

APPENDIX ONE

BUDGET OPTIONS FEEDBACK: TRANSFORMATION AND RESOURCES

1.0 SUMMARY

The majority of options contained within this theme related to 'back office' processes and services. The options are presented in this report, together with the quantitative data gathered through the consultation questionnaire, and a summary of any related comments received through the consultation process.

Options such as Council Tax, Libraries, One Stop Shops and Revenues and Benefits were included as part of Families and Wellbeing in the public consultation, but are presented within Transformation and Resources within this report.

2.0 BUDGET OPTIONS

2.1 REDUCING COUNCIL MANAGEMENT

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Wirral Council has around 4,800 employees. Some of the structures in departments, and services, are no longer fit for purpose and could be updated and reduced, to achieve major savings. This option involves a total restructure and significant reduction in middle and senior management layers across the entire Council.

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I support this under the circumstances	53.1%	2711
I accept this if it is absolutely necessary	37.5%	1911
I find this completely unacceptable	9.4%	480

QUESTIONNAIRE COMMENTS

Concern was shown regarding the potential impact of redundancies, both on service delivery and the Wirral economy. A strong view among these comments was that job losses and redundancies should be targeted at those earning higher salaries in the first instance to reduce 'top heavy' management.

It was also mentioned a number of times that redundancies and restructures should be completed logically, and through 'precision cuts', rather than blanket top slicing across the organisation. The majority of the comments concerning this option received through the questionnaire came from Council employees.

ADDITIONAL CONSULTATION

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As detailed in the substantive report, a comprehensive programme of staff consultation has taken place around this option and budget options with staff implications.

This consultation has consisted of communications and meetings with the Chief Executive, a full programme of briefings for affected employees and a series of meetings with Trade Union organisations.

OPTION SUMMARY

The first stage of this option was considered and recommended by Cabinet on December 20th 2012. The results of the final consultation demonstrate clear support for this option, with only 9.4% of all respondents stating that they find this option completely unacceptable. When the views of Council employees are taken into account separately, this figure rises somewhat, but the general theme of approval is consistent across both residents and Council employees.

2.2 WORKFORCE CONDITIONS OF SERVICE

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

The Council's current salary costs are £102 million. Another £6 million is spent on salary enhancements based on national and local conditions of service. This option is designed to reduce this expenditure by £4 million through making changes to employees' terms and conditions, including car mileage, phones, unpaid leave and single time working.

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I support this under the circumstances	39.8%	2033
I accept this if it is absolutely necessary	34.2%	1744
I find this completely unacceptable	26.0%	1329

QUESTIONNAIRE COMMENTS

Essential car user allowance was the main item that was mentioned in this area, with many people commenting that some staff would find it difficult to do their jobs without it, particularly within Children's Social Care.

ADDITIONAL CONSULTATION

As detailed in the substantive report, a comprehensive programme of consultation and engagement has taken place around this option with staff and through Trade Union bodies. Meetings with Trade Unions have highlighted concerns around staff losing contractual pay.

OPTION SUMMARY

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The results of this option show broad approval from people responding to the questionnaire. Some concerns were raised through comments, which are described above.

2.3 PROCUREMENT

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

The Council is looking to make savings and increase income through the way it pays for goods and services, through starting to charge schools for the work it does and also through paying some invoices and bills through an online system.

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I support this under the circumstances	53.7%	2706
I accept this if it is absolutely necessary	32.0%	1615
I find this completely unacceptable	14.3%	719

OPTION SUMMARY

This option was considered and recommended by Cabinet in December 2012. The results of the final consultation show strong support for this option, with almost 55% of respondents stating they support, and over 30% stating that they 'accept' its implementation.

2.4 TREASURY MANAGEMENT

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

The way the Council manages its cash flow and borrowing could also be significantly improved to bring in major savings. The Council will fund road repairs, building investments and other works through internal funds rather than borrowing, which will save around £1.7m.

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I support this under the circumstances	77.0%	3909
I accept this if it is absolutely necessary	19.6%	993
I find this completely unacceptable	3.5%	177

OPTION SUMMARY

This option was considered and recommended by Cabinet in December 2012. The results of the final consultation show strong support for this option, with over 75% of respondents stating they support, and almost 20% stating that they 'accept' its implementation.

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2.5 RATIONALISATION OF CIVIC SERVICES

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

The Mayor undertakes a range of civic and fundraising duties throughout their term of office. The option here is to make a saving through re-designing the service to offer better value for money.

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I support this under the circumstances	81.8%	4151
I accept this if it is absolutely necessary	14.5%	736
I find this completely unacceptable	3.7%	190

OPTION SUMMARY

The results of the final consultation show support for this option, with over 80% of respondents stating they support its implementation.

