

COUNCIL

At a meeting of the Council on Wednesday, 23 October 2024 in the Council Chamber, Runcorn Town Hall

Present: Councillors Wainwright (Mayor) Abbott, Ball, Baker, Begg, Bevan, Carlin, Connolly, Dennett, Davidson, Dourley, Fry, Garner, Gilligan, Goodall, Harris, S. Hill, V. Hill, Hughes, Hutchinson, Jones, Leck, M. Lloyd Jones, P. Lloyd Jones, C. Loftus, K. Loftus, Logan, A. Lowe, A. McInerney, T. McInerney, Nelson, L. Nolan, P. Nolan, Philbin, Polhill, N. Plumpton Walsh, Ratcliffe, Rowe, Ryan, Stockton, Teeling, Thornton, Wainwright, Wallace, Wharton, Woolfall and Wright

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Bramwell, McDermott, McDonough, C. Plumpton Walsh, Stretch, Skinner, Thompson and Wall

Absence declared on Council business: None

Officers present: M. Reaney, Z. Fearon, S. Young and G. Ferguson

Also in attendance: Two members of the press

	<i>Action</i>
<p>COU25 COUNCIL MINUTES</p> <p>The minutes of the meeting of Council held on 10 July 2024 were taken as read and signed as a correct record.</p>	
<p>COU26 THE MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS</p> <p>The Mayor announced that the following events had been arranged in aid of the Mayor's charity – the Halton Foundation and all are welcome to attend:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wellness In Widnes – 17 November• Abba Night – 14 December• Soul Night – 13 December• Town Hall Open Day – 7 December• Tickets are currently on sale from Councillor Wallace for the Christmas Hamper	
<p>COU27 LEADER'S REPORT</p>	

The Leader in his report to Council:

- spoke about local government finances, 14 years of the previous Government's austerity and that representations had been made to the current Government;
- advised that the Council had taken part in the Local Government Association's Corporate Peer Challenge this year and we was visited by a peer review team in September. A report was expected shortly;
- a CQC inspection of Adult Social Care was impending;
- the Labour Party Conference had recently been held in Liverpool and was a success for the region. It had been confirmed that the Labour Party Conference would be held in Liverpool in 2025; and
- he had recently attended a Halton Economic Business Forum at Heath Business Park.

COU28 URGENT DECISIONS

The Council considered a report of the Chief Executive, on the urgent decisions taken since the last meeting of the Council.

RESOLVED: That Council note the report.

COU29 MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

The Council considered the minutes of the Executive Board meetings on 11 July and 12 September 2024.

RESOLVED: That the minutes be received.

COU30 MINUTES OF THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD

The Council considered the minutes of the Health and Wellbeing Board meeting on July 2024.

RESOLVED: That the minutes be received.

COU31 QUESTIONS ASKED UNDER STANDING ORDER 8

It was noted that no questions had been submitted under Standing Order No. 8.

COU32 2024/25 TO 2026/27 CAPITAL PROGRAMME - EXB17

The Council considered a report of the Director, Finance, which sought approval for a number of revisions to the Council's 2024/25 Capital Programme.

Director of Finance

RESOLVED: That Council approve the updated capital programme for 2024-27, including forecast spend and funding, as set out in Table 1 and Table 2.

COU33 KINGSWAY QUARTER, WIDNES TOWN CENTRE - KEY DECISION - EXB18

Executive Board had previously considered a report which sought approval to progress delivery of Kingsway Quarter development.

Director of Finance

RESOLVED: That Council

- 1) adjust the Capital Programme for the sum of £750,000.00 to enable demolition of Kingsway Leisure Centre and associated preparation works to aid formal land disposal;
- 2) endorse the vision for Kingsway Quarter site for residential led development, as set out in para 3.6 of the report and in accordance with the wider Widnes Town Centre Strategy;
- 3) approves delegated authority to Director of Economy, Enterprise and Property, in consultation with the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Climate Change, for site marketing and disposal; and
- 4) authorises the Director for Economy, Enterprise and Property to arrange for all required documentation for the transactions to be completed to the satisfaction of the Director of Legal and Democratic Services, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services.

COU34 REPLACEMENT CREMATOR WIDNES CREMATORIUM - KEY DECISION

Executive Board had previously considered a report which sought approval to procure a replacement cremator and associated installation, service and maintenance contract.

Executive Director of Environment & Regeneration

RESOLVED: That

- 1) delegated authority be granted to the Executive Director – Environment and Regeneration, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Urban Renewal, to procure a replacement cremator and associated installation, service and maintenance contract; and
- 2) Council include £308,000, in the 2024/25 Capital Programme for the scheme, as outlined in section 5.0 of the report.

COU35 2024/25 SPENDING AS AT 31 JULY 2024 AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL FORECAST - EXB25

Council was asked to approve the Capital Programme as outlined in the attached report.

Director of Finance

RESOLVED: That

- 1) all spending continues to be limited to only absolutely essential items;
- 2) Executive Directors continue the urgent action to identify areas where spending could be reduced or suspended for the remainder of the current financial year, or additional funding secured;
- 3) approve the Capital Programme as set out in paragraph 3.21; and
- 4) the updated Medium Term Financial Forecast included at Appendix 5 is noted.

COU36 YOUTH JUSTICE PLAN - EXB27

Council were asked to approve the attached Youth Justice Plan 2024/27.

Executive Director of Children's Services

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the 2024-27 Youth Justice Plan be approved; and
- 2) authority be delegated to the Executive Director – Children's Services, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People and Families, to approve and submit an annual refresh of the Youth Justice Plan in 2025 prior to formal approval by Council next year.

