

# WIRRAL COUNCIL

## CABINET

FEBRUARY 7<sup>TH</sup> 2013

<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>CONSULTATION FINDINGS: WHAT REALLY MATTERS STAGE 2</b>
<b>WARD/S AFFECTED:</b>	<b>ALL</b>
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>CHIEF EXECUTIVE</b>
<b>RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER:</b>	<b>LEADER OF THE COUNCIL</b>
<b>KEY DECISION:</b>	<b>NO</b>

### 1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 Cabinet on July 10<sup>th</sup> 2012 instructed officers to implement a comprehensive programme of consultation and engagement in order to inform the development of the Council's Corporate and Financial Plan for 2013-2016 and further to inform the decision making process surrounding significant budget savings.
- 1.2 Cabinet received the feedback on the first stage of the consultation on November 8<sup>th</sup> 2012 and resolved to instruct officers to publish a series of budget options and to further consult on those options.
- 1.3 This report presents the feedback on those budget options from Wirral residents, staff and other stakeholders.

### 2.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

- 2.1 What Really Matters is the largest consultation exercise ever undertaken by Wirral Council, both in terms of reach and scope. This project was designed to engage the residents, workforce and stakeholders of Wirral Council in the development of a 3-year Corporate Plan and Financial Plan, as well as helping the Council to develop options for savings of £109 million over a three year period. The project works to one overall objective:

“To devise and implement a comprehensive, flexible and genuine consultation process; ensuring that options are developed in an open, transparent and robust manner and that every community, business and stakeholder in our borough has the opportunity to contribute.”

- 2.2 The What Really Matters project has been a two-stage consultation process; engaging the community firstly in debating the principles the Council should explore to develop the budget options and then further debate around those options.
- 2.3 This approach has ensured that the Council has sought public involvement and participation at every stage of the budget setting process – both in the development of options and providing further feedback on those options, as well as providing the opportunity to make further suggestions about Council plans, priorities and savings.
- 2.4 Stage one of the project launched on September 10<sup>th</sup> 2012 and closed on October 19<sup>th</sup> 2012. The results of this process were reported to Cabinet on November 8<sup>th</sup> 2012, and

a series of detailed budget options were published by the Chief Executive on November 9<sup>th</sup> 2012 in advance of a further programme of consultation (stage 2).

