



Have your say

Wirral Council Budget 2022/23 Proposal – Public Toilets Public Consultation Report



Consultation: 16 February – 14 April 2022

Report: 27 April 2022



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1.0 Executive Summary

Wirral Council is facing significant financial challenges and is currently going through a detailed process to set a budget for the next year. This is part of a wider approach to address long term structural issues in the council's finances and deliver substantial savings to balance the budget.

The council is legally obliged to set a balanced budget or risk Government intervention, and the savings measures currently being proposed are intended to put the authority on a stable financial footing for the long-term.

A number of budget proposals were consulted on, this budget proposal is for Public Conveniences. The Council currently provides 9 locations for Public Conveniences throughout the Borough and this proposal suggests the closure of 5 conveniences. However, there will remain public conveniences at numerous parks across the borough unaffected by this proposal, in addition to toilets open to the public at a number of public buildings. A map showing public toilets including parks is available in the Documents section of this webpage

During the pandemic public toilets at four key sites were opened when it was safe to do so, with additional cleaning put in place to maintain public safety. These opened sites were chosen due to their location, response to increased activity of residents and visitors at coastal areas, and also considering the condition and suitability of the facilities to provide a good quality public service.

The proposal is to retain those four sites that are currently open: West Kirby Marine Lake, Parade Gardens Hoylake, Harrison Drive (Kings Parade) New Brighton and Moreton Common. The sites that would close are Moreton Cross, West Kirby Concourse (external), Meols Parade (Bennetts Lane), New Ferry and Thornton Hough.

The retained Public Conveniences are generally in good condition, but some building improvements would be required; by reducing the number of sites this would allow more investment in the retained facilities.

This budget option will generate a potential saving of £50,000 if taken.

These consultation findings will be presented at the council's Economy, Regeneration and Development Committee at the meeting to be planned for June 2022. The Committee will scrutinise the savings proposals taking into account the comments of the public including any suggestions on alternative ways of making savings and the budget allotted by the full Council. Decision will be made on the Public Toilets proposal.

1.1 Key Findings

- 364 people in total completed the questionnaire.
- 88.4% said that they use public toilets in Wirral, 11.6% do not (Question 1).
- 11.0% agreed in principle with the proposal to close public toilets to help balance the council budget, 86.5% did not agree (Question 2).
- 52.1% strongly disagreed with the proposal to close some public toilets at less used locations. In total, 78.8% disagreed with this proposal and 15.2% agreed (Question 3).
- 75.2% said that they would not pay an additional fee to use public toilets in Wirral, 24.8% would pay (Question 4).
- For access to public toilets, respondents would pay the following (Question 5).
 - 57.7% would pay up to 30p
 - 5.9% would pay up to 50p
 - 30.5% would pay up to 50p
 - 5.9% would pay over 50p

Note: 272 people responded to this question despite only 90 people previously answering that they would be willing to pay.

- When asked for alternative ideas to continue to fund future maintenance and cleaning of public toilets in Wirral, the top themes were: (Question 6)
 - Find new revenue source (17.7%)
 - Require Payment (17.7%)
 - Make Savings Elsewhere (17.4%)
 - Public Toilets are a necessity (13.4%)
- When asked for any additional comments, the top themes were: (Question 7)
 - Public Toilets are a necessity (46.4%)
 - Social cost of closure (19.5%)
 - Against the proposal (10.5%)
 - Improve facilities (5.2%)

2.0 Methodology

Through the public toilets consultation people were asked to tell us their views of the budget proposal considering reduced budgets and they were also asked for further ideas on savings in leisure services.

Following the consultation, the feedback will be considered at a meeting of the Economy, Regeneration and Development Committee in June 2022.

The consultation was carried out between 16 February – 14 April 2022. The approach used was an online public consultation through the ‘Have your say’ consultation portal at www.haveyoursay.wirral.gov.uk with a page dedicated to the Public Toilets Consultation.

Documents provided on the site included a summary of the Public Toilets Budget Proposal, and a map of public toilets in Wirral.

One online questionnaire was provided for residents to engage with. Respondents were also able to request paper copies of the survey, or submit additional comments via a dedicated email address, which was published on the ‘Have your say’ website alongside the online tool.

2.1 Questionnaire

The consultation questionnaire was developed on the Public Toilets budget proposal and enabled stakeholders to record their feedback. 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-text comment questions, a text coding approach was used based on the reoccurring themes. This data was then collated and summarised in the report. 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 may add up to more than 100 percent. No paper questionnaires were submitted.

2.2 Analysis of Respondents

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.

2.3 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.

2.4 Communication

To raise awareness amongst as many residents, stakeholders, and businesses as possible, a consultation sub campaign was carried out which, linking with the overall budget narrative and service specific responses, urged target audiences to take part in the consultation.

