecasts for inflation in 2022 and 2023, specifically:-

- In October 2021, the Autumn Budget and Spending Review 2021 Statement set out forecasts that the Consumer Price Index could reach 4% in 2022, but would fall to 2.6% by 2023;

- In December 2021, the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement updated grant funding for 2022/23 by the actual Consumer Price Index as at September 2021 (3.1%); and,

- In February 2022 (when MFRA budgets were being finalised), the Office of Budget Responsibility forecast that the Consumer Price Index could reach 4.7% in 2022, but would fall to 2.3% by 2023.

Council notes that, since then, there has since been a dramatic shift in these expectations. The latest estimates from the Office of Budget Responsibility are that the Consumer Price Index will reach over 10.% this year – significantly higher than both the inflationary increase in funding which the Authority received and the forecast increases which informed the MFRA budget for 2022/23.

Coupled with continuing growth in demand for Protection services and meeting increasing risks such as flooding, Council recognises that the MFRA is now facing enormous financial difficulties.

Council notes that the Institute for Government recently estimated that local authorities in England will be facing unbudgeted costs of up to £2bn as a result of inflation being significantly higher than was forecast in the Chancellor of the Exchequer’s Autumn Budget and Spending Review announcements. The Authority has estimated that this impact could exceed the revenue provision by £2m in 2022/23 and the expected increase in capital expenditure is potentially +£10m;

- **The Authority had a fixed price electricity contract that ended in March 2022. The new contract has increased prices by +200%. Gas prices have had a similar increase. The additional cost in 2022/23 is estimated at £1.6m;**

- **Capital projects – many of which are essential in providing firefighters with the relevant training, PPE and equipment to provide an effective and safe fire response, have also been hit. The Authority is facing significant extra costs due to increases in the price of raw materials and labour. The proposed new Training and Development Academy / fire station, fundamental to keeping our firefighters safe and able to respond quickly and effectively, has seen its costs increased from £25m to £39m, of which a significant element relates to increased raw material and labour costs;**

- **The local government and firefighter pay award for 2022/23 have yet to be resolved –with inflation forecast to exceed 10% this year, pay disputes are inevitable if pay offers represent significant real-terms pay cuts. While removing any “cap” on pay increases, the Government has previously stated that any pay award must be funded from the Authority**

budget. This was already going to be difficult when pay was forecast to rise by around 2.5%, pay awards above those levels will add significant pressure on Authority finances if they are not resourced from additional funding provided by the Government. Each additional 1% = £0.5m; and,

- Operational revenue budgets across the full range of Authority services are being impacted by increases in the costs of materials, fuel, labour and a higher indexation ratio being applied to outsourced contracts.**

Council recognises that the financial challenge of inflation comes on top of the enormous pressures faced by the Authority after a decade of austerity when the biggest cuts in local authority funding impacted on the authorities in the most deprived areas of the country because they relied more heavily on the Government grants which were cut so severely. The Authority is also less able to raise income from increases in Council Tax and Business Rates.

Council is concerned that, without extra support, the Authority may have to once again balance the books by cutting more essential services to our vulnerable residents, including those in Wirral.

Council notes that, over the last decade or so, the MFRA have prioritised every possible option to achieve greater efficiency and minimise the need to cut budgets for essential services. It is clearly not realistic to expect financial pressures of this magnitude to be addressed through further efficiencies.

Council notes that, in effect, the Local Government Finance Settlement was determined on the basis of a set of assumptions which has since been proven to be significantly inaccurate. Council appreciates that those assumptions were legitimate at the time, but global and national events since then have created a wholly different set of circumstances. It would be unfair and unrealistic to expect the Authority to be able to cope with the scale of those changes. Wirral Council therefore urges the Government to ensure that the inflationary pressures facing fire and rescue authorities in 2022/23 are properly and fully funded.

Council asserts that, in the longer-term, for Levelling Up to be effective, it is essential that inequalities in local government funding are addressed. This must be reflected in both the forthcoming “Fair Funding” Review and the 2023/24 Local Government Finance Settlement – which should ensure that local authority funding is fairly distributed on the basis of local levels of deprivation and properly reflects the prevailing rates of price inflation and wage inflation which affect the services that the Authority delivers.

Council urges the Government to appreciate that the fire and rescue sector cannot resolve the current difficulties without national Government support.

The Council Leader is therefore requested to write to the appropriate Government Minister, to seek such financial support, as a matter of urgency.

54 **MOTION - SUPPORT FOR LOCAL GREEN SPACES**

Councillor Lesley Rennie moved and Councillor Ian Lewis seconded a motion submitted in accordance with Standing Order 13.

In moving the motion, Councillor Rennie confirmed that she was happy to accept the Labour Group amendment, which was moved by Councillor Paul Martin, and seconded by Councillor Paul Stuart as follows:

Insert new paragraph after paragraph 2: 'Council notes the work of various officers and their continued co-operation with elected members during this time.'

Councillor Rennie also confirmed that she was happy to accept the Green Group amendment, which was moved by Councillor Naomi Graham, and seconded by Councillor Pat Cleary as follows:

Insert at end: 'Council also notes the policies in the local plan that protect our open space, our green & blue infrastructure networks, ecological networks, nature conservation and environmental designations and thanks all residents and community groups that support those sites.'

