

COUNCIL

Monday, 2 March 2009

Present: The Mayor (Councillor A E R Jones) in the Chair
Deputy Mayor (Councillor A Hodson)

Councillors	RL Abbey	P Hayes	J Quinn
	T Anderson	A Hodson	S Quinn
	C Blakeley	S Holbrook	M Redfern
	A Bridson	A Jennings	P Reisdorf
	S Clarke	P Johnson	L Rennie
	IO Coates	AER Jones	D Roberts
	J Crabtree	J Keeley	L Rowlands
	G Davies	S Kelly	J Salter
	P Davies	B Kenny	H Smith
	WJ Davies	D Kirwan	T Smith
	F Doyle	D Knowles	W Smith
	W Duffey	I Lewis	P Southwood
	D Elderton	AR McLachlan	J Stapleton
	G Ellis	M McLaughlin	A Taylor
	S Foulkes	C Meaden	S Taylor
	L Fraser	D Mitchell	C Teggins
	G Gardiner	R Moon	G Watt
	J George	S Moseley	R Wilkins
	P Gilchrist	S Mounthey	J Williams
	JE Green	S Niblock	P Williams
	J Hale	C Povall	K Wood
	T Harney	A Pritchard	

Apologies Councillors K Hayes

127 MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS

The Mayor referred to the sad death of the son of David Cameron MP, Leader of the Conservative Party and it was agreed that a letter of condolence be sent to Mr Cameron on behalf of the Council.

128 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The members of the Council were invited to consider whether they had any further personal or prejudicial interests in connection with any matter to be debated or determined at the meeting and, if so, to declare it and state the nature of such interest. It was noted, in connection with the schools budget, that most members of the Council served as a governor of one or more schools. The following declarations were made:

All Members declared a personal interest in all Minutes concerning the Strategic Asset Review due to their membership of Joint Management Committees and as users of services;

Councillor David Kirwan – a prejudicial interest in Minutes 131 (Matters requiring approval by the Council), Minute 134 (Conservative Group budget proposal 2009/10 and Minute 135 (Amendment – Cabinet Minute 384) due to having been engaged in legal proceedings connected with the Strategic Asset Review.

Councillor Jeff Green – a personal interest in Minute 131 (Matters requiring approval by the Council) due to his wife's employment.

129 **PETITIONS**

In accordance with Standing Order 21, the Mayor received petitions submitted by –

(a) Councillor Denis Knowles on behalf of 26 signatories requesting traffic measures in Northbrook Road, Seacombe to facilitate bin collections; and

(b) Councillor Andrew Hodson on behalf of 396 signatories objecting to the proposal to close or transfer ownership of Heswall Hall and Alexander Hall.

Resolved - That the petitions be noted and referred to the appropriate chief officer and/or agency in accordance with Standing Order 34.

130 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 9th February 2009 had been circulated to members and it was –

Resolved – that, subject to the following amendments:

Council – 9 February (Minutes)

(i) **Minute 102 (Declarations of interest)**

Councillor Blakeley - the declaration in respect of minute 121 should read “personal”, not “prejudicial”.

Councillor Lewis – the declaration in respect of minute 120 should read “Personal interest by virtue of his membership of the Leasowe Community Homes Management Board”.

Councillor Bill Davies – delete name and substitute that of Councillor Duffey.

(ii) **Minutes 120 and 121**

The voting figures should be amended to take account of the fact that Councillor Teggins abstained from voting, to the following:

Minute 120 – 38 : 24 : 2

Minute 121 – 55 : 0 : 2

the minutes be approved and adopted as a correct record.

131 **MATTERS REQUIRING APPROVAL BY THE COUNCIL**

Cabinet – 23 February (Corrections to budget recommendation – minute 384)

Paragraph (4) – delete final line (referring to council tax increase)

Paragraph(12) – substitute the following:

That for the financial year 2009/10 the Council will ensure that no pensioner household over 75 will pay any increase in council tax, including the consequences of any Police and Fire increases. This applies where:

(i) the council tax payer pays council tax in Wirral as their main home and all individuals in the household that are counted as resident for council tax purposes are aged 75 or over on 1 April 2009 (but where the qualifying age criterion is met after 1 April 2009 eligibility will be effective from the relevant birth date only);

(ii) where council tax benefit is in payment the daily council tax rate payable as at 31 March 2009 shall apply and will not exceed the reduction that would apply if not in receipt of council tax benefit;

(iii) this reduction will be calculated after deduction of other council tax discounts, reliefs and benefits;

(iv) application must be made for the reduction where it is not currently in payment or the potential claimant is not in receipt of Council Tax Benefit.

Paragraph (16) – substitute the following figures:

Fire

A	£41.58	B	£48.51	C	£55.44	D	£62.37
E	£76.23	F	£90.09	G	£103.95		H
	£124.74						

Police

A	£93.74	B	£109.36	C	£124.99	D	£140.61
E	£171.86	F	£203.10	G	£234.35		H
	£281.22						

Paragraph (17) – substitute the following figures:

Valuation Bands

A	£960.11	B	£1,120.12	C	£1,280.15	D	£1,440.16
E	£1,760.20	F	£2,080.23	G	£2,400.27	H	£2,880.32

Paragraph (18) – amend council tax increase to 4.46%.

