



Regeneration and Environment
Budget Options
from the Chief Executive

The Budget Challenge in Wirral

Dear Resident

I was appointed as Chief Executive to improve the way in which Wirral Council operates. My first task is to ensure we address the unprecedented budget challenge before us. Unprecedented cuts to Council funding from central Government, combined with unfunded increased demand for social care in particular, mean that we have no choice but to cut around a third of our net budget over the next three years.

These are tough times – for our staff, Councillors, and most importantly the people who we serve. We have some tough decisions to make over the coming months.

Today I publish my options for where savings might be found for Councillors, Partners, staff and the public to consider. I have sought to offer these options according to the overriding principle that we should spend less on ourselves, taking savings first from our ‘back office’ and so mitigating as much as possible the impact on services to residents particularly our poorest and most vulnerable.

These options also represent around 25% more than we need to save in this first year. That is to make sure that our Councillors, when they consider these options alongside your feedback, have the opportunity to make choices as they take these extremely difficult decisions. These savings are proposed as part of a three year drive, which will see the Council building firm foundations for the future of the borough by transforming the way we work and provide services.

I am therefore firstly proposing to reduce our Senior Management costs by around a third. I am also consulting on reducing other staffing costs such as car mileage and phone bills.

In addition I am bringing forward options to make better use of our buildings and Information Technology. Importantly I am reviewing the amount of money spent on Agency Staff, Consultants, marketing and all other non essential spending.

Given the size of the budget gap this will not however be enough. The further options I put before you are not easy ones. Council services must change – there is no other way of finding the massive amount of money we need.

My pledge is that I will consult with staff, residents, community, voluntary and faith groups and businesses in order that we make the tough decisions we need to - taking your views and opinions into account.

Graham Burgess,
Chief Executive.

Regeneration and Environment Services in Wirral

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

The Council invests every year in 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.

Economy and Regeneration Services

We want Wirral to be a place where businesses flourish and people have access to jobs and quality affordable homes.

In order to achieve this, it is vital that the Council continues to support a thriving local economy which provides the bedrock for social, economic and environmental well being amongst all of our communities. We want to continue to support business growth, but to do so in a more focused manner that works with and utilises the experience and resources of other key stakeholders. We want to support the creation of jobs by the Private Sector through providing a supportive and enabling environment, not only through the day to day support provided by the Council, but also through speedy and appropriate use of the Council's Planning powers.

Having a quality and affordable place to live is important to ensure that all our residents live in a safe and appropriate home that allows them to gain maximum benefit for access to jobs, leisure, amenities, education and to gain associated social and economic benefits that they both desire and deserve. We will continue to work with Registered Social landlords and Private Sector landlords to maximise the number and range of quality homes for rent. We will continue our programmes to restructure the Housing Market and work with House Builders to increase the number of new homes built in Wirral.

Regeneration and Environment Services in Wirral

In what are tough economic times for both the Council and the nation as a whole, we must ensure that the limited resource available maximises the opportunities to achieve our vision for Wirral. It is therefore necessary to focus continuing resources into areas that will have most impact, when maximising the opportunity to utilise other resources available. We have to make some difficult decisions as we simply do not have the resources to continue spending the same amounts to achieve these goals.

However, the Council will continue to allocate its own resources into activities that will help support business, create jobs, allow access to those jobs for Wirral residents and allow people to live in safe, affordable and relevant housing.

Environment Services

Councils, including Wirral Council, have long had the principal role in commissioning or delivering a range of near-universal municipal services to all households and neighbourhoods in their area. These include, amongst others, waste and recycling, street cleansing, highway maintenance and traffic management, road safety, parks and open spaces.

Wirral Council has delivered its services through a range of different channels. These include direct via its own staff, through contractors and through shared service arrangements with other councils.

Increasingly, these functions have been

carried out in various partnership or collaborative arrangements with other public agencies (e.g. police and fire service) or, where appropriate, with volunteer or other community groups.

This broad based strategy has served the public well and remains a sound basis for service delivery. It will, however, need reviewing and rebalancing in light of changing needs, increasing pressure on resources and through value for money challenge.

