

**What
Really
Matters?**

Budget Options:
Summary Document for
Families & Wellbeing

*If you care about tomorrow,
you need to tell us today.*

Message from the Chief Executive

Dear Resident

I'm sure you will be aware that Councils across the country are facing major cuts in funding.

The Government is continuing to reduce the amount of money Councils are able to spend on services. These cuts are falling more and more on deprived, northern areas such as Wirral. While we fiercely believe the way these cuts are being allocated is both disproportionate and unfair, we have no choice but to implement them.

These are tough times - for our staff, Councillors, and most importantly the people who we serve. We have more extremely tough decisions to make over the coming months. To refuse to make the savings demanded of us would mean setting an illegal budget, which would ultimately result in the wholesale closure of services - putting thousands of vulnerable people at very real risk. Our duty as public servants is to do all we can to use the limited resources we have left in the most effective way possible to continue to ensure the services you rely on most remain available in some form. The only way we can do this is in partnership with you. We need your input and your views.

We started this process last year, and agreed savings of almost £50 million. This was a good start, and we were able, thankfully, to make most of these savings through so-called 'back office' costs, including efficiencies in areas such as management administration, marketing, agency costs, car mileage and phone bills. We also made significant progress in removing the legacy of bad financial management at this Council - we have made sure that going forward Council budgets are robust and are based on sound evidence, and the mistakes of the past are not repeated.

However, this year, we need to make further savings and are again asking for your help. Once again, we tried to come up with options which would mitigate, as much as possible, the impact of these budget cuts on our most vulnerable residents. Within this document you will find both an explanation of the Council budget, plus a series of principles which have been used to develop these options.

I put forward to you my options for where savings might be found, and I am asking all of you - residents, partners, and staff - to consider how we can spend less while minimising the impact on our poorest and most vulnerable residents. I understand how difficult it may be to contemplate some of these options, but the only responsible thing for us to do is to deal with the financial challenges we face.

Last year, we knew we had to save £109 million over the next three years - that figure has actually grown due to further announcements by the Government. This coming financial year, our budget gap is £27.5 million. We have found efficiency savings which add up to around £7 million, which do not impact on services. We are also assuming a below inflation rise in Council Tax which would generate £2 million. This means, of the budget options which have been put forward, only around £17.5 million need to be agreed - which I hope demonstrates that there is real choice over where savings can be found.

My pledge to you is that I will consult with staff, residents, community, voluntary and faith groups and businesses so that we can make these tough decisions together. I urge you to work with us and let us have your views.

Graham Burgess,
Chief Executive.

Message from Strategic Director, Clare Fish

The challenges we are facing, both in a financial and demographic sense, mean that we must change, we must adapt, and we must innovate to ensure that we continue to deliver services which are relevant to those who need them.

We have an ageing population, and more vulnerable adults needing our help. We have more and more children needing our support, and we have growing levels of child poverty. At the same time, the aspirations of the people we work with are, quite rightly, rising – as are their expectations of us. However, we have less money than ever to support them. Our challenges are clear – they are significant, but not insurmountable.

A priority is to continue to fulfil our duties to safeguard those who are most vulnerable whilst targeting the resources we have to ensure we achieve maximum value for the Wirral pound. We will continually seek innovative solutions to make certain the financial constraints being placed on the Council do not impact on our residents' ability to live full lives and achieve their aspirations.

To do this we must adopt a new way of thinking – working with and supporting individuals and communities to become more resilient, thereby reducing dependency and encouraging greater independence. This will require residents, people using our services and also our workforce to think and work differently.

It will also mean we will work much more closely with partners looking at how we can deliver services better together. We will be looking for whether other organisations are better placed to deliver services on our behalf.

We will shift focus, proactively involving service users in all aspects of how services are designed, delivered and reviewed. The money we spend will be scrutinised to ensure we commit public resources only where it will have most impact and deliver the most positive outcomes.

We recognise that none of these changes can happen overnight. We have a lot of work to do to 'get the basics right' and to bring our finances into line. We have already made a good start – and we will continue to work hard to make sure we get there.

