

Budget Proposals 2016-17: School Crossing Patrols

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

We have eight school crossing patrol points. This is not a statutory service, and parents are responsible, by law, to get their children to school safely, regardless of whether there is a crossing patroller in place.

Many other Local Authorities have removed their crossing patrol services completely. However, we recognise how much communities value this service, and we have developed a scheme to work with partners to deliver school crossing patrols. This means that staffing, management and funding of the patrol is operated by someone else, under a formal contractual agreement. We provide training, an initial supply of uniform, a lollipop and audit safeguarding checks. Only named people, approved by us can operate the crossing. This new arrangement is now in place for two crossing patrols. The remaining six are:

- Long Lane, Tilehurst
- Spurcroft, Thatcham
- John Rankin, Newbury
- Pangbourne
- Mortimer St John's
- St Paul's, Tilehurst.

The latter two are currently vacant and we have been unable to recruit to these posts. We have engaged with the local communities to start an open and honest conversation about these difficulties, and to see whether a solution can be found. We acknowledge that parents have a strong desire for a school crossing patroller and want to work with the community, in partnership, to solve the issues.

The School Crossing Patrol service costs £21,000 per annum.

The salary cost of one School Crossing Patroller (SCP) is approximately £2,500 per annum. We will have a small sum on money available to still fund uniforms, lollipops etc.

We propose to no longer fund or manage the school crossing patrols. This will save £21,000.

We are seeking to work with a partner, where there is a desire for a patrol to continue. Full details of how this works are on our School Crossing Patrollers webpage (www.westberks.gov.uk/lollipop) and we welcome expressions of interest.

If a partner does not come forward for a specific site, the school crossing patrol on that site will cease.

Summary of Key Points

- 66 responses via the online consultation response form. 60 were from individuals.
- Parents want the School Crossing Patrollers (SCP) to be retained, or for some form of automated or zebra crossings to be installed instead. This would enable parents and children to feel that they can cross busy roads safely. Assessed sites failed to meet the Department of Transport criteria for a controlled crossing (which includes zebra crossings). A zebra crossing would give too much priority to pedestrians and this could result in congestion and frustration for drivers at peak times and cannot be supported by traffic engineers.
- No partner organisations came forward to support the retention of the crossing patrol service, despite parents' assertion that this service is vital.

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

There were 60 responses from individuals. There were also responses from:

- Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council
- Pangbourne Parish Council
- Governing Body, Pangbourne School
- West Berkshire Green Party
- Tilehurst Parish Council
- UNISON

All responses objected to the proposal.

Responses were analysed by SCP location:

Mortimer	16
John Rankin	15
Pangbourne	10
Spurcroft	10
St Pauls	2
Long Lane	0
Other - no specific site	13
Total	66

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

The proposal was focussed on finding partner organisations to maintain the current crossing patrollers:

- Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council are actively trying to recruit a school crossing patroller.
- There were no other comments about this aspect of the proposal
- No partners came forward to work with the Council on maintaining the school crossing patrollers.

Parents understood it was their responsibility to get their child to school safely, but raised these concerns about the loss of the school crossing patrollers:

- Busy roads are dangerous to cross, and there is a high volume of traffic which residents believe is going too fast.
- Traffic at peak times on weekdays is different to crossing the roads at weekends.
- SCP provides an organised and safe location to cross, reducing the chance of an accident – therefore the impact might be that parents will cross at different locations and this could create a hazard for all road users.
- SCP ensures you are able to cross even when traffic is busy as the traffic stops for her. It will not do the same for parents and children who may have to wait to cross.
- SCP is a friendly face who children know and trust.
- Volume of pedestrians and volume of road users means this is not easy, and adults may be responsible for more than one child.

