

# Public Document Pack

## COUNCIL

Monday, 3 March 2025

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

Councillors	C Baldwin	J Stewart Laing
	P Basnett	T Laing
	G Bennett	E Lamb
	S Bennett	I Lewis
	J Bird	L Luxon-Kewley
	M Booth	P Martin
	A Brame	C Walsh-McDonald
	H Cameron	G McManus
	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-McDonald
	P Jobson	KJ Williams
	G Jenkinson	J Williamson
	T Jones	V Wilson
	M Jordan	G Wood
	S Kelly	

### 33 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Civic Mayor welcomed everyone to the meeting and advised that she had been informed in advance of a number of Members who had a personal interest in agenda item 4b 2025/26 Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy, related to the schools budget element by virtue of holding positions as school governors as follows:

Councillors Brame, Cleary, Cooke, Angie Davies, George Davies, Gilchrist, Foulkes, Jobson, Wilson, Wood.

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

Councillors Stephen Bennett, Cleary, George Davies, Gardner Grier, Mountney, Povall, Raymond, Robinson, Sullivan, Graham McManus, Julie McManus

With respect to recommendation 2 of the budget report which related to staffing, interests were noted in respect of the following Members of the Council, by virtue of membership of trade unions as declared within their register of interests: Basnett, Stephen Bennett, Bird, Cleary, Cooper, Angie Davies, George Davies, Foulkes, Gorman, Grey, Hall, Jenkinson, Jobson, Jones, Kenny, Laing, Luxon-Kewley, Martin, Grahame McManus, Julie McManus, Onwuemene, Powell-Wilde, Redfern, Robinson, Skillicorn, Stewart Laing, Paul Stuart, Sullivan, Tomeny, Jason Walsh-McDonald, Williams, Williamson, Wood.

The Civic Mayor then advised Members that in respect to recommendation 2 of the budget report which related to staffing, interests were to be noted for the following Members of the Council by virtue of membership of trade unions, as declared within their register of interests:

Councillors Basnett, Stephen Bennett, Bird, Cleary, Cooper, Angie Davies, George Davies, Foulkes, Gorman, Grey, Hall, Jenkinson, Jobson, Jones, Kenny, Laing, Luxon-Kewley, Martin, Grahame McManus, Julie McManus, Onwuemene, Pitt, Powell-Wilde, Redfern, Robinson, Skillicorn, Stewart Laing, Paul Stuart, Sullivan, Tomeny, Jason Walsh-McDonald, Williams, Williamson, Wood

The Civic Mayor then asked Members to make any further declarations of interest. Councillor Paula Basnett declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in respect of a Budget proposal contained within item 4b of the Budget 2025/26 and medium financial terms strategy report, by virtue of her employment at the Wirral Chamber of Commerce. Councillor Basnett informed the Mayor that she would leave the Chamber whilst the budget proposal that gives rise to any disclosable pecuniary interest is debated upon.

Councillor Naomi Graham declared a personal non-prejudicial interest by virtue of her husband's employment.

The Civic Mayor announced that apologies had been received from Councillors Ainsworth, Graham Davies and Johnson

35 **PROCEDURE FOR BUDGET DECISION MEETING OF COUNCIL**

The Council was then invited to consider the recommendation from the Policy and Resources Committee meeting from 19 February 2025, in respect of the procedure to be adopted for the budget debate at this extraordinary meeting of the Council.

On a motion by Councillor Paul Stuart, seconded by Councillor Jean Robinson, it was –

**Resolved – That, for the duration of the extraordinary meeting of 3 March 2025 (Budget Council):**

- (a) The procedure attached as Appendix A 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.**

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

7 matters had been referred by the meetings of Policy and Resources Committee on 15<sup>th</sup> January and 19<sup>th</sup> February 2025.

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

The first matter requiring approval was in relation to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and Council Tax Base Calculation 2025/26, which was moved by Councillor Paul Stuart, seconded by Councillor Jean Robinson.

**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. 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) Page 18  
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

## 36.2 **2025/26 BUDGET AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY**

The Mayor announced it was her intention to run one single debate on the motion but then take separate named votes at the end of discussion on the 2025/26 Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy recommendations (1-6) and on the statutory calculations for the Council Tax precept (7)

The first named vote was in respect of recommendations 1- 6.

Councillor Paul Stuart formally moved the Motion, which was seconded by Councillor Jean Robinson.

The Civic Mayor then informed Members that two amendments had been received.

Councillors Bird formally moved the Green Group Amendment which was seconded by Councillor Cleary.

