

## **Council – 18 October 2010**

### **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 speakers have 3 minutes).

#### **(1) WIRRAL'S FUTURE – BE A PART OF IT**

**Proposed** by Councillor Simon Holbrook (7 minutes)

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

- (1) Council welcomes the bold and innovative approach taken by the Conservative – Liberal Democrat joint administration in engaging widely with the public in the future shape and financing of Council services through the 'Wirral's Future – be a part of it' consultation.
- (2) Council thanks those members of the public, council staff and other stakeholders who have engaged in the consultation process and contributed their thoughts and ideas so far; and urges all those yet to make a response to make their contribution in the last few days before the consultation closes on 31st October.
- (3) Council thanks those officers of the Council who have worked tirelessly and enthusiastically to deliver the biggest ever consultation exercise carried out by the Council in such an efficient and cost effective manner.
- (4) Council further thanks those members of the independent task forces for bringing their knowledge and expertise to support the Council on the key challenges it has to face.
- (5) Council recognises that difficult decisions will need to be made to meet the financial challenges which are being faced by all local authorities.
- (6) Council notes that the final Budget decisions will rest with Full Council following reports to Cabinet on the consultation results by the independent task forces and that those reports and the evidence considered will all be publicly available.
- (7) Council is proud to be associated with this extension of democracy through its engagement with the public on these important questions.

## **AMENDMENT**

**Proposed** by: Cllr. Steve Foulkes (7 minutes)

**Seconded** by: Cllr. Phil Davies (3 minutes)

*Delete all after "Council" and insert:*

"notes that 6,032 members of staff have been invited by this administration not to be a part of Wirral's Future and that letters have been sent to them asking them asking them to consider either Early Voluntary Retirement if they are over 55 or Voluntary Severance if they are younger.

Council further notes the absence of any Cabinet report which, under normal procedure, would have set out the context of the decision to send these letters, explained how the cost of any subsequent EVRs or Voluntary Severance payments would be met, explained how the gaps in service created by the staff choosing to leave would be dealt with, looked at the procedure and risks associated with any refusal to let staff go who might subsequently be offered EVRs or Severance at a lower rate, and only in the light of the above information asked Cabinet to take a responsible decision on whether or not to make an offer of EVR or Voluntary Severance to staff.

Council also notes the apparent absence of any recorded formal decision to circulate the letters, even under delegated authority.

Council notes that the result of bypassing normal procedures and governing instead by press release was a high degree of chaos, uncertainty, and distress for staff, who were unclear at first whether they were to be made compulsorily redundant or offered voluntary retirement or severance and who, in many cases, received the wrong salary figures, leading to an apology to staff on the internal web site for the mistakes that had been made.

This distress was compounded by the fact the letters were deliberately sent on a Friday to the home address of individual staff in order to make sure the letters were received in the isolation of their own homes where they would be without the benefit of advice or the benefit of support from fellow colleagues. It was also made worse by the fact that this letter made it clear there was a very tight deadline for returning any applications for EVR and Severance, that individuals would have to leave by the end of December with possible reduced notice terms, and that the offer would be taken off the table after that deadline and a less generous offer substituted.

This was further compounded by the fact that a letter to staff from the Leader of the Council the day before contained the following implicit threat: "You should also be aware that whilst I remain committed to doing all I can to avoid compulsory redundancies in the future, my ability to do this will depend on whether we can make enough savings now".

Council deeply regrets the way in which its staff have been treated and re-asserts the fact that it values its staff and their commitment to the work they do for the people of Wirral and wants to reassure them that they will be given every opportunity

to make decisions that are right for them and their families, and that those decisions will not be made under any form of duress, or within a timescale that clearly indicates a three month deadline for the issuing of compulsory redundancies leading up to April 1st.

Council further recognises that under a Labour and Labour/Liberal Democrat Administration it has avoided any compulsory redundancies through careful management of the budget and believes that this administration's failure to take prompt action in dealing with the budget deficit will mean the threat of compulsory redundancies is much more likely."

