

## Budget Proposals 2016-17 Phase 2: Public Transport

### Consultation Summary Report

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#### 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, through posters on supported buses and a dedicated email address. Feedback was also received by letters and phone calls to the Transport Services Team.

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

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consultation in addition to our usual channels. This included making potential consultees aware of the impending exercise much earlier than normal via press releases and associated PR activities.

#### Proposal Background

The council has a statutory duty under the Transport Act 1985 to secure the appropriate provision of bus services, which members of the public rely on to get from place to place. The council must also have particular regard to the transport needs of members of the public who are elderly, disabled or those that may live in rural areas and have no means of transport themselves. Public transport also ensures that people are able to get to work which, in turn, helps to make the local economy as vibrant as possible.

The council remains committed to delivering effective transport solutions and public transport is a key component of this. However, it may not be known that the council currently provides around £1.4m each year to support bus services, a number of which do not necessarily provide good value for money in terms of subsidy per passenger journey.

The council currently subsidises 20 bus services out of 30 operating in West Berkshire, which account for some 615,000 annual passenger journeys.

#### Proposal Details

Phase One of the consultation proposed that the council's budget for subsidising public transport would be reduced by £320,000 in 2016/17. Phase Two is now proposing that the budget is reduced by a further £460,000.

The effect on local bus services of reducing the subsidy, provided by the council, by a total of £780,000 is likely to be as indicated in the table 1, but may be worse depending on contract costs. Where it is proposed to reduce services to operate on less than five days per week, exact details are still being assessed.

In addition to these service reductions, we are also proposing to:

- withdraw funding for the Readibus scheduled service that serves the Newbury/Thatcham/Reading corridor
- remove the West Berkshire additions to the National Concessionary Travel Scheme (i.e. travel 9:00 to 9:30am, companion passes, mental health entitlement and use on Handybuses and other community minibus transport)
- remove development and maintenance of the Real Time Passenger Information (RTPI) System.

**Table One: Summary of Service Reductions**

Service	Area Served	Details
2	Newbury - Wash Common	Reduction from half hourly to hourly service.
3	Newbury - Hungerford	A 2 hourly service retained.
4	Newbury - Lambourn	Reduction from a 2 hourly service with additional peak time services to 2 hourly only.
6/6A	Newbury – Compton – Chieveley - Newbury	To operate every 2 hours on B4009 with only peak journeys serving Chieveley and Beedon. Chieveley and Beedon daytime on Service 107.
8	Newbury - Greenham	Hourly service retained.

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Service	Area Served	Details
20/22	Hungerford - Marlborough	No change provided that Wiltshire continue to provide funding.
28	Purley – Reading - Caversham	This is a Reading BC contract and is likely to be altered by them.
46/46A	Swindon – Hungerford	No change provided that Wiltshire continue to provide funding.
75	Beech Hill - Newbury	Current twice weekly service will be withdrawn.
82	Gt Shefford – Lambourn - Wantage	Current once a week service will be withdrawn.
90	Lambourn - Hungerford	Current 90 minute service will be withdrawn.
90	Swindon - Lambourn	Current 90 minute service will be withdrawn.
101/104	Newbury - Thatcham	Hourly service retained.
101	Calcot - Chapel Row - Thatcham	Reduction from every 2 hours to 1 or 2 days each week with no peak time service.
102	Thatcham - Newbury	Hourly service retained.
104	Calcot - Aldermaston – Brimpton - Thatcham	Reduction from every 2 hours to 1 or 2 days each week with no peak time service.
105	Calcot – Bradfield – Aldermaston – Tadley	Current twice daily peak service will be withdrawn.
107	Newbury – Downlands	Reduction from peak and daytime service to Mon-Fri daytime only.
143	Upper Basildon – Pangbourne - Reading	Reduction from every 2 hours to 1 or 2 days each week and no peak time service. Connection may be required to Reading.
154	Beech Hill – Reading	Current once a week service will be withdrawn.
H1	Hungerford	Existing service retained.

### Consultation Response

#### Number of Responses

In total, 399 responses were received, 327 of which included comments. Of those who responded:

- 372 were individuals
- 14 were groups/organisations
  - Age Concern UK (Thatcham Club), Blands Court (residents of), Care Bus Volunteer Group, Downland Volunteer Group Community Car Scheme, Go Ride Community Interest Company, Hungerford Chain, It's My Life (Self Advocacy Group), M.W. Engineering, A New Way Education Ltd, Newbury Handybus, Park House School, Readibus, Theale Green School, Unison
- 14 were Town/Parish Councils
  - Ashampstead Parish Council, Basildon Parish Council, Brimpton Parish Council, Compton Parish Council, East Ilsley Parish Council, Hermitage Parish Council, Holybrook Parish Council, Hungerford Town Council, Inkpen Parish Council, Lambourn Parish Council, Pangbourne Parish Council, Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council, Theale Parish Council & Tilehurst Parish Council
- One was a District Councillor
  - Councillor Alan Macro

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We also received one petition from:

- Crookham Park Home Owners Association

#### Summary of Main Points

The key concern from the ending, or severe reduction, of any of the current contracted local bus services and the scheduled Readibus services, is that this would result in residents being isolated from vital services, including:

- shops (119 responses),
- medical services (105 responses)
- educational establishments (104 responses)
- employment (69 responses)
- banks, post offices, council offices (44 responses)
- libraries, especially if all but Newbury library closes (14 responses)

The key consequences of such isolation were cited as; reduced life opportunities and reduced quality of life. This could possibly lead, particularly in the case of Readibus users, to loneliness and depression and in some a serious deterioration in health. 24 respondents believed this would result in increased NHS and care in the community costs.

