



FUTURE COUNCIL BUDGET OPTIONS SCRUTINY REVIEW

Report of the Families & Wellbeing Policy & Performance Committee

November 2014

FINAL VERSION

FINAL REPORT

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1. INTRODUCTION BY THE CHAIR

In undertaking this piece of work to scrutinise the budget options for 2015 that fall within the remit of the Families and Wellbeing Policy & Performance Committee, the Panel has been realistic in appreciating that the financial position of the Council, with a reduction in funding of £100m over the last few years and outstanding shortfall of £45m over the next 2 years, means that there will inevitably be an impact on the services that the Council delivers.

In undertaking the task, we have looked in depth at the four proposals that have fallen within our remit which are:

- 1 Changes to the youth and play services
- 2 The proposal for the West Kirby Marine Lake
- 3 The option for the future use of Girtrell Court
- 4 The all-age disability service

During our examinations we have been mindful of our commitment in the Corporate Plan to protect the most vulnerable in our borough and though we have neither agreed or disagreed with the proposals, as that is not our role, we have reflected on the impact of the budget proposals, whether that be positive or negative, and in doing so, I believe we accomplished our task of honest scrutiny.

Councillor Moira McLaughlin (Chair)

Other Panel Members were:

Councillor Alan Brighthouse
Councillor Pat Cleary
Councillor Wendy Clements
Councillor Denise Roberts

2. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Wirral 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 must reduce spending by a further £70 million before 2018.

The Future Council project was established to help meet these challenges. The Council has conducted a comprehensive review into all of its services. The project has identified new ways of delivering services, proposed reduced levels of senior management, and is identifying the best value for money possible from contracts and the way the Council manages its finances. From an initial budget gap of £18 million for 2015/16, implementation of those proposals will reduce the gap to £2.5 million to be found from other options.

The Future Council project has identified 17 possible options for meeting the £2.5million funding gap. Four of these options fall within the remit of the Families and Wellbeing Policy & Performance Committee and have been scrutinised in some detail by members as part of the Future Council scrutiny process. The four options were:

- Youth and Play Services
- West Kirby Marine Lake
- Girtrell Court
- All-age Disability Service

The Chair, Vice Chair and Party Spokespersons formed the core membership of the Panel which undertook the evidence gathering. An initial meeting agreed the scope for this scrutiny work. The Scope document is attached as Appendix 1. Further sessions were held to focus on each of the four options, followed by a wrap-up meeting. All members of the Committee were invited to attend any of the evidence gathering sessions, which included visits to Girtrell Court and Willow Tree. The members attending each session are shown on the Scope document.

This scrutiny report will be presented for consideration by the Families and Wellbeing Policy & Performance Committee at its meeting on 3rd November 2014.

3. YOUTH AND PLAY SERVICE

3.1 Context

The Youth and Play Service currently costs the Council £2.38 million, and this option proposes a saving of £450,000; an approximate reduction of 19%.

The initial proposal would involve closing four satellite youth centres. The Council will continue to deliver provision within the four larger youth 'hubs' (currently located in Birkenhead, West Kirby, Wallasey and Eastham), although provision will be reduced from five to four evenings per week. The option would also see the Council stop the funding associated with the three current Play Schemes, Wirral Play Council, the Civic Award Scheme and the Duke of Edinburgh Award. The approximate impact on jobs is 23 FTE posts.

As part of its long term youth strategy, the Council has committed to making a major capital investment in a state of the art new Youth Zone, to be built in Birkenhead. There will be further implications for revenue funding once the Youth Zone is operational, currently estimated to be 2016.

This is set against a backdrop of a restructure within the Children and Young People's Department (CYPD) in 2013 that effected a move to an integrated targeted or early help offer. These proposals have, therefore, been developed from the premise of preserving the more targeted elements of the service offer.

