



Regeneration and Environment Policy and Performance Committee

Date:	Tuesday, 5 November 2013
Time:	6.00 pm
Venue:	Committee Room 1 - Wallasey Town Hall

Contact Officer: Mark Delap
Tel: 0151 691 8500
e-mail: markdelap@wirral.gov.uk
Website: <http://www.wirral.gov.uk>

AGENDA

**1. MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT
- DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST/PARTY WHIP**

Members are asked to consider whether they have any disclosable pecuniary interests and/or any other relevant interest in connection with any item(s) on this agenda and, if so, to declare them and state the nature of the interest.

Members are reminded that they should also declare, pursuant to paragraph 18 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules, whether they are subject to a party whip in connection with any item(s) to be considered and, if so, to declare it and state the nature of the whipping arrangement.

2. MINUTES (Pages 1 - 10)

To approve the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 17 September 2013

3. BUDGET OPTIONS (Pages 11 - 60)

The summary document and individual budget options papers are attached.

A presentation will also be made on this item.

**4. SCRUTINY REVIEW: IMPACT OF 2013/2014 BUDGET OPTIONS
AND POTENTIAL FOR 2014/2015 (Pages 61 - 90)**

5. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS APPROVED BY THE CHAIR

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REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT POLICY AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 17 September 2013

Present:

Councillor A Brighthouse (Chair)

Councillors

S Foulkes
S Williams
E Boulton
J Crabtree
P Doughty
G Ellis
R Gregson

K Hodson
M Johnston
P Kearney
A Leech
M Sullivan
KJ Williams

Cabinet Member:

Councillor G Davies

In attendance:

Councillor D Roberts

13 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST/PARTY WHIP

Members were asked to consider whether they had any disclosable pecuniary interests and/or any other relevant interest in connection with any item(s) on this agenda and, if so, to declare them and state the nature of the interest.

Members were reminded that they should also declare, pursuant to paragraph 18 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules, whether they were subject to a party whip in connection with any item(s) to be considered and, if so, to declare it and state the nature of the whipping arrangement.

Councillor M Sullivan declared his prejudicial interest in agenda item 5 – Highways and Traffic Representation Panel Minutes (see minute 17 post), insofar as it related to the proposed introduction of 20mph speed limits on various roads in Pensby.

Councillor J Williams declared his prejudicial interest in agenda item 5 – Highways and Traffic Representation Panel Minutes (see minute 17 post), insofar as it related to a proposed shared off road path for pedestrians and cyclists at Lever's Causeway, Bebington.

Councillor P Doughty declared his personal interest in agenda item 11 – Committee Referral – Permitted Development Rights (see minute 23 post) by virtue of his employment.

14 MINUTES

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 10 July 2013 be approved as a correct record

15 NOTICE OF MOTION - CUTS TO MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

The Head of Legal and Member Services advised that at the meeting of the Council held on 15 July 2013 (minute 21 refers), the following Notice of Motion proposed by Councillor D Roberts and seconded by Councillor J Stapleton was referred by the Mayor to this Committee for consideration.

CUTS TO MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

- (1) Wirral Council recognises the excellent work undertaken by Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service and applauds the commitment of its frontline and support staff. This Council also notes that those individuals' ability to protect the people of Wirral is being jeopardised by the Government cuts to funding as well as undermining staff morale.
- (2) This Council is deeply concerned by the findings of the Ken Knight review of fire and rescue services which makes the case for further huge cuts, mergers with other Authorities or Police Crime Commissioners and most worryingly privatisation. The Ken Knight review gives very little recognition of the very difficult decisions taken by Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority to date in managing the deepest cuts inflicted on any Authority in the Country and instead advocates its replacement by a PCC without any evidence whatsoever to prove that this would improve the service delivered to the residents of this city region.
- (3) This Council notes with serious concern the Government's alarming proposals to privatise part if not all functions of the fire and rescue service, along with yet further cuts to their grant funding which will impact on their ability in protecting residents from fire, road traffic collisions and other emergencies within the Borough of Wirral.
- (4) This Council is deeply worried that the Government has lost sight of the fire service's main purpose, to protect residents from fire, road traffic collisions and other emergencies and their devastating impact on our communities and that it threatens to put private profit ahead of the need to save lives and help people feel safe in their homes and community.
- (5) This Council further notes that the Government's proposals are in the context of a programme of ill-conceived efficiencies to fire and rescue services. The impact this will have on the communities of Merseyside is extremely worrying and places vulnerable residents in danger.
- (6) This Council also notes due to Government cuts which has seen Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service suffer cuts totalling £19.2m over the 4 year spending review with 180 firefighters posts deleted and a reduction in Fire engines from 42 to 28 by 2015.
- (7) The Government's proposal for further huge cuts in 2015 will have devastating effects on operational response and the community safety and prevention work delivered by the Authority to such an excellent standard.
- (8) This Council therefore calls on the Government, in particular the Secretary of State for Local Government and the Chancellor's department to cease their ill conceived and irresponsible cuts to our fire and rescue services and pledge instead to protect the public from further risk of fire by protecting this front line emergency service from further cuts and threats of privatisation.

In accordance with Standing Order 7 (6), Councillor Roberts had been invited to attend the meeting in order for her to be given an opportunity to explain the Motion. In accordance with Standing Order 7 (5), any recommendation from the Committee in relation to the Notice of Motion would be referred to the Council. Any debate at Council should take place upon the recommendation of the Committee and there should be no separate debate upon the motion itself.

Councillor Roberts indicated that the Notice of Motion had been submitted as a result of deep concerns around the findings of the Ken Knight review of fire and rescue

services, which made a case for further cuts to grant funding, mergers and privatisation. She stated that such proposals could seriously impact upon the ability of the Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service (MFRS) to protect Wirral residents from fire, road traffic collisions and other emergencies. She commented that cuts to grant funding to MFRS in recent years were double the national average and that the government proposals would lead to significant cuts in the numbers of firefighters and fire engines.

The Chair commented that he would have preferred to have heard evidence from the Chief Fire Officer to highlight the potential impact on Wirral of the proposals contained within the Ken Knight review. He referred also to the potential impact of a reduction in fire engines on the Council's emergency planning arrangements and upon the ability to respond to flooding, in the light of severe weather in recent years. Members commented that there was clearly a need for local discussion with fire professionals and to examine the link between spend and safety.

The Labour Group spokesperson and other Members expressed the view that the Notice of Motion should be fully supported, so as to support firefighters and send a message to the Government that such proposals are not acceptable. It was also suggested that all Members of the Council would benefit from hearing evidence from the Chief Fire Officer upon the impact on Wirral. The Chair also expressed a view that each of the Constituency Committees should be encouraged to take up this matter.

It was moved by Councillor Foulkes and seconded by Councillor Sullivan –

“That the Council be advised that the Regeneration and Environment Policy and Performance Committee fully supports the Notice of Motion in relation to Cuts to Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service”

The Motion was carried (8:6)

It was further moved by Councillor Foulkes and seconded by Councillor Sullivan –

“(1) That the Chief Fire Officer be requested to attend the next meeting of this Committee to highlight the potential impact of the Government proposals on the residents of Wirral.

(2) That a Special Meeting of the Committee be called, if necessary, and that all Members of the Council be invited to attend.”

The further Motion was carried unanimously.

Resolved –

- (1) That the Council be advised that the Regeneration and Environment Policy and Performance Committee fully supports the Notice of Motion in relation to Cuts to Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service.**
- (2) That the Chief Fire Officer be requested to attend the Committee at the earliest opportunity to highlight the potential impact of the Government proposals on the residents of Wirral.**
- (3) That a Special Meeting of the Committee be called, if necessary, and that all Members of the Council be invited to attend.**

16 YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN WIRRAL

The Strategic Director: Regeneration and Environment reported that at its meeting held on 16 January 2013 (minute 46 refers), the Economy and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviewed a detailed analysis of the effect of the economy on youth unemployment. He provided Members with an updated position on youth unemployment together with updates in relation to interventions that were available at national, city region and local levels to support young people into employment. He provided also an updated statistical Appendix, which reviewed data changes since the previous report.

Members expressed a view that although the improvement of employment prospects in Wirral was a key feature of the Council's Corporate Plan, youth unemployment specifically was a major concern for the Council. He welcomed all of the initiatives set out within the report and requested that a further update be presented to the 9 April 2014 meeting.

Councillor Johnston indicated that he had agreed to Chair a Task and Finish Group to undertake a piece of scrutiny work in relation to apprenticeships, which would soon be presented to the Committee. Members were eager that officers should take all opportunities to improve the Wirral apprenticeship offer. However, some concerns were expressed with regard to the real value of some apprenticeships being undertaken by young people and whether they all led to a specific trade qualification. There was also concern that unscrupulous employers could avoid paying a minimum wage using the guise of an apprenticeship.

The Head of Regeneration commented that youth unemployment was a particular challenge for the Council and that officers attached a significant priority to it. He proposed to bring back an update to the April 2014 meeting and to take up the comments from Members and specifically, whether the Corporate Plan had sufficient focus on youth unemployment.

Resolved –

- (1) That the report be noted.**
- (2) That the officers be requested to do all that is possible in addressing youth unemployment and improving the Wirral apprenticeship offer giving consideration to the value and quality of apprenticeships offered.**
- (3) That the Cabinet be requested to consider placing a significant priority on addressing youth unemployment by emphasising its importance in the Corporate Plan.**
- (4) That a further update be presented to the April 2014 meeting, the update to include a breakdown of apprenticeships undertaken by way of trade and timescale.**

17 HIGHWAYS AND TRAFFIC REPRESENTATION PANEL - MINUTES

Councillors Sullivan and Williams, having declared their prejudicial interest in this item, left the room during its consideration.

The Head of Legal and Member Services presented the minutes of the Highways and Traffic Representation Panel held on 11 September 2013.

The Panel had considered the following matters –

- Objections to Proposed 20 mph Speed Limits on Various Roads in Pensby
- A Petition objecting to Proposed Shared Off Road Path for Pedestrians and Cyclists at Lever's Causeway, Bebington
- A Petition requesting traffic management measures to address Parking and Speeding in Ben Nevis Road, Tranmere
- An objection to Proposed Traffic Signal Junction Improvement at Grove Road/Harrison Drive, Wallasey

In view of some concerns that had been expressed at the Panel in relation to consultation for highways and traffic schemes, the Head of Environment and Regulation outlined the process followed and confirmed that officers always adopted an inclusive approach, particularly with residents directly affected by any proposal. He suggested that the significant responses at the Panel meeting, both in favour and against, indicated the success of the consultation undertaken.

A Member commented that he was satisfied that the Panel had fully considered the evidence before it and had taken account of all of the views expressed by residents. However, it was important to understand that the themes under which bids for funding were submitted were not always in line with the priorities of local people.

Resolved –

- (1) That the minutes of the Highways and Traffic Representation Panel be noted.**
- (2) That the Committee recommend to the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation –**
 - (i) That the Proposed 20mph Speed Limit on Various Roads in Pensby, be approved.**
 - (ii) That the Proposed Shared Off Road Path for Pedestrians and Cyclists at Lever's Causeway, Bebington be approved.**
 - (iii) That the Proposed Traffic Signal Junction Improvement at Grove Road/Harrison Drive, Wallasey be approved.**
- (3) That no further action be taken in relation to the petition for traffic management measures at Ben Nevis Road, Tranmere.**

18 WORK PROGRAMME

Further to minute 12 (10 July 2013), the Chair presented an update upon the outcome of discussions with group spokespersons upon the formulation and development of the work programme for the ensuing municipal year. Although Members had identified a number of areas for review, it was recognised that it was important to have a manageable programme that could be adequately resourced considering elected member capacity and officer support.

He presented a detailed work programme in the form of a schedule for the municipal year, highlighting proposed activity against the following headings –

- Scheduled Reviews
- Potential Reviews
- Reports Requested
- Standing Items

A Member referred to an issue that he had raised at the last meeting with regard to issues associated with the use of PDAs in the brown bin collection, which was to be investigated by officers. In response to concern that a response had only recently been provided, the Head of Environment and Regulation indicated that he believed the Member had been advised that the matter had been fully resolved and the recent communication to all Members was to complete the Action Tracker. In response to a further question with regard to the Cheshire Lines Facilities Management contract, he proposed to provide a full response to all Members of the Committee.

