

## Consultation Summary Report

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### Why we consulted

Over the last five years, we've had to find savings of £41m. Since 2012/13, the government has given us less money by reducing the Revenue Support Grant by £30m, whilst over the same period we've seen increased demand for our services.

For 2017/18, we estimate that our budget will be £117m. To achieve a balanced budget we'll have to identify £8m of savings or increases in our income.

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 for both savings and income generation

### Approach

We published all the proposals on our website on 31 October 2016 with feedback requested by midnight on 11 December 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 on our [Consultation Portal](#).

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'd taken into account. Feedback was then invited through an online form and through a dedicated email address. Hard copies of the proposal documents and surveys were also made available on request.

As well as publishing the consultations on our website, we also emailed members of the West Berkshire Community Panel (around 800 people), local stakeholder charities, representative groups and partner organisations notifying them of the exercise and inviting their contributions. Heads of Service also made direct contact with those organisations directly affected prior to them being made publicly available.

Finally, we issued a press release on the 31 October 2016, and further publicised our consultations through our Facebook and Twitter accounts. We also placed posters in our main offices and libraries, and made them available to WBC Councillors and Parish and Town Councils to put up in the wards/parishes.

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**Proposal Background**

The council has a service level agreement with the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) to provide services for people in the district needing support and guidance with a range of financial advice relating to:

- Debt worries
- Benefits enquiries
- Housing and employment problems
- Concerns about consumer or tax issues

CAB also provides:

- Advice on legal matters
- Advice on immigration
- Advice on family and personal matters
- Support for carers

CAB are fully open (drop in, telephones, appointments) for six sessions a week:

- Monday to Wednesday mornings
- Monday and Wednesday afternoons
- Either Wednesday evening or Saturday morning

There are also specialist appointments on Tuesday afternoons and Thursdays and Outreach on Thursday mornings.

We have reviewed the numbers of clients seen by CAB and are aware that there has been a reduction in the people using the services offered. This could be because there are less people requiring support and advice, or as a result of the online facility, which helps to provide early advice and guidance to those in need.

**Legislation Requirements**

CAB will operate within their own governance framework, but from a legislative perspective there is nothing which requires us to provide the services offered by CAB.

**Proposal Details**

We currently provide annual funding of £199,892 for the range of advice and support listed above. It is proposed to reduce this funding by £60,000 in 2017/18.

**Consultation Response**Number of Responses

In total, 67 responses were received.

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### Summary of Main Points

The main thrust of the comments from people opposed to the proposal centred on the need for a free advice service to support vulnerable people. Those who supported the proposal considered that this was not a core service, and given the difficult financial challenges facing the council, this proposal was acceptable.

### Summary of Responses by Question

#### 1. Are you...?

	Number	%
Or anyone you care for, a user of this service	9	13.4%
A resident of West Berkshire	50	74.6%
Employed by West Berkshire Council	3	4.5%
A Parish/Town Councillor	10	14.9%
A District Councillor	0	0%
A Service Provider	6	9.0%
A Partner Organisation	0	0%
Other	13	19.4%

#### 2. How far do you agree with the proposal to reduce the funding to the CAB by £60,000 in 2017/18?

	Number	%
Agree	9	13.4%
Neither agree nor disagree	1	1.5%
Disagree	44	65.7%
Don't know	4	6.0%
Not answered	9	13.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>100%</b>

#### 3. What do you think we should be aware of in terms of how this proposal might impact people? For example, do you think it will affect particular individuals more than others?

The majority of respondents suggested that it would be the vulnerable who would be most impacted by this proposal. Some respondents also suggested that many of those requiring advice and guidance would be unable to pay for professional support and that this proposal would leave them even more exposed.

Some respondents suggested that with changes being made to the benefit system, the services that CAB offer would be in less demand. In addition, as a first point of reference people should be directed to the website, as this contains a significant amount of advice and guidance.

One respondent, who identified themselves as a volunteer, suggested that the £40,000 reduction made as part of the Budget Proposals in 2016/17 had resulted in a 25% reduction in opening hours. However, it should be remembered that CAB received £25,000 in transition funding; therefore the reduction in 2016/17 was only £15,000.

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One respondent suggested that the EqIA Stage One did not cover all the vulnerable people that presented to CAB. They explained that they had clients who could not read or write, whilst others presented with mental health issues and complex needs.

**4. If the decision is taken to proceed with this proposal, do you have any suggestions for how we can reduce the impact on those affected? If so, please provide details.**

Four respondents suggested that Council Tax should be increased to fund this service. Others also felt that CAB should look to have different opening times, which would enable service users to attend sessions without impacting on their working day.

One respondent thought that CAB should look to provide their services from cheaper Town Centre premises. Others believed that the CAB website contained a significant amount of useful and helpful information which would provide many answers to initial concerns and worries of potential clients.

**5. Do you have any other suggestions as to how these savings (approximately £60,000) might be achieved within this service? If so, please provide details.**

It was suggested that CAB should consider introducing a small charge for their services and look to attract grants from other organisations to mitigate the impact of this proposal. Moving to more affordable accommodation was also suggested.

One respondent also suggested that the council should move to a policy of 'Just in time' ordering for all of their stationery which may then free up some funding.

**6. Do you have any suggestions on how we might increase income, either in this service, or elsewhere in the council?**

Increasing Council Tax was suggested by four respondents.

**7. 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.**

There were no suggestions made as to how CAB might be helped by other organisations.

**8. Any further comments?**

The majority of respondents felt that this proposal, if approved, would impact on the vulnerable and that this could then, in turn, impact on other parts of the council.

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

Andy Day  
Head of Strategic Support  
Strategic Support  
19 December 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.*