

## Budget Proposals 2016-17: Friends in Need

### 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

The Friends in Need service is delivered by Depression Alliance (DA), a national charity. It supports people with depression to maintain recovery and wellbeing by developing strong local networks of like-minded people. This is done by building up social support networks for people with depression; providing an opportunity for people to meet online and face-to-face in local communities, to share experiences by doing ordinary things like having a coffee or going for a walk, and just simply reminding each other that they are not alone. The service can reach older, isolated people and those with long term conditions who find it difficult to get out.

The service in West Berkshire has been funded jointly with the Newbury and District Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and the council and costs £50,000 per annum which is shared equally by each organisation. In the first year, the target for the number of people to be referred to the service was 500, however only 80 people were referred over the first 7 months.

It is proposed that the service be decommissioned from March 2016 saving the council £25,000.

#### Summary of Key Points

We received seven comments about the Friends in Need budget proposal. Organisations included; Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust, Compton Parish Council and Depression Alliance. There was a general perception from these organisations that Friends in Need offers a unique service for people experiencing depression and helps to reach individuals that are hard to reach. Stopping the service could be detrimental for people already using this service.

Of the four individuals that responded, one person felt that the service could be delivered for better value by enhancing existing mental health services such as '8 Bells and Pulling Together'. The other three supported the project, some using their personal experiences to demonstrate the positive impact that the Friends in Need project has on their recovery and the added value of meeting face-to-face with other people and participating in the group activities, something which is not provided by other organisations such as Talking Therapies.

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

The majority of the people responding were not members of the service. Two of the seven responses were from members of Friends in Need and one organisation who responded was involved in the project. (Depression Alliance run the Friends in Need West Berkshire service).

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

One respondent has reported that more services are required for people with mental health issues. There was a concern that depression is a hidden illness and that Friends in Need helps people with depression to maintain their recovery and wellbeing with peer support. One service user reported that her severe depression and anxiety are helped by being able to access Friends in Need, as attending the groups on different days of the week has given her a reason to leave the house and socialise,

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without which, her severe depression and anxiety will remain. This strong social element, helps to target hard to reach groups, and in this sense is cost effective as it potentially prevents individuals from needing more expensive interventions.

There was a concern that by referring individuals who previously used Friends in Need to talking therapies is inaccurate as the two services are different. People who previously accessed talking therapies might benefit from a later referral to friends in need but not the other way around.

One respondent suggested that existing mental health support services should have been consulted on prior to the launch of this service.

**3. 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?**

One respondent said that this service affects individuals with depression and severe loneliness. In addition families and neighbours would also be affected.

Another respondent suggested that proper signposting for those who currently use service and potentially extra funding for existing groups.

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

Talk to existing mental health support groups and see what services they offer and the ways they could expand to meet the needs of Friends in Need clients. Also make sure that Friends in Need have robust volunteer recruitment and training policies and systems to protect vulnerable people from abuse.

**5. Do you think the online support programme being launched by Talking Therapies will meet the needs of those clients who have previously been referred to Friends in Need? Please explain the reason for your response.**

It will for some, but it will not help in cases of social isolation and preventative measures. Groups give social support which can help with depression.

**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.**

There is support in Mind, Eight Bells for Mental Health and Pulling Together, all operating locally, so someone should be talking to all these organisations.

**7. Any further comments?**

- The council has failed to provide to fund any mental health expertise into the community, prevention, recovery and peer support across West Berkshire. The lack of social care and outreach in West Berks for mental health has already meant many people have for years been left with mental health issues.

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- Although there has been an increasing number of referrals into Friends in Need from Talking therapies and more awareness of Friends in Need generally, though promotion of the service at different events, referrals from GPs and Talking Therapies have been slower than originally anticipated.
- Friends in Need help aide recovery and help people to stay well. There is a potential for relapse among current services users without this service, which offers a safe environment.
- Friends in Need looking to expand in 2016, with members helping to run groups and interact more, as well as further groups being developed in the evening and in areas such as Lambourn and Hungerford. People need to know that it is difficult for people with a mental health condition to engage at first, it takes time to introduce people to the idea of peer led groups.
- Funding is required to run activities and fund room hire.
- Difficulty in getting more volunteers involved in running groups due to stigma and lack of confidence.
- Talking therapies and will not end isolation as it does not provide a face to face contact which is very important.
- Support of a professional support worker - someone to deal with issues arising, organise events, build professional contacts, ensure safety of individuals data, spot any safeguarding issues and provide a point of contact for everyone is vital.
- So far, Friends in Need has good results which some members now accessing paid and/or voluntary work.
- Members come from diverse backgrounds, and may have other disabilities, be carers or recovering from personal traumas such as bereavement, redundancy, cancer, isolation.
- Equality impact Assessment does not look at the long term effects that a lack of community support could have and how many people in the future that could be affected.
- Investment in Friends in Need needs to be sustained as to build something from nothing especially in such a large authority in terms of geography and issues such as public transport restricting travel.
- Depression Alliance launched 'Friends in Need' 2 years ago. Over that time they have won an National award by Public health England for services in prevention of relapse in depression, and now there are over 21k people registered on the community, of those there are 130 are from West Berkshire. Another 150 people who have been referred to the local Friends in Need project on top of this.
- The Friends in Need groups are all founded on the principles of the 5 ways to wellbeing; to connect, keep learning; take notice; be active and to give.
- Project Coordinator has developed an excellent rapport with members and has really worked so hard to get people to come along and make the events happen.
- The schedule of activities is put together by members and includes a weekly walk (seasonal), a craft social enterprise, where crafts are made and sold at craft fairs to provide money for the groups to meet to do the ordinary social things like going out for dinner, that sometimes depression can rob you off. The group enjoy a weekly yoga slot and lunch / coffee meet ups but often have extra weekend and evening events to suit as wide a cross section of the community as possible.
- Project Coordinator has just recently joined the newly formed multi agency steering group with WB council working with troubled families waiting for referrals into CAMHs. The role of the project coordinator is to identify young parents where depression may be having an effect on children and young people's poor performance at school.

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- Starting a pilot like this in an area where there has been little support for people whose lives have been devastated by depression, needs time and needs pioneers to get things off the ground.
- Those pioneers have come forward and, the hard work has now been done, the network is now bedded in, and the people coming are a close knit group, and have a network in place to help sustain recovery.
- Over the year Friends in Need has seen people come to the group feeling very vulnerable and using the group to build the confidence to return to work.
- The Friends in Need support networks build up when other services close down at typical times like over the Christmas period. Last week they advertised in the local papers and radio and held a training event in a Newbury pub to plan the volunteer led Christmas events programme.
- This project is currently funded until March 2016; to lose funding now as the momentum has gathered would be dreadful. There is a risk of seeing the groups unravelling without the support of the coordinator and the wider DA network.

Another respondent said “We support the current discussions with the CCG to reconfigure and continue providing this service”.

### Conclusion

For some people, stopping this project would wreck the chance of building a strong network for people experiencing depression, anxiety and stress and the positive impact this service has on helping people with mental ill health in West Berkshire. On respondents view was that cutting funding for this service could also be seen to discriminate against those who have mental health as a disability. Another respondent highlighted that there are existing services whose remit could be extended to meet the needs of people accessing Friends in Need. Other respondents have highlighted that it would be a shame to pull funding for this project at a time when the momentum is just getting going.

***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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7 January 2016  
Version 1 (CB)