

# Council – 17 December, 2012

## MATTERS FOR DEBATE

The Council is asked to consider the following motions, submitted in accordance with the notice required by Standing Order 8(1), and objections and amendments submitted in accordance with Standing Order 7(2).

The order of business is as determined by the party groups in accordance with Standing Order 5(4) and the times for speeches by Standing Order 12(8) (all other speakers have 3 minutes).

### 1. AN EMERGENCY PLAN TO HELP PEOPLE COPE WITH BENEFIT CUTS

**Proposed** by Councillor George Davies (7 minutes)

**Seconded** by Councillor Steve Foulkes (3 minutes)

- (1) This Council is appalled at the draconian cuts to welfare benefits agreed by the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government, totalling £7 billion in 2014/15 with more likely to follow. At a time when the government has also cut taxes for millionaires Council finds this policy morally repugnant.
- (2) Cuts in benefits such as Incapacity Benefit, Council Tax Benefit, Housing Benefit, Disability Living Allowance, Crisis Loans and the imposition of a 'Bedroom' Tax will hit the poorest in society the hardest.
- (3) Universal Credit, the flagship of the government's welfare reforms, according to former Welfare Reform Minister, Frank Field, is 'practically unachievable' and heading for disaster.
- (4) The growth of Foodbanks is a sad indictment of the failure of this government to properly provide for those in need.
- (5) Figures published recently show that the government's flagship welfare-to-work programme has failed to hit its main target. As a result, over the course of this Parliament the country's welfare bill will be £20 billion higher than projected.
- (6) Many of the people who will suffer as a result of benefit cuts are likely to look to local Councils for help. Council therefore asks the Chief Executive to prepare an Emergency Plan which sets out how the Council together with organisations such as Registered Social Landlords and the Citizens Advice Bureau can provide assistance. The Plan should include: basic information on which benefits will be cut and who will be affected; the provision of enhanced welfare rights advice; and practical assistance to help people meet their basic living costs.
- (7) Council asks that this Plan be submitted to appropriate scrutiny committees and Cabinet at the earliest opportunity.

## **AMENDMENT**

**Proposed** by Councillor Phil Gilchrist (7 minutes)

**Seconded** by Councillor Tom Harney (3 minutes)

*Delete paragraphs (1) to (5) renumber paragraph (6) as paragraph (1) and insert:*

*'Council recognises that' at the beginning, in front of 'many of the people.....'.*

*Renumber paragraph (7) as paragraph (2).*

**Right of reply:** Councillor George Davies (7 minutes)

## **2. CUTTING TOO FAR AND TOO FAST**

**Proposed** by Councillor Jeff Green (7 minutes)

**Seconded** by Councillor Lesley Rennie (3 minutes)

(1) Council notes that the 'budget options' now being considered include:

- Closing Sure Start Children's Centres
- Cutting the Youth Service
- Removing Council Tax discounts to pensioners and others
- Closing the Birkenhead Dog Kennels
- Cutting the resources available to Area Forums and community groups
- Ending the home insulation programme
- Increasing the cost of Meals on Wheels
- Turning off street lights
- Scrapping the Apprenticeship programme and significantly reducing our capability to bring inward investment and jobs into the area

(2) Council notes a total lack of coherence or a guiding strategy behind these cuts and that at the same time as recommending the cutting back of services for the most vulnerable in our communities the administration, is not collecting all the money owed to the Council and has even taken action to vastly increase the Council's cash in the bank by a further £21 million.

(3) Council does not believe the approach adopted by the Labour Administration is morally acceptable or consistent with our aspiration for a resilient, active civic society that supports the weakest and poorest in our communities.

(4) Council believes the Labour Administration has once again 'got the cart before the horse' and calls for it to identify a coherent strategy first and present this to Council as a matter of urgency and then come forward with a budget to deliver this strategy.

(5) Council believes the public will accept an evidence based, thought through and considered blue print for the future as opposed to the unthinking, ill considered,

hypocritical slash and burn approach favoured, once again, by the Labour Administration.

