

## WIRRAL COUNCIL

### COUNCIL EXCELLENCE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

31 JANUARY 2012

<b>SUBJECT</b>	<b>YOU CHOOSE CONSULTATION</b>
<b>WARD/S AFFECTED</b>	<b>ALL</b>
<b>REPORT OF</b>	<b>DIRECTOR OF FINANCE</b>
<b>RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER</b>	<b>COUNCILLOR STEVE FOULKES</b>
<b>KEY DECISION</b>	<b>NO</b>

#### **1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report provides details of the findings of the You Choose consultation process. The findings are based upon responses received during the consultation process which commenced on 19 August 2011 and closed on 30 November 2011.

#### **2.0 RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1 That the report be noted.

#### **3.0 REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION**

- 3.1 The Local Government and Public Engagement in Health Act 2007 placed upon local authorities a duty to involve. This requires the provision of information and the opportunity for consultation and involvement of residents and other stakeholders. The Budget Simulator along with the development of Neighbourhood Plans is part of a process of engaging and raising the awareness of the residents of the Borough in the issues facing the Council.

#### **4.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES**

- 4.1 The Council has run a number of consultation programmes and events over recent years to seek residents views as to how services should be delivered and areas of priority. For 2012/13 the Council along with many local authorities has used a web based Budget Simulator known as You Choose.
- 4.2 The You Choose budget simulator was developed by the London Borough of Redbridge together with YouGov. You Choose has been used by a large number of local authorities and seeks residents views as to how to close the gap between anticipated expenditure and resources. Respondents were given the opportunity to adjust budgets by dragging sliders on the screen and noting the consequences both to services and to Council Tax levels. The simulator also provided opportunities for respondents to submit suggestions and comments relating to Council services.

- 4.3 For consistency the format used has followed as closely as possible to the previous consultation themes linked to the existing Corporate Plan. To provide maximum flexibility and choice to users, services were divided across the following 8 themes which were further divided over 46 service areas:-
- Your Family Adults
  - Your Family Children
  - Your Neighbourhood: Roads and Waste Management
  - Your Neighbourhood: Public Protection
  - Your Neighbourhood: Culture and Leisure
  - Your Economy: Housing and Community
  - Your Economy: Supporting Business
  - Your Council Support for Services
- 4.4 The simulator commenced with a budget gap of £25 million which was the Budget Projection at the time of commencing the consultation exercise. For 2011/12 all local authorities either froze or reduced Council Tax to benefit from the Council Tax Freeze Grant and the Government had previously indicated that a cap would have been applied to local authorities who increased Council Tax by more than 3%.
- 4.5 To provide opportunities for further analysis respondents were asked to provide details of their gender, age, ethnicity, disability status and the initial part of their post code. Such information however was not compulsory. YouGov has provided additional analysis based upon the above categories which may be used to highlight differences in priorities between groups.
- 4.6 As the You Choose simulator is an online web based tool there was a danger that those without access to IT facilities or lacking IT experience may have been more likely to be excluded from the consultation process. To mitigate this a number of measures were taken including:-
- A letter from the Leader of the Council to every Wirral resident highlighting the simulator, how to access it and a number to call to ask for assistance.
  - Dedicated IT facilities made available at One Stop Shops and Libraries.
  - A dedicated Call Centre telephone line to assist callers with queries regarding You Choose and to take suggestions. Approximately 100 calls were made to the number during the consultation period.
  - Information provided on the Council website as to how to complete the budget simulator and providing contact details for those needing assistance.
  - Additional targeted engagement took place with identified 'hard to reach' demographic groups and geographic areas. This involved events and outreach activity with older people, BME communities, vulnerable adults and younger people.

- 4.7 An extensive programme of events was also completed, with a range of 93 guided workshops or drop in sessions held throughout the consultation period. These events attracted in excess of 750 residents.