**Right of Reply:** Councillor Simon Holbrook (7 minutes)

## **(2) THREAT TO DEMOCRACY**

**Proposed** by Councillor Phil Davies (7 minutes)

**Seconded** by Councillor Steve Foulkes (3 minutes)

- (1) This Council notes that new EU procurement rules now in place can lead to much tougher penalties if procurement rules are broken, including the fact that the High Court has the power to set aside a signed contract, leading to potentially "significant and costly litigation" against the Council, with substantial damages being claimed, according to the latest Audit Commission report on Procurement, which followed the HESPE PIDA report.
- (2) In order to ensure that the Council avoids any such litigation, the Audit Commission recommends that the Council should:  
  
"Strengthen procurement and general governance policies and procedures to ensure the Council promotes the right culture, the risk and incidence of external challenge is managed and the benefits of procurement initiatives are not put at risk". It also points out the need for "formal documentation to include the thought process leading up to agreed decisions."
- (3) This Council is therefore deeply concerned that no attempt has been made to manage the potential risk to the Council from the use of Task Forces, set up outside the normal procedures, without elected members, to advise Cabinet on the budget, which could include recommendations to outsource Council services.
- (4) This Council believes serious risks exist because:
  - There is no requirement on Task Force members to fill in any register of interests, or to declare any interests in a meeting, but the potential is there for a conflict of interest should individual members of a Task Force, or their companies, friends, family or associates, recommend to Cabinet the outsourcing of services for which they could subsequently tender if Cabinet agreed their recommendation.

- Members of the Task Force have been given access to financial information in their advisory role.
- There is no record of any selection or vetting procedure for Task Force members.
- There is no formal Cabinet record of the setting up of the Task Forces, or agreed terms of reference. The only Cabinet record, which does not refer in any way to the setting up of individual Task Forces, refers only in more general terms to (setting up a consultation procedure) leaving all details to the approval of the Leader and Deputy Leader of the administration, which is outside usual Constitutional procedures.
- Subsequent details of the setting up of the Task Forces, the role they had to play, the individuals who would sit on them, and the consultation timetable were not taken to Cabinet, but announced in a press release.
- The draft questionnaire, apparently drawn up by members of the press office following input on options from the Task Forces, was not placed before Cabinet for consideration, as has been normal practice in the past on major consultations, but was again publicised in the press and on the Council's web site.
- Although the Council has well established procedures for conducting independent customer satisfaction surveys which ensure a balanced response across Wirral's population, these have not been used.
- The questionnaire is flawed, with questions either unclear or open to accusations of bias.
- The Constitutional democratic processes of the Council have been ignored and the Constitutional ability to call the Executive to account by calling decisions into the Scrutiny Committees has been bypassed by operating outside the Council's normal procedures.
- Council further notes that this process not only puts the Council at risk, but it also unfairly places members of the Task Forces at risk because, without any way of registering or declaring their interests, they are left unprotected from public perceptions of cronyism or impropriety, whatever the actual circumstances, if they receive Council funds in the future, or bid for Council contracts, (whether or not they come under European procurement rules.)

- (5) Council therefore refers this matter to the Audit and Risk Management Committee to consider what steps should be taken to protect both the Council and the members of the Task Forces in the future.

### **(3) RENEWABLE ENERGY GENERATION**

**Proposed** by Councillor Gill Gardiner (7 minutes)

**Seconded** by Councillor Simon Holbrook (3 minutes)

Council welcomes the Government's announcement of its intention to give local authorities the power, through legislative changes, to sell excess electricity generated by them from renewable resources back to the National Grid.

Council notes:

- (a) That, at present, only 0.01% of electricity in England is generated by local authority owned renewables, despite the scope that exists to install projects on local authority owned land and buildings. In Germany the equivalent figure is 100 times higher.
- (b) That, at present, local authorities are able to put any renewable electricity they generate to local use, and benefit from the associated feed-in tariff for projects smaller than 5MW. The legislative changes will remove restrictions on selling any excess renewable electricity into the grid.
- (c) That the steps that are now being taken to extend the rights of Councils could mean up to £200m a year in new income for local authorities across England and Wales.
- (d) The potential environmental benefits to Wirral Council of this new Government policy in terms of meeting climate change targets, reducing the carbon budget and benefiting from Feed in Tariffs and other incentives to renewable generation.
- (e) The potential financial benefits to Wirral Council of this new Government policy in terms of reduced electricity bills and potential income.
- (f) The opportunity to integrate green technology such as wind turbines and solar panels for electricity generation and combined heat and power as part of the ongoing office accommodation change project.
- (g) The potential to explore partnership working with renewable energy technology companies and social housing providers to install micro-generation technology on their properties in order to generate cheaper electricity for the benefit of tenants and the Council.

