

Cabinet – 11 December 2013

Financial Plan 2014/15 to 2018/19: Update on Draft Revenue Budget and Capital Programme, and outcome of budget consultation to date

Portfolio: Councillor Towe – Resources (Lead Portfolio)

Related Portfolios: All

Service: Finance – council wide

Wards: All

Key decision: No

Forward plan: No

1. Summary

- 1.1 Draft budget proposals have been distributed to scrutiny panels and stakeholders for consultation as part of the budget setting process. The final budget, including any changes arising from consultation arrangements, and final allocation of government funding, will be presented to Cabinet on 5 February 2014 for recommendation to Council, and will be considered by full Council on 27 February 2014.
- 1.2 The report also details the recommendations from each scrutiny panel on the draft revenue and capital budget proposals, along with findings from the second stage of resident and stakeholder consultation.
- 1.3 The Autumn Statement is due to be announced on 5 December, after the date of despatch of this report, therefore any funding implications for the council arising from the announcement will be presented in a supplementary report.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Cabinet note the feedback from scrutiny and performance panels, and feedback to date from the second stage of public / stakeholder consultation as set out in this report, and consider any changes to the draft budget proposals in light of this feedback.
- 2.2 That Cabinet refer this report to all scrutiny and performance panels for consultation, to enable their comments to be considered by Cabinet on 5 February 2014.
- 2.3 That Cabinet delegate to the Chief Financial Officer authority to approve the council tax base in order to inform preceptors of the final figures by 31 January 2014, in line with our statutory deadline. Final figures will be reported to Council on 27 February 2014 within the budget report.

3. Report detail

- 3.1 The draft revenue budget proposals and draft capital programme were reported to Cabinet on 23 October 2013. There are currently no changes to that previously reported, however the budget is an evolving process, with recognition that proposals may change during consultation (which ends in January) and prior to formal recommendation to full Council on 27 February 2014. We are also awaiting publication of the draft settlement for 2014/15, which is not expected to be known until after the Chancellors Autumn Statement on 5 December 2013, which may have implications on the current proposals.
- 3.2 As outlined in the supporting papers to Cabinet on 23 October 2013, we are anticipating the need to deliver:
- A gross revenue budget of c£620m and revenue savings of £18.97m in 2014/15.
 - A draft capital programme for 2014/15 which totals £37.6m, including new capital investment funded from the council's own resources of £14.05m (funded by capital receipts and unsupported borrowing) and externally funded schemes of £23.56m (funded by capital grants representing a balanced programme for 2014/15. In addition, the report sets out a further two years of proposals for 2015/16 to 2016/17.
- 3.3 The draft revenue budget proposals and draft capital programme were also referred to all Scrutiny and performance panels. **Appendix 1** summarises the feedback from each panel.
- 3.4 Cabinet agreed that draft savings proposals with a direct impact on services, totalling £7.92m, would be referred to public consultation. Information on the full proposals are also contained on the council's website. The outcome of the second stage of resident and stakeholder consultation, which ended on 14 November 2013, is attached at **Appendix 2**.

Leasing programme 2014/15 onwards

- 3.5 Leasing minimises the call on capital resources by spreading the acquisition cost over some years. Revenue funds are needed to finance operating leases. The 2014/15 leasing programme is summarised in Table 1 overleaf by portfolio. The revenue implications of the leasing programme of £1.84m for 2014/15 are included in the draft revenue budget.

Table 1 : Leasing Programme 2014/15 by Portfolio				
		Revenue		
	Capital Programme	New Starts	Current Leases	Total
	£m	£m	£m	£m
Portfolio:				
Environment	3.66	0.64	1.18	1.82
Resources	0	0	0.01	0.01
Social Care & Inclusion	0	0	0.01	0.01
Total Leasing	3.66	0.64	1.20	1.84

- 3.6 The prudential system allows borrowing to fund the purchase of leased items. This expenditure would be treated as capital expenditure and not revenue meaning the council would buy the assets outright. The decision to lease or buy depends on several variables, for example, the costs of borrowing and the residual value of the asset at the end of its leased life. Before each drawdown, our leasing advisors produce a report and recommend which financing approach is most appropriate. A rigorous evaluation is then undertaken before a decision to lease or buy is made, ensuring value for money.
- 3.7 The prudential system requires the setting of indicators for the likely level of capital expenditure each year. Decisions to lease or buy cause total expenditure to fluctuate during the year. Therefore regular monitoring reports to Cabinet and Corporate Management Team on the council's financial performance will include prudential indicators.

Funding changes notified / expected since Cabinet on 23 October 2013

- 3.8 The chancellors Autumn Statement was delivered on 5 December 2013, after despatch of this report. If there are any implications for Walsall, a supplementary paper will be circulated for consideration.

Council Tax Base

- 3.9 The authority is legally obliged to set the council tax base by 31 January each year and to notify the precepting authorities (i.e. Police and Fire & Civil Defence Authorities) accordingly. This is integral to the budget setting process, as it is required to calculate the annual council tax.
- 3.10 The council's Constitution (Part 5 s10.7) specifies that the council tax base will be considered and set by Cabinet. The calculation of the tax base is an administrative function, requiring officers to calculate based on the number of properties, which is subject to change. Cabinet are therefore asked to delegate responsibility to the Chief Financial Officer to approve the council tax base and to notify precepting authorities by 31 January 2014, to meet our statutory obligations.

4. Council priorities

- 4.1 The budget process follows council priorities, including the agreement to use marmot objectives to help redirect existing resources through the implementation and rollout of the working smarter change programme.

5. Risk management

- 5.1 Managers are required to deliver service and improvement targets on time, to standard and within budget.
- 5.2 The budget process is governed by the overarching medium term financial strategy. Risk management is an integral part of this activity and is embedded in budget preparation, monitoring and forecasting to enable potential budget variances and risks to be identified early and addressed.
- 5.3 There is a significant amount of uncertainty around Government funding for 2015/16 and beyond, worsening economic growth position and increased national borrowing levels. The medium term financial outlook will need to be updated once the worsening economic predictions are confirmed.

6. Financial implications

- 6.1 The council must set a balanced budget to meet its legal requirements as set out under legal implications.

7. Legal implications

- 7.1 Under the Local Government Act, an authority must set a council tax and balanced budget, giving 14 days notice of the council tax level prior to the date of billing.
- 7.2 The collection fund and council tax base are governed by Statutory Instrument 2012 No.2914 of the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012. We are legally obliged to set the council tax base and notify the precepting authorities by 31 January each year.

8. Property implications

- 8.1 Any direct property implications as a result of service redesign and revenue savings options will be assessed as part of the council's strategic property review.

9. Staffing implications

- 9.1 There will be some staffing implications arising from this report, and consultation with employees and unions will be undertaken in accordance with required procedures.

10. Equality implications

- 10.1 None directly associated with this report. An equality impact assessment is undertaken on all proposals and on the overall budget as assessed by the council's Equality team.

11. Consultation

- 11.1 Section 138 of the Local Government and Public involvement in Health Act 2007 placed a general duty on every local authority in England to take such steps as it considers appropriate to secure that representatives of local persons (or of local persons of a particular description) are involved in the exercise of any of its functions, among other things by being consulted about the exercise of the function. The 2010 Equality Act whilst not imposing a specific duty to consult, lays a requirement to have due regard to the equality impact when exercising its function.
- 11.2 Consultation is an integral part of the budget process and a wide programme of consultation was undertaken to consult with a wide range of stakeholders (i.e. councillors, residents, service users, business representatives, voluntary and community organisations, etc.).
- 11.3 Scrutiny and performance panels have received draft revenue and capital budget proposals, and their recommendations are reported at **Appendix 1**. Panels will receive and consider any revisions to the draft budget proposals, and feedback from budget consultation during December 2013 / January 2014, with further recommendations to be reported back to Cabinet on 5 February 2014.
- 11.4 This year, over 200 members of staff from across all directorates who have interaction with key groups / stakeholders, were briefed on the budget message and were involved throughout the budget consultation process which took the form of two phases.

Phase one (early September to October 23rd) saw thousands of 'Budget have your say' postcards and posters distributed. An online form and email were used to capture feedback from the public on where they think savings can and cannot be made.

As well as the staff briefings, budget information was shared via the Intranet and core brief, on pay slips and posters in offices. An online form and an email address for staff were also used to capture feedback.

