

‘Difficult Decisions 2019-20’

KEY FINDINGS

Responses

There were a total number of 3,350 responses to the consultation.

- 3,325 Responses to Survey (online and paper) * which generated 6,754 comments
- 7 Participants at the ‘market stall’ event
- 18 letters/emails

Copies of Letters, emails and all comments received can be found in the Members library.

*This gives a Confidence Level of more than 95% and a Confidence Interval of less than 5%.

*A **confidence level** is an expression of how confident a researcher can be of the data obtained from a sample. Confidence levels are expressed as a percentage and indicate how frequently that percentage of the target population would give an answer that lies within the confidence interval.*

*A **confidence interval** is the margin of error that a researcher would experience if he or she could ask a particular research question, say, of every member of the target population and receive the same answer back that the members of the sample gave in the survey.*

Survey Analysis

Quantitative Data

For each of the questions within the survey which were presented with a 'tick-box' response, there were a number of people who chose not to give a response. We are not able to determine why people chose not to give a response, and therefore should be cautious about making any assumptions. However, in order to present the results of the consultation accurately, the graphs will indicate the percentage of people who chose not to answer a particular question.

About You

1,862 people answered the questions in the 'About You' section of the survey. Therefore the analysis of the data by group is based on these responses.

Qualitative Data

Comments received in the survey have been analysed and coded/themed.

For each proposal, the total number of comments received is shown. The most commonly occurring codes/themes have then been highlighted in this document – along with the number of comments received related to that code/theme.

Income and Cost Recovery

WCBC has a 'Cost Recovery Policy', which outlines principles for charging for services provided by Wrexham County Borough Council (WCBC). It establishes a framework within which fees and charges set by the council are agreed and regularly reviewed, and also sets out the general principles by which the council will operate. The policy contains guidelines to ensure that fees are set appropriately in order for us to recover our costs, whilst also delivering value to the public, at a price that is reasonable for the service.

One of the main principles of the policy is that where it is appropriate to charge for a service, we should ensure that we are making enough money from charging to cover the costs of delivering this service. It also states that in some cases, where we're not able to cover our costs, we should consider decommissioning (i.e. stopping) the service.

There are some services which we currently provide for free, or for a 'contribution'. We will consider whether we could make a charge (or increase the charge) for some of these services, so that the income we generate is enough to cover the cost of providing the service.

We will also consider whether there are any other services (that we currently provide, or which we could provide in the future) which we could consider charging for in order to generate income which could be reinvested in council services. This approach may mean that we are able to continue providing some non-statutory services (which we might otherwise have to stop completely) by charging for them.

Do you have any suggestions for other ways in which WCBC could generate income?

Do you have any suggestions for other ways in which WCBC could generate income?	
Code / Theme	Count
Reduce Councillor salaries / Don't increase salaries / Make position voluntary	123
Remove the role of Mayor	111
Charge all staff and Councillors for parking	109
Reduce the number of Councillors	67
Reduce rents and business rates for businesses in Wrexham	61
Negative comments regarding the new paving on Hope Street	55
Reduce salaries of Council staff	50
Better enforcement of litter, dog fouling, parking etc.	45
Increase council tax	39
Other ideas for generating income	35

Waste Services

You will be aware from previous budget consultations that we have been reviewing the way that we deal with waste in Wrexham, for a number of years. As have other Local Authorities in Wales. You might also know that Welsh Government have been looking at this issue, as they want to ensure that local services are supportive of national initiatives and targets. Welsh Government guidance is that local authorities should look to move to monthly household waste collections (i.e. your black or blue bin), in order to increase the amount of waste we recycle, protect the environment and reduce costs. So far in Wales we haven't seen any areas achieve this standard. However, we have seen a number of areas (such as Gwynedd) move to collection of this household bin once every three weeks (as oppose to once a fortnight as we currently do in Wrexham).

