

# COUNCIL

Monday, 27 February 2023

Present: The Civic Mayor (Councillor Jeff Green) in the  
Chair  
Deputy Civic Mayor (Councillor Jerry Williams)

Councillors	T Anderson	P Gilchrist	S Mountney
	S Bennett	N Graham	Y Nolan
	J Bird	EA Grey	C O'Hagan
	M Booth	J Grier	A Onwuemene
	A Brame	P Hayes	O Osanlou
	D Burgess-Joyce	A Hodson	S Percy
	H Cameron	K Hodson	C Povall
	I Camphor	J Hoey	S Powell-Wilde
	C Carubia	J Johnson	L Rennie
	P Cleary	C Jones	J Robinson
	M Collins	T Jones	T Smith
	H Collinson	M Jordan	P Stuart
	C Cooke	S Kelly	Jason Walsh
	T Cox	B Kenny	S Williams
	A Davies	D Kenny	J Williamson
	C Davies	J Laing	V Wilson
	G Davies	I Lewis	G Wood
	T Elzeiny	J McManus	A Wright
	S Foulkes	P Martin	
	A Gardner	D Mitchell	

<u>Apologies</u>	Councillors	L Fraser	K Greaney
		E Gleaves	Joe Walsh
		H Gorman	

## 77 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Civic Mayor welcomed everyone to the meeting then led Council in a moments silence in memory of Elle Edwards who was tragically killed on Christmas Eve in Wallasey village.

The Civic Mayor informed the meeting that he had been informed in advance of a number of Members who had a personal interest in agenda item 4c, 'Budget 2022/23 and Medium-Term Financial Plan' insofar as it related to the schools budget element by virtue of holding positions as school governors, as follows:

Councillors Brame, Carubia, Cleary, Collinson, Cooke, Angie Davies, George Davies, Foulkes, Gilchrist, Grey, McManus, Mitchell, Smith, Wilson, Williams and Wood. He also reported that Councillor Jo Bird wished to declare an interest as her partner was a school governor.

Additionally, the Civic Mayor reported the following personal interests insofar as they related to the schools budget element, by virtue of those Members either themselves or close family members working in either Schools or the Council's Education and Children, or Young People's Directorate:

Councillors Chris Jones, Martin, Povall, Robinson and Stuart.

Members were then invited to make any further declarations. Councillors Mike Collins and Yvonne Nolan declared personal interests as school governors, and Councillor Jo Bird declared a personal interest by virtue of her partner being a school governor. Councillors Steve Foulkes, Brian Kenny, Leslie Rennie and Gill Wood declared personal interests as members of the Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority who voted on the precept. Councillor Leslie Rennie declared a personal interest as her husband received a pension from Merseyside Police. Steve Foulkes declared a personal interest as he received a pension from Merseyside Police. Councillor Brian Kenny. Councillor Ian Lewis declared a personal interest as he was a Trustee of an organisation hoping to acquire Wallasey village library through the Community Asset Transfer programme. Councillor Mike Collins declared a personal interest as his company had a contract with social services.

## 78 **CIVIC MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Civic Mayor asked for any apologies and these were then given for Councillors Leah Fraser, Emily Gleaves, Harry Gorman, Karl Greaney and Joe Walsh.

The Civic Mayor informed the Council that he had attended 57 events since the last Council meeting which included Christmas events such as a Community Carol service at Christ the King, the Ukrainian Christmas Day celebration, plus a war memorial centenary celebration, an Everest film presentation, Chinese New Year and a minutes silence for Ukraine. He invited Members to the Civic Sunday on 30 April at St Bridget's Church in West Kirby.

## 79 **PROCEDURE FOR BUDGET DECISION MEETING OF COUNCIL**

The Council was then invited to consider the recommendation from the Policy and Resources Committee meeting of 15 February 2023, in respect of the procedure to be adopted for this extraordinary meeting of the Council.

