

Future Council Public Consultation Pack

Introduction

Wirral Council continues to face major budget cuts as it seeks to serve residents at a time of increasing demand and complexity. Wirral is not alone, every deprived northern authority faces the same hard choices and there are no easy solutions.

The Council's grant funding will have been reduced by around 57% before the end of 2017 and despite already agreeing savings of more than £100 million since 2013, the Council is being forced to reduce its spending by a further £70 million before 2018.

On top of this, there are £57 million of cuts which have already been agreed and are in the process of being implemented during the next two years. All projections show that austerity will continue until at least 2018, but potentially way beyond.

The Future Council project was established to help meet these challenges and the Chief Executive, Graham Burgess, is inviting everyone with an interest in Wirral Council services to comment on a number of proposals he has put forward to make the necessary savings.

The Council has conducted a comprehensive review into all of its services. Every part of the Council has been scrutinised to ensure every pound is spent effectively and every service is as efficient as it can possibly be.

This project is called 'Future Council', and it has identified new ways of delivering services, proposed reduced levels of senior management, and is squeezing the best value for money possible from contracts and the way the Council manages its finances. These proposals would enable us to reduce the budget gap needed to be bridged by service cuts from £18 million next year, to £2.5 million.

We are not proposing huge service cuts and reductions. The proposals put forward by the Chief Executive may be controversial and unpopular in places, but are targeted at those areas which can be cut while greatly limiting the impact on vulnerable people.

MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

For five years now, deprived Councils throughout the north of England have been forced to make unprecedented cuts as a result of massive funding reductions imposed upon them by central government. National austerity measures have meant that Wirral Council has had to save over £100 million over the past few years. Despite this, we are still facing a further funding shortfall of £45 million over the next two years. By 2017, our grant from central government will have been sharply reduced by a massive 57% in just five years and this is before further cuts are imposed in 2018.

This has meant that we have had to make some extremely difficult decisions and although it does not get any easier, we have prepared ourselves well by reviewing and strongly challenging how we deliver every Council service. This has enabled us to find the majority of existing savings by proposing to reduce senior management, designing new and innovative service delivery models, evaluating contracts and agreeing to significantly change the size and structure of the authority's workforce. Had these potential savings not been identified, the Council would have had no choice but to make even deeper cuts to vital frontline services. Instead, we have protected as much as possible the front line services residents rely on, by agreeing major changes to how we operate and as an organisation, are now undergoing the biggest transformation in our history. We have already identified around £14 million of efficiency savings for next year that limit the

impact on frontline services, and we are reducing our senior management costs by a further £1.5 million. The Leader of the Council has also been clear that unless Government legislation changes, there will be **no increase in Council Tax** for Wirral residents. We now need the views of residents, community groups, partner organisations and staff on a number of proposals, which aim to achieve our remaining budget shortfall of £2.5 million.

Within this document, you will find an explanation of how the Council's budget is put together including where the money comes from, and where it is spent currently. You'll also see how we are approaching the budget this year; specifically how we are changing as an organisation and transforming services to save money.

The workforce and elected members of Wirral Council are public servants. We are here to serve the people of Wirral and that will not change. What must change is how we serve you. Meeting our duty as public servants means finding the best, most cost effective way of improving residents' quality of life.

We have made huge headway under increasing pressure from central government. A lot of time and effort has gone into limiting the impact on front line services but the scale of the cuts we are facing means that it is inevitable that some changes to services still have to be made. This document contains my options for how we might achieve the savings required of us. We have sought to find fair options that still help our budget position, while continuing to prioritise

the poorest and most vulnerable residents.

I am asking everyone with an interest in the services that the Council provides, including residents, community groups, partners and staff, to consider these options and share your views so that they can be taken into account by councillors when they make their budget decisions later this year.

I also ask you to understand that we have absolutely no choice but to implement some of these savings; to refuse to do so would result in an illegal budget and would put vital services at risk of closure.

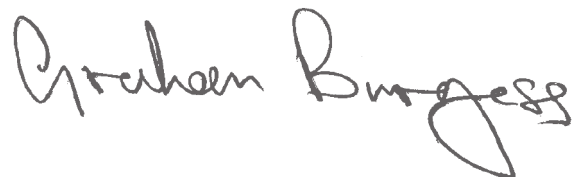
Public feedback has made a genuine difference to the decisions taken in previous years so it is important that you share your views on the proposals. Please visit www.wirral.gov.uk/futurecouncil or any One

Stop Shop or library to complete the online survey. The consultation closes on 31st October, when all feedback will be collated into a report for councillors to consider in November.

