

LIBERAL DEMOCRAT GROUP – 2015/16 BUDGET AMENDMENT

Date of Budget Council: **Tuesday 24 February 2015**

Date submitted: **Friday 20 February 2015**

Proposed by: **Cllr Phil Gilchrist**

Seconded by: **Cllr Stuart Kelly**

Council notes the Cabinet recommendation and the proposals to restore the cuts in services in a number of areas such as community patrol, dog wardens, the Williamson Art Gallery and car parks. Council notes that these areas were included by Cabinet in previous budgets without sufficient assessment of their impact. Council notes that the targets set at the time have proved unrealistic in practice, caused unnecessary uncertainty, led to lack of continuity in service provision and stored up problems which now need to be addressed.

Council, however, considers that the opportunity has been missed to reconsider further service areas where past Cabinet decisions have resulted in further problems, most notably in the rushed reduction in library opening hours, mismanagement of faulty street lighting and reduced capacity to tackle the blight of dog fouling on our streets and playing fields.

Council believes that insufficient attention is paid to reserves and balances. Council has a duty to residents to ensure that these are regularly reviewed so that funds do not remain unused for lengthy periods of time.

Council, therefore, resolves that Cabinet Minute 136 be varied as follows:

1. Library Services

That **£75,000** be allocated from the Remodelling Reserve to enable the successful implementation of the changes and the transfer to a revised service. The Cabinet embarked upon an over optimistic timetable to reduce library hours. The strategy has risks, especially where there are no Friends' Groups, with the prospect that local people are frustrated and services withdrawn. The funding is needed to develop a more flexible approach and allow the Council to work with staff, library users and user groups. This approach should seek advice and support from The Reader Organisation as appropriate. In addition to this one-off funding, Council recognises that the timescale for the implementation of the proposed operating pattern for libraries is ambitious and, to be successful, the changes need to be implemented in a timely manner. Council also notes that within General Fund balances, there is an amount set aside to cover delays in the implementation of budget savings.

2. Street Lighting

Council believes that **£30,000** should be identified for the re-introduction of night time scouting inspections. Since the removal of night time scouting, Streetscene has relied on the public to report lights that were out. However, this has caused further confusion. This funding is required in order to resolve this uncertainty and to ensure that stability can be brought to the street lighting service. It would also enable accurate monitoring of the contractor's performance in maintaining the street lighting service.

3. **Public Health & Healthy Homes Scheme**

Council notes that the Public Health Budget has £195,579 of uncommitted resources. Council recalls that the Cabinet reduced the successful Healthy Homes Scheme budget which enabled people to improve their heating systems and their health. Council believes that **£102,234** removed by Cabinet in July 2014 should be restored to continue to tackle fuel poverty from this uncommitted resource, with a particular emphasis on poor housing within the areas designated for selective licensing. In addition, funds should be released from this uncommitted resource to address social isolation.

4. **Local Welfare Assistance / Discretionary Housing Payments**

Council notes that the review of reserves highlighted the balance of £760,898 in the Working Neighbourhoods Fund. This has been the position for some time. Council believes that, in the absence of properly developed proposals for its use, **£300,000** can be released to augment the £900,000 funding identified for Local Welfare Assistance and to provide further flexibility in awarding Discretionary Housing Payments.

5. **Anti-Social Behaviour – joined-up working**

Council welcomes the steps being taken to tackle anti-social behaviour, especially the intervention activities with youth. However, Council calls upon the Cabinet to re-examine whether expenditure on internal structures of Council officers and co-ordinators might be better spent by being allocated to the Police and managed by mutual agreement. Proposals to bring the Community Safety and Anti-Social Behaviour teams together have been in development for some time and need the appropriate powers to make effective use of the money. Officers are requested to bring a report to Cabinet on how this project could be taken forward and funded from the Remodelling Reserve.

6. **Cleaning Up Wirral**

Council notes the restoration of part of the 2013 cuts to the Dog Warden Service but believes that the full saving should be restored (**£60,000**) to enable the service to operate at full strength once again. Council believes that the appointment of additional dog wardens can only work effectively if the Council actually gets the Public Space Protection Orders in place. Lessons need to be learned from the reduction and restoration of this team. Council needs to ensure that the various enforcement services cooperate and work effectively to improve the environment. Funding provided for 2015/16 will be subject to review for future years and will be met from the Waste Development Fund.