## RESULTS FROM THE YOU CHOOSE CONSULTATION

- 4.8 A total of 1,701 submissions were received during the consultation period. Approximately fifty English Councils have used the You Choose package and the Wirral response rate is the second highest.
- 4.9 For the purposes of producing statistically valid data analysis, You Gov has weighted the data received using appropriate statistical methodology to reflect the demographic make up of Wirral. This involves using the 2009 population estimates as published by the Office of National Statistics and sub-dividing over gender, age, ethnicity and disability to form ten interlocked age and gender subdivisions. Each of these is then weighted so that it falls in line with the proportion of the total population who fall into that sub-category. This means that the data is representative of the local population.
- 4.10 In order to undertake the above weighting, submissions that did not contain demographic data or which were incomplete have been excluded from the You Gov analysis. This results in a weighted response total of 1,355. The analysis by postcode shows a further reduction as a small number of returns were received from outside of Wirral, which may reflect input from employees who live outside the Borough. The responses and weighting are:-

<b>Demographic Analysis</b>			
<b>Category</b>	<b>Category Detail</b>	<b>Returns Containing Demographic Information</b>	<b>Weighted To reflect Population</b>
By Gender	Male	861	568
	Female	494	787
By Age	16-24	156	205
	25-34	211	218
	35-44	332	246
	45-54	326	241
	55+	330	445
By Ethnicity	White British	1,214	1,205
	Black Minority, Ethnic	141	150
By Disability	Non-Disabled	1,159	1,136
	Disabled	196	219
By Postcode	CH41 - CH43	414	402
	CH44 - CH46	353	344
	CH47 - CH61	321	331
	CH62 - CH63	229	229

Note: The Postcode Area returns and weighted base show a difference of 11. This is due to the weighting of returns across age and gender and the fact that postcodes with very low responses are not statistically significant and are therefore not shown within the postcode table. Their inclusion would result in an equal figure for the returns and weighting of 1,355.

- 4.11 A summary of the 1,355 complete submissions received, analysed over the major themes and the 1,701 shows there are no significant differences between the two survey population groups. The overall reduction to budgets suggested is approximately 11%. The You Gov report analysing the You Choose responses is shown within Appendix 3.

<b>Service Funding/Option Group</b>	<b>Weighted Average Suggested Theme Alterations</b>			
	<b>Original Value</b>	<b>Average Reduction</b>	<b>Reduction in budget</b>	
			<b>Pop 1,355</b>	<b>Pop1,701</b>
Your Council - Support for Services	38,400,000	6,304,000	-16.4%	16.0%
Your Economy - Housing & Community	15,500,000	1,705,000	-11.0%	11.2%
Your Economy - Supporting Business	9,100,000	1,128,000	-12.4%	11.7%
Your Family - Adult Social Services	74,100,000	8,906,000	-12.0%	12.6%
Your Family - Children & Young People	71,900,000	6,088,000	-8.5%	9.7%
Your Neighbourhood - Culture & Leisure	18,600,000	2,420,000	-13.0%	12.7%
Your Neighbourhood – Public Protection	4,900,000	240,000	-4.9%	6.1%
Your Neighbourhood - Roads & Waste Management Service	21,800,000	2,194,000	-10.1%	8.7%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>254,300,000</b>	<b>28,985,000</b>	<b>-11.4%</b>	<b>11.7%</b>

- 4.12 The accumulated weighted responses on average resulted in a reduction to all themes. Support for Services received the greatest suggested reduction of 16% of budget, whilst public protection which includes activities such as Community Safety received the lowest reduction of 5%. In terms of budget Adult Social Services would receive the largest reduction of almost £9 million and Support for Services and Children and Young People approximately £6 million if the budget was to be set purely on the basis of You Choose responses.
- 4.13 The You Choose simulator allowed respondents to reduce or increase budgets. The average of all responses resulted in all budgets being reduced. Further analysis of reductions at the sub-theme level is provided in appendix 1. The largest suggested reductions by sub-theme were Information Technology, Asset Management and Human Resources and Organisational Development.
- 4.14 Further detailed analysis of the responses received has been provided by YouGov. This includes details of responses analysed over gender, age bandings, ethnicity, disability status and post code area. This may highlight differences in priorities between these groups.

- 4.15 The average reduction to service funding suggested by respondents of approximately £29 million would result in a reduction in Council Tax of 3%. The level of suggested Council Tax reduction is similar to You Choose consultations undertaken by other local authorities.
- 4.16 Respondents were provided with an opportunity to make suggestions for improving services, raising income and making efficiencies. The top 10 suggested areas by respondents are contained below. Further analysis of suggestions is contained within Appendix 2.

