



Cabinet

25 February 2014

Report title	Budget 2014/2015 – outcome of consultation	
Decision designation	AMBER	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Andrew Johnson Resources	
Key decision	Yes	
In forward plan	Yes	
Wards affected	All	
Accountable director	Keith Ireland, Delivery	
Originating service	Finance	
Accountable employee(s)	Mark Taylor Tel Email	Mark Taylor 01902 556609 mark.taylor@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Report to be/has been considered by	Delivery Directorate Leadership Team	28 January 2014
	Strategic Executive Board	30 January 2014
	Budget Working Party	3 February 2014
	Strategic Executive Board	6 February 2014
	Cabinet Resources Panel	11 February 2014

Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Consider the responses to the consultation undertaken for the Five Year Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2014/2015 to 2018/19 as detailed in this report.
2. Agree the initial response of Cabinet to the consultation taking into account the final budget Cabinet will recommend to Council for approval on 5 March 2014

Recommendations for noting:

Cabinet Panel is asked to note:

1. The final response will also be fed back to those that participated in the consultation.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 This report sets to inform Cabinet about the consultation process undertaken to apprise the 2014/2015 budget-setting decisions, allowing for Councillors' consideration and approval of the initial responses to the consultation.
- 1.2 The final response to the consultation will be taken into account in the final budget that Cabinet recommends to Council to approve on 4 March 2014. The final response will also be fed back to those that participated in the consultation.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The Council's budget consultation took place from October 2013 to January 2014 in order to inform the budget-setting decisions for 2014/2015. All of the consultation and analysis was conducted in-house and this was a major factor in keeping the cost of delivery to a minimum.
- 2.2 The process was comprised of:
- A City Direct telephone hotline;
 - An invitation to submit comments in writing;
 - An online survey for the public and staff;
 - Workshops with communities of interest representing the equalities strands; and
 - Stakeholder meetings with
 - The business community
 - Trades unions
 - Private sector landlords
 - Registered social landlords
 - Voluntary and Community Sector organisations
 - Local Neighbourhood Partnerships
 - The Youth Council
- 2.3 The consultation was branded as 'Facing Reality' and the Council's Communications Team provided support to:
- set up a Facing Reality web page hosted on the corporate website;
 - produce and publish the Council's inaugural Financial Plan
 - produce and publish (in print and electronic format) an easy read guide to the budget proposals;
 - develop Facebook advertising that sign posted the public to the consultation (in particular a web-based survey); and
 - real time responses to a live Twitter feed focusing on the budget proposals.
- 2.5 The Facing Reality campaign was publicised in the Express and Star newspaper. The Cabinet Member for Resources was also interviewed by Radio WM.

- 2.6 A fully sponsored specially commissioned financial plan document setting out the Council's financial circumstances was used to reiterate the message within the Facing Reality campaign. The financial plan was published on the Council's website and was available to everyone that attended a stakeholder or community meeting throughout the consultation period.
- 2.7 An easy read guide to the budget proposals was also produced to accompany the detailed budget proposals published in the 23 October Cabinet Report. The easy read guide was published on the Council's website and was available on request and was also used as reference material for everyone that attended a stakeholder or community meeting throughout the consultation period.
- 2.8 Appropriate Cabinet members, Directors, Assistant Directors and in some instances, Heads of Service, attended stakeholder meetings in order to support the process and answer any relevant questions. A full and accurate record of all stakeholder meetings was kept by a Democratic Support Officer.

3.0 Discussion: executive summary of key findings

- 3.1 60% of the respondents to the online survey stated that they would be prepared to pay more council tax if that reduced the level of cuts to that service. Of those
- 19.5% indicated that they would be prepared to pay more than 5% extra;
 - just over 22% would be prepared to pay 5% extra;
 - 6.6% would pay 4% more;
 - 16% would pay an additional 3%;
 - 25% would pay an extra 2%; and
 - 10.5% would pay 1% more.
- 3.3 Future Consultations
- The scale of the council's financial challenge means that the council is now in a position where a minimum of £5 million will be found from a combination of new savings and increases in the value of the existing proposals for 2014/2015. Any new savings identified will be consulted upon individually.
- 3.4 There is evidence to suggest that there is some support for the following proposals:
- Reduce street lighting maintenance;
 - Fees and charges review – bereavement services;
 - Cessation of winter garden waste 'green bin' collection service;
 - Reduce number of councillors;
 - Review of the use of organists Bushbury Crematorium;
 - Removal of council subsidy for the operation at the bar at Aldersley Leisure Village;
 - Reduction in the Christmas decoration lighting and maintenance budget;
 - Review the function and extent of the Mayoral Office; and
 - Improve collection rate for Council Tax.

3.5 A comprehensive summary of the consultation findings can be found at Appendix i.

4. Key Findings

The main proposals that respondents commented upon were:

4.1 Replacing Local Neighbourhood Partnership with Community Economic Regeneration Stage 1 and 2

Respondents were concerned about how the council would consult effectively without the LNP staff and about the economic impact of this proposal as the staff have been effective at supporting communities in securing external funding.

4.2 Reduction in Voluntary Sector Grant

Organisations argued that the reduction in grant funding to the sector quoted in the council documentation (13%) is misleading as it includes commissioned activity. They believe reductions in grant funding will undermine the ability of the sector to win contracts and support vulnerable people. The sector underlined its importance in attracting external funding to the city.

4.3 Removal of Council Subsidy for Central Baths

Respondents thought that this proposal would have implications for the health of residents. They were also concerned that residents would not be able to access alternative facilities and that the proposal may have a disproportionate effect on some groups such as Asian women and disabled people.

41 (just over 7.5%) of respondents to the online survey said that this proposal would have an impact on them. 6095 people have signed a petition to save Central Baths

4.4 Reduction to overall council subsidy of Cultural Services including the Art Gallery

As well as being an important resource for communities, some respondents felt that these services could also play an important part in the regeneration of the city, attracting visitors and offering training and employment opportunities. 38 respondents to the online survey (just over 7%) said that this proposal would have an impact on them, with a further 32 saying that the proposal on Bantock House would impact upon them. 37 people indicated that they would be prepared to pay higher fees and charges if that protected this service.

4.5 Reduction in library opening hours and introducing charges for internet use.

Respondents were concerned that this proposal would have the greatest impact on the most disadvantaged people, particularly people who will shortly be required to make benefits claims online, job seekers (both of whom might require more than an hour to complete online forms) and those people for whom the libraries might be their main recreational outlet. 43 respondents to the online survey (just over 8%) said that this proposal would have an impact upon them and 20 (3.7%) indicated that they would be prepared to pay higher fees and charges if that protected this service.

4.6 Reduction in the Neighbourhood Wardens Service

Participants were concerned that if the catchment area was increased for the wardens, their effectiveness would reduce. Local residents felt that the wardens provided good public reassurance and had had an effect on crime in neighbourhoods. 34 respondents to the online survey (6%) said that this proposal would have an impact on them.

4.7 Reduce the number of Councillors

There was broad support for this proposal. 37 people (6.8%) who took part in the online survey were strongly in favour of this proposal with 28 saying that this proposal would have little or no impact upon them.

4.8 Reconfiguration of Youth Services, centred on Youth Zone and targeted youth support

Respondents were concerned about the practical difficulties, safety aspects and travel costs for young people accessing the Youth Zone. They also saw the potential for violence between young people from different geographical areas and were worried that the decrease in neighbourhood youth services would see a rise in anti-social behaviour in localities. 21 respondents to the online survey (3.9%) said that this proposal would have an impact upon them.

4.9 General comments unrelated to specific savings proposals

The online survey showed that the majority of people (just over 86%) agreed with the principle that the council should focus its resources on regeneration, protecting essential services and job creation. Participants were concerned about the impact of the savings on the most vulnerable and that the savings might have unintended outcomes particularly related to the economy and acute health and social care services. Some respondents questioned whether some of the proposals under the 'efficiencies' heading were in fact a reduction in services rather than efficiencies.

4.10 Respondents were interested in the council's overall approach to the budget challenge. Some participants felt that the council's back office costs and duplication could be reduced still further and that partnering arrangements with other local authorities should be considered. A partnership approach to addressing the challenges that the city faces was advocated by many and it was felt that the community had an important part to play in this.

4.11 Many participants would like to see an increased focus on prevention, which they said would ultimately save money, and felt that the council's stated commitment to this area was not reflected in the savings proposals themselves. Some groups raised concerns about their ability to comment meaningfully on the proposals based on the information the council provided.

4.12 Several savings ideas were suggested by participants. These varied from the council taking a more strategic approach to attracting external funding on behalf of the city to turning off street lights after a certain time at night or obtaining commercial sponsorship for flower beds.

- 4.13 A number of suggestions were made for saving money on staffing costs, particularly through the online survey. This included changing terms and conditions, reducing staffing hours, reducing the number of consultants in the council, capping or reducing salaries (with some advocating that this should be set above a certain salary level) and working from home.

5.0 Initial response from cabinet

- 5.1 The Cabinet would like to thank all participants in the consultation process and to pay tribute to the serious and constructive approach adopted. The Cabinet would also like to thank those participants who would be prepared to assist the Council by volunteering to assist within their communities or by offering to work with the Council to find alternative ways of saving money to prevent service cuts.

5.2 Replacing LNP with Community Economic Regeneration Stage 1 and 2

The Cabinet proposes to retain an earmarked fund designed to enable existing LNPs to put in place arrangements to continue working with their communities and to bid for external funding. The Council's Community Engagement Officer will be transferred to the service, as will be the remaining Voluntary Community Sector Engagement officer. Both of these officers will work with local grassroots organisations and the voluntary community sector to ensure that there is engagement with people who are more difficult to reach.

5.3 Reduction to overall council subsidy of Cultural Services including the Art Gallery

The Cabinet wishes the Art Gallery, Archives, Bantock House and Bilston Craft Gallery to become commercially viable under new business models designed to maximise revenue income and reduce the Council's subsidy. Where appropriate we will work with partner organisations to achieve this.

5.4 Reduction in the Neighbourhood Warden Service

The Cabinet notes that with reduced Council resources it will be important to work in close partnership with the police, who will be increasing the number of PCSOs in Wolverhampton. To ensure the remaining wardens are employed effectively, alongside PCSOs, the Council's Community Safety Team have been co-located at Bilston Street Police Station, and the Anti-Social Behaviour Unit at a Wolverhampton Homes site. It is also proposed in response to serious concerns in the consultation to give consideration to reinstate a number of warden posts which would require additional resources be built into the budget.

5.5 Reconfiguration of Youth Services, centred on Youth Zone and targeted youth support

The Cabinet is extremely sympathetic to the concerns expressed in the consultation regarding the closure of all open access youth facilities. We have left in the budget a sum of money available to reprovide some facilities through voluntary sector and community sector organisations. Further, the Council will be continuing to support some targeted work with young people within the own communities. Cabinet will give further consideration to the concerns raised about the practical difficulties, safety aspects and travel costs for young people accessing the Youth Zone.

5.6 Focus on Regeneration

Cabinet will continue to support regeneration work by using capital resources available to the Council either through government grant, government supported borrowing, capital receipts or prudential borrowing. There will be continued focus on the regeneration of the City Centre; the Junction 2 area including i54 and the Enterprise Zone as well as a focus on ensuring a supply of quality housing and employment land across the City. This is resulting in increased investment, new homes and employment opportunities for local people as well as increased business rates revenues and new homes bonus grant. Cabinet will have due regard to the revenue implications of any new prudential borrowing which supports further regeneration.

5.7 Job Creation

Cabinet will continue to support new jobs and training opportunities across the City. We are working directly with the businesses creating jobs to understand their needs and then developing approaches with our key partners including the College, University and Job Centre Plus to ensure local people get the appropriate support/training to access the jobs.

5.8 Reduction in Voluntary Sector Grant

The Cabinet notes concerns raised regarding reduction in Voluntary Sector Grant. Across the Council financial support to the voluntary sector remains considerable and where ever possible these changes have been made in a way that minimises the loss of external funding. The Council also has at its disposal a small earmarked "innovate to save" budget which is designed to create efficiencies and reduce costs in the Voluntary Sector. However due to recent concerns expressed regarding the impact of the cuts in community language teaching previously consulted upon it may be necessary to reserve some of this fund to be used as seed money for alternative provision of mother tongue teaching should sufficient resources not be available through existing approved budgets.

5.9 Reduce the number of Councillors

The Cabinet notes the feedback in relation to this proposal and will continue to consider it further.

5.10 Removal of Council Subsidy for Central Baths

Cabinet notes that there is a new commercial operating model being developed which is intended to move all Leisure Centres, including Central Baths to a more commercial footing. The new management team are developing a business model for the delivery of the service that will presented to Cabinet (Resources) Panel on 11 March 2014 for approval. The Cabinet's aspiration is that overall Leisure Centres won't require any subsidy and the Council is therefore looking for ways for the three sites together to at least break even as soon as is commercially possible.

5.11 Reduction in library opening hours and introducing charges for internet use.

Cabinet notes that the move of Libraries into community hubs will mean that many libraries will continue to be open for book borrowing and return and computer use even when staff are not present. In addition efforts are being made to develop network of volunteers to provide support to community libraries which may support extension to their opening hours

5.12 Other General Comments

Cabinet welcomes the wish of participants to see an increased focus on prevention to ultimately save money. The Council has, for example, invested resources in a new operating model in Children's Services which will ultimately produce cost savings as well as an improved Children's Service. However our ability to make additional investment in preventative measures is constrained by the lack of resources available to the Council. Cabinet will continue to seek savings in administration costs and by seeking partnership arrangements with other public, voluntary or private sector bodies. All other savings ideas suggested by participants will be given serious consideration.

6.0 Financial implications

- 6.1 Should any changes be made to the Draft five Year Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2014/15 to 2018/19 as a result of the findings of the budget consultation exercise resulting in an increased net budget requirement, for example additional budget growth or the withdrawal of savings proposals, new savings proposals of an equivalent value will have to be urgently identified to address the projected budget deficit.

[NA/22012014/V]

7.0 Legal implications

- 7.1 Sections 32 and 33 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 imposes a duty on local authorities to calculate their budget requirements and set the Council Tax for each financial year. These provisions are subject to amendment following the Localism Act 2011 which replaces these provisions with a new Section 31A and 31B, under which authorities will no longer be under a duty to calculate their budget requirement for the year, but will be under a duty to calculate a Council Tax requirement. The aim is to make local authority calculations (which must be in accordance with the 1992 Act otherwise the Council Tax setting will be void) simpler and to avoid the need for regulations each financial year.
- 7.2 Part Two of the Local Government Act 2003 also imposes a series of duties and powers to give statutory support to important aspects of financial good practice. This includes provisions in respect of the requirement for the Chief Financial Officer to report on the robustness of the estimates including the adequacy of the reserves.
- 7.3 Cabinet is required to agree a budget proposal to recommend to Full Council.

- 7.4 The Council is obliged to set its council tax by the statutory deadline of 10 March 2014.

7.5 The Council is required to consult on its draft council plan and budget.

[RB/24012014/K]

8.0 Equalities implications

8.1 The Council has a statutory duty to consult upon the impact of the way it carries out its business and the resulting effect on different groups of people within the community. This is designed to help the Council identify the particular needs of different groups and reduce the likelihood of discrimination, the eight relevant protected characteristics in this regard are:

- Age;
- Gender reassignment;
- Disability;
- Pregnancy and Maternity;
- Religion or Belief;
- Sexual Orientation;
- Race; and
- Sex

8.2 The preparation of the budget involves the allocation of resources for the provision of the Council's services and therefore has potential implications for the achievement of the Council's equal opportunities policies.

8.3 All savings proposals have assumed an Equality Assessment prior to approval.

8.4 As part of the budget consultation process, workshops were conducted with groups defined as having 'protected characteristics' in the Equalities Act (outlined in section 7.1). The purpose of this exercise was to determine if any of the savings proposals would have a disproportionate effect on any of the groups.

9.0 Environmental implications

9.1 Individual proposals include details of potential environmental implications.

10.0 Human resources implications

10.1 Individual proposals include details of the potential human resources implications.

11.0 Schedule of background papers

11.1 Draft Budget Strategy 2014/2015 and Medium Term Financial Strategy, reported to Cabinet on:

- 26 February 2013;
- 24 July 2013; and
- 23 October 2013

11.2 Budget Review – Five Year Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2014/15 to 2018/19, reported to Scrutiny Board on 17 December 2013

Summary report on the outcome of budget consultation for the period 2014 to 2019

Introduction

1. Background

- 1.1 Owing to a combination of rising costs in providing services, increased demand for services and cuts in the council's main source of funding - Government Revenue Support Grants - Wolverhampton City Council is facing a projected budget deficit of £30.8 million over the financial year in 2014/2015. The ever-widening gap between rising costs and falling incomes has been described nationally as the 'jaws of doom' and this scenario is also affecting Wolverhampton. In response the Council has already identified savings proposals of £14.4 million, in addition to the £100m already saved. It still needs to address a projected shortfall of over £20 million. The challenge could be as large as £123 m by 2018/19 if no action is taken.
- 1.2 The majority of the council's revenue income comes from Central Government revenue support grants. The Government grants will have reduced by 52%¹ since 2011/2012 following the 2010 Spending Review so the council automatically faces a budget shortfall. There is nothing within the council's control that could have been done to prevent this.
- 1.3 Neither can it control inflation or rising energy, food and fuel prices which eat further into its budgets every year. At the same time, low interest rates mean that the council isn't earning as much from its investments as it once did, while the economic downturn has had a negative effect on its income from fees and charges.
- 1.4 These challenges are coupled with local pressures on the budget, for example increased cost pressures created from looked after children, pension fund strain and the Primary School Expansion Programme. All these things together have caused the projected budget deficit that the council faces.
- 1.5 Wolverhampton City Council is committed to involving its citizens in contributing to the important decisions it has to make. In October it published its Draft Budget Strategy 2014/15 and Medium Term Financial Strategy. This document contained savings proposals totalling £64.4 m.

2. Methodology

- 2.1 Between 29 October 2013 and 24 January 2014, Wolverhampton City Council undertook and made available a range of consultation mechanisms to gather views on the proposed budget cuts; these included both quantitative and qualitative methodologies.
- 2.2 **Consultation sources: Qualitative**
The following is a summary of the participants in the twenty one stakeholder and community group meetings, plus details of other groups and interested parties that provided their views and opinions.
- 2.3 Stakeholder engagement meetings x 9

¹ 52% real terms reduction in funding from 2010/11 to 2015/16

- ◆ Trade Unions;
- ◆ Local Neighbourhood Partnerships x 4 meetings;
- ◆ Social Landlords and Private Landlords;
- ◆ Youth Council;
- ◆ Business Community; and
- ◆ Third Sector Partnership

2.4 Community Groups meetings – representing the equalities strands x 11

- ◆ Disabled People represented by One Voice
- ◆ BME Third Sector groups
- ◆ Carers represented by the Carer's Forum
- ◆ Deaf people represented by the Deaf Club
- ◆ Faith Communities represented by the Inter-Faith and Regeneration Network
- ◆ Transgender and Transsexual people represented by Gender Matters
- ◆ LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) Community represented by the LGBT Network
- ◆ Parents represented by Voice for Parents
- ◆ Older people represented by the Over 50's Forum
- ◆ Women represented by Women of Wolverhampton (WOW)
- ◆ Experts By Experience

2.5 Other consultees

- ◆ Emails and letters from residents and comments received from a dedicated telephone hotline.
- ◆ The council also received a petition

2.6 **Consultation sources: Quantitative**

The council made an online survey available to residents and staff for the duration of the consultation.