Youth Hubs / Clubs: There are currently four youth hubs; one based in each constituency. Each hub is open five nights per week (Tuesday to Saturday). In addition, four youth clubs operate as satellite centres to the hubs. The youth centres are open three nights per week (Monday plus two other nights). Both hubs and clubs offer open / universal access to a range of provision such as media suites, computer rooms, pool and table tennis. Hubs and Clubs also offer a range of activities and opportunities for young people including: dance, drama, creative arts, Duke of Edinburgh Award, sporting activities and workshops on issues that are important to young people, such as relationships, drugs, alcohol and sexual health. The aim is to enable young people to socialise in a safe environment while learning more about relevant issues and to enable their transition to adulthood, raise their aspirations and promote resilience.

As the hubs are larger, and open five evenings per week with an enhanced staffing establishment, they are also able to offer more opportunities and space for targeted projects, such as the Lads Project and the Girls Project, which are aimed at vulnerable groups. These projects are often public health funded and young people are referred onto the schemes from services such as outreach work, YMCA, the targeted service gateway and the police. The projects tackle everyday and often complex issues that young people can find themselves facing such as anti social behaviour, gender / transgender issues, child sexual exploitation, drug and alcohol issues, gun crime, gangs and abusive relationships and will alter the approach to respond to current issues and societal pressures and challenges.

Officers have previously done work to assess the distances which young people travel to the youth hubs and clubs. There is a perception that young people will always travel to the closest venue. However, this is not always the case and examples given where that young people travel from Woodchurch to the youth hub at West Kirby or to attend particular planned activities at the creative arts centre in Birkenhead, such as the Girls Group. In some geographical areas, it is a recognised challenge to encourage the young people to travel and noted there are also some physical restrictions, such as the cost, the availability of public transport or the family not being able to transport them.

In order to support young people to travel, needs are assessed and they may be offered grants for initial travel costs and encouraged to travel with peer mentors to encourage attendance and independence. No transport is offered to the youth hubs; only to special projects. There is no current data regarding the form of transport used by young people although, anecdotally, it is known that significant numbers travel on the bus or train.

Estimates of attendances, based on unique young people over the previous year are:

Constituency	Youth Hub		Youth Club	
West Wirral	West Kirby	320	Fender	140
Birkenhead	Shaftesbury	542	Charing Cross	95
Wallasey	Mill Lane	240	Moreton	113
Wirral South	Eastham	182	Bebington	155

Play Schemes: The Council currently runs 3 play schemes:

- Beechwood Play Scheme in Birkenhead – 193 unique individuals users
- Gautby Road Play Scheme in Birkenhead – 169 unique individuals users
- Leasowe Adventure Playground in Wallasey – 245 unique individuals users

The total cost of play scheme provision is £190,000 per year. Currently, approximately 600 children access the services across the 3 play schemes. These three schemes, all based at one end of the borough, are the historical legacy from social unrest in the 1980's. The schemes are open-access for 6 to 14 year olds, operate all year round and are free of charge to users. The schemes, managed by local Committees, open Monday to Friday during school holidays and on Saturday and after school during term-time.

Since the inception of these schemes, provision of play facilities have become much more guided by legislation, for example, the introduction of CRB checks (now DBS – Disclosure and Barring Service) and regulatory Ofsted inspections. The three staff in each scheme are currently employed on Council terms and conditions. It was commented that the schemes were originally set up by community groups with the local authority taking over responsibility at a later date. The increased regulation has inadvertently made them more costly and complex to operate.

Wirral Play Council: Every summer, the Wirral Play Council organises free open-access play schemes across Wirral for children aged 6-14 years of age, as well as holding a national Play day event in Birkenhead Park for up to 3,000 children. Wirral Council provides a contribution towards the running costs of Wirral Play Council and a member of staff is also seconded to Wirral Play Council to support the work. Wirral Council's total annual revenue contribution is £42,000. On average, approximately 1,600 children and young people access the provision across or during a year.

Wirral Civic Award and Duke of Edinburgh (DoE) Award Schemes:

The Wirral Civic Award Scheme works with primary age children via schools, voluntary groups, uniformed organisations and youth and play schemes. The scheme tends to operate as a pre-cursor for the Duke of Edinburgh Award and is for younger children. Most referrals to the scheme arise from primary schools and voluntary groups such as guides, brownies and scouts. The project is based on work in the community and young people work towards badges. On average, approximately 400 young people access the scheme during a year.

