

**What
Really
Matters?**

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.

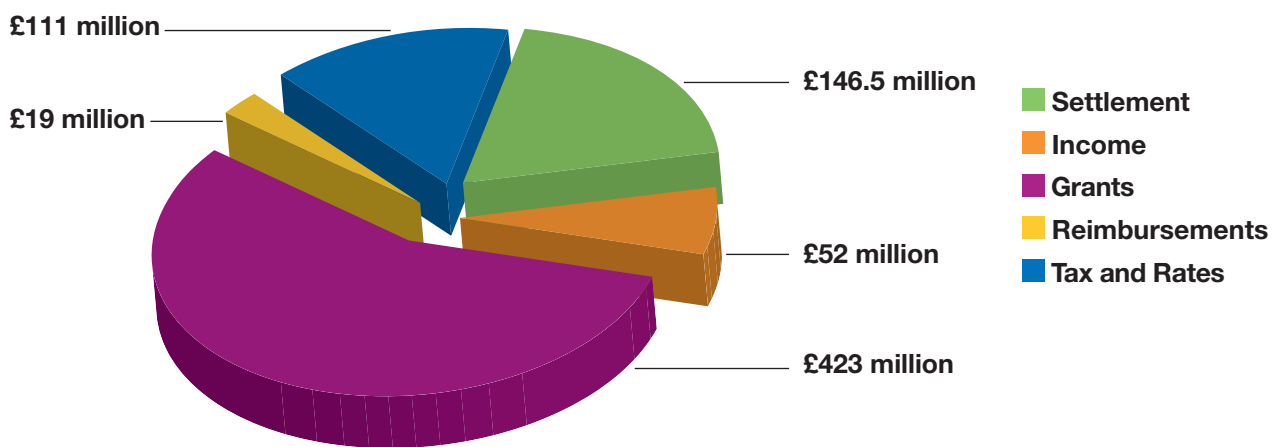
It is on these principles that these budget options are presented. The savings which are being proposed this year are difficult. They impact on you, as a resident, and they impact on our staff. They are tough choices, but necessary ones, and if we are to be successful we need to work together – staff, 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

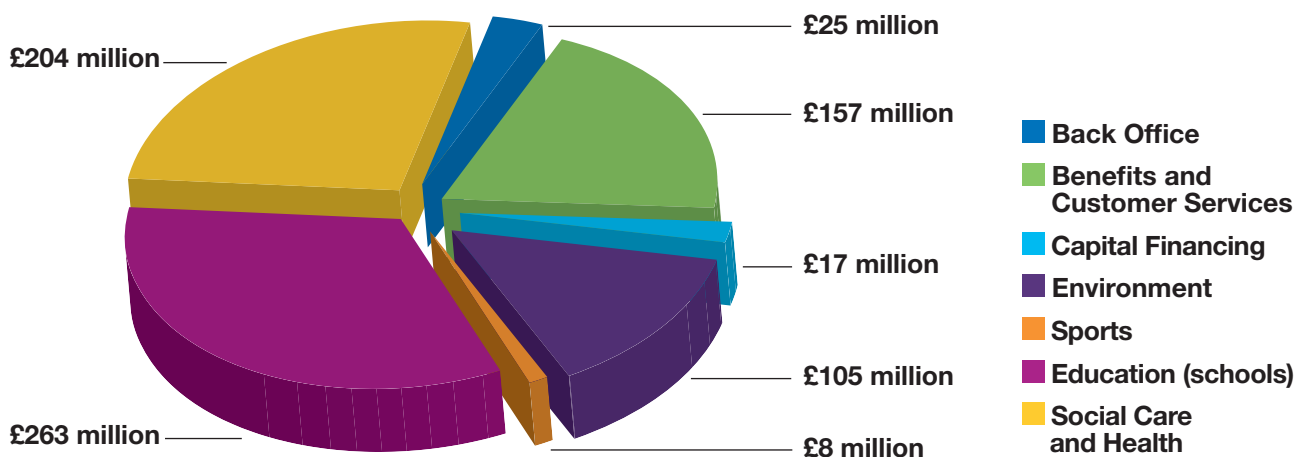
The Council, like a lot of public sector agencies and big organisations, has an extremely complicated budget. We've tried to simplify it on this page, to explain to you why we need to make savings and where our £27.5 million budget gap has come from.