If anyone has any other ideas for savings that do not appear in this document then we would be happy to hear from you.

Thank you for your contribution.

Graham Burgess,
Chief Executive.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Graham Burgess". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped 'G' and 'B'.

COUNCIL BUDGET EXPLAINED

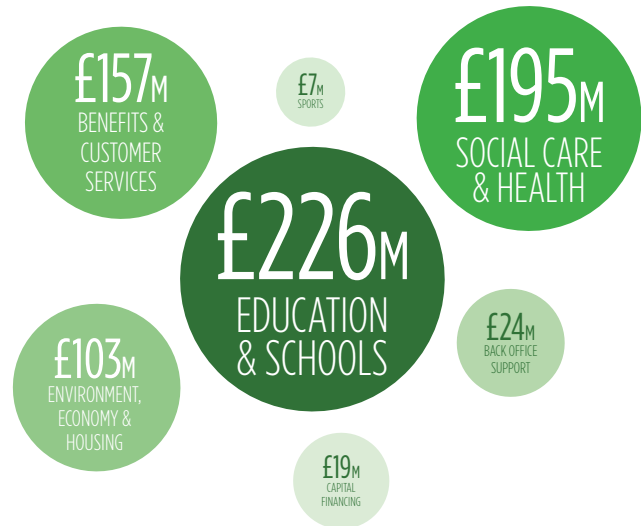
The Council has an extremely complicated budget, with funding coming in from a variety of different sources to deliver a wide range of different services and tasks. This document aims to explain where the money comes from, where it goes and why we need to make £18 million in savings this coming year.

WHERE OUR MONEY COMES FROM

Many people think that income from Council Tax and Business Rates is used to fund local services. The reality is actually a lot more complex. As you'll see from the diagram - the vast majority of the money comes from the Government, in the form of 'Grants' (£370 million), which is money provided to Councils to provide services mainly for schools and housing, and a 'Settlement' (£128 million), which is divided up among all of the Councils in the country based on need and deprivation. Only 28%, £144 million, of the Council's funding comes from Council Tax and Business Rates. We also make £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.



HOW OUR MONEY IS PLANNED TO BE SPENT:



You will see from this diagram that most of this money is either spent on social care and health (£195 million) or on education and schools (£226 million). We also spend £103 million on services to protect and improve our environment, economy and housing, £7 million on sports and £157 million on benefits and customer services - including libraries, one stop shops and call centres.

We spend £19 million on 'capital financing', which are existing costs associated with financing buildings and other major infrastructure projects, and we spend £24 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 diagrams, you will see that next year our current services plan to spend £18 million more than we receive. That trend continues the following year as well, meaning the total budget gap is £45 million over the next two years.

If we continue to deliver services in the same way, next year, we will spend £18 million more than we receive. If that trend continues the following year, the Council will have a total budget shortfall of £45 million over the next two years. This is clearly unsustainable and will lead to major service cuts.

THE BUDGET GAP

WHERE OUR BUDGET GAP HAS COME FROM:



Next year, we are facing Government cuts of around £24 million. We must also provide support to an ageing population, which continues to increase, plus unavoidable inflation, which will cost an additional £14 million. During last year, as part of the What Really Matters Consultation, we agreed savings of £20 million. This means that despite having already saved over £100 million, Wirral Council must still save an additional £18 million next year and a further £27 million the year after.

We have already been able to find savings of approximately £14 million by making changes to our workforce, getting the best value for contracts and proposing different and innovative ways of delivering services. Added to the £1.5 million we are proposing to save through reducing our senior management. It illustrates how we have managed to find the majority of savings for 2015/16 reducing the impact on front line services.

The budget gap has therefore been reduced from £18 million to £2.5 million. The remaining £2.5 million now needs to be found by changing, reducing or charging for some Council services.

The Council's earmarked reserves are held for specific purposes, including ring-fenced schools' funds, insurance and for the requirements of remodelling the Council. These reserves are regularly reviewed to ensure they are at an appropriate level for the size and activities of the Council. The Council's current reserves are at an adequate, but not excessive, level. Even considering the significant progress which has been made towards reducing the budget gap for 2015/2016, attempting to use one off funding from reserves to address a recurring funding shortfall is irresponsible and short sighted, and only serves to delay dealing with the root financial problem.

The Chief Executive has proposed budget options within this document which amount to around £4 million. £2.5 million of these options need to be agreed to contribute towards the £18 million in total savings which need to be agreed next year. This means that there is genuine choice as to where the savings can be made.