Current delivery of the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme is through a youth worker over 4 evenings per week; one evening a week in each constituency to support existing youth groups to facilitate the Award. Currently, approximately 472 young people access the scheme and are nominated via local secondary schools.

3.2 Proposal

Youth Hubs / Clubs: The proposal would result in the four youth clubs that operate as satellite centres to the youth hubs closing (Charing Cross in Birkenhead, Moreton, Fender in Woodchurch and Bebington).

Play Schemes: It is proposed that the 3 play schemes cease to be directly delivered by the Council and that a sum of approximately £22,000 be allocated to each of the Constituency Committees (approximately £88,000) for them to commission local providers to supply services or for children to access services / activities.

Wirral Play Council: Funding currently made available to support Wirral Play Council would cease. This would impact on summer play schemes and holiday provision. The arrangement to second a member of staff to Wirral Play Council would also cease.

Wirral Civic Award and Duke of Edinburgh (DoE) Award Schemes: The proposal is to cease the funding to support both the Wirral Civic Award Scheme and the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme.

Other proposed service reductions: Additional savings of approximately £40,000 would be made through reductions to current levels of provision. Current proposals are for a reduction in youth hubs opening 4 evenings a week rather than the current provision of 5 evenings. There would be a reduction in outreach services (Kontaktabus) also from five evenings per week to four evenings.

It is also proposed that the service continues to develop synergies with other agencies to identify the additional £100,000 required to bridge the gap to deliver the £450,000 total saving proposed by this budget option.

3.3 Impact

Youth Hubs / Clubs:

- This is a saving of approximately £151,000.
- Currently approximately 500 young people access the service across the four youth clubs (see above).
- The spread of provision will be reduced. Therefore, the distance of travel between locations for some young people will be greater. Previous closures, for example, in Greasby and in Leasowe have been mitigated by ensuring a greater number of regular visits by the Kontaktabus. Therefore, some provision continued to be delivered; albeit in a different form. (Note that Kontaktabus is a mobile youth provision, often used as a proactive response to problem areas).
- It remains uncertain how the young people currently using the four youth clubs would disperse.

Play Schemes:

- This is a reduction of approximately £100,000 to the budget.
- Other limited play provision schemes do exist within the borough delivered by voluntary and community sector providers and these provide a positive contribution. However, as these schemes are reliant on volunteers, their sustainability is not certain or assured. There is therefore an issue regarding how to make them viable; Council support and financial investment is often required to make them so. It may be possible that some demand could be picked up by existing or potential voluntary schemes.

Wirral Play Council:

- This is a saving of approximately £42,000.
- Alternative sources of funding would have to be found by Wirral Play Council.

Wirral Civic Award and Duke of Edinburgh (DoE) Award Schemes:

- This is a saving of £6,500 for the Wirral Civic Award Scheme and £16,600 for the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme.
- Both schemes would be affected by the reduction in funding. However, the impact of the proposal is difficult to assess as other contributors to the schemes will continue. It is unknown if other funders could or would fill the funding gap.

Overall Impact for the Youth and Play Service:

- Early intervention and prevention exists in order to reduce the demand for more costly services further down the line. Youth and play services help to prevent young people going into more costly social care or restorative justice systems. A consequence of a reduction in the budget for this form of early intervention could be a later increase in demand for specialist services.
- It is difficult for the service to measure its impact longer term on society. The impact of the service and the outcomes it delivers are not easy to evidence. They are often unique to each individual that engages with them and the baseline and distance travelled as a result may only be realised longer term, such as; entering in to employment and training, completing their education, becoming a resilient parent or not going in to custody. Key to the work of the youth service is that it

enables children and young people to enjoy their childhoods and helps to shape the citizens of tomorrow.

- A risk arising from this option is the loss of skilled Youth Workers and their expertise in identifying potential situations where young people could be at risk and demonstrating and deploying methods to engage and sustain contact with services.