Phase two (24th October to 14th November) focused on the draft budget policy proposals, allowing for a more informed and meaningful conversation with the public and staff. Staff from phase one have been involved with 38 face to face consultation events at various locations in the borough. These varied in times and covered various council buildings (e.g. libraries, leisure centres, First Stop Shop) along with town centre locations with support from the First Stop Express, and sessions at supermarkets. Specific meetings were also held with young people and other user groups including those with disabilities.

Responses from phase one;		Responses from phase two;	
Postcards	238	Postcards	191
Online and email	174	Online and email	30
Staff	149	Staff	29
		Face to face	560
<i>Total</i>	<i>561</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>810</i>

Overall 1,371 individual comments were received. Comments were gathered from a broad sample of the population. The non random approach means the response is not statistically representative, however it does provide a useful snapshot of opinion.

The attached report at **Appendix 2** summarises the main findings from the second stage of resident and stakeholder budget consultation. The grey boxes in the attached report on responses from Walsall Council on each savings proposal will be completed following consideration by Cabinet, and reported as part of the final budget report to Cabinet on 5 February 2014.

- 11.5 The report is prepared in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer, the Chief Executive, relevant managers and executive directors.

Background papers: Various financial working papers.

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James Walsh
Assistant Director – Finance (CFO)
03 December 2013



Councillor C Towe
Portfolio Holder – Resources
03 December 2013

Appendices: -

- 1 Feedback from Scrutiny and Performance Panels -
 - 1a Social Care and Inclusion
 - 1b Health
 - 1c Community Services and Environment
 - 1d Regeneration
 - 1e Children and Young People
 - 1f Corporate
- 2 Report findings from the second stage of resident/stakeholder consultation

Draft Budget 2014/15: Recommendation of the Social Care and Inclusion Scrutiny and Performance Panel following Budget Consultation

Summary of report

This report presents the comments and recommendations from the Social Care and Inclusion Scrutiny and Performance Panel following consideration of the draft revenue and capital budget proposals 2014/15 at the panel's meeting on 7 November 2013. This will enable consideration by Cabinet on 11 December 2013.

All scrutiny and performance panels have received draft revenue and capital budget proposals in respect of the services falling within their remit. Any changes to these proposals, following consultation, will be reported to a future meeting of the panel, providing an opportunity to make further recommendations to Cabinet. Cabinet may wish to consider the feedback contained within this report in formulating their draft budget proposals

The Panel undertook detailed consideration of the key proposals for the Social Care and Health Portfolio. This included significant discussion of the proposed removal of recruitability payments in relation to Links to Work. The Panel also considered a number of proposals for reviewing current services which officers considered were not consistent with the revised operating model. This included a review of care costs in extra care housing, as well as short term placements, with a reduction in the number of community satellite bases also proposed. The Panel raised specific concern in relation to the proposed removal of the welfare rights post providing advice and expertise in relation to health related benefits.

The Panel resolved that the following statement and recommendation be considered by Cabinet:

The Panel noted the proposed budget changes in Social Care and Inclusion as a result of the financial constraints, with concern at the potential impact on service delivery in several areas.

The Panel view with concern the emerging issue of the proposed removal of £110k of funding from recruitability payments, including Links to Work, Recruitability and Recruitability Plus services. Further to this the Panel would recommend that further consideration be given to retain the payments, allowances and other expenses for those who use the Links to Work service.

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Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tim Oliver'. The signature is stylized, with the 'T' and 'O' being prominent and the 'i' and 'l' being more fluid and connected to the rest of the name.

Councillor Tim Oliver
Chair, Social Care & Inclusion Scrutiny and
Performance Panel

12 November 2013

Draft Budget 2014/15: Recommendations of the Health Scrutiny and Performance Panel following Budget Consultation

Summary of report

This report presents the comments and recommendations from the Health Scrutiny and Performance Panel following consideration of the draft revenue and capital budget proposals 2014/15 at the panel's meeting on 14 November 2013. This will enable consideration by Cabinet on 11 December 2013.

All scrutiny and performance panels have received draft revenue and capital budget proposals in respect of the services falling within their remit. Any changes to these proposals, following consultation, will be reported to a future meeting of the panel, providing an opportunity to make further recommendations to Cabinet. Cabinet may wish to consider the feedback contained within this report in formulating their draft budget proposals

The Panel Resolved:

- 1. The Health Scrutiny and Performance Panel request that Cabinet give further consideration of the budget proposal to 'remove Social Care recruitability payments' and that further consideration is given to its options for the future. The Health Scrutiny and Performance Panel request a report containing a detailed business case to ensure the sustainability of the service for the future.**
- 2. The Health Scrutiny and Performance Panel wish to receive a further report on the proposal to remove the quality assurance team, and further assurances that its functions will continue to be executed**
- 3. The review of welfare support and advice is taken to the Health Scrutiny Panel as soon as possible, to reassure the Health Scrutiny Panel that residents will continue to be supported.**

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Signed:

Marco Longhi

Councillor M. Longhi
Chair, Health Scrutiny and Performance Panel

15 November 2013

Draft Budget 2014/15: Recommendations of the Community Services and Environment Scrutiny and Performance Panel following Budget Consultation

Summary of report

This report presents the comments and recommendations from the Community Services and Environment Scrutiny and Performance Panel following consideration of the draft revenue and capital budget proposals 2014/15 at the panel's meeting on 20 November 2013. This will enable consideration by Cabinet on 11 December 2013.

All scrutiny and performance panels have received draft revenue and capital budget proposals in respect of the services falling within their remit. Any changes to these proposals, following consultation, will be reported to a future meeting of the panel, providing an opportunity to make further recommendations to Cabinet. Cabinet may wish to consider the feedback contained within this report in formulating their draft budget proposals

The Panel Resolved:

That the report was noted.

Signed:



Councillor V. Woodruff

Chair, Community Services and Environment Scrutiny and Performance Panel

Signed:



Jamie Morris
Executive Director Neighbourhood Services

21st November 2013

Author

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Draft Budget 2014/15: Recommendations of the Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel following Budget Consultation

Summary of report

This report presents the comments and recommendations from the Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel following consideration of the draft revenue and capital budget proposals 2014/15 at the panel's meeting on 25 November 2013. This will enable consideration by Cabinet on 11 December 2013.

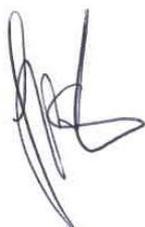
All scrutiny and performance panels have received draft revenue and capital budget proposals in respect of the services falling within their remit. Any changes to these proposals, following consultation, will be reported to a future meeting of the panel, providing an opportunity to make further recommendations to Cabinet. Cabinet may wish to consider the feedback contained within this report in formulating their draft budget proposals

The Panel noted the draft revenue and capital budget proposals for 2014/15.

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Simon Neilson
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Regeneration

Signed:



Councillor Louise Harrison
Chair, Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance
Panel

26 November 2013

Draft Budget 2014/15: Recommendations of the Children's and Young People Scrutiny and Performance Panel following Budget Consultation

Summary of report

This report presents the comments and recommendations from the Children and Young People Scrutiny and Performance Panel following consideration of the draft revenue and capital budget proposals 2014/15 at the panel's meeting on 26 November 2013. This will enable consideration by Cabinet on 11 December 2013.

All scrutiny and performance panels have received draft revenue and capital budget proposals in respect of the services falling within their remit. Any changes to these proposals, following consultation, will be reported to a future meeting of the panel, providing an opportunity to make further recommendations to Cabinet. Cabinet may wish to consider the feedback contained within this report in formulating their draft budget proposals.

The Panel acknowledged, with concern, that cuts would need to be made given the overall savings required for the Authority. In particular, discussion was held with regard to the proposed reduction in transport costs (including Special Educational Needs) by strictly adhering to the policy. Doing so would impact on some parents that had previously received assistance but would not in future. Members were concerned that this would impact upon parents' ability to ensure that children were able to travel to school safely. They were also particularly disquieted in relation to the review of transport funding in relation to provision of services to children with disabilities.

In relation to proposed savings which could be realised by a review of targeted youth support and targeted careers information, advice and guidance services, Members sought assurance that despite savings, there would be adequate support available.

Further discussion was held regarding the £930,000 reduction in relation to Children's Centres. The Panel requested further clarity and a report to the next meeting providing detail around the proposed clustering arrangement, impact on staff and timescales for implementation.

