



**Difficult Decisions
Consultation 2019-20
'YOU SAID. WE DID'**

'Difficult Decisions' Consultation - 'You Said, We Did'

In October and November 2018, Wrexham County Borough Council asked the public of Wrexham to take part in the 'Difficult Decisions' consultation, to inform the decisions we had to make in order to contribute to the estimated £9million we need to save in 2019/20.

The consultation involved a survey and a market stall event. A number of individuals and groups also submitted letters/emails of response. 3,350 people took part in the consultation in all, and we would like to thank all those people and groups who took part.

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

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

If you want to read all of the details about the proposals the Council made, and the results of the consultation, you will find a full report [here](#).

¹*This gives a Confidence Level of more than 95% and a Confidence Interval of less than 5% (based on 3,325 who responded to the survey)

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

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

Income Generation

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

We asked whether you had any other suggestions for ways in which WCBC could generate income.

You Said:

- Reduce Councillor salaries / Don't increase salaries / Make position voluntary
- Remove the role of Mayor
- Charge all staff and Councillors for parking
- Reduce the number of Councillors
- Reduce rents and business rates for businesses in Wrexham
- Negative comments regarding the new paving on Hope Street
- Reduce salaries of Council staff
- Better enforcement of litter, dog fouling, parking etc.
- Increase council tax
- Other ideas for generating income
- Hold more events / Charge for attending events

We Did:

Councillors' pay is fixed by the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales set up by the Welsh Government to ensure a nationally consistent approach to member remuneration. Individual Councils are not permitted to fix allowances outside the IRPW recommended scales.

Removing the role of mayor is not possible by law however the Council has been reducing overall expenditure in recent years and continues to take opportunities to achieve greater efficiencies in delivering this service.

The Council has been undertaking a review of staff and Member car parking and is now proposing a phased introduction for charging. The first phase is due to commence from May this year.

The Council is not able to determine the number of Councillors elected for the county borough. This is determined by the Boundary Commission for Wales, whose role it is to periodically conduct a review of all Parliamentary constituencies in Wales – with their most recent review taking place at the end of 2018.

Business rates are set by Welsh Government, and rents are set at the discretion of individual landlords and property owners. The Council does not have powers to make the changes suggested.

The new paving installed on Hope St. was undertaken to improve the environment and as part of a plan of improvements for the town centre.

Local government staff (i.e. Council employees) are subject to national pay and conditions, and therefore the Council cannot make changes in this area.

The previous contract for the delivery of enforcement services has ended, and Councillors are currently considering the options for the future.

Following the results of this consultation, Council Tax levels will be increased. Please see the separate Council Tax section for more information.

We put more events on in 2018/19 than in previous years (e.g. Christmas village) and we're committed to holding more events in the future where budget allows.

