



Flintshire County Council

**This is our moment
Public Engagement Events**

Summary Report

December 2015

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The purpose of the engagement:

- To raise awareness and help people understand the magnitude of the financial challenges facing the Council between now and 2018.
- To draw particular attention to the £21m savings required for 2016/17 and how the Council plans to bridge a £7m budget gap.
- To gauge the level of support for the way in which the Council plans to meet the financial challenge.

The period of engagement:

Monday 16 November 2015 to Monday 7 December 2015 at the following locations across the County:

Area 1	Argoed, Buckley and Penyffordd Monday 16 November	Elfed High School Buckley
Area 2	Bagillt and Flint Tuesday 17 November	Gwynedd CP School Flint
Area 3	Brynford, Caerwys, Holywell, Halkyn, Llanasa, Mostyn, Trelawyd & Gwaenysgor, Whitford and Ysceifiog Wednesday 18 November	Holywell High School
Area 4	Cilcain, Gwernaffield, Gwernymynydd, Leeswood, Llanfynydd, Mold, Nannerch, Nercwys, Northop, Treuddyn Monday 23 November	Bryn Coch School Mold
Area 5	Broughton & Bretton, Higher Kinnerton, Hope, Saltney Tuesday 24 November	Broughton CP School
Area 6	Connah's Quay, Northop Hall and Shotton Thursday 3 December	Civic Hall Connah's Quay
Area 7	Hawarden, Queensferry and Sealand Monday 7 December	Sandycroft CP School

The number of people taking part:

A total of 319 people attended the public engagement events. The breakdown by area can be seen in the table below.

	Area 1	Area 2	Area 3	Area 4	Area 5	Area 6	Area 7
Number registered	75	45	66	110	47	82	56
Number attended	50	35	55	59	41	51	28

The Programme

- Showing of the animated video 'This is our moment'
- Presentations by the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive
- Open questions and answers
- Assignment of Chief Officers to act as links for the development of community services in each of the seven areas:
 - Area 1 – Clare Budden, Chief Officer Community & Enterprise
 - Area 2 – Neal Cockerton, Chief Officer Organisational Change
 - Area 3 – Ian Bancroft, Chief Officer Organisational Change
 - Area 4 – Stephen Jones, Chief Officer Streetscene & Transportation
 - Area 5 – Neil Ayling, Chief Officer Social Services
 - Area 6 – Andrew Farrow, Chief Officer Planning & Environment
 - Area 7 – Gareth Owens, Chief Officer Governance
- This is our county – a reminder in pictures of the things people value about the county
- What do you think? Using interactive voting equipment to gauge general levels of support with the actions proposed.

Summary of open questions and answers

During the sessions people had the opportunity to ask questions, comment and feedback.

A general summary of debate across all areas can be found below:

- *UK and Welsh Government (WG) public spending*
Concern was expressed around the lateness of the WG settlement information and the difficulties it would create not only for the County Council but for Town and Community Councils also in setting their precepts.

Many queried the funding formula and wanted to understand why Flintshire is a low funded Council and also why WG have been imposing public spending cuts when overall funding from UK Government has not reduced. The impact of the Universal Credit on the Council's revenue was also queried.

There was recognition that local efficiencies and savings would not on their own be enough to meet the projected budget gap, and whilst it was acknowledged that WG was in the same position as Local Councils in allocating a reduced settlement from central Government, it was also generally felt that WG should respond positively to the asks being made by Flintshire County Council.

- *Allocation of additional NHS funding, the impacts of an ageing population and the contribution of leisure services to health and well-being*
It was evident in all meetings that people were concerned about the effects of an ageing population and the quality of care services needed for the future. The long term sustainability of private social care providers was also of concern if the cuts were to continue. There was strong support that councils should receive a proportion of the

additional National Health Service funding in order to help fund preventative social care services.

There was also a feeling that innovative partnership working between Health & Social Care funding should be a priority, not simply taking funds away from one area to offset budget pressures in another.

The links between leisure services and its benefits on health and well-being were also cited at many of the meetings.

- *Flintshire's economy*

The collection and distribution of business rates was discussed in all meetings and there was a general consensus for a larger proportion, if not all, of the business rates collected by Flintshire to be retained locally.