The Panel Resolved:

- 1. That a report on Children's Centres be submitted to the Children's and Young People's Scrutiny and Performance Panel to be held on 14 January, 2014;**
- 2. That the draft revenue budget and capital programme for 2014/15 for the Children's Services Portfolio be noted.**

Author

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Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rose Collinson". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Rose Collinson
Interim Executive Director
Children's Services

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "B. Cassidy". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Councillor B. Cassidy
Chair, Children's and Young People
Scrutiny and Performance Panel

27 November 2013

Draft Budget 2014/15: Recommendations of the Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel following Budget Consultation

Summary of report

This report presents the comments and recommendations from the Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel following consideration of the draft revenue and capital budget proposals 2014/15 at the panel's meeting on 28 November 2013. This will enable consideration by Cabinet on 11 December 2013.

All scrutiny and performance panels have received draft revenue and capital budget proposals in respect of the services falling within their remit. Any changes to these proposals, following consultation, will be reported to a future meeting of the panel, providing an opportunity to make further recommendations to Cabinet. Cabinet may wish to consider the feedback contained within this report in formulating their draft budget proposals.

At its meeting the Panel considered the proposals for the Resources Portfolio and considered the Council-wide financial plan 2014/15 – 2018/19.

Resources Portfolio

The Panel discussed the draft Resources budget and asked a number of questions. Below is a summary of the topics discussed:

Draft Capital Programme

Social Care IT systems review and enhancement

Following a question it was explained that investment was required to replace the existing social care IT system with a different software package that had increased compatibility with the systems used by other local authorities.

Replenish Smarter Workplaces capital pot

It was explained that this money would be used to complete the upgrade of the human resources IT system.

Revenue Budget

Reduce participation in recruitability scheme

A Member expressed concern about the reduction of spending in this area. The Portfolio Holder (Resources) clarified that he was supportive of the scheme and had been mindful to retain some placements but a reduction was necessary to assist in making savings.

My Money, My Home, My Job

A Member asked how many staff redundancies could be expected following the customer focused redesign in this area? It was explained that primarily management and support roles would be reduced with frontline resources maintained.

Efficiencies through stopping use of ATAR, the electronic time recording system

A Member expressed concern regarding the proposal to cease use of the current electronic time recording system used by staff. He felt that loss of the system could result in a loss of management control and be open to abuse.

The meeting discussed the advantages and disadvantages of different time recording methods and the need to ensure they were fit for purpose for a modern organisation.

Print & Design

Members on the Panel considered the proposed closure of the in-house print and design unit and reflected that the service had been seeking to make improvements for a number of years.

Council-wide Financial Position 2014/15 – 2018/19

The Panel considered all portfolio plans for future service delivery along with the draft revenue and capital budgets for 2014/15.

The Panel discussed the draft budget. They noted the recommendations made by the Health and Social Care Inclusion Scrutiny and Performance Panels and asked a number of questions. Below is a summary of the topics discussed:

Children's Services - Review of targeted youth support and targeted careers information, advice and guidance services

The Panel was reassured that consultation would take place on this proposal.

Children's Services - Expiry of Spurgeons contract for family support

The contract had now expired so the saving had been achieved.

Children's Services – Corporate Parenting; Internal residential; review of night time provision in homes

Members requested further information on this proposed saving.

Regeneration and Transport – Asset Management – service redesign and restructure

This saving would be achieved through staff savings.

Whilst respecting the current financial situation, the Chair expressed concern as he felt it was unsustainable to keep cutting budgets. He felt that Local Government was bearing the brunt of the Governments cost savings.

The Panel Resolved:

That:

- 1. the Resources portfolio plan and draft revenue and capital budget for 2014/15 be noted;**
 - 2. the recommendations of the Health and Social Care Scrutiny and Performance Panels be noted;**
 - 3. further information be provided to Members regarding the review of night time provision in homes under the children's services portfolio;**
- and;**
- 4. the financial plan 2014/15 – 2018/19 be noted.**

Signed:



Rory Borealis
Executive Director
Resources

Signed:



Councillor S. Coughlan
Chair, Corporate Scrutiny and Performance
Panel

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28 November 2013



Findings from Budget Consultation: Financial Year 2014/15

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1. Executive summary

- 1.1.** Between early September and 14 November 2013 over 1,300 comments on the council's budget were received.
- 1.2.** This level of response is good, with comments gathered from a broad sample of the population. However the non random approach means the response is not statistically representative and thus provides a snapshot of opinion of those people who responded; in writing, online or in face to face conversations with staff.
- 1.3.** General feedback on the budget as well as specific comments on draft budget policy proposals have been gathered, collated and summarised under common themes.
- 1.4.** Findings summarised here should be considered in line with service specific consultation and feedback and other relevant data where available.
- 1.5.** Feedback clearly shows that people want services for the most vulnerable adults and services for children to be protected, with investment rather than cuts imposed. People with disabilities are particularly concerned about the future and people of all ages are worried about the impact of cuts on the elderly.
- 1.6.** Services for children and young people are a priority and people want to see services extended and improved and not be subject to budget cuts. Giving young people the best start in life through provision of services and support is seen as crucial for their futures. Childrens Centres are very much valued and people are worried they might close.
- 1.7.** People want every effort made to minimise cuts on front line services by targeting cuts internally, from the top down. Streamlining management structures, tightening up HR policies to reduce employee costs, cutting out all non essential spend and making do.
- 1.8.** Making simple savings by lowering energy usage in council buildings was something people want to see the council actively doing, such as turning off lights and turning the heating down. Turning off or dimming street lights during the small hours was well supported.
- 1.9.** Reducing the number of Councillors and associated costs was also frequently mentioned as an area where cuts could be made.
- 1.10.** Feedback on specific draft policy proposals reflects the general comments. Proposals affecting vulnerable adults and children tend not to be supported, whilst proposals involving changes to services with the aim of achieving better value for money were, but only if the level of service is not affected.
- 1.11.** Feedback gathered shows that 6 proposals out of 28 are not supported, totalling £894,400.
- 1.12.** When considering these findings, the details covered in sections 3 and 4 of this report should be reviewed.

2. Introduction

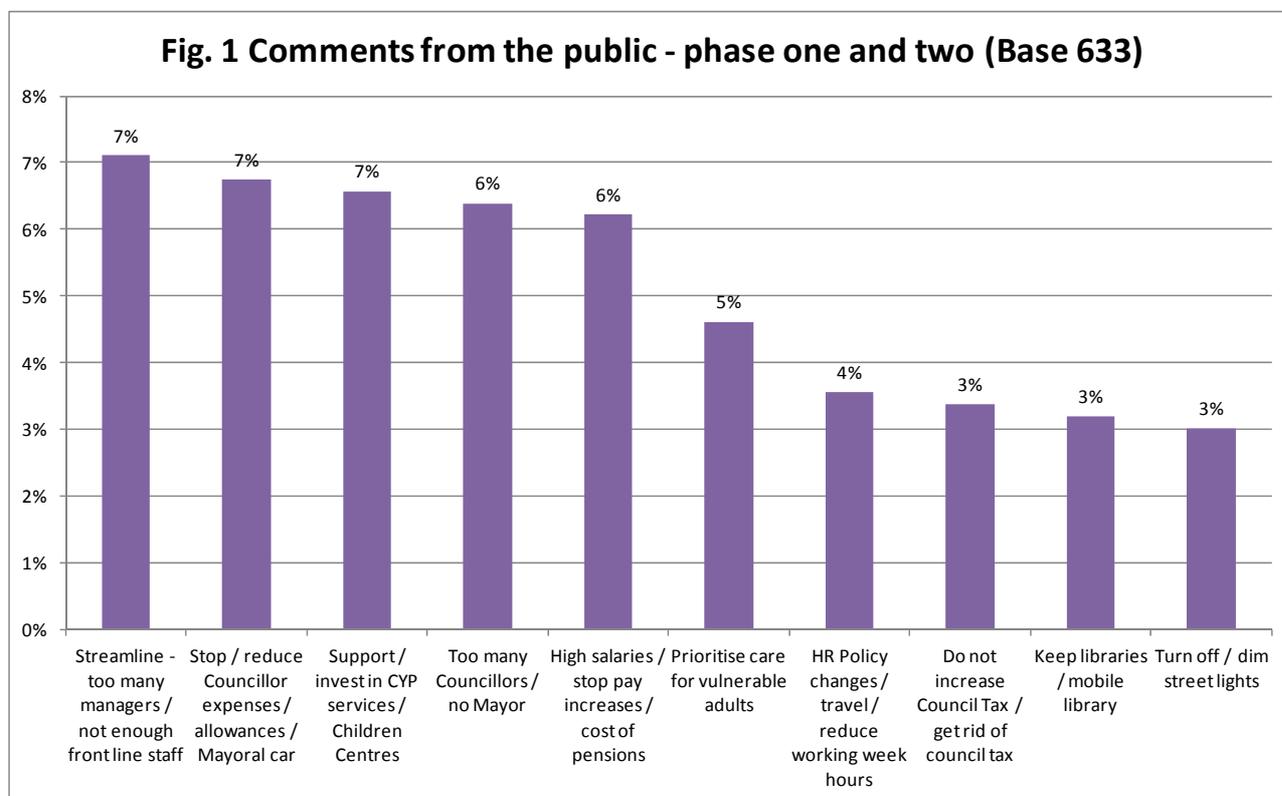
- 2.1.** Each year Walsall Council undertakes public consultation in preparation for the budget setting process. Residents, staff and other key stakeholders were invited to have their say on where they think council can make savings for the coming financial year as well as comment on draft budget policy proposals.
- 2.2.** Between early September and 14 November 2013, feedback was collected from a wide variety of residents and stakeholders, using non random methods, meaning results are not representative, but do give a broad view of opinion from service users and non users.
- 2.3.** Phase one consultation (early September to 23 October) was general in nature, with phase two (24 October to 14 November) focussing on 29 published draft budget policy proposals.
- 2.4.** People were able to respond online, in writing, by email, text message, telephone or via Facebook and Twitter. Information was posted on the council's website www.walsall.gov.uk/budgethaveyoursay and promoted in the local press. The closing date for responses was 14 November 2013.
- 2.5.** For phase two, face to face discussions and interviews were held at 38 special consultation sessions held all over the borough, including council buildings and supermarkets. Meetings were held with Youth of Walsall 'YOW', Making Our Choice and with disability groups at Goscote Greenacres.
- 2.6.** It must be remembered when interpreting the results that they are not based on quantitative statistical evidence. The findings are based on a non random sample of a cross-section of people and should not be confused with statistical representativeness.
- 2.7.** Across phases one and two, 1,371 comments were gathered online, face to face and in writing.

