

## Budget Proposals 2016-17: Citizen's Advice Bureau

### 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.

## Budget Proposals 2016-17: Citizen's Advice Bureau

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---

#### Background

The council has a service level agreement with the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) to provide services for people in the district needing support and guidance with a range of financial advice relating to:

- Debt worries
- Benefits enquiries
- Housing and employment problems
- Concerns about consumer or tax issues

CAB also provides:

- Advice on legal matters;
- Advice on immigration;
- Advice on family and personal matters;
- Support for carers.

CAB currently operates 4 days a week and a significant number of the advisers are volunteers.

We have reviewed the numbers of clients seen by CAB and understand that there has been a reduction. We are also aware that the future enquiries relating to Universal Credit, the replacement for the current benefits system, will, when introduced fully, be managed by a government agency set up specifically for that purpose. This could mean that the number of clients CAB sees could reduce.

We currently provide annual funding of £239,892 for the range of advice and support listed above. It is proposed to reduce this funding by £15,000 in 2016/17.

#### Summary of Key Points

There were sixteen responses received to the consultation. Eleven of the responses were from individuals, three from Parish Councils, one from Unison and one from CAB itself.

Of the sixteen responses two of these suggested that the proposed reduction was modest and should not impact greatly on the current services being delivered.

The others who responded suggested that any delay in clients being able to access services could have further impacts on the wider family which could then impact on other services provided by the Council. Parish Councils were particularly concerned about the loss of the outreach service.

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

One of those responding suggested that they had used the service in the recent past.

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

From the feedback received there are two differing views. One view suggests that the proposed funding reduction is modest and should not impact on the services provided

## Budget Proposals 2016-17: Citizen's Advice Bureau

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---

by CAB given that the Council contributes over £219,000 for the core service. A further £20,000 of funding is provided to CAB and relates to support they provide to carers which is unaffected by this proposal.

The second line of thought is that any reduction in funding which leads to a reduction in the number of hours that the service is available could impact on the vulnerable and merely move the problem to another service within the Council.

CAB has confirmed that a reduction of £15,000 will mean that their offices will close on a Thursday afternoon. The three Parish Councils that responded were concerned about any loss of the valuable outreach service provided by CAB.

#### **3. What do you think about potentially having to wait longer to see a CAB advisor?**

Three of the individuals responding suggested that having to wait longer to see a CAB Advisor could have a negative impact on the individual or family and potentially lead to them requiring further support from other parts of the Council.

#### **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?**

Two of the individuals responding to the consultation, felt that the impact would be felt by the vulnerable. There were no suggestions as to how this impact might be mitigated. However, the assumption being made was that the reduction in funding might result in the CAB reducing their hours of operation.

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

There were no suggestions as to how this might be delivered in a different way although the suggestion was made that if any individual had an employment issue the individual might be able to seek initial legal advice at little or no cost.

#### **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.**

No mitigation was suggested.

#### **7. Any further comments?**

There were no further issues raised in relation to this issue.

### Conclusion

The main concerns related to any loss of opening hours, which CAB has now confirmed will be the case. The offices will be closed from Thursday lunchtime to Monday morning.

With the exception of the above comments which were expected there was nothing else raised which would mean that the savings proposal could not be taken forward.

## Budget Proposals 2016-17: Citizen's Advice Bureau

### Summary of Feedback Received and Key Findings

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***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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4 January 2016  
Version 1 (CB)