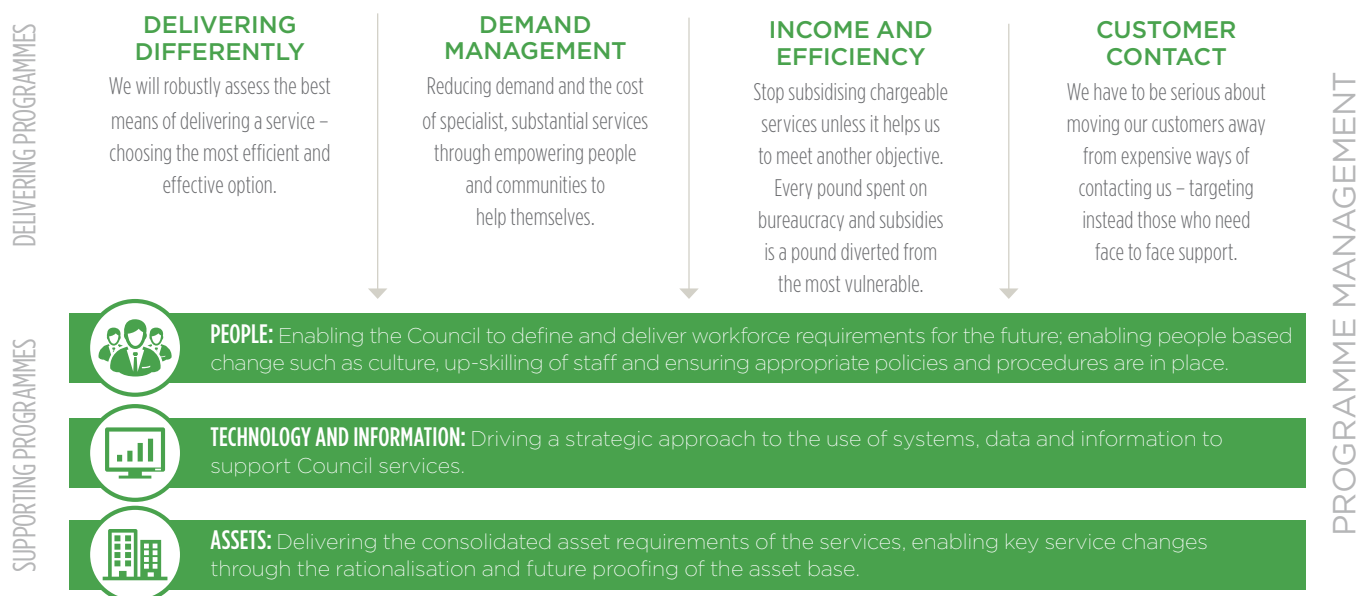
WHAT IS THE FUTURE COUNCIL PROJECT?

We have systematically and fundamentally challenged old ways of working – how services operate, what they cost and what they deliver. We propose to entirely remodel and refocus our so called ‘back office’ and support services to reduce what they cost. We have also agreed to restructure every Council department to reduce our employee costs by almost £10 million, which is part of a decision (and a saving) agreed last year.

While the impact upon residents from these changes will be reduced, saving £10 million in employee costs means, in effect, around 300 Wirral Council jobs will be lost – hopefully mostly on a voluntary redundancy basis. Many more of the changes we are proposing over the next two years will see the organisation shrink even further, as we seek new and innovative ways to provide the same level of services with ever reducing financial support from central government.

The Future Council project has given us the intelligence and data needed to progress a whole series of major changes and address the funding cuts we face without closing the vital services that residents of Wirral rely on.

This document explains the initial results of the Future Council project and asks for your views on proposals covering four themes:



WHAT IS THE FUTURE COUNCIL PROJECT?

During 2016/17, a greater level of savings than ever before will be achieved by transforming how the organisation operates. However, despite the majority of savings already having been identified without cutting services, the sheer scale of cuts to our funding mean that our Councillors will still need to make some difficult decisions about local services this year.

The rest of this document explains the progress that has already been made to achieve savings through the Future Council project, what we will do over the next twelve months to save more money, and the longer term projects that will be implemented over the next two years to transform Council services. It also explains what areas, services and priorities we will continue to invest in – as it is important to remember that, even in a time of vastly reduced resources, Wirral Council still invests £250 million every year in services for residents. Finally, the document also explains the Chief Executive's budget options that require your feedback, which involve changing, reducing or charging for some Council services.

We ask you to consider both our long term plans and the shorter-term budget proposals put forward by the Chief Executive to address next year's budget gap of £2.5 million.