2.6 MOVING TO FOUR YEAR ELECTIONS

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

The Council currently operates a system of three elections every four years, with Councillors elected for a four-year term. The option here would be to hold 'all-out' elections every four years, where all Members would be up for election for a four-year term.

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I support this under the circumstances	72.9%	3680
I accept this if it is absolutely necessary	17.6%	890
I find this completely unacceptable	9.4%	476

OPTION SUMMARY

This option was considered and recommended by Cabinet in December 2012. The results of the final consultation show strong support for this option, with almost 75% of respondents stating they support its implementation.

2.7 REDUCING THE COST OF DEMOCRACY

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

The Council currently operates a model of governance known as Strong Leader, which involves a Cabinet and five Overview and

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Scrutiny Committees, plus a number of other committees, who work to set Council policy, make and scrutinise decisions and set the Council budget. This option would involve a review of the Council's constitution and number of committees, and related meetings, to bring savings and a reduction in staff.

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I support this under the circumstances	69.5%	3494
I accept this if it is absolutely necessary	23.2%	1167
I find this completely unacceptable	7.2%	363

OPTION SUMMARY

This option was considered and recommended by Cabinet in December 2012. The results of the final consultation show strong support for this option, with 70% of respondents stating they support its implementation.

2.8 INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SERVICE

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

The Council invests funds in its computer equipment, which is used by thousands of Council employees on a daily basis. This option involves centralising, and significantly reducing, the funding spent on providing computers, printers and other IT equipment to Council, including reducing the number of employees required to service the equipment.

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I support this under the circumstances	49.3%	2476
I accept this if it is absolutely necessary	33.0%	1655
I find this completely unacceptable	17.7%	890

QUESTIONNAIRE COMMENTS

The comments related to IT, primarily from Council employees, were concerned that further reductions in this area could impact on efficiency across the board.

OPTION SUMMARY

This option was considered and recommended by Cabinet in December 2012. The results of the final consultation show strong support for this option, with almost 50% of respondents stating they support, and over 30% stating that they accept its implementation.

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2.9 PUBLIC RELATIONS AND MARKETING

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

The Council's communications and engagement division, which is responsible for promoting Wirral as a place, the Council's services, consultation activity and public relations and media activity. There are a number of options in this area, including a reduction in the core marketing budget of 50%, stopping the sponsorship of Tranmere Rovers Football Club, which would bring a saving of £135,000 and removing the funding which is used to subsidise tourism and visitor events throughout the borough.

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I support this under the circumstances	51.8%	2603
I accept this if it is absolutely necessary	29.4%	1475
I find this completely unacceptable	18.8%	945

QUESTIONNAIRE COMMENTS

The majority of comments in this area supported stopping the sponsorship arrangements with Tranmere Rovers FC, with a small number of people believing that it should be maintained as a driver to increase tourism visits to the borough. Further, while broadly supportive of the reduction in marketing spend; a number of people questioned removing the supported events budget in terms of tourism.

OPTION SUMMARY

Some concerns were raised about removing subsidies for tourism events, but there is still strong support shown for this option.

2.10 AREA FORUM FUNDING

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

The Council invests funding each year into its programme of Area Forum events. This funding is available for communities to pay for additional Council services or to pay for community or voluntary groups to perform projects and activities. The option here is to cancel the currently frozen allocation of Forum funding, and to further remove the funding from the Council budget in future years, to be replaced by a new method of engaging and working with communities.

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I support this under the circumstances	46.3%	2299

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I accept this if it is absolutely necessary	33.1%	1643
I find this completely unacceptable	20.6%	1020

OPTION SUMMARY

Cabinet released £330,000 of funding to community organisations in December 2012, and also agreed to implement a new method of engaging and working with communities in January 2013, subject to consultation with the Democracy Working Group and approval by Full Council. The final consultation results show strong public support for this option, with just over 20% stating that they oppose its implementation.

2.11 BETTER USE OF BUILDINGS

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

The Council owns an extensive and varied number of buildings, from which it delivers services and provides back office support. This option involves closing the Acre Lane and Municipal Buildings and relocating staff elsewhere.

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I support this under the circumstances	63.4%	3181
I accept this if it is absolutely necessary	28.1%	1409
I find this completely unacceptable	8.5%	424

QUESTIONNAIRE COMMENTS

These comments focussed on the idea that the Council needs to make better use of its assets, and to sell or rent any buildings that it does not need. People further suggested that the Council should not rent any buildings, and should only use buildings that it owns.

OPTION SUMMARY

Cabinet considered and recommended this option in December 2012. The final consultation results show strong support for this option, with less than 10% opposing its implementation.

2.12 TRANSFORMING BUSINESS SUPPORT

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

The Council has a range of administration staff throughout the Council, who provide support to departments. The option here is to bring together administration into three business units to support each new Council area, to ensure reduced costs and higher efficiency.

