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POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 15 January 2025

Present:

Councillor P Stuart (Chair)

Councillors	J Robinson	T Jones
	JE Green	J McManus
	J Bird	I Lewis
	P Gilchrist	S Mountney
	P Cleary	L Rennie
	EA Grey	S Bennett
	A Davies	G Jenkinson

75 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting as well as those watching the webcast.

76 APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

77 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following Members declared a registerable interest as Members of Trade Unions.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Interest</u>
Cllr Paul Stuart	Member of Community the Union Member of Unite the Union
Jean Robinson	Member of Unison
Julie McManus	Member of Unite the Union
Jo Bird	Member of Unison Member of The Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union BFAWU
Pat Cleary	Member of Unite the Union
Elizabeth Grey	Member of the National Education Union
Angela Davies	Member of Managers in Partnership, part of Unison
Tony Jones	Member of Unison (retired)

Stephen Bennett	Member of Unison (retired)
Gail Jenkinson	Member of Unite the Union

78 **MINUTES**

The Chair asked Members to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 11 December 2024.

Councillor Cleary queried minute item 70 of the minutes, noting that the minutes recorded an apology offered by Committee to Councillor Bird. Councillor Cleary requested that the minutes be corrected to state that apologies were offered by Councillors Stewart, Robinson and Green.

Councillor Grey queried minute item 68 relating to the Council Plan. The minute stated that a performance framework had been developed through working group activity. Councillor Grey stated that she welcomed the fact that working group activity was planned, but it had not yet happened.

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 11 December 2024 be approved as a correct record, with the above amendments.

79 **PUBLIC AND MEMBER QUESTIONS**

The Chair confirmed that no Public Questions, Statements or Petitions had been received.

80 **DELIVERY AND MANAGEMENT PARTNER (CONCESSION)**

This report set out a proposal for a new procurement initiative which sought to appoint a concessionaire under a concession contract.

The appointed concessionaire was to work with the Council as the contracting authority to design, market, and manage framework agreements for use by the Council and other contracting authorities.

The framework agreements covered:

1. Construction Works (with or without Lots), and
2. Developer Led Projects (with or without Lots) The Council intended to appoint the concessionaire by the end of March 2025 to design and set up both frameworks with anticipated award dates of Q2 2026.

Members were informed that a procurement exercise allowed the implementation of a new procurement initiative to appoint a concessionaire under the Concession Contracts Regulations 2016 (the “Concessionaire”) to work with the Council as the contracting authority to design, market and manage framework agreements for use by both the Council and other

contracting authorities such as local authorities, police and fire authorities, universities, NHS Trusts etc.

The initiative was expected to be income generating based on a commercial model that will make the concession contract financially viable for both the concessionaire and the Council. The concessionaire would not receive any consideration or payment from the Council for any of the services to be delivered under the contract. The precise detail of the commercial arrangements were not established as the concessionaire had yet to be appointed.

Members welcomed recommendation 2 which requested that the Director of Finance bring a further report to Members which was to set out the results of evaluation of the bids for a concessionaire. Members were also informed that the initiative was expected to be income generating based on a commercial model which made the concession contract financially viable for both the concessionaire and the Council. Members also queried the legal costs to set up the Concessionaire, how the delivery and management partner would support small to medium sized enterprises (SMEs).

Resolved –

- 1. to agree to a process to appoint a concessionaire who will work with the Council and specifically the Director of Finance reporting to the finance working group to design, market, and manage framework agreements commence as follows:**
 - (a) Construction Works (with or without Lots), and**
 - (b) Developer Led Projects (with or without Lots) as referred to in paragraph 1.1 of this report.**
- 2. That the Director of Finance be requested to bring a further report to Members which sets out the results of evaluation of the bids for a concessionaire for the concession contract to deliver the frameworks referred to in recommendation 1.**
- 3. That further steps that will need to be undertaken, post the decision to appoint the concessionaire which will include:**
 - a. Commencement of the procurement processes to appoint contractor, developer and professional services suppliers to the frameworks, and**
 - b. Evaluation submissions and make appointments further to the processes referred to at recommendation 2(b).**

c. That the Director of Law and Corporate Services, in consultation with the Director of Finance, will need to be authorised to finalise and enter into the concession contract and the framework agreements for contractor, developer and professional services suppliers all of which will be reported to Members in due course for decision.

81 **COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME AND COUNCIL TAX BASE CALCULATION 2025/26**

The report brought together related issues regarding the Council Tax Base for 2025/26 upon which the annual Council Tax levels will be set.

The proposed Council Tax Discounts included Local Discounts, Exemptions, and the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme to be used during 2025/26. These needed to be approved by Council by 11 March 2025.

Members were informed that the Council was subject to significant Financial Pressures, introducing a Banded Scheme for Working Age Claimants and aligning the Councils Council Tax Reduction Scheme with those across the City Region will assist alleviating these pressures. Implementing the decision of the Council Meeting of the 26 February 2024 to introduce 2nd Home Premiums also provided additional income.