On a motion by Councillor Janette Williamson, seconded by Councillor Jean Robinson, it was –

**Resolved – That, for the duration of the extraordinary meeting of 28 February 2023 (Budget Council):**

**(a) the procedure attached as Appendix A to the report be followed in respect of the meeting; and**

**(b) Council Standing Order 15.4 (timing of speeches) be suspended together with such other standing orders as may conflict with the Budget Council procedure or the Mayor’s administration of the meeting, in such a manner as the Mayor in his or her absolute discretion dictates, to ensure the objective of Council setting a lawful budget and council tax requirement prevails.**

**80 MATTERS REQUIRING APPROVAL OR CONSIDERATION BY THE COUNCIL**

Seven matters had been referred by the meetings of Policy and Resources Committee on 18 January and 15 February 2023.

**81 COUNCIL TAX 2023/24 (TAX BASE, DISCOUNTS AND EXEMPTIONS AND LOCAL COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME)**

The first matter requiring approval was in relation to proposed Council Tax, the motion for which was moved by Councillor Janette Williamson and seconded by Councillor Yvonne Nolan.

**Resolved (38:21) (1 abstention) – That**

**(1) The level and award of each local discount for 2023/24 be as follows:**

**Wirral Women’s & Children’s Aid**

**To continue to award Wirral Women & Children’s Aid 100% discount. This remains unchanged from 2022/23.**

**Care Leaver’s Discount**

**To award Care Leavers the requisite discount to reduce their Council Tax liability to zero until they are 25. This to remain unchanged from 2022/23.**

**Empty Property Discounts 2023/24**

**Discount category D = 0% Full charge on properties undergoing renovations.**

**Discount category C = 0% Full charge on empty properties from date they become unoccupied.**

**Both to remain unchanged from 2022/23, and to include an exception for properties requiring adaptations to meet the need of a disabled person who will be occupying the property as soon as the adaptations are complete and in addition awaiting renovations prior to being occupied by someone under Ukraine resettlement scheme.**

**Empty Property Premium =**

**100% (200% Council Tax) for unfurnished properties empty for more than two years.**

**200% (300% Council Tax) for unfurnished properties empty more than five years.**

**300% (400% Council Tax) for unfurnished properties empty more than ten years.**

**All remain unchanged from 2022/23, save for an exception from 1 April 2023 for properties that have restrictions placed upon them restricting the sale to a particular group (usually leasehold properties for the elderly which attract high service charges). An exception to be introduced to the Premium from 1 April 2023.**

**Council Tax Discretionary Hardship Relief Scheme**

**The Council Tax Discretionary Hardship Relief Scheme, approved by Cabinet in October 2013, to continue in its current format for 2023/24. The Scheme offers help and assistance in exceptional cases of hardship.**

**(2) Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (LCTRS)**

**The current Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme to remain unchanged from 2022/23 apart from the following :**

- a. The scheme to be aligned to all the Department of Work and Pensions uprating's and changes for Housing Benefit and Universal Credit**
- b. There to be no loss of entitlement due to payments made under Homes for Ukraine Scheme (£350)**
- c. In response to the government announcement (Council Tax Support Fund) of the 23 December, an additional reduction of at least £25 where a liability in excess of this exists, for all recipients of Council Tax Support for 2023/24 at the time of annual billing.**
- d. Delegated authority be given to the Head of Revenues & Benefits in consultation with the Director of Finance and Leader of the Council to create a discretionary scheme based upon government guidance to**

utilise any remaining funding provided under the Council Tax Support Fund for 2023/24

### **(3) Changes to Empty Property Discounts 2024/25**

To reduce the Empty Property Premium from 2024/25 to properties that have been empty for more than one year (Currently Two). So that the following apply:-

**100% (200% Council Tax) for unfurnished properties empty for more than one year.**

**200% (300% Council Tax) for unfurnished properties empty more than five years.**

**300% (400% Council Tax) for unfurnished properties empty more than ten years.**

### **(4) Changes to the treatment of second homes (dwellings that are furnished but are not someone's sole or main residence)**

From April 2024 the council to charge **100% (200% Council Tax) for any person with a second home within Wirral. Double the amount of council tax of a property occupied as someone's sole or main residence.**

## **82 BUDGET AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2023/24**

The Chair announced that following legal advice appendix at item 10 no longer needed to be treated as confidential and could be made publicly available. He proposed that items 5 and 6 on the agenda (exclusion of the press and public and noting the confidential appendix) therefore be withdrawn. This was approved by assent.

