‘Difficult Decisions’ Consultation – ‘You Said, We Did’

In September and October 2016, Wrexham County Borough Council asked the public of Wrexham to take part in the ‘Difficult Decisions’ consultation, to inform the decisions we had to make in order to contribute to the estimated £5million we need to save over the forthcoming financial year.

The consultation involved a survey, two town centre market stalls and social media activity. 1,043 people took part in the consultation in all[[1]](#footnote-1), and we would like to thank all those people and groups who took part.

A really important part of any consultation is feeding back to the participants about what has happened since they gave their opinions, and what effect their views have had. This process of feedback is about being able to show where your views have directly impacted on a proposal, and also explaining when there are times where we could not do everything suggested by the public (and explaining why).

So, we are now presenting this ‘You Said, We Did’ report to show you the final decisions that have been made about each of the proposals presented for consultation.

*If you want to read all of the details about the proposals the Council made, and the results of the consultation, you will find a full report at* [*www.wrexham.gov.uk/budget*](http://www.wrexham.gov.uk/budget)

If you’re interested in taking part in more consultations and letting Wrexham Council know what you think, why not sign up to Wrexham LSB’s new engagement hub – Your Voice Wrexham. [www.yourvoicewrexham.net](http://www.yourvoicewrexham.net)

Survey Analysis

**Average Score**

Rather than simply presenting the % of responses which agreed/disagreed with each proposal, each proposal has been given an ‘Average Score’.

This means that for each response, a score of 2 was given for each response of ‘Strongly Agree’, 1 for ‘Agree’, 0 for ‘Neither’, -1 for ‘Disagree’ and a score of -2 was given for ‘Disagree Strongly’. These scores were then added together and divided by the total number of responses to that question to give an average score between -2 and 2.

Viewing the responses in this way allows us to demonstrate more clearly the strength of opinion for each proposal, and therefore demonstrates the results more accurately.

Economy

We proposed:

Advertising on WiFi

The installation of a new digital CCTV system in the town centre gives the Council the option of using the connectivity to offer a free WiFi network to the public. If this option proves to be viable, it is proposed that we could seek private sponsorship and offer business advertising on the WiFi network, which would generate an income for the Council. Currently it is not clear what level of income this might generate, and we will work closely with local businesses (e.g. through the Town Centre Forum) to develop this idea further. We will need to test the market for this proposal, but we estimate that we may be able to generate income of at least £3,000 in 2017/18.

You Said:

Average Score – 0.86

 27% of people answering this question, chose to make a comment. These included:

* Many people felt that the amount of investment required to set this up, would not be worth the small amount of money that could be generated from advertising.
* A number of people felt that this proposal was a good idea.
* Some people felt that advertising on Wifi is annoying and would actually put people off from using it.
* A few people expressed doubts that this proposal would be successful.

We Did:

Whilst there is an income target for advertising on WiFi this was not the main consideration for providing free WiFi in the town centre. The intention is to increase footfall into the town centre and provide improved access to Council services and the facilities available to the people who live, work and visit Wrexham. There is evidence to suggest that many visitors choose their destination based on the availability of access to the internet.

It will also allow the Council to promote and raise awareness of events taking place in the town and local businesses to advertise local promotions and offers.

We are aware that not everyone wants to use the internet but there are also a significant percentage of the population and businesses that feel that access to the internet and online services is very important to them.

**People**

**Children’s Social Care**

We asked:

**Are there any other comments you wish to make about anything you have read in the ‘Children’s Social Care’ section?**

You Said:

* Many people were of the opinion that the Council should reduce management in this area rather than frontline staff/services.
* A number of people felt that front line services should be protected, and vulnerable cyp should not be negatively affected.
* Some people were concerned about internet access and whether people who couldn’t access the internet would be negatively affected.

We Did:

The Department are combining two management roles to achieve the savings required, thereby protecting frontline services.

Whilst there will be more information available on line we will retain a face to face service for those who do not have access to the internet.

**Education**

We asked:

**Are there any other comments you wish to make about anything you have read in the ‘Education’ section?**

You Said:

* Many people felt that the savings made within this department should not be to the detriment of children's education
* A number of people said that they felt they needed more information about the changes being proposed.
* Some people felt that we should be investing more in children and young people’s education, rather than trying to make savings from this area.

We Did:

Schools delegated budgets have been increased overall by 1.5% for 2017-18, at a time when central budgets continue to be reduced. In this way, we are continuing our efforts to ensure that funding continues to find its way to schools and classrooms.