### **Green Group Amendment**

- **Insert an additional recommendation:**

**Given recent reports from the Office of Environmental Protection and Natural England the £300,000 for Hoylake & West Kirby Beach Maintenance is repurposed as follows:**

- 1. £125,000 is allocated to Library provision to provide more time for engagement with local communities and consideration of a future operating model for the library offer in Wirral for the financial year 2025/6; and**
- 2. Any remaining funds left unspent after facilitating RNLI operations be allocated to a special reserve to support the development of community-based libraries and/or community asset transfer of existing library assets.**

The Civic Mayor then asked Councillor Gilchrist and Councillor Carubia to formally move and second the Liberal Democrat amendment. Councillor Paul Stuart confirmed that the amendment had been accepted at friendly.

### **Liberal Democrat Amendment**

- **Insert an additional recommendation:**

**To request the Director of Finance supported by the Director of Law and Corporate Services to establish a clear programme of dates for both the Committee Budget Oversight Panels and the Finance Working Group which will allow members to:**

- **monitor projected income and budget savings and to allow early identification and notification of savings not being met to members**
- **be briefed on where, how and to what extent budgets are impacted by seasonal variations**
- **be briefed on the impact of future Government spending reviews**
- **ensure that all of the above is reflected in the Council's Financial Recovery Plan**

The Civic Mayor then informed Members that there was an administrative matter which had necessitated an additional recommendation being prepared. This was in light of the disclosable pecuniary interest declared by Councillor Paula Basnett which related to a specific budget proposal.

**The recommendation was as follows,**

**6.d (ii) Approve specifically the Reduction in Business Support - contained in Appendix 1 (page 173), proposed and recommended by both the Council's Economy, Regeneration and Housing Committee and subsequently the Council's Policy and Resources Committee to Council.**

The Civic Mayor informed Members that she would ask Councillor Basnett to leave the chamber whilst Council considered the individual savings proposal for which she had made a declaration. The Civic Mayor asked Members to confirm they agreed with the proposed way of dealing with this administrative issue. This was agreed by assent.

Councillor Basnett then left the chamber.

Councillor Paul Stuart then formally moved the additional recommendation, which was seconded by Councillor Jean Robinson.

**Recommendation 6.d (ii) was then put to the vote,**

**It was therefore, resolved – that the Reduction in Business Support - contained in Appendix 1 (page 173), proposed and recommended by both the Council's Economy, Regeneration and Housing Committee and subsequently the Council's Policy and Resources Committee to Council be approved.**

Councillor Basnett then returned to the chamber.

The motion and amendments having all been formally moved and seconded, Councillor Paul Stuart then spoke to his motion.

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

Councillor Jeff Green, as Leader of the Conservative Group, then addressed the Council on the budget proposals.

Councillor Jo Bird 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.

Councillor Pat Cleary then spoke to the Green Group amendment.

The budget proposal as amended and Green Group amendment were then debated by Council.

The seconders of the amendment and motion, Councillors Pat Cleary and Robinson then spoke as seconders to the amendment.

Councillors Paul Stuart, Jo Bird and Phil Gilchrist then replied to the debate.

In respect of the Green Group amendment, the Council voted as follows:

For the amendment (20) - Councillors, J Bird, A Brame, C Carubia, P Cleary, C Cooke, P Gilchrist, H Gorman, N Graham, J Grier, G Jenkinson, S Kelly, E Lamb, R Molyneux, K Murphy, A Onwuemene, H Raymond, M Redfern, E Tomeny, C Walsh-McDonald, J Walsh-McDonald

Against the amendment – (42) – Councillors, C Baldwin, P Basnett, Gary Bennett, Stephen Bennett, M Booth, H Cameron, G Cooper, T Cox, A Davies, G Davies, S Foulkes, A Gardner, J Green, L Grey, B Hall, A Hodson, K Hodson, P Jobson, T Jones, M Jordan, B Kenny, T Laing, I Lewis, L Luxton-Kewley, P Martin, G McManus, J McManus, S Mountney, T Murphy, R Pitt, S Powell-Wilde, L Rennie, J Robinson, M Skillicorn, J Stuart-Laing, K Stuart, P Stuart, M Sullivan, J Williams, J Williamson, V Wilson, G Wood

Abstention – (1) Councillor Cherry Povall

The amendment was therefore lost (42:20) 1 abstention.

In respect of the Labour Group budget motion as amended the Council Voted as follows,

For the Motion (62) Councillors C Baldwin, P Basnett, Gary Bennett, Stephen Bennett, J Bird, M Booth, A Brame, H Cameron, C Carubia, P Cleary, C Cooke G Cooper, T Cox, A Davies, G Davies, S Foulkes, A Gardner, P Gilchrist, H Gorman N Graham,, J Green, L Grey, J Grier, B Hall, A Hodson, G Jenkinson, P Jobson, T Jones, M Jordan, S Kelly, B Kenny, T Laing, E Lamb, I Lewis, L Luxton-Kewley, P Martin, G McManus, J McManus, R Molyneux, S Mountney, K Murphy, T Murphy, A Onwuemene, R Pitt, S Powell-Wilde, H Raymond, M Redfern, L Rennie, J Robinson, M Skillicorn, J Stuart-Laing, K Stuart, P Stuart, M Sullivan, E Tomeny ,J Williams, J Williamson, C Walsh-McDonald, J Walsh-McDonald, V Wilson, G Wood

Against the amendment – (0)

Abstention – (1) Councillor Cherry Povall

The motion as amended was therefore carried (62:00) - 1 abstention.