More details on each project and budget proposal are available on the Council's website at wirral.gov.uk/futurecouncil or by emailing engage@wirral.gov.uk.

WHAT WE WILL CONTINUE TO INVEST IN

The Future Council project was established to help the Council meet its financial challenges, but it was also set up to make sure that, in making the cuts which are being forced upon us, we do not lose focus on what is most important and what the Council's priorities are.

At the end of 2017, Wirral Council will still be in a position to invest around £250 million into services for Wirral residents every year. That is a significant amount of money, and means the Council can still have a real impact in improving residents' quality of life, local environment and future prospects.

The Council Leader has been clear about what the Council's priorities should be, and the Future Council project has ensured that investment and cuts have been targeted to support them. Even in a time of unprecedented financial pressure, we must continue to strive to achieve our goals and improve the lives of Wirral residents. The Council is also investing an additional £14 million into supporting key services, over half of which is towards social care. We are also investing in the future, with a further £5 million in capital works, including investment to improve the efficiency of street lights and car parks.

PROTECT THE VULNERABLE

As part of the restructuring exercise, a decision was made to exclude a number of Council teams from this process where they had a direct impact on providing services to the most vulnerable – particularly within children's social care.

TACKLE HEALTH INEQUALITIES

Due to our role in leading on the public health agenda for the borough, we are in the positive position of being able to continue to invest resources in improving the health and wellbeing of Wirral residents. We will continue to invest appropriately in all forms of social care, and drive forward work to further integrate our services with the NHS.

DRIVE GROWTH IN OUR ECONOMY

We will continue to invest in driving growth in our economy, creating jobs and helping our businesses thrive. An exciting new development is planned for Birkenhead Town Centre, while Wirral Waters remains the UK's biggest regeneration project, with planning permission for a new Wirral Metropolitan College building on the site being approved recently. The number of people claiming Job Seekers' Allowance continues to fall, and we will continue to work hard, and invest, to ensure our economy fully recovers and Wirral residents have access to good jobs.

WHAT HAS THE COUNCIL DONE TO SAVE MONEY?

The Council is organised into three strategic directorates. The following pages show how each has already made significant progress in identifying savings.

SENIOR MANAGEMENT

The Council Leader has been clear from the outset that, while we are being forced to make huge reductions in our spending due to Government cuts, those savings should be made in a fashion that, as much as possible, protects front line services to the most vulnerable. We have stuck to that principle, and attempted to ensure that the broadest shoulders bear the greatest burden.

To further mitigate the cuts our front line services will need to make, we are proposing to save an additional £1.5 million through reducing the number of senior managers in our workforce. This will be done in a targeted and strategic manner, to make sure that services suffer as little as possible.

TRANSFORMATION AND RESOURCES

Remodelling the Council

Substantial, unprecedented reductions across the Council's back office, support services are being proposed. This includes centralising into one unit administrative and process-based work to create a 'Transaction Centre'. This will deliver significant savings for next year and will enable us to deliver further savings through evaluating the most appropriate way to provide the services in the future.

Proposals for savings will also be made next year across our 'professional services', such as Internal Audit, Human Resources, Finance, Legal and others. Again, this will enable us to find significant savings from delivering these services in an entirely different way in the future. Our ability to deliver what we need will be protected because of the approach we have taken, with centralised, targeted new functions focussed upon income and debt, governance and compliance, and commercialisation and change.

Cutting Our Costs

Over £2 million in savings within this area will be found without significantly impacting on front line services. Making better use of our 'capital' programme, which is funding that we use to improve and maintain buildings, roads and other infrastructure, will ensure we can free up other resources to make savings. We are also implementing our asset strategy, investing in some buildings and disposing of others to make our use of offices more efficient and less costly.

This includes improvements to Wallasey and Birkenhead Town Halls to allow more staff to be based there, which will have helped to reduce the running costs associated with other office accommodation by around £400,000 by the end of this financial year. The sale of surplus office accommodation, such as Acre Lane in Bromborough and the Municipal Building in Birkenhead, will also generate significant capital receipts for the Council in future years.

We are squeezing every bit of value we can out of various contracts, including telephones, printers, postage and others to make further savings and removing our existing 'cashiers' service. Our One Stop Shops will no longer be able to accept cash payments, which are expensive to process and which we believe is no longer needed as more and more people move to paying for services using credit/debit cards or through our website.

REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT

Remodelling the Council

This area has been extensively remodelled. The Future Council process has enabled us to propose major savings through combining functions such as Traffic and Transport with Highways. We are also proposing to redesign many of our other teams within this area – creating multi-functional services while achieving major savings.