Responses from phase one;		Responses from phase two;	
Postcards / in writing	238	Postcards / in writing	191
Online and email	174	Online and email	30
Staff	149	Staff	29
		Face to face	560
<i>Total</i>	<i>561</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>810</i>

- 2.8.** The grey boxes in this report on responses from Walsall Council on each savings proposal will be completed following consideration by Cabinet, and reported as part of the final budget report to Cabinet on 5 February 2014.

3. General feedback from phase one and two

3.1. Phase one posed a very open question ‘Where do you think we should be making savings?’ A vast array of comments were received, Figure 1 shows those most frequently mentioned by the public in phases one and two.



3.2. Other comments not shown in Figure 1 included;

- Reducing energy bills for council buildings
- Selling assets including land and empty buildings
- Charging more for services
- Cutting out all unnecessary spend and making do
- Stop using consultants and agency staff
- Fortnightly bin collections
- Plus many more which were less frequently mentioned

Services for children are vital for communities

3.3. Supporting and investing in services for children and young people were frequently mentioned, with Children’s Centres seen as an essential service in communities.

‘I don’t feel that we can afford to cut budgets with children services. Especially in the preventative services such as children’s services and youth.’

‘I would not like to see cuts in children’s services. I’m happy to pay more council tax to support this.’

‘Please do not reduce budgets for young people any more. Walsall needs to retain qualified youth workers more than ever as they do make a difference in

improving young people's lives. This is more important than managing libraries and art galleries for example.'

'I think the children's centre is a must in the communities, without them the children would not be getting the best possible start to life. Early intervention is crucial, keep our children's centres.'

Don't cut services for the most vulnerable

- 3.4.** Services for vulnerable children and adults is seen as a priority and comments indicate that people think that these services should not be cut. Some people feel particularly worried about the cuts and the impact it will have on them and those they care for.

'Put more money into services for the vulnerable people in the borough such as elderly, disabled, improving services for mental health and people on low incomes.'

'In view of the amount of elderly in Walsall. You must not cut social services for those who need it.'

'I am dreading budget cuts for the most vulnerable children and adults. I have a severely disabled son and have many friends with disabled children. We have already seen services cut to the bone and now we face the prospect of further, much deeper cuts both in education and social care. Many of us are already struggling to cope with the demands of caring for our children. Eligibility criteria for services are very high and many of my friends can't get any help at all. It seems that things are only going to get worse and I worry that some of these disabled children will end up in care because their parents have reached crisis point and cannot cope.'

- 3.5.** Service users (members of Making Our Choice learning disability group) speak of being 'scared' of the proposed cuts and how it will impact on them.

'Vulnerable people always seen to get hit [by the cuts] first.'

'I thought that the council was there to help look after me. I feel let down and scared.'

Libraries are a valued service, but it could be reduced

- 3.6.** A number of comments highlighted the value of the mobile library service, yet some people felt that the service could be reduced.

'Mobile library is a very good service, especially for people like myself who depend and rely on the service, as I am unable to travel to local libraries.'

'I hope we don't lose the mobile libraries as it is a very good service for pensioners especially.'

'There are too many libraries in Walsall'

'Does an Urban town need a Mobile Library? With direct staffing costs of a quarter of a million pound a year, Is this money well spent? When you add to that building,

heating, stock and fuel isn't the service costing us well over a million pound over five years? It is a luxury we cannot afford!

Make simple savings by reducing energy bills including street lights

- 3.7.** As well as reducing the energy bills of council buildings by turning off unused lights and turning the heating down, a number of people suggested turning off or dimming streetlights during the small hours.

'Turn off lights and PC monitors and other equipment when not in use.'

Turn heating down one degree in all public buildings and council offices.

'Dim or switch off street lights overnight e.g. 1am to 5am, apart from junctions'

'Dim street lights 11pm – 7am or switch every other one off.'

'Could you switch off the street lights at night? Or shorten the period they are on? Or have fewer lights on per street?'

Run an efficient council with cuts from the top down

- 3.8.** Many comments focussed on making cuts 'starting from the top' streamlining tiers of management.

'Reduce heads off services and middle management.'

'Remove the superfluous layers of management within service areas that add no value at all apart from creating barriers and preventing doing the real value work that matters.'

'We are all aware what challenges the Council will have over the coming years. Perhaps a review of the management structure in certain services may realise large savings, and then get the workers to do what they do best, run the council and services that the public really need.'

- 3.9.** Comments reflect the desire for high salary posts to be reviewed and reduced in advance of making cuts to frontline services.

'Look at the salary of top council officers, Chief Exec, directors etc before reducing community services.'

- 3.10.** Changes to HR policy and procedures were most commonly mentioned by staff, however the public too identified how savings could be made by making changes to council employment policies including; reducing and scrutinising travel expenses, subsistence claims, sick leave and the length of the working week.

- 3.11.** The vast majority of staff feedback related to specific changes to HR policies and procedures and several staff outlined in detail how specific changes in their area of work could achieve savings.

'Instead of redundancies offer to reduce contracted hours e.g. 30 hours per week.'

'Look into the allocation of essential car user allowance, in particular, the actual amount of mileage claimed by essential users – do the benefits outweigh the costs?'

'Reduce sick pay from 6 months with full pay to 3 months for Council staff, unless they have a terminal illness.'

'Scrutinise more vigorously council employee expense claims.'

'A complete shutdown at Christmas time, staff will need to save 3 days of their annual leave to cover the days between Christmas and New Year, this would save money on electricity.'

'I work in Children's residential and have a few ideas that I think would save the department a lot of money.'

Reduce the number of Councillors and associated costs

- 3.12.** Many comments questioned why Walsall has 60 Councillors and mentioned cutting the number per ward and reducing expenses.

'Why are the Councillors expenses never considered to take a cut or the number?'

'In this technology age do we need three Councillors per electoral ward?'

'I would like to see the number of Councillors per ward reduced to two.'

'Why does Walsall have so many Councillors?'

- 3.13.** Reducing the costs associated with Councillors was a common theme, in particular Councillor expenses and allowances and, amid budget cuts, whether a new mayoral car is needed.

'Cut Councillors expenses and avoid waste.'

'Reduction in Councillors expenses and fuel allowances would help.'

'Why when peoples jobs are at risk is the Mayor having a £40,000 new car when probably there was nothing wrong with the one he had?'

