

Reshaping Services Consultation

Phase 1 - May/June 2013

Overall Summary

Initial consultation with the public, staff and partners has been carried out to support the change programme. The purpose of this consultation was to start 'a conversation with the public', to increase understanding of the scale of the challenge and why difficult decisions will have to be made, and understand high level views on improving efficiency, reducing expenditure and increasing income.

The consultation, which took place between May and June 2013, used an online budget simulator exercise called YouChoose. The exercise asked participants to achieve a £34m savings target by selecting options to reduce expenditure, increase income and make efficiency savings as well as capturing further suggestions for saving money. A paper based survey was also available and focus groups were carried out with the Senedd Yr Ifanc/Youth Forum, the Diversity Forum, the Over 50's Forum and Social Housing Tenants to complement the exercise.

Just under a thousand people started the budget simulator exercise, with just over 300 people completing the exercise and submitting their response. In summary the key messages from participants (both those completing the survey and taking part in the focus groups) were as follows:

- Opportunities to improve the efficiency of Council services should be prioritised. For example reducing all waste, modernising ways of working, taking a lean systems approach, focussing on prevention.
- Opportunities to provide services differently that offer better value for money should be explored. For example more joined up working with partners, commissioning service providers in other sectors, consolidating services and encouraging greater community responsibility. However commissioning and contract monitoring needs to be improved to ensure good quality of services.
- Reducing expenditure will also necessitate reducing the cost of the workforce. For example reducing levels of management and support services and the number of employees.
- Any reduction in expenditure across frontline services should be spread across all services areas. Participants' preferences for reducing expenditure only varied slightly across different service areas.
- The Council should increase income from fines and penalties and maximise the uptake of Council services and facilities to increase the income they generate, as well as look for new, more innovative ways to generate income.

The Consultation

The Council is facing severe financial challenges over coming years, as the UK Government is looking to all Councils across the country to achieve savings and provide services with less funding. We know that we need to reduce our annual budget by at least £34 million over the next five years.

During 2013 and 2014 the Council will be working to reshape services to meet these severe financial challenges whilst prioritising support for the most vulnerable people in Wrexham. This will mean making services even more efficient, but will also mean withdrawing or reducing some services.

The Council will have a 'conversation with the public' during this time of change, to increase public understanding of the scale of the challenge and why difficult decisions need to be made, as well as understand their views on the way forward.

A phased approach will be carried out to consult on:

- People's high level views on decreasing/increasing expenditure on individual services, increasing income and improving efficiency
- Specific service delivery proposals that might be adopted by the Council to achieve a financially sustainable position going forward (where appropriate)
- Draft budget proposals for 2014/15

This report details the first phase of consultation, the purpose of which was to:

- Increase public understanding of the scale of the challenge and why difficult decisions will have to be made
- Understand high level views on making efficiency savings, reducing expenditure and increasing income, to inform work on reshaping services

The consultation took place during May and June 2013 and used an online budget simulator called YouChoose. This simulator was developed by Redbridge Council and made available free of charge to other Local Authorities through the Local Government Association. The simulator asks participants to balance the budget and achieve a £34m savings target by selecting options to reduce expenditure, increase income and improve efficiency. It also captures participants' further suggestions for saving money.

