



# Have your say

# Wirral Council Budget

## Consultation Report



**Consultation: 21 December 2020 – 22 January 2021**

**Report: 1 February 2021**

## Contents

<b>1.0 Executive Summary .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2.0 Methodology .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>2.1 Public Consultation .....</b>	<b>7</b>
2.1.1 Questionnaire .....	8
2.1.2 Ideas Board .....	8
2.1.3 Public Events .....	8
<b>2.2 Staff Feedback.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>2.3 Additional Responses .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>2.4 Analysis of Respondents .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>2.5 Interpretation of Results.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>2.6 Communication .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>3.0 Results .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>3.1 Questionnaire Results .....</b>	<b>11</b>
3.1.1 Children, Young People and Education Committee .....	11
3.1.2 Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee .....	12
3.1.3 Tourism, Communities, Culture & Leisure .....	17
3.1.4 Economy Regeneration & Development Committee .....	20
3.1.5 Housing Committee .....	21
3.1.6 Adult Social Care and Health Committee .....	22
3.1.7 Policy and Resources Committee .....	22
<b>3.2 Ideas Board Results.....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>3.3 Events Feedback.....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>3.4 Staff Feedback.....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>4.0 Demographics and Site Traffic .....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>4.1 Demographics .....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>4.2 Have your say - Site Traffic .....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Appendix 1: Qualitative Feedback.....</b>	<b>36</b>

# 1.0 Executive Summary

Wirral Council continues to face financial challenges which have been made more severe by the Covid-19 pandemic. Current figures indicate the authority needs to make savings in the region of £16.5m. Failure to make these budget savings will mean the council's expenditure will exceed its income, which is illegal.

At Policy and Resources committee on 18 December 2020 a programme of community and stakeholder consultation was agreed. The objectives of the public consultation were:

- **Understanding:** To enable stakeholders to understand the scale of the budget challenge, and how we are going about overcoming it
- **Engagement:** To enable stakeholders to contribute to the process, and ensure their views are valued and are being considered
- **Support:** To ensure stakeholders support the budget proposals, appreciate the work which has been done to involve them, and understand the reasons for budget decisions

To ensure the budget decision making reflected the views of all stakeholders, including Wirral residents and Council staff, feedback was sought on the budget proposals through a variety of methods. This included opportunities for submission of further ideas on what else the Council could do to bridge the budget gap. The key findings are outlined in this executive summary.

## Online Engagement

- ***Public consultation through the online 'Have your say' portal resulted in 2715 completed questionnaires, 236 "ideas" added to the Ideas Board and 74 questions for the online events.***
- Proposal 1 requested views on pursuing a reduction in Youth Provision, the response was 77% disagreement, 13% agreement, and 9% neutral.
- Proposal 2 requested views on combining Children's Social Care services, the response was 44% disagreement, 35% agreement and 21% neutral.
- Proposal 3 requested views on bringing together services together to develop a new Neighbourhoods model, the response was 63% agreement, 16% disagreement and 21% neutral.
- Proposal 4 requested views on reviewing car parking charges which resulted in a response of 45% agreement, 43% disagreement and 12% neutral.
- Proposal 5 requested views on ceasing the School Crossing Patrol Service, the response was 61% disagreement, 26% agreement and 13% neutral.

- Proposal 6 requested views on pursuing the option of reducing grass cutting frequency and allowing re-wilding, the response was 58% agreement, 30% disagreement and 12% neutral.
- Proposal 7 requested views on pursuing the option of ceasing maintenance on some green spaces and grass verges, the response was 45% agreement, 37% disagreement and 17% neutral.
- Proposal 8 requested views on closing council public conveniences, the response was 73% disagreement, 16% agreement and 12% neutral.
- Proposal 9 requested views on reducing the collection of general rubbish bins to once every three weeks, the responses were 66% disagreement, 26% agreement and 7% neutral.
- Proposal 10 requested views on pursuing efficiencies within the refuse and street cleaning contract held by Biffa. The responses were 51% agreement, 21% disagreement and 28% neutral.
- Proposal 11 requested views on pursuing a zero-tolerance view to Environmental Crime, the response was 74% agreement, 12% disagreement and 15% neutral.
- Proposal 12 requested views on pursuing the option reducing the council's culture and visitor economy service, the response was 43% agreement, 34% disagreement and 23% neutral.
- Proposal 13 requested views on pursuing the option of closing Europa Pools, the response was 52% disagreement, 33% agreement and 14% neutral.
- Proposal 14 requested views on pursuing the option of delaying the re-opening of Woodchurch Leisure Centre, the response was 56% agreement, 27% disagreement and 17% neutral.
- Proposal 15 requested views on pursuing the option of a potential closure or transfer of council operated golf courses, the response was 63% agreement, 23% disagreement and 14% neutral.
- Proposal 16 requested views on whether the council's museum service should be closed, the responses were 71% disagreement, 16% agreement and 13% neutral.
- Proposal 17 requested views on the option of developing income generating services at Royden Park, the responses were 69% agreement, 18% disagreement and 13% neutral.
- Proposal 18 requested views on the option of restructuring staffing at Birkenhead Market, the responses were 65% agreement, 11% disagreement and 24% neutral.
- Proposal 19 requested views on the option to remove the budget for building works in relation to people with disabilities, the responses were 71% agreement, 11% disagreement and 18% neutral.

- Proposal 20 requested views on the option to remove the annual programme of support for the Community Alarm Service, the responses were 67% disagreement, 14% agreement and 19% neutral.
- Proposal 21 requested views on the option to review Wirral Evolutions day services for people with learning disabilities, the responses were 42% disagreement, 30% agreement and 28% neutral.
- Proposal 22 requested views on the option to review 'back office' functions, the responses were 77% agreement, 9% disagreement and 15% neutral.
- Proposal 23 requested views on pursuing the option of using the balance on the Hardship Fund to reduce the bad debt provision, the responses were 59% agreement, 19% disagreement and 22% neutral.
- Proposal 24 requested views on pursuing the option of suspending ward members budgets, the responses were 42% agreement, 38% disagreement and 20% neutral.
- The questionnaire provided the option for respondents to provide further comments on the proposals and additional ideas. Of the 2715 questionnaire respondents 992 completed the comment box. A range of feedback was submitted, and the key themes can be categorised into **workforce** (40%) including senior officer pay, review of Councillor numbers and pay and reduced use of consultants; **leisure and tourism** (25%) including retaining leisure centres including Europa Pools, **refuse collection** (16%) including no reduction in general waste collection frequency and to improve the recycling offer; **revenue generation** (16%) including increased fines and camping opportunities; **Children's Services** (11%) including no cuts to the Hive; **parking** (10%) both for and against charges; and **arts and culture** (10%) including retaining the Williamson Art Gallery.
- The **Ideas Board** generated both **comments** on existing proposals and budget **ideas**. Review identified that 134 (41%) responses were comments and the remaining 194 (59%) were budget ideas.
- Of the **Ideas Board ideas** 88% fell into the categories of either **revenue generation** (44%) including enforcement (16%), parking (15%) and arts and culture (7%) or **savings** (44%) including council workforce pay and structure (42%), refuse collection (13%), council owned assets (6%) and cost sharing with other organisations (6%).
- The **Ideas Board comments** were categorised predominantly into three themes, Children's Services including The Hive (34%) suggesting no cuts to the budget, arts and culture noting retention of the Williamson Art Gallery (21%) and refuse collection (15%) suggesting no reduction in collection frequency.
- Demographic analysis of online responses was carried out; 95.6% of respondents are local residents living within Wirral, 4.4% are from other areas, the main two being Cheshire West and Chester and Liverpool. There is a relatively even spread of

responses from the four Wirral constituencies, Birkenhead 29.4%, Wallasey 22.8%, Wirral West 20.4% and Wirral South 23.0%.

## Public Events

- Staff Event: This session generated a mix of suggestions for income, together with feedback around four primary areas, these being cuts to youth services, the closure of council buildings (with a view to save on assets), the current capitalisation bid and the use of external consultants.
- Public Event: This session generated comments and feedback on six primary areas, these being cuts to youth services, closure of Europa Pools, closure of Woodchurch Leisure Centre, the retention of Golf Courses, move to three-weekly bin collections and closure of Williamson Art Gallery.
- Youth Event: This session focussed on cuts to youth services, specifically reduction of budget for The Hive.

## Staff Engagement

- The staff feedback form was completed 101 times. Feedback on the budget proposals focused on a set of key themes including no reduction in frequency of **waste collection** (17%); **workforce** (15%) noting senior officer salary costs, less outsourcing, no cuts to council staff and more staff permitted to take EVR; **art and culture**, retaining the Williamson Gallery (15%); **leisure and tourism** (13%) noting retention of Europa Pools; **school crossing patrols** (9%) being retained.
- Staff also submitted a variety of cost saving ideas, which related to the following key themes, workforce (47%), the council's office estate (7%), car parking charges (7%) and Libraries (6%).

## Additional Responses

- The questionnaire was made available in paper format and as an Easy Read Version. 47 paper copies and 20 easy read copies were received. The responses were incorporated into the questionnaire analysis.
- A number of additional responses including petitions were also submitted using the email address provided. The detail of the feedback is included in Appendix 1.

## Summary

- The budget consultation covered a range of different saving options. When reviewing both staff and public feedback through the range of channels provided, the majority of themes were linked to the budget options and aligned with the scoring on individual proposal questions.

## 2.0 Methodology

The budget consultation enabled stakeholders with the opportunity to provide feedback on a series of budget options outlined to balance the council's budget, as well as to offer any ideas on other options to enable an effective budget.

Following the consultation, the feedback will be considered by the Policy and Resources Committee, on 17 February, which will decide on a set of budget proposals to be recommended to the Full Council budget setting meeting, which takes place on 1 March 2021. Full Council will have the final say on the authority's budget for the next year.

The consultation was carried out between 21 December 2020 – 22 January 2021. A number of different methods for residents and staff to contribute to the consultation were provided and can be summarised:

- Online public consultation through the 'Have your say' consultation portal.
- Public Events to allow residents and other stakeholders to ask specific questions about the budget proposals.
- Staff engagement.
- Specific Budget Email Inbox.
- Opportunity for individuals and groups to provide feedback directly to the project team, Councillors, MP's and Senior Officers.

### 2.1 Public Consultation

A key part of the public consultation was carried out using Wirral Council's 'Have your say' consultation portal at [www.haveyoursay.wirral.gov.uk](http://www.haveyoursay.wirral.gov.uk) with a page dedicated to the Budget Consultation. A Budget Booklet, a Frequently Asked Questions Document and an Easy Read Version of the consultation were published on the portal and available for download to provide key information about the consultation.

Three online tools were provided for residents to engage with:

- An online questionnaire – to respond to specific questions about budget proposals.
- An ideas board – for residents to post 'ideas' about the council budget.
- A guestbook for residents to add a list of questions they would like to ask at the events.

Respondents were able to request paper copies of the survey, including an easy read version, or submit additional comments via a dedicated email address, which was published on the 'Have your say' site alongside the online tool.

### **2.1.1 Questionnaire**

The consultation questionnaire was developed in order to enable stakeholders to record their opinions on the budget proposals. In particular, the consultation invited views on:

- A set of questions specific to each budget proposal. These were provided on a Likert scale to ascertain whether respondents agreed, disagreed or neither agreed or disagreed with the proposal.
- To enable further understanding, and in-depth analysis, respondents were invited to provide free text comments to expand on their ideas or concerns.

Following closure of the consultation, the responses to each of the direct questions were collated and the responses included in this report. For the free comment question, a text coding approach was used based on the reoccurring themes. This data was then collated and summarised in the report.

Forty-seven paper and 20 Easy Read questionnaires were submitted. These responses were examined, and the points raised incorporated into the online questionnaire results to ensure the views were represented in the final analysis.

### **2.1.2 Ideas Board**

The Ideas Board function was set up to allow respondents to submit their own ideas about the budget, these could be approved and commented on by other members of the public.

The information provided was reviewed and categorised as it was noted that many of the submissions were comments on the existing proposals. The ideas and comments categories were then coded based on content and a set of themes were identified.

### **2.1.3 Public Events**

Three 'virtual' public events were held to enable those interested in the budget proposals to join an online Q&A. The events were held on Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> January, and included an event for staff, one for residents, and a third for young people.

The events were recorded and links to the videos posted on social media, through the staff Facebook page and sent directly to those requesting copies.

In addition to live questions that were submitted throughout the sessions, questions from the Guestbook were also addressed. For those that did not receive an answer, whether that be due to time or the need for additional information, a written response was sent via email.

## **2.2 Staff Feedback**

Staff were encouraged to provide their views and comments through a number of channels, with those who may be impacted by the proposals, briefed prior to the start of the consultation.

A form was set up on the intranet for staff to provide feedback on proposals, suggest their own ideas for cost savings and ask any questions about the proposals or the budget process. This form was promoted in ExecView (the Chief Executive's newsletter sent to staff by email),



Managers' View (sent to all managers by email), the intranet, on the Wirral Council Staff Facebook group and via individual directorates.

All staff feedback was collated and reviewed. Key comments and ideas were themed to enable effective review. Directorates were provided with staff feedback linked to their staff in order to inform further discussion as required. Budget ideas were also provided for further analysis and review.

An online event was also held on Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> January where staff had the opportunity to ask the Council Leader, Cllr Janette Williamson, questions about the budget. Nearly 400 members of staff attended the 30-minute event, which was held using Microsoft Teams.

## **2.3 Additional Responses**

Contact details were provided to enable organisations, groups, or special interest groups to submit their responses to the budget proposals. These submissions are included in Appendix one.

## **2.4 Analysis of Respondents**

The Council has provided a range of options for all stakeholders to feed back on the budget proposals and has sought to ensure a range residents and stakeholders were enabled to engage in the consultation.

Respondents to the online tools were provided with the option to provide demographic information about themselves. It must be noted that this is an option and that not all respondents included this information. This data allows the demographic results to be included in this report to enable analysis of the scope of responses and representation from different demographic groups.

## **2.5 Interpretation of Results**

In terms of the results, it is important to note that:

- The public consultation is not representative of the overall population but provides information on the opinion of those residents who engaged.
- For specific tools where percentages do not add up to 100, this may be due to rounding, or the question is multi-coded. All free text questions and ideas that offered respondents the option to provide written feedback could have covered multiple themes. Therefore, with free text responses being categorised using a coding system, some comments will be multi-coded and therefore add up to more than 100 percent.

## **2.6 Communication**

The COVID-19 virus continues to place limitations on engagement with local communities. However, to raise awareness amongst as many residents, stakeholders, and businesses as possible, a full communications campaign, utilising a variety of communications channels was delivered. This included:

- Organic Social Media (mix of platforms)
- Paid for and targeted social media (Facebook)
- Resident Email (inclusion in 4 editions)
- Partner/ Stakeholder E-Newsletters (printable for sharing)
- Councillor Updates (Including narrative to share with constituents)
- Creation of a dedicated Budget email inbox
- Press/ Content Media releases
- Budget updates posted to wirralview.com
- Outreach through established COVID response cells and Champions Network
- Evolving FAQ document
- Presence on wirral.gov
- Posts on Staff Facebook page
- Exec View (Staff Newsletter)
- Shared narrative for regular Workforce, Directorate and Team updates

# 3.0 Results

## 3.1 Questionnaire Results

The questionnaire was responded to by 2765 people, with 2715 through the online portal, 47 paper copies and 20 Easy Read copies submitted. No questions were mandatory so respondents could choose which questions to respond to.

### 3.1.1 Children, Young People and Education Committee

**Q1:** Activities for young people can help with educational outcomes and prevent child criminal exploitation, child sexual exploitation and anti-social behaviour. We are looking at exploring a reduction in Youth Provision, which would result in a potential saving of £200,000.

The responses provided were 77% disagreement overall, (50% strongly), 13% agreement overall, (6% strongly), with 9% neutral.

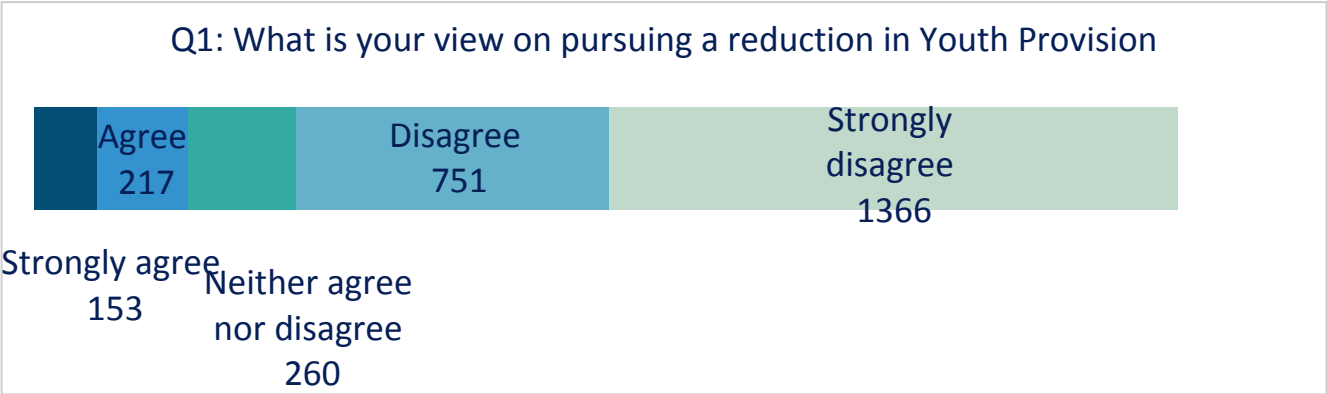


Chart 1: What is your view on pursuing a reduction in Youth Provision.

**Q2:** Children's Services includes preventative and support services that are both statutory and non-statutory – this means some the council must provide, and others the council chooses to because it believes they are valuable. These services support each other and are closely integrated. Their work includes ensuring vulnerable children who are being harmed or abused are protected and kept safe and families get the help they need. We are looking at combining the Modernisation & Social Care offer, which would result in a potential saving of £102,000.

The responses provided were 44% disagreement (27% strongly), 35% agreement (9% strongly) and 21% neither agree or disagree.

Q2: What is your view on combining Children's Social Care Modernisation & Social Care offer

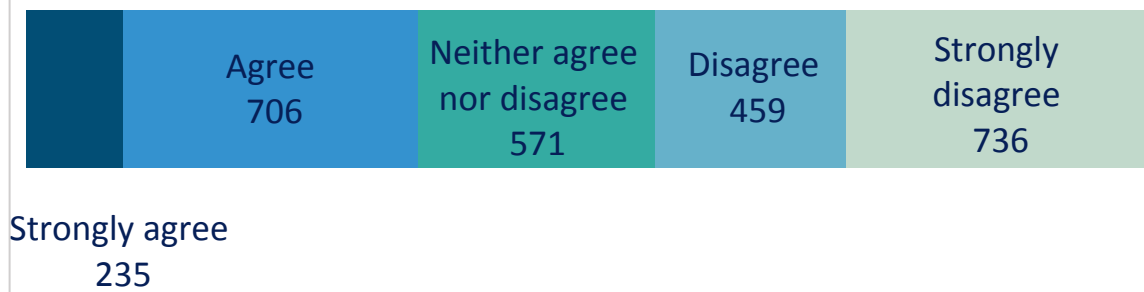


Chart 2: What is your view on combining Children's Social Care Modernisation & Social Care offer?

### 3.1.2 Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee

**Q3:** The existing Directorate provides a wide range of services and functions, some of which are statutory. However, there is an opportunity to bring services together and generate better, more focused and aligned Neighbourhood Services to residents. It is expected this could lead to a potential saving of £350,000.

The responses provided were 63% agreement (19% strongly), 16% disagreement (8% strongly) and 21% neither agree or disagree.

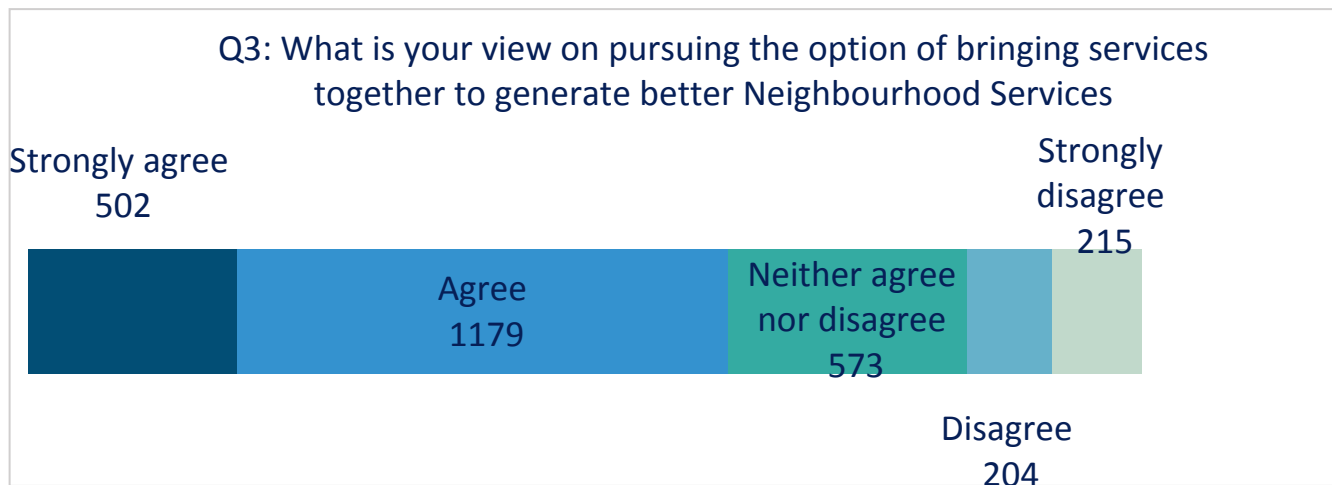


Chart 3: What is your view on pursuing the option of bringing services together to generate better Neighbourhood Services?

**Q4:** It is vital the council maximises its income where possible to ensure frontline services can be delivered. Parking charges can help control car use in busy locations, contributing to the council's climate emergency declaration outcomes by encouraging active travel and public transport alternative transport modes. It is proposed that a wide ranging and review of car parking charges looking at the options to increase parking charges and add charges

where appropriate. It is anticipated this would provide additional income to the council of £1,000,000.

The responses provided were 45% agreement (17% strongly), 43% disagreement (23% strongly) and 12% neither agree or disagree.

Q4: What is your view on pursuing the option of a review of car parking charges?

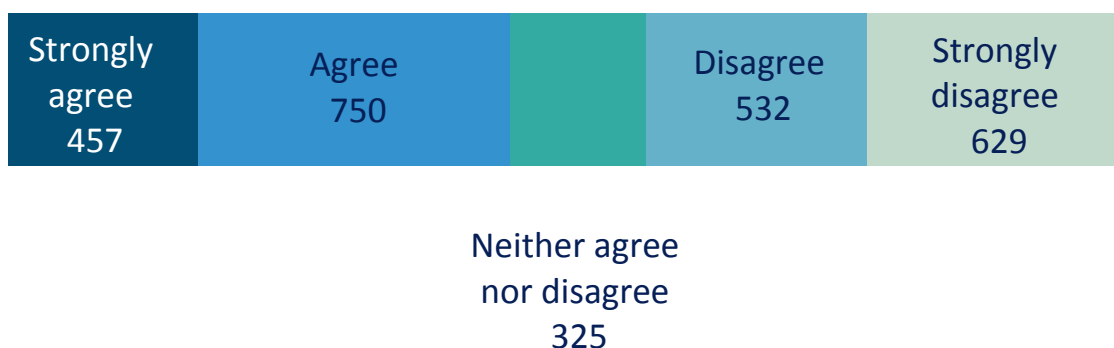


Chart 4: What is your view on pursuing the option of a review of car parking charges?

**Q5:** The School Crossing Patrol Service is not a statutory council function – i.e. the council is not legally obliged to provide this service. By ceasing the School Crossing Patrol Service the council would save £276,300.

The responses provided were 61% disagreement (34% strongly), 26% agreement (9% strongly) and 13% neither agree or disagree.

Q5: What is your view on pursuing the option of ceasing the School Crossing Patrol Service?

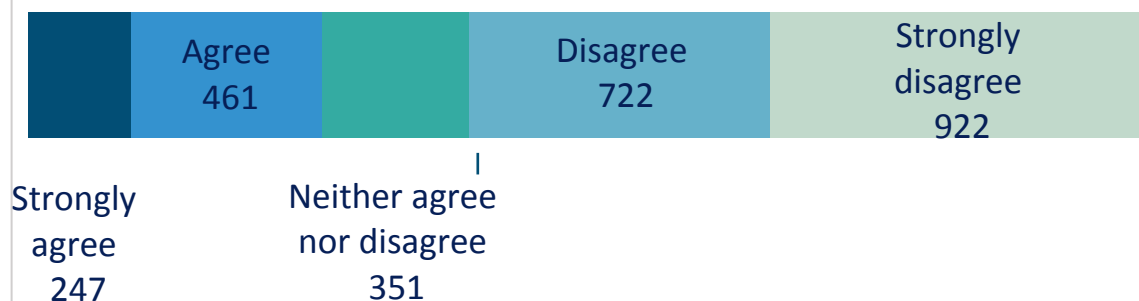


Chart 5: What is your view on pursuing the option of ceasing the School Crossing Patrol Service?

**Q6:** A reduction in grass cutting and maintenance of roadside verges and all parks and open spaces would mean changes such as less frequent cutting, only edge cuts at areas which are over 200 sqm, and operators only cutting around pathways and alongside roads leaving the middle/centre to grow long and enlargement of wildflower meadows. For all parks and open spaces there would be reduction in the grass cutting frequencies and where possible, for example, areas of woodland would be allowed to effectively re-wild or be cut less often. This option could lead to a saving of £250,000.

The responses provided were 58% agreement (24% strongly), 30% disagreement (15% strongly) and 12% neither agree or disagree.

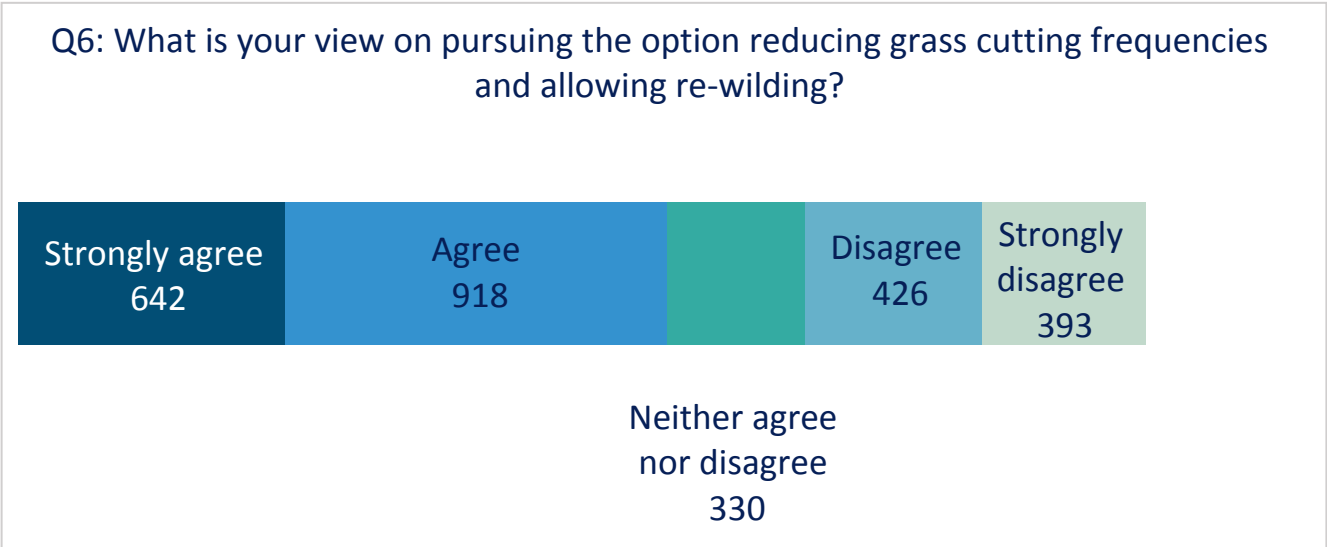


Chart 6: What is your view on pursuing the option reducing grass cutting frequencies and allowing re-wilding?

**Q7:** Ceasing maintenance (grass cutting and litter removal) at 45 amenity green spaces and 85 grass verge sites, possibly planting of trees, rewilding or where appropriate creating new allotments. Sites have been identified where reduced maintenance would have the least impact on the local area. This could lead to savings of £100,000.

