



Council Excellence Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date:	Tuesday, 27 November 2012
Time:	6.00 pm
Venue:	Committee Room 1 - Wallasey Town Hall

Contact Officer: Lyndzay Roberts
Tel: 0151 691 8262
e-mail: lyndzayroberts@wirral.gov.uk
Website: <http://www.wirral.gov.uk>

SUPPLEMENTARY AGENDA

3. **IMPROVEMENT PLAN - PROGRESS REPORT (Pages 1 - 16)**

8. **SOCIAL WELFARE REFORM - LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME (Pages 17 - 36)**

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WIRRAL COUNCIL

CABINET

29 NOVEMBER 2012

SUBJECT:	<i>WIRRAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN – PROGRESS REPORT</i>
WARD/S AFFECTED:	<i>ALL</i>
REPORT OF:	<i>CHIEF EXECUTIVE</i>
RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	<i>CLLR ANN MCLACHLAN</i>
KEY DECISION?	NO

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report provides an update on progress delivering the Council's Improvement Plan. There is a summary of the key achievements to date as well as the activities scheduled in the next period. These are set out against the five priority themes around which the plan has been developed.
- 1.2 The report also provides a more general narrative which reflects the observations of the Improvement Board and the feedback from the recent Peer Challenge as well as highlighting some of the issues and challenges in relation to the next stage of delivery.

2.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

- 2.1 The Improvement Plan was endorsed by the Improvement Board at its meeting on July 20th 2012 and formally approved by Cabinet on 6th September 2012.
- 2.2 The Plan is structured around the five improvement priority themes agreed through the early work of the Improvement Board, specifically:
- Leadership: Political and Managerial
 - Corporate Governance and Decision-Making
 - Corporate Plan
 - Budget and Financial Stability
 - Critical Services Areas: Safeguarding and Developing the Economy
- 2.3 To ensure there are clear lines of accountability for delivering the plan, a governance model has been developed and this was also approved by Cabinet at its meeting on 6th September. There is also an agreed reporting structure to ensure Executive Team regularly reviews the day to day delivery and Cabinet and the Improvement Board have regular oversight to ensure progress is being made.

3.0 PROGRESS AGAINST PRIORITY AREAS

PRIORITY 1 – Leadership: Political and Managerial

Target 1: Design and implement a leadership programme

- 3.1 Work has commenced on the scoping out and design of the new Wirral Council Leadership Programme. The Programme models the North West Collaborative Leadership Programme with specific scope to deliver to a wider range of leaders and managers at Wirral Council.
- 3.2 The approach to Elected Member development includes support for new Elected Members, the Skills for Wirral Councillors Programme and future plans for a dedicated Leadership Programme. There is also a commitment to achieving the North West Employers Organisation Member Development Charter. This activity is steered and championed by the Member Training Steering Group, comprising a representative from each Group and is chaired by Cllr Ann McLachlan, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member, Improvement and Governance.
- 3.3 New draft Leadership Behaviours and revised Leadership Expectations have been developed and will be used to inform the Leadership Development Programme in terms of identifying needs around skills and knowledge gaps.

Target 2: Review best practice and put in place an effective model for elected members to work together

- 3.4 Changes have been introduced by the new Chief Executive in the way Elected Members are supported to ensure greater transparency and rigour. This involves a framework of regular briefings being scheduled to ensure there is a consistent and efficient model in place for briefing members.
- 3.5 Changes have also been introduced to move the scrutiny function from within the political groups to be embedded within the strengthened policy function. This will enable support for Executive and Leaders of the opposition parties to be better co-ordinated.
- 3.6 A new system of support for Ward Members is also being implemented via a Member Enquiries System within the Committee and Administrative functions of the Council.

Target 3: Develop a shared vision and purpose for the organisation

- 3.7 An event attended by 80 Members, Officers and Partners was held in September 2012 to begin the process of developing Wirral's vision. The keynote speakers were Carolyn Downes, Chief Executive, LGA and Tony Travers, visiting professor, London School of Economics and Political Science. Both were well received and the session provided useful information in setting out the current context for local government. Evaluation of the event highlighted the benefit of having a mix of Officers, Elected Members and partners together to share and hear the views of others. A further visioning session is being planned for December.
- 3.8 It has been recognised there has been a lack of a strong corporate management function both to drive through the improvement plan priorities and to transform the performance and delivery of Wirral Borough Council. In order to ensure the

organisational structure is fit for purpose, a management restructure has been instigated. The first phase of this restructure is to establish three new Strategic Directors reporting directly to the Chief Executive. Each will have responsibility for the co-ordination of a programme area consisting of a number of the current Departments. The programme areas covered by these Strategic Directors are:

- Families and Wellbeing
- Regeneration and Environment
- Transformation and Resources

This Strategic Management Team will be supported by two further posts, a Director of Policy, Performance and Public Health and a Head of Communications and Community Engagement.

3.9 A wider management restructure at the levels below Strategic Director is now under way with the aim of realising 33% reduction in management costs.

Target 4: Design & Implement a cultural change programme

3.10 Since January 2012 a wide selection of feedback and information has been gathered from across the organisation including the Corporate Governance Survey, the full Employee Engagement Survey, the confidential staff disclosure line, Destination Excellence Events and the sessions held by Michael Frater to inform the development of a cultural change programme. A summary of all this data has been created, outlining the values that stand out as being those that are most important for the future of the organisation. The values will be short, clear and easy to relate to and will reflect current good practice and provide Wirral with a contemporary framework within which to take the Improvement Plan forward. The values will underpin all future training and development across the organisation and will be vital in the roll out of Performance Appraisal and Development.

3.11 Summary of achievements for this reporting period:

- Management restructure underway with recruitment process commenced
- Leadership Programme scoped and initial design shared with Executive Team
- Member decision-making process revised
- Initial Visioning event undertaken
- Elected Members starting to complete Personal Development Plans
- Feedback to inform organisational values and behaviours collated

3.12 Summary of activities planned for next reporting period:

- Second visioning exercise to be undertaken
- Next stage of management restructure undertaken
- All Elected Member personal development requests collated, reviewed and where appropriate training commissioned.
- Leadership Programme design completed, target audience agreed and timeframe agreed for the 1st cohort
- NWEO Briefing to Member Training Steering Group on Member Charter and Self Assessment Undertaken
- Skills for Wirral Councillors Programme finalised and published
- Elected Member Accreditation Model launched
- Develop strategies for risk, IT, procurement

PRIORITY 2 – Corporate Governance and Decision-Making

3.13 There has been detailed work undertaken to ensure that the actions within the HESPE action plan (Cabinet, 18 October 2012) are embedded within the appropriate Improvement Plan targets and the recommendations are cross-referenced in the programme management system to enable clear tracking and reporting.

Target 1: Ensure that the Code of Corporate Governance and supporting policies are consistently understood and followed

3.14 The project team has undertaken an initial meeting to scope the key activities to deliver this target and these have been developed into a project initiation document. A session has been held with IT colleagues to ascertain the most appropriate method for developing, record managing and publishing the constituent policies of the code of corporate governance. A framework for review against the CIPFA / SOLACE framework has been developed with the next stage to examine existing Wirral policies against this and develop a timetable for review based on assessed priority.

