

Budget Proposals 2016-17: Step by Step Support Lodgings

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

The Supporting People programme was launched in April 2003. The programme brought together several funding streams, including support provided through the Housing Benefit system, into a single grant from central government for local authorities to fund a variety of services aimed at helping vulnerable people live independently.

Supporting People services can take many forms; for example, refuges for women escaping domestic violence, housing with warden support (residential or floating) for the elderly, and hostels for recovering addicts. People living in supported housing receive 'housing related supported services' in order to enable them to live independently.

West Berkshire was successful in securing a significant level of funding at the outset (circa £6m), which has been largely protected to continue to deliver these non statutory services over the last twelve years.

The council provides funding for up to 12 host families to provide accommodation for vulnerable 16 – 21 year olds at risk of homelessness and placements for mothers and babies. The aim of the service is to move young people on to more independent living.

The proposal is to cease funding this work which has an annual value of £100,000. It is hoped to use other provision to support those who are most in need.

Summary of Key Points

There were 24 online responses to this savings proposal. Many of the responses were lengthy and detailed in terms of describing the impact the savings proposal would have.

The following organisations provided a response

- D 'n' A Project
- Step by Step partnership ltd (7 responses)
- West Berkshire Council - Care leavers team / Housing Service
- UNISON
- Tilehurst Parish council
- Pangbourne Parish Council
- Berkshire Healthcare NHS – NHS foundation trust

All responses received indicated the negative impact the cut in funding would have on very vulnerable young people, often whom we have a Corporate Parenting responsibility to. (Care leavers / LAC)

Respondents strongly argued that the impact of closing this service was likely to have a greater cost implication to other statutory services (including Housing Services - homelessness / Statutory Care services for children). This should be taken into account prior to any decision being made.

Respondents felt that discussions with the providers to form an alternative support model to support this vulnerable group should precede any decisions

The following provides a more detailed summary of responses received in relation to the specific questions.

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

6 of the people responding are users or carers of the service

Other responses received were by professionals that access the service (both staff within WBC and external staff) and by 6 staff from 'Step by Step' partnership.

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

All respondents highlighted that the service was provided to very vulnerable young members of the community, (including Looked After Children, Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers, care leavers and mothers and babies) and were clear the service provided a 'lifeline of support', supporting those that had already faced much adversity.

Many responses were from professionals who accessed the service to provide support and were clear that there was very little alternative.

The following summarises the impact respondents felt cuts to service would have:

- Negative impact on life outcomes for vulnerable people

- Outcomes from Supported Lodgings are good: 27% move onto to more independent supported accommodation, 29% move into their own accommodation and the remainder either returning home or living with other family and friends.

- Increase in demand / costs to services elsewhere:

- Increase street homelessness, welfare dependency, Anti Social Behaviour etc, increasing costs elsewhere in the council's budget
- Create added pressure on existing resources /services resulting in unmet need
- Greater costs to the NHS system or Criminal Justice system which, while not on the Council's score Card, can only add to Society's costs in these areas

- Homelessness

- Impact on homeless (greater risk to making people homeless)
- It will increase B+B stays and fostering placement
- Applicants are only placed in supported lodgings if they are confirmed to be homeless this means the Council is likely to have a statutory duty to accommodate them.
- Repeat homelessness - do not have the skills required for independent living.

- Mental Health

- Greater risk on MH problems for people that are not provided the correct support at an earlier point in their lives
- Increasing the risk of young vulnerable people requiring support in other areas i.e Mental Health / substance misuse.

- Social Care – Increased pressure on Children's services

- It will create added pressure within social services caseloads
- 65% of young people placed are under 18 or Care leavers who WBC are Corporate Parents to and have a duty under s.20 of the Childrens Act or unaccompanied asylum seekers. If assessed, it is likely that the remaining 35% would also fall into this category.

'If Supported Lodgings are no longer available alternative placements will need to be found for these young people. The Council is not lawfully able to place these young people into Bed & Breakfast accommodation, so the option, if Bramlings was not suitable, would be to provide a foster placement or to purchase Supported Lodgings from other areas. The savings proposal is £100,000. The cost of placing a young person into in-house foster care is £359 a week. The average placement in Supported Lodgings is 33 weeks. Therefore the average cost per year of alternative placements for the 65% young people currently accommodated to whom the Council owes a duty under Childrens Act

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is £106,623. In addition, there is a £75 a week contribution paid by the Council for looked after children, equating to £22,500 a year. This proposal simply shifts the burden of payment within the Council and could, in the long run, end up costing more.

