

Public Document Pack

COUNCIL

Monday, 2 December 2024

Present:

Councillor C Povall (The Civic Mayor)
B Kenny (Deputy Civic Mayor)

Councillors	A Ainsworth	T Jones
	C Baldwin	M Jordan
	P Basnett	S Kelly
	G Bennett	T Laing
	S Bennett	E Lamb
	J Bird	I Lewis
	M Booth	L Luxon-Kewley
	A Brame	P Martin
	H Cameron	C McDonald
	C Carubia	J McManus
	P Cleary	R Molyneux
	C Cooke	S Mountney
	G Cooper	K Murphy
	T Cox	T Murphy
	A Davies	A Onwuemene
	GJ Davies	R Pitt
	S Foulkes	S Powell-Wilde
	A Gardner	H Raymond
	P Gilchrist	L Rennie
	H Gorman	M Redfern
	N Graham	J Robinson
	JE Green	M Skillicorn
	EA Grey	K Stuart
	J Grier	P Stuart
	B Hall	M Sullivan
	A Hodson	E Tomeny
	K Hodson	J Walsh
	P Jobson	KJ Williams
	G Jenkinson	J Williamson
	J Johnson	V Wilson
		G Wood

18 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Civic Mayor welcomed everyone to the meeting and those watching the webcast. She then asked Members to consider whether they had any disclosable pecuniary and/or any other relevant interest in connection with

any matters to be determined at this meeting and, if so, to declare it and state the nature of such interest. No such interests were declared.

19 **CIVIC MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Civic Mayor announced that apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Graham Davis, Graham McManus and James Stuart-Laing.

The Civic Mayor then announced that she had completed 254 engagements to date including a hosting a Freedom of the Borough reception for David Armstrong.

20 **MINUTES**

Resolved – That the minutes of the meetings held on 7 October 2024 be approved as a correct record.

21 **PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

The Civic Mayor announced that one public question had submitted in advance of the meeting.

Mr Amit Sunny asked the Leader of the Council a question regarding the Liverpool Super Kings Cricket Club and shared access to Leverhulme playing fields pitches. Mr Sunny asked what the Council was going to do to ensure fair allocation of playing facilities reflecting inclusivity and equitable treatment for all cricket clubs.

The Leader of the Council responded to state that wicket allocations were based on operational financial considerations noting that the Council's policies do not prioritise specific clubs based on geography. Instead, it seeks to ensure that existing hire arrangements are reviewed and renewed where possible. However, hire arrangements for wickets operate on a seasonal basis and does not provide a guarantee of renewal. Whilst the availability of council cricket wickets is limited, the Council remained committed to ensuring that all allocation decisions were made transparently and equitably within these constraints.

21.1 **Statements and Petitions**

The Civic Mayor announced the one petition had been received and invited Emma Gould to present her petition of 1,023 signatures against the proposed Wirral Core Active Travel Network.

Ms Gould expressed the concerns of residents and business owners in Wallasey, noting that they felt that the proposed plan has not been adequately considered nor the potential adverse effects before being publicly presented.

21.2 **Members' Questions**

The Civic Mayor announced that one Member question had been received and asked Councillor Phil Gilchrist to present his question.

Councillor Gilchrist noted that the Minister of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) had issued a statement on the financial pressures facing councils and asked if the leader could confirm that officers were well placed and fully supported to work with MHCLG on mitigating these pressures.

The Leader responded to state that the Section 151 Officer and finance staff were in regular contact with MHCLG to discuss the significant challenges faced in relation to the Council's financial position and the actions required to address this. Officers continued to work with MHCLG to determine the level and the nature of support required to balance the Budget.

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

The Civic Mayor announced that there were 7 items requiring approval or consideration by Council

23 **YOUTH JUSTICE ANNUAL PLAN**

The first matter for approval was to approve the new Youth Justice Annual Plan as recommended by the Children Young People and Education Committee on Wednesday 16 October 2024.

Resolved – That the Wirral Youth Justice Service's Strategic Plan 2024-25 be approved.

24 **PAY POLICY 2025-2026**

The second matter for approval was to approve the new Pay Policy 2025-26 as recommended by Policy and Resources Committee on Wednesday 6th November 2024.