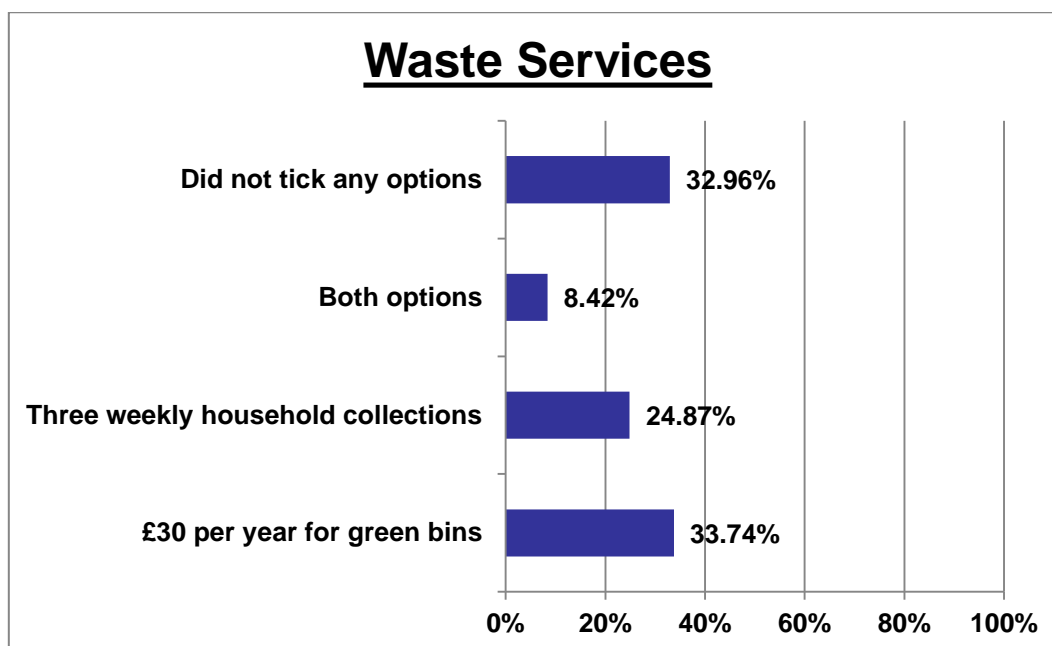
As we see the progress and changes that others are making to waste services, naturally in Wrexham we also need to consider making changes. There are a number of options for us to consider, and we'd like to know what you think.

One option would be that we introduce three-weekly bin collections for your black/blue bins. We will continue to collect your recycling on a weekly basis, as we would hope the amount of recyclable waste increases as a result of this change to 'residual waste'. This would bring us in-line with Welsh Government's Blue Print for Wales Collection Services, and other Local Authorities who have, or are, moving to this system. We estimate that this would generate the greatest level of savings, and also have to biggest impact on recycling within Wrexham.

The second option that we're proposing is to the way we handle green / garden waste. Based on some of the suggestions you made in last year's budget consultation, and the data we have about the volume of garden waste we collect, this year we are only collecting your garden waste once per month in November, December and January. Unlike household waste, the council doesn't legally have to collect garden waste; however we want to be able to provide this service, therefore the proposal is to charge everyone (who uses one) £30 per year for having their green bin emptied (plus £30 for any additional green bin). Other areas already charge an annual fee for green bins, such as Flintshire (who charge £30) and Carmarthenshire (who charge £42), and do not collect during the winter months.

2. Unfortunately, due to the level of cuts to our budget we need to make we do not have the option of doing nothing; therefore please tell us your views on the options we have outlined.

What would your preferred option be?



Please make any other suggestions or comments about waste services below:	
Code / Theme	Count
There is a risk of increased fly-tipping if these proposals are introduced	302
Reducing household waste collections would cause more problems e.g. vermin, smells and mess	234
People struggle with two-weekly bin collections - particularly people with children and pets	188
Reducing winter collections for green waste is reasonable, and could even be reduced further	123
There should be no changes in waste services when we pay so much in council tax	120
The services provided by bin collection teams need to be improved, including staff performance, recruitment and retention	114
Disagree with both options	107
People should be educated and encouraged to re-use and recycle more. There should be more done to ensure people follow the rules around recycling	100
Criticism of WCBC	94
Keep fortnightly bin collections	90

