

Budget Proposals 2016-17: Relate

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

Services delivered through Relate include [Relationship Counselling](#) for individuals and couples, [Family Counselling](#), [Mediation](#), [Children and Young People's Counselling](#) and [Sex Therapy](#). They also provide friendly and informal [workshops](#) for people at important stages in their relationships.

Relate have a network of [Relate Centres across the UK](#) and a group of licensed local counsellors that provide face-to-face counselling and support. They also provide [phone](#), [email](#) and [live chat](#) counselling so clients can choose the support that works for them.

The council currently funds Relate (Newbury) at an annual cost of £6,468.

The proposal is to cease funding Relate from April 2016.

Summary of Key Points

There were five responses to this proposal four of which were from non users of the service. One of the responses was from the Centre Manager of Relate. The Newbury and District Clinical Commissioning Group also responded and felt that any proposal which reduced the support available to the vulnerable was a negative step.

Many of the clients seen by relate go on to be signposted to other services. It was suggested that there is a deficiency in many early intervention services such as CAMHS and the service provided by Relate helps to bridge that gap by providing professional support and advice.

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

All three of those responding to this proposal were non users of the service.

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

The relatively small amount of funding helps to provide some of the vulnerable people Relate see with a subsidy, without which some vulnerable families would not be able to access the support and advice that they need. The professional advice and support provided by trained counsellors helps to support families that might otherwise break up. This, in turn, could have a major impact on any children attached to that family in terms of their future education etc. This may then impact on other services provided by the Council.

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?

In terms of early intervention it was suggested that Relate fills an unmet need by working with children at primary school age. There is evidence to suggest the mental health of our primary school aged children is increasing negatively. Early intervention would be beneficial in that the services provided by Relate could prevent further decline in mental health issues whether they originate from poor; sibling risky and negative behaviours (bullying) etc.

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It was suggested that adults on low incomes and children and young people who need specialist help to resolve troubled relationships at home would lose a key service to help them improve or save their relationship or to rebuild their confidence and relationships with their parents. Adults and children and young people may also be faced with travelling longer distances to Reading each week for their counselling, if there is a reduction in the local service.

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

One of those responding suggests that the management of bookings could be delivered via the Council's wellbeing hubs. However, the Centre Manager for Relate did not feel that, given the small amount of funding provided to Relate, that there would be any other options apart from the closure of the local facility.

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 of those responding suggested that the Council could introduce some form of triage service within the proposed new wellbeing hubs.

6. Any further comments?

No further comments were received.

Conclusion

Although there were only three responses received to this proposal all the points made were considered and informed. Although mention was made of the new wellbeing hubs, I am not sure whether the skills are available within these settings to manage all of the clients that Relate currently see. Clearly some of the comments that were raised by both individuals related to children and the complications of family breakdowns. There may be some potential to provide some early intervention to these families.

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.

Andy Day
Head of Strategic Support
4 January 2016
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