## **AMENDMENT**

**Proposed** by Councillor Phil Davies (7 minutes)

**Seconded** by Councillor Ann McLachlan (3 minutes)

*Delete everything and replace with the following:*

- (1) Council notes that the budget options published in the name of the Chief Executive on the 29th November are currently subject to consultation with the public. These are therefore officer options and not the views of the Administration. Council further notes that the Administration will present specific budget proposals to the Cabinet meetings on the 20th December and 7th February respectively.
- (2) Council rejects the claim that there is a lack of coherence or guiding strategy behind the budget options. The budget options have been put forward according to the overriding principle that we should spend less on ourselves, taking savings first from our 'back office' and so mitigating as much as possible the impact on services to residents, particularly our poorest and most vulnerable.
- (3) In order to manage the risks around the Council's budget, including the £17 million overspend inherited from the previous administration; the need to make provision for cuts in Council Tax Benefit; the need to complete Job Evaluation; and the impact of the Localisation of Business Rates; Council believes it is prudent to ensure that balances and reserves are at an appropriate level. Council also notes the finding of the Corporate Peer Challenge which took place recently. The team concluded that: 'There is a need to build up reserves given the level of risk the Council faces with its current approach to setting next year's budget.' Council also notes the recent report from the Audit Commission which revealed that most Councils nationally (under control of all parties) had built up reserves significantly because of increased risks.
- (4) Council believes that it is utter hypocrisy for the Conservatives to refer to the moral acceptability of approaches to the budget, when their government is cutting £108.7 million from this Council over the next three years; unfairly distributing local government cuts to the most deprived areas; cutting the benefits of some of the poorest people in our community; privatising the NHS; while at the same time they are giving tax cuts to millionaires and failing to ensure that large corporations pay a fair level of taxation. Instead of seeking to blame someone else, the Conservative Group should apologise to the people of Wirral.
- (5) Council acknowledges the open and transparent process which the Administration has followed in seeking to address the unprecedented cuts in our budget, including the largest consultation exercise ever undertaken by

Wirral Council. In particular, for the first time all budget options have been published for the public to comment on prior to a budget being agreed.

- (6) Council notes the positive conclusions from the Corporate Peer Challenge regarding the approach taken by the Administration to addressing the authority's financial and improvement challenges. The Executive Summary to the report of the Peer Challenge Team states that: 'The Council has a good grasp of the scale and urgency of the challenges it is facing. You recognise that significant financial challenges will continue as time elapses and that immediate and decisive measures to address them are required. We think the overall strategy you are working to, including the plans for organisational improvement and budget reduction, is appropriate given the challenges you face. Put simply we think you have a good awareness of the issues and an appropriate plan of action.'
- (7) Council notes that the Conservative Group has been quick to say which cuts it is opposed to, but has not yet told the public what their budget strategy is and what savings they would support. Council asks that this information be produced as a matter of urgency.
- (8) Finally, in light of the unfair way in which Wirral has been treated, Council agrees to request an urgent meeting with the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government and that this should involve all parties represented on the Council.

**Right of reply:** Councillor Jeff Green (7 minutes)

### **3. STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES IN WIRRAL**

**Proposed** by Councillor Tom Harney (7 minutes)

**Seconded** by Councillor Pat Williams (3 minutes)

- (1) Council recognises its duty to involve the people of Wirral in shaping the services it provides. The surveys carried out by the Council in the last two years have shown its commitment.
- (2) It thanks all those involved in this work. It also acknowledges the work of those who have organised Area Forums over a number of years. They have provided another opportunity for the public to be involved.
- (3) Council believes that the time is right to bring together these and other means of involving the public into a strategy which will ensure that all of our residents have the opportunity to be involved in our decision making processes.
- (4) In view of developments, such as the Localism Act 2011, Council believes that the time is right to relaunch the Forums, ensuring that they are fit for purpose.

- (5) Council further recognises that if they are to involve a greater proportion of the population, then the Forums will need to be fully involved in this, and be enabled to drive the process.
- (6) It also recognises that there is a need to work closely with partners providing statutory services in involving the widest part of the public.
- (7) Council asks the Leader to ensure that an Action Plan is drawn up by the appropriate people which will draw up proposals for the development of an updated consultation strategy, with Forums playing a major part. In particular the following need to be considered –
  1. differing ways of involving people of differing needs. The many techniques such as Planning for Real and Future Search need to be considered.
  2. the drawing up of neighbourhood plans as envisaged by the Localism Act.
  3. ways in which the Council can work with partners in consultation on common issues.
  4. the possibility of an annual programme of consultation and decision making, resulting in an open and transparent process.

