

Consultation Summary Report

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

Under the 1980 Highways Act we, as Highway Authority, have a duty to maintain the local road network, which extends to some 1,280km.

To achieve this, we have a revenue works budget of around £2.5m, covering activities such as patching, drainage repairs, gully emptying, bridge maintenance, winter gritting and dealing with highway emergencies such as flooding, road traffic accidents, fallen trees and other storm or adverse weather damage.

The 2015/16 budget for highway maintenance was reduced by £552,000 as part of the 2016/17 budget setting.

We have a team of officers and a Term Maintenance contract with Volker Highways Ltd in place to deliver the full range of highway maintenance services. This contract was renewed on 1 October 2016, following a competitive tendering exercise, and will run for the next 7 years, possibly up to 10 years depending upon contractor performance.

Proposal Details

To reduce the following areas of expenditure:

		% of Budget
Road patching	£200,000	50%
Drainage repair and maintenance	£200,000	58%
Total Reduction	£400,000	54%

The current total budget for road patching and drainage repair and maintenance is £742,000.

Legislation Requirements

Section 41 of the Highways Act 1980 places a duty on us, as the Highway Authority, to maintain highways maintainable at public expense.

Consultation Response

Number of Responses

In total, 64 responses were received.

Summary of Main Points

The majority of respondents do not agree with the proposed reductions to the highway road patching and drainage budgets.

Many felt that reduced maintenance standards would result in more surface water and potholes, leading to more accidents and claims for damage. Several people also commented that such cuts are a false economy and as a consequence were ill conceived and short sighted.

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There was also a focus on drainage and the implications that this cut may have in respect of flooding and potential damage to homes, from Thatcham Town Council. Reference was made to previous flood events in 2007 and 2014.

Summary of Responses by Question

1. Are you...?

	Number	%
A resident of West Berkshire	49	76.6%
Employed by West Berkshire Council	5	7.8%
A Parish/Town Councillor	15	23.4%
A District Councillor	0	.0%
A Service Provider	0	.0%
A Partner Organisation	0	.0%
Other	9	14.1%

2. How far do you agree with the proposal to reduce expenditure in road patching and drainage repair and maintenance?

Reduce road patching expenditure by £200,000 (50% of budget)	Number	%
Agree	2	3.1%
Neither agree nor disagree	2	3.1%
Disagree	47	73.4%
Don't know	1	1.6%
Not answered	12	18.8%
Total	64	100%

Reduce drainage repair and maintenance expenditure by £200,000 (58% of budget)	Number	%
Agree	1	1.6%
Neither agree nor disagree	2	3.1%
Disagree	48	75.0%
Don't know	1	1.6%
Not answered	12	18.8%
Total	64	100%

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

The key themes were road deterioration, potholes, safety and claims for vehicle damage. There was a general consensus that a reduction in the hand patching budget would impact all road users and some commented that this proposal would affect the rural areas more than the urban areas, cyclists more than car users and people who were visually impaired and/or elderly.

The majority of respondents were concerned about flooding, either directly on the highway or within adjacent property. Many also commented on the effect flooding has on road condition, safety and claims for vehicle damage.

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

Key themes included:

- not to make the cut at all
- increase Council Tax
- false economy
- work more efficiently
- get better value for money from contractors
- freeze/cut pay, T&C's and allowances
- increase maintenance

- 5. Do you have any other suggestions as to how these savings (approximately £400,000) might be delivered within this service? If so, please provide details.**

Key themes included:

- not to make the cut at all
- coordinate/plan works more efficiently
- increase Council Tax
- better repairs
- work more efficiently within the council and with external contractors
- self help
- get better value for money from contractors
- reduce the allowances paid to councillors

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

Key themes included:

- raise Council Tax
- freeze/cut pay, reduce terms & conditions and reduce allowances
- run cafes in Libraries to generate income
- run the tourist information centre on a more commercial basis to generate income
- look at working with other organisations to run services
- look at redundant services.
- decrease councillor allowances
- joint working/mergers with neighbouring councils
- charge utility companies for inspections
- coordinate/combine works more efficiently
- seek better value from external contractors/consultants
- consolidate offices into one fit for purpose building on cheaper land

- 7. Is there any way that you, or your organisation, can contribute in helping to alleviate the impact of these proposals? If so, please provide details of how you can help.**

Key themes were as follows:

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- movement of responsibility to others seen as 'passing the buck'
- badly thought out policies
- not to drive on roads
- get developers to pay for damage caused by their heavy vehicles
- 'volunteered out' already
- council is supposed to provide a service
- if we provide services - the council should pay us
- we pay and trust councillors to manage our money in our best interests

8. Any further comments?

The public consultation responses confirm the view that highway maintenance is very highly valued by Parish Councils and highway users, particularly in respect of road repairs and drainage. Many have recognised that cutting basic road maintenance is a false economy and short sighted, as a reduction in standards may result in deteriorating road surfaces and increased amounts of surface water, potentially leading to flooding, other safety related issues and more claims against the council.

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

Melvyn May
Highways Manager
Highways and Transport
21 December 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.