A variety of communications channels and platforms were utilised. This included:

- Organic social media (mix of platforms)
- Targeted, sponsored social media
- Resident Email (inclusion in 5 editions)
- Partner/ Stakeholder updates
- Availability of Easy read questionnaires
- Councillor Updates (including consultation specific URL and narrative to share with constituents)
- Creation of a dedicated Budget email inbox
- Digital campaign box adverts on council owned platforms (linking to HYS page)
- Press/ Content Media releases
- Budget updates posted to wirralview.com (Budget/ consultation specific news tab)
- Posts on Staff Facebook page
- Exec View (Staff Newsletter)

- Shared narrative for regular Workforce, Directorate and Team updates

In addition to the above, the service itself administered the issuing and recording of paper copies and responses, as well as direct engagement with friends/ interest groups.

3.0 Results

3.1 The Questionnaire

The questionnaire was responded to by 364 people, all through the online portal. No paper copies were submitted. No questions were mandatory so respondents could choose which questions to respond to.

Q1: Do you (or someone you care for) use public toilets in Wirral?

Of the 361 respondents, 319 (88.4%) said that they use public toilets in Wirral, 42 people (11.6%) do not.

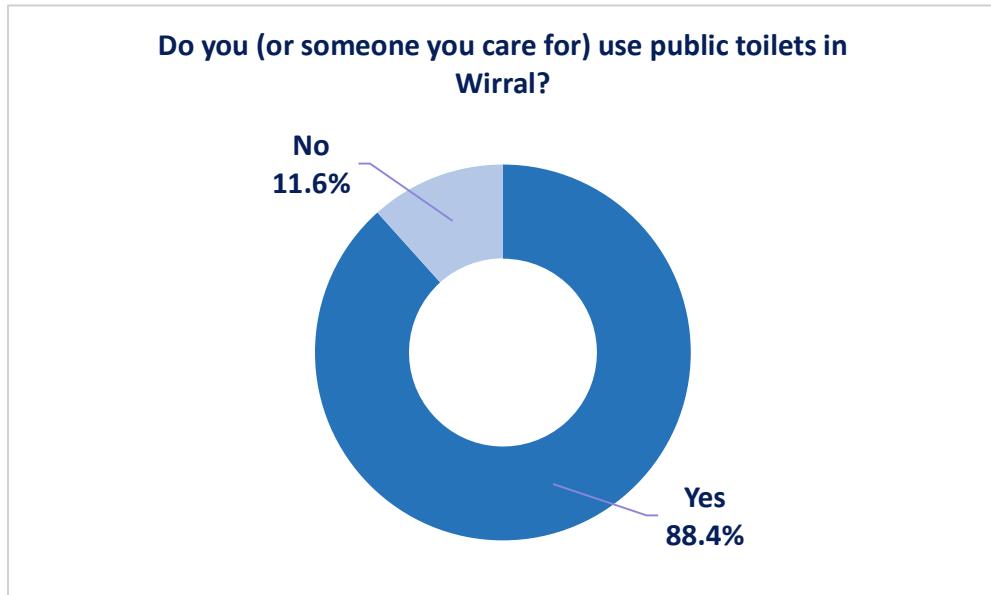


Figure 1: Chart showing the proportion of respondents who use public toilets.

Do you (or someone you care for) use public toilets in Wirral?	Total	%
Yes	319	88.4%
No	42	11.6%
Total	361	100.0%

Table 1: Showing the total number of respondents who use and do not use public toilets.

Q2: Do you agree in principle with the proposal to close public toilets to help balance the council budget?

364 people responded to this question. 40 people (11.0%) agreed in principle with the proposal to close public toilets to help balance the council budget, and 315 (86.5%) did not agree.