COU37 JOINT HEALTH SCRUTINY ARRANGEMENTS -

CHESHIRE & MERSEYSIDE - HEA15

The Health Policy and Performance Board had previously endorsed the Joint Health Scrutiny Arrangements – Cheshire & Merseyside and recommended for Council approval.

Executive Director
of Children's
Services

RESOLVED: That Council

- 1) notes the report and Appendix; and
- 2) approves the revised Joint Health Scrutiny Arrangements.

COU38 MINUTES OF THE POLICY AND PERFORMANCE BOARDS AND THE AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE BOARD

The Council considered the reports of the following Boards in the period since the meeting of Council on 10 July 2024:-

- Children, Young People and Families
- Employment, Learning and Skills and Community;
- Health;
- Safer;
- Environment and Urban Renewal;
- Corporate Services; and
- Audit and Governance.

COU39 COMMITTEE MINUTES

The Council considered the reports of the following Committees in the period since the meeting of Council on 10 July 2024:-

- Development Management;
- Taxi Licensing Sub Committee; and
- Regulatory Sub Committee.

COU40 NOTICE OF MOTION - DEFINING OUR COMMUNITY'S RESPONSE TO AUGUSTS DISTURBANCES

Council considered a Notice of Motion submitted in accordance with Standing Order No. 6.

The following Motion was proposed by Councillor Martha Lloyd Jones and seconded by Councillor Norman Plumpton Walsh:-

Defining Our Community's response to August's disturbances

Halton Council is proud that our City Region is defined by its fine history of supporting people in need of shelter or help with these groups have enriched our communities and worked alongside the existing community to build up our local economy and services.

With our fellow residents, we were appalled to hear of the terrible attacks in Southport on the three children, their friends and adults who bravely tried to defend them. Our thoughts remain with everyone affected and their families.

We are no less appalled at the cynical high-jacking of that tragedy as an excuse for attacks on police and emergency workers, malicious vandalism, arson and looting. We stand in support of our police and emergency workers who risked their lives to protect people and businesses and welcome the full force of the law being brought against those who use or encourage race hatred, violence and terror. The recent drunken and self-indulgent hooliganism was an attack on the law abiding 60+ million UK residents and businesses who will pay the bill in millions of pounds and the other crimes that the police should have been addressing.

Over the past half century, the people of Halton have overcome enormous social and economic challenges: the dismantling of our core industries, pharmaceuticals and engineering; the cost of living crisis; austerity and the pandemic. As a community, we have met these challenges together.

To protect and strengthen our Halton Togetherness we resolve to:

- Continue to fight the adverse legacy of the social and economic challenges we have faced to secure a better life for all our residents;
- Write to the Prime Minister to support his Government's stance on bringing immediate justice to those responsible

for acts of violence and hatred and for greater promotion of accurate information on the role of migrants in society and regulation of social media to prevent its role in inciting such acts;

- Stand with all our communities against hatred and misinformation; and
- Re-enforce our work on togetherness and social cohesion.

The motion was put and carried.

RESOLVED: That the motion be approved.

COU41 NOTICE OF MOTION - CHANGES TO THE WINTER FUEL ALLOWANCE AND PROTECTING PENSIONERS FROM FUEL POVERTY

Council considered a Notice of Motion submitted in accordance with Standing Order No. 6.

The following Motion was proposed by Councillor Davidson and seconded by Councillor Ratcliffe:-

Changes to the Winter Fuel Allowance and Protecting Pensioners from Fuel Poverty

This Council notes:

The Labour Government's recent decision to restrict the Winter Fuel Payment to only pensioners in receipt of means-tested benefits like Pension credit, as announced by Chancellor Rachel Reeves.

The estimated impact of this decision, which Age UK says will mean 2 million pensioners who badly need the money to stay warm this winter will not receive it.

The significant role that Winter Fuel Payments play in helping older residents of Halton and across the UK afford heating during the coldest months, thereby preventing 'heat or eat' dilemmas and safeguarding health.

The criticism from Age UK, the Countryside Alliance and other charities, highlighting the social injustice and potential health risks posed by this sudden policy change.

The additional strain this decision will place on vulnerable pensioners, many of whom do not claim Pension Credit despite being eligible, further exacerbating their financial hardship.

This Council believes:

That the Winter Fuel Payment has been a lifeline for many older people across the UK and that restricting its availability solely to those on Pension Credit risks leaving many pensioners in financial hardship.

While some pensioners currently in receipt of the Winter Fuel Payment may not require it, 19,809 across Halton sit just above the cut-off for Pension Credit and will now lose their allowance.

The decision to means-test Winter Fuel Payments, especially with such short notice and without adequate compensatory measures, is deeply unfair and will disproportionately affect the health and wellbeing of our poorest older residents.

The Government's approach fails to consider the administrative barriers and stigma that prevent eligible pensioners from claiming Pension Credit, leaving many without the support they desperately need.

This Council resolves to:

Bring forward a Council-led local awareness campaign to alert those eligible of Pension Credit, which in some respects will help access to the Winter Fuel Payment for those most in need.

Requests that the Council Leader writes to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, urging a review of the decision to means-test the Winter Fuel Payment and asking the Government to ensure that vulnerable pensioners, particularly those not claiming Pension Credit, are protected from fuel poverty.

Commit the Council to signing the 'Save the Winter Fuel Payment for Struggling Pensioners' petition being run by Age UK and write to all members offering them the opportunity to sign the petition themselves.

Encourage local efforts to promote Pension Credit uptake through Council services and partnerships with local charities and community organisations to ensure that all eligible pensioners in Halton are supported in claiming their entitlement.

The motion was put and refused.

RESOLVED: That the motion be refused.

Meeting ended at 7.35 p.m.