

## Budget Proposals 2016-17: Library Service

### 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, hard copies were available in all libraries, 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**

It is a statutory requirement to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service.

The mobile library service reaches areas of the district not served by a static branch library. The use of the service has diminished over the years and users are also using static branch libraries, suggesting that the mobile provision is much less essential than it once was.

The library service in West Berkshire is well distributed across the district, although the branches at Burghfield Common and Mortimer are only about 2 miles apart.

Visits to our two Mobiles have reduced by about 45% since 2005, and the number of items borrowed from them reduced by 25% in the last full year. We propose to reduce this service so it can be provided by one single staffed vehicle. In mitigation of the effect on those customers who are unable to travel to a library we will seek to expand the At Home Library Service by increasing volunteers.

Burghfield Common Library is about 2 miles from Mortimer Library, and in order to help us meet the level of savings required of Libraries in 2016 we propose to merge Burghfield Common Library with Mortimer Library into one building located in Mortimer.

The two proposals will save approximately £90,000.

#### **Summary of Key Points**

256 responses received, including four from parish councils (Holybrook, Sulhamstead, Burghfield, and Beenham) and one from Willink School. The remaining 251 responses were from individuals, mainly but not exclusively service users, some staff and some parish and district councillors.

A petition was also received about Burghfield Library called 'An Objection to the Closure of Burghfield Public Library' with 301 signatures.

#### Mobile Library Service

- Mobile service reduction would adversely affect isolated and older people who cannot get to a branch, and alternatives, such as the At Home Service would leave them as mere recipients of books not choosing their own.
- Concern at how practical it is to find lots of new volunteers for the At Home service.
- Concern about the eventual fate of Mobiles; is the plan to cease the service entirely?

#### Burghfield Common library

- Burghfield Common library serves a large and growing catchment.
- Merger not practical as Mortimer Library and village do not have sufficient resource to handle a large number of new users.
- Environmental concern about extra traffic between Burghfield and Mortimer.
- Children would lose the ability to walk to their local library and have to rely on parents to drive them.
- Burghfield Common performs better than several other libraries and is relied on by many disadvantaged and poorer families.

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

Most respondents say yes to this. Some others expressed concern on behalf of other people in their community who rely on Burghfield Common branch library or the Mobile library.

**2. How important is it to you that the Library service maintains its current level of service?**

Most say it is important, as the library serves many key groups of users and is a vital centre of community life. Some say a good library service is crucial for reasons such as, creating a civilised society, a well educated workforce that can compete in the global economy, to supporting the wellbeing of older people who are isolated and lonely, to enabling children to learn to read, study and attain at all levels.

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

Children in Burghfield would be prevented from using a library independently.

Vulnerable and poorer families and individuals who have greatest need of the range of services libraries provide would be less likely to use the service if it became more difficult and expensive for them to access it.

People are prepared to pay more tax to retain services they value.

Technology exists to create self service access, so that branch libraries could be maintained and run more cheaply in the immediate future.

**4. 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?**

Old, young, low income and unemployed, non car owners, rural isolated have been identified together with young mothers taking children to library activities and introducing them to the skills of reading and learning.

Residents of Burghfield and other immediate parishes.

All could be helped by retaining the library service with lower running costs, e.g. through technology and some further restructuring.

**5. Do you have any suggestions as to how this service might be delivered in a different way? In particular, do you have any suggestions for other ways to reduce the cost of the service or to help it to run more efficiently? If so, please provide details.**

Co-locating the library at Burghfield in the Church Hall, the Children's Centre or Post Office.

Self service technology to reduce staffing costs.

If closing the branch, use a Mobile for regular visits, e.g. twice a week

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- 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.**

Most say no. Several suggestions for other sources of funding, e.g. individuals suggest asking for donations or sponsorship from charities or businesses. There are no offers or indications that they or, their own organisation, would be able to contribute.

Some comment that it is the Council's responsibility, and other sectors are equally short of funds.

- 7. Do you know of any alternative organisations that could operate this service without any council funding? If so, please provide details.**

No suggestions.

- 8. Any further comments?**

### Conclusion

There is no strong case presented to change the proposed reduction in the Mobile Library service. Several important issues have been raised relating to the fairness and impact of the proposed closure of Burghfield Common Library, and Councillors may want to reconsider the proposal in light of this feedback.

***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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