The motion was agreed without a vote and, accordingly, the following minute was deemed to be approved:

Cabinet Minute 384 – Budget 2009/10

Resolved -

(1) Delivering a Vision for Wirral

- This is the second year of the Council's Corporate Plan and the new Vision for Wirral, accompanied by Wirral's Investment Strategy, which aims to create a more prosperous and equal Wirral, founded on a strong, vibrant local economy with high levels of employment.
- This budget also forms the third budget in a three-year Efficiency Plan, agreed by all parties, which set out to reduce the Council's spending commitments by thirty million pounds over a three-year period, a figure which later increased to meet additional financial difficulties experienced by the Council as demands for statutory services, and particularly Adult Social Services, increased.
- The Efficiency Plan was agreed in order to achieve a Council budget which would be sustainable for the long-term future and more resistant to the many pressures it was likely to encounter. Without this sustainable budget the Council would be struggling to deliver on the Vision it has set out.
- Over the three years the Council has, in fact, achieved efficiencies of £37.4 million. It has also successfully met Government efficiency targets, which are rigorously scrutinised.
- The decisions the Council has taken in order to do this have not been easy. They have challenged, and will continue to challenge, assumptions about the way the Council delivers services and the way in which it should invest in services for the future. This includes the radical changes being made in the way that Adult Social Services are delivered, giving individuals more choice and control over their own lives; the large scale transfer of community centres to community development trusts, who will both run and own the buildings themselves; the £20m investment in new neighbourhood centres which will bring together a variety of Council, community and other public sector services; and planned investment in new, 7-night-a-week, youth super centres designed to meet the needs of young people today. As part of giving individuals more choice, the Council has also included a new scheme whereby Area Forums could make decisions to buy additional Council services for their areas, according to local need, which has, amongst other things, created a further £100,000 of investment in youth sports and activities targeted to the need of local areas.
- We recognise that there has been considerable public resistance to some measures we have been required to take, because part of the price of preparing ourselves for the future has been the closure of some local facilities where there was over-provision in comparison with other authorities, where the strategic direction for the future has changed, or

where we simply needed to cut back on the number of individual buildings we owned, even though individual services provided from these buildings were popular and of a very high standard.

- When we first started on this process there was no sign of a recession on the horizon. We were just doing what we could to create a sustainable budget for the future which would allow the Council to grow and develop to meet the changing needs of its residents. Now, more than ever, in the middle of a recession, with council income dropping, unemployment rising and local businesses under real threat, we need that sustainable budget in order to be able to do all we can to assist the people we were elected to serve.

These measures, and those outlined below, are part of the Strategic Objective to create an excellent council, meeting the agreed priorities for improvement of improving the use of the Council's land and assets, maintaining a stable and sustainable budget and improving the Council's budgeting process to fully reflect its priorities and the priority for improvement of promoting greater independence and choice under the Strategic Objective of improving health and well-being for all, ensuring people who require support are full participants in mainstream society.

(2) Council Tax Levels

The proposed council tax increase for Wirral is 4.4%. Cabinet recognises that, after several years in which Wirral's council tax has been below the rate of inflation, this increase is higher than usual. However, it was made clear during the recent consultation on Wirral's Strategic Asset Review that residents of Wirral were prepared to pay a little more to retain some services they valued highly, particularly swimming and leisure facilities. Without the changes made to the original recommendations the increase in council tax would have been below 4%.

(3) Revenue Estimates

The revenue estimates for 2009/10, as set out in the Estimates Book now submitted, be approved subject to the amendments set out below.

(4) Zero council tax increase for pensioner households over 75

£
190,000

No pensioner household over 75 will pay any increase in Council Tax this year. This includes the consequences of any increases in Police and Fire precepts. This honours the target set (which is dependent on the Council's finances) to keep council tax increases for pensioner households over 75 at or beneath the level of the published inflation rate in the January Retail Price Index, which this year is just 0.1%.

(5) Protecting Children and raising the aspirations of young people

5,060,000

SCHOOLS

Cabinet welcomes the fact, as outlined in the Schools Budget resolution, that

an additional £4.4m has been allocated by the government for Wirral schools in 2009/10, and notes that this equates to an increase per pupil of 3.9%.

Cabinet re-affirms its commitment to Wirral schools by allocating over £660,000 of Area Based Grant resources to schools in 2009/10.

Cabinet recognises that this will help the Council meet one of its strategic objectives in the Corporate Plan to raise the aspirations of young people.

CHILD PROTECTION

690,000

Following the tragic case of Baby P, Children's Services, in tandem with many other local authorities, have been conducting a detailed review of all their activity and identifying areas where improvement is needed to ensure that children in Wirral are fully protected and everything conceivable is done to prevent any child falling through the safety net provided by Children's Services in conjunction with other Child Protection Services.

Cabinet asks for a detailed report on this review to be brought to Cabinet on 19 March and, in the meantime, proposes an increase in resources of £690,000 as a growth item to help fund any improvements necessary.

This helps meet the Strategic Objective of raising the aspirations of young people.

RESIDENTIAL CARE FOR CHILDREN

280,000

Cabinet recognises the progress that has been made in finding alternatives to residential care wherever possible, and also recognises that in cases where very specialist alternatives are required the time to implement such measures may be longer than originally anticipated. Cabinet therefore agrees to a one-year bridging sum of £280,000, to be set against the previously agreed saving of £650,000 alongside any potential slippage in the first year from the full-year resources required as outlined above to improve child protection.

This helps meets the strategic Objective of raising the aspirations of young people.