## **AMENDMENT**

**Proposed** by Councillor Ann McLachlan (7 minutes)

**Seconded** by Councillor Phil Davies (3 minutes)

*Delete everything and replace with the following:*

- (1) Council is committed to an open and transparent approach to all its decision making processes and notes the progress made in recent months via actions under the Council's Improvement Plan.
- (2) Council further notes that the "What Really Matters" consultation process has been the most successful and wide ranging engagement with the public of Wirral ever undertaken.
- (3) Council seeks to build on this success by ensuring at the next meeting of the Democracy Working Party its terms of reference are adjusted to widen the scope of its work into reviewing the way Council engages with the residents of Wirral and all our community partners and neighbourhoods.

**Right of reply:** Councillor Tom Harney (7 minutes)

#### **4. COUNCIL BUDGET**

**Proposed** by Councillor Phil Davies (7 minutes)

**Seconded** by Councillor Ann McLachlan (3 minutes)

- (1) This Council faces a huge challenge of maintaining vital services for the people of Wirral against a background of unprecedented cuts by government which will require the Council to cut £103 million from its budget over the next 3 years.
- (2) Council reaffirms the necessity to set a legal budget. This means that savings will need to be identified. However, cuts of this magnitude will require extremely difficult choices to be made between services.
- (3) Councils in the North of England with high levels of deprivation have had more severe cuts imposed on them in comparison with relatively affluent Councils in the South of England. This is neither fair nor equitable.
- (4) Council notes that the Leader of the Council wrote to the Secretary of State, Eric Pickles, on the 1st November 2012, requesting an urgent meeting about the Council's budget and how we could mitigate the impact of any savings. No reply has yet been received.
- (5) In the light of the unfair way in which Wirral has been treated, Council agrees to write again to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government to request an urgent meeting involving the three Party Leaders to discuss these matters.

#### **AMENDMENT**

**Proposed** by Councillor Alan Brighthouse (7 minutes)

**Seconded** by Councillor Tom Harney (3 minutes)

*After paragraph (5), add the following:*

- (6) Council endorses the recommendation of the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge to seek learning and support from other authorities as part of a process to identify different models of service delivery with apparent lower unit costs.
- (7) The Council thanks all Council employees for their loyalty and dedication during this difficult period. It congratulates the Council staff in achieving significant reductions in operating costs over the last two years. In total during this period, Council has made cost savings in excess of £38million.
- (8) Council does not underestimate the challenge it faces in 2013 and beyond. Council recognises that the consultation currently in progress provides Wirral residents with the opportunity to consider a range of genuine options. Council also congratulates officers for identifying savings that are considered to have no direct impact on Wirral residents and awaits the views of residents on these. In total, 62% of the consultation options are considered not to impact on residents.

- (9) To ensure that every opportunity continues to be made to reduce costs before reducing levels of service, Council accepts the need to implement the following recommendation from the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge: “We think there is much to do on asset management and rationalisation, office accommodation strategy and agile working. There is scope, we believe, for better approaches and practice which will result in increased productivity, greater efficiencies, improved cost effectiveness and better corporate working.”

**Right of reply:** Councillor Phil Davies (7 minutes)

## **5. USING THE SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES ACT**

**Proposed** by Councillor Jeff Green (7 minutes)

**Seconded** by Councillor Lesley Rennie (3 minutes)

- (1) Council supports the bottom up process in the Sustainable Communities Act that enables councils and their communities to drive the action and assistance that central government gives in promoting thriving local economies and sustainable communities;
- (2) Council notes that the Act gives councils the power to
- make proposals to government for action and assistance from government to promote sustainable communities, and that
  - those proposals can be for, but are not restricted to, new powers or a transfer of powers or public money and function from central control to local control;
- (3) Council notes that the Act defines sustainable communities broadly, that definition having the 4 aspects of:
- the improvement of the local economy,
  - protection of the environment,
  - promotion of social inclusion, and
  - participation in civic, political and democratic activity;
- (4) Council notes that new regulations for the Act made in June 2012 improve the process and make it more favourable for councils in the following ways
- councils’ proposals are submitted directly to the government, there will no longer be short listing
  - councils can submit proposals whenever they are ready as the process is now ongoing
  - there will be a time limit of six months on the government to consult and try to reach agreement with the Selector (currently the Local Government Association) regarding councils’ proposals and to then respond to those proposals