3.15 Progress has been made on implementing the improvement measures proposed following the review undertaken in relation to Committee Services, agreed by Cabinet on 21 June 2012. New arrangements are in place to ensure reports included on the Cabinet Agenda are more effectively managed. This has resulted in the number of Cabinets reports being reduced considerably. A new workflow for the production and management of committee reports (through the Mod.Gov System) has been prepared and arrangements are in hand to amend the Mod.Gov System.

Target 2: Review and update Schemes of Delegation and support systems for decision making and provide appropriate training

3.16 The Council has appointed additional capacity in the form of an Interim Head of Legal and Member Services. The post holder took up his position on the 1 October 2012 and has undertaken a brief review of current arrangements and progress. The Interim Head of Legal and Member Services concluded that to deliver and implement an effective Officer Scheme of Delegation, it is vitally important that Senior Political Leaders, Senior Officers and other stake holders are engaged. The relationship between these parties will have a significant bearing on the nature, scope and effectiveness of any revised Officer Scheme of Delegation. The necessary arrangements needed to ensure engagement are being put in place.

Target 3: Strengthen contract procedure rules and management whilst ensuring that appropriate information is in place to enable informed decision making

3.17 A Procurement toolkit has been developed to provide support and guidance for the delivery of the procurement function throughout the Council. The Toolkit is designed to support the acquisition of goods, services, and works in the context of the Procurement Strategy and the Contracts Procedure Rules. This has been underpinned by a workshop programme delivered to departments on problematic areas such as tenders, European directives, the “Chest” system etc. The next phase will include shaping the toolkit into a more interactive, user friendly format.

- 3.18 Improvements on contract management will be made as many of the activities in the HESPE action plan are delivered through the revised risk management arrangements, improved procurement procedures, revised performance management arrangements and more effective internal audit. However, further work is required on contract procedure rules and the management of contracts following the let of a contract; this is currently being explored by the procurement and legal functions.
- 3.19 An action plan has been developed setting out the steps necessary to improve the Council's corporate risk management arrangements. This is now under way and a number of initial meetings have been held with Members and senior officers. Scoping work has also been undertaken to prepare for the implementation of the Risk Management functionality of the Council's Concerto business and project planning IT to support a consistent corporate approach to risk management.
- 3.20 A review of Internal Audit has been undertaken with key milestones for improvement developed into an action plan. This action plan has been cross-referenced to the HESPE action plan to ensure all recommendations are included. The existing Chief Internal Auditor has taken early retirement and a shared service with Liverpool is being developed. An overview of the improvements made to the internal Audit function will be reported to Audit & Risk Management Committee in January and to the Improvement Board in February, as per the HESPE action plan.

Target 4: Establish an effective and coordinated approach to shaping and implementing policy

- 3.21 The transfer of staff to the newly established Director of Policy, Performance and Public Health has been completed. A policy network has been established and Policy Briefings are being provided on a frequent basis.
- 3.22 Partners have been invited to a pre-meeting to discuss the establishment of a Local Public Service Board. The Public Service Board will allow for a more community oriented approach to transforming public services through working together at a neighbourhood level and focus on integrated planning and delivery, responsive and proactive provision, shared resources and more effective partnership structures.
- 3.23 **Summary of achievements for this reporting period:**
- Policy unit establish.
 - Policy network created.
 - Policy briefings disseminated.
 - The introduction of revised leadership arrangements in Audit, including a shared service approach with Liverpool.
 - Procurement toolkit developed and road shows with Departments undertaken.
- 3.24 **Summary of activities planned for next reporting period:**
- First meeting of Local Public Service Board to take place.
 - A revised Officer Scheme of Delegation will be drafted.
 - Amendments to the Mod Gov system will be completed.
 - Evidence base for the development of the Corporate Plan developed.
 - Strategies for risk and procurement will be drafted to reflect the outcomes of the reviews of these functions.
 - Further work is required to plan the key activities to deliver the targets on:

- Strengthening Contract Procedure rules and management whilst ensuring appropriate information is in place to enable informed decision making
- Engaging with local and sub-regional partners to shape and respond to policy developments and implement decisions.

PRIORITY 3 – Corporate Plan

Target 1: A clear set of priorities based on understanding our customers’ needs and expectations

- 3.25 The Corporate Plan 2012-15 was refreshed and agreed by Cabinet on 10 July 2012. This will provide a framework for delivery during 2012-13 whilst a revised Corporate Plan aligned to the medium term financial plan is developed.
- 3.26 Phase one of the “What Really Matters” consultation was undertaken with the views of more than 7,000 people considered by Cabinet as they deliberated the results. During the course of the consultation the views of more than 13,000 people were sought at over 150 events. Locations such as shopping centres, supermarkets, community centres, cinemas and bingo halls were visited to make sure that as many people as possible had the opportunity to have their say. The findings have provided good insight into the priorities of our communities which will inform the service reviews undertaken to develop budget saving options.

Target 2: Develop a Corporate Performance Management Framework

- 3.27 The Executive Team considered a proposal for the development of a new corporate performance management framework based on the key principles of centralising resources and adopting a business partnering approach to delivering intelligence and analysis. The proposals also include the development of a number of performance dashboards to advise officers and members of key information on the council’s performance on a regular basis. This will include a Cabinet dashboard as well as dashboards for scrutiny.

Target 3: Objectives aligned to individual performance appraisal and development

- 3.28 The new Performance Appraisal & Development process has been agreed for Senior Managers and above in the first instance. Performance Appraisal & Development discussions commenced in October 2012, with the Chief Executive being the first to take part. All Directors and Heads of Service will have been appraised before December 2012. Development needs identified during these discussions will feed into the options around leadership development.
- 3.29 The newly developed Leadership Behaviours and revised Leadership Expectations will underpin the Performance Appraisal and Development process and will inform the Leadership Development Programme in terms of identifying needs around skills and knowledge gaps. The roll out of 360 degree feedback against the new Leadership Behaviours will commence from April 2013 as part of the six monthly Performance Appraisal & Development reviews.
- 3.30 **Summary of achievements for this reporting period:**
- Revised Corporate Plan (2012-15) agreed.
 - Phase one of the “What Really Matters” consultation undertaken.

- Proposals for new corporate performance framework agreed by Executive Team.
- Corporate Performance moved under the newly established post of Director of Policy Performance and Public Health.

3.31 **Summary of activities planned for next reporting period:**

- Development of a Corporate Plan 2013-16.
- Phase two of the “What Really Matters” consultation to be undertaken.
- Consult elected members on an on-going basis to establish and refine performance requirements and products (e.g. monthly balanced scorecards, annual performance statement etc).
- Development of a performance dashboard
- All Directors and members of The Executive Team completed Performance Appraisal & Development Review
- All Heads of Service completed Performance Appraisal & Development Review
- Preparation and training delivered for Senior Managers (anyone reporting to a Head of Service)

PRIORITY 4 – Budget and Financial Stability

Target 1: Ensure that the service review and consultation programme reflects the impact of reducing levels of resources

3.32 Since mid-August, there has been a dual focus of dealing with the in-year financial challenges and budgetary overspend, as well as developing a transparent budget process for 2013-16.