(6) Investing in Wirral

Cabinet recognises that we are facing a severe recession and it is essential to do everything possible to protect local businesses and local jobs from the impact of the credit crunch and the downturn in the economy as well as playing our part in stimulating the local economy. Cabinet therefore proposes the following measures:

TEN-DAY PAYMENT FOR SME CREDITORS

170,000

Council will seek to improve the cash flow of local businesses by targeting payment of invoices within 10 days for all creditors from small- and medium-sized enterprises employing fewer than 250 people. A report on this is requested for Cabinet on 19 March.

SUPPORT FOR MICRO-BUSINESSES WITH TEN EMPLOYEES OR FEWER

50,000

A grant fund of £50,000 for one year will be set up to give immediate support to previously successful micro-businesses employing ten or fewer employees who now face difficulties as a result of the credit crunch and to facilitate access to a much larger fund of £800,000 a year over two years, which would be paid for from Working Wirral funds. An urgent report on the setting up and operation of this larger fund is requested for Cabinet on 19 March.

USE OF THE COUNCIL'S MAJOR CAPITAL PROGRAMMES TO ASSIST THE LOCAL ECONOMY

The Council is planning a major £20m capital investment in new and modernised buildings over the next four years and over £25m of government money is also about to be spent on the building of a brand new secondary school. Contractors will be asked wherever possible to employ a high percentage of local labour. Cabinet recognises that during the recent building of the Floral Pavilion 20% of those employed came from a Wirral post code, and 65% from a Merseyside post code. Cabinet will do everything possible to ensure this record is matched or exceeded.

It is the Council's intention to make its new buildings as energy efficient as possible. Under the CRED carbon reduction scheme that the Council has signed up to, it has a duty to promote energy efficiency and where possible show the way with best practice. Every opportunity will be taken to allow local firms to showcase their wares through the Council's building programme.

APPRENTICESHIPS AND TRAINING

Details of a Construction Employment Integrator scheme are currently being drawn up which will bring together information on all construction projects on Wirral in the public and private sector. This will be used to create a variety of training and apprenticeship opportunities to continue across different schemes and allow access to new entrants to the construction industry while maintaining and improving its local skills base. A report is requested for Cabinet as soon as possible on this scheme, which will be funded through Working Wirral. Officers are also asked to explore the possibilities for wider apprenticeship schemes across the public and private sector similar to the Knowsley Apprentice scheme.

INVESTIGATION OF THE POTENTIAL FOR A MUNICIPAL BANK

The Director of Finance is asked to actively investigate the potential for setting up a Municipal Bank either in conjunction with other Merseyside authorities or separately, which would serve the function of assisting local businesses with loans in a situation where commercial banks are holding onto their own assets against future liabilities rather than lending to the business community. The concept of the Municipal Bank is already being explored by other local authorities and could also serve the function of assisting domestic clients with mortgages where the supply has dried up and where it may be in the interests of the local authority to encourage the use of housing which may not be attractive to commercial lenders.

The above items under Investing in Wirral help meet the Strategic Objective to create more jobs, achieve a prosperous economy and regenerate Wirral with the priorities for improvement of reducing worklessness and increasing enterprise and the aim to increase employment opportunities and match skills

to employers' demands.. It also meets the Strategic Objective to create a clean, pleasant, safe and sustainable environment, with the priority for improvement of reducing the Council's carbon footprint.

(7) Increased choice for local people 260,000

YOU DECIDE

A pilot scheme allowing Area Forums to buy in additional council services for their areas was carried out last year. It resulted in over £100,000 of additional funds being allocated on sports and youth activity, including diversionary activity to improve community safety, over £50,000 of additional money on cleaning up the environment, over £25,000 on other ways of improving levels of community safety and crime prevention, and a variety of small amounts on individual environmental improvements, road signing and educational initiatives. A full evaluation of the scheme will be presented to the Cabinet on 19 March. In the meantime, provision will be maintained at £260,000, which is £20,000 per Area Forum with the continuation of an additional £20,000 each for the Youth Parliament and the Older People's Parliament.

CAPACITY BUILDING IN THE COMMUNITY 50,000

Cabinet recognises that there is a major transfer of assets to the community taking place and considerable advice, assistance and shared knowledge will be needed to engage the community in this process and empower them to own and run their own facilities in the best interests of local people. Cabinet proposes that an additional sum of £50,000 be made available in the base budget to help in this process.

Cabinet further recognises that a detailed review of the community engagement and development functions within the Council needs to be undertaken in the light of new legislation, developments, initiatives and funding regimes, in order to ensure that all activities are properly focused and complement each other, and asks for an urgent report on this to the next appropriate Cabinet meeting.

The items above meet the aims under the Create an Excellent Council Objective of improving accountability, accessibility and openness and involving those who use our services in their design and delivery as well as improving partnership working with the public, private and voluntary sectors. The individual amounts spent by Area Forums also add to the Strategic Objective of creating a clean, pleasant, safe and sustainable environment as well as raising the aspirations of young people.

(8) Provision for increase in energy costs on Street Lighting contract 180,000

Cabinet proposes that the sum of £180,000 be included in the base budget as a growth item and contribution to the anticipated increase in energy costs for Wirral's street lighting, taking into account previously agreed efficiency measures.

(9) School Crossing Patrols 20,000

Cabinet proposes that the recommendations in the report to the Cabinet (see minute 382 above) be accepted and that the cost of £20,000 be included in the base budget. Cabinet notes that this will allow crossing patrol attendants to be moved from lower risk crossings to staff higher risk crossings, some of which are currently unstaffed because of the difficulties in filling vacant posts.

