

## Minority Report

**This Minority Report is produced by Councillors Chris Blakeley, Wendy Clements, Mike Hornby, Stephen Williams and Gerry Ellis following a meeting of the Coordinating Committee on Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2013.**

The Committee was convened following a call in of the Cabinet's decision on 07/08/2014 regarding the 'Transformation of Leisure Services, Sports and Leisure Facilities Pricing Structure.' The Call In was led by Councillor Paul Hayes and the reasons given are repeated below: -

*1. The decision made by Cabinet to cut the free services we offer to veterans of HM Armed Forces is contrary to the Council's previously stated commitment to support those who have been willing to make the ultimate sacrifice in defence of our freedoms.*

*2. The decision was not subject to any meaningful consultation, if at all.*

*3. The Cabinet (in the five minutes it took to 'debate' this item or in the Agenda documents) had no regard as to how the Council would identify a 'disabling' injury: what the criterion would be or who or what would adjudicate thereupon.*

*4. The Cabinet failed to have sufficient regard to the fact that many veterans of HM Armed Forces would suffer from mental rather than physical injuries, a characteristic of which will often be an unwillingness to discuss or disclose this injury, thereby discriminating against those afflicted by such injuries.*

Evidence was taken from two veterans of HM Armed Forces: Mr Kev Hannigan and Mr Eddie Denmark. Evidence was also taken from Council officers: Clare Fish, Mark Camborne and Damien Walsh as well as from Ms Tina Buckley from the All Members Military Organisation (AMMO).

We note that Ms Buckley gave evidence in which she suggested that she would not like to see anyone lose their free leisure pass. We further note that officers intimated that these proposals were not motivated by savings / increased revenue (despite having indicated projected savings (and/or increased revenue) of approximately £50,000.00 previously via email to Cllr Hayes). We note that officers and the Cabinet

member opined that the change in policy regarding veterans was aimed at reducing the occurrence of perceived 'abuses' following anecdotal evidence from staff.

After debate it was moved by the Chair Cllr McLaughlin and seconded by Councillor P Doughty –

*“That Cabinet minute 37 – 7 July 2014 (Transformation of Leisure Services Sports and Leisure Facilities Pricing Structure) be upheld”.*

It was moved as an amendment by Councillor Blakeley and seconded by Councillor Mike Hornby –

*“That this Committee, having heard evidence this evening, stands unconvinced that any potential saving (the achievement of which remains dubious) made by implementing the decision at paragraph 3 of the Cabinet report, outweighs the harm this decision will do to Wirral’s reputation as an Authority which takes seriously its duties under the Military Covenant and as an Authority that does all it can to actively uphold and advance the Covenant.*

*Therefore, this Committee urges the Cabinet to reconsider its decision and restore the free Leisure Passes to all the veterans of Her Majesty’s Armed Forces.”*

The amendment was put and lost (6:9).

The Substantive Motion was put and carried (9:6)

Resolved (9:6) (Councillor Blakeley voting against) – That Cabinet minute 37 (7 July 2014) – Transformation of Leisure Services Sports and Leisure Facilities Pricing Structure, be upheld.

Labour members of the Committee voted for the motion of Cllr McLaughlin, however we cannot agree that the motion of Cllr McLaughlin adequately reflects the information provided to the Committee and the evidence it heard and so we produce this Minority Report for Cabinet’s consideration.

We feel that members of the committee were confused as to the effect of the proposed policy as was Ms Tina Buckley; a member remained convinced that the proposed policy would still allow all veteran free access to swimming and leisure facilities when this is clearly not the case.

We submit that free access to our leisure facilities should be maintained for all veterans of HM Armed Forces and that should officers identify abuses then they be combatted with specific but robust policies for future consideration.