

Budget Proposals 2016-17 Phase 2: Domestic Abuse Response Team (DART)

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

West Berkshire Council's Family Resource Service provides a range of services to vulnerable families. One of these services, Domestic Abuse Response Team (DART), provides a rapid response to families who have experienced domestic violence and abuse. All police domestic abuse (DA) notifications, which are assessed as a lower risk, are passed to DART and those families are provided with an immediate outreach service, with the aim of intervening at an early stage, to prevent repeat DA incidents and minimise the impact on children.

Proposal Details

To cease funding one Family Support Worker, employed by A2 Dominion, who is seconded to work in the DART team. The team currently consists of 4.4 full time equivalent (fte).

This will save the council £33,000 a year.

Consultation Response

Number of Responses

In total, 38 responses were received, 31 of which included comments. Of those who responded:

- 36 from individuals
- Two from groups/organisations
 - Unison
 - Newbury Counselling Service

22 responses were from non-users of the service.

Summary of Main Points

The findings from the consultation highlighted the concerns about the reduction in the capacity of the team, particularly when set against the Phase One budget proposals. There were concerns about the impact on vulnerable women, children and families who suffer from living with domestic abuse (DA). It also raised the concern about not being able to intervene at an early stage and prevent repeat or more serious DA incidents. It was felt this would lead to family situations that become more serious and risky requiring a statutory child protection response and service.

There was concern that there is a high level of need in West Berkshire to provide support services to address DA and to avoid the homicides of the past. There was praise for the DART team as it has been assessed as effective and achieving positive outcomes and concerns that this service was going to be reduced and the devastating impact on vulnerable families.

There were no counter proposals except to say to look elsewhere for savings across council.

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Summary of Responses by Question

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

There were responses from five users of service.

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

The responses highlighted the valuable and effective work of the service and were very concerned about any loss or reduction to services to vulnerable families. They felt the council should be protecting the most vulnerable and that any reduction would have a very negative impact and cause the problems to become more severe. It will cause more people to continue to suffer the consequences of living with DA. Those who were users or previous users of service said this was a lifeline and a vital service that must be protected

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?

Those suffering from DA, mostly women and vulnerable children and families were identified as being most affected by this proposal.

There were no suggestions about helping with this, except moving the savings elsewhere.

4. 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.

One response said this should be left to the police. Two responses said that councillors expenses should be reduced and not be increased.

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.

No responses offered or addressed this. One service user said she would be willing to volunteer.

6. Any further comments?

None

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

Juliet Penley
Service Manager
Children and Family Services
9 March 2016

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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.