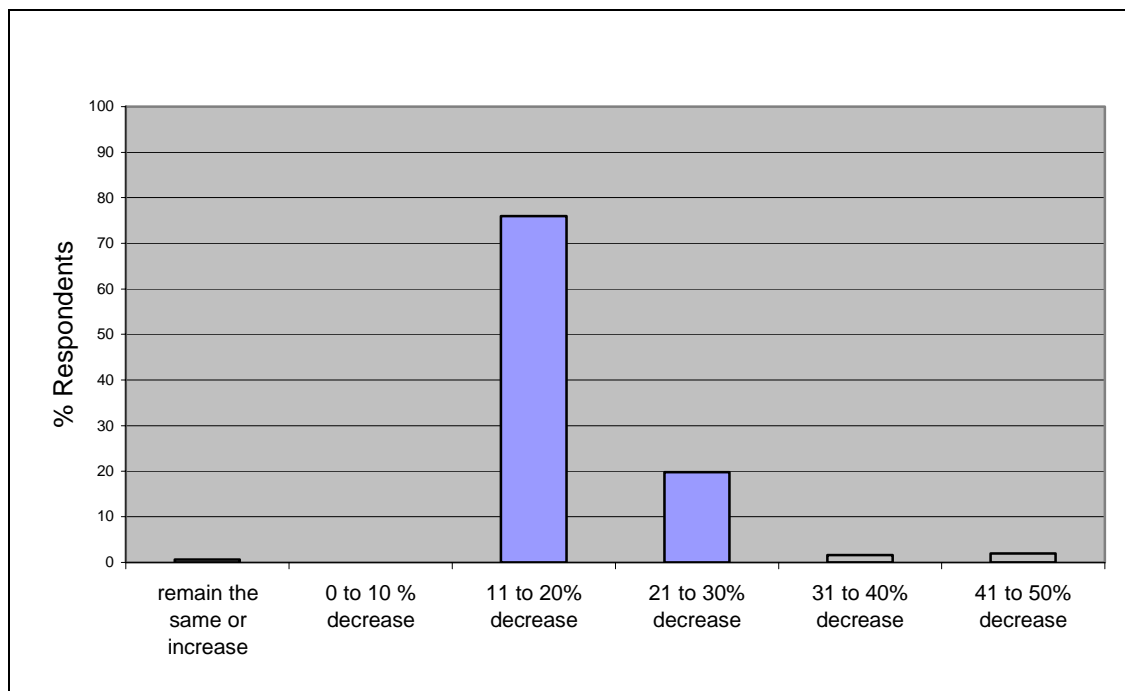
This exercise was widely publicised to the public, staff, Members, partners and Town and Community Councils via the internet, intranet, social media, press releases and where appropriate direct emails/letters. A paper based survey was also available and a series of focus groups were carried out with the Senedd Yr Ifanc/Youth Forum, the Diversity Forum, the Over 50's Forum and Social Housing Tenants, to complement the exercise.

YouChoose: Budget Simulator Results

Just under a thousand people started the budget simulator exercise, with just over 300 people completing the exercise and submitting their response. Of the 303 responses received 122 are believed to be from Council employees.

The first section of the budget simulator asked respondents where they would reduce expenditure across departments and services. The average reduction in expenditure was 19.3% overall, with the majority of respondents reducing expenditure between 11% and 20% as illustrated in chart 1 below:

Chart 1. Decreasing Expenditure – Overall Spread of Responses



Preferences for reducing expenditure only varied slightly across all departments and services as detailed in table 1. Average reductions in expenditure across departments ranged from 23.6% for Assets and Economic Development down to 16.6% for Children's Prevention and Social Care. Similarly average reductions in expenditure across services ranged from 25.1% for Integrated Transport down to 16.5% for Family Support Services. This suggests in general respondents would prefer savings to be spread across all departments/service areas, rather than concentrated on a specific department/service area.

