

COUNCIL

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CABINET PORTFOLIO SUMMARY REPORT

REPORT OF	Councillor Janette Williamson
CABINET PORTFOLIO FOR	Finance & Income Generation
CO-ORDINATING CHIEF OFFICER	Shaer Halewood – Director of Finance and Investment

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

Work continues on our approach to delivering a fair and sustainable Medium-Term Financial Strategy. Even in the face of continued austerity, and the projected complete loss of Revenue Support Grant, we will not compromise on our ambitions for Wirral.

Our financial strategy is about investment, not cuts. It is about using the money we have left to deliver for Wirral residents. It is about investing in the things which are most important to local people and making sure that every pound we spend goes towards delivering the 20 Pledges and improving the quality of life our residents enjoy. It is about sustainability and innovation in the face of austerity.

On 26 November, Cabinet agreed our Medium-Term Financial Strategy for consultation. This year, once again, we are facing up to delivering almost unimaginable levels of savings. By April 1 2019, we will have been forced to make savings of £45 million, achieved through reductions in spending and/or increasing our revenue.

The budget proposals out for consultation would see the council cut £1.5m from the cost of senior council management and encourage 'unprecedented investment and regeneration' in the borough. They also allow for continued major investment into services for vulnerable children and families.

I also want to highlight to all Members how important it is that we seek to maximise our income. The financial support we have lost from Government is not coming back, at least in the near future, so if we want to continue investing in services and in our borough, we have got to become more commercial and capitalise on every opportunity to bring more money into the Council.

That is why we have taken advantage of the opportunity to charge 200% Council Tax on empty properties, and it is why we will continue to find new, innovative ways of raising money for our services.

While some limited extra support seems likely after the Chancellors' Budget speech last month, our financial situation, if not addressed now, will only get worse over the next 18 months as the Government take the final steps towards removing central financial support to Councils like Wirral.

The proposals Cabinet agreed for consultation almost bring us to a balanced budget position for the coming year and put us on a much more stable financial footing for the next four years.

While none of us want to be in this situation, where we are forced to cut money from our budget, nonetheless I believe we have balanced our budget without cutting services or making a single compulsory redundancy and while investing huge resources into our services for vulnerable children and families.

The public consultation gets underway at the start of December and will run until mid-January, to make sure residents are able to make their voice heard before final decisions are taken in February and March 2019.

Read more in the [Wirral Globe](#), as well as comments from the [Council Leader](#).

Finally, I am pleased to highlight some excellent news to the Chamber. Our programme to help care leavers secure apprenticeship positions has been 'highly commended' on a national level.

The scheme received the highly commended title at the National Social Value Awards and has also been shortlisted for a Local Government Chronicle Award.

I am so proud of this programme. My role as Cabinet member for Finance is not just about finding ways to save money – it's about guiding how we invest, and making sure our money is used to increase social justice, equality and helping the most vulnerable.

This scheme helps our most vulnerable residents secure work, raise their aspirations and improve their quality of life. I am delighted it is going so well, and I want to congratulate everyone involved.

Read more in the [Wirral Globe](#).