Therefore, Council resolves:

- (1) To expand its renewable energy generation.
- (2) To instruct officers to ensure that renewable energy projects are an integral part of the office accommodation strategy.
- (3) To instruct officers to report back to the appropriate Cabinet member and to the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee at the earliest opportunity.

#### **(4) ANTI-SLAVERY DAY AND CHILD TRAFFICKING**

**Proposed** by Councillor Chris Blakeley (7 minutes)

**Seconded** by Councillor Wendy Clements (3 minutes)

Council:

- (1) Notes that 18 October is the first observance of Anti-Slavery Day and welcomes the campaign to end child prostitution and the trafficking of children for sexual purposes by, among others, ECPAT UK.
- (2) Expresses concern that human trafficking is the third largest criminal industry in the world and that around 1.2 million children and young people are trafficked every year for sexual exploitation and cheap labour.
- (3) Welcomes the Coalition Government's creation of a National Crime Agency which will lead on a crack down of the trafficking of people, weapons and drugs. Council also welcomes new measures to tackle human trafficking within the immigration system as a priority.
- (4) Calls for close working between local and national Government and partners to provide appropriate care and protection for victims of trafficking.

#### **(5) PARKS & OPEN SPACES – CONSULTATION HYPOCRISY**

**Proposed** by Councillor Steve Foulkes (7 minutes)

**Seconded** by Councillor Harry Smith (3 minutes)

- (1) Council condemns the sheer hypocrisy of the Conservative Liberal Democrat Alliance who have preached extensively the values of consultation with staff, trade unions and the public, only to ignore all their own so called values as soon as a major decision has to be taken.
- (2) Council condemns their abject failure to listen to their own staff on ways of saving money, choosing instead to drive through the privatisation of everything within the Council's Parks and Countryside service, including the maintenance and administration of all Wirral's open spaces, which includes Wirral's coastline and estuaries.
- (3) Council further condemns their craven refusal to allow an in house bid, hiding behind difficulties in making "the separation between client and bid team", particularly as the Audit Commission report following up the HESPE PIDA makes it clear that this is quite possible if the proper procedures are followed.
- (4) Council finally condemns their complete failure to consult with the public before taking this decision, even though they have already set up a major budget consultation exercise which could have specifically covered this issue.

- (5) Council believes that these failures demonstrate that their commitment to consultation is purely for propaganda purposes only and is therefore a cynical sham.
- (6) Council further believes that a change in the way we operate such major services, which goes far beyond a simple change in a grounds maintenance contract, should be considered as a major policy change and therefore subject to a vote in full Council, which is currently denied to us.

## **AMENDMENT**

**Proposed** by Councillor David Elderton (7 minutes)

**Seconded** by Councillor Bob Moon (3 minutes)

*Replace all after “(1) Council condemns the sheer hypocrisy of the” with:*

Labour Group, who started the PACSPE process under the previous Labour and Liberal Democrat administration, in reversing their position now the policy is being carried through to completion by the current administration.

- (1) Council welcomes the direct communication between the administration and staff and thanks staff for responding with their suggestions and ideas.
- (2) Council notes the approach taken by the previous but one, All-Party administration to award the waste collection contract to Biffa and previous Labour / Liberal Democrat administration to award the highways maintenance contract to Colas and believes the same process has been followed for PACSPE.
- (3) Council thanks those Labour Councillors who have participated in the PACSPE process, albeit not attending the most recent meeting.

**Right of Reply:** Councillor Steve Foulkes (7 minutes)

## **(6) INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF BIODIVERSITY**

**Proposed** by Councillor Phil Gilchrist (7 minutes)

**Seconded** by Councillor Dave Mitchell (3 minutes)

This Council recognises that 2010 has been declared the International Year of Biodiversity by the United Nations.

Council welcomes the fact that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has announced a structural reform plan which recognises the need to:

- support and develop British farming and encourage sustainable food production;
- help to enhance the environment and biodiversity to improve quality of life;
- and

- support a strong and sustainable green economy, resilient to climate change.

And that the coalition Government launched a discussion document “An invitation to shape the Nature of England” in July with an ambitious foreword from Caroline Spelman as secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Council also recognises that a key commitment has been given to the publication of a White Paper on the natural environment by spring 2011 and that this will take account of the report published by Sir John Lawton in September 2010 and commissioned by Hilary Benn in September 2009.