Resolved –

- (1) That the Regeneration and Environment Policy and Performance Committee work programme, set out in Appendix 1 to the report now submitted, be approved.**
- (2) That the officers be requested to bring additional reports to future meetings of the Committee in relation to –**
 - (i) An Update on Parking on Pavements and Verges**
 - (ii) The Impact in Wirral of Cumulative Impact Assessments**
- (3) That an update be provided to all Members of the Committee upon the Council Mortgage Scheme.**

19 DIRECTORATE PLAN PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT

The Head of Regeneration provided an outline of the current performance of Regeneration and Environment (as at 31 July 2013) against the Directorate Plan for 2013/2014. The report translated the priorities set out in the Directorate Plan into a coherent and measurable set of performance outcome measures and targets that would be used to evaluate the achievement of Directorate priorities over the next year of the plan.

The development of the Directorate Plan would be an iterative process during 2013/2014 based upon the feedback and requirements of Members and portfolio leads. The latest version of the report contained –

- (i) Key finance information
- (ii) Year-end forecast position
- (iii) Exception reports (a). To maintain local environmental quality (LEQ) of litter, detritus, dog fouling in main gateways and shopping areas and (b). 60% of all major planning applications determined within 13 weeks.

The Strategic Director indicated that the Directorate Plan linked directly to the Corporate Plan and set Directorate objectives in national and local context.

The indicators contained within the Plan formed a hierarchy underneath the high level indicators specified in the Corporate Plan. He had signed off the indicators contained within the performance report and agreed the following parameters which underpinned on-going performance management –

- 2013/14 Plan
- 2013/14 Plan trajectory
- 2013/14 Performance tolerance levels (determine RAG [Red, Amber, Green] status)
- Head of Service responsible for delivery of target

He highlighted the importance of the report providing Members with the information required to evaluate the delivery of the key priorities identified by the Directorate Plan and he requested that the Committee use the information contained within this report to inform its future work programme.

Within the Plan, the following indicators were marked as Red –

- % of Major Planning Applications determined within 13 weeks
- To Maintain local environmental quality (LEQ) via the street cleansing of litter, detritus and dog fouling in main gateways and shopping areas

The Head of Regeneration and the Head of Environment and Regulation provided an explanation of the issues that contributed to the downward trend of each of the indicators and set out the corrective activities which were now in place to secure improvement.

Resolved – That the report be noted and the thanks of the Committee be accorded to the officers for the informative training provided to Members in relation to performance management.

20 REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT BUDGET MONITORING

The Interim Director of Resources set out an approach to future budget monitoring arrangements to ensure that there was consistency across the Policy and Performance Committees and to ensure that Members had sufficient information to scrutinise budget performance for the Regeneration and Environment Directorate.

He commented that the Coordinating Committee had agreed that, in order to fulfil its corporate and strategic scrutiny role, it would continue to review the full versions of the most up to date monitor reports at its future scheduled meetings. The report contained a link to full versions of the revenue and capital monitor reports already considered by the Cabinet. However, the Chair indicated that the latest monitoring information had been published for consideration by the Cabinet at its meeting on 19 September 2013. For the three Policy and Performance Committees aligned to the Directorates, it was proposed that the relevant sections from the most recent revenue and capital monitoring reports would be summarised into a bespoke report for each Committee, which would include –

- Performance against revenue budget
- Performance against capital budget
- Performance against in year efficiency targets

Members had been requested to review the last Revenue and Capital Monitor reports to Cabinet in July to determine if they had any specific questions relating to the budget for the Regeneration and Environment Directorate.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

21 **USE OF DELEGATED POWERS REPORT**

The Strategic Director of Regeneration and Environment reported in accordance with the “Approved Scheme of Delegation” and the “Contract Procedure Rules” upon the use of delegated authority to –

- (a) Accept the lowest tender to continue the maintenance of a number of sites acquired/created during the Housing Market Renewal Initiative, located in Birkenhead, Tranmere, Rock Ferry and Wallasey.

He commented that as part of the former HMRI a number of sites were acquired and/or created through the demolition of low demand housing. The majority of those remaining sites would eventually be redeveloped over time. However, in the mean time, arrangements were necessary to ensure the sites did not become a nuisance and blight on local neighbourhoods. The maintenance of the sites included grass cutting and fly tip removal. Following an evaluation of the tenders received, the winning contractor was determined to be Continental Landscapes Limited and the contract price for the 33 month term was £56,565. This compares to the previous contract sum of £20,000 which covered a 10 month period.

- (b) Accept the tender to appoint Nathaniel Litchfield and Partners to undertake a new Strategic Housing Market Assessment for Wirral.

Under Section 8 of the Housing Act 1985, local authorities were required to consider the various accommodation needs of the local population and to carry out periodic reviews in order to provide relevant and appropriate provision to meet these needs. The information obtained through this was used to enable the Council to update and inform its Housing Strategy, strategic priorities and to provide the evidence base for the preparation of the Local Development Framework. Following the subsequent evaluation of the tenders received, the winning consultant was determined to be Nathaniel Litchfield and Partners. The contract price submitted was £45,770.

Resolved –

- (1) That the use of delegated authority to accept the lowest tender to continue the maintenance of a number of sites acquired/created during the Housing Market Renewal Initiative, located in Birkenhead, Tranmere, Rock Ferry and Wallasey, be noted.**
- (2) That the use of delegated authority to accept the tender to appoint Nathaniel Litchfield and Partners to undertake a new Strategic Housing Market Assessment for Wirral, be noted.**

22 POLICY UPDATE

The Director of Public Health/Head of Policy and Performance reported that one of the key elements of good Overview and Scrutiny, highlighted by the Centre for Public Scrutiny, was horizon-scanning, looking ahead to future changes in local government in order for the Council to have sufficient time to adapt to them. She indicated that as part of the reorganisation of Scrutiny within the Council, the scrutiny support team was now located alongside the Council's Policy unit to ensure those areas were joined up more effectively. She presented a Policy Briefing to enable Members to review new areas of policy and the government initiatives that would impact on local government in the short to medium term and requested Members to consider whether there were any items that could be included in the Committee's work programme.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

23 COMMITTEE REFERRAL - PERMITTED DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS

The Head of Legal and Member Services reported that at its meeting held on 30 May 2013 (minute 34 refers), the Planning Committee referred the report of the Head of Regeneration and Planning on changes to Permitted Development Rights to this Committee for information.

Members expressed a view that the legislation was confusing and had led to increased pressure on Planning Officers with a potential loss in income in relation to some planning applications. The Head of Regeneration commented upon a number of issues associated with the changes to Permitted Development Rights and, in response to Members' concerns, agreed to circulate his report to all Members of the Council for information.

It was moved by Councillor Sullivan and seconded by Councillor Foulkes –

“That this Committee strongly disagrees with the Tory led coalition, of slackening the planning regulations that previously needed local Council involvement with regard to planning applications (particularly in relation to boundary distances), the potential impact on fees and on the already overstretched Planning Department”

The Motion was carried (12:1) with one abstention

Resolved –

- (1) That the report be noted and circulated to all Members of the Council for information.**
- (2) That this Committee strongly disagrees with the Tory led coalition, of slackening the planning regulations that previously needed local Council involvement with regard to planning applications (particularly in relation to boundary distances), the potential impact on fees and on the already overstretched Planning Department (12:1 with one abstention).**

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Budget Options: Summary Document for Regeneration & Environment

*If you care about tomorrow,
you need to tell us today.*

Message from the Chief Executive

Dear Resident

I'm sure you will be aware that Councils across the country are facing major cuts in funding.

The Government is continuing to reduce the amount of money Councils are able to spend on services. These cuts are falling more and more on deprived, northern areas such as Wirral. While we fiercely believe the way these cuts are being allocated is both disproportionate and unfair, we have no choice but to implement them.

These are tough times - for our staff, Councillors, and most importantly the people who we serve. We have more extremely tough decisions to make over the coming months. To refuse to make the savings demanded of us would mean setting an illegal budget, which would ultimately result in the wholesale closure of services - putting thousands of vulnerable people at very real risk. Our duty as public servants is to do all we can to use the limited resources we have left in the most effective way possible to continue to ensure the services you rely on most remain available in some form. The only way we can do this is in partnership with you. We need your input and your views.

We started this process last year, and agreed savings of almost £50 million. This was a good start, and we were able, thankfully, to make most of these savings through so-called 'back office' costs, including efficiencies in areas such as management administration, marketing, agency costs, car mileage and phone bills. We also made significant progress in removing the legacy of bad financial management at this Council - we have made sure that going forward Council budgets are robust and are based on sound evidence, and the mistakes of the past are not repeated.

However, this year, we need to make further savings and are again asking for your help. Once again, we tried to come up with options which would mitigate, as much as possible, the impact of these budget cuts on our most vulnerable residents. Within this document you will find both an explanation of the Council budget, plus a series of principles which have been used to develop these options.

I put forward to you my options for where savings might be found, and I am asking all of you - residents, partners, and staff - to consider how we can spend less while minimising the impact on our poorest and most vulnerable residents. I understand how difficult it may be to contemplate some of these options, but the only responsible thing for us to do is to deal with the financial challenges we face.

Last year, we knew we had to save £109 million over the next three years - that figure has actually grown due to further announcements by the Government. This coming financial year, our budget gap is £27.5 million. We have found efficiency savings which add up to around £7 million, which do not impact on services. We are also assuming a below inflation rise in Council Tax which would generate £2 million. This means, of the budget options which have been put forward, only around £17.5 million need to be agreed - which I hope demonstrates that there is real choice over where savings can be found.

My pledge to you is that I will consult with staff, residents, community, voluntary and faith groups and businesses so that we can make these tough decisions together. I urge you to work with us and let us have your views.

Graham Burgess,
Chief Executive.

Message from Strategic Director, Kevin Adderley

Wirral's local environment and the economy are arguably the two biggest factors in driving the quality of life, health and levels of achievement for our residents.

Every year, the Council invests huge resources in both maintaining and improving the local environment, and in stimulating the local economy – through helping our local businesses to succeed and expand, and encouraging businesses to start up or relocate in Wirral.

We have had, and are working towards, huge successes. Projects such as the New Brighton development, the revitalisation of Birkenhead Park, the International Trade Centre, and International Golf Resort and, particularly, Wirral Waters are significant on a national and global scale.

We are determined that Wirral be a place where businesses flourish and people have access to good jobs, and quality, affordable homes in a pleasant, safe and clean environment.

The cuts from central government are the biggest challenge Councils, particularly northern Councils, have ever faced. Put simply, the demand for our services will soon outstrip the funding we have to provide them. Overcoming this challenge is difficult, and means we have to think radically and find new ways of working with our communities, with our businesses, and with our residents.

We need to focus our resources into areas that will have the most impact; we have to make difficult decisions as we simply do not have the resources to continue spending the same amounts to reach our goals.

We should not, and will not, be discouraged by this. The opportunities we have within our grasp are huge. Our regeneration projects are underway and will transform our economy, and our physical landscape and location are the envy of the country – proven by the numbers of visitors to Wirral rising at a faster rate than anywhere in the North West.

We are also transforming the way we deliver services at the most fundamental level – giving every Wirral community, every resident and every group the opportunity to almost design their own Council, in their own street. Our approach to Neighbourhood Working has already received national attention, and will mean residents being able to direct Council funding and resources in their own area towards the areas that matter most to them.