- councils that choose to submit proposals may now decide how to consult and try to reach agreement with representatives of communities in their areas on what proposals to submit;
- (5) Council notes that the government has formally invited all Local Authorities to use the Act by submitting proposals;
- (6) Therefore Council resolves to use the Act by responding to this invite and submitting proposals for action and assistance from central government each year for the next three years and to then review the outcome of this activity and consider whether to continue to use the Act; and
- (7) Council further resolves to
- to inform the local media of this decision;
  - to write to local MPs, informing them of this decision; and
  - to write to Local Works (at Local Works, c/o Unlock Democracy, 37 Gray's Inn Road, London, WC1X 8PQ or [info@localworks.org](mailto:info@localworks.org)) informing them of this resolution to use the Act.

## **AMENDMENT**

**Proposed** by Councillor Phil Davies (7 minutes)

**Seconded** by Councillor Ann McLachlan (3 minutes)

*Delete everything after paragraph (5) and insert the following:*

- (6) Therefore Council resolves to consult with all members and Neighbourhood Forums on ideas which could be put forward under the Act. The Chief Executive is asked to collate any proposals and bring a report to Cabinet which recommends which ideas will be submitted to government.
- (7) Council agrees to publicise any proposals once we know what they are.

**Right of reply:** Councillor Jeff Green (7 minutes)

## **6. POWER TO THE PEOPLE - COLLECTIVE ENERGY SWITCHING**

**Proposed** by Councillor Stuart Kelly (7 minutes)

**Seconded** by Councillor Phil Gilchrist (3 minutes)

- (1) Council notes the spiralling costs of household energy bills and believes that something needs to be done now, locally, to help residents struggling with fuel bills.
- (2) Council understands that whilst households are aware of the benefits of switching energy provider, few do and switching rates are low.



- (3) Council also endorses the concept of cooperation across geographical areas in order to obtain better energy deals for customers and notes a similar motion has recently been approved by Liverpool City Council.
- (4) Council notes the good work already being done by Cornwall Together, Oldham Council and South Lakeland District Council in partnership with 'ichoosr' which are encouraging their residents to sign up to collective energy switching.  
([www.cornwalltogether.com/en/about](http://www.cornwalltogether.com/en/about)  
[www.oldham.gov.uk/fuel\\_coop](http://www.oldham.gov.uk/fuel_coop) and  
<http://southlakeland.ichoosr.com/>)
- (5) Council, therefore, asks officers to explore the feasibility of setting up a Wirral Energy Switching Initiative and to work with local housing associations, the NHS, voluntary groups, care homes and households across Wirral to increase awareness and encourage them to sign up to the scheme.

## **AMENDMENT**

**Proposed** by Councillor Brian Kenny (7 minutes)

**Seconded** by Councillor Anita Leech (3 minutes)

*At the end of paragraph (5) add the following:*

- (6) Council notes that Energy and in particular its cost (along with the profits of energy companies) continues to be an ongoing public policy concern. The average annual household bill for gas and electricity has increased from approximately £500 in 2006, to over £1200 in 2011 – with many firms announcing fresh price rises in recent weeks.
- (7) Council notes that as energy bills have risen, many people have lost faith in the energy market, and the number of people switching supplier has hit a record low. According to Ofgem, 60% of consumers have never switched energy supplier and 75% of people are currently on their supplier's 'default' standard tariff. Research by the consumer group Which? has shown that consumers are missing out on £4 billion a year by not switching.
- (8) Council warmly welcomes initiatives such as 'SwitchTogether', - the Labour Party's Collective Energy Switching Scheme.
- (9) Council notes that Energy Projects Plus has submitted a bid on behalf of the Liverpool City Region authorities to the Department of Energy & Climate Change (DECC) to fund a regional collective switch. £5m is available from DECC to local authorities and Third sector organisations under its "Cheaper Energy Together" scheme. Energy Projects Plus would lead on the development of the scheme should the bid be successful and will work with local housing associations, the NHS, voluntary groups, care homes and households across Wirral to increase awareness and encourage them to sign up to the scheme. Council notes that we expect to find out shortly whether or not the bid has been successful. This will be publicised on the Council web site.

