

WIRRAL COUNCIL

CABINET

6 NOVEMBER 2014

SUBJECT:	FUTURE COUNCIL 2014: CONSULTATION FINDINGS (CHIEF EXECUTIVE BUDGET OPTIONS)
WARD/S AFFECTED:	ALL
REPORT OF:	CHIEF EXECUTIVE
RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	LEADER OF THE COUNCIL
KEY DECISION?	NO

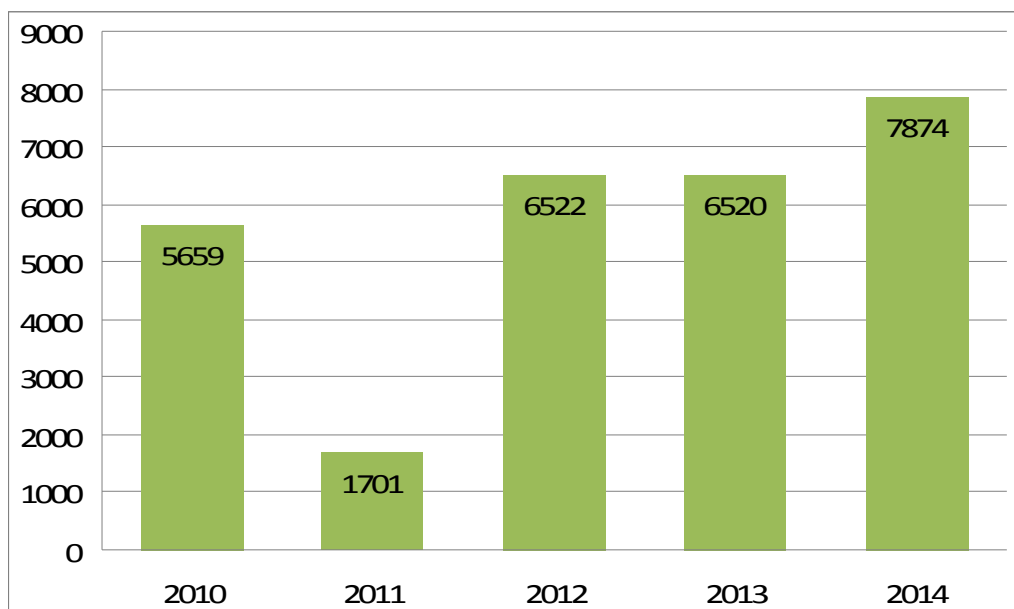
1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Chief Executive, on September 08 2014, published a series of budget proposals for public consultation as the Council seeks to make savings of £18 million in 2015/2016.
- 1.2 The Future Council project has been able to identify potential savings of £15.5 million through changes and efficiencies which would not require public consultation. If implemented, these changes would potentially reduce the budget gap to £2.5 million. Options were proposed for public consultation which totalled £3.7 million in 2015/2016, providing choice for Members in setting the budget.
- 1.3 This report presents the feedback from public consultation on those options 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 in its medium term financial strategy. Last year significant savings were agreed by Council in March 2014. £57 million in already agreed savings have a phased impact to 2017. However, further savings are required going forward. £18 million is required in 2015/2016, £27 million is required in 2016/2017 and, according to current estimates, £25 million will be required in 2017/2018. Total savings required over the next three years is therefore in the region of £70 million.
- 2.3 The Chief Executive published his options for how the £18 million in 2015/2016 savings could be achieved on 08 September 2014. These options have been the subject of a comprehensive programme of public consultation, which ended on 31 October 2014, the feedback to which is contained within this report.

2.4 The consultation resulted in 7874 individual questionnaires being returned, together with a series of letters, emails and petitions. This is a higher response level than any previous Wirral Council budget option consultation, and also higher than any comparable exercise nationally. The various levels of response achieved through budget consultations since 2010's "Wirral's Future" exercise is shown in the table below. In 2011 the Council delivered an online budget simulator exercise, with no specific budget proposals.



2.6 The budget proposals put forward total almost £4 million in savings for 2015/2016 and were presented for public consultation within a questionnaire. The detailed consultation findings against each option are provided within the appendices to this report. The table below shows a basic dashboard of the quantitative responses to the consultation questionnaire.

Budget Proposal	Saving 15/16 £000s	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
West Kirby Marine Lake	25	21.2%	42.5%	16.5%	9.7%	10.2%
All Age Disability Service	600	11.3%	36.0%	25.8%	13.7%	13.2%
Youth and Play	450	5.5%	12.8%	16.9%	29.0%	35.7%
Preventative Maintenance	570	7.9%	27.8%	15.7%	30.0%	18.6%
School Crossing Patrols	90	19.3%	36.4%	10.0%	16.3%	18.0%
C-Tax Over 70s Discount	600	25.2%	30.4%	10.9%	15.8%	17.7%
Commemorations	100	23.4%	45.5%	15.1%	9.3%	6.6%
Allotments, Bowling, Football	35	22.9%	43.1%	11.4%	11.9%	10.7%
Parking (Countryside Parks)	50	8.4%	18.7%	6.8%	25.2%	41.0%
Parking (Fort Perch Rock)	25	12.9%	28.6%	9.7%	18.8%	30.0%
Litter and Dog Fouling	70	49.4%	33.5%	8.6%	4.1%	4.4%
Cold Calling Zones	80	14.1%	18.3%	24.7%	19.9%	23.0%
Pest Control	65	14.7%	38.9%	19.0%	15.6%	11.8%
Public Conveniences	140	8.9%	17.0%	13.2%	28.1%	32.8%
Roadside Grit Bins	55	12.3%	29.6%	19.5%	20.8%	17.9%