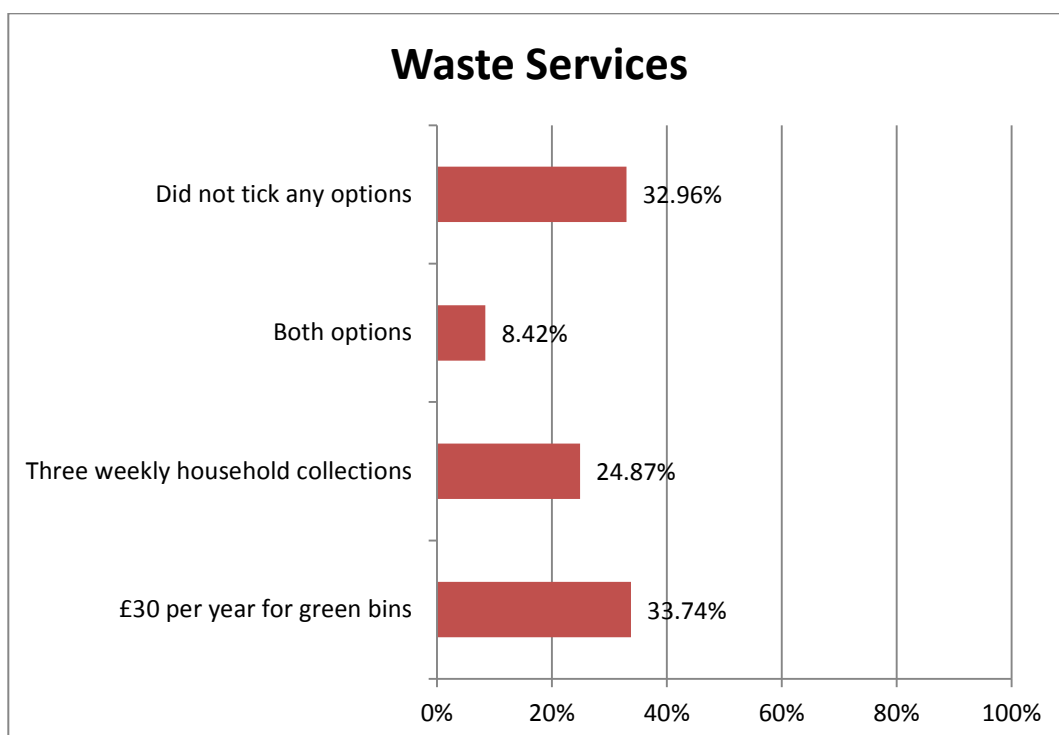
Waste Services

We proposed making some changes to waste services.

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

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

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



You Said:

- There is a risk of increased fly-tipping if these proposals are introduced
- Reducing household waste collections would cause more problems e.g. vermin, smells and mess
- People struggle with two-weekly bin collections - particularly people with children and pets
- Reducing winter collections for green waste is reasonable, and could even be reduced further
- There should be no changes in waste services when we pay so much in council tax
- The services provided by bin collection teams need to be improved, including staff performance, recruitment and retention
- Disagree with both options
- People should be educated and encouraged to re-use and recycle more. There should be more done to ensure people follow the rules around recycling
- Criticism of WCBC
- Keep fortnightly bin collections
- Hold more events / Charge for attending events

We Did:

The Council has been reviewing its waste and recycling service and proposed a number of options as part of the public consultation this year. The consultation responses are useful feedback as we develop our waste and recycling strategy and action plan.

We have decided not to introduce any changes to this service area at the present time, but will continue to develop options and examine the service to look for efficient methods of delivery and waste processing.

The Welsh Government has introduced statutory targets for recycling and, whilst Wrexham has produced excellent results to date, it is important that we continue to examine options to improve the work we do in this area.