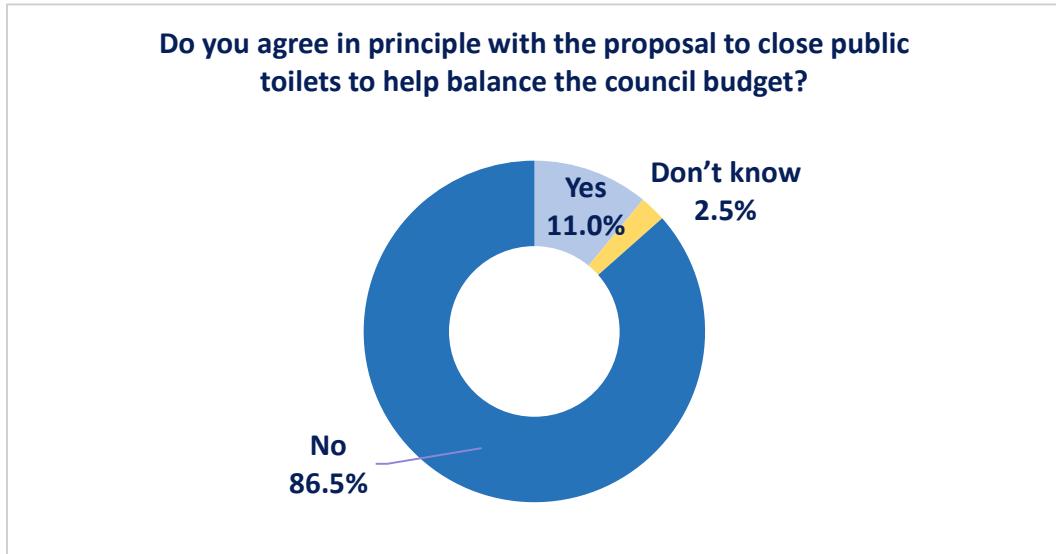


Figure 2: Chart showing the proportion of respondents who agree in principle with the proposal to close public toilets to help balance the council budget.

Do you agree in principle with the proposal to close public toilets to help balance the council budget?	Total	%
Yes	40	11.0%
Don't know	9	2.5%
No	315	86.5%
Total	364	100.0%

Table 2: table totalling agreement with the proposal to close public toilets to help balance the council budget.

Q3: What is your opinion of closing some public toilets at less well-used locations?

Of the 363 who responded to this question, ‘strongly disagree’ was the most common answer – selected by 189 (52.1%). In total, 78.8% disagreed with the statement and 15.2% agreed.

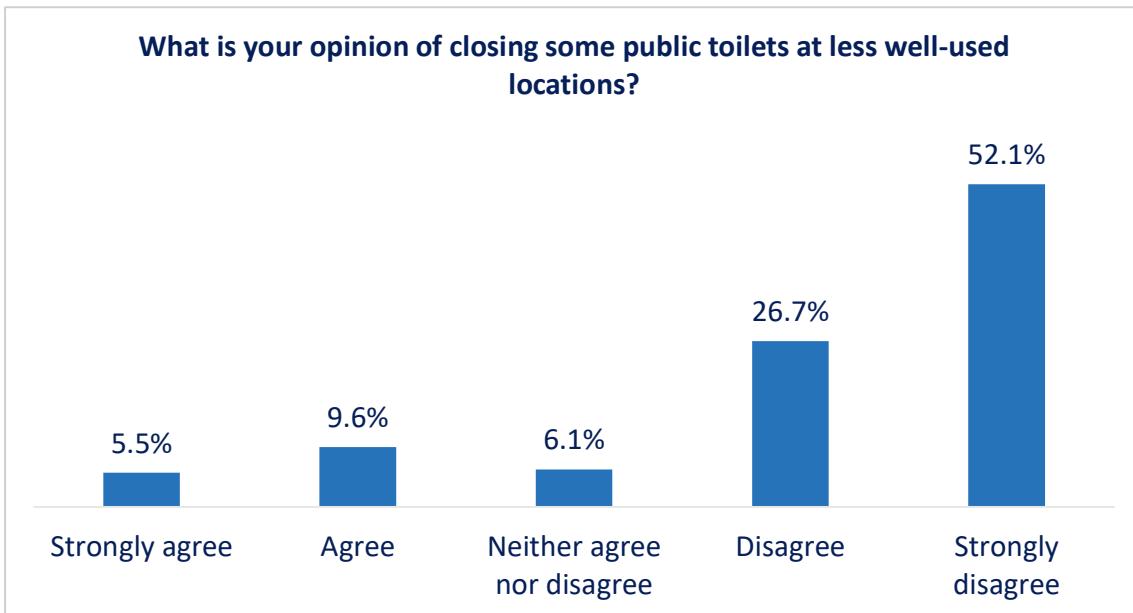


Figure 3: Chart showing the extent to which people agreed with the proposed closure of public toilet facilities.

What is your opinion of closing some public toilets at less well-used locations?	Total	%
Strongly agree	20	5.5%
Agree	35	9.6%
Neither agree nor disagree	22	6.1%
Disagree	97	26.7%
Strongly disagree	189	52.1%
Total	363	100.0%

Table 3: Table totalling the extent to which people agreed with the proposed closure of public toilet facilities.

Q4: Would you pay to use public toilets?

Of the 363 respondents, 273 (75.2%) said that they would not be willing to pay an additional fee to use public toilets in Wirral, 90 people (24.8%) would pay.

