

LOCAL DEMOCRACY WEEK

2014



13th – 19th October

Introduction

As part of Local Democracy Week, Wiltshire Council has put together a lesson resource to help children understand how their local Councillors make difficult financial decisions.

Children will learn, through discussion and role play, how best to use scarce financial resources as they debate the merits of the different projects and vote to decide which should be funded and which should not.

Teachers can also have fun being a heckling member of the public who asks difficult questions!

The release of the resource is timed to coincide with Local Democracy Week, but can be used throughout the year.

Wiltshire Council is keen to shape and improve this pack in response to your feedback, so please contact Democratic Services via the phone number or e-mail provided below, if you have any suggestions.

Please contact the Council’s Democratic Services team if your school is interested in exploring how it can further engage with the Council.

[**Councillor Jane Scott, OBE Leader of the Council and Leader of the Conservative Group**](http://cms.wiltshire.gov.uk/mgUserInfo.aspx?UID=158)

[**Councillor John Thomson, Deputy Leader of the Council**](http://cms.wiltshire.gov.uk/mgUserInfo.aspx?UID=164)

[**Councillor Jon Hubbard, Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group**](http://cms.wiltshire.gov.uk/mgUserInfo.aspx?UID=208)

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**1. HOW TO PLAY – TEACHER’S INSTRUCTIONS**

There are no right or wrong answers; this exercise is designed to show pupils how difficult it is to make budgetary decisions and also to teach children debating skills and public speaking.

Enclosed are 6 schemes which, it will be argued, should be given the required funding. Not all of the schemes can be supported, as the remaining budget is only £500,000. This budget could be used to allow some schemes to be completed, some partly completed and some not being funded at all.

It is for pupils to decide how the money would be best spent considering value for money and benefit to the community.

If there is a local issue that pupils would relate to then one of the schemes could be replaced if appropriate.

Pupils should be split into 6 teams and be given one of the proposals. Following time for discussion of their brief and also questions that can be asked of other teams, a spokesperson should be elected to act as the Cabinet Member who will outline their argument for being awarded the money – this should take no longer than 5 minutes.

Other teams will then be given the opportunity to ask questions about the proposed scheme – for no longer than 5 minutes.

Once all of the groups have made their case the voting can begin.

The voting procedure to be used should be a basic one and a suggested process is below.

1. Take each groups item in turn, remember that a group cannot vote for their own item.
2. Allow the entire class to vote if each proposal should go forward and record the number of votes for each scheme item.
3. Once the process has been completed score the options in order of the number of votes they received, 1 being the highest.
4. Start working through the options starting with the highest scoring proposal and record the costs in a running total.
5. When you reach your £500,000 budget the remaining options cannot go forward and a democratic voting process has decided which options are the highest priorities.

It is not essential that a conclusion is reached as to how the money should be allocated – the purpose of the exercise is to give pupils a greater understanding of the democratic process and experience of public speaking and debating.

**2. BACKGROUND**

Queens Forest Borough Council is situated to the north on the outskirts of the city of Fromebridge. There are 52 elected local politicians who are commonly referred to as Councillors. The Cabinet is a group of 6 of Councillors who meet together to discuss how to share the Council’s budget between 6 different schemes. Each Councillor looks after a particular department if the Council. They are referred to as Lead Members for that department.

EDWARD BEECHING is the Lead Member for PLANNING & TRANSPORTATION. He lives out in the countryside, where there are few buses and he has to drive everywhere. He often arrives at meetings complaining about traffic jams.

TOBY DRIBERG is Lead Member for CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE. Works hard and is an experienced politician. Some people say he wanted to be the Leader instead.

BEVERLY CASTLE is the Lead Member for COMMUNITY SERVICES. She is a relatively new Councillor and is the youngest member of the Cabinet. She sometimes struggles to be heard over the other more confident Councillors.

SYLVIA BOTTOMLEY is Lead Member for COMMUNITY CARE, HOUSING & HEALTH. She is a no nonsense lady, who with her husband, owns a large horse breeding farm. She has been known to compare looking after a farm to running a council.

ADAM PROFUMO is Lead Member for CORPORATE AFFAIRS. He is an accountant by training. Some people think he reduces everything to numbers and forgets about the people.

GERALD BANKSY is the Chair of the Cabinet and Leader of the Council overall. He is well liked and is good at using his good humour to calm arguments. His has however recently been in a bad mood about people painting graffiti on his garage.

Similar to other Councils the Queens Forest Borough Council has recently seen its budget get smaller due to the effects of the recession. This means that not all services in the council will be able to get the money that they ask for.

