

CABINET PORTFOLIO SUMMARY REPORT

REPORT OF	Councillor Janette Williamson
CABINET PORTFOLIO FOR	Finance and Resources

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is an update from the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources to Members of the Council on matters relevant to the portfolio.

Council Budget:

The council must ensure that a balanced financial position for the current financial year, which ends 31st March 2020, is delivered, yet reserves are at their lowest level this decade and we need to improve on our recent financial forecast by approximately £7m. Along with improvement plans in-year, we're simultaneously progressing ideas for closing a budget gap for next year of £12m.

A range of savings options are being considered, which includes reviewing all budgets and contracts we have in place in order to determine how we can do things differently, in order to be more efficient and more effective.

Empty Homes Premium:

There are 647 properties that have been empty for more than two years in Wirral, and 250 that have been empty for more than five years.

A new policy has been brought into play that will see owners of properties which lie empty for more than five years, liable to pay a 200% surcharge on their council tax.

The new policy is an extension of the existing additional council tax which must be paid by property owners who allow potential homes to be left unused for more than two years. This is about making sure that properties which could provide homes for people are brought into use and provide more homes for our residents.

Council Tax Reduction Scheme:

Earlier this month Cabinet agreed a new Council Tax Reduction Scheme reducing the minimum amount payable by non-protected groups from the current 22% minimum to a 12% minimum.

The investment of more than £800,000 ensures more than 9,000 low income households get a better deal on their Council Tax.

Fraud Awareness:

Fraud is a criminal activity where a person, business or organisation is deceived in order to cause a loss or for someone else's personal gain.

It costs local government more than £7 billion per year – money that could instead be used to improve the local community.

Wirral Council's Fraud Awareness campaign ran in November and was aimed at raising public awareness, change people's attitude towards fraud and encouraging residents and businesses to help spot and stop fraudulent activity.

Wirral Council takes a zero-tolerance approach to fraud and to the minority who commit fraud.

Types of fraud can include:

- false claims for Council Tax support
- misuse of direct payments
- misuse of grant payments
- false invoices for goods, works or services
- false accident claims
- misuse of blue badges