

Council – 11 December, 2017

Motions

The following motions have been submitted in accordance with the notice required by Standing Order 7(1) and are listed in accordance with Standing Order 7(2).

1. **NATIONAL BUDGET** *(to be debated)*

Proposed by Councillor Phil Davies

Seconded by Councillor Bernie Mooney

At the hands of this Tory Government, and the Coalition before, the people of Wirral have endured the longest period of falling incomes since records began. People are poorer under the Conservatives – and they feel poorer.

Chancellor Philip Hammond had the opportunity to deliver a budget offering real hope and change – and he bungled it.

This budget offered little for families in Wirral. The Chancellor offered little in the way of help to the least well-off: he failed to provide any vision for how, in the face of Brexit, we can hope to kick-start our economy out of its current doldrums. The Chancellor even denied unemployment exists, so little surprise the Tories have no message for those looking to return to work or further their careers.

For local government the story was the same. Less money available while demand rises. Our communities who need our help most are being failed by the Tories as a direct consequence of their broken austerity experiment.

One of the few measures directed at alleviating the financial stresses faced by councils up and down this country was the ability to charge an extra 100% council tax on properties which have been empty for more than two years.

While this may be impactful in central London where absentee overseas landlords sit on thousands of empty properties – this is of little consequence in Wirral. To put this in perspective – while Wirral has been forced to slash £200million from our budgets since 2010, this measure is understood to raise just £12,000 - unlikely to make much of an impact.

Mr Hammond tinkered with the economy when it needs turbo-charging. As his cabinet colleagues currently dither in their half-hearted negotiations on Britain's withdrawal from the EU the chancellor too has shirked his responsibilities. If ever we needed a grand plan and strong leadership that moment is now but instead we have a man whose best idea is to introduce a new rail card for those people who need a home.

Once again it is clear. Only Labour can be trusted to act in the best interests of the people of Wirral.

Council agrees to write to Wirral's 4 MPs and ask them to arrange a meeting with the Chancellor of the Exchequer asking him to look again at the issues facing local authorities up and down the country, including Wirral, and to take immediate action to avert the national crisis in children's social care by providing adequate funding and make serious and real interventions to protect the collapsing housing markets with real assistance which will help Wirral residents find suitable housing.

2. PREPARING COMMUNITIES FOR THE IMPACT OF NEW DEVELOPMENT

(to be debated)

Proposed by Councillor Phil Gilchrist

Seconded by Councillor Alan Brighouse

Council recognises that, at its meeting on 14 December 2015, Council had before it a Notice of Motion entitled 'Investing in our Communities'. This referred to the use of the Capital Receipt expected from the sale of Acre Lane as 'one of the most substantial receipts received since the Borough was created.'

The Notice of Motion referred to the limited resources available to the Constituency Committees.

It suggested that...

'Cabinet should consider allocating £1m from this asset sale into each Constituency Committee; in line with the 2020 vision and in the spirit of devolution to Constituency Committees, they should be enabled to determine the use of these funds.'

Council referred the Notice of Motion to the Cabinet of 22 February 2016. Cabinet decided that the Notice of Motion should be considered as part of the review of Neighbourhood Working and the future of the Council's Constituency Committees.

It is clear that limited progress has been made with this 'review' apart from a series of consultative sessions. It is also apparent that the Capital Programme considered by Cabinet (6 Nov 2017, item 10) expects that the Capital Receipt is being utilised:

<http://s03vs-intrcm.core.wcent.wirral.gov.uk/documents/s50045804/Capital%20Monitoring%20Q2%202017-18%20Report.pdf>

Council believes that Cabinet should consider and set out how Wirral can deal with the pressures on local services, including school accommodation and health and social facilities should the Acre Lane development proceed. Such considerations can also apply to other major developments and set out how Section 106 and, in future, Community Infrastructure Levies, may be secured and applied.

Consideration has yet, apparently, still to be given to allocating capital and revenue to Constituency Committees so that they can fulfil their role effectively.

Council also requests that Cabinet should consider spending part of the capital receipt on the physical infrastructure of the wider Bromborough and Eastham

community. That consideration should include identifying narrow estate roads where there are limited parking facilities and where grass verges are damaged.

3. REDUCING SINGLE USE PLASTIC IN WIRRAL *(to be debated)*

Proposed by Councillor Pat Cleary

Seconded by Councillor Adam Sykes

Council notes that, in the UK, some 2.2 million tonnes of plastic packaging is consumed annually. Only 40% of this is recycled domestically¹. According to recent research, eight million tons of plastic waste ends up in the world's oceans each year, endangering marine life and entering the food chain². In addition, there is a growing understanding of the risks posed to human health by toxic chemicals present in plastics.

Council also notes that following the introduction of the 5p bag charge in England in 2015, the use of single-use plastic bags dropped by 83% in the first six months.

