



## **SUPPLEMENTARY AGENDA**

### **Regeneration and Environment Policy and Performance Committee**

<b>Date:</b>	Tuesday, 4 November 2014
<b>Time:</b>	6.00 pm
<b>Venue:</b>	Committee Room 1 - Wallasey Town Hall

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## **AGENDA**

4. **FUTURE COUNCIL BUDGET OPTIONS SCRUTINY REVIEW-  
REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY PANEL (Pages 1 - 18)**

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## WIRRAL COUNCIL

### REGENERATION & ENVIRONMENT POLICY & PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE

4 November 2014

<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b><i>FUTURE COUNCIL BUDGET OPTIONS SCRUTINY REVIEW</i></b>
<b>WARD/S AFFECTED:</b>	<b><i>ALL</i></b>
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b><i>MEMBERS OF THE SCRUTINY REVIEW PANEL</i></b>

#### **1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

1.1 This report presents the findings of the scrutiny review of the Future Council Budget options that fall under the remit of this committee. Members are requested to consider the contents of this report alongside the outcome of the Future Council Public Consultation in referring any comments or formulating any recommendations to Cabinet.

#### **2.0 BACKGROUND**

2.1 The Future Council programme has been developed to enable the Council to respond to the on-going financial challenges it faces. On 10 April 2014, a report was presented to Cabinet setting out the engagement process in support of the programme. Cabinet resolved that the report and the engagement process for the Future Council Programme be referred as a priority for inclusion in the work programmes of each of the Policy and Performance Committees. As such the scrutiny of the Future Council budget options has been undertaken during September and October.

2.2 In order to ensure a consistent approach to scrutinising the budget options, the Chair of the Coordinating Committee convened a meeting of all Policy and Performance Committee Chairs and vice chairs on 3 September. Consideration was given to a review of last year's budget options undertaken by the Regeneration and Environment Committee. The review was consistent with the standard task and finish format and was well received by Members. As such the principles underpinning this approach have been replicated for scrutinising the Future Council budget options.

#### **3.0 APPROACH**

3.1 This scrutiny review falls into the category of pre-decision scrutiny, providing non-executive Members with the opportunity to understand and evaluate the Future Council budget option proposals in advance of any decisions by Cabinet or Council. The review has been time limited in order to meet the schedule for decision-making and as such has been concentrated into a number of focussed question and answer sessions with officers.

- 3.2 The methodology has involved the establishment of a scrutiny review panel to scope out and undertake a series of detailed question and answer sessions with the relevant officers responsible for producing the budget saving proposals. Discussions have focussed on the rationale behind the proposals, their deliverability and the impact and possible mitigation.
- 3.3 The report of the scrutiny panel is included as Appendix 1 to this report. Each of the budget options examined in detail is presented in terms of the service context, the details of the proposal, the impact proposal and the observations of the review panel.

#### **4.0 RECOMMENDATION/S**

- 4.1 Members are requested to note the contents of this report and highlight any comments or recommendations to Cabinet.

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**FUTURE COUNCIL BUDGET OPTIONS SCRUTINY REVIEW**

**REPORT OF THE REGENERATION & ENVIRONMENT POLICY &  
PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE**

**NOVEMBER 2014**

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## **1. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT**

At the meeting of the Regeneration & Environment Policy & Performance Committee held on 22 September, it was agreed that a Task & Finish Panel would be established to scrutinise the budget options that fell under the remit of the Regeneration and Environment Policy & Performance Committee.

The Review Panel consisted of the Chair and Party Spokespersons, although Members of the wider Committee were invited to participate in the detailed scrutiny sessions. Lead officers for the service areas were invited to each of the sessions to allow Members to question each of the proposals, including the impacts and mitigation.

At the scoping meeting for this review, six budget options out of the eleven that fall under the remit of the committee were prioritised for further scrutiny:

- Preventative Maintenance (Parks and Highways)
- School Crossing Patrols
- Car Parking – Countryside Parks
- Car Parking – Fort Perch Rock
- Public Conveniences
- Roadside Grit Bins

These options were selected in recognition of the level of savings proposed, the public interest they would generate and initial consideration of their impact if implemented. The remaining five budget options not examined in detail as part of this review were:

- Commemorations, Registrations and Memorials
- Charging for Allotments, Bowling Greens and Football Pitches
- Cold Calling Zones
- Pest Control
- Litter and Dog Fouling Enforcement

These five options were generally considered to be about increased revenue generation which was generally accepted as a direction of travel for the Council. Although some concern was expressed with regard to the proposal around charging for Allotments, Bowling Greens and Football Pitches that the respective percentage increases had not been consistently applied.