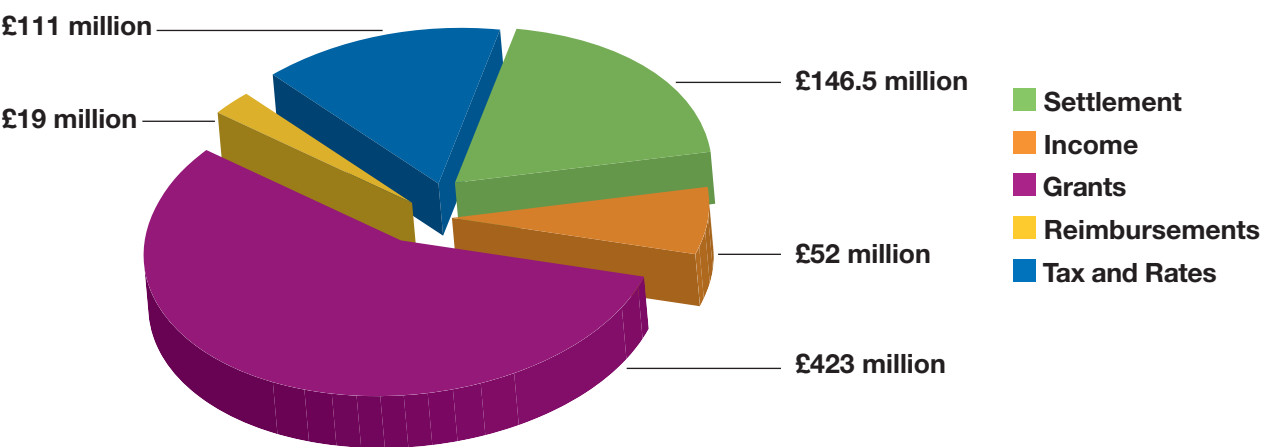
It is on these principles that these budget options are presented. The savings which are being proposed this year are difficult. They impact on you, as a resident, and they impact on our staff. They are tough choices, but necessary ones, and if we are to be successful we need to work together – staff, residents, partners and Councillors. We have made an excellent start, but the situation is still serious – I urge you to let us have your views.

Kevin Adderley,
Strategic Director -
Regeneration & Environment

Your Budget Explained

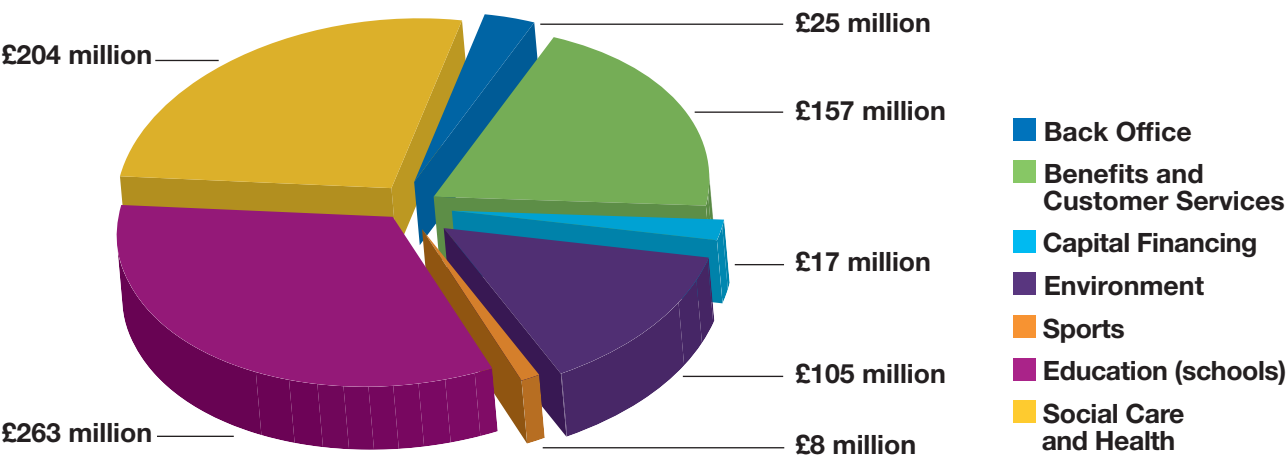
The Council, like a lot of public sector agencies and big organisations, has an extremely complicated budget. We've tried to simplify it on this page, to explain to you why we need to make savings and where our £27.5 million budget gap has come from.

WHERE OUR MONEY COMES FROM (2014/15):



Firstly, it's important to be clear about where the money Wirral Council spends actually comes from. As you'll see from the chart – the vast majority of the money comes from the Government, in the form of 'Grants' (£423 million), which is money provided to Councils to do specific jobs mainly for schools and housing, and a 'Settlement' (£146.5 million), which is divided up among all of the Councils in the country based on need and deprivation. We also receive £111 million from Council Tax and Business Rates, £52 million in income from services and £19 million in 'reimbursements', which is where organisations like the NHS pay us for delivering services on their behalf.

WHERE OUR MONEY IS SPENT:

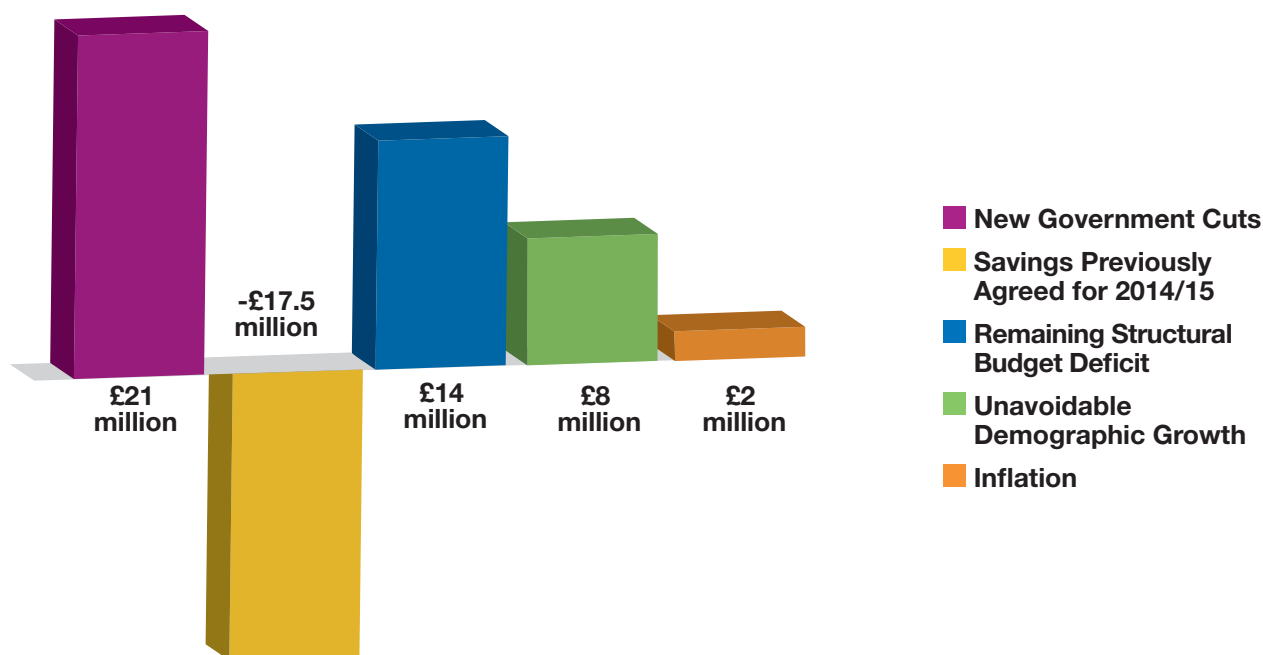


Your Budget Explained

You will see from the chart on the previous page that most of the money is either spent on social care and health (£204 million) or on education and schools (£263 million). We also spend £105 million on services to protect and improve our environment, economy and housing, £8 million on sports and £157 million on benefits and customer services – including libraries and one stop shops. We spend £17 million on ‘capital financing’, which are costs associated with managing the Council’s finances and the hundreds of buildings which services are run from, and we spend £25 million on ‘back office support’, which are those services that you rarely see but are essential to keep the Council running – things like human resources, Information Technology and finance.

If you look at both charts, you will see that next year our current services and plans are set to spend £27.5 million more than we receive. That is the problem we are asking for your help in solving, and why this consultation is so important.

WHERE OUR BUDGET GAP HAS COME FROM:

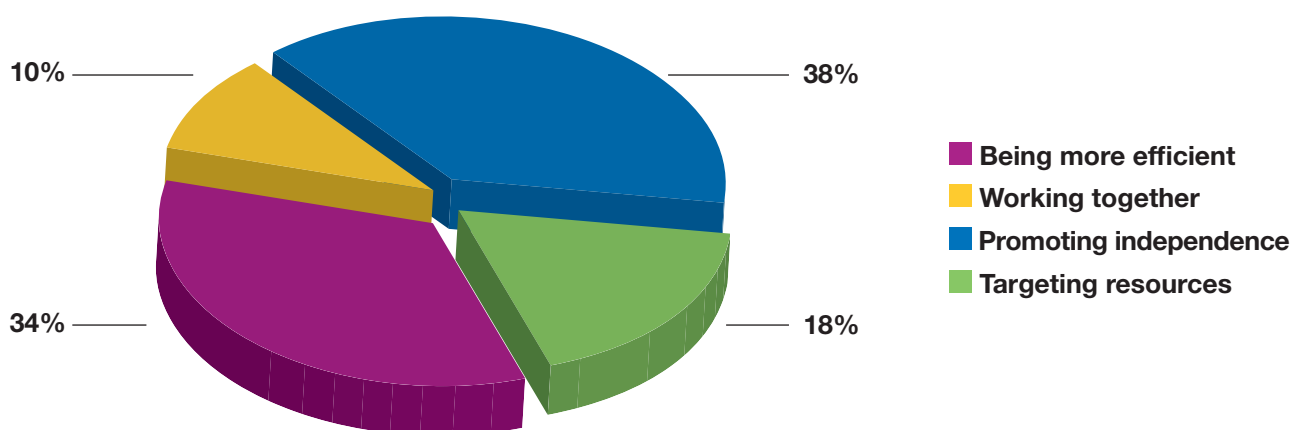


This year, we have to cope with new Government cuts of around £21 million. This wasn't a surprise – as you will know the Government has been cutting back on spending for a number of years now; so we made £17.5 million worth of savings from the last consultation which we will feel the impact of next year. We also have to deal with demographic growth, which will cost an extra £8 million, and unavoidable inflation, which will cost an extra £2 million. Also, due to a series of factors including bad financial management on our part and under funding, we have to correct our budgets for social care for adults and children – that will cost £14 million.

All of this means that we need to make savings this year of £27.5 million. We have presented lots of ideas for how we might do it – now we need to know what you think.

Budget Principles

Wirral Council is facing unprecedented budget challenges. To make the savings being demanded of us, and to continue to provide access to the services which our residents rely on, is going to take radical thinking, determination and some extremely difficult decisions.



The Leader of the Council has been, and remains, determined to ensure that the budget options we put forward lessen, as much as possible, the impact on front line services and the most vulnerable. That is the overriding principle upon which these options have been developed.

Clearly, considering the amount of savings which are required for the coming year, having some affect on services is unavoidable. So, we have developed a further four principles for developing options, focussing as much as possible on the running costs of the Council.

1. Being More Efficient: We will make sure that our services, our administration costs and our processes are streamlined, efficient and examples of national best practice to make sure no money is wasted on bureaucracy when it could be invested in services.

2. Working Together: We will work in genuine partnership with the rest of the public sector and organisations from the community, voluntary and faith sector to ensure the highest level of efficiency and the lowest levels of duplication to get you the best value for your money as a resident.

3. Promoting Independence: Wirral has vibrant, strong and cohesive communities. We will make sure that our communities have the tools, the confidence and the ability to help themselves to address local needs and improve residents' lives.

4. Targeting Resources: The sheer scale of our financial challenges means that we cannot continue to invest the same amounts of money into some services, and they will need to be reduced. We will work in partnership with you to take these difficult decisions and to make sure that our limited resources and services are distributed in a way that is fair, equitable and ensures they are targeted at those who need them most.

The savings which are being proposed this year are difficult. They impact on you, as a resident, and they impact on our staff. They are tough choices, but necessary ones, and if we are to be successful we need to work together - staff, residents, partners and Councillors. We have made an excellent start, but the situation is very challenging - please let us have your views.

Taking Part

We want everyone to be able to take part in this consultation. The options are difficult, they are important, and we know they are tough choices. We have tried to make it as easy as possible for everyone to take part.

More information about the budget options in this document is available from our website, at **www.wirral.gov.uk/whatreallymatters**. You can also call into any Council building and ask for copies.

If you would prefer an easy read version of this, or one of other consultation documents, then they are also available online - or you can contact us via email at **engage@wirral.gov.uk**, call into any Council building or call **0151 606 2030** and we will be happy to send you a copy.

Budget Options: Being More Efficient

Option: Environmental Health Modernisation

Budget Savings:

2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
235	-	-	235

Summary:

The Council spends £2.1 million per year in this area. As part of the Council's Technical Functions Transformational Project, foundation work looking at alternative service options has identified potential savings through greater efficiencies. £175,000 per annum will be delivered by improving processing and removing duplication with Trading Standards, resulting in the reduction of four posts within the Environmental Health Division.