Cutting Our Costs

We are again making sure that every service which we contract out is as efficient as possible and provides the very best value for the Wirral pound. Income can also be generated through new-build housing, parking and street works, pre-planning advice and implementing small charges for replacement alley gate keys. We will also make savings through our Invest Wirral business support service by making minor reductions and changes to the operation.

The education landscape has changed dramatically during the past five years. Schools are becoming more and more independent from the Council and, in the case of academies, totally independent. This has forced us to redefine our relationship with schools. Currently, the Council provides certain services to schools on a commercial basis – where the school pays for the service we provide. Some of these services, such as grounds maintenance, are provided to schools at a price well below what that service actually costs. In keeping with our principle of only subsidising services that demonstrate wider benefits to Wirral people, we will seek to ensure that all services provided to schools and other organisations ‘break even’.

FAMILIES AND WELLBEING

Remodelling the Council

We are focussing on reducing the requirement on specialist, costly services through implementing new models of delivery to target those most at need and at risk, particularly across Children’s Services. Our targeted services are already an example of best practice, and we will scale up and embed what works – such as our approach to Troubled Families.

Following the Council Leader’s principle of protecting the most vulnerable, around £16 million of services within Children’s Services were protected, as well as other services which were either fully grant funded, funded through income or had a direct relationship with protecting the vulnerable.

Cutting Our Costs

We will talk, on a one-to-one basis, to every adult receiving a ‘care package’ to make sure the support we provide is targeted to make them more independent, in both their abilities and their living situations. This work will be done sensitively and professionally – ensuring our care packages are appropriate, meet the person’s assessed needs and empower them to become as independent as possible.

Our Leisure Centres will continue on their drive to become more efficient, reducing the subsidy the Council provides to maintain them through implementing different working practices, pricing models and products.

DELIVERING DIFFERENTLY

WHAT IT MEANS

We will robustly assess the best means of delivering a service – choosing the most efficient and effective option. This theme focuses on fundamentally changing the way the Council delivers services. The scale of the budget reductions we are facing means that, inevitably, we will commission more services than we provide in the future – either through private companies, the voluntary sector or through another type of arrangement, such as a shared service with another Council or public sector agency.

This does not mean we will ‘outsource’ services for the sake of it.

We will analyse, model and research the best, most appropriate and cost effective way of delivering every Council service in the future – using a fair, systematic and consistent approach.

To make this work, we will use our influence to make sure that all public services in the borough work together, acting as ‘one team’ to make sure we get the maximum value for public money. We will make sure money isn’t being spent on similar things by different organisations when we can get better value through doing things together. We will also support partners and develop the skills and capacity within the community, voluntary, faith and private sectors so that the services we need to commission externally can be delivered to the standard that we need.

OUR FUTURE PLANS

Throughout the organisation, we will continue to review every service area to assess and evaluate the best way of delivering that service in the future. We are in the process of implementing the biggest change, and reduction, in our back office services we have ever completed, which will bring a big impact on our workforce. We will go further in the future, and find a new, more cost effective and equally as efficient way of delivering all of our back office services, making sure as much public money as possible is invested directly into the front line.

All of our professional services, such as Internal Audit, Finance, HR and Legal, will be further reviewed and a project will be established to explore new ways of delivering those services for 2016-17, delivering significant savings. A similar approach will be taken to the ‘Transaction Centre’ which we are in the process of establishing.

On the ground, we will be investing in new technology to provide LED Street Lighting. Cheaper to operate, better for the environment and, crucially, brighter – this investment will see us make long term savings in this area without switching off, dimming or otherwise reducing the street lights on the borough’s highways.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S BUDGET PROPOSALS

OPTION: WEST KIRBY MARINE LAKE

15/16	16/17	Total
£000s	£000s	£000s
25	0	25

This option would see us transferring the day to day operations of the site to another organisation – keeping the facility open but removing some of the financial burden to the Council.

OPTION: ALL AGE DISABILITY SERVICE

15/16	16/17	Total
£000s	£000s	£000s
600	0	600

This option would involve a holistic review and redesign of the way we deliver services to disabled children and their families, including overnight short breaks at Willow Tree and the interface between children's and adults services. It would mean a redesign of how support is delivered, with greater integration with other service areas, in particular early help and adult social care.

Detailed consultation with children and families accessing services will take place before any changes.