## **2. MEMBERSHIP OF THE REVIEW PANEL**

Councillor Mike Sullivan (Chair)

### **Other Panel Members were:**

Councillor Dave Mitchell  
Councillor Steve Williams  
Councillor Alan Brighthouse

### **3. PUBLIC CONVENIENCES**

#### **3.1 Context**

The Environmental Health Service manages ten Public Convenience facilities in Wirral. These are predominantly located in retail and coastal areas. The provision of Public Conveniences is not a statutory function and there is no statutory requirement for Wirral to provide this service.

The Public Convenience facilities are open seven days a week (9am – 5pm in the winter and 10am – 6pm in the summer) and serviced by four staff. Whilst detailed usage numbers are unknown, it is acknowledged some facilities are used more frequently than others and peak usage varies during the day and throughout the year i.e. coastal facilities are used more during the summer months.

In terms of other Local Authorities, Liverpool City Council has adopted a market based approach and no longer directly provides any public conveniences and Sefton Council has introduced a charge of 30p per use for facilities they directly provide.

Officers have considered introducing a charge in Wirral. However, there are a number of challenges that make this option impractical for the Wirral facilities, including the very heterogeneous physical design and most not being designed for the fitting of a secure single door meter or turnstile. The infrastructure to install metered doors could be in excess of £20,000 with the annual collections estimated at £5,000.

To achieve a saving equivalent to closing the facilities the annual income target would have to be in the region of £166,300 (budget savings of £141,300, £20,000 capital costs of installing meters and turnstiles, plus the annual collections estimated at £5,000). At 30p per use to achieve this level of income there would need to be over 500,000 users per year. This is unrealistic and officers believe that a reasonable projection would be 50,000 users with an income of £15,000 per annum. For these reasons, the introduction of charges to meet the required level of savings has not been put forward as a budget option.

#### **3.2 Proposal**

The budget option proposes the closure of the ten facilities at the following locations:

- Harrison Drive, New Brighton
- Changing Places Facility, Neptune Development, New Brighton
- Leasowe Common, Moreton Shore
- Garden Lane, Moreton Cross
- Hoyle Road, Hoylake
- Bennett's Lane, Meols
- Grange Road, West Kirby
- South Parade, West Kirby
- Thornton Common, Thornton Hough
- Woodhead Street, New Ferry

This option would realise savings of £141,300 broken down as £96,900 staffing costs and £44,300 non-staffing costs.

To mitigate the impact of this option, the Council would seek to identify potential partners i.e. local community organisations or businesses that may be interested in taking on the operation and maintenance of the facilities in their area. If no suitable organisations could be identified then it is proposed that the facilities would be permanently closed.

### **3.3 Impact**

Whilst the realisation of this saving would be straight forward to deliver, the loss of these facilities would be unpopular particularly amongst the more vulnerable sections of the community.

To mitigate the impact of this option, officers have undertaken an assessment to explore the potential for alternative delivery arrangements through a partner organisation. Of the ten public conveniences, three are considered to have high levels of demand: Harrison Drive (New Brighton), Leasowe Common (Moreton Shore) and South Parade (West Kirby). These sites would be a priority for identifying a delivery partner in order to maintain these facilities.

Three other sites: the Changing Place Facility (Marine Point, New Brighton), Hoyle Road (Hoylake) and Thornton Common (Thornton Hough) are considered to have the potential for an alternative provider to be identified.

Of the remaining sites, three are in town centre locations (Moreton Cross, West Kirby and New Ferry) where alternative provision is considered to be provided either at other Council facilities or in cafes and public houses. The final site at Bennett's Lane Meols is only half a mile from the Hoyle Road facility and as such would also not be a priority site for an alternative provider to be identified.

Legal agreements will be required to support the transfer of facilities to any community or organisation. However, the lead time for this is unclear at this stage.