Council believes that the reduction of single-use plastic would benefit health in Wirral and reduce waste. Council therefore requests the Cabinet to:

1. Develop a robust strategy to ensure Wirral Council phases out single-use plastics (SUP) in its activities within the next two years.
2. Work with partners and other large institutions e.g. the NHS to encourage them in developing similar strategies to reduce SUP.
3. Inform the public of Wirral of the reasons for phasing out SUP and encourage them to switch to alternatives.

Sources

1. *Wrap. Plastics Market Situation Report, Spring 2016, p9*

2. *Science. Plastic Waste Inputs from Land into the Oceans. Feb 13, 2015.*

4. DOMESTIC VIOLENCE *(to be debated)*

Proposed by Councillor Anita Leech

Seconded by Councillor Janette Williamson

This meeting takes place as the White Ribbon campaign's 16 Days of Activism against gender-based violence comes to a close. (December 10th).

The 16 Days campaign has taken place against a background of increased reporting of high profile cases of abuse directed against women, stretching from Hollywood to Westminster, but we must not forget the overwhelming majority of abuse takes place in a domestic environment, often against mothers and their children – and yet we see the Government again targeting the most vulnerable with its failed austerity measures.

According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) the majority of victims of domestic homicides recorded between April 2013 and March 2016 were females (70%).

The ONS also said that the police recorded 1.1 million domestic abuse-related incidents and crimes in the year ending March 2017, while the majority of victims of 454 domestic homicides recorded between April 2013 and March 2016 were females (70%).

However, according to the latest reports many victims of domestic abuse do not see justice.

Now we have a Government which is trying to sneak out measures which will put even more women's lives at risk. It is being reported that the Tory Government is planning to remove refuges and other forms of short-term supported housing from the welfare system. At a point in their lives, when they fear for their safety – and often that of their children – many women will now face even more pressure because the Government is withdrawing key support for them.

According to the reports the Government instead plans to hand money to local councils – but as we have seen before local government is expected to make this cash go further than the Government could manage. According to recent media reports *“the government proposes handing a “ring-fenced” grant to councils for short-term supported housing. However, this does not exclusively cover refuges – it is also aimed at older people, homeless people, offenders, people with mental illnesses and drug addicts”*.

Council recognises local authorities such as Wirral have demonstrated their ability to show great prudence and planning in making ever decreasing funding go much further, but believes it is unacceptable for the Government to place further pressures on local government, placing more women at risk because they are failing to balance their own budget.

Council agrees to write to the Home Secretary to ask her to drop these proposals and take the safety of women in situations of domestic abuse more seriously by providing adequate funding for key issues such as women's refugees and on-going support for women fleeing domestic violence.

5. ORGREAVE TRUTH & JUSTICE CAMPAIGN *(to be debated)*

Proposed by Councillor Christine Spriggs

Seconded by Councillor Brian Kenny

This Council is concerned and disappointed by the Home Secretary's rejection on the 31st October, 2016 of an Inquiry into the policing of events at Orgreave.

This Council observes that the Independent Police Commission said in their redacted report released in June 2015 “that there was evidence of excessive violence by police officers, and a false narrative from police exaggerating violence by

miners, perjury by officers giving evidence to prosecute the arrested men, and an apparent cover-up of that perjury by senior officers”.

This Council believes in the light of such statements that the Home Secretary needs to review her decision and ensure that there is a full public inquiry into the events at the Orgreave coking plant on 18th June 1984.

This Council notes that 95 miners were arrested and charged with offences, but were all later acquitted amid claims that police at the time had fabricated evidence.

Council agrees to write to the Home Secretary and ask that she takes into account the opinion of this Council and accepts that there is widespread public concern about events at Orgreave and calls for her to order a public inquiry into them.

6. THE UNITED KINGDOM’S HOUSEHOLD DEBT TICKING TIME-BOMB

(to be debated)

Proposed by Councillor Adrian Jones

Seconded by Councillor Paul Stuart

Council notes that in once prosperous Wirral hardship is increasing, food-banks can scarcely keep up with need, and the government’s withdrawal of central funding is set to significantly increase poverty throughout the Borough.

The Chancellor appears to think that there are no unemployed, more jobs are being created, and the economy is sound. However, in an increasingly low-wage ‘gig economy’ the continuing Tory/LibDem austerity policy continues to increase poverty through wage-depression whilst food-price inflation, housing costs, and increasing travel costs inexorably drive millions of low-income families and individuals (who may be in work or not in work) into unsustainable household debt. Many who are in paid employment earn so little that they qualify for benefits – a transfer payment of funds from the public purse to subsidise a low-wage “austerity” culture. Council notes that the present UK generation still anticipate becoming the first to receive lower life-time earnings than their parents and to be unlikely ever to earn enough to become homeowners.