OPTION: YOUTH AND PLAY

15/16	16/17	Total
£000s	£000s	£000s
450	0	450

The Council has committed to making a major capital investment in a state of the art new Youth Zone, to be built in Birkenhead. This option would see the Council reduce the funding associated with the existing youth service while that facility is developed. Initially, this option would involve closing four satellite youth centres, and reviewing the location of the four remaining youth 'hubs', currently located in Birkenhead, West Kirby, Wallasey and Eastham. The option would also see the Council stop the funding associated with the current 'Play Scheme'.

MANAGING DEMAND

WHAT IT MEANS

We will reduce the demand and subsequently the cost of specialist, substantial services through empowering people and communities to help themselves. We will place a major emphasis in the future on working with people, and communities, to both improve their aspirations and achievements and also limit the resources needed for costly, specialist services. We will also focus on improving people's living situations, aspirations and general family life across a whole range of areas - reducing the demand on Council services, enabling the money saved to be better invested elsewhere.

This will involve a complete redesign of the way outcomes are achieved for children, young people and vulnerable adults in Wirral. The focus will be on increasing independence, and reducing demand on Council resources, as well as joining up our work with partners, such as the NHS - which will provide major savings but also a more integrated service for people receiving support.

OUR FUTURE PLANS

We are in the process of reviewing our entire approach to delivering both children's and adults' social care - making sure we tackle potential problems early, before they require costly, specialist support services. We will place more emphasis, and resources, into services for early intervention and prevention - making sure people stay independent for longer and that specialist services are needed less. We will work particularly with our younger people to increase their independence through raising their aspirations and ambitions for the future.

We will also implement a full programme of behaviour change activity, targeted at problem issues in the borough which drain significant public resources sometimes unnecessarily. This will focus on reducing issues such as litter, dog fouling, criminal damage such as graffiti and other forms of vandalism such as fly tipping.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S BUDGET PROPOSALS

OPTION: PREVENTATIVE MAINTENANCE

15/16	16/17	Total
£000s	£000s	£000s
570	0	570

The vast majority of the funding the Council uses to maintain highways comes in the form of grants from national government. Wirral is one of only a few Councils in the country to put extra, local money into this fund to carry out 'preventative' work, across both our highways and our parks. This option would see us removing this additional investment, and focussing our maintenance work where there is a safety implication.

OPTION: SCHOOL CROSSING PATROLS

15/16	16/17	Total
£000s	£000s	£000s
90	65	155

Last year, the Council worked alongside all schools in the borough in an effort to share the costs of providing school crossing patrols. Unfortunately, only a few schools agreed to pay towards their costs. Therefore, this option would mean we review the school crossing patrols which are currently at 47 sites across the borough where there is already a pedestrian, pelican or puffin crossing in place. Initial estimates are that out of the 47 sites, a total of 41 school crossing patrols would be removed. We believe that, due to the crossing facilities which are in place 24 hours a day, the demand and requirement for a school crossing patrol is greatly reduced. Before this option is implemented, a full risk assessment will be completed on every crossing site.

INCOME AND EFFICIENCY

WHAT IT MEANS

We will not subsidise chargeable services unless it helps us to meet another objective. Every pound spent on bureaucracy and subsidies is a pound diverted from frontline services. The work in this theme will make sure the Council is efficient when it comes to charging and collecting income for services; it will focus on improving and streamlining the way in which we operate and collect funding and bring a commercial approach to the Council's business where it is appropriate.

Many of our services are also chargeable – both in terms of residents paying for them but also other organisations such as schools, housing associations and other partner agencies. We will focus on making sure those charges are appropriate and, importantly, cover what the service costs us to deliver.

OUR FUTURE PLANS

We will, over the course of the next year, place a much bigger emphasis on how we buy services and goods, how we collect income and how we charge for certain services. We will become, in the appropriate areas, a much more commercial organisation. Our procurement and change teams are being combined into one unit with a specific remit to focus on driving down costs on contracts, making the Council operate more efficiently, reducing duplication and streamlining processes.

We also operate a series of 'service level agreements', where we provide services to other agencies for a cost. We will review all of these agreements and make sure what we are charging is appropriate, and covers what the service is costing the Wirral taxpayer. Our enforcement teams will focus on community issues such as fly tipping, litter, dog fouling and graffiti.