2.7 **Considerations around representativeness of the data**

In line with best practice issued by Government (The Government's Consultation Principles July 2012), the consultation particularly focused on involving the range of stakeholders affected by the proposals, as well as enabling the general public to comment through the dedicated telephone hotline, an online survey and public meetings in each constituency. The findings from the stakeholder meetings, community group meetings and other qualitative correspondence, is by its very nature, indicative only and not necessarily representative of the wider population.

2.8 **Considerations around reporting**

It is recognised that the public, community groups and key stakeholders are not always aware of the budgetary constraints that local authorities operate under. For example, there is little awareness or understanding of the difference between capital and revenue budgets, controllable and non-controllable expenditure, nor distinctions made between statutory and discretionary spend. This document does not attempt to unpick this, but simply reports the views of the various consultees in their broadest perspective.

2.9 The qualitative findings are the primary source of information on the specific budget proposals. These have been drawn from copies of the meeting notes for the twenty stakeholder and community group events, social media, where available, and copies of emails and letters from other interested parties. It should be noted that these groups often represent the views of vulnerable people who are heavily dependent on the Council's support services (in line with Government Guidance). The inclusion of many of these groups forms an important part of the council's Equality Assessment of the budget proposals – a process that is legally required.

2.10 The report

The full report (of which the present document is a summary version) is available from the [Council's website](#) as well as the [engagement database](#).

Executive Summary and conclusions

3. This document summarises the key findings from a range of consultation exercises run by Wolverhampton City Council on its budget proposals for 2014/15 – 2020/21. It includes an analysis of 20 qualitative presentations and meetings with key stakeholder and community groups designed to gather views and opinions on 165 specific savings proposals. It also includes an analysis of letters, emails and petitions sent in by interested parties, the outline findings from two online quantitative surveys undertaken, data gathered through social media and telephone calls made to a designated hotline.

3.1 Consultation sources

Nine stakeholder engagement meetings held with Trade Unions, Local Neighbourhood Partnerships (x 4), Social Landlords and Private Landlords, Youth Council, Business Community and the Third Sector Partnership.

- 3.2 Eleven community group meetings held with One Voice (an organisation run by and for disabled people), Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Third Sector groups, Carers Forum, Deaf people, The Interfaith and Regeneration Network representing faith Communities, Gender Matters (an organisation representing Transgender and Transsexual people), the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Network, Voice for Parents, the Over 50's Forum, Experts by Experience and Women of Wolverhampton (WOW) group.

- 3.3 Other representation was made in the form of emails, petitions, social media and letters from residents from Bushbury; Oxley; Bilston East; Wednesfield; Whitmore Reans; Tettenhall; Compton; Low Hill and the Scotlands; Dovecotes and Finchfield as well as organisations such as Central Youth Theatre, The Third Sector Partnership; Gender Matters, the Over 50's Forum and UNISON.

- 3.4 In addition the council ran a bespoke telephone hotline and two online consultations, one for staff and one for the public.

4. Key Findings

The main proposals that respondents commented upon were:

4.1 Replacing Local Neighbourhood Partnership with Community Economic Regeneration Stage 1 and 2

Respondents were concerned about how the council would consult effectively without the LNP staff and about the economic impact of this proposal as the staff have been effective at supporting communities in securing external funding.

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As well as being an important resource for communities, some respondents felt that they could also play an important part in the regeneration of the city, attracting visitors and offering training and employment opportunities. 38 respondents to the online survey said that this proposal would have an impact on them, with a further 32 saying that the proposal on Bantock House would impact upon them. 37 people indicated that they would be prepared to pay higher fees and charges if that protected this service.

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There was broad support for this proposal. 37 people who took part in the online survey were strongly in favour of this proposal with 28 saying that this proposal would have little or no impact upon them.

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The online survey showed that the majority of people (just over 86%) were in agreement with the principle that the council should focus its resources on

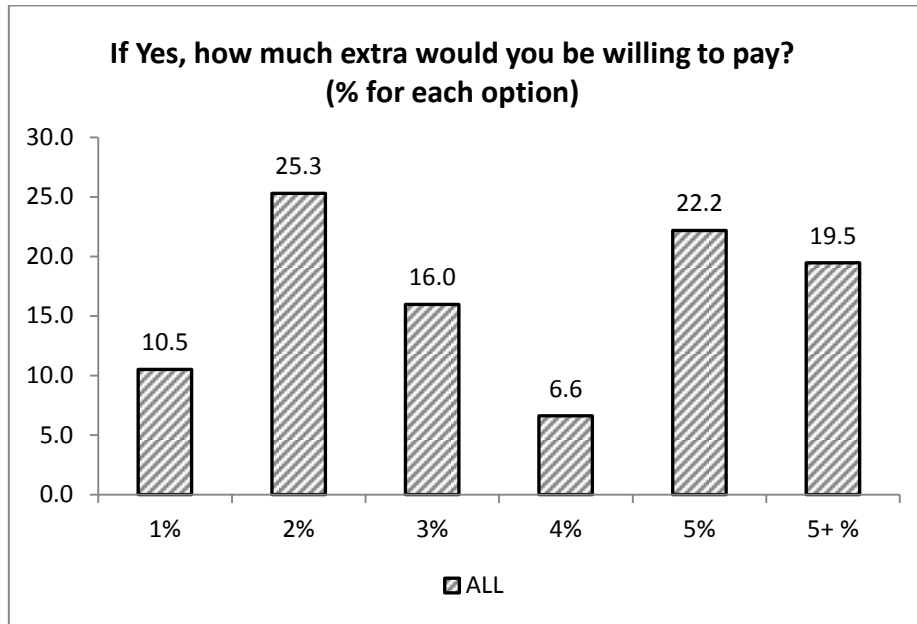
regeneration, protecting essential services and job creation. Participants were concerned about the impact of the savings on the most vulnerable and that the savings might have unintended outcomes particularly related to the economy and acute health and social care services. Some respondents questioned whether some of the proposals under the 'efficiencies' heading were in fact a reduction in services rather than efficiencies.

- 4.10 Respondents were interested in the council's overall approach to the budget challenge. Some participants felt that the council's back office costs and duplication could be reduced still further and that partnering arrangements with other local authorities should be considered. A partnership approach to addressing the challenges that the city faces was advocated by many and it was felt that the community had an important part to play in this. Many participants would like to see an increased focus on prevention, which they said would ultimately save money, and felt that the council's stated commitment to this area was not reflected in the savings proposals themselves. Some groups raised concerns about their ability to comment meaningfully on the proposals based on the information the council provided.
- 4.11 Several savings ideas were suggested by participants. These varied from the council taking a more strategic approach to attracting external funding on behalf of the city to turning off street lights after a certain time at night or obtaining commercial sponsorship for flower beds.
- 4.12 A number of suggestions were made for saving money on staffing costs, particularly through the online survey. This included changing terms and conditions, reducing staffing hours, reducing the number of consultants in the council, capping or reducing salaries (with some advocating that this should be set above a certain salary level) and working from home.

Findings from the quantitative (statistical) consultation

5. This Section summarises the statistical data from the quantitative online surveys. The external questionnaire had 324 respondents, and the internal questionnaire had 213 respondents, making a total response base of 537.
- 5.1 It should be borne in mind that this is not a sample survey of residents or staff, so the results reported in this section are not necessarily a representative sample due to self-selection.
- 5.2 There was broad agreement (just over 86%) that the Council's priorities are the right ones for the city, with slightly more agreement from internal respondents.
- 5.3 Respondents who answered "no" were able to specify what the Council's priorities should be; protecting the vulnerable, and focussing exclusively or almost-exclusively on essential services, were the two most common themes.
- 5.4 Both external and internal respondents were receptive to paying higher fees and charges to avert greater service cuts.
- 5.6 Respondents were able to specify particular services where higher fees and charges were tolerable to preserve service quality: both galleries and museums (37 respondents) and leisure (27 respondents) were clear leaders. Waste, Council Tax, and libraries were in a close group of 19-20 responses behind.
- 5.7 External respondents were likelier than internal respondents to say they would volunteer to reduce the extent of the cuts. However, neither group had a majority of respondents willing to volunteer.
- 5.8 Respondents were also asked, if they were willing to volunteer, which service they wished to volunteer for. However, despite 136 respondents answering this question, 27 of them just offered general comments about the notion of voluntary public services rather than nominating a service, 24 said they already volunteer as their answer, and 11 said they had no time or interest.
- 5.9 Internal respondents were likelier than external to indicate that they would pay more Council Tax to reduce the level of cuts. There were majorities in both the external and internal respondents groups for increases in Council Tax.
- 5.10 Respondents who said they would pay more Council Tax were then asked precisely how much extra they would be willing to pay. It was stated in the question heading that the impact of each 1% increase would be 20 pence per week based on the average property value (Valuation Band B) in the city.
- 5.11 **Please note:** the percentages in Fig. 1 are percentages of the overall respondents who said "yes". For instance, 25.3% of respondents who said "yes" would be willing to have a 2% rise in their Council Tax bills, the most-selected response. However, respondents who said "yes" were only 60% of all respondents to the question, so percentages need to be viewed in context.

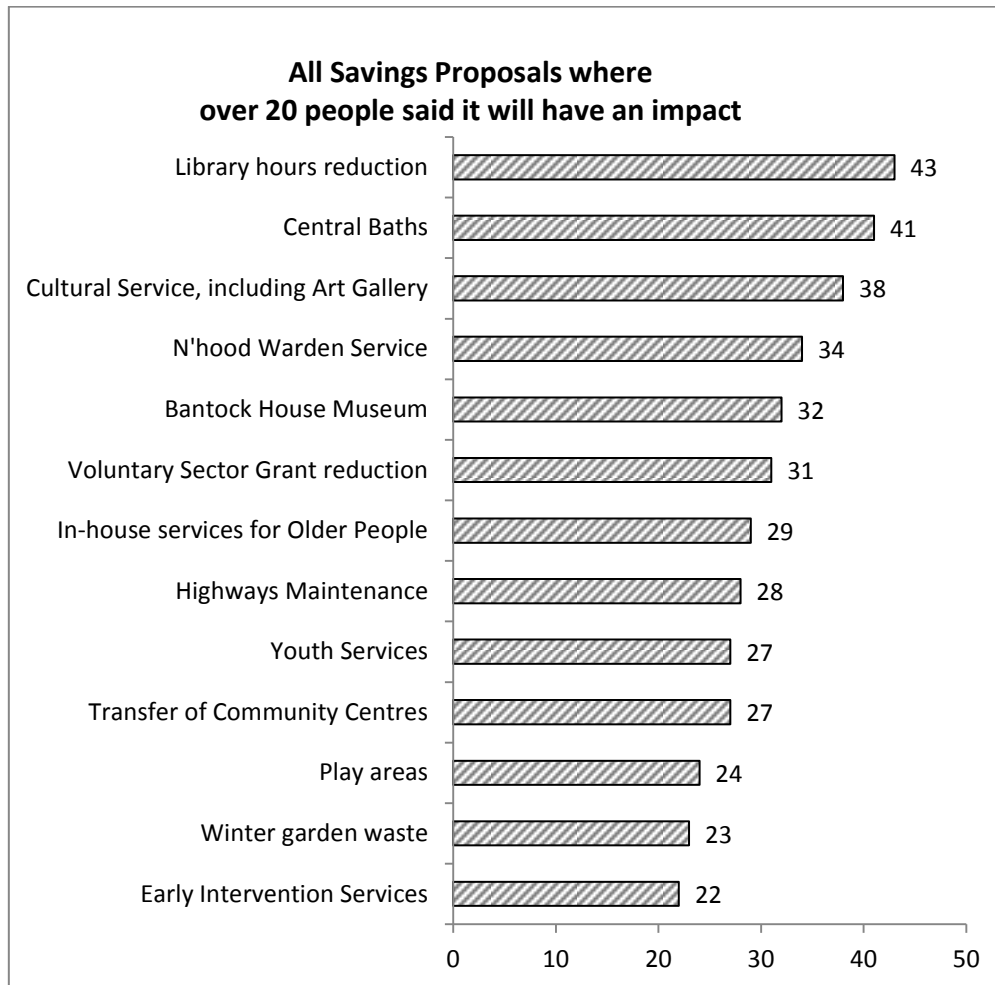
Fig. 1



5.12 All 165 savings proposals were presented to respondents, organised by set, and each respondent could nominate the top 5 within the set which would have an impact on themselves and their family (external) or on the city (internal). For instance, there were 90 savings proposals presented under the 'external cuts' heading, and respondents would then pick their top 5 there in terms of impact.

5.13 As there are 165 saving proposals, **Fig. 2** summarises only those where over 20 respondents felt each would have an impact. All of the proposals felt to have the greatest impact were from the 'external cuts' heading. Some of the topics were mentioned extensively in the qualitative budget consultation focus groups (for instance, library hours reduction), but other topics only emerge as a concern in this questionnaire (for example, winter garden waste).

Fig. 2



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The following section outlines the key views from the qualitative consultation with stakeholders, community groups and other interested parties. The twenty meetings covered a range of topics and gave attendees the opportunity to ask questions, gain clarification, and raise concerns or issues. The notes taken during these meetings do not always contain information on whether proposals are supported or opposed, though they do contain greater detail around the discussions, which for the sake of brevity, are not included in this report, but are available on request. This section also draws upon comments received from interested parties in emails and letters and comments made during the duration of the telephone hotline.

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services affected include those for young people, the elderly, disabled people, and the homeless and other vulnerable groups.

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The central location of the proposed Youth Zone was questioned by participants, many of whom would prefer youth provision in localities. There was a concern that public transport into the city was inadequate and was not affordable. For safety reasons parents would not want their children travelling into the centre alone. Once at the facility, people were concerned about the potential for violence between young people from different areas and the potential persecution of LGBT young people. Many respondents were concerned that this proposal (especially the removal of local clubs) could see a rise in antisocial behaviour in localities.

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Some groups were concerned that the proposals would impact more on the most vulnerable and lower income residents. They were concerned that cumulatively the proposals would disproportionately affect certain groups of people.

15. Unintended impacts of the savings

Some groups were concerned that the savings themselves might result in cost pressures for the council in the longer term and asked if this had been factored in. Others thought that the large number of council redundancies would impact on the economic regeneration of the city.

15.1 Another group wrote to the council saying that some of the budget proposal reductions appear to be in conflict with each other. They gave examples such as an increased number of people being cared for in the community (by, they assume) reducing numbers in residential care. At the same time the council proposes to cut care services that support people in the community (e.g. night visiting and possibly Carelink and Telecare).

15.2 The same group also thought that the council had failed to demonstrate the current outcomes achieved by services at their and the impact on those outcomes by the proposed reductions which, they state, is particularly important for preventative and rehabilitative services.

16. Equalities Issues

One group stated that the council could leave itself open to legal challenges if did not conduct adequate equality assessments. They stated that an overall equality assessment of the cuts was needed. Other groups asked, in the context of the cuts, what commitment the council has to BME groups and the wider equality and diversity agenda.

17. Community Solutions

There was evidence that a minority of residents and organisations would be prepared to fill the gaps left by service cuts. One group thought that faith groups would be interested in delivering services. They added that communities should also be encouraged to deliver services if they strongly feel that they should be retained.

17.1 They further stated that the availability of some facilities and services represents a good opportunity for some communities. Participants at two LNPs mentioned capitalising on Wolverhampton's 'community spirit' to help the city through the present difficulties.

18. Efficiencies

Some groups suggested that efficiency savings would impact on the quality of services delivered and one group asked that all the savings proposals be kept under review to ascertain the impact on resident's lives.

19. Pressures on the budget

Several groups suggested that a focus on prevention would help to keep down costs for acute health and social care and different approaches to addressing the financial challenge of protecting Looked After Children were mooted, with partnership approaches and an input from the Third Sector both suggested.

20. The Budget Challenge

Overall approach to the budget challenge

20.1 Participants were interested in the council's overall approach to the financial challenge it faces. Many suggestions were made including taking a Cooperative Council approach, mergers with neighbouring authorities, attracting more external funding, selling council assets and reducing the numbers of senior managers and consultants within the council.

Efficiency savings

20.2 Some thought that more should be done to address back office costs, with several groups querying why a third of the council's budget is spent in this area. Another group was particularly concerned with the high cost of 'treasury management' (£12.5m) which they said is not explained in the council's Medium Term Financial Strategy report. Others were concerned about the amount of duplication they saw and asked about the potential to make savings by reducing existing commercial contracts.

A partnership approach

20.3 The Third Sector Partnership said that the Third Sector should be considered part of the solution as well as a factor in the economic regeneration of the city. They said that they generated income for the city which could be reinvested into preventative services. However, the threat to the Third Sector's funding was impacting on their ability to generate income.

21. Focus on prevention

Whilst sympathising with the council's financial position, the Third Sector Partnership argued that the sector's early intervention and preventative work saves the council money by dealing with issues before they require the council's involvement. If the funding provided through the Community Initiatives Team ceases, this will mean an increased work load for the council as they will pick up work that the sector currently undertakes. This, they argue, has not been fully taken into account.

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22. The budget consultation process

The Carer's group, Wolverhampton Interfaith and Regeneration Network, Women of Wolverhampton and the Over 50's forum all raised concerns about the ability to comment meaningfully on the proposals based on the information provided. The proposals in the booklet provided by the council were described as vague and lacking in detail.

23. Savings ideas

Several savings ideas were suggested by participants including: maximising opportunities to attract external funding into the city (from Europe, for instance); turning street lights off in certain areas after midnight; selling council assets; attracting sponsorship for flower beds; reducing the wages of the Chief Executive and senior officers; stopping the refurbishment of the civic centre; turning down the heating in public buildings; reducing weekly household bin collections to fortnightly; introducing a 50 pence charge for all public toilets (with an exemption for radar key holders); stopping staff from retiring at the age of 55; making on the spot fines for vandalism, graffiti, anti-social behaviour, and fly tipping; and compelling householders to take responsibility for sweeping outside their own houses.

Summary report on the outcome of budget consultation for the period 2014 to 2019

Introduction

1. Background

- 1.1 Owing to a combination of rising costs in providing services, increased demand for services and cuts in the council's main source of funding - Government Revenue Support Grants - Wolverhampton City Council is facing a projected budget deficit of £30.8 million over the financial year in 2014/2015. The ever-widening gap between rising costs and falling incomes has been described nationally as the 'jaws of doom' and this scenario is also affecting Wolverhampton. In response the Council has already identified savings proposals of £14.4 million, in addition to the £100 million already saved. It still needs to address a projected shortfall of over £20 million. The challenge could be as large as £123 m by 2018/19 if no action is taken.
- 1.2 The majority of the council's revenue income comes from Central Government revenue support grants. The Government grants will have reduced by 52%¹ since 2011/2012 following the 2010 Spending Review so the council automatically faces a budget shortfall. There is nothing within the council's control that could have been done to prevent this.
- 1.3 Neither can it control inflation or rising energy, food and fuel prices which eat further into its budgets every year. At the same time, low interest rates mean that the council isn't earning as much from its investments as it once did, while the economic downturn has had a negative effect on its income from fees and charges.
- 1.4 These challenges are coupled with local pressures on the budget, for example increased cost pressures created from looked after children, pension fund strain and the Primary School Expansion Programme. All these things together have caused the projected budget deficit that the council faces.
- 1.5 Wolverhampton City Council is committed to involving its citizens in contributing to the important decisions it has to make. In October it published its Draft Budget Strategy 2014/15 and Medium Term Financial Strategy. This document contained savings proposals totalling £64.4 m.