3.33 In order to deal with the immediate financial challenge and overspend the following measures were introduced:

- Monthly risk-based monitoring introduced, rather than quarterly
- The implementation of a spending freeze
- A reduction in the projected revenue overspend from £17m (at Month 3) to £13.2m (at Month 6)
- A Zero Based Budget (ZBB) exercise undertaken to identify and eliminate bad budgets, and so provide a sound basis for the following years budgets
- A revised approach developed for spend to save investment, saving £2m in-year
- A risk based approach devised for managing Balances
- An elimination of £20m of legacy capital schemes

3.34 The following activities have been undertaken to ensure a transparent process is undertaken for the budget 2013-16:

- Revised budget targets – with 2013-14 up from £25m to £39m
- A challenge process introduced for examining savings, growth and assumptions
- Frameworks, to judge progress financially and politically, for:
 - Savings – over 10 lines of enquiry
 - Growth – over 5 areas
- A revised budget timetable resulting in a plan for savings £40m/£40m/£20m over the next three years
- A transparent savings list, released on November 9th to the public, showing all the options for consideration.

Target 2: Review governance and scope of Strategic Change Programme

3.35 The current Strategic Change Programme was agreed by Cabinet (21 February 2012). However, the delivery of savings through this programme has primarily been monitored through the revenue budget monitoring process. The existing Change Team have been focussed on developing and reviewing savings options and planning for their implementation with Departments. A longer term strategy for the programme and the role of the team will be developed following the appointment of the Strategic Director for Transformation and Resources.

3.36 Summary of achievements for this reporting period:

- Budget savings options developed by officers
- Revenue spending freeze implemented
- Capital spending freeze implemented
- Recruitment freeze implemented
- Monthly budget monitoring implemented for revenue & capital spending

3.37 Summary of activities planned for next reporting period:

- Further work is required to develop an evidenced based commissioning strategy informed by clearly identified needs. This is linked to recommendation 4 of the HESPE action plan which is to “Resolve the relationship of Procurement and Commissioning”.
- Further roll out of the Concerto system to coordinate corporate risk management arrangements.
- There is further work required on reviewing the governance and scope of the Strategic Change Programme, which will take shape following decisions made at special Cabinet on 20 December 2012.

PRIORITY 5 – Critical Services Areas: Safeguarding and Developing the Economy

Target 1: Deliver improvements in safeguarding, through implementation of the action plan arising from the safeguarding peer review

3.38 The peer review draft improvement plan was reported to Health and Well Being Overview & Scrutiny committee on 10 September. Discussions are ongoing to ensure there is a single reporting mechanism on the delivery of this action plan to avoid duplication.

Target 2: Develop approach to enhancing and adding value to the local economy through 'your Economy' goals and focuses

3.39 The Improvement Board (19/10/2012) received a presentation from the Director of Regeneration, Housing & Planning on the LGC award for Sustainable Economic Development. The Board agreed the work ongoing in this area was admirable, and that whilst the Economy remains a clear priority for the Council, the Board agreed that the Investment Strategy Board was the most appropriate forum for overseeing this important work.

4.0 OVERALL SUMMARY OF PROGRESS

- 4.1 Alongside progress against the specific priorities and targets detailed above, additional work has been undertaken to support the Council's improvement journey more generally. A high level communications plan has been developed to promote the work of the Improvement Board and a wider, more general communications strategy has been created to support delivery of the plan itself.
- 4.2 A key measure of the Improvement Plan's success will be that change is delivered across all parts of the organisation and at all levels. An essential component in support of this will be the development of a Change Management Strategy that sets out *how* the change process will be managed. A Change Management Framework (based on the Kotter 8-step model) has been developed that addresses the immediate challenges and priorities. However, it is recognised there will be a need to develop a more comprehensive Change Management Strategy for the long term once some of the fundamental decisions have been taken about the vision and future shape of the organisation.
- 4.3 As an independent and neutral observer of the Council's improvement process, the Improvement Board has acknowledged the real progress being made by the Council since endorsing the Improvement Plan in July. The Board has specifically noted the new culture at the top of the organisation and the successful collaboration between the new Chief Executive and the three party leaders. The recent decision to move to a bi-monthly meeting schedule is clear evidence the Improvement Board is confident that the momentum for change has been established and the Plan has now moved into the implementation phase. However, the Board has also highlighted the need for the Council to develop a narrative to provide a better sense of direction and a clearer picture of the outcomes and impact we are working towards.
- 4.4 There has been further independent endorsement of the progress being made through the recent Peer Challenge process. Whilst it is recognised the Council still has much to do and improve upon, the initial feedback provided includes the following statements:
- The Council has a good grasp on the scale and urgency of the challenges faced
 - The overall strategy we are working to is appropriate
 - The approach, pace and sequencing of change makes sense. There are significant risks but no alternatives.
 - There is clear and visible leadership and an organisation that is up for the change
 - There are underlying strengths in the organisation
 - Keep sharpening your strategic planning, risk management and thinking ahead
 - Some key decisions need to be made over the next few weeks – an important phase of improvement – maintain your resolve
 - The Improvement Board is right to reflect the progress being made by the council by evolving to a monitoring and challenge role and reducing the frequency of meetings

5.0 NEXT STEPS

- 5.1 A key theme running through the feedback received from the Improvement Board and the Peer Assessment is the need for the Council to maintain momentum. This message is clearly understood and forms a key element of the emerging Change Management Framework. However, it should be recognised the organisational restructure and

budget reductions that are the immediate priorities and challenge for the organisation could have a delaying impact on other areas of the Improvement Plan in the short term.

5.2 The next steps under each priority area within the plan have been set out above. A key focus for the Improvement Team will be to ensure these activities are being progressed. However, given the potential impact of the management restructure on both the timetable and capacity to deliver the Improvement Plan, another key focus for the team will involve re-scheduling activity where necessary and undertaking a gap analysis to ensure the impact of any reduction in management capacity is identified and addressed in relation to progressing the delivery of the Improvement Plan.

6.0 RELEVANT RISKS

6.1 A Programme Risk Register has been developed by the Executive Team and the latest version is included in Appendix 1.

7.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

7.1 The Improvement Plan is considered to be the only option for the Council and as such, no other options have been considered.

8.0 CONSULTATION

8.1 The development of the Improvement Plan has been undertaken in consultation with the Improvement Board and elected members. Activity within the plan has been informed by consultation with staff through the staff surveys undertaken this year.

9.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS

9.1 There are none arising directly from this report.

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

10.1 The initial resource requirements for delivering the Improvement Plan were assessed and reported to Cabinet 06 September 2012. No further resource requirements have been identified at this stage.

11.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

11.1 Delivery of the Improvement Plan involves reviewing and refreshing a number of core documents including the Council's constitution, the Scheme of Delegation and the Member / Office protocol. Where necessary i.e. when a key decision is required, these will be reported to Cabinet separately.