7. **Highway Maintenance / Safety**

Council welcomes the substantial funds being allocated for Highway Maintenance by the Coalition Government; £3,305,000 in 2015/16 with substantial additional funds available through till 2020/21. Council also welcomes the £2 million of Council investment 2015/18 into the highways infrastructure.

Council notes the substantial resources expected from the sale of assets at Acre Lane and requests Cabinet to allocate **£500,000** from this capital to be divided between the Constituency Committees to tackle concerns raised by local residents so that, for example, road widening and road safety can be prioritised and programmes drawn up by them.

Council approves the statutory calculations associated with the decision to accept the Council Tax Freeze Grant and there be no increase in the Wirral Council Tax element for 2015/16.

The Statutory Calculations and Resolution

It be noted that in accordance with Section 31B of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (as amended), that Cabinet on 9 December 2014 calculated the Council Tax Base 2015/16 for the whole of the properties in its area as 89,344.9 (Item T in the statutory formula).

That the following amounts be calculated and approved by the Council for the year 2015/16 in accordance with Sections 32-36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (as amended) (“the Act”);

- a) £114,206,012 being the amount calculated in accordance with Section 31A (4) of the Act (amended) as the Council Tax Requirement for 2015/16 (item R in the statutory formula). This amount (D) is determined as being the difference between:
 - i) £722,836,275 this being the aggregate of the amounts calculated in accordance with Section 31A (2) of the Act (as amended), i.e. the aggregate of the amounts that the Council estimates that will be charged to a revenue account for the year in performing its functions, that are required to be set aside for contingencies and reserves and required to be transferred from its General Fund to its Collection Fund in the year and
 - ii) £608,630,263 this being the amount calculated in accordance with Section 31A (3) of the Act (as amended), i.e. the aggregate of the amounts of income that the Council estimates will be credited to a revenue account for the year in accordance with proper practices, the amount of reserves that are estimated to be used to provide for the items referred to in paragraph (a) above, and required to be transferred from its Collection Fund to its General Fund in the year.
- b) £1,278.26 being the amount calculated in accordance with Section 31B (1) of the Act (amended) as the Basic Amount of Council Tax for 2015/16. This amount being calculated as item R divided by item T (as above).
- c) that in accordance with section 36(1) of the Act that the following amounts are calculated for each valuation band in the area:

Wirral – Basic Amount Of Council Tax Per Valuation Band

A	B	C	D
£852.17	£994.20	£1,136.23	£1,278.26
E	F	G	H
£1,562.32	£1,846.38	£2,130.43	£2,556.52

These amounts being the amounts given by multiplying the amount calculated as the basic amount of council tax by the number which in the proportion set out in Section 5(1) of the Act is applicable to dwellings in a particular valuation band which is applicable to dwellings listed in valuation Band D.

It be determined that the amount set in (c) above as the Council's Basic Amount of Council Tax for 2015/16 is not excessive in accordance with the principles determined by the Secretary of State under section 52ZC of the Act (as amended) and that no Referendum to approve the Basic Amount of Council Tax is required. The principles require a Referendum to be held for any increases of 2% or above.

Wirral – Basic Amount Of Council Tax Comparison For Referendum

	2014/15	2015/16	Change
	£	£	£
Band D	1,278.26	1,278.26	Nil

To note that the Police and Crime Commissioner for Merseyside and the Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service have issued precepts to the Council in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 for each category of dwellings in the Council's area as indicated in the tables.

Police and Crime Commissioner for Merseyside (figures are awaited)

A	B	C	D
E	F	G	H

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service (figures are awaited)

A	B	C	D
E	F	G	H

That having calculated the amounts for Wirral together with the Police and Fire the Council in accordance with Section 30 (2) of the Act hereby sets the following amounts as the total amount of Council Tax for the year 2015/16 for each of the categories of dwellings.

Total Council Tax for Wirral (awaiting figures for Police and Fire)

A	B	C	D
E	F	G	H