<b>You Choose Suggestion Themes</b>	<b>Numbers Expressing Theme</b>
Increase/ introduce charges	87
Reduce councillors/ expenses	81
Implement/Pursue fines	48
Reduce staff	45
Sell buildings/ land	37
Reduce wages/ salaries	34
Turn off lighting (Street and office)	31
Reduce sickness/ absence levels	28
Remove TRFC Sponsorship	27
Outsource work	26

- 4.17 Approximately 750 written responses have been submitted to the You Choose Budget Simulator during the consultation period. Submissions ranged from very general suggestions and comments to those relating to particular service areas. Suggestions relating to increasing or introducing fees included car parking (although other comments received suggested reductions in this area), charging for libraries, museums and art galleries and some childrens services. Where appropriate, suggestions involving particular areas will be passed to the relevant Council department.
- 4.18 The comments received and the results of the You Choose exercise share a number of similarities with the recent Neighbourhood Plans consultation. Community Safety initiatives received the lowest reduction with low reductions for other areas of public protection such as Environmental Protection.

## **5.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

- 5.1 There are risks that the You Choose consultation exercise will not gather a sufficient response either in terms of numbers or by excluding elements of the population without access to IT facilities. This risk has been mitigated through an extensive publicity campaign including letters to all residents and through a wide ranging programme of consultation events targeting harder to reach groups.

## **6.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

6.1 No other options were considered.

## **7.0 CONSULTATION**

7.1 The You Choose Budget Simulator is one of the means the Council is using to consult with the public over future funding decisions. Additional consultation is, taking or has taken, place through the recent Neighbourhood Plan consultation and through individual service consultations such as the transforming Day Services consultation and the Pensions reform consultation.

7.2 Any significant changes to service delivery and/or policy will require an appropriate consultation process to be undertaken.

## **8.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS**

8.1 There are no immediate implications for voluntary, community or faith groups arising from this report.

## **9.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS**

9.1 The use of the You Choose Budget Simulator has been made free to use for all members of the Local Government Association. The optional data analysis reports provided by YouGov will cost approximately £3,000.

9.2 There are no direct financial, IT, staffing or asset implications arising from this report. There will be implications arising from any subsequent budgetary decisions which take account of any responses received via the You Choose exercise.

## **10.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 The Budget Simulator is part of the Council duty to involve but does not replace the requirement to consult with service users on more specific budget proposals.

## **11.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

11.1 There are no specific equalities implications arising directly from this report. The You Choose budget simulator is an electronic web based tool. Input to the budget simulator process has been provided via a range of alternative methods including telephone contact points and engagement events. However budget decisions making use of input from You Choose may require an appropriate Equality Impact Assessment to be made.

## 12.0 CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

12.1 There are no carbon reduction implications arising directly from this report. However future budgetary decisions using input from You choose would require evaluating.

## 13.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

13.1 There are no planning and community safety implications arising directly from this report.

FNCE/292/11

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## APPENDICES

Appendix 1: You Choose Suggested Budgetary Alterations  
Appendix 2: You Choose Suggested Themes For Improvement  
Appendix 3: You Choose: You Gov Analysis of the You Choose Results for the Borough of Wirral

## SUBJECT HISTORY

<b>Council Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
Cabinet - You Choose Budget Consultation	1 September 2011
Cabinet - Neighbourhood Plans and Area Forum Funding	24 November 2011
Cabinet – You Choose Budget Consultation	8 December 2011

## Appendix 1: You Choose Suggested Budgetary Alterations

		Data		
ServiceFunding/OptionGroup	ServiceFunding/OptionTitle	Original Value	Average Reduction	Reduction as % of Budget
Your Council - Support for Services	Asset Management	9,000,000	1,501,890	16.7%
	Benefits and Revenues	6,500,000	978,441	15.1%
	Call Centre	1,900,000	299,248	15.7%
	Financial Services	2,800,000	443,867	15.9%
	Human Resources, Organisational Development and Payroll	4,200,000	698,374	16.6%
	Information Technology Services	8,000,000	1,395,784	17.4%
	Legal and Member Services	4,900,000	808,723	16.5%
	Planning Council Services and Monitoring Improvements	400,000	63,349	15.8%
	Supporting our Services	700,000	114,420	16.3%
<b>Your Council - Support for Services Total</b>		<b>38,400,000</b>	<b>6,304,096</b>	<b>16.4%</b>
Your Economy - Housing & Community	Housing Strategy & Homelessness	3,200,000	347,871	10.9%
	Private Sector Housing	1,000,000	125,742	12.6%
	Resident Engagement, Consultation and Communication	700,000	100,564	14.4%
	Support for the Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector	600,000	78,408	13.1%
	Supporting People and Adaptations	10,000,000	1,052,755	10.5%
<b>Your Economy - Housing &amp; Community Total</b>		<b>15,500,000</b>	<b>1,705,340</b>	<b>11.0%</b>
Your Economy - Supporting Business	Business Support and Attracting Inward Investment	1,900,000	233,390	12.3%
	Development Management and Building Control	1,900,000	246,366	13.0%
	Economic Development	4,400,000	538,851	12.2%
	Forward Planning	300,000	36,861	12.3%
	Tourism	600,000	72,965	12.2%
<b>Your Economy - Supporting Business Total</b>		<b>9,100,000</b>	<b>1,128,433</b>	<b>12.4%</b>
Your Family - Adult Social Services	Early Support and Advice	6,600,000	754,096	11.4%
	Market Management and Development	200,000	25,265	12.6%
	Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults	200,000	17,342	8.7%