Concern was raised about any threat to business and tourism support services which would have the potential to lose links with young creative thinkers who are vital to the County's future economy.

- *The Council's budget and assets*

The value of Council reserves and whether they could be utilised to meet the 2016/17 financial challenges was queried along with the accuracy of the Council's projections.

A further understanding of the Council's modernised operating structure and associated redundancy costs was provided.

The disposal of assets, particularly unoccupied buildings, was of concern in some areas, along with the need for the Council to ensure that it was not left to fund significant dilapidation costs and it collected all monies owed.

There were also questions in some areas around the continued funding for services perceived to be less important or beneficial, particularly during times of such austerity when difficult decisions are needed.

- *Community Asset Transfers (CAT)*

It was evident in most areas that there was an appetite for CAT, but that the Council needed to provide more timely and clearer support and guidance about what was on offer and the process for making it happen. The provision of sample models where this approach has worked elsewhere was also requested. A clearer understanding of what local communities would be willing to support would also be crucial to the success of any CAT.

There was concern that CAT could speed up the closure of some facilities and questions were raised around what would happen to facilities put up for CAT if they were not taken forward.

It was also suggested that perhaps the Council should look to selling off surplus assets to generate capital receipts rather than transferring them through CAT.

- *Education*

The sustainability of retaining all existing County schools was raised particularly in respect of pressures on individual school budgets and the upkeep and maintenance of school buildings. The need to ensure all schools were operating efficiently and effectively within budget was raised along with the need to avoid abortive design costs when putting forward submissions for 21st Century School funding.

The ability to realise savings around school transport was queried particularly when decisions around potential school closures would, in some areas, see an increase in transportation costs.

Concerns were raised by members of the deaf community around potential cuts to BSL interpreting services which provided communication support between deaf parents and schools.

The ability of schools to continue to attract the right calibre of teachers was also raised and a call was made to ensure the obligations of developers in respect of 106 agreements were met so as to positively impact on local schools.

- *Local Government Reorganisation*

The question of when and if a local reorganisation of Council's in Wales would take place was raised in most areas and although there was recognition that it was too far away to make a difference to the current financial situation, it could only be beneficial in terms of future savings. There was also the view that a decision needed to be made sooner rather than later as it was not just about money but the delivery of better more efficient services.

- *Council Tax*

The ability for Welsh Council's to set a higher rate of council tax to protect services, in the same way as English councils was called for.

- *Income generation and savings suggestions*

Asset disposal, increasing council tax, toll charges on A55, voluntary contributions from parents towards maintenance of school buildings, switching street lights off completely during the summer, cross border service sharing were all put forward as ways of saving money or generating income.

- *Engaging communities and organisations*

There was a general feeling that wider and yet more targeted engagement was needed not only about the current financial situation, but more significantly around individual service changes, how people would be impacted and how communities, groups and organisations could come together to meet the challenge and bridge the gap.

Summary of interactive voting session

The audience were asked nine questions to which they could either agree or disagree via the use of interactive voting keypads. A summary of the responses can be found below.

- Q1 When asked about their agreement with the way the UK Government is going about reducing money spent on public services, the majority in each of the seven areas did not agree. The largest majority was recorded in area 6 (87%) and the lowest majority in area 1 (71%).
- Q2 Considering the proposals highlighted by The Leader and the Chief Executive during their presentations, all areas agreed with the Council's plans for bridging the budget gap, with area 5 returning the highest majority (95%) and area 4 the lowest majority (74%).
- Q3 The idea of Councils doing more together to share costs and save money was very popular with returns ranging between 88% and 98% in agreement.
- Q4 There was strong backing in all areas for Welsh Government to support the Council in the way it was being asked. 100% of those voting in Area 4 were in agreement and returns of between 92% and 98% were recorded across the remaining six areas.
- Q5 There was again strong support in favour of Social Services being given extra funding from Government alongside the NHS. In this instance Area 1 returned 100% in favour with the remaining areas returning between 94% and 98%.
- Q6 There was a mixed response when asked to consider if the Council was playing its part to save money. 92% of the people who voted in area 5 were in agreement whilst only 58% were in agreement in area 1.
- Q7 On being asked whether there was support for paying a higher (affordable) rate of Council Tax in order to save local services there was again a mixed response between areas. In six of the seven areas there was a majority return in favour of this action, although the rate of return ranged between 59% and 85%. In area 7 however the majority (52%) were not in favour of an increase in Council Tax.
- Q8 All areas were in agreement with for paying for some services if it meant they could carry on with returns ranging from 73% to 89%.
- Q9 There was strong support in each of the seven areas for communities doing more to help save local services. The highest majority in favour was returned in area 5 (100%) and the lowest majority (81%) in area 1.