2. Methodology

- 2.1 Between 29 October 2013 and 24 January 2014, Wolverhampton City Council undertook and made available a range of consultation mechanisms to gather views on the proposed budget cuts; these included both quantitative and qualitative methodologies.
- 2.2 **Consultation sources: Qualitative**
The following is a summary of the participants in the twenty one stakeholder and community group meetings, plus details of other groups and interested parties that provided their views and opinions.
- 2.3 Stakeholder engagement meetings x 9
 - ◆ Trade Unions;
 - ◆ Local Neighbourhood Partnerships x 4 meetings;
 - ◆ Social Landlords and Private Landlords;

¹ 52% real terms reduction in funding from 2010/11 to 2015/16

- ◆ Youth Council;
- ◆ Business Community; and
- ◆ Third Sector Partnership

2.4 Community Groups meetings – representing the equalities strands x 11

- ◆ Disabled People represented by One Voice
- ◆ BME Third Sector groups
- ◆ Carers represented by the Carer's Forum
- ◆ Deaf people represented by the Deaf Club
- ◆ Faith Communities represented by the Inter-Faith and Regeneration Network
- ◆ Transgender and Transsexual people represented by Gender Matters
- ◆ LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) Community represented by the LGBT Network
- ◆ Parents represented by Voice for Parents
- ◆ Older people represented by the Over 50's Forum
- ◆ Women represented by Women of Wolverhampton (WOW)
- ◆ Experts By Experience

2.5 Other consultees

- ◆ Emails and letters from residents and comments received from a dedicated telephone hotline.
- ◆ The council also received a petition

2.6 **Consultation sources: Quantitative**

The council made an online survey available to residents and staff for the duration of the consultation.

2.7 **Considerations around representativeness of the data**

In line with best practice issued by Government (The Government's Consultation Principles July 2012), the consultation particularly focused on involving the range of stakeholders affected by the proposals, as well as enabling the general public to comment through the dedicated telephone hotline, an online survey and public meetings in each constituency. The findings from the stakeholder meetings, community group meetings and other qualitative correspondence, is by its very nature, indicative only and not necessarily representative of the wider population.

2.8 **Considerations around reporting**

It is recognised that the public, community groups and key stakeholders are not always aware of the budgetary constraints that local authorities operate under. For example, there is little awareness or understanding of the difference between capital and revenue budgets, controllable and non-controllable expenditure, nor distinctions made between statutory and discretionary spend. This document does not attempt to unpick this, but simply reports the views of the various consultees in their broadest perspective.

2.9 The qualitative findings are the primary source of information on the specific budget proposals. These have been drawn from copies of the meeting notes for the twenty one stakeholder and community group events, social media, where available, and copies of emails and letters from other interested parties. It should be noted that these groups often represent the views of

vulnerable people who are heavily dependent on the Council's support services (in line with Government Guidance). The inclusion of many of these groups forms an important part of the council's Equality Assessment of the budget proposals – a process that is legally required.

2.10 The report

The full report (of which the present document is a summary version) is available from the [Council's website](#) as well as the [engagement database](#).

Executive Summary and conclusions

3. This document summarises the key findings from a range of consultation exercises run by Wolverhampton City Council on its budget proposals for 2014/15 – 2020/21. It includes an analysis of 20 qualitative presentations and meetings with key stakeholder and community groups designed to gather views and opinions on 165 specific savings proposals. It also includes an analysis of letters, emails and petitions sent in by interested parties, the outline findings from two online quantitative surveys undertaken, data gathered through social media and telephone calls made to a designated hotline.

3.1 Consultation sources

Nine stakeholder engagement meetings held with Trade Unions, Local Neighbourhood Partnerships (x 4), Social Landlords and Private Landlords, Youth Council, Business Community and the Third Sector Partnership.

3.2 Eleven community group meetings held with One Voice (an organisation run by and for disabled people), Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Third Sector groups, Carers Forum, Deaf people, The Interfaith and Regeneration Network representing faith Communities, Gender Matters (an organisation representing Transgender and Transsexual people), the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Network, Voice for Parents, the Over 50's Forum, Experts by Experience and Women of Wolverhampton (WOW) group.

3.3 Other representation was made in the form of emails, petitions, social media and letters from residents from Bushbury; Oxley; Bilston East; Wednesfield; Whitmore Reans; Tettenhall; Compton; Low Hill and the Scotlands; Dovecotes and Finchfield as well as organisations such as Central Youth Theatre, The Third Sector Partnership; Gender Matters, the Over 50's Forum and UNISON.

3.4 In addition the council ran a bespoke telephone hotline and two online consultations, one for staff and one for the public.

4. Key Findings

The main proposals that respondents commented upon were:

4.1 Replacing Local Neighbourhood Partnership with Community Economic Regeneration Stage 1 and 2

Respondents were concerned about how the council would consult effectively without the LNP staff and about the economic impact of this proposal as the staff have been effective at supporting communities in securing external funding.

4.2 Reduction in Voluntary Sector Grant

Organisations argued that the reduction in grant funding to the sector quoted in the council documentation (13%) is misleading as it includes commissioned activity. They believe reductions in grant funding will undermine the ability of the sector to win contracts and support vulnerable people. The sector underlined its importance in attracting external funding to the city.

4.3 Removal of Council Subsidy for Central Baths

Respondents thought that this proposal would have implications for the health of residents. They were also concerned that residents would not be able to access alternative facilities and that the proposal may have a disproportionate effect on some groups such as Asian women and disabled people. 41 respondents to the online survey said that this proposal would have an impact on them

4.4 Reduction to overall council subsidy of Cultural Services including the Art Gallery

As well as being an important resource for communities, some respondents felt that they could also play an important part in the regeneration of the city, attracting visitors and offering training and employment opportunities. 38 respondents to the online survey said that this proposal would have an impact on them, with a further 32 saying that the proposal on Bantock House would impact upon them. 37 people indicated that they would be prepared to pay higher fees and charges if that protected this service.

4.5 Reduction in library opening hours and introducing charges for internet use.

Respondents were concerned that this proposal would have the greatest impact on the most disadvantaged people, particularly people who will shortly be required to make benefits claims online, job seekers (both of whom might require more than an hour to complete online forms) and those people for whom the libraries might be their main recreational outlet. 43 respondents to the online survey said that this proposal would have an impact upon them and 20 indicated that they would be prepared to pay higher fees and charges if that protected this service.

4.6 Reduction in the Neighbourhood Wardens Service

Participants were concerned that if the catchment area was increased for the wardens, their effectiveness would reduce. Local residents felt that the wardens provided good public reassurance and had had an effect on crime in neighbourhoods. 34 respondents to the online survey said that this proposal would have an impact on them.

4.7 Reduce the number of Councillors

There was broad support for this proposal. 37 people who took part in the online survey were strongly in favour of this proposal with 28 saying that this proposal would have little or no impact upon them.

4.8 Reconfiguration of Youth Services, centred on Youth Zone and targeted youth support

Respondents were concerned about the practical difficulties, safety aspects and travel costs for young people accessing the Youth Zone. They also saw the potential for violence between young people from different geographical areas and were worried that the decrease in neighbourhood youth services would see a rise in anti-social behaviour in localities. 21 respondents to the online survey said that this proposal would have an impact upon them.

4.9 General comments unrelated to specific savings proposals

The online survey showed that the majority of people (just over 86%) were in agreement with the principle that the council should focus its resources on regeneration, protecting essential services and job creation. Participants were concerned about the impact of the savings on the most vulnerable and that the savings might have unintended outcomes particularly related to the economy and acute health and social care services. Some respondents questioned whether some of the proposals under the 'efficiencies' heading were in fact a reduction in services rather than efficiencies.

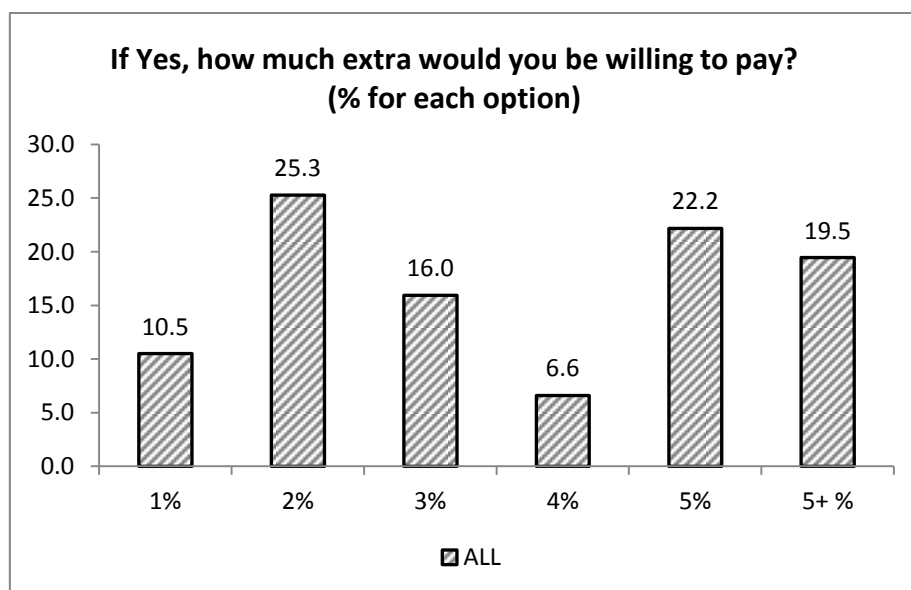
- 4.10 Respondents were interested in the council's overall approach to the budget challenge. Some participants felt that the council's back office costs and duplication could be reduced still further and that partnering arrangements with other local authorities should be considered. A partnership approach to addressing the challenges that the city faces was advocated by many and it was felt that the community had an important part to play in this. Many participants would like to see an increased focus on prevention, which they said would ultimately save money, and felt that the council's stated commitment to this area was not reflected in the savings proposals themselves. Some groups raised concerns about their ability to comment meaningfully on the proposals based on the information the council provided.
- 4.11 Several savings ideas were suggested by participants. These varied from the council taking a more strategic approach to attracting external funding on behalf of the city to turning off street lights after a certain time at night or obtaining commercial sponsorship for flower beds.
- 4.12 A number of suggestions were made for saving money on staffing costs, particularly through the online survey. This included changing terms and conditions, reducing staffing hours, reducing the number of consultants in the council, capping or reducing salaries (with some advocating that this should be set above a certain salary level) and working from home.

Findings from the quantitative (statistical) consultation

5. This Section summarises the statistical data from the quantitative online surveys. The external questionnaire had 324 respondents, and the internal questionnaire had 213 respondents, making a total response base of 537.
- 5.1 It should be borne in mind that this is not a sample survey of residents or staff, so the results reported in this section are not necessarily a representative sample due to self-selection.
- 5.2 There was broad agreement (just over 86%) that the Council's priorities are the right ones for the city, with slightly more agreement from internal respondents.
- 5.3 Respondents who answered "no" were able to specify what the Council's priorities should be; protecting the vulnerable, and focussing exclusively or almost-exclusively on essential services, were the two most common themes.
- 5.4 Both external and internal respondents were receptive to paying higher fees and charges to avert greater service cuts.

- 5.6 Respondents were able to specify particular services where higher fees and charges were tolerable to preserve service quality: both galleries and museums (37 respondents) and leisure (27 respondents) were clear leaders. Waste, Council Tax, and libraries were in a close group of 19-20 responses behind.
- 5.7 External respondents were likelier than internal respondents to say they would volunteer to reduce the extent of the cuts. However, neither group had a majority of respondents willing to volunteer.
- 5.8 Respondents were also asked, if they were willing to volunteer, which service they wished to volunteer for. However, despite 136 respondents answering this question, 27 of them just offered general comments about the notion of voluntary public services rather than nominating a service, 24 said they already volunteer as their answer, and 11 said they had no time or interest.
- 5.9 Internal respondents were likelier than external to indicate that they would pay more Council Tax to reduce the level of cuts. There were majorities in both the external and internal respondents groups for increases in Council Tax.
- 5.10 Respondents who said they would pay more Council Tax were then asked precisely how much extra they would be willing to pay. It was stated in the question heading that the impact of each 1% increase would be 20 pence per week based on the average property value (Valuation Band B) in the city.
- 5.11 **Please note:** the percentages in Fig. 1 are percentages of the overall respondents who said “yes”. For instance, 25.3% of respondents who said “yes” would be willing to have a 2% rise in their Council Tax bills, the most-selected response. However, respondents who said “yes” were only 60% of all respondents to the question, so percentages need to be viewed in context.

Fig. 1

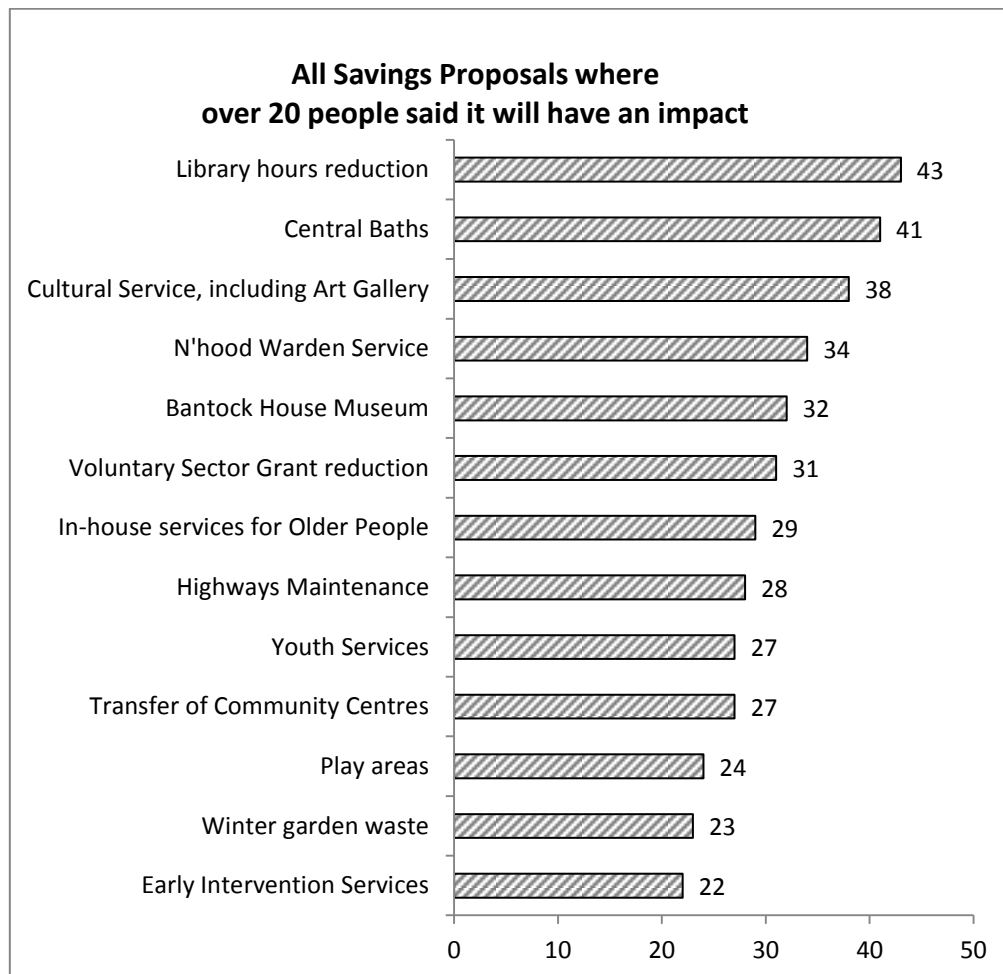


- 5.12 All 165 savings proposals were presented to respondents, organised by set, and each respondent could nominate the top 5 within the set which would have an impact on themselves and their family (external) or on the city (internal). For instance, there were 90 savings

proposals presented under the 'external cuts' heading, and respondents would then pick their top 5 there in terms of impact.

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15. Unintended impacts of the savings

Some groups were concerned that the savings themselves might result in cost pressures for the council in the longer term and asked if this had been factored in. Others thought that the large number of council redundancies would impact on the economic regeneration of the city.

15.1 Another group wrote to the council saying that some of the budget proposal reductions appear to be in conflict with each other. They gave examples such as an increased number of people being cared for in the community (by, they assume) reducing numbers in residential care. At the same time the council proposes to cut care services that support people in the community (e.g. night visiting and possibly Carelink and Telecare).

15.2 The same group also thought that the council had failed to demonstrate the current outcomes achieved by services at their and the impact on those outcomes by the proposed reductions which, they state, is particularly important for preventative and rehabilitative services.

16. Equalities Issues

One group stated that the council could leave itself open to legal challenges if did not conduct adequate equality assessments. They stated that an overall equality assessment of the cuts was needed. Other groups asked, in the context of the cuts, what commitment the council has to BME groups and the wider equality and diversity agenda.

17. Community Solutions

There was evidence that a minority of residents and organisations would be prepared to fill the gaps left by service cuts. One group thought that faith groups would be interested in delivering services. They added that communities should also be encouraged to deliver services if they strongly feel that they should be retained.

17.1 They further stated that the availability of some facilities and services represents a good opportunity for some communities. Participants at two LNPs mentioned capitalising on Wolverhampton's 'community spirit' to help the city through the present difficulties.

18. Efficiencies

Some groups suggested that efficiency savings would impact on the quality of services delivered and one group asked that all the savings proposals be kept under review to ascertain the impact on resident's lives.

19. Pressures on the budget

Several groups suggested that a focus on prevention would help to keep down costs for acute health and social care and different approaches to addressing the financial challenge of protecting Looked After Children were mooted, with partnership approaches and an input from the Third Sector both suggested.

20. The Budget Challenge

Overall approach to the budget challenge

20.1 Participants were interested in the council's overall approach to the financial challenge it faces. Many suggestions were made including taking a Cooperative Council approach, mergers with neighbouring authorities, attracting more external funding, selling council assets and reducing the numbers of senior managers and consultants within the council.

Efficiency savings

20.2 Some thought that more should be done to address back office costs, with several groups querying why a third of the council's budget is spent in this area. Another group was particularly concerned with the high cost of 'treasury management' (£12.5m) which they said is not explained in the council's Medium Term Financial Strategy report. Others were concerned about the amount of duplication they saw and asked about the potential to make savings by reducing existing commercial contracts.

A partnership approach

20.3 The Third Sector Partnership said that the Third Sector should be considered part of the solution as well as a factor in the economic regeneration of the city. They said that they generated income for the city which could be reinvested into preventative services. However, the threat to the Third Sector's funding was impacting on their ability to generate income.

21. Focus on prevention

Whilst sympathising with the council's financial position, the Third Sector Partnership argued that the sector's early intervention and preventative work saves the council money by dealing with issues before they require the council's involvement. If the funding provided through the Community Initiatives Team ceases, this will mean an increased work load for the council as they will pick up work that the sector currently undertakes. This, they argue, has not been fully taken into account.

