

# **COUNCIL – 9 February 2009**

## **MATTERS FOR DEBATE**

The Council is asked to consider the following motions, submitted in accordance with the notice required by Standing Order 8(1), and objections and amendments submitted in accordance with Standing Order 7(2).

The order of business is as determined by the party groups in accordance with Standing Order 5(3) and the times for speeches by Standing Order 12(8) (all other speeches have 3 minutes).

### **1. OBJECTION: Minute 325 (Cabinet – 15 January 2009) – STRATEGIC ASSET REVIEW**

**Proposed** by Councillor Green (7 minutes)

**Seconded** by Councillor Lesley Rennie (3 minutes)

(1) This Council welcomes the Cabinet's U-turn in its decision to retain Woodchurch Leisure Centre, Bromborough Civic Centre, Upton Library and Pensby Library.

(2) Council notes that Guinea Gap has only been given a stay of execution and that the future of Leasowe Recreation Centre remains uncertain.

(3) Council is shocked that Woodchurch Library and Eastham Library, libraries that were not even mentioned in the original Strategic Asset Review, are now to be closed and believes that it is unacceptable to treat the residents and service users in this way.

(4) Council believes that the public is totally opposed to the closures announced and contained in Cabinet minute 325 and Council therefore expresses its view that the closures announced by the Cabinet should not go ahead.

(5) Council further believes that Wirral is made up of a series of geographically dispersed and diverse communities: Council believes that the best way of meeting the needs of these communities is by providing local, high quality services. Council therefore demands that officers cease any further actions on the current Strategic Asset Review (other than activity based on streamlining back office administrative functions) and start work immediately on a new plan which will retain and enhance all those services (libraries, leisure centres, community centres, theatre and museums, etc) that are currently under threat.

(6) Council believes that the ruling administration has no mandate to close these vital services before the public has had the opportunity to express their wishes in the local elections.

**Right of reply:** Councillor Foulkes (7 minutes)

## **2. MOTION: RECKLESS TORY ECONOMICS**

**Proposed by** Councillor Phil Davies (7 minutes)  
**Seconded by** Councillor Foulkes (3 minutes)

(1) Council notes, with amazement, the breathtakingly reckless economics behind the Conservative Group's behaviour on this Council. This includes:

(a) a virtually total opposition to all savings proposed by the Cabinet in order to reduce the burden on Wirral's council tax payers. If this were implemented it would so far have cost the council tax payers a minimum of £11m, which is the equivalent of an 11% increase in council tax over and above the current projected increase of 4%, giving an increase of 15%. (Council further notes that as increases of over 5% are likely to be capped, this would not only incur further costs to the Council in re-billing, but mean that over ten million pounds worth of Council services would have to be dramatically slashed within the period of just a few weeks in order to restore the budget to a legal level);

(b) the use of a much vaunted £90m of reserves to support their lack of any viable alternative to the measures currently proposed by Cabinet. This would not only bankrupt the Council for the future, in the same way that their use of £13m of balances to hide the impact of the poll tax created a hole in Wirral's finances from which we are even now only just recovering, but would mean, amongst other things:

- raiding school balances to support general Council expenditure, which is illegal;
- running the Council with zero balances, instead of the £6m recommended by the District Auditor, which means any minor overspend immediately places the Council into an illegal position;
- using the Council's insurance fund, which is used to self-insure against claims or, in the case of very large claims, pay the initial excess. This would effectively leave the Council uninsured and liable for massive future costs and legal cases;
- using money paid in advance by the Government to fund specific schemes for purposes other than that for which the money is reserved, which would leave the Council liable for major claw-backs in the future;
- using money reserved against potential overpayment by the Government on housing benefits, which again would leave the Council liable to large claims without the money to meet them;
- using money allocated from other sources for specific projects which are not yet completed.

(2) Council further notes that this reckless behaviour, which would severely damage the Council's financial position and ability to offer services to the people of Wirral, is matched by the national position of the Conservative Party, which is to cut £5billion from public spending, including £240million from the Formula Grant paid to local authorities and at the same time promise a council tax freeze, leading to further devastation of local services.

(3) Council also notes that the dodgy accounting of the local Conservative Group is matched by that of their party nationally, who have so far declared the use of the same pot of money (government advertising and consultancy fees) twice for completely different purposes.