The work also identified a sustainable income source of £15,000 per annum. Furthermore negotiations around our transformational principles with our partners in Merseyside Port Health Authority (MPHA) has led to an agreement for the next three years to reduce the precept payment Wirral pays by £45,000.

Option: Floral Pavilion Review of Operations

Budget Savings:

2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
200	200	-	400

Summary:

This option proposes a comprehensive review of all aspects of the Floral Pavilion's current activities and structures to make a revenue saving in 2014/15 and 2015/16 of £400,000 against the Council's subsidy of £830,000.

This review will look at existing activities as well as exploring new income streams which may be generated in the future. It will explore whether there are alternative delivery models for the Floral, for the future, which will enable the Floral to operate more effectively in a commercial environment. It will also explore the greater use of new and online technologies in terms of marketing and ticket sales as well as investigating the further expansion of the recently launched ambassador's scheme.

Budget Options: Working Together

Option: Improved Memorial Service

Budget Savings:

2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
95	-	-	95

Summary:

This budget option would ensure we continue to deliver sensitive and professional memorial services.

This option includes providing further services and products for families in relation to memorials.

Option: Birkenhead Kennels

Budget Savings:

2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
40	-	-	40

Summary:

These savings would be achieved through the development of a formal partnership to run the service with the charity Friends of Birkenhead Kennels (FOBK) which has been supporting this service on a voluntary basis for a number of years.

Through this partnership the service would be delivered through FOBK with the Council retaining ownership of the building. The Friends of Birkenhead Kennels would deliver the administration, enquiry handling, vehicle requirements, building repair and maintenance, protective clothing and equipment. The main areas of service transformation would be the transfer of most of the kennel staff to the employment of FOBK who would also deliver the administration, enquiry handling, vehicle requirements, building repair and maintenance, general equipment and staff protective clothing and equipment needs of the service.

Budget Options: Working Together

Option: CCTV Monitoring Team

Budget Savings:

2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
420	-	-	420

Summary:

The primary function of the CCTV Control Room is to monitor images captured by the 111 cameras (55 of which are installed specifically to manage crime and disorder with the remainder being traffic control cameras) in place across Wirral.

By agreement with the CCTV Control Room, Merseyside Police in Wirral have the ability to control the cameras for operational reasons and to receive live images from a selection of cameras. With the establishment of a new Joint Police and Fire and Rescue Service Control Room the Police Control Room on Wirral will close and permission is being sought by the new Joint Control Room to increase the opportunities for the viewing of images and control of the CCTV cameras captured by large public CCTV systems such as Wirral's. This will increase the level of duplication with two control rooms monitoring the same images and controlling the same cameras.

This budget option would see the Council make savings by reducing duplication and closing the CCTV monitoring room, giving the access to Merseyside Police and Fire and Rescue images and unlimited control of Wirral's CCTV cameras. Wirral would remain responsible for the capture and transmission of CCTV camera images at a cost of £67,500 per annum. This proposal would not affect the functioning of the traffic management cameras in place throughout Wirral.

Budget Options: Working Together

Option: Williamson Art Gallery, Birkenhead Priory and Transport Museum

Budget Savings:

2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
374	150	-	524

Summary:

This option would see efficiencies being made in the running and operational costs of the Williamson Art Gallery, with a view to the organisation being transferred to a community organisation which has shown interest.

The option would also involve the transfer of part of the Transport Museum to a community organisation. Both aspects of this option would see the facilities remain open to the public.

Option: Heritage Fund

Budget Savings:

2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
40	-	-	40

Summary:

This option proposes the removal of the Heritage Fund, which is a small grants programme to support various projects and initiatives to heritage organisations in Wirral.

Council officers will work with these groups to enable them to access sources of funding from elsewhere wherever possible.

Budget Options: Promoting Independence

Option: Parks and Countryside Maintenance

Budget Savings:

2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
850	-	-	850

Summary:

The Council spends £7.2 million per year in this area. This budget option would see the Council make savings of £850,000 through reducing maintenance across 100 mainly small sites, all bowling greens except at Birkenhead Park and also withdrawing maintenance from 16 beaches. Importantly, we will continue to maintain most major parks, sports pitches and golf courses.

The sites which would no longer be maintained include: the non-golf and non-football pitch parts of Arrowe Park, 14 local parks, 32 natural and semi-natural green spaces, and 44 amenity green spaces.

The full list of green spaces and parks which would potentially not be maintained as a result of this budget option is available either from www.wirral.gov.uk/whatreallymatters or by calling into any Council building and asking for a copy.

Option: Street Lighting

Budget Savings:

2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
85	-	-	85

Summary:

The Council spends £1.6million per year on street lighting energy costs. This budget option would see the Council make savings of £85,000 representing a reduction in energy costs of approximately 5%, following on from a similar value reduction in 2013/14.

It is proposed to switch off further street lights to achieve the energy cost saving. A review of the most suitable locations is underway but is likely to include switching off alternate lights on a number of residential streets which are not culs de sacs.

Budget Options: Targeting Resources

Option: Highways Winter Maintenance

Budget Savings:

2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
85	-	-	85

Summary:

The Council spends £375,000 per year in this area during an average winter. This budget option would see the Council make savings of £85,000 through rationalising the service.

The costs of the service include the provision of the Council's salt storage depot, the gritter fleet and people on standby, and variable costs depending on the severity and duration of winter weather, associated with salt usage and gritter drivers, highway inspectors and the like being called out. The gritter fleet and salt are both owned by the Council, with gritter drivers being provided by the Council's highways contractor.

The proposal is intended to reduce these costs by removing salt bins from the highway and reducing our fleet of gritters from 10 down to 9 (and therefore reducing the extent of the gritting routes). Residents could choose to use community funding to continue to benefit from salt bins.

Option: Highways Maintenance and Coastal Defence

Budget Savings:

2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
25	-	-	25

Summary:

The Council spends £209,000 every year on the routine maintenance of structures such as bridges, subways, retaining walls, public footpaths, bridleways and coastal defence infrastructure. This budget option would see savings of £25,000 through rationalising this work.

We will encourage greater public involvement in the management and maintenance of rights of way, but possibly the cosmetic upkeep of sea defences too. We will also conduct a review of maintenance responses and treatments used to ensure that the level of maintenance is prioritised, for example, depending on usage or weather impacts at particular locations.

Budget Options: Targeting Resources

Option: Housing Strategy, Standards and Renewal Team

Budget Savings:

2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
206	-	-	206

Summary:

The work of the Housing Strategy and Standards and Renewal Team is fundamental in supporting economic growth and attracting people to invest and live in Wirral and in ensuring there is quality housing which is appropriate and affordable both now and in the future.

This option could see a reduction in the number of staff to achieve a saving.

Option: Car Parking Charges

Budget Savings:

2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
100	0	-	100

Summary:

The Council currently provides a number of free parking areas at parks, coast and countryside sites throughout the Borough. Given the budget problems the Council is facing it is considered the appropriate time for Wirral to implement a charge - as many other authorities have already done.

The budget option would see the Council raise approximately £100,000 per year from charging for parking at parks, coast and countryside sites at Fort Perch Rock, Royden Park, Wirral Country Park, Arrowe Country Park and Eastham Country Park.

**What
Really
Matters?**

Budget Option

Environmental Health

Savings

2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
235	0	0	235

Option summary

The Council spends £2.1 million per year in this area. As part of the Council's Technical Functions Transformational Project, looking at alternative service options has identified potential savings through greater efficiencies. £175,000 per year will be delivered by improving processing and removing duplication with Trading Standards, resulting in the reduction of a number of posts within the Environmental Health Division. The work also identified a sustainable income source of £15,000 per year. Furthermore negotiations around our transformational principles with our partners in Merseyside Port Health Authority (MPHA) has led to an agreement for the next three years to reduce the precept payment Wirral pays by £45,000.

Potential impact

The service delivers a wide range of statutory duties that help protect the health, safety and welfare of the residents of Wirral and those that choose to work and visit Wirral. The work undertaken by this service includes dealing with poor housing and illegal evictions, food safety, health and safety, stray & dangerous dogs, pest control, air quality, noise complaints, contaminated land and public conveniences. The service has also been adding value to the work it undertakes to support the Council's new statutory duty to deliver public health improvements and has embarked on a number of joint projects with Public Health including work on smoking cessation and tackling obesity. By reducing resources within Environmental Health there could be an effect on the resilience and capacity of the service to deal with emerging issues and to fully develop its potential to deliver public health improvements. In particular given the continuing efficiency drive within this service there could be a limited capacity to deal with any significant national or regional outbreaks of disease or public health concerns such as the more recent events in respect of Avian Flu, Legionnaires disease and the contamination of the food chain with horsemeat.

Reducing the impact

As part of the ongoing efficiencies there has been a management restructure which will enable greater flexibility of resources across the division. Training will be more generic and resources will be moved across the division to meet the potential demands of workload fluctuations and emerging issues. Improved workstream processing and risk analysis of the work undertaken will continue to help build the capacity of our professional officers as the service explores new and innovative ways of continuing to deliver a quality service.

**What
Really
Matters?**

Budget Option
**Review
of Floral
Pavilion,
New Brighton**

Savings

2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
200	200	0	400

Option summary

This option proposes a comprehensive review of all aspects of the Floral Pavilion's current activities and structures to make a revenue saving in 2014/15 and 2015/16 of £400,000 against the Councils subsidies of £830,000.

This review will look at existing activities as well as exploring new income streams which may be generated in the future. It will explore whether there are alternative delivery models for the Floral, for the future, which will enable the Floral to operate more effectively in a commercial environment. It will also explore the greater use of new and on-line technologies in terms of marketing and ticket sales as well as investigating the further expansion of the recently launched ambassador's scheme

Potential impact

The proposed budget reduction is challenging and it will have potential impacts on the future operations of the Floral Pavilion, the staffing structures and potentially the future delivery model. The review needs to carefully consider any potential impacts on the very positive reputation of the Floral which has been built up over the past five years of its operation.

Reducing the impact

The Council will work with the Floral's Management Team and use a business planning methodology supported by external advice to review the operations of the Floral and to explore new sources of income and a future delivery model.

The aim is to retain the reputation and quality of the Floral whilst at the same time diversifying and introducing some new income generation activities to enable the Floral to operate and compete in a increasingly competitive environment.

**What
Really
Matters?**

Budget Option

Improved Memorial Service

Savings

2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
95	0	0	95

Option summary

This budget option would see the introduction of new memorial ranges within the Council's crematorium and cemeteries. In addition to the new memorial ranges, the option also includes a projected increase in income and a corporate sponsorship of existing flower beds within the cemeteries.

Potential impact

The Bereavement Service provides a burial, cremation and memorial service to both residents and non residents of Wirral with the crematorium in Landican and 9 cemeteries.

The introduction of a new columbarium and memorial urn ranges within Landican Crematorium will provide families with a greater choice of options. The sale of urn ranges has traditionally been left to the Funeral Directors with the crematorium only offering a basic wooden casket. Increasing the ranges available within the crematorium to compete with the funeral directors may cause some displeasure to them.

Reducing the impact

The proposed columbarium is available from the supplier on a pay as we sell option, although this does not lessen the impact of below expected uptake, this does remove the up front purchase costs to the authority.

**What
Really
Matters?**

Budget Option

Birkenhead Kennels

Savings

2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
40	0	0	40

Option summary

These savings would be achieved through the development of a formal partnership to run the service with the charity Friends of Birkenhead Kennels (FOBK) which has been supporting this service on a voluntary basis for a number of years. Through this partnership the service would be delivered by FOBK with the Council retaining ownership of the building. However, the responsibility for the operational delivery of the service would be shared with the Partnership. The main areas of service transformation would be the transfer of most of the kennel staff to the employment of FOBK who would also deliver the administration, enquiry handling, vehicle requirements, building repair and maintenance, general equipment and staff protective clothing and equipment needs of the service.

Potential impact

As well as the savings that could be delivered from this partnership, FOBK have proposed a greater focus on re-homing through their network of supporters and other animal welfare charities. As a service improvement this focus on re-homing would also be supported by a radical change in opening hours with the kennels opening seven days per week for viewing and handovers to new owners. FOBK believe that their approach would reduce the time stray dogs would have to stay in the kennels before being re-homed and reduce the overall number of dogs that have to be euthanised annually.

