

## Budget Proposals 2016-17: Alana House Satellite Service

### Summary of Feedback Received and Key Findings

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#### Why we consulted?

Over the last four years we have had to make savings of £23m because we've received less money from central government. We have done this by becoming more efficient at what we do, by reducing some of our administrative functions and increasing our income. Throughout this period we have done our best to protect front line services.

We now have to find another £20m over the next four years, with almost £11m to be found in 2016/17. Much of this will come from further efficiencies within the council, but £4.6m will have to come from services that will impact the public.

In order to inform the budget setting process for 2016/17 we published a list of those proposals which would likely have a direct impact on service users, and sought the views from those affected and interested:

- to understand the likely impact
- to identify any measures to reduce their impact
- to explore any possible alternatives

#### Approach

All the proposals were published on the council's website on 3 November 2015 with feedback requested by 14 December 2015. Respondents were directed to a [central index page](#), with a video message from the Chief Executive outlining the background to the exercise.

Information relating to this proposal was linked directly from this index page. This contained more detailed information on what was specifically proposed, information on what we thought the impact might be, as well as what else we had considered in developing and arriving at this proposal. Feedback was then invited through an online form, and through a dedicated email address.

Each individual budget proposal was placed on our [Consultation Portal](#) which automatically notified those registered that an exercise had been launched. Members of the West Berkshire community panel (around 800 people) and local stakeholder charities, representative groups and partner organisations were also emailed directly, notifying them of the exercise and inviting their contributions.

Heads of Service made direct contact with those organisations affected by any of the budget proposals prior to them being made publically available.

A press release was issued on the same date, as well as publicised through Facebook and Twitter.

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---

#### Background

Alana House provides a support service for vulnerable women with complex needs. They work to improve the economic and social welfare of disadvantaged women and their families, divert women from custody and reduce the impact that crime has on vulnerable women and their local community. They empower women by giving them the tools and techniques to become independent and make a valuable contribution to society, through tailored support from a support worker providing 1-2-1 support sessions in Broadway House, home visits, and themed drop in sessions in Newbury and other community locations.

Alana House receives £22,500 per annum from the council. The service was set up at the start of 2013/14, and at that time also received funding from Berkshire Probation Service. Since July 2014 they have operated as a satellite service in West Berkshire, with continued funding from West Berkshire Council.

During 2014/15 Alana House West Berkshire received a total of 32 referrals and in the first half of 2015/16 they have had 19 referrals.

It is proposed to cease funding this service resulting in an annual saving of £22,500.

#### Summary of Key Points

- We received a total of 10 responses to the Alana House West Berkshire service.
- Five responses were from individuals and five responses were from organisations including; Unison West Berkshire, Tilehurst Parish Council, Unison, jomctraining.co.uk and two responses from the charity Parents and Children Together (who are responsible for delivering the Alana House Satellite Service).
- The majority of respondents reported that funding for this service should continue, due to the nature of the clients that use the service. There was a feeling that the vulnerable women that use the service are being helped to make a positive contribution to society and are diverted away from the Criminal Justice System (CJS) and are more able lead happier and healthy lives.

#### 1. Are you, or anyone you care for, a user of this service?

None of the responders reported to be a user of this service, either themselves or anyone they care for.

#### 2. Do you believe it is necessary to fund a specific service for vulnerable women when individual services are already in place? Please explain the reason for your response.

The majority of people responded to say 'Yes' because the service is hugely beneficial for the whole community, their families, and the women – as women are supported to access different services and to make positive life changes – for example, reducing access to the CJS, accessing training and employment, and they are more able to offer a stable and secure home for their children. Most respondents said this service helps really vulnerable women, is person centred and helps address their multiple, complex needs and problems that go alongside their chaotic lifestyles. A specialist gender specific holistic service was important, especially if the women had negative

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---

experiences with men. There were several suggestions that the service was cost effective and that only a relatively small amount of funding was required. Two responses referred to the fact that other suggested services are also at risk of cuts (e.g. Swanswell, CAB, NHS)

One person responded to say this project could be funded from a different source, for example any spouse or partner if they were single mothers.

**3. What do you think we should be aware of in terms of how this proposal might impact people?**

General consensus was that this will have an impact on families and local communities. The service reaches hard to reach, vulnerable women who could deteriorate without support and could have negative outcomes as a consequence, for example enter the CJS, become homeless, remain unemployed, lose children, get into debt, increased substance misuse difficulties – all of which could have a financial impact on local authorities and a negative impact on them, their families and their communities. We need to be compassionate as some of these women have had experiences with domestic abuse, and many domestic abuse and other women only services are being cut or have already been cut. The third sector are working in partnership with each other and often cross refer into other organisations.

**4. Do you feel that this proposal will affect particular individuals more than others, and if so, how do you think we might help with this?**

Vulnerable women (with complex needs), their children and families and future generations. Some women might be able to access lots of individual services, but these services might not have the capacity, skills and abilities to pick up the slack and some women will choose not engage because of the complexity of trying to work with multiple organisations unsupported. These women need the specialist 1:1 holistic support and group work that Alana House provides.

**5. Do you have any suggestions as to how this service might be delivered in a different way? If so, please provide details.**

One suggestion was that the service could perhaps be delivered through existing facilities such as Children's Centres or Greenfield House in Calcot.

One person suggested that the number of referrals needs to be looked at in order to establish the reason for low numbers, is extra promotion required, more use of social media, more awareness among referral agencies?

One person thought that the project is currently running as a satellite services from Reading, so is able to share their running costs.

One person suggested this project could be run 'through social services'.

**6. Is there any way that you, or your organisation, can contribute in helping to alleviate the impact of this proposal? If so, please provide details of how you can help.**

One person suggested their organisation could offer advice.

## Budget Proposals 2016-17: Alana House Satellite Service

### Summary of Feedback Received and Key Findings

---

There was a suggestion that council staff could be taken out of the LGPS, which could reduce council salary costs by approximately 30%. A new private sectors style pension scheme could be offered to council staff and the savings could be used to fund community projects such as Alana House.

Another person said the service is probably cutting costs by using Broadway House which is funded by Greenham Common Trust, so they get cheaper rent.

A comment was made by PACT - Parents and Children Together, who run Alana House: "We have expertise in adoption services, therapeutic support and community projects and can are open to a wider discussion about how services for children and families are delivered."

#### 7. Any further comments?

"Dependent upon what decision Central Government make with regards to the ring fenced grant, it is difficult to comment on this proposal at this stage."

"It's to be expected that a conservative council wouldn't care about people like this but that doesn't make it less disgraceful."

"I sincerely hope that West Berkshire Public Health is able to continue to provide the funding for PACT and Alana House to continue to provide this excellent service."

### Conclusion

There appears to be support for keeping the Alana House project due to the nature of the client group they work with. It seems as though this unique women's service has the potential to support and change not only the lives of vulnerable women themselves, but potentially the wider community by diverting vulnerable women away from the Criminal Justice System and by supporting them to access multiple organisations that can assist with making improvements to their chaotic lifestyles.

**Please note:** *In order to allow everyone who wished the opportunity to contribute, feedback was not sampled. Therefore this wasn't a quantitative, statistically valid exercise. It was neither the premise, purpose, nor within the capability of the exercise, to determine the overall community's level of support, or views on the proposals, with any degree of confidence.*

*The feedback captured therefore should be seen in the context of 'those who responded', rather than reflective of the wider community.*

*All the responses have been provided verbatim as an appendix to this report. Whilst this summary seeks to distil the key, substantive points made, it should also be read in conjunction with the more detailed verbatim comments to ensure a full, rounded perspective of the views and comments are considered.*

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