3.4 Conclusions of the Panel Members

- Members recognise that the youth service is a much needed preventative service relevant to young people's health, safety and personal development. The contribution of the service's work in tackling issues such as anti social behaviour, sex education and teenage pregnancy, drugs and alcohol, and so on is recognised. Youth and play services help to prevent young people going into more costly social care or restorative justice systems. There is concern that a consequence of a reduction in the budget for this form of early intervention and preventative work could be a later increase in demand for more costly specialist services.
- Members recognise that the broader strategy for youth provision is to move away from a universal service offer towards a more targeted approach. However, there is concern that the service still requires adequate resources to meet the demand.
- Members were concerned that the proposals appear to have been developed in response to a target figure that has been imposed rather than a level of efficiency that the service has determined possible whilst still providing an acceptable level of provision. Members stressed that further work is required to develop an alternative vision for the future service prior to savings being made.
- With regard to the three play schemes, the members believe that the geographical areas served by the schemes remain areas of high deprivation. Data shows that the schemes are widely used and that there is high community engagement. Therefore, the members suggest that, prior to any service reductions, further work takes place to develop alternative provision and that the possibility of partnership working with any other providers is explored. Members also suggest that the most appropriate allocation and use of the £88,000 made available to Constituency Committees will require further detailed examination.
- Members expressed concern that the proposals still require the identification of a further £100,000 in savings and proposals to secure other sources of funding to meet this are not clear at this stage.

4. GIRTRELL COURT

4.1 Context

Girtrell Court is a 'short break', respite service for adults with disabilities. The service has 20 beds, of which currently, 15 are 'respite' and 5 have been dedicated for permanent residents. Currently, 140 people are registered to access respite through Girtrell Court and many do use it for a number of weeks per year, which are allocated following a social work assessment. Cheshire and Wirral Partnership Trust (CWP) operate a similar establishment, Thorn Heys in Oxtun, which is a 6 bedded unit providing respite care for people with learning disabilities. Both services are supported by social work and health professional staff. Girtrell Court can also provide, as part of its respite function, unplanned or emergency care. This helps families in crisis, preventing placement breakdown and can also facilitate discharge from hospital.

Girtrell Court is regarded as a good site, with the potential to expand and the current building is adaptable. The building is 'tired', requiring some update work, for example, to replace the current shared bathroom / shower facilities with ensuite facilities.

Girtrell Court is currently operating at approximately 75% capacity level.

4.2 Proposal

The proposal is to explore the possibility of using Girtrell Court more widely. This could result in further investment in the facility, enabling NHS partners to use the centre on a joint basis. A full review of all the options available is being undertaken. CWP has been approached regarding the provision of a holistic respite and step-up / step-down service, delivering improved outcomes for local people in a local setting. The proposal will join together the facilities currently provided at Girtrell Court and Thorn Heys, which should result in efficiencies for both partners.

The preferred option is for the respite service to be provided at Girtrell Court, with both social care and clinical staff being based on the site. The re-configured service would offer 19 beds, 5 of which would be step-up / step-down beds; the remainder for respite. Provision will be for people with learning and physical disabilities and complex needs and will support patients who do not need hospital care, are being prepared for discharge following treatment or in cases where an acute hospital admission can be prevented. A multi-disciplinary team will be configured and the administration teams will be merged onto the Girtrell Court site. The future aim is for an occupancy rate at Girtrell Court to be 90% or above.

4.3 Impact

Financial: This project could be described as an efficiency; rather than a service cut. The £385k saving, judged by officers to be achievable will be realised by:

- Greatly reducing the commissioning of services externally. Currently, some emergency provision for respite care is provided by external providers, at an annual cost of approximately £300k. If the proposal goes ahead, it is anticipated that the building will run at nearly full (90%) occupancy. Therefore, the need for external providers will be significantly reduced.

- Sharing staff costs between Wirral Council and CWP. The future staffing models are currently being assessed and have yet to be finalised.
- Sharing running costs of the building.

Service provision for residents:

The proposal will significantly improve the facilities at Girtrell Court and expand the level of care and support which is currently available at the site. It was noted that some of the care packages, currently provided by other providers, were relatively expensive to purchase. The cost of a bed for a patient with complex needs can cost up to £3000 per week. Therefore, there is an intention to bring some of the provision in-house. However, a consultation process will be required and it is recognised that some families may be resistant to change as they are committed to their current provider.