(10) That any requirement of the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970 to consider reports be dispensed with on the grounds that, in the opinion of the Council, the matters are urgent.

(11) That the appropriate officers be instructed to issue to Wirral residents factual publicity about agreed policy options.

(12) That for the financial year 2009/10 the Council will ensure that no pensioner household over 75 will pay any increase in council tax, including the consequences of any Police and Fire increases. This applies where:

(i) the council tax payer pays council tax in Wirral as their main home and all individuals in the household that are counted as resident for council tax purposes are aged 75 or over on 1 April 2009 (but where the qualifying age criterion is met after 1 April 2009 eligibility will be effective from the relevant birth date only);

(ii) where council tax benefit is in payment the daily council tax rate payable as at 31 March 2009 shall apply and will not exceed the reduction that would apply if not in receipt of council tax benefit;

(iii) this reduction will be calculated after deduction of other council tax discounts, reliefs and benefits;

(iv) application must be made for the reduction where it is not currently in payment or the potential claimant is not in receipt of Council Tax Benefit.

(13) It be noted that, at its meeting on 15 December 2008, the Council calculated the figure of 104,276.0 as its council tax base for the year 2009/10 in accordance with regulation 3 of the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 1992, made under Section 33 (5) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

(14) That the following amounts be now calculated by the Council for the year 2009/10 in accordance with Sections 32 to 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (the Act) and the Collection Fund (Council Tax Benefit) (England) Direction 2002:

- | | |
|------------------|---|
| (a) £792,091,900 | being the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 32(2)(a) to (c) of the Act; |
| (b) £511,033,400 | being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 32(3)(a) to (c) of the Act; |
| (c) £281,058,500 | being the amount by which the aggregate at 14(a) above exceeds the aggregate at 14(b) above, |

calculated by the Council in accordance with Section 32(4) of the Act, as its budget requirement for the year;

(d) £152,050,000

being the aggregate of the sums which the Council estimates will be payable for the year into its General Fund in respect of redistributed Non-domestic Rates and Revenue Support Grant, adjusted for the amount of the sums which the Council estimates will be transferred in the year between its Collection Fund and its General Fund in accordance with Section 97(3) of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 and any amount which the Council estimates to be transferred between its Collection Fund and its General Fund pursuant to the Collection Fund (Community Charges) Directions under Section 98(4) of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, issued on 7 February 1994;

(e) £1,237.18

being the total amount at 14(c) above less the amount at 14(d) above, divided by the amount at 13 above, calculated by the Council in accordance with Section 33(1) of the Act, as the basic amount of its council tax for the year;

(f) Valuation Bands:

A	£824.79	B	£962.25	C	£1,099.72	D	£1,237.18
E	£1,512.11	F	£1,787.04	G	£2,061.97	H	£2,474.36

being the amounts given by multiplying the amount at 14(e) above by the number which, in the proportion set out in Section 5(1) of the Act, is applicable to dwellings listed in a particular valuation band divided by the number which in that proportion is applicable to dwellings in Valuation Band D, calculated in accordance with Section 36(1) of the Act, as the amounts to be taken into account for the year in respect of categories of dwellings as listed in different valuation bands.

(15) It be noted that this equates to a Wirral council tax rise of 4.43%.

(16) It be noted that for the year 2009/10 the major precepting authorities have stated the following amounts of precept issued to the Council, in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, for each of the categories of dwellings shown below:

Fire

A	£41.58	B	£48.51	C	£55.44	D	£62.37
E	£76.23	F	£90.09	G	£103.95	H	
	£124.74						

Police

A	£93.74	B	£109.36	C	£124.99	D	£140.61
E	£171.86	F	£203.10	G	£234.35	H	
	£281.22						

(17) Having calculated the aggregate in each case of the amounts at paragraphs (14) and (16) above, the Council, in accordance with Section 30(2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, hereby sets the following amounts of council tax for the year 2009/10 for each of the categories of dwelling shown below:

Valuation Bands

A	£960.11	B	£1,120.12	C	£1,280.15	D	£1,440.16
E	£1,760.20	F	£2,080.23	G	£2,400.27	H	£2,880.32

(18) It be noted that this equates to an overall increase in council tax of 4.46%.

Cabinet – 23 February (Corrections to schools budget recommendation – minute 385)

In paragraph 1.3 of the report on the Schools Budget (page 77 in the blue Estimates Book) the figure for Dedicated Schools Grant should read £188,136,000, not £194,121,000.

The motion was agreed without a vote and, accordingly, the following minute was deemed to be approved:

Minute 385 – Schools budget

Resolved -

(1) Cabinet welcomes the increase in funding from Government through Dedicated Schools Grant of £4.4m for 2009/10 and £5.9m for 2010/11. This amounts to over £10m more for Wirral schools over the next two years.

(2) Cabinet recommends to Council that the Schools Budget for 2009/10 be set at the level of the adjusted Dedicated Schools Grant which is £188,136,200. This equates to an increase of 3.9% per pupil.

(3) Cabinet notes that for 2010/11, the adjusted Dedicated Schools Grant will be £194,121,000, which equates to an increase of 4.4% per pupil.

(4) It is acknowledged that these increases are above the current CPI rate of inflation and that they compare favourably with the average national increases per pupil in 2009/10 of 3.7% and 2010/11 of 4.3%.

