

## Budget Proposals 2016-17 Phase 2: Library Service

### 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, paper 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 library service consists of nine branch libraries located across the district and two mobile libraries to reach areas of the district not served by the branch libraries. The 'At Home' service assists those that can't get to either a branch or mobile library and is largely operated through volunteers.

In addition to providing access to books, the library service also assists with early learning, adult continued learning, Internet access and use of computer technology learning. The branch libraries also provide facilities for various arts and craft activities and are available for use by various community groups

We consulted with you between 3 November to 14 December 2015 on a proposal to reduce the mobile service from two vehicles to one, and to merge Burghfield Common Library with Mortimer Library into one building located in Mortimer.

***\*The following proposal now supersedes this\****

#### Proposal Details

To reduce the library network by closing eight branch libraries and stopping the two mobile libraries. This will leave one branch library at Newbury and the 'At Home' service.

We will continue to provide assistance with access to the digital service, but will not develop the digital service any further.

It is anticipated that this will save the council £730,000.

#### Consultation Response

##### Number of Responses

In total, 2,751 responses were received, 2307 of which included comments. Of those who responded:

- 2,691 were individuals
- 46 were groups/organisations:
  - ABC 2 Read, Stellar Learning, Jubilee Day Nursery, Soft Play Centre, St Marks CE Primary School Cold Ash, St Marks CE Governors, Rhyme Time Theale, Theale Primary School, Pangbourne Primary School Governors, Lambourn Primary School, Little Hooters Pre-school, Mrs Bland's Infant School, Mrs Bland's School Governors, Garland Junior School, Spurcroft School Governing Body, A New Way Education Ltd, Mortimer Book Club, ? Book Club, Pangbourne Readers' Group, VIP Book Group, St Michael's Church Lambourn, UNISON West Berkshire, Friends of Hungerford Library, Save Lambourn Library, Hungerford Library Support, Knit and Natter and Art Group, Sylvester Kirk Racing, Jakobi Transport Ltd, Dublin Stud, www.thetourbuscompany.co.uk, Mortimer WI, Theale Green WI, Speakability, Speech and Language Therapists, BHFT, Downview Residential Home,

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Ramsbury Literary Group, Willows Court Residents, Mortimer 20 Club, It's My Life Self Advocacy Group, Burghfield and Mortimer Branch Labour Party (Wokingham CLP), Pangbourne and Whitchurch Sustainability Group, Coffee and Chat Group, ? PCC, Lambourn Imagination Library.

- 13 were Town/Parish Councils:
  - Ashampstead, Basildon, Brimpton, Compton, E Ilsley, Holybrook. Hungerford, Inkpen, Lambourn, Pangbourne, Stratfield Mortimer, Theale, Tilehurst
- One was a District Councillor:
  - Alan Macro

We also received five petitions from:

- Four 'Save the Library' groups:
  - Burghfield Common
  - Thatcham
  - Theale
  - Mortimer
- Crookham Park Home Owners Assoc.

### Summary of Main Points

- Difficulty of travel to Newbury and costs of travel by car or bus. Parking costs and removal of bus routes all combine to make access to a library much more difficult.
- Proposal is Newbury-centric, and Newbury Library would be overwhelmed if expected to meet demands from the whole district
- Negative impact on young, old, disabled and vulnerable; increased isolation and loneliness with consequent impact on mental health; penalises the disadvantaged and less well-off; very damaging to literacy; job seekers lose access to finding employment opportunities; loss of internet access to those who can't afford/don't have home access.
- Will harm communities, groups and quality of life in rural areas. And discourage people from moving into West Berkshire
- Impact negatively on NHS, Police and other organisations
- Passes the responsibility on to Parish/Town Councils and/or community groups
- What is the Council's statutory responsibility under the 1964 Public Libraries and Museums Act?
- Need more information to do a response and more time to consider alternative suggestions
- Some general criticism of Members for making this proposal
- New housing and Rural Service Centres require libraries and other key services.
- Harmful to literacy standards and to the local economy.

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#### Summary of Responses by Question

Please then address each of the questions posed and upon which feedback was sought.

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

2,538 respondents identified themselves as users of the service.

**2. Which Library / Library Service do you, or someone you care for, use? Please tick all that apply.**

Library	No. of responses
e-library	194
Burghfield Common	197
Hungerford	394
Lambourn	217
Mortimer	202
Newbury	508
Pangbourne	316
Thatcham	524
Theale	383
Wash Common	123
Mobile library service	227
'At Home' service	17

Many customers use more than one library.

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

- Difficulty of travel to Newbury and costs of travel by car or bus. Parking costs and removal of bus routes all combine to make access to a library much ore difficult.
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- Will harm communities, groups and quality of life in rural areas. And discourage people from moving into West Berkshire
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- Need more information to do a response and more time to consider alternative suggestions
  - Some general criticism of Members for making this proposal
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?**
- Will affect everyone in the district of all ages
  - Will cause rural isolation
  - Affects those unable to travel, including where there is poor transport, eg rural parts and the East.
  - Affects young, elderly, disabled and vulnerable
  - Bad effect on young families; increase in postnatal depression for mothers of toddlers who find the Rhyme Time and other library activities a vital association.
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.**

#### Funding

- Council tax increase to pay for the library service
- Draw down lottery funding
- Sell Shaw House
- Seek a better settlement from Government
- Run events to raise money
- Increase fines and reservation charges

#### Governance

- Give responsibility to Parish/Town Councils, schools and Community Interest Companies
- Joint provision with neighbouring Councils

#### Strategies

- Look at what other local authorities and other countries are doing
- Co-locate with other services to maximise building use
- Amalgamate libraries, and/or reduce open hours while retaining libraries
- Close Newbury to keep the other libraries open
- Home delivery/postal service
- Expand Mobile library service to meet demands from closed or reduced branches

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.**

#### Willing to:

- Pay more Council tax
- Pay more in car parking fees, business taxes
- Pay higher charges at Leisure Centres
- Seek a Judicial review against this proposal to close libraries
- Donate second hand books

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- Volunteer

#### 7. Any further comments?

- Several suggestions on housekeeping by the Council, reduce salaries of staff, cut
- Number of higher tier managers
- Cut back on meetings
- Cut Members' allowances
- Cut spend on lighting and heating in offices
- Cut back on other less essential services
- Reduce welfare benefits and number of those who claim
- Seek Judicial Review to get more funding

#### On The Negative Impact

- This proposal will be devastating to communities
- Are Members aware of the financial impact on communities and people of such a reduction in library services?
- Major impact on literacy levels

#### Local Services

- How will S106 and CIL money be used if there's only one library?
- Hungerford and Pangbourne are designated Rural Service Centres and thus ought to have libraries
- New housing developments need services

#### On The Consultation

- Some criticism of how the consultation was conducted, including short time scale and lack of performance information and costs

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

Mike Brook  
Library Services 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.*