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:

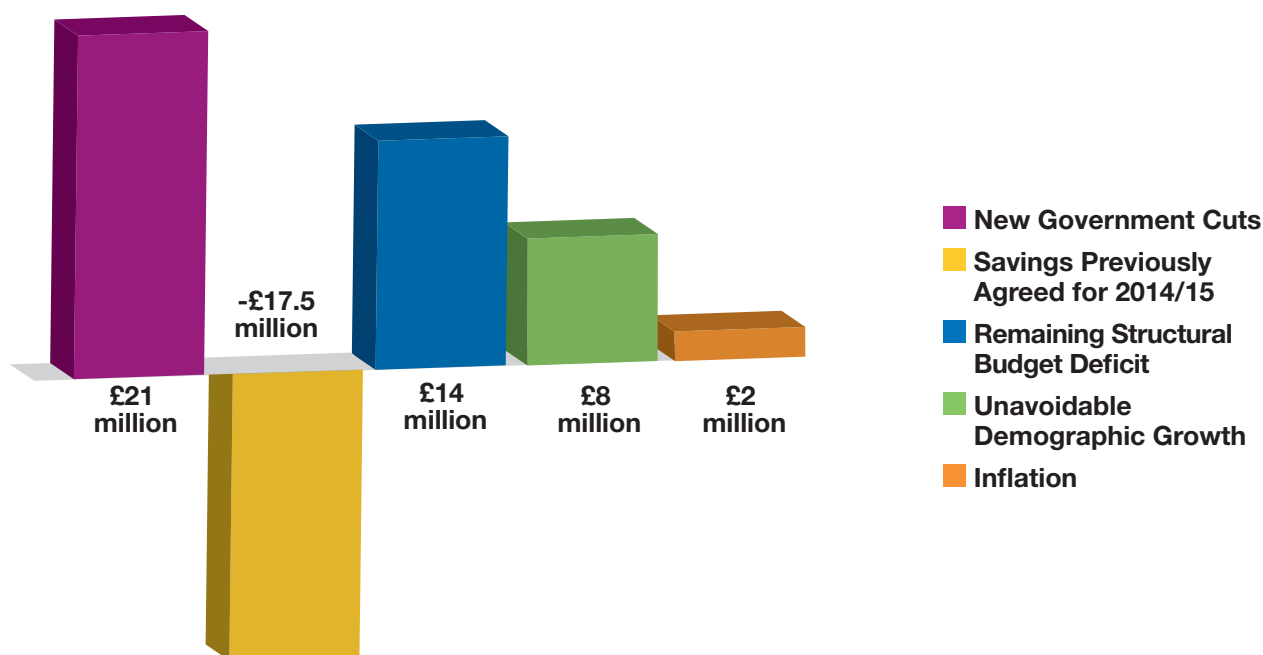


Your Budget Explained

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:

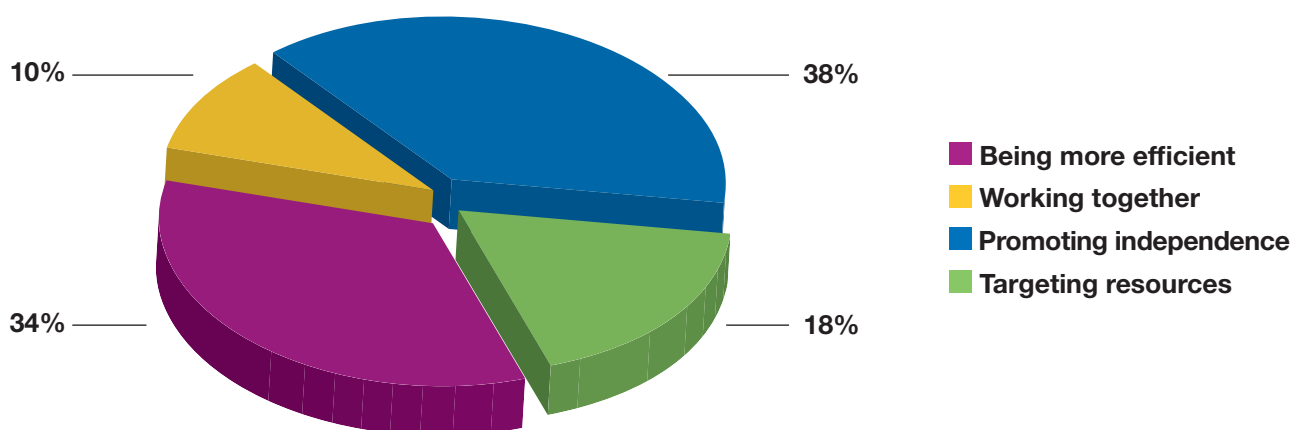


This year, we have to cope with new Government cuts of around £21 million. This wasn't a surprise – as you will know the Government has been cutting back on spending for a number of years now; so we made £17.5 million worth of savings from the last consultation which we will feel the impact of next year. 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 result.

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.