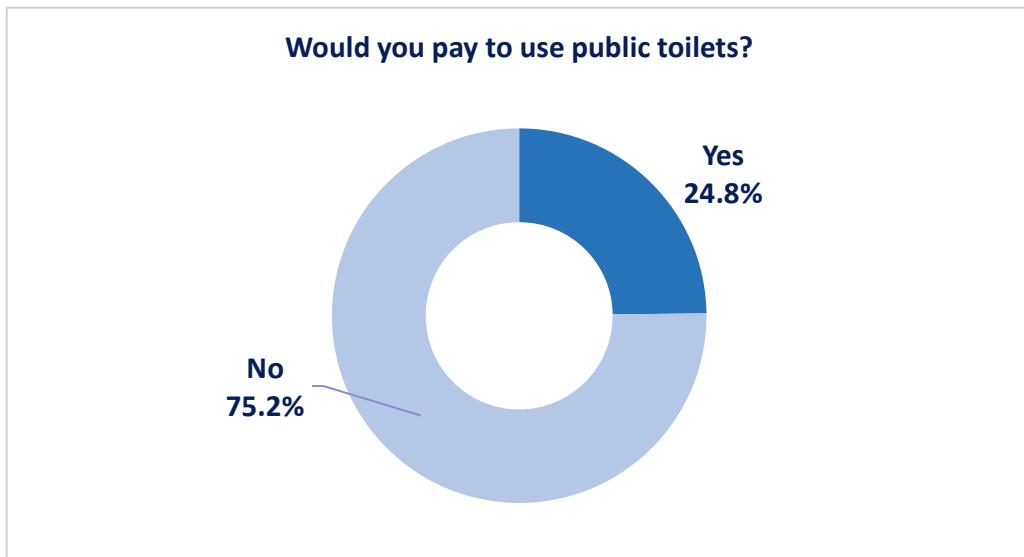


Figure 4: Chart showing the proportion of people who would pay to use public toilet facilities.

Would you pay to use public toilets?	Total	%
Yes	90	24.8%
No	273	75.2%
Total	363	100.0%

Table 4: Table totalling the number of people who would pay to use public toilet facilities.

Q5: How much would you pay to use public toilets?

Of the 272 respondents, 157 (57.7%) would pay up to 30p to use public toilets and 16 (5.9%) would pay up to 40p. 83 (30.5%) would pay up to 50p, while 16 people (5.9%) would pay over 50p.

Note: 272 people responded to this question despite only 90 people previously answering that they would be willing to pay

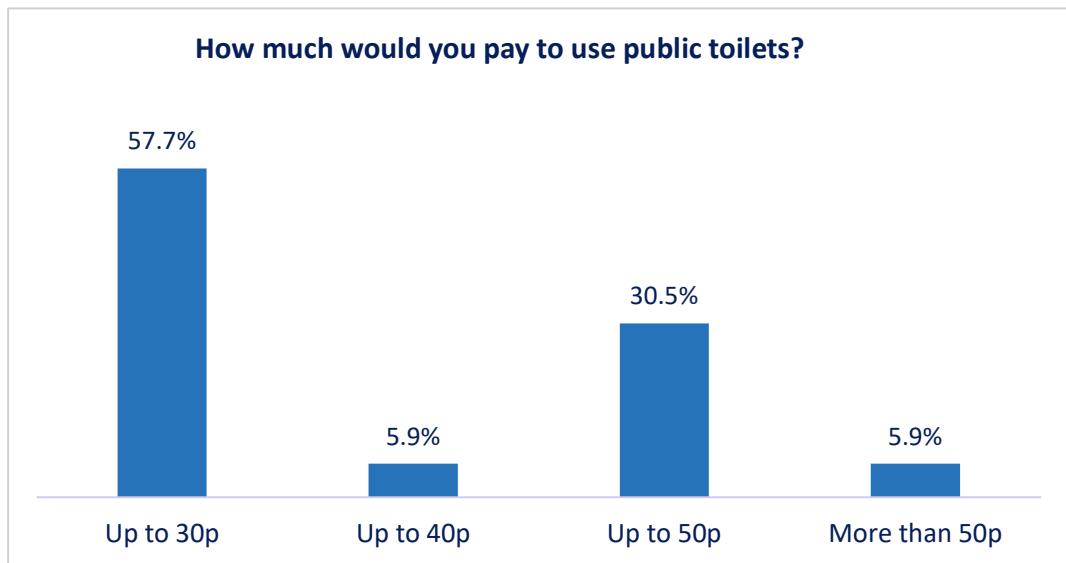


Figure 5: Chart showing the amount people would pay to use a public toilet.

How much would you pay to use public toilets?	Total	%
Up to 30p	157	57.7%
Up to 40p	16	5.9%
Up to 50p	83	30.5%
More than 50p	16	5.9%
Total	272	100.0%

Table 5: Table totalling the amount people would pay to use a public toilet.

