



Cabinet

Date: Tuesday, 10 December 2013

Time: 6.15 pm

Venue: Civic Hall - Wallasey Town Hall

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SUPPLEMENTARY AGENDA

4. **BUDGET CONSULTATION FEEDBACK (Pages 1 - 66)**

6. **COUNCIL TAX BASE INFORMATION (Pages 67 - 86)**

7. **SOCIAL ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT - DAY SERVICES (Pages 87 - 88)**

(Please see attached Appendix 1(2) which was omitted from the original agenda)

10. **IMPROVEMENT BOARD REVIEW**

This item has now been withdrawn.

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WIRRAL COUNCIL CABINET

10 DECEMBER 2013

SUBJECT:	CONSULTATION FINDINGS: WHAT REALLY MATTERS 2013
WARD/S AFFECTED:	ALL
REPORT OF:	CHIEF EXECUTIVE
RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	LEADER OF THE COUNCIL
KEY DECISION:	NO

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Chief Executive, on September 16 2013, published a series of budget options for public consultation as the Council seeks to make savings of £27.5 million in 2014/2015.
- 1.2 These options have been subject to comprehensive consultation with residents, Elected Members, Trade Unions, staff, partners, businesses, community organisations and other stakeholders.
- 1.3 This report presents the feedback from those consultations for consideration by Cabinet.

2.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

- 2.1 The Council has been aware of an increasing need to reduce its budget requirement as outlined by its medium term strategy. Last year significant savings were agreed at Budget Council in March 2013. This was an ambitious task and the in-year financial position indicates encouraging signs that these savings are being achieved. However, the saving required for 2014/2015 is £27.5 million with further significant savings required in future years.
- 2.2 The Chief Executive published his options for savings of September 16 2013, and simultaneously launched a period of public, Member, Trade Union and staff consultation lasting for 12 weeks. This consultation ended on December 06 2013 and the feedback received is contained within this report.
- 2.3 The consultation resulted in 6520 questionnaires being returned to the Council, together with a number of petitions, letters and emails.

3.0 CONSULTATION METHODOLOGY

- 3.1 Budget options were grouped according to the Strategic Directorate from which they were proposed; Transformation and Resources; Regeneration and Environment; and Families and Wellbeing. The options were further grouped according to 'Budget Principle', which were a set of four principles devised by the Chief Executive to guide the development of budget options. The principles were:
 - 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.

- 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 to highest level of efficiency and the lowest levels of duplication to get you the best value for your money as a result.
- 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.
- Targeting Resources: The sheer scale of our financial challenge means that we cannot continue to invest the same amounts of money into some services. Some 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.

3.2 Consultees were provided a range of information detailing the background, level of savings, potential impact and methods of mitigating any potential negative impact for each individual option. This information included:

- Questionnaire: Split into four sections, the questionnaire provided a summary of each option and provided the opportunity for respondents to select one of four choices indicating their opinion on the option.
- Summary Paper: Three summary papers (one per Strategic Directorate) were produced and were available online, at Council buildings and at consultation events. These papers provided a summary of each option, including the level of savings involved and some background information.
- Option Paper: This paper provided information regarding the background to the option, the potential impact if the option was implemented, proposed methods to mitigate that impact and also the potential savings associated with the option.

3.3 The consultation questionnaire and associated summary documents were made available in Easy Read, and distributed widely through Council and voluntary, community and faith sector networks. Further work was done to ensure accessibility including developing a video, broadcast on the Council website and through the network of LCD screens in Council facilities, which further explained the context behind the budget process and provided information on how to complete the questionnaire.

4.0 PUBLIC CONSULTATION

4.1 The Council has built up an extensive database of email addresses from residents, partners and other stakeholders who have opted to provide their details to receive information about Council services and consultations. This database received regular emails about the budget options and consultation process.

4.2 The Council's website was also used extensively throughout the consultation, with a home page presence promoting the project. Emails were also sent at regular intervals to our own staff as well as to colleagues working for organisations within the Public Sector Board. The Council's various social networking profiles and other websites were also used to promote the consultation.

- 4.3 Run through Constituency footprint, the Council also held, attended or organised over 200 events throughout the 12-week consultation period. These events were held all across the borough and during afternoons, evenings and weekends to ensure the widest and highest possible levels of engagement.
- 4.4 Questionnaires and information related to the consultation were also distributed through the network of one stop shops, leisure centres, libraries and children's centres throughout the borough.
- 4.5 The local and regional media also promoted and featured the consultation regularly throughout the past 12 weeks. Further coverage was also received through a number of community owned and managed magazines, newsletters and websites. Posters promoting the consultation were also distributed to almost 800 retail locations including post offices, pharmacies, and fast food outlets and off licences.

5.0 STAFF CONSULTATION

- 5.1 The budget options were presented to staff on the day they were published, September 16 2013, through a series of staff briefings held throughout the day at Birkenhead and Wallasey Town Halls. Employees received a presentation from a member of the Chief Executive's Strategy Group (CESG) and were invited to ask questions and provide feedback.
- 5.2 Regular communication with the workforce took place throughout the consultation period, in the form of emails from the Chief Executive and a series of visits to teams and offices by the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive. All correspondence to the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive was also considered as part of the consultation process. Formal consultation with Trade Union representatives was opened on September 16 2013 and a series of meetings have been held on an ongoing basis throughout the consultation period.

6.0 TARGETED CONSULTATION

- 6.1 Many of the options brought particular impacts or changes to service design to specific groups of residents. For these options, targeted consultation events and activity was delivered to ensure they had appropriate, and repeated, opportunities to have their say and feed their views into the process.
- 6.2 Consultation documents were distributed through all Wirral Council Youth Hubs and Centres, and to head teachers of primary, secondary and special schools throughout the borough. The consultation was also heavily promoted on websites such as teenwirral.com and through organisations such as Response, Wirral Youth Theatre, the Executive Youth Board, Civic Awards Groups, National Citizen Service, Wirral Schools Music Service and at the Youth Voice Conference.
- 6.3 The Children in Care Council also held a series of detailed focus groups with over 80 looked after children over the course of the consultation period, concentrating primarily on those options within the Families and Wellbeing directorate but also on other options relating to young people and the local environment.

- 6.4 Members of the Older People's Parliament were also provided with information about the consultation, as did organisations such as Age UK. BME communities were specifically targeted through organisations such as Wirral Change and Wirral Multi-Cultural Centre, who received consultation questionnaires translated into Bengali, Polish and Mandarin Chinese. This work has resulted in a higher than usual response rate from BME communities.
- 6.5 The Council also directly engaged with LGBT communities in Wirral through organisations such as the Terence Higgins Trust and Trans Wirral.
- 6.6 Specific, targeted consultation activity also took place with service-user groups directly affected by the budget options – including friends of the parks groups, bowling and sports clubs, and children's centre users particularly. A local organisation was also commissioned to produce Easy Read versions of the consultation literature to further improve accessibility to vulnerable groups.

7.0 CONSULTATION WITH THE VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH SECTOR

- 7.1 Detailed consultation and discussions with organisations in the voluntary, community and faith sector has taken place throughout consultation period.
- 7.2 This work will continue beyond the budget setting process, and will aim to ensure true and effective commissioning and partnership working between the Council, the public sector and the voluntary, community and faith sector.

8.0 PETITIONS RECEIVED

- 8.1 An e-Petition was received on the Council website entitled 'Children's Road Safety', which was specifically related to the proposal to transfer the costs associated with school crossing patrols to schools. At the time of writing this petition had gathered 11 signatories.
- 8.2 A further petition was received in relation to the option related to charging for parking within some country parks and Fort Perch Rock. This survey was entitled 'Petition to object to the Proposal to Charge Parking Fees at Eastham Ferry and Other Country Parks' and received 1,298 signatures. The Chief Executive was also made aware of a further petition related to Car Parking in Country Parks which was posted on the www.change.org website, which had gathered over 550 signatures.
- 8.3 A petition was also received on behalf of the Friends of Royden Park group, again in opposition to the budget option related to charging for parking at Country Parks. This petition had gathered 4519 signatures when submitted as part of the consultation process. A further petition was received on behalf of Unison, opposing all budget options but particularly highlighting CCTV control room, parks maintenance and car parking in parks. This petition gathered 680 signatures.

9.0 POLICY AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEES

- 9.1 A programme of meetings was held during the consultation process with Members of the Council's three Policy and Performance Committees; Transformation and Resources, Regeneration and Environment and Families and Wellbeing. At these

meetings, Council officers provided a presentation outlining the consultation process and engagement schedule.

- 9.2 Members were also provided with information related to each individual budget option within the scope of the Committee, with officers present to answer questions on the detail of each option in terms of potential impact, mitigation and deliverability.
- 9.3 Members made a number of suggestions at this series of meetings; minutes of which are reported to Cabinet as an appendix to this report.

10.0 ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

- 10.1 The Council used online software to capture all responses and provide analysis of the quantitative aspect of the consultation questions. Responses which are completed online go directly into the system, and any hand written responses are manually inputted into the same system, using clear protocols. A small team of officers who were responsible for organising and attending the schedule of community events were also responsible for ensuring all of the paper responses were accurately input into the database.
- 10.2 All responses to individual questions were analysed regardless of whether questionnaires were fully or partially completed.
- 10.3 Responses were continually analysed to ensure the final sample was as representative of the population of the borough as possible. This information was used to provide ongoing guidance to engagement officers to inform their schedules of events and promotional activity.
- 10.4 Analysis was undertaken for each budget option, and this information can be found at Appendix 1-3 of this report. Individual questions were presented in quantitative format, inviting respondents to select a choice among the following options:
- I would support this under the circumstances
 - I would accept this option
 - I have no opinion on this option
 - I find this completely unacceptable
- 10.5 Responses to the questionnaire are provided to Cabinet according to strategic directorate, with a detailed analysis of both questionnaire response, comments and other submissions received related to each budget option. Information in the form of 'free text' comments through the questionnaire was reviewed and analysed by the project team to identify common themes and suggestions. A summary of these comments is included within the Appendices to this report alongside the appropriate budget option. All of these comments are also available online at the Council website at www.wirral.gov.uk/whatreallymatters
- 10.6 The Council has been running budget consultations in this form since 2010 and consistently receives the highest level of engagement in the UK for any comparable exercise. This budget consultation received 6520 responses, a similar response rate to that which was received for this exercise for 2013/2014 and again higher than anything comparable in the UK.

10.7 The questionnaires include a section to capture demographic, geographic and other personal data about each respondent. These questions are entirely optional to complete, and the questionnaire makes that clear. These responses were analysed on an ongoing basis to monitor appropriate demographic and geographic representation against Wirral baselines. An analysis of this data is available to Cabinet at Appendix 4 of this report.

11.0 RELEVANT RISKS

11.1 A project team was established and met regularly to develop and deliver a project plan, with robust risk assessment arrangements. The key risk for this project is that failure to deliver a successful consultation project will leave the Council unable to develop a corporate or financial plan and make the budget savings required in 2013/14.

12.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

12.1 Council has made a commitment that all decisions related to the budget setting process should be underpinned by comprehensive, genuine and robust consultation with all stakeholders. Therefore no further options have been considered.

13.0 CONSULTATION

13.1 The Council has agreed with the voluntary, community and faith sector to define and strengthen relationships between these sectors for the benefit of all Wirral communities. There is a commitment to extensive consultation with local communities. The legal responsibilities regarding consultation and engagement are set out below.

14.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS

14.1 Engagement with organisations within the voluntary, community and faith sector has taken place and this work will continue to ensure that, where applicable, the sector is fully engaged and able to provide those services where a commissioning need may arise.

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

15.1 Existing staffing resources were used to develop and deliver this project, primarily through the Neighbourhoods and Engagement division, but with support and guidance from all departments.

16.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

16.1 Recent case law has made it clear that any consultation undertaken must be meaningful, informed and reasonable. Failure to ensure this could lead to legal challenge and any decision taken which takes into account the consultation could be undermined and open to challenge by way of Judicial Review. The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 came into force in April 2009 and introduced a duty for local authorities to involve, inform and consult with their communities. The duty is wide-ranging and applies to the delivery of services, policy and decision making and means the Council must consult relevant individuals,

groups, businesses, organisations and other stakeholders that the Authority considers likely to be affected by, or have an interest in, their actions and functions.

17.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

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

Yes and impact review is attached –

<http://www.wirral.gov.uk/my-services/community-and-living/equality-diversity-cohesion/equality-impact-assessments/eias-2010/chief-executives>

18.0 CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

18.1 A number of potential budget options, including the changed use of buildings across the borough, could bring benefits in terms of carbon reductions.

19.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

19.1 Potential community safety implications based on budget options.

20.0 RECOMMENDATION/S

20.1 That Cabinet notes the consultation process and implementation described within this report, and thanks Wirral residents, staff and other stakeholders for their input.

20.2 That Cabinet notes the detailed consultation findings in relation to each budget option as contained within Appendices 1, 2 and 3 and the feedback from Policy and Performance Committee Members which are provided as further Appendices to this report.

21.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

21.1 The recommendations respond to the Cabinet and Council commitment that budget decisions should be taken on the basis of robust, comprehensive and genuine consultation with Wirral residents, Council staff and all stakeholders.

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APPENDICES

- Appendix 1: Budget Options: Transformation and Resources
- Appendix 2: Budget Options: Regeneration and Environment
- Appendix 3: Budget Options: Families and Wellbeing
- Appendix 4: Budget Consultation Demographic and Geographic Data
- Appendix 5: Feedback from Transformation and Resources P&P
- Appendix 6: Feedback from Regeneration and Environment P&P
- Appendix 7: Feedback from Families and Wellbeing P&P

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**BUDGET OPTIONS FEEDBACK:
TRANSFORMATION AND RESOURCES**

1.0 SUMMARY

- 1.1 The options within this strategic directorate are presented in this report, together with the quantitative data gathered through the consultation questionnaire and a summary of any related comments received through the consultation process.
- 1.2 Options in this area primarily relate to ‘Corporate’ budget options, as such relating to either back office functions or cross-Council staff structures. Other options in this area relate to Council Tax; in terms of discounts and collection.

2.0 TRANSFORMING WIRRAL COUNCIL

Proposed Savings:

2014/2015	2015/2016	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s
3111	2500	5611

Option Summary:

- 2.1 The role of Local Government is changing at the most rapid pace in living memory; as more and more funding is removed, Councils are being forced to totally re-evaluate the way they do business – what services they continue to provide, what they outsource to the private and voluntary sector and what services are no longer available.
- 2.2 We intend to pro-actively respond to the changing needs of our communities through remodelling Wirral Council to ensure we are able to deliver the most sustainable, effective, targeted services for our communities possible.
- 2.3 We will address the structure and makeup of the entire Council by working with staff to transform our workforce – its structure, its skills, its priorities and its size. We will totally re-evaluate, re-design and re-structure the organisation. At the end of next year Wirral Council’s funding will have been reduced by around one third – the size of our workforce does not reflect this.
- 2.4 This option would see the workforce reduced in a targeted, strategic fashion, taking an equitable and fair approach to staff regardless of service area. This important exercise will deliver a flexible, fit for purpose organisation better able to adapt to the changing demands of our residents at a time of rapidly diminishing resources. This will also mean that even deeper cuts will not be made in front line services. We will also invest in support and training for our staff during this difficult

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transition period. This would also lead to a reduction in the amount of money which is invested in funding Trade Union Representatives and Training.