Eight people alleged they would have to move house if they lost their village bus service, because of their remoteness from essential services.

The loss/reduction of local bus services was believed, by 14 respondents, to threaten the economic well being of Newbury and Thatcham, where much shopping and business is carried out by the rural population.

43 responses believed that further traffic congestion and environmental pollution would result from current bus passengers having to travel by car. There would also be a higher demand on limited car parking spaces, particularly at hospitals /surgeries.

The ending of the council's enhancements to the national concessionary fares schemes was believed to largely target the vulnerable and least well off members of the community. This was particularly the case for the ending of the companion bus pass (8 responses) and acceptance of the pass on Section 19 services – Readibus, Handybuses and other community minibus services (36 responses).

#### Summary of Responses by Question

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

Of the 399 responses received, 54 answered no to this question. 33 did not answer this question.

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#### 2. Which bus service(s) do you, or someone you care for, use on a regular basis?

a) The bus services cited in responses were:

Service	No. of Respondents	Service	No. of Respondents
N&D 2	8	Go Ride 90 (Hungerford / Lambourn)	27
N&D 3	13	Go ride 90 (Lambourn / Swindon)	23
N&D 4	21	N&D 101	52
N&D 6/6A	14	N&D 102	5
N&D 8	3	N&D 104	27
Thamesdown 20,X20,X22	1	N&D 105	25
Reading Buses 28	1	N&D / WBC 107	5
Thamesdown 46/46A	1	Thames Travel 143	46
N&D 75	15	Horseman 154	8
Barnes 82	10		

b) The Readibus scheduled service that serves the Newbury/Thatcham/Reading corridor – 77 responses

c) Remove the West Berkshire additions to the National Concessionary Travel Scheme (i.e. travel 9:00 to 9:30am, companion passes, mental health entitlement and use on Handybuses and other community minibus transport) – 88 responses

d) Remove development and maintenance of the Real Time Passenger Information (RTPI) System – 3 responses

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

The major concern, outlined in the summary of the main points, is the fear of isolation that many living in rural areas fear from the erosion, or ending of their bus services. Readibus users also face multiple fears if they lose their service. All these people depend on these transport services to meet their basic needs and ensure their quality of life.

The ending of the Real Time passenger Information System was seen as a retrograde step by 3 respondents. Much of the costs of the system are historic and the system gives valuable information of the time keeping of the buses, especially in times of traffic delays and congestion.

#### 4. 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?

There were strong feelings that these savings would adversely affect certain groups of people. These were:

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- The elderly (highlighted in 189 responses)
- The disabled / infirm (highlighted in 137 responses)
- Non drivers and those with no access to a car/bike (125 responses)
- School / college pupils (104 responses)
- Those on low incomes, especially those who can't afford taxis (67 responses)
- Young people (34 responses)
- Those with educational special needs (11 responses)
- Bus drivers who may face redundancy (2 responses)

Suggestions from the consultation of measures that could be taken to reduce the impacts were:

- Charge holders of the national off-peak bus pass, when they travel on local buses, or on Section 19 services. Restrict the issue of the pass to disabled residents and limit the occasions an individual can present their pass.
- Raise local bus fares.
- Lower local bus fares.
- Promote the services more.
- Reduce less-well used journeys, or use smaller vehicles on them.
- Allow the public on school buses.
- The volunteer transport sector may be able to meet more demand, although their capacity to do so is limited by the availability of volunteers. It is also felt that volunteer drivers may not be keen on handling cash fares, especially the taking of fares from vulnerable passengers etc.

**5. Do you have any suggestions as to how this service might be delivered in a different way, but still achieve the same level of saving? If so, please provide details of any alternative proposals.**

The following suggestions were made regarding alternative ways of providing the service or reducing the budget:

- Replace existing bus services with:
  - Demand responsive services
  - Dial-a-Ride services
  - Volunteer services, including car schemes, and extend national off-peak bus pass to these services
  - Taxis
  - Lift share scheme
- Operate all services in-house
- Introduce feeder services to main bus routes
- Increase expenditure on bus services
- Do not build new bus station at the Wharf
- Raise Council Tax or Parish Council precepts
- Open the Vodafone bus services to the public

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**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.**

Responses suggested:

- Charities or big business could operate, sponsor or fund the threatened services
- Seek changes to commercially-operated services
- Council members and/or officers should face further cuts to benefits/salaries/pensions/expenses

**7. Any further comments?**

The feedback made it clear that our contracted bus services are highly valued by those who travel on them and rely on them, as are the scheduled Readibus services. For many these services are essential to their quality of life. There are real fears of social isolation and reduced quality of life and life opportunities should the services be severely reduced or terminated.

Some reassurance may be given that all communities will continue to be served by some form of public transport. However, this may not be by a local bus service, but by a service provided by the volunteer sector to help meet some essential travel needs.

It is evident that the local enhancements to the concessionary fares scheme are highly valued by residents. The ending of these enhancements is seen to impact on some of the most vulnerable residents in the district.

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

Mark Edwards / Peter Walker  
Head of Service / Transport Services Manager  
Highways and Transport  
11 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.*