

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 31 August 2022

Present: Councillor J Williamson (Chair)

Councillors T Anderson P Stuart
P Gilchrist H Cameron
P Cleary L Rennie
EA Grey A Hodson (In place
of J Johnson)
T Jones J Bird
Y Nolan M Booth
J Robinson K Hodson

34 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

The Chair welcomed members, officers and members of the public to the meeting and read out the webcast notice.

35 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Jenny Johnson.

36 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were asked to declare any disclosable pecuniary interests and any other relevant interest and to state the nature of the interest. No declarations were made.

37 MINUTES

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 13 July 2022 be approved and adopted as a correct record.

38 PUBLIC AND MEMBER QUESTIONS

39 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

The Chair reported that one Public Question had been received.

Ruth Molyneux outlined the impact the cost-of-living crisis was having on residents in Wirral South and asked whether Wirral Council would commit to keeping Bromborough Civic Centre and Library open during the winter months and ensure that the Civic Centre was put in scope for Community Asset Transfer.

In response, the Chair outlined that she was proposing to move a motion later in the meeting to ask officers to review Council assets with a view to setting up 'warm banks' in partnership with public sector partners.

A supplementary question was then asked in relation to Bromborough Civic Centre and Library, asking whether it would be included in the warm bank proposals and whether it could be kept open until a Community Asset Transfer could be completed. The Chair confirmed that the review officers would be asked to undertake would include all assets include Bromborough Civic Centre and Library.

40 **STATEMENTS AND PETITIONS**

The Chair informed the Committee that no statements or petitions had been received.

41 **QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS**

The Chair informed the Committee that no questions by members had been received.

42 **COST OF LIVING CRISIS**

The Director of Resources introduced the report which detailed the proposed response to the cost-of-living crisis affecting the Borough and its residents caused by the current and predicted high energy costs and rapidly rising inflation impacting on business and residents' incomes. The report detailed the information that had been collected by the Council in terms of the impact of the crisis on residents as well as the impact on the Council with a reported £5.3m gap in the 2022-23 budget as a result of energy increases, contract inflation and reduction in income. The report further detailed the package of both financial and non-financial support put in place for residents and businesses including from the Council, Central Government and other organisations.

Members discussed the report in detail and feedback was provided in relation to communicating with residents about the support on offer, and the links between the climate crisis and cost of living crisis. Further concern was raised in relation to the impact of increasing costs for foster carers, care homes and the delivery of the Council's regeneration programme.

Following the debate, it was moved by the Chair, seconded by Councillor Jean Robinson, that –

“the Policy & Resources Committee:

1. recognises the cost of living rise as a crisis for the Borough and that the Authority's response to assist citizens and businesses in need is declared as a priority in the coming period;
2. authorise the Chief Executive and Directors to:
 - a. collate and communicate the services and facilities that the Council can offer residents and businesses and the means by which they may access that support; and
 - b. work with community groups and other bodies to co-ordinate and assist, directly and through inclusion within the Cost of Living Action Group, to ensure the best delivery of services and facilities that may provide assistance across the Borough in responding to the cost of living crisis: and
3. incorporate the cost of living crisis as a stand-alone item for the Group Leaders' (Member Working Group) agenda for the Group Leaders to be briefed upon ongoing issues and liaise with the Cost of Living Action Group and to report back to a future meeting of the Committee the progress being made to support the crisis
4. That the Director of Resources report to the earliest possible meeting of this Committee on:
 - i. a review of all council buildings, including libraries and leisure centres, and provide the additional energy costings to keep them open during the Winter months to provide safe and warm spaces for residents who are struggling with the cost of living crisis;
 - ii. updating the Committee on work with our partners including the NHS, police, fire service, community and faith sector groups, to establish buildings that can be accessed by residents during the winter months to keep them safe and warm;
 - iii. a breakdown of all funding found to be available to community groups currently providing a support to residents in need, with a view to continuing and/or increasing it to ensure that residents are offered support during the cost of living crisis;
 - iv. a review of schemes to support residents such as fuel top ups whether the frequency and value of the support can be increased and the capacity within organisations to deliver additional support to residents to enable as many people as possible to stay warm at home for longer;
 - v. a review of COMF to support the cost of living crisis;
 - vi. an update on the £113,000 proposed by the Labour Group and agreed at full Council to address fuel poverty;
 - vii. a review of all reserves in light of this crisis and whether any can be used and or re-purposed in support of Wirral's cost of living crisis."

Councillor Tom Anderson then indicated that he wished to move four further additions to the motion. Following a discussion and clarification having been sought from officers, the meeting was adjourned at 19.08pm.

The meeting resumed at 19.34pm.

Councillor Tom Anderson moved an amendment to the motion, seconded by Councillor Lesley Rennie, to include the following as an addition –

“Policy and Resources Committee recognises that Council will have to make further saving next financial year. And that difficult decisions will be made. However, local councillors know their communities well and are well placed direct small amounts of funding to support our most vulnerable residents through the unforeseen economic turmoil.

Building on the pilot scheme developed by Wallasey Ward Councillors last Municipal Year, each Councillor will be given an additional £2000 to add to their existing Ward Member Budget to support community groups and charities in their wards to cope with increasing energy costs. This will ensure these Groups can continue the vital services our residents rely on.

To fund this initiative, Committee resolves to make an in year saving of 30% from the Communications and Marketing Budget (£144,450).

