

## Budget Proposals 2016-17: Highways Maintenance

### 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

Under the Highways Act 1980 the council (as Highway Authority) has a duty to maintain its local road network, which extends to some 1280km.

To achieve this, we have a revenue works budget of £2.875m, covering activities such as patching, drainage repairs, gully emptying, bridge maintenance, winter gritting and dealing with highway emergencies such as flooding, dealing with road traffic accidents, fallen trees and other storm or adverse weather damage.

We are proposing to reduce the following areas of expenditure:

		<b>% of Budget</b>
Road patching	£100,000	20%
Highway emergencies	£150,000	24%
Highway drainage	£100,000	23%
Winter gritting	£ 70,000	10%
Gully emptying	£ 67,000	34%
Reactive maintenance	£ 40,000	24%
Bridge maintenance	<u>£ 25,000</u>	<u>10%</u>
<b>Total Reduction</b>	<b>£552,000</b>	<b>19%</b>

#### Summary of Key Points

44 responses to the consultation were received, including 17 responses from the following Parish Councils:

- West Ilsley
- Enborne
- Tilehurst
- Yattendon
- Brightwalton
- Basildon
- Pangbourne x3
- Lambourn
- Holybrook
- Cold Ash
- Midgham
- Kintbury
- Compton
- Burghfield
- East Garston

A response was also received from the WBC Transport Services team.

All responses appear to have been made using the Council's on line consultation portal.

Every single respondent objected to the idea of cuts to the highway maintenance budget, particularly in respect of road repairs, drainage and gritting. Many felt that reduced maintenance standards would result in more surface water and potholes, leading to more accidents and claims for damage.

Several people commented that such cuts were counterproductive and a false economy. Some people commented that given the Council's promise to treat road maintenance as a priority, the proposals are unacceptable.

One Parish Council commented that 'a 19% reduction in the highways budget will affect more people in West Berkshire than virtually anything else in the package'. Whilst one resident commented that road maintenance should be prioritised 'over things like libraries, healthy eating and other soft services'.

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

40 of the 44 respondents commented that road conditions will worsen if these budget cuts are implemented (the remaining four restricted their comments to winter gritting and grit bins only) which will lead to more surface water and failing road surfaces. Several said we should be aware that claims against the Council will increase and questioned whether the Council are being negligent. Several respondents also noted that road maintenance and drainage works had improved in recent years but those cuts will mean a return to the previous 'dreadful road conditions'.

**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?**

Five respondents felt that the young and/or elderly would be affected; six respondents suggested that those living in rural areas would be most affected; three commented that those living in areas of high flood risk would be most affected. Ten respondents said that everyone would be affected because we are all highway users.

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

12 respondents made comments about how to deliver services in a different way. A summary of comments is as follows:

- Pay farmers to clear snow
- Outsourcing isn't effective – bring road repairs in house
- Road maintenance is a fundamental service and should be provided by the Council
- Review grit bin policy
- More resurfacing needed and less patching
- Make utilities repair roads properly
- Use resources effectively
- Improve communications with residents
- Use parking revenue to fund road repairs

**4. 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.**

Just 10% of the respondents made suggestions on how they could contribute. The comments were as follows:

- One Parish Council offered to carry out regular visual highway inspections
- One Parish Council suggested using the YOS to repair roads
- One Parish Council suggested that residents could take over responsibility for grit bins
- One Parish Council commented that by taking on responsibility for grit bins, council resource would be released for other work

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#### 5. Any further comments?

Other comments made included:

- How about a tax increase to pay for it?
- Council to sell off its assets
- Given flooding incidents in recent years, cannot understand this proposal
- Poor maintenance of the highways has a direct impact on all our pockets
- Should be a continued focus on capital investment
- Prevention is better than cure
- Stopping spending is not saving, it merely pushes the cost onto someone else

#### Conclusion

The public consultation responses confirm the view that highway maintenance is very highly valued by Parish Councils and highway users, particularly in respect of road repairs and drainage. Many have recognised that cutting basic road maintenance is a false economy as a reduction in standards may result in deteriorating road surfaces and increased amounts of surface water, potentially leading to more claims against the Council.

***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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11 January 2016  
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