It needs to be recognised that there is projected to be a marked, steady, decline over the foreseeable future in national resources to support these types of services. That will inevitably be mirrored in councils across the country, including in Wirral.

Against that background and conscious that demand for services is likely to outstrip the ability to supply, it will be necessary to make difficult decisions. Such decisions will need to be taken against a strong evidence base and with the limited resources allocated within clear priorities.

Increasingly, there will be a clear need to manage demand and, more generally, to manage public expectations of what the Council can and cannot do. The role of community and other groups will increase in significance as the Council itself diminishes its activities in the more discretionary areas where it is not required by statute to provide services or functions. More broadly, there will need to be a new relationship between the

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respective roles of the council and citizens.

Universal Services

Many of what are now universal municipal services are provided as a result of statutory requirements but where the actual level or quality of service is not closely defined. Other services which people are used to seeing as universal have a greater or lesser degree of discretion as to whether they are provided at all and to what level of provision.

There will be the need for decisions, informed both by evidence and from the views of the public and their representatives, as to the balances needing to be struck. It seems clear that the extent and quality of municipal services enjoyed now cannot be sustained with the resources available or in prospect. The difficult decisions will be around just what emphasis should be given to what; unfortunately it seems entirely unrealistic to expect to retain current service levels in these service areas.

Targeted Services

It will be necessary to identify service areas that are not, as such, universal across the community but meet particular needs. These more targeted service areas are often those where council provision sits alongside or competes with other providers.

In future, a sharper judgement will need to be made on whether the Council should continue to operate a particular service or whether other provision would suffice to meet the need of the community. In any case, these targeted services need to be assessed by the council on their commercial merits just as much as on their social benefits. Without this approach, costs will inevitably have to be transferred and carried by the rest of the community who don't benefit from the service in question.

Outcomes Approach

Within the two-pronged approach of Universal and Targeted services it is right, and drives to the heart of a Council's role, that full account is taken of the range of "outcomes" that it wants to achieve for the communities it serves.

Outcomes emerge and are defined through the political and corporate planning process, through societal norms and sometimes from statute.

A particular tension is that many highly desirable outcomes require services or interventions that are non-statutory, are discretionary and have to compete for a diminishing pool of local resources. It is also the case that many of these are highly regarded by local communities.

This suggests that the relationship between delivering services to citizens and citizens taking more direct responsibility for outcomes needs to change. This will be at the heart of the

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agenda for community outcomes and will help to shape the Council's own organisational emphasis.

Service Strategy

Our strategy is based fundamentally on an outcomes approach, clear policy rationale and using evidence based prioritisation.

We shall set these out clearly so that all can see both how and why decisions have been taken.

We shall enhance and sharpen up our approach towards explaining to and engaging with direct customers and other service users. This will help manage expectations but it is also appropriate to undertake active means of influencing the behaviour of targeted groups to help meet their needs as well as to help reduce unnecessary demand. The influencing of behaviours, helping to support and facilitate change, will be a core feature of the future strategy.

Many user needs can be met through relatively straightforward self service channels and we will increasingly provide these through various means.

We shall streamline and simplify our organisational structure and arrangements. Overlapping functions will be eliminated, professional "silos" will be dismantled where practical and multi-functional teams created. We shall have much more multi-skilled and multi-tasked staff, especially in inspections,

enforcement and community education. This will enable us to become more focussed, more efficient and reduce the number of parallel activities that we undertaken at present.

We shall reduce the amount and levels of management and redesign managerial spans of control. Our support services will themselves be designed to directly support service needs and will complement, and not duplicate, the Council's central support services.

We shall ensure that our service arrangements are sufficiently adaptable to meet a wide range of future challenges. These include resource levels, different models of procuring delivery of services and the like.

We shall enhance our collaborative arrangements with other agencies and work hard to engage with interested groups and the communities of Wirral more generally. In that regard we have a key role to play in supporting area or neighbourhood based arrangements and our new organisational approach has this at their heart.

