Budget Consultation – budget proposals for 2018/19- 2021/22

Walsall Council is legally required to set a balanced budget and whilst we have a medium term financial strategy, we annually review and refresh the budget following consideration of how to allocate available money. The setting of the budget involves making some tough financial decisions and takes into account national and local priorities as well as the needs, wants and aspirations of our 270,000 residents.

The council has reduced its spending by £173m since 2010 and needs to save in the region of a further £20m to be able to balance the budget in 2019/20. The council will need to do things differently, do different things and in some cases stop doing things that are not in line with corporate priorities or local need.

On 24 October 2018, Walsall Council published its draft budget report, which contains some £19.98m of revenue savings/efficiencies. We are now consulting on our draft proposals for the financial year 2019/20. Undoubtedly, these are difficult times and difficult decisions will have to be made. As a result, the levels of council service provision will change and some services will no longer be available in the future.

Have your say on draft budget proposals – Service change consultation

Public consultation opened on Thursday 25 October 2018 and will end on Friday 21 December 2018. Over the coming weeks, services will be consulting on proposed changes to specific services and as a key partner, we invite you to comment and ask for your support in encouraging parents and children to participate, to help us understand the potential impact the proposed changes may have.

Full details of the draft revenue budget are contained in the ‘Draft Budget and Capital Programme 2018/19-2021-2022’ report. This report can accessed from the Walsall Council Budget Consultation pages: Budget_consultation/budget_consultation_2018_192021_22

I would like to draw your attention in particular to the children’s services draft proposals. Details on all children’s services proposals (operational and service) can be accessed here: childrens_services_budget_options.

Consultations on the following children’s services proposals began on 5 November 2018:

- Proposal Ref No: 18 – Review of residential short breaks provision for children and young people with a disability (Saving 2019/2020: £172,000).

Walsall Council Children’s Services has, since October 2013, delivered residential (overnight) short breaks for children and young people with a disability at Bluebells, a purpose built home providing six beds. While this has met the majority of needs, there is a small cohort of young people whose needs are met in provision purchased from external providers in neighbouring authorities.
The demand for Bluebells has reduced since it opened in 2013, with families receiving short breaks in the home or community. In July 2015, there were 32 children and young people receiving support at Bluebells. There are currently 26 children and young people who receive regular short breaks at Bluebells, of these three young people are Wolverhampton residents and access the service through an inter-authority agreement. Children and young people receive different packages of care, ranging from 12 to 84 nights a year.

We are seeking your feedback on proposed changes to the services delivered at Bluebells in order to make this saving.

The proposal is to respond to the reduction in demand for residential short breaks at Bluebells by reviewing the availability of the service and reducing the opening times to four days out of seven (including weekends) during term time with the flexibility to open during the week during school holidays. This will ensure children and young people with disabilities and their families are supported with overnight short breaks which offer positive opportunities to families while ensuring these are delivered in a more efficient manner, responding to changes in demand in the settings in which short breaks are delivered.

For more detailed information on this proposal, please view the policy paper here.

- Proposal Ref No: 19 – Review of contracts within Toxic Trio for perpetrator and counselling services (Saving 2019/2020: £109,000)

The two services affected by this proposal are:

- **A programme for perpetrators of domestic violence** – the council has a contract to provide support to perpetrators of domestic violence intended to change behaviours, reduce safeguarding risks to children and reduce admissions to care due to domestic abuse. The value of the contract is £79,000 per year and is due to expire on 30 June 2019.

- **Counselling service for children aged 5–11 years affected by domestic abuse** – the council commissioned a counselling service for 12 months for children aged 5–11 years who have witnessed domestic abuse. The service was intended to improve emotional wellbeing, increase self-esteem and build resilience.

We are seeking feedback on two options service delivery in order to make this saving.

**Option 1**
- Cease the local perpetrator service on the expiry of the current contract expiry and refer perpetrators of domestic violence to the regional programme.
- Cease the counselling service pilot for children witnessing domestic abuse and refer to alternative services.

**Option 2**
- Review all current commissioned domestic abuse services (for victims, and perpetrators) and explore alternative ways to provide whole family support for families affected by domestic abuse in Walsall as part of Children’s Services Transformation Programme.

For more detailed information on this proposal, please view the policy paper here.

- Proposal Ref No: 20 - 20 Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND) Home to School Transport for service users post 16 years of age Consultation (Saving 2019/2020: £560,000)

The current Home to School Transport budget is £2,006,400, which provides both statutory and non-statutory (post age 16) transport. Currently, 626 children and young people receive help with Home to School Transport. Of these, 62 recipients are aged 16 to 18 years and 35 recipients are aged 19 plus and it is recognised that these numbers change every year due to age and individual needs.

The draft Budget 2018/19–2021/22 includes a proposed saving of £560,000 against the Home to School Transport budget. We are seeking your feedback on two options regarding proposed changes to the Home to School Transport service currently provided for young people aged 16 and older in order to make this saving. The two options are outlined below:

Option 1
- Young People with SEND 16-18 year olds (school Year 12 and 13) — cease all forms of travel assistance
- Young People with SEND aged 19+ — cease all travel assistance by taxi, mini bus or coach and continue to offer travel assistance through:
  - Independent Travel Training
  - Personal Transport Budget
  - Independent bus pass

Option 2
- Young People with SEND 16-18 & 19+ year olds – cease all travel assistance by taxi, mini bus or coach and continue to offer and travel assistance through:
  - Independent Travel Training
  - Personal Transport Budget
  - Independent bus pass

There is no statutory duty for the council to provide Home to School Transport for young people aged 16 -18 years (academic years 12 & 13) with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and the duty for those young people with SEND aged 19 and older is to provide assistance, however this is not defined. Further details relating to Walsall Council's Transport Policy for students aged 16-18 years and extended access to students aged 19 years and over is available here.
For more detailed information on this proposal, please view the policy paper here.

Drop in Sessions

We will be holding five drop-in sessions for service users and key stakeholders over the next few weeks (details below). Everyone is welcome at these sessions and there is no need to book. Staff will be on hand to answer questions and take feedback.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday 20th November 2018</td>
<td>2:00–4:00</td>
<td>Castle Business and Enterprise College, Odell Road, Leamore, Walsall WS3 2ED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday 23rd November 2018</td>
<td>17:00–19:00</td>
<td>MyPlace, Walstead Road West, Walsall WS5 4PE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday 26th November 2018</td>
<td>1:00–3:00</td>
<td>Jane Lane School, 203 Churchill Rd, Walsall WS2 0JH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday 28th November 2018</td>
<td>10:00–12:00</td>
<td>Mary Elliot School, Leamore Lane, Walsall WS2 7NR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday 29th November 2018</td>
<td>17:30–19:30</td>
<td>Education Development Centre. Pelsall Lane, Walsall, WS4 1NG</td>
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</tbody>
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To respond please email your comments to budgetconsultation@walsall.gov.uk, please ensure you include the reference number of the policy proposal you are commenting on.

The closing date for responses to service change is 21 December 2018, although individual services may have extended consultation deadlines on specific areas.

Final Budget proposal recommendations will be formalised by our Cabinet members on 13 February 2019 and Council will set the final budget and council tax levels on 28 February 2019.