12.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

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

(a) Yes – an initial EIA was undertaken but as this is an update report and not a proposal for consideration this did not progress beyond the initial EIA.

13.0 CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

13.1 There are none arising directly from this report.

14.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

14.1 There are none arising directly from this report.

15.0 RECOMMENDATION/S

15.1 Members are requested to note progress against the Improvement Plan

16.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

16.1 The people who live, work and enjoy leisure on the Wirral deserve excellence from their Council. Recent external assessments show that in some areas, particularly corporate governance, we have fallen short of that standard.

REPORT AUTHOR: *Fiona Johnstone*
Director of Policy, Performance & Public Health
0151 651 3914
email: Fiona.Johnstone@wirral.nhs.uk

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Risk Register
SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Cabinet	6 th September 2012

Appendix 1: Improvement Plan Risk Register

Risk Description	Existing Controls	Net Likelihood Score	Net Impact Score	Net Total Risk score	Planned Additional Controls
GOVERNANCE					
Officers and Elected Members do not adhere to the roles and responsibilities set out in the governance arrangements of the improvement plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Member and officer protocol Improvement Board endorsement of programme management arrangements 	2	3	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revised member officer protocol and training Cabinet approval of programme management arrangements
The roles and responsibilities relating to programme governance are not understood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Member briefings Regular reporting on progress / issues / risks 	3	4	12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Member engagement through scrutiny Review effectiveness of governance model / identify weaknesses and areas of improvement
Unrealistic stakeholder expectations of the ability to deliver the plan whilst also delivering against other Council priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Member briefings Regular reporting on progress / issues / risks 	2	4	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear prioritisation from 'what really matters'
CAPACITY					
Failure to create sufficient capacity within the key group of officers responsible for delivering the Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial resource plan endorsed by Improvement Board 	3	5	15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Detailed resource planning Cabinet approval for additional resources Robust business planning Ensure resource requirements to deliver the plan are included in the budget setting process
Insufficient capacity in the wider workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workforce planning Performance management arrangements 	3	5	15	
Executive Team focus on what is urgent rather than what is important.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved working arrangements for Executive Team Appointment of interim senior officers 	3	3	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appointment of Strategic Directors Transparent Council HoS Project Empowerment Project Review Business Systems Project Implementation of HR Self Serve Project
Failure to allocate sufficient resources (financial IT etc) to support the delivery of the Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delivery of the Improvement plan has been deemed critical by Executive Team Initial resource plan in place 	2	5	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Detailed resource planning Ensure resource requirements to deliver the plan are included in the budget setting process
ENGAGEMENT & COMMUNICATION					
Executive Team does not connect strongly and overtly with the key group of officers responsible for delivering the Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Senior management briefings 1 2 1 / appraisal process Head of Service Group and Project Teams 	2	3	6	
Staff are not effectively and universally engaged in the Improvement Plan and progress is not communicated clearly.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key messages disseminated in Senior management briefings Key messages disseminated in One brief Key messages disseminated in Authority wide broadcasts Key messages from Improvement Board available on the Council's intranet 	2	5	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improvement plan will be available on the Council's intranet Communication strategy

Equality Impact Assessment Toolkit (from May 2012)

Section 1: Your details

EIA lead Officer: Michele Duerden

Email address: micheleduerden@wirral.gov.uk

Head of Section: Michele Duerden

Chief Officer: Fiona Johnstone

Department: Policy, Performance & Public Health

Date: 06/11/2012

Section 2: What Council proposal is being assessed?

None, this report is to inform Cabinet of progress against the Council's Improvement Plan.

Section 2b: Will this EIA be submitted to a Cabinet or Overview & Scrutiny Committee?

Yes / No If 'yes' please state which meeting and what date

Please add hyperlink to where your EIA is/will be published on the Council's website

Section 3: Does the proposal have the potential to affect..... (please tick relevant boxes)

Services

- The workforce**
- Communities**
- Other** (please state eg: Partners, Private Sector, Voluntary & Community Sector)

If you have ticked one or more of above, please go to section 4.

- None** (please stop here and email this form to your Chief Officer who needs to email it to equalitywatch@wirral.gov.uk for publishing)

Section 4: Does the proposal have the potential to maintain or enhance the way the Council (please tick relevant boxes)

- Eliminates unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- Advances equality of opportunity
- Fosters good relations between groups of people

If you have ticked one or more of above, please go to section 5.

- No** (please stop here and email this form to your Chief Officer who needs to email it to equalitywatch@wirral.gov.uk for publishing)

Section 5:

Could the proposal have a positive or negative impact on any of the protected groups (race, gender, disability, gender reassignment, age, pregnancy and maternity, religion and belief, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership)?

You may also want to consider socio-economic status of individuals.

Please list in the table below and include actions required to mitigate any potential negative impact.

Which group(s) of people could be affected	Potential positive or negative impact	Action required to mitigate any potential negative impact	Lead person	Timescale	Resource implications

Section 5a: Where and how will the above actions be monitored?

Section 5b: If you think there is no negative impact, what is your reasoning behind this?

Section 6: What research / data / information have you used in support of this process?

Section 7: Are you intending to carry out any consultation with regard to this Council proposal?

Yes / No – (please delete as appropriate)

If 'yes' please continue to section 8.

If 'no' please state your reason(s) why:

(please stop here and email this form to your Chief Officer who needs to email it to equalitywatch@wirral.gov.uk for publishing)

Section 8: How will consultation take place and by when?

Before you complete your consultation, please email your preliminary EIA to equalitywatch@wirral.gov.uk via your Chief Officer in order for the Council to ensure it is meeting it's legal requirements. The EIA will be published with a note saying we are awaiting outcomes from a consultation exercise.

Once you have completed your consultation, please review your actions in section 5. Then email this form to your Chief Officer who needs to email it to equalitywatch@wirral.gov.uk for re-publishing.

WIRRAL COUNCIL

COUNCIL EXCELLENCE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

27 NOVEMBER 2012

CABINET

29 NOVEMBER 2012

SUBJECT	WELFARE REFORM: LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME
WARD/S AFFECTED	ALL
REPORT OF	INTERIM DIRECTOR OF FINANCE
RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER	COUNCILLOR PHIL DAVIES
KEY DECISION	YES

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Authority is required to establish a Local Council Tax Support Scheme, known as Council Tax Support (CTS) to replace Council Tax Benefit (CTB) from April 2013. This is a key strand of the Government's wider Welfare Reform review. The Scheme also brings with it reduced funding from Central Government, and Wirral needs to consider how to address this reduction in funding.
- 1.2 This report proposes a Local Council Tax Support Scheme to replace CTB for 2013/14 that manages the £3.2 million shortfall in Government funding which is based upon current, and increasing, levels of CTB. There are associated costs that increase the shortfall to a maximum of £3.635 million. In addition, the change also increases the likely level of non-collection of Council Tax by up to £1 million gross / £0.85 million net, and this needs to be included within the Budget Projections for 2013/14.
- 1.3 The Council must approve a scheme no later than 31 January 2013 or the Government default scheme, requiring the shortfall to be fully funded by the Council, will be imposed. Members are asked to approve a scheme to Council.