- 2.5 The Council could also, as part of this budget option, avoid paying additional costs of £2.373 million (based on 500 staff leaving) by removing the current, generous severance package available to staff leaving the organisation and instead implementing the statutory redundancy package based on actual pay.

Consultation Feedback

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I would support this under the circumstances	38.4%	2012
I would accept this option	21.8%	1144
I have no opinion on this option	8.0%	420
I find this completely unacceptable	31.8%	1670

- 2.6 Comments and further feedback in this area primarily came from Council employees, who expressed concern at the proposal to change the severance scheme from its current level.
- 2.7 However, Members will also be aware that Wirral currently pays one of the most generous severance schemes in the North West, with the majority of Councils paying the statutory rate. Wirral also pays redundancy on actual pay rather than the £450 per week national limit. Some Councils pay redundancy at enhanced rates but do not pay 3 months notice. The current cost of the severance scheme may mean we are able to allow less employees to leave than who volunteer, and it can also make it extremely difficult to 'bump' redundancies.

3.0 INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND TELECOMMS

Proposed Savings

2014/2015	2015/2016	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s
200	70	270

Option Summary

- 3.1 The Council spends around £1.1 million every year on telecommunications, including mobile phones, phone calls, network phones, CCTV, urban traffic control links and schools. This option involves combining all of these aspects into a single contract to deliver significant savings over two years.

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Consultation Feedback

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I would support this under the circumstances	53.4%	2847
I would accept this option	35.1%	1873
I have no opinion on this option	5.9%	312
I find this completely unacceptable	5.6%	301

4.0 MANAGING THE MONEY

Proposed Savings

2014/2015	2015/2016	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s
400	30	430

Option Summary

- 4.1 This option comprises a number of proposals, including improving the way the Council allocates 'capital' funding and achieving savings through insurance fund contracts. A further element of this option is to begin recovering payment transaction charges from customers using online or credit card methods to pay for services.

Consultation Feedback

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I would support this under the circumstances	34.1%	1817
I would accept this option	27.6%	1467
I have no opinion on this option	14.0%	748
I find this completely unacceptable	24.3%	1292

- 4.2 Many people leaving comments and other feedback in relation to this option expressed concern at the element of the proposal related to transaction charges. The Council is able to implement transaction charges just to credit card payments, which are more expensive to process, and not charge transaction charges for payments made with a debit card.

5.0 IMPROVING ACCESS TO THE COUNCIL

Proposed Savings

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2014/2015	2015/2016	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s
250	69	319

Option Summary

- 5.1 This option will see the Council make savings through making the Call Centre more efficient in the first instance. The option will also see significant early savings being made through improving the online channels people are able to use to contact the Council for such things as booking leisure and sports activity

Consultation Feedback

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I would support this under the circumstances	45.7%	2432
I would accept this option	36.4%	1939
I have no opinion on this option	9.4%	502
I find this completely unacceptable	8.4%	448

6.0 COUNCIL TAX COLLECTION

Proposed Savings

2014/2015	2015/2016	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s
140	0	140

Option Summary

- 6.1 The Council could seek Magistrate's Court agreement to increase Summons / Liability Order Costs by £10 for 2014-15 from the current total of £85 to £95 in respect of Council Tax and Business Rates non payers.

Consultation Feedback

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I would support this under the circumstances	48.2%	2212
I would accept this option	36.6%	1681
I have no opinion on this option	5.8%	265
I find this completely unacceptable	9.4%	431

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- 6.2 Comments and other feedback in this area questioned whether the proposed rise in Summons and Liability Order Costs was high enough, and suggested that full cost recovery should be achieved.

7.0 COUNCIL TAX 70 AND OVER DISCOUNT

Proposed Savings

2014/2015	2015/2016	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s
1300	0	1300

Option Summary

- 7.1 Wirral Council provides a Council Tax Benefit to War Widows, people in receipt of a War Pension and people disabled due to War, as well as providing a blanket 7.76% discount on Council Tax to every household where the residents are over the age of 70 – providing they are not in receipt of Housing Benefit or Council Tax Support.
- 7.2 This option proposes that, while the Tax Benefits for war widows, people receiving war pensions and people disabled due to war should remain, in line with the principle of using resources to protect the most vulnerable, the blanket pensioners' discount of 7.75% should be removed.
- 7.3 An option within this option would be to limit the discount only to those properties falling in the lower Council Tax bands (A, B & C). This would fit with the principle of the broadest shoulders bearing the greatest burden and would save £616,000.

Consultation Feedback

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I would support this under the circumstances	32.3%	1504
I would accept this option	22.0%	1024
I have no opinion on this option	5.6%	259
I find this completely unacceptable	40.2%	1874

- 7.4 The comments in this area were varied, with the majority of additional feedback received either suggesting that the discount should remain or that some form of means testing should be applied. Members requested that the responses to this option be expressed according to the age of the respondent. This data is provided below.

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Answer Options	What was your age on your last birthday?			
	16-24	25-44	45-64	65+
I would support this under the circumstances	27%	31%	33%	35%
I would accept this option	17%	23%	24%	19%
I have no opinion on this option	15%	7%	5%	5%
I find this completely unacceptable	41%	39%	39%	41%

**BUDGET OPTIONS FEEDBACK:
REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT**

1.0 SUMMARY

1.1 The options within this strategic directorate are presented in this report, together with the quantitative data gathered through the consultation questionnaire and a summary of any related comments received through the consultation process.

2.0 ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH MODERNISATION

Proposed Savings:

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

Option Summary:

- 2.1 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 a number of posts within the Environmental Health Division.
- 2.2 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.

Consultation Feedback

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I would support this under the circumstances	43.7%	2301
I would accept this option	31.7%	1668
I have no opinion on this option	17.3%	911
I find this completely unacceptable	7.4%	388

3.0 FLORAL PAVILION REVIEW OF OPERATIONS

Proposed Savings:

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

Option Summary:

- 3.1 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.
- 3.2 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.

Consultation Feedback

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I would support this under the circumstances	46.5%	2464
I would accept this option	32.9%	1747
I have no opinion on this option	5.3%	281
I find this completely unacceptable	15.3%	811

- 3.3 Many people expressed support for the Floral Pavilion, which demonstrated how valued the service is. A number of people did also express the view that as a commercial operation the facility should be run in a fashion where it does not require subsidy.

4.0 IMPROVED MEMORIAL SERVICE

Proposed Savings:

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

Option Summary:

- 4.1 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.

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Consultation Feedback

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I would support this under the circumstances	38.1%	1879
I would accept this option	27.7%	1365
I have no opinion on this option	22.7%	1119
I find this completely unacceptable	11.4%	564

- 4.2 Comments received in this area were primarily concerned with ensuring additional and increased income was achieved sensitively.

5.0 BIRKENHEAD KENNELS

Proposed Savings:

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

Option Summary:

- 5.1 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.
- 5.2 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.

Consultation Feedback

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I would support this under the circumstances	50.0%	2494
I would accept this option	35.5%	1774
I have no opinion on this option	8.2%	411

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I find this completely unacceptable	6.3%	313
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6.0 CCTV CONTROL ROOM

Proposed Savings:

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

Option Summary:

- 6.1 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.
- 6.2 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.
- 6.3 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.

Consultation Feedback

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I would support this under the circumstances	47.3%	2379
I would accept this option	34.7%	1745
I have no opinion on this option	6.1%	305
I find this completely unacceptable	11.9%	597

7.0 WILLIAMSON ART GALLERY AND TRANSPORT MUSEUMProposed Savings:

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

Option Summary:

- 7.1 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.
- 7.2 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.

Consultation Feedback

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I would support this under the circumstances	43.3%	2151
I would accept this option	31.2%	1553
I have no opinion on this option	9.2%	456
I find this completely unacceptable	16.3%	810

- 7.3 Comments received in this area were primarily concerned that the facilities involved should remain open to the public, but were generally supportive of the plans to transfer to community ownership.

8.0 HERITAGE FUNDProposed Savings:

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

Option Summary:

- 8.1 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

APPENDIX TWO

groups to enable them to access sources of funding from elsewhere wherever possible.

Consultation Feedback

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I would support this under the circumstances	34.9%	1653
I would accept this option	24.9%	1179
I have no opinion on this option	14.2%	674
I find this completely unacceptable	25.9%	1224

- 8.2 Comments in this area focussed on ensuring that removing this amount of funding did not result in the valued Heritage Events which take place throughout the year being cancelled.

9.0 PARKS AND COUNTRYSIDE MAINTENANCE

Proposed Savings:

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

Option Summary:

- 9.1 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.
- 9.2 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.

Consultation Feedback

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I would support this under the circumstances	10.1%	481
I would accept this option	14.0%	665
I have no opinion on this option	7.7%	368
I find this completely unacceptable	68.2%	3244

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- 9.2 Many people expressed concern at this option, particularly related to the health benefits associated with parks and the potential impact on the local environment. The Council received a series of letters from various parks groups expressing concern at the level of saving and removal of maintenance.
- 9.3 The Council would, if this option was accepted, work closely with Friends groups, bowling clubs and other parks groups to ensure that every opportunity is available for residents to get involved and increase their role in protecting and improving these sites.

10.0 STREET LIGHTING

Proposed Savings:

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

Option Summary:

- 10.1 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.
- 10.2 It is proposed to switch off further street lights to achieve the energy cost saving. A review of the most suitable locations is underway but is likely to include switching off alternate lights on a number of residential streets which are not cul-de-sacs.

Consultation Feedback

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I would support this under the circumstances	37.2%	1719
I would accept this option	27.6%	1276
I have no opinion on this option	4.0%	184
I find this completely unacceptable	31.2%	1440

- 10.3 Many people commenting on this option expressed a view that other sources of saving, specifically LED solutions, would be a better option than switching alternate lights off. A long term strategy for street lighting, and its energy usage, is already in preparation and will consider the benefits of LED lighting along with other equipment and energy consumption reduction options available, or already in use. This

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will identify the long term savings potential and the investment costs required to bring about such savings.

11.0 COASTAL DEFENCE AND HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE

Proposed Savings:

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

Option Summary:

- 11.1 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.
- 11.2 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.

Consultation Feedback

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I would support this under the circumstances	28.2%	1302
I would accept this option	21.5%	991
I have no opinion on this option	10.4%	478
I find this completely unacceptable	39.9%	1838

- 11.3 Comments here were concerned that reductions would lead to safety issues. Investments in unnecessary road signs were also highlighted as areas where savings could be made.
- 11.4 If accepted, this option would see the Council adopt a much more targeted approach to coastal defences and highways maintenance, and ensure funding was directed on the basis of need and robust risk analysis.

12.0 HIGHWAYS WINTER MAINTENANCE

Proposed Savings:

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

Option Summary:

- 12.1 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.
- 12.2 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.
- 12.3 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.

Consultation Feedback

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I would support this under the circumstances	19.4%	894
I would accept this option	13.5%	623
I have no opinion on this option	5.9%	272
I find this completely unacceptable	61.3%	2830

- 12.4 Safety concerns were regularly highlighted through additional feedback on this option, particularly in terms of motorists and older people and those lacking mobility.
- 12.5 If accepted, this option would see the Council adopt a much more targeted approach to winter maintenance, and ensure funding was directed on the basis of need and robust risk analysis. Grant and other community funding through the Council's constituency committees could also be utilised should residents wish to continue funding roadside salt bins.

13.0 HOUSING STRATEGY, STANDARDS AND RENEWALS

Proposed Savings:

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

Option Summary:

- 13.1 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.

Consultation Feedback

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I would support this under the circumstances	41.2%	1889
I would accept this option	30.5%	1397
I have no opinion on this option	15.3%	700
I find this completely unacceptable	13.1%	600

14.0 CAR PARKING CHARGES

Proposed Savings:

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

Option Summary:

- 14.1 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.
- 14.2 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.

Consultation Feedback

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I would support this under the	18.2%	847

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circumstances		
I would accept this option	12.4%	578
I have no opinion on this option	5.4%	252
I find this completely unacceptable	64.0%	2977

- 14.2 Further feedback received in this area centred around the potential negative impact on both the health of residents if they were discouraged from visiting parks, the knock-on effect of people parking on surrounding residential roads, and the potential of discouraging visitors to the borough. A number of petitions were also received in relation to this option, which are detailed in the substantive report.

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**BUDGET OPTIONS FEEDBACK:
FAMILIES AND WELLBEING**

1.0 SUMMARY

1.1 The options within this strategic directorate are presented in this report, together with the quantitative data gathered through the consultation questionnaire and a summary of any related comments received through the consultation process.

2.0 PAYING FOR ADULT SOCIAL CARE

Proposed Savings:

2014/2015	2015/2016	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s
1117	0	1117

Option Summary:

2.1 A major priority within adult social services is to improve the method in which services are charged for; ensuring it is fair, equitable and effective. This work is intended to ensure that everyone using services are financially assessed promptly and importantly that the appropriate levels of charges and financial support for vulnerable people is implemented.

2.2 This proposal includes:

- Charging interest of 4% on deferred payment balances that remain outstanding more than 56 days after the end of the agreement.
- Increase the Council's debt recovery rate from the existing 85% to at least 87.5%.
- Ensure Extra Care Housing clients are assessed under the fairer charging system.
- Make the rates for respite, short term residential and long term residential equal at £120 per week, as is the case at many other Councils.

2.3 It is important that the Council ensures that payments are collected promptly and in a way that is clear and fair in order to deliver a balanced budget, which has been a problem in the past.

Consultation Feedback

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I would support this under the circumstances	42.0%	2202

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I would accept this option	27.6%	1447
I have no opinion on this option	13.1%	687
I find this completely unacceptable	17.3%	906

3.0 REVIEW OF TRANSPORT DEPOT AND FLEET

Proposed Savings:

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

Option Summary:

- 3.1 The transport budget has a turnover of £8.9m and it is proposed that a £100,000 saving is achieved within depot and vehicle maintenance costs. This will be through a consolidation of all vehicle and equipment maintenance for the council on one site, a review of the vehicle fleet, rationalising, modernising and reducing where possible and developing partnerships with neighbouring authorities.

