

# WIRRAL COUNCIL

## CABINET

09 DECEMBER 2014

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

### 1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 On September 08 2014, the Chief Executive 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 in 2015/2016. Options were proposed for public consultation which totalled £3.7 million, providing choice for Members in setting the budget.
- 1.3 This report presents a summary of the feedback from the public consultation and the pre-decision scrutiny work completed by the Policy and Performance Committees. Cabinet is requested to consider these findings, and if it is so minded, to use this feedback to inform its budget deliberations and recommendations.

### 2.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

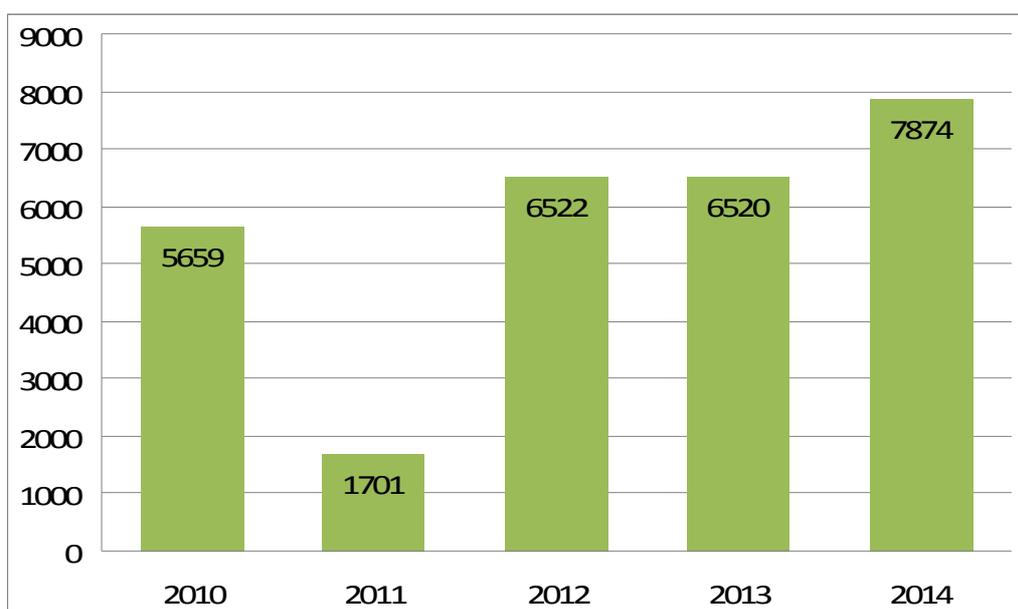
- 2.1 The Council has been aware of an increasing need to reduce its budget requirement, as outlined in its medium term financial strategy. Last year significant savings were agreed by Council in March 2014. There is currently £57 million in already agreed savings that will have a phased impact to 2017. 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.
- 2.2 The Chief Executive published his options for 2015/2016 on 08 September 2014. These options have been the subject of a comprehensive programme of public consultation, which ended on 31 October 2014. The findings of this

consultation were reported in full to Cabinet on 6 November 2014. This report can be viewed at the link below:

<http://democracy.wirral.gov.uk/mgAi.aspx?ID=27158>

### 3.0 CONSULTATION FINDINGS

3.1 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.



3.2 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%

#### 4.0 PETITIONS

4.1 The following petitions related to the budget consultation were received within the consultation period and reported to Cabinet at its meeting on 6 November 2014.

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

4.2 The Unison 'Save Our Services' petition was supplemented by a further paper petition containing 3474 signatures after the 6 November Cabinet report was published, meaning the total number of signatures for this petition was 4042.

4.3 The lead petitioners for both 'Save Our Services' and 'Save Wirral Sailing Centre' have both indicated that, due to receiving more than 3,000 signatures, they would like to exercise their right to address the next meeting of Full Council, under the Council's petition scheme.

4.4 A further petition related to a School Crossing Patrol on the A41, New Ferry, was received with 1276 signatures and reported to Council on 16 October 2014. Further submissions were received from pupils of Woodlands Primary School, Birkenhead, in relation to the proposal regarding School Crossing Patrols.

4.5 A small number of petitions were received after the closing date of consultation and, as such, did not form part of the original report to Cabinet on 6 November. These were:

- Upton Library – 107 signatures
- Greasby Library – 171 signatures (in addition to the 353 signatures quoted in the table above).
- St James Library – 214 signatures.

- 4.6 Further petitions were posted on the [www.change.org](http://www.change.org) website, relating to Wirral Play Council (61 signatures) and Moreton Youth Centre (16 signatures).
- 4.7 An additional petition related to Irby library was received on November 26, around one month after the closing date of the public consultation. This petition contained 714 signatures, in addition to the signatures quoted above, and was submitted together with a letter from the chair of the Friends of Irby Library.
- 4.8 The chair of the Friends of Greasby Library also submitted a letter opposing the budget proposal, following the initial consultation period.

