

Budget Proposals 2016-17: Short Breaks for Disabled 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, two meetings with providers of services, and a meeting for parents organised by a parent group 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

At present, our support for families with disabled children is provided through contractual arrangements from a range of partners. These partners are largely from local or national charity organisations and help provide a range of services, including short break residential respite, local activities and groups for children with disabilities and their families.

Much of this activity is non-statutory and can take different forms, such as:

- supporting children returning home from their out of district, residential school during the holidays
- offering activities at weekends within peer group settings
- providing regular respite care so children can be cared for close to home
- supporting parents or carers in looking after their children at home

This activity is provided alongside the support families are able to receive through Direct Support Payment arrangements, and gives opportunities for many of the activities on offer for disabled children, to be subsidised.

At present, the service provides a range of support in different amounts and at different levels to children with additional needs and their families. This support is provided through a range of different contract arrangements, funded by the council, but delivered predominantly through external providers.

The proposal is to cease all the current contractual arrangements, in order to rationalise these arrangements; revising and reducing the breadth of the current provision and refocusing support to those children and families assessed to be in the greatest need.

It is also proposed to reduce council funding and deliver significantly more limited short breaks provision, whilst working with the community based organisations and charities to help provide support for those families who are most able to manage their own support arrangements for their disabled children. This will save the council £345,000.

Summary of Key Points

58 responses were received, including 46 from parents or carers. The remainder were from organisations, members of the public and two Parish Councils (Tilehurst and Pangbourne). The organisations that responded were:

- Homestart westberkshire
- Parent Voice
- National Autistic Society
- Brookfields school
- West Berkshire Mencap
- Crossroads
- Unison
- Oasis and Spectrum club (National Autistic Society)

In addition to the online formal consultation:

- Met with 8 providers of short breaks (contracts) on 30/11/15 and 4/12/15. These were Mencap, Crossroads, KIDS, Dingley, Homestart, Guideposts, National Autistic Society and PALS.

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- 9 parents attended an open meeting arranged by Parent Voice (parent participation organisation)
- Parents views collated by Mencap and Crossroads (14)
- Petition online (via 38 degrees) with 3,173 signatures

The feedback from parents and carers stressed the value and importance of services and they were against any reduction. Families stated how stressful caring for a disabled child could be and how these services were vital for providing respite and a break. Families also said that services were important for their children socially as they often provided only leisure or social activity they were able to use.

The ceasing of the council's funding via contracts for short breaks will have a significant impact on the capacity of the organisations to continue to provide services to families. If there is no future funding then most organisations are likely to continue to provide a very limited range of services and will need to increase charges to cover costs. For larger organisations like Mencap and Crossroads, who provide services to the greatest number of children with disabilities, they say they will need to make staff redundant and close some services completely.

All feedback from families has said how much they value and rely on these short breaks services. Feedback also stated that these services were important to preventing family breakdown, the need for costly residential care and preventing family distress and stress. Feedback from organisations stressed similar points as to the value and need for services. Some organisations said they would continue in a smaller and different way. They could increase charges which may penalise the less well off and reduce range of services provided.

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

There were 27 carers or parents that responded who were users; plus the other parent feedback as outlined above

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

- Overall reduction in support to families with disabled children.
- Increased stress on families, more use of more costly and specialised services, more social isolation of disabled children.
- Young People with SEN cannot access other services. Loss of confidence if service lost
- Likely increase of family breakdown and use of residential care.
- Very valued service, which is cost effective.
- May lead to some organisations closing through loss of core funding.
- Families rely on these services, they trust them to care for their children with complex needs

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?

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It will particularly affect families with disabled children and disabled children themselves

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

Generally responses were against any reduction in services. More personal budgets to be made available, peer support, charities could work together in a more effective way.

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.

Some organisations said they could apply for grants elsewhere although this is very challenging and loss of core council funding does impact this sometimes. Some organisations said they could increase changes

6. Do you have any suggestions on how we can best identify other sources of support and alternative arrangements, breaks and activities for families and their children with disabilities? If so, please provide details.

The current range are good and don't need changing, provide more personal budgets, Special schools could run after school clubs and holiday care.

7. Any further comments?

This will end up costing the council more in long run because of the increased likely need for more specialised services.

The council is not facing up to its responsibilities and statutory requirements, The council must protect services to children with autism

Conclusion

There appears no additional information from feedback to lead to this proposal not proceeding as planned

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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