- Without this service we would have many of our care leavers living on the street or back with their birth families which caused them even more harm.
- **Fostering placements**
 - Increased need for fostering placements (and therefore increased cost)
 - Additional cost of fostering and other emergency provisions where the current support framework disappears.

Three respondents were clear that the proposal contradicts OFSTED recommendations and best practice which identified widespread and serious failures placing children and young people at risk of harm.

Responses consistently highlighted that the proposal to reduce supported lodgings will create even more significant costs elsewhere in the system.

One response indicated that all housing support service need to be consolidated to provide a more efficient means of helping people in need.

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?

Responses were clear that the proposal would affect young people, as young as 11 years old right up to age 21. Specific groups of people included:

- Older LAC - Concern was raised that as corporate parents we will be failing them by removing this service.
- Care Leavers
- Unaccompanied asylum seekers
- 16/17 year olds

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

Respondents felt that the service is working really well as it is and is currently delivered in the best / most cost effective way. There was concern that if the service was a cut a significant amount of skilled expertise would be lost.

Alternative options suggested included:

- Increase foster placements - Secure alternative foster placements, but this would prove a lot more expensive than supported lodgings itself. (especially IFA placements).
- Reducing placement capacity to reduce costs
- Advice and guidance/gateway provision could be developed to focus on homelessness prevention and early intervention – initial cost implication in setting this up.
- West Berkshire Council could invest in early intervention (mediation, mentors / talent coaches) to reduce and avoid cost across a range of council budgets now and for the future.
- The contract for Bramlings house should be looked at before this vital service.

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- Retaining these placements and growing them over time to reduce need for more expensive fostering, or less effective and therefore cost efficient supported accommodation options which are putting young people at unnecessary risk.
- Access on the basis of a spot purchasing framework with some core staffing costs allocated to coordinate placements.
- Share the cost with a neighbouring council like Reading for example and build up a larger bank of hosts across the area to provide your provision as this would be cost effective compared to fostering charges

One respondent referred to potential changes to housing Benefit *'The Government is proposing further changes to the Housing Benefit system where a young person aged 21 or under will be unable to claim housing benefit. This type of accommodation will be exempt from these changes and will ensure we have a means to safeguard young people who have been made homeless in the future. This should be considered and explored further as part of the decision to end this service.'*

One respondent proposed that the full saving of £201,000 is taken from the Mental Health Supported Living Scheme (currently proposing a £100,000 saving from a £201,000 budget) in order to save the supported Lodgings scheme.

5. Do you have any suggestions on how we can ensure people are aware of the other sources of support available? If so, please provide details.

Respondents were concerned that there are no existing alternative support options as the service was unique.

A number of options were suggested:

- Dedicated Young person's Information Advice and Guidance service maintaining a directory of support and connecting young people to specialist services.
- Private rental sector worker and bond/deposit to build links with private sector and broker accommodation for vulnerable young people.
- West Berks could purchase some early intervention such as peer education, mediation, talent coaches.

However, these would need to be developed, and this would generate cost.

Many respondents were concerned the only other option locally was 'Bramblings' and the adult hostel at Newtown road. However, there are always full and respondents reported were unsuitable for most vulnerable young people that currently used Step by Step.

Respondents felt that West Berkshire should be clearly proposing the alternative support avenues on website etc. This should be completed in respect of each recommendation being implemented.

6. 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.

Step by Step suggested that they could deliver a wide range of alternative support services and would be very happy to discuss options, such as those outlined above, further with West Berkshire Council

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Suggestions were made that West Berkshire could retain a smaller number of contracted placements or spot purchasing framework agreement.

Respondents felt that discussions with the providers to form an alternative support model to support this vulnerable group should precede any decisions. Discussions could establish exactly what other options can be provided and at what price, and if alternative sources of funding (i.e. Greenham Common Trust, charitable trusts) could be explored.

7. Any further comments?

Comments continued to further reinforce previous comments and that the proposal would have a significant impact on vulnerable young people, and that the proposal was not based on evidence of need or local data.

Concerns were made that the proposal was not based on evidence of need, and it was short sighted in that it would have a significant cost implication for statutory services further down the line (i.e LAC / Homelessness / increased need for foster placements)

'adding to other costs in the system and potentially creating significant long term negative consequences for Society as a whole is simply perverse.'

There was concern that no alternative model or form of support provision is being suggested within these proposals.

Concern was raised that West Berkshire had no clear intention or made any proactive effort to consult with service users / providers either prior to or even within the public consultation and stated that there is no evidence provided within this consultation of adequate equality impact assessment.