2.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

CHANGES IN LEGISLATION

- 2.1 In the Spending Review 2010 it was announced that the CTB Scheme would be abolished and a framework for localised support schemes for Council Tax would be introduced and operative from 2013/14. It was also announced that Government support would be reduced by 10% of current year spend. For Wirral the spend is £32 million with an increasing take-up of 1% per annum.

- 2.2 The Local Government Finance Bill (enacted in November 2012) and the Welfare Reform Act 2012 impose a duty on billing authorities to design and introduce a Localised Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTR) by 31 January 2013 for operation from 2013/14. If not the Government Default Scheme is introduced which requires the Council to fully fund to previous CTB levels.
- 2.3 The Local Government Finance Act 2012 was given Royal Assent on 1 November 2012 and incorporated an amendment from the House of Lords that the CTS schemes will be reviewed after 3 years.

LOCALISED SCHEME – PENSIONERS AND VULNERABLE GROUPS

- 2.4 The Government has prescribed that local schemes must offer protection to certain groups, which will include eligible pensioners, based on the same factors that have determined their eligibility and award under the current Council Tax Benefit (CTB) scheme. Unlike most other groups, pensioners cannot be expected to seek out paid employment to increase their income and are protected from any reduction in Council Tax Support. Pensioners currently account for 41.5% 17,736 of the Council CTB caseload of 42,713. As current charge-payers age, and so meet the criteria, this will increase the numbers being protected. Wirral’s age profile is of an increasing elderly population and no additional funding is provided for this ongoing shift.
- 2.5 The Government have indicated that a local scheme should also look to support to the same level as now other “vulnerable groups”, which are currently not defined, as well as ensuring that the scheme supports the Welfare Reform programme aim of supporting people back into work. Wirral has consulted on whether vulnerable people should be protected under its CTS scheme and 82% of respondents agreed they should be. Members are asked to consider which groups should be considered for inclusion in the vulnerable category. The table shows the cost of this protection which would have to be paid by Working Age claimants (to fund all groups this cost would be £719,000):

Table 1 : Claimant Numbers and Funding the cost of Vulnerable Groups

Group	Numbers	Cost to Working Age claimants	
		£	£
Pensioners	17,736		
Vulnerable *			
Disabled	4,269	618,000	
Disabled Child	657	95,000	
War Pensioners	<u>38</u>	<u>6,000</u>	<u>719,000</u>
Total	22,700		719,000
Working Age	<u>20,013</u>		<u>(719,000)</u>
Total	42,713		0

* Vulnerable for the purposes of the Scheme are people who receive a Disability Premium or who have a disabled child and are in receipt of a disabled child premium and people in receipt of a War Pension. The vulnerable groups under the scheme are as set out in the current CTB scheme.

- 2.6 If pensioners and the vulnerable groups, which equate to 53.1% of the current claimant base, are not worse off in 2013/14 compared to 2012/13 then the Working Age claimants have to bear the cost that the Council decides not to fund. The impact is that the Working Age claimants will pay up to 22% of the Council Tax charge.

FUNDING THE LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME

- 2.7 The Government will allocate funding separately to billing and precepting authorities, in proportion to their Council Tax charge, to support the provision of Local Schemes. Under the previous CTB arrangements Wirral as the administering authority was fully reimbursed for all awards made. Wirral will now receive 85% of the available funding with the Police and Fire and Rescue Services the balance. The grant is not being ring-fenced to use for the Local Scheme so authorities can decide its scale as long as any statutory levels and protections are met.
- 2.8 The grant will be a reduction of 10% on previous CTB grant funding. It will be based upon the May 2012 caseload and reassessed at November 2012 and will take no account of any ongoing increase in caseload. For Wirral this is currently showing a 1% to 2% per annum increase (the risk is upon the Council and each 1% increase in benefits paid will cost the Council £300,000). Those authorities with a high proportion of people on benefits face higher risks than those serving less deprived areas, as do those with an ageing population, both at a time of unprecedented resource reduction for all authorities.
- 2.9 CTB currently reduces the net Council Tax payable whereas the 25% Single Person Discount reduces the gross sum payable and is taken into account in the annual Council Tax Base calculation used to determine the level of Council Tax. The new Local Scheme will be viewed as reducing the gross sum due (the same as the Single Person Discount calculation) thus reducing the Council Tax Base. The Council's total budget requirement to be raised from Council Tax is reduced by the Government grant which is set at 90% in respect of the previous CTB awards.
- 2.10 As the Council Tax Base and amount to be raised both reduce the charge per Council Tax Band should be equivalent to 2012/13 bar for the 10% reduction. The Government view is that authorities are then free to make up any or all of the 10% reduction and if the full sum is found (£3.2 million for Wirral) the Council Tax level would stay the same.

LOCAL SCHEME CONSULTATION

- 2.11 All Councils are legally required to consult on their proposals for the CTS scheme. Wirral's consultation took place from 3 September to 31 October 2012. Forms were available on line and at Libraries and One Stop Shops and Council staff attended October's Neighbourhood Forums to explain and encourage participation. There was an advert in the local press and a direct email to 7,662 centrally held names which drew 1,158 responses.
- 2.12 This consultation coincided with the "What Really Matters" consultation and there were 1,826 responses which is high in comparison with other Councils. The responses and comments have informed the final decisions made in drawing up the Wirral scheme proposals for 2103/14. The Appendix details the responses with the headlines being:-
- 98% were Wirral residents.
 - 27% were in receipt of Council Tax Benefit/.
 - 40 responses were received from Voluntary Groups, 37 from Registered Providers and 50 from Private Landlords.
 - 82% agreed the Council should protect vulnerable people.

LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME

- 2.13 The report to Cabinet on 19 July 2012 indicated that Wirral like all Councils was likely to retain most of the elements within the current Council Tax Benefit scheme and this remains the case. However there are some amendments which will mitigate the shortfall in Government grant.
- 2.14 Whilst all software suppliers have stated they will be unable to provide a bespoke system for 2013/14 they are confident that they will be able to deliver Wirral's proposed changes by altering their current CTB system. In respect of administration there will be increased costs of £135,000, made up of
- court fees payable (approximately £35,000),
 - payment processing costs (potentially 200,000 additional payments approximately £85,000) and,
 - postage and stationery costs (£15,000).

Table 2: COSTS OF THE LOCAL SCHEME 2013/14

Details	£
10% reduction in Government Grant	3,200,000
Increasing caseload at 1% per year	300,000
Administration and Court Costs	135,000
Total Costs	3,635,000

2.15 The schemes have been modelled on historical data and whilst subject to change before the year-end will be minor changes within acceptable parameters. The recommended scheme (Scheme 1) is based upon the reduced funding available and Scheme 2 based largely on the recently announced one year transitional protection grant from Government. Scheme 3 is the Government Default Scheme if the Council does not implement its own scheme.