Committee further resolves to make this a permanent, full year saving for the 2023 / 2024 financial year.”

The Committee discussed the implications of the amendment and sought legal advice. Members were advised that they should be assured that they have all the necessary information required to make a decision. The motion was then put and lost (6:9).

Councillor Tom Anderson moved a further amendment to the original motion, seconded by Councillor Kathy Hodson, to include the following as an addition –

“On 25th July, the Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee approved the funding of Wirral’s Health Protection Delivery Service from April 2023 to March 2024 through the core Public Health Grant.

Given we have now moved into a phase of ‘Living with Covid’, this Committee recognises the unanticipated energy price increased impacting our residents must take precedence. Therefore, this Committee resolves to:

1. Reprofile £705,756 from the Health Protection Delivery Service to the Household Support Fund to ensure our most vulnerable residents, young and old, are supported through the uncertainty of the fluctuating energy markets.
2. Requests the Director of Public Health to review the Health Protection Delivery Service in line with all other services directly funded from the £30.99 million Public Health Grant and make recommendations to the next meeting of the Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee as to how the Health Protection Delivery Service could be delivered from April 2023.”

A further discussion ensued on the proposed amendment. The motion was then put and lost (6:9).

Councillor Tom Anderson moved a further amendment to the original motion, seconded by Councillor Helen Cameron, to include the following as an addition –

“Policy and Resources Committee recognises the excellent work undertaken by community and voluntary groups enabled by the Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) as part of the Government and Council’s response to the Covid crisis.

In addition to the £1.7 million of COMF money identified, this Committee believes we should go further in support of our most vulnerable residents this winter. Therefore, utilising £5.1 million from the Public Health Reserve for 2022/23 (retaining £800,000 to mitigate against overspends) Policy and Resources Committee resolves to create a £6.8 million Cost of Living Fund building on the practices, oversight and delivery developed during the operation of COMF to support our most vulnerable residents.”

Members debated the addition and its implications. It was then put and lost (6:9).

Councillor Tom Anderson moved a further amendment to the original motion, seconded by Councillor Lesley Rennie, to include the following as an addition –

“Policy and Resources Committee recognises the Government provided over £200 million to support our residents through the Covid crisis.

From the latest tranche funding figures, £673,155 remains uncommitted from a total of £8.5 million.

Therefore, Policy and Resources resolves to transfer this uncommitted spend to the Emergency Financial Support Scheme and Discretionary Housing Scheme to support those residents who can demonstrate they have suffered financial hardship as a direct result of Covid.”

The Director of Resources outlined that there was a requirement to spend the tranche funding on Covid-19 related outcomes, therefore proposed the addition of “subject to the equivalent amount of funding being released from core budgets”. Councillor Tom Anderson as mover of the amendment accepted the additional wording.

The substantive amendment was then agreed as a friendly amendment by Councillor Janette Williamson as the mover of the original motion.

The substantive motion was then put and agreed unanimously. It was therefore –

Resolved – That the Policy & Resources Committee:

- 1. recognises the cost of living rise as a crisis for the Borough and that the Authority’s response to assist citizens and businesses in need is declared as a priority in the coming period;**
- 2. authorise the Chief Executive and Directors to:**
 - c. collate and communicate the services and facilities that the Council can offer residents and businesses and the means by which they may access that support; and**
 - d. work with community groups and other bodies to co-ordinate and assist, directly and through inclusion within the Cost of Living Action Group, to ensure the best delivery of services and facilities that may provide assistance across the Borough in responding to the cost of living crisis: and**
- 3. incorporate the cost of living crisis as a stand-alone item for the Group Leaders’ (Member Working Group) agenda for the Group Leaders to be briefed upon ongoing issues and liaise with the Cost of Living Action Group and to report back to a future meeting of the Committee the progress being made to support the crisis**
- 4. That the Director of Resources report to the earliest possible meeting of this Committee on:**
 - viii. a review of all council buildings, including libraries and leisure centres, and provide the additional energy costings to keep them open during the Winter months to provide safe and warm spaces for residents who are struggling with the cost of living crisis;**
 - ix. updating the Committee on work with our partners including the NHS, police, fire service, community and faith sector groups, to establish buildings that can be accessed by residents during the winter months to keep them safe and warm;**
 - x. a breakdown of all funding found to be available to community groups currently providing a-support to residents in need, with a view to continuing and/or increasing it to ensure that residents are offered support during the cost of living crisis;**
 - xi. a review of schemes to support residents such as fuel top ups whether the frequency and value of the support can be increased and the capacity within organisations to deliver additional support**

to residents to enable as many people as possible to stay warm at home for longer;

- xii. a review of COMF to support the cost of living crisis;**
 - xiii. an update on the £113,000 proposed by the Labour Group and agreed at full Council to address fuel poverty;**
 - xiv. a review of all reserves in light of this crisis and whether any can be used and or re-purposed in support of Wirral's cost of living crisis.**
- 5. recognises the Government provided over £200 million to support our residents through the Covid crisis. From the latest tranche funding figures, £673,155 remains uncommitted from a total of £8.5 million. Therefore, Policy and Resources resolves to transfer this uncommitted spend to the Emergency Financial Support Scheme and Discretionary Housing Scheme to support those residents who can demonstrate they have suffered financial hardship as a direct result of Covid, subject to the equivalent amount of funding being released from core budgets.**