Resolved – that, the Pay Policy Statement for the financial year 2025-2026 be approved.

25 **CAPITAL MONITORING QUARTER 2 2024/25**

The third matter for approval was the revised 2024/25 Capital Programme of £100.219 million, which took account of re-profiling, virements, additional funding requirements and grant variations identified since the Capital Programme was formally agreed on 26th February 2024.

Resolved – that,

- 1. The revised Capital Programme of £100.219 million for 2024/25, including the virements of budget referred to in Appendix 3 of this report be approved.**
- 2. Additional funding for the scheme referred to in section 3.7 in this report be approved.**
- 3. The amendment to the Council's Minimum Revenue Provision policy as set out in 3.8.1 of this report be approved.**
- 4. The request to enter into a Pre-Construction Services Agreement as detailed in 3.8.4 be approved and accept the C4 estimate detailed in 3.8.5 prior to the Grant Fund Agreement being signed.**

25.1 REVISIONS TO THE CONSTITUTION

The fourth matter for consideration was to approve the updated revisions to the Constitution which had been amended to incorporate changes referred to Council by the Constitution and Standards Committee who met on 20th November 2024.

The proposed changes as recommended by the Constitution and Standards Committee were in relation to:

- Public Questions
- Members Scheme of Allowances

Resolved – that,

- 1. the proposed amendments to the Constitution, as detailed in sections 3.2 to 3.4 of the report as recommended by the Constitution and Standards Committee be endorsed.**
- 2. the revisions to the Constitution be adopted**

25.2 APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT PERSONS TO CONSTITUTION AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE

The fifth matter for approval was the appointment of Independent Persons. The report sought approval for the re-appointment of two Independent Persons to sit as co-opted members of the Constitution and Standards Committee for two years.

Resolved – That:

- 1.the following Independent Persons be appointed to the Constitution and Standards Committee, for a period of two years:**

- **Mr C Jones**
- **Professor RS Jones**

2. that the short period of transition that the number of independent persons may increase by 2, as set out in paragraph 3.5 of the report be noted

25.3 DRAFT STATEMENT OF LICENSING POLICY

The sixth matter for approval was the draft Statement of Licensing Policy under the Licensing Act 2003 which was attached as an appendix to the report.

Resolved – that,

- 1. the draft Statement of Licensing Policy 2024 - 2029 under the Licensing Act 2003 attached at Appendix 1 to the report be approved.**
- 2. the Cumulative Impact Assessment applied to the area of Birkenhead currently referenced in the draft Statement of Licensing Policy 2024 - 2029 attached at Appendix 1 to the report should continue**

25.4 DRAFT STATEMENT OF GAMBLING POLICY

The seventh matter for approval was the draft Statement of Gambling Policy under the Gambling Act 2005 which was attached as an appendix to the report.

Resolved – that, the draft Statement of Gambling Policy 2024-2027 under the Gambling Act 2005 attached at Appendix 1 to the report be approved.

26 DECISIONS TAKEN SINCE THE LAST COUNCIL MEETING

The Civic Mayor invited members to ask questions in relation to the minutes of Committee meetings held since the last Council meeting.

Councillor Stuart Kelly asked a question of Councillor Liz Grey in her capacity as the Chair of the Chair of the Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee on 18 September 2024 minute extract 23. Councillor Kelly raised concerns over the lack of timely communication about road closures on Woodchurch Road and surrounding areas, causing disruptions to residents, businesses, and public transport.

Councillor Gray acknowledged the issue and promised a written response to Councillor Kelly's question.

Councillor Ruth Molyneux asked a question of Councillor Paul Stuart in his capacity as the Chair of Policy and Resources Committee. Referring to the minutes of the 6 November 2024, minute extract 23, Councillor Molyneux questioned the financial viability of moving Council Committees back to Wallasey Town Hall, citing costs of £1.6 million per year.

Councillor Paul Stuart responded to state that the move back to Wallasey Town Hall had been fully costed.

