

Budget Proposals 2016-17 Phase 2: West Berkshire Museum

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 Museum opened in August 2014 after a four year refurbishment project.

The project involved the restoration of two historic buildings of importance to the national heritage; the 17th century Cloth Hall (Grade 1 Listed) and the 18th century Granary building (Grade II Listed) in Wharf Street, Newbury.

The purpose of the museum is to conserve and restore the historic buildings for public access and to provide:

- accessible museum facilities for local people and visitors
- events and activities for people of all ages, including schools (at the museum and elsewhere in the area) which promote interest in the heritage
- a focus for the activity of the many local history and archaeology clubs groups and societies in the district
- Information, advice and guidance on the history and archaeology of the district
- care for the 40,000+ objects of local interest in the museum collection and exhibit as many as possible through an annual programme of locally themed exhibitions
- volunteering and works experience opportunities for local people

Since re-opening, the museum has proved popular, exceeding expectations in the numbers of users, outreach activities and customer satisfaction.

Proposal Details

To reduce the net cost of the Museum by £40,000 a year.

In order to maintain the current opening hours the saving will be met by reducing:

- schools and other educational work by 40%
- capacity to recruit, train and manage volunteers by 20% (one day a week)
- capacity to manage and allow public access to the museum's collections by 20% (one day a week)

Consultation Response

Number of Responses

In total, 46 responses were received, 38 of which included comments. Of those who responded:

- 45 were individuals
- One was a group/organization
 - Unison West Berkshire

Seven responses were from non-users of the service.

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Summary of Main Points

- Reduced access to heritage learning events and activities for schools and young people and reduce public access to the museum's collections.
- Significant capital investment has been made to refurbish the museum and protect the historic buildings.

Summary of Responses by Question

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

32 respondents identified themselves as a user of this service.

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

Reduced access to heritage learning events and activities for schools and young people and reduce public access to the museum's collections.

Significant capital investment has been made to refurbish the museum and protect the historic buildings.

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?

Most respondents commented that the proposal would adversely affect schools and children.

No suggestions were received about how to mitigate this other than to use more volunteers.

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.

- There were two suggestions for use of volunteers, one for more volunteers and two the run the museum only with volunteers
- One suggested seeking commercial sponsorship.
- To reduce opening hours
- Formation of a charitable trust to run the museum
- Close the museum
- House the museum at Shaw House

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 suggestions were received that alleviate the impact of the proposal.

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6. Any further comments?

Unison sought assurance about staff welfare and that proper consideration should be given to any alternative proposals

Reduce staffing costs

Relocation of the Tourist Information Office in the Museum would make better use of the building

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

Paul James
Culture Manager
Culture of Environmental Protection
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.