North Tyneside Council Report to Council Date: 18 February 2016 Title: 2016-2019 Financial Planning and Budget Process: Liberal Democrat Notice of Objection

Report of:

The Liberal Democrat Group

Wards affected: ALL

Liberal Democrat Group Notice of Objection for the 2016/17 General Fund Revenue Budget, the proposed Council Tax Level for 2016/17, the Investment Plan for 2016-2019 and the Treasury Management Statement and Annual Investment Strategy for 2016/19

Liberal Democrat Objection to Mayor's Budget 2016/17

1.0 Introduction

We object to the elected Mayor and Cabinets proposals for the Budget for 2016/2017.

While recognising the difficulty that cuts in local government finance by Central Government continue to mean difficult decisions have to be made. Cuts have been made, year on year, by at least the last four Governments. We firmly believe that it is time for Central Government to realise the amount of hard work carried out by staff and the important services provided by local government.

We believe that while there is a small economic recovery regionally and nationally, many families are still experiencing economic difficulties. We would therefore call on the elected Mayor to review her proposals, and prioritise to ensure protection of services, particularly, to children and young people and vulnerable adults. The Council should ensure that it is providing services that people need and want.

We would especially draw attention to the following areas where we have particular concerns;

 Citizen interaction and delivery of service for external and internal customers. This will mean losing 108 jobs and losing face to face contact with the general public in most instances. It also means the public having to embrace modern technology and while many people now do so, there are still residents who are reluctant to do so especially among elderly and vulnerable residents.

- 2. Community provision of family services. North Tyneside have had a good service of Nursery provision in the Borough in the past, now leaving much of it to be privately provided is extremely alarming to many residents who need to access childcare in order to work. Despite the assurances given at a recent Council meeting, there are still doubts as to whether the private section can meet the need.
- 3. Creation of well being services. £941,000 reduction, these areas have led to support to families in the past and could lead to serious issues of personal risk.
- 4. Single front door and supporting gateway. £926,000 reduction, this area has already been depleted by reductions in previous years. No evidence that proposed changes will be effective. There are more people needing this service, yet there will be less staff to deal with them.
- 5. Cashless project. The Council has been trying to achieve this for many years. While every encouragement should be made to persuade residents to use alternative methods of payment. There are still many residents who don't have bank accounts.
- 6. Increase in charges including Sports and Leisure and Bereavement charges, last year the Council made large increases in these areas, this year the proposed charges are still above the rate of inflation. At a time when the Council should be encouraging residents to participate in healthy pursuits.

Like the Labour Group in 2013, we also believe that a modern Council shouldn't be reliant on increasing fees and charges to generate income especially after the large increases last year.

Once more we would suggest that all parties should be prepared to work together and there should be an all party group to monitor the budget especially any areas of high risk. It is essential to have efficient budgetary control and to maintain financial stability and concentrate on providing the quality services residents expect and deserve.

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