



**COUNCILLOR PHIL DAVIES
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

**CABINET
22 FEBRUARY 2016**

BUDGET CONSULTATION FINDINGS

Councillor Phil Davies, Leader of the Council, said:

“Setting the Council budget is always a difficult task – made more so by continuing reductions in our support from Central Government. Every year, we have committed to not making these tough decisions in isolation, and asking Wirral residents to give us their views.

“Once again, they have delivered – in record numbers. Over 10,000 local people have taken part in this consultation process; a higher level of response than anywhere else in the UK for a similar exercise. On behalf of the Cabinet I thank them for their involvement and pledge to consider all the feedback we have received when we propose our budget.”

REPORT SUMMARY

The Council is required to make significant budget savings over the coming five years. On 18 December 2015 the Council commenced consultation with staff, residents and other stakeholders on a series of savings proposals.

This report provides Cabinet with the feedback from that consultation process for noting and for consideration when proposing the Council budget for 2016/17. It also includes Elected Member feedback from a series of budget scrutiny workshops

This matter affects all Wards within the borough. It is not a key decision.

RECOMMENDATION/S

Cabinet are requested to:

1. Note the consultation process and implementation described within this report, and thanks Wirral residents, staff and other stakeholders for their input.
2. Note the consultation findings within this report and associated appendix in relation to each budget proposal, and the feedback from Policy and Performance Committee Members which are provided as further appendices to this report.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

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.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

The 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.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

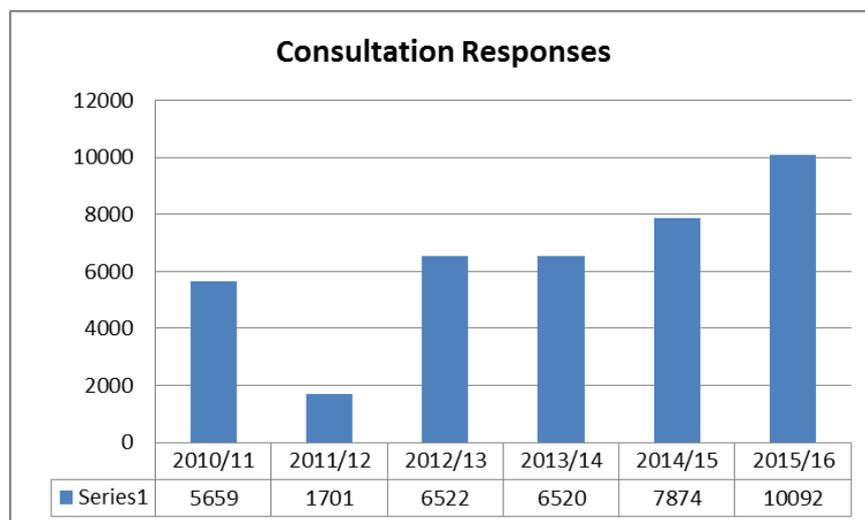
On 18 December 2015 the Council commenced consultation on a set of budget proposals which were designed to support achieving a balanced budget for 2016/17.

These proposals were also, where necessary, subject to statutory consultation with Council staff. The public consultation period ended on Friday 29 January at 5pm and staff consultation continues until 12 February 2016.

This report provides Cabinet with a summary of the consultation process alongside the findings from the public consultation activity.

The consultation resulted in 10,092 questionnaires being returned, together with a series of letters, petitions and other representations. This represents a higher response level than any previous Wirral Council consultation and a higher level of response than any comparable exercise anywhere in the UK.

The various levels of response since the 2010/11 'Wirral's Future' exercise is shown in the graph below. In 2011/12 the Council delivered an online budget simulator consultation, with no specific budget proposals.



The consultation was delivered this year through an online and paper questionnaire, which sought to gather views on a series of policy-based questions for how the Council could change services or processes in order to save money. This was supported by the publication of each budget proposal with relevant details, against which residents were invited to submit their views.

The consultation questionnaire and associated information on specific budget proposals was made widely available through over 50 individual locations throughout the borough, as well as being extensively promoted online through the council website and social media, and through local and regional media.

The consultation was further promoted to hundreds of community organisations, businesses and via email to over 60,000 residents – ensuring as many Wirral residents and stakeholders were aware of the consultation process and its proposals as possible, which has led to a record high number of respondents.

A series of meetings took place during the consultation with Members of the Council’s Policy & Performance Committees. Members were provided with information relating to budget options 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. The findings of these reviews are available for consideration by Cabinet in the appendices of this report.

At the time of writing, the following petitions have been received by the Council related to the budget consultation.

Petition	Signatures
School crossing patrol, Christ Church School, Moreton.	462
Stop the Job Cuts, Stop the Service Cuts	20
Save Girtrell Court Respite Home	280

The budget proposals were presented to staff on the day they were published for the Cabinet meeting on 18 December. The public consultation process ran simultaneously with the staff consultation process. Regular communication with the workforce took place throughout the consultation period, in the form of emails from the chief executive and regular briefings from senior management. All correspondence received by the chief executive, Council Leader, Cabinet Members and senior council staff has also been considered as part of the consultation.

Formal consultation and engagement with Trade Union representatives continues. Statutory consultation in relation to the proposed closure of the Girtrell Court respite facility is also ongoing.

The full results of the budget consultation exercise can be found in appendix 1 of this report. Comments received through the paper and online consultation questionnaire documents are available for Cabinet to review on the Council’s website.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None arising as a direct implication of this report.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

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.

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.

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.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

Existing staffing resources were used to develop and deliver this project, calling on advice and support from across the organisation.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

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 2016/2017.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

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.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

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:

<http://www.wirral.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/equality-impact-assessments/equality-impact-assessments-2014/budget#overlay-context=communities-and-neighbourhoods/equality-impact-assessments/equality-impact-assessments-2014>

REPORT AUTHOR: Kevin MacCallum
Senior Manager: Marketing & Communications

APPENDICES

1 – Detailed Consultation Findings

2 – Transformation & Resources P&P Review

3 – Regeneration & Environment P&P Review

4 – Families & Wellbeing P&P Review

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
None	N/A