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- Cars slow down for speed cameras and then speed up again.
 - There may be an accident and someone may get injured or killed.
 - Parents will have to find a crossing point away from parked cars to have clear visibility of the main road and any adjoining roads
 - Reduces the independence of Year 6+ children going to school unaccompanied.
 - The school island in the middle of the road will become congested.
 - More parents may drive their children to school increasing congestion and creating environmental and parking issues
- 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?**
- Parents and children, especially where one adult has more than one child to cross (and perhaps even a buggy/ bike/ scooter as well)
 - Those with disabilities take longer to cross the road or find it difficult to judge when it is safe to cross
 - If more parents drive, parking issue may affect local residents
 - Move the Mortimer speed camera nearer to the crossing point, to slow traffic. This will aid parents and children to find a spot to cross the road.
- 4. Do you have any suggestions as to how this service might be delivered in a different way? If so, please provide details.**
- Install a zebra crossing or pedestrian lights or some other form of automated crossing
 - More traffic calming measures
 - Can the Council apply for a grant to fund the crossing patrollers?
 - Could the Police PCSO staff the crossing?
 - More parking restrictions to aid visibility would mitigate some of the impact
 - Council keep the service and recharge the schools
 - Councillors forego their expenses to fund the SCP in their Ward.
- 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.**
- Pedestrian Crossing Employee could be employed directly by school, payment through school 'friends' committee fundraising, with support from WBC
 - Parent Volunteers - core team of ten parent volunteers per school who commit to patrolling for one session per week for one year. Fixed day, fixed term so easy for each volunteer to plan around. Not easy to administer.
 - Respondent who is a Road Safety Engineer has offered to donate high visibility clothing for the patrol and the children needing to cross the road.
 - Special village fundraising?
 - Sponsorship by a company?
- 6. Do you know of any community groups that would be willing to partner with us to maintain the local patrol? If so, please provide details.**
- No responses

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7. Counter proposals: have any other organisation come up with any ideas for how they can mitigate the proposal / do things differently which would allow the service to be maintained.

- No responses

8. Other issues:

- UNISON would expect that the needs of any staff subject to transfer would be taken fully into account. We can confirm that this is our standard process.

9. Any further comments?

- One respondent questioned how the proposal met legislative requirements. The contractual agreement we use has been drawn up by the Council Legal Team, and ensures that any crossing operated under agreement with a partner is legally compliant. The same respondent queried how a school could fund a SCP, and the advice from the Council's Finance department is that this function can be funded from a school's budget, but not from the Local Authority's centrally-held schools' budget.

Conclusion

Parents understand that it is their responsibility to get their child to school safely, but are concerned about the volume and speed of traffic. They are fearful that there will be an accident leading to injury or death if the crossing patrollers are removed. Unfortunately, no partner organisations came forward to support the retention of the crossing patrol service, despite parents' assertion that this service is vital.

It should also be noted that recruitment of new crossing patrollers has not been successful over the last couple of years, and parents are frustrated where there are vacant crossing patroller posts. The working hours and salary for a stand-alone school crossing patroller are not attractive in the job market. Therefore, even if there were a desire for a crossing point to continue, it may not be possible for it to be staffed.

Many parents suggest that installing an automated or zebra crossings would resolve the issue. The Department for Transport (DfT) guidelines for the justification of a controlled crossing are based on years of research. It is important that controlled crossings are only installed where they meet the criteria. The surveys we conducted show that none of the sites meet the criteria.

We need to ensure that the potential risk of death or injury to a child is mitigated if this proposal is to go ahead. This is done by Highways assessments in line with national guidelines about traffic flow and volume, visibility and so on, and these assessments also include consideration of traffic calming measures, signage, warning lights etc. Whilst a school crossing patroller could alleviate some of the risk, the difficulties in recruiting patrollers means that the Council cannot address this issue alone.

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There are no current plans to introduce more traffic calming measures at the identified sites as the Highways assessments have indicated that there is sufficient opportunity to cross the road safely.

The exercise has not highlighted any impacts that are not already anticipated.

We will continue to be open to working with a partner in the future, where this is a desire for a school crossing patrol. The framework and legal agreement for a partnering arrangement are in place.

Temporary Amendment to Mitigate Impact

Whilst we are seeking a full partnership arrangement as described in the proposal, we could consider continuing to fund existing patrollers whilst they remain in post. However, this arrangement would be on the understanding that, as and when the patroller left the post, the partnership arrangement we have described in our proposal would be required or the crossing would cease at that time.

This interim solution would mean that the full savings from the proposal would not be realised, but would ensure that the willing and effective staff on the 4 crossings could continue.

We would also strongly suggest that the relevant schools engage with this approach and allow one/two people to be trained and registered to act as cover in case of illness or absence.

By retaining the current staff but deleting the other posts and associated costs, the savings from this proposal would reduce from £21k to £11k, and a Council budget of £10k per annum would be required. The Council budget would reduce over time as and when patrollers left their posts or retired, providing small savings in future years. The Council budget would eventually be removed.

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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