Consultation Feedback

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I would support this under the circumstances	50.8%	2690
I would accept this option	35.2%	1864
I have no opinion on this option	5.1%	271
I find this completely unacceptable	8.9%	474

4.0 SHARED SERVICES AND INTEGRATION (ADULT SOCIAL CARE)

Proposed Savings:

2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
608	10	1200	1818

Option Summary:

- 4.1 Efficiencies can be achieved through sharing resources, in particular through developing shared services across the council and across borders to deliver more efficient use of the workforce. It is national policy to move to integration with the NHS with the aim of improving and streamlining services in the community. As integrated teams are

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developed and assessment and delivery arrangements are streamlined there will be further opportunities for management savings. As part of this option, a single Health and Social Care organisation will be developed, streamlining and improving social care and health services.

4.2 We will move towards this by:

- Reviewing front line services in preparation for full integration.
- Reviewing support services alongside service re-design and streamlined assessment and recording arrangements.
- Reviewing with our NHS partners of the arrangements for the integrated equipment services – ensuring value for money.
- Reviewing Mental Health Services which builds on the review and re-organisation already undertaken by the NHS Partnership Trust.

4.3 This option will deliver an improved, streamlined, effective service for people using services although it will bring an impact on the number of jobs required.

Consultation Feedback

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I would support this under the circumstances	39.2%	1932
I would accept this option	25.1%	1236
I have no opinion on this option	13.9%	684
I find this completely unacceptable	21.8%	1075

5.0 ACCOMMODATION FOR 16-17 YEAR OLDS

Proposed Savings:

2014/2015	2015/2016	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s
600	0	600

Option Summary:

- 5.1 When a 16/17 year old is assessed as at risk of being homeless temporary accommodation is sometimes required, while their needs are assessed. Similarly, young people leaving care to live more independently also need to have their needs assessed, and are frequently placed in accommodation which is purchased as required.
- 5.2 Supported accommodation is currently purchased as required; this is not always the most effective solution for these young people. There are plans to develop a service delivered by a specialist provider within

APPENDIX THREE

a Council owned property. This will not just realise a saving, but will help deliver a better service and outcomes for these young people.

- 5.3 It is proposed that accommodation for care leavers who are moving on to live more independently, should in future be provided by reconfiguring some aspects of existing supporting people contracts to provide accommodation to meet these young people's needs.

Consultation Feedback

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I would support this under the circumstances	43.6%	2162
I would accept this option	33.5%	1662
I have no opinion on this option	12.9%	642
I find this completely unacceptable	10.0%	494

6.0 WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH SCHOOLS

Proposed Savings:

2014/2015	2015/2016	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s
915	300	1215

Option Summary:

- 6.1 This option would involve the Council working in partnership with schools to ensure that our shared resources are used most effectively and equitably to provide the services our young people need. This option would involve working with schools to share the costs and resources required to deliver a number of services, including school crossing patrols, school improvement, the education social welfare service and some of the early retirement costs associated with school staff.

Consultation Feedback

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I would support this under the circumstances	38.6%	1916
I would accept this option	27.7%	1377
I have no opinion on this option	11.1%	549
I find this completely unacceptable	22.6%	1121

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6.2 The Council received a number of letters and emails from parents and some school governors related to this option, which were primarily concerned at a perceived potential for school crossing patrols being removed entirely. It is important to note that the element of this option related to school crossing patrols is concerned with working with schools in the borough so that they fund their operation, and does not involve removing the patrols unless the schools involve decide they do not believe they are required.

7.0 COMMISSIONING AND CONTRACTING (ADULT SOCIAL CARE)

Proposed Savings:

2014/2015	2015/2016	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s
1905	165	2070

Option Summary:

7.1 The Council has significantly strengthened its commissioning functions, which has enabled a strong focus on improving strategic commissioning, procurement and arrangements for ensuring contract compliance. This option will ensure that every penny the Council spends delivers value for money and improved outcomes for people who use services.

7.2 This work is effectively underpinned by key strategic commissioning plans which cover: prevention and early intervention, carers, targeted support, learning disabilities and the Market Position Statement. There is now a developing and maturing relationship with providers from all sectors and a clearer focus in relation to commissioned services.

7.3 This proposal includes:

- A shared approach and understanding on how Council funding is commissioned within the community, voluntary and faith sectors.
- Improvements in the payment process to providers and the introduction of Electronic Care Monitoring.
- Efficiency derived through stronger strategic commissioning.
- Savings derived through effective control of contract inflation.
- Efficiency through review of high cost external contracts and improved outcomes through more effective arrangements in serving people with learning disabilities.

7.4 Most savings within this option come from improving processes and procedures and do not have any impact on the service received by the public. We will work with colleagues and partners in the community, voluntary and faith sectors to ensure any potential impact on them is

APPENDIX THREE

mitigated. There will be potential impact on service users who may experience a change in service provider, as a result however, services should be more effectively aligned to assessed eligible needs.

Consultation Feedback

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I would support this under the circumstances	42.2%	1989
I would accept this option	31.4%	1481
I have no opinion on this option	12.8%	601
I find this completely unacceptable	13.6%	642

- 7.5 Further feedback in this area focussed mainly on ensuring that quality was maintained within any commissioned service.

8.0 EARLY INTERVENTION TO SUPPORT FAMILIES

Proposed Savings:

2014/2015	2015/2016	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s
300	1950	2250

Option Summary:

- 8.1 The numbers of children becoming looked after in Wirral is not any higher than in comparable Councils; however the children do remain in care here longer than they should. This option would focus on early intervention, and supporting more children to safely leave care and live with their families.
- 8.2 Current spend on commissioning or providing care for Looked After Children is £16m per year from a total budget for Specialist Services of £39m. These proposals we will not compromise children's safety and welfare, which remains our top priority and duty. The proposals should reduce the number of children needing more specialist intervention through delivering targeted early help resulting in fewer children needing specialist support and providing capacity to support fewer children to remain looked after for long periods of time.

Consultation Feedback

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I would support this under the circumstances	41.4%	1963

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I would accept this option	30.3%	1435
I have no opinion on this option	13.2%	625
I find this completely unacceptable	15.2%	720

9.0 CAREERS ADVICE AND GUIDANCE

Proposed Savings:

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

Option Summary:

- 9.1 This option refers to the Merseyside wide contract to provide careers advice and guidance to get young people into education, employment or training. The option would involve targeting the work to provide most support to those people who are not in education, employment or training, or most at risk of becoming NEET. Importantly, this service is also provided to young people who need it by many other providers, including schools, colleges and organisations within the voluntary and community sector.

Consultation Feedback

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I would support this under the circumstances	41.7%	2077
I would accept this option	32.6%	1622
I have no opinion on this option	12.8%	635
I find this completely unacceptable	13.0%	645

- 9.2 Some concerns were highlighted in regards to youth unemployment and a potential rise in the NEET rate in the borough should this option be implemented. However, there are many other providers who offer careers advice in addition to Council provision. If this option is accepted we will work with young people and these providers to ensure people at risk of becoming NEET are effectively signposted and get the support they require.

10.0 SERVICE DESIGN AND IMPROVEMENT (ADULT SOCIAL CARE)

Proposed Savings:

2014/2015	2015/2016	TOTAL
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£000s	£000s	£000s
4148	1975	6123

Option Summary:

- 10.1 The Council is required to meet the needs of those who are assessed as having ‘substantial’ or ‘critical’ needs as defined within Fair Access to Care Guidance. The Council currently spends £83.485m on meeting assessed need. Over the past year considerable work has been undertaken to deliver efficiencies through a programme of service re-design and service improvement – thus ensuring that the Council continues to meet its statutory obligations.
- 10.2 The proposed ongoing efficiency is being delivered through:
- Re-configuring intermediate care and reablement and through this reducing the need for high levels of longer term support.
 - Agreement with the NHS to utilising the budget for delayed discharge reimbursement for services that facilitate better hospital discharge.
 - Utilise the Social Care Fund grant more effectively.
 - Commission additional extra care housing as an alternative to care home provision.
 - Commission more responsive home care and increase utilisation of assistive technology
 - Adults and CYP work more effectively to ensure smooth transition into adult services.
 - Streamline assessment processes and realign staffing.
 - Introduce new IT system to support streamlined assessment, recording and production of management information and intelligence.
 - There is no proposal to close any day centres and we will ensure fair and equal access to all day services.
- 10.3 Most savings within this option come from improving processes and procedures and do not have any impact on the service received by the public. The programme of improvement and redesign is aimed at ensuring that there is greater choice for individuals and increased opportunity to be supported at home. Care at home is usually more cost effective and leads to better outcomes for individuals. Service redesign requires an effective change management programme and will affect the way in which assessments are undertaken and there is an impact on working practices.

Consultation Feedback

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I would support this under the circumstances	41.2%	1938

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I would accept this option	26.8%	1263
I have no opinion on this option	14.2%	669
I find this completely unacceptable	17.8%	836

11.0 CHILDREN'S CENTRES

Proposed Savings:

2014/2015	2015/2016	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s
500	1500	2000

Option Summary:

- 11.1 The Council spends over £6 million on providing Children's Centres and associated services. This budget option would enable the Council to save £2m over the next two years without closing any centres, by reducing the front line staff in Children's Centres through restructuring and reducing services at a number of Children's Centres.
- 11.2 We will maintain full service delivery at one main site in each of the borough's four Constituency areas and use an Outreach model to provide services from all the remaining sites. This reduction would be completed in a targeted, strategic fashion to ensure the minimum amount of disruption for the families using the services. The Council has a statutory duty to ensure that there are sufficient Children's Centre services for its population of children under the age of five and their families. It is not proposed to close any Centres at this stage – this proposal will maintain services at four Children's Centres in the borough: Rock Ferry, Seacombe, Pensby and Brombrough. It will reduce the opening hours and services available from the other twelve sites including the two maintained nursery schools.

Consultation Feedback

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I would support this under the circumstances	27.1%	1263
I would accept this option	17.2%	802
I have no opinion on this option	14.0%	653
I find this completely unacceptable	41.6%	1936

- 11.3 This option received comments highlighting that vulnerable and disadvantaged families benefitted most from children's centres and that any reductions in service provision could bring a potential impact of those families requiring further, more expensive services later on.

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- 11.4 This option is part of a full strategic redesign of the service, and will involve a full needs assessment of the families currently using the centres and those who will require support in the future. The new service model will be designed in that context, and will ensure that the resources are effectively targeted at those most in need.

12.0 FAMILY, PARENTING AND YOUTH COMMISSIONING

Proposed Savings:

2014/2015	2015/2016	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s
200	300	500

Option Summary:

- 12.1 This budget option would see a saving of £200,000 being made by targeting the parenting, family and targeted youth support services which are purchased from private and voluntary organisations. It would also see a further saving of £300,000 being made through more efficient and effective commissioning arrangements in relation to family support. It would lead to a reduction in the provision of parenting and family support and youth services and mean the service would be almost entirely focussed on those children and families with the highest level of need.

Consultation Feedback

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I would support this under the circumstances	39.2%	1811
I would accept this option	25.5%	1177
I have no opinion on this option	17.8%	823
I find this completely unacceptable	17.6%	813

13.0 REDUCING SUBSTANCE MISUSE AND TEENAGE PREGNANCIES

Proposed Savings:

2014/2015	2015/2016	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s
160	0	160

Option Summary:

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- 13.1 This area has a partnership budget of £650,000. The council pays other providers to deliver some of this service on its behalf. A budget saving of £60,000 could be reached by reducing the level of service the council buys in around preventing and treating substance misuse. This option would also see a reduction of £100,000 in the funding allocated by the Council to a joint service aiming to reduce the number of teenage pregnancies within the borough. Expertise, support and funding would still be available from colleagues in Public Health.

Consultation Feedback

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I would support this under the circumstances	38.9%	1808
I would accept this option	26.7%	1238
I have no opinion on this option	9.9%	458
I find this completely unacceptable	24.5%	1140

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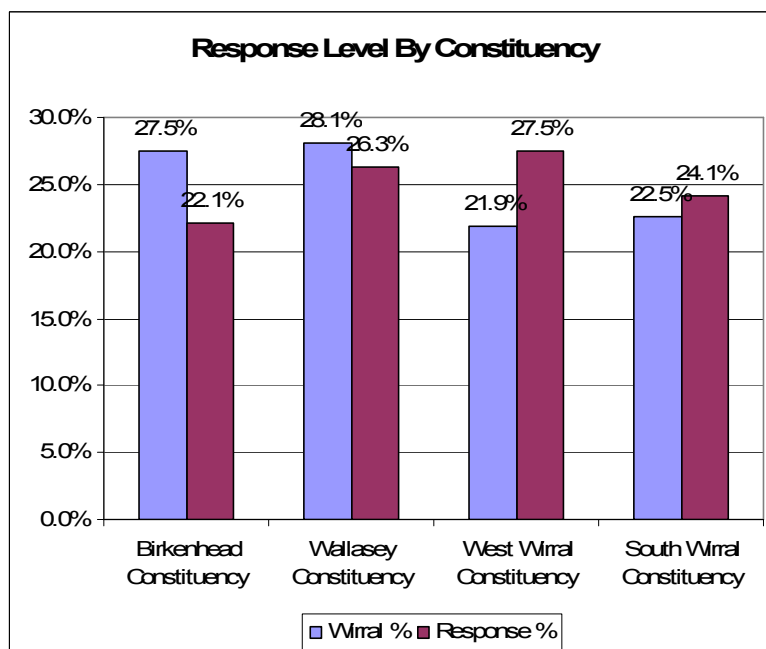
**BUDGET OPTIONS FEEDBACK:
GEOGRAPHIC AND DEMOGRAPHIC DATA**

1.0 SUMMARY

- 1.1 The questionnaire asked a range of demographic and geographic questions in order to measure how representative the response sample was, when compared to the population of Wirral as a whole.
- 1.2 These questions were optional and represent an important element of the Council’s attempt to discharge its statutory duties under the Equality Act 2010. 4309 respondents provided at least some level of response in this section, representing a return of 66% respondents willing to share information about their equality and diversity details.