Budget Options

The budget options in this report have been proposed to try and re-design the services we deliver; to make the savings we need to make but at the same time maintain safety standards and protect the quality of services as much as possible.

These budget options have been developed by Council Officers and, as much as possible, we have tried to develop them following what you told us in the first stage of this consultation.

That consultation focussed on four main themes: raising income, changing service delivery, re-shaping services and stopping services. The options in this report also follow those four main themes.

For each of the options summarised in this report, you can find much more detailed information as to what likely impact they will bring by visiting our website at www.wirral.gov.uk/whatreallymatters or calling us on 0151 606 2030.

What You Told Us:

“The Council should look to raise income through raising or introducing charges. Raising charges should take every step to not disadvantage or marginalise vulnerable groups by making services unaffordable, and the services selected for increased charges should be chosen carefully.”

Budget Options

Option: Increase Income from Parking

Currently, car parking charges vary across the borough. It is much more expensive to park in Birkenhead or Liscard, for example, than it is to park in West Kirby.

This option would include standardising charges across Wirral to bring them all onto the same current tariff as Birkenhead, and reduce the 'all day' charge to a competitive rate of £2.50 and annual and seasonal permit rates in outer Birkenhead car parks.

This option would also include reducing the administration involved in servicing parking appeals, reducing what we spend on parking enforcement, and reducing what we spend on collecting cash from and performing maintenance on parking meters.

This proposal rationalises the charging regime across the borough. Broadly, parking in western areas would have charges increased to align with the existing charging regime in the East. The greater tendency for use of car parks in the West would generate additional revenue. This will remove the inequalities of low charges in West Wirral but will mean charges in these areas i.e. Heswall and West Kirby will increase substantially.

Through standardising car parking charges across the borough, income is expected to increase by £150,000 per year although business in some locations is expected to fall. Through setting a competitive 'all day' rate in outer Birkenhead Car parks, this should encourage a return to parking in some of these areas.

**Budget Saving:
£281,000**

Budget Options

Option: Garden Waste Collection

Garden waste is currently collected free of charge from Wirral residents once per fortnight. Councils are not required by law to either offer the service for free, or offer it at all. This service is popular among residents, and contributes towards improving the local environment and improving recycling levels.

The option would remove the free kerbside collection of garden waste and replace the service with either a chargeable 'opt in' service operated by the Council, or an 'opt in' subscription service operated by a private or community organisation.

This option could potentially result in increased levels of fly tipping; which would be mitigated through help and support to allow residents to home compost and reduce their garden waste.

**Budget Saving:
£1 million**

Option: Increasing Waste Charges

Wirral Council operates a service where bulky or large items of household waste can be collected, for a charge, which is known as the ERIC service. The Council also provides replacement bins for a charge for residents who have lost or damaged their bins.

This option would increase the cost of the Environmental Reciprocal Improvement Carrier (ERIC) service from the current fee of £20 to £26.50 per visit. It will further review the policy for replacing bins and increase the existing charge, while tightening up the policy on who receives free replacement bins.

This option does bring the risk of increases in fly tipping and complaints, but also provides the opportunity for residents to work together to get better value from the service, for example neighbours requesting one visit to collect both of their bulky items. It will also increase income to the Council to safeguard against further price rises and reductions to other services.

**Budget Saving:
£80,000**

Budget Options

Option: Planning

The Council currently provides pre-planning application advice free of charge, whereas many other Local authorities including Sefton, Liverpool and St Helens all charge a fee.

The option in this area is to introduce a fee for all pre-planning advice.

Evidence from other Councils is that these schemes work and generate income, careful monitoring will be put in place to make sure that pre-planning advice still continues.

**Budget Saving:
£10,000**

What You Told Us:

“The Council should make savings through changing the way services are delivered through outsourcing, sharing services or encouraging groups of staff to take over the running of services – as long as the Council kept the responsibility for the quality of the service.”

Budget Options

Option: Wirral Apprentice Programme

The current Wirral Apprentice Programme is creating 114 apprenticeship placements in Wirral, and has been charged to provide a 12 month subsidy for NVQ level 3 placements and nine months for NVQ level 2. The programme has been well received by Wirral businesses and has been successful in providing apprenticeships.