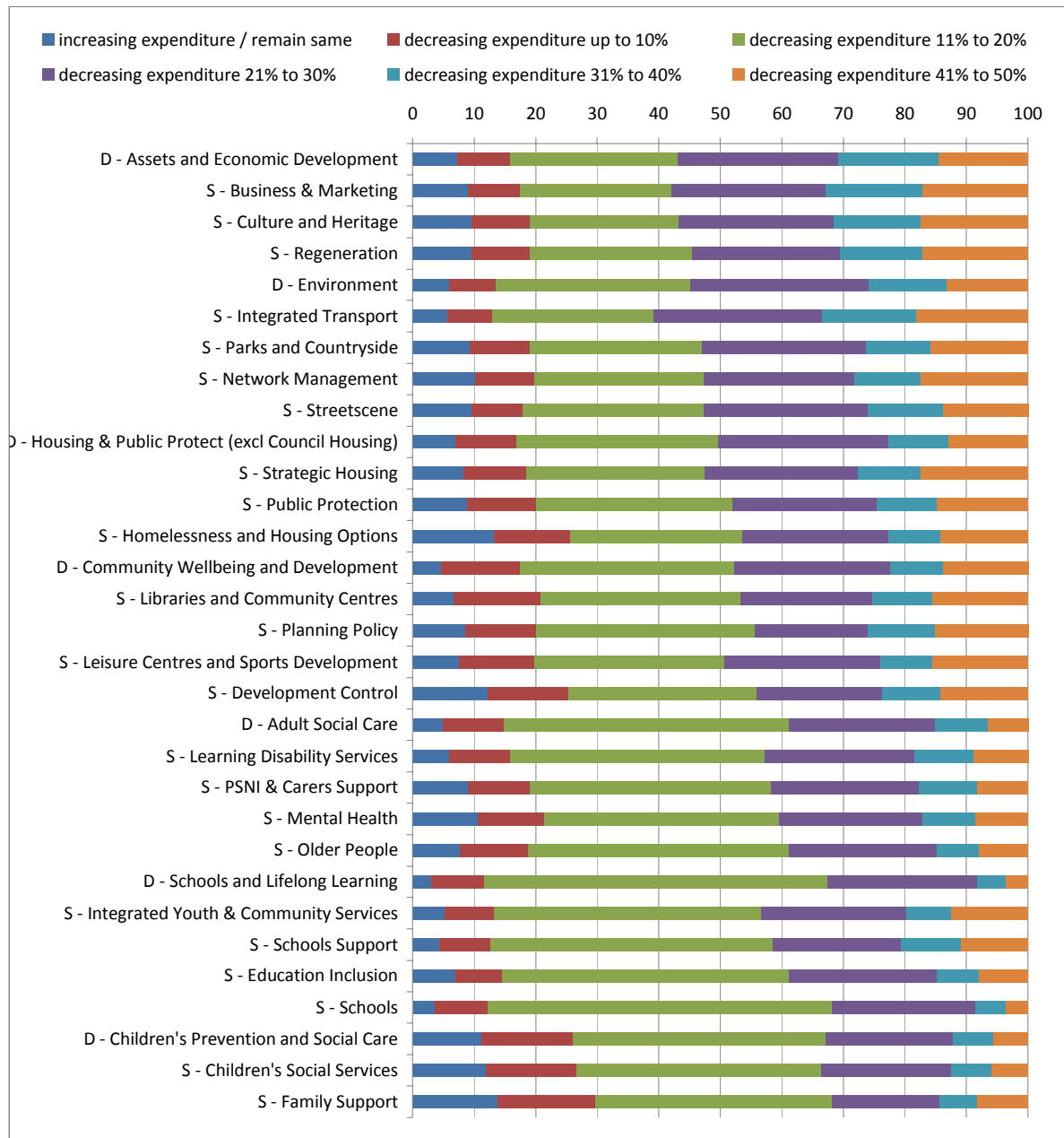
However it is important to note that there were differences in opinion, as illustrated in graph 2 below, highlighting the difficult decisions that will have to be made.

Table 1. Decreasing Expenditure by Department and Service Area

Departments and Service Areas	Average % decrease in expenditure
Assets and Economic Development	-23.55
Business & Marketing	-24.03
Culture and Heritage	-23.49
Regeneration	-23.23
Environment	-22.72
Integrated Transport	-25.14
Parks and Countryside	-22.22
Network Management	-22.20
Streetscene	-21.68
Housing and Public Protection (excluding Council Housing)	-21.49
Strategic Housing	-22.46
Public Protection	-21.34
Homelessness and Housing Options	-20.04
Community Wellbeing and Development	-21.38
Libraries and Community Centres	-21.53
Planning Policy	-21.36
Leisure Centres and Sports Development	-21.30
Development Control	-20.27
Adult Social Care	-19.70
Learning Disability Services	-20.64
Physical Sensory Neurological Impairment and Carers Support	-19.74
Mental Health	-19.21
Older People	-19.12
Schools and Lifelong Learning	-18.44
Integrated Youth and Community Services	-21.26
Schools Support	-21.25
Education Inclusion	-19.53
Schools	-18.28
Children's Prevention and Social Care	-16.55
Children's Social Services	-16.55
Family Support	-16.48