2.0 GEOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

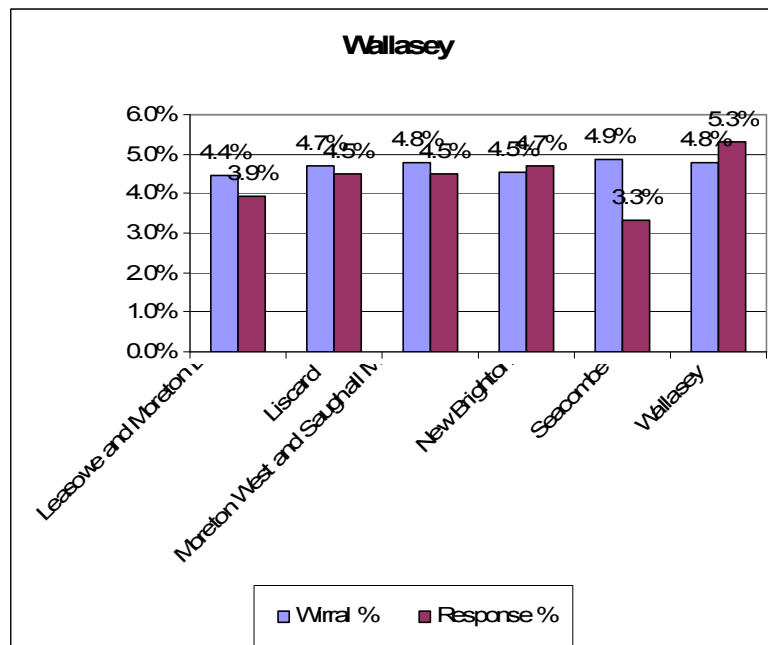
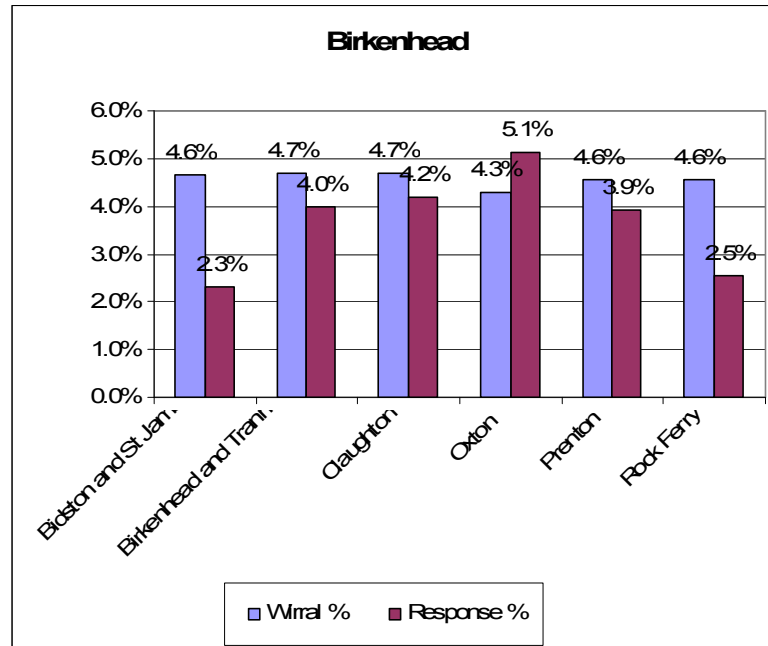
- 2.1 People responding to the questionnaire were asked to provide their post code to enable the Council to ensure that all communities in Wirral were represented in the presented results.
- 2.2 4558 (74%) of respondents gave us a valid post code to indicate their location information. The following chart shows the percentage of respondents who completed the survey against the proportion of the population living in each parliamentary constituency in Wirral.



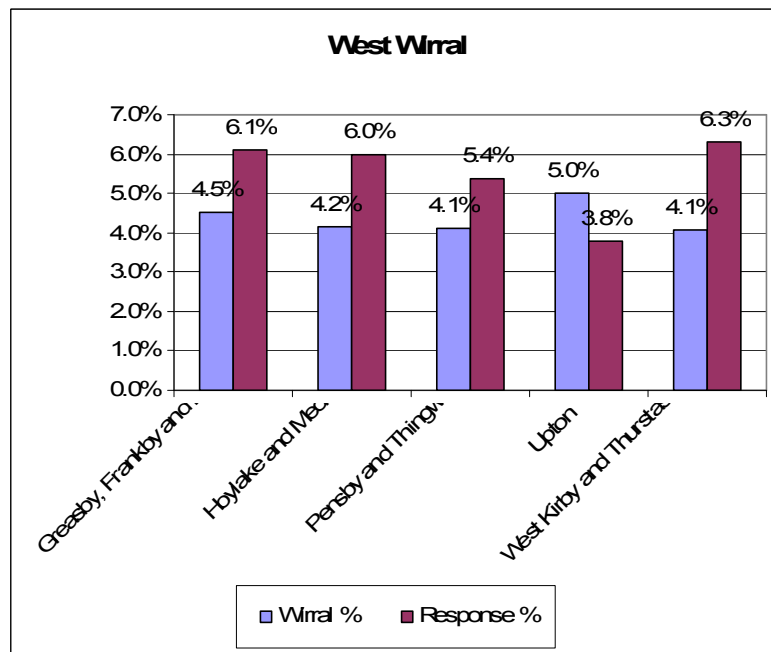
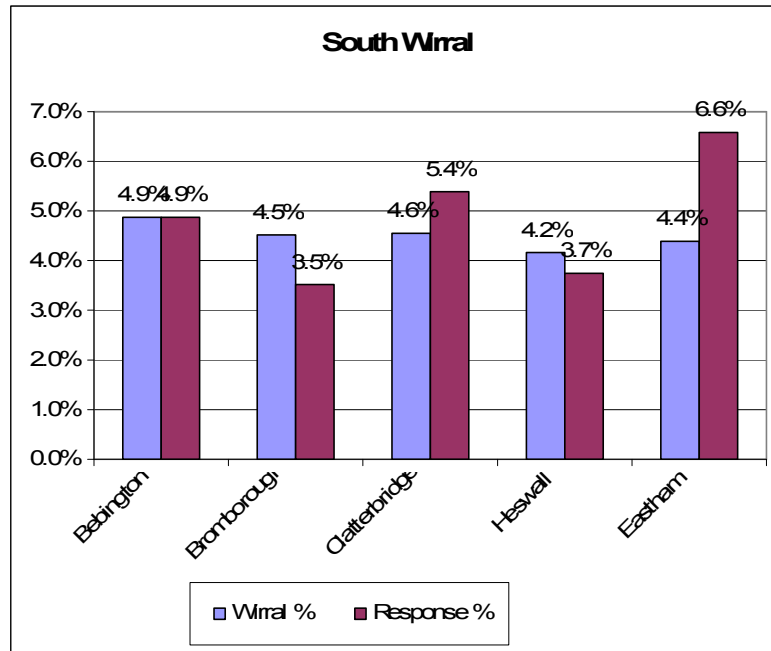
- 2.3 This demonstrates that Birkenhead is under represented, and Wirral West is over represented within the sample. It further shows that, as a Parliamentary Constituency, Wallasey and Wirral South are relatively evenly represented based on the sample compared to population.

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2.4 Generally, it is acknowledged that more deprived areas are often under represented in research consultations. However, a significant effort was made to undertake and focus consultation and awareness raising events in these areas and this has led to a survey sample that is considerably more reflective of Wirral's population than would otherwise be the case. The following four charts demonstrate this same information based on the Wards within each constituency area.



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3.0 DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS – Equality and Diversity

3.1 A number of questions were asked relating to people's demographics. The results to a selection of these questions are provided below:

Gender:

Are you:		
Answer Options	Wirral %	Response %
Male	48%	47.5%
Female	52%	50.1%

Age:

What was your age on your last birthday?		
Answer Options	Wirral %	Response %
Under 16	20%	1%
16-24	9%	3.2%
25-44	24%	29.7%
45-64	28%	40.3%
65+	19%	20.7%

Disability:

Do you consider yourself to be a disabled person?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	8.3%	352
No	86.5%	3676
Prefer not to say	5.2%	222

Ethnicity

3.2 90% of respondents to the consultation were White English or White British. This is actually slightly under-representative of the 'White British' population in Wirral. Based upon the 2011 Census, 94.7% of people in Wirral consider themselves to be 'White British', suggesting that Black and Minority Ethnic groups are well represented within the sample.

4.0 RELATIONSHIP TO COUNCIL

4.1 A further important question which was asked and used to analyse the responses to the consultation was regarding the relationship between the respondent and the Council. The vast majority of our respondents

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are residents of Wirral (88.8%), with 18.4% of responses coming from members of staff, and 2.6% (156) responses being received from local businesses.

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TRANSFORMATION AND RESOURCES POLICY AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 6 November 2013

<u>Present:</u>	Councillor	S Whittingham (Chair)	
	Councillors	RL Abbey P Gilchrist C Blakeley P Glasman R Gregson J Hale	M Johnston M Patrick L Rowlands J Salter A Sykes J Williamson
<u>Deputies:</u>	Councillor	P Brightmore (In place of C Muspratt)	
<u>In attendance</u>	Councillors	A Jones	A McLachlan
<u>Apologies</u>	Councillor	A Hodson	

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

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

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

No such declarations were made.

19 MINUTES

A Member, referring to minute 13, 'ICT Strategy' commented that she had not received anything in writing from the Interim Head of ICT as yet on the security of the Wrap2 system, the Strategic Director of Transformation and Resources, assured the Committee that he would follow this up.

Resolved – That the minutes of the Transformation and Resources Policy and Performance Committee of 23 September, 2013 be approved.

BUDGET OPTIONS

The Committee received a presentation from Kevin MacCallum, Marketing and Engagement Manager, Neighbourhoods and Engagement, on the process of the Budget Options consultation. The consultation was launched on 16 September with extensive online promotion. There had been around 200 events to date with direct engagement with 20,000 Residents. To date, a total of 5,000 responses had been received, 4,000 from residents and 1,000 from members of staff.

Budget options had been developed with the focus on four principles:

- Being More Efficient
- Working Together
- Promoting Independence
- Targeting Resources

The consultation would close on 6 December, with the results being considered by Cabinet on 10 December and recommendations from the Cabinet being considered by Council on 16 December, 2013.

In response to questions from Members on the consultation process, Kevin MacCallum made the following comments:

- A fifth of the responses so far were from staff and these could be disaggregated from total responses if there was a different view between staff and residents when the results were published.
- Responses from community organisations would count as one response although they would be highlighted in the results and shown as community responses.
- Although direct engagement had taken place with 20,000 people so far only 4,000 questionnaires had been returned from the public, though this engagement was comfortably the highest level of engagement of any similar consultations in the country.
- He would be able to supply a breakdown of responses by ward to all the Committee.
- More time was spent going to particular established groups, with over 200 so far having been consulted.
- The staff working on the consultation were neighbourhood engagement staff whose role it was to spend 52 weeks of the year doing this type of work.
- This was now the third or fourth time such a consultation exercise had been undertaken and the response rate was continually improving.
- The neighbourhood engagement staff were continually being made aware and finding out of new community groups being established and these were then involved and added to the consultees.

- Staff would knock on doors and try and talk to as many people as possible particularly in hard to reach groups of residents.

Councillor Blakeley commented that the Committee had no idea of what the people of Wirral's responses were to the consultation until it had concluded and what really mattered was what the people of Wirral wanted.

Councillor Hale commented that there was no reference to consulting with Councillors in the Chief Executive's message in the consultation paper foreword. Whilst fully supporting the consultation process he expressed concern about the interpretation of responses and that many of the questions were very general.

Councillor Johnston commented that political criticism of the process undermined the consultation process which was previously started under a Conservative / Liberal Democrat administration.

Councillor Brightmore commented that the Committee was meeting to scrutinise the budget options and not to make any decisions.

The Strategic Director commented that the published officer proposals to meet budget savings were an opportunity to pre-scrutinise and discuss the options in advance of consideration by the Cabinet on 10 December with proposals to be decided by Council on 16 December.

It was moved by Councillor Blakeley and seconded by Councillor Hale that –

'The meeting stand adjourned to be reconvened on a date when the budget consultation results are known and can be considered by the Committee.'

The motion was put and lost (4:10).
(Councillors Blakeley, Hale, Rowlands and Sykes voting for the motion).

The Chair then invited the Committee to consider each of the budget options in turn and comments, questions and responses were made as follows:

1. Transforming Wirral Council

- A request was made for a table to be supplied to all the Committee Members giving details of the current number of funded trade union representatives and listing where they were seconded from (Councillor Gilchrist)
- There was a need for more details around where the 500 staff losses occur and what would this mean in terms of service delivery (Councillor Johnston)
- With regard to severance, now it was no longer in the remit of the Employment and Appointments Committee, where would the decisions

be made and what were the views of the Trades Unions on this?
(Councillor Johnston)

The Strategic Director and Head of HR and OD in response stated that they would be able to provide details of the numbers of full time TU officials. There were significant areas within the Council where there were higher costs when benchmarked against similar sized authorities and Ernst and Young, appointed as consultants to deliver details of the remodelling option. An initial report on the proposals would be available within the next two weeks which could then be discussed with Members and the TUs. A detailed structure change proposal would be available by the end of January. The views of the TUs through consultation on the severance and funding for TU representatives option would be fed back in due course.

The decisions on any proposed changes to severance packages would be recommended by the Cabinet budget meeting for a decision by Council in December.

Further comments and questions included:

- The proposed savings are over two years, how much would relate to the principle 'promoting independence'?. (Councillor Glasman)
- The Conservative Group take these options very seriously but there was a need to listen to what the public think as what really matters was what matters to the people of Wirral. He would be happy to question officers on these proposals when the people of Wirral had spoken. (Councillor Blakeley)
- A request was made for a breakdown of when the savings would take effect. (Councillor Patrick)
- The savings were quite frontloaded, how confident was the Strategic Director of achieving these and mitigating any impact on service delivery? (Councillor Brightmore)

The Strategic Director, in response, stated that this option was not about reducing service delivery to customers but rather about achieving a smoother, more efficient running of the Council with reduced resources. The impact on direct service delivery he hoped would be kept to an absolute minimum. This option would be spread over two years with discussion beginning early in the New Year with savings being realised from October 2014. As soon as any decisions were made then a full risk assessment would be taken.

The Head of HR and OD stated that there were 8,658 full time employees (non-teaching), of these 4,570 were Trades Unions members (53 %). There were currently 8 full time seconded TU representatives a ratio of 1 to 571 staff. A proposed reduction to 4 full time seconded TU representatives would give a ratio of 1 to 1,143 staff.

2. Information Technology and Telecommunications

- There had recently been some discussion on the numbers of mobile telephones issued to staff. (Councillor Gilchrist)
- Are there any estimates for these renegotiated merged contracts and was the option in respect of CCTV the same as that reported under the Regeneration and Environment directorate. (Councillor Johnston)
- Why was this even an option when renegotiation for telecommunications contracts should be taking place each year to achieve value for money. (Councillor Sykes)
- How much would the Council be saving taking broadband away from Members and asking them to pay for it themselves. (Councillor Salter)
- How was the figure for a saving of £270,000 arrived at? (Councillor Patrick)

The Strategic Director and IT Services Manager stated that a report would be taken to the Audit and Risk Management Committee on 25 November on the mobile telephones issues. There had certainly been no double counting in respect of the CCTV saving. It was not part of the budget option to reduce any IT access for Members. Tenders were sought each year for these services although the benefit of a single contract for these services was now thought appropriate to enter into at this time. Conversations were held with suppliers to gain a certain level of intelligence as to what savings could be achieved and information on those companies contacted could be shared with Members.