Council notes that the report makes the following key points for establishing a strong and connected natural environment:

- That we better protect and manage our designated wildlife sites;
- That we establish new Ecological Restoration Zones;
- That we better protect our non-designated wildlife sites;

Council recognises that it has, with its range of parks, open spaces, and habitats managed for the people of Wirral, a key role in maintaining biodiversity.

Council, therefore,

- (a) looks forward to the White Paper;
- (b) would welcome updated reports to Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny as appropriate;
- (c) expresses its appreciation of the work being undertaken by officer, volunteers and local organisations to encourage, secure, maintain and protect biodiversity in Wirral.

And states its belief that the issue of biodiversity and the retention and creation of habitats for bees and other insects, should continue to be recognised and enshrined in relevant planning policies and preparations for the future management of parks and open spaces.

## **AMENDMENT**

**Proposed** by Councillor Jerry Williams (7 minutes)

**Seconded** by Councillor Harry Smith (3 minutes)

*Delete all after* “Council recognises that it has, with its range of parks, open spaces and habitats managed for the people of Wirral, a key role in maintaining biodiversity” *and insert:*

“Council therefore deplores the rash decision taken by Cabinet without any consultation with staff or the general public to hand over the maintenance and administration of these parks, open spaces and habitats to a private sector which is

motivated by profit rather than by any desire to protect the biodiversity of our plants and wild life and to compound that decision by not even allowing an in house bid from members of staff who understand what is needed.

Council expresses its appreciation of the work being undertaken by officers, volunteers and local organisations to encourage, secure, maintain and protect biodiversity in Wirral.

Council states its belief that the issue of biodiversity and the retention and creation of habitats for bees and other insects should continue to be recognised and enshrined in relevant planning policies and that Wirral's parks, open spaces and habitats should not be privatised but should continue to be managed in house, without any profit motive, in the interests of the people of Wirral and the wider environment for generations to come."

**Right of Reply:** Councillor Phil Gilchrist (7 minutes)

## **(7) RESTORING CIVIL LIBERTIES**

**Proposed** by Councillor Cherry Povall (7 minutes)

**Seconded** by Councillor Peter Kearney (3 minutes)

Council:

- (1) Believes that the British state has become too authoritarian, and that over the past decade it has abused and eroded fundamental human freedoms and historic civil liberties.
- (2) Endorses the decision by the Coalition Government to scrap the ID card scheme and the National Identity register.
- (3) Welcomes the decisions to protect child identity including the abolition of the ContactPoint database and ending the finger-printing of children at school without parental permission.
- (4) Looks forward to further protection of civil liberties from the outcome of the review of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000.

## **AMENDMENT**

**Proposed** by Councillor Simon Holbrook (7 minutes)

**Seconded** by Councillor Dave Mitchell (3 minutes)

*After paragraph (3) add:*

- (4) Welcomes moves to have innocent people's DNA removed from the police database.

Re number existing paragraph (4) as (5) and add “and welcomes the forthcoming Freedom Bill to roll back a generation of illiberal and intrusive legislation.”

## **AMENDMENT**

**Proposed** by Councillor George Davies (7 minutes)

**Seconded** by Councillor Denise Realey (3 minutes)

*Delete all after “Council” and insert:*

“condemns the decision of the coalition government to scrap ContactPoint, the national children’s database, which was established following the recommendations of Lord Laming into the death of Victoria Climbié. This database would have improved the exchange of information between different agencies working with vulnerable children and was backed by The Royal College of GPs, The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health and the NSPCC.

Council believes that this unthinking decision is an example of the ideological way in which individual rights have been set above the best interests of the victims the recommendations would have protected.

Council notes that calls to scrap large numbers of CCTV cameras and to get rid of ASBOS, which are both key weapons in the fight against the anti-social behaviour which torments many neighbourhoods, is another case in point where the many victims are being sacrificed to the rights of one individual to make their life a misery without being caught on camera, or given an ASBO preventing him, or her, from entering the area they have terrorised.

Council condemns decisions taken in isolation by a Cabinet of Liberal Democrats and Tory millionaires which will lessen its ability to deal with anti-social behaviour, particularly at a time when savage cuts in public spending will dramatically reduce the number of police or community support officers available to deal with this kind of nuisance crime which can make life hell for those who live with it and who, unlike government Cabinet members, do not have the money to escape it.”