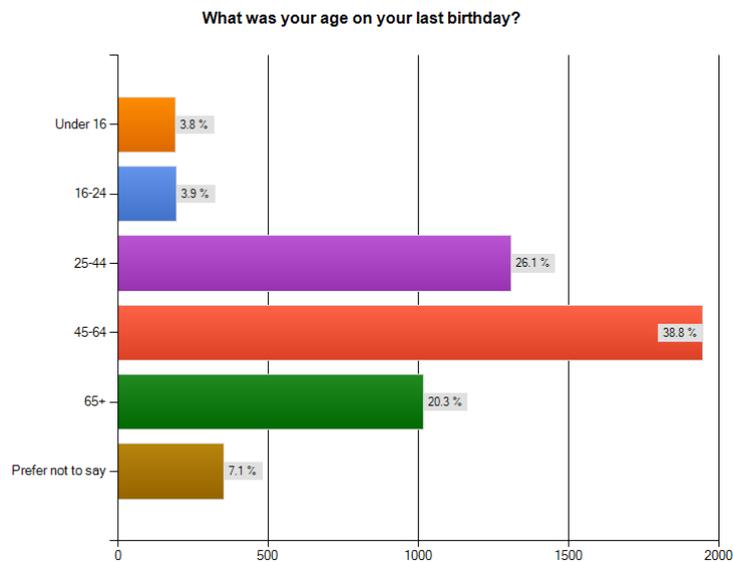
### **3.0 CONSULTATION METHODOLOGY**

- 3.1 Budget options were grouped within three themes: Transformation and Resources, Regeneration and Environment, and Families and Wellbeing. Residents, staff and stakeholders were provided with 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 three sections, the questionnaire provided a one paragraph summary of each option and provided the opportunity for respondents to select one of three choices indicating their opinion on the option.
  - Summary Paper: Three summary papers (one per 'theme') 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: For each of the published options, a detailed option paper was available. 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.
- 3.2 The questionnaire was the primary research tool used in this consultation, and as such it was essential that the document was designed in a way to ensure robust, clear and actionable results. It was also vital to the success of the project to ensure that the questionnaire was produced in a fashion that was accessible, clear and neutral. To ensure that this was the case, Council officers took a number of steps to ensure the questionnaire was externally validated as an effective research and consultation tool.
- 3.3 A draft version of the questionnaire was analysed by an external agency through the Market Research Society. The final draft of the questionnaire was also presented to the members of the Children in Care Council and a group of people with learning disabilities at a Council Day Centre who made further suggestions as to the design and wording of the document.
- 3.4 Further work was also done to ensure accessibility including publishing an interactive Easy Read version, and developing three individual videos, which were used at consultation events, on the Council website and also played through the network of 30 LCD screens in One Stop Shops and Libraries. These videos were designed to more fully explain the context of the options and also provide guidance for how to complete the questionnaire document.
- 3.5 There were a number of different routes available for residents, staff and other stakeholders to provide their views on the budget options. The primary route for residents was through the questionnaire, which could be completed online or on paper format, but residents also regularly sent letters and emails directly to the Chief Executive or through the consultation mechanism. A number of petitions were also received relating directly to both the process in general and specific budget options.

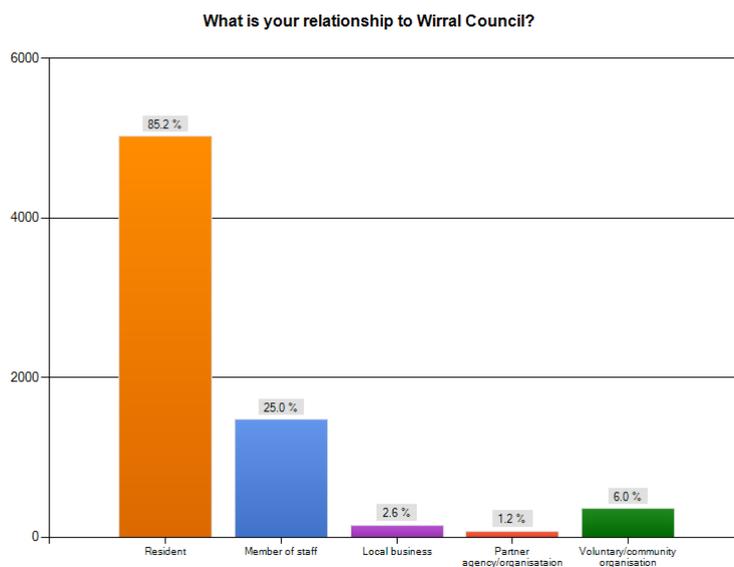
- 3.6 An extensive programme of staff consultation was also delivered, including manager briefings, consultation events, written communications from the Chief Executive and consultation with Trade Union representatives. Further detailed workshops were also held with Members of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees.
- 3.7 For people using services which may potentially be affected as a result of the budget options, there was further detailed consultation held. The mechanism employed and feedback received as part of this consultation is provided in the appendices to this report alongside the appropriate option.
- 3.8 The first stage of the consultation process involved a programme of 150 events, and resulted in the Council receiving almost 7000 responses. The second stage of the consultation process involved a further 100 community events, extensive online promotion and engagement, and a programme of targeted consultation with potentially affected groups of staff and people who use services. This second stage of consultation received 6522 responses as of January 31<sup>st</sup> 2013.

#### **4.0 PUBLIC CONSULTATION**

- 4.1 An extensive communications and engagement plan was implemented to ensure this consultation reached the widest possible audience. All promotional and engagement activity was completed via existing Council staff and resources.
- 4.2 Over 100 events were held at many locations throughout the borough, including supermarkets, community centres and libraries. The programme of direct engagement events was published on the Council website and constantly updated, as well as being circulated to the local and regional media.
- 4.3 Online communications were also utilised widely to help promote the consultation, with emails being sent to over 13,000 Wirral residents and extensive promotion of the consultation on the Council website, via social media, as well as partner and community owned websites. Regular communications were also provided via local and regional media throughout the consultation period.
- 4.4 Promotional and engagement activity was evenly spread across the borough, with additional events taking place in main shopping areas. This work contributed to a level of response which is representative of the borough on a geographical basis. In terms of parliamentary constituencies, West Wirral is slightly over represented in the response, Wallasey slightly under represented, with Birkenhead and South Wirral represented almost exactly.
- 4.5 A wide range of age groups were also encouraged to take part in the consultation, with specific activity taking place within schools, youth centres, cinemas, bingo halls and through events with partners such as the Older People's Parliament. The chart below demonstrates the age breakdown of the respondents to the consultation.



