

# WIRRAL COUNCIL CABINET

10 DECEMBER 2013

<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>CONSULTATION FINDINGS: WHAT REALLY MATTERS 2013</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 The Chief Executive, on September 16 2013, published a series of budget options for public consultation as the Council seeks to make savings of £27.5 million in 2014/2015.
- 1.2 These options have been subject to comprehensive consultation with residents, Elected Members, Trade Unions, staff, partners, businesses, community organisations and other stakeholders.
- 1.3 This report presents the feedback from those consultations for consideration by Cabinet.

## 2.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

- 2.1 The Council has been aware of an increasing need to reduce its budget requirement as outlined by its medium term strategy. Last year significant savings were agreed at Budget Council in March 2013. This was an ambitious task and the in-year financial position indicates encouraging signs that these savings are being achieved. However, the saving required for 2014/2015 is £27.5 million with further significant savings required in future years.
- 2.2 The Chief Executive published his options for savings of September 16 2013, and simultaneously launched a period of public, Member, Trade Union and staff consultation lasting for 12 weeks. This consultation ended on December 06 2013 and the feedback received is contained within this report.
- 2.3 The consultation resulted in 6520 questionnaires being returned to the Council, together with a number of petitions, letters and emails.

## 3.0 CONSULTATION METHODOLOGY

- 3.1 Budget options were grouped according to the Strategic Directorate from which they were proposed; Transformation and Resources; Regeneration and Environment; and Families and Wellbeing. The options were further grouped according to 'Budget Principle', which were a set of four principles devised by the Chief Executive to guide the development of budget options. The principles were:
  - 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.

- 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 to highest level of efficiency and the lowest levels of duplication to get you the best value for your money as a result.
- 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.
- Targeting Resources: The sheer scale of our financial challenge means that we cannot continue to invest the same amounts of money into some services. Some 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.

3.2 Consultees were provided 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 four sections, the questionnaire provided a summary of each option and provided the opportunity for respondents to select one of four choices indicating their opinion on the option.
- Summary Paper: Three summary papers (one per Strategic Directorate) 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: 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 consultation questionnaire and associated summary documents were made available in Easy Read, and distributed widely through Council and voluntary, community and faith sector networks. Further work was done to ensure accessibility including developing a video, broadcast on the Council website and through the network of LCD screens in Council facilities, which further explained the context behind the budget process and provided information on how to complete the questionnaire.

## **4.0 PUBLIC CONSULTATION**

4.1 The Council has built up an extensive database of email addresses from residents, partners and other stakeholders who have opted to provide their details to receive information about Council services and consultations. This database received regular emails about the budget options and consultation process.

4.2 The Council's website was also used extensively throughout the consultation, with a home page presence promoting the project. Emails were also sent at regular intervals to our own staff as well as to colleagues working for organisations within the Public Sector Board. The Council's various social networking profiles and other websites were also used to promote the consultation.

- 4.3 Run through Constituency footprint, the Council also held, attended or organised over 200 events throughout the 12-week consultation period. These events were held all across the borough and during afternoons, evenings and weekends to ensure the widest and highest possible levels of engagement.
- 4.4 Questionnaires and information related to the consultation were also distributed through the network of one stop shops, leisure centres, libraries and children's centres throughout the borough.
- 4.5 The local and regional media also promoted and featured the consultation regularly throughout the past 12 weeks. Further coverage was also received through a number of community owned and managed magazines, newsletters and websites. Posters promoting the consultation were also distributed to almost 800 retail locations including post offices, pharmacies, and fast food outlets and off licences.

## **5.0 STAFF CONSULTATION**

- 5.1 The budget options were presented to staff on the day they were published, September 16 2013, through a series of staff briefings held throughout the day at Birkenhead and Wallasey Town Halls. Employees received a presentation from a member of the Chief Executive's Strategy Group (CESG) and were invited to ask questions and provide feedback.
- 5.2 Regular communication with the workforce took place throughout the consultation period, in the form of emails from the Chief Executive and a series of visits to teams and offices by the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive. All correspondence to the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive was also considered as part of the consultation process. Formal consultation with Trade Union representatives was opened on September 16 2013 and a series of meetings have been held on an ongoing basis throughout the consultation period.

## **6.0 TARGETED CONSULTATION**

- 6.1 Many of the options brought particular impacts or changes to service design to specific groups of residents. For these options, targeted consultation events and activity was delivered to ensure they had appropriate, and repeated, opportunities to have their say and feed their views into the process.
- 6.2 Consultation documents were distributed through all Wirral Council Youth Hubs and Centres, and to head teachers of primary, secondary and special schools throughout the borough. The consultation was also heavily promoted on websites such as teenwirral.com and through organisations such as Response, Wirral Youth Theatre, the Executive Youth Board, Civic Awards Groups, National Citizen Service, Wirral Schools Music Service and at the Youth Voice Conference.
- 6.3 The Children in Care Council also held a series of detailed focus groups with over 80 looked after children over the course of the consultation period, concentrating primarily on those options within the Families and Wellbeing directorate but also on other options relating to young people and the local environment.