The responses provided were 45% agreement (16% strongly), 37% disagreement (16% strongly) and 17% neither agree or disagree.

**Q7: What is your view on pursuing the option of ceasing maintenance of 35 amenity green spaces and 85 grass verge sites?**



Chart 7: What is your view on pursuing the option of ceasing maintenance of 35 amenity green spaces and 85 grass verge sites?

**Q8:** The council maintains nine public convenience sites at mainly coastal areas. These include Harrison Drive New Brighton, Moreton Common, Moreton Cross, West Kirby Marine Lake, West Kirby Concourse (outside), Parade Gardens Hoylake, Meols Parade, New Ferry and Thornton Hough. Closure of these would lead to a saving of £142,000.

The responses provided were 73% disagreement (42% strongly), 16% agreement (6% strongly) and 12% neither agree or disagree.

**Q8: What is your view on pursuing the option of closing council maintained public convenience sites?**

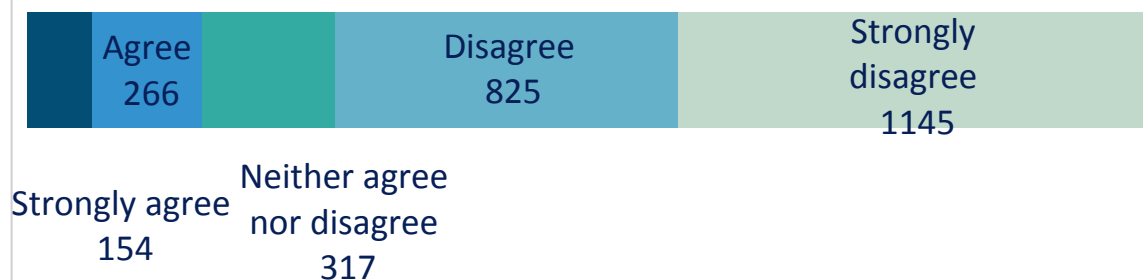


Chart 8: What is your view on pursuing the option of closing council maintained public convenience sites?

**Q9:** Reducing the collection of green general rubbish bins from once every two weeks, to once every three weeks while maintaining the grey recycling bin collection at every two weeks. This proposal could lead to additional packaging (e.g. plastic pots, tubs and trays, tetra pack type cartons and aerosol cans) being permitted in the grey recycling bin and/or a separate food waste collection. The option could mean a saving of £180,000.

The responses provided were 66% disagreement (51% strongly), 26% agreement (10% strongly) and 7% neither agree or disagree.

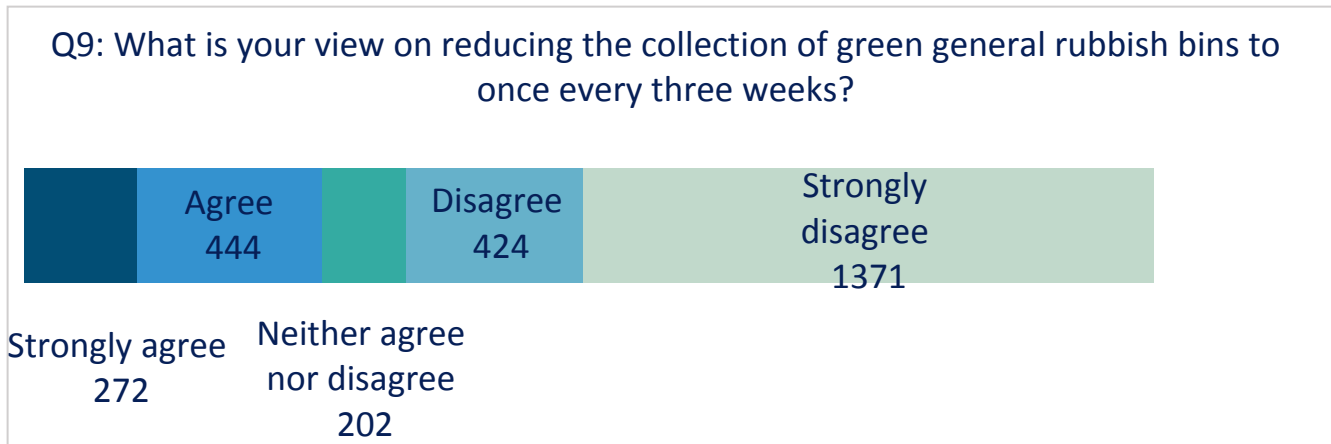


Chart 9: What is your view on reducing the collection of green general rubbish bins to once every three weeks?

**Q10:** The refuse collection and street cleansing contract the Council has with Biffa has been in place for more than 10 years and was extended to 2027. Over the years a significant amount of efficiencies have been taken, however, a specific requirement of the terms of the contract extension was to pursue further efficiencies. It is estimated this could result in a saving of £75,000.

The responses provided were 51% agreement (18% strongly), 21% disagreement (10% strongly) and 28% neither agree or disagree.

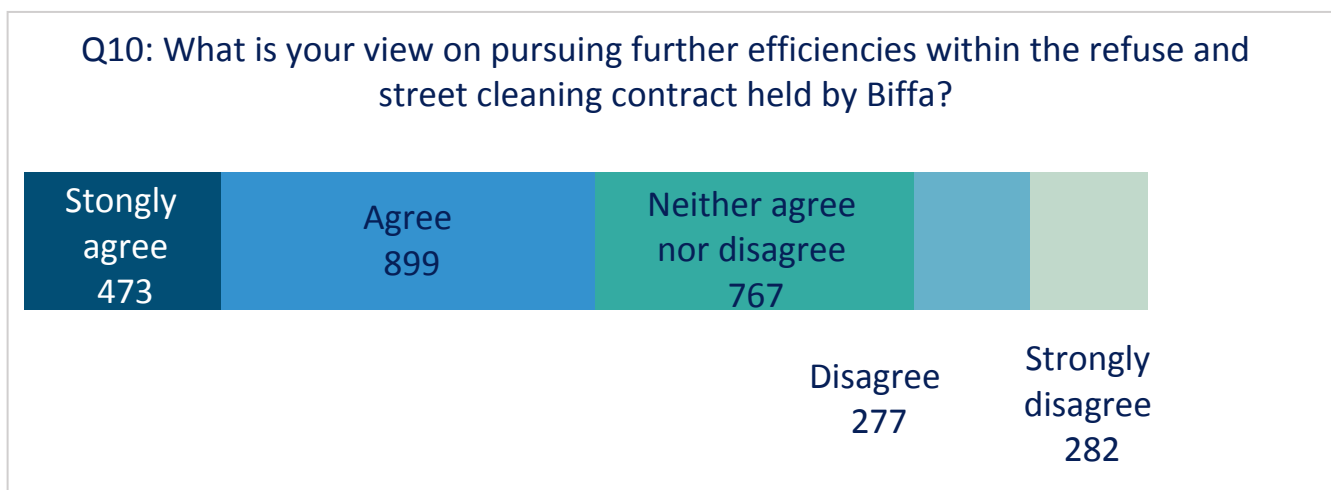


Chart 10: What is your view on pursuing further efficiencies within the refuse and street cleaning contract held by Biffa?

**Q11:** The Council's Enforcement Policy was amended to remove the zero-tolerance approach, but it is possible to re-establish this. Environmental crime has increased during the



Covid-19 lockdown. The return to zero-tolerance would involve education and engagement with residents and be targeted to locations where there has been significant anti-social behaviour and environmental crime and could lead to an income of £150,000.

The responses provided were 74% agreement (38% strongly), 12% disagreement (6% strongly) and 15% neither agree or disagree.



Chart 11: What is your view on pursuing a zero-tolerance approach to Environmental Crime?

### 3.1.3 Tourism, Communities, Culture & Leisure

**Q12:** A major reduction in the council's culture and visitor economy service could be achieved through staff savings and deleting the events budget. This proposal would leave a small resource remaining within the regeneration team to deliver the culture elements of the regeneration programme, plus marketing resource re-allocated to the corporate communication team to manage the upkeep of visitor economy website and marketing, including involvement in the Liverpool City Region joint work on visitor economy. Savings of £620,000 could be achieved in the council budget by reducing this service.

The responses provided were 43% agreement (15% strongly), 34% disagreement (15% strongly) and 23% neither agree or disagree.



Chart 12: What is your view on pursuing the option of a major reduction in the council's culture & visitor economy service?

**Q13:** Closure of Europa Pools in Birkenhead could lead to considerable savings. The town is about to undergo major regeneration which will include looking at the best options for future leisure provision within the town. The saving which would be achieved by closing Europa Pools is £640,000.

The responses provided were 52% disagreement (33% strongly), 33% agreement (16% strongly) and 14% neither agree or disagree.

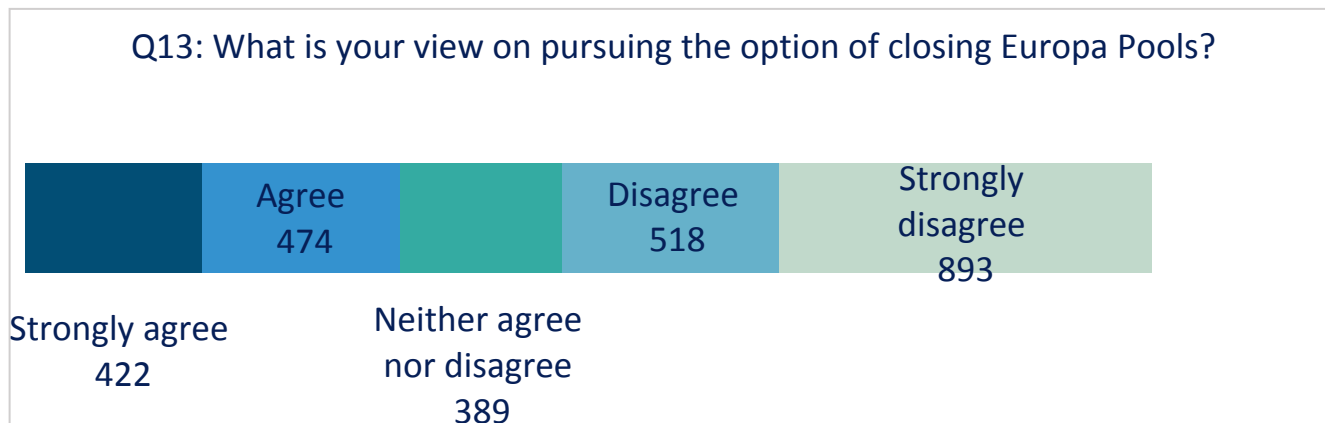


Chart 13: What is your view on pursuing the option of closing Europa Pools?

**Q14:** Some of our leisure centres are being used to support the Covid response, while refurbishment can only be done while centres are closed to the public. Woodchurch is one of Wirral's smaller Leisure Centres with one of the lower levels of usage with the second highest level of financial support. Delaying the re-opening of Woodchurch Leisure Centre could save the council £322,000.

The responses provided were 56% agreement (22% strongly), 27% disagreement (14% strongly) and 17% neither agree or disagree.

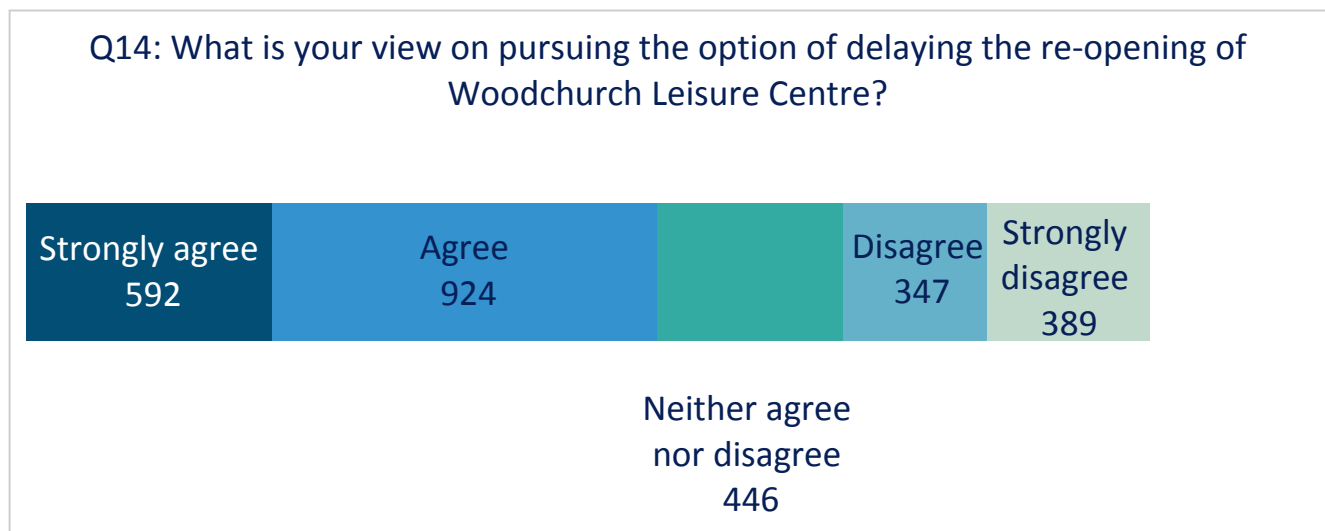


Chart 14: What is your view on pursuing the option of delaying the re-opening of Woodchurch Leisure Centre?

**Q15:** The Council operates four golf professional courses. This is a non-statutory service (the council is not legally required to do this). In addition, there are a number of private courses throughout the Borough. Interest remains from private sector operators to run and operate council-owned courses under a lease arrangement. A review of options around the provision of council-owned courses will be carried out. Potential closure/transfer of council operated golf courses could save £273,000.

The responses provided were 63% agreement (35% strongly), 23% disagreement (15% strongly) and 14% neither agree or disagree.

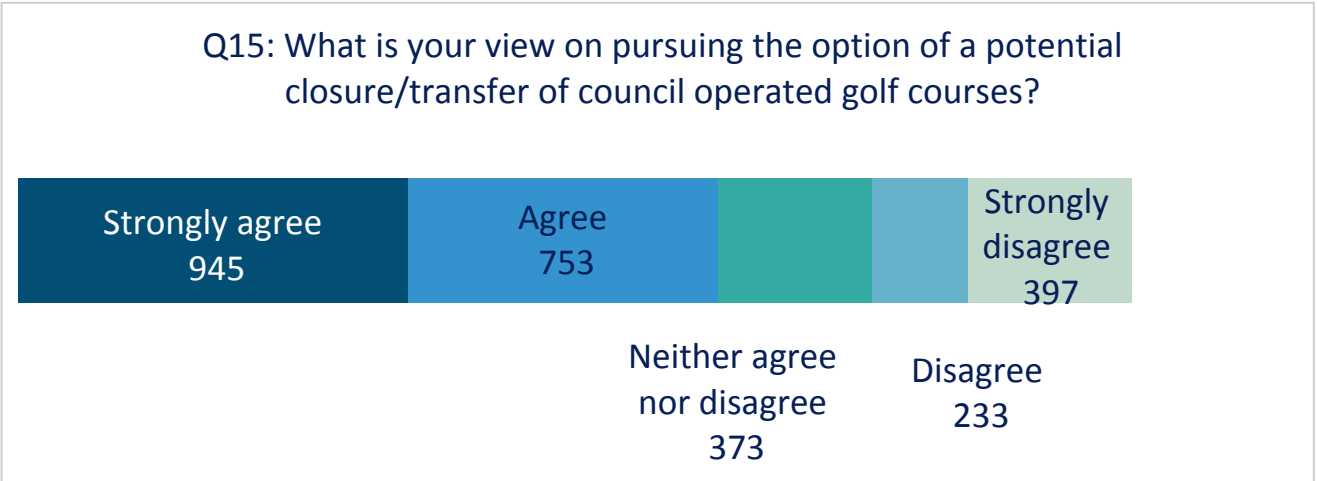


Chart 15: What is your view on pursuing the option of a potential closure/transfer of council operated golf courses?

**Q16:** This option is for a full review of the council's museum service provision which includes the Williamson Art Gallery & Museum. A separate exercise would be required to establish the cost of maintaining any buildings mothballed by this proposal and a decision taken as to what to do with the historic collections. Retaining the collections will attract an annual maintenance cost of approximately £50,000 per annum. Closure of the museums service could save £327,500 from the council budget per year.

The responses provided were 71% disagreement (46% strongly), 16% disagreement (7% strongly) and 13% neither agree or disagree.

Q16: What is your view on whether the councils museum service should be closed?

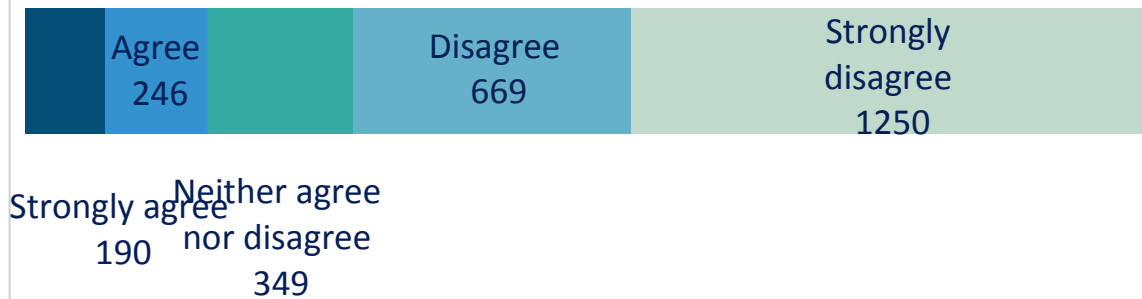


Chart 16: What is your view on whether the council's museum service should be closed?

**Q17:** Develop elements of Royden Park with income generating services, providing significant environmental and social outcomes. The main element is the proposal for a high ropes aerial park located adjacent to the new overspill car park. An external partner will be sought to fund, design, plan, construct and operate the park on a turnover share/lease agreement. This option could see income to the council of £80,000.

The responses provided were 69% agreement (31% strongly), 18% disagreement (10% strongly) and 13% neither agree or disagree.

Q17: What is your view on whether the option of developing income generating services at Royden Park should be pursued?

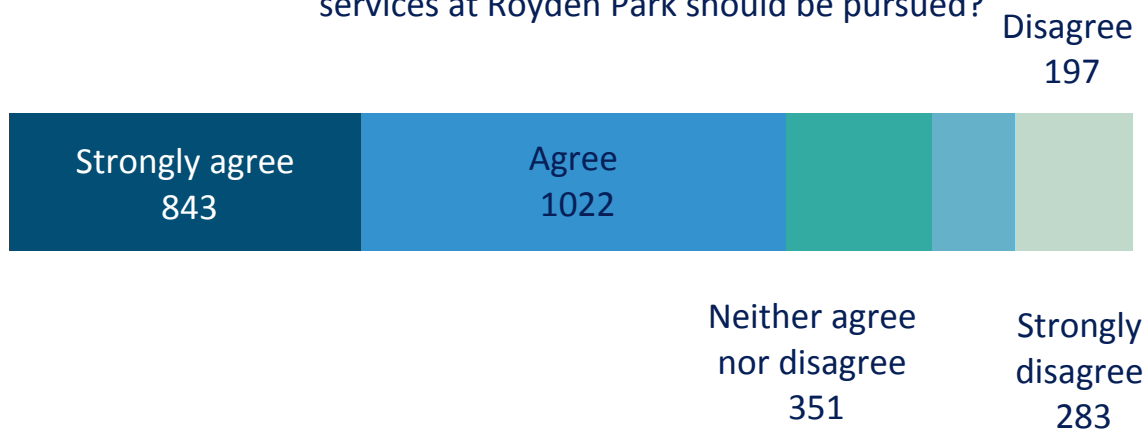


Chart 17: What is your view on whether the option of developing income generating services at Royden Park should be pursued?

### 3.1.4 Economy Regeneration & Development Committee

**Q18:** Restructuring staffing arrangements to better serve delivery will ensure Birkenhead Market can drive forward its redevelopment. It is proposed staffing is reduced over 2-3 years in tandem with the development and relocation of the market to the temporary site. A restructure of Birkenhead Market could result in savings of £240,000.

The responses provided were 65% agreement (25% strongly), 11% disagreement (5% strongly) and 24% neither agree or disagree.

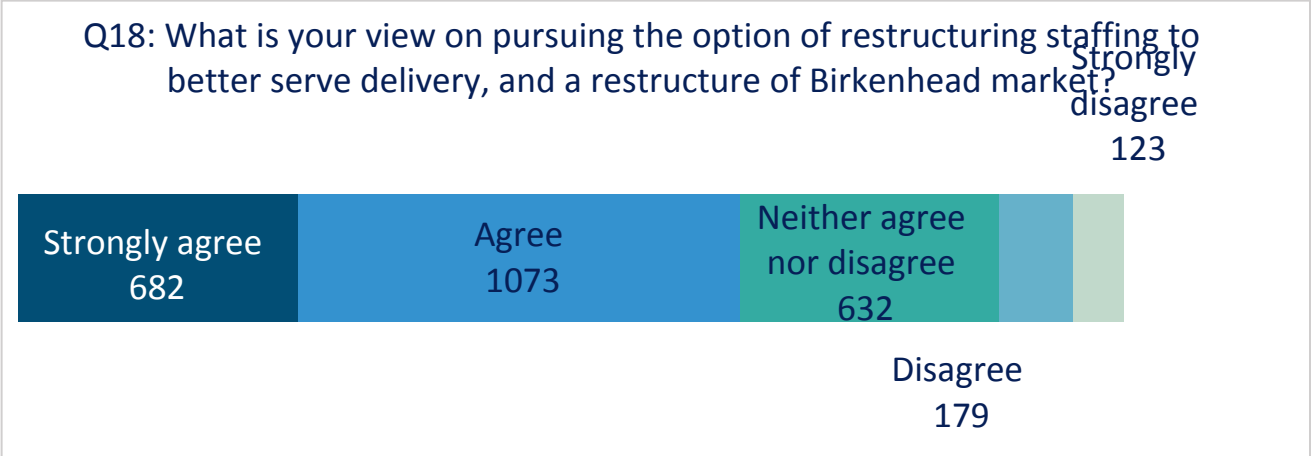


Chart 18: What is your view on pursuing the option of restructuring staffing to better serve delivery, and a restructure of Birkenhead market?

**Q19:** The majority of public buildings owned by the council are Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) compliant. As a result, the budget for building works in relation to people with a disability accessing council buildings over the last few years has greatly reduced. If future works are required these can be covered by the general building code. The removal of this budget will not have any detrimental effect on access to council building for people with a disability as any unforeseen works will be covered within the property code. This proposal could save £200,000.

The responses provided were 71% agreement (30% strongly), 11% disagreement (5% strongly) and 18% neither agree or disagree.

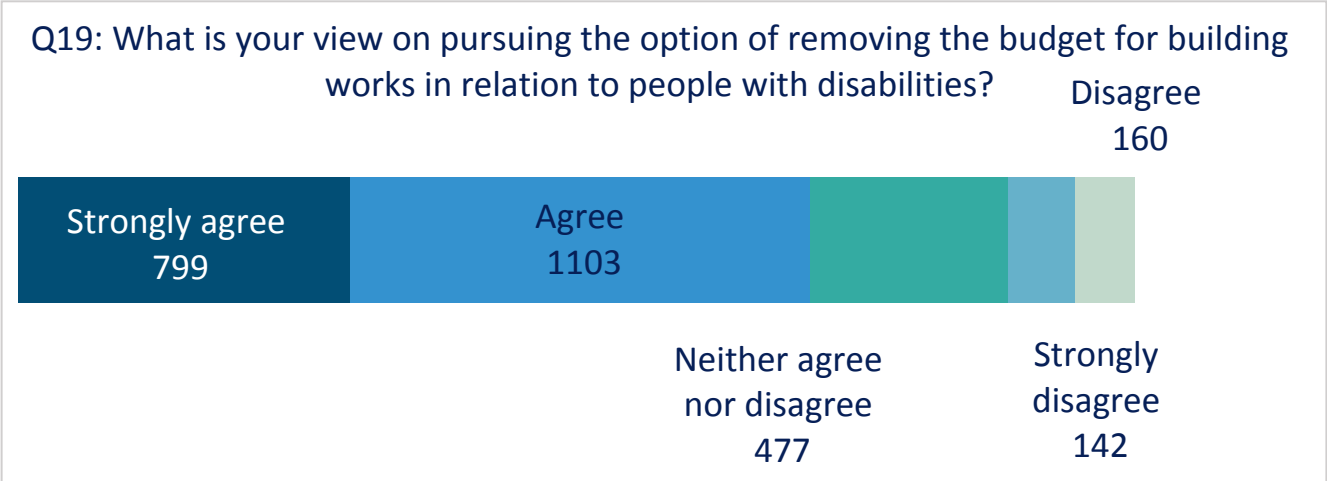


Chart 19: What is your view on pursuing the option of removing the budget for building works in relation to people with disabilities?

3.1.5 Housing Committee

**Q20:** The Community Alarm Service offers a low-level support service to aid independent living and reduces the burden on social care and health services. The option proposes the

removal of an annual programme of support used to meet the shortfall for low income and older people households, which could result in a saving of £500,000.

The responses provided were 67% disagreement (31% strongly), 14% agreement (6% strongly) and 19% neither agree or disagree.

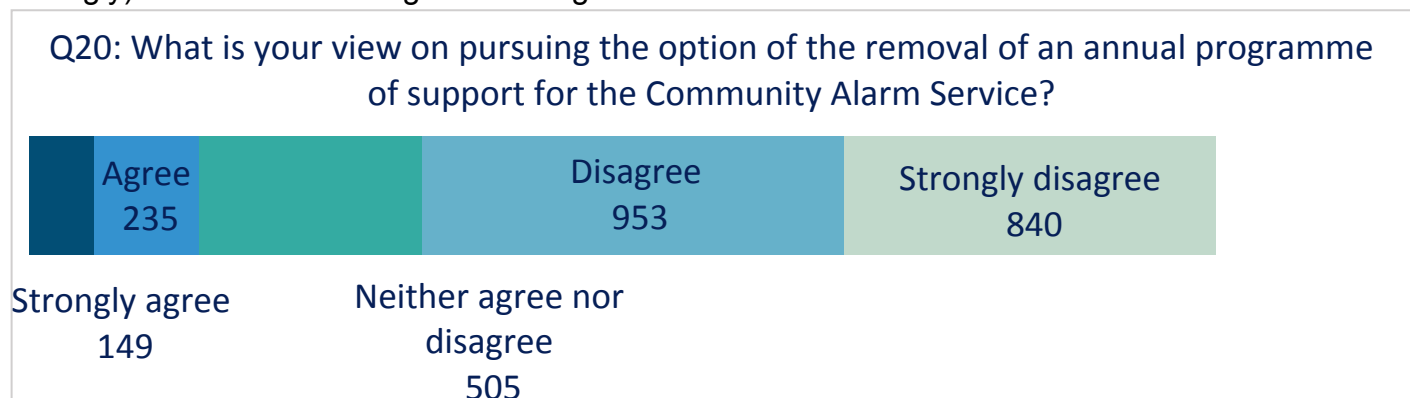


Chart 20: What is your view on pursuing the option of the removal of an annual programme of support for the Community Alarm Service?

### 3.1.6 Adult Social Care and Health Committee

**Q21:** Wirral Evolutions review of day services for people with Learning Disabilities. This option relates to a service review with the aim of modernising the current operating model and reduce the associated operating costs of delivering day services for people with Learning Disabilities. The review's aim is to manage the cost of current provision by service changes that could lead to savings of £500,000.

The responses provided were 42% disagreement (21% strongly), 30% agreement (9% strongly) and 28% neither agree or disagree.