4.6 The consultation further asked respondents to identify their relationship to Wirral Council, and the table below demonstrates how respondents answered this question. 787 people stated that they were both residents and members of staff.



- 4.7 Further detailed information related to the demographic and geographic profile of the consultation response sample is available in Appendix 4 of this report.
- 4.8 A detailed programme of consultation and engagement was also delivered with our partners in schools, to discuss the potential impact and planned mitigation of the budget options in relation to schools.
- 4.9 This programme consisted of meetings with all Secondary head teachers, all Primary head teachers and all Special head teachers during November 2012. Further meetings were held with the School Forum in November 2012 and the School Governors' Forum in January 2013. The Wirral Children's Trust also met to discuss and provide their views on the budget option.

4.10 At these meetings all budget options with an impact on schools were discussed, and head teachers were able to provide their views on the option and also make other suggestions. The feedback from all of these meetings has been considered as part of this consultation process.

## **5.0 STAFF CONSULTATION**

5.1 Staff were able to take part in the consultation on budget options in the same way as residents and other stakeholders; through the public questionnaire, emails to the Chief Executive and, if they so wished, attending consultation events.

5.2 Throughout the consultation period, all staff who are deemed 'at risk' as a result of the budget options have attended briefings with their Chief Officers or Head of Service. At these briefings employees were able to provide feedback and were encouraged to provide additional suggestions for how the Council could make alternative savings.

5.3 The Chief Executive has received and personally replied to in excess of 400 emails and letters, the majority of which came from staff as a response to the Chief Executive's weekly communications. Many of these letters and emails contained suggestions for additional savings and also queries from staff and residents as to the potential impact of individual budget options.

5.4 Suggestions and comments received through these routes were generally similar, and mainly focussed on terms and conditions of employment. Many of these comments focussed on the issue of unpaid leave, as presented as part of the 'Conditions of Service' budget option. Staff expressed a number of different preferences for the way the unpaid leave is taken, with a number of staff stating that they would prefer the leave to be taken over the Christmas period.

5.5 Further suggestions were also made in relation to the proposals around Essential Car User Allowance, with some staff suggesting that it should be removed altogether and some others believing it should be reduced in a targeted fashion. A number of employees, particularly based in Children's Social Care teams, believe that the Essential Car User Allowance is vital for them to be able to do their jobs. More suggestions were made in relation to terms and conditions which focussed on reductions in annual leave, enhancements, sickness entitlements and salary caps and reductions, as an alternative to potential compulsory redundancies.

5.6 Many suggestions were also made by staff which focussed on increasing the Council's income. These suggestions focussed on our use of buildings and the potential for sale in some instances and reduced energy and utility costs in others, and also frequently mentioned the potential for certain Council functions to offer their services to the public, private and community sectors to generate income. A number of staff also suggested that the Council should look to generate income through advertising on its website, network of buildings and land.

## **6.0 TRADE UNION CONSULTATION**

6.1 Formal consultation with the Trade Unions in relation to the statutory consultation under Section 188 (4) of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act

1992 on the impact of the Officer Budget Options opened on 12 November 2012. The statutory 90 days consultation period commenced from this date.

- 6.2 In addition, on 12 November 2012 the Chief Executive opened consultation on a range of proposals which impact on staff terms and conditions, and changes to a number of Council policies including the Council's Discretionary Severance Scheme. This included proposals for unpaid leave, enhancements and car allowances and a number of policy changes including allowances for disturbance, relocation and telephone and the Council's severance scheme.
- 6.3 Since 12 November 2012 over 20 meetings have been held with the Trade Unions to discuss Council's budget position and impact of Officer Budget options. During these meetings the proposed changes to Terms and Conditions and Severance were also discussed.
- 6.4 Eight meetings have taken place specifically to discuss and analyse the impact of the proposals for terms and conditions and proposed policy changes. It was agreed that consultation in relation to Terms and Conditions would be extended beyond 20 December 2012 to allow further discussions to continue.
- 6.4 The Trade Unions have raised concerns about the consultation period in relation to the proposed Officer budget options. They have also made it clear that they would not support compulsory redundancies and are seeking an attractive severance scheme to encourage volunteers.
- 6.5 In relation to Terms and Conditions the Trade Unions have raised concerns about the cumulative financial impact of the proposals on employees. They have raised concerns about the equity of the proposals for removal of enhancements for weekend working and the potential impact on services of the removal of car user allowances. The Trade Unions have made it clear that they want to protect contractual pay.

