

Budget Proposals 2016-17 Phase 2: Calcot Service Point, Sainsbury's

Consultation Summary Report

Why We Consulted?

From 3 November to 14 December 2015, we consulted on the need to make £10.8m of savings in 2016/17. £4.6m of these savings affected frontline services. The consultation generated over 2,500 responses and covered [47 individual budget proposals](#).

Shortly before Christmas, however, the Government began a [public consultation](#) on local government funding and proposed to reduce our funding by 44% (Revenue Support Grant). This announcement was totally unexpected, and we were faced with the challenge of finding an additional £7.6m of savings, whilst also considering increases in Council Tax.

In order to inform this process, 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 15 February 2016 with feedback requested by 7 March 2016.

Respondents were directed to a [central index page](#), which outlined the overall background to the exercise, and provided links to each of the individual proposals.

Each individual page included further details on the specifics of what the proposal contained and what we thought the impact might be, along with any other elements we had taken into account.

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 publicly available.

A press release was issued on the same date, and was further publicised through the council's Facebook and Twitter accounts.

The period in which we invited responses was reduced to three weeks in this case, instead of the usual six. This is because the funding announcement from government was both unexpected and very late in the financial year. It was not possible to extend the consultation period without negatively impacting the delivery of the 2016 council budget. In order to minimise the impact of this shorter timescale, we undertook extra activities to publicise the consultation in addition to our usual channels. This included making potential consultees

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aware of the impending exercise much earlier than normal via press releases and associated PR activities.

Proposal Background

The council currently operates an office within the Sainsbury's store at Calcot, Reading. This office provides face to face services for customers and is open on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, between 9:30am and 4:30pm, and on the second Saturday of each month between 9:30am and 12:30pm.

The Calcot office has been in place for some years and has historically been well used, particularly by customers who reside in the eastern part of the district. However, technological development over time has resulted in customers being able to, and in many cases preferring to, access council services in more flexible and modern ways, many of which are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. As a result, the demand at the Calcot office has declined.

The reduction in demand for face to face services has been compounded by the withdrawal of payment facilities at Calcot, which was occasioned as a result of changing security requirements and operational changes elsewhere within the council. The withdrawal of payment facilities has removed the primary incentive for significant numbers of customers to continue to visit the facility.

Alongside the reduction in demand, the costs of operating this office have risen over the years as a result of changes to the terms related to our occupation of the premises.

Proposal Details

To close the office located in Sainsbury's at Calcot, which will result in savings of circa £20,000 in year one from an estimated total budget of £53,500. The savings derived will be on-going year to year.

Customer enquiries will continue to be handled at our Newbury offices via personal visit, telephone and e-mail and via the council's website.

Consultation Response

Number of Responses

In total, 30 responses were received, 25 of which included comments. Of those who responded:

- 24 from individuals
- One from groups/organisations
 - Unison West Berkshire
- Four from Town/Parish Councils
 - Compton Parish Council
 - Holybrook Parish Council
 - Theale Parish Council
 - Tilehurst Parish Council

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- One from District Councillors
 - Alan Macro

15 responses were from non-users of the service.

Summary of Main Points

A total of 30 responses were received but only 25 of these contained any comments. 24 of these responses were from individuals, one from UNISON, four from Parish Councils and one from a District Councillor.

Two respondents suggested that, apart from rubbish collection, the Calcot office is the only thing provided for Council Tax payers living in the Eastern part of West Berkshire. Several respondents commented on the costs of accessing services by telephone or post and the potential costs of travelling to Newbury and having to pay for parking.

Two respondents suggested that the council should extend the service across a wider range of council services and that opening hours should be extended.

Several respondents indicated their agreement with the proposal and one suggested that this service should not be sustained for the minority who benefit from it.

Concerns were raised that this proposal would impact most upon elderly and disabled customers, however one respondent recognised that there were already alternative ways of accessing services but went on to say that they choose not to use these.

One of the Parish Councils suggested that availability of planning application details at Parish Council offices should be highlighted.

Summary of Responses by Question

1. Are you, or someone you care for, a user of the service?

12 of the 30 respondents (40%) described themselves, or someone they care for, as users of the service.

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

18 responses were received. Several of these raised concerns about the lack of services provided in the Eastern part of West Berkshire, describing it as the 'poor relation'.

Several respondents commented on the distance and costs of travelling to Newbury, though most of these appear to assume that face to face services are the only way in which they can deal with the council.

One response suggested that as a result of the proposal to close libraries the availability of planning application details at Parish Council offices should be highlighted more effectively to those who do not have internet access.

Two respondents supported the proposal, one of these noting that there are many other means of contacting the council.

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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?

14 responses were received. The main concerns were the effects upon the elderly, the disabled and those on low incomes. Two respondents suggested that elderly customers prefer to make face to face transactions.

It was suggested that a mobile service might be provided, that opening hours might be reduced and/or that the office might be relocated.

4. Do you have any suggestions as to how this service might be delivered in a different way, whilst still making the same level of savings? If so, please provide details of any alternative proposals.

12 responses were received. Several suggested reducing opening hours and/or relocating the office to save rental costs, though most noted that this would not deliver the same level of savings.

One suggested moving the office to Theale library and another suggested a peripatetic service operating from various libraries in the East of the District.

Two respondents suggested that a wider range of council services should be included and opening hours extended, one suggested that the facility should be housed with another service/building.

One respondent suggested making savings in the Customer Services management team (though the figures they quoted were both speculative and inaccurate).

Another supported the proposal and described the provision as 'an inefficient and ineffective use of resources'.

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.

Five responses were received, none of which suggested how the respondents might contribute.

One commented that 'it is unnecessary anyway' and another queried why this proposal had been made if the lease wasn't due to expire for another year. For clarity, the current lease expires 16 April 2016.

6. Any further comments?

13 responses were received. Four of these urged keeping the service going, or not completely closing it, with one suggesting extending the range of services.

Another five of the respondents suggested that the service should definitely be closed and/or agreed with the proposal.

One respondent suggested making the savings in the Customer Services management team first.

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UNISON sought assurance that compulsory redundancy of any affected staff should be a last resort.

One respondent questioned why residents at this end of the District should come under West Berkshire Council, when they are closer to Reading and miss out on some of the benefits of being a Reading Borough Council resident.

Officer conclusion and recommendation can be found in the associated Overview of Responses and Recommendations document.

Ian Haggett
Customer Services Manager
Customer Services
8 March 2016

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.