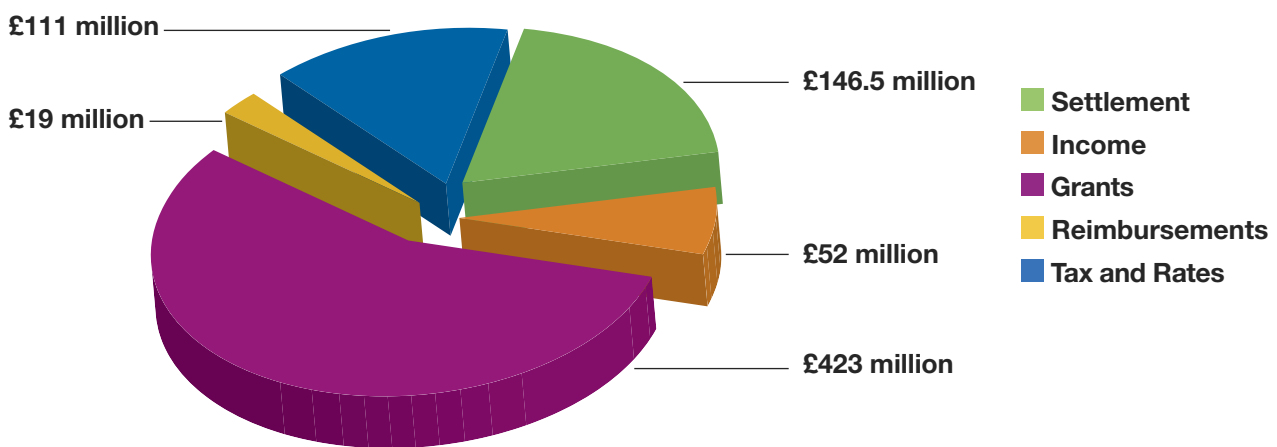
The savings which are being proposed this year are difficult. They impact on you, as a resident, and they impact on our staff. They are tough choices, but necessary ones, and if we are to be successful we need to work together – staff, residents, partners and Councillors. I therefore strongly urge you to let us have your views.

Clare Fish,
Strategic Director -
Families & Wellbeing

Your Budget Explained

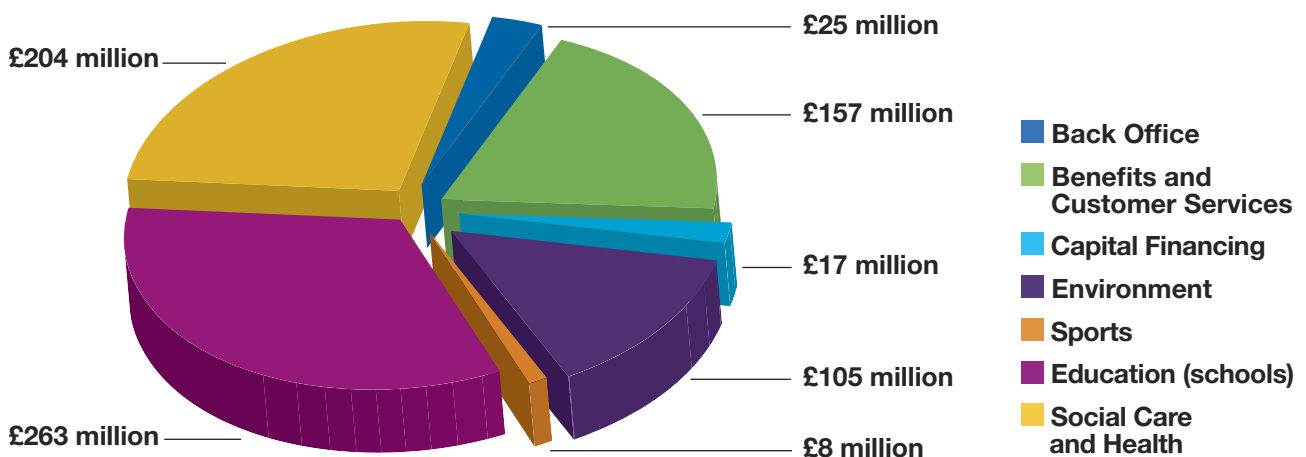
The Council, like a lot of public sector agencies and big organisations, has an extremely complicated budget. We've tried to simplify it on this page, to explain to you why we need to make savings and where our £27.5 million budget gap has come from.

WHERE OUR MONEY COMES FROM (2014/15):



Firstly, it's important to be clear about where the money Wirral Council spends actually comes from. As you'll see from the chart – the vast majority of the money comes from the Government, in the form of 'Grants' (£423 million), which is money provided to Councils to do specific jobs mainly for schools and housing, and a 'Settlement' (£146.5 million), which is divided up among all of the Councils in the country based on need and deprivation. We also receive £111 million from Council Tax and Business Rates, £52 million in income from services and £19 million in 'reimbursements', which is where organisations like the NHS pay us for delivering services on their behalf.