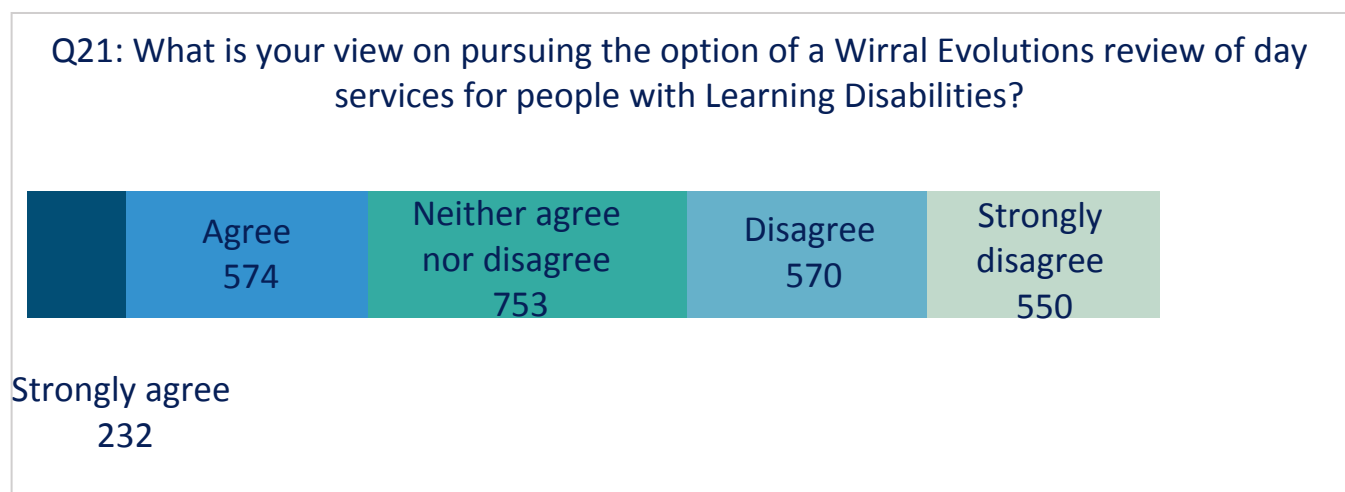


Chart 21: What is your view on pursuing the option of a Wirral Evolutions review of day services for people with Learning Disabilities?

### 3.1.7 Policy and Resources Committee

**Q22:** The council is aiming to become more efficient and is reviewing all "back office" functions to be able to continue to provide high-quality services for residents and businesses in Wirral at the best cost. This will include changes such as a reviewing IT Services, centralised print process, reduced staffing in business support, and changes to contract management. We estimate this could save around £2 - 3m.

The responses provided were 77% agreement (41% strongly), 9% disagreement (4% strongly) and 15% neither agree or disagree.

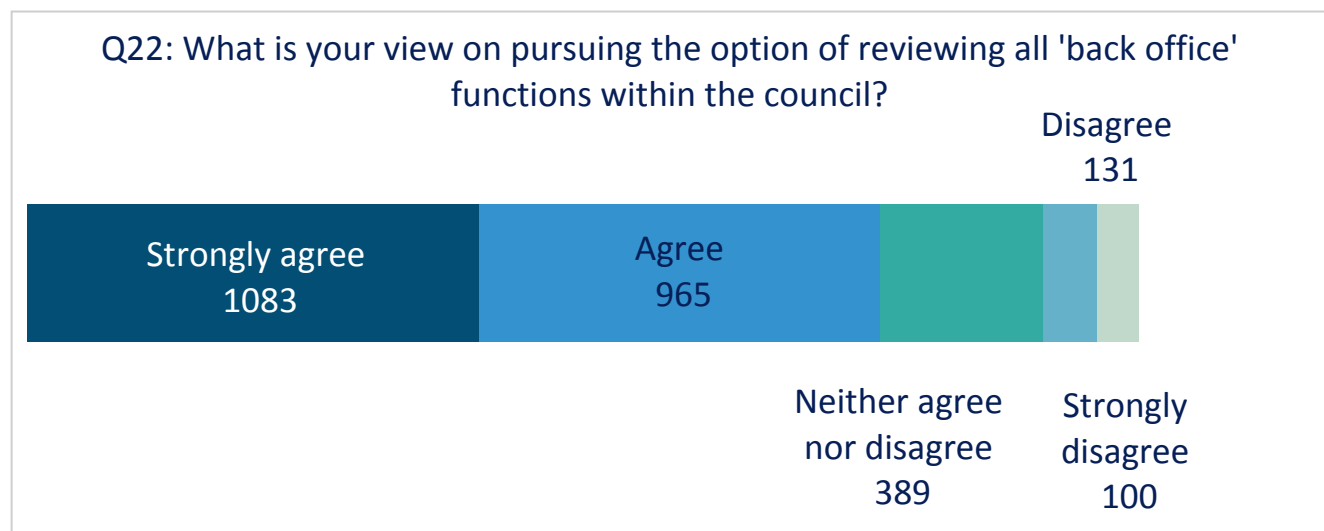


Chart 22: What is your view on pursuing the option of reviewing all 'back office' functions within the council?

**Q23:** As part of the government's support for Covid-19, Wirral received a £3.9m Hardship Fund which has been used to help working age Local Council Tax Support claimants with a discount on their 2020/21 Council Tax bill. By 31st August 2020, £1.5m of the fund had been used, and these funds will be available to claim up to the end of March 2021, when the remaining balance will then be known. It is proposed to use the remaining balance to clear old outstanding Council Tax arrears. This will reduce the bad debt provision requirement, and therefore improve the estimated year end Council Tax position. Changes to the council's hardship fund and bad debt provision could allow for savings of £1m.

The responses provided were 59% agreement (23% strongly), 19% disagreement (10% strongly) and 22% neither agree or disagree.

**Q23: What is your view on pursuing the option of using the balance of the Hardship Fund to reduce the bad debt provision?**

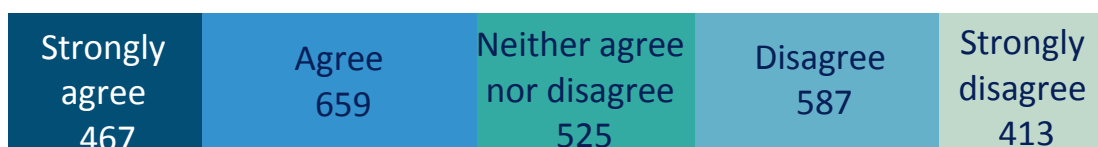


**Chart 23: What is your view on pursuing the option of using the balance of the Hardship Fund to reduce the bad debt provision?**

**Q24:** Individual councillors in each ward in Wirral are able to allocate a share of the “ward member budgets” to support local objectives. The funds are allocated to local community organisations, charities, statutory bodies, and businesses to improve the well-being of the local area, its environment or economy. It is proposed to suspend this for the next financial year which will save £250,000.

The responses provided were 42% agreement (18% strongly), 38% disagreement (16% strongly) and 20% neither agree or disagree.

**Q24: What is your view on pursuing the option of suspending ward members budgets?**



**Chart 24: What is your view on pursuing the option of suspending ward members budgets?**



**Q25: If you have suggestions for how the council can make additional savings or potential sources of income, please use this space to outline your proposal(s):**

Of those 2715 that responded to the questionnaire via the online portal, 992 completed the comment box.

Comments were reviewed and categorised into themes. The top themes are illustrated in the chart and table.

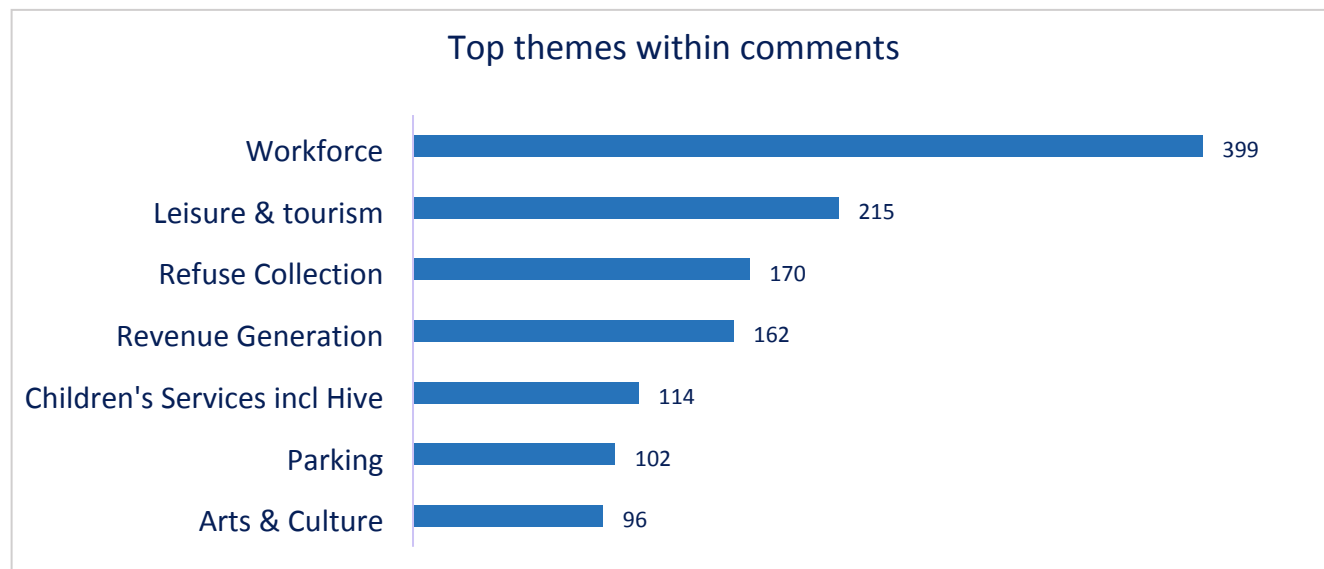


Chart 25: Top themes within comments about additional savings or potential sources of income

Top Themes	Frequency
Workforce	399
Leisure & tourism	215
Refuse Collection	170
Revenue Generation	162
Children's Services including The Hive	114
Parking	102
Arts & Culture including Williamson Art Gallery	96

Table 1: Top themes within comments about additional savings or potential sources of income

### Council Workforce & Structure

Comment upon the Council's own workforce and structures appeared within 448 (40%) of submissions. The most prevalent comments and suggestions within this theme were that:

- Council Senior Officers take a salary reduction (32% of comments in this category) and/or that the council trims its workforce to become less top-heavy (8%).

- The number of elected members (councillors) are reduced (23%) by at least 1 or more per ward. A pay reduction, or pay freeze was also suggested (5%) and/or a reduction or removal of expense payments (7%).
- The use of fewer Consultants/use of in-house staff for functions currently carried out by consultants (22%)

## **Leisure & Tourism**

215 (22%) of the comments referenced leisure and tourism on the peninsula. The most prevalent comments and suggestions within this theme were:

- Europa Pools to remain (23% of comments in this category).
- Leisure Centres and facilities in general to be retained and/or increased in number (21%).

## **Refuse Collection**

170 (17%) of the comments referenced the proposals with regards to refuse collection. The most prevalent comments and suggestions within this theme were:

- Against 3 weekly general waste collection (55% of comments in this category).
- That a 3 weekly recycling bin (grey bin) collection would be preferable to reducing the general waste collection (9%).
- That an improved waste and recycling offering in general – such as more accessible recycling points for a wider variety of materials, improved access to the household recycling centres (tips) and increased use of services such as the ERIC collection service (9%).

## **Revenue Generation**

162 (16%) of comments included a suggestion for additional revenue generation measures. Those mentioned most frequently were:

- Revenue from increased enforcement of fines such as from Parking, littering, dog fouling (32% of comments in this category).
- Introduction of charges and/or dedicated campsites for camper vans/mobile homes, as well as for campers in general (12%).
- Zero tolerance to fly tipping and increased revenue from resulting fines (11%).

## **Children's Services, including the Hive**

Comments about Children's services in general, and the Hive in particular, appeared in 114 (11%) of comments. The prevalent sentiments were:

- No cuts to Children's Services (59% of comments in this category)
- No cuts to the Hive Service (31%)

## **Parking**

102 (10%) of the submissions included comments about parking. The most prevalent comments and suggestions within this theme were:

- Parking charges to remain or be increased (44% of comments in this category)
- Parking charges to be scrapped or reduced (37%)

## **Arts & Culture**

96 (10%) of the submissions included comments about arts & culture, including the Williamson Art Gallery. The most prevalent comments and suggestions within this theme were:

- The Williamson Art Gallery should be retained (61% of comments in this category), perhaps with some additional revenue generation such as hiring out rooms (7%) or charging entry (4%).
- Museums and galleries in general should be retained (20%).

### 3.2 Ideas Board Results

A total of 328 submissions were made to the online Ideas board. Review of the submissions identified that 134 (41%) of responses were comments on the existing budget proposals. The remaining 194 (59%) submissions contained ideas.

Of the ideas, 88% fell into the categories of either revenue generation (44%) or Savings (44%).

#### Revenue Generation – most frequent categorised ideas

- **Enforcement** 16% of comments in the Revenue Generation category, including use of fines such as from parking/littering/dog fouling/fly tipping/council tax evasion.
- **Parking** 15% – retain or increase parking charges to generate revenue.
- **Arts & Culture** 7% – Generate revenue from the Williamson Art Gallery including by charging for entry, hiring out rooms, gift shop and/or café and fundraising.

#### Savings - most frequent categorised ideas

- **Council Workforce & Structure** 42% of comments in the savings category – including the use in-house staff instead of consultants and outsourced contractors, Council Senior Officers to take a salary reduction and fewer Councillors.
- **Refuse Collection** 13% - including that a 3 weekly recycling bin (grey bin) collection would be preferable to reducing the frequency of general waste collection.
- **Council owned assets** 6% - to where possible sell Council owned buildings in favour of the workforce working from home and carry out minimum spending & maintenance on those that are retained.
- **Cost sharing** 6% - Combining common universal functions, such as HR, with neighbouring councils. Making joint purchases with other councils to benefit from economies of scale.

Of those submissions that contained comments rather than ideas, these comments fell predominantly in the themes:

- **Children's Services including The Hive** 34% - No cuts to The Hive budget (96%).
- **Arts & Culture** 21% - The Williamson Art Gallery should be retained (100%).
- **Refuse Collection** 15% - No reduction in the frequency of general waste collection (90%)

### 3.3 Events Feedback

The virtual Q&A events were broadcast to approximately 620 accounts. The three sessions generated a wide and varied range of questions, opinions and feedback.

Being of a more qualitative data set, and with the added 'live' element, it is more difficult to quantify feedback than that of a written form. However, there were clear themes that emerged from each session, these being:

- **Staff Event:** Income ideas, cuts to youth services, the closure of council buildings and the use of external consultants.
- **Public Event:** Cuts to youth services, closure of Europa Pools, closure of Woodchurch Leisure Centre, retention of Golf Courses, three-weekly bin collections and closure of Williamson Art Gallery.
- **Youth Event:** Focussed predominantly on cuts to youth services.

### 3.4 Staff Feedback

The staff feedback form was completed 101 times with a wide range of views on the budget proposals and budget ideas. These submissions fell predominantly in the themes:

- **Refuse Collection** 17% - No reduction in the frequency of general waste collection (100%).
- **Workforce** 15% - Senior officers should have reduced salaries (25%), more work should be brought in house rather than outsourced (25%), no cuts to council staff (25%) and more staff to be allowed to take EVR (25%).
- **Arts & Culture** 15% - The Williamson Art Gallery should be retained (100%).
- **Leisure & Tourism** 13% - Europa Pools should be retained (100%).
- **Youth Services** 9% - School Crossing Patrols should be retained (100%).

Staff also submitted a variety of cost saving ideas. 47% of these ideas related to the workforce, such as:

- Bringing more work in-house (27%)
- Reducing the number of leaders or managers (22%)
- Continuing the period of unpaid leave over Christmas (6%)

There were also a number of ideas relating to the use of the council's office estate (7%), car parking charges (7%) and the number of libraries (6%).

# 4.0 Demographics and Site Traffic

## 4.1 Demographics

Registration was required to engage in the online Budget Consultation. The registration form included questions regarding demographics including gender, age group, ethnicity and sexual orientation, however not all questions in the registration form were compulsory and respondents could choose to select ‘prefer not to say’ or skip the question. The demographics results are summarised below.

95.6% of respondents are local residents living within Wirral, 4.4% are from other areas, the main two being Cheshire West and Chester and Liverpool. There is a relatively even spread of responses from the four Wirral constituencies. A map of respondents illustrating their location in Wirral is shown below.

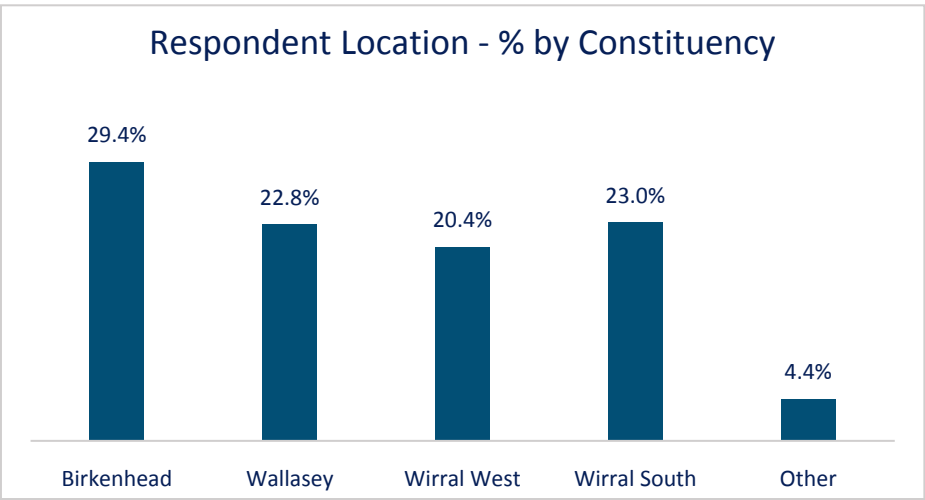
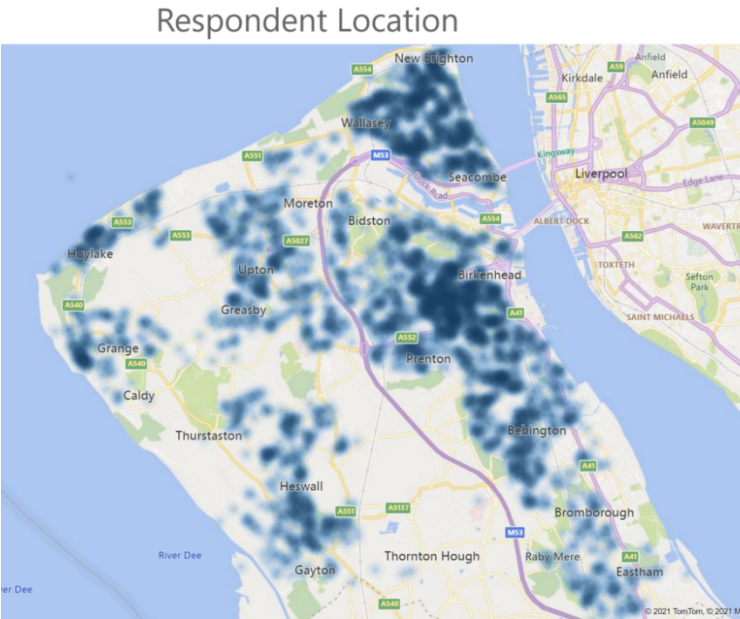


Chart 26: Respondent location by category



Map 1: Respondent location within Wirral

The respondents provided information regarding a range of categories such as if they were a resident, a member of a voluntary, community organisation, a council employee. Respondents were able to choose to belong to a number of categories. The majority of responses were from local residents.

Category	Number	%
A local resident	2313	84.3
Other	93	3.4
A local resident, A member voluntary/ community	88	3.2
A local resident, A Council employee	76	2.8
A local resident, A local business,	59	2.2
A member voluntary/community	52	1.9
An employee of Wirral Council	21	0.8
A local business	11	0.4
A local resident, A local Business, A member of a voluntary/community	8	0.3
A local resident, Other	6	0.2
An elected Member of Wirral Council	5	0.2
A local business, A member voluntary/community	4	0.1
A local resident, A Council employee, A member voluntary/community	3	0.1
A member voluntary/community, Other	2	0.1
A local resident, A local business, Council employee, A member voluntary/community	1	0.0
A Council employee, A member voluntary /community	1	0.0

**Table 2: Category of respondents**

The gender of respondents was 59% female, 38% male, with 3% preferring not to say and 0.25% preferring their own term.

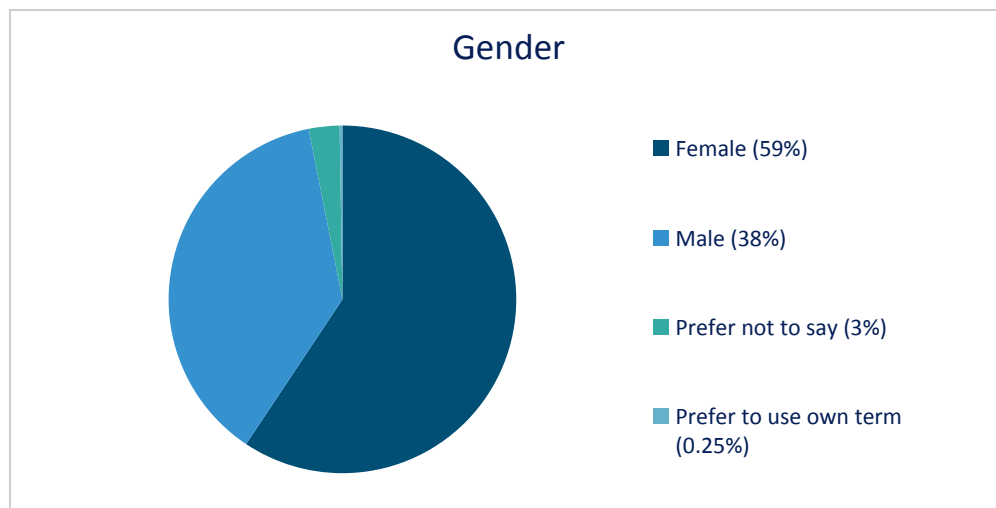


Chart 27: Gender of respondents

The age group profile is illustrated with the most common age groups were 45-54 years (22%), 35-44 years (21.7%) and 55-64 years (19.8%).

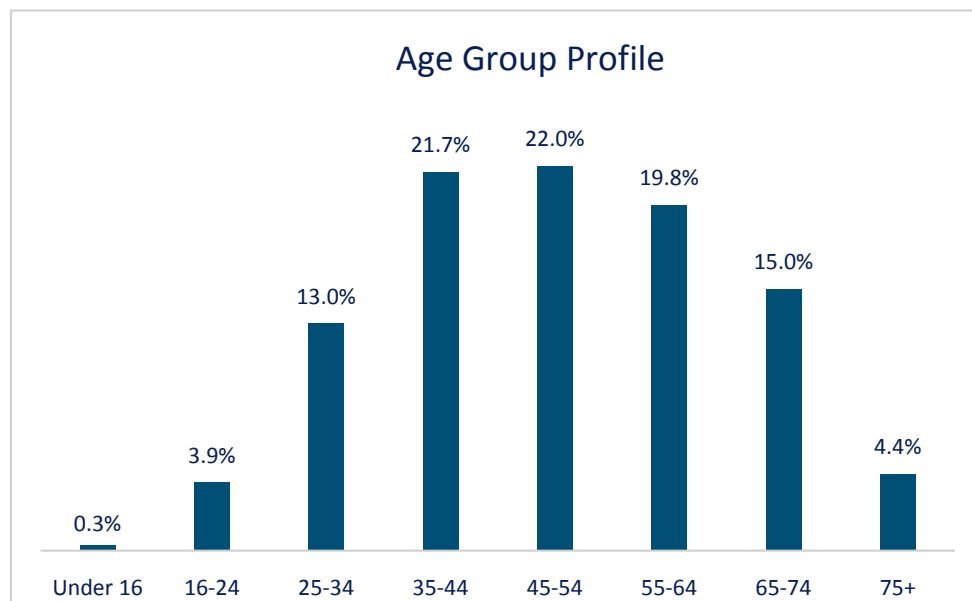


Chart 28: Age group of respondents

93.5% of respondents were white British, with only 96 (3.5%) respondents were of a non-white or other ethnicity.

81.3% of respondents were heterosexual, 2.7% were gay/ lesbian, 1.7% bisexual and 14.3% preferred not to say.



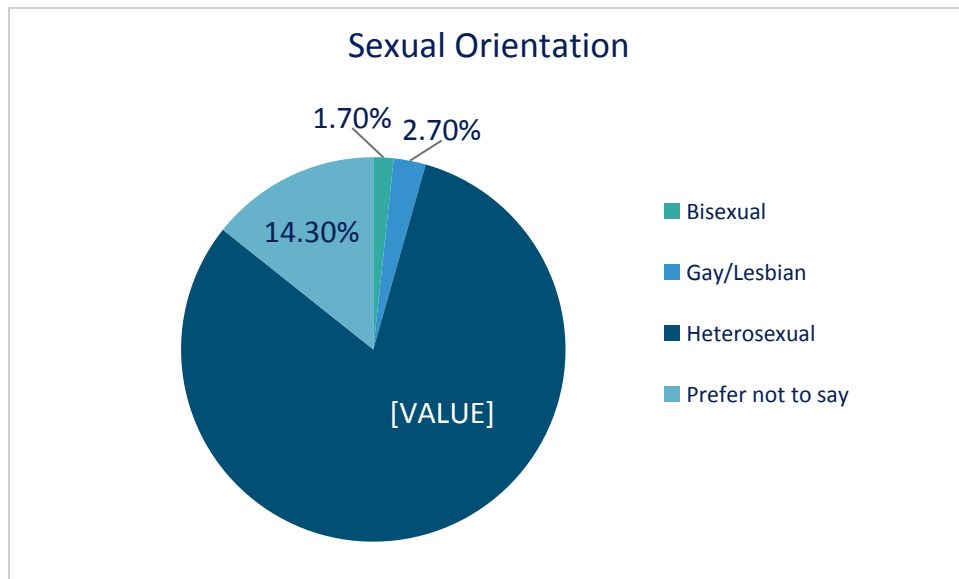


Chart 29: Sexual orientation of respondents

## 4.2 Have your say - Site Traffic

Reviewing the site activity, visits, and how people visit the site can be useful to evaluate if people are aware of the site, as well as to ensure engagement activities are deployed effectively, and to a wide range of different people – enhancing public engagement in the future.

Site registration allows us to confirm the number of engaged participants through the completion of the questionnaire, ideas board or asking a question, this was 2,793. Of those that contributed, 2,715 completed the online questionnaire. The ideas board had 217 people contributing 236 new ideas. The ideas were also engaged with, including 1,505 ‘votes’ and a further 90 comments - a total of 1,831 contributions. A total of 59 people provided 74 questions for the events. A single registered participant can perform multiple actions.

Analysis of site traffic during the consultation period allows an estimation of numbers of site visits – this being 19,157, with 13,720 participants visiting the budget consultation page. Of these 9,988 were informed participants through an action on the site, such as contribution to a tool or downloading a document. These figures cannot be viewed as definitive as they are based on site tracking through ‘cookies’ and there are a number of factors that can impact on this. These include that cookies may be disabled or deleted, individuals may access the site multiple times through different devices or different browsers. However, the figures can be used to gauge how much interest has been generated in individual projects through the rate of engaged participants.

The route that people access the site is known as the traffic source. The ‘Have your say’ portal allows analysis to be carried out on traffic source, and if they lead to engagement in the

site tools such as the questionnaire. This analysis allows a greater understanding of which communication and promotional tools to use to optimise engagement.

For this project a range of traffic sources have been reviewed and summarised in the table below. Most visits to the site were direct visits where people have the site URL directly in their internet browser and these generated high rate of engagement with 30.1% of visits resulting in completion of a tool on the site or view or download a document. Compared to this, whilst social media accounted for 20.5% of traffic it only generated 3.4% engagement. An email about the consultation generates the most engagement at 37.5%.

Traffic Source	Site Visits	% of Visits	Number Engaged	% Engaged
Direct	13645	71.23%	4102	30.1%
Social Media	3927	20.50%	132	3.4%
Email	104	0.54%	39	37.5%
Search engine	408	2.13%	91	22.3%
.Gov sites	68	0.35%	14	20.6%
Referrals	1005	5.25%	124	12.3%

Table 3: Site traffic sources

Documents on the site were utilised by the public, with 1,658 downloads of the Budget Booklet, 252 downloads of the Easy Read Consultation Version and 163 downloads of the Budget Frequently Asked Questions.

# Appendix 1: Qualitative Feedback

This appendix includes feedback directly sent to the contact email address:

[budgetconsult@wirral.gov.uk](mailto:budgetconsult@wirral.gov.uk)

## **Williamson Art Gallery**

We write on behalf of the Museums of Cheshire and the Liverpool City Region Museums & Heritage Network in response to Wirral Council's budget consultation process for 2021/22.

We wish to express our support for the Williamson Art Gallery & Museum, which is at risk of closure having been identified as a potential budget saving in the consultation. We represent 30 different organisations from across the Liverpool City Region, Chester and Cheshire, a rich mix of small and large museums, galleries and heritage attractions run by trusts, local authorities, and universities. The Williamson is an important and longstanding member of our networks.