This option would involve stopping the programme, and therefore not providing a further 55 apprentice positions across Wirral over the next 12 months.

This would mean that only the national apprenticeship scheme would then be operating in Wirral. However, there may be an opportunity of developing an apprenticeship scheme for the Liverpool City Region. In this case there would be a greatly reduced cost to the Council and Wirral would then be offering a programme similar to the other City Region authorities.

**Budget Saving: £500,000
or £420,000 dependent upon
which option is agreed**

Option: Handyperson Scheme

The work of the Handyperson Service helps people to continue living independent lives in their own homes for longer, resulting in fewer clients needing to access health and social care services at an earlier stage. The aim of the service is to offer an effective solution to a wide range of housing related problems, at a reasonable cost delivered by trusted Council employees.

The option here is to redevelop the service, meaning it is targeted more effectively at people who have recently been discharged from hospital, and reducing the service available to the general public.

The service reaches some of the most vulnerable in our community, who might normally be reluctant to accept more intensive help. Many clients are older owner-occupiers who are not known to statutory health and support services, yet they often lack a network of family or friends to support them to maintain their homes.

**Budget Saving:
£209,400**

Budget Options

Option: Restructure of the Regeneration, Housing and Planning

A service restructure in the Regeneration, Housing and Planning (RHP) Department to address reducing external grant income and changes to external organizations providing services.

Over the last 12 months there have been a number of significant changes which have led to a reconsideration of the structure and work of the Department:

- **Regeneration Team:** The proposed team restructure/ reduction will realise revenue savings of £143,700.
- **Invest Wirral:** Through the removal of the International Links and Social Enterprise posts, a saving of £47,900 for each will be made (a total of £95,800).
- **Investment Strategy Team:** The Inward Investment Manager post is currently vacant. Deleting this post will result in a saving of £60,800.
- **Housing Strategy Team:** This team currently has a vacant Principal Officer Housing Strategy post. Deleting this post will result in a saving of £38,600.

The work of the Regeneration Team has reduced as access to external funds such as those via NWDA and ERDF have diminished, particularly in relation to funds for development of the “place”. The proposals involved reducing the number of project managers from six to three, that will continue to allow sufficient resource to deal with the deliverable projects seeking some form of external resource.

There has recently been a successful bid for EU funds from a voluntary organisation in Wirral to develop support for Social Enterprises and referrals will be made to that organisation.

The Government has recently increased resource into UKTI to encourage businesses to look at international markets for additional business. Referrals will be made direct to UKTI for relevant business support.

Not filling the vacant Inward Investment manager post will mean that we will be unable to have a dedicated senior officer dealing with the creation of Inward Investment. We will spread that role across a number of senior officers and increase our publicised “offer” via the LEP and UKTI.

The Principal Housing Officer post has been vacant for a while and not filling the post will mean continuing as we have, with duties shared amongst the team.

**Budget Saving:
£338,900**

Budget Options

Option: Kennels Service

The Council currently operates a collection service during office hours and a standby service for the collection of strays outside normal hours. Detained animals are kept at the Council kennels in Birkenhead.

The option here would be to stop delivering a specific Wirral Council service and instead join negotiations with city region partners to deliver a cross Merseyside scheme to make savings.

The kennels in Wirral would close and owners would need to travel to Halewood to collect their pets, which could be a disincentive and harm the current 80% re-homing rate.

**Budget Saving:
£100,000**

Option: Home Insulation

The Warmer Wirral programme provides free or reduced home insulation for Wirral residents.

There are two options in this area; either to remove the budget for the programme, which would provide a saving or reduce the budget and still allow some work relating to energy efficiency and fuel poverty.

This could lead to some people having less access to affordable insulation programmes, but would be mitigated by a number of new national programmes.

**Budget Saving:
£985,600 to remove the budget.
£925,600 to reduce the budget**

Budget Options

Option: Environmental Health

The Council's Environmental Health team perform a wide range of duties related to the health, wellbeing and safety of the borough.

