

2022/2023 BUDGET SETTING

1.0 Purpose of the Report

To provide insight, analysis and update on budget consultation methods and outcomes as part of the 2022/ 2023 budget setting process.

2.0 Resident Consultation (2nd – 28th November 2021)

At Policy and Resources committee on 25 October 2021 a stakeholder consultation programme was agreed. Through the consultation people were asked to tell us what their priorities are, what council services matter most to them, and where they believe the Council should be focusing its efforts to help develop the budget plan.

A total of 534 survey responses were received, with the majority of the respondents (87.9%) being local residents. The most represented Wirral Ward was Hoylake and Meols (11.3%), the least represented Wirral Ward was Bromborough (0.2%).

In terms of demographics, 59.3% of respondents were male and 36.4% female. The most represented age group was 65–74-year-olds, and the least represented age group was 16–27-year-olds (0.8%).

2.1 Key Findings

Parks and Open Spaces and Children's Services were highlighted as being among the top 3 for both most valued services and most important services to invest more resources in. The services that were most frequently placed as being most valued were:

- Children's Services (46.1% of respondents)
- Parks and Open Spaces (42.5%)
- Adult Social care (40.0%)

The services that were most frequently placed as most important to invest more resources in were:

- Parks & Open Spaces (39.2%)
- Museums (39.0%)
- Children's Services (36.3%)

In terms of Wirral Plan priorities, Safe and Pleasant Communities was the priority most frequently placed as most important, by 46.2% of respondents, with working with partner agencies to reduce crime and tackle anti-social behaviour as the key action.

2.2 Free Text Responses

As part of the consultation, respondents were invited to outline suggestions as to how the council could make additional savings or generate income. They were also invited to contribute to the online Ideas Board. Within both, the most common suggestions were:

- The council should have fewer consultants

- The council should have fewer councillors
- Reduce salaries within the council

2.3 Methodology

The consultation was carried out between 2 November – 28 November 2021, making use of an online public consultation portal - 'Have your say. A Budget Booklet, a Financial Strategy 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.

In addition, two online tools were provided to encourage residents to engage – these being an online questionnaire – to respond to specific questions about budget proposals and an ideas board – for residents to post 'ideas' about the council budget. Respondents were also 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' website alongside the online tool.

In order to further encourage engagement a major social and digital media sub campaign was carried out, which included regular messaging, targeted demographical and geographical communications, resident e-newsletters, and regular theme specific stories. A mix of printed adverts and advertorials were also placed to encourage participation, as well as digital click-through links and targeted news stories.

3.0 Consultation with local Businesses

Following P&R Committee on 17th January, it was agreed that a two-week statutory consultation would take place with our business community. This consultation ran from 19th January to 2nd February.

3.1 Working with the Chamber

The consultation team worked closely with the Wirral Chamber to engage with businesses that are linked into their current networks. This included a Business Member special update, social media push, LinkedIn sponsored posts and agenda item on Business Network meetings.

3.2 Wirral Council – Targeted Engagement

In addition to the Chamber partnership, a Wirral Council Business Consultation email was sent to registered businesses (4,200), which resulted in:

- 759 clicks to proposals landing page
- 552 unique visitors
- A 60.6% open rate
- A 13.3% click rate

A targeted social media push, via the Wirral business LinkedIn network was also undertaken. This resulted in:

- 7,529 impressions
- 632 clicks to proposals landing page

3.2 General Feedback

As part of the business consultation, respondents were invited to provide feedback and comments on the current budget proposals, as well as to outline any suggestions they may have as to how the council could make additional savings or generate income. This was received through the budgetconsult@wirral.gov.uk inbox and recorded as free text responses. General feedback included:

PROPOSAL: Technology and Care Package Review - If the council can save £3.89m on this and are not prepared to spend it on what it was brought in for then scrap it off council tax bills.

PROPOSAL: Review of Golf Offer – Can we look for ways to increase income rather than closing the facility.

PROPOSAL: Market Rental for Park Café – This would result in drastic, unaffordable rent therefore rendering the business unprofitable.

PROPOSAL: Cease Overtime Budget in Parks - Review timescales in line with the scheduled level of maintenance to reduce rather than cease overtime payments.

PROPOSAL: Climate Emergency Budget – Agree with removal.

PROPOSAL: Capitalisation of Salaries – The council should abide by the same standard of accounting principles and corporate governance as private businesses when applying salary capitalisation.

PROPOSAL: Cessation of Constituency Team – To remove this team would have a devastating impact on services currently being delivered by the Birkenhead Constituency Team to the Birkenhead community.

4.0 Budget Proposal Specific Consultations

The third round of consultations are specific to budget proposals where there is a legal duty to consult – and are focussed on how the budget proposals that are agreed at Full Council will be implemented. These consultations are currently live or scheduled. Initial findings will be taken to service committees in June. Consultations include:

Proposal: Whole Council Elections

Consultation Period: 13th December 2021 to 20th February 2022

<https://haveyoursay.wirral.gov.uk/wirral-local-elections-consultation>

Proposal: Review of Golf Offer

Consultation Period: 31st January to 27th March 2022 TBC

<https://haveyoursay.wirral.gov.uk/budget-2022-23-golf>

Proposal: Permanent Closure and Demolition of Woodchurch Leisure Centre

Consultation Period: 31st January to 27th March 2022 TBC

<https://haveyoursay.wirral.gov.uk/budget-2022-23-woodchurch>

Proposal: Closure of Europa Fun/Leisure Pool & Enhanced Gym Offer

Consultation Period: 31st January to 27th March 2022 TBC
<https://haveyoursay.wirral.gov.uk/budget-2022-23-europa>

Proposal: Temporary Closure and Remodelling of Bidston Tennis Centre
Consultation Period: 31st January to 27th March 2022 TBC
<https://haveyoursay.wirral.gov.uk/budget-2022-23-tennis>