**Right of Reply:** Councillor Cherry Povall (7 minutes)

## **(8) USE OF COUNCIL RESOURCES**

**Proposed** by Councillor Steve Foulkes (7 minutes)

**Seconded** by Councillor Brian Kenny (3 minutes)

- (1) Council is concerned that the Liberal Democrats have been reduced to using the Council’s Friday mail run in a vain and hopeless attempt to persuade fellow councillors from the Labour Group to join them on death row, as they face total extinction in the May elections.

- (2) Council recognises the Liberal Democrat desperation as their party continues to haemorrhage members nationally, disillusioned by the growing number of broken promises the Coalition has forced upon them.
- (3) It also recognises their fear locally as the Conservatives shed crocodile tears while targeting Lib Dem seats in West Wirral in anticipation of Labour gains at Liberal Democrat expense elsewhere.
- (4) Council even recognises the uncertainty they must feel as the leader who promised them safety in a coalition with the Tories faces losing his seat himself.
- (5) However, despite all these pressures, Council would still appreciate the courtesy of a postage stamp on Political mail rather than having it delivered at the Council Tax payers' expense.

## **(9) COUNCIL TRANSPARENCY**

**Proposed** by Councillor Simon Mountney (7 minutes)

**Seconded** by Councillor Sue Taylor (3 minutes)

Council:

welcomes requests for information and believes the Freedom of Information Act has helped to open up public bodies.

However, Council believes that a request for information under the Act should be a last resort and that, in the first instance, more information should be made available to all residents by the Council.

Council therefore,

- (1) Welcomes the decision to publish details of supplier payments of £500 or more each month and notes that almost 200 enquiries from staff, residents and press have been received.
- (2) Thanks the independent organisation 'Openly Local' for their advice on making this information more accessible and user-friendly.

Council requests Cabinet consider further steps to open up Wirral Council to the public.

## **AMENDMENT**

**Proposed** by Councillor Anne McArdle (7 minutes)

**Seconded** by Councillor Jean Stapleton (3 minutes)

*Insert at the end of paragraph 1.*

“However, Council is concerned that as no additional resource has been identified to cover the requirement to publish details of supplier payments of £500 or more each month and to respond to queries from the public, the media, the press and Councillors, this work has been split between a Procurement Manager and an Administrative Officer and they have taken on this role in addition to their existing duties and that the consequences of this are that other elements of work, such as consolidating and letting contracts, are being delayed.

Council therefore believes the cost involved in delivering this policy in this way at a time of financial difficulty should have been thought through in more detail before any final decision to go ahead was taken.

Council also notes that the publication of the list gives a clear indication of the number of private sector companies in regular dealings with the Council who will clearly suffer as public spending is cut back.”

**Right of Reply:** Councillor Simon Mountney (7 minutes)

## **(10) FREE SCHOOLS**

**Proposed** by Councillor Chris Meaden (7 minutes)

**Seconded** by Councillor Phil Davies (3 minutes)

- (1) Council condemns the introduction by the Conservative/Liberal Democrat Coalition Government of Free Schools, without any consideration for the impact these will have on existing schools and educational standards for all children.
- (2) Council notes that there has been no consideration of:
  - The impact of creating an additional new school or schools at a time when other schools are being closed down because of falling pupil numbers and the cost of maintaining surplus places.
  - The potential for increasing social divisiveness and unfairness in the system as Free Schools choose the pupils they want without any Local Authority control on how pupils are chosen or admitted.
  - The danger that appropriate provisions made for children with special needs may be put at risk.
  - The impact on already complex school admissions and exclusions policies.
  - The possibility of lower educational standards as several Free Schools already established have confirmed they will not limit their appointments to qualified teachers.
  - The possibility of driving all educational standards down as money is distributed more thinly to remaining schools.
- (3) Council believes that the creation of Free Schools is a badly thought out, politically motivated decision which can only waste scarce resources and flies in the face of the real need, which is to provide good local schools, accessible to all.

## **AMENDMENT**

**Proposed** by Councillor Sheila Clarke (7 minutes)

**Seconded** by Councillor Paul Hayes (3 minutes)

*Replace all after “(1) Council condemns the” with*

“failure by the previous Government to close the inequality gap between children’s achievement in the most deprived and most prosperous communities and believes that the Coalition Government is right to seek to give all children the opportunities to achieve their full potential.