## **7.0 CONSULTATION WITH THE VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH SECTOR**

- 7.1 A number of budget options detailed in the appendices of this report make specific reference to voluntary, community and faith sector organisations, and their ability to carry out work and perform services on behalf of the Council and other partners.
- 7.2 Detailed consultation and discussions with those organisations has been in progress within this context throughout the full consultation period, and a workshop including a number of key voluntary organisations took place during phase one of the consultation, and the outcome was reported to Cabinet in November 2012.
- 7.3 Following this work, a working group has been established consisting of Council officers and representatives from the sector, which is meeting weekly to discuss and agree partnership approaches to ensure that the sector and the Council is able to deliver on those budget options where the VCF sector is suggested as a potential alternative supplier.
- 7.4 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 A number of petitions were received during the consultation period, related to both specific budget options and the process of making savings as a whole. These petitions have been included in the consultation findings. The table below describes a list of petitions received in opposition to the budget options.

<b>Petition</b>	<b>Signatures</b>
Neighbourhood Funding Freeze (e-petition)	16
Stop the Garden tax (e-petition)	122
Wirral Council Cuts	6680
Council Kennels	7644
Wirral Council Cuts (e-petition)	184
Crown Bowling Greens (e-petition)	79
Save Moreton Youth Centre (e-petition)	45
Save Moreton Youth Centre	559
Bebington / New Ferry Youth Club	139
Coronation Park, Greasby	118
Heswall Bowling Green	690
Junior Crown Green Bowlers	174
Save Belvedere Youth Club	384

8.2 The petitions 'Neighbourhood Funding Freeze' and 'Stop the Garden' tax were responded to in October and December 2012 and have formed part of this consultation process. The two petitions, 'Wirral Council Cuts' (6680 signatures) and 'Council Kennels' (7644 signatures) were considered by Council on 17th December, 2012, in accordance with the Council's petition scheme (minute 75 refers) at which the spokespersons for the two petitions addressed the Council and it was agreed that the petitions be noted and comments of the spokespersons be considered as part of the ongoing consultation process on the budget options.

8.3 The Chief Executive also received a number of letters from organisations such as Bowling Clubs, Friends of the Park organisations and other user groups. These communications are reported within the appendices of this report alongside the appropriate option.

8.4 Among other letters, the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council also received a letter from the Agencies for Carers Executive (ACE) which provided results from a piece of research they had conducted with a number of voluntary and community organisations in relation to the budget options. These results demonstrated the options which were most important to those organisations represented, which have been considered as part of this consultation process.

8.5 A further letter was received from Wirral MENCAP, which provided views on a range of options contained within the Families and Wellbeing strategic theme. This feedback came from two events held by the organisation in December 2012, and provided a range of suggestions and concerns which have been considered as part of this consultation process.

8.6 Minutes from a meeting of Wirral's Children's Trust, which was convened to discuss the budget options, were also received and formed part of this consultation process.

## **9.0 SPECIAL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETINGS**

9.1 A further programme of meetings was held with Members of the Council's five Overview and Scrutiny Committees following the publication of the Chief Executive's Budget Options, following further workshops held in September and November 2012.

9.2 At these meetings, Committee Members were provided with detailed information relating to each budget option within their portfolio, and were able to ask questions of Council officers as well as invite opinion and expertise from external partners.

9.3 Members made a number of suggestions at this series of meetings, minutes of which were reported to Cabinet on 20 December 2012.

## **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 was put in place to input all of the responses from the paper questionnaire into the database. This enables the project team to review the results on a regular basis and present the findings to Executive Team to consider response levels and findings.

10.2 All valid responses to individual questions were analysed regardless of whether questionnaires were partially or fully completed.

10.3 Responses were continually analysed to ensure they were coming from a sample that was representative of the make up of the Wirral population as a whole. This information provided guidance on the development and targeting of events and other promotional and engagement activity throughout the consultation period.

10.4 Analysis was undertaken for each question, and these reports can be found at Appendices 1-3. Individual questions were presented as quantitative data, illustrated as percentages of respondents who have selected one of the following statements:

- I support this under the circumstances
- I accept this if it is absolutely necessary
- I find this completely unacceptable

A small number of options provided a different method of indicating a preference, which is again detailed in Appendices 1-3.