	Services for Regaining Independence	2,300,000	224,711	9.8%
	Social Work Teams in the Locality	33,900,000	4,222,060	12.5%
	Social Work Teams Providing Specialist Support	20,600,000	2,370,653	11.5%
	Support for Commissioning	3,700,000	499,735	13.5%
	Support to meet Personal Choice	6,600,000	791,849	12.0%
<b>Your Family - Adult Social Services Total</b>		<b>74,100,000</b>	<b>8,905,711</b>	<b>12.0%</b>
Your Family - Children & Young People	Children in Need / Looked After Children	17,100,000	1,389,372	8.1%
	Children with Disabilities	3,900,000	268,514	6.9%
	Early Years, Sure Start and Children's Centres	10,100,000	959,342	9.5%
	Integrated Youth Service	6,200,000	493,390	8.0%
	Looked After Children Care Provision	15,200,000	1,283,086	8.4%
	School and Learning Support	6,100,000	469,365	7.7%
	Support for Vulnerable Children and Special Educational Needs	4,700,000	340,999	7.3%
	Transport	8,600,000	884,373	10.3%
<b>Your Family - Children &amp; Young People Total</b>		<b>71,900,000</b>	<b>6,088,441</b>	<b>8.5%</b>
Your Neighbourhood - Culture & Leisure	Arts & Museums	1,100,000	148,795	13.5%
	Libraries & One Stop Shops	7,900,000	1,108,637	14.0%
	Parks & Countryside	5,900,000	716,790	12.1%
	Sport & Recreation	3,700,000	445,994	12.1%
<b>Your Neighbourhood - Culture &amp; Leisure Total</b>		<b>18,600,000</b>	<b>2,420,216</b>	<b>13.0%</b>
Your Neighbourhood - Public Protection	Community Safety	2,500,000	114,492	4.6%
	Environmental Health	1,400,000	73,162	5.2%
	Health, Safety & Resilience	300,000	15,472	5.2%
	Trading Standards	700,000	36,649	5.2%
<b>Your Neighbourhood - Public Protection Total</b>		<b>4,900,000</b>	<b>239,775</b>	<b>4.9%</b>
Your Neighbourhood - Roads & Waste Management Service	Highways Management	6,200,000	665,694	10.7%
	Traffic & Road Safety	2,200,000	236,868	10.8%
	Waste Collections and Street Cleansing	13,400,000	1,291,093	9.60%
<b>Your Neighbourhood - Roads &amp; Waste Management Service Total</b>		<b>21,800,000</b>	<b>2,193,655</b>	<b>10.1%</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>254,300,000</b>	<b>28,985,666</b>	<b>11.4%</b>

## Appendix 2: You Choose Suggested Themes For Improvement

<b>You Choose Suggestion Themes</b>	<b>Numbers Expressing Theme</b>
Increase/ introduce charges	87
Reduce councillors/ expenses	83
Implement/Pursue fines	48
Reduce staff	45
Sell buildings/ land	37
Reduce wages/ salaries	34
Turn off lighting (Street and office)	31
Reduce sickness/ absence levels	28
Remove TRFC Sponsorship	27
Outsource work	26
Employ volunteers/ benefits claimants	22
Work with other Councils	21
Host more events/Hire out buildings	20
Re-think procurement policy	20
Rationalise buildings	19
Reduce road junction improvements	19
Reduce buildings costs	17
Stop employing consultants	17
Stop putting up traffic signs	15
Make use of Community offenders	13
Don't outsource work	12
Reduce printing costs	13
Joined up approach	11
Reduce rebates/ benefits	10
Stop/ charge for translation services	10
Reduce benefits	9
Increase tax and council tax	8
Reduce opening hours	6
Reduce funding for alcoholics/ drug users	6
Charge employees for parking	5
Remove/reduce parking charges	4
Get utilities to work together on roads	4
Reduce Council Tax	2
Introduce Litter tax for takeaways	2