

Budget Proposals 2016-17: Pre School Teacher Counselling 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. Direct contact was made with all current and recent users of the service, primary schools, early years settings and Health to advise them of the consultation.

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: Pre School Teacher Counselling Service

Summary of Feedback Received and Key Findings

Background

The council provides support for children under five with significant special educational needs (SEN) through the Pre-School Teacher Counselling Service (PSTC). The service is staffed by qualified teachers who are early years and SEN specialists. Staff visit children in their homes on a regular basis in order to promote their educational development, model strategies and provide resources for parents to use with their children. They also assist with the transition to early years settings and schools, providing support and training for staff to help them meet the child's needs. PSTC also help to coordinate support the family is receiving from other professionals. The service is currently supporting approximately 108 children.

The current budget for the Pre-School Teacher Counselling Service is £167,000 which funds 3.3 teachers. We propose to reduce this budget by 50% from September 2016, and seek approval from the Schools Forum for the service to be 50% funded through the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). The DSG is grant funding allocated by central government to councils to specifically fund schools and associated services within schools.

Summary of Key Points

63 responses were received. Of these, 20 responses were from organisations and 43 were from individuals.

The following organisations provided feedback:

Newbury and District CCG
Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust
Compton Parish Council
Sensory Consortium Service
Hungerford Nursery School
Jubilee Day Nursery
Love Lane Pre School
Pied Piper Pre School
Chieveley Pre School
Westwood Farm Pre School
Crabtree Pre School
Dingley Early Years Centre
Compton Pre School
School (unidentified)
Purley School
St. John the Evangelist Infant and Nursery School
Primary School (unidentified)
Theale Primary School
Parsons Down School
Woolhampton School

Of the 43 responses from individuals, 5 were from current or ex Pre School Teacher Counsellors and the remainder were from parents.

The majority of responses were from parents and they focused on:

- (a) the importance of the service in facilitating successful transition (in to early years settings or from early years settings to schools) for very young children with SEND
- (b) the positive impact on children's progress and outcomes

Budget Proposals 2016-17: Pre School Teacher Counselling Service

Summary of Feedback Received and Key Findings

(c) the risk of more expensive interventions being needed if this early intervention service is reduced

(d) the value parents place on having someone in a key working role who is able to provide information and advice and emotional support and who can coordinate other services and generally help parents to navigate the system.

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

48 respondents identified themselves as users of the service.

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

(a) A large number of respondents referred to the importance of the PSTC service in facilitating an effective transition of children with SEND in to pre school settings and from pre school settings in to school. PSTCs were felt to be instrumental in supporting this process, including the provision of information and training to receiving schools and settings. Both parents and schools / settings mentioned the importance of the training provided, particularly for early years settings which may have limited experience or knowledge of children with SEND. Concern was expressed that children may not be able to access settings or placements may fail; also that children may arrive without one to one support, where needed, having been put in place.

(b) Many parents talked about the good progress which their children had made as a result of regular work with a Pre School Teacher Counsellor and felt this progress could not have been achieved otherwise. Parents and professionals expressed the view that outcomes for children would suffer with reduced support.

(c) Respondents raised the importance of early intervention in order to maximise a child's potential and prevent needs from escalating. Reducing early intervention was felt likely to result in increased expenditure later in the child's life, such as specialist placements or even family breakdown. It was noted that there was already a waiting list for the service; reductions in the service would increase waiting times and impact on the ability of the service to intervene at a critical point in the child's development. Also, a reduction in service would put strain on other services.

(d) Parents referred to the need for access to PSTCs at a time when they are vulnerable, eg. following diagnosis, and when there may be little help from other sources. PSTCs can provide information and advice, coordinate other services and help families to navigate the system. Parents referred to the shock of diagnosis, the strain of caring for a disabled child and feelings of fear and isolation; they described how PSTCs had given them hope for their child's future. Some respondents commented on the importance of this support coming from suitably skilled and knowledgeable professionals.

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 groups which were considered to be most affected were young children with SEND, their parents, staff in schools and settings and other professionals.

Of the parents who would be affected by a reduction in service, the groups mentioned as most adversely affected were:

- Parents who do not have strong support networks in their families or communities

Budget Proposals 2016-17: Pre School Teacher Counselling Service

Summary of Feedback Received and Key Findings

- Parents who don't have the means to seek help elsewhere, eg. privately
- Parents who struggle to access services and ask for help
- Families who may be experiencing other issues such as poverty or safeguarding concerns
- New parents

Measures which could help included training for SENCOs, a system for prioritising referrals according to need, reducing waiting times for CAMHS and increasing expertise in other services.

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

Suggestions for delivering services in other ways included:

- Funding the service through the Dedicated Schools Grant as schools are "key beneficiaries" of the service
- Charging parents for the service or some aspects of it
- Changing the balance of staff to include fewer qualified teachers and more NNEBs / early years practitioners, eg. one teacher in charge supported by non teaching staff
- Operating the service from Children's Centres to take advantages of synergies with other staff supporting families of children under 5
- Reducing the number of home visits and providing more support to parents via e-mail and phone following an initial home visit
- Providing workshops for parents
- Supporting parents through parent support groups
- Bringing children together for play based sessions – in Children's Centres, hospitals or therapy settings
- Focusing work on transitions in to early years settings and from early years settings to schools
- Providing written guidance on good practice in transition for children with SEND
- Focusing on improving skills in early years settings
- Developing some early years settings as centres of expertise in SEND
- Providing guidance documents / web pages for early years settings and schools, giving advice and helpful tips
- Ceasing support from the service to schools when children are transitioning in to school and source this elsewhere, eg. special school outreach or the Cognition and Learning Team. Expand these services to meet this need.
- Using experienced SENCOs to provide support to early years settings
- Some respondents stated that it was not possible to provide the service in other ways and that it should remain as it is or be increased.

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.

One Children's Centre suggested that the service could become part of Children's Centres. One early years setting suggested that some early years settings might be willing to host meetings, group sessions and therapy services.

One respondent suggested a local company which might be willing to give financial support.

Budget Proposals 2016-17: Pre School Teacher Counselling Service

Summary of Feedback Received and Key Findings

6. Any further comments?

- Suggestion that PSTCs could be renamed Early Support Coordinators / Practitioners
- Importance of early intervention was stressed.
- There is a higher than average incidence of Autistic Spectrum Disorders in this area and therefore services which contribute to the support of children with ASD should be protected.
- WBC should be showcasing this service and not reducing it.
- Some respondents reiterated their view in this section that the service should not be reduced.

Conclusion

It is clear that the parents, early years settings and schools who responded place a very high value on this service for the reasons outlined. Parents speak in their responses of the service being a “lifeline” at a time when they were at their most vulnerable and talk of not knowing how they or their children would have managed without it.

It is important that the outcomes which this service provides are maintained, as far as possible, including effective transition for young children with SEND, maximising educational progress, intervening early to reduce the need for more costly interventions later, effective coordination of services and parents feeling that they have adequate practical and emotional support.

There are potential options for delivering the service in a more cost effective way whilst protecting, at least to a degree, the delivery of the service outcomes. These options would involve using some staff who are not qualified teachers. There is the potential to explore these models of service delivery, although the impact on children’s outcomes on using less qualified staff needs to be assessed.

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.

Jane Seymour
Service Manager, SEN & Disabled Children’s Team
Education Service
7th January 2016