

Living in Wirral Task Force: Options and Recommendations

Introduction

'Wirral's Future' is the largest and most far-reaching consultation exercise ever undertaken by the Council. The decision to develop it was initiated at a meeting of the Council's Cabinet on the 24th June 2010 in response to the existing budgetary challenges faced by the local authority. The level of engagement undertaken within the scope of the consultation has been significant, with over 40,000 paper questionnaires being distributed, as well as being available online. Through the consultation road show, 10,000 people were directly engaged.

Four independent Task Forces were established with a remit to review the Council's services in relation to four areas: Economy and Regeneration; Living in Wirral; Adult Social Services and Children and Young People's Services. The Task Forces were independently chaired. Task Forces were asked to develop a series of options papers which would form the basis of a wider public consultation and programme of engagement with residents, staff, businesses and stakeholders in the voluntary, community and faith sector. The key mechanism for consultation and engagement activities was a questionnaire based on the options papers which contained a general Part A (including questions about satisfaction with Wirral as a place to live) and four themed sections relating to each of the Task Forces. Information relating to the Task Forces and the how the public consultation was undertaken is available at www.wirral.gov.uk/wirralfuture

Living in Wirral Task Force

Discussions took place across the following areas:

- Wirral's environment
- Culture and leisure
- Housing
- Regulation

The Task Force discussed which services are core to the Council meeting its statutory and legal responsibilities and which are non-essential but important for quality of life in the borough. There was agreement that whilst quality of life services such as cultural, leisure and sporting facilities are of importance, there was greater scope for reviewing these services and looking at alternative ways to deliver them.

Further to these discussions, the Task Force agreed a series of options that they wished to be considered and for consultation with the public. The section of the questionnaire relating to Living in Wirral was developed in accordance with the options proposed by the Task Force. The questions asked and the consultation responses can be found at www.wirral.gov.uk/wirralfuture

This document revisits the original options proposed by the Living in Wirral Task Force and makes recommendations for the Council's Cabinet. These have been agreed following consideration of the consultation responses at a final meeting of the Task Force.

Options and Recommendations

A number of options within this report relate to charging for services. The results of the consultation suggested that some form of means testing should be employed in these areas. The Task Force made it clear that, while they are not opposed to means testing, any system should be robust, clear and not cost more than the saving it is intended to make.

The Task Force also recommends that any increases, or introductions of, charging should be related back to Question A7 of the consultation (Please rank your Council priorities).

In relation to Wirral's Environment the Task Force suggests
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The Council **must**:

Option 1

Continue to deliver essential and statutory services.

This option was upheld by the Task Force as a recommendation to Cabinet.

Option 2

Reduce unnecessary red tape in the light of reduced central government control.

This option was upheld by the Task Force as a recommendation to Cabinet.

Option 3

Continue to undertake preventative maintenance on Wirral's roads.

This option was upheld by the Task Force as a recommendation to Cabinet.

Option 4

Maintain the current programme of coastal and sea defence work.

This option was upheld by the Task Force as a recommendation to Cabinet.

Option 5

Continue the commitment to reduce Wirral's carbon footprint.

This option was upheld by the Task Force as a recommendation to Cabinet.

The Council **should**:

Option 6

Renegotiate the Biffa contract for refuse collection and street cleaning to achieve potential savings of £450,000.

This option was upheld by the Task Force as a recommendation to Cabinet.

Option 7

Take a stronger approach to enforcement in relation to trade waste agreements to avoid trade waste being sent to landfill with residents' waste.

This option was upheld by the Task Force as a recommendation to Cabinet.

Option 8

Consider increasing fees for a number of optional Council services – for example, minibus driver training, and collection of bulky household waste.

In the absence of a clear mandate from the consultation, this option is recommended for further consultation work to include a full list of potentially chargeable services.

Option 9

Use the outcome of a current pilot to determine whether the Council should dim street lighting across the borough to save money on energy costs.

This option was upheld by the Task Force as a recommendation to Cabinet.

Option 10

Consider increasing the ERIC (bulky items collection service) charge, whilst increasing education and enforcement to prevent an increase in fly-tipping.

In the absence of a clear mandate from the consultation, this option is recommended for further consultation work to include a full list of potentially chargeable services.

Option 11

Review existing provision of a free garden waste collection service and consider instead introducing an annual fee for the service which could achieve approx. £800k a year. In doing this, the Council must recognise the need for some concessions and the importance of educating people on other options (e.g. composting) to avoid negative impacts such as rats and mice. It would also need to ban garden waste in green and grey bins to prevent an increase in garden waste going to landfill.

In light of the results of the consultation, this option is not recommended. However, the Task Force recommends the Council undertakes further work to investigate the potential for savings through reducing collections or the cessation of collections during winter months.

Option 12

The Council should review how resources are used to support road safety, reflecting what has most impact whilst also considering public priorities.

The Task Force was presented with prioritisation from the consultation, and this is recommended to the Council's Cabinet, to be used in conjunction with evidential information on the impact of road safety measures.

Option 13

Examine non-statutory Traffic Management services and consider whether money is being spent on the right things.

This option was upheld by the Task Force as a recommendation to Cabinet.

The Council should consider **stopping**:

Option 14

Free graffiti removal on private property and examine the possibility of increasing on-the-spot fines for issues such as dog fouling and litter picking. It should also increase the involvement of Neighbourhood Groups. It should also look at extending the income generated by providing the service to partner and private organisations, and look to extend the scheme on a commercial basis to other partner and private organisations.