We are very much aware of the significant and ongoing financial pressures faced by local authorities. As leaders of local businesses, we know that difficult decisions must be made to ensure future sustainability. We know too that Wirral Council has felt the effects of budget cuts more than most local authorities and that Covid-19 has only made the financial challenges you are facing more severe. However, we felt compelled to write to you, in support of our colleagues, to outline just how important The Williamson is – for us, for people, and for Wirral's economy – and the impact its closure will have.

Local authority museums and galleries are integral to place-making and tightly bound to local pride and identity. They are part of the DNA of the area and communities they serve. Through their work, they help people to make sense of the past, raise aspirations, and make better decisions for the future. Because of the important collections they hold, the stories they tell, their relationships with communities, and the neutral spaces they provide, they are uniquely placed to help councils to deliver on important agendas too, like the environment, and social injustice. They also make a significant contribution to the local economy, both directly and indirectly, and have the potential to support regeneration. They do this by raising the profile of an area, driving domestic visitors and visitor spend, and providing employment and skills development opportunities for residents, creative practitioners, and businesses.

The Williamson is amongst the best performing local authority museums and galleries in the UK. Its permanent collections tell a local story, but they contain a wealth of treasures of national and international significance. Each year an exciting programme of exhibitions are curated in partnership with contemporary artists, schools and colleges, and community groups. The venue welcomes in the region of 50,000 visitors each year and its activities are worth just under £1 million to the local economy.

Over the last few years, the team at The Williamson have invested significant time and money in using their collections to promote wellbeing and tackle inequalities. For example, in 2020/21 they are working with Wirral Council's Family Matters team to support families at risk

of having children taken into care. The esteem with which the gallery is held locally is demonstrated by the petition that has been launched to prevent its closure, which at the time of writing has over 10,000 signatures. Over 80% of their visitors originate from the local area.

During the pandemic, their work has not stood still. They have adapted their practices to generate more digital content, thereby ensuring that their important work continues to make a difference to people's lives. When the pandemic subsides and the ability for people to participate in authentic experiences is possible once again, venues like The Williamson will be in a really strong position to appeal to both actual and virtual visitors, to support local authorities with their recovery efforts, and to improve the mental wellbeing of visitors and residents.

For us, The Williamson is integral to the local cultural and heritage ecology. We find that we are most successful when we work together effectively. We have worked hard and for many years to present a joined-up offer and disperse visitors across the region. We share resources to strengthen our programmes. We share expertise to create a level playing field. As one of the key cultural assets in the region, the loss of The Williamson will be significant for us and its impact will be felt for generations to come. We urge you not to take a short-term decision that will have a significant and ongoing impact for the people of Wirral but also impede your ability to deliver the council's vision for Wirral, 'to secure the best possible future for our residents, defined by the community prosperity we create and supported by our excellent people and services'.

We will close by saying that like you we are looking forward to better times. Despite the significant loss and suffering the pandemic has created, there are opportunities too and we feel certain that the region will emerge from this pandemic in an even stronger position. With initiatives like Eureka on the horizon for Wirral, there is plenty to get excited about. They will without doubt enhance Wirral's existing offer, providing something very different for the area, but we must not lose one of our greatest cultural assets in the meantime.

Thank you for taking the time to read our letter of support. If you would like to discuss any aspect of it, please do not hesitate to get in touch with us.

I am writing to voice my anxiety over the possible closure of the Williamson. It is a cultural hub for the community that serves its needs and interest in many ways. It is a gallery that has a wonderful collection of art and Wirral historical artifacts, as well as showcasing local musical and artistic talent with concerts and exhibitions that feature the work of Art societies and our schools and colleges. It shows classic films and has a programme of workshops that I know from experience stimulate both old and young to further their artistic and craft endeavours. The cafe has become a social hub for local people to meet prior to exploring the fascinating contents of its many rooms or its excellent bookshop- and it is a resource for local artists both through its exhibits and the art materials available in the onsite art shop. Although

it is smaller than a large regional gallery it is big in its ambition to serve its locality both culturally and socially and in that sense, it is quite irreplaceable.

The loss of this vital cultural amenity to the Wirral would be disastrous for a community which will be in even more desperate need of a local and accessible cultural and social hub in the months and years to come as it recovers from all the pressures caused by Covid 19.

We write to express our concern about the above which appears as one of the 'Options for Saving' under the heading 'Tourism Communities, Culture & Leisure' in the Council's Budget Booklet 2021.

The Northern Ceramic Society was founded in 1972 with an international as well as a British membership that is particularly strong in the North of England. We have always admired the way in which the local people of Birkenhead have taken pride in showing their history to the rest of the world, in particular their ceramic history of which your area is justly proud.

This certainly includes the stories the Williamson Art Gallery & Museum can display through the collection of Birkenhead Della Robbia pottery. You will know that these wares are unique, in that they were made by local people trained on the job as artists and potters, and the pots they made are known and admired internationally. Although there are small collections elsewhere, the world centre of study for this remarkable factory is at Birkenhead where the collection is beautifully set out as a testament to local pride and international recognition. Our Society has regularly visited this collection, the last occasion being in August 2019, when our members both from the UK and overseas were once again thrilled to see the displays.

In addition to the local pottery, the Knowles Boney Collection of 18th century Liverpool porcelain at the Williamson is also quite unique in its breadth. We know of no similar collection elsewhere on public display. We are of course also conscious of the other collections on show at the Williamson and during our visits we also appreciate the local art exhibitions when these are available. There will no doubt be much local concern expressed at the prospect of losing these.

We do understand that the Council is facing severe financial constraints due to the current budget situation, but nevertheless we do urge the Council to carefully consider the ongoing loss both to local people and to visitors if the Williamson collections ceased to be accessible, and if at all possible, to find some way of keeping this gem of an art gallery open to the public.

We are writing to you as part of Wirral Council's budget 20 – 21 consultation, as we are dismayed to learn that the survival of the Williamson Art Gallery and Museum is threatened by budget cuts.

We are huge fans of WAGM and have been part of the Friends scheme for many years. We regularly visit to enjoy the vibrant exhibitions, historic collections and wonderful art displays. We particularly appreciate access to view the world class collection of Della Robbia ceramics which draws visitors from the north west and far beyond. Della Robbia plays a unique and key role in Birkenhead's cultural heritage.

Closing WAGM would have a devastating effect on the local community as it is a popular venue for concerts, workshops, art classes and school visits. In addition, it would have major practical implications for Birkenhead Priory and the Transport Museum, both of which are managed from the Williamson. The café in the museum is a popular and well attended catering venue and well supported social hub.

For over 50 years the Williamson has played a significant role in our lives, bringing art and culture to one of the most deprived part of the country. My 80-year-old mother lives locally and also uses the Williamson to attend events and meet people – as do so many of her elderly friends and neighbours. It's a lifeline for them.

We fully appreciate the wonderful and much needed educational benefits the Williamson brings to children on the Wirral. Our young nieces regularly attend art events there which have benefited their creativity and mental wellbeing. This is needed now, more than ever, when arts and crafts are being stripped from school curricula.

Families moving to the Wirral are looking for activities to do with children and the Williamson fills this role admirably. It also attracts positive feedback from the many tourists who visit, bringing much needed revenue to the borough. There is huge potential to further promote the museum and enhance its place as part of Wirral's wider visitor economy.

We understand that Wirral Council's finances are in a parlous state with difficult decisions having to be made across the board. We ask that you consider the Williamson's future as vital to the Wirral's cultural and community offering and do everything you can to save it from closure now and in the future.

Not long after my son died in 2003 of a brain disease, I was elected a member of The Wirral Society of Arts and I have been a member ever since. The following year my daughter was diagnosed with the same brain disease. She is still alive and has been in care for the past seven years. I continue to struggle with my Mental Health issues, but I have managed to exhibit at the Williamson every year. I won the Open in 2006, the Kriterion Award in 2013 and the Presidents Prize more recently.

The Williamson is more than just an Art Gallery to me. I have no doubt that it has been a life saviour for me and helped me through a very difficult 15 years. It would be wonderful if I could carry on exhibiting my work there for at least another 15 years.

I have been a resident of Oxton for the past 24 years, living in James Street directly opposite the Williamson Art Gallery.

In 2000 I was one of the consultants for the 2020 Vision project with the then Council leader Steve Maddox. The aim was to revitalise Birkenhead by creating a cultural and Artist led community based upon the successful model of Bold Street, Wood Street and Concert Square areas of Liverpool which I was part of. The Artist led community that had established itself 10 years previously had helped to create the environment that Tom Bloxham, Jonathan Falkingham, Bill Maynard and Urban Splash went on to so successfully exploit.

I feel that in the longer term it would be very short sighted to contemplate the closure of the Williamson which represents as much a catalyst for the regeneration of Birkenhead as we artists in our youth had been for Urban Splash and Liverpool. I feel that the position of the Williamson is central to the community giving Birkenhead and Oxton a very vibrant and clear identity that people want to move to and be a part of. Sadly, it is often only when the creative community which is often invisible has been lost that it makes its absence felt.

The Williamson has played a central role in my own life both socially and importantly as a professional Artist, where I have exhibited over the years as well as enjoying the many cultural and social events that the Williamson team have created.

In January 2018 I had a major one man show in the Williamson gallery, occupying two large rooms. Colin Simpson was very supportive, and we were both delighted with the show's success and the number of people who travelled from outside the area to view it. As a direct result of this show I was approached by a top London Gallery, David Messums of Mayfair who are now my sole representatives.

The opportunity to exhibit as a local Artist, my connection to the Wirral and the representation of the working people of Birkenhead within my figurative work has enabled Messums to build up a clear profile and root me in the tradition of Northern Artists for which they are champions. I believe that this would not have happened without the Williamson's and Colin Simpsons remit of exhibiting Artists from the Wirral and supporting the local community directly through a programme of exhibitions and

importantly not representing the norm, that of an elitist organisation just pandering to the high arts, to the exclusion of the wider community.

You need not look any further than the Wirral open to see such a wide diversity of ethnicities and cultural backgrounds exhibiting. The Williamson represents the Cultural heart of Birkenhead.

I am writing to you to express my deep concern re the possible closure of the Williamson Art Gallery.

The Art Gallery is described as Wirral's hidden gem and during my lifetime it has proved itself worthy of this description to so many as it nears its 100th anniversary in 2028.

I would like to explain my involvement with the Williamson over the past forty years, not to make me the important subject, but rather to emphasise how important it is, not only to the





people of Wirral, but as a national & International venue for art exhibitions, poetry and music recitals, lectures, community projects and educational programmes. The staff working at the gallery, including a cafe, book, art shop and outside gallery, under the expert guidance of Colin, have always been so welcoming, supportive and creative in their care and development of what is Wirral's number one art venue.

Not in any particular order I would like to draw attention to some of the many exciting events that the Williamson Art Gallery has created, nurtured and presented.

\* Biennial art exhibitions for Wirral Schools in collaboration with Unilever, whereby Artists in Residence worked on site at, for example, Birkenhead Priory, Lady Lever Art Gallery, Unilever Factory, Hilbre Island etc with a wide range of pupils, students & staff to develop their art skills in paint, print, film, ceramics, sculpture and textiles. These workshops culminated in a large exhibition that ran for six weeks during the summer and gave pleasure to thousands of pupils and visitors. As an art teacher and art advisory teacher for Wirral I know how important they were in developing the skills of pupils, teachers and Artists in Residence alike

\* Old Masters and Young Poets. This was a school's event that was sponsored by Lord Leverhulme and encouraged young & older children and their teachers to visit the Walker, Lady Lever and Williamson Art Galleries to view paintings under the expert eye of Colin Simpson, Frank Milner & Marie Stacey (English Inspector) to write poetry. This was then published as a collection for public appreciation and an evening celebration with pupils at the centre of events accompanied by staff and parents at the Williamson Art Gallery.

\* Poetry/ Literary Events: Poetry evenings have been held regularly at the gallery with up to one hundred and fifty in the audience.

Stephen Spender, Carol Ann Duffy and Simon Armitage, Carol as Poet Laureate in 2018 & Simon in 2019, the current Poet Laureate. These were organised by First Thursday, a long-standing poetry group from Heswall.

\* Children's Saturday & Holiday Workshops with Artists in Residence have been a cornerstone of the Williamson's annual diary with thousands of young people, from the local community, learning new skills and having fun.

\* Art Exhibitions - The Williamson houses a fine collection of paintings and UK's largest collection of Della Robbia pottery as well as an important collection of ship's models highlighting Cammell Laird and Mersey Ferries and traffic on the River Mersey.

It hosts regular exhibitions which include national international artists, local artists and student degree shows.

As part of an International Batik Exhibition, it was exciting to have an artist fly in from Japan for the Private View.

The Singh Twins, internationally acclaimed artists are regular visitors, supporters and exhibitors at the gallery.



\* Music - The Williamson has regularly hosted musical evenings and Sunday afternoon concerts encouraging local talent as well as national performers.

U3A, local groups, teachers, community groups and so many more use this 'hidden gem' and certainly Wirral without the Williamson Art Gallery would lose a significant cultural, community and much-loved centre for the Arts.

Thank you for reading this, I have only touched the surface of the Williamson's activities, but I know I am writing this on behalf of thousands of people who have enjoyed & enjoy the galleries presence and its central function in Wirral society and population.

The Williamson is a fairly small Art Gallery compared to some. To build a new facility of this quality complete with the collections would be expensive. Why throw our asset away. The collections are of particular note Della Rosa pottery and the ship models being favourites. The Wirral has a rich cultural heritage, particularly around the Deeside with many artists, writers, poets, musicians. Other important collections are also connected with the gallery.

To close the gallery and leave us with nothing and nowhere to exhibit our artwork to a professional standard. To leave us with no cultural centre on the Wirral seems strange.

The Wirral is often considered a small area containing every aspect of our national life and culture. With the only art gallery dumped our area becomes devoid of soul, and no longer representative of our way of life.

I have hung artwork at the gallery from my twenties to the present day. Also attending ventures supporting those less fortunate. Mental health events and taking my husband to musical concerts when he suffered from dementia.

We only have one Ferry across the Mersey, please consider leaving us just one art gallery where our children have something more than the trivial, and we can gather to be artists in our community.

I have used the Williamson gallery as an exhibiting artist with the WSA and as a visitor to exhibitions book shop and cafe.

If you close this space, you will need a better plan otherwise you have a vacuum space which is prone to decay vandalism which will run the area down and create more costs in dealing with the problems. This is a vital community space which could be run as part of a bigger museums project linked to the Tate /Liverpool museum or something like that. It has adapted well as a concert venue It could host international style art architectural exhibitions in that format which post pandemic would attract visitors and revenue. It could be used as part of the art tech college buildings it also has restaurant possibilities (post pandemic) in conjunction with the art gallery space All major museums have a beautiful restaurant as well

as a cafe It is a lovely building in its own right, I am not sure if it would adapt well to apartments as it has few windows. Those are my thoughts Please don't close and leave empty.

We, the management committee of North Wales Society of Fine Art (NWSFA), are writing to you because we understand that closure of the Williamson Art Gallery is one of the options that the Council is considering in order to balance its future budgets.

NWSFA is the foremost membership body representing visual artists in North Wales and surrounding areas. Most of our members are professional or semi-professional i.e., they make all, or a significant proportion of their living from their art. NWSFA exhibited at the Williamson Gallery last year and we are already in discussions about similar exhibitions in the future. Many of our members live on the Wirral, are members of other organisations that exhibit regularly at the Gallery (such as the Wirral Society of Arts) or participate in the Gallery's own exhibition programmes.

Our society fully appreciates the financial problems that the Council is facing and the difficult decisions that you are going to have to make as a result.

We assume that the potential negative impacts of closing the Gallery on areas such as quality of life, education, social cohesion have already been well-rehearsed by others.

Instead, we would like to focus on the fact that while closure of the Williamson Gallery might appear to create immediate cash savings, it would result in a significant opportunity to rebuild the post-Covid-19 economy of the Wirral and beyond being missed.

According to a report by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, in February last year (i.e., immediately prior to the first lockdown), the creative sector had been growing five times faster than the national economy as a whole. Karen Bradley, the Secretary of State stated that "this is a testament to the talent and drive of its workforce and we are working closely with them to make sure this fantastic success continues".

Figures from Statista, a leading provider of data about the art market, reveal that the turnover of "artistic creation" in the UK had been steady over the 10 years to 2017 and had experienced considerable growth in more recent times.

Yet, despite making such a valuable contribution to the local economy, it is widely acknowledged that the cultural sector has been hit harder than most by the pandemic. Artists such as those that we represent are typically self-employed and small scale. Their main route to market has been shut off for the last 10 months with the closure of art galleries (many did not open even when lockdown was eased) and a large proportion do not qualify for any kind of the financial support packages on offer.

In the meantime, the Bank of England Reported in November 2020 that wealthy households have been saving significantly during the pandemic. It is these people who buy art (according

to an Arts Council of Wales survey in 2015, two-thirds of art gallery visitors are in social grades ABC1). Then, In December, the Centre for Business and Economic Research received widespread publicity by revealing that an estimated £197 billion of private savings had been accumulated in 2020 and was ready to be spent when lockdown ends.

All of this creates an exciting cocktail of ingredients that can aid the recovery of a post-pandemic economy on the Wirral. We have a sector with a proven track record of high economic growth and performance and a significant resource of private funds that is just waiting to be invested in its product.

The key to bringing the ingredients together will be to build as much exposure for the sector as possible; creating opportunities for the local cultural sector to promote its work to potential customers with the power to spend. Art galleries will be the key catalyst in this.

With that in mind, it would seem almost perverse to coincide this opportunity with the closure of one of the most important arts galleries in the country. The Williamson Gallery is one of only a very small number venues in the whole of the Merseyside/ North Wales region that is able to cater for the kind of larger-scale exhibitions that will need to take place and that can be run by organisations like ours.

We do hope that you are able to see the enormous economic potential that exists in retaining the Williamson Gallery and would welcome the opportunity to work with you or the Gallery to explore some of them.

Although I don't live on the Wirral, I treasure The Williamson. It is a gem of a gallery providing not only for the local population but for other people. It's a good resource for artists to get their work displayed and I've visited it many times for this purpose.

As a member of the WSA I was delighted to see my work displayed so well in such a grand context. Please save this space for future generations.

Several years ago, I left London to live in North Wales. Rather like many in the 'metropolitan bubble' I assumed that the provincial cultural landscape would be several rungs down the quality ladder from the high-flying capital. However, this prejudice quickly dispelled when I visited the Williamson Gallery and saw the standard of the art works on show. Particularly the Wirral Society annual show. I was stunned by the quality of the artworks on display.

My admiration for the gallery has increased over the intervening years.

I have been made aware of the devastating news that the gallery is under threat of closure, and I would appeal to you and your fellow councillors to do whatever is in your power to avoid this and keep this wonderful institution open.

The current covid crisis, (which although it undoubtedly will have had a detrimental effect on finances), underlines the vital importance of the continuation of the Williamson due to its wonderful contribution to the mental well-being of our citizens.

I understand that the Williamson Art Gallery and Museum is under threat of closure.

I am not a resident of Wirral, but I am a regular visitor to the Williamson. I have observed how popular it is as a community resource and I feel its closure would be a great loss to Wirral.

I am writing on behalf of The Oxton Society to say how concerned we are at the level of proposed cuts that the Council is forced to consider at this time. Clearly, there are important and competing priorities which will make the task extremely difficult. However, there is only one Williamson Art Gallery and Museum.

We are very concerned that we have been at this point before, in 2013, when the Secretary, Alan Chape, and I were part of a small group, led by Professor Robert Lee, and tasked by the Council to review and produce a strategy to preserve and develop the Williamson. It seems that we are at this point again. I quote from the Strategic Plan submitted to the Council in 2014.<sup>[1]</sup>

“Recently, a major refurbishment of the gallery and museum has been completed involving an expenditure of £1.3m to repair the roof and to make the building fully DDA compliant. Within this context, it is our belief that the Williamson has a strong future as a continuing focal point for artistic excellence but also as a recognised leader for arts activities which address wider socio-economic issues relating to health and wellbeing, low esteem, and the direct consequences of relative deprivation. Art galleries and museums are increasingly seen as key agents in delivering educational and health benefits, in transforming local communities, and in promoting good and active citizens.”

That vision holds now and with even greater force after the impact of the pandemic in the short and, undoubtedly, in the longer term. The Williamson, under Colin Simpson’s leadership, has developed in a number of important ways in line with our recommendations, and has become an even greater part of the fabric of Wirral and its local communities. These include:

1. Successful grant awards from Arts Council England and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation to create workshops for vulnerable young people and pre-school children.
2. The opening of the Green Gallery, a unique space on the Wirral, funded through trusts and a campaign of private donations, which won awards including from the Royal Horticultural Society in 2019.
3. A significant extension of its network of partnerships to deliver programmes of activities which deliver educational and health benefits and are used by a wider range of groups, including those that are vulnerable and lack opportunities elsewhere.

4. A wider programme of exceptional exhibitions in celebration of artistic excellence (notably Henry Moore) and, during Lockdown, the development of a strong digital presence in which the team have revealed the depth and qualities of the collection and gained a wider audience.
5. The Gallery shop has been stocked exclusively with Wirral-based artists and makers, including Oxton Artists, and has developed a unique character; it has provided a showcase for local artists and a vital income stream for small local businesses.
6. A book shop and art shop within the Williamson have increased the footfall and casual attendance and local small businesses are supported.
7. The Oxton Society's own strategic partnership with the Williamson, through which it houses the Oxton history archive, highlights local history and heritage and builds on the Council's Heritage Strategy to enable the people of Wirral to develop a real sense of place.

We also believe that the Gallery has an important part to play in the regeneration of Birkenhead as a place with exciting new opportunities for attracting visitors and meeting the needs of the resident population. It should form an integral part of, and be a focus for, the recent Council-commissioned consultancies to develop a Culture and Heritage Strategy for Birkenhead. The latter involves two consultancies to undertake the work: Counterculture Partnership LLP in association with Architectural Emporium and Sound Diplomacy. Both consultancies have a strong track record in delivering similar strategies in the UK and have linked in a number of specialists to their project teams to ensure that the wide-ranging issues for culture and heritage in Birkenhead are robustly explored. The Williamson is a cultural and community hub which should be one of the centrepieces of the proposed strategy.

In conclusion, we believe that the Williamson is a unique community and cultural asset, resource and facility for the people of Birkenhead and urge the Council to preserve it for generations to come as part of Birkenhead's vibrant and successful future.

We are contacting you in our capacity as Chair and Secretary of the Friends of The Arno and Oxton Fields to express our opposition to the closure of the Williamson Art Gallery and Museum. We are aware of the Council's need to make savings in its forthcoming budget and of the financial review that is being undertaken. We welcome the online consultation on options that have so far been identified, but we are very concerned to note that the future of the Williamson is again under threat.

During the last few years considerable progress has been made by the Council, in partnership with the Friends of the Williamson and other local organisations, to strengthen the role of the gallery as a tourism asset, an educational resource and a community hub. While this has been interrupted by Covid 19, we believe that the contribution made by the gallery to the community will become even more important once normal life is restored. As a volunteer group we appreciate the opportunity to support the Council in its duty to maintain and enhance one of its major environmental areas. Similarly, we are confident that volunteers will

be prepared to play an increasingly significant role in working with the Council to secure the future of the Williamson.

One of the Williamson's particular strengths is the links that it has with other cultural facilities, including Birkenhead Park, Bidston Hill, The Arno, Port Sunlight Village and the Lady Lever Gallery. Collectively these visitor attractions provide significant potential to expand tourism across East Wirral. Furthermore, at a time where a major regeneration of Birkenhead is about to commence, it is appropriate to consider the contribution that culture and leisure can make to the town's identity and attractiveness as a place to live and work.

We hope you will take account of our views.

Dear Councillors, it is with great consternation and regret that i have seen that the closure of the Williamson Art gallery is being considered. I would like to register my deep objection to this proposal. The Williamson, apart from being one of the most iconic architectural buildings on the Wirral, provides cultural and educational facilities and experiences that nowhere else on the Wirral provides. It is used by a large portion of the local population, artists, teachers, designers, families and societies, the closure would be another nail in the coffin of our shrinking social and cultural needs for the area. I am positive that with truly creative thought and action this facility can not only maintain the present wonderful amenities but add significantly to them. Closure would be a total disgrace and betrayal of the standing of living and culture and ethos of the Wirral. thanking you

I hope this finds you well - I appreciate you are receiving a large influx of emails currently, however, I hope you may spare some time to read my email regarding a matter close to myself, and an artist collective I am part of. I read with great sadness that the closure of Williamson Art Gallery & Museum and Birkenhead Priory has been tabled by the council, and I wished to share our experiences in a bid to show the power and presence these organisations have for their local community.

My name is Mrs Janine Suggett and I am writing to you on behalf of the Oxton Artists, of which I am the Chairman. As an introduction, we are a group of circa 20 artists living in Oxton, and each year we have had the privilege of holding our commercial art show - the Oxton Art Fair - within the walls of the Williamson Art Gallery and Museum. For the last 15 years, the art fair has been a constant and growing success, attracting up to 1400 visitors each year. It has been a great privilege for us to be able to have the Williamson Art Gallery and Museum host our event each year.

As we all know, the past twelve months have been cataclysmic for the world, the UK, and arts and culture in general. I can't begin to imagine the full effect it has had across the Wirral



Borough - and I appreciate what a seemingly impossible task it is to somehow prioritise and budget across the full landscape of growing needs.

I hope that you and your colleagues are able to understand the extent of the soft power that the arts bring across the nation both in terms of economic value, as well as health and wellbeing. Indeed, the Wirral and wider Merseyside is known globally for its cultural offer. Though doors are not able to open to key institutions such as the Williamson, I hope that we can look beyond to see the impact it has for the community around it - both before and during the pandemic.

The Williamson Art Gallery and Museum has several unique assets:

- Its position at a cultural crossroads in the Wirral, accessible to a diverse pool of people.
- The unique and varied collection it keeps.
- The historical poignancy and value - as the dream of John Williamson (the Director of Cunard Shipbuilding), which further connects it to the heritage of, not just Merseyside, but the wider UK.
- The architectural and physical assets it has - the neoclassical architecture, the central garden and the plentiful parking offer ensuring physical accessibility to as many visitors as possible.

As we all know, the Williamson has undergone organisation audits before, most recently in 2013 - and we were thrilled that the council were able to save this organisation. Granted, current economics are deep, and complex, but once lost to the community, it will be hard - if not impossible - to bring back to life these cultural hubs.

I appreciate that your team will be fully considering all options, and that it is not as simple as a 'yes/no', but may I suggest that the council consider the following:

- A short 'Situation Analysis' - where the council begin to understand the true importance of these organisations. This type of work - done by an outside and unbiased expert - often includes an in-depth assessment of the strategic context and the Wirral cultural market through research and analysis across a range of factors. This stage is crucial for a lot of councils when considering the future of certain assets - and helps form the solid and tangible foundations upon which your recommendations and future options will be based.
- This could be followed by an 'Options Appraisal' - which is where the Williamson Art Gallery and Museum / Birkenhead priory sites are fully reviewed, and where outside experts are often able to put forward a recommendation as to whether the sites are worth saving - they look at Planning Recommendations, Operating Models and Financial Assessments. They would help the council to form a fuller picture of what these sites can achieve in the future - and whether it is, indeed, possible to achieve this.

While the current operating models for both sites may not work for current and future audiences, there is such incredible potential. And the community stands behind the council

when it comes to saving these important places - as a place of meeting, where young people and children come to learn and be inspired. Where history meets the future, and where imagination can be explored. As we all now, places like these are needed now, more than ever.

We must not lose the Williamson and I ask you humbly to consider all possible avenues. I would be delighted to discuss more our ideas to support your decision making.

I doubt if you know my name but I'm an Internationally exhibiting artist who was born and educated in Birkenhead – my family lived in Oxton, then Tranmere and finally Prenton where I spent all my life until the age of 18 when I left the Laird School of Art to 'go down south'.

I have been informed by quite a few people of the threat, yet again it seems, to the future of the Williamson. I would like to add to my dismay as to this news. The Williamson has played a major part in my development from the very early days when I was taken by my art teacher at school to the film nights there in the sixties on the lives of famous artists. I can't tell you what effect this had on me –it gave me hope that one day I might be able to be an artist who lives off his work. This I've been able to do ever since. I've also had two major exhibitions at the museum and my work is in the permanent collection with the help of government funding. I was told all the way through my early to forget about the idea of being an artist as it would be impossible to make a living from it but those evenings at the Williamson gave me that belief I could do it.