This has not gone down well with some of the residents in the Borough. One, a Mr Buster Vein, has threatened to come to the meeting and make a scene.

Normally residents have to submit their questions in advance if they want to ask something at the Cabinet meeting. Mr Vein has not done so and the Chair will need to handle his interruptions carefully.

**3. THE ROLE OF THE CHAIR**

The Chair is crucial to the success of this exercise. It is essential that the Chair is able to control the discussions and manage time in a way that is fair to all teams. The chair must also be a persuasive and confident orator. (Teachers may wish to consider chairing discussions themselves if necessary.)

The Chair will assume the position of Leader of the Council with responsibilities for Council and Community Leadership.

The Chair also has a scheme of their own – although they do not have a team behind them to discuss the case that they will put forward!

Teachers/Chair can decide when to introduce this scheme – they may wish to introduce it when all other schemes are discussed or keep it in reserve if they feel that decision making will be completed too easily!

The Chair should begin by opening the meeting and explaining proceedings. Each team will have 5 minutes to present their case and 5 minutes will be allowed for other teams to ask questions. The Chair must ensure that discussions do not overrun as this exercise is designed to last approximately two hours.

Either the Chair or teacher should run the voting procedure, with another pupil responsible for recording the number of votes cast.

**4. DEPARTMENTAL RESPONSIBILITIES**

**PLANNING & TRANSPORTATION**

Responsible for

* Planning, deciding which buildings get built, and where.
* Traffic Management & Road Safety
* Transportation including public transport & travel
* Public Rights of Way, looking after paths and bridleways.
* Conservation and heritage (including museum services)

**CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE**

Responsible for

* All education for children and young people
* Youth Services
* Early years and childcare
* Children’s social services

**COMMUNITY CARE, HOUSING & HEALTH**

Responsible for

* Social Services for adults including Care Homes for the elderly and day centres for adults with learning difficulties
* Health and ensuring good relationships with health organisations such as the Primary Care trust and NHS
* Management of the Council’s houses

**COMMUNITY SERVICES**

Responsible for

* Equalities for all regardless of race, age or sex
* Arts and cultural services
* Leisure Services
* Tourism
* Libraries
* Rubbish Collection

**CORPORATE AFFAIRS**

Responsible for

* Ensuring that the Council provides best value for money in all the services it provides
* Allocation of the Council’s resources for IT, employee development and financial services
* Strengthening local democracy
* Gypsy and Traveller issues

**COUNCIL & COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP**

Responsible for

* Community Leadership
* Community Safety – including ASBO’s, Youth Offending Team & Drug Action Team
* The Council’s overall performance

**GROUP 1**

**Planning and Transportation**

Over the past 3 years, traffic lights have been installed on all but 2 roundabouts on the Outer Ring Road. The scheme has reduced traffic congestion and improved the reliability of public transport.

In addition, the number of serious or fatal accidents on the ring road has been significantly reduced with the installation of each new set of traffic lights.

The planning department would therefore like to complete the traffic light system on the Ring Road at a total cost of £200,000; the project would consist of a set of lights on the remaining two roundabouts at a cost of £100,000 each.

The project could be split with one set being installed this year and a bid being put forward for further funding to complete the scheme next year.

However, because this would mean double the disruptions to traffic and the digging up of the road to lay cables twice, it would cost £110,000 per roundabout if they were done one at a time.

MCj03891740000[1]

MC900361204[1]MC900361222[1]**GROUP 2**

**Children and Young People**

Bothwell is a semi-rural village in the far corner of the Queens Forest Borough area. The village consists of a small Town Hall, a primary school, a small convenience store and a public house. The nearest Leisure Centre is 20 miles away. The village is currently home to 220 young people under the age of 18, but the population is growing due to a nearby development of 100 houses and flats due for completion in 2015.

On the outskirts of the village there is a small park and a youth centre which was built in 1967. Over the years there have been a number of repairs done to the building, but the Council’s Health and Safety Team have advised that the building is no longer safe and must be closed immediately.

The department has been advised that it is more cost effective to demolish and rebuild the youth centre than to improve it to the required standards.

It is proposed to increase the size of the building to include a small kitchen and an additional room which could be used by other groups such as mother and toddler groups, coffee mornings for older people and scout and brownie groups. The total cost of the building work, improvements to the car park and refurbishing the inside of the building is £225,000. However the department would also like £25,000 to improve the park which is next to the youth centre. The money would be used to replace the play equipment for the smaller children ( which has been vandalised ) with new, state of the art facilities and install a skate ramp for older children and teenagers.

