

Chief Executive's Budget Proposals Future Council Project

Public Consultation Feedback	
Theme	Income and Efficiency
Definition	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 the most vulnerable.

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1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The future plans and budget proposal within the change theme of 'Income and Efficiency' are presented for Members within this report. Also presented is the quantitative feedback received through the consultation questionnaire and a summary of the main themes emerging through qualitative feedback, from sources such as the consultation questionnaire, meetings with groups and letters, emails and other communications sent directly into the consultation process.

2.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

2.1 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.

2.2 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.

2.3 Within the consultation documents, residents were provided with an explanation of what each change theme meant in practice – and what future plans and projects would be delivered in the coming years. They were then provided the opportunity to comment on those proposals and give an indication on whether they were appropriate and if they would suggest any changes.

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- 2.4 Residents were then provided with the specific, immediate budget proposals put forward by the Chief Executive. Residents were provided with an explanation of the impact of the option and the associated saving and requested to indicate if they supported the implementation of the option.

3.0 WE CONSULTED ON THE FOLLOWING FUTURE PLANS

- 3.1 In relation to 'Income and Efficiency', residents were provided the following explanation of the change theme on which they were requested to provide feedback and comments.

"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.

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."

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4.0 FEEDBACK RECEIVED

- 4.1 Responses were broadly supportive of the overall approach outlined in the consultation documents and highlighted the need to ensure services are viable through levying appropriate charges for certain services.
- 4.2 Residents were generally keen on the proposal to increase revenue generated through advertising and sponsorship, but were clear that this should be done carefully and not at the expense of the local environment.
- 4.3 Concerns were raised that charging for certain services could deter usage and lead to further problems, and many responses mentioned issues such as fly tipping and others becoming more problematic if residents were expected to pay more towards their cost. Responses therefore requested that charges, where introduced or increased, should be realistic, appropriate and affordable.
- 4.4 However, respondents were generally in agreement that service level agreements and other contracts should be charged at the full cost or at a profit where appropriate. Concerns were limited to charging residents, and particularly low income or vulnerable residents, for services.

5.0 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S BUDGET PROPOSALS

- 5.1 Residents were then provided with the budget proposals from the Chief Executive in this area to comment on. These proposals are provided below together with the public feedback which has been received.

Option: Council Tax Over 70s Discount

15/16	16/17	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s
600	-	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.

Wirral has over 15,500 over 70's households with low incomes that receive Full Council Tax Support as a protected vulnerable group. These households will be unaffected by this proposal.

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Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly agree	25.2%	1319
Agree	30.4%	1590
Neither agree nor disagree	10.9%	573
Disagree	15.8%	830
Strongly disagree	17.7%	926

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.

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Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly agree	23.4%	1221
Agree	45.5%	2376
Neither agree nor disagree	15.1%	790
Disagree	9.3%	487
Strongly disagree	6.6%	344

Option: Charging for Allotments, Bowling Greens and Football Pitches

15/16	16/17	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s
35	-	35

The Council provides major subsidies for the maintenance and other running costs associated with football pitches, allotments and bowling greens across the borough. This option proposes that the Council implements an appropriate and reasonable price increase for people using these facilities so that, while not making the service break even, the subsidy required from the Council does reduce.

Football Pitches; 376 teams play on the 130 Council owned football pitches. The current price for a Type A Grade pitch, including changing

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and shower facilities, is £499 per year. This option would increase that charge by 10% to £549 per year.

Bowling Greens; 57 bowling clubs play on Council owned greens. This option would increase the annual charge for 'half share' from £1200 to £1440. The Council would still continue to subsidise this service by 85%. We will also work with bowling clubs to explore the possibility of transferring ownership and management of the greens from the Council to the clubs themselves.

Allotments; Fees for allotments are charged per plot. This option would increase the charge currently in place from £35.70 per year, to £52 per year (or £1 per week).

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Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly agree	22.9%	1197
Agree	43.1%	2250
Neither agree nor disagree	11.4%	597
Disagree	11.9%	620
Strongly disagree	10.7%	561

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.

Charging would allow the council to continue to offer public car parks into the future in a fair and sustainable manner, particularly given the financial strains on other areas. Charges are already in place in many other Council-provided car parks in other communities, particularly where there is a significant demand for parking.

The hours when charges would apply will be determined on a site by site basis, taking into account local factors, but are likely to start from 10am. Income from Parks car parks (after deduction of costs of collection) will be ring fenced for use on projects in the country park where the charge applies. It might be possible to provide discounted parking for volunteers and other regular users of the parks.

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Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly agree	8.4%	437
Agree	18.7%	978
Neither agree nor disagree	6.8%	353
Disagree	25.2%	1319
Strongly disagree	41.0%	2142

A number of letters and emails to both the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council were also received in opposition to this proposal.