Concern was highlighted that due to the majority of Young People accessing the provision having a statutory duty owed, these proposals do not in fact reduce cost as the cost of fostering placements will be greater than of Supported Lodgings . Further cost to West Berkshire council budgets is in fact being accrued, whilst less choice is being given to vulnerable young people and an increased risk to children is being created. This proposal seems to directly contradict the Ofsted recommendations made to turn around what was deemed inadequate practice and range of provision and choice for the most vulnerable young people within our community.

Appendix A provides a few examples of responses both from professionals and service users

Conclusion

Clear concern of the impact that these cuts would have on vulnerable young people.

Loss of this service could have a significant cost implication to the Council in other areas by pushing the costs to Children and Family services and Housing services in relation to meeting the statutory duties under S.20 of the Children's Act and our duties to assist Homelessness.

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.*

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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.

Barbara Billett
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Appendix A

'I am disturbed at the news that you are proposing the removal of funding to Step by Step Lodgings. As a person who experienced a violent and abusive home growing up, I can say that an organisation like Step by Step is a lifeline for young adults. These individuals do not choose their situations; they have been pushed into a life of desolation. You must remember that these people have no choices in life, an extremely hard concept to grasp for many as most are fortunate to have a stable home. Furthermore, these people are young, barely out of school, have little life experience and you are abandoning them. There is no other word for it. For West Berkshire council to remove this vital funding you will be turning the other cheek. Housing is just the beginning for these young adults. There are so many obstacles to overcome but housing is the best place to start. Can you imagine trying to start your working, adult life with no home and living on the streets? The untold damage homelessness causes goes further than the physical but can, and will, create mental health issues putting further strain on the health system. The problem doesn't go away by removing the funding. Please don't punish these young people for being born into a life they did not ask for. Please continue to support housing for them so that they can finally learn what stability is, so that they can build their self-esteem, so that they can be part of society. I promise you; funding this is by far more value for money than supporting a broken society wracked with abuse. I speak from experience. I have seen the damage it causes and I have felt the pain of not having anywhere to turn to.'

'I feel that this service is a unique service, that has been run expertly by Step by Step for many years. This provision caters for some of the more vulnerable members of our society, young people, who have already faced much adversity in their lives. This service gives these young people the chance to experience, stability, empathy, boundaries, in a safe and nurturing environment, many of them for the first time in their lives. Here they can learn the necessary life skills that will take them into a successful adult life. Many of the needs of these young people are so complex, it is my belief that they may not get met in other environments. My field is substance misuse, and I am of the opinion, that if you place vulnerable young people with complex issues, such as substance misuse, self harm and mental health issues in one place, the "contamination" risk or "trigger risk" of clients upon each other keep many of these clients stuck, and make it difficult for the young person to engage in other support services in a meaningful way, as peer influence can be the greater pull in the life of a young person. This is where this supportive lodgings service is able to make a huge difference. There is no risk from other peers within a family home, and this, in turn, enables other support services orbiting around the young person to have much greater efficacy in the life of that young person. This reduces the cost to society of young people who get stuck in a cycle and reliance upon support services, as they lack the tools to achieve independence, but it is also a great example of long term thinking, as an early intervention of this type, that has proven to be so successful, enables a safe and reliable exit for young people to move out of support and into a manageable and meaningful adult life.'

'There are many many, too many, children and young people who are without a loving, caring and supportive home. Through no fault of their own they find themselves abused, neglected, tormented and unloved. We owe it to them to care for, protect and home them. Step by step is an absolutely essential service for so many vulnerable children and young people. These individuals, and there are hundreds each year, have been let down by us, everyone. We cannot let this service cease to exist. I have worked very hard within social work for the best part of a decade and I am totally devastated to hear that Step by Step may lose their funding. I have worked with vulnerable children and teenagers intensively and I see first hand their need for the things some of us take for granted. As human beings, we cannot take away a service which provides our children with the very basics in life. It would be an utter crime.'

'Where will vulnerable young people go if this provision for supported lodgings is removed? I care for a young person with ASD who has no supportive family members so would have to live either in a hostel or on the streets. She needs to learn valuable independent life skills which she would not get from either of the 2 alternatives listed and could possibly take the wrong paths in live. The decision to remove this funding is very short sighted and totally wrong.'

'This cut will affect the most vulnerable. It is likely to cause an increase in demand for other services, some of which are provided by the Council, which will increase the workload of staff who are already hard pressed. It may also have the further unintended consequence of making more difficult the Council's aim of a workforce in the Children and Family Service that is not reliant on agency staff.'