Some people currently access their care via a personal budget. It is assumed that the personal budget would be capped at the level which Girtrell Court would charge. Therefore, in those circumstances the client would have to pay a top up in order to purchase their service from a more expensive external provider.

A separate consultation regarding respite practice and procedure is due to take place. The aim is to work towards an annual four week standard allocation, which may represent a reduction for some individuals. However, across the North West, four weeks respite is seen as generous provision.

Staff consultation: A positive meeting has been held with staff at Girtrell Court. The potential investment in Girtrell Court as the preferred site is seen as a positive proposal, based on the initial consultation. However, it is noted that future staffing structures have yet to be agreed.

The drive for greater integration between health and social care: A further driver for change is the Joint Commissioning Strategy between Wirral Council and Wirral Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG). Discussions regarding pooled funding arrangements have commenced with the CCG. The introduction of the Better Care Fund, from April 2015, will further encourage the momentum towards greater integration between partners.

4.4 Conclusions of the Panel Members

- Members welcome the direction of this proposal and are particularly pleased with the commitment to the proposal registered by the Cheshire & Wirral Partnership Trust (CWP).
- Given the envisaged investment in the fabric of the building, the proposal will provide a positive future for the facility and a more positive outlook for the service. However, the building design work is yet to be completed and agreed by both Wirral Council and CWP.
- The proposal to integrate the service demonstrates a local example of the national progression towards closer integration of health and social care provision.
- Members were concerned that the proposals do not lead to a restriction in choice of provision for clients of the respite service. However, officers have provided reassurance that alternative sources of provision will remain available to clients.
- Members expressed concern regarding the significant amount of work that remains to be delivered for this option prior to the commencement of the financial year in April 2015. Further work is required to develop the business case in order to ensure that the option is financially viable.
- It is noted that appropriate capital resource will need to be secured and the appropriate consultation processes need to be completed.
- It is recognised that further work will be required to align the charging policies of the health and social care provision within the service as currently health care is provided free at the point of need whereas social care is provided on a means tested basis.

5. ALL-AGE DISABILITY

5.1 Context

The total budget for the Children with Disabilities service is £5.5million. Wirral's spend per child is more than double comparator Local Authorities (£35 per child compared to statistical neighbour average of £17 in 2013/14). The reputation of Wirral's service is high. The effectiveness of the service is measured by a combination of benchmarking, Ofsted inspections and views from groups such as Parents Forums.

The option has implications for four components of the service:

- Willow Tree short breaks
- Children with Disabilities social work team
- Transition team
- Family Support team

Willow Tree

Willow Tree provides overnight short breaks for children with high-level learning and physical disabilities. The building was formerly Rossclare Children's Home but converted to Willow Tree in 2011. The service is targeted at those children with the most complex needs and / or challenging behaviour, aged between 8 and 18 years old. The facility offers 9 bedrooms for children and is currently accessed by approximately 50 children and young people.

Given the nature of the provision, Willow Tree is a costly service to operate. Running costs are approximately £1.5million per year, partly due to the need for high staffing levels. The average nightly cost per stay for a child is £306 per night. This increases significantly during school holidays. There is a minimum of 4 night staff on duty, although additional staff will be deployed depending on the requirements of individual children.

The length of stay varies depending on the needs of the child and family. Access ranges from 28 nights per year to 120 nights per year. Each individual case is assessed by panel and the level of support determined. The support provided to children at Willow Tree is very much on an individual basis; staff trying to mirror the routines employed by parents at home. Only a few children have provision out-of-borough and that is normally driven by education-based requirements. No short break provision is provided out of borough.

Children with Disabilities team

The Children with Disabilities team is currently working with 233 children. Many of the children have involvement with the team for several years. The majority of children have an allocated social worker, with some being supported via a Fieldwork Assistant. There are currently 10 social workers in the team. Referrals are received from CADT (Central Advice and Duty Team) and cases assessed. The team works with complex needs children which are the criteria required to receive a service from the team.

Some children with disabilities are supported in the Locality Social Work teams. These are children who are disabled but, due to the level of their disability, would not meet the criteria to access the Children with Disabilities Team. However, they would be eligible for direct payments, although they will not be accessing Willow Tree or the Children with Disabilities team.