We are not proposing to close any Leisure Centres. We believe that by modernising them, targeting marketing and promotion, and changing working practices we can drive up income to a level where we can keep our centres open, either managed by the Council or through another arrangement. We also believe we can generate more income through selling advertising space to businesses on Council land and other sites.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S BUDGET PROPOSALS

OPTION: COUNCIL TAX OVER 70S DISCOUNT

15/16	16/17	Total
£000s	£000s	£000s
600	0	600

Wirral Council is the only Council in the UK which offers households a discount on their Council Tax based purely on their age and the Council Tax band of their home. The discount is not means tested, people receive it regardless of their personal financial circumstances, and our residents with the lowest income already receive Council Tax Support and therefore either pay no, or only a proportion of, Council Tax. We therefore propose this option, which would remove that discount for all current recipients to achieve a saving of £600,000.

OPTION: COMMEMORATIONS, REGISTRATIONS AND MEMORIALS

15/16	16/17	Total
£000s	£000s	£000s
100	100	200

It is proposed to merge the current births, deaths and marriages registrar team with the crematorium and burials registrar team, co-locating the merged team within one office. It is also proposed to raise burials and cremation fees to closer match those of neighbouring authorities, while not affecting our ability to offer a competitively priced service.

OPTION: CHARGING FOR ALLOTMENTS, BOWLING GREENS AND FOOTBALL PITCHES

15/16	16/17	Total
£000s	£000s	£000s
35	0	35

This option proposes that the charges associated with using Council allotments, bowling greens and football pitches are raised over the next two years, to ensure the income collected more closely covers the costs associated with providing maintenance. We will also pursue transferring the management and ownership of Bowling Green sites to the bowling clubs themselves.

OPTION: CAR PARKING - COUNTRYSIDE PARKS

15/16	16/17	Total
£000s	£000s	£000s
50	15	65

This option would introduce pay and display parking charges into the Parks and Countryside car parks at Arrowe Country Park, Eastham Country Park, Wirral Country Park and Royden Country Park. The option will generate income, but requires some investment in providing cash payment ticket machines. The income generated will assist in continuing the maintenance of the park.

OPTION: CAR PARKING - FORT PERCH ROCK

15/16	16/17	Total
£000s	£000s	£000s
25	10	35

This option would introduce pay and display parking charges into the Fort Perch Rock car park at New Brighton, where there are presently no charges. The option will generate income from a well utilised car park and requires some investment in providing cash payment ticket machines. There are currently traffic problems developing around the successful New Brighton redevelopment, which it is thought would be eased through this approach – before implementing this option the Council would work closely with all businesses involved.

OPTION: LITTER AND DOG FOULING ENFORCEMENT

15/16	16/17	Total
£000s	£000s	£000s
70	0	70

Littering and dog fouling offences can impact adversely on the local environmental quality of Wirral. The Council has saved £1 million per year by targeting our street cleansing resources more efficiently. Many community groups have also risen to the challenge and play a significant role in keeping our borough clean and tidy. However, unfortunately, there are a minority of people that persist in discarding their rubbish irresponsibly. The Council proposes to launch a joint dog fouling and litter patrol team to target such offenders. A more generic team will maximise the limited resources available to tackle these problems.

OPTION: COLD CALLING ZONES

15/16	16/17	Total
£000s	£000s	£000s
80	60	140

This option proposes that we implement a small charge of £10 per household where a community wishes to implement a 'No Cold Calling Zone' in their street or area. Residents within No Cold Calling Zones will benefit from rapid response to reported instances of 'cold caller' activity, a designated coordinator, link to 'Ringmaster' messaging and alerts, advice and other services.

OPTION: PEST CONTROL

15/16	16/17	Total
£000s	£000s	£000s
65	0	65

This option proposes, alongside some staffing changes, a 10% increase in charges for all domestic and commercial services provided by Environmental Health, and the introduction of a charge for the element of the Pest Control service related to rats and cockroaches.

OPTION: PUBLIC CONVENIENCES

15/16	16/17	Total
£000s	£000s	£000s
140	0	140

The Council manages ten public convenience facilities which are located mainly in retail and coastal areas across the borough. The provision of public conveniences is not a statutory function and there is no legal obligation on Wirral Council to provide this service. This budget option would be to seek out community organisations that may wish to take on the full delivery, maintenance and operational costs of running the facilities in their area. If no suitable organisations could be identified then it is recommended that the facilities be permanently closed.

OPTION: ROADSIDE GRIT BINS

15/16	16/17	Total
£000s	£000s	£000s
55	0	55

The Council installed 100 roadside grit bins, which were strategically located throughout the borough – to help residents living on hills, and other areas where ice and snow caused more dangerous problems. Following the success of this programme, the Council agreed to install extra bins at residents' request, 198 in total. This option proposes that, while the winter maintenance and gritting routes would remain unaffected, the Council would no longer fill 198 roadside grit bins from the highway. Communities are welcome to continue filling the bins with salt themselves should they wish to. We will continue to provide precautionary salt spreading to the 10 priority routes, the clearance of ice and snow from these routes and major shopping areas and 100 grit bins which have been installed in accordance with the criteria for the statutory provision of grit bins.

