

Budget Proposals 2016-17: Public Transport

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, through posters on all supported bus services, a public meeting in Lambourn, 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.

Budget Proposals 2016-17: Public Transport

Summary of Feedback Received and Key Findings

Background

The council has a statutory duty under the Transport Act 1985 to secure the appropriate provision of bus services upon which members of the public rely for getting from place to place. We must also have particular regard to the transport needs of members of the public who are elderly, disabled or those that may live in rural areas and have no means of transport themselves. Public transport also ensures that people are able to get to work which, in turn, helps to make the local economy as vibrant as possible.

We remain committed to delivering effective transport solutions and public transport is a key component of this. We currently provide around £1.4m each year to support bus services, subsidising 20 bus services operating in West Berkshire, which account for some 615,000 annual passenger journeys.

The proposal is to reduce the amount that we pay in subsidies to public transport operators. We currently provide around £1.4m each year in supporting local bus services and are seeking to reduce this by £320,000 next year.

Services have been ranked based on the cost to the council per passenger trip with the most expensive being targeted for savings. This analysis suggests that:

The following services will be withdrawn entirely over the next 12 months:

- 75 – Beech Hill to Newbury
- 90 – Hungerford to Lambourn
- 105 – Newbury/Aldermaston/Tilehurst
- 154 – Beech Hill to Reading

The following services are also likely to be severely affected:

- 3 – Newbury to Hungerford
- 4 – Newbury to Lambourn
- 6/6A – Newbury to Compton circular service
- 101 – Newbury/Bradfield/Tilehurst
- 104 – Newbury/Brimpton/Tilehurst
- 107 – Downlands villages

We also support the following services, many with additional funding from neighbouring authorities, town or parish councils. These services may also be reviewed if the funding from neighbouring authorities is withdrawn:

- 2 – Newbury to Wash Common
- 8 – Newbury to Greenham
- 20/22/46 - Hungerford to Marlborough / Swindon
- 28 – Purley to Reading
- 82 – Great Shefford to Wantage
- 90 – Lambourn to Swindon
- 102 – Newbury to Thatcham
- 143 – Upper Basildon to Reading
- H1 – Hungerford circular

Budget Proposals 2016-17: Public Transport

Summary of Feedback Received and Key Findings

We will be considering other changes to transport provision following a "Total Transport" review which is due to report to central government in 2016/17. This may have an impact on other areas including:

- Bus stop infrastructure (e.g. real time passenger information)
- Community Transport
- The Concessionary Fares Scheme

Summary of Key Points

414 responses to the consultation were received. These were predominantly made through the formal consultation questionnaire either via hard copy or directly to the online consultation portal. Some responses were received over the phone, in letters or face to face with council officers. These responses were then added to the online consultation portal by officers.

14 of these responses were from Town / Parish Councils; Aldermaston, Basildon, Burghfield, Chaddleworth, Compton, East Garston, Hungerford, Inkpen, Kintbury, Lambourn, Pangbourne, Purley, Stratfield Mortimer and Tilehurst.

10 responses were received from organisations. These were Eight Bells for Mental Health, Fare Wise Travel, Lambourn Volunteer Group, Newbury College, Pangbourne and District Volunteer Service, Parish of Saint Catherine (Tilehurst) and Saint Birinus (Calcot), Supply My Office Ltd, Valley Community Bus, West Berkshire Green Party and White Horse Consulting Services Ltd.

The key concerns raised were that the ending, or severe reduction, of any of the current contracted local bus services would result in residents being isolated from vital services;

- Isolation from medical services (174 responses)
- Isolation from educational establishments (164 responses)
- Isolation from shops (163 responses)
- Isolation from employment (126 responses)
- Isolation from sports and leisure facilities (29 responses)
- Isolation from libraries (6 responses)

5 people alleged they would have to move house if they lost their village bus service.

The key consequences of such isolation were cited as reduced life opportunities and reduced quality of life possibly resulting in loneliness and depression.

The loss / reduction of local bus services was believed by 8 respondents to threaten the economic well being of the local economy, especially the towns where much shopping and business is carried out by the rural population.

53 responses believed that further congestion and pollution would result from current bus passengers having to travel by car.