Council believes that most students in Wirral, and their parents and carers, are satisfied with the performance of their chosen schools but welcomes the option of free schools for those parents who are not.

Council welcomes the pledge by the Coalition Government to narrow the gap by the introduction of a Pupil Premium for those children from deprived backgrounds, who Council believes have the right to as good a standard of education as any other.

Agrees with Labour’s most successful-ever Leader, Tony Blair, that to deny parental choice is ‘a gross, unbelievable social injustice’.

**Right of Reply:** Councillor Chris Meaden (7 minutes)

## **(11) GREATER FREEDOMS FOR COUNCILS**

**Proposed** by Councillor Gerry Ellis (7 minutes)

**Seconded** by Councillor Karen Hayes (3 minutes)

Council:

- (1) Believes that local people know what is best for their communities and regrets the loss of local decision making under previous governments through the growth of unelected QUANGOs, ringfencing of budgets and national targets and performance indicators.
- (2) Welcomes the Coalition Government’s pledge to abolish many of the 1,100 QUANGOs and for their powers to be returned to national and local government and full democratic oversight.
- (3) Supports the decision to remove much of the ringfencing of central government grants to local authorities and the enablement of greater local discretion in spending.

## **AMENDMENT**

**Proposed** by Councillor Denise Roberts (7 minutes)

**Seconded** by Councillor Anne McLachlan (3 minutes)

*Delete all after* “Believes that local people know what is best for their communities” *and insert:*

“And would be concerned to lose the current watchdogs, such as the Audit Commission, who protect them against misuse of public funds or failures to maintain the standards of services they deserve.

Council recognises that, while some Quangos may clearly have had their day, there are others which perform a vital role in our society, which will cost more to replace than maintain, and which act as an independent voice for the people which, if silenced, will allow the government of the day to ride roughshod without challenge over the people they say they represent.

Council believes that the freedom conveyed at this point by the removal of ring fencing and greater discretion in local spending, is simply a smoke screen to disguise the full extent of cuts in local authority funding and their impact on services, and is designed to shift blame away from national government to local government.

Council further believes that the use of extensive consultation, and the approaching further devolution of budgets from local government to smaller neighbourhoods, at a time of increasing austerity, is cynically designed to put the blame for cuts on local residents themselves, who once more are being asked to choose between being hung, shot or guillotined.”

**Right of Reply:** Councillor Gerry Ellis (7 minutes)

## **(12) COALITION GOVERNMENT REALITY GAP**

**Proposed** by Councillor Jean Stapleton (7 minutes)

**Seconded** by Councillor Ann McLachlan (3 minutes)

- (1) This Council expresses its deep concern about the “reality gap” opening up between the propaganda surrounding announcements of Government policy and the reality in practice.
- (2) Council notes that the Cabinet Member for Work and Pensions, Ian Duncan Smith, has set out his plans at the Tory conference to change the Welfare Benefit system in favour of moving people off benefits into work, thereby reducing the numbers of people in poverty, and cutting the Welfare Benefits bill.
- (3) However, Council notes:

- The Coalition Government says they want more people in work, yet their own figures show that their plans to cut the deficit will throw 100,000 more people out of work every year than Labour plans.
- They cancelled the two year Job Seekers guarantee which was aimed at giving jobseekers a guaranteed offer of a job, internship, volunteering placement or work experience if they were out of work for two years or more.
- They axed the Future Jobs Fund and slashed the Working Neighbourhood Fund, which are designed precisely to improve the number of jobs available and in particular to give opportunities to young people.
- On Wirral, without any consultation, £1.6m was axed from the Working Neighbourhood Fund which could have paid for more apprentices, helping Wirral residents into work.
- Four million in total was slashed from the Area Based Grant, without any consultation, affecting schools, children's services, Wirral jobs and other services.
- The Council is one of the largest employers on Wirral, yet Government plans to slash local government funding in the forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review, leading to dramatic cuts in services, could see thousands of jobs going on Wirral alone.
- Increasing VAT to 20% will penalise the poor most and the Institute for Fiscal Studies has pointed out that the Coalition's budget was a regressive one, hitting the poor hardest.
- Introducing a cap on Housing Benefit, which is extensively used by those in work on low incomes, will lead to intensive overcrowding in unsuitable accommodation or to families being evicted and made homeless as the increase in top up fees makes their homes unaffordable.

