

Budget Proposals 2016-17: Youth Offending Team (YOT)

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 Youth Offending Team (YOT) is made up of social workers, education workers, a police officer, health worker, probation, restorative justice and youth workers. The Team helps young people access the services young people need to help turn them away from crime.

The council currently funds three areas of work that have helped young people in the area of communication and to be more physically active.

1. A Speech and Language Therapist is employed to help improve the communication skills for young offenders and has also trained other staff in the YOT in skills and techniques to help their clients. Funding of £12,873 has been made available to the YOT since 2013/14 for this.
2. Opportunities for young offenders to be more active, giving them the chance to experience new and different forms of activity which helps to divert them from crime. Funding of £9,000 has been available from 2014/15 for this.
3. Education Mentoring support post. Funding of £2,310 has been available from Public Health to increase the support for young people in the YOT who are also in full time education.

It is proposed to cease funding these three areas of work within the YOT. This will result in a saving of £24,183.

Summary of Key Points

We received a total of 10 responses. Six responses were from individuals and four were from organisations including Newbury & District CCG, Berkshire Healthcare NHS – NHS foundation trust and Youth Offending Team (YOT).

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

One respondent answered yes to this question.

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

- Concern that the removal of funding for the speech and language therapy will be detrimental in a number of ways:
 - It is widely recognised that 60 – 90% of young people accessing YOT services present with undiagnosed speech, language and communication needs (SLCN), which have a direct impact on their offending behaviour. This is compared to 6% of the general population. The young people accessing the YOT typically do not engage readily with services such as Health and Education and are unlikely to access the support in any other way. Without access to an SLT within the YOT, the young person would need to be referred to the NHS CYPIT service, and would be offered an appointment in a clinic. The likelihood of the young person attending and engaging in that appointment, are significantly reduced.
 - Young people with SLCN have difficulty communicating with others. This may be because they cannot say what they want to, have difficulty in understanding what is being said to them or do not understand the social

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rules of communication. Many young people struggle with the concept of time, which has an implication if they fail to attend appointments and breach their sentence. Many young people entering the youth justice system may not have had their SLCN identified at school, and many may not be in formal education at all. SLCN also prevents young people from benefiting from verbally mediated interventions. Interventions can include rehabilitation, education and treatment programmes.

- A young person who experiences difficulties understanding or processing language will struggle to understand the language of the justice system, understand what is expected of them or access interventions. Their risk of re-offending is therefore significantly increased.
- A young person who struggles to express themselves clearly, and in a logical and sequential way will find it difficult to make themselves understood or explain an event or situation, especially during times of increased emotional states e.g. anxiety, frustration, anger. Social communication difficulties will impact on a young person's ability to communicate effectively with others and build positive relationships – a definite risk factor for offending behaviours.
- Having access to an SLT within a YOT prevent language and communication difficulties being a barrier to accessing rehabilitation intervention, or a cause for re-offending.
- The proposal to cut the funding for speech and language therapy is based on the assumption that YOT workers will be able to pick up additional (specialist) tasks in addition to their existing work. The training element of the role of the SLT has enabled those who come into contact with young people who offend to be better equipped at identifying and supporting their needs. However there is a concern that existing YOT staff have either the capacity or the skills to differentially diagnose speech, language and communication needs, which can be further masked by learning difficulties, and provide appropriate support.
- The Audit Commission (2004), in their comprehensive assessment of the Government's Youth Justice Reforms, showed the financial impact of not identifying and supporting young people's language and learning needs. They used a real case study of a boy called James, who was serving his second custodial sentence at the age of 15. The Audit Commission stated that the costs of James' pathway through the justice system was £153,687. Had the appropriate interventions been delivered at the right time, over £140,000 would have been saved to the public purse. If a similar saving were made on just one in ten of the young people sentenced to custody (over 8000 per year), more than £100 million would be saved to public services.
- Current situation in West Berks YOT: The work of the SLT in West Berks YOT covers a wide and varied remit, although input can largely be categorised into three groups; direct work (including assessment and therapy) with the young person, regular consultation with staff around differentiation of intervention plans and training those who work with young people who are/or are likely to offend. All young offenders entering the youth justice system are allocated a caseworker, who completes an assessment (ASSET) to find out the risks and protective factors playing a part in a young person's offending. As part of that assessment, there is a speech, language, communication and neuro-disability tool (as well as an additional SLCN screening tool in West Berks YOT written by the SLT for use with their young people). These screening tools are used to allow the caseworker to broadly identify SLCN. Without access to an SLT within the YOT, there is very little

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support in how to interpret the screening tool findings and know how to support the young person and ensure that interventions are accessible, and therefore effective at reducing re-offending. A new assessment tool, ASSETPLUS is coming into effect over the course of next spring, and this includes a mandatory screen for speech, language and communication. As a result of this mandatory screen the YOT will be required to meet the needs of these young people who have a positive screen. This support could be provided through direct one to one therapy, group based therapy or through training the wider workforce to be able to respond to these needs.