Budget Proposals 2016-17: Public Transport

Summary of Feedback Received and Key Findings

3 responses stated that access to the countryside, particularly for hikers, would be adversely affected by the proposed savings.

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

There were 414 responses to the consultation, of which 350 declared that they were users of bus services. Amongst the respondents were 14 from Town / Parish Councils and a further 10 from other organisations.

The bus services cited in responses (although not necessarily used by the respondent) were:

Service	No. of Respondents	Service	No. of Respondents
N&D 2	3	Go Ride 90 (Hungerford / Lambourn)	94
N&D 3	37	Go ride 90 (Lambourn / Swindon)	96
N&D 4	89	N&D 101	29
N&D 6/6A	31	N&D 102	3
N&D 8	4	N&D 104	30
Thamesdown 20,X20,X22	12	N&D 105	32
Reading Buses 28	0	N&D / WBC 107	22
Thamesdown 46/46A	5	Thames Travel 143	11
N&D 75	3	Horseman 154	6
Barnes 82	54	WBC H1	5

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

It is clear from both the volume of responses (414, second highest response rate in the consultation) and the diversity of responses, that this proposal will have wide-ranging effects on individuals. In particular it was highlighted that this may affect:

- The elderly (258 responses) who are less mobile and for whom buses can provide a lifeline.
- Non-drivers and those without access to cars (243 responses).
- Young people (164 responses) and their ability to access education and employment.
- The disabled and infirm (96 responses)
- Those on low income (62 responses) who cannot afford taxis to get out and about.
- Job seekers (13 responses) who would find getting to interviews and work difficult.

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?

Within West Berkshire, the elderly and disabled account for 33% of all bus passengers. This number rises to 43% on Council-supported bus services. Within the consultation, of those that declared it, 46% were aged 65 or above, 21% had a disability, and 69% were female.

Suggestions from the consultation to mitigate against the impacts were:

Budget Proposals 2016-17: Public Transport

Summary of Feedback Received and Key Findings

- Charge for the issue or use of the national off-peak bus pass or restrict its use to the disabled. However none of this is legally permissible.
- Amend the fares charged to either recover more revenue or increase more passengers, although both of these options would be expected to lead to less overall funding available.
- Promote the services more. The Council does make bus service information available via its own website, through Traveline, with timetables at bus stops, and through the Travel Guide. It is difficult to see how this could be improved cost-effectively where the population is dispersed as it is in West Berkshire.
- Reduce less-well-used journeys, or use smaller vehicles on them. The economics of bus operation mean that less-well-used journeys operate at minimal cost, and using a mix of vehicles with larger vehicles required at peak times would cost more.
- Using school buses, which is not possible without additional cost due to disability legislation.

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

The following suggestions were made regarding alternative ways of providing the service or reducing the budget:

- Replace existing bus services with
 - Demand responsive services.
 - Dial-a-Ride services.
 - Volunteer services, and extend national off-peak bus pass to these services.
 - Taxis.
 - Lift share scheme.
- Operate all services in-house.
- Introduce feeder services to main bus routes.
- Increase expenditure on bus services.
- Do not build new bus station at the Wharf.
- Raise Council Tax or Parish Council precepts.

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.

Responses suggested:

- Charities or big business could operate or fund the threatened services.
- Bring back Post Buses.
- Seek changes to commercially-operated services.
- Council members and/or officers should face further cuts to benefits / salaries / pensions / expenses.

6. Any further comments?

The feedback made it clear that our contracted bus services are highly valued by those who travel on them and rely on them. For many, the bus services are essential to their quality of life. There are real fears of social isolation and reduced quality of life, and life opportunities should the services be severely reduced or terminated.

Budget Proposals 2016-17: Public Transport

Summary of Feedback Received and Key Findings

Some reassurance may be given that all communities will continue to be served by some form of public transport. However, this may not be by a local bus service, but by a service provided by the volunteer sector to help meet some essential travel needs.

Conclusion

The large number of responses to this consultation detailed the hardships and difficulties many would face if the bus services were severely reduced or terminated. This highlights that if additional funding is available, a reduction in the proposed budget saving for public transport would be beneficial. Without this, a large number of residents will be subjected to enforced changes to their travel arrangements.

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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