### **3.4 Conclusions of the Panel Members**

- Members emphasised the importance of the sites that have the highest levels of usage and welcomed proposals to identify an alternative provider at these locations.
- Members acknowledge that further work is required in order to develop potential opportunities to try and keep as many sites open as possible under new operating arrangements.
- Members raised concerns about the potential negative impact on the large numbers of coastal walkers and coastal events if facilities are closed.
- Members acknowledged the potential risks to the sustainability of arrangements where facilities are transferred to community organisations that are dependent on volunteers.
- Members noted that where there are well-established friends or residents groups, the potential for these to act as a delivery partner is stronger.

## **4 SCHOOL CROSSING PATROLS**

### **4.1 Context**

The School Crossing Patrol service has some 102 sites in Wirral. To support the overarching service, there are eleven mobile patrols and two supervisors who provide first line management.

In 2013/14, the Council opened discussions with schools in an effort to share the costs of providing this service. However, despite some positive discussions the Council did not get a consensus from headteachers and governing bodies and there has been very limited take up by schools.

Across the 102 sites, 47 have some form of light controlled crossing such as pedestrian traffic lights, puffin or pelican crossings. Historically, whenever a light controlled crossing has been installed, the School Crossing Patrol site has remained.

Wirral Council has provided School Crossing Patrols using formula-based criteria since 2004 which, although not a national requirement, is deemed good practice. In 2009 a revision to the criteria was approved which included weighting being applied to factors which may assist pedestrians to cross such as road width, accident record and vehicle speed. Since 2009, this weighting has not been amended.

Sites are re-assessed against these criteria every 3 years. As part of this review, surveys are carried out on the number of pedestrians using the crossings and the number of vehicles that go through them. A range of other pertinent factors such as the speed of traffic is also analysed. A review is scheduled for this municipal year and is already under way.

Whilst no sites have been disestablished since 2009, some have proven difficult to recruit to and there are currently 40 staff vacancies across the service. As such, officers make operational decisions on a daily basis to prioritise staff resources to those sites which have no fixed crossing controls (such as lights) and provide the most appropriate cover given the staff available. The service includes 11 mobile (relief) patrols which move to cover short-term vacancies.

### **4.2 Proposal**

This budget option involves revising the Council's criteria and the weighting applied where pedestrian traffic lights, pelican or puffin crossings are already in place.

It is estimated that 41 school sites would have their crossing patrol removed due to the presence of light controlled crossing facilities. National guidance from RoSPA (Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents) indicates that as both School Crossing Patrols and pedestrian crossings serve the same objective (to stop traffic to allow pedestrians to cross) it would be unusual to provide a School Crossing Patrol where there are pedestrian traffic lights.

Implementation of this option would require a revised policy and criteria weighting being approved by Cabinet along with the outcome of the surveys currently under way. The disestablishment of sites would be made prior to the commencement of the 2015/16 school year.

The budget saving of £155k would commence from 2015/16 but would not be fully realised until the end of 2016/17.

### **4.3 Impact**

Risk assessments would be carried out where a school crossing patrol site no longer met the Council's criteria. Any school affected will be consulted with and would have the option to continue funding a school crossing patrol directly.

Where sites do not meet the new criteria, and risk assessments are carried out, mitigation measures will be considered, such as waiting restrictions, vehicle activated speed signs or other physical measures. Whilst the Council does have a statutory duty for road safety, this does not specifically include the provision of school crossing patrols.

Having both a light controlled crossing and a school crossing patrol at the same location can be perceived as a duplication of provision. National Guidelines produced by Road Safety Great Britain indicate that school crossing patrols should not be provided at light controlled crossings as this can cause confusion for pedestrians and motorists.

Children are now educated from year 6 with effective programmes on road safety. It is planned that schools will be provided with additional information on how to use crossings safely.

If the option is implemented, the number of mobile (relief) patrol staff may reduce if the Council does not have the full compliment of 102 sites as the need may not be there.

### **4.4 Conclusions of the Panel Members**

- Members were reassured that the proposal would allow schools to buy the service in (if they did not meet the Council's criteria).
- Members raised concern that whilst schools are becoming more independent, their job and resources should be towards educating children with traffic/transport being the responsibility of the local authority.
- Although Members endorsed the proposal for schools to be provided with safety information as additional mitigation, schools should also be encouraged to ensure their School Travel Plans and Safer Routes to School programmes are reviewed and updated appropriately.
- Officers should take into consideration any comments from the Council's Constituency Committees in relation to school crossing patrols as part of the budget option decision making process.