Q6: Do you have any alternative ideas to continue to fund future maintenance and cleaning of public toilets in Wirral?

Responses to this question were tagged, categorised by theme. The top themes are highlighted below.

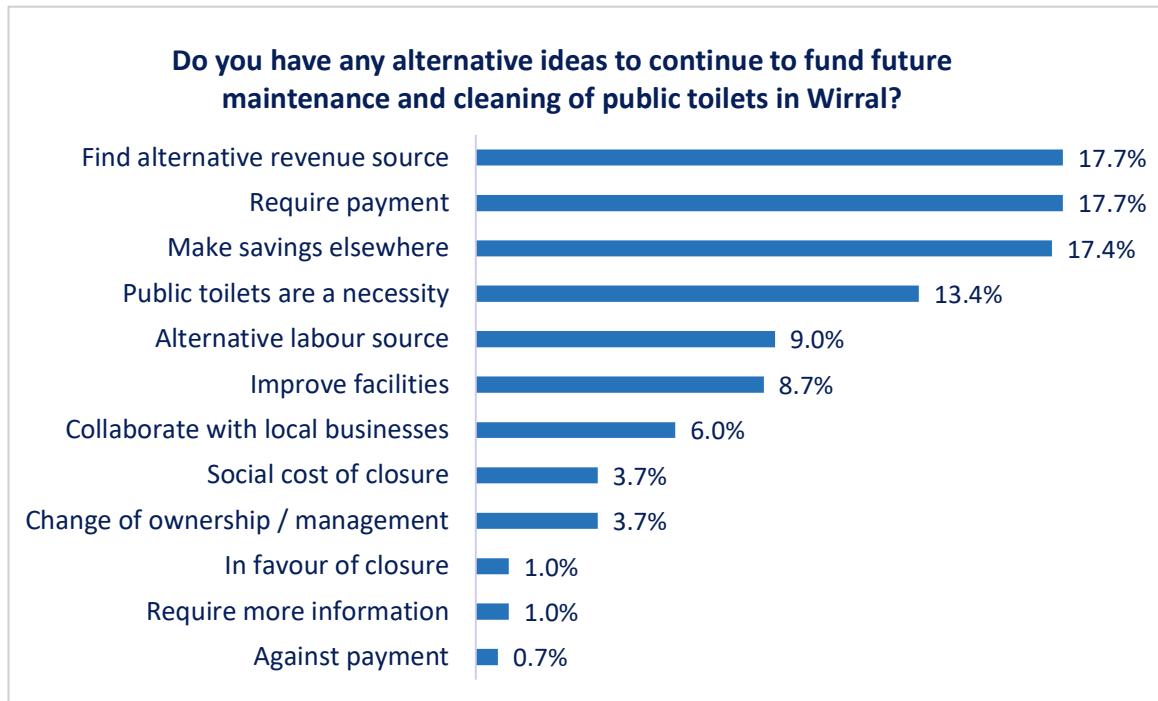


Figure 6: Chart showing the top themes of alternative ideas to fund public toilet maintenance and cleaning.

Tag	Count of Tag	% of Tags
Find alternative revenue source	53	17.7%
Require payment	53	17.7%
Make savings elsewhere	52	17.4%
Public toilets are a necessity	40	13.4%
Alternative labour source	27	9.0%
Improve facilities	26	8.7%
Collaborate with local businesses	18	6.0%
Social cost of closure	11	3.7%
Change of ownership / management	11	3.7%
In favour of closure	3	1.0%
Require more information	3	1.0%
Against payment	2	0.7%
Total	299	100%

Table 6: table totalling the themes of alternative ideas to fund public toilet maintenance and cleaning.

Find New Revenue Source (17.7%)

The leading theme was that to continue to fund public toilet operations, Wirral council should explore new ways to generate revenue. Among this category, respondents suggested that the council should seek to maximise advertisement opportunities for businesses, increase council tax and raise more money through parking charges and fines.

Require Payment (17.7%)

It was commonly suggested that public toilets should be pay to use with the money contributed towards maintenance. However, many highlighted that they would only be happy to pay if it was made easy, with card payment options available and machines readily offering change. Additionally, it was suggested that payment before entering would reduce vandalism, and in turn reduce maintenance costs as a result. Some respondents also stated that they would only be willing to pay for toilet access if they were well maintained and hygienic.

Make Savings Elsewhere (17.4%)

Many suggested that the council should look to make savings elsewhere and keep the public toilet provision in place. It was commonly suggested that the council should reduce the number of councillors, reduce council salaries, and stop lending money to other councils. Additionally, people suggested that public services should be reduced, by closing libraries and leisure facilities.