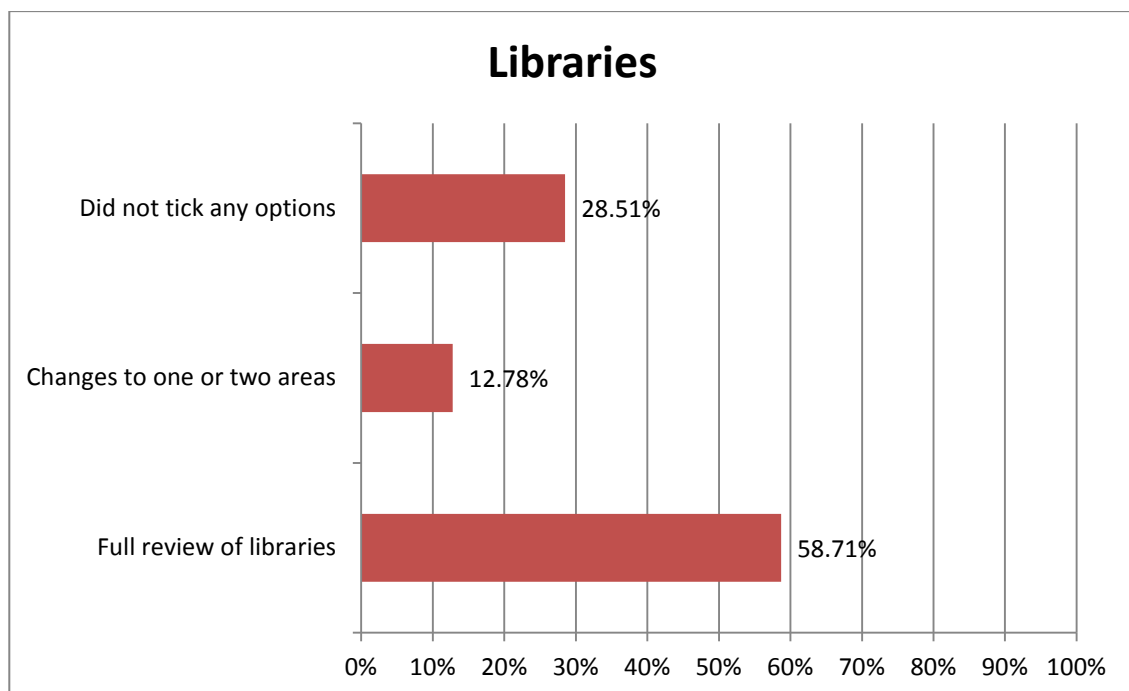
Library Services

We proposed to Make some changes to library services.

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

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

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



You Said:

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

We Did:

Libraries are acknowledged as an important part of the community and need to be accessible to all; and therefore a review of our libraries will take place to ensure that they provide a modern and accessible service in the future, ensuring that the public funding invested into the service is spent as efficiently and effectively as possible. The review will be concluded during 2019/20 and consultation with service users will take place before final recommendations are considered and adopted.



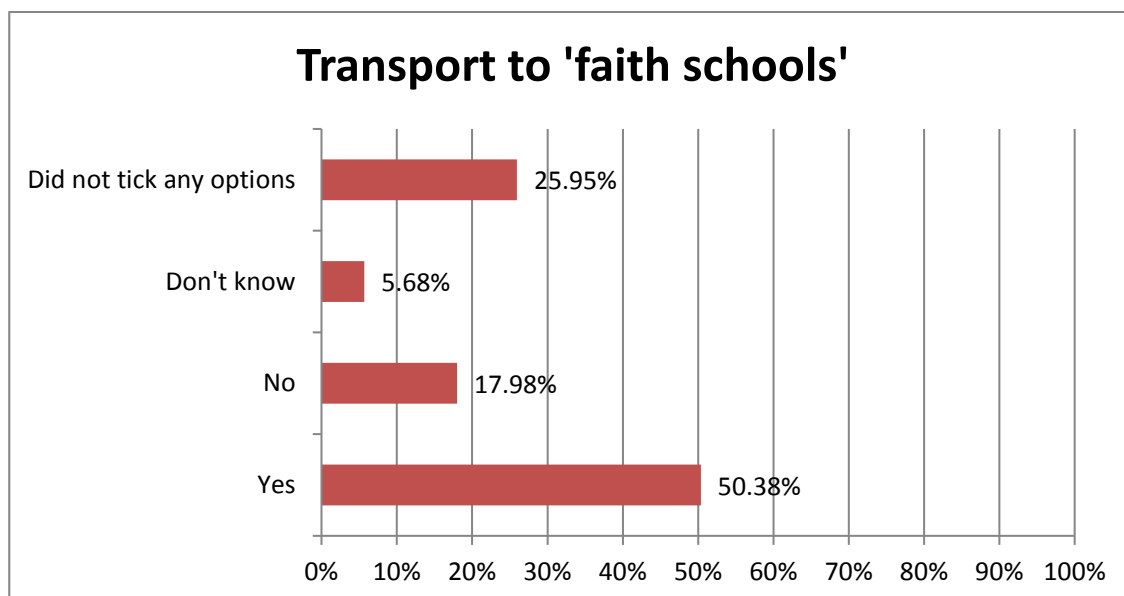
Transport to Faith Schools

We proposed to making changes to the way we deliver school transport to faith schools.