This option involves developing a collaboration for this function with Cheshire West and Chester in order to develop a mutual organisation to deliver the service.

This option would have no impact on the level of service.

**Budget Saving:
£109,000**

Option: Trading Standards

Within the Council's Trading Standards division there are a number of officers who are responsible for providing support to vulnerable customers.

This budget option involves reducing this service by One Fair Trading Officer and a Senior Trading Standards Officer

Some of this workload for the proposed option would be taken up by other staff. A further option for this area is to abolish the Fair Trading Scheme.

**Budget Saving:
£71,000**

Budget Options

Option: Pest Control

The Pest Control Service provides a treatment service to domestic customers and fulfils contracts for the private sector.

The option in this area involves reducing the department by one member of staff.

This proposal will see the loss of one full time member of staff, which could have a potential impact on the level of service.

**Budget Saving:
£30,000**

What You Told Us:

“You said we should look at non-universal, optional services and investigate if they could be reduced or stopped.”

Budget Options

Option: Reduce Highway Maintenance Activity

A potential reduction in grants means the Council will have significantly less funding to spend on road maintenance in the coming years. At the moment, the Council has a contract with an external company to complete all road maintenance work.

This option would reduce proactive maintenance of roads, footways, signage, and street furniture. This means that the Council would only complete maintenance where there is a direct safety issue.

This option will still ensure our roads and highways are safe, but reducing the more cosmetic work done on our roads will reduce the quality of our highways network in places. This brings a number of risks which will need to be mitigated, but ensures that we are using our remaining resources in a responsible manner.

**Budget Saving:
£588,000**

Option: Reduce Street Lighting

At the moment the Council operates a scheme which involves people travelling the borough to perform lighting inspections at night.

This option would stop night time inspections of lighting and where it is safe to do so, switch off lighting either completely or part of the night.

To make this option work, the Council would trial equipment to reduce energy consumption and also work with volunteers, such as Neighbourhood Watch Groups, to replace the scouting service, as well as extensively promoting the methods of reporting faulty lights. A safety-first approach will be taken to reducing or switching off lighting.

**Budget Saving:
£265,000**

Budget Options

Option: Rationalise Highways Drainage Service

The Council performs regular maintenance work across drainage inspections on the highways, ensuring that risk of flooding is brought down as low as possible.

This option would rationalise the wider drainage inspection service through targeted inspections at problem sites and reduced levels of maintenance.

Money can be saved by changing the inspection arrangement for highway drainage, and prioritising only those areas at greater risk of flood.

**Budget Saving:
£106,000**

Option: Reduce Street Cleansing

The Council, through its contractor Biffa, ensures that Wirral streets are well cleaned. This is, however, at a high cost.

The option would pilot a reduction in quality of service with a view, if the results are acceptable, to reducing the level of street cleansing in future years.

A reduction in Council street cleaning will be balanced out by encouraging partnerships with the voluntary/community sector to keep Wirral's streets clean, however, street cleanliness in some areas may still reduce. This option would involve reducing the levels of cleaning in rural areas, industrial areas and some residential areas, but would not affect tourist 'hot spots', main retail areas and the main gateways in and out of the borough.

The Council recognises that this option might increase customer dissatisfaction and will work with the community to encourage more local ownership to reduce litter.

**Budget Saving:
£1 million**

Budget Options

Option: Reducing School Crossing Patrols

The Council currently provides school crossing patrol sites across the borough, which are funded and managed almost entirely by Wirral Council. This is not a statutory service, and is operated during school term time only.

This option would involve charging schools for the crossing patrol service and removing the cost to the Council entirely.

The council would continue to employ the staff and provide professional supervision. Many safety schemes (e.g. Pelican crossings) have been introduced on Wirral roads and in some cases the provision of these schemes and retention of the crossing patrol may be duplicated. Schools would be invited to consider this aspect, and would be expected to provide the funding for each of the patrol staff.

