

Budget Proposals 2016-17: Thames Valley Positive Support

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

Thames Valley Positive Support (TVPS) is a voluntary sector organisation that is funded to give additional support and advice to those testing positive for HIV. They provide support, counselling, condom distribution and prevention (including HIV self sampling).

The rate of newly diagnosed HIV was 2.2 per 100,000 in 2013. 81 people were accessing HIV services in that year in West Berkshire. The rate of HIV infection is higher in black Africans and in men who have sex with men, so these two groups are targeted.

It is important to identify HIV early, since it can be treated and people who are diagnosed early are now far less likely to go on to develop AIDS and need significant NHS and social care services in the latter stages of the disease. Hence the supply of HIV self testing kits will need to be continued.

TVPS receive £13,000 per annum to provide this specialist service for HIV positive residents in West Berkshire through outreach, drop-ins and web based support. It is proposed to reduce the annual contribution to TVPS by £7,000.

Summary of Key Points

A total of five responses received comprising of two females and three males, all aged between 45-65.

Apart from one response, all were supportive of the work of TVPS and stated their position with passion. They felt strongly about the importance of the service and its unique nature (TVPS being the only HIV charity in Berkshire). One respondent stated that the stigma of HIV remained in an area such as West Berkshire, with TVPS providing much needed personal and emotional support. The majority felt the funding should be safeguarded and not eroded further. The impact of postal HIV testing was felt by one person to potentially lead to higher diagnosis of HIV and more need for support services. Another did not feel HIV postal testing could replace face to face help offered by TVPS. Only one person feedback that enough was done in the community in this field and felt no more work was required.

Overall most of the responses spoke highly of TVPS and the service they offered to, what they feel, are a marginalized and vulnerable group of people, living in West Berkshire.

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

There was no response from carers as most were direct comments from individuals.

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

This will have an impact on the emotional and wellbeing of people with HIV in West Berkshire, who feel that they require this one to one support. In particular, those who feel isolated and vulnerable in the locality.

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?

Respondents stated that those living with HIV would be affected and that retaining the Funding would help reduce their concern over the future of the service.

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4. **Do you think that the alternative proposals we are putting in place might help to mitigate any negative impact on the reduced availability of the service as a whole? Please explain the reason for your response.**

It will mitigate at some level however it depends on the need required by users. That said, the organisation will be assessing each case and ensuring alternative Specialist advice can be provided by the relevant agencies. Some of these areas are Not core public health interventions and need to be considered in that context, with acceptable alternatives available, such as housing advice and benefit support.

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

There were not many comments reflecting a view on this question, apart from one, that suggested funding should be ceased as the service was not required.

6. **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.**

Raised awareness and promotion with partners as well as in one to one discussions.

7. **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.**

No suggestions were offered in response to this question by those submitting a reply.

8. **Any further comments?**

None

Conclusion

The majority of those residents who did respond, many felt the importance of the service to Support their needs, given the vulnerability and isolation they felt, because of their HIV condition.

***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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