SCHEME 1 – GRANT REDUCTION CONTAINED WITHIN CLAIMANT BASE (recommended as this scheme sees the costs being met)

2.16 In summary, the costs can be met using five proposals detailed after Table 3

Table 3 : RECOMMENDED (SCHEME 1) INCOME TO THE COUNCIL

Details	£
Proposal 1 Award limited to 78%	3,190,000
Proposal 2 Second Adult Rebate	123,000
Proposal 3 Limit Flat Rate Deductions	183,000
Proposal 4 Stop backdating of claims	58,000
Proposal 5 Support based on savings	81,000
Total Income	3,635,000

2.17 Detail of the five items:

- **Proposal 1 - Limit the award of Council Tax Support to 78% of the Council Tax liability**
Rather than the current 100% liability so, at least, 22% of Council Tax will be paid by the Working Age claimants which currently number 20,013. This equates to approximately £4.15 per week to be paid by a couple living in a Band A property and £3.11 or per week for a single person living in a Band A property. Limiting awards to 78% reduces the CTS funding shortfall by £3.190 million.
- **Proposal 2 - Remove Second Adult Rebate**
Currently 389 people are not entitled to Council Tax Benefit on their own right as their income or savings are too high but they can claim Second Adult Rebate because they have an adult living with them who is on low income. The maximum reduction is 25% and the removal of this realise £123,000.
- **Proposal 3 - Flat-rate Non-Dependant deduction at £9.90 per week**
Other adults such as sons, daughters other relatives or friends who live in a claimants house are expected to contribute to bills such as Council Tax. The deduction presently varies from £3.30 to £9.90, depending on the adult's income. This would currently impact on 805 households and realise £183,000.

- **Proposal 4 - Stop backdating of CTS claims**
Currently CTB claims can be backdated for up to 6 months if good cause is shown for not claiming earlier. In the first half of 2012/13 432 claims were backdated. If Wirral only granted CTS from the date of the claim then it will reduce the CTS shortfall by £58,000.
- **Proposal 5 - Limit CTS support to those with savings under £6,000**
Under the current scheme savings between £6,000 and £16,000 are taken into account when calculating CTB. Savings over £16,000 and the claimant will not qualify for CTB. There are currently 119 CTB claimants with capital over £6,000 who would no longer qualify and this proposal will reduce the CTS shortfall by a further £81,000.

Note : Members should be aware that these proposals are not mutually exclusive and some charge payers would face two or more reductions further increasing their Council Tax bill.

SCHEME 2 – TRANSITIONAL GRANT SCHEME
(not recommended as this only part funds the scheme and this part funding is only for the financial year 2013/14)

- 2.18 On 15 October 2012 the Government allocated £100 million to help assuage the £500 million removed overall from the national CTB scheme. This transitional payment is only available for 2013/14 so would have to be found by Councils in 2014/15 or claimants would then face a significant increase in Council Tax payments.
- 2.19 Wirral's' share, providing specific conditions were met in relation to its local CTS scheme, is likely to be £747,000 and to receive the grant:-
- The level of Council Tax payable must be limited to 8.5%. The Wirral Scheme 1 proposal has a payable level of 22%.
 - The taper rate used in the scheme not increasing to more than 25%; Wirral had no plans to do this.
 - There is no sharp reduction in support to those returning to work. Wirral had no such plans.
 - Councils would not propose large increases in non dependant deductions. Wirral plans to rationalise all deductions to £9.90 (Scheme 1, proposal 3).

Table 4 : NOT RECOMMENDED (SCHEME 2) COST TO THE COUNCIL

Details	£
Proposal 1 (amended) Award limited to 91.5%	1,235,500
Proposal 2 Second Adult Rebate	123,000
Proposal 4 Stop backdating of claims	58,000
Proposal 5 Support based on savings	81,000
Grant	747,000
Total Income	2,244,500
Council costs are £3,635,000 so shortfall	1,390,500

- 2.20 If Wirral applies for the grant of £747,000 then CTS budget savings of £1,390,500 will have to be identified. Proposals 1 and 3 cannot be actioned so will not deliver the savings from within the local CTS scheme or provide for a 1% increase in caseload for 2013/14. The grant cannot be applied for until after 31 January 2013, when the new CTS scheme will be in place and will be payable in March 2013. Given the criteria and the Council's financial situation applying for the grant is not viewed as the preferred option.

**SCHEME 3 – GOVERNMENT DEFAULT SCHEME
(not recommended as the Council would have to identify savings equivalent to the 10% reduction in Government Grant)**

- 2.21 Failure to adopt a Local Scheme will result in the Government default scheme being imposed upon the Council. This scheme is the current CTB scheme and will require Wirral to fully fund the 10% grant reduction and also the new claimants for 2013/14. Given the financial impact this is not recommended.

IMPACTS OF BILLING AND COLLECTING INCREASED COUNCIL TAX

- 2.22 From April 2013 Council Tax will become collectable from some of the more vulnerable and low income working age residents with many making payment for the first time. Consequently this will impact upon collection rates with a likely drop in collection from the current 97.5% by 0.4% to 1% which equates to between £0.6 million to £1 million gross in 2013/14. The net loss to the Council needs to be reflected in the Budget Projections for 2013/14.

Table 5 : LOSSES ON COLLECTION TO BE FUNDED BY THE COUNCIL

Details	£ Minimum	£ Maximum
Drop in collection	600,000	1,000,000
Preceptors share	90,000	150,000
Loss to the Council	510,000	850,000

- 2.23 A higher percentage of non-payment is inevitable, as previous 100% recipients are presented with a Council Tax bill for the first time - similar to when General Rates was replaced by Community Charge in 1990. The Universal Credit Regulations are awaited to see if it will allow for deductions for non-payment of Council Tax. The current amount of deduction would take approximately 56 weeks to clear the Council Tax debt plus costs due thus leaving an increasing year-on-year level of debt.
- 2.24 The level of contact will inevitably also increase with volumes of advice support and collection contacts being handled at One Stop Shops / Libraries, Call Centre and Back Office. These are not contacts likely to be handled via the developing self service route. Effective contact will also include trying to direct to other agency and organisations support, albeit they too will be facing this situation with reduced resources.

3.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 3.1 Whichever Local Scheme is agreed there are the risks around the impact upon both claimants and the Council. For the Council this relates to the collectability of the sums due including the increased administration required to pursue what will be low level debts. The implementation of Scheme 1 will mitigate the costs to the Council although there will be an increase in costs due to the non-collectability of the debts.
- 3.2 If the Council does not adopt a Local Scheme the Government will impose its default scheme, which is the current scheme and it will still have to find the full level of savings and increase in caseload for 2013/14, affecting its budget adversely.
- 3.3 In respect of demographic changes the Council has allowed for a contingency of 1% representing increased claims for 2013/14. This covers the increase in the elderly population. There is an economic risk in that if any large Wirral based employer or one in the surrounding area ceased to trade there could be a considerable increase in the number of claimants. Wirral has to fund increases arising from these changes from its own resources.

4.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 There is a statutory requirement to have a Localised Support Scheme for Council Tax in place by 31 January 2013 or the Government default scheme will be used as the Localised Scheme for 2013/14.