Birkenhead needs the Williamson –I don't understand the role of a town if it hasn't a cultural hub, a museum showcasing its past and the future.

Please check out my web site to see what happened to me after I left, I now exhibit worldwide and museums as far as China and Russia have substantial collections of my work.

I hope you can help to preserve the arts in the town and have the Williamson play a prominent role.

We are a group of about 20 artists living in Oxton and close by, and we have had the privilege of holding our yearly art show within the walls of the Williamson for over 15 years.

It has been a constant, I can say growing, success, attracting up to 1400 visitors during that busy weekend in November ever year.

Except in 2020, naturally.

I appreciate you are receiving a large influx of mail currently, and that what I want to talk about is one problem amongst many...

I would like to talk about the possible closure of the Williamson Art Gallery & Museum and the Priory - but mostly the Williamson, as I do know it so well.

The past ten months have been cataclysmic for the World, the U.K. and its people, and the



Arts in general. And I appreciate, we all do, what an impossible task it is to somehow prioritise spending fairly in a Council.

But I also believe the Arts are of great value to the nation, in general, and to our community in particular. We must look beyond the obvious affection for the Williamson, and its quiet presence in our midst. It has several unique selling points: its position, its Collection (being audited at the moment), its carpark (practical point!).

We, the Oxton Artists, did our very best to rescue it in Winter 2013, and organised various events, with great success. Of course, so did many other organisations and individuals... But it is a very different situation, and the problems are very complex.

An appraisal would show its potential, which we appreciate every year, in terms of its surroundings and its staff and their willingness to help.

The whole picture has changed greatly since 2013 - the opening of the Green Gallery to mention the most spectacular! A secret garden par excellence. The most visually and emotionally successful project - not, in our opinion, promoted outside sufficiently...

But its footfall has also increased. The Williamson Café was such an attraction too! And as we know, all Museums need an adjacent Café...

The Children's Activities were always a sell-out, and more than ever they are essential to the wellbeing of young people. Imaginative and all encompassing, they are greatly missed...

I was a Wirral resident for years and still visit the Wirral and the Williamson on a regular basis.

The Williamson has a special place in my heart because I've attended so many meetings there, of a professional nature, over the years. David Hillhouse and Colin Simpson always supported the Wirral art teachers and gave us a space to meet, discuss issues and enjoy current exhibitions. This was much appreciated.

The Williamson over the years has been a cultural hub for many groups. Schools have held exhibitions of work which has helped foster support and inform local people of the endeavours of local children. Local and National artists exhibit at the Williamson. The permanent exhibitions are a wonderful teaching element, historically so important and relevant. Students studying the history of ceramics for example have been able to study the Della Robbia work and learn about the history of ceramics and the Italian context.

The museum is a vital social hub with cafe and shop to enjoy as well as exhibitions on the walls.

It would be a crime to deprive the people of Wirral of this gem which has always been accessible. It's not a stuffy gallery for the few but somewhere for everyone. The staff are always so welcoming.

It's place that supports local artists but has a broad reaching influence.

Please do not allow the Williamson to close.

I am writing to you about the proposed closure of the Williamson Art Gallery and Museum, listed in your budget consultation document. As the Friends of the Williamson and Priory, we are obviously opposed to this. It is now clear that there is considerable public opposition to this particular proposal. Our petition, which you may already have seen, has gathered over 10,000 signatures and rising and not just from local residents. The importance of an art gallery and museum, which holds a large and important art collection, extends much wider than the limits of the Borough in which it resides. I know that many of our supporters have not only completed your consultation but written to their councillors with their own stories of the impact of the Williamson on their lives. I would ask that you take a little time to read some of their comments, together with those in the petition and see how the gallery and what it offers has enhanced their wellbeing.

Impact of covid on community welfare and potential for Williamson to form part of the healing process.

At some point this year, the covid situation is likely to improve sufficiently for galleries museums and theatres to re-open. The museum staff were already accustomed to engaging with the community and making both the Williamson and Priory relevant to their lives. The Wirral Public Health report of 2019 "Culture in Action" featured the work done in and from the Williamson and in its conclusions, said this:

*"We have a unique opportunity to use Wirral's year as Borough of Culture as a springboard for developing a deeper and shared understanding of how public engagement in arts and culture can contribute to physical and mental health, emotional wellbeing, community resilience, health maintenance and improvement."*

How apposite those words are now that, for nearly a year and continuing, the whole community has had to face social and educational disruption and isolation. The Williamson's response has been to post daily, on Facebook and Twitter, images of the extensive collection, together with photos of the Priory and videos about individual paintings and the history of the buildings. This has reminded people that there still exists the potential for a normal world of enjoyment and beauty. Many people have posted that they are keen to have the opportunity to visit and view the original works. Complementing this reaching out, the Friends on our Facebook page have been reminding the public of past exhibitions of both local and international artists, Wirral Metropolitan College student shows and the many concerts offering a variety of music (from jazz to opera, 41 in 2019) and theatre performances. People are tired of just existing. They want to live again. Those isolated need stimulation beyond supermarket shopping. Wirral has hitherto been an excellent place for enjoying leisure and culture. It is often why people choose to live here.

Range of culture assets within and Williamson.

Performance Venue. The excellent acoustics of gallery 4, together with the intimate atmosphere has made the venue popular with both performers and audiences.

Art and craft classes. These are held for both adults and children, including the disadvantaged, run at capacity. A popular summer arts programme for children ends with an exhibition of work.

Schools programme. This has run for many years (45 in 2019) and the children love coming and learning about history through the museum collection.

Exhibition Galleries- Changing exhibitions of local artists, international artists and Wirral Metropolitan College student shows.

Museum Galleries- for the much-loved permanent collections.

Meeting spaces- the building is used for meetings, including local art and history groups and a monthly book club is run by a member of staff.

Functions The building is licensed for weddings and two were held in 2019. There is potential for development here. People like using unusual space such as museums.

Open air gallery- the Friends recently raised about £ 80,000 to create an award-winning garden gallery for relaxing in, for exhibitions and as a meeting space.

Shopping- the gallery has its own shop for local artists' work and there is a bookshop and art supply shop.

This is an awful lot happening in and from one building. It is purpose built and serves its purpose. The whole package could not be replicated elsewhere and the social cost to the community of losing these benefits appears nowhere in your proposal.

The Williamson's place in Birkenhead and the regeneration scheme.

Birkenhead is about to undergo an ambitious programme of regeneration. The Priory sits within the designated area. The Williamson lies neatly between the Birkenhead Library and Birkenhead Park and the town centre. It should be seen as part of the regeneration plan, not closed in advance of it. I have tried to discover Wirral's current Culture Policy. It seems we do not have one and this must surely be an error of planning. Wirral emerged into the year of covid from a hugely successful Year of Culture during which the Williamson held a number of exhibitions and events as part of that. This is the time to build on that success, not undermine it. Culture forms such an important part of the health and wellbeing of a community, as emphasised in the 2019 report and so many of Wirral's residents have had to face isolation and our children have been deprived of so many of their normal activities. It would be a sad outcome of the Birkenhead plan if we end up encouraging people to visit and move in only to find they habitually hop over to Liverpool because they find what Birkenhead offers is seriously lacking in stimulation and entertainment.

The relationship between the Williamson and the Priory.

The rising profile that the Priory currently enjoys has been achieved by the museums team promoting both buildings as contrasting and complementing venues, so as to match events and performers with the most appropriate setting. Close the museums service and you risk the Priory sliding back into a quiet anonymity. It is Merseyside's oldest building and the site of Wirral's earliest history. The quality and range of community engagement by the museum

service across the two sites cannot be effectively delivered elsewhere. As the hub of that service, the Williamson should be accorded its prime importance.

Cost/Benefit analysis.

I would suggest that the figure quoted as the annual cost represents excellent value for money. Once you drill into the detail of the figures, I believe you will find that the closing costs are higher than you estimate and the annual running costs of preserving the collection and maintaining the grade 2 building, much higher. You are the custodians of the collection which you plan to deprive the community of access to. The social cost of the community activities provided at present at the Williamson, across the age groups, needs to be calculated and put in the balance. During lockdown, improvements have been made to the gallery lighting; redecoration has taken place and you now propose to waste that expenditure. To close the building and the service is a retrograde step to your future plans for this Borough as a whole and Birkenhead in particular.

I urge you to make every effort to keep the Williamson open. The Williamson is not a budget luxury. It influences and changes lives.

I am writing to you in regard to the concerns within our community surrounding the future of the Williamson Art Gallery.

My name is Gethyn Jones and by profession I am a cellist in the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, a post I have held for some 36 years. I have also been a resident of the Wirral for most of that time.

In those 36 years, as you can imagine, I have seen many challenges and changes to the arts scene worldwide. Funding in the sector has always been difficult, but never more challenging than the present!

In my spare time I volunteer to run the music concert series at the Williamson every Sunday throughout the summer. These concerts provide a platform for young up and coming musicians to perform.

Many Wirral youngsters take part in them alongside established professional musicians from the region and beyond. The series has been a fixture in the North West's cultural calendar for the last 25 years or so.

The concert attendances are large and often fill the venue to capacity. These concerts are totally free of charge to the audiences. The quality of the performances is exceedingly high and cover a great variety of genres, from classical to jazz to pop and folk.

The series is highly regarded by all those artists who participate and the venue itself being a massive reason why these wonderful musicians give up their Sundays to perform there. The Williamson has a truly unique vibe and one that we all love and adore. It is a real gem, that few communities nationwide, still possess and strive to maintain.

It would be a tragedy to lose it, especially for our young, talented musicians here in Wirral.

Please let me know if there is anything, I can do to help maintain this wonderful gallery that provides so much cultural wealth to Wirral residents and beyond.

As Chair of Art Friends Merseyside, I should like to voice our members' concerns, many of whom live on the Wirral, about current news on the future of the Williamson Art Gallery.

We fully understand the difficulties which all local authorities currently face in balancing the books, especially after the exceptional demands on funding over the last twelve months and what continues to be an uncertain period of time. However, we feel that now more than ever cultural institutions such as the Williamson must keep their doors in order that this great local asset can be enjoyed by the local community. This pandemic has highlighted the nation's appetite for culture and, of course, the benefits it brings to health and wellbeing.

You will be aware that the gallery not only shares its collection in an excellent manner but acts as an important social hub for many groups and families.

We would urge you to work with your colleagues to find a long-term solution for this wonderful Merseyside asset and important collection.

I am writing to you all to express my concerns about the reported closing of the Williamson Art Gallery. I have lived in Oxton since 1974 and during that time have visited the Gallery on numerous occasions to benefit from the excellent exhibitions, musical events, talks and meetings. I am a former Art Teacher and, in that role, and also as Advisory Teacher for Art, the Gallery was vital in providing a venue and resource for young people as part of their creative education. I feel that closing the Williamson would absolutely deprive so many people of a creative venue to visit and as a population we certainly creativity.

It is with great consternation and regret that i have seen that the closure of the Williamson Art gallery is being considered. I would like to register my deep objection to this proposal. The Williamson, apart from being one of the most iconic architectural buildings on the Wirral, provides cultural and educational facilities and experiences that nowhere else on the Wirral provides. It is used by a large portion of the local population, artists, teachers, designers, families and societies, the closure would be another nail in the coffin of our shrinking social and cultural needs for the area. I am positive that with truly creative thought and action this facility can not only maintain the present wonderful amenities but add significantly to them. Closure would be a total disgrace and betrayal of the standing of living and culture and ethos of the Wirral.

I am writing to offer my support for the group asking that the Williamson Gallery not be closed. The loss of such a resource would be devastating to an area so closely linked with Art Education. Please let me know if there is anything, I can do to help the decision fall in favour of keeping the Williamson open. Do you know if National Museums Liverpool would be interested in taking it over?

The Williamson Art Gallery and Museum is outstanding in owning many fine collections which attract visitors from far and wide. It is host to many organisations, too numerous to mention and supporting disabled youngsters in work experience. Closure of the Williamson would be detrimental to Birkenhead and the Wirral.

The cost of savings in relation to closing the Williamson Art Gallery could be offset in many other ways, including making rooms for hire for other functions. The building and its artefacts and collections could be made more accessible to the public with some imagination and a small cost.

The art gallery and museum has been a part of Wirral culture for many years and is an integral part of Birkenhead.

For families on a low budget, it is one of the few places to take children where there is no cost. This is especially helpful on rainy days during school holidays. By exposing children to culture we can broaden their minds and their interests.

The closure of the Williamson would be a great loss to Birkenhead and the Wirral.

Even here in Australia, I have learned of the Wirral Borough Council's intent to permanently close the Williamson Art Gallery & Museum.

As an active worker in the Arts & Culture sector for 20 years, I fully understand the constraints caused by government budgetary cuts, however, this news is worrying. I note growing international notice of the proposal, *The Art Newspaper* has quite serious reach <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/news/covid-closes-nightingale-museum>

The Williamson has both a depth of local historical importance and is the hub of a vibrant community art scene: it is a true gem for the Wirral. The collections are of truly international significance: I cannot understate this, the collection rivals, and betters those of many other UK regional institutions.



Today, these collections have more audience reach than ever, pre-Covid they were accessible to local community, but, in these past months through the innovative work of the Williamson staff they are now available in the global on-line environment.

If the decision is made to permanently close the Williamson, this may present more issues than it solves. There are serious considerations to be done regarding the best practice care of the collection and the heritage building itself. The collection and building are owned by the taxpayer and will need to be publicly accounted for, especially when removing a public facility that is as cherished with civic pride as the Williamson is.

More to the point is the detriment of its closure to community - art supports the emotional and psychological well-being of its audience. Post-Covid, institutions of the Williamson's calibre can play a major role in the healing process for many people affected by the current times they are suffering with.

Museums and Art Galleries are exceptionally important in shaping individuals. Personally, as a student (Wirral is where I was born and where I still call home) visits to the Williamson in the 1990s were instrumental to my choice of career path. A decision to close the Williamson must not be taken lightly, to close is to fail the community now and into the future.

The Wirral Council holds a real tangible asset with the Williamson. It is a drawcard institution. With a little investment and innovation, it can invigorate the borough, it has the capacity to become a major event venue and a wonderful destination for local and national visitors.

Faced with severe budgetary cuts in the financial year 2014-15 (part of what is now seen as a central government strategy of 'perma-austerity'), Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council (WMBC) gave serious consideration to mothballing WAGM or leasing the premises to a third party (the Elim Pentecostal Gateway Church). The budget consultation exercise at the end of 2013 contained a proposal to reduce its funding by £400,000 over the following two financial years with £250,000 to be saved in 2014-15. A reduction in funding by 73 per cent would have led to its inevitable closure.

On the initiative of Frank Field, an Action Group was established in December 2013 to find ways of saving WAGM and securing a sustainable long-term future. The Action Group, subsequently known as the Shadow Strategic Board (SSB) produced in February 2014 a draft Strategic Plan and Business Plan (2014-2019) that set out a framework for future development

of the Williamson as a centre of artistic excellence, a focal point for local history and heritage, and as a community resource which addressed the wide needs of local people and residents of Wirral in terms of creativity, health, education and wellbeing.

It was accepted that WAGM was a unique community asset which had yet to realise its full potential. A case was made for its devolution to a new Trust (a company limited by guarantee as a registered charity), but in the final analysis the Council, having accepted the SBB's main conclusions, opted to keep it in house.

### The Case for Retaining and Developing WAGM

This is as compelling as it was when the SSB met. Many of the surrounding areas are amongst the most deprived in the country; educational achievement is below the Wirral average; and average life expectancy is over 15 years lower than in the wealthier districts of West Wirral. Art galleries and museums are seen increasingly as key agents in delivering educational and health benefits, in transforming local communities, and in promoting social cohesion. Within this context, WAGM has a strong future as a focal point for artistic excellence and as a recognised leader for arts activities which address wider socio-economic issues relating to health, wellbeing, low esteem and the social consequences of deprivation. With sufficient support, it will continue to deliver key elements of the Council's current strategy in a significant number of areas.

A Vision Statement for the future of WAGM set out key aims, and objectives based on three interrelated themes. They remain as relevant in 2021 (particularly in response to the damage inflicted by Covid-19 and the incompetence of Central Government in managing the pandemic) as was the case some years ago:

- A celebration of artistic excellence designed to foster creativity, craftsmanship and skill training, including the application of new technology.
- An emphasis on local history and heritage to enable the people of Wirral to develop a real sense of place and to add their individual stories to its history.
- An engagement with the community based on a network of partnership organisations which will deliver programme activities with significant educational and health benefits.

### Achieving strategic aims

Until progress was halted by the outbreak of Covid-19, WAGM had made considerable progress in improving its operational profile, attracting new audiences, developing new facilities (including a successful cafeteria, the 'Green Gallery', and arts- and literature-based shops), consolidating its involvement in formal and informal learning, strengthening community engagement and exploiting funding opportunities. Indeed, since the crisis in 2014-15, WAGM has achieved a great deal, as I am sure you know. It is described on travel sites as 'an absolute gem' and was awarded TripAdvisor's Certificate of Excellence in 2019. Visitor numbers have increased markedly and its record in attracting external grant support has been strengthened (for example, with funding from the Arts Council National Lottery Project and the Elephant Trust for Alan Ward's Photographs from Another Place, 22 December 2019 – 2 February 2020). There has been a greater emphasis on history and heritage, with the highly successful Made



of Iron exhibition in 2019 (an integral part of Wirral Borough of Culture 2019). This celebrated Wirral's maritime links by focusing on six famous vessels built by Cammel Laird, while Community Made of Iron brought together digital archives, photographs and artefacts that captured the experience and social history of workers, their families and communities. The Forward Plan 2011-2016 for Wirral's Museum Service rightly emphasised the importance of extending the number of community engagement projects and considerable progress has already been made. As part of the Hedd Wynn Festival in September 2017, WAGM hosted an event for local schools (Bidston Avenue Primary, Our Lady and Saint Edward, the Priory Parish, Portland Primary and The Wirral Hospitals School) where pupils were able to read out the poems they had written for a *War & Peace Anthology*. It was a very moving occasion. It should also be remembered that the improved performance of WAGM has been achieved with limited resources, but its impact has been considerable.

### Financial and Strategic Considerations

From a financial perspective, the proposal to mothball WAGM makes little sense. On-going costs will still be incurred; its unique collection will be neglected and its quality impaired; and the continuing rise in utility costs will reduce further the level of savings. Moreover, recent years have seen a considerable capital investment in WAGM which will cease to generate benefits for the Council, while closure will lead to the termination of community engagement projects and undermine overall support for the very varied programmes that the Williamson has delivered successfully. The current budget proposal makes no mention of the future of Birkenhead Priory & St. Mary's Tower, but their future must inevitably be seen as part of a broader, forward-looking strategy for the Wirral Museums Service.

Strategically, WAGM has a critical role to play in the future of Wirral and its residents. This is particularly the case in relation to Birkenhead, where plans for the re-development of the market area were recently released. At the same time, significant progress has been made in taking forward plans to secure World Heritage Site inscription for Birkenhead Park, as the first publicly funded park in the world. The response a wide range of professional bodies, including the International Committee on Monuments and Sites UK and World Heritage UK, has been immensely supportive; a (third edition) of the draft Nomination Document has been finalised; and the case is compelling, WAGM is an important element in this process, as the custodian of paintings, prints, and other artefacts relating to the park's history. We are intending to celebrate the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of Birkenhead Park next April, which will also feature an exhibition including items from the Williamson's collection. In a wider context, WHS inscription is intended as a means of increasing tourism, particularly on the eastern side of the peninsula, and of contributing to Birkenhead's regeneration.

Both my wife and I and my late parents were born and bred in Birkenhead. We now live in Oxton. I was brought up at Home Farm, Landican. My late father, High Sheriff of Merseyside in 1979/80 would proudly say of the borough that whilst at the Landican end of the Borough in

the time it took him 3 years to rear a calf to a cow, at the other end of the Borough they built the Ark Royal.

The Williamson is part of Birkenhead's, and now latterly Wirral's, cultural heritage. There are sadly very few cultural places in Wirral, but the Williamson is one of them and under local control. Now that the Churches' influences are not as strong as they were the Williamson provides a centre for much needed community activity, as well as its traditional role for local artistic activity.

Of course, it does not yield an income and costs the ratepayer money. That is the lot of such places. The Williamson is easily accessible and not off-putting. Schools can use it.

If money has to be saved in the Council budget, then sharp end services such as the Williamson can offer should be protected. In these difficult times the many layers in your bureaucracy could be more seriously looked at.

To lose the Williamson would be an irreversible loss. To destroy is easy. To rebuild much more difficult.

I wish to express how shocked I was to hear this news. I have always appreciated the educational advantages of having this museum on the Wirral and as a Primary School teacher (now retired) I took pupils there on school visits, as well as my own children, and I now take my grandchildren.

Nowadays as member of a local art society I get great pleasure in visiting all the art exhibitions, and as the Wirral Open Art Exhibition attracts people from far and wide it has to be an excellent way of promoting the Borough. The Williamson is also a venue for showcasing the heritage of Birkenhead, the artwork and talents of local schools as well as providing art /craft classes and concerts.

I read in your proposals that you have a 'Culture & Heritage Strategy ' to put culture, creativity & heritage at the heart of regenerating Birkenhead. Surely the Williamson provides much of this already, so the proposed closure seems completely contradictory.

There are a number of crises running alongside each other in the UK currently, the virus and the economy being the headlines. These are national but filter down with immense impact on all local life. The problems that beset the Council and therefore all the citizens of Wirral are of the most profound importance.

The one crisis that is now taking on equal importance nationally and locally is the crisis of the mental health of the population.

I worked for many years in Wirral Mind and before that for the Council addressing the mental health needs in the community. I know that large sections of the community are vulnerable to

mental health problems. In an area like the Wirral as many as 50% of people are, even in normal times, experiencing or managing significant mental and emotional problems. And once people fall into these problems it is not only difficult but a long-term journey out of them. It consumes resources, costs the country billions and causes misery.

Today's crises will abate but the mental wellbeing of the people of Wirral will assuredly be severely dented in the process. The Williamson was deliberately sited away from the business and retail part of Birkenhead so it could be accessed more easily by local people. Places like the Williamson, with exhibitions, talks, concerts, meetings, workshops, the bookshop, art supplies and the cafe is without doubt a special mental health resource and a hub for hundreds of local people and families...and with many more to come. Its presence not only inspires, educates and entertains but is at its roots an essential part of the fabric of maintaining and improving our wellbeing, through involvement in art, creativity and meeting with others. Its closure would greatly add to the problems and the emotional damage we are now experiencing as a community, which impacts on us all as individuals. The Williamson isn't an Art Gallery and Museum, it is an emotional lifeline and a force for recovery from this crisis and beyond. It gives out positive messages of hope and a path for many out of these distressing times.

We are writing to you in your capacity as Vice-Chair of the Tourism, Communities and Culture Committee for Wirral Council, concerning the budget option to close the Williamson Art Gallery and Museum. We realise that the Council is facing a huge challenge in identifying savings for 2021/2 and we have already given our feedback in the official consultation, but felt it was necessary to also write to you, in view of your particular role, to urge that this option be rejected. Our three Oxton Ward councillors have also been made aware of our views and we have written to the Committee Chair.

The Williamson is a unique part of Wirral's heritage, as we are sure you know, and along with many other Wirral residents we have for many decades enjoyed the great variety of what it offers. It is so much more than a traditional art gallery and museum, although its collections of paintings, pottery and ship models are excellent: it offers a venue for many present-day local artists to exhibit at frequent, well attended events, excellent local history exhibitions, regular music events (especially in the summer), adult courses and makes a real contribution to art education for Wirral school children. In a very real sense, the Williamson is a community facility, in ways that the (outstanding, but very different) Lady Lever Art Gallery would never claim to be. It is truly a 'Jewel in the Crown' for Wirral!

At a time when mental health and wellbeing are such an issue in society, the contribution that the arts can make to addressing these issues should not be underestimated and it would be tragic if the Williamson's unique and enriching contribution to the Wirral community were to be lost. Please do all that you can to prevent this.

Here we have a building funded by Mr Williamson a director of the Cunard shipping line, houses many different pictures and artefacts all from Birkenhead and Wirral!

How can the council even consider closing down one of the most important build?

Buildings we have, it is also a learning institution and displays are heritage and must be saved!

I read with great sadness that the closure of Williamson Art Gallery & Museum and Birkenhead Priory has been tabled by the council, and I wished to share our experiences in a bid to show the power and presence these organisations have for their local community.

I am writing to you on behalf of the Oxton Artists, of which I am the Chairman. As an introduction, we are a group of circa 20 artists living in Oxton, and each year we have had the privilege of holding our commercial art show - the Oxton Art Fair - within the walls of the Williamson Art Gallery and Museum. For the last 15 years, the art fair has been a constant and growing success, attracting up to 1400 visitors each year. It has been a great privilege for us to be able to have the Williamson Art Gallery and Museum host our event each year.

As we all know, the past twelve months have been cataclysmic for the world, the UK, and arts and culture in general. I can't begin to imagine the full effect it has had across the Wirral Borough - and I appreciate what a seemingly impossible task it is to somehow prioritise and budget across the full landscape of growing needs.

I hope that you and your colleagues are able to understand the extent of the soft power that the arts bring across the nation both in terms of economic value, as well as health and wellbeing. Indeed, the Wirral and wider Merseyside is known globally for its cultural offer. Though doors are not able to open to key institutions such as the Williamson, I hope that we can look beyond to see the impact it has for the community around it - both before and during the pandemic.

The Williamson Art Gallery and Museum has several unique assets:

- Its position at a cultural crossroads in the Wirral, accessible to a diverse pool of people.
- The unique and varied collection it keeps.
- The historical poignancy and value - as the dream of John Williamson (the Director of Cunard Shipbuilding), which further connects it to the heritage of, not just Merseyside, but the wider UK.
- The architectural and physical assets it has - the neoclassical architecture, the central garden and the plentiful parking offer ensuring physical accessibility to as many visitors as possible.

As we all know, the Williamson has undergone organisation audits before, most recently in 2013 - and we were thrilled that the council were able to save this organisation. Granted, current economics are deep, and complex, but once lost to the community, it will be hard - if not impossible - to bring back to life these cultural hubs.

I appreciate that your team will be fully considering all options, and that it is not as simple as a 'yes/no', but may I suggest that the council consider the following:

- A short 'Situation Analysis' - where the council begin to understand the true importance of these organisations. This type of work - done by an outside and unbiased expert - often includes an in-depth assessment of the strategic context and the Wirral cultural market through research and analysis across a range of factors. This stage is crucial for a lot of councils when considering the future of certain assets - and helps form the solid and tangible foundations upon which your recommendations and future options will be based.
- This could be followed by an 'Options Appraisal' - which is where the Williamson Art Gallery and Museum / Birkenhead priory sites are fully reviewed, and where outside experts are often able to put forward a recommendation as to whether the sites are worth saving - they look at Planning Recommendations, Operating Models and Financial Assessments. They would help the council to form a fuller picture of what these sites can achieve in the future - and whether it is, indeed, possible to achieve this.

While the current operating models for both sites may not work for current and future audiences, there is such incredible potential. And the community stands behind the council when it comes to saving these important places - as a place of meeting, where young people and children come to learn and be inspired. Where history meets the future, and where imagination can be explored. As we all now, places like these are needed now, more than ever.

We must not lose the Williamson and I ask you humbly to consider all possible avenues. I would be delighted to discuss more our ideas to support your decision making.

I am writing to you concerning the review of the council's museum service provision.

I am deeply concerned that, if the Williamson Art Gallery and possibly the Priory and the Transport Museum, which as you know are managed from the Williamson as well, were to be mothballed as part of the council's plan to save money, that we might lose them all forever. This would be deeply upsetting as they play an enormous roll in the community.

The educational advantages of all three sites are enormous as they bring alive the history of the area and help the understanding of how the Wirral evolved in relation to Liverpool and the surrounding area, and the roll it can play in the future. I well remember the excitement of school visits to the Williamson and staring in amazement at the Priory as its story was brought alive by whoever was showing us around. Students from across the country come to

do research, particularly of the paintings but also the Della Robbia pottery - a unique and irreplaceable collection. The variety of artefacts is enormous, and it would be hard to see how this vast historic collection could be amalgamated successfully anywhere else.

The exhibitions are beautifully executed and are a delight to visit. As a member of the Art Fund, we have had many very successful events in the Williamson, including lectures, parties, demonstrations, concerts and tours of the galleries. Equally the Art Society (formally NADFAS) held its monthly meetings here for many years.

