

## Budget Proposals 2016-17: Visitor Information Service

### Summary of Feedback Received and Key Findings

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#### 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. A printed form was made available at the Visitor Information Centre in Newbury Town Hall.

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 Visitor Information Centre (VIC) is located in the Town Hall, Market Place, Newbury.

The VIC was established in Newbury in the mid 1980s to encourage and welcome visitors to the town and West Berkshire. It was originally located in the Museum and moved to the Town Hall in February 2013 as part of the museum redevelopment project.

The VIC provides:

- a fully accessible visitor information service for local residents and UK and overseas visitors;
- a Box Office Service to help support local events and venues
- booking agency for National Express, Barnes coaches tickets and K&A Canal Trust boat trips;
- local accommodation bookings - finding suitable accommodation to meet visitors' needs;
- brochures and leaflets, travel timetables, books and maps, faxing and photocopying, local produce and souvenirs
- bike hire;
- promotion of local groups, charities and attractions;
- a disabled friendly venue which is also a refuge for disabled people if they don't feel safe in the town.

This council will cease providing the Visitor Information Service resulting in a saving of £62,000

#### **Summary of Key Points**

There were 142 responses in total, three from town / parish councils (Newbury Town Council, Pangbourne and Compton Parish Councils) and four from local organisations:

- Newbury Business Innovation District (BID)
- West Berkshire Green Party
- West Berkshire Ramblers
- Kennet & Avon Canal Trust (Enterprise) Ltd

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

140 individual responses were received from service users.

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

Concerns included:

- Loss of friendly and knowledgeable face to face information services that benefit visitors – particularly the elderly, vulnerable people, people without access to IT, and overseas visitors and others with limited English language skills
- Loss of face to face ticket sales service in Newbury town centre for coach travel and tickets for local events

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- Potential damage to the visitor economy – particularly smaller businesses in Newbury including places to eat, shop and stay overnight
- Potential loss of reputation – is Newbury welcoming to visitors?

**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?**

The proposal does have some impact on the elderly, vulnerable people, people without access to IT, and overseas visitors and others with limited English language skills.

Some vulnerable people know and trust the staff and value the VIC as a haven if they feel unsafe in the town centre although this is not the role of the service.

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

Suggestions included:

- Maintain location at Town Hall and reduce staff hours
- Use of volunteers
- Move service to Newbury Library and/or West Berkshire Museum
- Newbury BID to further develop VISIT NEWBURY website
- All parish and town councils to provide funding

**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.**

The VISIT NEWBURY website <http://www.visitnewbury.org.uk/> is operated by the Newbury BID. Currently the VIC staff add local event information to the site. Newbury BID can provide more visitor information in the future but to do so they estimate that they will require funding for 15 – 20 hours of staff time each week.

No other proposals were received.

**6. Any further comments?**

None.

### Conclusion

Loss of friendly and knowledgeable face to face information services that benefit visitors and local people, particularly the elderly, vulnerable people and those without access to IT. There is comment that the saving could impact on the visitor economy, particularly small businesses and potential loss of reputation for the area.

Suggestions have been made to deliver the service in a different way that would reduce costs or transfer the costs entirely to town and parish councils. A further suggestion to mitigate the saving is to develop the online provision which is currently operated by the Newbury BID.

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***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.*

Paul James  
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5 January 2016  
Version 1 (CB)