The second matter requiring approval was the Council Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy for 2023/24.

Councillor Janette Williamson formally moved the Motion, which was seconded by Councillor Jean Robinson, and which was set out as a recommendation of the Policy and Resources Committee of 15 February 2023, minute 94.

The motion having been formally moved and seconded, Councillor Janette Williamson spoke to her motion.

Councillor Kathy Hodson, as Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee, then spoke to the Schools Budget element of the proposed budget.

Councillor Tom Anderson, as Leader of the Conservative Group, then addressed the Council on the budget proposals.

Councillor Pat Cleary, as Leader of the Green Group, then addressed the Council on the budget proposals.

Councillor Phil Gilchrist, as Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, then addressed the Council on the budget proposals.

The budget proposals were then debated.

At 7.40pm the Mayor adjourned the meeting for a short break.

The meeting resumed at 7.55pm.

**In respect of the budget motion, the Council divided as follows:**

For the motion (38) - Councillors S Bennett, J Bird, A Brame, C Carubia, P Cleary, H Collinson, C Cooke, A Davies, C Davies, G Davies, S Foulkes, P Gilchrist, N Graham, E Grey, J Grier, J Hoey, C Jones, T Jones, S Kelly, B Kenny, D Kenny, J Laing, P Martin, J McManus, D Mitchell, Y Nolan, C O'Hagan, A Onwuemene, O Osanlou S Percy, S Powell-Wilde, J Robinson, T Smith, P Stuart, Jason Walsh, J Williams, J Williamson and G Wood.

Against the motion (21) – Councillors T Anderson, M Booth, D Burgess-Joyce, H Cameron, I Camphor, M Collins, T Cox, T Elzeiny, A Gardner, P Hayes, A Hodson, K Hodson, J Johnson, M Jordan, I Lewis, S Mountney, C Povall, L Rennie, S Williams, V Wilson and A Wright.

Abstaining (1)– Councillor J Green.

The motion was therefore carried (38:21) (1 abstention).

**The Council was then invited to vote on the Statutory calculations for the Council Tax levels for 2023/24 in accordance with Sections 32-36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.**

The Council voted as follows:

For the motion (59) - Councillors T Anderson, S Bennett, J Bird, M Booth, A Brame, D Burgess-Joyce, H Cameron, I Camphor, C Carubia, P Cleary, M Collins, H Collinson, C Cooke, T Cox, A Davies, C Davies, G Davies, T Elzeiny, S Foulkes, A Gardner, P Gilchrist, N Graham, E Grey, J Grier, P Hayes, A Hodson, K Hodson, J Hoey, J Johnson, C Jones, T Jones, M Jordan, S Kelly, B Kenny, D Kenny, J Laing, I Lewis, P Martin, J McManus, D Mitchell, S Mountney, Y Nolan, C O'Hagan, A Onwuemene, O Osanlou, S Percy, C Povall, S Powell-Wilde, L Rennie, J Robinson, T Smith, P Stuart,

Jason Walsh, J Williams, S Williams, J Williamson, V Wilson, G Wood and A Wright.

Against the motion – none.

Abstaining (1) – Councillor Jeff Green

The motion was therefore carried (59:0) (1 abstention).