Councillor Naomi Graham asked a question of Councillor Paul Stuart in his capacity as the Chair of Policy and Resources Committee. Referring to the minutes of the 6 November 2024, minute extract 53 and 54, Councillor Graham praised the council's efforts to improve energy efficiency but pointed out that many Display Energy Certificate (DEC) recommendations had remained unchanged since 2017.

Councillor Paul Stuart responded that energy-saving initiatives were in place, but he agreed to ensure recommendations were shared with staff.

Councillor Jason Walsh-McDonald asked a question of Councillor Tony Jones in his capacity as the Chair of Economy, Regeneration and Housing Committee. Referring to the minutes of the 16th September, minute extract 102 Councillor J Walsh McDonald questioned how the council would protect the Green Belt and implement the 2040 Framework in light of government guidance.

Councillor Tony Jones promised a written response would be issued.

Councillor Amanda Onwuemene asked a question of Councillor Paul Stuart in his capacity as the Chair of Policy and Resources Committee. Referring to the minutes of the 6 November 2024, minute extract 54. Councillor Onwuemene questioned whether the council's financial struggles would lead to compulsory redundancies.

Councillor Paul Stuart acknowledged financial challenges but assured that compulsory redundancies would be a last resort.

Councillor Gail Jenkinson asked a question of Councillor Paul Stuart in his capacity as the Chair of Policy and Resources Committee. Referring to, minute extracts 38 & 57. Councillor Jenkinson questioned why the Local Plan

had disappeared from the agenda and warned that its absence could lead to uncontrolled Green Belt development.

Councillor Paul Stuart assured that the plan was still under review by the inspectorate and would be presented once the inspection process was complete.

Councillor Jo Bird asked a question of Councillor Jean Robinson in her capacity as Vice-Chair of Policy and Resources Committee, minute extract 48. Councillor Jo Bird queried that the decision to build two office blocks had gone to full council.

Councillor Robinson stated that the decision had gone to full Council.

26.1 **JOINT ARRANGEMENTS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS**

Councillor Gilchrist asked a question of Councillor Steve Foulkes in his capacity as Chair of the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Transport Committee. Councillor Gilchrist raised concerns about frequent rail disruptions on the Wirral Line to Hooton due to severe flooding, possibly exacerbated by recent developments in the area. He asked whether the council was actively engaging with Network Rail to find solutions.

Councillor Foulkes responded that flooding has been a recurring issue and that while past interventions (such as clearing drains and culverts) had helped, recent extreme rainfall has worsened the problem. He acknowledged the potential impact of new housing developments but emphasized that multiple factors contribute to flooding. Authorities, including Network Rail, the council, and third-party landowners, are meeting biweekly to address the issue. Solutions under consideration include larger pumps and water storage tanks.

27 **MOTION 1 - WIRRAL COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO THE CLIMATE AND BIODIVERSITY**

Councillor Ewen Tomney moved and Councillor Ed Lamb seconded a motion submitted in accordance with Standing Order 13.

In moving the motion, Councillor Tomney confirmed that he was happy to accept the Labour Group amendment, which was moved by Councillor Elizabeth Grey, and seconded by Councillor Janette Williamson as follows:

Insert the following words (in bold) and delete the following struck through words from the resolutions:

- Reaffirm the **importance of the 2019 Declaration of an Environment and Climate Emergency**, recognising the urgent threat of climate change and recommitting to its goals, focusing on reducing carbon emissions and transitioning to sustainable, climate-conscious practices across all council operations;

- declare a Nature and **Climate Biodiversity Emergency (accepting that the ‘Environment’ part of the 2019 declaration is better described by the term ‘Nature’)**, reinforcing Council’s commitment to protecting Wirral’s ecosystems and natural heritage ~~thereby extending current~~ **celebrating that we now include both assessments of biodiversity as well as of climate impacts in policies, actions, and planning;** and

- ask the Environment, Climate Emergency & Transport committee to **continue to develop** an action plan for implementing this declaration including promoting understanding by the public.