3. Managing the Money

- What impact would this have on the customer? (Councillor Gilchrist)
- Could the introduction of a charge for credit charge payment increase levels of debt in those least well off? (Councillor Whittingham)
- This could be a disincentive to people paying. (Councillor Brightmore)

The Head of Business Processes, in response, gave details of the current fee charges in respect of processing payment methods. Assessments were not made as to people's ability to pay by credit card, although if people were to use debit card payments the charges for an overdraft would be a lot less than the interest charges on credit cards. The introduction of a charge would hopefully move more customers into paying by direct debit which was the least costly collection method for the Council.

4. Improving Access to the Council

- 'This option will see the Council make savings through the Call Centre more efficient in the first instance', how in the first instance? (Councillor Glasman)

- Would there be a full Equality Impact Assessment undertaken to assess the impact on the vulnerable? (Councillor Brightmore)
- The option was to be welcomed as it would improve services to customers. (Councillor Johnston)
- Did it include the Floral Pavilion? (Councillor Gregson)
- Would there be direct job losses? (Councillor Patrick)
- Were the Council introducing self-assessment kiosks? (Councillor Gilchrist)

The Head of Business Processes responded that this was part of the wider transformation project improving customer access. Moving people away from access where there was a need to talk face to face or on the telephone to complete the process to where there was no need. This would initially apply to the call centre but then other customer access points would also be looked into, such as one stop shops. EIAs would be carried out on all these changes. The changes would not include the Floral Pavilion as this was a more commercially orientated operation. There would be no direct job losses although currently vacant posts within the call centre would be removed. Self-assessment branded Wirral kiosks were already in operation at certain locations.

5. Council Tax Collection

- Was the Council legally obliged to recover all non-payments, however small, when that figure could be in pence and cost more to recover? (Councillor Williamson)
- What were the court fees and had the authority benchmarked against other authorities as to their recovery fees? (Councillor Johnston)

The Head of Business Processes responded that there was no lower amount limit at which the Council did not recover non paid council tax or business rates. Internally, decisions were made as to at what point summons' for non payment were issued. Every local authority paid £3 to the court and the remaining £82 was to cover the Council's costs, the Council was not allowed to profit on these charges. Wirral's charges were believed to be in line with other Merseyside and neighbouring Cheshire authorities.

6. Council Tax Over 70s Discount

- Wirral was one of only a few Councils to provide this discount. (Councillor Gilchrist)
- Would it be possible to operate a tapered discount? (Councillor Whittingham)
- Could the responses to the consultation on this option be broken down by age? (Councillor Glasman)

The Head of Business Processes stated he was aware of only two other authorities in the country who operated an age based discount, with neither discounting as much as Wirral's current discount. A tapered discount might be possible but would clearly affect the level of savings and analysis would have to be undertaken as to whether this was possible within the computer system which currently calculated the blanket discount for 13,000 residents.

Kevin MacCallum assured the Committee that the responses to this option would be broken down by age range.

The Chair then moved, and it was seconded by Councillor Patrick, that –

'The comments and questions from Members be noted.'

It was moved as an amendment by Councillor Blakeley and seconded by Councillor Hale, that the following be added to the recommendation –

'The Committee meets again in December to discuss fully the results of the budget consultation prior to the Cabinet and Council meetings'

The amendment was put and carried (11:3)

Resolved (11:3) –

(1) That the comments and questions from Members be noted.

(2) That the Committee meets again in December to discuss fully the results of the budget consultation prior to the Cabinet and Council meetings.

The Head of Legal and Member Services then advised the Committee that this special meeting would have to be held on Monday 9 December, at a time to be agreed, as the consultation process finished on Friday 6 December, and the Cabinet would be meeting on 10 December.

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REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT POLICY AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 5 November 2013

<u>Present:</u>	Councillor	A Brighthouse (Chair)	
	Councillors	S Foulkes S Williams E Boulton J Crabtree P Doughty G Ellis R Gregson	K Hodson M Johnston P Kearney A Leech D Realey M Sullivan KJ Williams
<u>Cabinet Members:</u>	Councillors	G Davies P Hackett B Kenny	C Meaden H Smith
<u>In attendance:</u>	Councillor	P Gilchrist	

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

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

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

No such declarations were made.

25 MINUTES

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 17 September 2013 be approved.

26 BUDGET OPTIONS

The Council's Marketing and Engagement Manager gave a brief presentation on the ongoing 'What Really Matters?' Budget Consultation process, which sought the views of Members, staff, residents and businesses upon a range of savings options that had been proposed by officers for consideration by the Cabinet, to address a budget gap of £27.5m. The consultation had launched on 16 September 2013 and had followed a similar format to that used last year. He indicated that some 200 consultation events had been held to date and there had been direct engagement with in the region of 20,000 residents, with over 50 permanent engagement points. To date, over 5000 completed

questionnaires had been received, with over 1000 from members of staff. He provided an indication of response levels by Constituency, which were in the process of being evaluated. He assured Members that every comment made would be read and categorised, and published with the results following the close of the consultation exercise on 6 December 2013. The results would then be presented to the Cabinet on 10 December, with a recommendation to the Council on 16 December 2013.

The Labour Group spokesperson referred to comments that had been made by the Chair in a recent leaflet circulated to residents, which questioned the value of the consultation exercise. He sought clarification from the Chair that he was now satisfied with the process in the light of the officer presentation.

In response, the Chair expressed his personal view that the consultation had only limited value, as it was essentially self-selective by those who chose to engage with it. It could not be taken as being fully representative of the views of the people of Wirral but nevertheless, he believed it to be a significant improvement over the exercise undertaken in 2012/2013.

Members noted that the value of the budget options was in excess of the savings required, in order that the Cabinet would be able to respond to views expressed as part of the consultation. A Scrutiny Review had been undertaken by a Task and Finish Group upon the 'Impact of the 2013/2014 Budget Options and Potential Options for 2014/2015' (see minute 27 post).

It was agreed that in the light of the officers' comments upon the following Regeneration and Environment budget options, the individual views expressed by Members should be referred to the Cabinet for consideration –

Environmental Health Modernisation

£235k

- That a quality service should be maintained and the officers do all that is possible to maximise income.
- That consideration should be given as to whether charges could be made for the star ratings awarded to eateries.
- That measures should be put in place to ensure that there is no risk to public health as a result of the saving and that statutory obligations would continue to be met.

Floral Pavilion – Review of Operations

£400k

- That a detailed and thorough review should examine all existing activities to ensure the efficient operation of the facility to ensure it is in a position to operate and compete in a commercial environment, without reliance on a subsidy paid by the Council.
- That there should be an increased use of new and online technologies and, in view of assurances from officers, a booking fee should be introduced.
- There should be a greater exploration of additional income streams to maximise the use of the venue.
- That any proposed parking charge to be introduced in New Brighton should have regard to the potential impact on the Floral Pavilion.

Improved Memorial Service **£95k**

- No comments were made.

Birkenhead Kennels **£40k**

- No comments were made other than the potential for friction between paid staff and volunteers working together, which would have to be monitored.

CCTV Monitoring **£420k**

- That the proposed option be supported, as it seeks to avoid duplication of CCTV monitoring activities being undertaken by the Council and the Police and Fire and Rescue Service Control Room.
- Assurance was sought that the Police and Fire and Rescue Service were committed to the proposal and had the resource to undertake additional monitoring.
- Assurance was also sought that incidents in Wirral would continue to be addressed promptly, with response times not adversely affected.

Review of Williamson Art Gallery and Birkenhead Priory **£400k**
Wirral Transport Museum **£124k**

- Assurance was sought that all artworks had been subject to valuation.
- In response to a question, the officers confirmed that no consideration had been given to the sale of any of Wirral's cultural assets.
- That, in order to retain our 'museum' status and to ensure for the care of the collections, it was essential to have a curator in post.
- In response to a question from a Member, the officers proposed to provide a briefing note to Members on the arrangements in place regarding artwork on tour.
- In response to concerns expressed by Members in relation to the challenging target and ambitious timescales, the officers indicated that the savings identified for the Williamson Art Gallery may be realised over a longer time period. If so, a further report would be presented.
- Clarification was sought that the Transport Museum buildings and collection would remain in the Council's ownership.
- Members commented on the role of volunteers at the Transport Museum and highlighted their professionalism and competency.

Heritage Fund **£40k**

- Members supported the proposed saving option and noted that although a saving of £40k would be realised, the option would allow the retention of a budget for the continued funding of activities, £12k having been spent in 2013/2014 (£5k on a bus and transport event and £7k for heritage open days).

Reducing Parks and Countryside Maintenance

£850k

- That the maintenance of parks and open spaces was fundamental to leisure activities in Wirral and a reduction could have a detrimental impact on tourism.
- That a more balanced approach should be adopted by reducing maintenance in all parks, rather than a complete withdrawal of maintenance in those parks identified.
- That the officers should give consideration to the suitability of sites for an asset transfer or community partnership approach with local residents groups.
- That Wirral's beaches should be excluded from the savings option, and that maintenance, and removal of spartina grass, should continue.
- That more initiatives should be undertaken to encourage the public to have pride in Wirral's beaches and our parks and open spaces, and to take away litter.
- In response to concerns expressed by Members about the potential impact on Wirral's beaches by a proposal by Peel Holdings to dredge the River Mersey, the officers proposed to circulate a briefing note to all Members on the latest position.
- Concern was expressed about additional costs that could be incurred by the Council as a result of the savings option (e.g. health issues arising from unclean beaches and anti-social behaviour in overgrown parks and open spaces).
- That the officers should identify further disused sites that may be put to public use.

Street Lighting

£85k

- Officers agreed to address concerns that were expressed in relation to the procurement restrictions being in place, which could prevent the use more efficient lighting technology and adversely impact on the Lighting Strategy.
- That, with many residents being in fuel poverty, it was not acceptable to expect residents to provide or improve their own lighting on their premises to reduce dependence on public lighting.
- That the officers should investigate and compare the costs and potential savings associated with new LED lighting technology against dimming the existing conventional lighting.

Highways Winter Maintenance

£85k

- Members noted that there was no need for grit bins to be removed and that salt could be provided to them at the request of residents who were able to self help with gritting, particularly in more severe winters and in those areas of the Borough with steep roads.
- It was noted that the provision and suitability of locations of grit bins, based on local requirements, could be better addressed by the Constituency Committees.

Coastal Defence and Highways Maintenance

£25k

- No comments were made.

Restructure of Housing Strategy, Standards and Renewal Team £206k

- Concern was expressed by Members that a reduction in the staffing levels of the Housing Strategy and Standards and Renewal Team could leave the Council without the expertise required to react to changes in national policy or future Government initiatives to secure economic growth and attract investment in Wirral.
- However, Members noted that at the present time, of the seven posts to be deleted to achieve the level of savings, five had already left the employment of the Council on a voluntary basis.

Car Parking Charges

£100k

- Some comments were made that parking at the locations identified should continue to be free, with the exception of new Brighton, where parking charges could be imposed during the day but could be free in the evening so as not to have a detrimental impact on the operation of the Floral Pavilion.
- That, if parking charges were imposed at the locations identified in the savings option, they should be set at a reduced level so as to mitigate the impact on those residents who used those car parks on a regular basis.
- That, if parking charges were imposed at those locations, there would be a requirement to undertake repair works at some sites to bring them to an acceptable standard.
- That the officers should explore the use of modern technology so as to ensure the most cost effective and convenient method of collection.

Members also gave consideration to whether there were any other areas within the Regeneration and Environment Committee's remit where savings could be identified for consideration by the Cabinet.

The Vice-Chair expressed views –

- That representation should be made to the Government to request that LTP funding should not be ring fenced, so as to give greater freedom to local authorities as to how they used the money to meet local need.
- That representation should be made to Merseytravel to explore the possibility of securing funding to subsidise the winter gritting of bus routes.

Resolved –

- (1) That the range of views expressed by Members in respect of the various savings options be referred to the Cabinet for consideration.**

- (2) That the officers be requested to investigate the suggestions for additional savings/income identified by the Vice-Chair.

27 **SCRUTINY REVIEW: IMPACT OF 2013/2014 BUDGET OPTIONS AND POTENTIAL FOR 2014/2015**

The Chair presented a Scrutiny Review: Impact of 2013/2014 Budget Options and Potential for 2014/2015, which had been undertaken by a Task and Finish Group comprising Councillor Alan Brighthouse (Chair) and Councillor Paul Doughty.

Members thanked Councillors Brighthouse and Doughty and the officer support for the significant work they had undertaken on behalf of the Committee, but were disappointed that the second largest political group had not been represented at any of the six meetings that had been held.

The Chair advised that, given the timescales, it had not been possible to review all of the budget options for 2013/2014 in detail, or the potential options for 2014/2015. However, the Group had focused on the most significant options and had made a number of observations and recommendations.

Resolved – That the Scrutiny Review be referred to the Cabinet for consideration of the recommendations alongside the views expressed by Members to each of the Budget Options (see minute 26 ante).

**FAMILIES AND WELLBEING POLICY AND
PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE**

Monday, 4 November 2013

Present:

Councillor W Clements (Chair)

Councillors	M Hornby	T Norbury
	S Mountney	D Roberts
	C Povall	W Smith
	M McLaughlin	J Stapleton
	P Brightmore	J Williamson
	B Mooney	Shoebridge
	S Niblock	Scott

Deputies:

Councillor P.Kearney
(In place of P.Hayes)

Councillor P.Gilchrist
(In place of P.Williams)

Co-opted Members: Mrs H.Shoebridge – Parent Governor Representative
Mr.A.Scott – Diocesan Representative

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

Councillor Clements declared a personal interest by virtue of her employment in an early years setting.

Councillor Hornby declared a personal interest by virtue of his appointment as a trustee/Director of Voluntary and Community Action Wirral.

Councillor Roberts declared a personal interest by virtue of her appointment on the Management Committees of Arch Initiatives and Wirral Council for Voluntary Service.

Councillor Mooney declared a personal interest by virtue of her employment with Age UK.

Councillor Norbury declared a personal interest by virtue of his employment with Merseytravel and by virtue of him having a relative employed at a Children's Centre

Councillor Williams declared a personal interest by virtue of his appointment on the Management Committees of Arch Initiatives.

25 **MINUTES**

RESOLVED:

That the accuracy of Minutes of the meeting of the Families and Wellbeing Policy and Performance Committee held on 9 September, 2013 be approved.