(5) Cabinet recognises that this budget will help the Council to achieve one of the strategic objectives in the Corporate Plan, which is to raise the aspirations of young people. This funding will also contribute towards the four themes in the Children and Young People's Plan:

- Reducing health inequalities for children and young people
- Intervening and supporting children earlier and in their communities
- Reducing the gap in outcomes for children
- Improving value for money in services

(6) Cabinet notes that the increase in funding per pupil of 3.9% in 2009/10 includes the following spending assessment by the Government: Minimum Funding Guarantee (2.1%) and Government priorities (0.8%).

(7) Cabinet notes that the Government has set the Minimum Funding Guarantee at 2.1% for the period 2008-2011. This is 1% below the assessment of average cost pressures and assumes an efficiency gain in schools, as part of national public sector efficiency requirements.

(8) The projected budget of 2009-2011 includes the following items (for detail see Appendix 1 of the Director's report):

Inflation

Provision is included for teachers and other pay at 2% and income at 3%. Provision has also been included for price inflation at 2%.

Headroom

Headroom is the difference between the DSG and the budget required to continue funding schools at their current level, after allowing for inflation, unavoidable cost pressures and the Minimum Funding Guarantee. Cabinet notes the decision taken in 2008/09 about Headroom in 2009/10. This is allocated as follows:

Deprivation funding to "narrow the gap"	£1,933,000
Secondary Education Inclusion Bases	£75,000
Increase in Statement value	£170,000

Other Specific Grants

Specific grants have been included in the budget and are detailed in the table below:

	Amount 2008/09	Estimate 2009/10	Estimate 2010/11
	£	£	£
LSC 6 th Form and SEN	20,341,400	20,767,100	21,201,600
School Development Grant:			
- Devolved	15,129,900	15,142,500	15,200,700
- Central	1,165,100	1,189,500	1,218,500
Schools Standards Grant	10,516,300	10,568,600	10,681,200
Learnwise – LSC/ESF	491,000	1,470,000	827,000
School Lunch Grant	554,700	553,300	553,300
Ethnic Minority Achievement	159,600	188,200	199,800
Extended School Sustainability	470,700	849,500	1,196,900
Targeted Primary and			

Secondary Strategy	2,176,200	1,911,100	TBA
Making Good Progress*	-	791,600	TBA
Surestart, Early Years and Childcare	9,101,000	9,562,000	10,385,000
Free entitlement for 3- and 4-year-olds	-	404,300	1,651,900
Playing for Success	80,000	80,000	80,000

* Making Good Progress is a new programme aimed at improving the rate at which pupils' progress year on year and includes funding for one-to-one tuition for children who have fallen behind expectations.

Area Based Grant

The following Area based Grants are also included in the Schools Budget:

	Amount 2008/09	Estimate 2009/10	Estimate 2010/11
	£	£	£
Secondary behaviour and Attendance	68,300	68,300	68,300
School Development Grant	776,600	444,700	444,700
Choice Advisors	52,100	52,100	52,100
Flexible 14-19 Partnerships	100,000	98,600	96,900
Total	997,000	663,700	662,000

Early Years

The number of children in Early Years settings has increased and Cabinet agrees to allocate growth of £134,000 to meet this requirement.

Special Educational Needs (SEN)

Cabinet notes the continuing pressures on SEN budgets and that this is mainly due to costs charged by other local authorities for SEN placements outside Wirral. Cabinet recommends that Council sets spending targets that will limit the increase required in 2009/10 to £250,000. This will be met from a reduction in the SEN Plan budget (£150,000), a reduction in Schools Contingency (£100,000) and reduced pressure on independent special school budgets, following changes to school places to be implemented at Claremount School in September 2009 and 2010.

Insurance

Cabinet agrees to carry forward, if available, into 2010/11 a schools contingency underspending of up to £200,000 to meet part of the increase in school insurance costs as set out in paragraph 4.9 of the report presented to the Schools Forum on 21 January.

(9) Increase in places at the Observatory School

The Observatory school provides places for secondary age pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD). Cabinet agrees to increase

places from 40 to 50 with effect from September 2009, as part of the successful strategy to reduce the number of placements in out-of-borough schools.

(10) This Schools Budget reflects the advice and recommendations of the Schools Forum, from its meeting on 21 January 2009.

(11) Cabinet notes the full details of the budget breakdown and recommendations contained within the report and appendices of the Director of Children's Services, which have been presented to this meeting.

(12) Cabinet therefore endorses the Schools Budget for 2009/10 as set out above and recommends it to the Council for approval.

With the permission of the Council, the Leader reserved part of the time for speaking, allocated to him under Standing Order 5(1)(h), to his right of reply to the main debate on the proposed amendments to the Cabinet's budget.

In accordance with Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003, the Director of Finance submitted a written report in respect of the budget recommended by the Cabinet, which examined the robustness of the proposed budget with particular reference to

- (a) the adequacy of General Fund balances and reserves;
- (b) the achievability of any savings included in the budget;
- (c) the impact of the proposed budget for 2009/10 on the setting of the budget for 2010/11.

Similar reports were submitted in respect of the proposals in minutes 134 and 135 below.

132 PROCEDURAL MATTERS

Councillor Dave Mitchell withdrew his proposed amendment to Cabinet Minute 384.

Councillor Sarah Quinn referred to the transfer of Pensby Community Centre and the reference to this matter in Councillor Green's proposed amendment to Cabinet Minute 384. The Director of Law, HR and Asset Management indicated that this matter did not render the amendment unlawful.