22. The budget consultation process

The Carer's group, Wolverhampton Interfaith and Regeneration Network, Women of Wolverhampton and the Over 50's forum all raised concerns about the ability to comment meaningfully on the proposals based on the information provided. The proposals in the booklet provided by the council were described as vague and lacking in detail.

23. Savings ideas

Several savings ideas were suggested by participants including: maximising opportunities to attract external funding into the city (from Europe, for instance); turning street lights off in certain areas after midnight; selling council assets; attracting sponsorship for flower beds; reducing the wages of the Chief Executive and senior officers; stopping the refurbishment of the civic centre; turning down the heating in public buildings; reducing weekly household bin collections to fortnightly; introducing a 50 pence charge for all public toilets (with an exemption for radar key holders); stopping staff from retiring at the age of 55; making on the spot fines for vandalism, graffiti, anti-social behaviour, and fly tipping; and compelling householders to take responsibility for sweeping outside their own houses.

Full report on the outcome of budget consultation for the period 2014 to 2019

Introduction

1. Background

- 1.1 Owing to a combination of rising costs in providing services, increased demand for services and cuts in the council's main source of funding - Government Revenue Support Grants - Wolverhampton City Council is facing a projected budget deficit of £30.8 million over the financial year in 2014/2015. The ever-widening gap between rising costs and falling incomes has been described nationally as the 'jaws of doom' and this scenario is also affecting Wolverhampton. In response the Council has already identified savings proposals of £14.4 million, in addition to the £100m already saved. It still needs to address a projected shortfall of over £20 million. The challenge could be as large as £123 m by 2018/19 if no action is taken.
- 1.2 The majority of the council's revenue income comes from Central Government revenue support grants. The Government grants will have reduced by 52%² since 2011/2012 following the 2010 Spending Review so the council automatically faces a budget shortfall. There is nothing within the council's control that could have been done to prevent this.
- 1.3 Neither can it control inflation or rising energy, food and fuel prices which eat further into its budgets every year. At the same time, low interest rates mean that the council isn't earning as much from its investments as it once did, while the economic downturn has had a negative effect on its income from fees and charges.
- 1.4 These challenges are coupled with local pressures on the budget, for example increased cost pressures created from looked after children, pension fund strain and the Primary School Expansion Programme. All these things together have caused the projected budget deficit that the council faces.
- 1.5 Wolverhampton City Council is committed to involving its citizens in contributing to the important decisions it has to make. In October it published its Draft Budget Strategy 2014/15 and Medium Term Financial Strategy. This document contained savings proposals totalling £64.4 m.

2. Methodology

- 2.1 Between 29 October 2013 and 24 January 2014, Wolverhampton City Council undertook and made available a range of consultation mechanisms to gather views on the proposed budget cuts; these included both quantitative and qualitative methodologies.
- 2.2 **Consultation sources: Qualitative**
The following is a summary of the participants in the twenty one stakeholder and community group meetings, plus details of other groups and interested parties that provided their views and opinions.
- 2.3 Stakeholder engagement meetings x 9
 - ◆ Trade Unions;
 - ◆ Local Neighbourhood Partnerships x 4 meetings;
 - ◆ Social Landlords and Private Landlords;

² 52% real terms reduction in funding from 2010/11 to 2015/16

- ◆ Youth Council;
- ◆ Business Community; and
- ◆ Third Sector Partnership

2.4 Community Groups meetings – representing the equalities strands x 11

- ◆ Disabled People represented by One Voice
- ◆ BME Third Sector groups
- ◆ Carers represented by the Carer's Forum
- ◆ Deaf people represented by the Deaf Club
- ◆ Faith Communities represented by the Inter-Faith and Regeneration Network
 - ◆ Transgender and Transsexual people represented by Gender Matters
- ◆ LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) Community represented by the LGBT Network
- ◆ Parents represented by Voice for Parents
- ◆ Older people represented by the Over 50's Forum
- ◆ Women represented by Women of Wolverhampton (WOW)
- ◆ Experts By Experience

2.5 Other consultees

- ◆ Emails and letters from residents and comments received from a dedicated telephone hotline.
- ◆ The council also received a petition

2.6 **Consultation sources: Quantitative**

The council made an online survey available to residents and staff for the duration of the consultation.

2.7 **Considerations around representativeness of the data**

In line with best practice issued by Government (The Government's Consultation Principles July 2012), the consultation particularly focused on involving the range of stakeholders affected by the proposals, as well as enabling the general public to comment through the dedicated telephone hotline, an online survey and public meetings in each constituency. The findings from the stakeholder meetings, community group meetings and other qualitative correspondence, is by its very nature, indicative only and not necessarily representative of the wider population.

2.8 **Considerations around reporting**

It is recognised that the public, community groups and key stakeholders are not always aware of the budgetary constraints that local authorities operate under. For example, there is little awareness or understanding of the difference between capital and revenue budgets, controllable and non-controllable expenditure, nor distinctions made between statutory and discretionary spend. This document does not attempt to unpick this, but simply reports the views of the various consultees in their broadest perspective.

2.9 The qualitative findings are the primary source of information on the specific budget proposals. These have been drawn from copies of the meeting notes for the twenty one stakeholder and community group events, social media, where available, and copies of emails and letters from other interested parties. It should be noted that these groups often represent the views of

vulnerable people who are heavily dependent on the Council's support services (in line with Government Guidance). The inclusion of many of these groups forms an important part of the council's Equality Assessment of the budget proposals – a process that is legally required.

Executive Summary and conclusions

3. This document summarises the key findings from a range of consultation exercises run by Wolverhampton City Council on its budget proposals for 2014/15 – 2020/21. It includes an analysis of twenty qualitative presentations and meetings with key stakeholder and community groups designed to gather views and opinions on 165 specific savings proposals. It also includes an analysis of letters, emails and petitions sent in by interested parties, the outline findings from two online quantitative surveys undertaken, data gathered through social media and telephone calls made to a designated hotline.

3.1 Consultation sources

Nine stakeholder engagement meetings held with Trade Unions, Local Neighbourhood Partnerships (x 4), Social Landlords and Private Landlords, Youth Council, Business Community and the Third Sector Partnership.

3.2 Eleven community group meetings held with One Voice (an organisation run by and for disabled people), Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Third Sector groups, Carers Forum, Deaf people, The Interfaith and Regeneration Network representing faith Communities, Gender Matters (an organisation representing Transgender and Transsexual people), the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Network, Voice for Parents, the Over 50's Forum, Experts by Experience and Women of Wolverhampton (WOW) group.

3.3 Other representation was made in the form of emails, petitions, social media and letters from residents from Bushbury; Oxley; Bilston East; Wednesfield; Whitmore Reans; Tettenhall; Compton; Low Hill and the Scotlands; Dovecotes and Finchfield as well as organisations such as Central Youth Theatre, The Third Sector Partnership; Gender Matters, the Over 50's Forum and UNISON.

3.4 In addition the council ran a bespoke telephone hotline and two online consultations, one for staff and one for the public.

4. Key Findings

The main proposals that respondents commented upon were:

4.1 Replacing Local Neighbourhood Partnership with Community Economic Regeneration Stage 1 and 2

Respondents were concerned about how the council would consult effectively without the LNP staff and about the economic impact of this proposal as the staff have been effective at supporting communities in securing external funding.

4.2 Reduction in Voluntary Sector Grant

Organisations argued that the reduction in grant funding to the sector quoted in the council documentation (13%) is misleading as it includes commissioned activity. They believe reductions in grant funding will undermine the ability of the sector to win contracts and support

vulnerable people. The sector underlined its importance in attracting external funding to the city.

4.3 Removal of Council Subsidy for Central Baths

Respondents thought that this proposal would have implications for the health of residents. They were also concerned that residents would not be able to access alternative facilities and that the proposal may have a disproportionate effect on some groups such as Asian women and disabled people. 41 respondents to the online survey said that this proposal would have an impact on them

4.4 Reduction to overall council subsidy of Cultural Services including the Art Gallery

As well as being an important resource for communities, some respondents felt that they could also play an important part in the regeneration of the city, attracting visitors and offering training and employment opportunities. 38 respondents to the online survey said that this proposal would have an impact on them, with a further 32 saying that the proposal on Bantock House would impact upon them. 37 people indicated that they would be prepared to pay higher fees and charges if that protected this service.

4.5 Reduction in library opening hours and introducing charges for internet use.

Respondents were concerned that this proposal would have the greatest impact on the most disadvantaged people, particularly people who will shortly be required to make benefits claims online, job seekers (both of whom might require more than an hour to complete online forms) and those people for whom the libraries might be their main recreational outlet. 43 respondents to the online survey said that this proposal would have an impact upon them and 20 indicated that they would be prepared to pay higher fees and charges if that protected this service.

4.6 Reduction in the Neighbourhood Wardens Service

Participants were concerned that if the catchment area was increased for the wardens, their effectiveness would reduce. Local residents felt that the wardens provided good public reassurance and had had an effect on crime in neighbourhoods. 34 respondents to the online survey said that this proposal would have an impact on them.

4.7 Reduce the number of Councillors

There was broad support for this proposal. 37 people who took part in the online survey were strongly in favour of this proposal with 28 saying that this proposal would have little or no impact upon them.

4.8 Reconfiguration of Youth Services, centred on Youth Zone and targeted youth support

Respondents were concerned about the practical difficulties, safety aspects and travel costs for young people accessing the Youth Zone. They also saw the potential for violence between young people from different geographical areas and were worried that the decrease in neighbourhood youth services would see a rise in anti-social behaviour in localities. 21 respondents to the online survey said that this proposal would have an impact upon them.

4.9 General comments unrelated to specific savings proposals

The online survey showed that the majority of people (just over 86%) were in agreement with the principle that the council should focus its resources on regeneration, protecting essential services and job creation. Participants were concerned about the impact of the savings on

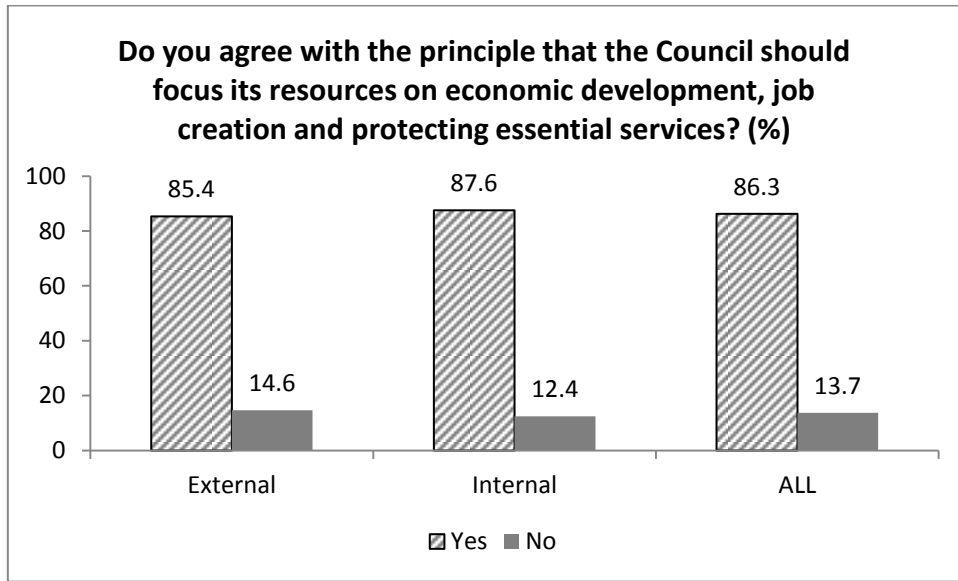
the most vulnerable and that the savings might have unintended outcomes particularly related to the economy and acute health and social care services. Some respondents questioned whether some of the proposals under the 'efficiencies' heading were in fact a reduction in services rather than efficiencies.

- 4.10 Respondents were interested in the council's overall approach to the budget challenge. Some participants felt that the council's back office costs and duplication could be reduced still further and that partnering arrangements with other local authorities should be considered. A partnership approach to addressing the challenges that the city faces was advocated by many and it was felt that the community had an important part to play in this. Many participants would like to see an increased focus on prevention, which they said would ultimately save money, and felt that the council's stated commitment to this area was not reflected in the savings proposals themselves. Some groups raised concerns about their ability to comment meaningfully on the proposals based on the information the council provided.
- 4.11 Several savings ideas were suggested by participants. These varied from the council taking a more strategic approach to attracting external funding on behalf of the city to turning off street lights after a certain time at night or obtaining commercial sponsorship for flower beds.
- 4.12 A number of suggestions were made for saving money on staffing costs, particularly through the online survey. This included changing terms and conditions, reducing staffing hours, reducing the number of consultants in the council, capping or reducing salaries (with some advocating that this should be set above a certain salary level) and working from home.

Findings from the quantitative (statistical) consultation

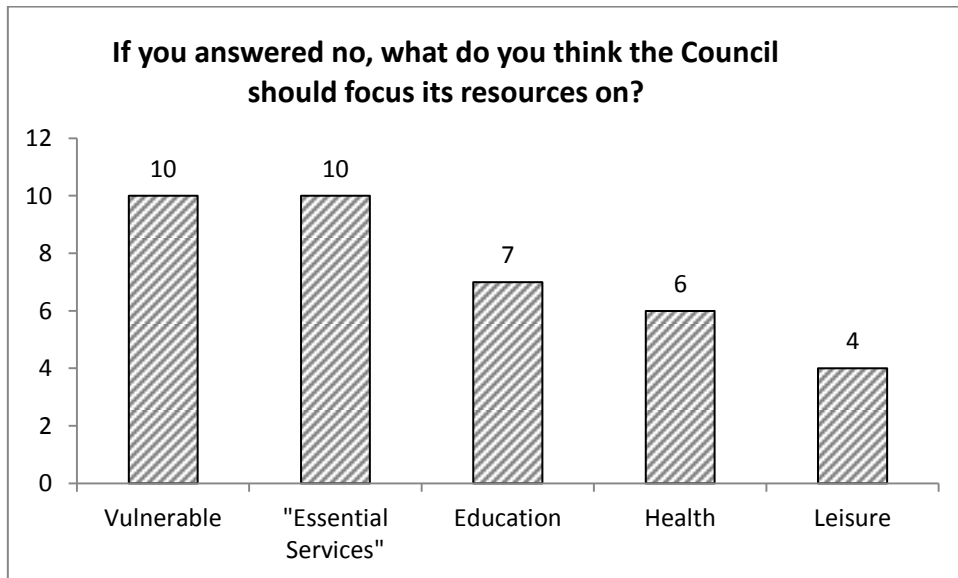
5. This Section summarises the statistical data from the quantitative online surveys. The external questionnaire had 324 respondents, and the internal questionnaire had 213 respondents, making a total response base of 537.
 - 5.1 It should be borne in mind that this is not a sample survey of residents or staff, so the results reported in this section are not necessarily a representative sample due to self-selection.
 - 5.2 There was broad agreement that the Council's priorities are the right ones for the city, with slightly more agreement from internal respondents (**Fig.1**).

Fig. 1



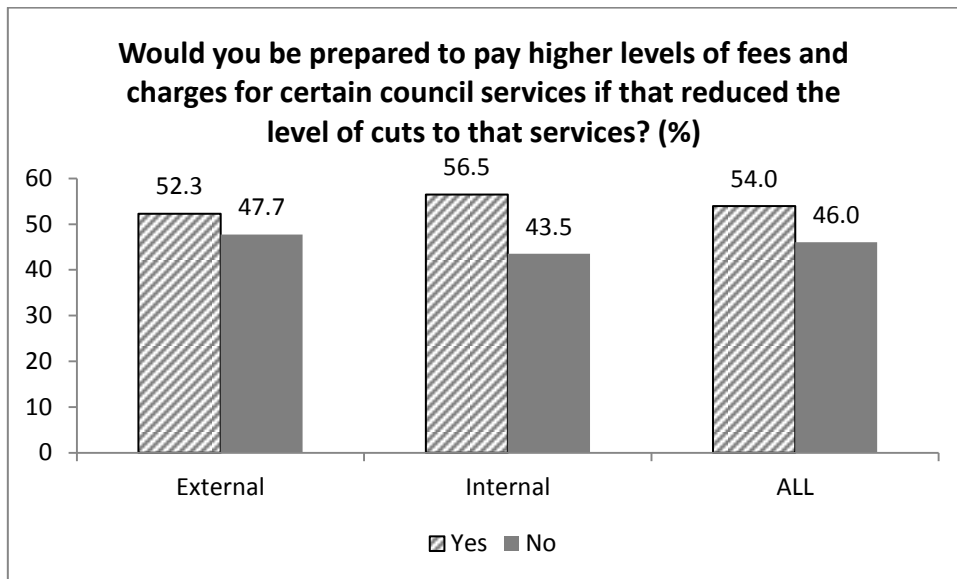
5.3 Respondents who answered “no” were able to specify what the Council’s priorities should be; protecting the vulnerable, and focussing exclusively or almost-exclusively on essential services, were the two most common themes (Fig. 2).

Fig 2



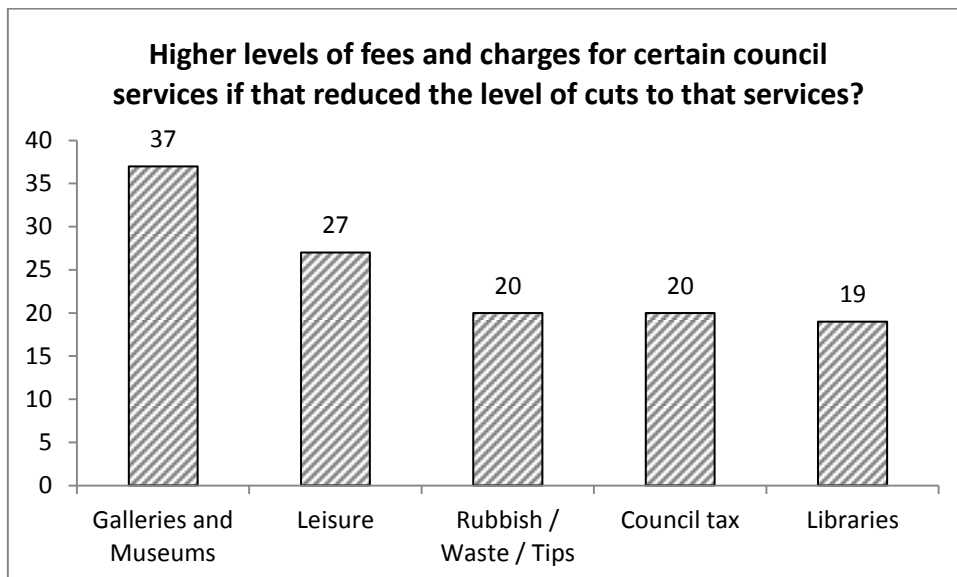
5.4 Both external and internal respondents were receptive to paying higher fees and charges to avert greater service cuts (**Fig.3**).

