

Budget Proposals 2016-17 Phase 2: Theatres

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 provide funding to the Corn Exchange, Newbury and the Watermill Theatre, Bagnor, and through an agreement requires the organisations to deliver programmes of arts activity and education outreach work.

Both theatres are well run, high performing organisations that deliver the agreed outcomes.

Corn Exchange (Newbury) Trust Ltd

The current agreement covers a five year period ending in March 2019. The agreed payments are:

- 2014/15 - £343,000
- 2015/16 - £310,000
- 2016/17 - £276,000
- 2017/18 - £242,000
- 2018/19 - £208,000

The council owns the freehold of the building and leases it to the Trust for the purposes of providing the services outlined in the agreement.

The Watermill Theatre Ltd

The council has a three year agreement with the Watermill Theatre that runs until March 2017.

Payments previously agreed with the Watermill are:

- 2014/15 - £41,400
- 2015/16 - £31,400
- 2016/17 - £31,400

Proposal Details

To reduce the council's annual contribution by 44%, in line with the reduction in grant the council receives from central government.

Corn Exchange (Newbury) Trust Ltd

To reduce funding by £136,000 to a payment of £174,000.

The Watermill Theatre Ltd

To reduce funding by £14,000 to £18,000.

This will save the council £150,000 a year

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Consultation Response

Number of Responses

In total, 3,224 responses were received, 1,619 of which included comments. Of those who responded:

- 2,895 were individuals
- 241 were representatives of 22 groups/organisations:
 - Watermill Theatre
 - Corn Exchange
 - Young Corn Exchange
 - Arts Council England (meeting with Council)
 - Newbury Spring Festival
 - The Cedars School
 - St Edward's School
 - Brightwalton Primary School
 - Newburytheatre.co.uk
 - Roughouse Theatre
 - Newbury Dramatic Society
 - Age Concern
 - Touch to See
 - Newbury Embroiderers Guild
 - Studio 8
 - Open Studios
 - Southern Sinfonia
 - Speakability
 - Newbury Socialites
- Three responses were Town/Parish Councils
 - Stratfield Mortimer
 - Frilsham
 - Hermitage
- One response from a District Councillor
 - John Gardner, St Johns Ward, Newbury

Summary of Main Points

All respondents expressed concerns about reductions in cultural provision for residents and visitors to West Berkshire including:

- Reductions in education and outreach activity for young people, older people and people with disabilities.
- The budget reduction for the Corn Exchange destabilising the organisation and making it unviable in its current form.
- The potential negative impact on the evening economy in Newbury town centre.

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Summary of Responses by Question

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

2,854 identified themselves as users of the theatres.

2. Which Theatre(s) do you, or someone you care for, use?

1,688 said they used the Corn Exchange and 1,207 used the Watermill Theatre.

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

The main areas of concern amongst the respondents are:

- General reductions in cultural provision for local residents and visitors to West Berkshire
- Reductions in both organisations' education and outreach activity for young people, older people and people with disabilities. Currently this involves 6,200 school children a year
- The budget reduction for the Corn Exchange destabilising the organisation and making it unviable in its current form
- Reductions in the Corn Exchange's cinema service
- Negative impacts for the evening economy in Newbury town centre

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?

The responders consider that the main impacts will affect the following groups:

- Families (168 responses), children (499 responses) and young people (309 responses)
- Education / schools (257 responses), schools (300 responses)
- Older people (115 responses)
- Vulnerable groups (89 responses)

In particular, groups that are marginalised in terms of economic disadvantage, age (both young and old), social isolation and disability have been identified by responders.

Suggestions to reduce the impact of the proposals include:

- Target funding to groups who have fewer opportunities to participate in cultural activities
- Increase the timescale for the proposed reduction in funding to allow time to develop other income streams

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.

- Increasing ticket prices at the Corn Exchange for all events or for some premium events to subsidise others.
- Either not make this proposed reduction in funding within the current Service Level Agreements with the theatres OR to spread the reduction across

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several financial years to allow the theatres to develop other income and investment.

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.

- A number of respondents suggested they already helped through patronage
- There was one offer of sponsorship and other suggestions that wider sponsorship from businesses should be sought
- One suggestion was to cancel all subsidies so that theatre goers pay for their entertainment or close and sell the Corn Exchange
- A number already volunteer and suggest the use of volunteers is increased
- Key groups should be invited to a forum to discuss the issues
- Encourage greater membership of 'Friends of...' and other donations by users.

7. Any further comments?

- Friends / members scheme with regular D/D contributions. Increase number of patrons. Raise sponsorship.
- Increase no. of volunteers
- Raise ticket prices
- Divert council tax to the theatres and raise council tax for this purpose
- Subsidise U21 ticket prices as a priority
- Reduce the pay of Council Executives
- Close venues 2 days per week
- Increase the proposed period of cuts to allow theatres to mitigate against these
- Reduce street lighting to provide cost cutting in other areas

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

Paul James
Culture Manager
Culture and Environmental Protection
9 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.