OPTION: GIRTRELL COURT

15/16	16/17	Total
£000s	£000s	£000s
385	0	385

Girtrell Court is a 'short break', respite service for adults with disabilities. The service has 20 beds, of which 15 are 'respite' and 5 are designated as permanent. At the moment, 130 people are registered to access respite through Girtrell Court, and all use it for a certain number of weeks per year. This option would explore the possibility of using this facility more widely. This could potentially see Girtrell Court being invested in, and its capabilities expanded to enable the NHS to use the centre on a joint basis for patients who either do not need hospital care or who are being prepared for discharge following treatment. A full review of all the options available will be undertaken and will require full consultation with those people directly impacted by any proposed changes.

CUSTOMER CONTACT

WHAT IT MEANS

We have to be serious about moving our customers away from expensive ways of contacting us – targeting those who need face to face support. ‘Customer Contact’ means, basically, all of the different ways residents contact the Council or access services – either over the phone, online, through letters or emails or face to face at one of our hundreds of buildings. This work will conduct a thorough review of all those access channels, and make sure they are as cost effective and targeted as possible.

We will focus on moving as many services as possible entirely online – removing back office administrative costs, and making processes much easier for customers to complete. The Council also spends millions every year on various forms of information, advice and guidance – both directly providing it and also through contracts. We will again review all of this spend to make sure that we are getting the best value for money possible.

OUR FUTURE PLANS

Wirral Council operates more libraries and One Stop Shops than any other borough in the region. We also have a fully integrated call centre, many buildings with reception desks, a website, social media channels and hundreds of phone numbers and email addresses which people use to access services and contact the Council.

Clearly, this is hugely expensive to maintain. Over the next twelve months we will implement a new customer access strategy – applying a strategic, whole-Council approach to how resources are invested in dealing with residents who contact us and access our services. This will completely remodel our approach to our call centre, how our website is used, our library operations and our one stop shops. We will also, over the next few months, implement an appointments system at many one stop shops – making the services more efficient, less costly and hugely reducing waiting times for customers.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE’S BUDGET PROPOSALS

OPTION: COMMUNITY LIBRARIES

15/16	16/17	Total
£000s	£000s	£000s
411	0	411

We are one of the only Councils to not close any libraries. We believe this is the right decision as libraries play a hugely important role in any community. However, maintaining 24 libraries in their current form in a borough as small as Wirral is clearly not possible in the current financial climate. This option would see our community libraries, which are smaller and less well used, 15 in total, reduce their opening hours to an alternating 2 or 3 days per week, 10am-2pm. This option would NOT affect central libraries or libraries with One Stop Shop facilities included.

These hours would be implemented on an alternate basis – so that on any given day, at least one library in a constituency area would be open. This option brings the benefit of major savings, while at the same time keeping all 24 of Wirral’s libraries in operation. It also gives us the opportunity to actively seek community involvement to potentially increase the libraries opening times and use in the future – rather than closing the facilities permanently.

Analysis confirms customer demand across these sites currently peaks during 10am – 12pm and 2pm – 4 pm with a significant reduction in demand outside of these periods. It is anticipated that the removal of the lunchtime closure at these sites will encourage more uniform and focused usage across a proposed 4 hour day.

HOW TO TAKE 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. They have been put forward because other options would have a major impact on some of the most vital services that Wirral residents, particularly vulnerable people, rely upon. We have tried to make it as easy as possible for everyone to take part.

Over the next few weeks, we will be visiting hundreds of community organisations across Wirral to talk about the changes and options in more detail. You can find more information about the budget options in this document from our website, at www.wirral.gov.uk/futurecouncil. 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 the other consultation documents, then they are also available online - or you can contact us via email at engage@wirral.gov.uk or call into any Council building and we will be happy to send you a copy.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

This consultation is open until 31st October 2014. After that point, Councillors from all of the Council's Policy and Performance committees will look at the results and provide their views.

The Council's Cabinet will then, on November 6th, consider the results of the consultation and make a recommendation on what budget proposals they think should be accepted, based on your feedback. This recommendation will then be debated and voted on by all Councillors when they meet to set the budget.

If you take part in the consultation, please remember to give us both your post code and your email address and we will keep in touch with you as decisions are made over the next few months.

