

Overview of Responses and Recommendations

Appendix N3b

Budget Proposals 2017/18: Highway and Drainage Maintenance		Head of Service: Mark Edwards Author: Melvyn May	2 March 2017 Version 3 (Council)
Proposal:	To reduce the following areas of expenditure: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Road patching by £200,000 (50% of budget) • Drainage repair and maintenance by £200,000 (58% of budget) 		
Total budget 2016/17:	£742,000	Recommended saving 2017/18:	£400,000 (53.9%)
Initial proposed saving 2017/18:	£400,000 (53.9%)	Final recommendation to Council 2017/18:	To proceed with this proposal
No. of responses:	In total, 64 responses were received. Of those that responded: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 49 identified themselves as residents of West Berkshire • 5 as council employees • 15 as Parish/Town Councils • 9 as other, including Unison 		
Key issues raised:	Concern that reductions in the amount of road repairs and drainage works carried out will result in worsening road conditions and more surface water leading to deterioration, flooding, more accidents and claims for damage. In short, any reduction to these budgets would be a false economy.		
Equality issues:	No issues were raised during the consultation, that weren't already included in the EqIA stage 1.		
Suggestions for reducing the impact on service users:	Suggestion	Council response	
	Work more efficiently and get better value for money from contractors	<p>Suggestions included: not making any cuts at all, cutting pay, lowering speed limits and traffic management which were general statements and not directly linked to the proposed savings or practical. Those that were relevant are summarised below:</p> <p>All contracts are tendered on a competitive basis. Every effort is made to coordinate like for like work to help deliver value for money. To repair every defect in a given length of road is not practical and would put further pressure on the council's limited budget. As a consequence, the council takes an asset management approach.</p>	

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	Fill Potholes, clean drains	The council has in place an Asset Management Plan to ensure the road network is maintained in an appropriate way moving from reactive/temporary repairs to planned permanent repairs using capital funding. This approach has seen a continued improvement in condition and a reduction in the number of potholes and in combination with the remaining maintenance budgets and additional Department for Transport funding, will help mitigate any negative impacts of this budget proposal. The council's three Year Highway Improvement Programme and capital budgets are not affected by these budget proposals and the council will continue to routinely cleanse roadside gullies and provide a reactive emergency response in the event of highway flooding and other issues on the highway.	
	Lower speed limits	Not practical/enforceable or directly linked to the proposed savings.	
	Freeze pay, reduce T&C.	The council has already implemented both suggestions and further examination of T&C's has been proposed.	
	Utility workmanship.	The council inspects utility works up to the maximum chargeable level under current legislation. Increasing this would increase the council's costs unless non-compliances were found. It is accepted that poorly reinstated utility trenches can adversely affect the road construction and result in potholes.	
	Train local councillors to mark up potholes.	Not practical due to the H&S, training and insurance/liability implications of working on a live road.	
	Settling of claims	The council has a duty to maintain the highway in a safe condition. Any claim has to prove negligence – that is the law.	

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Alternative options for applying the saving in this area:	Suggestion	Council response	
		There were suggestions including councillor performance, expenses/allowances and pay, cycle lanes, reducing car use, all of which were not directly linked to the proposed savings, or in some cases, practical. Those that were relevant were:	
	Coordination of works on the highway.	The council proactively manages works on the public highway under the Permit Scheme to ensure the efficient use of road space. Wherever possible, works are combined to deliver value for money.	
	Be more efficient in regards to finding more competitive contractors	All contracts are tendered on a competitive basis and every effort is made to coordinate like for like work to help deliver value for money. To help deliver value for money, the council has in place an asset management framework which complies with current national standards.	
	Make patching equipment available for our communities to do this themselves.	Allowing Parish and Town Councils to perform certain maintenance functions is currently being considered. Patching however is not likely to be one of them due to the H&S, training and insurance/liability implications of working on a live road.	
	Back office efficiencies, consolidation of services and staff.	In identifying savings, service delivery has been considered including those in the back office.	
Suggestions for income generation:	Suggestion	Council response	
		There were suggestions including reducing Chief Executive salary, pay in general, use of consultants, cafes in libraries, commercial enterprise like tourist information, collaboration with other organisations and the use of efficient and effective staff. All of these were general statements and not directly linked to the proposed savings, or in some cases, practical. There were also repeated suggestions including coordination and delivering value for money which have been covered above. Those that were relevant are summarised below:	
	Increase Council Tax	This is for councillors to consider.	
Charge for utility inspections	The council already inspects and charges up to the maximum allowable levels in accordance with current legislation.		

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	Merger with adjacent authorities, economies of scale.	Some shared services are already in place. Internal coordination of works to drive efficiencies is already in place, however, extending this outside West Berkshire would not necessarily produce savings due to network differences and local service standards. This was explored during the recent re-tendering of the term maintenance contract, however there was little appetite with other authorities due to differing contractual arrangements.	
	Sell Market St and WSH and move to a single fit-for-purpose location where land is less expensive?	Accommodation for council officers and Members has been reviewed and reduced on a number of occasions with a view to reducing costs. There are currently no plans to move to a single location.	
	Pay cuts, no more pay rises	The council tends to follow national pay guidelines and awarded a 1% increase last year.	
Suggestions for how others may help contribute:	No practical suggestions put forward.		
Officer conclusion and recommendation as a result of the responses:	<p>The exercise has not highlighted any impacts that are not already anticipated such as worsening road condition, more surface water and increased numbers of claims and complaints.</p> <p>It is therefore recommended that the council progress with this proposal.</p>		

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