Chart 2. Decreasing Expenditure – Spread of Responses by Department and Service Area

(D indicates results for a department and S indicates results for a service area)



The second section asked respondents which, if any, of a series of options they would select to increase income to help balance the budget. All options for increasing income received support from at least half the respondents. The most popular options were to increase income across cleaning services (84.9%) and leisure services (74.1%). The least popular option was to increase income across Telecare services (57.6%). Table 2 below details the results for all income options listed in the survey.

Table 2. Increasing Income

Income Options	% Respondents selecting option
Cleaning Services	84.87
Leisure Services	74.01
Cemeteries and Crematorium	68.42
Car Parking	66.45
Catering/Schools Meals	66.12
Telecare	57.57

The third section asked respondents which, if any, of a series of options they would select to improve efficiency to help balance the budget. All options for improving efficiency received high levels of support. The most popular options for improving efficiency were purchasing more efficiently (91.1%) and making more efficient use of our buildings (90.8%). The least popular option was to use alternative service delivery models (71.38%). Table 3 below details the results for all efficiency options listed in the survey.

Table 3. Improving Efficiency

Table 3. Efficiency Options	% Respondents selecting option
Purchasing more efficiently	91.12
Making more efficient use of our buildings	90.79
Increasing customer access to digital self service	82.24
Sharing our services with other public sector providers	79.61
Alternative service delivery models	71.38

YouChoose: Further Suggestions to Save Money

At the end of the budget simulator exercise respondents were asked for further suggestions in relation to how they think the Council can save money. Nearly 500 further suggestions were received from respondents, the majority of which related to improving efficiency, followed by reducing expenditure and then increasing income. The most popular proposals are summarised below.

Improve Efficiency:

- Reduce waste, economise everything and cut back on all internal costs
- Share services, pool resources and work more collaboratively with other local authorities/partners
- Encourage greater community responsibility, community projects and volunteering
- Consider outsourcing services to other sectors where this offers better value for money, but improve contract monitoring to ensure good quality services
- Reduce bureaucracy, streamline processes and modernise ways of working.

Reduce Expenditure:

- Freeze or reduce pay and benefits for the highest earners
- Reduce the number of Councillors and associated pay and benefits
- Flatten the organisational structure and reduce levels of management
- Reduce staff levels and freeze pay and benefits
- Review all services and systems and focus on delivering priority and statutory outcomes in the leanest possible way.

Increase Income:

- Sell or rent out empty Council buildings
- Increase advertising, promotion and uptake of income generating services
- Introduce modest charges for free transport
- Increase charges and enforcement for fines and penalties
- Concerns raised about how increased car parking charges would affect the town centre.

Reshaping Services Focus Group Results

Focus group discussions were carried out with the Senedd Yr Ifanc/Youth Forum, the Diversity Forum, the Over 50's Forum and Social Housing Tenants, to gather views on reshaping Council services to meet the financial challenge. The key messages are summarised below.

Overall participants thought:

- The Council should improve efficiency and look to provide services differently before reducing or withdrawing any services
- That there are opportunities to make services more efficient and deliver services in different ways

- The Council should be focusing on reducing the cost of providing services rather than reducing spending on services.

Schools and Lifelong Learning – participants thought:

- There are likely to be opportunities for efficiency savings across schools as this is the area of greatest spend
- Schools and teaching staff are already stretched and standards need improving therefore schools may need to be delivered differently
- Savings could be realised by sharing resources, sharing managerial or specialist teachers, amalgamating schools and encouraging academies
- Schools should focus on raising standards and outcomes.