A list of the full questions asked can be found in Appendix 1.

Feedback

At the end of each session people were given the opportunity to complete additional feedback forms and a summary of the information provided is detailed below:

- *Three things valued by communities which have the potential to be delivered differently with community involvement*
 - play areas, leisure centres, bowling greens, recreation, public open spaces, allotments, maintenance of Rights of Way, support AONB, countryside services, development of community gardens on council land, Mold Alex, Bailey Hill, heritage, tourism, Theatr Clwyd
 - community centres, meeting places, youth clubs, combine community centre and library service, swimming pool, public toilets
 - libraries, community roving library services developed to provide additional joined up services resources to support and strengthen rural and isolated areas, library home service to house bound, pay a small payment for library service
 - more 3rd sector preventative services for health & social care, social care (elderly & mental health), dementia friendly communities, home help, links between NHS & social care, snow angels service (Chester and Cheshire West Council), regular warden visits to sheltered housing, neighbourhood monitoring of vulnerable individuals, social enterprise for day services (LD and older people)
 - schools/education, community access for learning for life, skills, experiences and assets of retired population, voluntary support/input in schools, John Summers High School
 - grounds maintenance e.g. cemeteries, Buckley common, litter picking, recycling centres, refuse collection, highway maintenance
 - community watch/security, more community policing, policing (including traffic)
 - transportation, review bus subsidies, community transport, cycle routes, summer road toll on A55
 - business support, support for local voluntary sector, a county run lottery
 - more inclusive discussion and engagement with public
- *Other comments*

Other comments left at each of the sessions were primarily repeats of the discussions undertaken during the question and answer session.

The engagement process

Who could get involved:

A maximum capacity of 200 people was set per venue. 100 places at each location were reserved for attendance by targeted invitation and 100 places were open for registration by members of the public.

Targeted invitations by emailed to:

All elected County Councillors

Town and Community Councils (T&CCs) (4 places allocated to each)

Head Teachers and Chairs of Governors of all county schools

Local Service Board Partner organisations e.g. NW Police, Fire & Rescue, BCUHB, FLVC,

54 voluntary and charitable organisations

Assembly Members and Members of Parliament

Registration for public attendance was promoted via:

Animated video summarising the current financial situation

www.flintshire.gov.uk/OurMoment and www.siryfflint.gov.uk/EinCyfle

@FlintshireCC and @CSyFFlint - Twitter

The Council's emagazine 'Your Council' (9000 subscribers)

Existing networks / service user groups e.g. older people, young people, equality groups, tenants, businesses

Council workforce via Infonet, Moodle and direct email

County Councillors and T&CCs within their respective communities

Press briefing, press release, media coverage

Registration

Registration for places, both by invitation and public spaces, could be secured online or via telephone.

Electronic statistics

During the period of consultation the following statistics were also recorded:

	English	Welsh
No. of views 'This is our moment' animation recorded on the Council's YouTube channel	457	34
No of unique page views www.flintshire.gov.uk/OurMoment (incorporating the animation)	3195	68
No. of page views 'Your Council' emagazine	2905	182

Interactive Voting Questions

- Q1 Do you agree with the way the UK Government is going about reducing money spent on public services?
- Q2 Do you agree with how the Council plans to bridge the budget gap?
- Q3 Should neighbouring Councils do more together to share costs and save money?
- Q4 Would you support Welsh Government helping in the way we have asked?
- Q5 Should Social Services have extra funding from Government alongside the NHS?
- Q6 Do you agree the Council is playing its part to save money?
- Q7 Would you be prepared to pay a higher rate of Council Tax to save local services?
- Q8 Would you be prepared to pay for some services if it meant they could carry on?
- Q9 Would you support your community doing more to help save local services?