

Budget Proposals 2016-17: Housing Related Outreach Support Service

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.

A telephone survey was carried out to 15 users of the service to try and gain their views.

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: Housing Related Outreach Support Service

Summary of Feedback Received and Key Findings

Background

The Supporting People programme was launched in April 2003. The programme brought together several funding streams, including support provided through the Housing Benefit system, into a single grant from central government for local authorities to fund a variety of services aimed at helping vulnerable people live independently. West Berkshire was successful in securing a significant level of funding at the outset (circa £6m), which has been largely protected to continue to deliver these non statutory services over the last twelve years.

Supporting People services can take many forms; for example, refuges for women escaping domestic violence, housing with warden support (residential or floating) for the elderly, and hostels for recovering addicts. People living in supported housing receive 'housing related supported services' in order to enable them to live independently

The council commissions an outreach service to people in their own homes to provide housing related support aimed at preventing eviction. The service offers a three tier approach to provide a mixture of short and long term services for up to a maximum of 92 people at any one time.

It is proposed to cease this provision and make available information to help people identify and access other sources of support. This will save the council £184,000.

Summary of Key Points

A total of 55 responses were received

- 23 online response
- 11 responses came in via email (scanned paper copies of the consultation - entered into the online database)
- 6 responses via email, from users of the service had more generic responses (- entered into the online database as comments)

- 15 telephone responses (entered into the online database)

Many of these responses were quite lengthy and detailed in their response.

Organisations that provided feedback include:

- o Two Saints
- o Southern Housing group
- o WBC Adult Social Care – social worker feedback
- o WBC – Housing service staff
- o Salvation Army
- o Loose ends
- o UNISON
- o Tilehurst Parish Council
- o Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust
- o Pangbourne Parish Council

The feedback provided a clear overview of the value that the service provided, risks in relation to the impact of service cuts in terms of additional pressures being placed on other statutory services such as Housing.

The following provides a more detailed summary of the responses received in relation to the specific questions:

Budget Proposals 2016-17: Housing Related Outreach Support Service

Summary of Feedback Received and Key Findings

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

36 of the 55 responses were from people that use the service.

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

Respondents considered that this would have a significant impact on some of the most vulnerable in our society.

The following summarises the impact that the cuts to the services would have

1- **Housing issues:** mentioned by a significant proportion of the respondents

Service has a role in preventing homelessness by:

- helping to maintain / sustain tenancies,
- preventing eviction and those losing their accommodation
- reduces numbers sleeping rough (vital in contacting those on the street)

A number of respondents provided some statistics as clear evidence to the potential impact: *'Of 82 service users supported during Q1 and 2, 54 were potentially at risk of losing their home (a good number were also on probationary tenancies and the early intervention provided would set them up with skills to ensure they can sustain their tenancy). Eviction was prevented in 66% of those cases. In the event that eviction cannot be prevented, the household is likely to approach the Council as homeless. Excluding the cost of temporary accommodation, which can be in the region of £300 a week, the average cost of taking and determining a homelessness application in West Berkshire is £1500. Therefore, not only is the financial cost to the Council high, but the emotional wellbeing of the of the household is placed at risk...'*

'The Housing Options Team are unable to offer the intense support that Floating Support Workers provide to households, and see the this Service as an essential feature of Council's homeless prevention approach. If the Floating Support Service was no longer available, it is likely that the number of homeless preventions would reduce and the number of homeless applications would increase, placing significant pressure on a tightly-resourced team'

2- **Impact on the ability for individuals to manage their household affairs**

The service provides positive support to help individuals deal with life situations / household affairs and live independently. Many users gave clear examples of the support they had received

Examples included:

- helping complete letters forms (many users of the service have literacy difficulties)
- helping applying for benefits
- attending Court,
- attending Health appointments
- Information and help with arranging / accessing other services. – many users of the service do not have access to the internet or find arranging services very difficult.

Without this support there would be an increased risk of homelessness and reliance on other services.

3- **Financial Hardship - Debt Management & benefit advice / support**

The service provides support to enable vulnerable individuals to manage their financial affairs.

This also ensures debts to the council are minimised ; the service supports clients to pay housing benefit and council tax arrears, and sourcing other income from charitable sources to enable individuals to prioritise key debts that would lead to eviction.

Without this support there would be an increased risk of homelessness and reliance on other services.

4- **Delayed discharges**

Delayed Discharges from specialist mental health inpatient beds may be affected as there will be a lack of supported accommodation to enable individuals to move on within West Berkshire.

Budget Proposals 2016-17: Housing Related Outreach Support Service

Summary of Feedback Received and Key Findings

5- Increase demand for other services.