Fig. 3



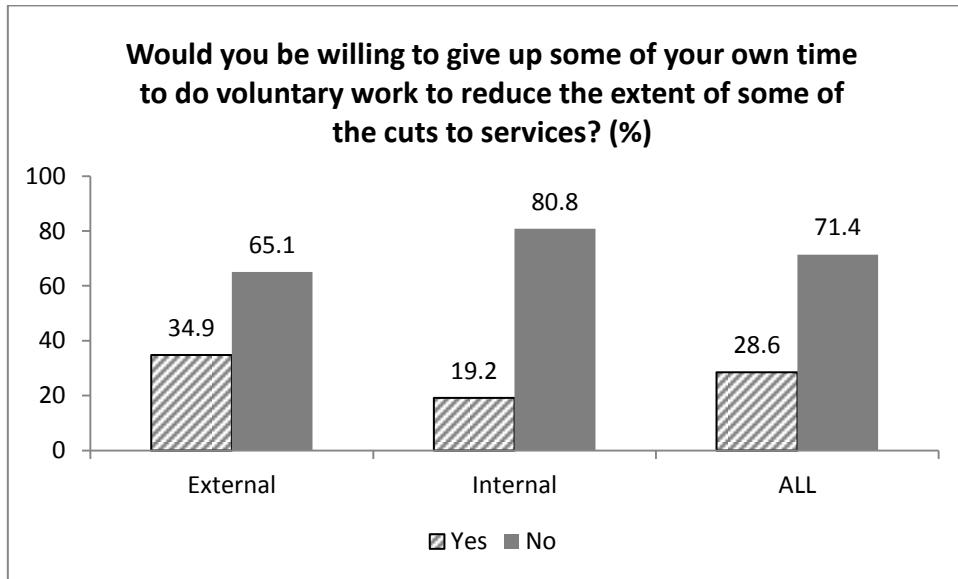
5.5 Respondents were able to specify particular services where higher fees and charges were tolerable to preserve service quality: both galleries and museums (37 respondents) and leisure (27 respondents) were clear leaders. Waste, Council Tax, and libraries were in a close group of 19-20 responses behind (**Fig. 4**).

Fig. 4



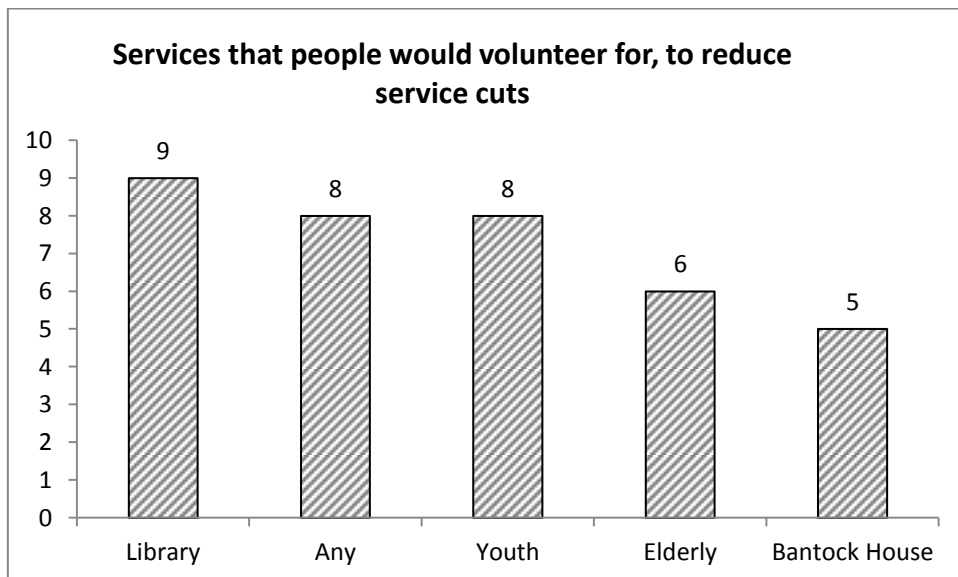
5.6 External respondents were likelier than internal respondents to say they would volunteer to reduce the extent of the cuts (**Fig. 5**). However, neither group had a majority of respondents willing to volunteer.

Fig. 5



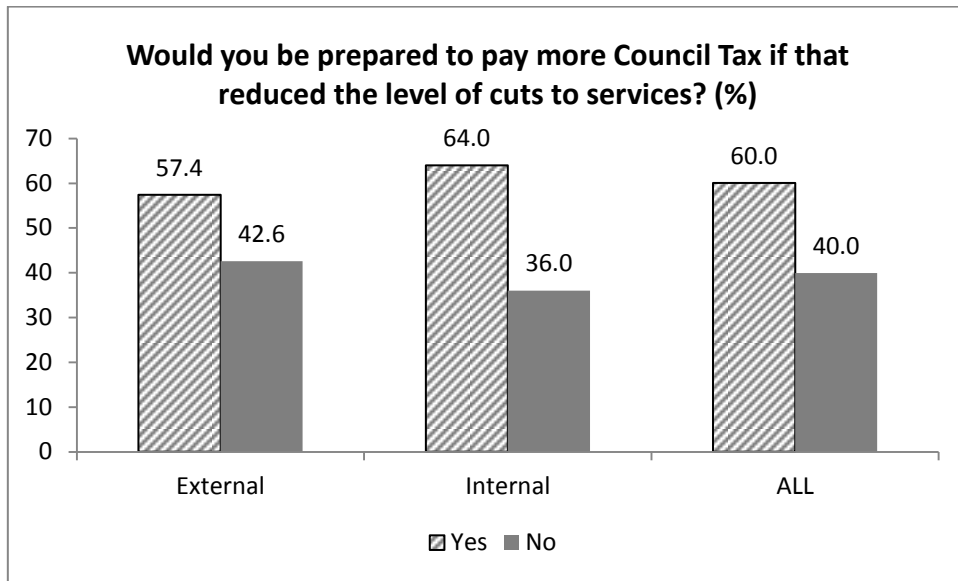
5.7 Respondents were also asked, if they were willing to volunteer, which service they wished to volunteer for (**Fig. 6**). However, despite 136 respondents answering this question, 27 of them just offered general comments about the notion of voluntary public services rather than nominating a service, 24 said they already volunteer as their answer, and 11 said they had no time or interest.

Fig. 6



5.8 Internal respondents were likelier than external to pay more Council Tax to reduce the level of cuts (**Fig. 7**). There were majorities in both the external and internal respondents groups for increases in Council Tax.

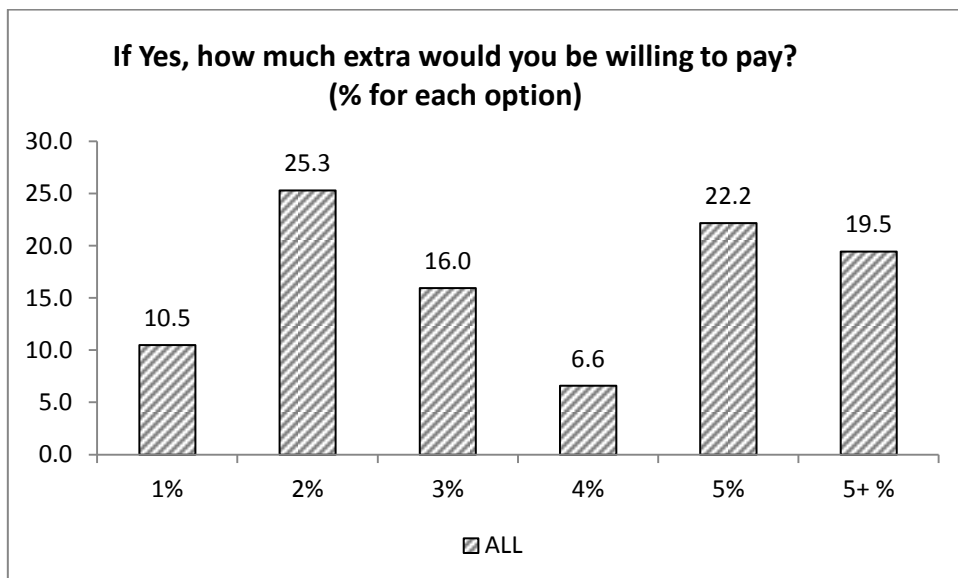
Fig. 7



5.9 Respondents who said they would pay more Council Tax were then asked precisely how much extra they would be willing to pay (Fig. 8). It was stated in the question heading that the impact of each 1% increase would be 20 pence per week based on the average property value (Valuation Band B) in the city.

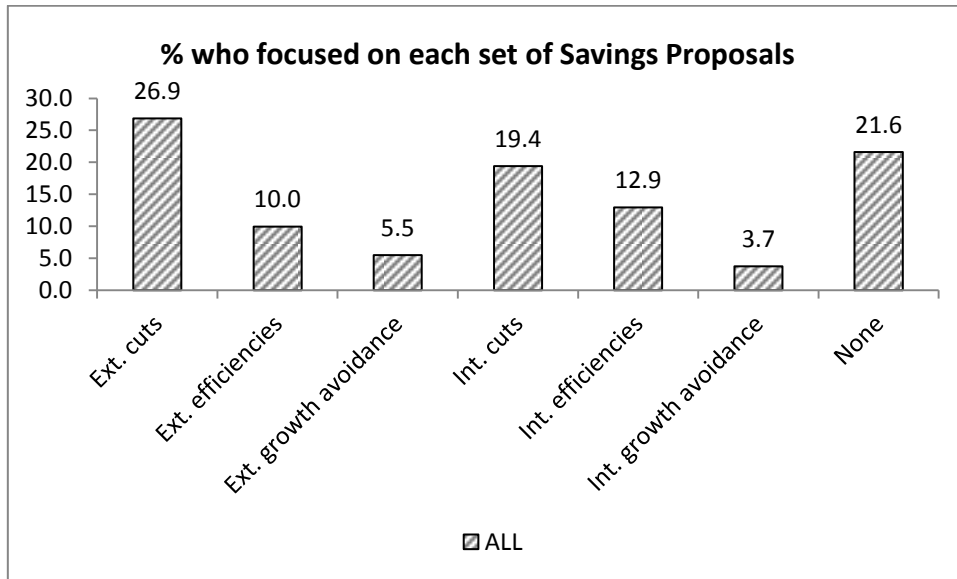
5.10 **Please note:** the percentages in Fig. 8 are percentages of the overall respondents who said “yes”. For instance, 25.3% of respondents who said “yes” would be willing to have a 2% rise in their Council Tax bills, the most-selected response. However, respondents who said “yes” were only 60% of all respondents to the question, so percentages need to be viewed in context.

Fig. 8



5.11 Respondents were also asked if they wished to focus on any particular set of proposals (**Fig. 9**). External cuts (26.9%) and internal cuts (19.4%) were the most-selected options.

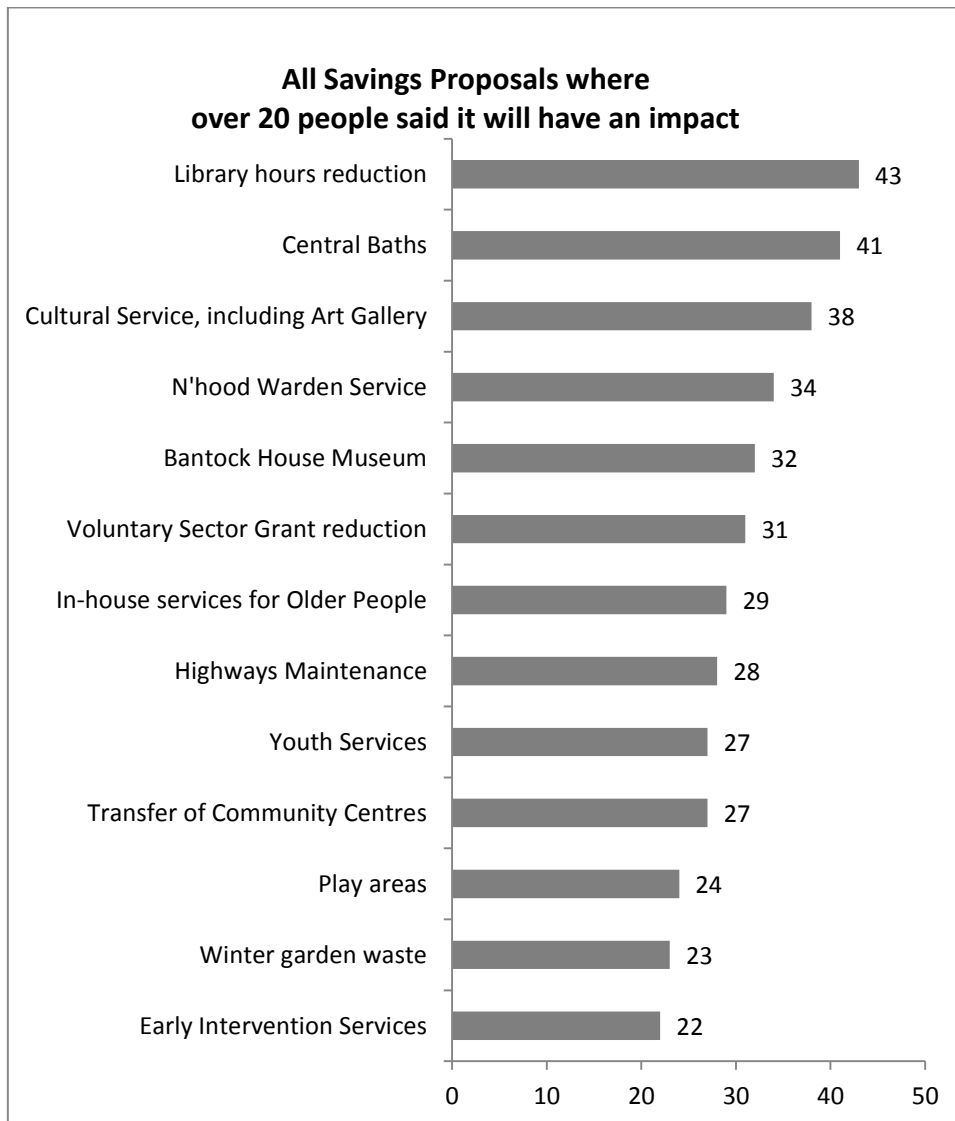
Fig. 9



5.12 All 165 savings proposals were presented to respondents, organised by set, and each respondent could nominate the top 5 within the set which would have an impact on themselves and their family (external) or on the city (internal). For instance, there were 90 savings proposals presented under the 'external cuts' heading, and respondents would then pick their top 5 there in terms of impact.

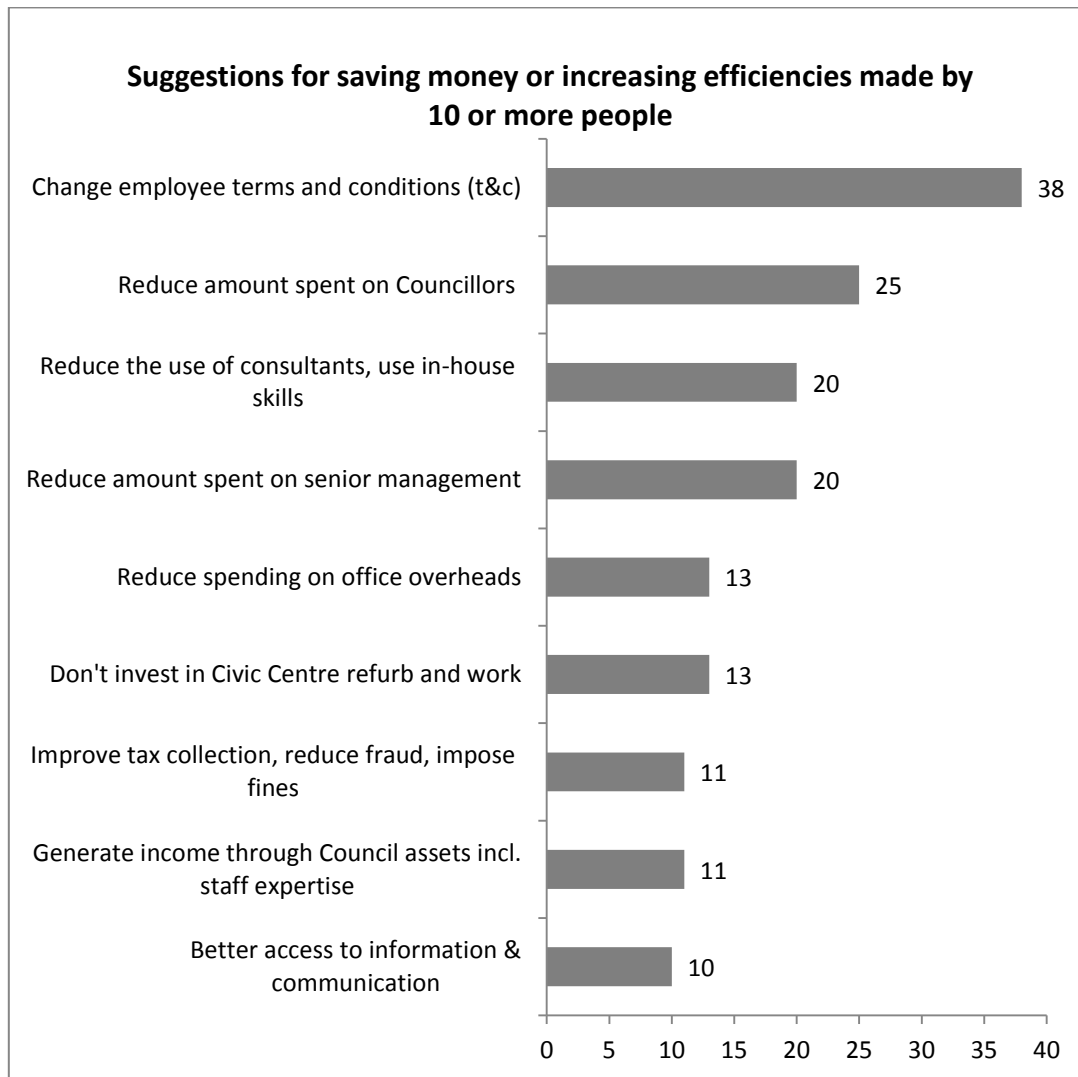
5.13 As there are 165 saving proposals, **Fig. 10** summarises only those where over 20 respondents felt each would have an impact. All of the proposals felt to have the greatest impact were from the 'external cuts' heading. Some of the topics were mentioned extensively in the qualitative budget consultation focus groups (for instance, library hours reduction), but other topics only emerge as a concern in this questionnaire (for example, winter garden waste).

Fig. 10



- 5.14 People were invited to suggest ideas for saving money or for increasing efficiency of the organisation. **Fig. 11** summarises those where over 10 respondents made a similar point or suggestion.
- 5.15 The most common suggestion – changing employee terms and conditions – includes both reducing staffs’ hours (9 respondents) and cap or reduce salaries (8 respondents). However, respondents differed how to cap or reduce salaries: some favoured an all-inclusive salary cut for Council employees, but others favoured a cut for salaries above a self-defined pay threshold. ‘Working from home’ has been deliberately double-counted in two sections (‘change employee terms and conditions’, and ‘reduce spending on office overheads’) as it is pertinent to both areas.

Fig. 11



5.16 For each set of the 165 savings proposals, respondents were able to report whether any of the cuts would have little to no impact in their opinion (**Fig. 12**) and (separately) whether the respondent was strongly in favour of any particular proposals mooted (**Fig. 13**). A reduction in the number of Councillors, reducing Christmas lights, removing the subsidy for Aldersley bar, and scaling back the Mayoral function and role were all felt to have little or no impact and were favoured by respondents.