Public Toilets are a necessity (13.4%)

Respondents often cited that closure of public toilets could have accessibility implications, particularly for the elderly, people with disabilities and those with young children. Additionally, closure of public toilets could have adverse effects on the likelihood, and duration of visits to public places.

Q7: Do you have any additional comments on this budget savings proposal?

Responses to this question were tagged, categorised by theme. The top themes are highlighted below.

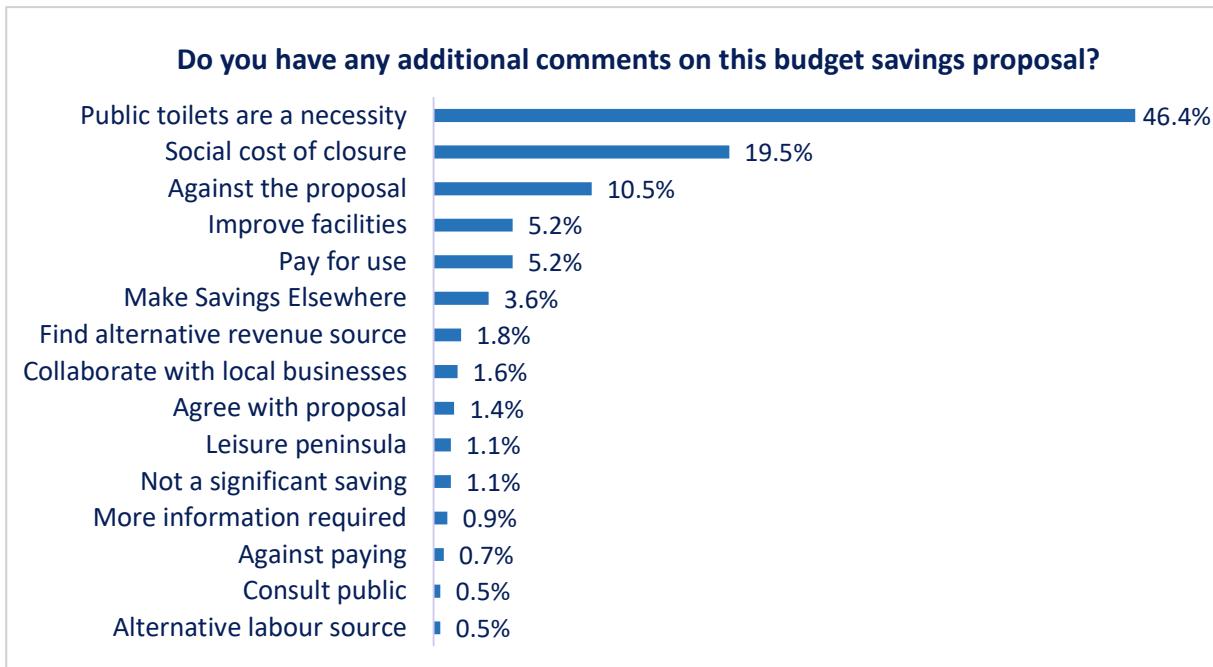


Figure 7: Chart showing the top themes of additional comments.

Tag	Count of Tag	% of tags
Public toilets are a necessity	204	46.4%
Social cost of closure	86	19.5%
Against the proposal	46	10.5%
Improve facilities	23	5.2%
Pay for use	23	5.2%
Make Savings Elsewhere	16	3.6%
Find alternative revenue source	8	1.8%
Collaborate with local businesses	7	1.6%
Agree with proposal	6	1.4%
Leisure peninsula	5	1.1%
Not a significant saving	5	1.1%
More information required	4	0.9%
Against paying	3	0.7%
Consult public	2	0.5%
Alternative labour source	2	0.5%
Total	440	100.0%

Table 7: Table totalling the themes from additional comments.

Public Toilets are a necessity (46.4%)

Respondents often cited that closure of public toilets could have accessibility implications, particularly for the elderly, people with disabilities and those with young children. Additionally, closure of public toilets could have adverse effects on the likelihood, and duration of visits to public places.

Social cost of closure (19.5%)

Many respondents highlighted the potential social cost of closure. With a reduced public toilet availability, there is a disincentive to enter public spaces. Therefore, the public might exercise less, reducing health levels. Additionally, people may have no other choice but to urinate publicly, which lowers hygiene levels and would result in a greater cleaning cost.

Against the proposal (10.5%)

Many comments stated that they disagreed with this proposal.

Improve facilities (5.2%)

Instead of reducing the toilet provisions, some argued they should be invested into. Many believe that more toilets are needed rather than less. Additionally, some suggested that investing into self-cleansing toilets would reduce maintenance costs.