WHERE OUR MONEY IS SPENT:

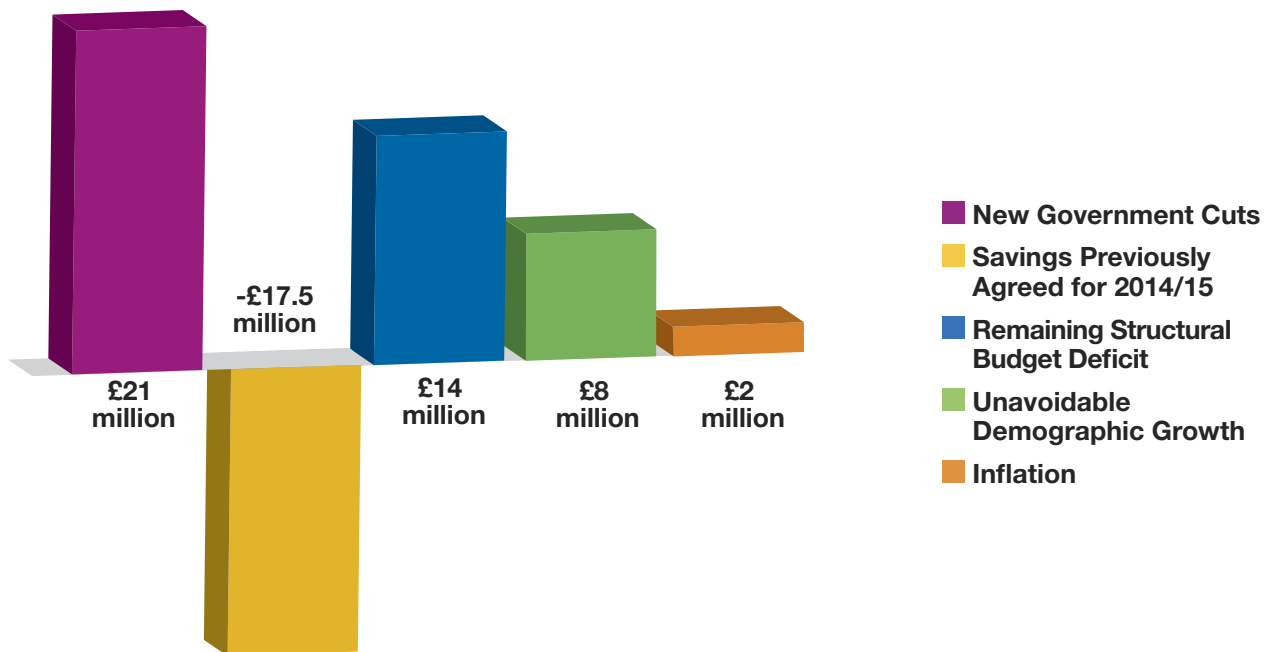


Your Budget Explained

You will see from the chart on the previous page that most of the money is either spent on social care and health (£204 million) or on education and schools (£263 million). We also spend £105 million on services to protect and improve our environment, economy and housing, £8 million on sports and £157 million on benefits and customer services – including libraries and one stop shops. We spend £17 million on ‘capital financing’, which are costs associated with managing the Council’s finances and the hundreds of buildings which services are run from, and we spend £25 million on ‘back office support’, which are those services that you rarely see but are essential to keep the Council running – things like human resources, Information Technology and finance.

If you look at both charts, you will see that next year our current services and plans are set to spend £27.5 million more than we receive. That is the problem we are asking for your help in solving, and why this consultation is so important.

WHERE OUR BUDGET GAP HAS COME FROM:

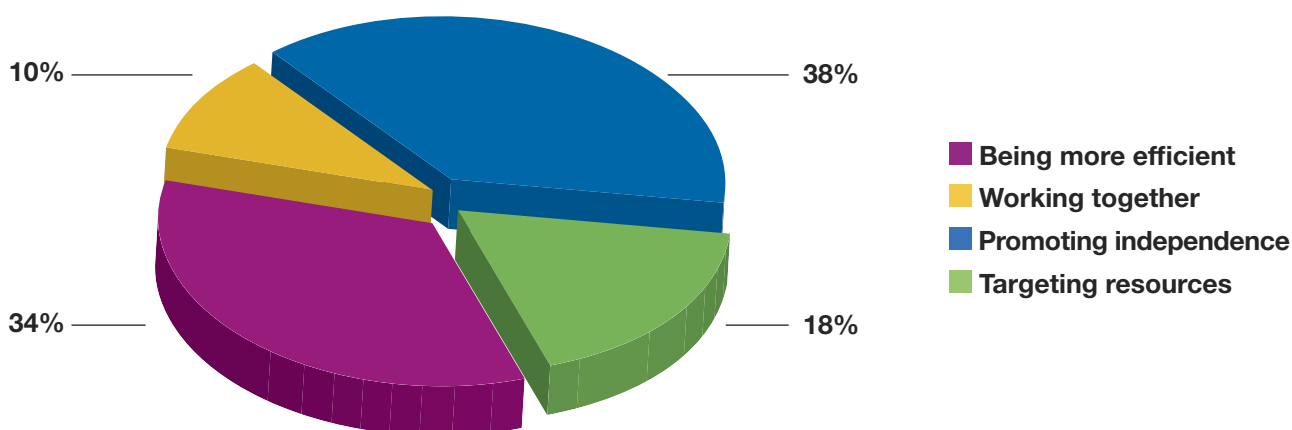


This year, we have to cope with new Government cuts of around £21 million. This wasn't a surprise – as you will know the Government has been cutting back on spending for a number of years now; so we made £17.5 million worth of savings from the last consultation which we will feel the impact of next year. We also have to deal with demographic growth, which will cost an extra £8 million, and unavoidable inflation, which will cost an extra £2 million. Also, due to a series of factors including bad financial management on our part and under funding, we have to correct our budgets for social care for adults and children – that will cost £14 million.

All of this means that we need to make savings this year of £27.5 million. We have presented lots of ideas for how we might do it – now we need to know what you think.

Budget Principles

Wirral Council is facing unprecedented budget challenges. To make the savings being demanded of us, and to continue to provide access to the services which our residents rely on, is going to take radical thinking, determination and some extremely difficult decisions.



The Leader of the Council has been, and remains, determined to ensure that the budget options we put forward lessen, as much as possible, the impact on front line services and the most vulnerable. That is the overriding principle upon which these options have been developed.

Clearly, considering the amount of savings which are required for the coming year, having some affect on services is unavoidable. So, we have developed a further four principles for developing options, focussing as much as possible on the running costs of the Council.

1. Being More Efficient: We will make sure that our services, our administration costs and our processes are streamlined, efficient and examples of national best practice to make sure no money is wasted on bureaucracy when it could be invested in services.

2. Working Together: We will work in genuine partnership with the rest of the public sector and organisations from the community, voluntary and faith sector to ensure the highest level of efficiency and the lowest levels of duplication to get you the best value for your money as a result.

3. Promoting Independence: Wirral has vibrant, strong and cohesive communities. We will make sure that our communities have the tools, the confidence and the ability to help themselves to address local needs and improve residents' lives.

4. Targeting Resources: The sheer scale of our financial challenges means that we cannot continue to invest the same amounts of money into some services, and they will need to be reduced. We will work in partnership with you to take these difficult decisions and to make sure that our limited resources and services are distributed in a way that is fair, equitable and ensures they are targeted at those who need them most.

The savings which are being proposed this year are difficult. They impact on you, as a resident, and they impact on our staff. They are tough choices, but necessary ones, and if we are to be successful we need to work together - staff, residents, partners and Councillors. We have made an excellent start, but the situation is very challenging - please let us have your views.

Taking Part

We want everyone to be able to take part in this consultation. The options are difficult, they are important, and we know they are tough choices. We have tried to make it as easy as possible for everyone to take part.

More information about the budget options in this document is available from our website, at **www.wirral.gov.uk/whatreallymatters**. You can also call into any Council building and ask for copies.

If you would prefer an easy read version of this, or one of other consultation documents, then they are also available online - or you can contact us via email at **engage@wirral.gov.uk**, call into any Council building or call **0151 606 2030** and we will be happy to send you a copy.

Budget Options: Being More Efficient

Option: Paying for Adult Social Care

Budget Savings:

2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
1117	-	-	1117

Summary:

A major priority within adult social services is to improve the method in which services are charged for; ensuring it is fair, equitable and effective.

This work is intended to ensure that everyone using services are financially assessed promptly and importantly that the appropriate levels of charges and financial support for vulnerable people is implemented.