I am part of the recently formed Art Friends Merseyside and we have every intention of using the gallery as much as we did when we were organising local Art Fund events. We are raising money by holding events, to support local galleries and museums, and will be giving small grants every year to different local museums which hopefully will enable them to enlarge and compliment their existing collections.

The local art exhibitions and the Oxton Art Fair are again another example of how the Williamson plays such an important role in the community. I have attended various art courses including four excellent enameling ones. The encouragement of artistic talent as well as the ability to escape to a world of beautiful artefacts when visiting museums and galleries, plays a leading role in the mental health of many people.

It would be a disaster to close the three sites now particularly as I understand money has now been made available for the development of Birkenhead centre and there is possibly more funding to come.

While I appreciate the council's dilemma over its budget, I feel very strongly that the closure of the Williamson and possibly the Priory and the Transport Museum is not the best way forward.

**Petition:**

<https://www.change.org/p/wirral-borough-council-keep-the-williamson-art-gallery-open>

**Refuse Collection**

It is not a good idea to make the green waste bin to three weeks emptying as it will call rodents and smells especially in hot summer weather. Maybe the grey recycling bin could be emptied less often but the green household bin definitely needs emptying more frequently.



Why are the council considering moving the emptying of the green bin waste to 3 weeks? Surely for hygiene reasons it would be better to empty the grey bins ever 3 weeks and leave the green bins at 2 weekly intervals.

I write with regard to the proposal to close Europa swimming pool. I appreciate the council need to make cuts wherever and whenever possible but to close this facility would be catastrophic to local children.

This pool is packed out every school holidays and weekends with children and families enjoying the leisure pool, often seen with queues around the block.

This pool is used to teach the next generation of children to learn to swim and affectively saving lives.

This pool hosts the only competition pool in the area, housing Wirral Metro swimming club where my 14-year daughter swims up to 18 hours a week! There is no other facility who can provide what their club needs to continue this level of training.

I am appealing to you as a mum of three children who all use this pool week in week out that it needs to stay open for not only me and my family but hundreds of local families bringing their children to exercise, have fun, grow to love competing, learning to swim, and keeping a happy healthy mental health.

If this close, children in one of our most deprived areas will see a decline in their mental health. I'm already seeing the effects on my children's mental health that the pandemic has had but if this facility closes my daughter will have nowhere to train, my son will have nowhere to work out and my youngest will be left without a fun pool to play and release the tension of the week.

Please do not allow the closure!!

My concern is about Europa pools being closed. I am 12 years old I have trained at Wirral metro for about 2 years. I have become very passionate about swimming.

1) Does anyone on the committee understand anything about competitive swimming?

If you do, then you would understand that we need a pool.

2) Where will we train? Would you be able to provide us with the same amount of pool time?

I train for about 12 hours a week, and I am not just worried about myself I am worried about other clubs and future generation of swimmers. Europa pools is used by the entire swim community including the schools.

3) Where will peninsula galas, open meets and school galas take place?

Bebington- Oval = This pool only has 4 lanes and there is no space for spectators.

Wallasey- Guinea Gap = There are only 4 lanes and no space for spectators.

Birkenhead- Leasowe = This may have 6 lanes but there is not enough space for spectators.

Hoylake- Concourse = 4 lanes and not enough space for spectators.

Woodchurch = They only have 4 lanes.

Europa is the only pool with enough space for swimmers and spectators. Everyone has seats to sit down and space to stand up. Europa has all the best equipment. It has diving blocks and a digital scoreboard.

I am 13 years old and a keen swimmer and spend nearly 18 hours a week in the pool at Europa training with Wirral Metro. I find it good for my physical and mental health, like so many of my friends. I am worried that if you close Europa I won't have anywhere else to train. Please can you assure me that I will always have a pool at Europa.

One of your plans is to close Europa. My daughter swims for Wirral metro, if Europa closes where are the squad supposed to swim, what provision are you going to provide for these children who work so hard to achieve their goals which potentially include Regionals, Nationals and Olympics?

I'm responding regarding the option of closing Europa Pools. There are a few reasons that I'm strongly against this option being taken up.

1. It's the only facility of its type in the area.
2. Many people in the immediate vicinity will not have the means to travel to other facilities.
3. Health and wellbeing has been a major focus of Government/NHS policy in recent years, with the intention of improving the nation's health, mental health and reducing the strain on the NHS. I can't remember a time when wellbeing has been more important - and the NHS needs protection now, more than ever. So, closing the major leisure/fitness facility in the area doesn't make any sense.
4. Closing Europa would especially impact children. I believe that kids have already had enough to deal with over the last 9 months with schools being closed and not being able to see family and friends. Taking this away from them doesn't seem right.
5. Europa is the base of Wirral Metro Swimming Club who desperately need access to the facility for their performance programme. The kids in the club have put in thousands of hours



of training in the hope of becoming an elite level swimmer. Closing the facility will pretty much wipe-out their prospects.

**Petition:** [https://www.change.org/p/wirral-council-save-europa-pools?recruiter=1121858790&utm\\_source=share\\_petition&utm\\_campaign=share\\_for\\_starter\\_s\\_page&utm\\_medium=whatsapp&utm\\_content=washarecopy\\_26342018\\_en-GB%3A7&recruited\\_by\\_id=9d99f900-b221-11ea-8051-d10f46ec59cd](https://www.change.org/p/wirral-council-save-europa-pools?recruiter=1121858790&utm_source=share_petition&utm_campaign=share_for_starter_s_page&utm_medium=whatsapp&utm_content=washarecopy_26342018_en-GB%3A7&recruited_by_id=9d99f900-b221-11ea-8051-d10f46ec59cd)

## **Swimming Pools**

I would like to voice my protest at the plans to close Europa and mothball the Woodchurch Pool. I do so in my capacity as treasurer and coach of the Woodchurch Swimming club and parent to two girls who swim for the club. I myself am a swimmer, competing in the national masters and I swim 6 times a week when pools are open.

I have completed the Budget cuts consultation survey. I would really like to see the detail in the numbers to understand how the Council thinks it would really save £300,000 by closing the Woodchurch pool for a year. A swimming pool still requires maintenance even if it is closed or it will simply decline and cost a lot to restore. You will not really save anything unless you make the staff redundant. It costs a lot to do that. Then you'd need to find people to run the pool in a year or so. I suspect you don't really achieve much by keeping a pool closed for a further year. All these staff are likely to have been on full pay since the March 2020 lockdown despite the centre having remained closed throughout.

The Woodchurch pool is one of the nicer ones on the Wirral. It is light and relatively spacious. If it is under-utilised that is because the Council have not done enough to promote it. It is apparent that many Wirral residents do not even know it's there. The Council have often turned down opportunities to hire the pool out to clubs and commercial swim schools that would pay more commercial rates to use it. How can it be that the Caldys pool has huge demand from groups keen to hire it from the early hours to 10pm every day (including bank holidays!) but the Council claims there is no demand for Woodchurch pool. Also, the fact that the Council have not invested in this centre means that areas other than the pool have deteriorated to a significant extent and they don't attract anyone.

We are aware that the air conditioning needs an upgrade to make it COVID compliant. This was the case for all pools in the Wirral which is why there were delays to opening any Wirral pools. Three did not open until the end of October despite the government allowing pools to open on 25 July. The remainder of Wirral pools are still shut. How is that Cheshire West & Chester managed to open all of its pools from 25 July. The delay to the opening of only half of the Wirral Pools until the end of October (with the rest still shut) suggests mismanagement and a lack of investment. In warmer weather could the Woodchurch pool operate in a COVID compliant manner simply by opening a number of the fire exits to improve the circulation of air?

The Council claims it has lost money due to having the leisure facilities closed for months. The closure from 25 July to the end of October is down to the Council. However, this sounds contradictory to me; on one hand the Council say they have lost income from having the leisure centres closed and on the other they say closing them can save money.

I don't accept that using the centre as a vaccines centre means the pool cannot be used. The pool is at one end of this facility and vaccines are administered from another part of this centre, which is at quite a distance. It would be quite easy to keep people using each facility apart. Alternatively, there must be plenty of other buildings which cannot be used due to Covid that could be used for vaccines.

Schools must offer swimming as part of the National Curriculum. If this pool is closed, schools that use it will now have to hire buses to use other pools. Hiring buses is expensive so have you taken these extra costs into account. This is just one example of extra costs arising from keeping the pool closed. I assume it will also mean that pupils will waste more time in travelling when they could be learning something else. Will the Council even be able to offer all pupils the swim sessions they need for schools to comply with the National Curriculum?

I used to be an Invigor8 member prior to March lockdown but have not renewed my membership simply because the Council cannot offer me enough swimming in the facilities that are open. So, the Council is losing money from reduced Invigor8 membership. I know a number of adult swimmers that used to swim at the Concourse now swim at Caldys for this reason.

Europa pool. This is also an important facility for Wirral with huge demand. It will be very damaging to competitive swimming on Wirral if we are left without the competition pool. It should not be running at a loss if it is well managed. When the Council calculated the savings from closure did it take into account all the income lost from the car park charges at Europa if it closes?

I am in disbelief that the Council is even consulting "on a review of back office function". The Council should constantly be looking to make savings through efficiencies in administration. This is not something the Council should question.

Why have the Council continued not to seek charges for parking? The Council have always done this so why stop if they are so short of funding.?

I can see on your website that you are currently investigating sport in the community and wanted to highlight this case study to you as an example:

<https://www.wirralglobe.co.uk/news/18945938.wirral-council-budget-deficit-see-swimming-baths-close/><https://www.wirralglobe.co.uk/news/18945938.wirral-council-budget-deficit-see->

### [swimming-baths-close/](#)

Due to the Government reneging on its promise to pay back Council's for their coronavirus spend and to end austerity, Council's across the Country are having to make drastic cuts to institutions that once gone are gone forever from communities. Wirral Council is one such Council, a place with a high number of elderly people and poor people, a suburban place that does not make much through council or business tax.

The Council are now telling residents that they will have to close down the Borough's most popular swimming pool, Europa Pools, and the local Museum in Birkenhead. Birkenhead is a very working-class area, and these facilities offer sport and culture right in the heart of these communities. If you have ever gone to these venues before covid-19 they are packed with kids and families.

Where is the Conservatives "Levelling Up" agenda, if children in then North are not even able to learn to swim?

The plans also include possible closure of the public golf course, which offers cheap deals for local working-class children to learn golf, as well as the closure of the Woodchurch leisure centre, which again is the heart of a deprived community.

The Council has lost half of its budget since 2010, and the final blow of the Government's Council covid-19 funding settlement not even covering what Council's need, will hamper a whole generation of young people in deprived areas. I think the Treasury should implement a one off 1% wealth tax: <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/dec/09/economic-cost-of-covid-crisis-prompts-call-for-one-off-uk-wealth-tax>

<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/dec/09/economic-cost-of-covid-crisis-prompts-call-for-one-off-uk-wealth-tax> to cover this black hole in the finances of local Government to save young people falling decades behind the generation above in these deprived areas. Council run institutions like leisure centres and museums mean poorer families (who are more likely to be obese) are able to get cheaper or free tickets to attend, just privatising them is not the answer, especially in poor areas like Birkenhead where they wouldn't be able to turn a profit anyway.

I know Wirral isn't the only place this is happening, and sadly it is not a Council in London that can raise business rates or sell of its land.

I hope you are able to read this and consider it for your evidence.

There seems to be many unintended consequences of this pandemic and the next generation being unable to access sport and culture in their communities being one of them is frankly terrible. As I said, once swimming pools, libraries and museums (often created in Victorian times) are taking away they are almost never reinstated.

Please do not close down facilities like pools in areas of social deprivation like Birkenhead and Woodchurch. No to the People's Lido which will take away custom from the Council pools and is likely to become a financial burden on the Council over time.



I would like to voice my protest at the plans to close Europa and mothball the Woodchurch Pool. I do so in my capacity as treasurer and coach of the Woodchurch Swimming club and parent to two girls who swim for the club. I myself am a swimmer, competing in the national masters and I swim 5 or 6 times a week when pools are open.

I have completed the Budget cuts consultation survey. I would really like to see the detail in the numbers to understand how the Council thinks it would really save more than £300,000 by closing the Woodchurch pool for a year. A swimming pool still requires maintenance even if it is closed or it will simply decline and cost a lot to restore. You will not really save anything unless you make the staff redundant. It costs a lot to make employees redundant. Then you'd need to find people to run the pool in a year or so. I suspect you don't really achieve much by keeping a pool closed for a further year. All these staff are likely to have been on full pay since the March 2020 lockdown despite the centre having remained closed throughout.

The Woodchurch pool is one of the nicer ones on the Wirral. It is light and relatively spacious. If it is under-utilised that is because the Council have not done enough to promote it. It is apparent that many Wirral residents do not even know it's there. The Council have often turned down opportunities to hire the pool out to clubs and commercial swim schools that would pay more commercial rates to use it. How can it be that the Caldys pool has huge demand from groups keen to hire it from the early hours to 10pm every day (including bank holidays!) but the Council claims there is no demand for Woodchurch pool. I suspect the Caldys pool does not run at a loss. Also, the fact that the Council have not invested in the Woodchurch Leisure Centre means that areas other than the pool (i.e., halls and rooms) have deteriorated to a significant extent and they don't attract anyone.

We are aware that the air conditioning needs an upgrade to make it COVID compliant. This was the case for all pools in the Wirral which is why there were delays to opening any Wirral pools. Three did not open until the end of October despite the government allowing pools to open on 25 July. The remainder of Wirral pools are still shut. How is that Cheshire West & Chester managed to open all of its pools from 25 July. The delay to the opening of only half of the Wirral Pools until the end of October (with the rest still shut) suggests mismanagement and a lack of investment. In warmer weather could the Woodchurch pool operate in a COVID compliant manner simply by opening a number of the fire exits to improve the circulation of air?

The Council claims it has lost money due to having the leisure facilities closed for months. The closure from 25 July to the end of October is down to the Council. However, this sounds contradictory to me. On one hand the Council say they have lost income from having the leisure centres closed and on the other they say closing them can save money.

I don't accept that using the centre as a vaccines centre means the pool cannot be used. The pool is at one end of this facility and vaccines are administered from another part of this centre, which is at quite a distance and with separate entrances. It would be quite easy to

keep people using each facility apart. Alternatively, there must be plenty of other buildings which cannot be used due to Covid that could be used for vaccines.

Schools must offer swimming as part of the National Curriculum. If this pool is closed, schools that use it will now have to hire buses to use other pools. Hiring buses is expensive so have you taken these extra costs into account? This is just one example of extra costs arising from keeping the pool closed. I assume it will also mean that pupils will waste more time in travelling when they could be learning something. Will the Council even be able to offer all pupils the swim sessions they need for schools to comply with the National Curriculum?

I used to be an Invigor8 member prior to March 2020 lockdown but have not renewed my membership simply because the Council cannot offer me enough swimming in the facilities that are open. So, the Council is losing money from reduced Invigor8 membership. I know a number of adult swimmers that used to swim at the Concourse now swim at Caldys for this reason.

Europa pool. This is also an important facility for Wirral with huge demand. It will be very damaging to competitive swimming on Wirral if we are left without the competition pool. It should not be running at a loss if it is well managed. When the Council calculated the savings from closure did it take into account all the income lost from the car park charges at Europa if it closes?

Please save the swimming pools, they are a vital place for exercise for all members of the community, all ages and all abilities. The swimming clubs provided a focus for the local community bringing people together, giving young people a constructive outlet. They learn a skill which could save their lives, they understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle. They develop the ethos of supporting the local community, have the opportunity to give back to the community by helping and supporting younger children. The higher-level sport develops British champion role models, and pride in the region. In the long term this will provide savings in health, both physical and mental, and is a real investment in the local community for people of all ages and ability.

### **Woodchurch Leisure Centre**

Please open Woodchurch pool as soon as possible, keep it open and invest in its future, for the sake of the deprived local communities that use it, all the many schools that use it to fulfil the National Curriculum obligation to teach all children to swim and all the disabled, elderly and overweight who need it and cannot access other forms of exercise for physical reasons. If reducing health inequalities is an aim of this Council, then you must look to keep this pool open.

I would be grateful if you would record my objection to temporary or permanent closure of Woodchurch pool and also my objection to stopping or reducing school crossing patrols.

I would like my objection to the continued closure of Woodchurch Leisure Centre to be logged as part of the budget consultation.

As the parent of a child who uses the Centre regularly, I feel it is a vital resource to offer children affordable and local swimming.

Both physical and mental health is of utmost importance for all children but as this Centre serves an area of social and economic challenge it is even more important to maintain this facility to provide equality of opportunity for fitness and leisure activities for young people in the community.

I am writing to you today in the hope to make you aware of the significant negative effects that the proposal to mothball Woodchurch Leisure Centre (WLC) would have on our local community and schools. I live in Thingwall, work hard, pay my taxes and have never asked for anything.

I have completed the 'have your say' survey and detailed my concern in the 'comments' section, a large portion of which is detailed below.

I understand the tough times we are facing, however from a personal viewpoint - please. please do not mothball Woodchurch Leisure Centre. Myself and my family have been regular patrons of the swimming facilities for many, many years now. I was a member of Woodchurch Swimming Club growing up and now my daughter is a member. I know so many local people who use it themselves and their children have their swimming lessons there. My auntie, cousins and parents (and many, many friends with their families) have used this pool through the years - for swimming, aqua-aerobics, mother and child and rehabilitation purposes. Some have health problems and live local to the pool, so it is ideal for access and addressing physical and mental health problems (rheumatoid arthritis, hip/knee replacement, heart attacks, cancer and anxiety to name a few). Mothballing would appear to be just step one of closure.

Prior to COVID-19, many local primary schools, including my daughters (Thingwall Primary) utilise WLC for their school swimming lessons. With curriculum requirements the time allocated for swimming lessons is minimal and having a pool nearby means that actual pool time can be maximised, particularly for children who have not been introduced to the wonderful world of swimming. The staff there are fabulous and most have been there for many years, which all adds to the experience when your child can walk in and feel safe to say hi to all the lifeguards. It may not appear much to outsiders, but it really is a safe, happy space for so many. The staff keep it spotless and extremely well maintained (on what I can only imagine is a very small budget). We have been heartbroken to see other Wirral pools re-open and Woodchurch remain closed and the rumours as to why this has been the case have changed by the day. If the argument that the pool is closed as the building is being used for a



covid-centre (which is clearly vitally important currently), this makes absolutely no sense whatsoever. If you know the layout of the building, the swimming pool has a completely separate entrance to all other parts of the building and so there is no cross-over of people if both were open (if people are confused where to go at the front of the building - then a couple of signs and/or directions on the floor would suffice to help direct the flow of people going to each service). If the question is ventilation, then there are several doors which can be opened, whilst the pool is open, something Calday pool appears to have adopted.

Europa is also a great pool, and important in terms of competitive swimming on the Wirral (pulling in swimmers from all around for quarterly open swimming competitions). It is also jam-packed at weekends to use the great (but very small in my opinion) leisure pool/wave pool and slides. However, I do understand that the area in which it stands is in desperate need for re-generation. I understand within the regeneration budget for there to be a provision for rebuilding a leisure service of some description.

I also understand that in the past two years, plans were drawn up and money was spent to begin the redevelopment of Woodchurch into an aquatic centre. With only the smallest of imagination, one can see that the land surrounding the Woodchurch leisure centre provides endless possibilities for expansion, not only of the swimming facilities - but for many, many other sports. It is ideally placed in the middle of Wirral and this would attract so many more people to the centre and, if managed well, likely turn losses into profit. When Woodchurch was originally built, the local people actually contributed to this as they had absolutely nothing in the area for them.

There is no point of just complaining and saying this can't happen, without providing suggestions, thoughts and ideas for a potential solution in the longer term.

I am a forensic toxicologist by trade, and this is clearly outside my area of expertise. However, a simple solution in my opinion, is that if the money set aside for leisure facilities from the regeneration of the Birkenhead area where Europa pools is now, could potentially be injected into an all singing-all dancing aquatic/sports centre in Woodchurch - an area also in much need of regeneration, this would be of great benefit to so many. This building could provide both a top standard racing/training pool and fun pools on a much larger scale than that provided currently by both Woodchurch and Europa. In addition, a good standard gym and possibly spa-like facilities (hydrotherapy pool etc) would be hugely attractive (I know many people, myself included who would change my gym membership immediately to a council facility such as this). Many other sports would also gain from a centre like this in Woodchurch, for example astro-turf pitches are in huge demand by local football and hockey teams. I also know that a judo club, producing children who (prior to covid) were representing GB in competitions overseas use the hall at Woodchurch leisure centre to train. Martial arts have been growing exponentially in popularity over the recent years and a much-updated hall for which clubs could come and use for training would be immensely appealing (and contribute to profits of course).

At the end of the day, seeing such leisure facilities as Woodchurch, which is adored by its users, as a financial burden, is only because the council have driven it to be so. With such

little invested money and effort, in addition to zero awareness in the local community of its existence (this has become blatantly obvious recently as I know several healthcare workers who have said that they are shocked how many people who are being told to go to Woodchurch Leisure Centre for their vaccinations, have no clue what, or where it is!). An investment into such a sports facility in Woodchurch would tick so many boxes - providing services to the population both near and wide, injecting investment into an area in much need of regeneration itself (potentially allowing the development of ancillary businesses around the facility - cafes etc.) and of course improving both physical and mental health of the Wirral people, hopefully reducing the burden on our precious NHS in future years to come. Finally, and probably to a lot of people involved - the most important point, if managed well, a centre such as this would make money.

I understand that back in 2009 a similar need to save money existed and it was proposed as part of the Strategic Asset Review to close Woodchurch Leisure Centre. Woodchurch Swimming Club members, local residents, GP's, councillors and local user groups played a big role in helping to keep the centre open. At that time, it was accepted by Wirral Council that the Pool was of great importance to the public, to School swimming's National Curriculum requirements, to Learn to Swim, Woodchurch Swimming Club and other organised user groups, and that the Leisure Centre itself, although it did not offer Squash or badminton etc, was used by many Sports and Social Groups of great importance to the local area. As a result, the necessary financial cuts were made elsewhere. Sadly, because of the continued lack of investment, WLC appears to remain a financial burden. The present proposal is to mothball it for a year. This means that many of the good things that happen there will stop. Pools left empty tend to deteriorate, the centre will probably be vandalised. We fear that if closed it may never re-open.

My daughter is devastated to not be back training with her team (and me, coaching) several times a week at Woodchurch and this has certainly contributed to her significant mental health struggles attempting to cope with everything being taken away from her through this unprecedented time.

Please consider my points seriously and try to find other ways to save money other than mothballing our beloved local swimming pool. We are living in a time where this would feel like kicking us in the gut when we are already on the floor struggling to cope.

As a swimming coach with Woodchurch Swimming Club, I was happy to hear and I feel that a good case has been made for the importance of Europa so that the Council can make a properly informed decision on its future/replacement. There was however no mention of the proposed mothballing of Woodchurch Pool which I believe would be disastrous, so this letter specifically concerns Woodchurch. Before going on to discuss the need to keep the Pool



open when lockdown eases, I want to comment on/question the reasons I have been given for keeping the pool closed. Firstly, it has air conditioning that is not Covid compliant; how much will it cost to put this right and why has it not been done between now and last March when the pool closed? Secondly the building will be used for Covid vaccination, so in a building with 2 large entrances, why does this prevent the pool from being used? There is no need for any mixing of those arriving for vaccination and those arriving for swimming. Thirdly financial; how is it even remotely possible to lose £300,000 per annum running a 25m swimming pool? Perhaps the Council need to adopt a similar business plan to Calday Trust who manage to do the same thing while making ends meet.

Now with regard to the pool, apart from use by the public for leisure swimming, the pool is used by Woodchurch Swimming Club which even after Covid losses still has a membership of well over 100, many more than Wirral Metro which (rightly) was given some weight in the Consultation Q & A. A few members are elite swimmers also with Metro, but most are not, and the most important purpose of local competition swimming is about developing the outlook and potential of young people. The pool is also used extensively for the Council's Learn to Swim lessons and the loss of those lessons will be keenly felt, as time will not be available at other pools, particularly if Europa is out of action. The same can be said of school swimming for National Curriculum purposes. Woodchurch is used by at least 9 schools, some of which can walk to the pool for their lessons, saving the cost of buses. It seems unlikely that there will be sufficient capacity at other pools to satisfy the needs of these schools. Those groups just mentioned represent what Swim England describe as the "Swimmer Pathway" from learning to swim through swim club to elite. All stages are important to the health and wellbeing of young people and disruption of the pathway is a seriously bad thing. Local GP's will tell you that the loss of a local facility is an equally bad thing for older adults who need a local pool for exercise for mental and physical health. Indeed, for that reason, Dr Ivan Camphor of Heatherlands surgery on Woodchurch Estate took a leading part in the campaign to save Woodchurch LC from the Strategic Asset Review of 2009 that is referred to below.

With regard to the Leisure Centre in general, as it says in the "have your say" document, Woodchurch is a small Leisure Centre that is not busy enough. This is because it does not offer much in the way of leisure facilities other than the very pleasant pool. I have always been somewhat mystified by this as it is in a prime location in the middle of the Wirral Peninsula, surrounded by a very large field which has a running track, mostly unused. It does not even have a gym, which could hardly fail to do well given the location. It loses money because it has not received the investment that it needs. When we host other swimming clubs the swimmers' parents often say, "This is a lovely pool, I didn't know it was here." If the Centre had more to offer, then perhaps it would be better known and both it and the pool would be better used.

Back in 2009 a similar need to save money existed and it was proposed as part of the Strategic Asset Review to close Woodchurch Leisure Centre. Woodchurch Swimming Club members, local residents, GP's, councillors and local user groups played a big role in helping to keep the centre open. At that time, it was accepted by Wirral Council that the Pool was of great importance to the public, to School swimming's National Curriculum requirements, to

Learn to Swim, Woodchurch Swimming Club and other organised user groups, and that the Leisure Centre itself, although it did not offer Squash or badminton etc, was used by many Sports and Social Groups of great importance to the local area. As a result, the necessary financial cuts were made elsewhere. Sadly, because of the continued lack of investment, Woodchurch Pool remains a financial burden. The present proposal is to mothball it for a year. This means that many of the good things that happen there will stop. Pools left empty tend to deteriorate, the centre will probably be vandalised. We fear that if closed it may never re-open.

I am writing as Chair of the Woodchurch Swimming Club and a concerned resident of the Wirral. I attended the Consultation Q & A meeting on Teams on Thursday and was surprised there was no mention of the proposed mothballing of Woodchurch Swimming pool. I believe there had been several questions and comments added as part of the “Have Your Say” submission for both Europa and Woodchurch pools. I appreciate that Europa is proposed to be closed, but as others have said there are potentially plans in the bigger picture for that to be redressed through new facilities in the future.

Can we have further explanation on why Woodchurch Pool needs to stay closed because of the vaccination centre – they are entirely separate parts of the building with their own entrance/exits. It should be relatively easy to maintain a Covid secure environment.

As we come out of lockdown it will be more important than ever for people to stay healthy and fit, something that swimming can do for lots of people who cannot otherwise exercise due to its low impact on the body. Investing in swimming pools has been shown to be repaid with reduced costs for health spending and associated services as supported by several GPs in 2009 when Woodchurch Pool was proposed to be closed as part of a review then.

Can we see the details of the £300,000 loss to run the pool – as similar (and less accessible) facilities run by Caldys Pools seem to be doing well and is often overbooked, indicating there is demand for pool time that is not being met. This has been especially true as due to Covid people are seeking every opportunity to get out and exercise.

It is my fear that once mothballed, the pool will never reopen - can we have a firm commitment and date as to when the pool will be reopened in the future.

## **Golf**

Referring specifically to the Warren and Brackenwood for now, I’m told by a Labour Party member and trade union activist that jobs are at risk due to closure/private sector outsourcing. Can you confirm if this is the case? Again, on a personal level I’d like to see a way through the negative feeling that continues to exist on this issue. Have alternative ways been looked into regarding their running? For example, with a Community Interest Company

or Co-Operative SPV established to asset lock the courses and then create a business case for running them? It may kickstart some more social value and community wealth building opportunities and I'd be happy to have a chat at your convenience on this should you wish to pursue. In my current working life, I have established and continue to run 3 Community Interest Companies, one of which has benefitted from asset-locked stock transfer from Liverpool City Council, so I am aware of the benefits around them.

