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BUDGET OPTION: YOUTH AND PLAY SERVICES

1.0 OUTLINE OF PROPOSAL

- 1.1 The option in this area is to review provision of Play Schemes, reduce the youth outreach service and integrate all youth clubs and the Duke of Edinburgh Open Award Centre) into the 4 main Youth Hubs, where services would be centralised.
- 1.2 It is further proposed that the Youth Opportunity Fund should be stopped (this fund provides opportunities for organisations to bid for funding to deliver projects for young people) and that Birkenhead Youth Hub (currently located at Shaftesbury Youth Club) and Response be relocated to Pilgrim Street Arts Centre.
- 1.3 In addition, it is proposed that the service will be aligned with the New Youth Zone planned for Birkenhead.

2.0 RATIONALE FOR PROPOSAL

- 2.1 DFE benchmarking data indicate that Universal Services for young people in Wirral are high cost - spend per head of £78 compared with a statistical neighbour average of £39.
- 2.2 Reviewing the provisions as detailed, a budget saving of £923,000 will be achieved within the Youth Service and £255,000 within the Play Service.

3.0 ACCESSIBILITY OF PROPOSAL

- 3.1 The option in relation to Youth and Play Services 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 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

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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.
- 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.
- 4.3 Organisations from the Voluntary, Community and Faith sectors were also actively encouraged to take part in this consultation process.
- 4.4 All youth centres and 'hubs' in the borough were encouraged to take part in the consultation process, with questionnaires distributed across all sites. Further consultation and engagement was also completed through

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organisations such as the Wirral Children's Trust, Schools Forum as well as all head teachers and governors in the borough.

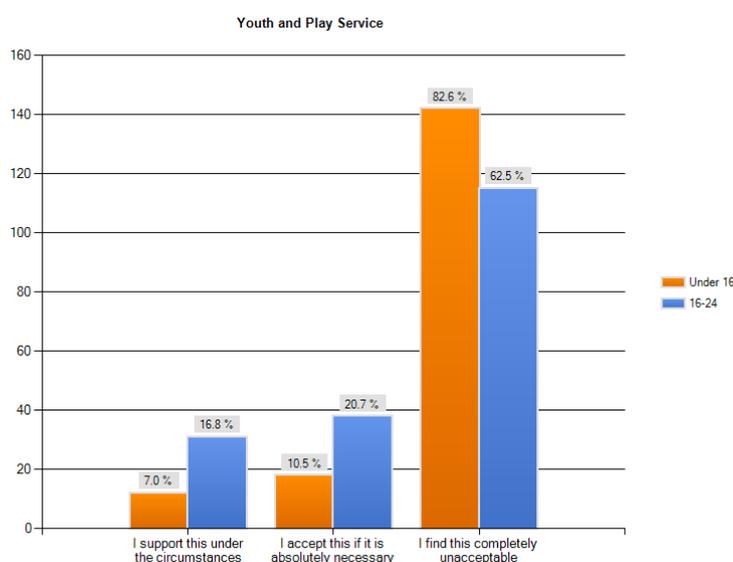
- 4.5 At consultation meetings with the bodies described above, concerns were highlighted about the proposed reduction in these services, with members highlighting the positive impact they have on the lives of the young people they serve.

5.0 CONSULTATION FEEDBACK

- 5.1 In terms of the public consultation process, the response to the questionnaire demonstrated a mixed response 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	29.5%	1494
I accept this if it is absolutely necessary	28.5%	1445
I find this completely unacceptable	42.1%	2133

- 5.2 The public consultation also asked people to identify their age, by selecting one of five bands. 356 people answered this question that also identified their age as either being under 16, or 16-24, and their responses are shown in the graph below.



- 5.3 A number of petitions were also received in support of certain youth centres and projects, details of which were reported to Cabinet on February 7th 2013. These centres included Wirral Youth Theatre, St

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Mary's Youth Club, Belvidere Youth Club, Gautby Road Play Area, and Moreton Youth Centre.

6.0 POTENTIAL IMPACT IDENTIFIED

- 6.1 The potential impact of implementing this option was provided at the start of the process in the original options paper; further potential impacts have been identified and discussed with people using services throughout the consultation process.
- 6.2 The proposal would reduce the number of easily accessible youth facilities. It would cease the Youth Opportunity Fund, close 11 Youth Clubs and the Duke of Edinburgh Open Award Centre, reduce Youth Outreach provision and management, and focus provision to young people around the 4 Youth Hubs, while relocating Response and Birkenhead Youth Hub at Pilgrim Street Arts Centre.
- 6.3 Most Youth Clubs and Play Schemes have been in operation for decades and are well embedded in local communities and valued by them. The proposal would also impact greatly on the current level of staff within the service.
- 6.4 Concerns were raised in the consultation that reducing the level of youth provision could impact on levels of anti social behaviour, as well as reduce the potential for young people to take part in positive activities such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme.

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 The accessibility of youth services to young people should be considered of paramount importance if this option is accepted, including those young people with learning difficulties and disabilities. Consideration should also be given to young people with transport to Hubs, as well as opening hours.
- 7.3 Further work should be completed with the voluntary, community and faith sector to promote the availability of other youth and play provisions, particularly those which cater for young people to take part in positive activities.
- 7.4 The new Youth Zone in Birkenhead will provide a major enhanced service for young people in Wirral.

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8.0 SUMMARY

- 8.1 The rationale for this proposal is outlined within this report, in that to modernise, consolidate and realise savings from universal youth services a complete review of the services is necessary. It is also clear that Wirral's spend per head is almost double that of its statistical neighbour average.
- 8.2 The consultation has raised a number of concerns around this option, which should be shown due regard if this option is considered and recommended by Cabinet and approved by Council, particularly with regard to accessibility and achievement.
- 8.3 It is therefore felt appropriate that a decision can be taken to implement this option, and continue to work with the young people and potential alternative providers in order to ensure due regard is paid to the concerns.