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

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

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



You Said:

- Parents should pay all or some of the cost
- Discrimination towards faith schools / breaches equality and human rights
- Concern about affordability / should be means tested
- The current transport policy should be reviewed so that it is equal for all
- The system is currently biased in favour of faith schools
- Unfair and detrimental to families of faith
- The Council / taxpayer should not be funding this
- The removal of free transport would take away choice
- Parents should choose the nearest school
- Welsh schools should be included in the proposal
- The church should pay

We Did:

Following consultation and careful consideration of the responses, the Council decided not to pursue the review of transport to faith schools. We had representations from schools, the church and families who would be effected, and accept that this is not the right decision at this time. However in the future, we may consider reviewing the current policy on school transport in general to ensure that it continues to provide the most appropriate arrangements.

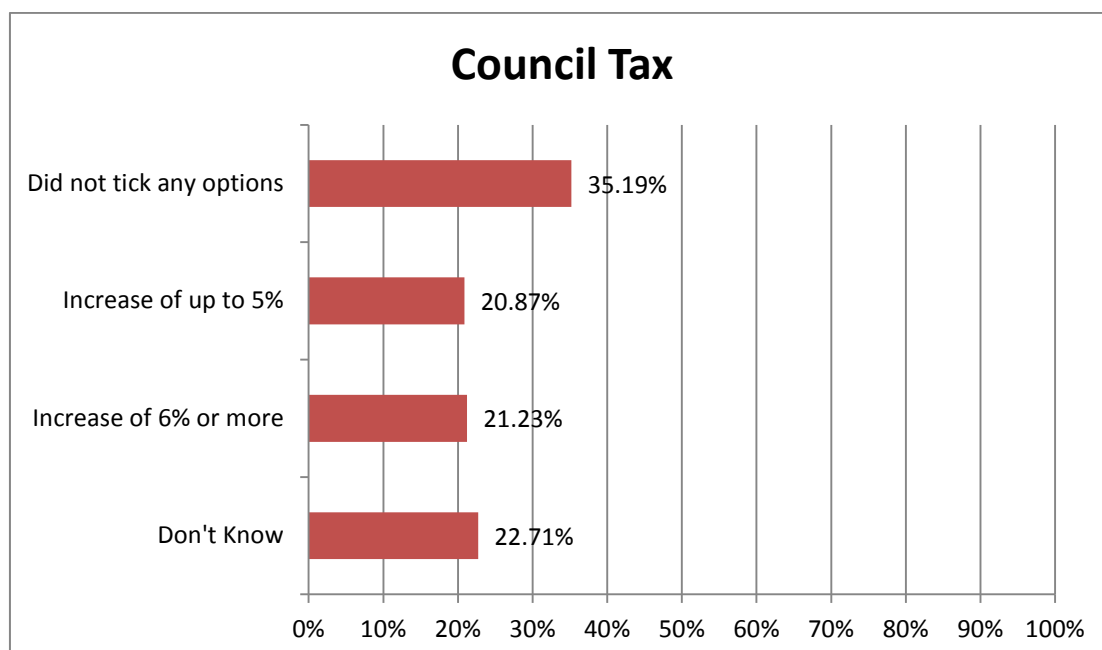
Council Tax

We proposed increasing the rate of Council Tax.

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

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

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



You Said:

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

We Did:

As a result of your responses and the difficult settlement from Welsh Government, the council does not have any choice other than to increase council tax. We also note that many other authorities in Wales are planning significant increases for 2019-20 but Wrexham council has kept the increase to 5.5%. This compares with the North Wales Police contribution of 7.74%. We have also provided an additional 5.4% funding to fund the North Wales Fire Service levy, and we are providing schools with a 3% increase in their budget (in addition to any central government funding of teacher pensions which will be provided to schools).

We have endeavoured to protect the vulnerable and have marginally increased Social Care budget whilst not introducing any further savings to those considered and agreed during the 2017 budget consultation process. We also recognise that Welsh Government has provided a number of specific grants for social care which are outside of the council's revenue budget.

Wrexham Band D council tax level will remain at around the 7th lowest in England and Wales