Loss of this service could impact the Council by shifting the costs elsewhere:

- Increase in Housing issues (see above)
- Greater reliance on Adult Social Care and increase in safeguarding issues / concerns
- Impact on CMHT - capacity issues for staff to undertake specialist core mental health activities.
- Increase in offending behaviour & drug and alcohol support required
- Increase in Children's Safeguarding issues.
- Impact on Children's services - The Council does not owe a duty to all homeless households and some families will need to be assisted by Children's Services which is a hidden financial burden arising from homelessness.

6- Early intervention & prevention

Respondents highlighted the role of the service in early intervention to deal with issues quickly and identification of any safeguarding, decreasing risk to child protection

Research was provided from one respondent on the significant savings of early intervention:

Research shows that for every £1 spent supporting people, £3 is saved on other public expenditure (Cap Gemini report 2009). The existing floating support service works with approximately 200 clients each year. In the past year 76% of these clients were supported to prevent eviction. Without this support over 150 households would have been made homeless. This would potentially have further increased the number of clients sleeping rough in West Berkshire. Of these households 43% had children, which would potentially have resulted in West Berkshire having to place these families into temporary housing costing an estimated £455 for each family each week (West Berkshire – Bed and Breakfast charging policy – 2011). Where this was not possible it is likely that the children would have to be placed in foster families at a cost of £557 for each child each week (annual cost varies between £29,000-£33,000 – Children in Care - National Audit Office 2014).

6- Negative impact on Health and emotional wellbeing of individuals

Loss of the service would impact negatively on people's lives:

- People will be unable to cope
- Family breakdown
- Poorer outcomes for individuals
- Mental and physical health issues

At least 2 individuals indicated that the service had 'saved lives'

Homeless households are more likely to be out of work, to experience poor mental and physical health conditions and children may be unable to attend school if placed out of district.

7- **Social isolation** was highlighted as a negative consequence to the loss of service

8- Travelling Communities

Support is provided to travelling communities and residents of the Council-managed Gypsy & Traveller site.

One respondent indicated that this intensive support is essential in giving the residents an active voice and ensuring that they are able to manage their licenses effectively, this cannot be delivered by the Housing team.

One respondent commented that it was an opportunity to scrutinise service that is inefficient and creates dependency.

Budget Proposals 2016-17: Housing Related Outreach Support Service

Summary of Feedback Received and Key Findings

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?

The responses indicated that the people that will be affected by this proposal are vulnerable residents of West Berkshire; in particular

- Homeless people / people at risk of losing their home
 - People with Mental Health difficulties and substance misuse
 - Residents of Council managed Gypsy and Traveller sites
 - People in severe poverty / families on low incomes
 - Women and children
 - People with Learning difficulties (can't read or write)
 - Difficult to engage clients
- One respondent felt that no specific individuals would be affected

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

Many respondents did not have any suggestions and felt that the service was delivered in the best way. By definition the 'outreach' service meant that people need support to be offered in a different way. i.e. outreach service adjusts to the individual and their pace

Numerous responses reinforced that they did not want the service to end.

'This service helps you to contact other services which are available to you.'

'This is a really important service, please do not take this away'

The following suggestions were made:

1- Reduced level of support workers being integrated into the Housing Service. This would offer some reduction in costs and would ensure the resources are targeted towards the households which will impact on Children's Service and Homelessness provisions.

2- Bringing the service back into the Council, to sit within the Housing Options Team would reduce costs by roughly half - this estimate is based upon having 2 Floating Support Workers and 1 Senior Floating Support Worker who would supervise the FSW and the Temporary Accommodation Support Officer who is already in post. This would enable the team to target specific households with an identified support need who have approached the Housing Options Team and to provide intensive support to those at risk of homelessness for a variety of reasons.

2- We (Two Saints) propose that West Berkshire reduces our annual income by £105,950, so we can deliver an alternative service which would provide:

- drop-ins at agreed locations
- a rapid intervention service offering six support sessions for those in most crisis.
- Employing 1.5 staff members

Or by £122,600 which would see services being provided to the most vulnerable via drop in support only, and employing 1 full time member of staff. We believe that this approach would enable you to achieve savings, whilst still meeting the needs of your local community.

Budget Proposals 2016-17: Housing Related Outreach Support Service

Summary of Feedback Received and Key Findings

3- A smaller, more targeted service could reduce costs and there may be a 'spend to save' argument for considering this when looking at prevention v. homeless application costs. For example, the service could work only with households identified by the Housing Options Service as being at risk of homelessness rather than with a wider, more generic, client group and could be delivered either through the existing provider or in-house. It is anticipated that this could be delivered with 3 x officers (one of whom already works within the Housing Service).