Insert additional paragraphs following the last bullet point:

Council celebrates the fact that Wirral came top out of all authorities compared across the country in terms of biodiversity when investigated by Climate Emergency UK. Council wishes to thank officers for all the work that is going into protecting the natural world in Wirral, including all the actions and outcomes outlined in this week’s update on the Biodiversity & Net Gain Strategy which was agreed by the Environment, Climate Emergency Transport Committee a year ago and which has led to the recruitment of a fully qualified and experienced ecologist and the successful awards of national grant funding to establish exciting new habitat restoration and habitat banks here in Wirral and close work with the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority on a Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

After a discussion where Members spoke to the motion, it was put to the vote and,

Resolved (47:15) 1 Abstention that,

Council reaffirms its stance that climate change poses an urgent and escalating threat to Wirral’s communities, environment, and future generations. Immediate and coordinated action remains essential to safeguard residents’ collective wellbeing.

In 2019 Wirral Council declared an environment and climate emergency, recognising the severe threat of climate change and committing to urgent action. Since then, this council has made many positive changes, with local initiatives across renewable energy, green infrastructure, and community awareness.

However, since the declaration, the urgency of the climate crisis has only intensified. This July set the record for Earth's hottest day ever recorded, and 2024 is projected to be the hottest year in history, surpassing the previous record set just last year. Alarmingly, global average temperatures are expected to exceed the critical threshold of 1.5°C warming above pre-industrial levels this year. As the Prime Minister stated at COP in November, "the world stands at a critical juncture in the climate crisis," emphasising the urgency of immediate and coordinated action.

Extreme weather events are becoming more frequent and intense. The UK's wettest 18 months on record, culminating earlier this year, has intensified severe flooding—including here on Wirral—posing significant risks to Wirral's communities. These climatic changes are increasing threats to health, infrastructure, and the environment.

The climate crisis is accompanied by a profound and related biodiversity challenge, with the degradation of ecosystems and loss of species further exacerbating environmental and community vulnerabilities.

The delicate balance of ecosystems is vital for clean air, water, and fertile Soil. Yet, biodiversity in the UK is in steep decline, with species abundance dropping by 19% since 1970. Pollinators, such as bees and hoverflies, essential for food production, have decreased by 18%, while pest control species like the 2-spot ladybird have fallen by 34%. Today, only 14% of key wildlife habitats are in good condition, including just 7% of woodlands and 25% of peatlands. The UK is now Page 5 one of the most nature-depleted countries on Earth, and protecting and restoring ecosystems additionally demands immediate and coordinated action.

The escalating climate and biodiversity crises demand decisive action and place a clear responsibility on us, as elected representatives, to respond with meaningful and accelerated efforts. The Government's Net Zero Strategy emphasises that "*local government plays an essential role in meeting national net zero ambitions*" and is "*best placed to integrate activity on the ground*" and inspire action across businesses, communities, and civil society. By expanding and accelerating targeted efforts, supported by adequate funding and resources, the council can reduce pollution, restore biodiversity, and build resilience against these growing challenges. Last year's Climate Change Committee's Progress in reducing UK emissions 2023 Report to Parliament highlights that progress is "too slow", and lacks "the necessary action on the ground". Wirral Council's risk register further highlights the urgency of action, stating, "Total emissions are above the carbon budget targets for 2023/24 and we will continue to miss the targets unless we are able to secure significant investment to decarbonise the council assets."

Ensuring a sustainable, resilient, and healthy future for Wirral will require a significant scaling up of local efforts to match the urgency of the task ahead. Council therefore resolves to:

- Reaffirm the importance of the 2019 Declaration of an Environment and Climate Emergency, recognising the urgent threat of climate change and recommitting to its goals, focusing on reducing carbon emissions and transitioning to sustainable, climate-conscious practices across all council operations;**
- declare a Nature and Climate Emergency (accepting that the ‘Environment’ part of the 2019 declaration is better described by the term ‘Nature’), reinforcing Council’s commitment to protecting Wirral’s ecosystems and natural heritage celebrating that we now include both assessments of biodiversity as well as climate impacts in policies, actions, and planning; and**
- ask the Environment, Climate Emergency & Transport committee to continue to develop an action plan for implementing this declaration including promoting understanding by the public.**

