

Budget Proposals 2016-17: Cleaner Greener

Summary of Feedback Received and Key Findings

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

The council undertakes works with and supports a partnership based group known as the Greener Sub-Partnership. The council also provides advice to businesses and the community on energy efficiency.

The proposal is to cease supporting the Greener Sub-Partnership and providing any community based energy activities such as the Green Exchange.

Summary of Key Points

Eight responses were received in total, none from Parish or Town Councils. Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust made a response to express concern but were unable to offer any options to assist. One of the eight responses was from a user of the service and the views were mixed on whether the service was needed at all.

Information already available on the web was seen to be a way for those who are interested in such topics to get access to advice and views were mixed on whether the Council should need to signpost people to organisations which concentrate on these matters.

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

General concerns were raised about the impact of climate change; there were no direct references to the interests of the local population. Local events that are currently run with the support of the council would stop and this may reduce the ability of partner organisations to raise the profile of green issues.

2. 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?

Concerns were raised that people in or close to fuel poverty would not be able to access advice to help with their situation.

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

Although Parish Councils were mentioned, there were no direct suggestions put forward.

4. Do you know of any existing community initiatives which could help to promote sustainability in your community? If so, please provide details. If not, would you be interested in establishing one?

A local food buying group was mentioned, but no suggestions have been put forward to identify potential initiatives to engage with.

5. Do you think Green Exchange could be supported by local Parish or Town Councils to develop better local links? If so, please comment.

Each Parish or Town Council can decide to use their resources to support work like this, but none have come forward directly.

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6. **Do you know of any existing organisations which could be encouraged to take on the objectives of the Greener Sub-Partnership? If so, please comment.**

No comments received.

7. **Any further comments?**

One response commented that this is a non core function and the funding should be removed.

Conclusion

There was a general view expressed that whilst it may impact on the wider issue of climate change, the impact of stopping this service for local people was negligible and there does not appear to be any appetite for another organisation to become more involved.

***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.

Paul Anstey
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