**Right of reply:** Councillor Davies (7 minutes)

### **3. MOTION: WIRRAL PARTNERSHIP HOMES**

**Proposed by** Councillor Alan Taylor (7 minutes)  
**Seconded by** Councillor Doyle (3 minutes)

(1) This Council recognises the significance of the in-depth presentation given to the Housing and Community Safety Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 15 January 2009 and welcomes the Department of Regeneration's technical and advisory assistance to the company in finding a solution to the problems raised by the conditions found in modernising their tower blocks and sheltered housing.

(2) Furthermore this Council again welcomes the decision of the Cabinet in endorsing Wirral Partnership Homes' request to modify the representation required for a quorate meeting of the Board, thus enabling the company to operate effectively in these difficult times.

(3) Council believes that it is essential that the Conservatives play a full part in this process, to work to minimise the impact of the problems experienced by Wirral Partnership Homes on the residents of Wirral.

**Right of reply:** Councillor Taylor (7 minutes)

### **4. MOTION: RENT INCREASES**

**Proposed by** Councillor Leah Fraser (7 minutes)  
**Seconded by** Councillor Blakeley (3 minutes)

(1) Council notes with concern that, at a time when many families are feeling the pinch, housing associations and registered social landlords (RSLs) are setting above-inflation increases in rent.

(2) Council believes the use of the recorded increase in Retail Price Index in September 2008 of 5% is not an accurate indicator today and will see many tenants in Wirral paying disproportionate increases in rent.

(3) Council therefore welcomes the efforts of the Local Government Association, supported by many RSLs and publications such as Inside Housing, for the Government to enable rent increases to be kept to a more manageable increase.

(4) Council calls on the social landlords in Wirral to consider the impact of increases on tenants and also asks the Chief Executive of Wirral Borough Council to write to the LGA and Department for Communities and Local Government endorsing the need for RSLs to be given the freedom to set lower increases without being penalised in future years.

**Right of reply:** Councillor Fraser (7 minutes)

## **5. MOTION: CONSERVATIVE FAILURE TO ATTEND HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**Proposed by** Councillor Kenny (7 minutes)  
**Seconded by** Councillor Ann McLachlan (3 minutes)

(1) This Council expresses extreme concern that, at the normal scheduled Housing and Community Safety Overview and Scrutiny Committee, held on 15 January 2009, not one representative of the Conservative Party attended. This is despite the fact that the Conservatives are entitled to three seats on the Committee.

(2) Council is particularly concerned that the Conservative Party felt unable to arrange for even one representative to consider many crucial scheduled agenda issues, on behalf of the people of Wirral, including:

- Wirral's Housing Market Renewal Programme 2008-2011 - Mid Year Progress Report 2008/09
- Housing Stock Transfer - Progress Report
- Presentation on Tower Blocks and Sheltered Housing
- Presentation on Homelessness: Rough Sleepers/Street Drinkers
- Review of Scrutiny Work Programme
- Anti-Social Behaviour Watch Schemes
- Policing in Wirral
- Clearance programmes for areas including Wallasey
- HMRI areas including Seacombe, Liscard and Egremont.
- CCTV Control Room Report

(3) This Council believes that all political parties should accept a responsibility to consider, and make decisions on, crucial issues, within the Council's agreed committee structure, on behalf of the Wirral electorate. By their non-attendance, the Conservatives have shown that they are not willing to accept such responsibilities, and, at the same time, have badly let down the Wirral electorate, who expect real leadership from their elected representatives, as opposed to "political posturing".

**Right of reply:** Councillor Kenny (7 minutes)

## **6. MOTION: STRATEGIC ASSET REVIEW**

**Proposed by** Councillor Gilchrist (7 minutes)  
**Seconded by** Councillor Mitchell (3 minutes)

(1) Council recognises that Cabinet minute 325 (Transforming Wirral - Strategic Asset Review), welcomed:

(a) "*the high level of public participation*" in the consultation process and  
(b) "*the considerable time and effort put in by a number of correspondents who sought to provide detailed arguments for the retention of a particular facility*".

(2) Council believes that this specifically opposed the closure of Bromborough Library and Civic Centre and did not call as such, for the relocation of the One Stop Shop, but concentrated on the importance of the Library and Civic Centre.

(3) Council therefore does not consider that the consultation showed, in any way, a desire by Bromborough or Eastham residents for the closure of Eastham Library as a library or re-location of such a key One-Stop Shop drawing from a wide area.

