

APPENDIX TWO

BUDGET OPTION: ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

1.0 OUTLINE OF PROPOSAL

- 1.1 Assistive Technology in Wirral is jointly funded by Wirral Council and NHS Wirral. The joint management of the service is provided via Wirral Council. The service has seen a growth in the numbers of people being supported by the service of over 225% since 2009/2010. In 2011/12 there were over 4,500 people accessing the service at a cost of £1.5m.
- 1.2 Assistive technology includes installations in a person's home such as bed occupancy sensors, property exit sensor, pull chords, flood detectors and falls detectors. Assistive Technology in Wirral is increasingly recognised as an integral part of supporting individuals and carers.
- 1.3 This equipment is currently installed free of charge, and the people who receive the service have the added benefit of 24/7 monitoring, again for no charge. The value of the equipment ranges significantly, depending on the volume and type of support required but can cost as little as a few pounds to over £5,000.
- 1.4 The option in this area is to provide the same service, to the same standard, but introduce a weekly charge of £3 per household, per week, regardless of the level of equipment installed within the house.
- 1.5 The charge would be based on an individual's ability to pay.

2.0 RATIONALE FOR PROPOSAL

- 2.1 The option is to implement a proposed charge based on the cost of providing an ongoing monitoring service. The proposed charge of £3 per week is in line with charges made by other Local Authorities. It is estimated that 50% (2,500) of current users would be liable for this charge, but subject to a financial assessment of their ability to pay.
- 2.2 The current system is not to charge, this is seen as untenable going forward. A nominal fee has been put forward that covers the cost to the council, to charge more may be illegal.

3.0 ACCESSIBILITY OF PROPOSAL

- 3.1 The option in relation to Assistive Technology was published alongside a series of other options from the Chief Executive on November 9th 2012. These options were published following an extensive period of consultation during September and October 2012, which focussed on broad principles of policy to gather initial views on how options should be developed.
- 3.2 Residents, staff and stakeholders were provided with a range of information detailing the background, level of savings, potential impact

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and methods of mitigating any potential negative impact for this and all other options. 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.

- 3.3 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.
- 3.4 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.
- 3.5 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.

4.0 CONSULTATION PROCESS

- 4.1 An extensive programme of public consultation was completed in relation to all options which were published in November 2012. This programme included over 100 community events at locations such as libraries, supermarkets, cinemas, community centres and children's centres.

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- 4.2 Extensive online promotion of the consultation was also completed, with emails being sent to over 13,000 residents, and the consultation also featured prominently on the Council's website which receives in excess of 1,000 hits per day.
- 4.4 A series of detailed meetings, covering all budget options, was also held with key organisations. These organisations included the Carers' Development Committee, Carers Association and the Enabling Fulfilling Lives Group among others.
- 4.5 A full programme of presentations and workshops were held in Council Day Centres and residential and respite facilities, which were extremely well attended and involved a full discussion of the proposed options, its potential impact and the mitigation which could be implemented.

These meetings are listed below:

Group / Centre	Date
Carers Association	28.11.12
Carers Development Committee	30.11.12
Highcroft	14.12.12
Eastham Day Centre	7.1.13
Heswall Day Centre	10.1.13
Highcroft	14.1.13
Moreton Day Centre	17.1.13
Enabling Fulfilling Lives Group	18.1.13
Beaconsfield	29.1.13
Fernleigh	30.1.13
Sylvandale	4.2.13
Girtrell Court	7.2.13

- 4.6 People using services were also assisted throughout the consultation period to complete the online and paper based questionnaire, in easy read format, with help from other people using services, staff and the videos which were produced.

5.0 CONSULTATION FEEDBACK

- 5.1 In terms of the public consultation process, the response to the questionnaire demonstrated strong support from Wirral residents, staff and other stakeholders as to the implementation of this option. The table below shows the response to the public consultation:

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I support this under the circumstances	53.7%	2582
I accept this if it is absolutely necessary	29.4%	1414
I find this completely unacceptable	16.9%	812

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- 5.2 At the series of consultation meetings at key sites as described above, people attending were provided with a detailed presentation related to the budget options involved. This presentation provided people with the rationale for proposing the options, which is outlined in section 2.0 of this report.
- 5.3 People were then given the opportunity to ask questions of Council officers and also to have those questions fed into the consultation process; either through completing a questionnaire or by having their comments noted at the meeting, or with any Council officer they worked with at any convenient time.
- 5.4 It is clear from the notes from these meetings that the only major concern around this option was the person's ability to pay, and the potential impact of increasing charges on the person receiving care.

6.0 POTENTIAL IMPACT IDENTIFIED

- 6.1 The main concern highlighted in the consultation for this option is regarding the person's ability to pay.

7.0 PROPOSED MITIGATION

- 7.1 It is important that due regard is shown to the concerns highlighted throughout this consultation process from people using the services, their families, carers, and our own workforce. It is proposed that, should this option be considered and recommended by Cabinet and approved at Council that the following factors should be taken into account in the implementation of the option.
- 7.2 A full financial assessment should be implemented to determine if any charge which is introduced for Assistive Technology is fair and the person is able to pay.

8.0 SUMMARY

- 8.1 It is felt appropriate that a decision can be taken to investigate charging for Assistive Technology with a view to developing a proposal for further consultation, or to investigate working with the VCF sector to deliver assistive technology for groups of people currently accessing the Council service.