

WIRRAL COUNCIL

COUNCIL EXCELLENCE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

27 SEPTEMBER 2011

SUBJECT	YOU CHOOSE - BUDGET CONSULTATION
WARD/S AFFECTED	ALL
REPORT OF	DIRECTOR OF FINANCE
RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER	COUNCILLOR STEVE FOULKES
KEY DECISION	NO

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 As part of the 2012/13 Budget Consultation process, on 19 August 2011 the Council commenced a web-based public consultation entitled 'The Great Debate' using an on-line package known as You Choose.
- 1.2 You Choose is a budget simulator developed by YouGov and supported by the Local Government Group which provides residents with the opportunity to suggest changes to close the estimated £25 million budget gap and limit any Council Tax increase for 2012/13. Details have been hand delivered to all residents with the electoral registration forms and a series of You Choose public engagement events are taking place throughout the Borough during the period of the consultation which is due to conclude on 30 November 2011.
- 1.3 Chief Officers have provided information for the simulator which shows the implications for their services of reducing budgets by 10%, 20% and 50% and of increasing budgets by 5%.
- 1.4 This report and a demonstration of You Choose were presented to the Cabinet on 1 September 2011.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 That the report be noted.

3.0 REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 The Local Government and Public Engagement in Health Act 2007 placed upon local authorities a duty to involve. This requires the provision of information and the opportunity for consultation and involvement of residents and other stakeholders. The simulator will be part of a process in engaging and raising the awareness of the residents of the Borough of the budget issues facing the Council.

4.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

- 4.1. The London Borough of Redbridge together with YouGov developed the web based budget simulator which is being used by a number of local authorities including Liverpool and Sefton to seek residents views as to how to close the budget gap.

- 4.2 A letter from the Leader of the Council providing details of the budget consultation as well as the Neighbourhood Plan consultation has been circulated to all residents from 19 August 2011. Access to the budget simulator is available via the Council web-site and at One Stop Shops and Libraries. Events are also being run at a number of venues including leisure facilities and a dedicated telephone line has been set up at the Call Centre to assist members of the public without access to a computer.
- 4.3 The Leader of the Council has requested that all consultations should report back by the end of December and supporting this process the You Choose simulator will remain open until 30 November 2011.

Budget Simulator Format

- 4.4 The format of the simulator allows for budgetary details of up to eight service functions to be displayed with up to ten sub-categories behind each service. The format is determined by the individual Council.
- 4.5 For consistency the format used has followed as closely as possible to the 2010 consultation themes and is linked to the existing Corporate Plan. To provide maximum flexibility and choice to users, services have been divided across the maximum eight service functions:-
- Your Family Adults
 - Your Family Children
 - Your Neighbourhood: Roads and Waste Management
 - Your Neighbourhood: Public Protection
 - Your Neighbourhood: Culture and Leisure
 - Your Economy: Housing and Community
 - Your Economy: Supporting Business
 - Your Council Support for Services
- 4.6 Behind the service functions up to ten sub-categories have been created. These provide details of the service and implications of changes to funding levels. Details of the service functions and sub-categories can be found in the Appendix.
- 4.7 The budgetary information, as in 2010, relates to controllable expenditure categories. This will maximise the opportunity for users to select areas where savings may be possible. The Waste Disposal Authority and Merseytravel levies are outside of Council control, and expenditure linked to equivalent income generation has also been excluded.
- 4.8 The simulator allows users to drag a slider to reduce or increase budgets. A consequence will then arise from making an alteration. For ease of use the consequences have been split into four bandings.
- Budget reduction of 10%.
 - Budget reduction of 20%.
 - Budget reduction of 50%.
 - Budget increase of 5%.

- 4.9 The simulator also has the facility to provide suggestions for raising income and making efficiencies. Residents are asked at the end of the process to submit via a free form text box suggestions as to how the Council might increase income and make savings.
- 4.10 To successfully make a return, users must either reduce the budget gap to zero or below, or submit a budget figure within an acceptable Council Tax increase limit. If users fail to do this they are asked by the You Choose system to go back and reduce budgets further. To maximise returns and minimise users leaving the site without submitting a response, the acceptable Council Tax increase allowed has been set at 3%. This is the level above which the Government has previously indicated it would impose capping powers. The 3% level does not imply any future Council Tax decision but would allow submissions from users who reduced the budget gap from £25 million to within approximately £3.5 million.

The Engagement Process

- 4.11 A schedule of over 100 engagement events has been developed by the Interim Head of Corporate Planning, Engagement and Communication, to run throughout September, October and November at a variety of locations. These events will consist of guided workshops and drop in surgeries at Council, community and partner locations as well as 'retail' events, where staff will be available in shopping centres and supermarkets helping people complete the simulator.
- 4.12 Additional targeted engagement will be completed within identified 'hard to reach' demographic groups and geographic areas. This will involve events and outreach activity with older people, BME communities, vulnerable adults and younger people. Additional events will also be scheduled in those areas with lower levels of home-internet access.
- 4.13 The simulator will also be promoted extensively through Council facilities, the local media and through the networks of our partners in the public and community, voluntary and faith sectors. It will also be promoted heavily via the Council website, www.wirral.gov.uk, and will be hosted through a dedication section of the site, www.wirral.gov.uk/budget2012, which will also contain the schedule of outreach and engagement activity.
- 4.14 This consultation will run concurrently with the Neighbourhood Plan project. Cabinet resolved on 23 June 2011 to develop neighbourhood plans for each Area Forum. The key principles of the Neighbourhood Plans are to:
- Accurately reflect the real challenges for the area based on engagement and consultation with local communities.
 - Set out a vision for a community and identify local priorities within the area.
 - Robustly influence the way the Council invests resources and delivers services in a local area.
 - Determine the future distribution of forum funding.