Council celebrates the fact that Wirral came top out of all authorities compared across the country in terms of biodiversity when investigated by Climate Emergency UK. Council wishes to thank officers for all the work that is going into protecting the natural world in Wirral, including all the actions and outcomes outlined in this week’s update on the Biodiversity & Net Gain Strategy which was agreed by the Environment, Climate Emergency Transport Committee a year ago and which has led to the recruitment of a fully qualified and experienced ecologist Page 6 and the successful awards of national grant funding to establish exciting new habitat restoration and habitat banks here in Wirral and close work with the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority on a Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

28 MOTION 2 - SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES

Councillor Stephen Bennett moved and Councillor Paula Basnett seconded the following motion submitted in accordance with Standing Order 13.1.

In moving the motion, Councillor Bennett confirmed that he was happy to accept the Green Group amendment, which was moved by Councillor Gail Jenkinson, and seconded by Councillor Judith Grier as follows:

Insert the following words (in bold)

Huge thanks to all the young people who participated in the Wirral Youth Parliament on 13th November 2024. Their voices are vital; many shared their experiences living with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). They emphasised the importance of person-centred support and care, advocating for genuine co-production in the design and delivery of services.

On 24th October 2024, the National Audit Office published a pivotal report titled "Support for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs." This report estimates that approximately 1.9 million children and young people aged 0 to 25 years in England (11%) were identified as having SEND as of January 2024, with 1.7 million currently in school.

The findings are concerning: many families have lost confidence in the SEND system, and since 2019, there has been no consistent improvement in outcomes for Page 7 these young people. The report also highlights that the system is financially unsustainable and urgently requires reform.

The previous Conservative government failed these children and their families. In contrast, the new Labour government is committed to addressing these concerns.

*One of the Labour government's key missions is to break down barriers to opportunity, aiming for a sustained rise in young people's school outcomes over the next decade. This includes building essential life skills ensuring **families are able to afford to meet their child's SEND needs, so that every child can achieve their best life.** Reforming the SEND system is crucial to this mission.*

The Labour government's commitment to building a National Health Service fit for the future will ensure more appointments to tackle long waiting lists, alongside a joint workforce strategy integrating education, health, and social care.

The National Audit Office has recommended a whole system reform to improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND and their families. The SEND system needs rebuilding from the ground up. Services should be navigable for parents, children, and young people, with each child having a single, transparent plan outlining the support they are entitled to.

Wirral Council need a clear, long-term funding stream based on local needs and a national workforce strategy to address recruitment and retention challenges across all services working with children and young people.

Council acknowledges the SEND improvement notice issued to Wirral Borough Council on 15.5.24 and restates its commitment to bring about meaningful change and improvement to the educational opportunities and outcomes for our SEND children and young people.

The Council requests that the Leader of the Council and the Chair of the Children, Young People & Education Committee write to the Secretary of State for Education, asking her to take decisive action per the report's findings and the debate undertaken at Youth Parliament, and to show bold leadership that focuses on integrating education, health, and care services, developing a whole-system approach to the reform that SEND services need. This will drive better planning and earlier intervention, creating a sustainable system that achieves positive outcomes for all children.

Any reform to the SEND system needs to ensure that every child and young person with SEND has the support they need to thrive.

After a discussion where Members spoke to the motion, it was put to the vote and,

Resolved (Unanimously) – that

Huge thanks to all the young people who participated in the Wirral Youth Parliament on 13th November 2024. Their voices are vital; many shared their experiences living with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). They emphasised the importance of person-centred support and care, advocating for genuine co-production in the design and delivery of services.

On 24th October 2024, the National Audit Office published a pivotal report titled “Support for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs.” This report estimates that approximately 1.9 million children and young people aged 0 to 25 years in England (11%) were identified as having SEND as of January 2024, with 1.7 million currently in school.

The findings are concerning: many families have lost confidence in the SEND system, and since 2019, there has been no consistent improvement in outcomes for Page 7 these young people. The report also highlights that the system is financially unsustainable and urgently requires reform.

The previous Conservative government failed these children and their families. In contrast, the new Labour government is committed to addressing these concerns.