10.5 Responses are provided under each thematic area (Transformation and Resources, Regeneration and Environment, and Families and Wellbeing) with a detailed analysis of responses prepared for each question.

10.6 Information provided 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 analysis reports alongside the quantitative data. All comments received through the questionnaire are available online at the Council website at [www.wirral.gov.uk/whatreallymatters](http://www.wirral.gov.uk/whatreallymatters).

10.7 The questionnaires include a section to capture demographic and personal information about each respondent. These responses were analysed on an ongoing basis to monitor appropriate demographic representation against Wirral baselines. A full analysis of this data is provided at Appendix 4 of this report.

## **11.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

11.1 A project team was established and met weekly 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 This project was developed and delivered in response to the independent review of Corporate Governance arrangements, the priorities for improvement adopted by the Wirral Improvement Board and the Council decisions in relation to ensuring that lawful engagement and consultation are central to all Council budget and decision making processes. 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 A number of budget options contained within the appendices to this report detail increased partnership working with the VCF sector. Consultation completed to date with these organisations is outlined in section 7.0 of this report. 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 Communications and Engagement division and Policy Unit, 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.

## **21.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S**

21.1 The recommendations respond to the agreed objective for this project, which was:

“To devise and implement a comprehensive, flexible and genuine consultation process; ensuring that options are developed in an open, transparent and robust manner and that every community, business and stakeholder in our borough has the opportunity to contribute.”

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## **APPENDICES**

- Appendix 1: Budget Options Feedback: Transformation and Resources
- Appendix 2: Budget Options Feedback: Regeneration and Environment
- Appendix 3: Budget Options Feedback: Families and Wellbeing
- Appendix 4: Geographic and Demographic Summary of Response

## **SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)**

<b>Council Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
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<b>Cabinet</b>	<b>8<sup>th</sup> November 2012</b>
<b>Cabinet</b>	<b>10<sup>th</sup> July 2012</b>
<b>Cabinet</b>	<b>21<sup>st</sup> June 2012</b>

## Equality Impact Toolkit (new version February 2012)

### **Section 1: Your details**

**Council officer:** Kevin MacCallum

**Email address:** kevinmaccallum@wirral.gov.uk

**Head of Service:** **Head of Neighbourhoods and Engagement**

**Chief Officer:** **Chief Executive**

**Department:** Neighbourhoods and Engagement

**Date:** January 2013

### **Section 2: What Council function / proposal is being assessed?**

Council Budget Consultation 2012: What Really Matters?

### **Section 2b: Is this EIA being submitted to Cabinet or Overview & Scrutiny Committee?**

**Yes** Cabinet February 7<sup>th</sup>.

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

**Section 3:** Will the Council function / proposal affect equality in .....? (please tick relevant boxes)

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

**Section 4:** Within the Equality Duty 2010, there are 3 legal requirements. Will the Council function / proposal support the way the Council .....(please tick relevant boxes)

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

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**Section 5:** Will the function / proposal have a positive or negative impact on any of the protected groups (race, gender, disability, gender reassignment, age, pregnancy and maternity, religion and belief, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership)?

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

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

Protected characteristic	Positive or negative impact	Action required to mitigate any negative impact	Lead person	Timescale	Resource implications
All	Negative – potential for some communities and groups to be not as involved as others in influencing Council budgets and services.	Specific targeted work will take place to ensure all communities are encouraged to take part	Kevin MacCallum	November 2012 and ongoing	Staff time
All	Negative – potential changes and/or reductions in service could impact on communities and groups	Specific targeted consultation will take place across all affected groups	Kevin MacCallum	November 2012 and ongoing	Staff time

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

A dedicated project team is in place to ensure the effective delivery of the consultation process. Weekly project team meetings provide the opportunity for regular review of the equalities considerations at each critical stage of the project through initiation, project planning, document production, the consultation phase itself and the analysis, findings and reporting back stages.

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

The Council has drawn upon its extensive networks of contacts and partners to promote the consultation process with a specific emphasis on voluntary, community and faith sector groups and organisations.

**Section 7: Are you intending to carry out any consultation with regard to this Council function / policy?**

Yes

**Section 8: How will consultation take place?**

A comprehensive consultation engagement strategy was planned and delivered, comprising over 100 events across the borough together with a wide range of targeted activity with groups.