Members queried the implementation date of the 2nd Homes Premium and the impact of the Banded Scheme for Working Age Claimants, and how residents and homeowners were to be informed. Assurances were made that a publicity campaign was to be undertaken, to ensure that as many residents were informed of the changes as possible.

Resolved – that,

- 1. the figure of 97,908.96 as the Council Tax Base for 2025/26. This is an increase of 1,915.03 (1.99%) on last year's Council Tax Base be approved.**
- 2. recommend to Council that,**

The level and award of each local discount for 2025/26 be as follows: -

1. Wirral Women's & Children's Aid

To continue to award Wirral Women & Children's Aid 100% discount. This remains unchanged from 2024/25.

2. Care Leaver's Discount

To award Care Leavers the requisite discount to reduce their Council Tax liability to zero until they are 25. This remains unchanged from 2024/25.

3. Empty Property Discounts 2025/26

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 2024/25, and to include an exception for properties requiring adaptations to meet the needs of a disabled person who will be occupying the property as soon as the adaptations are complete. This also applies to properties awaiting renovations prior to being occupied by someone under Ukraine resettlement scheme. Empty Property Premiums for 2025/26 to remain unchanged from 2024/25, except for where statutory exceptions have been introduced in “The Council Tax (Prescribed Classes of Dwellings and Consequential Amendments) (England) Regulations 2024”. 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. Exceptions detailed in 3.24.

4. 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 2025/26. The Scheme offers help and assistance in exceptional cases of hardship. Residents experiencing hardship as a result of changes to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme will be directed to this scheme. Appendix 1

5. Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (LCTRS) The current Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for Working Age Residents to be replaced from the 1st April 2025 with a banded scheme requiring a minimum payment of 17.5% from all Working Age Claimants. Appendix 2

The scheme for pensioners as required by legislation remains unchanged from 2024/25 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 government defined compensation schemes.

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

From 1st April 2025 the council to charge an additional 100% council tax (200% Council Tax) for any person with a second home within Wirral

82 EXCEPTIONAL FINANCIAL SUPPORT APPLICATION

The report provided a brief update on the Council's critical financial position and requested the committee's support for the Section 151 Officer's application to the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) for £20m of Exceptional Financial Support in 2024/25.

At the end of quarter 2, the Council anticipated a potential adverse 2024/25 outturn position of £21.563m on Directorate spend. While the quarter 3 financial position was still being analysed, the outlook is not expected to improve and may indeed worsen due to the anticipated winter pressures on social care services.

The financial projections for this year mean the Council was confronted with a significant risk of a considerable in-year overspend which the Council did not have the resources to resolve and a budget position which was not sustainable in future years. The Council was set to enter 2025/26 with severely diminished reserves, leaving it vulnerable to potential economic pressures, without adequate financial resilience to cope with any unexpected costs and no resources to fund the costs of required transformational changes.

Members were informed that the Section 151 Officer had begun discussions with MHCLG and had submitted an initial request for Exceptional Financial Support.

The Section 151 Officer advised that Members had been working hard to agree potential savings for 25/26 through the Finance Working Group and the Budget Oversight Panels and the outcomes of these included a wide range of savings with a total value in the region of £25m.

The savings were to be very challenging to achieve in full, in year, and required the Council's transformation journey to be accelerated.

Members discussed Early Voluntary Retirement/Severance, noting that they were pleased that there was a thoughtful and constructive dialogue with staff and Trade Unions undertaken. Members requested some oversight of future staff changes via Finance Working Group.

On a motion by Councillor Stuart, duly seconded it was,

Resolved – that,

- 1. the Section 151 Officer’s application for £20m of Exceptional Financial Support to cover the deficit position for 2024/25 and a further potential £20m for 2025/26 to fund transformation costs of agreed savings be supported.**
- 2. the Section 151 Officer’s intention to maintain the spending freeze and recruitment controls, to limit expenditure to only absolute essential items, for the remainder of the year and into 2025/26 be noted.**

the Section 151 Officer in consultation with Directors be instructed to minimise spend, where possible.

- 3. the Director of Law and Corporate Services in consultation with the Section 151 Officer and other Directors be authorised to carry out consultation (both individual and collective), including the serving of any statutory notices or other notices (such as HR1 and Section 188 documentation), and to support and seek alternatives in respect of employment, as required, noting that this will include a global offer to all staff to seek early voluntary redundancy.**

83 **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chair presented the report, and informed Members that the Committee was responsible for proposing and delivering an annual committee work programme. It was reported that the work programme should align with the corporate priorities of the Council, in particular the delivery of the key decisions which are within the remit of the Committee.

It was envisaged that the work programme would be formed from a combination of key decisions, standing items and requested officer reports. The report provided the Committee with an opportunity to plan and regularly review its work across the municipal year. The work programme for the Policy and Resources Committee was attached as Appendix 1 to the report.

Members requested that a budget recovery plan be added to the work programme and queried the time scales for an Asset Management Policy.

Resolved – That Policy and Resources Committee notes the proposed Policy and Resources Committee work programme with the above addition.