Libraries

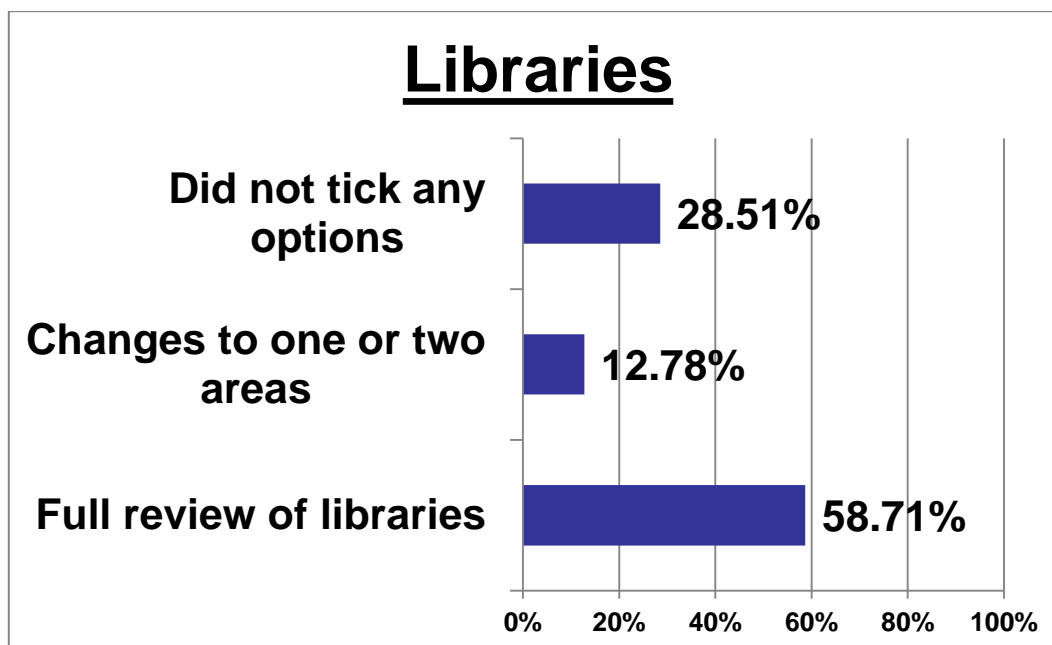
Local authorities in Wales have a duty to provide 'adequate and sufficient' library services; however, it is up to each authority to decide how they will provide these services in their area. In Wrexham, we currently spend approximately £1.3million on libraries every year, and so clearly, in these difficult times, this is an area that we need to review to ensure that it is efficient, and able to meet residents' changing needs.

Our proposal is that over the next year, we undertake a complete review of library services across Wrexham, in order to understand your needs and how best we could transform this service to meet those needs. Our expectation is that by doing this we would be able to deliver a more modern service, whilst also reducing spend in this area and helping bridge the gap in our budget in future years. As part of this review we would be engaging with communities where there are options for changing the service.

We simply cannot continue with current spending in this area, therefore if we do not carry out this full scale review of library services, there will still need to be changes. We have identified some possible options for saving money for 2019/20 (including potentially having to change the way we deliver library services in specific areas of the county) however it's unlikely that these changes will contribute to the effectiveness of the service, or help to deliver a modernised service which meets local need; and there may still need to be further reductions in this area in future.

3: Unfortunately, due to the level of cuts in our funding we need to make we do not have the option of doing nothing; therefore please tell us your views on the options we have outlined.

What would be your preferred option?



Please make any other comments or suggestions about libraries below	
Code / Theme	Count
Libraries are community assets and should be maintained - they are local meeting spaces and also help prevent loneliness and isolation and are used by schools	129

Consider income generation - e.g. charging membership fee, renting out space, computer use, having cafes, seek sponsorship	122
Service they provide is essential to families, the elderly and people on low incomes (e.g. those that can't afford computers / WiFi / books and job seekers)	122
Libraries not needed - digitalise services and train people in how to use them / provide tablets to those in greatest need	75
Don't close any more libraries or reduce the service	65
Transfer libraries to private / third sector orgs / Community Councils and seek more volunteers to help run them	58
Co-locate in other council buildings, community buildings, schools or Ty Pawb	57
Only have one library in town-centre (close all others)	50
A review is needed to make best use of resources / meet customer needs / modernise the service - ensure staff are involved	49
Use library buildings for other public services as well (make greater use of providing services in communities)	46

Transport to 'faith schools'

Within Wrexham we have a number of 'faith schools' (i.e. those schools which are intended for pupils of a particular religious faith). Parents can choose to apply for their children to attend these schools.

