

Budget Proposals 2016-17 Phase 2: West Berkshire Neighbourhood Wardens Scheme

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, from a meeting held with Sovereign Housing and all appropriate Parish and Town Councils 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

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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

We provide an annual financial contribution to the West Berkshire Neighbourhood Wardens Scheme, established in 2002. Sovereign Housing Association (SHA) employs the Neighbourhood Wardens and also contributes financially to the Scheme. A number of Towns and Parishes also make annual financial contributions to the scheme. The Wardens patrol in three teams, covering the following areas:

- Tilehurst
- Holybrook
- Purley on Thames
- Theale
- Pangbourne
- some areas of Newbury, Greenham, Speen, Cold Ash and Thatcham

A robust tasking and prioritisation process ensures that the Wardens visit areas where and when their services are most required.

Neighbourhood Wardens provide a regular, highly-visible patrolling presence in the community and form part of a wider community safety family, including other agencies such as: the Police, Town and Parish Councils and the Fire and Rescue Service.

They also respond to a wide range of issues which affect quality of life and their primary functions are to:

- support the police in reducing crime and the fear of crime
- address environmental issues
- engage in positive ways with young people
- act as role models
- identify and provide reassurance to the elderly and vulnerable
- promote community cohesion

Proposal Details

To cease the annual financial contribution to Sovereign Housing of £208,000.

Consultation Response

Number of Responses

In total, 88 responses were received, 37 of which included comment. Of those who responded:

- 77 from individuals
- Seven from groups/organisations
 - Unison West Berkshire
 - Riverside Junior Youth Club

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- Clay Hill Residents Association
- Speen, Shaw and Donnington Neighbourhood Action Group
- Holybrook Neighbourhood Action Group
- Newbury Wardens
- Neighbourhood Watch and Newbury SW Neighbourhood Action Group
- One from a West Berkshire Council service
 - Waste Management Team
- Three from Town/Parish Councils
 - Holybrook Parish Council
 - Pangbourne Parish Council
 - Theale Parish Council

21 responses were from non-users of the service.

Summary of Main Points

The main issues to come out of the responses were that the public feel that the Wardens provide a visible presence and reassure the public in terms of safety. A significant number of the comments also refer to the vital work that the wardens do in picking up litter and preventing fly tipping.

Other comments relate to the links that wardens have with young people and the schools. A couple of those responding suggested that crime might increase a result of this proposal proceeding.

Summary of Responses by Question

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

37 of those responding confirmed that they had used the service. 11 of those responded confirmed that they were not users of the service.

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

Many of those responding felt that people would feel less safe and that local communities could suffer from an increase in fly tipping, litter and other anti-social behaviour activities.

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?

Some of those responding felt that some of our less affluent areas such as Greenham, who have benefitted, from this service could experience more crime and anti-social behaviour as a result as this service ceasing.

Other people who responded felt that the elderly would be impacted as they may feel less safe in their communities.

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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.**

Some of those responding felt that Parish and Town Councils should fund the service. Others felt that volunteers could provide the service, although there was no detail about how this might be organised or managed.

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.**

Some of those responding felt that Council Tax should be increased to fund this service.

6. **Do you know of any alternative sources of funding, which might be available to protect this service? If so, please provide details.**

Several of those responding suggested approaching Greenham Common Trust. One suggested the use of Proceeds of Crime Funding could be used to support the Wardens scheme.

7. **Any further comments?**

No further comments were made.

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

Andy Day
Head of Service
Strategic Support
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.