133 MATTERS FOR DEBATE

The Council agreed a procedure for the meeting, in accordance with Standing Order 13, which included provision for dealing with the two amendments lodged in one debate (see minutes 134 and 135 below).

134 AMENDMENT: CONSERVATIVE GROUP BUDGET PROPOSAL 2009/10

Proposed by Councillor Green
Seconded by Councillor Mrs Rennie

(1) That the revenue estimates for 2009/10, now submitted to Council, be approved, subject to the amendments in paragraphs (3) and (4) below.

(2) It be noted that this budget proposal is based on the belief that:

the level of criticism, including petitions and letters signed by over 60,000 people protesting at the current administration's decision to close libraries, sports and recreation centres, museums, theatres, community centres and public halls, has been unprecedented. Therefore the Council, as servants of the public, must respond to residents' concerns and act when setting this year's Council budget to protect the valued and much loved local services that are currently under threat;

the reported business model for a 'Wirral Council Bank', described as the Council borrowing from the 'wholesale money markets' and offering mortgages to 'struggling house hunters and businesses' matches previously failed business models, this proposal should be not proceeded with;

this budget proposal, therefore, by a more intelligent use of Council resources, will reverse the administration's closure plans and will result in lower council tax bills than those proposed by the Labour/Liberal Democrat Cabinet. This budget proposes an overall increase in the level of council tax for Wirral residents of only 2.5%

(3) Changes

(a) Reinstate all of the facilities marked for closure or transfer as part of the Labour/Liberal Democrat administration's Strategic Asset Review. Reversing the SAR closure plans will require

£3,101,000

The £3,101,000 requirement arises from reversing the following cuts:

(i) Beechwood, Eastham, Higher Bebington, Hoylake, Irby, New Ferry, Prenton, Ridgeway, Seacombe, Wallasey Village and Woodchurch Libraries

(£796,000)

(ii) Hoylake, Westbourne Hall, Beechwood, Gautby Road, Livingstone Street, Noctorum, Leasowe, Seacombe, Greasby, Overton, Woodchurch, Kylemore and Pensby Community Centres

(£244,000)

(iii) Guinea Gap, Leasowe, Grange Road West and Beechwood Sports and Recreation Centres

(£1,246,000)

(iv) Pacific Road, Wirral Museum and Wirral Transport, Museums & Theatres

(£518,000)

(v) Halls and other buildings, including Leasowe Lighthouse, The Grange, Grosvenor Ballroom, Vale House, Mayer Hall, New Ferry, 65 The Village, Victoria Hall, Heswall Hall, Turntable, Alexander Hall,

(£297,000)

(b) In addition, the Council agrees to establish a reserve for additional ongoing repairs to Council assets now being retained

£547,000

(c) Reverse cuts imposed by the Labour/Lib Dem. administration in Youth Club provision £150,000

(d) Reverse all cuts in school crossing patrols by Labour/Lib Dem. administration £30,000

(e) Reverse cuts to the ERIC Service and retain as a free service £515,000

(f) Reverse Adult Social Services transport cut, bridged for one year to allow staff the time and resources to prepare an 'in-house' best offer £180,000

(g) Noting the failure of the administration's 2009/10 budget to passport the return of the 2.5% reduction in VAT to Council customers and residents, Council therefore resolves to return the surplus to the public through reduced council tax

£75,000

(h) Savings

(i) Savings on the SAR decommissioning costs (one-off) (£200,000)

Deletion of year 1 SAR capital programme (£450,000)

Saving on administrative buildings (to be met from bridging finance) (£1,000,000)

Total £1,650,000

(ii) All non-front line vacancies to be evaluated (fill, keep vacant or delete) by Employment and Appointments Committee prior to recruitment to post £200,000 (The terms of reference of the Committee be amended accordingly)

(iii) Inflation - reduction of provision for price inflation £908,000

RPI is now down to 0.1% and budget includes 2%. Reduce the amount for general price inflation from 2% to 1% whilst retaining inflation at 2% for contractual commitments and imposing 0% (freeze) change to current Councillor Allowances.

(iv) Noting that the budget includes £672,000 for Corporate Marketing, Destination Marketing and Design and Brand Management, this be reduced by £300,000

(v) Noting that the budget includes £870,000 for external consultancy costs, this be reduced by

£290,000

To control the use of external consultants introduce requirement for Cabinet approval before any future engagement (i.e. the officers' scheme of delegation be revised accordingly)

(vi) Change Team
£592,000

Change Team to be funded from bridging finance in 2009/10 with the intention that from 2010/11 the Team be funded from the savings / results generated by the Team.

(vii) Noting the 185 staff in the Finance Department's IT Service, this be reduced, as a first step, by five posts with the resulting saving of
£100,000

(viii) Management structure

Council believes the current council management structure is not 'fit-for-purpose' and believes the following changes are required:

Reducing the number of departments from seven to four
(£390,000)

Delete two posts due to become vacant (Heads of Service for HR and Policy) and realise consequential opportunity saving by not engaging consultants to fill vacancies
(£188,000)

Total initial saving on changes to Council structure
£578,000

Recognising that this structure requires time to consider and implement, these options are to be met from bridging finance in 2009/10 to allow the savings to be delivered from 2010/11.

(ix) Noting the proposed Efficiency Investment Budget (EIB) in the 'Estimates Blue Book' for 2009/10 states a total budget of £8,200,000 of which £5,000,000 remains unallocated, Council believes the use of a proportion of the EIB to respond to the clearly stated expressions of the public to retain much valued local services to be an appropriate use of the EIB.