Girtrell Court	385	19.6%	44.4%	23.0%	5.6%	7.4%
Community Libraries	411	15.6%	38.3%	10.2%	11.4%	24.4%

3.0 CONSULTATION METHODOLOGY

3.1 Budget options were grouped according to one of four change themes which were proposed for consultation, as the basis of a future transformational change programme for the Council. The change themes were:

- Delivering Differently: We will robustly assess the best means of delivering a service – choosing the most efficient and effective option.
- Managing Demand: Reducing demand and the cost of specialist, substantial services through empowering people and communities to help themselves.
- Income and Efficiency: Stop subsidising chargeable services unless it helps us to meet another objective. Every pound spent on bureaucracy and subsidies is a pound diverted from the most vulnerable.
- Customer Contact: We have to be serious about moving our customers away from expensive ways of contacting us – targeting instead those who need face to face support.

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: 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.
- Consultation Pack: One document containing information on the change themes and all associated budget proposals was produced and made available at Council buildings and on the website.
- Summary Paper: Four summary papers (one per change theme) were produced and were available online and through Council buildings. These papers provided a summary of each option, including the level of savings involved and some background information.
- Business Cases: These papers 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 consultation pack was 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 promotion 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 Service Board. The Council's various social networking profiles and other websites were also used to promote the consultation.
- 4.3 Over 300 community organisations were directly contacted through Constituency Teams, highlighting the consultation programme and ensuring that all residents who are members of community organisations were directly engaged with as part of the consultation process.
- 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 programme. Further coverage was also received through a number of community owned and managed magazines, newsletters and websites. The Council also ensured a presence throughout a number of supermarkets highlighting the project throughout the consultation period.

5.0 STAFF CONSULTATION

- 5.1 The budget options were presented to staff on the day they were published. The public consultation is ongoing at the same time as statutory consultation is taking place with staff affected by the remodelling of the Council process, which is part of savings agreed at Council as part of the budget setting process.
- 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 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 and engagement with Trade Union representatives continues.

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.
- 6.3 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 particularly. A local organisation was also commissioned to produce Easy Read versions of the consultation literature to further improve accessibility to vulnerable groups.
- 6.4 All partner agencies were engaged with through the Public Service Board, with specific communications being distributed by partner agencies to their workforce.

7.0 MEMBER ENGAGEMENT

- 7.1 A programme of meetings was held during the consultation process with Members of the Council’s Policy and Performance Committees.
- 7.2 Members were 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. Members elected to establish task and finish working groups to examine selected options in more detail.
- 7.3 Members were further able to engage in the budget setting process through Constituency Committees, with each committee receiving either a report or a presentation describing the potential impact of each budget option to the particular constituency area.
- 7.4 Members in Wirral South, at their meeting, posed a series of questions related to the budget proposals which have been considered as part of the consultation process. Eastham Ward Members also submitted a detailed consultation response which has also been considered as part of this process.

8.0 PETITIONS RECEIVED

- 8.1 The following petitions related to the Future Council project have been received:

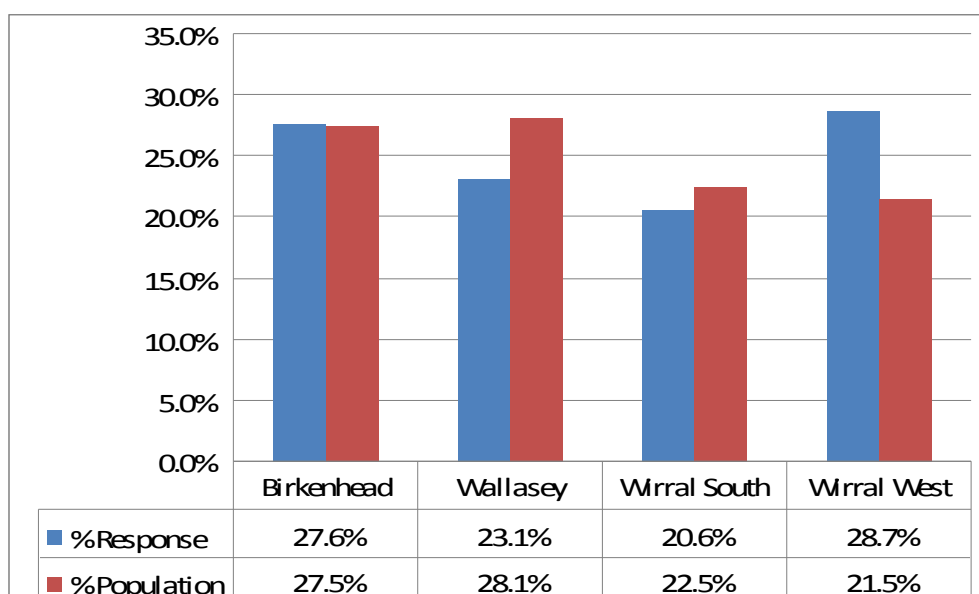
Petition	Signatures
Save our Services (Unison)	568
Save Wirral Sailing Centre	4739
Moreton Youth Centre	128
Greasby Library	353
Irby Library	336
Save Our Play Service	1899
Hoylake Library	10
Pensby Library	551