(4) Council believes that this is not the record of a Government set on improving work opportunities and cutting poverty. Rather it is the record of a Government which, once again, will penalise the poor in order to help the rich.

## **AMENDMENT**

**Proposed** by Councillor John Hale (7 minutes)

**Seconded** by Councillor James Keeley (3 minutes)

*Delete all after "Council" in paragraph 1 and insert:*

- (1) This Council welcomes the support of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the European Union, and the vast majority of economists and financial analysts for the Coalition plans for debt reduction.
- (2) Council notes that the Cabinet Member for Work and Pensions, Ian Duncan Smith, has set out his plans at the Conservative conference to change the Welfare Benefit system in favour of moving people off benefits into work, thereby reducing the numbers of people in poverty, and cutting the Welfare Benefits bill.

*Delete (3) and insert:*

(3) This Council notes:

- That the last Labour Government left a deficit of £156 billion, costing billions of pounds in interest charges.
- That despite a record deficit of £156 billion, the outgoing Labour Government had only identified £22 billion savings, which would have meant a year on year increase in the deficit and interest charges.
- That if no action was taken, the country's mortgage would rise to £1.4 trillion in 2015, with the National Debt incurring £70 billion a year interest – more than the schools, climate change and transport budgets put together.
- That if no action was taken, the country's credit rating could be affected, leading to much higher interest rates with adverse effects on jobs, family incomes, with increased mortgage defaults.

(4) This Council recognises that action needs to be taken to address the financial challenges arising from the global recession and recognises the distress, anger and upset caused to people across Wirral, including some of the most deprived communities by the previous Labour Government's financial and regulatory mismanagement, such as cuts to public services and abolition of the 10p starting rate of Income Tax for the lowest paid. Council notes that the overall impact of all the measures in the Chancellor's Budget of 22 June was progressive, building on the coalition's principles of freedom, fairness and responsibility.

(5) Council also notes that while other countries went into recession later and returned to growth faster, the UK economy suffered the longest period of recession since the 1930s.

(6) Council believes that the action taken by the Coalition Government will restore the nation's finances and also enable fairer, greener taxes and protection for the most vulnerable, including:

- Raising the personal allowance for under 65s by £1,000 in April 2011, with the gains limited to basic rate taxpayers. The Government estimates that the 880,000 lowest income taxpayers will be removed from tax altogether.
- The introduction of a levy based on banks' balance sheets and action on unacceptable bank bonuses.
- Freezing council tax in 2011-12, in partnership with local authorities.
- A triple guarantee to help pensioners by uprating the Basic State Pension by earnings, prices or 2.5%, whatever is highest.
- An increase in the child element of the Child Tax Credit of £150 above CPI indexation.
- Increase capital gains tax to 28% for top rate taxpayers.

(7) Council recognises that the public understands that action is needed to address the unsustainable levels of government debt and applauds the initiative taken nationally by the Coalition Government and locally by Wirral's Cabinet to engage with the public on their priorities for future public spending of taxpayer's

money. Council further notes that this represents a continuation of the Council's policy on engagement agreed with all party support on 15 February 2010.

- (8) Council is outraged but not surprised at the utter hypocrisy of the Labour Party for its failure to be honest with the public about the scale and impact of the budget reductions needed as a result of its own party's mistakes in government, and for suggesting that the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats are wrong to consult the public on the difficult challenges that lie ahead.

## **AMENDMENT**

**Proposed** by Councillor Simon Holbrook (7 minutes)

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

*Delete paragraph (1) and renumber existing paragraph (2) as paragraph (1)*

*Delete existing paragraph (3)*

*Renumber paragraph (4) as paragraph (2) and replace all text after "Council believes" with "that helping people into work and ensuring no one is out of pocket after moving from unemployment to work is the best way to reduce poverty and ensure fairness for taxpayers".*

**Right of Reply:** Councillor Jean Stapleton (7 minutes)

## **(13) NEW INVESTMENT IN WIRRAL**

**Proposed** by Councillor Andrew Hodson (7 minutes)

**Seconded** by Councillor Don McCubbin (3 minutes)

Council:

- (1) Supports the bid for a Local Enterprise Partnership for Merseyside that will enable greater focus on the needs of Wirral, partner local authorities and employers and thanks those officers involved in the bid.
- (2) Believes private-sector led investment will help to rebalance Wirral's economy and is keen to attract new jobs to the Borough, particularly 'green' jobs and those which offer opportunities for additional apprenticeships.