Make cuts elsewhere before cutting services

- 3.14.** It is clear that people, including staff, want to see a council that is efficiently managed, that tiers of management are streamlined, services are efficiently run and appropriate HR policies applied before cuts to frontline services are made.
- 3.15.** There appears to be a general lack of understanding of the range of services provided and the reasons why certain decisions are made in the context of the saving proposals e.g. Primark investment. In addition people find it difficult to accept cuts amid spending on what they deem non essential e.g. resurfacing of the Council House car park and a new Mayoral car.

- 3.16.** Increasing understanding amongst residents and other stakeholders about what the council does and why. This would help improve the quality of engagement through better understanding, and therefore enable a more informed opinion.

4. Feedback on specific draft budget policy proposals

- 4.1.** Each year Walsall Council undertakes public consultation in preparation for the budget setting process. Residents, staff and other key stakeholders were invited to have their say on where they think council can make savings for the coming financial year.
- 4.2.** Phase two of budget consultation focussed on gathering feedback on 29 draft policy proposals (totalling £7,949,780) and consisted largely of face to face discussions with staff. Feedback was also gathered in writing and online. The opinions gathered reflect opinions from a broad, non representative, cross section of people. Please refer to 2.6 of this report for a note on representativeness.
- 4.3.** Respondents included service users and non users, findings should be balanced alongside service specific consultation, feedback and other information.
- 4.4.** Opinions on draft budget policy proposals are summarised in Table. 1 according to whether the respondent was in support, in support but had concerns / suggested amendments or not in support of the proposal.
- 4.5.** It should be noted that only a limited amount of information about each proposal was made available to the respondent. This was so that respondents were not overwhelmed by information and it ensured the task was manageable in a face to face conversation. Some respondents felt unable to comment as they needed more information on the proposal. Not every respondent commented on every proposal.

TABLE 1: SUMMARY OF OPINIONS ON DRAFT POLICY OPTIONS 2014/15

SERVICE	Ref No	WHAT IS THE SAVINGS OPTION ?	2014/15	Support (a)	Support with concerns / amendments (b)	Overall Support (a+b)	Do not support (c)	Don't Know/Not Provided	Net Support (a+b-c)
Children's Services	1	Reduce taxi costs for looked after children (Base:147)	£100,000	54.4%	10.2%	64.6%	34.0%	1.4%	30.6%
	2	Review and redesign of Children's Education Services (Base: 99)	£500,000	65.7%	9.1%	74.8%	21.2%	4.0%	53.6%
	3	Reduce school transport / bus passes (Base: 148)	£200,000	42%	8%	50%	44%	4.7%	6%
	4	Reduce contribution to Walsall Safeguarding Board (Base: 79)	£30,000	64%	6%	70%	28%	2.5%	42%
	5	Review of targeted youth support, careers advice and guidance (Base: 143)	£450,000	24%	9%	33%	64%	2.1%	-31%
	6	10% reduction in youth contracts (Base: 123)	£75,000	36%	6%	42%	50%	7.3%	-8%
	7	Reduction in Childrens Centres funding (Base: 155)	£930,000	41%	13%	54%	41%	2.5%	13%
	8	Expiry of contract for family support (Base: 77)	£282,000	43%	14%	57%	32%	10.2%	25%
Neighbourhood Services	9	Closure of Walsall Museum (Base: 244)	£70,000	38%	14%	52%	44%	2.8%	9%
	10	Reduce maintenance and on-site presence in 3 cemeteries (Base: 167)	£50,230	47%	9%	56%	38%	6.0%	17%
	11	Reduce the maintenance of play areas by 20% (Base: 169)	£49,400	29%	14%	43%	53%	3.0%	-10%
	12	Reduce grants to allotment associations by 50% (Base: 164)	£20,150	62%	10%	72%	24%	3.6%	47%
	13	Remove subsidy to sports users for maintenance of grassed sports facilities (Base: 171)	£90,000	55%	11%	66%	33%	1.8%	33%
	14	Increase in bereavement and registration charges by 5.5% (burials, cremations, registry of births, death and marriages) (Base: 180)	£165,000	29%	6%	35%	62%	2.2%	-28%
Regeneration	15	Review of provision of school crossing wardens (Base: 168)	£85,000	48%	19%	67%	32%	0.6%	35%
Resources	16/17	Increase in blue badge application fee from £2 to £10 (Base: 230)	£33,000	71%	11%	82%	16%	1.3%	66%
	18	Cease contracted mobile security to 3 of the 4 homeless projects (Base: 136)	£32,000	40%	9%	49%	37%	12.2%	12%
	19	Reduce the council's involvement in recruitability (Base: 141)	£45,000	28%	5%	33%	63%	4.0%	-30%
	20	Cease council operated print and design service (Base: 95)	£150,000	72%	7%	79%	14%	7.4%	65%
Social Care	21	Renegotiate Housing 21 contract (Base:92)	£480,000	66%	11%	76%	17%	5.4%	59%
	22	Removal of recruitability payments (Base: 154)	£110,000	34%	7%	41%	61%	2.5%	-20%
	23	Review preventative low priority services (Base: 153)	£300,000	44%	13%	57%	36%	6.4%	22%
	24	Review care costs in extra care housing. (Base: 136)	£750,000	46%	11%	57%	34%	7.9%	23%
	25	Reduce use of residential care for short term placements (Base: 136)	£500,000	38%	11%	49%	44%	5.0%	5%
	26	Reduce use of domiciliary care in individuals homes (Base: 159)	£1,000,000	40%	11%	51%	42%	6.2%	9%
	27	Closure of Broadway North residential unit (Base: 94)	£100,000	44%	12%	56%	39%	4.3%	17%
	28	Reduce the number of Day Care locations (Base: 160)	£160,000	36%	14%	51%	44%	3.7%	6%
	29	Review of social care government grant funding (Base: 84)	£1,193,000	72%	1%	73%	16%	8.2%	57%

4.6. Proposal 1: Reduce taxi costs for looked after children

Overall opinion: Support

There is general support for this proposal with most people feeling carers should provide transport or make use of cheaper alternatives including public transport and group transport e.g. minibuses. Some people were in support but only if it did not adversely impact on the children.

'Why not consider offering parents and foster parents mileage to take children to school as an alternative to paying for taxis - this would reduce expenditure.'

'If foster carers have their own vehicles then they should transport them.'

'Agree so long as it doesn't affect the children's care.'

Others raised concerns about the impact this may have on carers and the children who may live some distance from their school due to their placement. Some felt that cuts to children's services should be avoided and the welfare of children should be a priority.

"Can't put money on a child's welfare"

"Support but feels more consideration needs to be given as to where children are placed. From own experiences is aware that children on placement live miles away from school, so why can't they attend closer schools."

Response from Walsall Council on proposal 1

To be completed once final consultation is concluded in January

4.7. Proposal 2: Review and redesign of Children's Education Services

Overall opinion: Support

Making education services better value for money was widely supported, but only if education services for children and young people were improved and that savings focus on management and running costs.

"Ok, but are we sure we can manage with less. Isn't Walsall quite low on the education league table."

'Providing no impact on quality of service.'

'Savings should focus on management costs.'

"It depends on what exactly is envisaged - if the savings are achieved by targeting back-office and management costs, then I would support this"

'I agree if it makes it better for the children.'

Others disagreed with cuts to children's services as they felt children and young people should be a priority.

"Kids need more help and support not less."

"I don't agree. I have worked in education all my life and it needs investment not cuts"

Response from Walsall Council on proposal 2

To be completed once final consultation is concluded in January

4.8. Proposal 3: Reduce school transport / bus passes

Overall opinion: Support

There is overall support (+6.1% net support) for this proposal but the tipping point for support is boosted by the 8.1% supporting the proposal with concerns / amendments.

People tend to agree that the council should use stringent criteria when issuing school passes. Those who support this proposal suggest it's a matter of choice where children go to school and hence a parental responsibility to fund school travel.

"Agree, it's their option which school they go to so they should provide travel themselves"

"Agree - they could choose a school that is nearer"

However, there is support for provision for disabled and disadvantaged children.

"Depends of vulnerability of people involved. I support the idea of reducing costs through better procurement but would need more information on the saving i.e. who wouldn't get a bus pass who used to?"

"We must support access to special schools"

Those who don't support this proposal raise concern about passing additional costs onto already hard pressed families and are worried about the impact on education caused by increased non attendance. There is also a feeling that children should be sent to their closest school and encourage more children to walk to school.