## **5 CAR PARKING – COUNTRYSIDE PARKS**

### **5.1 Context**

Country parks were established as a result of the 1968 Countryside Act and provide a wide range of opportunities for recreation, health and education to improve the quality of life for local communities. The Council manages 4 countryside parks for the benefit of

residents and visitors to the borough. These are Wirral Country Park, Arrowe Country Park, Eastham Country Park and Royden Country Park. The Council provides a car park at each of these locations and is currently free of charge for all users.

A review of the Council's car parking strategy has recently been completed by the Regeneration and Environment Policy & Performance Committee. This review was set up in response to the standardisation of car parking charges from 1st April 2013. The review has developed a number of principles that should be followed in the development of a borough wide car parking strategy that balances revenue generation with demand and the economic health of local centres across the borough.

## **5.2 Proposal**

The proposal is to introduce pay and display parking charges across all country parks. It is estimated that this will generate income of £50,000 in 2015/16 and a further £15,000 in 2016/17. Wirral's policy of allowing free parking for blue badge holders would continue within these car parks.

For this budget proposal, initial investment is required to provide cash payment ticket machines estimated at a total cost of £60,000 to £80,000 across all four country parks.

It is proposed that surplus income from the car parks, above the target income for the budget option taking into account service costs, would be re-invested for use on projects within the country park where surplus is generated. This will be after the budget saving has been achieved including the deduction of the costs of collection.

In respect of enforcement and cash collection costs, it is anticipated that these would be absorbed within the existing service provision and there would be no direct impact on employees.

The delivery of this budget option would be subject to the requirement to comply with the statutory Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) process and an amendment to the relevant TROs. This could result in objections being received to the TRO proposals which would then need to be resolved before charges could be applied.

## **5.3 Impact**

There is currently very high usage at these car parks. The introduction of parking charges is likely to reduce levels of usage and this is taken into account in the income forecast. The reduction in usage may also have a negative impact on visitor numbers and their contribution to the local economy.

The reduction in usage is considered to be contrary to the Council's Parks and Open Spaces Strategy which seeks to encourage greater use of the borough's parks and open spaces. Widening the use of parks and open spaces is considered to be beneficial for wider public health benefits.

To mitigate the impact of these proposals on local regular users such as by dog walkers, consideration is being given to not introducing charges until 10:00am and the estimated income from car parking charges take this into account. However, it is likely that a review will be carried out on a site by site basis taking into account local factors.

Country park services are reliant on the work and support of friends and volunteer groups. This proposal may impact on the numbers of people becoming volunteers or joining friends groups at these parks. However, consideration is being given to the provision of discounted parking to mitigate this risk.

The proposal could have a negative impact on NHS staff working at Arrowe Park Hospital. To mitigate this, Wirral's policy of providing permits/discounts to traders and their employees for the use of its car parks may be considered.

#### **5.4 Conclusions of the Panel Members**

- Members welcomed proposals to mitigate the impact on friends groups and park volunteers. Members suggested that the Council should offer free parking as an acknowledgement to the contribution they make to the quality of these parks.
- Although Members had concerns about the impact on local, regular users of the country parks; the proposal not to introduce charges until 10am was welcomed.
- Members commented that it was critical to get the pricing of charges right to balance an acceptable level of income generation without reducing visitor numbers significantly.
- Concern was expressed about the impact this proposal would have on the additional cost of a round of golf at Arrowe Park acknowledging price sensitivities around this offer. The impact on Sunday League football players was also recognised.
- Members highlighted concerns about pricing being reasonable and the need for convenient denominations.
- Members also suggested that more flexible payment machines i.e. those that allow for credit card payment could have a beneficial impact on receipts.

## **6 CAR PARKING – FORT PERCH ROCK**

### **6.1 Context**

Wirral Council maintains the Fort Perch Rock car park which is located by the entrance to Fort Perch Rock in New Brighton. The car park has approximately 180 parking spaces and is well used with the ongoing development in New Brighton. The car park is currently free of charge for all users.