The rapid expansion of private debt was recognised as early as 2015 when Ian Duncan Smith’s right wing ‘think tank’ warned that household debt had risen by more than £34 billion in less than three years and stood at £1.47 trillion – the highest ever recorded. Almost nine million people were ‘over indebted’ through credit card borrowing, bank overdrafts, and pay-day loans. The IDS findings are vindicated by the JP Morgan Chase Foundation’s research, revealing that as many as fifteen million UK people are now in serious debt just trying to pay their ordinary living bills. The extent of hardship is illustrated in Wirral’s formerly prosperous shopping centres where major retailers are closing to be replaced increasingly by charity shops and pawn-broking businesses, and by the dependency of so many people (including many who are in paid employment) on charities and food banks.

Council agrees to write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and ask him to recognise the growing problem of household debt on the poorest families on Wirral and to reconsider his welfare policies.

7. ECONOMIC VIABILITY ASSESSMENTS FROM DEVELOPERS *(the Civic Mayor to refer to the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee)*

Proposed by Councillor Stuart Kelly

Seconded by Councillor Chris Carubia

This Council recognises the pressing need to provide quality homes which are affordable to those on low and middle incomes in Wirral and for transparency with regard to planning applications to ensure that the Council's own policies on affordable housing requirements are met.

Regrettably, a recent report from the housing charity, Shelter, has revealed the widespread use and abuse of Economic Viability Assessments (EVAs), resulting in thousands of affordable homes being lost every year because of viability assessments. (Slipping through the loophole: How viability assessments are reducing affordable housing supply in England)

http://england.shelter.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0010/1434439/2017.11.01_Slipping_through_the_loophole.pdf

Council are dismayed that there are companies who are openly boasting in their promotion that they can help developers to avoid paying Section 106 monies and making appropriate levels of affordable housing provision. These companies produce EVAs in order to demonstrate that developers are not making sufficient profits to enable councils to insist on full 106 or affordable housing contributions.

<http://www.s106management.co.uk/how-it-works>

Whilst some of these EVAs are submitted in good faith, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that the reports can be prepared in such a way as to attempt to confuse local planning committees and present a misleading picture. Some London councils, such as Lambeth LBC, now insist that EVAs are no longer able to be submitted unless they are able to be viewed by members of the public and in open session at planning committee meetings. <https://www.lambeth.gov.uk/sites/default/files/pl-development-viability-spd.pdf>

Accordingly, this Council, which is committed to increasing the delivery of affordable housing, requests that the Cabinet commissions the development of a new Development Viability Supplementary Planning Document to:

1. require any planning application which does not meet the affordable housing requirement to submit an Economic Viability Assessment which must be fully public and will be published online alongside the other planning application documentation.

2. require such Economic Viability Assessments to be in a standard proforma to aid understanding and comparison by members of the planning committee and the public.
3. consider offering a 'fast-track' planning service to applications which deliver 40%, or more, affordable housing, as identified in the Wirral Strategic Housing Market Assessment and Housing needs Study (May 2016) to incentivise this behaviour by developers.
4. consider 'clawback' mechanisms where large applications cannot comply with the affordable housing thresholds, to ensure that any subsequent improvement in viability is accompanied by an appropriate increase in the affordable housing provision.

The Development Viability Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) would enable these factors to become a material consideration for the Planning Committee dependent on the circumstances of individual applications.

8. PLANNING AHEAD TO USE THE COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY *(the Civic Mayor to refer to the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee)*

Proposed by Councillor Phil Gilchrist
Seconded by Councillor Stuart Kelly

Council recognises that the Cabinet last considered the use of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) at its meeting on 15 January 2015 (Minute 131 refers).

<http://democracy.wirral.gov.uk/documents/s50022901/Community%20Infrastructure%20Levy%20Update%20Report.pdf>

At that time, it was reported that...

'The Council's Core Strategy Local Plan is now at an advanced stage in preparation. A revised Proposed Submission Draft Core Strategy is expected to be presented to the Council for approval for publication and public examination in July 2015.'

Since that study, it is worth noting that

- (a) Knowsley Council adopted a Supplementary Planning Document on developer contributions in June 2016.
- (b) Cheshire West and Chester Council adopted a full scheme in July 2017.
- (c) Sefton set out a draft charging schedule for consultation in September 2017.

Council appreciates that developer contributions can be secured by the planning system through on-site provision and design, site-specific planning obligations and the Community Infrastructure Levy. Given the extent of the Budget Gap it is essential that these means are explored.

Council is also aware that documentation released at the time of the most recent Budget has laid out the Government's intention to set about speeding up the process of setting and revising CIL to make it easier to respond to changes to the market. Apparently, this will include...

'allowing a more proportionate approach than the requirement for two stages of consultation and providing greater clarity on the appropriate evidence base'.

Council believes that, whatever the outcome of the intervention by Sajid Javid (Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government) on 16 November, this Council now needs to make greater progress in assessing how the use of the Community Infrastructure Levy can raise resources to assist in the provision of local facilities and services.

Accordingly, it requests that the Cabinet allocates sufficient resources to speed up the local plan making process, the use of developer contributions and examination of the use of the Community Infrastructure Levy.