Having applied the guillotine in accordance with Standing Order 9.1, the Council did not debate this matter, and having agreed to the Labour and Green amendments, the substantive motion, as amended, was put and it was

—

Resolved (unanimously) – That

Council thanks residents of Wirral for continuing to engage in the development of a Local Plan, following adoption of the updated Statement of Community Involvement by the Regeneration and Economic Development Committee at its meeting on 4th March 2021.

In particular, Council notes the findings of the review of sites for Local Green Space designations which contributed to the draft Local Plan and the additional protections offered to valued and long-standing green spaces, often in urban areas where green space is at a premium.

Council notes the work of various officers and their continued co-operation with elected members during this time.

Council thanks residents and community groups for their ongoing support for the retention of local green spaces, including:

- 1. School Lane fields (Wallasey Village);**
- 2. Tower Grounds (New Brighton) and**
- 3. Ditton Local Nature Reserve (Leasowe)**

and the safeguards afforded to all designated Local Green Spaces within the draft Local Plan.

Council also notes the policies in the local plan that protect our open space, our green & blue infrastructure networks, ecological networks, nature conservation and environmental designations and thanks all residents and community groups that support those sites.

55 MOTION - STOP THE ATTACKS ON OUR COUNTRYSIDE AND NATURE

Councillor Liz Grey moved and Councillor Steve Foulkes seconded a motion submitted in accordance with Standing Order 13.

In moving the motion, Councillor Grey confirmed that she was happy to accept the Green Group amendment, which was moved by Councillor Jason Walsh, and seconded by Councillor Harry Gorman as follows:

Insert new penultimate paragraph: ‘Council acknowledges that despite the government's determination to take us back to 1970s levels of environmental protection, we are in a biodiversity and climate emergency. We remain committed to achieving Carbon Net Zero Borough-wide no later than 2041 and will continue to make planning and other decisions with this in mind

Having applied the guillotine in accordance with Standing Order 9.1, the Council did not debate this matter, and having agreed to the Green amendments, the substantive motion, as amended, was put and it was –

Resolved (unanimously) – That

Council notes that the Government has, in its announcements of 21st and 22nd September 2022, proposed, “liberalised planning rules to release more land” in “tax cutting investment zones” to “unlock housing development”.

Council notes that this deregulation of environmental protection to enable housing and other building development includes the green open spaces around Wirral.

Council also notes that the new Retained EU Laws Bill could see the end of the basic protections known as Habitat Regulations – laws that protect birds and animals across the country and that this deregulation has been described by the RSPB as “places you love from the shires to the cities – all under threat from bulldozers, from concrete”.

Council believes that our countryside and nature deserve more protection, not less, and that this attack on our green open spaces must stop.

Council acknowledges that despite the government's determination to take us back to 1970s levels of environmental protection, we are in a biodiversity and climate emergency. We remain committed to achieving Carbon Net Zero Borough-wide no later than 2041 and will continue to make planning and other decisions with this in mind.

Council therefore requests that this Government reverse any plans to reduce legal protection of natural spaces and asks that the Leader of the Council write to the Government urging it to retain and not abandon the protections we have in this country, which is already the most nature depleted country in the Western world.

56 **MOTION - STOP FRACKING**

Councillor Liz Grey moved and Councillor Sue Powell-Wilde seconded a motion submitted in accordance with Standing Order 13.

In moving the motion, Councillor Grey confirmed that she was happy to accept the Green Group amendment, which was moved by Councillor Naomi Graham and seconded by Councillor Harry Gorman as follows:

Insert new paragraph number 7, after the paragraph ending with “nor the disregard for the climate emergency”: ‘Council restates its opposition to all unconventional gas extraction including underground coal gasification, coal bed and methane fracking under Wirral, it’s offshore waters and Dee and Mersey Estuaries.’

Having applied the guillotine in accordance with Standing Order 9.1, the Council did not debate this matter, and having agreed to the Green amendments, the substantive motion, as amended, was put and it was –

Resolved (unanimously) – That

Council notes that the Government has lifted the 2019 ban on fracking, despite its own commissioned report by the British Geological Survey

concluding that there is no scientific evidence that fracking is safe for local communities.

Council also notes the comments by The Secretary of State (SoS) for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), Jacob Rees-Mogg, that:

“While HM Government will always try to limit disturbance to those living and working near to sites, tolerating a higher degree of risk and disturbance appears to us to be in the national interest.”

And from Kwasi Kwarteng, when himself SoS for BEIS, and asked if fracking would lower energy prices:

“No amount of shale gas from wells across rural England would be enough to lower European price any time soon. With the best will in the world, private companies are not going to sell the shale gas they produce to UK consumers below the market price.”

Council believes that while the former SoS for BEIS believes fracking won't lower energy prices and the current incumbent believes that local communities should just put up with the risk of earthquakes, we do not share the Government's disregard for their economic and environmental wellbeing, nor the disregard for the climate emergency.

Council restates its opposition to all unconventional gas extraction including underground coal gasification, coal bed and methane fracking under Wirral, it's offshore waters and Dee and Mersey Estuaries.

Council notes that a Petroleum Exploration and Development Licence 184 (PEDL184) is currently held by a company with interests in fracking and this licence includes part of the Wirral West constituency.

Council therefore calls on the Government to reinstate the ban on fracking and protect our communities from the fear and distress involved.

Council requests that the Leader of Wirral Council writes to the SoS for BEIS urging him to invest instead in renewable energy and subsidise adequate home insulation programmes across the country to properly deal with the cost of living crisis, the climate emergency and to better provide energy security.