**Right of reply:** Councillor Stuart Kelly (7 minutes)

## **7. RECORDING AND FILMING WITHIN COUNCIL MEETINGS**

**Proposed** by Councillor Chris Blakeley (7 minutes)

**Seconded** by Councillor Geoffrey Watt (3 minutes)

Council,

- (1) Believes the widest possible number of people should be able to easily engage in democracy, whether as active participants or interested observers via the use of blogs, microblogs, Facebook and Twitter including video and audio recordings.
- (2) Believes the Administration has made a mistake in banning the public from being able to attend and film at meetings.
- (3) Notes that in order to protect the rights of members of the public, petitioners and others who are not elected members and may interact with the Council and its committees that notices are placed in meeting rooms notifying the public that the proceedings may be recorded. Council further asks that Chairs of committees also ensure members of the public are informed at the beginning of every meeting that proceedings may be recorded and broadcast.
- (4) Council therefore reaffirms its commitment made in previous years by the Conservative and Liberal Democrat administration and in the interests of openness and transparency to ensure that all members of the public who wish to record open meetings of the Council and its committees are encouraged to do so.
- (5) Council asks the Head of Law, HR and Asset Management to make the necessary changes to the Council's constitution to incorporate the right of members of the public to record in either audio or video at all open meetings of the Council.

### **AMENDMENT**

**Proposed** by Councillor Bill Davies (7 minutes)

**Seconded** by Councillor Moira McLaughlin (3 minutes)

*Delete everything and replace with the following:*

- (1) Council notes that the Administration has not banned the public from being able to attend and film at meetings.
- (2) The issue of filming is under review. The Acting Director of Law, Human Resources & Asset Management has been asked to look at how a balance can be struck between maintaining openness and transparency and addressing

concerns among some members about what safeguards can be put in place on how video recordings might be used.

- (3) Council notes that the wider issue of the Council streaming its committee meetings is being considered by the cross-party members Equipment Steering Group.
- (4) Council asks for the outcome of the review to be presented to the Licensing, Health and Safety and General Purposes Committee for detailed consideration.

**Right of reply:** Councillor Chris Blakeley (7 minutes)

## **8. SAFEGUARDING OUR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

**Proposed** by Councillor Mark Johnston (7 minutes)

**Seconded** by Councillor Pat Williams (3 minutes)

- (1) Council expresses its deep sorrow and sadness at the tragic and needless death of Hannah Windsor and extends our deepest sympathies to her family and friends.
- (2) Council welcomes the Serious Case Review being undertaken by Wirral Local Safeguarding Children Board concerning this tragedy and requires that, when published, the lessons learnt be made available in order to avoid such destructive events taking place in our Borough in the future.
- (3) Council, therefore, requests that all findings when published by WSCB are presented to the Council's Safeguarding Reference Group at the earliest opportunity to consider the actions assigned to the Council Departments regarding highlighted areas of concern.
- (4) Council would also request that the dissemination of any lessons include a briefing to members of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

**Right of reply:** Councillor Mark Johnston (7 minutes)

## **9. PLANNING APPLICATION APP/11/01418**

**Proposed** by Councillor Michael Hornby (7 minutes)

**Seconded** by Councillor Anthony Cox (3 minutes)

- (1) Council notes that over 4,000 residents of Greasby and the surrounding area objected to planning application Number APP/11/01418 for the Erection of buildings for a retail unit (Sainsbury's Local Store) and Vets surgery on the car park of the Red Cat, Greasby Road, Greasby, CH49 3AT.

- (2) Council notes that Wirral Planning Department while failing to determine the application was minded to recommend Refusal and this was subsequently noted and endorsed by the Planning Committee.
- (3) Council recognises that the applicant exercised their right of appeal to the Planning Inspectorate, however, is disappointed that despite the massive local opposition the Planning Inspector allowed the appeal following an exchange of documentation effectively ignoring the voices of the local community.
- (4) Therefore Council instructs the Chief Executive to write to the Rt Hon Eric Pickles MP, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government to express this Council's disappointment at the process and decision and requests that in the interest of Localism the Secretary of State "Calls In" the Planning Inspector's decision and orders a Public Inquiry, which will involve the local community in the decision making process ensuring this matter is dealt with in an open and transparent manner.