Fig. 12

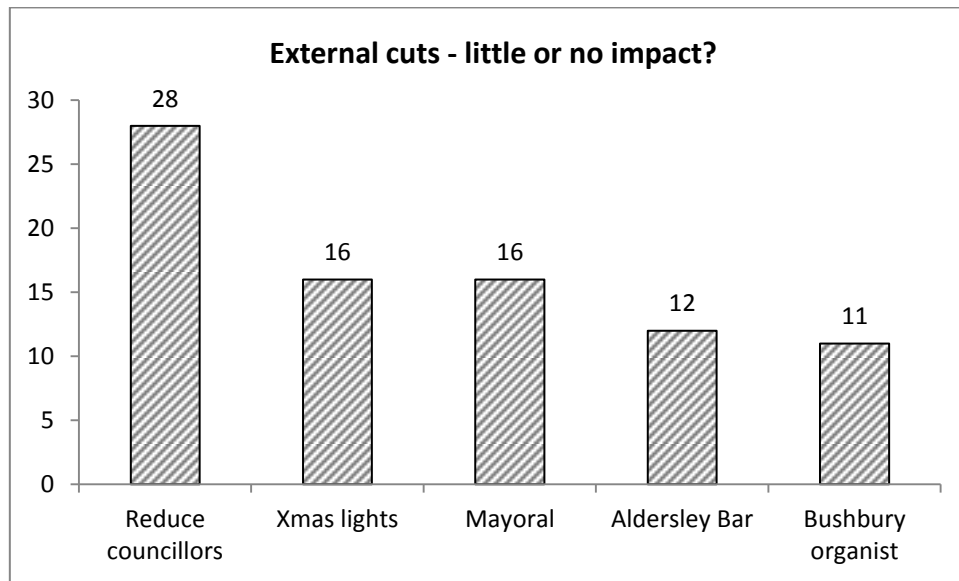
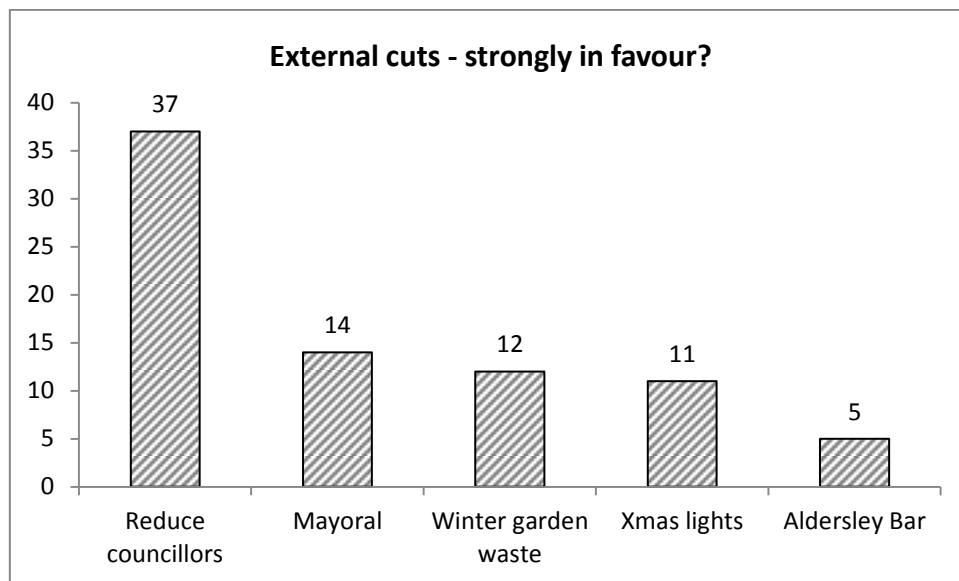


Fig. 13



5.17 Apart from external cuts, the biggest of the 6 sets, none of the other sets had more than 10 comments about whether particular proposals had little to no impact, or about whether the respondent favoured particular proposals in sets. The number of responses was not large enough to draw substantive conclusions; they are presented without further commentary (Figs. 14 – 23).

Fig. 14

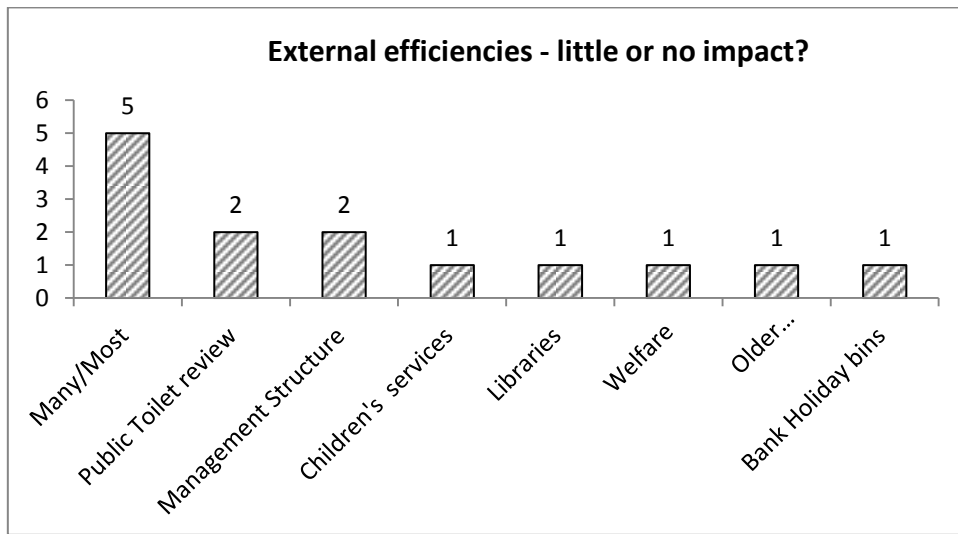


Fig. 15

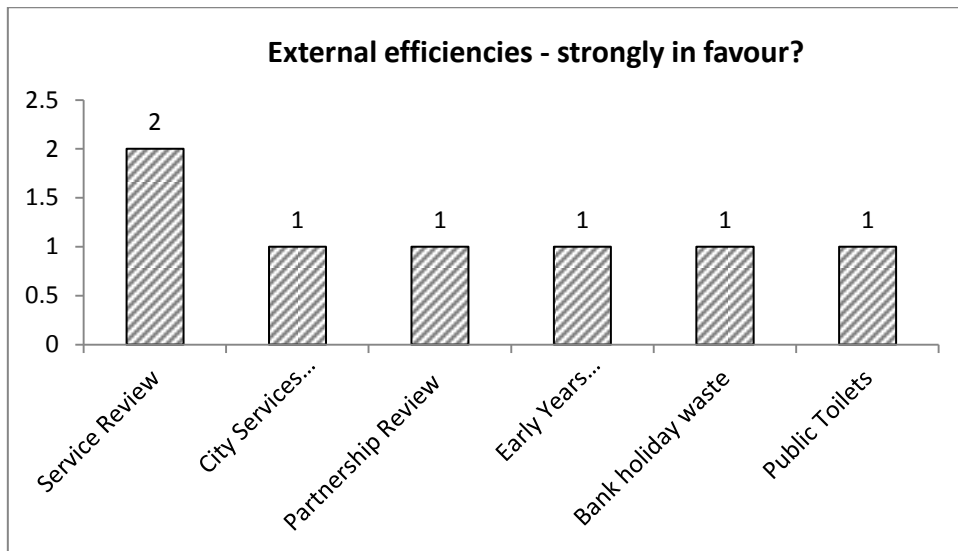


Fig. 16

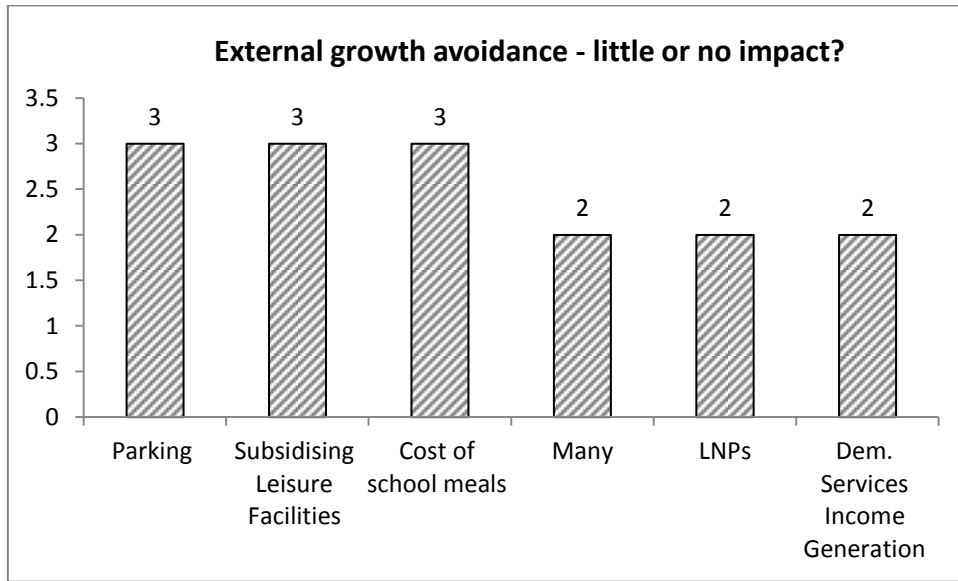


Fig. 17

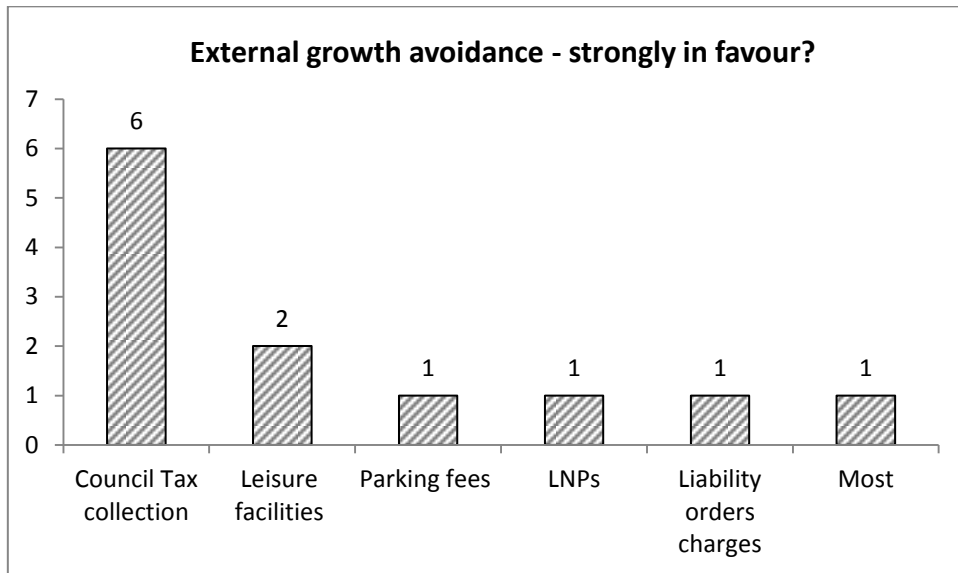


Fig. 18

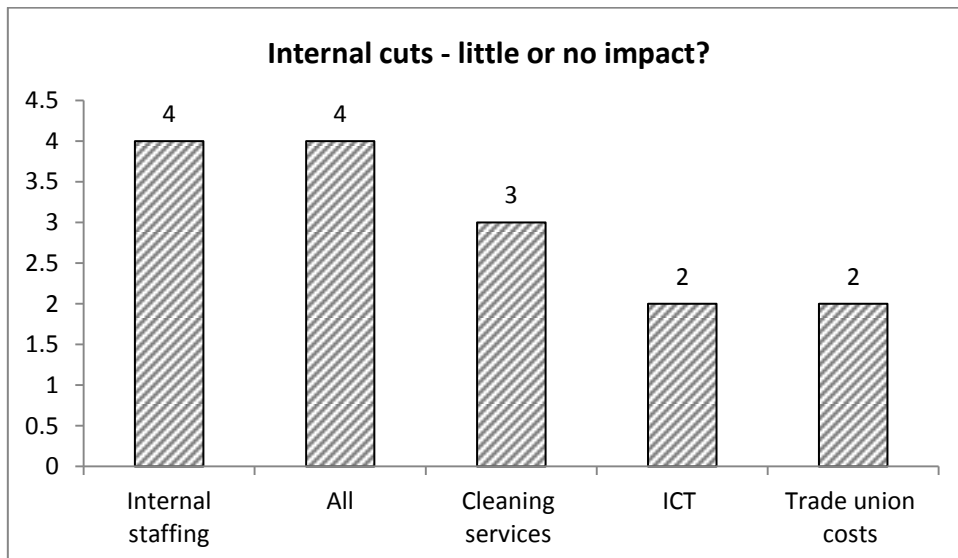


Fig. 19

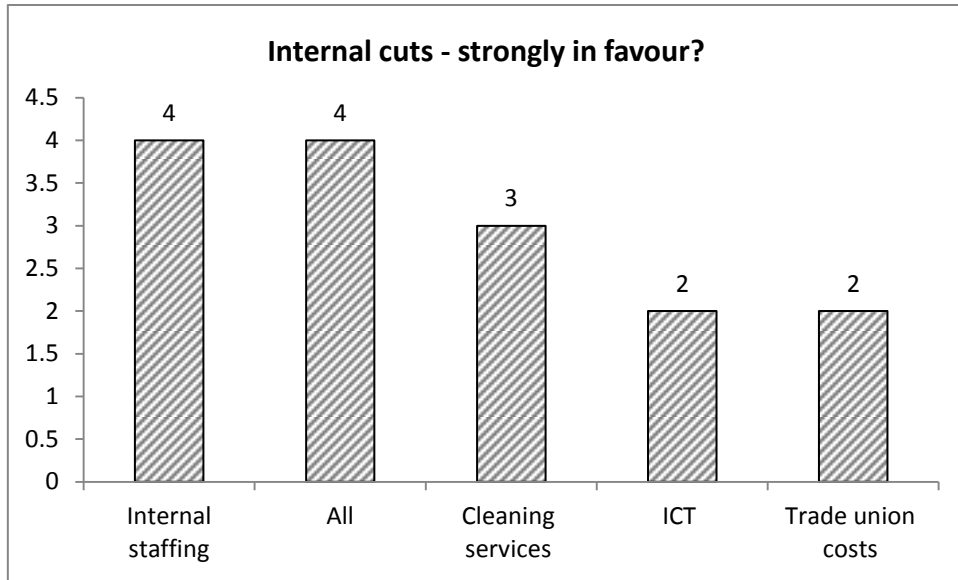


Fig. 20

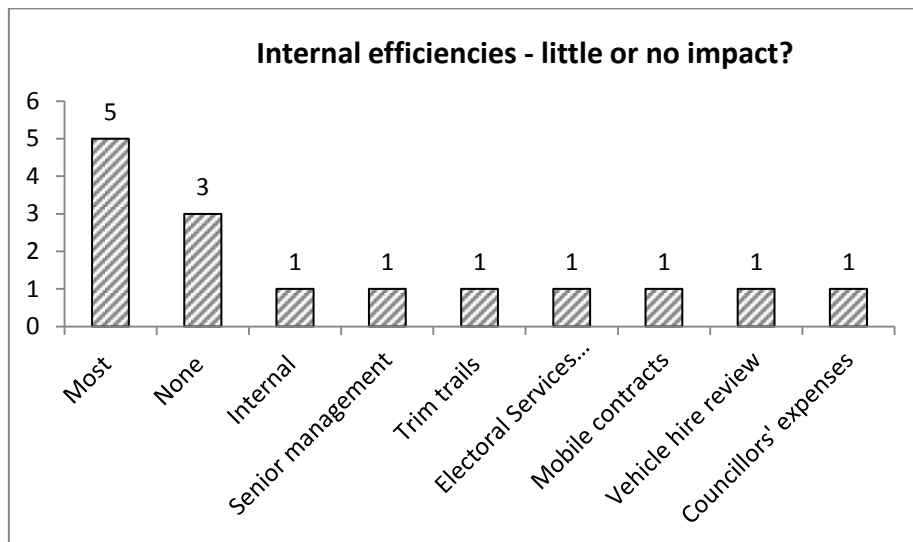


Fig. 21

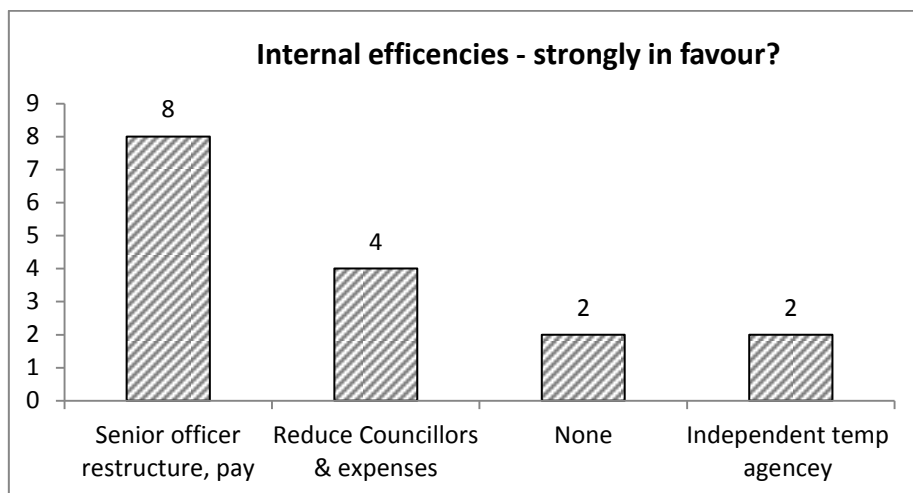


Fig. 22

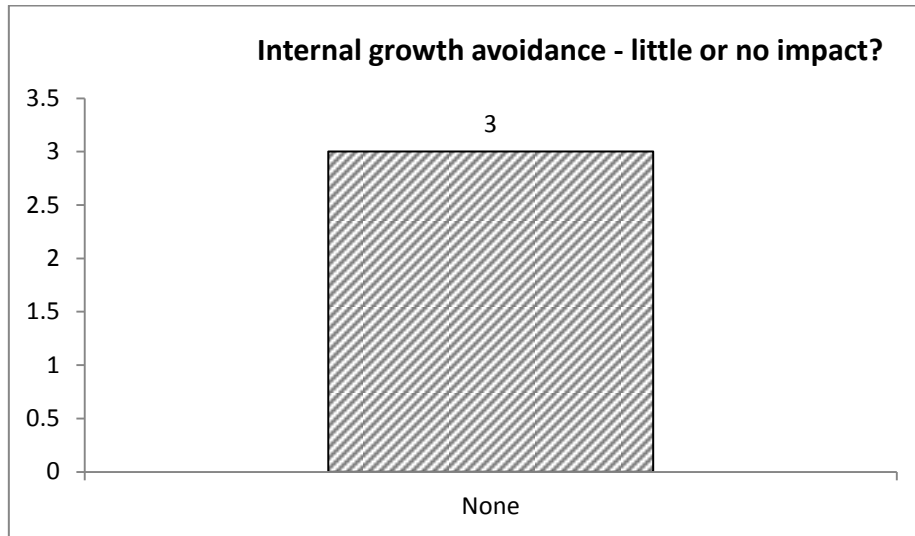
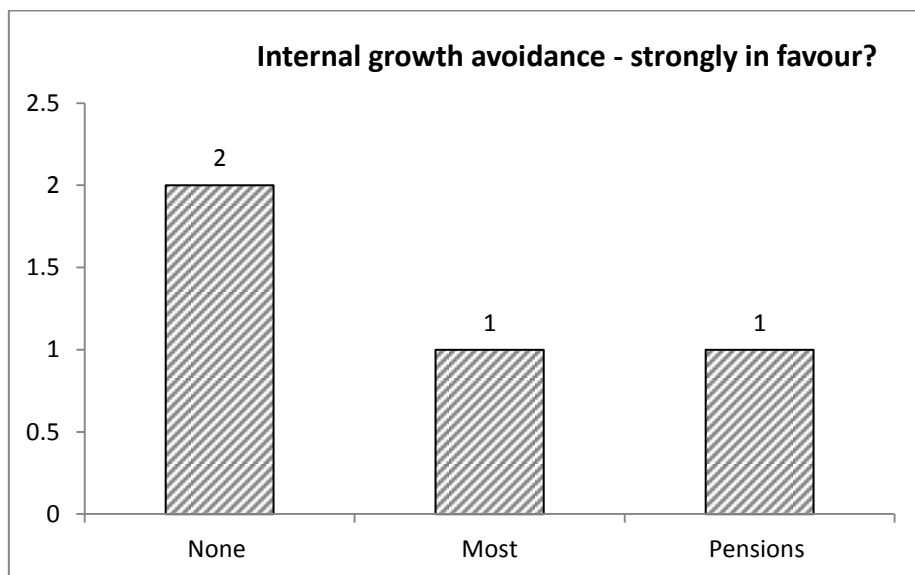