Over the past 12 - 18 months various consultations, workshops, reviews and surveys have been conducted surrounding the future provision of Golf. This included so many stakeholders, from Clubs and users to unions and employees. There was also a call in, and Environment and overview scrutiny meetings held which resulted in agreed actions. These included.

- 1) To retain the courses in house
- 2) A ground survey commissioned, and capital programme be amended to carry out the investment and improvements needed from the survey over the next EIGHT years
- 3) A consultative user group be established with clubs, employees and users
- 4) Unfreeze capital money to provide suitable equipment for maintenance staff to bring the courses up to standard
- 5) That there be no reduction in playing capacity.

These were accepted and agreed as late as Dec 2019.

Yet here we are again - the process the council went through was the right process. But now this seems to be ignored. This will erode trust in the council, the council processes and consultations and of course, the councillors themselves.

The only real viable option, to save the alleged £273 000 within the budget year you are consulting on is to close the courses. We believe this will reignite the greenbelt issue and building on green land that was so fiercely opposed as you know.

Are the council going back on their agreements and long-term plans with regards to Golf? and can you confirm that closing the course will actually save the council overall, the £273 000 when you take into account redundancies or redeployments, recharge costs etc?

I am a member of Arrowe Park Ladies' Golf Club and Warren Ladies Golf Club.

I wish to express my concern about any further budget cutting which would jeopardize the future of the clubs.

It is well recognized that exercise outdoors is highly beneficial to the physical and mental health of the participants.

### **Adult Services**

I hope you are well and can assist in the proposed budget cut of £500,000 from Wirral Evolutions. They provide an excellent service for adults with special needs.

Graham Hodgkinson of Adult Services has recommended this reduction from his budget with no other suggested cuts from Adult Services. In discussions with Graham Hodgkinson together with others in the Parent/Carers group he has given the impression that this cut will be made in any event. A forgone conclusion and consultation will make no difference.

I find it appalling that such a huge amount can be stricken from such a small company without any reasoning. Please ask Graham Hodgkinson where these cuts can be made. He must have gone through some thought process to come up with this figure. Such a reduction will be disastrous to the lives of adults who use the service and parents/carers. Our son, Graeme attends Oakenholt, Moreton and I am treasurer of the charity which purchases extras for the centre.

There has been a suggestion that the service be brought in house but that would be a total disaster given the council's track record. We don't want to go back to a time when the service simply confined service users to the building with no creative programme of events.

I do hope you can help in this matter because adults with special needs must be a priority for any council.

I have learned that WBC proposes to cut the budget for adult services one of the most vulnerable groups in our society. I am a carer for my brother-in-law.

(unpaid) who lives with me and attends Heswall day centre I have noticed over the years I have looked after him the service offered has slowly been ebbed away, first the hot meals at lunchtime, then the transport and his blue badge not renewed. A further cut would be disastrous. I have to speak out for him as he can't speak for himself. Please reconsider.

I believe this Service is provided and run by Wirral Evolutions -for WBC Adult Social Services.

Can you provide a breakdown of the Savings proposals to enable an informed contribution; - .... for example, is it a saving on a Building / Centre .... funding for Staffing / personnel.

Hoping you can help, to allow me to make a meaningful contribution to the Budget Proposals Consultation deadline (later this week)

## **Youth Services**

You will know many members of The Hive and their families have contributed to the process, along with board members, stakeholders, partner agencies and others who are concerned about the welfare and prospects of young people. For many of our young people this has provided a first experience of politics and local democracy, involvement with which is something we always encourage.

I am conscious that much has already been submitted and contributed but I just wanted to pick up on one issue that has come to our attention during the process, that being that a number of elected members consider The Hive to be Birkenhead centric in its work and I just wanted to respond to this.

Whilst strategically located in Birkenhead, as both one of the areas of Wirral of greatest deprivation as well as having better central transport links than other areas, The Hive is Wirral Youth Zone, not Birkenhead Youth Zone and we have always worked hard to ensure that the organization serves and supports young people from across Wirral. This approach has been sustained and as the chart below illustrates, 84% of current members live outside of the Birkenhead and Tranmere areas.

I am a trustee of The Hive Youth Zone, a position I have held since before it opened and where I have oversight of all matters relating to HR and People. As such I am particularly interested in the mental health and well-being of all involved, young people and team alike. The Hive is not a specialist mental health charity, nor does it aspire to be, but supporting the positive mental health of members has always been an integral part of the day to day work of the youth work team.

Engagement in physical activity and/or creative arts is known to promote positive mental health and with these activities forming a major part of our offer to young people we do see positive outcomes. This is evidenced in “Ambitions for Young People”- A study of the impact of universal youth provision at OnSide Youth Zones (which incorporated a Deep Dive study at The Hive) which reports;

- 77% of members report being more confident;
- 73% of members feel happier about their lives.
- 89% of members on free school meals feel happier about their lives.

Furthermore, The Hive offers more bespoke support to those young people needing extra help via our mentoring program on which young people receive weekly support from the

same mentor. This is a well-established successful scheme which has seen a 100% increase in referrals since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, three quarters of which are made by the Local Authority.

Increases in mental health concerns among young people have been widely reported over recent months including just this week when The Princes Trust reported the results of its research including the finding that one in four young people have felt “unable to cope” in the pandemic. This is no surprise to our youth workers who have remained connected with young people over and above what we are permitted to offer on site; proactively calling vulnerable members, delivering essential supplies, combining this with welfare checks, increasing outreach work and much more.

Conscious of continually wanting to meet young people’s needs The Hive (having secured a specific grant) have invested in training for more than 20 workers in mental health first aid. As such we are now committed to having trained workers available at all times to help young people overcome concerns and regain focus and confidence thereby preventing escalation of issues to a point requiring professional intervention at greater cost.

In these circumstances I believe, and not a view held solely by me I would add, that a reduction in support for young people will be devastating to many and ultimately counterproductive. I have lived most of my life as a resident on the Wirral and lived as a child in the public house next door to The Hive. My personal experiences motivated me to support The Hive and I was delighted when asked to become a Trustee because of my passion and local ties. From my experience as a Trustee, I could relay countless stories of the amazing wide-reaching support and work that the teams of youth workers have provided, the betterment to a staggering number of young people’s lives has been achieved across the Wirral and I worry for the future ability to provide this life changing support.

Whilst I appreciate the difficult predicament the council faces as a budget is prepared, I would ask that the council does consider the needs and future of Wirral’s young people and reconsiders its proposal.

I would implore you to reconsider having The Hive as an option for your funding cuts. There are very clear statistics showing how much our young people need these services.

### YoungMinds

COVID-19 summer 2020 survey: 80% of respondents agreed that the coronavirus pandemic had made their mental health worse.

I would like to ask you to support the funding for The Hive.

The people who work for this organisation have, during both lockdowns, been unstinting in their support of the people who use The Hive.



Their efforts, particularly regarding fund raising, have been diverse and at times strange, but successful and constant. Statistics strongly back this up: -

Coronavirus: Impact on Young People with Mental Health Needs – Sept 2020

Study of Young people going back to school after Lockdown 1.0 showed.

- 69% of respondents described their mental health as poor now that they are back at school; this has risen from 58% who described their mental health as poor before returning to school.
- 40% of respondents said that there was no school counsellor available to support students in their school.
- Only 27% had had a one-to-one conversation with a teacher or another member of staff in which they were asked about their wellbeing, by the time they completed the survey.
- Almost a quarter of respondents (23%) said that there was less mental health support in their school than before the pandemic, while only 9% agreed that there was more mental health support.

Source: <https://youngminds.org.uk/media/4119/youngminds-survey-with-young-people-returning-to-school-coronavirus-report-autumn-report.pdf>

The Guardian Newspaper Article - Youth organisations in England face wholesale closure

Published: 3<sup>rd</sup> Jan 2021

“There are 1.6 million children from a vulnerable family background for whom support is either patchy or non-existent. Just over half of these children are ‘invisible’ to services,” said Anna Alcock, the head of engagement and advocacy at UK Youth. “Youth work could be the only answer to helping these children; a preventative service that provides support before problems arise.”

“Youth services simply do not have the capacity or enough funding to meet young people’s vastly increased needs,” said the NYA’s chief executive, Leigh Middleton. “They have depleted reserves and incomes slashed by half or more.

I am writing this in response to the potential budget cuts proposed for Youth Services, in which I have been made aware that this is specifically targeted to the Hive Youth Zone.

I would like to ask you to take a minute to read the reasons why I strongly disagree that the funding you provide the Hive should be cut. I might just be one person, however, I know there are many more people that the Hive has changed lives of, since 2017, and will continue to do so in any possible way. Before I tell you my story on how the Hive has impacted my life, I would like you to read just how much the Hive does for young people on the Wirral.



The Hive provides a 365 day offer to be able to support young people, for just 50p a visit, they get everything that every young person on the Wirral deserves. Somewhere to go, something to do and someone to talk to. They have over 20 activities on a session each night, where there is something suitable for everyone, whether that be arts, sports or 'rec' activities. The most important thing in my opinion is the level of support the Hive provides for young people, particularly during these uncertain times.

During the lockdowns and the different tiers our local area have faced, the Hive has adapted to every restriction thrown at them, to provide the support for young people in times that were uncertain for everyone. They have adapted their in-house offer quickly and efficiently to provide a virtual offer for young people, including online videos on social media platforms, zoom sessions and live social media sessions. This gave young people an opportunity to check in with staff and have that ounce of normality back in their lives, even if it is through a different method.

In addition to this, the Hive have supported vulnerable young people by doing doorstep visits, delivering hampers and activity packs and making regular phone calls to young people to ensure their wellbeing and safety. They also have an email address which is monitored 7 days a week, where young people can reach out for support when they need it.

Now please, if you could take just a few minutes just to read how the Hive has helped me personally, I would be very grateful...

I have been involved with the Hive for six years now, and I can honestly tell you it has been the best six years of my life. Before the Hive, I was a young person suffering from isolation, lack of confidence and severely struggling with my mental health after the loss of my dad. I was self-harming every single day, blaming myself for my dad's death, and I was very low, didn't see a future for myself, and the worst thing was I couldn't and wouldn't open up because I was scared to admit that I needed help, or that anyone cared enough to help me.

The Hive proved all my beliefs wrong, from day one. They supported me with every single aspect of my life; from education, mental health, caring for my mum, and building my skills up to allow me to achieve what I wanted to in the future. They helped me to keep my head above water when I felt like I was drowning inside. They provided me with everything I needed to fight what felt like impossible battles and provided me with a place that I called home.

Even before the Hive was open, it helped me so much. Being part of their development group allowed me to build my confidence by interviewing staff, representing them in consultations and talking to the founder patrons to ask them to support the Hive where possible. I did all this whilst making friends that I am still in contact with now, the longest I have had a friendship for.

If I look back a couple years ago, I was not expecting myself to make it through the year, I honestly felt that low. I didn't see a future, I was enrolled on a degree that I hated, I was so unhappy, but now, thanks to the Hive I was able to complete a Prince's Trust course, a college course and I am now doing a degree that I love, and I have learnt that it really is ok

not to be ok. I owe my everything to the Hive because, without them I wouldn't have experienced things I have experienced today, and I wouldn't be able to have reached the milestones I have today.

Without the Hive, I can honestly tell you I wouldn't be alive today, they saved my life when I didn't think it was possible to be saved. Through every up and down in my life, they were there for me, like they are for every young person, 365 days of the year, they are there to provide the support that the young people of Wirral not only need but deserve. They built my resilience and provided me with opportunities that I am forever grateful for, just like I know they have for many other people on the Wirral.

If I had allowed myself to continue to be as low as I was a few years ago, I honestly don't think I would have made it to see my nephew grow up, to meet my niece, and to finally say I am happy in life. I am not saying my issues have gone away, I still struggle with self-harm, I still struggle with my mental health, but the important thing is, I have more bad days than good days, and on the days when things are hard, the Hive taught me ways to cope with it, they taught me to reach out if I needed it.

Before you cut the funding, you provide to the Hive, please take into consideration everything I have said. Think about the detrimental effects the budget cut will have on young people of the Wirral. Every young person deserves somewhere to go, something to do and someone to talk to every day of the year, and a safe place where they can call home, just like I did. The Hive change lives on a daily basis, and not only did they change mine, but they also saved it.

I would like to express my great concern about the reduction in the budget for Youth Services, or more specifically, the Hive. Halving their budget will have a huge impact on the work undertaken there; as a consequence, this could have a detrimental effect on the lives of many young, and often extremely vulnerable, people in the borough at a time when this couldn't be in greater demand. This vital youth work, although organized on a different basis, has continued throughout the COVID pandemic; the expertise of the management at the Hive is also a reference point for other care professionals.

The Hive is a truly inspirational place that has a profound effect on the lives of thousands of young people. If the current level of financial support for the Hive can't be maintained, presumably these young people would need assistance from other services; this would then place a greater financial burden on them.

Please give great consideration to this proposed significant reduction in the budget of the Hive. The lives of many young people could be in jeopardy!

The Hive does so much for me and other young people around Wirral. I have friends from Meols, Upton and other areas that come to The Hive, we all travel there because it is the only

place, we feel safe and they understand and support our needs. Why would you make cuts to The Hive when it is supporting so many young people across the whole of Wirral, and wider community's?

There are young people who rely on The Hive heavily, young people with disabilities or young people needing support with their mental health and wellbeing, how are you prepared to help them if you're thinking of cutting the services that The Hive provides to these young people.

I am very concerned about the proposed cut of £200,000 to the Grant to The Hive Youth Zone project. This is a very successful project supplying a great need to one of the poorest parts of the whole country.

The Hive helps keep youths off the street and thus stops them getting bored and then into trouble by taking drugs or committing other crimes.

I understand that since the Hive opened crime in Birkenhead has substantially reduced. This one fact proves that it is a project worth supporting.

It would be a tragedy if the cuts The Hive will have to make result in increased drug and other offences.

I suspect that every £1 of grant to The Hive saves several pounds in other areas that have to clear up the results of anti-social behaviour.

As well as financial, the costs of anti-social behaviour affect the victims but also ruins the lives of offenders who may never be able to lead productive lives once they have police records.

Each extra criminal that these cuts could cause will cost the community thousands of pounds annually for 40 or 50 years. Please find the Budget elsewhere.

My daughter is disabled, and she loves going to the Hive. She is 21 years old so cannot access young peoples' youth clubs, but she cannot relate to adult provision because she is only small and is mentally not an adult. If council cuts effect the Hive, where can she go?

Are you going to provide any money for the services that will be overused should you cut the Hive because without the Hive's early intervention, mental health services will be stretched, social workers (who aren't doing adequate visits because of covid, and the hive have made first contact with vulnerable young people when teachers and services hadn't seen them for months)?

Please don't cut the budget for the hive it's a good and safe place for young people to attend and for young people to talk and get help with problems.

The hive has helped so many young people grow in persona and just be them self around new people but most of all they do everything they can to be there for young people do you think if the hive get funding taken away from them, you're going to see young people struggle in so many ways.

You have mentioned that Birkenhead is one of the most deprived areas, and you have also mentioned the mental health crisis. Why are you proposing to cut the Hive, when the Hive not only supports young people in Wirral with their mental health but also provides food parcels, support for families and have stepped up massively during covid-19, when everyone else stepped down?

I am emailing in regard to the proposed cut to youth services including the Hive youth zone. As a member myself of nearly 4 years that building has given me a vast amount of life changing opportunities and skills that I would never of dreamed I would get for example I went away twice on a sailing experience I have been on several residential various trips and visits and travelled around the country but not only that growing up on the Wirral is difficult there is limited things to do and get involved In for such an affordable price to the hive completely changed that for me at one point I was attending this facility every single night where I could get a hot meal do many activities sports music art etc but not only that just have someone there to talk to about your day and that back up for if you ever where to need it the hive has become a massive part of my life and I would do anything in my power to persuade you against any cut to this service as I know the detrimental effect this will have on so many young people's lives as well as the staff that work there. Therefore, under no circumstances do I agree any funding should be cut at all if anything should be increased do the extremely challenging times they are facing.

The Hive isn't a youth club!!!! It is an essential service for young people on the Wirral! It is a support, a lifeline, a home for so many young people on the Wirral! It is so much more than a

youth club, a youth club is a table tennis and tv etc, the hive provides so much more than this.

As a Trustee at The Hive I would like responses to the following questions please.

Please can you explain why the published budget document did not clarify that all of the proposed £200k reduction in spending on youth services would be applied to The Hive, leaving it to The Hive to communicate this to Wirral residents?

Youth work is now officially recognised as essential and as confirmed by Diana Barran, Minister for Civil Society, qualified youth workers are now recognised as key workers. Does the council believe cuts to key workers are appropriate at this time and if not, will it reconsider the proposed cut to The Hive?

Increases in mental health worries amongst young people have been widely reported over recent months. Youth work support to prevent such issues unnecessarily escalating is needed now more than ever. The Hive have responded to this by ensuring most of the youth work team are now fully trained in mental health first aid. If such support is reduced how does the council propose responding to the issue?

The Hive has seen an increase of 100% in referrals and demand for its mentoring programme since last summer with three quarters of the increase coming from Wirral council teams. Does the council accept that if such programmes are cut then young people's problems can escalate and ultimately cost more to address

The council contributes less than 30% of the current revenue costs of The Hive equating to just 36p per day per member, or significantly less if the digital programme is factored in. The Hive generates the remainder of funds via charitable donations therefore giving excellent value for money to Wirral. If a reduction in council funding caused other supporters to lose confidence how does the council propose meeting the subsequent unmet needs now being met by The Hive?

The Institute of Fiscal Studies have reported that young people, along with women are the two groups most significantly impacted by Covid. According to your budget document £54m has been administered in business grants due to Covid. At the very least should support for young people be maintained through critical services like The Hive.

I write as a Patron of The Hive facility in Birkenhead to share my dismay at the proposed budget cuts for this facility.

In the time of a national pandemic which has seen young people's mental health issues soar and ever rising youth unemployment – I find it difficult to understand how these proposed cuts make moral or economic sense. Every negative impact made on the ability to support our young people now will have lasting and serious consequences for our society, evidenced by the lasting impact of the youth service cuts in the 80's and 90's.

It is my understanding that the level of proposed cuts will have as a minimum the following effects.

- Closing on Sundays, losing the dedicated Hiveability session for disabled members and a weekly session for junior members.
- Shorter opening hours throughout the week (closing one hour early each day).
- A reduction in our outreach work, positively engaging fewer young people; and
- 50% reduction in mentoring (1-2-1 support)

Each of these reductions will negatively impact on Wirral's young people's mental health, social cohesion and ambition at a time when we should be investing more in ensuring our youth are supported to strive for their (and our) better future.

I sincerely hope you reconsider these proposed cuts and sustain the level of support given to The Hive, maintaining the social contract you have with your young residents.

I am writing to you as a Wirral resident and council taxpayer and also as a volunteer at The Hive Youthzone in Birkenhead.

I have read the consultation document for the Wirral Council's budget for 2021 - 22. I appreciate that it is really difficult in the circumstances for the council to find savings of £16.5m when there is such a demand for public services. There are absolute no easy choices, but I would ask that there be protection of the current expenditure on 'Children, Young People & Education'. Of all the sectors in society who have been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, perhaps we really should give priority to children and young people in order to ensure that their futures are secured with our support.

In particular, I would register a strong disagreement to the proposal for a reduction in Youth Provision of £200,000. I understand that this proposal relates solely to the Council's support to The Hive. I do think that this would be highly unfortunate and cause much harm in view of the activities and support which The Hive provides to thousands of young people, many of whom are from a disadvantaged background and who really do benefit from its services. Since opening in April 2017, The Hive has provided tens of thousands of hours of engaging and positive fun activities as well as more targeted activities such as mentoring, holiday clubs, young leaders' programmes and employability support in addition to a comprehensive programme for disabled young people. Since the start of the pandemic, when other services

have closed or been reduced, The Hive staff developed a digital programme enabling young people to remain in contact with their youth workers, set up a dedicated contact email monitored 7 days a week and maintained telephone contact with many of the youngsters. The Hive reopened once it had adapted its building and its programme in line with regulations.

All of this work is so valuable to the children and young people who benefit considerably. If the proposed cut is approved, it will result undoubtedly in a significant amount of the work carried out by The Hive being put at serious risk.

I would urge the council not to proceed with the proposed cut of £200,000 in the budget for Youth Provision.

As a former Patron and current Trustee at the Hive, I wanted to voice my deep concern and sadness in relation to the proposed Council funding cuts to the Hive. For many years I have been a huge advocate for making our community safer and attractive to young people and local businesses.

As a result of the Hive's supportive interventions with young people there has been a huge reduction in anti-social criminal activity which in itself speaks volumes about savings to the State and Safeguarding Wirral as a Community.

In light of the recent financial success of the new Towns Fund, I would request that Members re-consider the proposed cuts in the context of the transformational impact of the Hive on our community and local economy.

I am writing to express my concern re the above.

I have had close links to the Hive over the last 18 months and have seen first-hand the real difference its services make to so many families over the 3 years it has been operating. It has real potential for effecting fundamental change in so many ways, but it takes time to embed change and reap the rewards. I have been so impressed in the way that the Hive has adapted to Covid and has continued to support families in a real, tangible way.

The Hive has significant business engagement sitting alongside local government funding which is a really strong partnership to be built upon. Any cut in funding is extremely unlikely to be picked up by business at the moment and will, no doubt, lead to a direct reduction in service provision. Given that our young people are already facing an interrupted education with real financial and social pressures from the pandemic, it is essential that they have somewhere to turn, and the Hive provides just such support.



With the Hive supporting the whole of the Wirral and complementing so much of the care from our Council, how can you consider cuts to this vital service at a time when it's needed the most. Are you aware that 84% of active members live outside Birkenhead/Tranmere, with members from all electoral wards?

I had worked for Wirral for over 18 years, in Early Years, before becoming a Foster Carer for Wirral Council for the past 3 years.

I am also fortunate enough to be a member of Team Hive, which I found to be one of my favourite jobs ever. Working with the experienced and highly qualified team at the Hive, has taught me many new skills, and further developed my understanding of the true needs of all Wirral young people.

My young CLA, who has been in placement with me for 3 years attends the Hive.

She joined as soon as she came to me and has progressed through to the senior section.

Without the constant support, opportunities provided, friendships made, and the support of every member of staff, she would have found many things very difficult with her situation.

She has attended the Hiveability sessions, as she has ADHD and Dyslexia regular Junior sessions, Holiday club, outings etc.

This has greatly helped her socially, with her education, and life skills.

She has gained massively in confidence and her ability to deal with others.

She has also received support through the Hive Mentoring Scheme, with one-to-one support around her specific needs and interests.

We have attended the Hive Christmas Lunches with other families and received support packages throughout all of the Lock downs. From delivery of resources, to regular Zoom sessions, phone calls from team members, emails and texts to check we are ok.

Now none of this may seem important to you, but as a single, working carer, their support has been invaluable both to myself and YP. It is immeasurable to quantify the impact being part of the Hive family.

This has also saved Wirral Council both manpower and financially in the care of YP, as we have accessed lots of FREE support and advice through the Hive.

This has not had to incur further interventions or cost to the Children's department.

To cut even a small amount of funding to the Hive, would be detrimental to ALL Wirral Young people, as it serves over 80% of the Wirral, not just Birkenhead.

Having experienced other Youth Services and centres, I can honestly say the Hive is the best service, with well trained, approachable, knowledgeable staff, who always go the extra miles for the YP and their families.

It is more than a “Youth Club” it is a centre for so many experiences for YP, with access to career choices, training, talents etc.

In short as my YP says “it’s the best place ever, and I always feel safe and happy there, and you know I love it and I’m safe too. I’ve made friends, learnt to cook, sew, do sports and my favourite is climbing. I know if I need anything, I just ask the staff, they always know what to do, even when my bike broke. I love the Hive!”

As I say I also work there as a Youth Worker, and I have met so many fantastic YP, and their families and played a small part in seeing real change for them, and that they always have only good and positive things to say about the Hive. And that like me they appreciate all the effort, hard work and commitment they all show to OUR Young People. Even in the midst of a worldwide Pandemic.

i am a teenager from Birkenhead and I would like to help change your decision on cutting the funds for the Hive, they saved my life!

The Hive has done a lot for me and many other young people and we need this to be reconsidered!!

I have been a member of the Hive since 2017 and up until lockdown I was there more than I was at home! The Hive has changed my life and hundreds of other young people, since opening in 2017 they have had over 1/4 of a million visits!!

Before the Hive opened, I was an isolated teenager who had just moved to a new house and school due to bullying, when first starting the Hive I had no confidence however 3 years on and I’ve achieved the most amazing things because of the support and opportunities given from the Hive and the incredible youth workers there!

I can only start by telling you some of the amazing opportunities I’ve had, one being a life changing experience when I performed in the Royal Albert Hall alongside the Script, John Newman and I was privileged to even meet Prince Harry. I’m part of a vocal group we’ve we have performed in countless venues including both cathedrals in Liverpool, I also run the junior pop choir, a younger version of the vocal group I am in.

As a young leader I volunteer my time each week to give back to the younger generation as the Hive staff have done for me and hundreds of other young people!

Because of the opportunities and help I’ve had from the Hive, in July last year they helped me get an apprenticeship in a SEN primary school, this has set me up for the rest of my life and I wouldn’t of been able to do it without them!

The Hive is an amazing facility and the young people of the Wirral need it now more than

ever, due to lockdown the mental health statistics in young people have rose greatly, the Hive is an amazing support and this money being cut will not only affect us as young people later in life, however they won't be able to give the innumerable amount of support and opportunities to the younger generations as there won't be enough fund to carry on doing so!

During lockdown and over Christmas the Hive supported hundreds of families with food hampers, isolation activity packs, toy hampers and daily phone calls to the young people to make sure they were ok, they adapted there offer in less than a week to ensure that all young people still had a virtual youth zone and a way of accessing youth work even if it was virtual.

I am asking you to please reconsider your proposal! It is so important to thousands of young people! If you take 200,000 pounds away from them, you will have to put it back in for mental health support for young people and other opportunities the Hive provide!

I am trying to voice the thoughts and feelings for many young people as this will affect thousands of children in the future years, some who are too young to have social media now and can't voice their opinions now.

A €200,000 cut to their provision will jeopardise the Hive being there for many young people!

As a school we a grateful for the added value The Hive offer to us in regard to wrap around support with -

Delivery of isolation packs to our students

Food hampers for students and their families who are struggling.

Programmes such as Inspiring Futures which has supported groups of young people who have disengaged with school. The programme has enabled them to try new activities and encouraged them to reengage with school.

If the Hive could no longer offer these services due to cuts, what would the council do to support with enhancing Young peoples' attainment & engagement.

Cutting funding to The Hive can only have a very negative impact to the wellbeing on our already struggling and neglected young people in this deprived and under privileged area. It also will impact people's jobs and surely that will just transfer the financial burden to another department... with the unemployment this will cause.

As a founder patron of The Hive and continued supporter I have seen for myself the great work that is carried out. Throughout this past year and particularly during the lockdowns the staff and volunteer's day in day out have continued to engage with young people throughout Wirral. Many of those they support are vulnerable and if it was not for the The Hive they



would not have received as much if not any support to check on their wellbeing, including the delivery of food parcels.

Regardless of the current situation The Hive does amazing work in engaging with youngsters, giving them new opportunities and helping them prepare for their futures. Wirral Council has undoubtedly contributed towards the success of The Hive through their funding from the start. However, the proposed cut of 50% of your present funding to The Hive would have a devastating effect. It was well documented that the long-term effects of the pandemic will impact on the young generation most, therefore moving forward it's essential The Hive is there in its full capacity for these people when they will need it most.

The Hive is not just a Youth Club, as it provides so many services for young people and their families!

I am writing in my capacity as Chair of The Hive asking for the Council's reconsideration of the proposed £200,000 funding cut.

Before I write anything further, I firstly acknowledge the Council's considerable help and support over the past four years. Your financial pledges have not only secured the viability of our youth work, but it has also continually helped to enhance our offer. Thank you so much, you have been instrumental in our success.

Your association with us has been a "win win". The current financial dynamics read well, with your contributing less than 30% of our current revenue costs, equating to 36p per day per member or significantly less if the digital programme is factored in. Research has established that The Hive brings £2.03 of social benefit for every £1 spent on operating costs. Now together with your fellow counsellors, you all have the unenviable task of deciding which services should be reduced.