The FOBK proposals indicate that their new focus would be delivered with the same numbers of kennelling staff. Although the use of voluntary staff would be extended, the change of the rotas for the existing staff to enable weekend opening would affect the current 24 hour out of hours service currently provided by the Council. The current proposals from FOBK would only provide a service from 8am until 8pm. These hours would accommodate the times when 80-85% of all stray dogs are taken in at the kennels.

However, there would be no service for the remaining 15-20% of stray dogs, which includes seized dogs by the Police and dogs brought in by Social Services after 8pm and before 8am.

Reducing the impact

As part of the launch of this proposal the new partnership would communicate with its stakeholders, including the Police and Social Services, to advise them of the alternative service providers that would be available. The partnership would ensure that a range of media and engagement techniques would be used to inform service users of the changes with advice on options for stray dogs found after 8pm and before 8am. As part of the new partnership the Senior Animal Control Officer would remain in the employment of the Council as part of the statutory duty in respect of maintaining a Dog Warden and to ensure continuing compliance with the other statutory duties relating to Animal Welfare regulation. In the medium term their job role would develop to meet the Council requirements in these areas. However, in the short term this officer would be utilised on site at the kennels to support FOBK in the transfer of responsibilities.

**What
Really
Matters?**

Budget Option

CCTV Monitoring

Savings

2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
420	0	0	420

Option summary

The primary function of the CCTV Control Room is to monitor images captured by the 111 cameras (55 of which are installed specifically to manage crime and disorder with the remainder being traffic control cameras) in place across Wirral. By agreement with the CCTV Control Room Merseyside Police on Wirral have the ability to control the cameras for operational reasons and to receive live images from a selection of cameras.

With the establishment of a new Joint Police and Fire and Rescue Service Control Room the Police Control Room in Wirral will close and permission is being sought by the new Joint Control Room to increase the opportunities for the viewing of images and control of the CCTV cameras captured by large public CCTV systems such as Wirral's. This will increase the level of duplication with two control rooms monitoring the same images and controlling the same cameras. This budget option would see the Council make savings by reducing duplication and closing the CCTV monitoring room giving the Joint Control Room access to images and unlimited control of Wirral's CCTV cameras. Wirral would remain responsible for the capture and transmission of CCTV camera images at a cost of £67,500 per annum.

This proposal would not affect the functioning of the traffic management cameras in place throughout Wirral.

Potential impact

Because of the level of duplication which exists, the impact will be minimal. CCTV cameras operating in Wirral will continue to be monitored for the purposes of preventing and detecting incidents of crime and disorder.

There are non CCTV functions performed by the Wirral Control Room staff that will require changes to current practices. For example activation of the Emergency Plan, receiving alarm activation calls and facilitating communication between the Community Patrol Service.

Reducing the impact

The system for activation of the Emergency Plan can actually be streamlined and enhanced by this proposal. Currently the Police managing an incident will recognise the need to activate the Councils emergency plan and request this via the CCTV Control Room who then make a telephone call to the duty emergency planning officer. Giving the Police direct access to contact the emergency planning officer on duty would speed up and streamline this process.

Management of radio communications between the Community Patrols and reception of alarm activation calls can be maintained by adjustment of the existing system managing both radio and telephone communication channels.

**What
Really
Matters?**

Budget Option

Review of Williamson Art Gallery & Birkenhead Priory

Savings

2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
250	150	-	400

Option summary

This option proposes a comprehensive review of the operations of the Williamson Art Gallery in Birkenhead and the Priory in Birkenhead to identify savings in revenue costs for these facilities.

The review will look at a number of matters including the potential for income generation, alternative delivery models and reductions in current expenditure.

Potential impact

The potential impacts of the review are in relation to the future operations of the facilities and potential implications on staffing

Reducing the impact

The Council will work with the current Management Team using a business planning methodology supported by external advice, where required, to review the operations and staffing of the Williamson and Priory and to explore income generation opportunities and alternative delivery models.

The aim is to enable both facilities to continue to provide cultural opportunities for the residents of Wirral and beyond and also to enhance there wherever possible, by encouraging more visitors and enabling greater viewing of the art through electronic and digital means. This will compliment the £1.25m investment that the Council has recently made in the Williamson

**What
Really
Matters?**

Budget Option
**Wirral
Transport
Museum**

Savings

2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
124	0	0	124

Option summary

This option proposes an asset transfer of the Wirral Transport Museum, based at Taylor Street in Birkenhead, to tram and bus volunteer group.

Potential impact

The Council has an active policy of Community asset transfer which seeks to transfer assets into community based organisations so that they can take forward these assets into the future. In this option there are specialist tram and bus volunteer groups who have expressed an interest in taking forward the museum and developing it for the future. This transfer would proceed, if agreed, on the basis of a full 5 year business plan.

The proposal will have a potential impact upon the three members of staff that are employed at the Tramway Museum.

Reducing the impact

The five year business plan would set out the vision for the future and a development plan for the museum would be part of this process. This will look carefully at finances, grant assistance and other opportunities.

The Council staff at the Museum will be fully consulted on this proposal along with the appropriate Trade Unions.

**What
Really
Matters?**

Budget Option **Heritage Fund**

Savings

2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
40	0	0	40

Option summary

This option proposes a £40,000 budget reduction in the Heritage Fund, which would essentially remove the funding entirely. The Heritage Fund provides small grants to support various projects and initiatives by heritage organisations in Wirral

Potential impact

The impact would be the reduction in available funding to support local heritage initiatives and projects.

Reducing the impact

To reduce this impact the council will work with local groups to assist them to apply for external funding to support local initiatives.

**What
Really
Matters?**

Budget Option

Reducing Parks Maintenance

Savings

2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
850	0	0	850

Option summary

The Council spends £7.2 million per year in this area. This budget option would see the Council make savings of £850,000 through reducing the maintenance at 100 mainly small sites, all bowling greens except at Birkenhead Park and also withdraw maintenance from 16 beaches. Importantly, we will continue to maintain most major parks, sports pitches and golf courses.

The sites which would no longer be maintained also include: the non-golf and non-football pitch parts of Arrowe Park, 14 local parks, 32 natural and semi-natural green spaces, and 44 amenity green spaces.

Potential impact

Green and open spaces provide valuable health benefits and social opportunities for people, including those with mental health conditions. Reducing the number of accessible green spaces may have a particular effect on more vulnerable people and the socio-economically deprived communities. Fitness trails in Arrowe and Mersey Parks would not be installed.

Reduced standards of cleanliness on the 16 beaches could result in reduced visitor numbers and loss of some of these local jobs as well as a loss of quality of life for local people. Over 2,000 people belong to bowling clubs who use the Council's bowling greens. Many of them are over 60 who benefit physically, mentally and socially through regularly enjoying bowling.

If the Council, partner or external grant funding were not found for start-up costs then land use reallocation – for example creating new allotments or habitats - would not be possible. Partner groups such as friends or other community based groups may not have capacity for taking on the management of these sites. The Council also has a statutory duty to have regard to biodiversity conservation when carrying out its functions. The cessation of maintenance on natural and semi-natural green spaces would need to be managed to maximise positive biodiversity outcomes.

Reducing the impact

Some sites could be reallocated for alternative land use, subject to other considerations and consents, for example local amenity, planning and biodiversity interest. Such uses might include: creating new allotments in areas with large waiting lists; sale of land for gardens or development; and woodland or wetland creation which would require additional capital funding.

Some sites could be taken on and managed by community-based partner groups with support from Council staff to manage the transition.

Parks and Open Spaces potentially affected by Budget Option.

No.	Site name
	Arrowe Park (non- golf and non-football parts of the park)
LOCAL PARKS	
	Bidston Court
	Brackenwood Park
	Brookhurst Park (The Chase) (non-play area part of the park)
	Citrine Park
	Dawstone Park
	Mersey Park (non-play area and non-multisport parts of the park)
	Oakdale Park
	Overchurch Park
	Sandlea Park
	Coronation Park (non-play area and non-football pitch parts of the park)
	Saughall Grange
	Hill House
	Kings Parade Recreation Ground
	Upton Park (part of)
NATURAL AND SEMI-NATURAL GREEN SPACE	
	Allport Common
	Arrowe Brook Road Woodland
	Bromborough Dock Nature Area
	Burford Avenue Woodland
	Caldy Hill
	Compton Road Nature Area
	Dibbins Green Woodland
	Feather Lane Woodland
	Former RAF Camp, West Kirby
	Gayton Pinewoods
	Gilroy Nature Reserve
	Jenny's Wood
	Kinglass Road Pond
	Little Thornton Common
	Lowfields Avenue Woodland
	Monkey Wood
	Newton Common
	Paradise Wood
	Plymyard Dale Woodland
	Poll Hill
	Poulton Road Woodland
	Prenton Dell Woodland
	Reeds Lane Nature Area
	Rhododendron Gardens ('The Rhods')

	Saughall Massie Road Woodland
	Stapledon Wood
	Tanar Close Woodland
	The Beacons
	The Breck
	The Marfords
	Thornton Common
	Vyner Road South Woodland
AMENITY GREEN SPACE	
	Atherton Street/Portland Street G/space
	Ballantyne Drive Greenspace
	Bentham Close Greenspace
	Berwick Close Greenspace
	Bradmoor Field
	Broadway Greenspace
	Bromborough Cycleway
	Captain's Pit
	Carr Bridge Road Greenspace
	Delta Road East
	Derby Pool Greenspace
	Egerton Street Play Area
	Fender Valley Footpath
	Flynn's Piece
	Grange Farm Crescent Greenspace
	Greasby Road Greenspace
	Greenbank Road Greenspace
	Hanover Close
	Hargrave Avenue Greenspace
	Heygarth Road Greenspace
	Holm Lane (25 Acre Site) (non-play area parts of the park)
	Hoylake Road Greenspace
	Lennox Lane Greenspace
	Limekiln Lane
	Lower Flaybrick Road
	Madeley Drive Greenspace
	Martin Close Greenspace
	Moreton Linear Park (non-play area parts of the park)
	Onslow Road
	Poulton Recreation Ground
	Prospect Hill
	Riverbank Road Greenspace
	Rivington Avenue Greenspace
	Roman Road
	Shorefields Field

	Shorefields
	St Hilary Gardens
	Storeton Road Greenspace
	The Hollows
	The Little Arno
	The Pinfold
	The Red Noses
	Wirral Gardens
BEACHES (cease cleansing)	
	Caldy Beach
	Egremont Shore
	Gayton Saltmarsh
	Heswall Foreshore
	Hoylake Beach
	Leasowe Bay
	Meols Beac
	Moreton Beach
	New Brighton Beach (2)
	New Ferry Foreshore
	Red Rocks
	Shorefields,
	Thurstaston Beach
	Wallasey Beach
	West Kirby Beach
	West Kirby Saltmarsh
BOWLING GREENS	
	Arrowe Park
	Ashton Park
	Bromborough Rec
	Central Park
	Coronation Park
	Harrison Park
	Heswall Hall
	Higher Bebington Rec,
	Irby Playing Fields,
	Lingham Park
	Marine Park
	Meols Lower Green,
	Meols Parade Gardens
	Newton Park
	Poll Hill
	Quarry Rec
	Queens Park Meols

	Saughall Grange Rec
	Victoria Gardens
	Victoria Park
DISUSED PLAYING FIELDS	
	Conway Playing Fields
	School Lane Playing fields

**What
Really
Matters?**

Budget Option

Street Lighting

Savings

2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
85	0	0	85

Option summary

The Council spends £1,633,100 per year on street lighting energy costs. This budget option would see the Council make savings of £85,000 representing a reduction in energy costs of approximately 5%, following on from a similar reduction in 2013/14. It is proposed to switch off further street lights to achieve the energy cost saving. A review of the most suitable locations is underway but is likely to include switching off alternate lights on a number of residential streets which are not cul de sacs.

Potential impact

While there is no legal duty to provide street lighting, the provision of lighting addresses a number of hazards which are more prevalent during darkness or poor visibility, such as road safety, crime and fear of crime, and anti social behaviour. Whilst some lighting will be switched off, there will still be a requirement to inspect and maintain the equipment to fulfil the Council's statutory duty to maintain the highway.