One of the Labour government’s key missions is to break down barriers to opportunity, aiming for a sustained rise in young people’s school outcomes over the next decade. This includes building essential life skills ensuring families are able to afford to meet their child’s SEND

needs, so that every child can achieve their best life. Reforming the SEND system is crucial to this mission.

The Labour government's commitment to building a National Health Service fit for the future will ensure more appointments to tackle long waiting lists, alongside a joint workforce strategy integrating education, health, and social care.

The National Audit Office has recommended a whole system reform to improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND and their families. The SEND system needs rebuilding from the ground up. Services should be navigable for parents, children, and young people, with each child having a single, transparent plan outlining the support they are entitled to.

Wirral Council need a clear, long-term funding stream based on local needs and a national workforce strategy to address recruitment and retention challenges across all services working with children and young people.

Council acknowledges the SEND improvement notice issued to Wirral Borough Council on 15.5.24 and restates its commitment to bring about meaningful change and improvement to the educational opportunities and outcomes for our SEND children and young people.

The Council requests that the Leader of the Council and the Chair of the Children, Young People & Education Committee write to the Secretary of State for Education, asking her to take decisive action per the report's findings and the debate undertaken at Youth Parliament, and to show bold leadership that focuses on integrating education, health, and care services, developing a whole-system approach to the reform that SEND services need. This will drive better planning and earlier intervention, creating a sustainable system that achieves positive outcomes for all children.

Any reform to the SEND system needs to ensure that every child and young person with SEND has the support they need to thrive.

29 MOTION 3 - BACK WIRRAL FARMERS

Councillor Vida Wilson moved and Councillor Jeff Green seconded the following motion submitted in accordance with Standing Order 13.1.

In moving the motion, Councillor Wilson confirmed that she was happy to accept the Liberal Democrat amendment, which was moved by Councillor Phil Gilchrist, and seconded by Councillor Allan Brame as follows,

Insert the following words (in bold)

Council notes that:

The recent 2024 Autumn Budget changes to Agricultural Property Relief and Business Property Relief, known commonly as a Family Farm Tax, announced by the Labour Government will have a detrimental impact on Family Farms and farmers' ability to pass on their farms to the next generation of farmers.

Council believes that:

The Labour Government have committed a shameful betrayal and let down farmers by breaking their promise to not introduce a Family Farm Tax. The Family Farm Tax will damage the ability of farmers to pass on their farms to their children and create instability for tenant farmers.

Labour's Family Farm Tax will threaten food security by forcing the sale of family farms.

The Labour Government's Family Farm Tax will make British food production harder. That the Secretary of State for the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Steve Reed and Keir Starmer failed to include the introduction of this tax in the Labour Party's manifesto.

Numerous rural and farming organisations such as the National Farmers Union (NFU) and Country Land and Business Association have warned that countless farms will be harmed, threatening food security and rural areas.

The comments made by Secretary of State for the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Steve Reed that already struggling farmers will have to 'do more with less' is an insult to British farmers who produce affordable, quality food to world leading animal welfare and environmental standards, all while protecting and enhancing our precious countryside.

At a time when many farmers in Wirral are struggling with soaring costs and energy prices, this sudden tax rise will damage the future of their farms.

Council resolves:

To request that the Leader of the Council writes to the Secretary of State for the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to outline the Council's dismay at this decision and calls on the Government to stop the Family Farm Tax.

To request the Mayor to sign the National Farmers Union petition Stop the Family Farm Tax on behalf of the Council and the petition is circulated to all Members to sign

That the Chief Executive writes to all local farmers outlining what the Council can do to support them.

It is important to recognise that the Council received a detailed report on the importance of Wirral's farmland following a Notice of Motion agreed by all Members on 15th October 2018. This led to a report 'Study of Agricultural Economy and Land in Wirral' dated 30 September 2019 at a time when the Council set out to show that our farmland should be protected from the threat posed by developers. This reported that 'Around 74% of agricultural land is rented as opposed to being owner-occupied' The document was also clear that the predominant challenge farmers in Wirral currently face is making sufficient income from agriculture. The key concerns are rising input costs, decreasing output prices and the potential reduction in direct subsidy payments.'