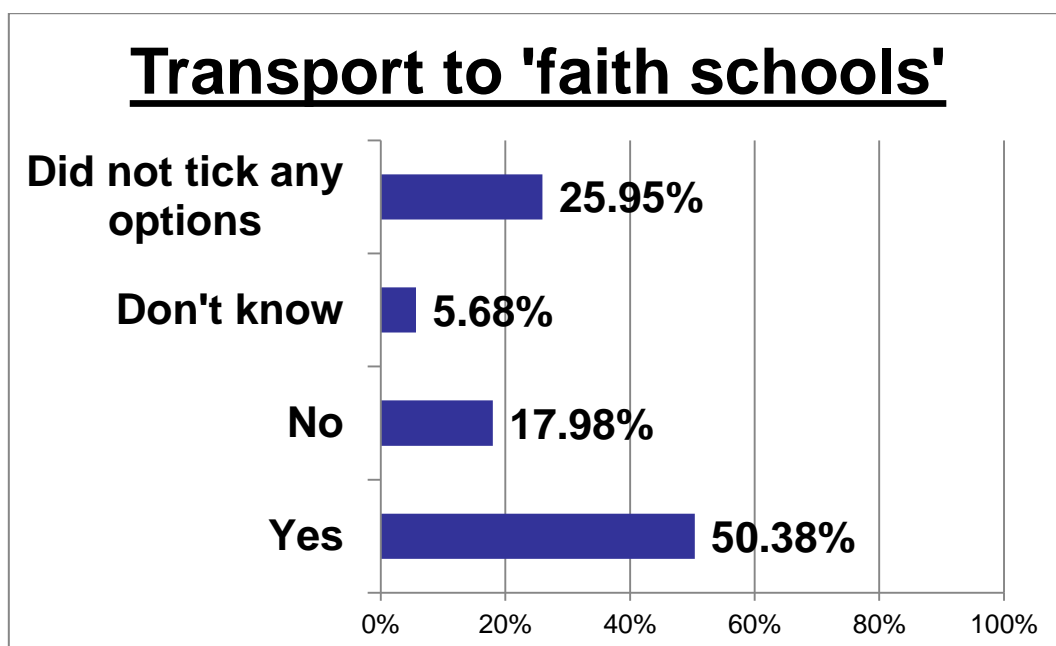
The arrangements for home to school transport in Wrexham are that we provide transport for any child living more than 3 miles (for secondary school), or more than 2 miles (for primary school) away from the school that they are attending, providing this is the nearest suitable school to where they live. We do not provide free school transport to those pupils whose parental preference is not to send them to the 'nearest suitable school'. Should a parent decide that they want their child to attend a faith school, free school transport is currently provided for pupils living further than 2 or 3 miles away – regardless of whether there is a non-faith school closer to where they live.

The provision of this transport to faith schools is 'discretionary' (meaning that we are not required to provide it by law). We estimate that providing this transport currently costs us around £302,000 per annum, and therefore we want to review the current arrangements for this provision, and consider ending this free transport.

Any changes in this area would affect transport to 17 schools in Wrexham, and there are currently 406 pupils who would be affected by this proposed change. If we were to proceed with this review, we would also need to undertake consultations with all schools, parents and other interested stakeholders such as the diocesan authorities; and would want to ensure that there was no detrimental impact on pupils' education as a result. We would also need to ensure that any changes made as a result of this review and consultation would be implemented at an appropriate time (e.g. should this proceed, the earliest it could be implemented would be the start of the school year in September 2021).

4. Due to the current financial challenge we are facing, we have no choice but to consider reviewing a large number of our services.

Please tell us whether you would support us undertaking this review of school transport to faith schools.



Please make any other comments or suggestions about transport to 'faith schools' below	
Codes / Themes	Count
Parents should pay all or some of the cost	436
Discrimination towards faith schools / breaches equality and human rights	145
Concern about affordability / should be means tested	100
The current transport policy should be reviewed so that it is equal for all	82
The system is currently biased in favour of faith schools	77
Unfair and detrimental to families of faith	69
The Council / taxpayer should not be funding this	57
The removal of free transport would take away choice	53
Parents should choose the nearest school	44
Welsh schools should be included in the proposal	32
The church should pay	32

Council Tax

Council tax is a locally raised tax that is payable on all domestic properties. It is made up of three separate elements - a Wrexham County Borough Council charge, a North Wales Police Authority charge and a Community Council charge. Wrexham County Borough Council collects all of these charges and retains the amount due to itself and pays the Police Authority and the individual Community Councils the amounts collected on their behalf. The amount paid is dependent on the 'Band' into which a property has been placed. These bands range from 'A' to 'I'; with 'A' being the lowest charge up to 'I' being the highest charge made. Reductions are also made where a person lives alone or a property is vacant.

For 2019/20 we are considering a range of options, including an increase in council tax equivalent to 6% in a Band D property, due to the ongoing pressure on ongoing austerity. We appreciate that this is more than in previous years, and we understand that budgets are tight for everyone, however in order to help cover rising costs and to protect front-line services as much as possible, we are asking you to consider supporting this proposal. This will help us to protect, as much as possible, those services that are a high priority to you - such as schools and to meet the increased demands placed on adults' and children's social care.

As a Local Authority, we also have to contribute to the North Wales Fire and Rescue Service, and this year we have been asked for an increased amount. An increase in council tax will mean we can fund the Fire and Rescue Service in the way they have requested (e.g. a 0.65% rise in council tax will help them maintain the two fire engines at Wrexham Fire Station).