Transition team

The Transition team provides a link between Children Services and Adult Social Care. Although, organisationally the transition team is part of CYPD, there is also a strong link to DASS. Traditionally, nationwide the crossover from children to adult's services has been a challenge, for example, due to different legislative frameworks and funding arrangements. It is often the case, that a young person will receive a less intensive package of support once they have made the transition into adulthood.

Family Support Team

The Family Support Team works with parents to support them in caring for their child. Many of the children are on the ASD (Autistic Spectrum Disorder) spectrum. There are currently 13 in the team, who work Wirral-wide. Some of the same children access Willow Tree for overnight breaks.

5.2 Proposal

This option, aiming for a budget reduction of £600,000, would involve a holistic review and redesign of the way services are delivered 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, including a greater emphasis on early help and a greater integration with adult services. There is confidence among senior officers that the £600,000 target can be delivered. Proposals will include reviews of personnel, layers of management and transport arrangements at Willow Tree. Detailed consultation with families accessing services will take place before any changes are agreed and implemented.

Promotion of early help: The key element of this proposal is that the quality of service will not be reduced. The aim remains to provide sufficient support in order to keep families together wherever possible. The general principle will be to promote early help in order to avoid, where possible, escalation to a higher level of need.

Transition: There is an opportunity to review the delivery of support to those young people with disabilities aged between 14 and 25, especially as the Children and Families Act 2014 has now come into effect. The aim is to make the transition process smoother by creating greater integration of children and adult services. It was emphasised that smoothing the transition process does not equate to scaling down the service. In the past, the transition has been a long, drawn-out process, with the perception of clients that they faced a cliff-edge as their services would be vastly diminished as they approached adulthood. It would be advantageous for young people to transition from childhood to adulthood more swiftly by the two services being brought together. It is likely that there would be implications for staff numbers, although further clarity is still required.

Transport arrangements for Willow Tree: The transport to and from school and Willow Tree involves escorts. The escort is not the child's normal escort to / from home and is therefore unknown to the child. Currently, Willow Tree leases 2 vehicles, both of which are up for renewal. It is proposed to lease 3 new vehicles and use Willow tree staff to transport the children. The elimination of the use of specific escorts will generate a total budget saving of £30,000, while the additional vehicle lease cost is negligible (approximately £300). In addition to the budget saving, it is expected that the service will be improved too, as the children will be accompanied by staff to who they are known.

Promotion of independence: The Children and Families Act 2014 places particular emphasis on personalised budgets. It is recognised by the Council that although the quality of service is high further progress needs to take place regarding the personalised budget agenda.

Social worker involvement: Evidence suggests that in many cases parents would prefer to not have a social worker. Instead, parents want access to high quality, effective and consistent services that help support them and their disabled child. The evidence is based on work done by other Local Authorities and on feedback received from parents. However some families do need support from a social worker and that will continue in those cases. Wherever possible, the support should be on a graduated basis.

5.3 Impact

- The intended budget saving is £600,000.
- There will be an impact on staff numbers (although not yet determined).
- Consultation is due to take place with parents, including Wirral Family Forum but has not started yet.
- There is a determination among senior officers that the quality of service will not be reduced.
- It was confirmed that the emphasis of the proposal was to reduce the number of children in categories receiving the highest levels of support. This would be achieved by placing greater emphasis on early help in order to remove the need for complex support at a later time. This can be achieved by reducing the number of children who receive support from a social worker. There are currently 3 caseworkers (that is, non-qualified social workers) in the Children with Disabilities team. The intention is that some families can be stepped-down from receiving social worker support. There are families for whom the benefit from coordination provided by a social worker is debatable. Where young people will need longer term help as an adult, the creation of an all-age disability service will help ensure that they progress through to adulthood more swiftly which will be more cost effective.
- It was confirmed that, regardless of the need for budget reductions, the service would be reviewed. The case was made to Members that the service needs to be delivered to the same standard but more efficiently. Legislative and client requirements have changed; the delivery model needs to change to reflect that. In addition, an early help model is being embedded throughout the directorate. It is not logical for the Children with Disabilities service to be excluded from that change.