In view of Wirral's changing climate and its impact on our fields and farms, the need for security of food supplies for Wirral and the rest of the country and the distress and uncertainty caused by the recent budgetary announcements, Council believes that the real concerns and interests of family farmers should be placed above those who have merely bought land for investment or tax avoidance purposes.

Accordingly, Council also requests Government to re-assess the timing and implementation of the tax regime to ensure that food supplies are secured and produced in as environmentally sustainable way as possible to ensure soil health and a sound financial base for future generations.'

After a discussion where Members spoke to the motion, it was put to the vote and it was lost (21:41) (1 abstention).

30 **MOTION 4 - IMPROVEMENT NEEDED FOR PAYMENT SYSTEMS TO PROTECT WIRRAL BOROUGH COUNCIL AND SMALL BUSINESSES**

Councillor Stuart Kelly moved and Councillor Phil Gilchrist seconded the following motion submitted in accordance with Standing Order 13.1.

In moving the motion, Councillor Kelly confirmed that he was happy to accept the Labour Group amendment, which was moved by Councillor Ann Ainsworth, and seconded by Councillor Paul Stuart as follows,

Insert the following words (in bold)

Council recognises that small and medium sized businesses who supply the Council with services often run very tight margins and may struggle to survive due to unpaid bills.

Regulation 113 of the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 requires public authorities, like Wirral Council, to pay undisputed invoices due within 30 days, and to publish data showing their performance on paying invoices within 30 days.

Wirral MBC performance can be found here - [Invoices paid within 30 days | wirral.gov.uk](https://www.wirral.gov.uk/invoices-paid-within-30-days)

Council notes with concern that performance in paying invoices to suppliers in the financial year 2023/24 dropped by nearly 20% compared to previous years. (Approx. 78% against 98%)

The drop in performance exposes the Council to the risk of having to make interest payments on late invoices of £700,000; bad news especially for small and medium sized businesses whose cash flow might be affected and Wirral Council tax payers who could end up footing the bill for system failures.

Council therefore requests that the Director of Finance produces a report to be considered by Members at the next practicable meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee which provides Members with assurances of steps to be taken to restore the 30-day target to historical levels, to improve payment systems, and to reduce potential liability.

The report should include the following:

- An explanation as to why the nearly 20% drop has occurred in 23/24***
- Detail the types of businesses affected by failure to pay undisputed invoices within 30 days (Small, Medium, Large) in 23/24***
- Consider a rapid escalation process for undisputed invoice payment that breaches the 30-day regulation 113 of the Public Contracts Regulations 2015. This will help small and medium family-run businesses***

After a discussion where Members spoke to the motion, it was put to the vote and,

Resolved (unanimous) – that,

Council recognises that small and medium sized businesses who supply the Council with services often run very tight margins and may struggle to survive due to unpaid bills.

Regulation 113 of the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 requires public authorities, like Wirral Council, to pay undisputed invoices due within 30 days, and to publish data showing their performance on paying invoices within 30 days.

Wirral MBC performance can be found here - [Invoices paid within 30 days | wirral.gov.uk](https://www.wirral.gov.uk/invoices-paid-within-30-days)

Council notes with concern that performance in paying invoices to suppliers in the financial year 2023/24 dropped by nearly 20% compared to previous years. (Approx. 78% against 98%)

The drop in performance exposes the Council to the risk of having to make interest payments on late invoices of £700,000; bad news especially for small and medium sized businesses whose cash flow might be affected and Wirral Council tax payers who could end up footing the bill for system failures.

Council therefore requests that the Director of Finance produces a report to be considered by Members at the next practicable meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee which provides Members with assurances of steps to be taken to restore the 30-day target to historical levels, to improve payment systems, and to reduce potential liability.

The report should include the following:

- An explanation as to why the nearly 20% drop has occurred in 23/24**
- Detail the types of businesses affected by failure to pay undisputed invoices within 30 days (Small, Medium, Large) in 23/24**
- Consider a rapid escalation process for undisputed invoice payment that breaches the 30-day regulation 113 of the Public Contracts Regulations 2015. This will help small and medium family-run businesses**

This page is intentionally left blank