A review of the Council's car parking strategy has recently been completed by the Regeneration and Environment Committee. This review was set up in response to the standardisation of car parking charges from 1st April 2013. The review has developed a number of principles which should be followed in the development of a borough wide car parking strategy that balances revenue generation with demand and the economic health of local centres across the borough.

### **6.2 Proposal**

The budget option proposes the introduction of pay and display parking into the Fort Perch Rock car park. The estimated income would be £25,000 in 2015/16 and a further £9,000 from 2016/17. This takes into consideration an estimated 20% reduction in car park usage. For this budget proposal, initial investment is required to provide cash payment ticket machines estimated at a cost of £20,000.

The delivery of this budget option would be subject to the requirement to comply with the statutory Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) process and an amendment to the relevant TROs. This could result in objections being received to the TRO proposals which would then need to be resolved before charges could be applied.

In respect of enforcement and cash collection costs, it is understood that these would be absorbed within the existing service provision and there would be no direct impact on employees.

### **6.3 Impact**

Although the reduction in usage could have a detrimental impact on visitor numbers which could have a knock on effect for businesses, traders and the local economy, it is understood that consultation with stakeholders would be undertaken prior to this option being progressed.

The Council's policy of offering discounted parking permits to the employees of local traders and businesses could also provide some mitigation, which allows their employees to come and go throughout the day without the requirement to use Pay and Display equipment.

There is a risk of displaced parking into adjacent areas. However, it is acknowledged that New Brighton does have sufficient alternative parking provision in the area; both on and off-street, in which there are no charges.

### **6.4 Conclusions of the Panel Members**

- Concern was expressed that this proposal would be at odds with the plan to attract more day time activity (such as conferences) to the Floral Pavilion.
- Members also highlighted a potential negative impact on those attending matinee performances at weekends and over Christmas.
- Members acknowledged that this proposal is different from the Countryside Parks proposal as New Brighton is more like a town centre location with alternative car parking provision available.

## **7 PREVENTATIVE MAINTENANCE (PARKS AND HIGHWAYS)**

This budget option has merged both preventative maintenance budgets for Parks and Highways resulting in an aggregated budget saving of £570,000 if both proposals are implemented.

### **7.1 Context – Highways Preventative Maintenance**

The maintenance of Highways is a statutory duty for the Council as a local highway authority (although the level of maintenance to be provided is not prescribed). Highway maintenance covers all aspects of the highway infrastructure such as carriageways, footways, drainage, street lighting, public rights of way, bridges and other structures, traffic signs and road markings, street furniture, together with coastal defence infrastructure.

Most of the funding to maintain highways is provided through government grants from central government but Wirral is still one of the few local authorities to put extra local money into this fund to carry out the preventative works.

## **7.2 Proposal**

It is proposed to cease all revenue-funded highway maintenance which is not directly safety related, as defined in the Council's highway maintenance policy. Similarly, revenue funded coastal defence infrastructure maintenance will be reduced to that which is strictly necessary for maintaining safety, resulting in a saving of £475,000 in 2015/16.

## **7.3 Impact**

If the proposal is implemented, there would no longer be funding for maintenance which addresses the deterioration of the appearance of highway infrastructure, defects which do not meet the intervention criteria defined in the highway maintenance policy, nor revenue funded maintenance which prevents the deterioration of the highway, including the coastal defence infrastructure.

The proposed saving represents approximately 21% of the revenue funding used directly for highway and coastal defence maintenance activity other than tree maintenance, street lighting energy and the fixed costs associated with winter gritting. This would result in a reduction from £2.2M in 2014/15 to £1.7M in 2015/16 for maintenance work carried out.

Some of the deterioration of highway infrastructure is caused by collisions or vandalism and it is proposed that increased levels of financial recovery are achieved. Approximately £100,000 per year is recovered but the total cost is nearer to £250,000. It is proposed that income be increased by £10,000 in 2015/16. However, this would be reliant on information being received and a campaign to encourage the public to report more incidents would be required which could be beneficial for the Council.

A reduction in the preventative maintenance budget may lead to higher levels of reactive safety repairs being required through the deterioration of the highways infrastructure over time. Long term reductions in preventative highway maintenance and other infrastructure repairs and renewals would mean that maintenance carried out at a later date would be significantly more expensive, resulting in greater levels of investment.