This proposal includes:

- Charging interest of 4% on deferred payment balances that remain outstanding more than 56 days after the end of the agreement.
- Increase the Council's debt recovery rate from the existing 85% to at least 87.5%.
- Ensure Extra Care Housing clients are assessed under the fairer charging system.
- Make the rates for respite, short term residential and long term residential equal at £120 per week, as is the case at many other Councils.

It is important that the Council ensures that payments are collected promptly and in a way that is clear and fair in order to deliver a balanced budget, which has been a problem in the past.

Budget Options: Being More Efficient

Option: Review of Transport Depot and Fleet

Budget Savings:

2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
100	-	-	100

Summary:

The transport budget has a turnover of £8.9m and it is proposed that a £100,000 saving is achieved within depot and vehicle maintenance costs.

This will be through a consolidation of all vehicle and equipment maintenance for the council on one site, a review of the vehicle fleet, rationalising, modernising and reducing where possible and developing partnerships with neighbouring authorities.

Budget Options: Working Together

Option: Shared Services & Integration (Adult Social Care)

Budget Savings:

2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
608	10	1200	1818

Summary:

Efficiencies can be achieved through sharing resources, in particular through developing shared services across the council and across borders to deliver more efficient use of the workforce.

It is national policy to move to integration with the NHS with the aim of improving and streamlining services in the community. As integrated teams are developed and assessment and delivery arrangements are streamlined there will be further opportunities for management savings. As part of this option, a single Health and Social Care organisation will be developed, streamlining and improving social care and health services.

We will move towards this by:

- Reviewing front line services in preparation for full integration.
- Reviewing support services alongside service re-design and streamlined assessment and recording arrangements.
- Reviewing with our NHS partners of the arrangements for the integrated equipment services – ensuring value for money.
- Reviewing Mental Health Services which builds on the review and re-organisation already undertaken by the NHS Partnership Trust.

This option will deliver an improved, streamlined, effective service for people using services although it will bring an impact on the number of jobs required.

Budget Options: Working Together

Option: Accommodation for 16-17 Year Olds

Budget Savings:

2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
600	-	-	600

Summary:

When a 16/17 year old is assessed as at risk of being homeless temporary accommodation is sometimes required, while their needs are assessed. Similarly, young people leaving care to live more independently also need to have their needs assessed, and are frequently placed in accommodation which is purchased as required.

Supported accommodation is currently purchased as required, this is not always the most effective solution for these young people. There are plans to develop a service delivered by a specialist provider within a Council owned property. This will not just realise a saving, but will help deliver a better service and outcomes for these young people.

It is proposed that accommodation for care leavers who are moving on to live more independently, should in future be provided by reconfiguring some aspects of existing supporting people contracts to provide accommodation to meet these young people's needs.

Option: Working in Partnership with Schools

Budget Savings:

2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
915	300	-	1215

Summary:

This option would involve the Council working in partnership with schools to ensure that our shared resources are used most effectively and equitably to provide the services our young people need.

This option would involve working with schools to share the costs and resources required to deliver a number of services, including school crossing patrols, school improvement, the education social welfare service and some of the early retirement costs associated with school staff.

Budget Options: Promoting Independence

Option: Commissioning & Contracting (Adult Social Care)

Budget Savings:

2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
1905	165	-	2070

Summary:

The Council has significantly strengthened its commissioning functions, which has enabled a strong focus on improving strategic commissioning, procurement and arrangements for ensuring contract compliance.

This option will ensure that every penny the Council spends delivers value for money and improved outcomes for people who use services.

This work is effectively underpinned by key strategic commissioning plans which cover: prevention and early intervention, carers, targeted support, learning disabilities and the Market Position Statement. There is now a developing and maturing relationship with providers from all sectors and a clearer focus in relation to commissioned services.

This proposal includes:

- A shared approach and understanding on how Council funding is commissioned within the community, voluntary and faith sectors.
- Improvements in the payment process to providers and the introduction of Electronic Care Monitoring.
- Efficiency derived through stronger strategic commissioning.
- Savings derived through effective control of contract inflation.
- Efficiency through review of high cost external contracts and improved outcomes through more effective arrangements in serving people with learning disabilities.
- Most savings within this option come from improving processes and procedures and do not have any impact on the service received by the public.

We will work with colleagues and partners in the community, voluntary and faith sectors to ensure any potential impact on them is mitigated. There will be potential impact on service users who may experience a change in service provider, as a result however, services should be more effectively aligned to assessed eligible needs.

Budget Options: Promoting Independence

Option: Early Intervention to Support Families

Budget Savings:

2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
300	1950	-	2250

Summary:

The numbers of children becoming looked after in Wirral is not any higher than in comparable Councils; however the children do remain in care here longer than they should. This option would focus on early intervention, and supporting more children to safely leave care and live with their families.