Reduce EIB by:
£2,600,000

(4) Growth

It be noted that this proposal leaves the following growth in the Council budget for 2009/10 as recommended by the Cabinet

	£
Zero council tax increase for pensioner households over 75	190,000
£5.060m more for schools.	5,060,000
Child protection and response to 'Baby P' case	690,000
Residential care for children	280,000
Ten-day payment for SME creditors	170,000
Support for micro-businesses of 10 employees or less	50,000
You Decide – more choice for local people	260,000

Capacity building in the community	50,000
Provision for increase in energy costs on street lighting	180,000
School crossing patrol service (part, but see above)	20,000

(5) Good to Great

This Council is committed to making the changes necessary to achieve the aim of being recognised by Wirral residents as a good council, providing services that meet residents' aspirations for themselves, their families and their community at a cost that is affordable and reasonable. To achieve these aims we believe the Council should commit itself to:

Giving Wirral residents more opportunities and power over their lives, economically, socially and culturally
 Strengthening Wirral families
 Making Wirral safer, stronger and greener

In presenting this budget proposal for 2009/10, we have attempted to restore the process of the Authority addressing the aspirations as well as meeting the public's expectations.

A key building block to make the change to a truly great council will be the effective management of the Council's own budget. Council therefore instructs officers to ensure that budgets stay within limits set and requires them to request the Director of Finance's approval, and to produce a corrective action plan, for any potential overspends occurring during the financial year.

(6) That any requirement of the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970 to consider reports be dispensed with on the grounds that, in the opinion of the Council, the matters are urgent.

(7) That the appropriate officers be instructed to issue to Wirral residents factual publicity about agreed policy options.

(8) The Council for the financial year 2009/10 will offer a discount on council tax to ensure that no pensioner household over 75 will pay any increase in council tax, including the consequences of any Police and Fire increases. This will apply where:

(i) the council tax payer pays council tax in Wirral as their main home and all individuals in the household that are counted as resident for council tax purposes are aged 75 or over on 1 April 2009 (but where the qualifying age criterion is met after the 1 April 2009 eligibility will be effective from the relevant birth date only); and

(ii) all such individuals are not in receipt of council tax benefit and application is made for the discount.

This discount will be calculated after deduction of all other council tax discounts and reliefs.

(9) It be noted that, at its meeting on 15 December 2008, the Council calculated the figure of 104,276.0 as its council tax base for the year 2009/10 in accordance

with regulation 3 of the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 1992, made under Section 33 (5) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

(10) That the following amounts be now calculated by the Council for the year 2009/10 in accordance with Sections 32 to 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (the Act) and the Collection Fund (Council Tax Benefit) (England) Direction 2002:

(a) £788,805,900 being the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 32(2)(a) to (c) of the Act;

(b) £510,518,400 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 32(3)(a) to (c) of the Act;

(c) £278,287,500 being the amount by which the aggregate at 10(a) above exceeds the aggregate at 10(b) above, calculated by the Council in accordance with Section 32(4) of the Act, as its budget requirement for the year;

(d) £152,050,000 being the aggregate of the sums which the Council estimates will be payable for the year into its General Fund in respect of redistributed Non-domestic Rates and Revenue Support Grant, adjusted for the amount of the sums which the Council estimates will be transferred in the year between its Collection Fund and its General Fund in accordance with Section 97(3) of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 and any amount which the Council estimates to be transferred between its Collection Fund and its General Fund pursuant to the Collection Fund (Community Charges) Directions under Section 98(4) of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, issued on 7 February 1994;

(e) £1,210.61 being the total amount at 10(c) above less the amount at 10(d) above, divided by the amount at (9) above, calculated by the Council in accordance with Section 33(1) of the Act, as the basic amount of its council tax for the year;

(f) Valuation Bands:

A	£807.07	B	£941.59	C	£1,976.10	D	
	£1,210.61						
E	£1,479.63	F	£1,748.66	G	£2,017.68	H	
	£2,421.22						

being the amounts given by multiplying the amount at 10(e) above by the number which, in the proportion set out in Section 5(1) of the Act, is applicable to dwellings listed in a particular valuation band divided by the number which in that proportion is applicable to dwellings in Valuation Band D, calculated in accordance with Section 36(1) of the Act, as the amounts to be taken into account for the year in respect of categories of dwellings as listed in different valuation bands.

(11) It is noted that this equates to a Wirral council tax rise of 2.19%.

(12) It be noted that for the year 2009/10 the major precepting authorities have stated the following amounts of precept issued to the Council, in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, for each of the categories of dwellings shown below:

Fire

A	£41.47	B	£48.39	C	£55.30	D	
	£62.21						
E	£76.04	F	£89.86	G	£103.69	H	
	£124.42						

Police

A	£93.50	B	£109.08	C	£124.66	D	£140.25
E	£171.41	F	£202.58	G	£233.74	H	
	£280.49						

(13) Having calculated the aggregate in each case of the amounts at (10) and (12) above, the Council, in accordance with Section 30(2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, hereby sets the following amounts of council tax for the year 2009/10 for each of the categories of dwelling shown below:

Valuation Bands:

A	£942.04	B	£1,099.06	C	£1,256.06	D	£1,413.07
E	£1,727.08	F	£2,041.10	G	£2,355.11	H	£2,826.13

(14) It is noted that this equates to an overall increase in council tax of 2.50%.