**A. Resolved (38:21) (1 abstention) - That**

- (1) a) the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) set out as Appendix 7 be approved;
- b) increases to the Council's fees and charges equal to or above the annual Consumer Price Index reported by the Office for National Statistics in February 2023 be approved, unless either of the following conditions apply:
- i. There is a statutory constraint that prevents such an increase,
  - ii. The Council is operating in a market whereby such an increase would result in the Council being uncompetitive.
- c) the Discretionary Rate Relief Policy for Business Rates for 2023/24 set out as Appendix 6 be approved.
- d) Unearmarked Reserves (General Fund Balances) be maintained at a figure not lower than £13.18m for the course of the 2023/24 financial year.
- e) it be approved that, in respect of the Budget Proposals, the Director with portfolio undertake such actions as they consider necessary to implement the agreed Budget and deliver the savings, income and efficiency proposals developed as part of the formulation process and update Committees accordingly.
- f) the 2023/24 Schools Budget of £337.017m be approved

**B. Resolved (59:0) (1 abstention) - That:**

- (1) a. the Band D Council Tax be set at £1,798.48 for the Wirral Borough Council element of the Council Tax, representing a general increase of 2.99% and 2.00% ringfenced increase to Adult Social Care, and the Council Tax requirement for the Council's own purposes for 2023/24 of £171.9m as detailed in Appendix 5.
- b. it be noted that the additional precepts from the Police & Crime Commissioner for Merseyside and the Merseyside Fire & Rescue Authority remain in estimated form and authority be delegated to the Section 151 Officer to implement any variation to the overall council tax arising from the final notification of the precepts.

- (2) the additional funds of £135,000 arising from the final settlement be allocated as follows:  
£41k be invested in specialist, complex investigation work to support Children's social care cases where there are multiple victims or perpetrators.  
£94k be invested by not taking the following four budget options that fall within the Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee in respect of:
- The review of bulky waste (ERIC) collection service £10k
  - The Environmental Health Service Review £40k
  - The reduction in the recycling promotional budget £20k
  - The reduction in Waste & Environmental Services budget £24k

83 **CAPITAL MONITORING QUARTER 3 2022/23**

The third matter requiring approval was in relation to the capital monitoring for quarter 3 2022/23.

On a motion by Councillor Janette Williamson, seconded by Councillor Jean Robinson it was -

**Resolved – That**

- (1) the revised Capital Programme of £86.3 million for 2022/23 be approved, including the virements of budget referred to in Appendix D of the report.
- (2) the additional funding be approved for the schemes referred to in section 3.7 of the report from a variety of sources, new borrowing required from the Council, capital receipts, external contributions and the repurposing of previously agreed Council borrowing.

84 **CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2023-28**

The fourth item requiring approval was in relation to the capital programme for 2023-28.

On a motion by Councillor Janette Williamson, seconded by Councillor Jean Robinson it was -

**Resolved - That**

- (1) the new bids as detailed in Appendix B to this report be approved requiring £17.69 million of funding for inclusion in the Capital Programme.



- (2) any new bids supported by grant funding be approved but do not commence until written confirmation has been received from the granting authority.
- (3) the Capital Programme 2023-28 as detailed in Appendix C to this report be approved.

85 **CAPITAL FINANCING STRATEGY 2023/24**

The fifth item requiring approval was in relation to the Capital Financing Strategy 2023/24.

On a motion by Councillor Janette Williamson, seconded by Councillor Jean Robinson it was -

**Resolved – That**

- (1) the Capital Financing Strategy 2023/24 be approved.
- (2) the associated Prudential Indicators be adopted.
- (3) the Council's Minimum Revenue Provision policy be approved.

86 **TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2023/24**

The sixth item requiring approval was in relation to the Treasury Management Strategy 2023/24.

On a motion by Councillor Janette Williamson, seconded by Councillor Jean Robinson it was -

**Resolved – That**

- (1) the Treasury Management and Investment Strategy for 2023/2024 be approved.
- (2) the Treasury Management Prudential Indicators be approved.

87 **INVESTMENT STRATEGY 2023/24**

The seventh item requiring approval was in relation to the Investment Strategy 2023/24.

On a motion by Councillor Janette Williamson, seconded by Councillor Jean Robinson it was -

**Resolved – That the Investment Strategy for 2023/2024 which includes potential investment in Service Investments: Loans (including the Approval Limit detailed in Table 1), Service Investment: Shares (non-currently held), Commercial Property and Loan Commitments and Financial Guarantees be approved.**