

CABINET PORTFOLIO SUMMARY REPORT

REPORT OF	Councillor Janette Williamson
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is an update from the Cabinet Portfolio Holder to Members of the Council on matters relevant to her portfolio.

DELIVERING A FAIR AND SUSTAINABLE BUDGET

I am pleased to report the Council Accounts for 2016/17 were published before the statutory deadline of 30 September, with the External Auditor giving a positive opinion. At the end of the year we delivered an underspend of almost £3 million. This was due to Members and officers working together to manage the financial pressures while remaining focussed on delivering the excellent services our residents rely on.

The current year is no less demanding, and we must continue our work to ensure our budget is delivered. Judging by reading the national media, residents would be forgiven for assuming austerity was over and public services were once again being properly funded from Whitehall. This is far from the truth, and Wirral still faces enormous financial challenges in the coming years.

Continuing reductions in funding combined with the planned withdrawal of the Revenue Support Grant and huge increases in demand for services, particularly children's social care, have placed Wirral's finances in a precarious position.

We are working hard now to develop new proposals for how we can meet these challenges, and are asking all elected members – regardless of party – to support the process and help us create a budget which is collaborative, allows us to deliver our 20 Pledges and which meets the needs of Wirral residents.

Residents will be able to review these proposals, and provide their views through a consultation exercise. Regular updates will be published on Wirral View and through the local media.

SUPPORTING SMALL BUSINESSES

I was pleased earlier this month to ensure many Wirral businesses, which have been adversely affected by this year's Business Rates Revaluation, could receive financial assistance to help provide relief against the impact of the changes.

Our existing policy to provide Discretionary Rate Relief to local businesses has been amended to reflect the availability of additional funding provided by central government and target this financial support on to those who need it most.

A priority in the Wirral Plan is for Wirral to be a place where employers want to invest and businesses are able to thrive.

Encouraging small businesses to develop and grow is at the heart of this and as business rates represent a significant cost to them, we are keen to ensure small businesses in particular can access rate relief.

This is a real demonstration that Wirral is a welcoming and supportive place to do business, with a local authority that will give them the best possible chance to succeed.

In Wirral, the policy will provide local small to medium-sized businesses with relief if their business rates were projected to rise by more than 5% and their new rateable value is less than £200,000 as a result of the revaluation. It is forecast that more than 600 local businesses will benefit.

Under the 'support for small business' relief scheme, around 30 Wirral small businesses will qualify to have their business rates increase capped at £600 per year, while as part of the 'support for public houses' initiative, which is for one year only, around 100 Wirral pubs and similar venues will receive business rate relief of up to £1,000 provided they have an rateable value of less than £100,000.

Read more about the new policy on [Wirral View](#).