**Adult Social Care**

We proposed:

**Older People’s Day Centres**

We’ve made changes over the last few years which have moved away from directly providing day centres for older people. We’re working more closely with older people to help them stay independent and connect with their own communities. As we’ve developed these new services, we’ve less demand for places in Council run day centres. So we’ll continue to develop these new, community services and think about whether there is a demand for Council-run day centres anymore. (‘Day Centre’ provision will still be provided by third sector organisations, just not by the Council). We’ll work with service users and their families to make sure that we can continue to support them. **We think this could save around £47,000 in 2017/18.**

You Said:

Average Score – 0.16

* Many people felt that these services are important and losing them could lead to older people feeling lonely and isolated.
* A number of people said they would agree if no negative impact on service users.
* Some people said that the council have an important role to play in supporting vulnerable older people.
* Some people were concerned that outsourcing this could be expensive and lead to poorer services.

We did:

Adult Social Care accepts the importance of these services, and have therefore ensured that a range of services are available for Older People before proposing the decommissioning of council run day centres. We have now been able to complete this work, and following more detailed consultation with service users, have made more significant savings (by bringing forward savings which we did not envisage as possible until future years). This work has now been completed successfully without any reduction in service for Older People, with a total saving of £188,000. The range and quality of services will continue to be monitored and reviewed to ensure that we are able to meet the needs of older people in our communities.

We proposed:

**Work Opportunities**

The Council supports three projects which give work opportunities for people with disabilities, sensory impairment and mental health needs. We’re proposing that we work with these projects over the next two years to help them to become ‘social enterprises’. This means that they’ll run as businesses and any profits will be put back into the projects to keep them running. This will mean that they will no longer need funding from the Council. **This proposal will not make any savings in 2017/18, but we think it could save around £334,000 in the longer term.**

You said:

Average Score – 0.68

* Many people felt that the proposal was a good idea to support people who need it most.
* A number of people were concerned that this proposal may not be viable and the projects would eventually need to close.
* Some people felt that the council should continue to support these services to some extent.
* A few people felt that the Council would need to ensure that these social enterprises are run and supported effectively.

We did:

Over the next year we will continue to work on developing the options for the future of Work Opportunities services to ensure that they can be positive, sustainable and affordable in the long term. Service users and their families will continue to be involved in the development of these services, and the ongoing plans for change.

We asked:

**Are there any other comments you wish to make about anything you have read in the ‘Adult Social care’ section?**

You Said:

* Many people said that the council has a responsibility to protect the most vulnerable in society, and need to ensure they are still able to do this (even whilst making savings).
* A number of people made comments which were critical of the Council, and current services offered within the Adult Social Care department.
* Some people felt that these services need greater investment, not reductions.
* A few people felt that they needed more information in order to give an opinion.

We did:

Wrexham Council remains committed to ensuring that it is able to protect the most vulnerable and this together with investment in improved information, advice and preventative services will remain the priority for Adult Social Care investment. The overall budget for the department has been increased by 1.3% for the forthcoming year, and the department remains committed to modernising the services we offer so that we can meet demand and public expectations, whilst ensuring that we are managing within the resources available.

PEOPLE

We asked:

**Do you have any other suggestions for ways in which we could save money or generate income within the PEOPLE theme?**

You said:

* Many people felt that the town centre should be improved for visitors with more events and less empty shops.
* A number of people suggested that appropriate departments should be combined to make efficiency savings.
* A few people felt that the council should work more in partnership with others.
* A few people suggested that the Council should stop spending on external consultants.
* A few people suggested improvements to the way the Council consults with people (including involvement of staff).

 We did:

* The long term vision for Wrexham is to have a revitalised Wrexham town- centre and surrounding neighbourhoods, achieved by having new and improved homes, the creation of businesses, jobs and growth of the arts and creative industries sectors.
* Departments will continue to collaborate and share resources where appropriate, to ensure the best use of time and budget, whilst still meeting the needs of the people we serve.
* As part of the Council’s processes we will always consider whether a service could be delivered better, and /or more efficiently, and in partnership with others, if timescales and other factors allow us to do so.

PLACE

Environment and Planning

We proposed:

**Crematorium Hours**

The Council runs the crematorium in Wrexham. We’re thinking about extending the opening hours (currently 9am-6pm in the week, and 10am-6pm on weekends). **It is not clear at this stage what the financial impact of this proposal would be.**

You said:

Average score – 0.49

* Many people were in agreement with the proposal if is cost effective and the additional service is needed.
* A number of people felt that they needed more information in order to give an informed opinion.
* Some people felt that the proposed extended service is not necessary.
* A few comments expressing doubt that the proposal will have any positive effect on the budget.
* A few people said that they thought the Council needs to explore this idea more thoroughly before progressing.

We did:

Most responses made by the public were supportive of this proposal, but others clearly wanted more information on the changes of hours. The Council will pursue this change, but keep the public and service users informed.