3.2 Direct Representations

One direct representation was received via the dedicated email address supplied for the consultation process. This is provided in Appendix 1.

In relation to public toilets, an online petition was created related to the Vale Park Public Toilet which the campaigners suggest should be rebuilt and reopened following its destruction in Storm Arwen. As at 27/04/2022 09:00 143 people have signed this petition. This petition can be found here:

<http://democracy.wirral.gov.uk/mgEPetitionDisplay.aspx?ID=500000052&RPID=523864828&HPID=523864828>

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.

Most of the respondents (91.8%) classed themselves as local residents.



Figure 8: Who are you registering as?

The gender of respondents was 60.6% female, 35.8% male, with 3.4% preferring not to say and 0.3% preferring their own term.



Figure 9: Gender of respondents

The age group profile is illustrated with the most common age groups were 65-74 years (28.3%), followed by 55-64 years (23.7%). Under 16s were unrepresented and 16–24-year-olds only made up 1.4% of respondents.

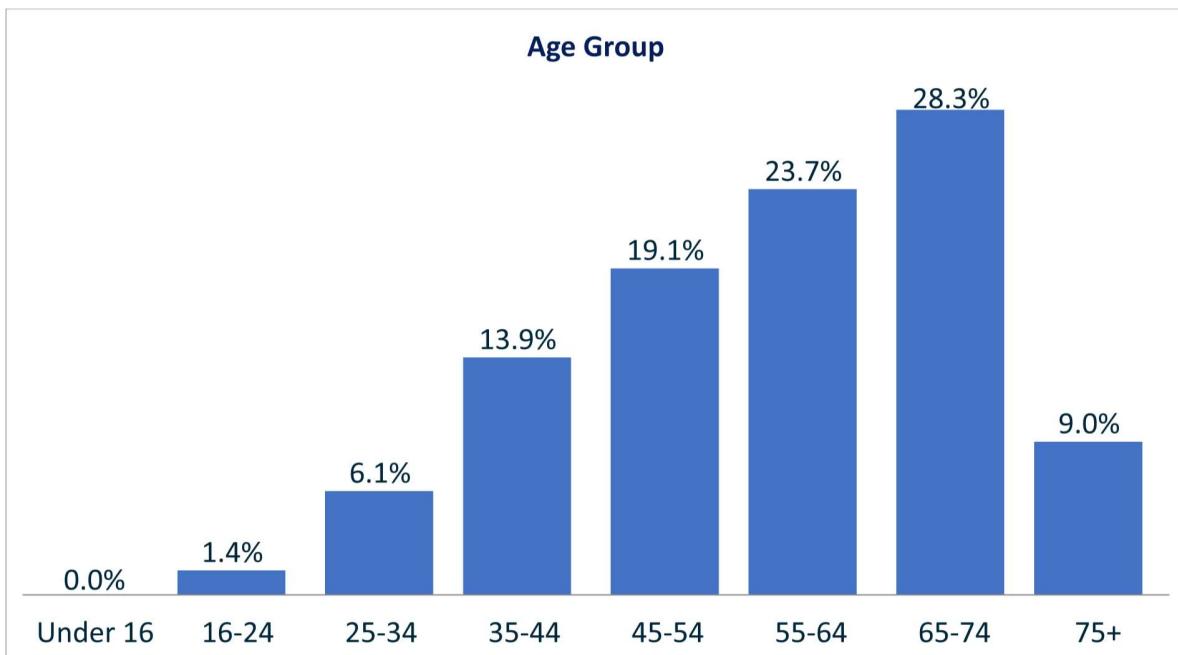


Figure 10: Age group of respondents

93.1% of respondents were white British. Only 3.2% of respondents were of a non-white ethnicity.