5.0 CONSULTATION

- 5.1 This has taken place with precepting authorities, interested groups and the public during the period 3 September 2012 to 31 October 2012 (Council Tax Benefit Is Changing – Have Your Say).. Wirral has satisfied its legal responsibilities around consultation and received a high number of responses from the public.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS

- 6.1 There are ongoing implications for all groups as the impact of the changes are identified and implemented.

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

- 7.1 The adoption of a Localised Scheme includes the need to change financial modelling to support the Scheme. The Government support will reduce by around £3.2 million in 2013/14 and the Council has to determine whether to meet this loss from alternative savings or to fund all, or part of this, from a reduction in awards to current CTB recipients. Depending upon the decision taken there could be increased challenges in collecting the sums due.

7.2 The Localised Scheme options are set out in Section 2 as being:-

SCHEME 1 – GRANT REDUCTION CONTAINED WITHIN CLAIMANT BASE

Recommended as this essentially ensures the Scheme can be funded from within the reduced resources available – see above of which:-

Table 6: COSTS OF THE LOCAL SCHEME 2013/14

Details	£
10% reduction in Government Grant	3,200,000
Increasing caseload at 1% per year	300,000
Administration and Court Costs	135,000
Total Costs	3,635,000

Table 7: INCOME TO THE COUNCIL

Details	£
Proposal 1 Award limited to 78%	3,190,000
Proposal 2 Second Adult Rebate	123,000
Proposal 3 Limit Flat Rate Deductions	183,000
Proposal 4 Stop backdating of claims	58,000
Proposal 5 Support based on savings	81,000
Total Income	3,635,000

The reduction in grant of £3.2 million is met by Working Age Claimants paying Council Tax at 22%, to meet the costs of the increasing numbers of claimants, administration and court costs.

SCHEME 2 – TRANSITIONAL GRANT SCHEME

Not recommended as the Transitional Grant would be £747,000 so the Council would have to find £1.4 million in 2013/14 as well as the costs for the increasing claimant numbers. This grant is only payable for 2013/14 so the Council would have to find further savings in 2014/15, equivalent to the grant.

SCHEME 3 – GOVERNMENT DEFAULT SCHEME

Not recommended as this would require the Council to identify £3.2 million from its own resources requiring alternative savings to be identified.

7.3 There is likely to be a shortfall of up to £1 million gross / £0.85 million net, in income due to these changes as sums are being collected from those who previously did not pay. This shortfall needs to be reflected in the Council Budget Projections for 2013/14, as a reduction in the income from a change in the Council Tax discounts.

7.4 The on-going staffing and IT requirements to administer the new scheme will depend upon the Scheme agreed. In terms of implementation the Government provided £84,000 with an indication that it can be used to support the development of new schemes with £59,000 required to fund the amendments to the current CTB system.

8.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 The Scheme could be subject to challenge by Judicial Review so once the Scheme is approved this will be prepared in conjunction with the Head of Legal Services.

9.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The potential impact on equality of the proposals has been nationally considered reviewed and the DCLG hyperlink is:-
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/lqfblocalcounciltaxaxeia>

The Council's current benefit related equality impact assessments are at:-;
<http://www.wirral.gov.uk/my-services/community-and-living/equality-diversity-cohesion/equality-impact-assessments/eias-2010/finance>

The introduction of a Local Scheme will have equality implications which will be more clearly identified as the Scheme is developed. A Phase 1 Equality Impact Assessment is appended.

10.0 CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are none arising directly from this report.

11.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There are none arising directly from this report.

12.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

12.1 That it be recommended to Council that:-

- a) Eligible Pensioners and Vulnerable Groups (disabled, disabled child and war pensioners) be protected under the Local Council Tax Support Scheme.
- b) The Local Council Tax Support Scheme proposed for 2013/14 be Scheme 1 with the associated proposals that will see Working Age Claimants meet 22% of the Council Tax payable in order to meet the £3.2 million reduction in Government Grant.
- c) The annual increase in caseload, estimated at 1% (£300,000) per year be included with the Budget Growth Projections for 2014/15 onwards.

- d) The potential losses on collection of £1million gross /£0.85 million net be incorporated within the Council Tax Base calculation and that this reduction in Council Tax Income be reflected in the Budget Projections for 2013/14, funded from the change in the Council Tax discounts.
- e) Thanks are extended to those residents who participated in the Council Tax Benefit consultation in ensuring the consultation was meaningful.

13.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

13.1 The Council is required to adopt a Local Council Tax Support Scheme for implementation in 2013/14 and this report enables Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet to consider the proposed Scheme and constituent proposals and for making recommendations to Council.

REPORT AUTHOR: Malcolm Flanagan
 Head of Revenues Benefits & Customer Services
 Telephone: (0151 666 3260)
 Email: malcolmflanagan@wirral.gov.uk

REFERENCE MATERIAL

National statistics - statistics.dwp.gov.uk
 Department for Work and Pensions / Department for Communities and Local Government - guidance and legislation

SUBJECT HISTORY

Council Meeting	Date
Cabinet	22 September 2011
Council Excellence Overview & Scrutiny Committee	16 March 2011
Council Excellence Overview & Scrutiny Committee	17 November 2011
Council Excellence Overview & Scrutiny Committee	26 March 2012
Cabinet	19 July 2012

CONSULTATION ON CHANGES AFFECTING COUNCIL TAX

BENEFIT FROM 1 APRIL 2013

The Consultation Period was 3 September 2012 to 31 October 2012 and 1,826 people responded to the 12 questions asked in response to the Government changes. Respondents were asked if they Strongly Agreed, Agreed, Neither Agreed nor Disagreed, Disagreed or Strongly Disagreed.

For this exercise responses have been grouped into Agree or Disagree

- | | | | | | |
|---|--|-------|-------|----------|-------|
| 1 | The Council should look to increase the amount of money raised from households and increase charges for everyone. | Agree | 19.1% | Disagree | 67.1% |
| 2 | The Council should raise the amount of Council Tax by increasing the charges on Second Homes and Empty properties. This would allow the Council to make no changes to the Council Tax scheme. | Agree | 83.3% | Disagree | 9.5% |
| 3 | The Council should make no changes to the Council Tax Benefit scheme and instead make further cuts to services to fund this specific change. | Agree | 18.0% | Disagree | 61.1% |
| 4 | Currently when someone who has been unemployed for a long time then starts work they continue to receive the same level of benefit for an extra 4 weeks, regardless of their income. Last year this cost the Council £81,000. Should people receiving Council Tax Support continue to get the same level of support for a 4 week period once they have started work to help pay for their Council Tax? | Agree | 42% | Disagree | 45.7% |
| 5 | The Council should implement the Government guidance and cut the amount of Council Tax Benefit award to working age claimants. Should the Council do this? | Agree | 49.7% | Disagree | 29.3% |
| 6 | The Council should consider reducing the eligible level of support to a maximum percentage, for example 80%. This would enable the Council to reduce its spending by approximately £3 million. Should the Council do this? | Agree | 56.6% | Disagree | 24.5% |

7 As well as protecting pensioners, the Council has a requirement to define and protect vulnerable people who are genuinely unable to work. If we do protect some vulnerable claimants then we need to make larger reductions in the support given to other working age people. We have defined our vulnerable adults as people who are disabled, have a disabled child or a recipient of a War Pension. Do you agree the Council should protect vulnerable people?