## **AMENDMENT**

**Proposed** by Councillor Bernie Mooney (7 minutes)

**Seconded** by Councillor Brian Kenny (3 minutes)

*Delete paragraph (4) and replace with the following:*

- (4) Therefore Council instructs the Acting Director of Law, HR and Asset Management to consider whether there are any grounds to seek a review of the Planning Inspectorate's decision and inform Members of the Council accordingly. The Chief Executive should also write to the Rt Hon Eric Pickles MP, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, to express this Council's disappointment at the decision particularly given the Localism Agenda promoting engagement and involvement of the local community in local decision making processes.

**Right of reply:** Councillor Mike Hornby (7 minutes)

## **10. OBJECTION /**

**AMENDMENT:           MINUTE 132 (CABINET – 29 NOVEMBER 2012)  
WELFARE REFORM – LOCAL COUNCIL TAX  
SUPPORT SCHEME  
Item 6A – Matters Requiring Approval by the Council**

**Proposed** by Councillor Simon Mountney (7 minutes)

**Seconded** by Councillor Chris Blakeley (3 minutes)

*Delete paragraph (1) (d) in the resolution and replace with:*

Council recognise that difficult times call for difficult decisions but during times of austerity it is important that we all make our fair contributions and this Council should lead by example and ensure that here in Wirral we are all in this together, act as one

nation and we share the burden fairly. It is therefore only fair that we take every step and ensure every measure is put in place to ensure that all council tax is collected where due. It is only by doing this that those law abiding citizens who pay Council tax will only be asked to pay what is required of them and their families and not be forced to subsidise those who choose not to pay their share.

*Delete paragraph (4) in the resolution and replace with:*

It is paradoxical that cabinet see a Government transitional grant scheme as “not help(ing) Wirral” “which will have to be found by cuts elsewhere” yet the shortfall from failure to collect what is due as outlined in 1 (d) is seen as acceptable.

**Right of reply:** Councillor Phil Davies (7 minutes)

**11. OBJECTION /  
AMENDMENT:           MINUTE 132 (CABINET – 29 NOVEMBER 2012)  
WELFARE REFORM – LOCAL COUNCIL TAX  
SUPPORT SCHEME  
Item 6A – Matters Requiring Approval by the Council**

**Proposed** by Councillor Stuart Kelly (7 minutes)

**Seconded** by Councillor Phil Gilchrist (3 minutes)

*Delete paragraph (1) (b), (2), (3), (4), (5) and (6), renumber paragraph (7) as new paragraph (6) and insert:*

- (1)(b) The Local Council Tax Support Scheme proposed for 2013/14 be based upon the recommended Scheme 1 except that Working Age Claimants meet 8.5% of the Council Tax payable and excluding any saving on the non-dependant deduction, the difference being met from the following changes to exemptions and discounts to empty and second homes;
- i) Class A vacant dwelling exemption discount changed to 25%
  - ii) Class C vacant dwelling exemption discount changed to 25%
  - iii) Class L vacant dwelling exemption removed
  - iv) Second home discount removed
  - v) Long term empty dwelling premium applied
- (2) Council notes the outcome of the recent consultation which shows 83% support for the principle of charges for vacant properties and second homes as a means of supporting the Council Tax Support Scheme.
- (3) It be noted that this equates to a weekly contribution on a Band A property for working age couple claimants of £1.61 compared to the £4.15 charge in the Cabinet recommendation.
- (4) Council notes that Wirral is now eligible for the Government’s Transitional Grant Scheme Allocation of £748,815.

- (5) Council further resolves that part of this Grant should be allocated to a plan, to be drawn up by the Chief Executive, and reported through Scrutiny to Cabinet, which sets out how the Council, together with organisations such as RSLs and the CAB, can provide assistance to those affected. The plan should also include arrangements, including enhanced welfare rights advice and practical assistance, to ensure that people are claiming all benefits to which they are entitled.
- (6) The four Wirral MPs be requested to lobby the Government for more funding on the Council's behalf.

**Right of reply:** Councillor Phil Davies (7 minutes)