- 6.4 Members of the Older People's Parliament were also provided with information about the consultation, as did organisations such as Age UK. BME communities were specifically targeted through organisations such as Wirral Change and Wirral Multi-Cultural Centre, who received consultation questionnaires translated into Bengali, Polish and Mandarin Chinese. This work has resulted in a higher than usual response rate from BME communities.
- 6.5 The Council also directly engaged with LGBT communities in Wirral through organisations such as the Terence Higgins Trust and Trans Wirral.
- 6.6 Specific, targeted consultation activity also took place with service-user groups directly affected by the budget options – including friends of the parks groups, bowling and sports clubs, and children's centre users particularly. A local organisation was also commissioned to produce Easy Read versions of the consultation literature to further improve accessibility to vulnerable groups.

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

- 7.1 Detailed consultation and discussions with organisations in the voluntary, community and faith sector has taken place throughout consultation period.
- 7.2 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 An e-Petition was received on the Council website entitled 'Children's Road Safety', which was specifically related to the proposal to transfer the costs associated with school crossing patrols to schools. At the time of writing this petition had gathered 11 signatories.
- 8.2 A further petition was received in relation to the option related to charging for parking within some country parks and Fort Perch Rock. This survey was entitled 'Petition to object to the Proposal to Charge Parking Fees at Eastham Ferry and Other Country Parks' and received 1,298 signatures. The Chief Executive was also made aware of a further petition related to Car Parking in Country Parks which was posted on the [www.change.org](http://www.change.org) website, which had gathered over 550 signatures.
- 8.3 A petition was also received on behalf of the Friends of Royden Park group, again in opposition to the budget option related to charging for parking at Country Parks. This petition had gathered 4519 signatures when submitted as part of the consultation process. A further petition was received on behalf of Unison, opposing all budget options but particularly highlighting CCTV control room, parks maintenance and car parking in parks. This petition gathered 680 signatures.

## **9.0 POLICY AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEES**

- 9.1 A programme of meetings was held during the consultation process with Members of the Council's three Policy and Performance Committees; Transformation and Resources, Regeneration and Environment and Families and Wellbeing. At these

meetings, Council officers provided a presentation outlining the consultation process and engagement schedule.

- 9.2 Members were also provided with information related to each individual budget option within the scope of the Committee, with officers present to answer questions on the detail of each option in terms of potential impact, mitigation and deliverability.
- 9.3 Members made a number of suggestions at this series of meetings; minutes of which are reported to Cabinet as an appendix to this report.

## **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 who were responsible for organising and attending the schedule of community events were also responsible for ensuring all of the paper responses were accurately input into the database.
- 10.2 All responses to individual questions were analysed regardless of whether questionnaires were fully or partially completed.
- 10.3 Responses were continually analysed to ensure the final sample was as representative of the population of the borough as possible. This information was used to provide ongoing guidance to engagement officers to inform their schedules of events and promotional activity.
- 10.4 Analysis was undertaken for each budget option, and this information can be found at Appendix 1-3 of this report. Individual questions were presented in quantitative format, inviting respondents to select a choice among the following options:
- I would support this under the circumstances
  - I would accept this option
  - I have no opinion on this option
  - I find this completely unacceptable
- 10.5 Responses to the questionnaire are provided to Cabinet according to strategic directorate, with a detailed analysis of both questionnaire response, comments and other submissions received related to each budget option. Information 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 Appendices to this report alongside the appropriate budget option. All of these comments are also available online at the Council website at [www.wirral.gov.uk/whatreallymatters](http://www.wirral.gov.uk/whatreallymatters)
- 10.6 The Council has been running budget consultations in this form since 2010 and consistently receives the highest level of engagement in the UK for any comparable exercise. This budget consultation received 6520 responses, a similar response rate to that which was received for this exercise for 2013/2014 and again higher than anything comparable in the UK.

10.7 The questionnaires include a section to capture demographic, geographic and other personal data about each respondent. These questions are entirely optional to complete, and the questionnaire makes that clear. These responses were analysed on an ongoing basis to monitor appropriate demographic and geographic representation against Wirral baselines. An analysis of this data is available to Cabinet at Appendix 4 of this report.

## **11.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

11.1 A project team was established and met regularly 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 Council has made a commitment that all decisions related to the budget setting process should be underpinned by comprehensive, genuine and robust consultation with all stakeholders. 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 Engagement with organisations within the voluntary, community and faith sector has taken place and 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 Neighbourhoods and Engagement division, 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 and the feedback from Policy and Performance Committee Members which are provided as further Appendices to this report.

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

21.1 The recommendations respond to the Cabinet and Council commitment that budget decisions should be taken on the basis of robust, comprehensive and genuine consultation with Wirral residents, Council staff and all stakeholders.

**REPORT AUTHOR:** **Emma Degg**  
Head of Neighbourhoods and Engagement  
Email: [engage@wirral.gov.uk](mailto:engage@wirral.gov.uk)

## **APPENDICES**

- Appendix 1: Budget Options: Transformation and Resources
- Appendix 2: Budget Options: Regeneration and Environment
- Appendix 3: Budget Options: Families and Wellbeing
- Appendix 4: Budget Consultation Demographic and Geographic Data
- Appendix 5: Feedback from Transformation and Resources P&P
- Appendix 6: Feedback from Regeneration and Environment P&P
- Appendix 7: Feedback from Families and Wellbeing P&P