

MINUTE EXTRACT

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

TUESDAY 13 FEBRUARY 2024

111. 2024/25 BUDGET AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

The Director of Finance submitted the report setting out the draft budget for the 2024/25 financial year. The draft budget was based on the extensive work and analysis undertaken by officers and the finance sub-committee working group and was presented for consideration to the Policy and Resources Committee. Members were informed that if approved, the budget and medium-term financial strategy would be presented to Council on 26 February 2024.

The report contained several appendices, some of which were required to be published as part of the statutory annual budget process and others that provided the Committee with relevant information relating to short and medium-term budget planning, inclusive of consultation aspects and financial assumptions. It was reported that those assumptions would potentially change and that they would be reported through the Council's governance processes for budget monitoring to the Policy and Service Committees.

The 2024/25 draft budget had been compiled using the figures in the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement for 2024/25 as the final settlement was expected to be published after the publication date of the report, in early February 2024. Any material changes to the final settlement that impact on the assumptions included within this report were reported verbally to the Committee at the meeting. The budget proposals had been produced following extensive engagement of the Policy & Resources Committee, Finance sub-working group and other Policy and Service Committees during the last year. This process had identified the need to reflect the Council Plan priorities, particularly the delivery of high quality, efficient, universal services to all residents.

The Chair thanked all Members and officers for their full participation in the budget setting process, which had enabled the Director of Finance to submit the report and recommendations for Members consideration this evening. The Chair explained that he had contacted Group Leaders with a proposed additional recommendation to those published as follows,

“6. Authorise the reinstalment of the one-off Saving of £400k from the temporary closure of Wallasey Town Hall, in full, until April 2025 and add the additional £246k saving this produces to the £1m investment fund for activities linked to visible improvements in services across the borough.”

It was then moved by the Chair, seconded by Councillor Tony Jones, that the officer recommendations as detailed in the report be approved, subject to the inclusion of the above additional recommendation.

The Political Group Leaders and a number of Members echoed the views expressed by the Leader in respect to the collaborative work undertaken by representatives of all political groups in the budget setting process both via policy and service committees and the finance sub working group.

Councillor Pat Cleary then proposed an amendment, seconded by Councillor Jo Bird, in respect to recommendation 4 (d) which was to delete the words “finance sub-committee” and replace them with “the relevant Policy and Service Committee”.

The amendment was then put to the vote and lost (3:12).

The original motion was then put, and it was:

Resolved - That,

1. Authority be delegated to the Section 151 Officer, following consultation with the Chair and Group Spokespersons of the Policy & Resources Committee, to do anything necessary – including minor financial adjustments – to give effect to the proposals contained in this report and address any funding changes, if any.

2. Note and consider the response to the financial proposals forming a draft budget for the purposes of consultation under section 65 of the Local Government Finance Act, set out as below be noted:

Appendix 1 Budget Proposals

Appendix 2 Budget consultation

Appendix 3 Policy & Service Committee budget proposals feedback

Appendix 4 The Dedicated Schools Grant Schools Budget

Appendix 5 Provisional Council Tax Statutory Calculations

Appendix 6 Discretionary Rate Relief Policy

Appendix 7 Medium-Term Financial Strategy

Appendix 8 Budget proposal changes since November 2023

Appendix 9 Council Tax Base Calculation Process and Associated Background Information.

3. Recommend to Council a Revenue Budget of £399.603m, noting that the Section 151 Officer in liaison with the Monitoring Officer and Head of Paid Service may need to make adjustments to the Budget estimates before the preparation of final reports for Full Council on 26 February 2024.

4. Accordingly recommend that Council:

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

b) Approve increases to the Council’s fees and charges equal to or above the annual Consumer Price Index reported by the Office for National Statistics in September 2023, unless either of the following conditions apply:

- i. There is a statutory constraint that prevents such an increase,
- ii. The Council is operating in a market whereby such an increase would result in the Council being uncompetitive.

c) Approve the Discretionary Rate Relief Policy for Business Rates for 2024/25 set out as Appendix 6.

d) Approve the creation of a £1m project fund within the budget for 2024-25 as set out in section 3 and that oversight of the project fund be retained by the Finance Sub-Committee.

e) Approve that Unearmarked Reserves (General Fund Balances) is maintained at a figure not lower than £13.18m for the course of the 2024/25 financial year.

f) Agree the Budget Proposals as set out in Appendix 1 and authorise, in respect of the Budget Proposals, that the Director with portfolio undertake such actions as they consider necessary to implement the agreed Budget and deliver the savings, income and efficiency proposals developed as part of the formulation process and update Committees accordingly.

g) Approve the 2024/25 Schools Budget of £378.552m

5. Recommend (subject to a separate vote at Council) that Council:

a) Sets the Band D Council Tax at £1,888.22 for the Wirral Borough Council element of the Council Tax, representing a general increase of 2.99% and 2.00% ringfenced increase to Adult Social Care, and the Council Tax requirement for the Council's own purposes for 2024/25 of £181.3m as detailed in Appendix 5.

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

6. Authorise the reinstalment of the one-off Saving of £400k from the temporary closure of Wallasey Town Hall, in full, until April 2025 and add the additional £246k saving this produces to the £1m investment fund for activities linked to visible improvements in services across the borough.