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MCj02405690000[1]

**GROUP 3**

**Community Care, Housing and Health**

The service of providing Council housing to the local community has always required a significant amount of resources. Many people are entitled to free or reduced rent accommodation and that, together with maintenance and administrative costs, mean that the service always requires significant funding.

Two years ago the Council signed over the majority of its housing stock to a Housing Association. The Council now wants to sign over its remaining properties to the Housing Association (there are in total 1000 properties consisting of houses, flats and bedsits)

The Association has only agreed to take ownership if work is done to improve the condition of some of the properties.

The total cost of the work and the legal and administrative costs of the hand over will be £400,000, but there will be a significant saving to the council in future years (approximately £40,000 a year).

It is possible to hand over a proportion of the remaining houses (but no less that 50%). If this is the course of action chosen then the Council will have to pay further legal and administrative costs in the future when the remaining properties are transferred – these costs are yet to be determined.



**GROUP 4**

**Corporate Affairs**

Running elections requires sophisticated software. The software must be capable of storing the details of every person eligible to vote in the area and details of the hundreds of staff that are needed on Election Day.

The software which the Council currently uses cannot support Queens Forest Borough’s growing population and needs to be replaced; the cheapest system (but not necessarily the best) that can be purchased is £30,000 – money which has already been allocated to the department.

The number of people who vote at elections is in decline. Research has shown that one of the reasons why people do not vote is that they find it difficult to find time to visit polling stations.

Queens Forest Borough Council has decided to try and increase the number of people who vote by purchasing an on line voting system.

The system will allow people to vote on line or at a number of electronic voting stations which will be purchased and placed in town centres and the Bower Ridgeway shopping centre.

The cost of purchasing the voting booths will be £20,000 and the supporting software will be £30,000 (already allocated for the scheme).

There are rumours that Central Government will insist on all local authorities purchasing such systems within the next 5 years and the Corporate Affairs Department would like to spend the additional £20,000 to buy the advanced system in good time for the next election.

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MCj02411590000[1]

**GROUP 5**

**Community Services**

Many tourists visit the nearby city of Fromebridge each year boosting the local economy by millions of pounds. However, only a very small percentage of these tourists come to the Queens Forest Borough area.

Farley Court in village of Flexton Farley is a 16th century house which was visited in 1535 by King Henry VIII and the second of his six wives, Anne Boleyn.

The east wing of the house which was built in preparation for the King’s visit was recently featured in a BBC documentary called The Tudors.

The Community Services department are keen to use this opportunity to encourage more visitors to the area and boost the tourist trade in South Gloucestershire.

They would like £150,000 to bring Farley Court up to the required Health and Safety standards for visitors and to install new toilet and baby changing facilities.

It is anticipated that this money will be recouped within 4 years by people paying entry fees to the house. Additional benefits which will be an increase in visitor numbers to other historic sites such as Rosehill Castle, Hernes Hill Park and Codastream Mill and significant benefits to related industries such as hotels, bed and breakfasts and other local businesses.

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**GROUP 6**

**Council and Community Leadership (the chair)**

The growing population of the Queens Forest Borough area has resulted in an increase in levels of reported crime – particularly Anti-Social Behaviour.

Anti-Social Behaviour can take a number of forms from graffiti, dropping litter and making too much noise in the street.

Research shows that many people are very afraid of being victims of anti-social behaviour and that initiatives to tackle this sort of crime improve the lives of the entire community.

There are many ways to tackle Anti-Social Behaviour; one of the most successful is by the establishment of Community Justice Panels.

These panels allow the perpetrators of anti-social behaviour to meet face to face with their victims to discuss how they were affected. In some authorities using these panels re-offending rates have dropped to just 2%, saving the Council considerable financial and officer resources.

This scheme will cost £50,000 to set up and run for 12 months.

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**SECTION 6**

**The Unhappy member of the public.**

During the meeting Buster Vein interrupts the debate to complain that one of the projects is a waste of money and that his taxes are too high.

This role could be best played by the Teacher and can pick on any of the projects for criticism.

In the first instance the Chair of the meeting should answer Mr Vein’s questions or if it is appropriate refer them to the Lead Member.

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| Anti Social Behaviour | Is any aggressive, intimidating or destructive activity that damages or destroys another person's quality of life |
| Budget | The amount of money you have to spend |
| Cabinet | Group of senior Councillors |
| Housing Association | Organisation which owns houses to rent to those in need. |

**Glossary**