Council, therefore, welcomes:

- continuing progress of the redevelopment of New Brighton
- investment in The Contact Company to create 244 jobs in Birkenhead
- meetings between the Leader of the Council and potential Chinese investors

## **AMENDMENT**

**Proposed** by Councillor Stuart Kelly (7 minutes)

**Seconded** by Councillor Simon Holbrook (3 minutes)

*Before "Council therefore welcomes" insert:*

- (3) Instructs officers to continue work to attract sources of funding, such as the Regional Growth Fund, to enable Wirral and the wider City Region to make the transition away from an economy with significant dependence on public sector employment and to assist in creating the conditions for growth and enterprise within the private sector to increase the number of private sector sustainable jobs.

## **AMENDMENT**

**Proposed** by Councillor Jean Stapleton (7 minutes)

**Seconded** by Councillor Phil Davies (3 minutes)

*Delete all after paragraph 1 and replace with –*

“Expresses it’s fear that any private sector led investment will be totally inadequate to re-balance Wirral’s economy in the light of swingeing public sector cuts which will not only destroy thousands of jobs on Wirral, but will also put many private sector companies at risk who depend on the public sector for a large proportion of their work, increasing even further the level of job losses across Wirral.

Council welcomes any new jobs in the borough, particularly those which offer opportunities for additional apprenticeships but believes this welcome could be deemed hypocritical because the Cabinet is failing to practice what it preaches and has already slashed £1.6m from the Working Neighbourhood Fund in the Council’s own budget this year which is used to pay for apprenticeships.

Council also recognises that the latest creation of apprenticeships in the Home Insulation programme put forward by the previous Labour/Liberal Democrat administration, and celebrated now in press releases by the current Conservative Liberal Democrat administration is a prime example of a programme instigated by the public sector, leading to close co-operation with the private sector, which required an injection of funds from the public sector which will no longer be available for new programmes as public spending cuts start to bite, so leading to lost future job opportunities for Wirral residents.

However Council welcomes:

- continuing progress of the redevelopment of New Brighton
- investment in The Contact Company to create 244 jobs in Birkenhead
- meetings between the Leader of the Council and potential Chinese investors

Council also welcomes the dramatic conversion of the Leader of the Council and his acolytes from their previous scepticism in opposition to a sudden understanding of the importance of travelling to China to meet with potential investors in Wirral.”

**Right of Reply:** Councillor Andrew Hodson (7 minutes)

#### **(14) FUNDING FOR INSULATION IN HMRI AREAS**

**Proposed** by Councillor Harry Smith (7 minutes)

**Seconded** by Councillor George Davies (3 minutes)

- (1) Council expresses its concern that funding for insulation programmes in HMRI areas could be under threat after 2011, as outlined in the report to Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee on carbon reduction.
- (2) Council recognises that the HMRI initiative, and many other valuable programmes, will be subject to decisions made in the Comprehensive Spending Review in October which could see Departmental budget cuts of 25% or more.
- (3) Council would urge the Government to continue with Pathfinder, or a similar scheme, which has already produced major housing benefits for deprived communities in Rock Ferry, Tranmere, Birkenhead, Seacombe and Liscard.
- (4) Council recognises that, while progress has been made, there is substantial work still to be done to achieve the original HMRI goals which will require secure funding in the future.
- (5) Council welcomes the start of its own insulation programme for private sector homes outside HMRI areas and points out the real benefits already identified of the existing insulation programme in HMRI areas in terms of reducing fuel poverty, reducing Wirral's Carbon footprint by increasing energy efficiency and improving private sector housing stock.
- (6) Council believes that any removal of funding for this programme in HMRI areas would be very short sighted and would have serious consequences in Wirral's most deprived areas.

#### **AMENDMENT**

**Proposed** by Councillor Gill Gardiner (7 minutes)

**Seconded** by Councillor Stuart Kelly (3 minutes)

*Add:*

- (7) Council welcomes the recent announcement from the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, Chris Huhne, of a “Green Deal” to create almost 250,000 jobs in green industries and modernise £26m homes to make them energy efficient, boosting the economy as well as helping households to reduce

their energy bills and their carbon footprint and taking more households out of fuel poverty.

**Right of Reply:** Councillor Harry Smith (7 minutes)