This option was upheld by the Task Force as a recommendation to Cabinet.

Option 15

The Council should stop differential charging and introduce standard and fair fees in all Council car parks across the borough, with due consideration to the potential impact on local shopping economies and residential streets.

This option was upheld by the Task Force as a recommendation to Cabinet.

Option 16

Look at overheads and delivery costs of all services, and examine where savings could be made by commissioning services externally.

This option was upheld by the Task Force as a recommendation to Cabinet.

In relation to Culture and Leisure , the Task Force suggests

The Council **must**:

Option 17

Continue to offer a comprehensive library service across the borough. However the Council should consider moving some of its 24 library services into the same buildings as other services such as One Stop Shops, community or children's centres to reduce the amount spent on buildings; and also consider improving technology within libraries in order to reduce staffing costs.

This option was upheld by the Task Force as a recommendation to Cabinet.

Option 18

Expand and invigorate the marketing efforts designed to maximise income through sport and recreation centres.

This option was upheld by the Task Force as a recommendation to Cabinet.

Option 19

Maintain the Book Start initiative.

This option was upheld by the Task Force as a recommendation to Cabinet.

Option 20

Complete Value for Money reviews of the high spend in the areas of sport & recreation and open spaces.

This option was upheld by the Task Force as a recommendation to Cabinet.

Option 21

Make projected savings under the Parks & Countryside Services Procurement Exercise and look at any possibilities of increasing these savings.

This option was upheld by the Task Force as a recommendation to Cabinet.

The Council **should**:

Option 22

Improve marketing of its golf and leisure facilities (such as Marine Lake) and consider the introduction of private tuition and holiday clubs to increase income. The Council should also consider a more integrated approach to managing golf courses and all of its leisure facilities to achieve potential efficiency savings.

This option was upheld by the Task Force as a recommendation to Cabinet.

Option 23

Look into sponsorship opportunities for galleries and exhibitions.

This option was upheld by the Task Force as a recommendation to Cabinet.

Option 24

Continue to transfer the ownership of community centres to community-based organisations where they wish to do so.

This option was upheld by the Task Force as a recommendation to Cabinet.

Option 25

Establish what the public's priorities are in terms of Culture and Leisure Services.

Prioritisation of services from the consultation was presented to the Task Force. The Task Force recommends this to Cabinet for consideration.

The Council **should stop**:

Option 26

Direct delivery of the preservation of Wirral's heritage, if it can be more efficiently managed through outsourcing.

This option was upheld by the Task Force as a recommendation to Cabinet.

In relation to **Housing**, the Task Force suggests

The Council **must**:

Option 27

Seek to maximize all sources of external funding to improve current and future housing conditions in Wirral.

This option was upheld by the Task Force as a recommendation to Cabinet.

Option 28

Maximize the contribution of other partners, including the Registered Social Landlords, Private Landlords and Private Developers to investing in current housing stock in Wirral and providing new housing for future generations.

This option was upheld by the Task Force as a recommendation to Cabinet.

Option 29

Ensure that services to prevent people becoming homeless are maintained as this reduces costs further down the line.

This option was upheld by the Task Force as a recommendation to Cabinet.

Option 30

Reduce unnecessary “red tape” in the light of reduced central government control.

This option was upheld by the Task Force as a recommendation to Cabinet.

The Council **should**:

Option 31

Review the delivery of a number of housing services including some aspects of the strategic housing function, the private sector housing function and homelessness services to ascertain if there are other partners or organisations who could deliver some or all of these.

This option was upheld in part by the Task Force as a recommendation to Cabinet, however it is recommended that further work is carried out by officers on whether another organisation could monitor and report on the housing needs of the borough.

Option 32

Give the highest priority to its support for vulnerable people through the ‘supporting people’ programme as this can prevent people from falling into higher need status. However, the Council should review the administration of this programme to simplify the funding process and ensure the payment given and the monitoring process deliver the best value for money.

This option was upheld by the Task Force as a recommendation to Cabinet.

Option 33

Consider alternative ways of delivering the 'home improvement agency' through external contracts and increased partnership with independent providers.

This option was upheld by the Task Force as a recommendation to Cabinet.

Option 34

Accelerate working with partners to bring more empty properties back into productive economic use.

This option was upheld by the Task Force as a recommendation to Cabinet.

Option 35

Consider the options for developing "shared services" for example a sub-regional choice based lettings scheme for Merseyside.

This option was upheld by the Task Force as a recommendation to Cabinet.

Option 36

Review the private sector landlord accreditation scheme as there is some duplication with a national body that provides this function. Consider charging for accreditation.

This option was referred back to Council officers to investigate where, if any, duplication exists before any recommendations are made.

In relation to Regulation , the Task Force suggests
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The Council **must**:

Option 37

Continue providing regulatory and emergency planning services that are largely statutory, provide an essential preventative function and are considered to be value for money when compared with other local authorities.

This option was upheld by the Task Force as a recommendation to Cabinet.

The Council **should**:

Option 38

Review its approach to charging to ensure that services do not run at a loss, and charges reflect the market price.

This option was upheld by the Task Force as a recommendation to Cabinet.

Option 39

Review its community safety provision to ensure it is cost effective and demonstrates added value to police services.

This option was upheld by the Task Force as a recommendation to Cabinet.