(4) Council, having regard to sections 7 and 8 of the Cabinet decision, which determines that Eastham library should close, believes that this decision is based on a misreading and misunderstanding of the points raised in the petitions, letters and at the meeting at Hulme Hall.

(5) Council therefore calls upon the Cabinet:

(i) to re-examine this matter in detail in the light of the views being expressed, particularly by Eastham and Woodchurch residents who had no reason, until 15 January, to campaign for the retention of their valued services;

(ii) to take no action on the present decision and, for the avoidance of doubt, to ensure that budgetary provision is retained in the base budget to continue services until a decision based on the responses to consultation has been made and the level of service provision has been determined.

**Right of reply:** Councillor Gilchrist (7 minutes)

## **7. AMENDMENT: Cabinet minute 325 (STRATEGIC ASSET REVIEW)**

**Proposed** by Councillor Harney (7 minutes)

**Seconded** by Councillor Gilchrist (3 minutes)

(1) Council

(i) believes that many issues and proposals contained in the Strategic Asset Review have caused considerable concern to the communities throughout Wirral. Council recognises that, since October, there has been uncertainty around the future provision of libraries, recreational and other facilities;

(ii) is concerned that the direction of the Strategic Asset Review, creating larger complexes, in key locations, is too broad an approach for a borough consisting of so many communities;

(iii) believes that section (26) dealing with the rationalisation of office accommodation is what the public rightly expect should happen with an organisation of this size.

(2) Council believes that the public deserve and prefer community-based, accessible services, with savings achieved in office accommodation and through agile working, rather than the closure of facilities.

(3) Therefore, recalling that this matter was first 'expedited' on 16 October 2008, Council requests that this work must be brought forward as a matter of urgency and calls for that approach to receive priority in order to secure savings.

(4) Council believes that tackling too many issues, in too short a timescale, has created an excessive workload and a lack of effective capacity to tackle the issues effectively. However the consolidation of buildings and facilities may be achievable by working with each community in a sensitive and realistic manner.

(5) That the proposed programme of library closures be rescinded and budgetary provision should be made. The prospect of borrowing to secure physical improvements to buildings, saving energy and running costs, remodelling and improving them, should be properly addressed, with regard to capitalisation and borrowing costs.

(6) Council therefore resolves:

(i) That the proposals in sections (1) to (6) inclusive of the recommendation be approved, subject to officers reporting back on the results of the investigations and discussions and alerting members to areas of concern at the earliest opportunity.

(ii) That the proposals in paragraphs (7) up to and including (16) of the proposals be not proceeded with.

(iii) That the innovative schemes referred to in sections (17) and (18) be commended for further development and introduction.

(iv) That the reassurances and clear statement regarding Birkenhead Central Library in paragraph (19) be warmly welcomed and endorsed.

(v) That, with regard to all the centres and facilities covered in paragraph (20), the emphasis must be on working with communities so that the users can make an informed judgment on their provision and individual circumstances.

(vi) That the proposals contained in paragraphs (21) to (25) be approved in principle, but developed further and that progress reports on each of the matters be given to the Cabinet at regular intervals, and that, as a matter of principle, any member requesting information on progress be kept fully informed.

(vii) That the issues of office accommodation and agile working be addressed with urgency.

(viii) That paragraph (29) be set aside in order to assist this process and to proceed on the basis outlined.

(ix) Finally, that officers report on the financial implications of the above as part of the budget process.

**Right of reply:** Councillor Foulkes (7 minutes)

## **8. AMENDMENT: Cabinet minute 325 (STRATEGIC ASSET REVIEW)**

**Proposed** by Councillor Mitchell (7 minutes)

**Seconded** by Councillor Gilchrist (3 minutes)

(1) That no action be taken relating to the provision and pattern of library services covered in this decision.

(2) Council notes that last Autumn the Department for Culture, Media and Sport launched the Library Service Modernisation Review:

*"to refresh the Government's vision for the public library service that enables local authorities to respond to consumer expectations and to deliver their aspirations for their communities".*

Council recognises that this is to be published this Spring, then consulted upon.

(3) Council believes that no action should be taken until due attention has been given to its conclusions but notes that the aims of the Review are the provision of a 'community-led service', the kind of service Wirral residents have been urging this Council to retain.

**Right of reply:** Councillor Moon (7 minutes)