5.4 Conclusions of the Panel Members

- Members agree that not enough detail is currently available to formulate a definitive conclusion on this option. There is, therefore, a question mark regarding the achievability of the savings within the required timescale, although senior officers do remain confident that the efficiencies can be found from the within the service's budget. Further work is required to develop a coherent plan to demonstrate how the efficiencies can be delivered from within the Disabilities Service and what the specific impacts of those changes will be.
- Members stressed that the overriding aim must be that the needs of children and families within the service must be met.
- Members welcomed the proposal to reorganise the school transport arrangements for children at Willow Tree, while recognising that the proposed saving (approximately £30,000) is a relatively small part of the total saving (£600,000).
- Members are supportive, in principal, of further work taking place to enable less children being linked to a social worker where that is in the best interests of the child and family.

6. WEST KIRBY MARINE LAKE

6.1 Context

Wirral Sailing School, operated by Wirral Council, is based at West Kirby Marine Lake and offers water sport activities and courses to anyone aged 8 and over. Many sporting and recreational activities are provided at the site such as windsurfing, sailing, kayaking, canoeing and power boating.

The Wirral Sailing School and the West Kirby Sailing Club operate from either end of the Marine Lake, working in collaboration with each other. The West Kirby Sailing Club is a private members club. Members of West Kirby Sailing Club have to obtain a licence from the Council to sail on the lake. An adult licence costs £161 per year (April 2014 – March 2015).

The Wirral Sailing School (local authority) monitors the licences, advising non-licence holders to obtain a licence where necessary. No craft are allowed on the lake without a licence. The Marine Lake offers a very safe and controlled facility.

The Wirral Sailing School provides training and tuition, currently led by a Senior Sailing Instructor and a small bank of seasonal instructors. Once trained, the clients may move on to join the West Kirby Sailing Club. A symbiotic relationship has, therefore, developed between the two organisations. The Council has, in the past, worked well with West Kirby Sailing Club and a positive relationship exists.

The Marine Lake offers a low cost facility, currently relying on an annual Council subsidy of approximately £25,000 dependent on levels of income generated. Sources of income include the provision of courses in addition to licence charges.

6.2 Proposal

The budget option proposes that a partner is sought to which the day-to-day operations of the site, including the running of the Sailing School, would be transferred. This would keep the facility open but remove some of the financial burden to the Council.

It is anticipated that the partner would work in partnership with the West Kirby Sailing Club to manage the facility. In order to remove the £25,000 subsidy, the operator would either have to reduce costs or increase income. The aim is to provide an affordable facility while retaining the current ethos of “pay and play on the lake”. However, no potential partner organisation has emerged to date, although this may happen as a result of the public consultation relating to the Future Council programme.

The potential saving of £25,000 is based on the current amount to which the sailing School is subsidised, that is, the balance of current income minus current expenditure.

The Leisure Strategy will determine the optimum delivery framework for services in the future. Within the existing model, it is assumed that the operation of the Sailing School at West Kirby Marine Lake will be included as part of the wider portfolio of leisure facilities. Conversely, if the Future Council option is approved, the West

Kirby Marine Lake would be removed from the portfolio of services for future review.

6.3 Impact

- The annual savings resulting from the option will be £25,000.
- If the Council no longer directly delivers the Sailing School facility, there will be an impact on 4 staff (3 Lake staff, 1 Senior Sailing Instructor and coaching staff).
- The service would be no longer delivered by the Council; the current ethos may be lost.
- The Sailing School works to encourage usage from across the borough; not just from West Kirby. As an example, the Troubled Families programme has used the Sailing School for clients during the summer. It is anticipated that such work will continue in the future with funding from Sport England. Other inclusion work aims to reduce antisocial behaviour and encourage disability groups to use the Marine Lake. An alternative provider may find it difficult to provide such support.