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Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I support this under the circumstances	65.6%	3266
I accept this if it is absolutely necessary	26.9%	1338
I find this completely unacceptable	7.5%	375

OPTION SUMMARY

This option was considered and recommended by Cabinet in December 2012. The final consultation results show strong support for this option, with less than 10% opposing its implementation.

2.13 RESTRUCTURE OF LAW, HR AND ASSET MANAGEMENT

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

This Council department is responsible for a number of functions, covering Council buildings, human resources and legal services. This option proposes restructuring and reducing the division as well as investigating the outsourcing of part of the department.

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I support this under the circumstances	53.4%	2643
I accept this if it is absolutely necessary	31.6%	1564
I find this completely unacceptable	15.0%	740

OPTION SUMMARY

The final consultation results show strong support for this option, with over 50% stating they support the option, and 15% opposing its implementation. This option was considered and recommended by Cabinet in December 2012.

2.14 REVENUES AND BENEFITS

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

As Welfare Reform and Universal Credit is rolled out the workload in the Revenues and Benefits division will increase. Staffing levels will, however, be able to reduce to reflect the new arrangements. The option in this area is therefore to begin to reduce staff in this division as the new Universal Credit is implemented.

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I support this under the	40.8%	1869

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I accept this if it is absolutely necessary	39.9%	1830
I find this completely unacceptable	19.3%	885

QUESTIONNAIRE COMMENTS

Comments stressed the need to ensure the implications of Welfare Reform are properly considered when deciding where reductions should be made.

OPTION SUMMARY

The results to this question show strong support for reducing the number of staff within the division.

2.15 INCREASING COURT COSTS

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

The Council at the moment charges non-payers of Council Tax £65. This is below the actual costs, which are around £87. The option here is to increase these charges to £75.

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I support this under the circumstances	76.2%	3589
I accept this if it is absolutely necessary	17.5%	823
I find this completely unacceptable	6.3%	299

QUESTIONNAIRE COMMENTS

The majority of comments relating to Council Tax were regarding court costs – people believe that the Council should charge full cost recovery in this area, rather than simply increasing the fee.

OPTION SUMMARY

The comments and results related to this option show overwhelming support for this option, with just 6.3% of respondents stating that they opposed its implementation.

2.16 COUNCIL TAX DISCOUNTS AND EXEMPTIONS

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

There are a range of discounts and exemptions on Council Tax available to Wirral residents, including reductions for properties undergoing major repair and long term empty properties. The option in this area is to conduct a full review of these discounts with a view to increasing income from Council Tax.

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Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I support this under the circumstances	54.0%	2525
I accept this if it is absolutely necessary	28.3%	1323
I find this completely unacceptable	17.7%	829

OPTION SUMMARY

The consultation results show strong support for this option, with over 50% of respondents stating that they supported and almost 30% stating that they would accept a review of exemptions and discounts.

2.17 COUNCIL TAX PENSIONER DISCOUNT

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Pensioners aged over 70 in Wirral currently receive a discount of 7.76% against their Council Tax. The option here is to reduce that discount or change the qualifying criteria.

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I support this under the circumstances	22.9%	1086
I accept this if it is absolutely necessary	24.4%	1160
I find this completely unacceptable	52.7%	2499

OPTION SUMMARY

A slight majority, 52.7%, of people answering this question would oppose any reduction in the Pensioner Discount for Council Tax.

2.18 COUNCIL TAX DISCRETIONARY RELIEF

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Wirral last year paid discretionary business rate relief for charities, voluntary, social, educational and sporting organisations for a total of over £1m. The option here is to review and potentially reduce the amount of businesses and funding which is used to help these businesses with their rates.

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I support this under the circumstances	38.8%	1814
I accept this if it is absolutely necessary	37.9%	1774

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I find this completely unacceptable	23.3%	1088
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OPTION SUMMARY

The results to this question show strong support for this option.

2.19 LIBRARIES AND ONE STOP SHOPS

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Wirral Council has a network of 13 One Stop Shops (OSS) and 24 Libraries. The options in this area include: further merging of libraries and One Stop Shops, the reduction of opening hours, particularly around Christmas and New Year, and the increased use of volunteers in the running of the facilities. The option of community asset transfer will also be part of this option. The Council also propose to reduce the book fund, which libraries use to purchase new books.

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I support this under the circumstances	26.8%	1274
I accept this if it is absolutely necessary	30.1%	1435
I find this completely unacceptable	43.1%	2051

QUESTIONNAIRE COMMENTS

Opinions were mixed in this area; a number of people believe that there are too many libraries in Wirral and that smaller ones should close. Conversely, many people commented that libraries were vital and that, while merging with OSS and closing between Christmas and New Year was acceptable, reducing the service (and reducing the book fund) was not.

OPTION SUMMARY

Taking the comments into consideration, there is still relative support for this option – with over 25% stating they would support and over 30% stating they would accept its implementation.