**Budget Saving:
£330,000**

Option: Maintenance of Parks and Open Spaces

Wirral has over 200 sites which are classed as being 'parks and open spaces'; these sites are a mixture of large and local parks, general green spaces, beaches and bowling greens.

There are two options in this area:

The first is to stop the maintenance of the non-golf and football pitch areas of some parks as well as stopping maintenance of a number of local parks, green spaces and beaches.

The second option is to reduce the maintenance regime, so that more areas are left for wildlife and only cut once a year, and some areas being cut on a three week cycle rather than the existing 2 week cycle among other reductions.

The Council would work with, particularly, Friends groups to ensure that parks could be maintained through community management, and aims that by 2015 Friends groups had a major role to play in the maintenance and future development of all parks.

**Budget Saving:
£850,000 for option one or
£450,000 for option two**

Budget Options

Option: BME Support in Supporting People Service

Part of the Council's Supporting People team is a service which, while not statutory, is designed to provide support to help vulnerable people from the BME community to live independently in accommodation and prevent problems that can often lead to hospitalisation, institutional care, custody, tenancy breakdown and homelessness.

The option would involve stopping this service, and requiring other organisations to provide this type of service.

Since the establishment of this service in 2005, a number of other community based organisations have been developed in Wirral who provide services to the BME Community. As a result there is increased capacity to assist clients in accessing services.

Further potential clients can also access other floating supported services tendered in 2009. The services are available to all socially excluded vulnerable groups, including those clients from the BME Community. We also hold a contract with Wirral Citizen's Advice Bureau to provide housing advice and support to all Wirral residents, which provides a very similar service to this one.

**Budget Saving:
£100,000**

Option: Supporting People

The supporting people programme currently costs £9.75 million and delivers services to around 5,500 Wirral residents. The service makes sure that people who have housing related support needs are supported to maintain their tenancies and remain independent.

The option would involve reducing the budget of this service through renegotiating contracts, tendering services, remodelling services, and closing services.

The impact of this budget reduction would be mitigated by the remaining resources within the division being more closely focussed on the most vulnerable.

**Budget Saving:
£2 million**

Budget Options

Option: Investing in Wirral's Businesses

Wirral Council operates a service called Invest Wirral, which provides a wide range of business support services including supporting private sector investment, providing business advice, investment in start up businesses, a business forum, the Council's green growth strategy, and social enterprise support services.

The option in this area would reduce the support offered to business in a number of locations, including withdrawing the 'Business Angels, investment fund and the Business Investment Grant. These options may be replaced by regional grants in the future. Additional options in this area would avoid duplication with other services by removing the Invest Wirral events budget, and the social enterprise support, both of which should have no implications for Wirral businesses.

These options are proposed in the knowledge that they will impact on the Council's ability to invest to support new businesses, but will be mitigated by working closely with regional and national organisations to provide replacement funding.

**Budget Saving:
£352,000**

Option: Community Patrol and Dog Fouling

Wirral Community Patrol consists of more than 20 officers who work towards improving the security and safety of Wirral Council properties but also making Wirral a safe place to live, work and visit. The Council also provide a Dog Fouling Enforcement Team which aim to improve and protect the Wirral environment by reducing dog fouling.

The option is to stop paying enhanced salaries for evening and weekend work for Community Patrol, except for bank holidays, and also to reduce the size of the dog fouling enforcement team.

The community patrol option would not impact on the level of service delivered to Wirral residents but will equate to a loss of income for the staff involved. In terms of the dog fouling team, there would be an impact for Wirral residents who may see an increase in the levels of dog fouling.

**Budget Saving:
£362,000**

Budget Options

Option: Modernisation of Leisure

Currently, Leisure Centres across Wirral have periods where usage is extremely low, compared to the number of staff working at the sites.

The option in this area is to make a number of changes to pool operating times and working practices, including closing Europa Leisure Pool and Guinea Gap Pool during less busy times, and reducing the staff requirements for the sauna operation at Guinea Gap Leisure Centre among others.

These proposals will require changes to the activity programmes in leisure centres which will affect groups such as swimming clubs, but will have the least affect on the majority of users.

**Budget Saving:
£429,000**
