

Budget Proposals 2016-17: Physical Activity in Children

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

Childhood obesity is a significant problem and we believe that the council has a role to play in helping to promote healthy lifestyles amongst children and therefore reduce the rates of children who are overweight and obese in West Berkshire. However, rates are lower in West Berkshire compared to England as a whole. In 2013/14, 19.5% of children aged 4 to 5 years in West Berkshire were either overweight or obese compared to 22.5% in England. By year 6 of primary school, 28% of children were either overweight or obese again lower than the average for England (33.5%).

Measures to tackle children being overweight and obese include improving diets and healthy nutrition, along with increasing the levels of physical activity amongst children. A number of measures have been funded by the council and include free school holiday activities for 2 to 10 year olds and free swimming lessons and transport.

The free school holiday activities for children aged 2 to 10 years are run at local leisure centres and include a range of activities including trampolining, bouncy castles, team games and soft play. They are open to all and work on a first come, first served basis. The free swimming lessons are aimed towards children from more deprived backgrounds and aim to equip them with the basics for swimming before they start swimming lessons at school.

It is proposed to reduce the budget for free school holiday activities for children aged 2 to 10 by £9,000. This is currently a universal service (open to everyone) and the intention is to reduce the numbers of sessions run and advertise more effectively.

It is also proposed to reduce the budget for free swimming lessons and transport by £7,000, which will reduce the number of free swimming lessons provided but these will be targeted towards those with greater need.

The two proposals will result in a saving of £16,000.

Summary of Key Points

There were three responses in total to the consultation on Physical Activity in children. All of which were from individuals within the 45-65 age bracket. It was felt that the impact of reducing this service would be felt by families and had the potential to contribute towards rates of childhood obesity. However, it was also felt that charging for this service was a potential alternative.

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

There were three responses in total. None of the individuals responding described themselves as a user of this service.

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

There was a general feeling that by limiting the chances of children getting involved in physical activity was taking a short term view and sends the message that physical activity is not important. There were concerns that it would reduce the overall numbers of children having enough exercise and two of the three responses linked reduction in physical exercise to a likely increase in obesity. In addition, the potential for increasing

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a class divide was highlighted if universal services are removed. However, one response felt that although there would be an impact, there are alternatives available.

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?

It was felt that this proposal would impact on future generations (reducing life expectancy in the future) and working parents in particular. It was suggested that services should be provided at cost.

4. Do you feel there are alternatives activities available to you? Please explain the reason for your response.

There were no responses to this question.

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

There were no responses to this question.

6. Would you use the service if a subsidised payment was required? Please explain the reason for your response.

One individual felt that they would be prepared to pay if they needed the service.

7. 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 responses to this question.

8. Any further comments?

Comments included the following:

- Stop the 16% rise in councillors allowances
- Reduce the number of councillors by 20%
- Put up council tax each year for the next 5 years
- Cut the budget for the planning and vision departments.

Conclusion

There were three responses however these did express a strong opinion that childhood obesity was an important problem and reducing physical activity opportunities for children could be a contributing factor. However, it was also expressed that this is a service that people are prepared to pay for, should they require it.

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***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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