Adult and Children's Social Care – participants thought:

- Social services are vital for protecting vulnerable people, so the focus should be on delivering services more efficiently
- Services could be more focussed on prevention, early intervention and reablement, to reduce the demand for services
- The standard of services, particularly those commissioned from external organisations needs to be improved, through more effective procurement and contract monitoring
- Services could be less standardised and more focussed on the needs and circumstances of each individual
- The above actions would improve outcomes and lead to greater efficiencies over the long term.

Environment – participants thought:

- There are opportunities to deliver environmental services more efficiently and differently to generate savings
- Community responsibility and involvement could be more encouraged, for example for grass cutting, planting and street cleansing
- Services such as road works, utility works, bin collection and street cleansing routes could be better coordinated
- Preventing problems would be more cost effective than fixing problems in the long term, for example resurfacing roads rather than filling pot holes
- The energy efficiency of street lighting could be improved through part night lighting or dimming.

Housing and Public Protection (excluding Council housing) – participants thought:

- Welfare reform is likely to increase the demand for homelessness services which may make it more difficult to achieve savings in this area
- The demand for affordable housing is increasing which may make it more difficult to achieve savings in this area
- The new centralised telephone number for trading standards does not provide an effective customer focused service
- Public protection services could be better aligned with Environment Services to reduce duplication and share expertise.

Community Wellbeing and Development – participants thought:

- Community facilities are important to maintain but they could be delivered differently to make savings
- A number of community facilities such as libraries, community centres and sport facilities could be co-located in one community building such as a school
- The new resource centres such as Plas Pentwyn are particularly good examples of effective community hubs
- A mobile library facility might be a better alternative for community libraries, providing more resources and more user friendly opening hours
- Views differed on the privatisation of leisure facilities with some citing affordability issues and other opportunities for improved facilities.

Assets and Economic Development – participants thought:

- The economy is an important area in the current climate and expressed concern about the degeneration of the town centre
- There are further opportunities to promote Wrexham County Borough as a place to visit that could generate income for the Council
- Current facilities such as the museum and the art gallery could be improved, new tourist opportunities such as a mining centre created, transport links to more rural locations such as the aqueduct improved, and charges for facilities introduced.

Income – participants thought:

- Income for services that the Council currently charges for such as planning and leisure should cover the cost of providing those services
- Income and enforcement activity should be increased for fines and penalties
- Offering a reduced rent for empty shops and other Council buildings would increase income generated from them.
- Modest charges could be introduced for services such as free bus passes, the museum and the art gallery
- There are other potential areas the Council could compete with the private sector to generate income, such as expanding preschool nursery provision and providing a waste collection service for businesses.

Other key messages from participants were:

- More joined up working with partners and other local authorities would create savings
- Efficiency could be improved if departments worked better together
- Job seekers and people serving a community sentence could provide some Council services in exchange for training
- Encouraging more community spirit, social responsibility and volunteering would reduce the demand for services.

Consultation Evaluation

36 Participants who completed the You Choose Survey also provided feedback about the survey, which is detailed in Appendix 4.

Positive feedback suggested that some participants liked the modern and progressive nature of the survey and felt that the survey communicated the difficult decisions the Council has to make.

However other feedback suggested two key areas for improvement when carrying out similar consultation exercises in the future:

1. Some participants would like more complex and detailed information to base their responses on. For example more detailed information about the budget and more refined information about the consequences of increased and decreasing expenditure, as well as more information to explain the causal nature of the system as a whole.
2. Some participants would also like to see a wider range of options for reducing expenditure, increasing income and improving efficiency. For example to be able to reduce spending across all sources of expenditure including support services, housing services, and staff and Members, as well as having more imaginative and better costed options for increasing income and improving efficiency.

Some participants also suggested further methodologies that could be used to consult on the financial pressures. For example setting up an independent panel consisting of specialist officers, finance officers, Members, partners, other local authorities and members of the public, to review and make recommendations for improving the efficiency of each Council activity.