Wirral has been able to maintain a steady capital programme which consists of funding from the Local Transport Plan, funding put in by the Council over a number of years, grants from government and also emergency funding for severe weather, pot holes etc. Officers state that there is a need to ensure capital funding remains available to carry out preventative maintenance to support the reduction in reliance on revenue budget funding.

The highways contractor will be affected through a reduction in revenue funded routine and preventative maintenance ordered through the contract. This could result in some potential job losses in the local workforce employed by the contractor. However, there will be no direct implications for Council staff if this option is implemented.

In respect to the installation and maintenance of apparatus by the utilities, it is understood by Members that there is a national issue with unsightly openings in roads

and poor reinstatements as most work is sub-contracted out to third-parties. Permits are paid for by utilities and their fees would cover the authority's costs. Officers commented that even though Wirral does police the activities of the utilities to a satisfactory level there is likely to be some benefit of having a Permit Scheme if value for money can be proved and this is currently being assessed.

If non-essential maintenance is a priority for the community, then Constituency Committee budget priorities might consider the serviceability maintenance of highway and coastal infrastructure.

#### **7.4 Context – Parks Preventative Maintenance**

Preventative maintenance works carried out on the 210 parks and countryside sites are paid for out of the Parks and Countryside Planned Preventative Maintenance (PPM) budget which is currently set at £384,200. Maintenance work carried out from this budget includes, amongst others, repairs to seats, fencing, walls, footpaths and playgrounds.

#### **7.5 Proposal**

It is proposed that the preventative maintenance budget for parks and countryside is reduced from £384,200 to £300,000 per year. The budgets for the Constituency forums do not include any funding from the preventative maintenance budget.

#### **7.6 Impact**

The Council uses a prioritisation programme of maintenance works to make the best use of the budget, with sites receiving works through the parks preventative maintenance programme in some years but not in others. A reduced budget will result in an increase in competing demand for this funding.

Additional funding may also be required to address maintenance requirements of particular parks - for example communities may look to philanthropy or grant aid from the Lottery to fill gaps in public funding for parks.

Parks have a management plan that determines the main work that should be carried out. The preventative maintenance budget also supports these management works, impacting on what can be spent.

There would be increased risk of tripping hazards and accidents associated with other infrastructure / park furniture should preventative maintenance work reduce. This could cause a rise in complaints and accident claims being made against the Council.

Although there is a backlog of works to be carried out across sites, there is not enough in the budget for them all to be completed. However, part of the budget will allow the service to react to emergencies or significant work that must be carried out.

#### **7.7 Conclusions of the Panel Members**

- Members agreed there is a need to ensure that capital funding remains available to carry out preventative maintenance on highways to support the reduction in reliance on revenue budget funding.

- Members welcomed proposals in principle for the Council to become a Permitting Authority as a means to recover costs. However, the full implications of a Permit Scheme were not fully explored and are yet to be determined.
- Members were surprised at the small scale of the parks PPM budget and had concerns about this being further reduced highlighting the need for Wirral's parks to remain safe and usable in both the short and long term.

## **8 ROADSIDE GRIT BINS**

### **8.1 Context**

Grit bins are items of street furniture which hold rock salt which is spread across roads to counter snow or ice and generally improve safety on roads which are not gritted by any other means. The provision of grit bins is part of the Highway's Winter Service Operational Plan which is developed to enable the Council to respond to ice and snow conditions. The plan covers the precautionary salt spreading on ten identified priority routes and major shopping areas as well as the filling and maintenance of roadside grit bins.

Wirral Council currently has 298 grit bins on the highway. 100 of these were originally located based on an assessment against an essential safety need i.e. roads off the regular gritting network, deemed potentially hazardous in freezing/icy conditions such as road junctions with steep gradients, road junctions near to schools, medical centres or local shopping areas. The other 198 were installed in locations as determined by local area forums and paid for with 'You Decide' funding. Since installation, their filling has been funded through the highways revenue budget.

### **8.2 Proposal**

The budget option is to discontinue the filling of the additional 198 grit bins. This will result in a saving of £55,000 from the highways revenue budget. The Winter Service will continue as normal with regard to gritting the 10 priority routes and major shopping areas as well as the 100 original grit bin locations to provide an essential safety service. There will be an estimated cost of £10,000 in one-off expenditure to remove the grit bins, should this proposal proceed.