- 8.2 Numbers of signatures quoted are correct at the time of writing this report. A further petition related to a particular school crossing patrol in New Ferry was received and reported to Council on 16 October 2014. Further petitions were posted on the www.change.org website, relating to Wirral Play Council (61 signatures) and Moreton Youth Centre (16 signatures).
- 8.3 The lead petitioner for the 'Save Wirral Sailing Centre' petition has indicated that, should this saving form part of the Cabinet budget recommendation, he would like to assert his right to address Council on behalf of his petition, due to receiving more than the 3,000 signatures required under the Council's petition scheme. The Council has also received indications that a further paper petition, containing over 3000 signatures, will be received from Unison in addition to the e-survey listed above. If received, this petition would also trigger a debate at Council.

9.0 ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

- 9.1 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.
- 9.2 All responses to individual questions were analysed regardless of whether questionnaires were fully or partially completed.
- 9.3 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.
- 9.4 Analysis was undertaken for each budget option, and this information can be found at Appendix 1-4 of this report. Individual questions were presented in quantitative format, inviting respondents to select a choice using a standard Likert scale:
- Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Neither agree nor disagree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
- 9.5 Responses to the questionnaire are provided to Cabinet according to change theme, with a detailed analysis of both questionnaire responses, 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/futurecouncil

- 9.6 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 7874 responses, a higher response rate to that which was received for this exercise in previous years and again higher than anything comparable in the UK.
- 9.7 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.
- 9.8 The full geographic analysis, on a constituency basis, is provided in the chart below which compares the response from each constituency (as a percentage of the total response) against the population in that constituency as a percentage of the total Wirral population.



- 9.9 In terms of the age range of the respondents, the majority of returns came from residents within the 25-44 and 45-64 age bands. The full breakdown of the age range of respondents is provided in the table below.

Age Band	Count	%
Under 16	160	3.0%
16-24	370	6.9%
25-44	1423	26.4%
45-64	2051	38.0%
65+	1184	21.9%
Prefer not to say	208	3.9%

- 9.10 The consultation also attempted to gather data to demonstrate the ethnicity of the response sample. This data shows that 92% of the total response identified themselves as 'White – English' or 'Other – British' which is broadly representative of the Wirral population. 10.3% of respondents, 510, indicated

that they considered themselves to be a disabled person which is again broadly representative of the Wirral population.

9.11 The consultation further required respondents to identify their relationship to Wirral Council. The results of this question are provided to Cabinet through the table below.

Source	Count
Resident	6872
Member of Staff	1079
Local Business	176
Partner	62
Voluntary organisation	260

10.0 RELEVANT RISKS

10.1 A project team was established and met on a weekly basis 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 2015/2016.

11.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

11.1 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.

12.0 CONSULTATION

12.1 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.

13.0 OUTSTANDING PREVIOUSLY APPROVED ACTIONS

13.1 All outstanding actions are complete.

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, through the establishment of a dedicated project team using skills and expertise from across the organisation, led by the Strategic Director for Transformation and Resources.

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.
- 16.2 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.
- 16.3 Certain budget proposals will be subject to further, statutory consultation on a one to one or other direct basis with people using the service(s) affected.

17.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 17.1 Yes. An Equality Impact Assessment was developed and reported to Cabinet on 13 March 2014.

Individual Equality Impact Assessments relating to each budget proposal have been developed and are published for Members on the Council website from the following link.

<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/my-services/community-and-living/equality-diversity-cohesion/equality-impact-assessments/eias-april-2014>

18.0 CARBON REDUCTION AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 18.1 None arising directly as a result of this report.

19.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 19.1 None arising directly as a result of this report.

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, 3 and 4 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 Emma Degg
AUTHOR: Head of Neighbourhoods and Engagement

APPENDICES

1. Delivering Differently Budget Options
2. Managing Demand Budget Options
3. Income and Efficiency Budget Options
4. Customer Contact Budget Options

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Cabinet	19 June 2014
Cabinet	10 April 2014
Cabinet	13 March 2014