Reducing the impact

Location choices will be made with care, particularly when considering the potential for safety issues. We will review the outcomes and feedback from key partners, such as the police, on the actual impact at locations selected for the 2013/14 budget option.

We will encourage residents and businesses to consider providing, or improving, their own lighting on their premises to reduce dependence on public lighting. We will also encourage road users to take greater care during darkness and poor visibility, in their driving/cycling/walking behaviour and ensure vehicle and bike lights are fitted and maintained, and that appropriate clothing is worn.

**What
Really
Matters?**

Budget Option

Highways Winter Maintenance

Savings

2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
85	0	0	85

Option summary

The Council spends £375,000 per year in this area during an average winter. This budget option would see the Council make savings of £85,000 through rationalising the service.

The costs of the service include the provision of the Council's salt storage depot, the gritter fleet and people on standby, and variable costs depending on the severity and duration of winter weather, associated with salt usage and gritter drivers, highway inspectors and the like being called out. The gritter fleet and salt are both owned by the Council, with gritter drivers being provided by the Council's highways contractor.

The proposal is intended to reduce these costs by removing salt bins from the highway and reducing our fleet of gritters from 10 down to 9 (and therefore reducing the extent of the gritting routes).

Potential impact

Whilst the salt in grit bins is used to limited effect it provides some safety benefits on those local roads with nearby access to a bin. There will be a risk of increased slips and falls on untreated roads, and this is likely to impact mostly on those with restricted mobility and those who are more prone to injury when falling, such as the elderly.

Many residents are already aware that the grit bins only bring limited benefits – due to the inefficient spread of the salt, and its low effectiveness on quiet roads when the temperature of the road is colder. There are also a number of operational factors including the fact that the time taken to refill all grit bins often exceeds the period of bad weather.

Reducing the impact

The Council will encourage residents to clear snow, and particularly assist those who are not able to themselves. Information will also be provided for how to drive and walk on icy roads and pavements.

**What
Really
Matters?**

Budget Option

Coastal Defence & Highways Maintenance

Savings

2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
25	0	0	25

Option summary

The Council spends £209,000 every year on the routine maintenance of structures such as bridges, subways, retaining walls, public footpaths, bridleways and coastal defence infrastructure. This budget option would see savings of £25,000 through rationalising this work.

Potential impact

The Council would carry out less routine maintenance, meaning that repairs required and requests for repairs would take longer to be achieved. It is likely that the appearance of some elements of structures, such as graffiti, safe but damaged railings, vandalism and build up of dirt and detritus would not be attended to in order to prioritise on essential maintenance.

Reducing the impact

We will encourage greater public involvement in the management and maintenance of rights of way, but possibly the cosmetic upkeep of sea defences too. We will also conduct a review of maintenance responses and treatments used to ensure that the level of maintenance is prioritised, for example, depending on usage or weather impacts at particular locations.

**What
Really
Matters?**

Budget Option

Restructure of Housing Strategy and Standards & Renewal Service

Savings

2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
206	0	0	206

Option summary

The work of the Housing Strategy and Standards and Renewal Team is fundamental in supporting economic growth and attracting people to invest and live in Wirral and in ensuring there is quality housing which is appropriate and affordable both now and in the future. This option could see a reduction in the number of staff by up to seven to achieve a saving of £206,000.

Potential impact

The work of the team enables the Council to identify and secure funding for a range of projects which directly impact upon people's quality of life and improve the quality and supply of housing available. The service also protects the most vulnerable people from living in hazardous housing conditions through a range of interventions including enforcement, advice and assistance. In addition, through a comprehensive approach of targeted resources, investment and funding secured the team alongside partners have a key role to play in regenerating local neighbourhoods and supporting employment and training through housing led initiatives.

Restructuring the service and reducing the number of staff will result in efficiencies through rationalisation and reducing service delivery in non statutory areas. This will have a particular effect on the most vulnerable people and the socio-economically deprived communities within Wirral. The team dealt with 3,589 enquiries for assistance regarding their current housing conditions. The team brought 296 long-term empty properties back into use in 12/13 and accredited over 200 properties as well as carried out in excess of 400 Healthy Homes Inspections to improve property standards for more vulnerable clients. In addition the team approved 22 empty property grants, completed 140 informal notices and served 90 statutory notices. The number of housing standards inspections carried out by the team last year was 2,640. Any reduction in the service would impact on the number of homes which could be inspected and the number of vulnerable people assisted.

The team further enabled over 239 units of affordable housing to be delivered with our partners which was 10% above target. This also significantly contributed to increasing new housing supply in the borough. Over the last five years, there has been 1068 homes delivered against a target of 833, £73.3m total housing investment has been secured alone for the 2011-2015 programme period, impacting on increased availability of homes, job creation, regeneration of neighbourhoods, improved outcomes for fuel poverty/child poverty and general health and well being. Specific employment outputs relating to housing led regeneration schemes include 13 apprenticeships created, 74 jobs for unemployed Wirral residents, 1,441 training initiatives delivered while developing 99 vocational and construction/inspection related courses.

If funding was reduced there would be an inability to fully respond to delivery of affordable housing, tackling fuel poverty and empty homes, delivery of landlord accreditation, grant and loan assistance to tackle sub standard housing. In addition, healthy homes inspections would be reduced to properties only where high risk hazards are reported and it is likely that response times would significantly increase.

The inspections currently undertaken for health visitors, social workers, children centres and other front-line services to ensure quality housing conditions for vulnerable households would have to cease and would only be carried out if a serious hazard is present.

Reducing the impact

Options would need to be explored to deliver Landlord Accreditation via a self assessment approach with only 10% spot checks completed, however there would still be a requirement to retain some staffing service in order to facilitate this.

There would have to be a reduction in the extent of assistance offered to private residents for emergency repair cases and financial assistance would be limited to those most at risk. Reduction in service would impact on the ability to attract inward investment and contribute to cross authority initiatives and funding opportunities therefore these would be prioritised with regards to those which could generate the greatest reward.

There would be a requirement to generally prioritise all the work we undertake.

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**What
Really
Matters?**

Budget Option

Car Parking Charges

Savings

2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
100	0	0	100

Option summary

The Council currently provides a number of free parking areas at parks, coast and countryside sites throughout the Borough. Given the budget problems the Council is facing it is considered the appropriate time for Wirral to implement a charge – as many other authorities have already done.

The budget option would see the Council raise approximately £100,000 per year from charging for parking at parks, coast and countryside sites at Fort Perch Rock, Royden Park, Wirral Country Park, Eastham Country Park and Arrowe Country Park.

Potential impact

The introduction of charges may have an adverse affect on visitor numbers and in some areas charging may lead to parking being moved into nearby residential streets causing disruption to residents. Further traffic management measures could be required to control the parking on environmental and road safety grounds.

Reducing the impact

Other options could be considered including reducing the fee for parking, which may be more acceptable to the motorist but would not generate as much income towards the operational costs of services at parks, coast and countryside sites.

It is, however, considered that the tariffs would be at a level believed to be acceptable by most motorists in comparison to charges set by other local authorities.

WIRRAL COUNCIL

REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT POLICY & PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE

TUESDAY 05 NOVEMBER 2013

SUBJECT:	Scrutiny Review: Impact of 2013/14 Budget Options and Potential for 2014/15
REPORT OF:	Task & Finish Group

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report sets out the findings of the task and finish group examining the impact and deliverability of budget options taken 2013/14
- 1.2 This report also considers potential budget options for 2014/15 to make an informed contribution by way of pre-decision scrutiny to 2014/17 budget options

2.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

- 2.1 In November 2012, Cabinet instructed the Chief Executive to publish and then consult in relation to a series of budget options, designed to enable the Council to begin the process of making savings of £109 million over the next three years. Cabinet further resolved that a number of principles, which were detailed in the resolution, should be paramount in the design of those options.
- 2.1 The Chief Executive further outlined in communications to residents and the Council workforce that the budget options had been designed to, as much as possible, mitigate the impact on the 'front line' and look to the back office for savings.
- 2.2 These principles, combined with the changing public demands and expectations in relation to service delivery for these departments, the current economic climate in a wider sense and the unprecedented financial challenges the Council is facing, contributed to the development of a new vision for how services in these areas will and should be delivered in Wirral, which formed a further basis for the publication of options.
- 2.3 Budget Council on 5th March agreed over £48m in budget savings for 2013/14. Despite the progress made towards delivering these savings, major financial challenges remain. There is a need to find further savings of £27.5 million for the next financial year. On 16 September 2013 the Chief Executive published options for consultation on savings for 2014 and beyond.

3 METHODOLOGY FOR THIS REVIEW

- 3.1 At their inaugural meeting, Members of Regeneration and Environment Committee considered initial items for their work programme. An item identified was the Review of the implication and impact of Budget Options 2013/14. It

was further agreed that the Chair and Party Spokespersons would finalise the programme, including the detailed scope of this review.

- 3.2 Task & Finish Group representatives were nominated and agreed by Party Spokespersons. Participants in this review were Cllr Alan Brighthouse (Chair) & Cllr Paul Doughty.
- 3.3 In order to inform the upcoming debate on 2014/15 budget options, it was agreed this review would need to report in time for Committee to consider the Task & Finish Group's findings at their November budget meeting.
- 3.4 Initial discussions relating to the scope took place, agreeing that given the timescales involved it would be helpful to focus on a number of 2013/14 options and specific options for 2014/15. These were largely chosen because they had high value savings attached e.g. Garden Waste (£582k) or because they aligned to other options and it was logical to group them together e.g. Street lighting and Highways Maintenance.
- 3.5 Individual sessions took place between members of the Task & Finish Group and Service Managers to discuss the impact & deliverability of each of the 2013/14 budget options and to consider potential budget options for 2014/15.
- 3.6 To support this process the Task & Finish group were provided with research information, data & desktop analysis before and after sessions.

4.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 4.1 There are none relating to this report.

5.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 5.1 N/A

6.0 CONSULTATION

- 6.1 Comprehensive programmes of consultation and engagement have been completed in relation to each of the budget options outlined within this report. The mechanisms and feedback from the consultation process was reported in detail to Cabinet on February 7th 2013

7.0 OUTSTANDING PREVIOUSLY APPROVED ACTIONS

- 7.1 N/A

8.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS

- 8.1 N/A

9.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS

- 9.1 The Council faces unprecedented financial challenges, requiring savings of £27.5m in the next financial year. This report will inform pre-decision scrutiny of proposed savings.

10.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 N/A

11.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

11.1 Has the potential impact of your proposal(s) been reviewed with regard to equality?

(b) No because there is no relevance to equality.

The report is for information to Members and there are no direct equalities implications at this stage.

12.0 CARBON REDUCTION AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

12.1 N/A

13.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

13.1 N/A

14.0 RECOMMENDATION/S

14.1 Members are requested to consider the findings of the Task & Finish Group and use these to inform their pre-decision scrutiny of the Council's budget options.

15.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

15.1 To ensure Members have the appropriate information to review the budget performance of the directorate.

REPORT AUTHOR: Tim Games
telephone (0151) 691 8336
email timgames@wirral.gov.uk

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Report of the Task & Finish Group

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What Really Matters?

IMPACT OF 2013/14 BUDGET OPTIONS AND POTENTIAL OPTIONS FOR 2014/15 SCRUTINY REVIEW

A report produced by the Regeneration & Environment Policy & Performance Committee
October 2013

WIRRAL BOROUGH COUNCIL
IMPACT OF 2013/14 BUDGET OPTIONS AND POTENTIAL OPTIONS FOR
2014/15 SCRUTINY REVIEW
FINAL REPORT

	<i>Page</i>
1. Introduction by the Chair of the Task & Finish Group.....	3
2. Budget Options	
Car Parking.....	4
Garden Waste.....	6
Street Cleansing.....	8
Highways.....	10
Street Lighting.....	13
Supporting People.....	15
Floral Pavilion.....	17
Williamson Art Gallery & Birkenhead Priory.....	19
Parks & Countryside.....	20
Memorial Services.....	21
 3. Concluding Remarks.....	 22
 Appendices	
1 - Scope Document.....	23

1. INTRODUCTION BY THE CHAIR OF THE TASK & FINISH GROUP

In examining the budget savings both for last year and next year it was clear that some options seem to be on the basis of reducing the costs by a target percentage, while others were more 'bottom up' driven to identify the most cost effective way of providing the service. This latter approach invariably provided the most effective outcome.