26 **BUDGET OPTIONS**

The Committee considered the summary documents and the budget proposals for the Families and Wellbeing Department. Clare Fish, Strategic Director, Families and Wellbeing introduced the proposals and explained the key principles behind the proposals and indicated that the Directorate would be working alongside, Public Health, Schools and Health to design appropriate services to support those most in need. The priority for the Department was to fulfil its duty to support the most vulnerable whilst providing value for money.

1. **Option: Paying for Social Care**

- Were any of the neighbouring Authorities doing this?
- Was there an estimate of how many people would be charged?
- What was the procedure for dealing with those people who have estates to sell to pay for their care?
- What were the charges for respite care, and how many people could potentially be affected?
- Why was the proposal to increase the Council's debt recovery rate set at 87.5%?

In response to the above questions raised by Members, Ms Chris Beyga, Head of Delivery confirmed that other neighbouring authorities were charging along with the Wirral and indicated that regular assessment were being undertaken but it was expected to affect a small number of people who would be charge and those facing maximum increases would be appropriately financial assessed to ensure affordability. In relation to those people who have property to sell to pay for their care, Ms Beyga indicated that this was a sensitive issue dealt with between the Department, lawyers and the families. In relation to those affected by the charges for respite care, it was confirmed that the estimated number would be minimal; this would be confirmed to Members.

2. Option: Shared Services and Integration (Adult Social Care)

- In relation to the work being done already, were the NHS going to be asked to pay for what they should in relation to services provided?
- In relation to reviews detailed in the option summary how was the savings going to be made?
- What was the potential impact on staff?
- In relation to the proposed reduction in Mental Health provision, would this be kept under review to ensure services could be provided for all ages?
- In relation to the Staff options review, what was the timescale?
- What were the Shared Services options?
- Would there be a negative impact on the delivery of care services?
- Need more specific details and options before consideration at Council

In response to the above Questions/comments raised by Members, Ms Beyga indicated that the Department were currently consulting with the NHS regarding service provision and agreed to provide a briefing note on the details of this to Members. In relation to reviews and the savings to be made, Ms Beyga indicated that the Department were reviewing all its services provision to ensure they were fit for purpose and identify savings where possible. In relation to the impacts on staff, this was yet to be determined a full review on the options would be undertaken in November/December.

With regards to reductions in Mental Health provision. Ms Beyga indicated that she was working closely with colleagues in CWP and undergone a robust review to ensure that there is a high quality service provided and that the service is regularly reviewed.

In response to Members request further information regarding this Budget Option will be presented to the next Policy and Performance Families and Wellbeing Committee meeting to be held on 5th December

3. Option: Commissioning and Contracting

- What is different than that, that's already been done on commissioning and contracting?
- What are Standards for providers?
- Would these services cover a whole range? And how will they be monitored and quality assured?

- Would the contracts include ethics monitoring in relation to zero hours contracts?
- Will there be a mechanism for monitoring care received?
- In relation to the review process, how will actual care provision be monitored?
- In relation to the transitional period, would this be reviewed?
- Is the proposed review process adequate for those with complex needs?
- What timetable will contract providers be given?
- What if people aren't happy with their service provision?
- How will safeguarding issues be monitored?
- Will the process for the letting of contracts be done through Constituency Committees?
- How will the potential impacts on service users in relation to service changes where providers are changed be managed?

In response to the above Questions/comments raised by Members, Ms Jacqui Evans, Adult Social Services indicated that previous contract commissioning posts had been deleted in previous structural changes but were essential to enabling the department to improve its commissioning arrangements. Adults restructure proposals supported by cabinet, had agreed to reinvest in these posts and the Department was now confident it was able to move forward and form effective integrated commissioning partnerships with the CCG and shared services opportunities with Cheshire West and Chester Council. In relation to standards, Ms Evans reiterated that the Department would ensure that the standards of care in the provider sector were acceptable and were above the minimum standard required. The system would now be more robust and contracts would be let with a heavy emphasis on quality.

Ms Evans indicated that the contracts would cover a whole range of services and that she was currently working with Legal and Procurement officers on the tender and interview process and also ensuring robust contract arrangements in place. Regular reviews are to be undertaken, more so with new providers. In relation to ethics monitoring, this would be built in to all contracts going forward

In relation to the monitoring of care, Ms Evans indicated that Quality Assurance officers had been employed and monthly contract monitoring meetings held with providers, evidence is also requested from the providers in relation to performance targets; mystery shopper arrangements were also in place. The department is implementing an electronic care monitoring system which will be cross checked and reviewed at monthly monitoring meetings. Contracts were awarded with a heavy emphasis on quality and providers ability to implement the principles of the ethical care charter. This includes

zero hour contracts. The contract monitoring process will include scrutiny of providers implementing these principles.

Ms Evans indicated that the implementation of the new domiciliary and re-enablement contract would mean a change for many customers. There may be possible TUPE arrangements which would minimise any change of support and therefore mean there would be no change in providers. The transition plan would not be known until the provider contracts confirmed. There was a project and communication plan and the Department would work together with providers to minimise any impact on service users. The full contract will be in place by 6th April 2014. If people are unhappy with their service provision, they can speak directly to their provider or contact Adult services directly, so we can investigate and reach resolution. Individual annual reviews will also continue to be undertaken.

4. Option: Service Redesign and Improvement (Adult Social Care)

- Will the savings target projected for Year 1 be met?
- Are there any plans for the Council to ensure there was one charge for all?
- What are the plans for managing the transition from Childhood to Adulthood Social Services support and how will an integrated service save regarding this save the Council money?
- In relation to the assessment processed, are there plans to improve these?
- In relation to adults with learning disabilities, is the Council moving away from crisis care?
- In relation to respite care do we have any beds? And what if patients don't like the respite facilities we have? What options are available to them?

In response to the above Questions/comments raised by Members, Ms Evans indicated that if the Department kept up the focus and pace then yes the projected target savings could be met. In relation to the regulation of charges for day services, these were dependent on the costs of the service provided, the whole of the day services provision was to be redesigned along with a costing model.

Ms Beyga indicated that in relation to the transition from child care to adult care, an all age disability service is to be designed and services implemented to aid the transition, this would enable the Department to plan for growth and suit all individual needs. Ms Julia Hassall, Director of Children's Services

indicated that by making the service more proportionate and planning appropriately this would lower the cost of care packages.

In relation to the assessment process and crisis/respite beds, Ms Evans indicated that the assessment process was to be improved and that this would be regularly monitored; crisis bed were still commissioned and the service provision would be reviewed to see if services could be provided more effective and efficiently and to offer more choice in the community.

5. Option: Review of Transport Depot and Fleet

Members made no comments on this item.

6. Option: Accommodation for 16-17 year olds

- How was this helping in encouraging young people to stay at home?

In response to the above Questions/comments raised by Members, Ms Hassall indicated that a more structured support mechanism with skilled intervention put in place to help mediate between families to try and resolve issues.

7. Option: Working in Partnerships with Schools

- School crossing patrols, cost of employment was in the past £3,500, now it's risen to £5,000, why?
- This was a lot of money that the school would have to find if they wanted a patrol officer
- Education Social Workers, what was the incentive to get young people into school?
- In relation to the consultation period for schools to be consulted with, why was this so close to the option being considered by Cabinet in December?
- In relation to the figures on non-attendance at schools, was this apparent in particular areas of the Borough?
- Schools Improvement Budget, were there proposed changes?

In response to the above Questions/comments raised by Members, Ms Hassall indicated that in relation to school crossing patrols consultation and a series of meetings was to be held with schools in November 2013.

In relation to the Schools Improvement Budgets, It was reported that there would be a change but not to the service schools received.

8. Option: Early Intervention to Support Families

- What are the criteria used to ascertain a child living in poverty?
- In relation child poverty figures was this higher or lower than the neighbouring authorities and are these figures increasing or decreasing?
- Request for an update on child poverty at a future meeting

In response to the above Questions/comments raised by Members, Ms Hassall indicated that compared to other neighbouring authorities such as Sefton, the Council was slightly higher with our figures showing a slight increase. Work was underway to improve this through better case management.

In response to the request by Members, a further report on child poverty would be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.

9. Option: Careers, Advice and Guidance

- Concern that this option may jeopardise the excellent work done in the past
- Has the careers advice for schools declined over the years?
- In relation to the Combined Authority and skills gap, how will schools access opportunities arising in the region?
- What is the support given to those in deprived areas who have no access via electronic means?
- What brought about the need for change?

In response to the above Questions/comments raised by Members, Ms Hassall indicated that most of the schools have provided their own careers service, but the Council had a statutory duty to provide guidance. A portal has been commissioned for the City Region and also Mersey Interactive which is an online tool available to school regarding the employment opportunities available.

10. Option: Children's Centres

- Under the new plans will families have to travel to access children centres?
- Early Intervention Policy, will this have a negative impact?
- New Ferry: What will the model be for delivery of service for a joint library / Children's Centre?
- Can we have an update on this at the December meeting?

In response to the above Questions/comments raised by Members, Ms Hassall indicated that it was hoped that staff would be able to travel to outreach centres in local communities to support families. Further information regarding this Budget Option will be presented to the next meeting on 5th December

11. Option: Review of Commissioning of Family Support

Members raised no questions or comments on this item

12. Option: Children's Services Commissioning

- What are the impacts on voluntary services?
- Potential impacts differ from those first published for this option, why?
- How will the Department monitor that service users get the support they need?
- Will both the private and voluntary sector be monitored the same?

In response to the above Questions/comments raised by Members, Ms Hassall indicated that it was too early to see what impacts this would have on the voluntary services but all parties would be fully consulted.

27 ATTAINMENT SUB-COMMITTEE

In relation to the Attainment Sub-Committee, Ms Hassall indicated that the Terms of Reference were currently in draft and that the membership had now been agreed with the Chair and Spokespersons.

28 WORK PROGRAMME

In relation to work programme items, A Members suggested that a Task and Finish Group be undertaken to look at Safeguarding Children.

RESOLVED:

That a Task and Finish Group in relation to Safeguarding Children be added to the work programme.

WIRRAL COUNCIL

CABINET

10 DECEMBER 2013

SUBJECT	COUNCIL TAX 2014/15
WARD/S AFFECTED	ALL
REPORT OF	HEAD OF BUSINESS PROCESSES
RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER	COUNCILLOR PHIL DAVIES
KEY DECISION	YES

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This report brings together related issues regarding the proposed Council Tax Tax-Base for 2014/15 upon which the annual billing and Council Tax levels will be set; the proposed Council Tax Discounts and exemptions for 2014/15 and the Council Tax Support Scheme to be used during 2014/15. All, apart from the Pensioner Household Discount, need to be approved by Council by 31 January 2014.

2.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

2.1. The Authority has a number of statutory decisions that it must make each year with regard its administration of Council Tax. The three which are required to be agreed by Council by 31 January are set out in this report.

2.2 The Authority is required to annually determine its Council Tax Tax-Base. This is in order to determine the appropriate levels for Wirral, the Preceptor Authorities (Police & Crime Commissioner and Fire & Rescue Services) and the Environment Agency (Flood Defence). The Tax-Base has a direct impact on the Council Tax that will be levied for Wirral for 2014/15 and the level of Revenue Support Grant received from Central Government. This decision could be a delegated function but the matter is to be considered by Cabinet and Council for 2014/15. The calculation and factors taken into consideration are set out in Appendix 1.

2.3 Local Discounts can be granted under Section 13a of the Local Government Act 1992 and are used in Wirral to support Wirral Women's Aid Refuge and award Pensioner Discounts. These are reviewed annually. The Local Government Finance Act 2012 introduced changes in national Council Tax discounts and exemptions. These were considered and adopted for 2013/14 by Cabinet on 24 January 2013 and cover the level of discount awarded on empty properties and the premium charged on long term empties. Wirral chose to maximise the amount payable in each category and must review its charges for 2014/15. The calculation and factors taken into consideration are set out in Appendix 2. The Pensioner Discount in 2014/15 is the subject of public consultation the results of which are a separate report on this agenda.

- 2.4. In April 2013 the Government replaced the national Council Tax Benefits Scheme with a localised scheme of support which would be set and administered by each Council to support people on low income. Certain national parameters remain such as previous levels of support must continue for pensioners and vulnerable people. Wirral's Council Tax Support Scheme is largely based on the previous Council Tax Benefit Scheme. The Scheme must be approved by 31 January prior to the year it will be applied. The calculations, implications and factors taken into consideration are set out in Appendix 3

3.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 3.1 If the Council Tax Tax-Base figure is not declared by 31 January 2014 the Council and Preceptor Authorities will be unable to make considered budgetary decisions that could delay the Council Tax bills and income streams for 2014/15.
- 3.2. In respect of Local Discounts and Exemptions the changes made last year to domestic empty property charges raised anticipated collection by £3 million. Collection is ongoing and a lower figure than the overall collection rate is being collected. Any changes to the current level of discounts or reduction to the empty premium would see a reduction in Council Tax raised by this means and the money lost would have to be replaced by another income stream.
- 3.3. That the Council Tax Support Scheme will give a different level of support to people which if allowed will increase their risk towards further financial hardship. For the Council this Scheme has the capacity to be a growth item and impact on its overall budgetary position because if the decision is taken to raise the amount of support given then the cost of the Scheme rises.

4.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 The Local Discounts and Exemptions and the Council Tax Support Scheme could be amended from that proposed which will have financial impact for the authority as set out in each part of this report.

5.0 CONSULTATION

- 5.1 No consultation is required in the calculation of the Tax-Base. The Discount and Exemptions are maintained at the previous year's level and no direct consultation has been undertaken on making no change. The Council Tax Support Scheme similarly stays unaltered in its Scheme rules and as such this does not require formal consultation as was undertaken last year in its introduction.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS

6.1 A number of charge payers will see their Council Tax charges increase and will then look to access these organisations for support and advice.

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

7.1 The Council Tax-Base is used to calculate Council Tax levels for 2014/15. Failure to comply with timescales could delay Council Tax bills with the potential to affect collection and cash-flow. On the assumption that the levels of support under the Local Council Tax Support Scheme and the Discounts and Exemptions remain unchanged from 2013/14 the increase in the Council Tax-Base from 2013/14 to 2014/15 will result in increased Council Tax income of around £0.9 million in 2014/15. Of this sum £0.4 million was assumed in the Budget Projections for 2014/15.

7.2 For Local Discounts variations to the discounts will either generate additional or less income. The cost of local discounts are met in full by the Council and do not impact upon the Council Tax-Base. Any saving to the Council will result in an increase in the amount payable by the charge payer.

Table 1: Local Government Act 1992 Local Discounts

	£
Wirral Women & Children's Aid	3,502
Pensioner Discounts (at 31 October 2013)	1,348,000
Council Tax Discretionary Relief (Hardship)	50,000
Total	1,401,502

Table 2: Local Government Act 2012 Empty Property Discounts

Income from minimising discounts	£
Empty properties – renovation (Discount D) of 0%	143,700
Empty properties – unoccupied (Discount C) of 0%	2,203,200
Empty property – premium of 150%	566,700
Total	2,913,600

7.3 If the Pensioner Discount is retained at the current level, ie a 7.76% discount, there will be an increased budget requirement in 2014/15 of £26,000 to meet existing claimants if a 2% Council Tax rise is implemented.