Just about everyone acknowledges that services to young people should not be reduced or indeed disrupted in any way. Thankfully, youth work is now officially recognised as essential, as confirmed by Baroness Barran, Minister for Civil Society. Qualified youth workers are now recognised as key workers. This so much complements the findings of the Prince's Trust announced earlier this week who said:

*Young people are in danger of giving up on their futures and on themselves, with a quarter saying they feel unable to cope with life. Their long-running annual survey of young people's happiness and confidence returned the worst findings in its 12-year history. More than one in four said they had felt unable to cope with life since the start of the pandemic, increasing to 40% for those not in education, employment, or training. Half of 16- to 25-year-olds said their mental health had worsened since the start of the pandemic.*

*“The pandemic has taken a devastating toll on young people’s mental health and well-being,” said Jonathan Townsend, the Trust’s UK Chief Executive. “Many believe they are missing out on being young, and sadly we know that the impact of the pandemic on their employment prospects and overall well-being could continue far into their futures.”*

*Half of the young people interviewed said current political and economic events had affected their mental health. More than half said they always or often felt anxious, rising to 64% among those not in work, education, or training.*

With the established reputation of The Hive, we are already working to address such issues, through existing specialist mental health and employability programmes.

The irony surrounding the financial threat is that as an organisation we are needed today more than ever before. In an ideal world, I am sure you and your colleagues would be wanting to enhance our offering at this time when services are much in demand and now increasingly so. Only this week we received and acted on 360 referrals from local schools asking for our assistance with young people who are isolating.

We have around 3000 members of The Hive. If the average household has 2.3 occupiers, that’s around 7000 individuals who have significant impact from our youth work. Over 4,500 have viewed our recent Virtual Awards ceremony online, again demonstrating the level of local interest. Of course, I am aware of social media, newspaper, and local radio support, all of which emphasise the impact of our activities.

Although I have been a supporter of The Hive since its early days, it was only last month I had the honour to succeed John Syvret as Chair, the day before the Council cuts were announced. Since then, I have begun to appreciate more the extraordinary impact this charity has for the benefit of all residing in the Wirral with 84% of our members living outside the Birkenhead/Tranmere region. We have members from all electoral wards.

It was good to see you within the last week’s Q&A Consultation and clearly you have all been in listening mode and thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts. Collectively this is such an important part of the process, helping you all to make more informed decisions. Likewise, as a Board, we have been supporting our staff, young people and their families as we have focused on representing our organisation whilst continuing to serve our communities.

The impact of The Hive is indeed extraordinary and over the past few weeks I have been so encouraged hearing how strongly our young people and their families and indeed our community at large feel about what we do. The consequences of reducing our income would have such a terrible effect over The Wirral, significantly increasing the demands on other areas of Council provided services and associated costs.

Cutting youth support would send out such a negative message and this is so contrary to what central government as well as our local Council need whilst we prioritise our care for our young people. We need to give them hope for their future and to lead by example, simultaneously delivering far reaching benefits to wider society.

We do enjoy a very strong working relationship with you all. We look forward to carrying on with our responsibilities, supporting yourselves to look after those who need our help.

I am contacting you in regards to the budgeting for the hive , I just wanted to let you know that when my son has attended it's been a real help to our family and his mental health , the workers couldn't of done more to try and accommodate his special needs , which helped me work in the summer holidays , and half term times , the Sunday inclusion session was very helpful for children with needs to have some where to go safe when there is very few places also , I will never forget they had us for Christmas Dinner when , we were completely alone not this year just gone but the year before , they made us welcome when no 1 wanted us because of my sons behaviours around special needs , so I feel that it is vital that they get the support they not just for us but other families thank you for taking the time to read this.

Letter to Angela Eagle MP

**Petition:**

[https://www.change.org/p/wirral-borough-council-no-funding-cuts-for-the-hive?utm\\_source=share\\_petition&utm\\_medium=custom\\_url&recruited\\_by\\_id=bd6806b0-5027-11eb-9fa3-b7f98f1de79b](https://www.change.org/p/wirral-borough-council-no-funding-cuts-for-the-hive?utm_source=share_petition&utm_medium=custom_url&recruited_by_id=bd6806b0-5027-11eb-9fa3-b7f98f1de79b)

**Grass Cutting**

I had a similar idea to yours last Sunday, I was mulling over not bothering to mow my own lawn ever again to save electricity or pick-up litter to save my bad back. But then I thought about it for 3 seconds and realised that not cutting the grass or picking up the rubbish would be a stupid idea as it would lead to the garden looking overgrown, scruffy and uninviting. It would also annoy the heck out of my neighbours who would conclude that I was a complete moron. I am sure the Council will be judged by residents, visitors and investors in exactly the same way.

The above proposals will lead to the borough looking even more unkempt than it already does. These proposals are only appealing if you do not care how the Wirral looks. Do you think visitors first impressions would be 'Oh look how lovely the long grass looks' or do you think it more likely to be 'look at the state of the place, the Council doesn't even bother to cut the grass'? My money is on the latter!

If anything, the Council should be going completely the opposite way on this and increasing spending on grounds maintenance to provide a smart, neat environment that is aesthetically pleasing for all to enjoy and be proud of. Frequency should be increased, height of cut should be reduced, and decent edge trimming should be undertaken so that the borough is



more likely to attract tourists and investors as nobody wishes to live or work in an unkempt environment.

Nothing so openly showcases to the public how good or bad a Council is more than the neatness of its open green spaces, grass verges and hedgerows. Maintenance should be one of the Councils top priorities as it was in 2006 when the borough looked neat and tidy just prior to the Open Golf Championship. I wonder what the R&A, and the 000's of visitors will think of the place next time they visit!

As you read this, please ask yourself whether you mow the lawn and pick-up litter in your own garden. If you do, ask yourself why you do it. After you have concluded that you like your garden to be a nice place to spend time in and enjoy, and that keeping it in a pleasant condition is worth the effort and expense, you will then hopefully realise how terrible this proposal is.

### **School Crossing Patrol**

Following on from unison update, I feel disappointed by the cuts to the crossing patrols near schools. My daughter attends Christ church primary in Moreton. Cass the crossing patrol near this site is very much part of the community. I know lots of parents and children regularly chat to her. This role is a huge start to the school day not only the safety aspect but having a positive social interaction with a familiar adult at the start of the day for some children.

It's sad that cuts impact on children, her role helps children learn the importance of safety and stops some parents trying to take short cuts by quickly running across the road. Helping children learn from an early age the benefits of road safety in a relaxed manner.

### **Miscellaneous**

Children, Young People & Education

Youth Provision - £200k cut.

I would have liked a bit more detail on this option as it doesn't really give enough detail on which service provision would be affected. Is it funding for the Hive in Birkenhead? Overall, I wouldn't be in agreement on this. Children & young people have already been badly affected by the pandemic and a cut to services for them will only exacerbate their vulnerability further.

Modernisation & Social Care - £102k cut.

Again, I would have liked more drilled down detail. If it's a cut in provision for vulnerable children etc then I wouldn't be in favour.

Environment, Climate Emergency & Transport

Neighbourhood Review - £350k saving.



If this means that there won't be a reduction in neighbourhood services for residents then yes.

#### Parking Charges - £1m income

This is a difficult one. A catch 22 situation. Damned if you agree and damned if you don't. I can see both arguments - positive effect on climate but negative effect on local retail. People will just drive to retail parks, so local independent shops will lose out, unless they are in walking distance and people have the time and want to walk to them. Online retail has increased since the pandemic started, and I think that this will more or less stay at the new level. I think higher car parking charges will lead to less footfall, shops will close, and this will mean a reduction in business rates for the LA. A vicious circle. You could perhaps raise it in some areas, but not in others and I really don't think there should be parking charges at parks anyway. Some residents don't have their own green space, so access to public green space is important (especially in a pandemic). If you have to charge people to park at parks, then it should be cheap parking at a much lower rate than to park elsewhere.

#### School Crossing Review - £276.3k cut.

I realise this isn't a statutory service but if you want more kids to walk to school then I don't think you should get rid of Lollipop men & women. They provide an element of road safety around primary schools and also a reassuring visible presence for parents & children walking to school. This service is encouraging residents to 'do the right thing' and get off their backsides and out of their cars and walk their kids to school - therefore teaching their children to do the right thing as well. So no, I don't agree with this option.

#### Reduction in Grass Cutting - £250k cut.

This one isn't as simple as saving as you are making out. I agree that more of the land in our borough should support wildlife & pollinators. So yes, more wildflower meadow habitat is to be encouraged. Also, this is possible by leaving panels and only cutting areas which need it for road safety/pedestrian access. However, proper wildflower meadows (even small panels of land) require the correct treatment and maintenance to ensure that they thrive. This doesn't mean just leaving an area of grass and never doing anything to it. It means cutting it very low, scarifying it, sowing a mixture of wildflower seeds and yellow rattle and then letting this establish, no cutting through the season, except for a really good close cut at the end of the flower season, when all the flowers have bloomed and died, and their seeds have dropped onto the ground (late August/early September). Then it needs cutting and all grass removing as any left behind will only add nutrients back into the ground and wildflower meadows need poorer soil to thrive. So yes, treat as wildflower, but staff will still need to tend these areas, so there will still be a labour cost for the 'panels' of wildflowers, so operatives will need to be re-trained from 'hack it & cut it' to the Monty Dons of the PAC service.

#### Ceasing green space maintenance - £100k cut

I'd like to have had more information on this. Which amenity areas? Where? Yes, we do need more allotments or perhaps raised bed resident growing schemes? We also need more trees and wildflowers. But we still need litter removal, and it depends on where these amenity

areas are and whether residents want these things or whether they want clean & tidy grass edges. This needs to be sensitive to the area with engagement with residents and I don't think you'd realise those figures.

Removing the current provision of public toilets - £142k cut

We are supposed to be a Tourism/Leisure peninsula. Tourists, visitors and residents need toilets. Most of the sites listed are in tourist/leisure areas, like New Brighton and West Kirby, so these should be kept.

Changing Household Waste Collection to every 3 weeks - £180k cut

My opinion quite frankly is, No. This option has suggested that it 'could lead' to having additional packaging (plastic pots, tubs, trays, tetra paks & aerosols) recycled, but why aren't we already recycling these things?! Other LA's in the LCR do recycle them so why aren't we? Change the contract. Why did we lock into an extension with Biffa to 2027 if it doesn't include the recycling of these types of packaging? It means sending more still to landfill - so it's bad for the environment and we as an Authority will pay more landfill tax than we could do - double lose lose. A separate food waste collection has already been proposed in previous consultations and has been dismissed by the LA and Councillors as costing too much versus any cost savings. Rotting food, used nappies, used incontinence pads, cat and dog poo needs collecting every 2 weeks at the least. If you do manage to get the plastic tubs, pots, trays, aerosols etc collected for recycling, then you could always reduce the size of the green bin?

Refuse collection & street cleaning from Biffa - £75k saving.

Yes, if this doesn't mean a reduction in service to residents and that Biffa staff are at least on Living Wage.

Environmental Enforcement - £150k income

We're already giving out fines/PCN's for this, but please don't go back to using the tactics of Kingdom Ltd! Officers should be using common sense when deciding on whether to issue fines or not. You are going to need a lot of education with residents/visitors - if people won't wear masks in shops and on public transport and stay at home in a lockdown then you've no chance of appealing to their civic duty. But yes, if people drop an empty crisp packet or bottle or cigarette butt then they should be fined. If it's a little old lady feeding a piece of bread to the birds, then no she shouldn't.

Tourism, Culture & Leisure

Reduction in Culture & Visitor Economy - £620k cut.

Yes. I think the corporate budget for this is far too big, you can't morally justify it when you're proposing cuts in youth provision, community alarm service, closure of the main pool & leisure centre for a deprived area of the borough and adult & social care provision.

Closure of Europa Pools - £640k cut.

No. I thought the plan was to build a new pool/leisure centre next to the Europa Site and after it has been built to close & demolish Europa and build retail/restaurants on that area? I don't think Europa should close until a new pool/leisure centre has been built. The new pool/leisure centre should also be a Municipal one not a private gym company. Birkenhead is currently (& historically) an economically deprived area and residents have profoundly poorer health outcomes than residents on the western side of the borough. Europa Pools is a resource for improving residents health outcomes. Closure before a replacement is built would negatively affect physical & mental health of residents.

Delay re-opening of Woodchurch Leisure Centre - £322k cut.

I would have liked more detail on this option as I don't feel informed enough to have a decisive opinion on it. It doesn't say how long the proposed delay in re-opening is for. Are you thinking about keeping it closed for whole of the 2021/22 financial year? As lockdown and a high tier will certainly go into April? So, you're thinking to keep it closed for the rest of the year? It being closed at the moment has a reason as it's been re-purposed, but if leisure re-opens you will be disadvantaging Woodchurch residents.

Closure of municipal golf courses - £273k cut.

Golf is leisure and exercise and it's outdoors. It's cheaper than private golf courses and it's diversified in recent years with football golf. I do think we still need a municipal golf offer, especially being a tourism and leisure peninsula, which has a notable international golf presence. Maybe we don't need 4 courses though? One could be re-purposed to allotments (income generation & good for climate) and new forest with tree planting (climate)?

Closure of Williamson Museum - £327.5k cut.

History and art are a reflection of an educated and cultured society. I think if you are going to keep it needs to generate some income. I would like it to stay open (I love history and art), but it could be seen as an elitist interest when you're proposing the other cuts that you are. I would rather Europa Pools is kept open as Europa benefits more people, those who are in more need.

Rope walks at Royden Park - £80k income

I like the fact that you've thought of providing something different that we don't currently have to generate income. But why are we letting an external partner do it and only taking rent? This could be done by us and ran by PAC service, but you are going to have to market Royden as an 'Adventure' destination. People have come to value the importance of their green spaces and public parks during the current pandemic and this new interest in the outdoors should be seen as an income opportunity by us as a Council.

Economy, Regeneration & Development

Restructure Birkenhead Market - £240k saving.

I had thought that this was being done anyway as part of the Birkenhead Regen Plan. I would like to see a new market modelled on those in Barcelona and Amsterdam, where food is sold by independent food producers, pop-up restaurants offering an independent food offer

(no chains), a street social/farmers market offer. This is a good opportunity for us to take the new interest people have in locally produced food and run with it.

DDA Building Works budget - £200k saving.

If DDA complaint measures will be implemented as part of the general building code for any municipal development or new build, then yes.

Housing

Community Alarm Service - £500k cut.

No, I don't agree with this.

Adult Social Care & Health

Wirral Evolutions Review - £500k cut.

No. This service has already changed to a CIC and had a further review. Carers aren't paid enough for what they do. They are key workers - the Covid pandemic has made people realise this. Please don't batter them after they have been working through this to ensure the safety and wellbeing of vulnerable people with needs. These carers are more important than Directors or Councillors.

Policy and Resources

Ward member budgets - £250k saving for 1-year suspension.

Yes, as this is discretionary spend.

One Stop Shop reduction - £98k

Only if service provision for residents isn't negatively affected. Not all residents do online so a physical presence is still needed for this.

Review of Revenues & Benefits - £150k

If there won't be a negative impact on service provision for residents.

Programme Management Office - £670k cut.

Yes

Digital Services/IT reduction - £618k

Not if it affects service. IT services do a good job of keeping the Authority cyber safe and enabling us to wfh. They provide a good helpline service and issues are sorted quickly in my experience & no I don't work in IT!

Centralised Print Service - £157k

Only where generic documents/simple jobs would have been sent to Printing anyway. Some documents are individual (usually in projects that still require paper documents), so for these it would be better (in staff costs i.e., labour time) and timelier to keep an MFD for these projects, as it would be quicker for 1 person to print off 3 pages there and then than to send it to Print and for them to print it and Distribution to then deliver it back to the project.

This may work for some service teams but not all, but it may reduce some of the canda contract cost. Suggest you ask individual Team managers whether they could move to this or not?

Business Support Unit - £237k cut.

We still need front of house for some buildings, definitely public ones.

Local Council Tax Support - £1m underspend

Yes, as you have received alternate Government funding which covers this relief.

Review of Contract & Commissioning support - £350k cut.

I would have liked more details on this, but if you are following LGA guidance then yes.

Apprenticeships first model - £148k saving.

I thought that we were already following this approach, as we recruit apprentices and graduates each year and they seem to transition to normal job roles afterwards?

Review of Council Traded Services - £270k saving.

Yes, if it doesn't affect service provision.

I have lost the will to live after all of that feedback, but I do have some suggestions as follows:

What about thinking big and creating something both income generating and that appeals to both the borough's history and the recent interest people have in the outdoors and exercising outdoors? What about building a new seawater Lido for New Brighton or West Kirby? Cold water swimming is an increasingly popular thing to do as it's thought to improve your immune system and also promote better mental health. Drawbacks to using the sea are jellyfish, people not being aware of tidal currents, lack of changing facilities etc. Why not build a lido, offer changing facilities, a coffee shop (where people can get a hot chocolate to warm back up...and a slice of cake for those calories they've burned off and now they feel virtuous)? I think it's a winner.

Another idea similar to the Lido is to build a Wave Centre? This would encourage wannabe surfers to train at the Centre acquiring a certain level of skill before going out in the sea. It would also perhaps attract visitors from the LCR (those with no coast) and other areas?

With the reduction in footfall in traditional retail centres across the Country and the increase in online retail, the Government should consider introducing a tax for online retailers. Part of this could then be used to support bricks and mortar retail via distribution to Local Authorities. MP's should petition Government and LA's ask the LGA to consider taking this up as an argument as well. Not a chance I know, but it would go some way to offsetting the disparity between online and high street.

Finally, not going to be popular, but do we really need 66 councillors to represent Wirral?

1; In my opinion it is best to keep the bin service as it is. People as it is now dump rubbish in fields and roads in Wirral. It will only get worse if 3 x weekly collection occurs.

2; I would like some improvement to the Wirral cycle lanes. Near Moreton. The lanes stop at Saughall Massie. No route to West Kirby or Hoylake.

The money you did obtain went to Bromborough. The West Kirby/Hoylake area does not even have a footpath? from Saughall Massie??

3 Parking is limited, and I have mentioned that valuable space is taken even from your Pest Control Van which I asked to be parked better in the Grampian Way road as before?

4 The 400 new houses in Moreton are good but that is 800 cars i.e., 2 people per car. There is no Shop even to buy a bottle of milk in this area. If they go to the small Tesco they will drive. It may be worth looking at a small Tesco etc in this estate?? Or opposite the estate near the old garage.

(stitch in time saves nine)

5 Rubbish, this is building up in Moreton and it may be worth looking at a local collection. One day in the week per month. No problem in helping.

6 Paving people still park on the pavements and cause problems. Hence that is why I asked for your council van pest control to park in the other area. More room.

7 Trees You did have a budget for this, and I was wondering what the plan was. Nice to start planting in Moreton along the roads Not in Birkenhead again please.

I am one of your constituents and am writing to you with comments about the Wirral Council Budget 2021 consultation. I want to make you aware of my views about some of the items listed in the consultation document, where I have particularly strong views.

Page 9: Parking charges. This is always a very contentious issue. Can I suggest that the Council looks into provision of charging points for electric cars in car parks, in collaboration with one of the companies that provide them? With appropriate arrangements this should provide an income stream for the council as well as being attractive to tourists. It would also benefit Wirral residents who live in flats or (like me) do not have off-road carparking.

Page 9: Reducing grass cutting of verges, roadsides, parks and open spaces. This is an excellent idea. It is so sad to see colourful flowers, even orchids, cut off when they are in full bloom. These areas have such a great natural diversity of grasses and flowers. To increase long-term financial savings, the council should also, in contract details or when new mowing machinery is purchased, specify that the grass cuttings are collected and removed rather than left to rot on the cut area. Not only is this more aesthetically pleasing but over time will reduce the fertility of the area so slowing the growth of grass, reducing need for cutting and increasing diversity of other plants within the grassland. In addition, consultation with



ecologists on the best timing of grass cutting and possible addition of yellow rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*) to further slow grass growth would be of long-term benefit.

Page 10: Ceasing green space maintenance, planting trees, creating allotments. These are all excellent ideas and overlap with the reduced grass cutting listed on page 9. The note about ceasing litter removal is surely unlikely but maybe the interval can be reduced. I hope the Council will take appropriate advice on the types and care of trees to be planted. Provision of more allotments would be very welcome since many have been lost on the Wirral over the years (e.g., Mayer Park; adjacent M53 junction 2; Port Sunlight Greendale Road). When I applied for an allotment in 2019, I was told that some sites have people waiting over 5 years. If true, this is surely unacceptable.

Page 10: Closing public conveniences. This is a very bad idea. It is uncivilised and unhygienic. It is not welcoming to visitors. It disadvantages those with children, the elderly (especially men with prostate problems) and others with medical conditions. Provision through restaurants and pubs cannot be relied on since they are not always open, and many do not provide facilities for non-customers. We have seen in 2020 what happens when people visit areas that lack public conveniences.

Page 10: Reducing collection frequency of green rubbish bins and increasing recycling, possibly food waste. This is another contentious issue. I support it along with increased general and targeted publicity about what goes in the recycling bin.

Page 11 – 12: Remove support for culture and visitor economy. You point out that the council is not required to support this area but also that it is a valuable source of income. I think your proposals need more thought. Collaborating with Liverpool and Chester is obviously important, especially to think why someone would visit the Wirral rather than just travel through to visit these better-known places. Closing the Williamson Art Gallery and Museum and the Europa Pool reduce reasons to visit and reduces opportunities for local residents.

Page 20: Review of Benefits and Revenue Service. I think this is a good idea. My experience is from dealing with my late mother's affairs. She had a fall alarm provided through the council services which we each thought was excellent. It gave me confidence to continue working knowing she could get help and was invaluable on her last day. When dealing with her probate a few months later, I was assured that her payments for this service were complete. A full year later I had a letter that she owed £10. The series of letters, detailed payment account and phone calls that followed, since I thought it was a mistake, must have cost the Council over £10 in postage and time. Anything that makes payments more timely, understandable, transparent and informative can only be valuable to save Council money and time.

I've noticed that you are a member of the Economy Regeneration and Development Committee as well as conservation area advisory committees, so I hope my comments are of interest to you.

The consultation document indicates that savings of £16.5 million in financial year 2021 – 2022 are needed, and the items listed reach £10, 375, 800. The Council must thus have



ideas for additional sources of savings to reach the required target. I hope that some of these provide larger than anticipated savings to replace some of those in your brochure that are poor value.

Does Wirral need 66 Councillors? Would this not be a huge saving to cut the amount?

Please record my disagreement to getting rid of school crossing patrols and to closure of Woodchurch pool for any time. It needs to open asap.

I support the options to rewild areas and reduce grass maintenance.

Thank you,

I am a local resident and have seen the online budget video and the budget gap you have. I have spoken to a number of your people involved in analysing costs in the council and I discussed grassroots football. We have a growing concern on the Wirral that the grass pitches through lack of investment are now most of the time waterlogged and unusable. The cost to the council for maintaining these pitches will be massive and the income you generate will be small from pitch fees etc. With the current covid pandemic I can see many of these grassroots teams folding and players stopping so less people playing resulting less income as a result too.

I run a local football club with approximately 380 children involved in with some youth and adult teams. We run from a council owned pitch and all lease a school facility ourselves at great cost. Our council owned pitches we can probably use during the season 12 weeks out of the 24-week season which isn't ideal.

The need for Astro pitches and better-quality grass pitches are massive and we understand the limitations on the councils. However, you have many options available to you:

1) hand the control of large pitch venues i.e., plymyards to the leagues (Eastham league have over 6000 players) who could then run these pitches, maintain them, invest in them and make them better without being a drain on council resources.

2) the clubs of substantial size could and would be able too if given sites with more control be able to do the same as above. In some cases, being able to invest and get sport England and other funding to develop them further giving grassroots players the chance to play more often.

To get funding for leagues or clubs they need substantial lease or own these sites as the funding won't be given if the council can take the land back at any point after the investment has been made.

The need for these pitches is massive and the time is now otherwise in the near future grassroots will die and the game will be lost. I know of local ex footballers who would support and have enquired about venues such as lingham park but wasn't able to get anywhere.

The parents would pay whatever is needed to get the kids playing. I do believe the grassroots community and leagues would be able to improve and take the costs out of the council's hands if given the space and land to do it. I'm sure this would benefit all parties and lead the way in how local sports in ran in our borough and give our community the best facilities we possibly can in the current climate.

Regarding saving money by altering green waste bins to be collected every 3 weeks. I feel that this will add additional costs to the council overall as people will be guaranteed to fly tip their rubbish. This is a problem already in my area of New Ferry where people constantly dump rubbish in entry ways. You only have to look at Christmas collections where there are a few days difference to the amount of rubbish dumped around the area. This surely would cost the council more in arranging for them to be emptied or to solve vermin issues. The individuals who actively do this need to be caught and heavily prosecuted and fined. I, myself have provided the council with the details of a resident that was notorious for fly tipping, even the Biffa men knew who he was and as far as I am aware, he was never issued a fine much to the suffering residents disappointment and at a cost to us, the taxpayers!

I agree with the wildflower grass verges however, you need to ensure that pathways running alongside are disability friendly for people who use wheelchairs, mobility scooters, visually impaired etc.

Adult social care.

I strongly disagree with the proposals that half a million pound needs to be saved when Wirral Evolutions inherited that debt and have never been able to pay the debt back to the council due to the council not raising the contract price of the block booking in line with inflation, increasing staff costs etc. I agree that there is a need for modernisation however, I feel that more than 1 year would be required to complete this modernisation and it also should not be at the expense of the vulnerable adults that attend. I feel that despite an easy read document going out that the people who access Wirral Evolutions service have not been consulted at all and have not had the proposals given to them to agree or disagree on. For example, they agree to modernise the service, however, do they fully understand that they may not be with their friends, at a centre that they have accessed most of their adult lives or by being supported by staff that they have also known for the majority of their lives. What will happen to those individuals whose service will be reviewed and discharged? Those individuals have had so much to contend with this year, being locked down 3 times, not being able to see their

family and friends or access the centres that they feel safe in. What about the extra upset that this is going to cause them? What additional services will those people need if they are severely distressed by the proposed changes to Wirral Evolutions and to whose expense? Most of the people that attend still reside with their parents or siblings who are an ageing population, saving the taxpayer and Wirral council an absolute fortune in care home fees. Accessing the day centres is their only respite and prevents a carer breakdown. What will happen if their child/ siblings only care breaks down and they cannot cope looking after them at home? They will need to go into a residential/ supported living facility therefore increasing the cost to the council. In addition, how come out of all the adult service providers is it only Wirral Evolutions that has been asked to make a saving? Autism Together despite being a charity is one of the largest employers on the Wirral and demands a high fee for Wirral residents who access their service. Are they required to become cheaper to make a saving to Wirral council? How can Wirral council expect Wirral Evolutions to make such a saving, alongside no doubt closure of centres, reduction in staffing but become more “modern”. This is a lose lose situation that has been put out for “consultation” however, I firmly believe that a decision has already been made.

I sincerely hope that you change your mind and waiver the half a million-pound debt from Wirral Evolutions. I also hope that you do consult with the individuals who access the centre and provide evidence of the consultation with those individuals.

Other ways that the council could save money is look at contractors who are commissioned to complete repair jobs that stick plasters on council buildings and do not resolve health and safety issues. How much are these contractors being paid? I appreciate it must go out to tender however, the cheapest tender should not always win. The one who will fix the issue first time round should as this ultimately would save money overall. The Wirral is also full of old run-down council buildings that are not used to capacity. Can some of these buildings/ land not be sold to generate revenue for the local authority?

Realise and publicly accept that you are all living with your hands wedged in the real taxpayers’ pockets....

Unlike Council employees many real taxpayers are now unemployed, so no longer taxpayers. So much less money for you.

Full transparency

Publish all payments to staff and Councillors – so we can see where to make the savings to our money.

Review all the departments – whose ideas were they. are they still of value, close them?

List all depts, staff numbers and salaries of the management and their pension pots.

Effective Scrutiny of the Council’s “Cunning Schemes”, e.g., £5m? wasted so far on the great Hoylake Golf Resort fiasco, £00,000’s preparing the inappropriate THIRD Sea Wall with a

rising cost of £6m of taxpayers' money to construct. Surely £6m could buy the houses at risk for that sum!

Re-align to Private Sector pay and benefits. E.g., Close all DB pensions.

Reduce the number of Councillors.

Stop "rewarding" those who "leave". for whatever reason.

Stop lending out "my" money.

Make service departments profitable. e.g., Enforcement, Planning etc.

Keep the parks funded as they are part of the ONLY economic growth, and anything else related to – *Day Tourism*.

Keep the Green bins at two weeks collection. Think of those with nappies and colostomy bags filling bins for weeks in the summer. Major Biohazard!