We proposed:

**Public Protection**

The Council operates services such as Trading Standards, Environmental Health, Licensing and Health and Safety Services. This service are working hard to find better ways of working in order to improve the service, become more efficient and make savings. Where we no longer provide a particular service, we’ll make sure that we signpost people to advice and guidance from other sources**. We think this could make savings of around £150,000 in 2017/18.**

You said:

Average score – 0.43

* Many people said that they needed more information to make an informed comment on this proposal.
* A number of people felt that this service area should not be reduced, as these services are needed now more than ever.
* Some people expressed concern that these services not being delivered by the council will have a negative impact on quality.
* A few people made comments which were critical of the current service.
* A few people felt that it is very important to keep the public informed if these changes are implemented.

We did:

Most responses made by the public were not supportive of this change. The Council has modified the proposals to reduce the cuts (to £100,000) that will be made to this service, but will still pursue savings through restructuring the team and making other efficiencies. Public protection is a statutory service and the Council recognises its responsibilities in this respect.

We proposed:

**Improving Cost Recovery**

This department provides some services for which they charge a fee (e.g. burial record searches, contaminated land and land charges, highway markings and reclaiming lost/stray dogs). It is proposed that the current fees we charge are increased, so that we recover the cost for the service (and can therefore make savings from the Council budget). **We think this could save around £19,000 in 2017/18.**

You said:

Average score – 0.86

* Many people were supportive of the council recovering its costs, and people paying their own way.
* A number of comments said that any increases would need to be reasonable / manageable.
* Some people expressed concern about the cost to service users.
* A few people said that they felt they needed more information to be able to give an informed opinion.

We did:

Most responses made by the public support cost-recovery and the Council will do all that it can to achieve this.

We asked:

**Are there any other comments you wish to make about anything you have read in the ‘Environment and Planning’ section?**

You said:

* Many people made comments about waste and recycling services.
* A number of people made comments about green spaces and parks.
* A few people said that they felt they needed more information to be able to give an informed opinion.
* A few comments were critical of council staff.
* A few of the comments received were related to grass cutting.

We did:

The Council recognises that the public have had to deal with significant changes to the waste collection and recycling service this year. This has been necessary to provide the service in the most cost-effective manner, while also achieving stringent recycling targets, which it turn will make Wrexham a more sustainable place to live and work.

**PLACE**

We asked:

**Do you have any other suggestions for ways in which we could save money or generate income within the PLACE theme?**

You said:

* A number of you made suggestions for how you think we could generate more income in the future.
* Some comments received related to tourism in Wrexham.
* A few of the comments were to do with car parking in the town centre.
* A few people felt that communities should be more involved in making improvements within their own areas.
* A few people felt that enforcement of all regulations in Wrexham needs to improve.

We did:

The Council will do all that it can to generate income, but without undermining public access to essential, statutory services.

**Organisation**

Corporate and Customer Services

We proposed:

**Contact Centre Telephone Service**

Currently we offer a telephone contact service (based within Contact Wrexham) which is available from 8.30am until 5.30pm on Mondays to Fridays. We receive fewer phone calls in the last 30 mins of every day; and so we are thinking of stopping the service at 5pm. **It is estimated that this could generate £51,000 in 2017/18.**

You said:

Average Score – 1

* Many of the comments showed that people felt the proposed changes will have a negative impact on those people who work and are unable to call before 5pm.
* Some people were critical of the current service in the Contact Centre.
* A few people felt that the opening times of the Contact Centre could be reduced further than proposed.
* A few comments suggested alternatives to the changes proposed.

We did:

Changes to the Contact Centre Telephone Service are being progressed in light of the overall positive response from the public.

Recent service issues following major changes to Streetscene waste regimes caused access issues which we are reviewing.

We proposed:

**Registration Services**

The Registration Service is responsible for registering births, deaths and marriages; as well as performing civil wedding ceremonies. It is proposed that we make more income in this area so that we can cover our costs. So, we could offer a number of ‘extras’ which people may want to use. E.g. Offering commemorative certificates; and charging for access to the webcam facility (meaning friends/relatives can watch your wedding online). **It is estimated that this could generate additional income of approximately £5,000 in 2017/18.**

You said:

Average score – 0.97

* Many of the comments were a general agreement with the proposal.
* A number of people felt that the estimated increased income is not a significant amount, and it may not be worth the investment needed to implement.
* Some people felt that this proposal could be extended even further to create more significant income.
* A few people said that the Council need to consider what is affordable for people, and the costs should not be prohibitive.

We asked:

**Are there any other comments you wish to make about anything you have read in the ‘Corporate and Customer Services’ section?**

You said:

* Some people suggested that there could be further improvements made to the way that Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks are made.
* A few comments were made with people expressing that they’re supportive of a move to more online services.
* A few people were critical of specific council services.

We did:

Exploitation of ICT solutions and digital transformation is pivotal to delivery of customer services in the 21st Century. General public support to this way of working is encouraging and we are committed to improving the availability of services, and access to the Council overall.