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. Prior to implementing this option the Council would work closely with local businesses and traders.

Charging would allow the council to continue to offer public car parks into the future in a fair and sustainable manner, particularly given the financial strains on other areas.

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Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly agree	12.9%	674
Agree	28.6%	1501
Neither agree nor disagree	9.7%	510
Disagree	18.8%	986
Strongly disagree	30.0%	1573

Option: Litter and Dog Fouling Enforcement

15/16	16/17	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s
70	-	70

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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 introduce 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.

This proposal is an enhancement to current service levels. In addition, longer term impacts should include a reduction in littering and dog fouling, leading to increased environmental quality and less demands on the Council's cleansing resources.

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Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly agree	49.4%	2589
Agree	33.5%	1758
Neither agree nor disagree	8.6%	452
Disagree	4.1%	216
Strongly disagree	4.4%	229

Option: Cold Calling Zones

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

Tackling commercial crimes conducted in people's homes is a national priority. This type of crime can take many forms, including distraction burglary or bogus callers, illegal money lending, scams or other forms of fraudulent activity.

Survey results show that 95.6% of households do not want doorstep cold callers with 20% of respondents reported having had problems following dealings with cold calling doorstep sellers.

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 a rapid response to reported instances of 'cold caller' activity. They will also benefit from a designated coordinator, link to 'Ringmaster' messaging and alerts, advice

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and guidance, a continuously updated directory of approved traders, street signage, window stickers and ongoing support.

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Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly agree	14.1%	738
Agree	18.3%	956
Neither agree nor disagree	24.7%	1294
Disagree	19.9%	1041
Strongly disagree	23.0%	1205

Option: Pest Control

15/16	16/17	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s
65	-	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.

Under the Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949 the Local Authority has a duty to take such steps as may be necessary to secure so far as practicable that their district is kept free from rats and mice. This option proposes taking the same approach of many other local authorities by charging to deal with rat infestations. The proposed charge of £25 offers value when compared to commercial charges by larger private companies. A review of information provided on the Council's website would also be undertaken to ensure that advice is clear on what action can be taken to help prevent infestations by pests such as rats and mice.

The introduction of the charge for rats and the commercialisation of the service reduce the competitive impact of the Council on private pest control firms that operate within Wirral.

There are a number of private businesses which operate in Wirral that offer pest control services and a number of well known DIY stores that sell a range of products that can be used to control the common pest. If this budget option was approved, Call Centre staff would be trained to provide general advice on where to go to get advice on home treatments and what alternative private pest control companies operate in Wirral.

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Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly agree	14.7%	765
Agree	38.9%	2028
Neither agree nor disagree	19.0%	993
Disagree	15.6%	812
Strongly disagree	11.8%	616

Option: Public Conveniences

15/16	16/17	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s
140	-	140

The Council manages ten public convenience facilities 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 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.

The public convenience facilities managed by the Council are located in retail and coastal areas which during the summer months in particular can be popular with shoppers and visitors, especially if the weather is good.

However, in some of the popular areas where these facilities are based there are often alternative toilets in shops and Council buildings that members of the public could use. In areas where there are other public toilets, improved signage could be placed to make locations clearer.

The number of people using Council-run toilets is unknown as the facilities are cleaned by mobile attendants and no counting system is use. However, anecdotally the high use sites in popular coastal areas such as West Kirby and New Brighton are thought to be used by thousands of people every year.

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Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly agree	8.9%	464
Agree	17.0%	886
Neither agree nor disagree	13.2%	691

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Disagree	28.1%	1469
Strongly disagree	32.8%	1714

Option: Roadside Grit Bins

15/16	16/17	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s
55	-	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 particular problems.

Following the success of this programme, the Council agreed to install 198 extra bins at residents' request. This option proposes that, while the winter maintenance and gritting routes would remain unaffected, the Council would no longer fill these 198 grit bins from the highway. Communities would be welcome to continue filling the bins with salt themselves should they wish to.

We would 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 were installed in accordance with the criteria for the provision of grit bins.

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Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly agree	12.3%	641
Agree	29.6%	1543
Neither agree nor disagree	19.5%	1017
Disagree	20.8%	1084
Strongly disagree	17.9%	934

Option: Girtrell Court

15/16	16/17	TOTAL
£000s	£000s	£000s
385	-	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

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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.

This option could improve the facilities at Girtrell Court and expand the level of care and support which is currently available at the site.

Change can be difficult for people and their families, so a full review of all the options available will be undertaken in addition to full consultation with people directly impacted by any proposed changes before they are implemented.

This option would bring benefits to the NHS in particular, who have indicated they would welcome the opportunity to commission the support they require from an improved facility at Girtrell Court.

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Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly agree	19.6%	1024
Agree	44.4%	2317
Neither agree nor disagree	23.0%	1199
Disagree	5.6%	290
Strongly disagree	7.4	384