- 4.15 A full consultation programme is in place to cover all parts of the borough with individual Area Forum consultation plans developed with ward Councillors. This comprehensive approach will ensure that the consultation is fully inclusive to enable the Neighbourhood Plans to represent all communities. Council buildings including One Stop Shops, Libraries and leisure centres are designated places where local residents can provide their views and the Community Engagement Team are also carrying out a series of focus group meetings with as many community groups as possible.
- 4.16 The findings of the consultation will be reported to communities in a series of meetings during October 2011 with draft Neighbourhood Plans agreed by December 2011. A summary of this timetable is outlined below.

Activity	Timescale
Programme of community consultation events	July to Sept 2011
Findings to be collated	September 2011
Findings reported to Area Forums and local action plans developed in response to the findings	Oct / Nov 2011
Neighbourhood Plans in place	December 2011

5.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 5.1 There are a number of risks involved within the budget simulator consultation.

Risk	Mitigation
Low response rate limits usefulness of response	Every household will receive a letter regarding the budget simulator. Dedicated telephone line and contact points established. Extensive programme of events taking place
Web site provides limited information on which to seek opinion.	All departments have been engaged and have provided detailed information regarding their service provision and cost of services. Wirral has included more information than similar authorities who have used You Choose.
Access to web site and Equality Issues	Responses can be made via telephone and at contact points. Community wide programme of events being run to engage with harder to reach groups and those without direct access to IT
Decisions arising from simulator are not fully consulted upon	The simulator is part of a community engagement process providing an overview of public views. Further consultation will be undertaken regarding any specific service changes.

6.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 6.1 No other options were considered.

7.0 CONSULTATION

7.1 The You Choose Budget Simulator is one of the means the Council is using to consult with the public.

8.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS

8.1 The consultation programme sets out to engage with the voluntary, community and faith sector.

9.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The use of the You Choose budget simulator has been made free to use for all members of the Local Government Association. The optional data analysis reports provided by YouGov will cost approximately £3,000.

10.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The simulator is part of the Council duty to involve but does not replace the requirement to consult with service users on more specific budget proposals..

11.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There are no specific equalities implications arising directly from this report. The You Choose budget simulator is an electronic web based tool. Input to the budget simulator process is being provided via a range of alternative methods including telephone contact points and engagement events.

12.0 CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

12.1 There are no carbon reduction implications arising directly from this report.

13.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

13.1 There are no planning and community safety implications arising directly from this report.

FNCE/197/11

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SUBJECT HISTORY

Council Meeting	Date
Cabinet	1 September 2011

APPENDIX

Category	Budget £m
1 Your Family: Adults	
1 Locality Provision (DASS)	33.9
2 Services for Regaining Independence (DASS)	2.3
3 Support to meet Personal Choice (DASS)	6.6
4 Social Work teams providing Specialist Support (DASS)	20.6
5 Early Support and Advice (DASS)	6.6
6 Market Management and Development (DASS)	0.2
7 Support for Commissioning (DASS)	3.7
8 Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults (DASS)	0.2
Total	74.1
2 Your Family: Children's Services	
1 Area Integrated Youth Service (CYP)	6.2
2 Transport (CYP)	8.6
3 Children with Disabilities (CYP)	3.9
4 Early years, Surestart and Children's Centres (CYP)	10.1
5 Looked after Children care provision (CYP)	15.2
6 School and Learning Support (CYP)	6.1
7 Children in Need / Looked after Children (CYP)	17.1
8 Support for Vulnerable Children & Special Educational Needs (CYP)	4.7
Total	71.9
3 Your Neighbourhood - Roads & Waste Management	
1 Waste Collections and Street Cleansing (TS)	13.4
2 Traffic & Road Safety (TS)	2.2
3 Highways Management (TS)	6.2
Total	21.8
4 Your Neighbourhood - Public Protection	
1 Health, Safety and Resilience (TS)	0.3
2 Trading Standards (Law)	0.7
3 Community Safety (Law)	2.5
4 Environmental Health (Law)	1.4
Total	4.9
5 Your Neighbourhood - Culture & Leisure	
1 Arts and Museums(TS)	1.1
2 Parks & Countryside (TS)	5.9
3 Sport and Recreation (TS)	3.7
4 Libraries and One Stop Shops (Fin)	7.9
Total	18.6

6	Your Economy - Housing & Community	
1	Support for the Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector (CS)	0.6
2	Supporting People and Adaptations (CS)	10.0
3	Housing Strategy & Homelessness (CS)	3.2
4	Private Sector Housing (CS)	1.0
5	Resident Engagement, Consultation & Communication (CS)	0.7
	Total	15.5
7	Your Economy - Supporting Business	
1	Tourism (CS)	0.6
2	Development Management and Building Control (CS)	1.9
3	Forward Planning (CS)	0.3
4	Economic Development (CS)	4.4
5	Business Support and Attracting Inward Investment (CS)	1.9
	Total	9.1
8	Your Council - Support for Services	
1	Planning Council Services & Monitoring Improvements (CS)	0.4
2	Supporting our Services (CS)	0.7
3	Financial Services (Fin)	2.8
4	Information Technology Services (Fin)	8.0
5	Benefits and Revenues (Fin)	6.5
6	Call Centre (Fin)	1.9
7	Legal & Member Services (Law)	4.9
8	Human Resources/Organisational Development/Payroll (Law)	4.2
9	Asset Management (Law)	9.0
	Total	38.4
	Overall Total	254.3