The use of 'honest' budgets has still not been fully implemented. In some areas the difficulty in achieving this year's target is more the result of previous failings to meet the budget than the actual implementation of the current year savings.

It would be wrong to underestimate the challenge facing operational departments. The size of the required savings, the reduction of staff at all levels, the introduction of shared services and the creation of Constituency Committees increase the difficulty of a smooth transition to a lower-cost Council. In spite of these challenges the Regeneration and Environment Department ought to ensure that adequate resources are provided to undertake the following:

1. Completion and subsequent implementation of the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy
2. Detailed assessment of alternative management structures of the Floral Pavilion
3. Review of a Car Park strategy
4. A revised street lighting strategy
5. A medium term assessment of possible options for the Williamson Art Gallery and given the timescales involved, consideration should be given to the partial deferment of some of the proposed Williamson Art Gallery 2014/15 savings.
6. Preparatory work to inform the 2017 contract review for street cleansing and refuse collection

Councillor Alan Brighthouse (Chair)

Other Panel Members were:
Councillor Paul Doughty

2. BUDGET OPTIONS

Car Parking

2013/14

This option standardised car parking charges across Wirral with a few minor exceptions.

Budget Saving 2013/14 £281,000.

Performance against this target

Month 3 Revenue Monitor reports the savings target is amber suggesting the bulk of this saving will be achieved through income generation as per the original budget option but was currently falling short of this target. Month 5 Revenue Monitor acknowledges there is still “a shortfall against the 2013-14 budgeted income target”, however states that;

“The reasons for the shortfall do not directly relate to the service changes made at the start of the year to achieve the savings option target of £281,000. These service changes included the reduction of a car parking administration post (1 FTE) and the reduction of expenditure on the car parking enforcement and cash collection contracts. Parking charges were also rationalised across the borough to bring all tariffs in line with Birkenhead and to remove the inequalities of low charges in West Wirral. The data collected to date shows that all of these changes have been successfully implemented and the expected savings of £281,000 will be achieved.”

2014/15

The budget option would see the Council raise approximately £100,000 per year from introducing charging for parking at parks, coast and countryside sites at Fort Perch Rock, Royden Park, Wirral Country Park, Eastham Country Park and Arrowe Country Park, which previously did not charge.

Budget Saving 2014/15 £100,000

Findings and observations

Members appreciate and recognise why a harmonised charge was introduced across the borough to achieve the revenue required for budget savings.

A shortfall in Car Parking revenue in the previous year has made the 2013/14 target more difficult to achieve.

The latest Revenue Monitor suggests that these savings were not intended to come from increased revenue and shows savings to be met from other sources and should be achieved.

Members acknowledge that 2014/15 options are different to those of 2013/14, but have concerns whether this will deliver the budget saving target given previous performance.

Members remarked that in respect of the 2014/15 Car Parking Budget Options, there is concern regarding the viability of charging visitors to Parks & Countryside sites. Members further commented that access to parks and the countryside should be encouraged, linked to promoting healthier lifestyles and this option could reduce footfall.

Members note that the issue is different in New Brighton, which following development is more of a tourist attraction, where the public have expectations to pay to park. Members endorse the proposal to increase the revenue through Car Park charging at both Fort Perch Rock & New Brighton.

Members suggested that where car parking charges are applied it should be easy & convenient for users to make payment.

Recommendations

The Task & Finish Group recommends Cabinet instructs Officers to develop a Car Parking strategy and action plan for the Borough which considers:

- Evidence based research considering trends and demands to understand usage and inform tariff setting & Car Park use with a view to maximising both income and car park use
- Use of cashless technology & other appropriate Car Park management systems
- How to maximise income in areas of high demand
- Other services in Council Car Parks e.g. advertising on tickets, promotion or marketing initiatives, town/shopping centre promotion or other appropriate commercial activities such as car washing and interior cleaning
- Rounding of tariffs away from odd figures (e.g. £1.05)
- Traffic management issues
- Viability of charging for evenings or over night stays at appropriate sites, such as areas of limited residential parking facilities
- Sites for new parking where there is demand and revenue opportunities

Cllr Paul Doughty is keen to work with Officers to develop a coherent Car Parking Strategy and action plan that addresses the areas highlighted above.

Garden Waste

2013/14

This option replaced the existing garden waste collection service with a chargeable opt-in service from June 2013.

Budget Saving 2013/14 £582,000

Performance against this target

Savings are to be identified through a reduction in fleet as we move from a universal service to a targeted chargeable service. It is anticipated that this saving target will be met; however negotiations with Biffa will not be concluded until November.

The income target has been met and is currently overachieving.

Findings and observations

Members noted that 35,000 residents had signed up to the scheme so far, which was in excess of the initial forecast of 30,000. Members acknowledge that the option has met its target and welcome further benefits to the Council to be achieved through revised contract arrangements with the current provider.

Members were advised of a 1% increase in residual waste and acknowledge that some garden waste is going into residual waste bins. Members welcomed the waste composition studies, completed and scheduled, to understand the amount of garden waste deposited in residual waste bins.

Members were advised of a 67% increase in green waste presented at three of Wirral's waste reception centres over the last three months. Members were advised that there has been no discernable increase in fly-tipping and suggest this continues to be monitored.

Members recognise there is always discomfort when introducing charges for a previously free service; however, the 2013/14 option has had the effect of targeting garden waste services to those residents which clearly have a requirement for it. Members acknowledge the original strategy to distribute garden waste bins to all residents to drive recycling rates, but observed a percentage of bins were rarely or never used.

Members were advised that work is ongoing to champion recycling and composting and to educate residents how to compost effectively. Members welcome this work and the potential benefits it could bring environmentally and economically.

Members noted the work that is currently being undertaken to examine alternative operators for the recycling of garden waste. In particular

Members welcomed any proposals that would enable garden waste material to be recycled in Wirral.

Members recognise that there will be further opportunities to make savings in 2017 as a result of the waste collection contract break.

Recommendations

Whilst subscription to this service is above forecast savings Members recommend no increase in charges for this service. Further savings should be found by reducing the cost of collection and improved contractual arrangements.

Future efficiencies may come from the contract break in 2017 and planning for improved contractual arrangements should start as soon as practicable.

Members recommend a review of the current payment collection costs and the introduction of improved payment systems e.g. Direct Debit

Street Cleansing

2013/14

This option changed street cleansing from an outcome based system to a frequency based service. Implemented in July

Budget Saving 2013/14 £1,000,000

Performance against target

The service changes have been implemented as per schedule. Transitional costs will be covered by a transfer from the efficiency fund, repayment of which is scheduled over four years.

Findings and observations

Members were advised of issues affecting alleyways and recognise the need for resident responsibility through a program of education and where necessary enforcement.

Members consider that given the changes have been implemented from July 2013 it is too early to fully understand the impact.

Members were advised that no other Merseyside authority is making savings of this scale.

Members acknowledge that £1million from £4.8million budget is bold and do not consider there is further scope for reducing this budget.

Members recognise that the service changes increase the requirement for the Council to take more responsibility in auditing the quality of street cleansing. Members welcome this proactive approach.

Recommendations

Members recognise that understanding the impact of these changes is difficult at this early stage, and limits the possibility of recommendations that will mitigate the impact and therefore recommend this is fully explored by a Task & Finish group which is scheduled to commence in the New Year.

Members recommend Cabinet instruct officers to closely monitor the frequency based service to understand and recognise any issues with hotspots and have a mechanism to react to them.

Members do not consider there being further scope for budget savings in this service as it currently stands, but recommend the exploration of the uncoupling of the tender for street cleansing & waste collection for future efficiencies. A good opportunity for this will be provided at the 2017 contract break.

There may be a future opportunity for Constituency Committees to have greater control over street cleansing arrangements and this should be considered in the planning for contractual renegotiation.

Highways

2013/14

This option rationalised pro-active highway maintenance work and ensured resources were primarily focussed on minimising pot-holes and completing the level of resurfacing required to meet all road safety concerns.

Budget Saving 2013/14 £588,000

Performance against target

There is a small amount of slippage on this budget saving due to a delay in the reorganisation of resources. It is expected that this slippage will be managed within existing budget resources. The bulk of this saving will be achieved from a reduction in maintenance works. This reduction has already been built into the works plan of the service and will therefore be achieved.

2014/15

Coastal Defence & Highways Maintenance

This option rationalises routine maintenance of structures such as bridges, subways, public footpaths, bridleways and coastal defence infrastructure. Essential maintenance would be prioritised.

Budget Saving £25,000

2014/15

Highways Winter Maintenance

This budget option would see the Council reduce costs by removing salt bins from the highway and reducing the fleet of gritters from 10 to 9 thereby reducing the gritting network.

Budget Saving £85,000

Findings and observations

Members recognise that with a reduced budget, the cosmetic maintenance of the highway would be addressed at a slower pace. They further welcomed information that reactive and proactive work concentrating on the safety of the highway has been delivered. Members acknowledge the work of officers in delivering the budget saving for Highway Maintenance for 2013/14, but recommend no further savings be considered beyond those suggested for 2014/15 until a new highways contract is awarded.

Members were advised of the internal reorganisation of resources to achieve the 2013/14 savings.

Members were made aware of the risk of increased expenditure on any future highways contract, the extent of which will not be known until the current tender exercise is complete.

Members were advised of the budget options for 2014/15 regarding Coastal Defence & Highways Maintenance and Highways Winter Maintenance.

In relation to Winter Maintenance the Members were advised that grit bins are not really effective and are not the best use of a scarce and limited resource. Members note that salt degrades if not used and requires traffic flow to make it work effectively. Members were advised that it is challenging and expensive to maintain the bins from an operational perspective and resources could be better used elsewhere.

Members acknowledge operational expense and the points made regarding the effectiveness of grit bins, but question why area forums were encouraged to purchase them in the first place. Members would again suggest that it is difficult to take away something which has previously been offered.

Members were advised about the proposed reduction in the number of gritters on the network which would affect winter 2014. Members were informed that A-roads would continue to be gritted but B and C roads would see rationalisation. Inspectors will consider the network and grit hotspots.

Members appreciate that use of social media and other communications to inform road users will enhance the understanding of the Councils winter maintenance decision making.

The members acknowledge and welcome the work of Council officers to constantly monitor road and weather conditions throughout the night, rather than adhere to decisions made during normal office hours. This ensures both a more appropriate response to emerging conditions and a saving in salt usage.

Members were advised that a national report indicates that no other Local Authority has reduced winter maintenance of highways and to do so would be against the national trend. This may attract interest and publicity.

Members observe that winter maintenance of the highway is an emotive area which may give rise to adverse publicity if there is a particularly bad winter.

Members suggested that whilst they recognise the need to identify savings a reduction in gritters from 10 to 9 has to be viewed as an entirely arbitrary decision.

Recommendations

In respect of the Coastal Defence and Highways Maintenance budget option; Members consider that is inappropriate for budget savings amounting to £25,000 to be included in possible options and recommend savings of this level should be left to Officer discretion.

In respect to the Highways Winter Maintenance budget option, Members request Cabinet instructs officers to prepare a report that identifies any hotspots or strategic points where grit bins may be retained.

Members suggest that consideration should be given to retaining the 10th gritter in storage for its possible use in cases of extreme weather conditions.

Street Lighting

2013/14

This option rationalised street lighting maintenance and also involved switching lights off, where it would not present a safety issue.

Budget Saving 2013/14 £265,000

Performance against target

There is a small amount of slippage on this budget saving due to a delay in the reorganisation of resources. It is expected that this slippage will be managed within existing budget resources. The bulk of this saving will be achieved from a reduction in maintenance works. This reduction has already been built into the works plan of the service and will therefore, be achieved.

2014/15

This option proposes to switch off further street lights to achieve energy cost savings. A review of the most suitable locations is underway but this is likely to include switching off alternate street lights on a number of residential streets that aren't cul de sacs.

Budget Saving 2014/15 £85,000

Findings and observations

Members were advised that 1100 lights had been switched off as part of the delivery of the budget saving. The lights, which were the larger bulbs on the network, were removed from commercial estates, A-roads and walkways. Members were informed that some walkways had been refitted following requests from the police. Members welcomed ongoing discussion with the police regarding lighting in crime hotspots.

Members note that the Council has invested in dimming units that save energy and that approximately 1100 lights are linked to a central management system which is managed from Cheshire Lines.