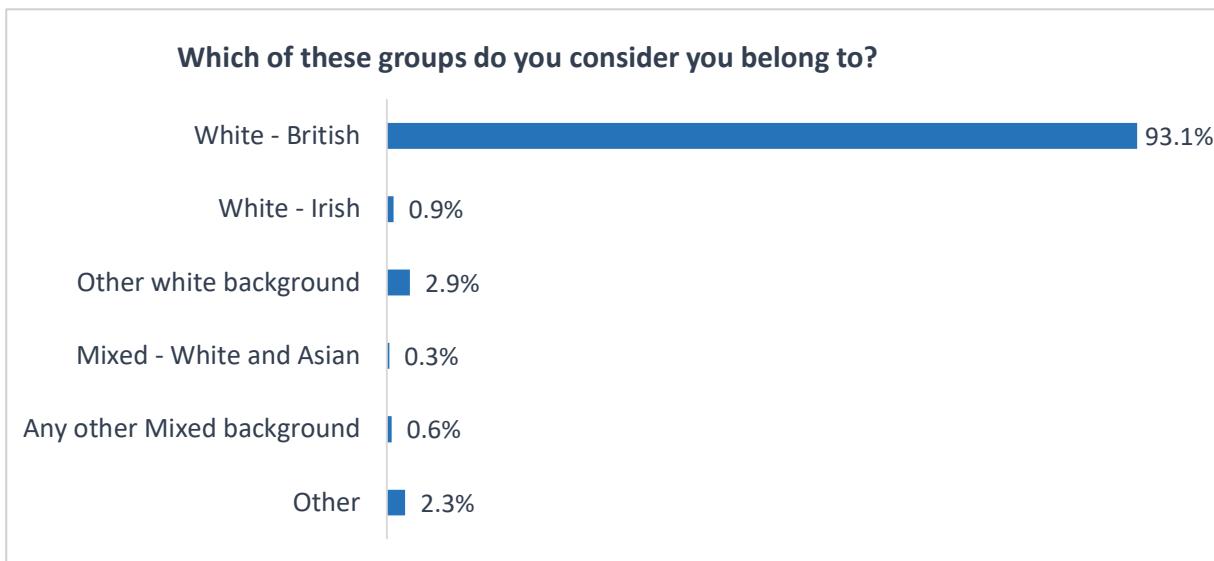


Figure 11: Ethnicity of respondents

79.0% of respondents were heterosexual, 2.6% were gay/ lesbian, 1.1% bisexual and 17.2% preferred not to say.

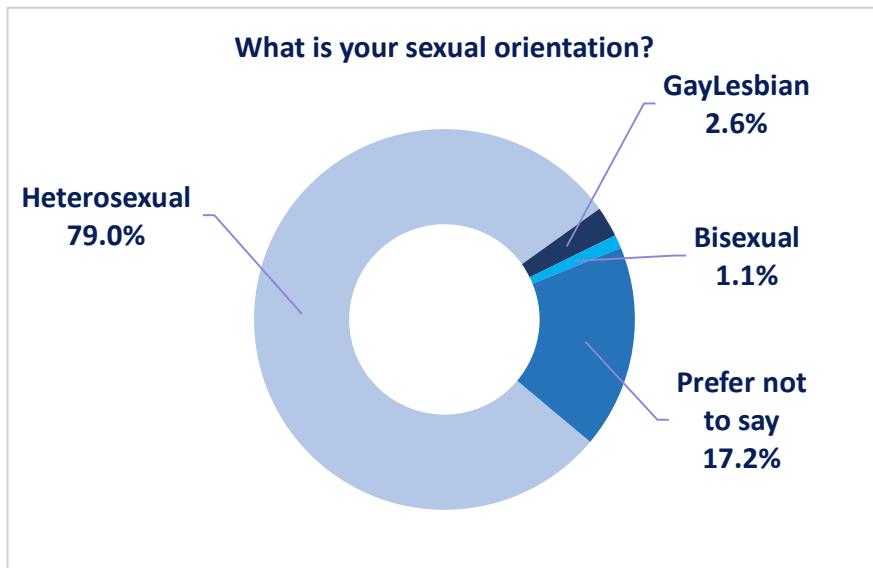


Figure 12: Sexual orientation of respondents

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 a quick poll; 364 people completed the Poll online.

2,700 visited the Wirral Council Local Elections Consultation page of the Have Your Say site, of these 250 downloaded a map of public toilets and 65 downloaded the budget proposal document. 364 people in total completed the questionnaire.

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 either visits via links sent in email (1156 visits) or links clicked from social media sites (981). Email visits generated a rate of engagement of 8%, meaning 8% of these visits resulted in completion of the poll, and social media visits had an engagement rate of 10.6%.

TRAFFIC CHANNEL	AWARE VISITS	INFORMED VISITS (%)	ENGAGED VISITS (%)
EMAIL	1156	429 (37.1%)	92 (8%)
SOCIAL	981	497 (50.7%)	106 (10.8%)
DIRECT	316	154 (48.7%)	86 (27.2%)
REFERRALS	212	147 (69.3%)	75 (35.4%)
SEARCH ENGINE	34	12 (35.3%)	3 (8.8%)
.GOV SITES	2	2 (100%)	2 (100%)

Table 8: Site traffic sources

Appendix 1: Direct Representations

This appendix includes feedback directly sent to the contact email address:
budgetconsult@wirral.gov.uk

"I am very disappointed that there is a proposal to close 9 public conveniences around the Wirral. This leaves no toilets available for any visitors to use should they require to do so. I think this should be one of the basic things that the Council provides."