7.4 For 2014/15 the Council Tax Support Scheme will be retained bar for the up-rating amendment and any increase in overall Council Tax. The likely cost of the Scheme will be £27.9 million based on the current charges.

7.5 It is estimated that an additional £265,000 will be required if it was agreed to fund the up-rating increase in Council Tax Support which is in line with similar up-rating increases in respect of Housing Benefit. If not agreed then the amount paid by charge payers would increase.

- 7.6 It is estimated that £530,000 will be required to fund a 2% Council Tax increase in 2014/15. This covers the increase for all recipients including pensioners and vulnerable categories (62% of our caseload, £330,000 of this sum) that have to be covered at the 100% maximum support under national legislation. If this is not agreed then the increase in Council Tax could fall to be fully met by working age charge payers in receipt of Council Tax Support seeing a disproportionate increase in their maximum payable from 22%.
- 7.7 There are no IT, asset or specific staffing implications arising directly from this report.

8.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The legislation requiring this calculation is the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax-Base) Regulations 1992. This requires the Authority to declare, by means of Council resolution, the Tax-Base it will use to calculate the tax level and this resolution must be no later than 31 January in the year preceding the tax.
- 8.2 This decision, could be delegated under Section 84 of the Local Government Act 2003, amended Section 67 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, such that a full Council meeting is no longer required to adopt the Council Tax Base. The Council could then delegate the Tax Base determination function in accordance with Section 101 of the Local Government Act 1972.
- 8.3 Publication of the Council Tax Discounts and Exemptions and the Council Tax Support Scheme for 2014/15 is required by 31 January 2014.

9.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The link to the Equality Impact Assessments for the Discount and Council Tax Support Scheme <http://www.wirral.gov.uk/my-services/community-and-living/equality-diversity-cohesion/equality-impact-assessments/eias-2010/finance>

10.0 CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are no implications arising directly from this report.

11.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 There are no implications arising directly from this report.

12.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 12.1 That the figure of 87,786.2 be approved by Cabinet and recommended to Council as the Council Tax-Base for 2014/15.

- 12.2 That the level and award of each local discount for 2014/15 be made as follows:-

Wirral Women's & Children's Aid

To award the Refuge discount of 50% and the Flat's Discount of 75%.

Pensioner Household discount

Cabinet is asked to consider whether it wishes to vary the current Pensioner Household discount.

Empty Property Discounts

The discount and premium rate remain unchanged for 2014/15 as follows:
Discount category D 0% - Full charge on properties undergoing renovations.
Discount category C 0% - Full charge on empty properties from date they become unoccupied.
Empty Premium 150% - Properties empty for more than two years

- 12.3 That the Council Tax Support Scheme approved for use in 2013/14 be also approved as the Scheme for 2014/15 subject to:-

The annual up-rating of figures be in line with that used for the Housing Benefits Scheme.

The views of Cabinet are sought as to whether the funding of the up-rating (£265,000) and the impact of a potential Council Tax rise should be met by the Council or the charge payers.

The views of Cabinet are sought as to whether the funding of any Council Tax increase should be fully met by the Council or the charge payers. For example a 2% Council Tax rise would require funding of £530,000 to be identified.

13.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 13.1 To allow Members to be aware of the Council Tax base for 2014/15 and the factors taken account in its calculation.
- 13.2 To allow Members to decide on the level of Local Discounts and the content of the Council Tax Support Scheme for 2014/15 taking account of the financial issues impacting on the authority as well as charge payers.

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APPENDICES

- Appendix 1 COUNCIL TAX TAX-BASE 2014/15
Appendix 2 COUNCIL TAX LOCAL DISCOUNTS 2014/15
Appendix 3 COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2014/15

REFERENCE MATERIAL

Department for Communities and Local Government; - Council Tax (CTB1) form and accompanying documentation.

Local Government Finance Act 1992, 2003 and 2012.

Valuation Office Agency - Valuation List.

Welfare Reform Act 2012.

Council Tax Reduction Scheme (Default Scheme) (England) Regulations 2012.

SUBJECT HISTORY

Council Meeting	Date
Cabinet	11 December 2011
Cabinet	24 January 2013
Council	28 January 2013

COUNCIL TAX TAXBASE 2014/15**1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1. The Authority is required to annually determine its Council Tax-Base. This is in order to determine the appropriate levels for Wirral, the Preceptor Authorities (Police & Crime Commissioner and Fire & Rescue Services) and the Environment Agency (Flood Defence). The Council Tax-Base has a direct impact on the Council Tax that will be levied for Wirral for 2014/15 and the level of Revenue Support Grant received from Central Government.
- 1.2. This Council Tax-Base can be a delegated function. However it is considered that the matter is considered by Cabinet and Council for 2014/15. The Council Tax-Base must be agreed by 31 January 2014 and will be used to calculate the Council Tax charges for 2014/15.

2. BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

- 2.1. The Tax-Base calculation process is as follows;
- Calculate the number of properties at 11 November 2013 adjusting for changes due to demolitions and new builds which are then converted to the Band D equivalent.
 - Adjust for discounts, exemptions and disabled relief and add in any changes expected over the year reflecting the Local Council Tax Support Scheme and changes to empty discounts.
 - Convert the number of “discounted” dwellings in each Council Tax Band to Band D equivalent;
 - Adjust the total number of Band D equivalents by the estimated Council Tax collection rate for the year. The amended calculation is as below and will be utilised in calculating the Council Tax charge for 2014/15.
- 2.2 The properties per Council Tax band within Wirral as at 11 November 2013:-

Table 3: Wirral Council Tax bandings November 2013

Band	Value (£)	Properties 2012	Change	Properties 2013	Band %	Ratio
A	<40,000	58,950	-253	58,697	40.1	6/9
B	40,001-52,000	31,354	+275	31,629	21.6	7/9
C	52,001-68,000	27,182	-48	27,134	18.6	8/9
D	68,001-88,000	13,070	+65	13,135	9.0	9/9
E	88,001-120,000	8,086	-33	8,053	5.5	11/9
F	120,001-160,000	4,230	+3	4,233	2.9	13/9
G	160,001-320,000	3,093	-6	3,087	2.1	15/9
H	>320,000	270	-2	268	0.2	18/9
Total		146,235	+1	146,236	100.0	

- 2.3. The properties are then converted to the Band D equivalent and adjusted for the Local Council Tax Support Scheme and other Council Tax Discount, Exemptions and Disabled Relief and then adjusted by the Collection Rate to give the Council Tax-Base.

Table 4: Wirral Council Tax Band D calculation 2014/15

Band	Band D equivalent at 11 November	Changes due to Council Tax Support Scheme, Discounts, Exemptions and Disabled Relief	Net Band D equivalent
A	33,345.0	12,128.1	21,216.9
B	21,982.5	3,649.6	18,332.9
C	21,884.7	1,911.6	19,973.1
D	12,036.8	602.3	11,434.5
E	9,142.2	246.8	8,895.4
F	5,720.4	118.6	5,601.8
G	4,827.9	39.0	4,788.9
H	465.0	0.3	464.7
Band A Disabled (1/9 th of Band A)	55.7	28.8	26.9
Total	109,460.2	18,725.1	90,735.1
Collection Rate			x 96.75%
Adjusted Council Tax-Base			87,786.2

- 2.4 The Collection Rate takes into consideration previous experience and current collection rates. Last year's projections are so far proving accurate and it is recommended to continue with the Collection Rate of 96.75%.
- 2.5 The reduction from 2011/12 levels of 98.5% to 96.75% reflected:-
- the substantial impact caused by non-payment due to the introduction of the Local Council Tax Support Scheme in 2013/14, affecting over 15,000 Working Age cases replacing the previously fully funded Council Tax Benefit. It is expected, and so far confirmed by the first months of collection, that £1 million of the £3million billed, the equivalent to 1% will not be paid.
 - the changes to Council Tax Exemptions and Discounts, affecting over 13,000 properties in year, from 1 April 2013. Although raising substantial Council Tax, £3 million, collection rates confirm that £750,000, equivalent to 0.75% are unlikely to be paid.
- 2.6 The Collection Rate is the rate that best reflects collection over more than just the current year and will therefore take longer than the financial year to achieve. All previous year collections have ultimately met or exceeded projections and this rate should be achieved for 2014/15 despite the significant changes from 2013/14.

2.7 The recommended figure for 2014/15 is 87,786.2. Compared to the 2013/14 figure of 87,116.4 this is an increase of 669.8 reflecting the actual Local Council Tax Support figures and the changes to Empty Property exemptions to 0% discount and full charge from 1 April 2013.

2.8 The level of Council Tax is confirmed at Budget Council which for 2014/15 is scheduled for 25 February 2014.

3.0 RELEVANT RISKS

3.1 If the Council Tax-Base figure is not declared by 31 January 2014 the Council and Preceptor Authorities will be unable to make considered budgetary decisions that could delay the Council Tax bills for 2014/15.

4.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1 None. The Council has to set the Council Tax-Base by 31 January each year.

5.0 CONSULTATION

5.1 None required in calculating the Council Tax-Base figure.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS

6.1 There are no implications arising directly from this report.

7.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS, FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING AND ASSETS

7.1 The Council Tax-Base is used to calculate Council Tax levels for 2014/15. Failure to comply with timescales could delay Council Tax bills with the potential to affect collection and cash-flow.

7.2 On the assumption that the levels of support under the Local Council Tax Support Scheme and the Discounts and Exemptions remain unchanged from 2013/14 the increase in the Council Tax-Base from 2013/14 to 2014/15 will result in increased Council Tax income of around £0.9 million in 2014/15. Of this sum £0.4 million was assumed in the Budget Projections for 2014/15.

7.3 There are no IT, asset or staffing implications arising directly from this report.

8.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 The legislation requiring this calculation is the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax-Base) Regulations 1992. This requires the Authority to declare, by means of Council resolution, the Tax-Base it will use to calculate the tax level and this resolution must be no later than 31 January in the year preceding the tax.

8.2 This decision, could be delegated under Section 84 of the Local Government Act 2003, amended Section 67 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, such that a full Council meeting is no longer required to adopt the Council Tax Base. The Council could then delegate the Tax Base determination function in accordance with Section 101 of the Local Government Act 1972.

9.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no implications arising from this report and an Equality Impact Assessment is not required.

10.0 CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no implications arising directly from this report.

11.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There are no implications arising directly from this report.

12.0 RECOMMENDATION

12.1 That the figure of 87,786.2 be approved by Cabinet and recommended to Council as the Council Tax-Base for 2014/15.

13.0 REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

13.1. To allow Members to agree and be aware of the Council Tax-Base for 2014/15 and the factors included in its calculation.

COUNCIL TAX LOCAL DISCOUNTS & EXEMPTIONS

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Local Discounts and Exemptions are subject to an annual review and impact directly upon the Council Tax income to the Council. From 1 April 2013 the Council adopted 0% discount levels for empty properties and properties undergoing construction, where previously they had been exempt for 6 and 12 months respectively thus receiving a 100% discount. This report reviews the initial year's experience of these reduced discounts and increased charges and also the current levels of specific local discounts. Any amendment or granting of discount agreed as part of this report will come into force from 1 April 2014.

2.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

2.1 Councils can reduce the Council Tax paid by using locally defined discounts. The discount granted can be anything up to 100% and is met fully from Council resources. The original driving force behind the introduction of these discounts was to allow Councils to react to local circumstances such as flooding or other natural disasters. These discounts do not affect the Tax-Base calculation and are not required to be published in advance.

2.2 Any amendment or granting of discount agreed as part of this report will come into force from 1 April 2014.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1992 – LOCAL DISCOUNTS

2.3 Local Discounts, as used by Wirral, are granted under Section 13a of the Local Government Act 1992 and reviewed annually.

Table 5: Local Government Act 1992 Local Discounts in Wirral 2013/14

	£
Wirral Women & Children's Aid	3,502
Pensioner Discounts (at 31 October 2013)	1,348,000
Council Tax Discretionary Relief (Hardship)	50,000
Total	1,401,502

Wirral Women & Children's Aid

2.4 Cabinet on 22 July 2004 awarded a local discount to Wirral Women's and Children's Aid. The discount has been confirmed annually to date at 50% for the refuge and 75% for both flats, leaving no Council Tax to pay, on the basis of the valuable work undertaken at the premises. The circumstances have remained unaltered and the cost of the award is currently £3,433.

2.5 A decision is required as to whether this discount continues for 2014/15.

Pensioner Households

- 2.6 Wirral has operated a non-means tested local discount for pensioner households since 2007/08. The qualifying age for households was reduced to 70 two years ago. The discount includes any preceptor authority increase and is currently worth 7.76% of the Council Tax payable.

Table 6: Pensioner Households Discount 2013/14 at October 2013

Council Tax Band	Recipients Oct 2013	Pensioner Reduction in payment per band	Full award per household
		£	£
A	2,765	169,916	76.11
B	3,084	227,670	88.79
C	3,887	334,642	101.48
D	2,041	200,179	114.16
E	1,424	174,957	139.53
F	787	113,255	164.90
G	469	79,236	190.27
H	24	5,041	228.33
Totals	14,481	1,304,887	

- 2.7. Cabinet will be aware the continuation of this discretionary discount scheme is the subject of public consultation through our “What Really Matters” consultation on the Budget proposals, the results of which are subject to a separate report on this agenda.
- 2.8. The What Really Matters consultation included the following option:-

Table 7: Pensioner Households Discount restriction at November 2013

Band	Total Granted	Budget Saving
	£	£
No Awards given – scheme ended	0	1,348,000
Award only to Bands A, B, C	732,000	616,000

- 2.9 A decision is required as to whether this Pensioner Discount continues and then specifying the qualification criteria and recipient amounts for 2014/15.

Council Tax Discretionary Relief

- 2.10 Regulations allow that a discount can be granted to an individual in case of extreme hardship and that is covered by the Council’s Council Tax Discretionary Relief policy (minute 71, 10 October 2013) or a discount can be granted to all empty properties within a specific area, such as a clearance area. This can give more flexibility to the Council which has to fund any locally defined discounts.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2012 – DISCOUNTS AND EXEMPTIONS

- 2.11 The Local Government Finance Act 2012 introduced changes in national Council Tax discounts and exemptions which gave local authorities local discretion as to levels of discounts. These were considered and adopted by Cabinet on 24 January 2013 (minute 166) for the 2013/14 financial year and Wirral chose to maximise the charges it raises by minimising the discount awarded, ie 0%.

