

Our country is in debt. The scale of the national debt means the Government will be asking all public sector organisations to find savings from their budgets or to increase charges to raise additional income. Watford Borough Council is anticipating having to find just over £4 million savings over the next 3 to 4 years. To put this in context, the council's total annual budget is currently around £16 million, so this will be just over a 25% reduction.

Watford is already one of the most efficient district councils in the country, having made over £12 million savings since the Mayor was elected in 2002. This means the council is already lean, so finding this level of extra savings will require some changes to how Watford Borough Council operates, and the level and range of services provided.

The managing director is looking at staffing levels and how the structure and organisation of the council could be adjusted in order to find savings. We would like the help of our residents to understand where budget reductions could be found from the services we currently provide.

You will notice that there are no options regarding our major projects such as the Colosseum, Charter Place redevelopment and Watford Health Campus. This is because these projects are funded through our capital budget - we are not allowed to use this money to finance the day-to-day running of the council.

All of the following options are under consideration, and your views would be appreciated.

QUESTIONS

Your expectations

Since the last general election there has been much talk in the national media about public sector spending cuts, however there has been limited news coverage about the likely impact on services provided by local councils.

Q1. What is your reaction to hearing that local councils, like Watford Borough Council, will need to find this levels of savings i.e. just over a 25% reduction in overall budget? Please select ONE.

- I expected Watford Borough Council would be affected by the public sector spending cuts and this level of savings is what I was expecting.....
- I expected Watford Borough Council would be affected by the public sector spending cuts but didn't expect the level of savings required to be as high.....
- I expected Watford Borough Council would be affected by the public sector spending cuts and expected an even higher level of savings to be required.....
- I did not expect Watford Borough Council to be affected by the public sector spending cuts..
- I don't know.....

PLEASE CONTINUE...

Timescale

Watford Borough Council expects to have to find £4 million savings over a three to four year period. Some savings will be deliverable in year one, others will not be achievable until years two or three or even four. It is considered good practice for councils to keep money in reserve. The council has the option of dipping into its reserves to cushion the savings it needs to make in the short term.

Q2. Where there is scope to decide when a saving can be made, which of the following options do you prefer? Please select ONE.

As many savings as possible should be made in year one.....

Savings should be spread out across the four year period, so that residents are not hit with everything in one go.....

Savings, as far as possible, should be delayed until years three to four, using council reserves to bridge the gap in the first two years.....

Sharing Services with other councils

Watford Borough Council and Three Rivers District Council now share a number of back office services: IT, finance and HR, as well as the frontline service of Revenues & Benefits. Watford Borough Council now saves £1.1million every year as a result of shared services.

Q3. What are your views on extending shared services? Please select ONE.

The council should consider all opportunities to further share its services with Three Rivers or other councils where there are savings to be made.....

The council should not consider sharing any other frontline services (e.g. street cleaning, waste services or housing advice) with other councils.....

The council should not extend its shared services any wider.....

PLEASE CONTINUE...

Statutory services

Borough or district councils are required by law to provide certain services (called statutory services). These include environmental health & licensing; household waste & recycling collection; street sweeping; planning & building control; and homelessness & housing waiting list services. Councils are only required to provide a basic service, but many, including Watford provide a superior service. To make savings, the council could reduce the standard of service it currently provides.

Q4. In order to find savings, the council could reduce the standard of service it currently provides across its statutory services. Please select ONE statement that expresses your views.

The current standard of service should be retained across all statutory services and savings should be found from elsewhere in the council’s budget such as leisure, arts and events ...
Please go to Q6

The council should only provide a basic standard of service across all statutory services. ...
Please go to Q6

The council should retain some services at the current standard but reduce others.
Please go to Q5

Statutory service levels

Please only answer this question if you selected the **THIRD** statement of Q4. In the previous question you stated that you believe the council should retain some services at the current standard but could reduce the service in others.

Q5. Please select your preferred option for each of the following statutory services. We currently provide a high standard of service in each:

	Maintain current standard of service	Reduce standard of service to make savings	No preference	Don't know
Homelessness service (looking at how we prevent homelessness and administering the housing register).....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Planning applications, advice & policy (ensuring right development takes place at the right time).....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Street cleaning (includes cleaning of all open public open spaces).....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Licensing (eg regulating taxis, pubs & clubs, gaming, off-licences).....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Environmental health services (including food safety, noise nuisance, pollution monitoring, stray dogs & some pest control).....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Collection of household waste (including recycling of green waste, plastic, glass & paper).....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

PLEASE CONTINUE...

Non-statutory services

In addition to the statutory services discussed in the previous question, the council also chooses to provide other services, known as 'non-statutory services'. In order to find savings, the council could choose to reduce or stop providing non-statutory services.

Q6. How important do you think the following services are for the town, given the current economic climate? Please tick ONE box for each service:

	Very	Fairly	Not very	Not at all	Don't know
Advice services (eg including advice on waste and recycling, energy saving, housing, debt).....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Anti-social behaviour (includes preventing anti-social behaviour and tackling graffiti and vandalism).....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Appearance of the town (eg maintenance of grass verges, provision and upkeep of flower beds, tackling of environmental crime such as fly-tipping).....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Arts and cultural activities (eg Watford Museum, town centre events, funding to Palace Theatre).....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Civic and other events (eg the Audentior Awards, remembrance services, fireworks at Cassiobury Park).....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Customer services (including how we answer the phones, the service provided at our Customer Service Centre in the Town Hall).....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Information about council services & news (the council provides information via its website & other social networking sites, its magazine About Watford, and through e-newsletters).....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Leisure activities – adult (excluding leisure centres) (including sports clubs – eg bowls & cricket clubs, allotments).....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Leisure activities – youth (excluding leisure centres) (including adventure playgrounds, sports projects, culture and arts activities).....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Maintaining the town's parks and other recreational open spaces	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Safety in town centre and parks (eg CCTV, joint initiatives with police, park rangers).....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Subsidised bus services (the County Council provides bus services, but Watford Borough Council also subsidises the following routes: R8/9, 318 & 346/7).....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Taking decisions on services

Watford Borough Council has to find around £4million of savings, equivalent to just over 25% reduction in budget. When considering each service area, the council needs a number of guiding principles.