The Council were then invited to vote on recommendation 7, the Statutory calculations for the Council Tax levels for 2025/26 in accordance with Sections 32-36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992

The Council voted as follows,

For the Motion (62) Councillors C Baldwin, P Basnett, Gary Bennett, Stephen Bennett, J Bird, M Booth, A Brame, H Cameron, C Carubia, P Cleary, C Cooke G Cooper, T Cox, A Davies, G Davies, S Foulkes, A Gardner, P Gilchrist, H Gorman N Graham,, J Green, L Grey, J Grier, B Hall, A Hodson, G Jenkinson, P Jobson, T Jones, M Jordan, S Kelly, B Kenny, T Laing, E Lamb, I Lewis, L Luxton-Kewley, P Martin, G McManus, J McManus, R Molyneux, S Mountney, K Murphy, T Murphy, A Onwuemene, R Pitt, S Powell-Wilde, H Raymond, M Redfern, L Rennie, J Robinson, M Skillicorn, J Stuart-Laing, K Stuart, P Stuart, M Sullivan, E Tomeny ,J Williams, J Williamson, C Walsh-McDonald, J Walsh-McDonald, V Wilson, G Wood

Against the amendment – (0)

Abstention – (1) Councillor Cherry Povall

**A. The motion as amended was therefore carried (62:00) 1 abstention, that -**

**1) authority be delegated to the Section 151 Officer, following consultation with the Chair and Group Spokespersons of the Policy & Resources Committee, to do anything necessary to give effect to the**



proposals contained in this report and address any funding changes. This extends to adding any further increases in funding to reserves.

2) authority be delegated to the Assistant Director for People and Organisational Culture to carry out any measures in respect of staffing that is required to achieve savings or implementation. This may include consultation (both individual and collective), the serving of any statutory notices or other notices as required (such as HR1 and Section 188 documentation if required), support and seeking alternatives in respect of employment.

3) authority be delegated to the Assistant Director for Governance and Corporate Support to carry out public consultation as required in respect of any policy decisions within the agreed savings.

4) the response be noted to the financial proposals forming a draft budget for the purposes of consultation under section 65 of the Local Government Finance Act, set out as:

Appendix 1 Budget Proposals

Appendix 2 Budget consultation

Appendix 3 Policy & Service Committee budget proposals feedback

Appendix 4 The Dedicated Schools Grant Schools Budget

Appendix 5 Provisional Council Tax Statutory Calculations

Appendix 6 Discretionary Rate Relief Policy

Appendix 7 Medium-Term Financial Strategy

Appendix 8 Budget proposal changes since November 2024

Appendix 9 Council Tax Base Calculation Process and Associated Background Information

Appendix 10 Budget Pressures and Growth

5) a Revenue Budget be approved of £444.722m, noting that the Section 151 Officer in liaison with the Monitoring Officer and Head of Paid Service may need to make Page 140 adjustments to the Budget estimates before the preparation of final reports for Full Council on 3 March 2025.

6) Council approves the,

a) Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) set out as Appendix 7

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 September 2024, 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 2025/26 set out as Appendix 6 be approved.**

**6.d.i) Unearmarked Reserves (General Fund Balances) are increased by £3.562m to a total of £16.738m in 2025/26 (including a one-off £1.187m contribution from the collection fund surplus.)**

**6.d.ii) that the Reduction in Business Support - contained in Appendix 1 (page 173), proposed and recommended by both the Council's Economy, Regeneration and Housing Committee and subsequently the Council's Policy and Resources Committee to Council be approved.**

**e) in respect of the Budget Proposals, that the Director with portfolio be authorised 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 rigorous monitoring process established to track both overall budget performance and the delivery of savings proposals, as previously reported to Policy and Resources committee in July 2024 be noted, with an updated report scheduled for March 2025. Furthermore, note the establishment of a Member Oversight Panel specifically tasked with reviewing and monitoring the progress of the transformation and change programme.**

**g) the 2025/26 Schools Budget of £421.858m be noted**

**h) To request the Director of Finance supported by the Director of Law and Corporate Services to establish a clear programme of dates for both the Committee Budget Oversight Panels and the Finance Working Group which will allow members to:**