Last year the increase in council tax across Wales ranged from 3.3% to 12.5% - in Wrexham we increased by 3.9% - the third lowest increase across Wales, and below last years' North Wales average of 5%. Our council tax has always been one of the lowest in Wales, and nationally, of the 250 number of Local Authorities in England and Wales, our residents pay the seventh lowest council tax rate.

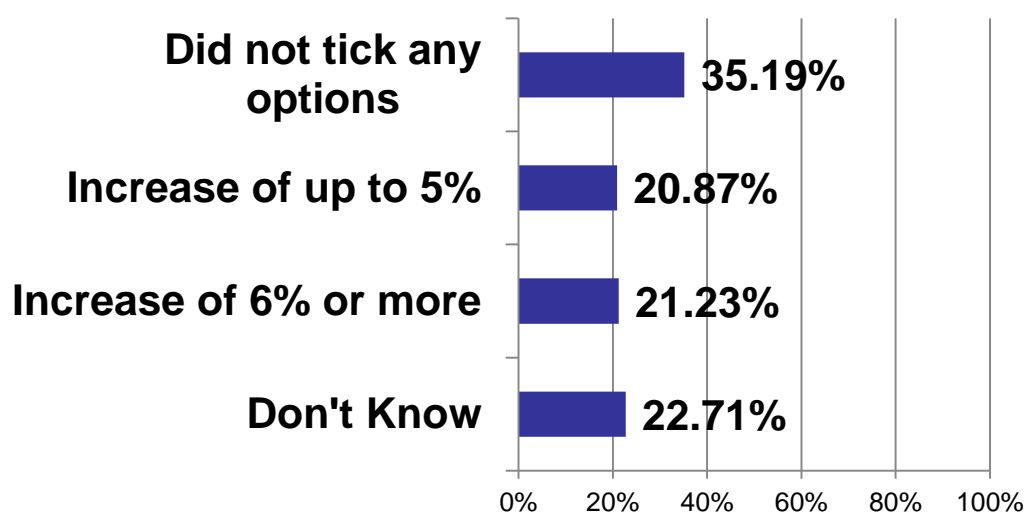
Each year the Welsh Government does an assessment of how much it expects each Local Authority to need to spend to deliver its services (known as the Standard Spending Assessment). It then provides a proportion of this funding, and the rest has to be made up from generating income and council tax. In order to meet the budget that Welsh Government states we will need, we would actually need to increase council tax by around 13%. We are not proposing to do this and so we currently bridge this funding gap through very tight budgetary control and being as efficient as possible.

One option we are considering is an increase of 6% which will cost a family in a Band D property approximately £5.45 extra a month. Whilst we appreciate that many people's budgets are tight, we want to do all we can to protect important services such as schools and social care, and this increase in council tax will help us to do this.

5. We believe there has to be an increase in council tax to support essential frontline services that you, as residents, feel are important.

We therefore ask you to consider the following options, and select one.

Council Tax



Please make any further comments about Council Tax below.	
Codes / Themes	Count
Council services are reducing/substandard/not fit for purpose/not value for money so unfair to increase Council Tax	218
Council tax is high enough already and the proposed increases would be unaffordable	217
Criticism of the Council Tax question - including leading/biased answer categories, requiring more detailed information, and misunderstanding the increase would only apply to band d properties/band d and above	120
Council Tax increases should be kept inline with other measures/levels - e.g. inflation, cost of living, wages/pensions	115
Do things differently to save more money - suggestions include improve efficiency, shared/integrated services with partners, invest to save, cutting services	86
Support the proposed increases as long as it is spent on the services outlined (Social Care, Education, Fire)	80
Council Tax should be frozen or reduced	71
Prioritise essential services and stop wasting money on unnecessary projects - e.g. Ty Pawb, Town Centre Paving, Car Park Signage	66
Reduce the cost of Councillors - including numbers, salaries, expenses, perks	64
Support a Council Tax increase - some stipulating only up of 5%/6%, others stating up to 10%	59

Any other suggestions or comments

Please tell us if you have any other suggestions for savings or alternative ways which we can deliver our services.	
Code / Theme	Count
Reduce number of Cllrs / Cllr pay	225
Remove the mayor / reduce mayoral budget	122
Reduce staffing levels	92
Reduce senior officers pay	90
Reduce spend on Ty Pawb / Ty Pawb - criticism	63
Block paving wasn't necessary / was waste of money	61
Staff and Members to pay for parking	54
Tackle staff not performing	53
Hire out empty offices / Reduce office accommodation / Make better use of our assets / Sell buildings and land / Sell off assets no longer required / Groves	45
Stop using consultants / contractors - use staff instead / Do more in-house - no contractors (e.g. Kingdom)	45