4 - Extend the drop in times held at 107 London Road - the existing hostel staff can cope with the demand.

5- Help could be provided by getting more people to volunteer to do some of the work at Two Saints.

In contrast some respondents were clear that the Council should not rely solely on the voluntary sector and local Churches to meet the growing problem. *'As a voluntary organisation we need Housing Support to work with us and to whom we can refer our clients for help.'*

6- The service could operate at a reduction in service. Perhaps down to 2 staff managed by a P/T team leader, or a TL from the resettlement service, reducing numbers of service users at any one time. Focus could be on the most vulnerable clients in the area, those with the more enduring issues that cannot be met by other services.

7- The service could also attempt to seek funding from Landlords that refer to the service, as their own tenancy support services are unable to truly prevent (follow all the processes through) an eviction due to conflict of interests. And historically these referrals made up 70% of the referrals to the service.

5. Do you have any suggestions on how we can ensure people are aware of other sources of support? If so, please provide details.

Many service users reiterated the beneficial impact of the service provided Two Saints

Some respondents felt there was no duplication in services and so removing the service would leave a significant gap.

Some responses referred people to CAB and their landlords (role of tenancy support officers) as alternative forms of support. However, there was recognition that cuts are also proposed to CAB so directing additional households towards them does not appear to be realistic.

The floating support service was recognised as offering over and above that of CAB i.e Home visits / support to a household to go to Court etc

A number of responses suggested that information and advice services / IT solution could be developed and the Council could invest in better local publicity. However, there was clear recognition of the initial cost / resource this would take and more importantly that the many of the people supported through this service do not have IT access, find it difficult to engage and so this effort would not actually target those most in need:

'It is a great concern that many people will slip through this net and not be captured. In regard to housing related support there are very minimal other services to signpost to,

Budget Proposals 2016-17: Housing Related Outreach Support Service

Summary of Feedback Received and Key Findings

so I am not sure to where we could, other than CAB, which again is appointment only, and not as flexible or creative to engaging a very chaotic person/family.'

One suggestion was that a key member of staff could be designated to provide the information and support ' - a designated in house Floating Support worker' who could run a drop in service and possible 'benefits' or 'debts' surgeries.

There were some concerns raised that the Council have not been able to make people aware of the proposed cuts so how could they let people know about other sources of support. *'This survey would only be known to a tiny proportion of people. Our own service was only made aware of it by our management team pointing it out to us. We in turn have tried to let our partner agencies know and obviously we've told all our current clients, however we still cannot let ex clients or potential clients know of the cuts. I don't know how any one would even recognise our service as it states "housing related outreach support" and nothing about Two Saints floating support'.*

'The fact that in this consultation the service was not even named 'Floating Support' which is what everyone knows it as, suggests to me that the Council did not wish to make it obvious and attract opposition'

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 were no suggestions / proposals as to how organisations could help alleviate the impact of this proposal. The only comments made reinforced that there were no resources available to take on this type of intensive homelessness prevention work and that the proposed cuts would have a negative impact on them as the demand for their services could increase. (i.e Housing services)

Some responses highlighted that services are already reliant on volunteers who can only do so much.

7. Any further comments?

Many respondents provided praise and further reinforced the positive impact that the service had had to date. There were many personal examples of the support that had been provided and the positive impact the support had had on their lives.

A number of case studies were provided by professionals to reinforce the value of the service.

Many respondents reinforced that the loss of this service will have a huge effect, escalating issues around housing and re emphasising that the cost of services will be need to be met by other services, potentially in a more costly manner.

Budget Proposals 2016-17: Housing Related Outreach Support Service

Summary of Feedback Received and Key Findings

8- Conclusion

Respondents clearly considered that this proposal would have a significant impact on some of the most vulnerable in our society and were clear that the impact of the cuts would be transferred to other statutory services. (Housing / Social Care etc)

The option of make available information to help people identify and access other sources of support was considered difficult as there was clear recognition of not only the initial cost / resource this would take; but, more importantly an acknowledgment that many of the people supported through this service do not have IT access, find it difficult to engage and so this effort would not actually target those most in need.

Proposals were put forward for a smaller more targeted service, working with the Housing service or by Two Saints providing a greatly reduced 'drop in' service – further consideration should be given to these options.

***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.

Barbara Billett
Quality Assurance Manager
Care Commissioning, Housing and Safeguarding
8 January 2016
Version 1 (CB)