- monitor projected income and budget savings and to allow early identification and notification of savings not being met to members**
- be briefed on where, how and to what extent budgets are impacted by seasonal variations**
- be briefed on the impact of future Government spending reviews**
- ensure that all of the above is reflected in the Council's Financial Recovery Plan**

**B. resolved (62:00) 1 abstention – that council,**

**a. Sets the Band D Council Tax at £1,982.44 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 2025/26, as detailed in Appendix 5.**

**b. Notes that the additional precepts from the Police & Crime Commissioner for Merseyside and the Merseyside Fire & Rescue Authority remain in estimated form and delegates authority to the Section 151 Officer to implement any variation to the overall council tax arising from the final notification of the precepts.**

### **36.3 2025-32 CAPITAL PROGRAMME**

The third item requiring approval was the capital programme for 2025-30 which was formally moved by Councillor Paul Stuart, seconded by Councillor Jean Robinson.

#### **Conservative Group Amendment**

The Conservative Group Amendment was then formally moved by Councillor Simon Mountney, Seconded by Councillor Max Booth as follows,

*Council notes that on-street carparking charges cannot be used to support the Council's Revenue Budget.*

*Council is dealing with the current financial crisis facing the Council and further notes that the repayment of £1 million capital (over the 10-year life of the asset) will cost the Council Taxpayer £150,000 per year (information provided by Director of Finance)*

*Given the public's overwhelming rejection of on-street parking charges due to the major impact the resulting parking displacement will have on residents, local businesses and visitors to Council attractions, Council agrees to remove the £1 million from the 2025-2026 Capital Programme identified for car parking charging equipment and return this matter to the appropriate Policy and Services Committee(s) for further consideration.*

*Accordingly, Council is recommended to approve:*

1. *The new bids as detailed in Appendix 2 to this report (removing the capital requirement for car parking equipment) requiring £187.8m of funding for inclusion in the Capital Programme; and*
2. *The Capital Programme 2025-32 as detailed in Appendix 3 to this report, deleting reference to the car parking equipment proposing capital expenditure of £1m in 2025/26.*

Councillor Mountney then spoke to the amendment.

The Capital Programme and amendments were then debated.

Councillor Booth then spoke as seconder to the amendment.

Councillor Jo Bird then raised a point of order regarding the timing of guillotine to which the Director of Law and Corporate Services responded.

The Council then proceeded to the votes

The Conservative amendment was then put to the vote and was lost (20:42)1 Abstentions. The substantive motion was then put to the vote.

**It was therefore Resolved (62:00) 1 abstention – that....**

- 1 The new bids as detailed in Appendix 2 to this report requiring £18.8m of funding for inclusion in the Capital Programme be approved.**
- 2 The Capital Programme 2025-32 as detailed in Appendix 3 to this report be approved.**

#### **36.4 CAPITAL FINANCING STRATEGY 2025/26**

The fourth item requiring approval was the Capital Financing Strategy 2025/26.

On a motion by Councillor Paul Stuart, seconded by Councillor Jean Robinson, it was –

**Resolved – that,**

- 1. the Capital Strategy for 2025/26 be approved;**
- 2. the associated Prudential Indicators to be adopted, contained within this report; and the Council’s Minimum Revenue Provision policy as set out in Appendix 1 of this report be approved;**

**3. the Council's Minimum Revenue Provision policy as set out in Appendix 1 of this report be approved.**

### **36.5 2024-25 CAPITAL MONITORING QUARTER 3**

The fifth item requiring approval was the Capital Financing Strategy 2025/26, Quarter 3.

On a motion by Councillor Paul Stuart, seconded by Councillor Jean Robinson, it was –

**Resolved – that,**

- 1. The revised Capital Programme of £93.953m 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; and**
- 3. The amendment to the Council's Minimum Revenue Provision policy as set out in 3.9.2 of the report be approved.**

### **36.6 Treasury Management Strategy 2025/26**

The sixth item requiring approval was the Treasury Management Strategy 2025/26.

On a motion by Councillor Paul Stuart, seconded by Councillor Jean Robinson, it was –

**Resolved – that,**

- (1) the Treasury Management Strategy for 2025/2026, as set out in Appendix A to this report be approved.**
- (2) the Treasury Management Policy Statement, as set out in Appendix B to this report be approved.**
- (3) the Treasury Management Prudential Indicators for 2025/2026, as set out in Appendix C to this report be approved.**

### **36.7 Investment Strategy 2025/26**

The seventh item requiring approval was in relation to the Investment Strategy 2025/26.

On a motion by Councillor Paul Stuart, seconded by Councillor Jean Robinson, it was –

**Resolved – that, the Investment Strategy for 2025/26 which includes the scope of potential investment in the following activity areas: (a)**

**Commercial Property; (b) Service Investments: Loans; (c) Service Investments: Shares be approved.**