### **8.3 Impact**

The provision of grit bins is important in the public perception for maintaining safety levels in winter conditions. However, the effectiveness of additional grit bin provision is questionable in that the grit can degrade over time and needs to be efficiently spread and ground in by vehicles to be properly effective. Officers would consider it more beneficial for the time used filling these additional grit bins to be prioritised on clearing other locations i.e. higher priority safety areas.

Removal of grit bins may have a detrimental impact on vulnerable adults who may not feel safe in leaving their home and become more isolated. These vulnerable residents may not be able to obtain essential items or be able to access or receive specific services, such as medical appointments. This may create more demand for community and voluntary services.

Should this option proceed, consideration would be given to producing appropriate guidance to residents, particularly the more vulnerable. This guidance would include walking safely in icy conditions and how to assist neighbours in clearing snow.

Although the saving has been identified as £55,000, the overall Winter Service budget can be affected by severe winters during which Cabinet may be requested to approve more funding.

As an alternative solution to grit bins for the future, officers are investigating the use of 'drop bags' which have been adopted in other local authorities. The key benefit of drop bags is that they can provide a more flexible and targeted response and avoid the cost of maintaining a stock of grit bins.

There is potential for grit bins to be left for communities, schools or voluntary organisations to take on their continued maintenance and filling. However, it is acknowledged that future maintenance and replacement costs would need to be considered.

#### **8.4 Conclusions of the Panel Members**

- Members noted there is no planned review of the 100 essential grit bin sites. However, concerns were raised that some essential sites may not now be classed as essential and that grit bin sites that are part of this proposal may have more of a case of being essential.
- Members would welcome a report covering future alternative solutions to grit bins, such as 'drop bags', to be presented to the Regeneration and Environment Policy & Performance Committee for discussion.

**Review Title: Future Council Budget Options Scrutiny Review**

**Scrutiny Panel Chair:** Councillor Mike Sullivan – [mikesullivan@wirral.gov.uk](mailto:mikesullivan@wirral.gov.uk)

**Panel members:**

Councillors Steve Williams, John Hale (for scoping meeting only), Dave Mitchell (for scoping meeting and session 1 covering school crossing patrols and public conveniences) , Alan Brighthouse (for session 2 covering car parking, preventative maintenance and roadside grit bins).

**Scrutiny Officer(s):** Mike Lester / Mike Callon

**Dept Link Officer:** Mark Smith

**Other Key Officer contacts:**

School Crossing Patrols – Dave Rees, Rhian Hughes  
 Public Conveniences – Colin Clayton  
 Preventative Maintenance – Rob Clifford, Mary Worrall  
 Car Parking (Country Parks) – Rob Clifford, Mary Worrall  
 Car Parking (Fort Perch Rock) – Rob Clifford  
 Roadside Grit Bins – Rob Clifford

**1. What are the review objectives?**

- To gain a better understanding of proposed budget options that fall within the remit of the Regeneration & Environment Committee
- To prioritise which options the panel intends to explore in greater detail.
- To examine the budget options in terms of their context, rationale, deliverability, impact and potential mitigation.

**2. What specific value can scrutiny add to this topic?**

- Scrutiny can add value by highlighting potential positive and negative impacts of the proposed options to the Executive to inform their decision-making. The scrutiny can highlight potential issues and risks and steps that can be taken to mitigate these.

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

- Cabinet Members
- Members of Full Council

**4. Duration of enquiry?**

This is a time limited piece of work due to the lead in times for reporting the outcome of the public consultation in advance of decision-making by Council.

**5. What category does the review fall into?**

This review falls into the category of pre-decision scrutiny.

**6. What information is required?**

**Primary research:** Discussions with relevant Council officers about the detail of proposals.

**Secondary research:** Previous committee reports, comparator information from other authorities and any supporting data behind the proposals.

**7. Who can provide evidence and what areas do we want them to cover?**

Relevant Council Officers will be required to provide the details behind the proposed budget option including the service context, the rationale for the proposal, the deliverability of the proposal and the impact and any potential mitigation.

**8. What processes can we use to feed into the review? (site visit/survey etc.)**

A full public consultation is being undertaken. The outcome of this will be available to the committee at the same time as the findings of this scrutiny review are reported.