Table 8: Local Government Act 2012 Empty Property Discounts 2013/14

Income from minimising discounts	£
Empty properties – renovation (Discount D) of 0%	143,700
Empty properties – unoccupied (Discount C) of 0%	2,203,200
Empty property – premium of 150%	566,700
Total	2,913,600

Empty Properties Discount

- 2.12 The changes allowed by the 2012 Act covered charges made against empty property and second homes. In broad terms this removed the exempt classifications A and C and allowed Councils to define their own level of discounts re-categorising them as discounts C and D. The Regulations also allowed Councils to apply a premium on properties that had been empty for more than two years with the maximum premium being 50% on top of the 100% Council Tax already levied.
- 2.13 Council chose to award 0% discount (Discount D) – full charge - on properties undergoing renovations (Exemption A) which were previously entitled to a 12 month exemption, or 100% discount. The major impact other than increased charges, based upon this change is that as there is no incentive to inform the Council that a property is undergoing major repairs. The reported number of cases dropped from 132 last year to 92 for the same period in 2013/14. This maximisation of charge has raised an additional £143,723 in Council Tax during 2013/14.
- 2.14 Council chose to similarly award a 0% discount (Discount C) – full charge - on empty properties that had previously been exempt for the first six months that they were empty, or 100% discount. This has received the most negative comments in our contacts. Disputes have increased between tenants and landlords as to the date a tenant left the property. Previously as there was a six month exemption neither party was immediately liable as Council Tax was not payable and so nearly all were able to be adequately resolved. The charge is levied now from day one and disputes often occur which have to be resolved by Council Tax staff. This maximisation of charge has raised an additional £2,203,194 in Council Tax during 2013/14.

- 2.15 A further issue for landlords is that this immediate charge does not give any opportunity to “turn a property around” for a new tenant to take over without incurring a Council Tax liability. Landlord representative’s state they are denied rental income whilst readying a property for a new tenant but are charged full Council Tax in that time. If the Council were to grant a 100% discount for the first month that a property became empty this would clearly alleviate some of the problems mentioned. However if this proposal from landlords was implemented then this would cost £400,000 in lost Council Tax income.
- 2.16 The Council similarly resolved to charge the maximum amount of Premium on properties that had been empty for more than two years which is 150%. The aim of this was to encourage prompt property re-occupation and discourage properties being held empty by speculators waiting for an increase in values. Our records indicate that this has not had the effect hoped for as yet. The number of long term empty properties in Wirral increased from 700 to 772 over the last 12 months. However to remove the Premium would cost £566,717 in lost Council Tax income if property eligibility levels in 2014/15 are the same as in the previous year.

3.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 1.1 The changes made last year to empty properties raised anticipated additional Council Tax charges in the region of £2.9 million net. Collection is ongoing and a lower figure than the overall charged sums is being collected.
- 1.2 Any increase to the current level of discounts, or reduction to the empty premium, would see a reduction in Council Tax raised and collected. The income foregone would have to be replaced by another income or budget stream or would be a cut in total Council budgets.

4.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 The options available are detailed in Section 2.

5.0 CONSULTATION

- 5.1 The continuation of the local discount scheme for Pensioner Household Discount is a Budget Option within the ‘What Really Matters’ consultation.
- 5.2. The level of charges for discounts and exemptions were consulted on in 2012/13 and no specific consultation has been undertaken on their levels for 2013/14 as they are not proposed to be changed. The highlighted issues that landlords have made the service aware of are set out in this report.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS

6.1 A number of charge payers who see their Council Tax charges increase will look to access these organisations for support and advice.

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

7.1 The financial impact is dependent on the level of Local Discounts that Cabinet / Council resolves to take forward and variations to the discounts will either generate additional or less income.

Table 9: Local Government Act 1992 Local Discounts

	£
Wirral Women & Children's Aid	3,502
Pensioner Discounts (at 31 October 2013)	1,348,000
Council Tax Discretionary Relief (Hardship)	50,000
Total	1,401,502

Table 10: Local Government Act 2012 Empty Property Discounts

Income from minimising discounts	£
Empty properties – renovation (Discount D) of 0%	143,700
Empty properties – unoccupied (Discount C) of 0%	2,203,200
Empty property – premium of 150%	566,700
Total	2,913,600

7.2 The cost of local discounts are met in full by the Council and do not impact upon the Council Tax-Base. Any saving to the Council will result in an increase in the amount payable by the charge payer.

7.3 If the Pensioner Discount is retained at the current level of 7.76% there will be an increased budget requirement in 2014/15 of £26,000 to meet existing claimants if a 2% Council Tax rise was implemented.

7.4. There are no IT, asset or staffing implications arising directly from this report.

8.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Legal publication of the decisions made will be required.

9.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The Equality Impact Assessment link is shown; <http://www.wirral.gov.uk/my-services/community-and-living/equality-diversity-cohesion/equality-impact-assessments/eias-2010/finance>

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 the level and award of each local discount for 2014/15 be made as follows:-

Wirral Women's & Children's Aid

To award the Refuge discount of 50% and the Flat's Discount of 75%.

Pensioner Household discount.

Cabinet is asked to consider whether it wishes to vary the current Pensioner Household discount.

Empty Property Discounts

The discount and premium rate remain unchanged for 2014/15 as follows;
Discount category D 0% - Full charge on properties undergoing renovations.
Discount category C 0% - Full charge on empty properties from date they become unoccupied.
Empty Premium 150% - Properties empty for more than two years

13.0 REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

13.1 To allow Cabinet to decide on the level of local discounts to be awarded for 2014/15 being able to take account of the financial issues impacting on the Authority as well as charge payers.

COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2014/15

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report details the current status of recipients of Wirral's Council Tax Support Scheme and details options available for consideration for 2014/15 and proposes the scheme to be adopted be largely unaltered from that used in 2013/14. The 2014/15 scheme must be adopted by Council no later than 31 January 2014.

2.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES - COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT

- 2.1 Central Government abolished Council Tax Benefit (CTB) on 31 March 2013 and tasked each administering Council to formulate an individual Local Scheme to replace it. At the same time Central Government reduced the grant they awarded to Councils for CTB by 10%. The Government also stated that any local Council Tax Support Scheme (CTS) devised should leave pensioners no worse off than they were under the 2012/13 CTB scheme. The option was also given to define vulnerable groups and offer the groups the same level of protection as pensioners. Wirral designated persons classed as disabled or with disabled children as vulnerable in 2013/14.
- 2.2 At 1 December 2013 there were 38,089 Council Tax Support claimants in receipt of Council Tax Support totalling £27.9 million. The caseload of 38,089, declining from 39,667 at the end of CTB, is split into three categories:

Table 11 : Council Tax Support Scheme claimants at 1 December 2013

By category	Numbers	% of total
Pensioners	16,274	43%
Vulnerable Groups	7,213	19%
Working Age	14,602	38%
Totals	38,089	100%

- 2.3 Having regard to the financial pressures Council resolved, on 28 January 2013, that it could not find funding from its existing budgets to make up the shortfall between 2012/13 and 2013/14 and decided to pass on the reduction to Council Tax Support recipients that resulted in working age claimants paying a minimum of 22% of the Council Tax charge. This decision was supported by both the Council's "What Really Matters" consultation scheme and the separate consultation scheme on the Council Tax Support Scheme.
- 2.4 The Government did offer additional financial support, late on in the 2013/14 process that if the amount to pay for working age was limited to 8.5% a one year grant of £748,000 was offered. However, for Wirral this left a shortfall of £1.26 million and was rejected.

- 2.5 The response to the new Council Tax Support (CTS) Scheme has seen a lower than expected number of appeals against the decisions that Council officers have had to make. CTS was one of a number of changes taking place in the Welfare arena and the main focus of attention has been on the Under Occupancy Regulations (what has become known as the “Bedroom Tax”) which has seen benefits reduced for rent support by 14-25% in some cases.
- 2.6 Payment levels were anticipated to be low, projecting 66% collection rate on these specific sums and thus far are inline with projections and are reported to Cabinet as part of the monthly Revenue Monitoring report. There was a degree of protest at the initial court hearing for non collection which passed peacefully, without incident and the Council obtained the necessary Liability Orders.
- 2.7 The current scheme has been reviewed by officers and consideration has been given to include or exclude different income types on a full or partial basis, cap the level of Council Tax Support Scheme to a particular Band, residency timescales, deduction levels for additional occupiers, capital limits, taper levels and changes to vulnerable groups. This list is not exhaustive but indicative of the areas reviewed. As there has only been an initial year it is felt that no substantive eligibility criteria should be altered and these should be retained for year two.
- 2.8 It is felt that while the impact on individuals has been considerable the local elements within the scheme were not disproportionate in their effect and that the retention of the vulnerable group and qualifying criteria are as fair and equitable as could be put forward balancing this against the financial impacts that face the authority.
- 2.9 Wirral’s Council Tax Support Scheme is largely based on the previous national Council Tax Benefit scheme and its calculations mirror Housing Benefits to build up an entitlement for support. These include applicable amounts, premiums, disregards and non dependant deductions. Each year these are up-rated, for example in line with inflation, or as in this year by a previously set 1%. This up-rating is to be done for Housing Benefits and the Council must approve if it will apply a similar up-rating to Council Tax Support calculations.
- 2.10. The Scheme will be continually monitored and annually reviewed and approved by 31 January prior to the year it will be applied.

3.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 3.1 That the opportunity to amend the local Scheme is not utilised.

4.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1 The local Scheme was reviewed and various options to that Scheme have been considered.

5.0 CONSULTATION

5.1 No specific consultation has been undertaken on the levels for 2014/15 as the main Scheme is retained.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS

6.1 Charge payers who see their Council Tax charges increase will look to access these organisations for support and advice.

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

7.1 For 2014/15 the Council Tax Support Scheme will be retained bar for the up-rating amendment and any increase in overall Council Tax. The likely cost of the Scheme will be £27.9 million based on the current charges.

7.2 It is estimated that an additional £265,000 will be required if it was agreed to fund the up-rating increase which is in line with similar increases in respect of Housing Benefit. If not agreed then the amount paid by charge payers would increase.

7.3 It is estimated that £530,000 will be required to fund a 2% Council Tax increase in 2014/15. This covers the increase for all recipients including pensioners and vulnerable categories (62% of our caseload, £330,000 of this sum) that have to be covered at the 100% maximum support under national legislation. If this is not agreed then the increase in Council Tax could fall to be fully met by working age charge payers in receipt of Council Tax Support seeing a disproportionate increase in their maximum payable from 22%.

7.4. There are no IT, asset or specific staffing implications arising directly from this report.

8.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Publication of the Council Tax Support Scheme for 2014/15 is required by 31 January 2014.

9.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The Equality Impact Assessment link is shown.
<http://www.wirral.gov.uk/my-services/community-and-living/equality-diversity-cohesion/equality-impact-assessments/eias-2010/finance>

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 the Council Tax Support Scheme approved for use in 2013/14 be also approved as the Scheme for 2014/15 subject to:-

The annual up-rating of figures be in line with that used for the Housing Benefits Scheme.

The views of Cabinet are sought as to whether the funding of the up-rating (£265,000) and the impact of a potential Council Tax rise should be met by the Council or the charge payers.

The views of Cabinet are sought as to whether the funding of any Council Tax increase should be fully met by the Council or the charge payers. For example a 2% Council Tax rise would require funding of £530,000 to be identified.

13.0 REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

13.1 An annual decision has to be taken on the Local Council Tax Scheme which includes decisions as to the funding of the impacts of up rating calculations in line with Housing Benefits and of increases in Council Tax levels.

Service Name	Service Description	Primary Service Type	Gross Budget	Staffing Budget	Premises Budget	Recharge Budget	Capital Charges	Net Budget	Total FTE	Total Staff	Total Daily Capacity	Comments
Cambridge Road	Day service with a base in Wallasey but also delivering services from four community settings.	Centre based day service with community engagement	682,400	419,800	26,300	207,900	28,400	681,500	14.01	18	43	
Eastham Centre	This service provides an environment conducive to nurturing and developing individuals. There are also active links made with local communities and other agencies.	Centre based day service with community engagement	779,700	524,500	47,700	159,700	47,800	767,800	21.94	26	74	
Highcroft Centre	This service provides an environment conducive to nurturing and developing individuals. There are also active links made with local communities and other agencies whilst also offering opportunities to access community based activities.	Centre based day service with community engagement	759,500	376,600	22,600	331,400	28,900	759,500	14.06	19	35	
Heswall Centre	This service offers predominantly centre based support to individuals with complex and profound disabilities. It provides carers with information and acts as a gateway to other services. The service supports maintenance programmes around mobility, diet and challenging behaviours whilst also offering support to individuals enabling them to access community based activities.	Day service for complex disabilities	954,500	588,700	67,700	218,700	79,400	940,700	23.01	31	81	
Pensby Wood	This service offers predominantly centre based support to individuals with complex and profound disabilities. It provides carers with information and acts as a gateway to other services. The service supports maintenance programmes around mobility, diet and challenging behaviours whilst also offering support to individuals enabling them to access community based activities.	Day service for complex disabilities	535,100	350,900	45,900	93,700	44,600	513,100	13.99	20	25	
Dale Farm	Provides individuals with opportunities to learn life skills through the therapeutic use of horticulture.	Life skills development	270,000	157,800	10,600	89,000	12,600	252,200	3.89	4	26	
Best Bites	Employment service which aims to train individuals in the catering profession.	Supported employment	949,900	837,800	24,100	88,000	-	923,100	22.48	25	36	
Masque Theatre	This service is an arts organisation of people who are working towards professional status. It offers a wide range of creative opportunities for targeted participants and new audiences. This service provides a touch base and support facility for people who are currently either in employment or seeking employment in the local community.	Supported employment	117,000	100,100	10,400	6,500	-	112,700	1.00	1	21	
Moreton Centre	This is also a flexible service that enables staff to actively forge relationships with the local community to ensure the potential for people to access community based activities is maximised. This is a service supporting people to obtain work experience and vocational training. The aim is to enable people to progress onto a more independent life and to contribute to the community.	Supported employment	480,600	90,900	19,100	257,900	112,700	433,700	14.20	16.0	35	
Royden Park	The activities are centred on horticulture, conservation and playing an active part in the community.	Supported employment	183,800	147,700	14,800	21,300	-	183,700	5.00	5	23	

Service Name	Service Description	Primary Service Type	Gross Budget	Staffing Budget	Premises Budget	Recharge Budget	Capital Charges	Net Budget	Total FTE	Total Staff	Total Daily Capacity	Comments
Star Design	This is a woodwork service which provides individuals with a wide range of woodwork based activities to help gain/regain the skills required to enter/re-enter employment.	Supported employment	174,300	66,100	49,800	53,000	5,400	153,600	3.00	3	10	