Q7. Please state whether you agree or disagree with each of the following principles:

	Agree	Disagree	Don't know
The council should only continue to provide non-statutory services that are popular or well-used	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The council should not fund or provide services that are provided by other voluntary groups or organisations in the town..	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The council should reduce all 'gold' standard services to a lower standard (e.g. silver or bronze), if savings will be significant.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The council should explore alternative options for providing some services, such as outsourcing services to private companies if the savings will be significant.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Support to voluntary sector

Since 2002, Watford Borough Council has provided around £1.2 million a year in grants to the voluntary sector, which includes large grants to the Citizens Advice Bureau, Council for Voluntary Services and the Palace Theatre; as well as smaller grants to organisations including Watford Mencap, Shopmobility and the New Hope Trust.

Q8. In this tougher economic climate, what support do you think the council should be giving the voluntary sector? Please select ONE.

- The council should **not reduce** the level of financial support it gives to voluntary organisations.....
Please go to Q10
- The council should **stop** giving money to voluntary sector organisations.....
Please go to Q10
- The council should **reduce** its voluntary sector support across some or all organisations.....
Please go to Q9

Q9. If you agreed with the third statement, please advise by how much the financial support (currently £1.2million) should be reduced? Please select ONE.

- By five per cent, equivalent to a £60,000 reduction (minimum impact).....
- By ten per cent, equivalent to a £120,000 reduction (medium impact).....
- By 20 per cent, equivalent to a £240,000 reduction (significant impact).....
- By 50 per cent, equivalent to a £600,000 reduction (substantial impact).....
- Don't know.....

PLEASE CONTINUE...

Fees and charges

In addition to the money it receives from council tax, Watford Borough Council receives further income from fees and charges. Increasing council tax is not an option this year, but it is possible to increase existing fees and charges, and to charge for services that are currently free. **Doing so, could help the council to maintain services that may otherwise need to be reduced or changed.**

Q10. The council could increase the price it currently charges for the following services. Please select ONE box for each item

	Maintain at current price	Increase price	No preference	Don't know
Allotment fees Watford Borough Council charges £2.20 per pole per year* (size of allotments vary - £11 per year for average plot size)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Burial fees Watford Borough Council charges £405 a grave (Highest in Herts is Broxbourne at £895, lowest is Welwyn Hatfield at £390)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Car Park – The Avenue Watford Borough Council charges £3 a day (Non-council town centre car parks charge up to £11 a day)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parking permits – residential (to pay for enforcement) Watford Borough Council charges £20 a year for first permit and £40 for second	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parking permits – medical (for doctors and health visitors) Watford Borough Council charges £10 a year	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pest control – cockroaches, bedbugs & pharaoh ants / wasp nest removal / fleas Watford Borough Council charges £63* per hour for controlling cockroaches, bedbugs & pharaoh's ants	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Watford Borough Council charge: £41* for first wasp nest and £13* for each additional nest treated at same time				
Watford Borough Council charges £32* for first flea treatment and £26.50* for second treatment within 28 days				

* 50% reduction currently applies for standard concessions

PLEASE CONTINUE...

Q11. If you think prices for any of the above should be raised, what level of increase do you think the council should consider? Please select ONE box for each item

	Increase by around 10-25%	Increase by around 25-50%	Increase by 50%+	Don't know
Allotment fees	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Burial fees	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Car Park – The Avenue	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parking permits – residential (to pay for enforcement)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parking permits - medical	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pest control – cockroaches, bedbugs & pharaoh ants / wasp nest removal / fleas	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q12. The council could also start to charge for services that are currently free. Please select ONE box for each item.

	Continue to provide for free	Introduce a charge	No preference	Don't know
Cassiobury Park – car park (Park visitors could be charged to park their cars in Cassiobury Park car park)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cassiobury Park – paddling pools (An entrance fee to the paddling pools area could be introduced)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fireworks event (Attendees to the annual fireworks event at Cassiobury Park could be charged an entrance fee)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parking – disabled bay installation (The council does not currently charge for installing a disabled bay outside a resident's home)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pest control – mice (Currently the removal of mice and rats from residential properties is free, a charge could be introduced for mice)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Public toilets (The council could introduce a charge to visitors to the Town's public toilets)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Recycling bins & boxes (replacement) (The council currently provides residents with a replacement bin or box for free)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

PLEASE CONTINUE...

The cost of councillors

Your councillors play an important role in representing your interests. Each ward in the borough is represented by three Watford Borough councillors, which means that Watford Borough Council has 36 councillors in total. Councillors get an allowance for the work they do. In addition, as a Watford resident you are democratically represented by a Hertfordshire county councillor, a directly elected Mayor and an MP.

The council could save money by reducing the number of councillors per ward from **THREE** to **TWO**.

Q13. Do you agree that reducing the number of councillors per ward should be considered as a way to save money?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Additional comments on council savings

Q14. If you have any other comments or suggestions as to where else you think we should be making savings, please give them here:

**Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.
The results of the survey will be available on our website next year.**

Prize draw

- I would like my completed survey to be entered into the prize draw for a £50 Harlequin Voucher. **Please tick the box to be entered.**