Fig. 23



Findings from the qualitative (discussion based and other submissions) consultations: views on specific proposals for budgetary savings

6. The following section outlines the key views from the qualitative consultation with stakeholders, community groups and other interested parties.
- 6.1 The twenty meetings covered a range of topics and gave attendees the opportunity to ask questions, gain clarification, and raise concerns or issues. The notes taken during these meetings do not always contain information on whether proposals are supported or opposed, though they do contain greater detail around the discussions, which for the sake of brevity, are not included in this report, but are available on request. This section also draws upon comments received from interested parties in emails and letters and comments made during the duration of the telephone hotline.
- 6.2 There are 165 specific proposals within the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy document. The budget proposals have been banded in to broad summary headings within this report as follows:
- ◆ **Efficiency Savings**
 - ◆ **Growth Avoidance**
 - ◆ **Income generation**
 - ◆ **Invest to Save**
 - ◆ **Cut in Service**
 - ◆ **General comments unrelated to specific proposals**
- 6.3 **Extent of consultation discussions and interpretation considerations**
Given the broad spread of the proposals totalling 165, not all/only relevant topics were discussed by stakeholders and community groups during the meetings. The topics discussed are therefore likely to reflect the issues of most importance to the participants. All of the groups did have access to the public facing budget proposals documentation prior to the meetings.
- 6.4 The public, community groups and key stakeholders often do not have the time to gain an understanding of the difference between controllable and non-controllable costs, or between statutory and discretionary spend. The reader should therefore be mindful of this context when considering the findings in the following sections.

Qualitative Consultation main findings

7. Efficiency Savings

Deletion of posts in welfare rights and financial assessment services

BME organisations said that benefit take-up is a key component of Local Government Finance, so we need to show Central Government that the need still exists here, and there may be other “ripple effects” of cutting welfare rights provisions as yet unaccounted for. The LGBT network wanted to know if it was possible to vire money from the Social Inclusion budget to the Welfare Rights one, as the welfare rights work often prevents problems escalating to the extent that social inclusion intervention is required. Other areas discussed included; *Learning Disabilities Assessment and Care Management care packages; Mental Health Care Assessment and Care Management: packages of care; Physical Disabilities Assessment and Care*

Management: packages of care; Reducing costs within in-house services for Older People; Restructure of Learning Disabilities Assessment and Care Management: Social Work Teams; Restructure of Older People Assessment and Care management: Social work Teams; Restructure of Mental Health Care Management – Social Work Teams); and Restructure of Physical Disabilities Assessment and Care Management – Social Work Teams.

- 7.1 The BME groups said that demonstration of need (and protecting vulnerable people) affects our funding from Central Government and that the council needs to maximise this aspect. The Carer's forum stated the 6% cut in physical disabilities packages of care needed further clarification about the impact it might have, and the same group was concerned over the future of a local hub for moderate/severe learning difficulties. The Over 50's Forum presented a written submission in relation to services for older people. In it they claim that "there seems to have been a significant lack of strategic thinking behind the budget reduction proposals relating to services for older people.
- 7.2 There are 3 key features which need to be taken into account:
- i. The rapid growth in the number of older people in the city and in particular the higher than average numbers living in poverty and with long term limiting illnesses;
 - ii. The economic impact this has because of the pressure on family carers to give up work in order to look after older relatives; and
 - iii. The importance of relatively low cost preventative services in significantly reducing the level of expenditure on intensive health and social care services in the medium and long term"
- 7.3 Three residents phoned the council's telephone hotline in relation to Restructure of Learning Disabilities Assessment and Care Management (x1); Restructure of Mental Health Care Management – Social Work Teams (x1); and Restructure of Physical Disabilities Assessment and Care Management – Social Work Teams (x1)). No further details were provided.
- 7.3 Renegotiation of funding for Independent Living Service**
The Over 50's Forum and the Carer's Group were concerned that care quality and coverage would be diminished by this proposal, and that reducing respite care was thought to be a bad idea. In particular a reduction in wages could have impact upon the quality of provision, and a restructure here ought to prioritise findings from best practice elsewhere. A decline in provision quality could lead to escalation of some cases, thereby increasing costs. The SE LNP said that current resources e.g. Telecare need to be fully exploited.
- 7.4 Reduce staffing in Carer's Support Team**
The Interfaith and Regeneration Network thought that this proposal would lead to Carer's Support being over-stressed and over-stretched, with NHS needing to pick up shortfall. The Carer's Forum saw this proposal as a "false economy", as the service offers a valued support and signposting function as well as offering a short-term crisis cover when carers can't cope anymore.

7.5 Reduction in Staffing Budget for Youth Offending Service

The BME groups queried the accuracy of the figures and asked how the costs are worked over 5 year period, stating that this is recurrent saving. The Interfaith and Regeneration Network thought that there would be consequences in terms of stress, leading to NHS needing to pick up shortfalls.

7.6 Reduce external market block contracts for day services

The Over 50's Forum said that, whilst under-utilised, the day services provide valuable social contact for older people, with potential health benefits and lack of escalation for critical cases as a result. Over-booking day care provision may result in a better attendance than at present, as many have to cancel at short notice. South West LNP said that day centres help older people get back on their feet after hospital.

7.7 Reduce the number of Highway Technicians

The Interfaith and Regeneration Network suggested that these proposals could be a false economy if people make claims for vehicle damage from poor road conditions.

7.8 Reduce Street Lighting Maintenance

Gender Matters supported this idea in principle but said that more details were needed.

7.9 Review of jointly-funded services (council and NHS)

One person phoned the council's telephone hotline in relation to this proposal. No further details are available.

8. Growth Avoidance

No comments were made in relation to this set of proposals

9. Income generation

9.1 Improve collection rate for council tax

BME groups thought that savings from Council Tax Collection were "tiny" and that the focus of the savings generally had too much emphasis on charging residents. They suggested that there was a need to look at maximising revenue before looking to charge residents. The Interfaith and Regeneration Network thought that there was also a need to give advice regarding budgeting before pursuing people who did not pay. Gender Matters agreed that more needed to be done to improve the collection rate than at present.

9.2 Replacing Local Neighbourhood Partnerships with Community-Led Economic Development – Stage 1 and 2 (please note that stage 1 is an invest to save proposal)

The BME groups were concerned with the possible duplication with community groups' work at the moment. They argued that there should be key officers in localities working with existing community groups. The LGBT Network said that the proposal would need examination. South East LNP criticised the proposed reduction of neighbourhood support officers, as it would hinder voluntary groups from securing external funding. They asked for a more phased approach to enable them to find other methods of support asking if the LNP support could remain for another 12 months. The NE LNP questioned how the council would conduct consultations without LNP support.

- 9.3 Four written submissions were received from
- ◆ Oxley Tenants and Residents Association;
 - ◆ Blakenhall LNP;
 - ◆ Tettenhall LNP and WREN; and
 - ◆ Low Hill and Scotlands PACT.
- Their comments are summarised below:
- 9.4 The very best people are already in post, so why is the council asking them to reapply for their own jobs?
- 9.5 The economic impact of this proposal is understated. Will there be support to community groups outside of the priority areas to access funding? An example was given of £1.1 million of investment brought into implement canal side improvements in Tettenhall. This project was of benefit to people in areas outside of Tettenhall e.g. in Whitmore Reans, therefore strict demarcation regarding areas of benefit should not apply.
- 9.6 Community led economic regeneration projects require people with a broad skills mix e.g. in carrying out consultation, disseminating information, helping create effective partnerships, and working with local people to formulate realistic goals. The community will need reassurance that LNP support will remain in place until September 2014 and that effective handover of information will take place.
- 9.7 Blakenhall LNP wrote to the council and was concerned that the proposals put the community and vulnerable individuals at greater risk. They said that the greatest loss of services appeared to be community-facing services for people most in need. The cuts to neighbourhood and other frontline services will have an impact on community cohesion and may result in unrest and disturbances.
- 9.8 The LNP also argues that, since the council has a duty to consult, and the LNP fulfils this function for many service groups, it will be more costly for individual service groups to arrange their own consultations. The LNP states that valuable qualitative information will be lost to the authority if the LNPs cease. They further argue that cuts that affect the most vulnerable should be avoided and that the cuts could have a negative effect on Blakenhall both physically and economically.
- 9.9 Finally the LNP makes the point that the council has opted for 'easy cuts' rather than trying to achieve savings whilst improving outcomes.
- 10. Parking Services and Charging Review.**
- The Interfaith and Regeneration Network were concerned that raising parking charges would have a negative impact on city centre businesses. They argued that there was a need reduce parking charges and/or **“think of positive actions”** such as free drive through provision at the market for heavy goods instead. Gender Matters felt that, **“it will drive out trade and fail to attract businesses”** whilst at the same time making other retail centres such as Bentley Bridge, Merry Hill or Telford more attractive to shoppers.

11. Increase School Meals Charges

The Interfaith and Regeneration Network thought that that this proposal was inconsistent with the focus on attainment and skills in the Corporate Plan.

12. Fees and charges review – Bereavement Services

Whilst agreeing with the proposal, the Interfaith and Regeneration Network said that there was a need to consider the level of fees and the impact upon the poor.

13. Revenues and benefits technology improvements

One person phoned the council's telephone hotline in relation to this proposal. No further details are available.

14. Invest to Save

No comments were made in relation to this set of proposals

15. Cut in service

15.1 Reduction in Voluntary Sector Grant

This proposal was commented upon by the majority of the equality groups, most of whom highlighted it as their priority issue. The BME groups said that the level of cut shown is misleading as it includes commissioned activity. They argued that this is incorrect as those contracts have been won in competition, quite often, with the private sector. They said that it should also be taken into account that funding to Housing Support providers (many of whom are voluntary sector providers) and Community Initiatives is scheduled to reduce as well. Support for the voluntary sector is already tailored to Corporate Plan and City Strategy.

15.2 The LGBT network mentioned a need to assess value for money, and to justify groups' activities in light of a reduced funding pot.

15.3 The BME groups pointed to the potential impact on the employees in the voluntary sector losing their jobs and on vulnerable people and groups. The social cost of this has not really been acknowledged. They asked if pension liabilities to the council been addressed.

15.4 Women of Wolverhampton and the Interfaith Network mentioned that a prior lack of collaborative work with the council makes the current situation more difficult than it could have been and an opportunity had been lost in engaging with the sector about how they could work with the council to support vulnerable people. Women of Wolverhampton and South West LNP said that the voluntary sector provides a good return on investment and adds value to the city. They will have reduced funding and yet be told to 'do more' with it and their value in contributing towards the city's economic regeneration is not recognised.

15.5 The North East LNP was concerned that there are not enough volunteers to run all the services. This will lead to a possible inability to assist the Council with its priorities, as cuts are front-loaded, and change with three months' notice isn't realistic.

- 15.6 Gender Matters mentioned that the Council could not necessarily rely upon the voluntary sector themselves to deliver services, as even the voluntary sector had been forced to make cuts.
- 15.7 In a press release issued by the Third Sector Partnership local charities expressed concern at the scale of the cuts facing the voluntary and community sector in Wolverhampton. They maintain that grant funding for the local voluntary and community sector will be cut by over 50% over the next two years, resulting in funding being withdrawn to 30 organisations in the City, and the closure of many of them. They argue that as a result, vulnerable people in communities will lose services, and over 200 jobs will be placed at risk, along with support for over 800 volunteers. The services affected include those for young people, the elderly, disabled people, the homeless and other vulnerable groups.
- 15.8 Whilst acknowledging the huge budget cuts the City Council is facing and urging all sectors to press Wolverhampton's case at national level, the Third Sector Partnership states that it is keen to work with the council to meet the needs of vulnerable people in the city.
- 15.9 Chris Irvine, Chair of the Wolverhampton Third Sector Partnership, which acts as a forum for over 100 voluntary and community organisations in the city, said ***“With local people already facing cuts to services from the Council, it is crucial that voluntary and community groups are able to respond to what will be a growing demand on their already stretched services. The sector has also brought in over £26 million of external funds in the past two years, but its ability to do so in the future will be undermined by the scale and timing of these cuts.”***
- 15.10 The Central Youth Theatre also provided the consultation with a copy of their press release . They say that council officers scored the Youth Theatre as having no economic value in a cabinet report on voluntary sector savings, although Central Youth Theatre has attracted £250,000 to the city in four years. Former members, including Beverley Knight and Ben Clark, co-creator and actor in BBC3's *Badults*, have also provided evidence of the impact the Youth Theatre has had on their professional careers, with many former members becoming successful as performers, in behind-the-scenes roles in theatre, film and television and in fields such as teaching and journalism. Director Jane Ward received an MBE in November 2013 for services to drama and to the community. She says: ***“I only received the MBE in November, and so it comes as a very bitter irony that the Council has chosen us.”***
- 15.11 Representatives of Central Youth Theatre contacted the council separately to say that factors such as uncertainty about future funding and both their premises have made the future of Central Youth Theatre uncertain. Gender Matters contacted the council to make the point that the organisation is not funded by the council and as such it could easily relocate to another area, meaning that the council or another provider would need to pick up on the services Gender Matters provides.

15.12 Removal of Council subsidy for Central Baths

Women of Wolverhampton argued that this proposal had a disproportionate effect on females (especially Asian females) who are frequent users of Central Baths. They point to the health benefits of exercise and the need for a full equality analysis. Women of Wolverhampton claimed that staff were demotivated due to lack of investment in the baths. South East LNP thought that the facility needed refurbishment. They also thought that the baths could possibly raise charges to cover the shortfall, including charging for parking. South West LNP suggested that the café could generate additional revenue. South East LNP said that people will struggle to travel to alternative baths. The North East LNP supported attempts to work with private sector to find a solution. An individual emailed the council concerned that local children would face an increased risk of drowning in the canals if this facility closed. He was also concerned about the implications on peoples' health and that travelling to alternative facilities would be difficult for him. He was also concerned about accessing other baths in the city that

15.13 Two callers phoned the council hotline in relation to this proposal. A Customer with a disability called. She relies on swimming to help her condition (MS). She would not be able to afford the cost of travelling to any of the other baths. Another customer was concerned that the possible closure of the baths would impact on the economy, the community and children swimming.

16. Reduction to overall Council subsidy of Cultural Services, including Art Gallery

Women of Wolverhampton said that cultural services could be a driver of tourism to the city, and Gender Matters stated that reductions or even closures of venues would mean there was ***“nothing to draw people into the city at night or even in the day”***. The LGBT Network stated that, in the words of one participant, they wished to ***“keep facilities open even if reduced”***.

16.1 Women of Wolverhampton suggested closer working between Bilston Craft Gallery and the City of Wolverhampton College to create craft apprenticeships. They said that possible new areas to explore include heritage faith trails, and also changing opening hours to increase visitor footfall.

16.2 A resident from Tettenhall emailed to say that the park, house and café at Bantock Park are a real attraction for families in the area. They are well used and are particularly convenient for residents who rely on public transport. One resident phoned the telephone hotline in relation to this proposal. (No further details provided). A “Save Bantock House” Facebook page has been established which has 2124 members. The group has arranged a public meeting on 29 January 2014 to develop proposals for saving the venue.

17. Reduction in library opening hours and introducing charges for internet use

According to the LGBT Network and Experts by Experience, a reduction in library opening hours and charges for the internet would have a disproportionate effect upon disadvantaged groups. Experts by Experience made the point that soon people would have to complete welfare benefit claims online and suggested waiving charges for those on benefits. Participants at Gender Matters said that the internet was, “the only social

outlet for some people". The LGBT Network thought that demand for IT might outstrip supply. NE LNP noted that those who are job seeking may need longer than an hour to apply for a job online. SE LNP thought that libraries were a key community resource for many children and adults.

- 17.1 The council received emails from the Libraries Action group and two residents, one from Penn and one from Finchfield. In addition to the open letter from the Libraries Action Group to Simon Warren, the group also submitted an extract of the letter, offering to work with the council to form a constituted 'Friends of the Library' group in order to attract external funding to mitigate the effects of the cuts on the city's library services. One respondent suggested that the closure of Finchfield library would disproportionately affect older people in the area as the area of benefit, Finchfield and Castlecroft, have almost double the city average of residents aged 75 and above.
- 17.2 Another respondent wrote to ask that the two staff working at Finchfield library be retained due to diverse services they provide and the positive manner in which they do so, which the respondent does not feel can be replaced by a mechanised system. One resident phoned the telephone hotline in relation to this proposal. (No further details provided).
- 18. Reduction of the Neighbourhood Warden Service**
- The Interfaith and Regeneration Network were particularly concerned about the reduction in neighbourhood wardens for the city centre. They were also concerned that if the catchment area for neighbourhood wardens increased, this would reduce their effectiveness. Social and private landlords said that the service was valued and made a big difference. They suggested that the council look into the scheme being funded in a different way e.g. sponsorship.
- 18.1 Six individual written submissions were received in relation this proposal from groups or individuals in Bushbury; Oxley (x3); Bilston East; and Whitmore Reans. They made the following points:
- 18.2 The neighbourhood wardens service provides good public reassurance, particularly for elderly people in the Bushbury area and in Oxley nothing is too much trouble for them. Oxley is now an area of low crime largely due to efforts of the wardens working alongside the police. Recently the wardens were involved in an intervention to stop a growing problem of drug dealing in an area. However, there are on-going issues of drug dealing, anti-social behaviour, robberies and muggings. If the service is cut then crime would increase and it would create long-term problems in Bradley, where, alongside getting involved in various community projects, the wardens also act as a first port of call for any concerns residents have. These savings could be a false economy in the long run, putting pressure on other services such as the Police and on repairs as a result of criminal damage.
- 18.3 The representative would prefer cuts in other areas e.g. weekly bin collections or grounds maintenance rather than in the neighbourhood wardens service.

The council also received a petition from Lincoln Green Tenants and Residents Association signed by 70 residents. The text of the petition is, ***“For our area Lincoln Green and Oxley Village as part of Oxley and Bushbury North to be considered a priority area. The area is full of elderly and vulnerable people and (the) area (is) a target for bogus callers.”*** The proposal around the Neighbourhood Wardens is subject to scrutiny on 30 January 2014 and the results will be reported to Cabinet on 25 February 2014.