Finance

We asked:

**Are there any other comments you wish to make about anything you have read in the ‘Finance’ section?**

You said:

* Some people expressed concern about the impact on other departments of the changes within the finance department – as other departments are required to take on some of the functions previously done centrally.
* Some of the comments received stated that not everyone is able/wants to use online services; therefore there should be a balance between online and face to face.
* A few comments were received about the Tenant Content Scheme – with some people feeling that it should not be the role of the Council to provide this service at all, and others feeling that the level of income expected was not worth the investment it may need.
* A few people were concerned about the reduction in staffing levels within this department.

We did:

* The Finance areas of the Council are working hard together with other services to enable Managers and staff to do things themselves. This varies from budget monitoring to the provision of online payslips to staff. The Council is mirroring the digital arrangements that are happening in our everyday lives and it is continuing to develop and make efficiencies in these areas.
* We have listened to the observations made by the public around on-line services. We agree that there should be a balance. We are taking a step by step approach to services like electronic Council Tax Billing and online Benefit Claims to ensure that there remains a choice and that the advantages of the changes are shared with the public.
* We are keen that Council tenants have access to affordable contents insurance for their own protection; however the use of the scheme remains optional. It is agreed that this is only a small saving but in the current time of austerity in public sector services then every little helps.
* We share the public’s concerns over reducing staff numbers but given that the resources available to the Council are reducing and the demand for its services are increasing, the Council must do things differently and continue to reduce its staffing costs.

**Organisation**

We asked:

**Do you have any other suggestions for ways in which we could save money or generate income within the ORGANISATION theme?**

You said:

* Some of the comments received stated that Council staff working practices should be explored and improved.
* Some comments were from people who felt that we should abolish the role of Mayor.
* A few people felt that the council should work more collaboratively with other partners.
* A few people felt that the council should run more as a business, and work more efficiently.
* A few people said that the Council could save money by reducing unnecessary spending on producing everything bilingually.

We did:

* We continue to work hard across all departments to ensure that working practices are effective and efficient.
* The role of Chairman of the Council or Mayor is covered by Section 3 of the Local Government Act 1972. This states that all local authorities must elect a Chairman annually and as a Chartered Borough we use the term ‘Mayor’ for this role. The office of Chairman or Civic Mayor is an important element of a council’s governance structure and the public face of the authority. By virtue of Section 5 of the 1972 Act the Council must also appoint a Vice Chairman or Deputy Mayor annually. As these roles are a statutory requirement, it will not be possible to remove them, or even to temporarily suspend them. However, much work has been undertaken to appreciably reduce expenditure on the role of mayor.
* There are two ways in which this is being done. Firstly through the Local Service Board we bring together partners from Health, Police, Education and AVOW to jointly deliver on services that we can more effectively deliver together. Secondly through partnership working in conjunction with neighbouring authorities in area such as Planning, Legal Services and Community Safety. As part of the Council’s processes we will always consider whether a service could be delivered better, and /or more efficiently, and in partnership with others, if timescales and other factors allow us to do so.
* The Council will always seek to comply with its responsibilities to promote Welsh Language and Culture as now embraced in the National Welsh Language Standards set by Welsh Government.

Council Tax

We proposed:

The Council’s total budget for the 2015/16 financial year was £223 million, which was made up of £170 million from Welsh Government funding and £53 million from Council Tax.

Given the continuing financial challenge we face, and the increasing requirement to make savings and review our services, we would once again like to know what you think about increasing Council Tax. Welsh Government say that Local Authorities are able raise Council Tax by a maximum of 5%, which in Wrexham would mean an increase of £49.82 per year (or 96p per week) for Band D properties.

Raising council tax by 5% (rather than the already planned 3%) would generate approximately £836k per annum in additional income (which would reduce the amount of money we need to save from other services).

You Said:



23% of people chose to make a comment. These included:

* The services provided by the Council do no warrant an increase in council tax.
* People's wages aren't rising, and nor is inflation, therefore neither should council tax.
* There should be no increase at all in council tax.
* This may be reasonable if the quantity and quality of services is not reduced.
* The council should be better at reducing spending, rather than increasing council tax.
* The proposed increase would put people / families under pressure during difficult times.

We Did:

The Council’s proposed Council Tax increase for 2016/17 has been set at 2.6% (which matches the latest estimate of the Retail Price Index for January 2017, which is also 2.6%). This is slightly below the Council’s Medium Term Financial Plan and the Council has listened to the responses made and is continuing to keep the level of Council Tax in Wrexham at a very low level. It is around the 7th lowest in England and Wales and will be the lowest of the North Wales Authorities. Keeping the Council Tax at this low level requires services to be more efficient than elsewhere and clearly some services will have to cease or be provided in a different way.

1. \*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.* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)