6.4 Emerging approach

- Staff at the Sailing School are developing a number of ideas aimed at increasing activity at the Sailing School in order to provide additional income. An alternative approach has been suggested as a means to keep the Sailing School in-house and make it cost-neutral based on reducing annual staff costs by £10,000 and increasing income by a minimum of £15,000. It was noted that income has exceeded forecast over the past two years. 2014/15 is also predicted to exceed the budgeted income.
- Pricing strategy for leisure facilities is critical. An increased price can lead to a reduced usage, that is, customers vote with their feet. Before pricing structures are altered, benchmarking work will take place with similar local facilities in Crosby and North Wales. Based on the results of the benchmarking and wider market considerations, there may be options to review pricing structures to further raise additional income.

6.5 Conclusions of the Panel Members

- This Future Council option was dependent on identifying a suitable partner organisation to whom the operation of the Sailing School could be transferred. Members note that no interested partner organisation has yet been identified.
- During the time of this scrutiny review, an alternative approach has emerged. Officers are developing new proposals, the intention of which is to remove the need for the current annual subsidy to the service of approximately £25,000. This will be achieved by a combination of reducing staff costs by £10,000 and raising income by £15,000. Members acknowledge and welcome the alternative approach.
- Members propose that the officers are requested to explore the option for enhanced income generation in greater detail to ensure that, as a minimum, the funding gap can potentially be bridged and the service become self-sustainable.
- If the service was to become self-sustainable, the financial drive to outsource the service, at least in the short-term, would be removed.

Review Title: Future Council Budget Options Scrutiny Review

Scrutiny Panel Chair: Councillor Moira McLaughlin – moiramclaughlin@wirral.gov.uk

Panel members:

Councillors Wendy Clements, Denise Roberts, Alan Brighthouse, Pat Cleary (all sessions except West Kirby Marine Lake), Treena Johnson (Youth and Play only), Christine Spriggs (Youth and Play only), Cherry Povall (Girtrell Court only), Bruce Berry (Girtrell Court and All Age Disability), Tony Norbury (All Age Disability and West Kirby Marine Lake).

Scrutiny Officer(s): Alan Veitch / Mike Callon

Dept Link Officers:

Deborah Gornik – Youth and Play
 Jayne Marshall – Girtrell Court
 Emma Taylor – All Age Disability
 Damian Walsh – West Kirby Marine Lake

Other Key Officer contacts:

Youth and Play – Steve Chan, Caron Druker, Mark Newman.
 Girtrell Court – Michele Doyle, Sarah O’Dowd.
 All Age Disability – Debbie Kewley, Debbie Pearce, Bethan Eagles.
 West Kirby Marine Lake – Mike Withy.

1. What are the review objectives?

- To gain a better understanding of proposed budget options that fall within the remit of the Families & Wellbeing Committee
- To examine the budget options in terms of their context, rationale, deliverability, impact and potential mitigation.

2. What specific value can scrutiny add to this topic?

- Scrutiny can add value by highlighting potential positive and negative impacts of the proposed options to the Executive to inform their decision-making.
- The scrutiny can highlight potential issues and risks and steps that can be taken to mitigate these.

3. Who will the Committee be trying to influence as part of its work?

- Cabinet Members
- Members of Full Council

4. Duration of enquiry?

This is a time limited piece of work due to the lead in times for reporting the outcome of the public consultation in advance of decision-making by Council.

5. What category does the review fall into?

This review falls into the category of pre-decision scrutiny.

6. What information is required?

Primary research: Discussions with relevant Council officers about the detail of proposals.

Secondary research: Previous committee reports, comparator information from other authorities and any supporting data behind the proposals.

7. Who can provide evidence and what areas do we want them to cover?

Relevant Council Officers will be required to provide the details behind the proposed budget option including the service context, the rationale for the proposal, the deliverability of the proposal and the impact and any potential mitigation.

Relevant partners where appropriate i.e. Members have requested that a representative (Val McGee) from the Cheshire and Wirral Partnership Trust is brought into to provide information in relation to the Girtrell Court proposal.

8. What processes can we use to feed into the review? (site visit/survey etc.)

Site visits are proposed for Girtrell Court and Willowtree. It is also proposed that the meeting with officers from the Youth and Play Service is conducted at the Creative Youth Development Centre in Pilgrim Street.

A full public consultation is being undertaken. The outcome of this will be available to the committee at the same time as the findings of this scrutiny review are reported.