19. Reduction of opening hours at the Archive service and staffing restructure

Women of Wolverhampton suggested that Archives could charge for services especially groups researching for their Heritage Lottery Fund bids, visitors to the city and people researching their family history.

20. Reduce level of Discretionary Rate Relief

BME organisations and the Interfaith and Regeneration Network both pointed to the potential impact upon voluntary sector organisations and small businesses. The Carers Group agreed that removing the Discretionary Rate Relief put some charities or not-for-profit organisations out of business. They felt the risk of this event would increase if the changes weren't publicised suitably in advance.

The BME organisations thought that this proposal contradicts the priorities in the Corporate Plan. They also thought that it may discourage or impede new businesses from forming or setting up here.

21 Transfer and de-commission a number of in-house services for Older people

In a written submission a representative of UNISON raises three question areas:

- i. How was the proposal arrived at and what equality analysis has been conducted? What consultation has been conducted with staff and key partners?
- ii. What evidence is there that the contract with 'Big Word' is cost effective and provides the added value that the current in-house service provides?
- iii. What other options were considered in relation to this proposal?

21.1 The respondent believes that the current in house provision provides a value for money service that supports the corporate priorities of supporting vulnerable people and builds a confident capable council. She says that it is important that the proposal does not have a disproportionate effect on staff and service users and that the council has regard to its duties under the Equality act 2010.

22. Reshaping Partnership support and Rationalisation of Economic Development and Black Country Working

The BME groups thought that removing Partnership support and Economic Development reduces the scope of regeneration and income maximisation for city.

23. Cessation of Winter garden waste 'green bin' collection service.

The BME groups thought that there was potential to charge wealthier residents for this service, but this was not endorsed by all participants. A resident phoned the council hotline to say that he is unhappy with the proposal to move to monthly green bin collections in the

winter as he has a large tree in his garden and he struggles to fit all the leaves in with fortnightly collections.

24. Reduce the number of Councillors

There was broad support for this proposal from BME organisations, the Interfaith and Regeneration Network and NE LNP. The Carers Forum and BME groups were concerned about the risk of increased workload for councillors and what it might mean for councillor contact. The NE LNP supported this proposal and suggested that councillors should be volunteers i.e. should not receive expenses.

A resident from Dovecotes phoned the council hotline to express support for this proposal alongside a suggestion that the number of councillors should reduce to a third of current numbers.

25. Ranger Service Review

SE LNP was concerned that the proposal to cease locking the parks at night will lead to an increase in anti-social behaviour. A resident from Whitmore Reans emailed the council to say that leaving the parks unlocked at night leaves them vulnerable to damage and open to criminal activities such as drug dealing.

26. Reduction in funding for Housing Support and Social Inclusion providers

The LGBT network asked for a review of overlaps and duplication in this area. They said that it was an important issue which needs handling carefully.

27. Review of the Community Safety service

The LGBT Network pointed to a lack of consultation with key stakeholder regarding priorities and particularly the exclusion of Hate Crime. The city needs to be perceived as safe and the NE LNP argues that the cost for this service is minimal.

28. Review of the use of Organists at Bushbury Crematorium

There was support from the BME groups for this proposal, whilst giving the choice to residents pay for an organist themselves and/or make own arrangements. 11 people that took part in the online survey said that this proposal would have little or no impact on them.

29. Review bedding planting across the city.

The BME groups suggested that perennial plants could be used instead of annuals. Women of Wolverhampton suggested that the council sought commercial sponsorship of flower beds.

30. Re-configuration of Youth Services, centred on Youth Zone and targeted youth support

THE BME groups, LGBT Network and North East and South West LNPs questioned the central location of the proposed Youth Zone rather than having youth provision in localities, as “young people are very community-orientated”. There was also concern that public transport into the city was not good enough, and parents would not want their children travelling into the centre alone. The North East LNP suggested that youth centres could be located at schools. Many respondents were concerned that this

proposal (especially the removal of local clubs) could see a rise in antisocial behaviour in localities. One aspect was that LGBT youth could be “persecuted” if spotted asking for information, advice or guidance about LGBT issues there. This was felt to be particularly acute for LGBT youth from BME communities, who may fear harassment over their sexuality if knowledge became widespread. The Interfaith and Regeneration Network pointed out that it was potentially unfeasible for voluntary sector to cover shortfall in provision in light of cuts to their budgets. There was interest in the proposal to handover youth clubs to voluntary groups within the South West LNP.

- 30.1 Women of Wolverhampton made specific comments that the youth service only works with small groups of young people at present, with lack of co-ordination with voluntary sector. Women of Wolverhampton also noted the removal of youth clubs was mentioned in proposals but other aspects like the Central Youth Theatre were not. The North East LNP were concerned that most volunteers are older people who are unlikely to want to volunteer for the youth service.
- 30.2 Hyperlocal website, WV11 invited feedback on the proposal to develop a Youth Zone via their Facebook page. Up until 18/12/2013 (when NE LNP constituency staff submitted feedback), the page had received 61 comments, with some participants commenting more than once.

A summary of the comments are below:

- i. There were sixteen comments in relation to the difficulties young people would face in travelling to the venue. People mentioned the rising costs of public transport and parents were concerned about how safe young people would be travelling to the venue. A further four comments related to the potential for trouble between young people from different areas.
- ii. There were eight comments expressing general opposition to the proposal, some of whom urged others to sign petitions and contribute to the consultation.
- iii. Eight comments referred to the positive role that voluntary organisations such as the scouts and guides could play in helping to fill the gap left by the closure of local facilities.
- iv. Six comments voiced concerns that this proposal would lead to an increase in crime and anti-social behaviour
- v. The lack of general leisure opportunities for young people in localities was mentioned by four people.
- vi. Three people said that they thought the subsequent consultation would be tokenistic.
- vii. There were three comments saying that they had understood that the development of the community hubs was supposed to safeguard local youth provision and one person said that he had not heard that the implication of establishing the Youth Zone was that local services would close. Two people said that the Youth Zone should be in addition to not instead of neighbourhood youth services.
- viii. Three comments expressed the view that decision makers are unaware of the impact that their decisions will have on local communities and another three comments spoke about the value of the youth service
- ix. One person mentioned that the proposed location was poor (on the outskirts of the city centre) and that the existing Epic Centre was better located.

- x. One person thought that similar ideas had worked in other cities and that the Youth Zone could be good for the city.

31. Move Shopmobility to be more commercially supported

The Carer's Forum questioned the need for this provision stating that other Black Country authorities don't have a similar scheme. The Over 50's Forum stated that other schemes had failed when they were privatised and that this is important provision for older people.

32. Rationalise the Highway Thin Surface Operation and Review of Highways maintenance.

The Interfaith and Regeneration Network suggested that these proposals could be a false economy if people make claims for vehicle damage from poor road conditions.

33. Remove council subsidy for the operation of the bar at Aldersley Leisure Village

The Carer's Forum suggested that the bar could be run as a commercial enterprise by a brewery.

**34. General comments unrelated to the above categories
General comments about the savings**

34.1 The impact on the most vulnerable

Gender Matters, Voice For Parents and Experts by Experience were concerned that the proposals would impact more on the most vulnerable and lower income residents. Wolverhampton Interfaith and Regeneration Network's greatest concern was the impact of the savings on older and disabled people. They were concerned that cumulatively the proposals would disproportionately affect certain groups of people.

35. Unintended impacts of the savings

Wolverhampton Interfaith and Regeneration Network were concerned that the large number of council redundancies would impact on the economic regeneration of the city and that any new jobs created in the city through, for instance the i54 development, would be given to people from outside the city.

Businesses wanted to know if the longer term cost pressures of the savings for the council and the wider economy had been calculated. In a written submission the Over 50's Forum says that some of the budget proposal reductions appear to be in conflict with each other, giving the following examples

- ◆ Expenditure on assessments will be reduced, at the same time as increasing the number being undertaken, through the introduction of assessments 6 weeks after hospital discharge
- ◆ An increased number of people will be cared for in the community (presumably by reducing numbers in residential care), at the same time as cutting care services that support people in the community (e.g. night visiting and possibly Carelink and telecare)
- ◆ Expenditure on welfare benefits advice will be reduced, at the same time as increasing the take up of welfare benefits to offset increased charges to service users

- 35.1 They also say that, ***“a major omission is any analysis of the outcomes achieved by services at their current levels and the impact on those outcomes by the proposed***

reductions. This is particularly important for preventative and rehabilitative services. In order to make a rational decision, the Council would need to know not only the savings that would be made now by cutting the services, but also the increased expenditure on intensive health and social care services that would be incurred in 2 to 3 years' time, as a result of the reduction in the number of people receiving preventative and rehabilitative interventions."

36 Pensions

Gender Matters were concerned about the expense of allowing employees to claim their pension at the age of 55 and suggested that this entitlement should be stopped. It was suggested by businesses that the council could use pension funds as a source of capital funding.

37. Equalities Issues

Wolverhampton Interfaith and Regeneration Network stated that the council could leave itself open to legal challenges if did not conduct adequate equality assessments. They stated that an overall equality assessment of the cuts was needed. The BME groups asked, in the context of the cuts, what commitment the council has to BME groups and the wider equality and diversity agenda.

38. Community Solutions

The Experts by Experience group felt that volunteering was being implicitly encouraged as a way of filling the gaps left by service cuts. One participant was keen to volunteer but his criminal convictions prevented him from doing so. He asked if the council would examine how ex-offenders could be enabled to volunteer. Voice for Parents thought that faith groups would be interested in delivering services. They added that communities should also be encouraged to deliver services if they strongly feel that they should be retained. The availability of some facilities and services represents a good opportunity for some communities. Participants at both the SW and SE LNPs mentioned capitalising on Wolverhampton's 'community spirit' to help the city through the present difficulties.

39. Efficiencies

The BME groups queried whether the social care efficiency savings were really efficiency savings or if they amounted to a reduction in services. They also pointed out that the Third Sector Partnership, supported by the Community Initiatives Team, had mapped duplication of grants and contracts across the council and they asked that this be looked at with a view to identifying savings.

Wolverhampton Interfaith and Regeneration Network suggested that efficiency savings would impact on the quality of services delivered and asked that all the savings proposals be kept under review to ascertain the impact on resident's lives.

40. Pressures on the budget

The LGBT Network and Women of Wolverhampton (WOW) recognised that caring for Looked After Children was a statutory responsibility. Nonetheless they asked if the spend in this area could be reduced. WOW suggested that outsourcing to private companies or working in partnership with the Third Sector might be more efficient, whilst the LGBT network suggested that a cross-Black Country facility was a possible solution. BME

organisations suggested that the council needed to encourage people to take more responsibility and WOW and One Voice similarly suggested an increased focus on preventative work.

41. The Budget Challenge

Overall approach to the budget challenge

Participants from an LNP were interested in the council's overall approach to the financial challenge it faces. For instance they asked if the council was taking a John Lewis Cooperative Council approach (which one participant advocated), or looking to commission from the private sector? Social and private landlords asked if radical solutions to the challenge Wolverhampton is facing had been considered i.e. merging with South Staffordshire Council or sharing staff between councils. They also suggested that the council could sell some of its land for the 2015/18 Affordable Housing Scheme. One participant from SW LNP suggested that the council should do things differently and should use their buildings and land to generate income. Gender Matters and the LGBT Network both suggested that the Black Country Authorities should share back office functions, with the LGBT Network suggesting that the voluntary sector could provide this function.

- 41.1 One participant at the Third Sector Partnership meeting said that they did not believe that a salami slicing approach to making savings was the most effective way to work. The BME groups were concerned that the main strategy for making the savings appeared to be to charge residents more. They thought that the savings were duplicated and not joined up and suggested that they had been driven by a sense of panic. Participants at SW LNP and the Third Sector partnership were concerned that the cuts were too harsh and would result in increased unemployment in the city and would not leave Wolverhampton much to build on when the economy does recover.
- 41.2 A participant from SW LNP asked that all councillors, regardless of their political persuasion, work together on the current financial issues. BME groups and the LGBT Network would prefer to see an approach that maximises innovative ways of generating income (something they say the council has been encouraging the Third Sector to do for quite some time). Participants from the SE LNP urged the council to make savings by reducing the numbers of managers rather than frontline staff.
- 41.3 The Carer's group wanted to know if the new Head of Communications was necessary expenditure and the BME group were concerned about the numbers of interim consultants the council employs. A member of Gender Matters suggested that the council should "stop cutting, use the reserves, and allow the Government to send in a taskforce, to force the Government's hand" and One Voice suggested that there should be protests against government cuts.

Efficiency savings

- 41.4 The BME groups and the LGBT Network thought that more should be done to address back office costs. The BME groups were particularly concerned with the high cost of 'treasury management' (£12.5 million) which they said is not explained in the

council's Medium Term Financial Strategy report and dwarfs preventative services such as carer's support.

- 41.5 The Over 50's Forum was also concerned about a third of the budget being spent on back office costs. In their subsequent written submission they state that the council has ***“told voluntary sector organisations, with which it has contracts, that expenditure on their central overheads of more than 10-12% is unacceptable. However, it seems that the Council does not follow its own advice on this matter, since, as far as we can see, central Council functions account for some 20-25% of its expenditure. In addition the Council's expenditure of over £2 million a year on consultancy fees seems profligate in the circumstances. We would like to know what target the Council has set for expenditure on its central administrative and corporate functions, as a percentage of total annual spend.”***
- 41.6 The trade unions and SE LNP were concerned about the amount of duplication they saw. The Third Sector Partnership asked about the potential to make savings by reducing existing commercial contracts.

Addressing the future budget challenge

- 41.7 An LNP were interested in where the remaining £10.3 million saving required for 2013/14 would come from and also how far the consultation would influence the final savings to be made.

A partnership approach

- 41.8 The Third Sector Partnership said that the Third Sector should be considered part of the solution as well as economic regeneration. They said that they generated income for the city which could be reinvested into preventative services. However, the threat to the Third Sector's funding was impacting on their ability to generate income. Both the Third Sector Partnership and the SE LNP thought that the answer lay in partnership working. However, the Third Sector Partnership stated that decisions had been made that were at odds with partnership working.

The economy and regeneration

- 41.9 One person at the SE LNP would like to see less emphasis on an IT system and more on attracting new companies to come to the city by reducing business rates. The BME groups would like to see social enterprise promoted within the voluntary sector and council services packaged together and delivered by the sector, which, they say, would represent much better value for money.

42. Focus on prevention

Whilst sympathising with the council's financial position, the Third Sector Partnership argued that the sector's early intervention and preventative work saves the council money by dealing with issues before they require the council's involvement. If the funding provided through the Community Initiatives Team ceases, this will mean an increased work load for the council as they will pick up work that the sector currently undertakes. This, they argue, has not been fully taken into account.

42.1 In their written submission the Over 50's Forum say, ***“we can find nothing in the budget reduction papers which shows the expected level of this downstream growth in expenditure, which should be offset against the short term savings from the proposed cuts in voluntary and statutory sector preventative and rehabilitative services.”*** The BME group, Gender Matters, Voice for Parents and One Voice supported the focus on preventative care. However, the BME group thought that a focus on preventative care was not reflected in the savings proposals. They cited a number of examples such as cuts to the welfare rights team, carers support, reducing services for older people and the family advice support team. Voice for Parents and the Carers Forum were concerned that cuts to preventative work would end up costing the local authority more in the long run as more costly interventions would be required in the future.

43. The budget consultation process

The Carer's group, Wolverhampton Interfaith and Regeneration Network, Women of Wolverhampton and the Over 50's forum all raised concerns about the ability to comment meaningfully on the proposals based on the information provided. The proposals in the booklet provided by the council were described as vague and lacking in detail.

43.1 The Over 50's Forum stated that an indication of the proposed cut as proportion of the budget for that service area would have been useful. Women of Wolverhampton felt that the document did not show the linkage between various proposals. A representative from One Voice and Gender Matters both felt that the Facing Reality booklet and presentation were political.

44. Children and Young People

Voice for Parents were concerned that the Children's Centres might be affected by subsequent savings proposals. They also sought assurance that Special Educational Needs funding provided by government would not be subsumed into general council funding. A number of issues were raised in relation to the Youth council including the future location of the base for the Youth Council, whether youth elections would continue, what support the Youth Council would continue to receive and transitional arrangements.

45. Lobbying National Government

The Trade Unions wanted to know what actions local members of parliament would take regarding to lobbying the government and could the trade unions work with the council to lobby central government.

46. Supporting the economy

Businesses would like to see more done to support young people into business, particularly through offering vocational training in community centres.

They stated that many small businesses felt excluded from the council's procurement processes, which they found too complicated. They asked for council support in tapping into the internet shopping market and mentioned using existing retail outlets to establish a 'click and collect' service for small businesses. Rents for private landlords have reduced by 5 – 10% on average. The requirement to pay council tax after 21 days of a property becoming vacant is unmanageable and social and private landlords would like

to see the allowance increased above three weeks. Businesses suggested that more could be done to attract people into the city centre e.g. special events. They were concerned about empty shops and suggested that the shopping area could be shrunk.

47. Council Tax

Attendees at the NE LNP were concerned that in 2014/15 residents would be paying more council tax for fewer services. One resident from SW LNP said he would be happy to pay more council tax if this would save services.

48. Savings ideas

The BME group and Voice for Parents suggested that the council should maximise opportunities to attract external funding (from Europe, for instance), not just for the council but for the city as a whole. Women of Wolverhampton suggested that Bantock House could be sold and the money retained to invest in the other galleries in the city. They also suggested that street lights could be turned off in certain areas after midnight and that a charge could be made to use the archives service. They put forward the idea that local businesses could sponsor flower beds (as they do in other parts of the country) doing away with the need for council funding in this area completely. The Youth Council thought that the wages of the Chief Executive and senior officers should be reduced. The Youth Council were opposed to the refurbishment of the civic centre.

48.1 A resident from Compton wrote in with the following savings and income generation ideas. She suggested:

- ◆ Taking advantage of shale gas reserves;
 - ◆ Reducing unnecessary care assessments for service users with long term incurable illnesses;
 - ◆ Turning down the heating in public buildings;
 - ◆ Reduce weekly household bin collections to fortnightly;
 - ◆ Turning off street lamps after 11:00 p.m.;
 - ◆ Stopping sweet biscuits at public meetings;
 - ◆ Introducing a 50 pence charge for all public toilets (with an exemption for radar key holders);
 - ◆ £1000 on the spot fines for vandalism, graffiti, anti-social behaviour, illegal drug use and fly tipping;
 - ◆ Planting low maintenance perennial plants in all communal green areas and grass verges; and
 - ◆ All householders to take responsibility for sweeping outside their own houses
- She suggests that these measures would free up funding for social care.

48.2 A staff member from Gender Matters emailed to make the following comments:

- ◆ The savings will impact on the people of Wolverhampton the hardest;
- ◆ Wolverhampton City Council should explore every avenue to make savings e.g. looking at savings on unnecessary software licenses, merging back office functions with other Black Country authorities, merging back office functions generally and generally think the unthinkable in terms of reshaping local government; and
- ◆ The council should stop allowing people to retire early at the age of 55 – the £2 million figure quoted to enable this to happen would be better invested in frontline service.