Following the combined debate (see also minute 135 below), and Councillor Foulkes having replied to it, the amendment was put and lost, with the Council dividing as follows:

For the amendment (23) - Councillors T Anderson, C Blakeley, SL Clarke, WA Duffey, DM Elderton, GJ Ellis, Mrs L Fraser, JE Green, J Hale, Paul Hayes, AC Hodson, PSC Johnson, J Keeley, I Lewis, SD Moseley, SR Mountney, C Povall, A Pritchard, Mrs LA Rennie, SL Rowlands, Sue Taylor, GCJ Watt, and Mrs K Wood.

Against the amendment (40) - Councillors RL Abbey, A Bridson, I Coates, JA Crabtree, George Davies, PL Davies, WJ Davies, F Doyle, S Foulkes, G Gardiner, John George, PN Gilchrist, T Harney, SA Holbrook, AT Jennings, SE Kelly, Brian Kenny, DT Knowles, Ann McLachlan, M McLaughlin, CM Meaden, GD Mitchell, RK Moon, S Niblock, Jean Quinn, M Redfern, PTC Reisdorf, DE Roberts, J Salter, H Smith, PA Smith, WW Smith, PM Southwood, JV Stapleton, A Taylor, CM Teggins, R Wilkins, KJ Williams and P Williams.

Abstainer (1): Councillor A Jones

Resolved - That it be noted that, subject to the vote in minute 135 below, minute 384 is therefore confirmed.

135 AMENDMENT: CABINET MINUTE 384 (BUDGET 2009/10)

Proposed by Councillor Gilchrist

Seconded by Councillor Harney

(1) That Cabinet minute 384 be amended to take account of the following changes.

(2) (a) Council believes that the budget proposed by the Cabinet should be amended to recognise the upset and frustration expressed by library users throughout the Borough.

(b) Council recognises that over 28,000 residents had signed petitions seeking to retain libraries threatened with closure. Substantial petitions from Eastham, Hoylake and Prenton and Woodchurch were received after 15 January 2009.

(c) Council believes that there is scope in the overall budget to continue the highly regarded library service as present, in locations readily reached by young children and mothers with prams, and children seeking to read and research after school without long journeys, offering computer training opportunities for all ages, and catering for increased numbers of residents seeking access to information and local facilities in this time of recession..

(3) Council therefore requests that the £796,000 required to retain the library service be found as follows -

(i) Making a realistic provision for inflation:

(a) Council notes that the Estimates for 2009/10 include £6.3m for inflation, with inflation for general prices and contracts at 2%, with a separately identified sum for energy.

(b) Council recalls that the budgets in both 2004 and 2005 worked on the basis of inflation at 1%, in 2006 and 2007 provision for inflation was 0%, and at 2% in 2008 and 2009.

(c) Council believes that the most recent '*Inflation report*' published by the Bank of England on 19 February, offers sufficient guidance in Chapter 5:

..the central projection is for CPI inflation to fall well below the 2% target in the medium term, as the downward pressures from the substantial margin of spare capacity more than outweigh the waning impact on import and consumer prices from the lower level of sterling..' (page 40).

(d) A 0.4 % reduction in price inflation, but taking out of this calculation anything to do with contracts or energy, would produce a saving of £348,000, to be applied towards restoring library services to the community.

(e) Inflation for general prices be set at 1.6% and for contracts at 2%.

(ii) Bringing into use the Transitional Provision for Libraries

The estimates contain £188,000 (reported to Finance and Best Value Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 2 February 2009) which can be utilised.

(iii) Re-allocating resources from the You Decide funding.

(a) Council recognises that substantial member involvement, officer time and determined efforts were made to involve the public from September 2008 through to the allocations being confirmed by Cabinet on 5 February 2009. In total, 2118 people responded to questionnaires after extensive surveys by Mott McDonald which had to be purchased.

(b) Whilst important lessons for local democracy from the You Decide scheme are being evaluated, allocating this funding to retaining library services would benefit considerable numbers of Wirral residents who have expressed their views so clearly in recent months.

Therefore the sum of £260,000 be applied to the retain library services.

(iv) In addition, Council notes that retaining library services in the communities removes

the need to spend resources on mothballing, boarding up and securing these buildings,

the expense of removing stock and facilities, the costs of re-provision and the costs of moving the One Stop Shop from Eastham.

(v) Finally, Council considers the needs of Wirral's people are best met by providing this level of comprehensive and efficient library service.

(4) (a) In accordance with the Financial Regulations (paragraph 2.5) in the Constitution, Chief Officers are expected to manage their budgets '*responsibly and prudently*' and that they " *should avoid supporting recurring expenditure from one-off sources of savings or additional income, or creating future commitments for which they have not identified future resources*".

(b) Council therefore requests the Cabinet to continue to look for savings in administration, departmental structures, and agile working and office accommodation, as opposed to reducing the library service.

(c) Given the present economic situation, and the prospect of further Government spending reviews, it is essential that departmental duplication, in systems, in training or even the provision of six press officer posts is challenged.

(d) Cabinet be requested, therefore, to address these issues from the outset of the financial year.

Following the combined debate (see also minute 134 above), and Councillor Foulkes having replied to it, the amendment was put and lost (28:35).

Resolved - That it be noted that minute 384 is therefore confirmed.

136 **VACANCIES**

There were no nominations to vacancies submitted.

137 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The Council were informed that this was Andrea Grant's last Council meeting at Wirral and thanked her for her work at Wirral.