## **5.0 FINDINGS FROM SCRUTINY**

- 5.1 To ensure a consistent approach to scrutiny across the Policy and Performance committees, the Chair of the Coordinating Committee convened a meeting of all Committee Chairs and Spokespersons on 3<sup>rd</sup> September. At this meeting, Members considered a review undertaken in 2013 by the Regeneration and Environment Committee of last year's budget options. The review was consistent with the standard task and finish format and was well received by Members. As such this approach was adopted.
- 5.2 This scrutiny approach falls into the category of pre-decision scrutiny, providing non-executive Members with the opportunity to understand and evaluate the Future Council budget proposals in advance of any recommendations by Cabinet and decisions by Council. The reviews undertaken by each committee were time limited in order to meet the schedule for decision-making.
- 5.3 Each committee established a scrutiny review panel to scope out its approach to examining each budget option. This involved a series of detailed question and answer sessions with the relevant officers responsible for producing the saving proposals. Other witnesses and sites visits were incorporated where possible. Discussions focussed on the rationale behind the proposals, their deliverability and the impact and possible mitigation.
- 5.4 The findings of the review panels are presented as three reports, one for each Committee. These are included as appendices 1, 3 and 5. The reports follow a consistent format, presenting the service context, the details of the proposal, the impact of the proposal and the observations / conclusions of the review panel.
- 5.5 In addition to these reports, the draft minutes of the committee meetings held on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> of November are also included as appendices 2, 4 and 6 to this report. These capture the additional comments and recommendations from the Committee discussions in the light of the public consultation findings which were presented at each meeting.

## **6.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

- 6.1 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.

## **7.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 7.1 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.

## **8.0 CONSULTATION**

- 8.1 The report to Cabinet on 6 November 2014 sets out the extent of the consultation activity undertaken in relation to the budget options. The Council has used a range of access channels to ensure wide engagement with residents, partners and other stakeholders including the website, email, libraries, one stop shops, leisure and children's centres.
- 8.2 Targeted consultation has also been undertaken in relation to those budget options which would have a particular impact on specific groups of residents or service users. This has included targeting all Wirral Council Youth Hubs and Centres, friends of parks groups, bowling and sports clubs. Over 300 community organisations were directly contacted by the Constituency Teams and a local organisation was commissioned to produce Easy Read versions of the consultation literature to improve accessibility for vulnerable groups.
- 8.3 The budget options were presented to staff on the day they were published. The public consultation has been on going at the same time as statutory consultation with staff in relation to the Future Council remodelling process, which is part of the savings previously agreed at Council.
- 8.4 As well as Members being engaged through the scrutiny process, Constituency Committees have received either a report or a presentation describing the potential impact of each budget option to the particular constituency area. Members in Wirral South, at their meeting, posed a series of questions related to the budget proposals. Eastham Ward Members also submitted a detailed consultation response. Both of these have been considered as part of this process.

## **9.0 OUTSTANDING PREVIOUSLY APPROVED ACTIONS**

- 9.1 All outstanding actions are complete.

## **10.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS**

- 10.1 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.

## **11.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS**

11.1 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.

## **12.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

12.1 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.

12.2 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.

12.3 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.

## **13.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

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

13.2 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>

## **14.0 CARBON REDUCTION AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

14.1 None arising directly as a result of this report.

## **15.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

15.1 None arising directly as a result of this report.

## **16.0 RECOMMENDATION/S**

16.1 That Cabinet notes the consultation and scrutiny findings as described within this report, and thanks Wirral residents, Elected Members, staff and other stakeholders for their input.

16.2 That Cabinet has regard to these findings in relation to the Future Council budget options.

## **17.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S**

17.1 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** Joe Blott  
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#### **APPENDICES**

- Appendix 1: Future Council Budget Options Scrutiny Review: Report of the Families & Wellbeing Policy & Performance Committee
- Appendix 2: Draft Minutes of the Families and Wellbeing Committee 3 Nov 2014
- Appendix 3: Future Council Budget Options Scrutiny Review: Report of the Regeneration & Environment Policy & Performance Committee
- Appendix 4: Draft Minutes of the Regeneration & Environment Committee 4 Nov 2014
- Appendix 5: Future Council Budget Options Scrutiny Review: Report of the Transformation & Resources Policy & Performance Committee
- Appendix 6: Draft Minutes of the Transformation & Resources Committee 5 Nov 2014

#### **SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)**

<b>Council Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Cabinet</b>	<b>06 November 2014</b>
<b>Cabinet</b>	<b>19 June 2014</b>
<b>Cabinet</b>	<b>10 April 2014</b>
<b>Cabinet</b>	<b>13 March 2014</b>