"I don't support because of adding costs onto carers/parents when money already tight for families"

"Reduction will cause extra stress on families."

"Children and young people are able to walk to school. Boundaries should mean they are within walking distance of schools. Pupils aren't used to walking"

"Children won't attend school"

Response from Walsall Council on proposal 3

To be completed once final consultation is concluded in January

4.9. Proposal 4: Reduce contribution to Walsall Safeguarding Board

Overall opinion: Support

The general opinion was that contributions from partners should be equal and fair, but cuts should not affecting safeguarding was seen as important.

"Should be equal responsibility"

"Don't think safeguarding should suffer, but the council's contribution should be fair compared to other members"

"Providing no reduction in what is delivered, safeguarding is an important function"

Response from Walsall Council on proposal 4

To be completed once final consultation is concluded in January

4.10. Proposal 5: Review of targeted youth support, careers advice and guidance

Overall opinion: Do not support

Participants in the budget consultation research do not support this proposal by a ratio of almost 2:1.

Many respondents disagreed with this proposal outright and without further comment, including a number that just disagreed in principle with any cuts impacting on Childrens services.

*"Do not support", "Disagree", "Do not cut", "Don't agree", "Definitely don't agree"
"I wouldn't want any proposals going forward but if necessary protect Childrens services"*

The main sentiment for disapproval is the need to invest in children and young people's future, especially the vulnerable and to support them into work with the right careers advice.

"Don't support - you should be investing in children"

"No - they need the support"

"Young people should have access to careers advice and guidance - especially the most vulnerable"

"We should not be reducing expenditure on children's services"

Supporters of the proposal included those, for whom the proposal had no direct impact, or where they made suggestions for alternatives.

"Support the cuts and offer this service through schools"

"This could be reduced. There's a lot of other careers advice out there"

Response from Walsall Council on proposal 5

To be completed once final consultation is concluded in January

4.11. Proposal 6: 10% reduction in youth contracts

Overall opinion: Do not support

The reasons people gave for not supporting this proposal focused on the need for more services and support for children and young people not less.

"Don't agree - children are the future and we should invest in them"

"It's important to have activities for kids to keep the kids off the street. This should not be reduced, it should be increased."

"Children need to have plenty of things to do. This proposal would cause an increase in anti-social behaviour."

"The number of children needing care and support is increasing. In light of recent media on Children's Services and Ofsted I don't think this saving is worth it."

Some people raised concerns about the impact the reduction would have on the community and voluntary sector.

"I don't agree. Grant value to these organisations should be kept as they are as they do a good job."

Others, felt that the proposal was acceptable or 'seems reasonable', some respondents said it did not affect them.

Response from Walsall Council on proposal 6

To be completed once final consultation is concluded in January

4.12. Proposal 7: Reduction in Childrens Centres funding

Overall opinion: Support

Respondents clearly value the support they get from Childrens Centres in terms of the benefits that children receive from interacting with others, helping with parenting issues/skills and by providing the child care that supports parents into work.

Whilst there is overall support for this proposal, this balance is tipped by 12.5% of respondents supporting the proposal but with concerns/amendments.

Reservations centre on concerns of the lack of detail of the actual nature and therefore potential impact of the cuts and that Childrens Centres might ultimately be closed; which respondents point out they don't support.

"I support this proposal as long as there are no closures"

"I am concerned that children's centres should not close. I am not in work yet, but children's centres help with advice on child care so that I can get back to work."

"If you reduce funding but keep them open they will eventually have to cut the activities and I'm concerned that Saturdays could be at risk."

Response from Walsall Council on proposal 7

To be completed once final consultation is concluded in January

4.13. Proposal 8: Expiry of contract for family support

Overall opinion: Support

Generally respondents supported this proposal but there were a range of associated concerns.

"OK so long as the support is available in other ways"

"Ok in general but the service is important in preventing family breakdown / children becoming troubled. Need to ensure that there is some provision continued to be offered for those who need it."

"What's going to be put in place instead? If we don't meet needs now then will backfire in the future with more family breakdown, disillusioned young people."

A number of people were concerned that the service would cease, with some suggesting that the service could be run by the council.

"I agree with this proposal so long as there is someone able to provide the service that is currently provided."

"Service still needs to be run by the council, can't stop it completely!"

Response from Walsall Council on proposal 8

To be completed once final consultation is concluded in January

4.14. Proposal 9: Closure of Walsall Museum

Overall opinion: Support

This proposal raised the highest number of responses of all the proposals; probably because this is a widely known service. There is overall support for this proposal but that is on the basis of the 14.2% supporting the proposal with concerns / amendments.

Many respondents conceded support for closure because they weren't users of the service. However many of these people said that it would be 'a real shame' to lose Walsall Museum as it was part of Walsall's heritage and a good asset for the borough and especially children and young people.

"Museums are vital to keep trace of our culture and heritage and should not be closed down."

There was also both confusion with and comparison to the New Art Gallery (NAG), with many people confusing the Walsall Museum with closure of the NAG, of which there was some support. A number of residents suggested that the museum could be merged into the NAG, with some people saying that this would broaden its appeal.

"Make better use of the Art Gallery to display the things from the museum."

Generally people were concerned what would happen to the museum collection and felt that if it did close that somewhere else should be found to house these collections. There was also reference to recent press coverage about the cost of closure and payback of grant received to cover recent refurbishment, prompting criticism of the proposal.

Response from Walsall Council on proposal 9

To be completed once final consultation is concluded in January

4.15. Proposal 10: Reduce maintenance and on-site presence in 3 cemeteries

Overall opinion: Support

The majority of respondents were happy with the proposal to reduce maintenance. Some commented that a certain level of maintenance is needed, which some suggest could be undertaken by volunteers.

"Yes reduce the maintenance, you don't need someone going there every day or when they do."

"Ok in general but you must ensure that the environment is nice for visitors. If it becomes overly neglected then it could stop people going, people wanting burials there and could result in more vandalism."

"Could make the saving and continue level of service by using young offenders/people on probation to do this for free."

Those that did not support the proposal felt that the importance of cemeteries should not be overlooked. Others felt that the current levels of maintenance need improving, particularly given the proposal to increase charges for burial.

"Do not support. Cemeteries are important places for people so need to be kept a nice environment."

"They are already a mess so I do not agree"

"The costs for burials etc are being increased but maintenance is being cut back - this is unfair."

Response from Walsall Council on proposal 10

To be completed once final consultation is concluded in January

4.16. Proposal 11: Reduce the maintenance of play areas by 20%

Overall opinion: Do not support

A majority (53%) of respondents oppose the proposal because of safety and cleanliness concerns and the need to encourage children to be more active.

"Children's play areas and parks need to be safe and clean."

"Even non essential maintenance could still have a health and safety impact for young children so I completely disagreed with this."

"I do not agree with this. Play areas need to be clean. There is already a problem with glass in some play areas and as a parent you need to be careful. There should be no dogs allowed in the play areas either."

Some feel that the current level of park maintenance is not sufficient, with a reduction of 20% making the problems worse.

"Parks are already in a terrible state so reducing maintenance will be even worse. We are meant to be encouraging kids to be healthy, the state of the parks and planned reductions in maintenance won't help that"

"Play areas are in a bad condition there is a lot of vandalism etc. Probably need more maintenance rather than less."

A few comments reflected concerns about the need for regular monitoring and how repairs would be made if there are cuts.

"Only if equipment is regularly inspected by council staff."

"How will damage be repaired if cuts in the service?"

Response from Walsall Council on proposal 11

To be completed once final consultation is concluded in January

4.17. Proposal 12: Reduce grants to allotment associations by 50%

Overall opinion: Support

There is strong support for this proposal with almost four fifths of respondents agreeing with the decrease in grants to allotments. Many people simply 'agree' with the proposal, with supporters passing comments about the benefit people gain from having an allotment, how hard they are to get and hence costs need to reflect the premium and that current costs are not unaffordable.

"People are lucky to have allotments as there is a long waiting list and I am sure people would be prepared to pay more for the privilege."

"Allotment users aren't charged enough - increase the charges more"

"Allotments don't cost much so yes should cut"

"The fees are very low and this increase is valid"

"I agree because people benefit anyway from having produce from their allotment and fees aren't unaffordable."

"I think people should pay more for allotments as they benefit financially from them (cheap produce)"

Where there is not support respondents recognise the health & well-being benefit allotment brings to older people and a rise in costs will hit older people on lower incomes.