Agree 81.6% Disagree 9%

8 Some single customers are not entitled to Council Tax Benefit in their own right because their income is too high or they have too much savings. However they can claim Second Adult Rebate because they have an adult living with them who is on a low income. They can get up to 25% off their bill. By removing Second Adult Rebate would enable the Council to reduce its spending by approximately £123,000. Should people who receive this rebate be asked to pay more?

Agree 70.8% Disagree 15.3%

9 Under the existing Council Tax Benefit scheme other adults such as a grown up son, daughter, other relative or friend who lives in a claimant's home are expected to contribute to household bills, such as Council Tax. If Wirral introduced a standard non-dependant deduction set charge for example £9.90 this would reduce spending by more than £183,000. Should all working age people who have non-dependants living with them be asked to pay more?

Agree 65.9% Disagree 22.4%

10 Currently Council Tax Benefit awards can be backdated for up to 6 months if the claimant can show good reason why they did not claim from an earlier date, If Wirral awarded benefit from the date of the application only; it would reduce spending by approximately £58,000. Should Wirral continue to back date claims?

Agree 41.4% Disagree 43.8%

11 Under the current scheme a person's savings are taken into account when calculating Council Tax Benefit if they are over £6,000, in the new Council Tax Support scheme, Wirral proposes not to offer any support to claimants who have savings over £6,000. By doing so Wirral would reduce its spending by approximately £81,000. Should the Council do this?

Agree 54.0% Disagree 32.5%

12 The Council should have a Discretionary Support Fund to support and reduce the Council Tax bills of people suffering genuine and exceptional hardship, because of the changes being made to Council Tax Benefit. Should the Council have a Discretionary Support Fund?

Agree 78.6%

Disagree 10.5%

There were 499 comments that were considered as part of the overall analysis and formulation of the proposed scheme.

Equality Impact Assessment Toolkit (from May 2012)

Section 1: Your details

Council officer: Diane Eusoof

Email address: dianeusoof@wirral.gov.uk

Head of Service: Malcolm Flanagan

Chief Officer: Peter Timmins

Department: Finance

Date: 01.10.2012

Section 2: What Council proposal is being assessed?

Housing & Council Tax Benefits Service (including education welfare benefits)

Section 2b: Will this EIA be submitted to a Cabinet or Overview & Scrutiny Committee?

No If 'yes' please state which meeting and what date

.....

Please add hyperlink to where your EIA is/will be published on the Council's website (see your Departmental Equality Group Chair for appropriate hyperlink)

.....

Section 3: Does the proposal have the potential to affect..... (please tick relevant boxes)

- Services**
- The workforce**
- Communities**
- Other** (please state eg: Partners, Private Sector, Voluntary & Community Sector)

If you have ticked one or more of above, please go to section 4.

- None** (please stop here and email this form to your Chief Officer who needs to email it to equalitywatch@wirral.gov.uk for publishing)

Section 4: Does the proposal have the potential to maintain or enhance the way the Council (please tick relevant boxes)

- Eliminates unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- Advances equality of opportunity
- Fosters good relations between groups of people

If you have ticked one or more of above, please go to section 5.

- No** (please stop here and email this form to your Chief Officer who needs to email it to equalitywatch@wirral.gov.uk for publishing)

Section 5:

Could the proposal have a positive or negative impact on any of the protected groups (race, gender, disability, gender reassignment, age, pregnancy and maternity, religion and belief, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership)?

You may also want to consider socio-economic status of individuals.

Please list in the table below and include actions required to mitigate any potential negative impact.

Which group(s) of people could be affected	Potential positive or negative impact	Action required to mitigate any potential negative impact	Lead person	Timescale	Resource implications
Disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusion of Welfare Rights Unit in the service offering independent advice regarding disability benefits – positive impact • Availability of literature in large print & Braille - positive impact • Training in DDA included at induction & Equality & Diversity Training mandatory - positive impact • Home visits available to assist in form completion & information gathering- positive impact • e-enabled services -positive impact • Accessible network of One Stop Shops throughout the Borough-positive impact • Access to Call Centre with specialist advisors- positive impact • Safeguard policy for vulnerable claimants- positive impact • Dedicated named officer offering advocacy where required-positive impact • Convenient access to payments via Post 				

	Offices- positive impact				
Race	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Translation service available & access to interpreters if required-positive impact • Information leaflets can be provided in different languages-positive impact • There is the facility to translate any system generated correspondence into any language-positive impact • Accessible network of One Stop Shops throughout the Borough-positive impact • Access to Call Centre with specialist advisors-positive impact 				
Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • targeted adverts for take up-positive impact • Partnership working with Age UK & The Pension Service-positive impact • Accessible network of One Stop Shops throughout the Borough-positive impact • Access to Call Centre with specialist advisors-positive impact • Convenient access to payments via Post Offices ,widely used by older people -positive impact • Liaison with young people's representatives-positive impact • Convenient access to payments via Post Offices (useful for young people who are more likely to have difficulty opening bank accounts) -positive impact • e-enabled services-positive impact 				
Gender reassignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Named officer as contact point for those have undergone gender reassignment-positive impact • e-enabled services-positive impact 				

Section 5a: Where and how will the above actions be monitored?

Feedback from Forums , complaints , comments please forms and Departmental Equality Group.

Section 5b: If you think there is no negative impact, what is your reasoning behind this?

Reliance on partnership working with the voluntary sector in particular , and regular liaison to identify any issues which need to be addressed .

Monitor complaints to ensure that there is no dissatisfaction on grounds of equality .

Section 6: What research / data / information have you used in support of this process?

Previous EIA's for this service area and those undertaken as separate projects to improve service delivery

Section 7: Are you intending to carry out any consultation with regard to this Council proposal?

No – (please delete as appropriate)

If 'yes' please continue to section 8.

If 'no' please state your reason(s) why: The local authority administers Housing and Council Tax Benefits on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions .

(please stop here and email this form to your Chief Officer who needs to email it to equalitywatch@wirral.gov.uk for publishing)

Section 8: How will consultation take place and by when?

Before you complete your consultation, please email your preliminary EIA to equalitywatch@wirral.gov.uk via your Chief Officer in order for the Council to ensure it is meeting it's legal requirements. The EIA will be published with a note saying we are awaiting outcomes from a consultation exercise.

Once you have completed your consultation, please review your actions in section 5. Then email this form to your Chief Officer who needs to email it to equalitywatch@wirral.gov.uk for re-publishing.

Section 9: Have you remembered to:

- a) **Add appropriate departmental hyperlink to where your EIA is/will be published (section 2b)**
- b) **Include any potential positive impacts as well as negative impacts? (section 5)**
- c) **Send this EIA to equalitywatch@wirral.gov.uk via your Chief Officer?**
- d) **Review section 5 once consultation has taken place and sent your completed EIA to equalitywatch@wirral.gov.uk via your Chief Officer for re-publishing?**