Current spend on commissioning or providing care for Looked After Children is £16m per year from a total budget for Specialist Services of £39m.

These proposals we will not compromise children's safety and welfare, which remains our top priority and duty. The proposals should reduce the number of children needing more specialist intervention through delivering targeted early help resulting in fewer children needing specialist support and providing capacity to support fewer children to remain looked after for long periods of time.

Option: Careers Advice and Guidance

Budget Savings:

2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
200	-	-	200

Summary:

This option refers to the Merseyside wide contract to provide careers advice and guidance to get young people into education, employment or training. The option would involve targeting the work to provide most support to those people who are not in education, employment or training, or most at risk of becoming NEET.

Importantly, this service is also provided to young people who need it by many other providers, including schools, colleges and organisations within the voluntary and community sector.

Budget Options: Promoting Independence

Option: Service Design & Improvement (Adult Social Care)

Budget Savings:

2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
4148	1975	-	6123

Summary:

The Council is required to meet the needs of those who are assessed as having 'substantial' or 'critical' needs as defined within Fair Access to Care Guidance. The Council currently spends £83.485m on meeting assessed need.

Over the past year considerable work has been undertaken to deliver efficiencies through a programme of service re-design and service improvement – thus ensuring that the Council continues to meet its statutory obligations.

The proposed ongoing efficiency is being delivered through:

- Re-configuring intermediate care and re-ablement and through this reducing the need for high levels of longer term support.
- Agreement with the NHS to utilising the budget for delayed discharge reimbursement for services that facilitate better hospital discharge.
- Utilise the Social Care Fund grant more effectively.
- Commission additional extra care housing as an alternative to care home provision.

- Commission more responsive home care and increase utilisation of assistive technology
- Adults and CYP work more effectively to ensure smooth transition into adult services.
- Streamline assessment processes and realign staffing.
- Introduce new IT system to support streamlined assessment, recording and production of management information and intelligence.
- There is no proposal to close any day centres and we will ensure fair and equal access to all day services.
- Most savings within this option come from improving processes and procedures and do not have any impact on the service received by the public.

The programme of improvement and re-design is aimed at ensuring that there is greater choice for individuals and increased opportunity to be supported at home. Care at home is usually more cost effective and leads to better outcomes for individuals. Service re-design requires an effective change management programme and will affect the way in which assessments are undertaken and there is an impact on working practices.

Budget Options: Targeting Resources

Option: Children's Centres

Budget Savings:

2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
500	1500	-	2000

Summary:

The Council spends over £6 million on providing Children's Centres and associated services. This budget option would enable the Council to save £2m over the next two years without closing any centres, by reducing the front line staff in Children's Centres through restructuring and reducing services at a number of Children's Centres.

We will maintain full service delivery at one main site in each of the borough's four Constituency areas and use an Outreach model to provide services from all the remaining sites. This reduction would be completed in a targeted, strategic fashion to ensure the minimum amount of disruption for the families using the services.

The Council has a statutory duty to ensure that there are sufficient Children's Centre services for its population of children under the age of five and their families. It is not proposed to close any Centres at this stage – this proposal will maintain services at four Children's Centres in the borough: Rock Ferry, Seacombe, Pensby and Brombrough. It will reduce the opening hours and services available from the other twelve sites including the two maintained nursery schools.

Budget Options: Targeting Resources

Option: Family, Parenting and Youth Commissioning

Budget Savings:

2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
200	300	-	500

Summary:

This budget option would see a saving of £200,000 being made by targeting the parenting, family and targeted youth support services which are purchased from private and voluntary organisations. It would also see a further saving of £300,000 being made through more efficient and effective commissioning arrangements in relation to family support.

It would lead to a reduction in the provision of parenting and family support and youth services and mean the service would be almost entirely focussed on those children and families with the highest level of need.

Option: Reducing Substance Misuse and Teenage Pregnancies

Budget Savings:

2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
160	-	-	160

Summary:

This area has a partnership budget of £650,000. The council pays other providers to deliver some of this service on its behalf. A budget saving of £60,000 could be reached by reducing the level of service the council buys in around preventing and treating substance misuse.

This option would also see a reduction of £100,000 in the funding allocated by the Council to a joint service aiming to reduce the number of teenage pregnancies within the borough.

Expertise, support and funding would still be available from colleagues in Public Health.