"Allotments keep older people busy."

"See this as a lifeline for older people."

Amongst those supporting with concerns / amendments were suggestions of a 25% reduction as an alternative proposal.

There was also feedback from allotment association members who accepted the need to increase rental charges but expressed the need to set their 2014/15 budgets and hence a query when associations will be notified of the decision so that fees can be set and communicated to users.

Response from Walsall Council on proposal 12

To be completed once final consultation is concluded in January

4.18. Proposal 13: Remove subsidy to sports users for maintenance of grassed sports facilities

Overall opinion: Support

There is overall support for this proposal from slightly over two thirds of respondents with just under one third not in support.

Those not in support raise concerns about the impact the proposal will have on the health and well being of the borough especially young people. That costs are already expensive with facilities already struggling to remain viable as it is and that costs need to be minimised in order to attract usage and remain affordable to families.

"I disagree as there will be an impact on health and young people"

"Too many children aren't doing sport nowadays because facilities / time are not available during school hours. We should encourage them to be doing sport / joining clubs outside of school by reducing costs and subsidising clubs even more."

"I disagree because people need to keep fit"

There's a suggestion that those whom support the proposal don't necessarily use these facilities and feel that users should pay market cost so the 'taxpayer' isn't subsidising these facilities.

"I agree cost should be met by the groups hiring the facility"

"Council (and therefore all taxpayers) shouldn't pay for this"

For supporters but with concerns; the issue is about getting the balance right and remaining as affordable as possible so as to still encourage usage and hence health benefits.

"Shouldn't charge full costs, it's for the kids."

"If we had to increase then at max should only put up by £1 a session."

"Reduce by less, and only charge 50%"

"Recover 50% as costs passed onto teams that use the facilities"

"It's an issue of ability to pay - some can afford, and some cannot"

Response from Walsall Council on proposal 13

To be completed once final consultation is concluded in January

4.19. Proposal 14: Increase in bereavement and registration charges by 5.5% (burials, cremations, registry of births, death and marriages)

Overall opinion: Do not support

Participants in this consultation do not support this proposal by a ratio of almost two to one. However it needs to be noted that all of the comments centre on bereavement costs i.e. burial / cremation service rather than registration charges specifically. This is because the proposal detail only referred to 'burial, cremation and associated charges'.

Those who disagree with the proposal mainly have concern about how expensive the burial service is becoming and how this increases impacts on older people and their families in meeting bereavement costs.

"Burial is already enough"

"It's already too expensive to die!"

"Putting up cost of burial/cremation is bad - she has a friend who couldn't afford a plaque for her relatives grave - caused a great deal of distress."

"No increases. Funerals are expensive enough as it is."

Those who support the proposal call for an increase at inflation rate and as long as costs are in line with neighbouring authorities.

"Only if this does not make us more expensive than other Black Country councils"

"Increase in line with inflation"

<p>Response from Walsall Council on proposal 14 <i>To be completed once final consultation is concluded in January</i></p>

4.20. Proposal 15: Review of provision of school crossing wardens

Overall opinion: Support

Over two thirds of participants in this consultation express support for this proposal.

Those in support of the proposal agree with the rationale but emphasise the need to maintain services on main roads, and only cut funding where schools agree to take over responsibility. There are often suggested alternatives such as using volunteers, parents, teaching assistants and PCSO's.

"Parents should also help take kids"

"Agreed but only on crossings where there are traffic lights"

"Agree if schools fund them" "Only if schools pay for it"

"As long as the crossing patrols are taken on by schools - road safety issue."

"Agree as long as safety isn't compromised"

Those not in support of the proposal either disagreed outright and without further comment or raised child safety concerns.

"Keep things as they are. Needed for children's safety"

"I do not support because of the impact upon pedestrian/ road safety"

"No I do not support - school crossing patrol wardens are the safest option"

Response from Walsall Council on proposal 15

To be completed once final consultation is concluded in January

4.21. Proposal 16/17: Increase in blue badge application fee from £2 to £10

Overall opinion: Support

This proposal received the second highest number of comments and there is strong support for this proposal, including from current blue badge holders. The proposed charge is perceived to be good value for money with some saying it should be more.

"I am disabled and I would pay £10 as it provides benefits to me."

"Agree, they save enough from not paying for parking."

"One of my relations is a blue badge holder and I feel this is fair and reasonable given it is renewed every 3 years. It is still value for money."

"I support this. In fact it could be possibly increased further as it is not a great sum of money to pay for the service and benefits it provides"

Some felt that £10 was too much for those who are already vulnerable, with some suggesting issuing badges every 5 years rather than every 3.

"If there is to be a charge of £10.00 badges should be issued for 5 years."

"£8 increase is a lot, it seems a large and unjustifiable increase."

"If you are disabled your earning capacity is limited."

Response from Walsall Council on proposal 16/17

To be completed once final consultation is concluded in January

4.22. Proposal 18: Cease contracted mobile security to 3 of the 4 homeless projects

Overall opinion: Support

There is overall support for this proposal. Where there is support residents tended to just say 'yes, support' without further comment, with those supporting but with concerns saying that they were worried about the security of the people at these sites caused by the proposals and in some cases a call for better understanding of the potential impact.

"I am concerned that the people affected are a vulnerable group, and I consider protection of people a priority."

"There is a need for more places like this and a need for security. There are more people needing homeless help"

"I support if low risk to users and staff"

However, the issues for those not in support centred on the genuine need for support 'at all times' with fears expressed about the risks associated with cuts to security, and that security might already not be at appropriate enough levels, hence further cuts will put people at increased risk. That vulnerable homeless and especially young people need our support.

"Don't agree - seems like it will leave people at risk"

"What will be the impact on service users, residents and staff?"

"There is insufficient security anyway"

Response from Walsall Council on proposal 18

To be completed once final consultation is concluded in January

4.23. Proposal 19: Reduce the council's involvement in recruitability

Overall opinion: Do not support

Two thirds of respondents opposed this proposal, particularly as it impacts on the most vulnerable in society who many feel need supporting and given additional opportunities to work.

"Don't reduce posts. It's important for people with disabilities to have job opportunities."

"Recruitability is needed to support people, stopping the scheme would be devastating for some people."

"People should get all the help that they need. It's harsh to cut money from people with disabilities."

"These people need all the help they can get to get into employment. With recent media coverage on more checks on disability entitlements and govt encouraging them to get back to work, then they will need the support to do this."

Some felt that sufficient support, opportunities and benefits are already available and therefore supported the proposal.

Response from Walsall Council on proposal 19

To be completed once final consultation is concluded in January

4.24. Proposal 20: Cease council operated print and design service

Overall opinion: Support

Support for this proposal was based on the assumption that printing would be cheaper from an external supplier and there is no direct impact on front line services.

"If you can get it printed cheaper then do so"

"Very definitely. There are external suppliers in Walsall which are very reasonable and very quick. The overheads for in house printing must be excessive."

Some people raised concerns about confidential documents being printed by an external supplier and perhaps the service just needs to be made more efficient.

"Confidentiality issues means that in-house service is a better option."

"Keep the service in the council but reduce the staff and make it more cost efficient"

"Seems strange that an in-house service can be expensive, surely it's cheaper to provide in-house"

Response from Walsall Council on proposal 20

To be completed once final consultation is concluded in January

4.25. Proposal 21: Renegotiate Housing 21 contract

Overall opinion: Support

There is strong support (76%) for reviewing services in order to make them better value for money. Making savings through efficiency and best value is popular.

"OK, reducing cost of contracts is something we should be looking at doing, as long as no reduction in service."

However, respondents said that achieving value for money should not be at the detriment of the service.

"What about improvements for service users? These things happen but service doesn't improve."

"OK so long as the proposals work - so long as VFM is achieved without a reduction in service"

"The council should get the best deal financially - but you should not reduce the service provided."

Response from Walsall Council on proposal 21

To be completed once final consultation is concluded in January

4.26. Proposal 22: Removal of recruitability payments

Overall opinion: Do not support

Removing recruitability payments for people with learning disabilities who access training workshops was not supported. Proposals that affect people with disabilities are not well received or generally supported because of the perceived impact it would have on an already vulnerable group. Supporting people with learning disabilities in a way that gives them purpose and a sense of pride was seen as really important.

"I don't support this. We need to support vulnerable people to live a full life."

"I know someone who has accessed these workshops, the payment makes people feel wanted. You should be encouraging more local firms to pass on simple work to people with learning disabilities and pay them appropriately."