Regarding the 2014/15 Budget Option; Members were informed that up to 3000 street lights with smaller bulbs would be switched off in residential areas. This would affect around 10% of residential areas and reduce energy costs by 5%. Members acknowledge that a review of suitable locations would be undertaken.

Members recognise that to meet the savings of the budget option lights would need to be switched off but question the rather crude method of simply removing the fuse.

Recommendations

Members recommend that officers explore if the Central Management System for lighting can be linked to the Police CCTV Room and consider any potential benefits this would deliver.

Members recommend that Cabinet instructs Officers to deliver a clear Street Lighting strategy before savings beyond those suggested as an option for 2014/15 are considered.

Supporting People

2013/14

This option resulted in the Council seeking to re-negotiate contracts within this service in order to achieve savings.

Budget Saving 2014/15 for delivery 2015/16 £2,000,000

Performance against target

This budget option has produced around a million pound in 2013/14 which is a year ahead of the original schedule.

Findings and observations

Members were advised that from 2003 until April 2010 this was a national programme with services commissioned through a ring-fenced budget of around £11.1 million in 2003, which was subsequently reduced to £10.3m in 2009/10. Since April 2010 the Council has required efficiencies against the programme budget year-on-year, reducing to £10.3m in 2010/11, £10.1m in 2011/12 to £9.44m in 2012/13.

The budget is no longer ring-fenced and following the implementation of budget options savings, the revenue budget now stands at £7.4 million. It is difficult to assess if the funding reduction is proportionally the same as other Greater Merseyside authorities, as in some instances the Supporting People Programme has been incorporated into the wider Social Services budgets.

Members acknowledge that some budget savings had been found a year earlier than anticipated and recognise the hard work of officers to bring this about.

Members were advised that a significant element of the savings has been found through encouraging providers to maximise Housing Benefit.

Members recognise and support the strategy to retain the Supporting People service within the Housing Section. This enables specific housing needs to be addressed rather than considered as part of the overall provision by adult or children services. Members are mindful that Budget Options need to be reviewed in their entirety so that savings in one area do not impinge on another or result in double counting. This is particularly the case for adults or children's services.

Members recognise the risks associated with these savings but recognise that difficult decisions must be made in these circumstances.

Members appreciated this good example of working well with external service providers. Members acknowledge that these good working relationships have yielded positive benefits.

Recommendations

Members recommend that given the remaining savings in this area will be primarily generated through contract renegotiation these are not double counted in other options; such as procurement savings.

Members recommend that Cabinet acknowledges the interconnectivity between services for vulnerable people and making savings and policy decisions holistically.

Floral Pavilion

2014/15 & 2015/16

This option proposes a comprehensive review of all aspects of the Floral Pavilion's current activities and structures to make revenue savings in 2014/15 and 2015/16 of £400,000 against the Councils subsidies of £830,000.

This review will look at existing activities as well as exploring new income streams which may be generated in the future. It will explore whether there are alternative delivery models for the Floral, for the future, which will enable the Floral to operate more effectively in a commercial environment. It will also explore the greater use of new and on-line technologies in terms of marketing and ticket sales as well as investigating the further expansion of the recently launched ambassador's scheme.

Budget Saving 2014/15 £200,000

Budget Saving 2015/16 £200,000

Findings and observations

Members were advised that the Floral Pavilion has historically failed to make income targets, and has exceeded its budget allocation by around £200,000 in each of the last two years. Therefore to achieve the required saving in 2014/15 a real saving of £400,000 is required.

Members welcome a more commercial approach to the management of the Floral Pavilion and the change in working practices.

Members noted that a proposal to add a £1 booking fee to all ticket sales is forecast to generate £100,000 in income

Members acknowledged the increased use of volunteers and were impressed with the number involved. Members understand that this led to savings against staffing costs.

Members were advised that the average age of Customers visiting the Floral Pavilion was over 55 years and in order to broaden the Customer base Blue Lounge events, targeted at younger people have been scheduled and have been reasonably successful to date. Members welcome broadening the offer to younger Customers.

Members remarked that many local councils have now transferred their theatres to social enterprise and trusts.

Recommendations

Members recommend that Cabinet consider future delivery models for the Floral Pavilion and instruct officers to develop a long term plan.

Future planning should consider the sustainability of the venue as a subsidised Council service. Exploring whether the Floral Pavilion should remain with the Council and consider what other operational models could deliver the offer.

Williamson Art Gallery & Birkenhead Priory

2014/15 & 2015/16

This option proposes a comprehensive review of the operations of the Williamson Art Gallery in Birkenhead and the Priory in Birkenhead to identify savings in revenue costs for these facilities.

The review will look at a number of matters including the potential for income generation, alternative delivery models and reductions in current expenditure.

Budget Saving 2014/15 £250,000

Budget Saving 2015/16 £150,000

Findings and observations

Members were advised that the Williamson Art Gallery currently costs £591,000 to run and has recently had capital investment of £1.25m for refurbishment.

Members were informed that the gallery has 30,000 visitors per year and that many visitors come from outside the borough.

Members observed that the savings in the short term savings could only be achieved by a review of opening hours and staffing levels.

Members remarked that the forecast level of savings may not be deliverable by April 2014 and therefore savings may not be realised for the full year.

Members were advised of the recent Heritage Lottery Funding award to Birkenhead Priory which alongside its low running costs has secured its future.

Recommendations

Members recommend that Cabinet consider future delivery models for the Williamson Art Gallery and instruct officers to develop a long term plan.

Parks & Countryside

2014/15

The Council spends £7.2 million per year in this area. This budget option would see the Council make savings of £850,000 through reducing the maintenance at 100 mainly small sites, all bowling greens except at Birkenhead Park and also withdraw maintenance from 16 beaches. Most major parks, sports pitches and golf courses would continue to be maintained.

The sites which would no longer be maintained also include the non-golf and non-football pitch parts of Arrowe Park, 14 local parks, 32 natural and semi-natural green spaces, and 44 amenity green spaces.

Budget Saving 2014/15 £850,000

Findings and observations

Members were informed that this option would reduce the maintenance operation at a large number of parks and the withdrawal of maintenance from 16 Wirral Beaches.

Members acknowledge that a phased approach to the removal of park maintenance, the consideration of land re-allocation and the involvement of Community Groups would be preferable, but understand that this is not immediately possible given the timescales for budget savings.

Members were keen to understand the split between the budget savings for Parks and Beaches and were advised that the savings from withdrawing beach cleansing alone is £125,000.

Members are mindful of previous Council reports and discussions relating to beaches regarding Spartina grass. Members also commented that removal of maintenance of the beaches could affect tourism and visitor numbers as well as residents enjoyment of the beaches. This is of concern as we host the Open Golf tournament in 2014.

Recommendations

Members recommend Cabinet consider a more balanced targeted approach which considers reducing maintenance in all parks - not just those suggested, rather than a complete withdrawal on some parks.

Members recommend Beaches be separated from this budget option and recommend maintenance continues.

Memorial Services

2014/15

This budget option would see the introduction of new memorial ranges within the Council's crematorium and cemeteries. In addition to the new memorial ranges, the option also includes a projected increase in income and a corporate sponsorship of existing flower beds within the cemeteries.

Budget Saving 2014/15 £95,000

Findings and observations

Members were advised of the budget option plan to increase income through the sale of a new memorial range along with other suggestions to increase revenue.

Members remarked that income targets appeared optimistic but welcomed innovation and the exploration of further income opportunities.

Recommendations

Members recommend that Cabinet instructs Officers to explore further income opportunities in this area whilst being mindful of taste and dignity.

Concluding Remarks

The Chair would like to thank all of the Officers who participated in this review.

The examination of the budget options for 2013/14 & proposals for 2014/15 have been restricted to areas within Regeneration & Environment.

Given the timescales of this review, it was not possible to review all of the budget options for 2013/14 or potential options for 2014/15 for Regeneration & Environment. It was therefore important that the Task & Finish Group concentrated on the most significant options.

Date: 14th August 2013

Review Title: **Review of the implementation and impact of the 2013/14 budget on Regeneration & Environment, together with an examination of possible future budget options.**

Scrutiny Panel Chair: Cllr Alan Brighthouse	Contact details: (t) 07983 960356 (e) alanbrighthouse@wirral.gov.uk
Panel members in attendance: Cllr Paul Doughty	pauldoughty@wirral.gov.uk
Scrutiny Officer(s): Michele Duerden Tim Games	Contact details: (t) 0151 691 8440 (e) micheleduerden@wirral.gov.uk Contact details: (t) 0151 691 8336 (e) timgames@wirral.gov.uk
Departmental Link Officer: Service Leads	Sheila Jacobs Rob Clifford Mark Smith/ Ian Platt David Ball Tara Dumas Mike Peet
Other Key Officer contacts:	Mark Goulding (Finance) Margy Sandalls (Performance) Clive Ashton (Performance)
<p>1. Which of our strategic priorities does this topic address?</p> <p>Wirral Council has a responsibility for commissioning or delivering a range of near-universal services to all households and neighborhoods in their area. These include, amongst others, waste and recycling, street cleansing, highway maintenance and traffic management, road safety, leisure services, parks and open spaces.</p> <p>The quality of Wirral's local environment and health of our economy are significant factors affecting the quality of life of our residents and any reductions in services will affect this. However, this must be seen in the context of the Council's priority of achieving financial stability. The Council's significant budget deficit is projected to be around £75m over the next three years, in addition to the £48m savings agreed by council for 2013/14.</p>	
<p>2. What are the main issues?</p> <p>Council (5th March) agreed budget savings options over £48m to be delivered in 2013/14.</p>	

This Task & Finish Group will examine the following options within the Regeneration & Environment Directorate:

- Supporting people (£2m)
- Street Cleansing (£1m)
- Highways Maintenance (588k)
- Garden Waste Collection (£582k)
- Car parking (£281k)
- Street Lighting (£265k)

The Task & Finish Group will also examine any departmental contribution to corporate savings for example 30% reduction in management costs.

The Task & Finish Group will also assess related proposals for 2014/15 budget savings within this Directorate.

Out of scope:

All other budget savings options agreed for 2013/14.

3. The Committee's overall aim/objective in doing this work is:

- To understand the impact and deliverability of 2013/14 budget options
- To make an informed contribution into 2014/17 budget options

4. The possible outputs/outcomes are:

- 4.1 Understand the impact of implementation of 2013/14 budget options.
- 4.2 Inform contribution to debate on 2014/15 budget options.

5. What specific value can scrutiny add to this topic?

Research and assess the impact of 2013/14 options to enable an informed evaluation of 2014/15 budget options to influence Cabinet

6. Who will the Committee be trying to influence as part of its work?

- 6.1 Cabinet
- 6.2 Council

7. Duration of enquiry?

- The Committee will be considering future budget options between November 2013 and January 2014, therefore the Task & Finish review will need to be completed during September and October. Proposed meeting dates are Monday 16th September, Tuesday 24th September, Tuesday 1st October and Tuesday 8th October 2013.

8. What category does the review fall into?

Policy Review	<input type="checkbox"/>	Policy Development X	<input type="checkbox"/>
External Partnership	<input type="checkbox"/>	Performance Management	X <input type="checkbox"/>
Holding Executive to Account X	<input type="checkbox"/>		

9. Extra resources needed? Would the investigation benefit from the co-operation of an expert witness?

The review will be conducted by councillors with the support of officers.

10. What information do we need?

10.1 Secondary information (background information, existing reports, legislation, central government documents, etc).

- Budget Book 2013/14
- Annex 5 – savings monitor
- Revenue monitor
- Performance Dashboard
- Benchmarking Information
- Management information

10.2 Primary/new evidence/information

10.3 Who can provide us with further relevant evidence? (Cabinet portfolio holder, officer, service user, general public, expert witness, etc).

council officers to include:

- Service Managers
- Heads of Service

10.4 What specific areas do we want them to cover when they give evidence?

Service specific information relating to the options set out in section 2.

11. What processes can we use to feed into the review? (site visits/observations, face-to-face questioning, telephone survey, written questionnaire, etc).

- Desktop analysis
- Face to face questioning

12. In what ways can we involve the public and at what stages? (Consider whole range of consultative mechanisms, local committees and local ward mechanisms).

The selection of budget options for 2014/17 will be subject to a public consultation exercise.

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