

Budget Proposals 2016-17: Home to School Transport – Other proposals

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

Parents are legally responsible for making sure that their children get to and from school at the appropriate times each day. This includes a parent making arrangements for their child to get to and from school when they have work commitments.

West Berkshire Council's Home to School Transport Policy sets out the circumstances in which it will provide free transport to children and young people travelling to school or college. It relates to West Berkshire residents of statutory school age (from the term following the fifth birthday to the end of Year 11). We spend £1.6m per year on transport to mainstream schools. This is a significant cost at a time of reducing financial resources.

We also provide additional help on a discretionary basis. The scale of budget reductions means that the council needs to prioritise statutory functions and review discretionary services.

It is proposed that discretionary aspects of the Home to School Policy are reduced through the following actions:

- 1. Remove the discretionary entitlement to transport to the catchment school for primary school pupils. This change would come into effect in April 2016, and would affect pupils/students purchasing transport for the academic year 2016/17.**
- 2. Make changes to the Fare Payer Scheme. These changes would come into effect in April 2016, and would affect pupils/students purchasing transport for the academic year 2016/17.**

These proposals reduce the council's free transport provision for mainstream pupils to the statutory minimum. The national transport guidance says that discretionary elements can be charged for. Where discretionary elements have been retained, the price has been revised to reflect the cost of providing the service. Summary below:

Actions	Pupils	Savings
Removal of free primary catchment entitlement	47	£5,000
Changes to the Fare Payer Scheme		
Fare Payer Scheme – Trains (a)	71	£33,200
Fare Payer Scheme - Sibling discount (b)	15	£1,000
Fare Payer Scheme - Buses (c and d)	259	£101,500
Total	392	£ 140,700

Summary of Key Points

Proposal affecting catchment pupils

- One response was received supporting the proposal to removal of primary catchment entitlement.

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Proposal affecting Fare Payer Scheme

- No responses were received about the change to the Fare Payer Scheme sibling discount (b).
- 4 responses about the proposed cost of a Fare Payer seat on the bus (c & d) and on response about the train (a), all stating that the Standard Rate of £684 is too high.
- Responses about available routes (see other Summary Report) were related to but not specific about the Fare Payer price.
- Parents would be willing to pay a small amount for a seat on the bus (amounts quoted ranged from £20 p.a. to £100 p.a.). This is substantially less than the cost of a seat to the Council. One response wanted a sibling discount (b), as this is important to families with more than one child.

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

There were 5 responses from users of the service. The Report includes other comments made elsewhere in the consultation by users, which were related to but not specifically about the Fare Payer price.

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

- The cost of £684 is too high and would be a burden on families
- The higher cost would be especially hard for low income families of post-16 students
- Post-16 provision in rural West Berkshire should not cost so much - £684 is too high when we do not have alternatives of walking routes or public buses.

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?

- Low income families of 6th form students.

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

- Could you charge a lower flat rate for Post-16s who were on Pupil Premium when they left school?
- Charge a lower rate for rural post-16 students attending their catchment school 6th form

5. 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 responses

6. Counter proposals: have any other organisation come up with any ideas for how they can mitigate the proposal / do things differently which would allow the service to be maintained.

- No responses

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7. Other issues:

- No responses

8. Any further comments?

- Don't increase the charge and make savings elsewhere
- Parents would be prepared to pay a small amount, figures quoted ranged from £20 p.a. - £100 p.a. but would expect the Council to subsidise the rest of the cost.

Conclusion

The respondents did not want the price subsidy to be removed, which will lead to an increase in the price to a Standard Rate of £684 p.a. (payable in instalments), and have asked for a lower rate to be charged, and for the Council to continue to subsidise the cost.

These elements of the proposal offered some mitigation to the impact of the proposal for post-16 and low income families:

- The proposal removed universal entitlement for mainstream post-16 students, but retained a guarantee of a place on the school bus for students who live further than 3 miles away from their nearest or catchment school/College. This would provide a benefit for rural families, although not a financial saving for the families.
- Post-16 students from low income families can apply for bursary funding, which is provided from the government to schools and Colleges, and our website explains how this applies to different educational establishments.
- The proposal includes the ability to consider exceptional circumstances for post-16 students on a case by case basis.
- The price can be paid over up to 8 instalments.

The exercise has not highlighted any impacts that are not already anticipated.

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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