Those involved in the scheme were particularly against the proposal.

"I go to Links to Work and for me it's like having a role and a sense of pride."

"It's not right that the council gets paid for contracts and people don't get paid."

One person gave a direct example of the value individuals place on the scheme and that the cut may be more costly in the long run;

"There will be an impact on the independence of those on the scheme. One person on the scheme is only supposed to attend twice a week but he loves it so much he attends 5 days a week. There is potentially a longer term costs for the council if more support is needed at home. You should look at better utilising the building, it's a very big building not fully used but costing a lot."

Those in support felt that not paying people who attend for training purposes was justified, but questioned 'free labour' and the overall success of the scheme..

"If a disabled person is keen to get work then they should want to go to these workshops for the experience rather than the money. However, if they are doing work for local businesses [for profit] at these workshops then shouldn't really be working for free."

"This would depend on the % success rates i.e. how many people who attend this course actually go on to get a job? If it is a low % I would support this saving."

Response from Walsall Council on proposal 22

To be completed once final consultation is concluded in January

4.27. Proposal 23: Review preventative low priority services

Overall opinion: Support

There is overall support for this proposal with 57% of participants in this research supporting a review of low priority preventative services.

Supporters often agreed without further comment including a number strongly agreeing.

"Agree", "Strongly agree", "Support" "Good idea", "Yes, a good thing".

Some supporters felt the need to support independent living whilst opponents felt that independent living wasn't suitable for everyone and were concerned about withdrawal of services.

"Good thing – it encourages independence"

"Support independence - teach people the skills to be independent and then do not keep bothering them"

"If the council can support people to lead more independent lives and it saves money, then I would support this."

"Older people would prefer to be independent, but need to make sure we don't reduce too much and let people slip through the care net."

"They should be supported and if they are capable, not forced to live independently if it is not suitable for them."

"My father is 86 years of age and needs some help. He can't be completely independent."

"If people can live independently but still need some help to do this"

Others who disagreed felt that services should continue to be provided to those in need i.e. the elderly and vulnerable. There was concern for the impact of the proposal and a general sense that social care services need to be maintained rather than cut.

"Need to look after old people"

"Don't cut as it supports vulnerable people"

"Reducing funding in these areas will push people into institutions and in the long run will cost more"

"If we do not give the appropriate support or if certain support is phased out (people are encouraged to be too independent), it could backfire into a serious issue."

Response from Walsall Council on proposal 23

To be completed once final consultation is concluded in January

4.28. Proposal 24: Review care costs in extra care housing

Overall opinion: Support

Respondents (56.6% overall) support this proposal, with many people supporting without further comment. Where comment was provided, supporters welcomed a review but wanted to ensure that services were maintained to the people that needed them most.

"Review will be a good thing if it helps the right people"

"Important to make sure services are available for those that most need it."

"Ensure that people who really need the service still get it"

"As long as this is for genuine people"

Opponents of the proposal don't want social services for the elderly or vulnerable cut.

"Should not cut things for older people"

"There are a lot of older people who need assistance"

"Old and vulnerable people support is priority and should not be cut"

"Don't agree with this saving but can see why it has been included however it seems unfair to be targeting the vulnerable again."

Response from Walsall Council on proposal 24

To be completed once final consultation is concluded in January

4.29. Proposal 25: Reduce use of residential care for short term placements

Overall opinion: Support

There is overall support, though marginal, for this proposal but that is on the basis of the 11.3% supporting the proposal with concerns / amendments.

Those who didn't support the proposal tended to have a dislike of a range of social care proposals because of the need to support people in need. That more care was needed not less. They raised issues about the impact on support for already vulnerable people and concerns for the knock on effect to other services.

"These services are needed to support people"

"Moving costs elsewhere will be placing a greater burden on the NHS."

"This proposal is short-sighted. The knock on impacts will be more costly"

Where there was support for the proposal people accepted the need for independent living as a better alternative to going into care but that there was still a clear role for short term care and hence a concern for the service diminishing.

"Support as long as it helps people gain their independence"

"We should support people in their own homes"

"Short term placements offer great respite to carers who may be on the verge of breakdown when caring for partners/siblings/friends. This may be their only life line for a few weeks away from caring."

There was a call for a review on placements to be assessment led and based on need.

"Support the proposal as long as the assessment process is proper and robust"

"Review the need for short term placements based on those in most need"

Response from Walsall Council on proposal 25

To be completed once final consultation is concluded in January

4.30. Proposal 26: Reduce use of domiciliary care in individuals homes

Overall opinion: Support

Although there was overall support, respondents were concerned about the impact the reduction may have on older people who are particularly vulnerable and in some cases more support is needed.

"Ensure that people who really need the service still get it."

"Only if assessed properly, you need to ensure that those who need support will get it."

"People need more support, not less to keep them at home. Some people receive too much care that they don't need and this takes it away from people who really need it"

Many people highlighted the value of face to face contact and the need to prevent older people becoming more and more isolated as a result of using assisted technology.

"As so long as the changes do not lead to people being cut off."

"One to one in the home is a good way of support. It means care can be more personal and makes the person feel supported."

"Ensure that older and vulnerable people do not become more isolated as a result of cost reductions."

"The carer who visits may be the only source of human contact some people get, so removing this may cause other issues for person receiving help."

Response from Walsall Council on proposal 26

To be completed once final consultation is concluded in January

4.31. Proposal 27: Closure of Broadway North residential unit

Overall opinion: Support

Although there was general support for this proposal, the quality of service was paramount and doubts were raised about the independent sector's ability to provide a service that is of the same level of quality currently provided by the council.

"Important to get it right – the quality of service is what matters, not always improved by going to independent sector. It can work if got the right people running it."

"I would be very wary of independent sector's ability to deliver."

Most people felt that as the service would be reprovided the proposal is reasonable, but only if the level of service is not affected and it costs less.

"Fair as long as providing the support that is needed"

"If it's cheaper elsewhere then OK"

"Independent sector needs to provide value for money, and council should be in position to fight for value for money, rather than letting firms charge what they want and the council just pays."

"I would support this as long as residents are not affected. I would be happy if people receive the same care package but I am concerned that they might have to travel further / out of town to receive it."

Whilst no information about the location of a new facility was provided, a number of people mentioned the need to provide transport for service users to the new location.

"Would travel be provided for those that have to travel further? The council should provide this for users who are put at a disadvantage by these changes. Assuming that is the case, then I would support these changes."

Response from Walsall Council on proposal 27

To be completed once final consultation is concluded in January

4.32. Proposal 28: Reduce the number of Day Care locations

Overall opinion: Support

There is overall support, for this proposal with the tipping point for this being the 14.2% supporting the proposal with concerns / amendments.

Those not supporting the proposal express the value they get from these services especially for the respite this provides carers and the support it provides elderly and disabled people.

"Too many of these centres have already closed, these places are a life line for carers to have a break from caring 24/7."

"You should keep day care centres. Disabled people should have a place where they can meet and communicate with friends."

"I am concerned that vulnerable adults and older people are being hit hard by these proposals. The right support is needed, quality of services really matters"

Similarly those showing support for this proposal also expressed concern about the impact on vulnerable people and hence the need to make the reduction in the right place and to be sensitive and responsive to the potential impact on individuals. There is support for reductions in venues rather than places, alongside the need to consider where geographically the reduction takes place.

"Need to be careful how the number is reduced – if the person is used to a particular place then it can be difficult to move to somewhere new."

"Council must provide for extra journeys. If that is the case then proposal is ok."

"Fine as long as transport to new venues is provided for those who need it."

"Certain people may need support if local centre closes i.e. people with autism who like familiarity - transport issues."

"This needs to be done right - look at the facilities and venues, look at how centres are managed, what facilities are where and how groups access them. Look at staffing ratios and links to transport, the levels of need and accessibility. I am critical of investment in Pheasey (great facilities) given only 13 people access this - service users not given options of where they go, user should get to choose"

Response from Walsall Council on proposal 28

To be completed once final consultation is concluded in January

4.33. Proposal 29: Review of social care government grant funding

In line with comments opposing cuts that affect vulnerable people, respondents are supportive of this proposal to use government grant funding to support existing services in adult social care.

"Yes, brilliant"

"What is actually needed"

Minimal information was provided about how and where this funding would be used therefore some felt unable to comment or simply agreed with the proposal.

Response from Walsall Council on proposal 29

To be completed once final consultation is concluded in January

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