- Concern that the removal of funding for the Education Mentoring support will have the following impact:
 - Without this service young people may not be able to receive the support they currently receive, which will have a direct impact upon their ability at school, their health and wellbeing and their behaviour at home. Furthermore they will be unlikely to have the same options available to them for further education without the support to achieve good grades.
 - It will mean that that this support is not available to highly vulnerable young people. One of these young people was referred by YOT, but as the YOT order is now completed, that support is no longer available. The work is tied in directly with the studies the young people are undertaking and can range from Year 6 (primary) to Year 11 (GCSE) and can go beyond to college education. Subjects covered can be as diverse as Maths, English, Business Studies, History, Geography, handwriting, etc, etc. The great benefit of this input is that it is tailored to the young person's specific needs, the main advantage being the confidence it engenders and, as the work is one to one, the young person can work at their own pace. The results can be outstanding.
 - The proposed cuts to the Education Mentoring support within the YOT does not take account of young people from the Looked After Children's Education Service and the Family Intervention Team who, along with YOT clients, benefit from longer term educational intervention provided by the mentoring service. Input frequently continues beyond involvement from other agencies. There is strong evidence to suggest that it aids desistance of offending and reduces risk of offending and vulnerability. The mentoring service delivers bespoke curriculum based support for each young person. Schools and Pupil Referral Units are highly appreciative, recognising that this level of provision is not achievable for them. It does not appreciate that the mentoring service over its years of operation has been responsible for engaging with pupils who have become entirely disengaged from education despite the efforts of the YOT, schools and PRU's. During such times the service has been able to maintain educational provision which has subsequently led to reengagement and access to exam accreditation. The service will not be able to accommodate provision for the two pupils affected by the cut. Given that this will take effect from April and not at the end of an academic year it is likely to become very harmful to their engagement and achievement in school. There is every reason to believe that discontinuation of mentoring input will have a severe negative impact upon this young person, leading to increased professional involvement and expenditure from other Children's Services agencies

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- Concern that the removal of funding for the support will have the following impact:
 - Working with young people who offend can often present several challenges to those who work with them as issues of ambivalence towards those in authority, resentment at receiving a court order and typical adoption of anti-social attitudes often exemplify the lifestyle of these young people. Often poor health patterns have developed within this group, leading to poor lifestyle choices. Through creative dialogue with young people about the benefits to be gained by purposeful gym sessions an interest is created, and a commitment to engage is obtained. An evaluation of the first year of the project showed that engaging young people who offend in matters related to their physical and emotional health and well-being is achievable through the physical health project. The project has enabled young people to engage in an activity that has a knock on effect in other areas of life, the anecdotal responses of the young people and their parents places a high value on the work undertaken with them through the project and ascribe a wide range of benefits following the intervention.

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 project works with young people who pose a high risk or causing harm to others or a high risk of reoffending, this group of young people tend not to engage with universal services, have poorer health outcomes and have disengaged from services. The impact of a reduction in the project would be to further disenfranchise this group of young people.

This proposal will affect vulnerable young people more than others, especially those who do not and struggle to make appropriate relationships with adults. The young people are often from families on low income, are living in insecure or not suitable home conditions, have witnessed or experienced domestic abuse and are struggling with their own emotional well being.

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

There is not sufficient capacity in the general SLC provision for teenagers to address the over representation of young people who offend with those needs. Without the Speech Therapist for a day a week there would not be a direct alternative.

There have been preliminary discussions with other organisations who deliver universal sporting activities, however, there is a reluctance to have a mix of offenders and non-offenders as the staffing ratios are greater and the chance for individual input is limited. There is no like for like replacement to the project.

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.

Discussions have taken place with other agencies to seek an alternative funding source or referral mechanism; however, to date nothing is forthcoming.

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The YOT will continue to fulfil the statutory duty to young people who offend to address their likelihood of reoffending, but this additional health and lifestyle support will cease without suitable funding.

6. Any further comments?

Overall comments suggest that it would be a mistake to reduce these services as any money that is 'saved' now will be lost in the future when vulnerable young people who do receive this support fail to become active citizens in this LA. This would be a short term saving which could result in leading to a large cost.

Conclusion

The overall feedback suggests there is support to keep funding these projects within the YOT. The impact of removing the funding for the Speech and Language Therapist and the Education Mentoring support in particular is likely to have a detrimental effect on the outcomes for the young people accessing the YOT service and the wider community as a whole.

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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