

Budget Proposals 2018/19: Citizens Advice West Berkshire (CAWB)

Consultation Summary Report

Why we consulted?

Over the past eight years we've had to find savings worth £55m, while at the same time responding to an increase in demand for services. This is due to a reduction in funding from central government which has seen the Revenue Support Grant (worth £33.7m to the council in 2011/12) fall to just £100,000 in 2018/19, ahead of being phased out completely in 2019/20.

We've found these savings by becoming more efficient at what we do, reducing our workforce by over 20% over the past seven years, reducing some of our administrative functions and increasing our income. We've also had to make difficult decisions about reductions to some public services. However, throughout this difficult and challenging period we've done our best to protect services.

In 2018/19 we have to find a further £10m worth of savings or additional income, to ensure we deliver a balanced budget. We're proposing that a significant amount of these savings will come from within the council, through making further efficiencies such as re-tendering contracts. However, a number of proposals, amounting to £1m, have been identified from services that will impact the public. It was these proposals that made up the Budget Proposals 2018/19 consultation.

Approach

We published all the public-facing proposals on our website on 27 November 2017, with feedback requested by midnight on 10 January 2018.

Respondents were directed to a central index pageⁱ, which outlined the overall background to the exercise, and provided links to each of the individual proposals on our Consultation Portalⁱⁱ.

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, and responses were also accepted verbally and by letter.

As well as publishing the consultations on our website, we emailed members of the West Berkshire Community Panel (around 700 people) 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.

We issued a press release to local media, local MPs, all District Councillors and Parish Clerks on the 27 November 2017, and further publicised our consultations through our Facebook and Twitter accounts.

Finally, we placed posters in our libraries and made them available to WBC Councillors to put up in the wards.

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Proposal Background

We have a service level agreement with Citizens Advice West Berkshire (CAWB)ⁱⁱⁱ, to provide services for people in the district needing support and guidance with a range of financial advice relating to:

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

CAWB also provides:

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

CAWB currently run drop-in sessions three days a week, and their website offers a wide range of advice and information. When cases are more complex, face-to-face support is available. A number of advisors are volunteers.

Proposal Details

To reduce the annual core funding to CAWB from £120,000 to £40,000 for 2018/19.

Legislation Requirements

The advice and support services provided by CAWB are not statutory in nature. This proposal does not therefore conflict with any legislation.

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

Consultation Response

Number of Responses

In total, 263 responses were received.

Summary of Main Points

The majority of those responding considered that the services provided by CAWB were essential and supported the most vulnerable in our society. 232 respondents disagreed with the proposal whilst 7 agreed with the proposal. 13 of those responding failed to confirm whether they agreed or disagreed with the proposal.

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Some of those responding considered that the proposal would only result in clients attending the Council to receive the support currently provided by CAWB which would then make this proposal counter-productive.

It is clear from the responses that CAWB are a much respected and valued organisation which provides a range of support to everyone, particularly the vulnerable. The introduction of Universal Credit will potentially create a need for more support and so the proposal to reduce the funding paid to CAWB funding should be reconsidered.

Summary of Responses by Question

1. Are you...?

	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
Or anyone you care for, a user of this service	75	20.2%	28.5%
A resident of West Berkshire	234	62.9%	89.0%
Employed by West Berkshire Council	12	3.2%	4.6%
A Parish/Town Councillor	14	3.8%	5.3%
A District Councillor	1	.3%	.4%
A service provider	7	1.9%	2.7%
A partner organisation	3	.8%	1.1%
Other	26	7.0%	9.9%
Total	372	100.0%	141.4%

2. How far do you agree with the proposal to reduce the annual core funding to CAWB from £120,000 to £40,000 in 2018/19?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Agree	7	2.7	2.8
Neither agree nor disagree	4	1.5	1.6
Disagree	232	88.2	92.8
Don't know	7	2.7	2.8
Total	250	95.1	100.0
Not answered	13	4.9	
Total	263	100.0	

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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 overwhelming majority of those responding which disagreed with the proposal considered that the vulnerable would be most affected although some of those responding made the point that the range of services provided by CAWB were available to all.

A small number of those responding drew attention to the forthcoming roll out of Universal Credit. Whilst the Council will be expected to provide advice and guidance to new Universal Credit claimants very often clients presented with a complex range of other issues such as debt worries etc. CAWB had the requisite skills and experience to deal with these complex issues.

A small number of those responding suggested that those requiring support and advice would merely seek support from the Council which would mean that the proposal, as it stood, would be counter-productive.

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.

Those responding who agreed with the proposal suggested that there were other charities (Christians Against Poverty) and organisations which could provide this support if CAWB was unable to do so.

One of those responding suggested that CAWB should introduce other methods of dealing with clients such as providing advice and information over the phone and this approach might then negate the need to have the amount of overheads that CAWB are responsible for.

A number of those responding suggested that any reduction in grant funding should be phased over a number of years to provide CAWB with more time to adjust to the reduction and to secure funding from other areas.

A small number of those responding suggested that CAWB should seek to relocate their office to the Council's Market Street Offices or at a local church thereby reducing their overheads. Others suggested that Council Tax should be increased rather than reduce the funding to CAWB.

One of those responding suggested that CAWB should review the amount of paid staff they employ as a way of helping to mitigate the proposed reduction.

5. Do you have any other suggestions as to how these savings might be delivered within this service? If so, please provide details.

No suggestions were provided.

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6. Do you have any suggestions on how we might increase income, either in this service, or elsewhere in the council? If so, please provide details.

One respondent suggested that an additional 5p increase on the proposed green waste charge should be implemented which would then negate the need to reduce CAWB's funding whilst a few others suggested that Council Tax should be increased.

7. Is there any way that you, your community, or your organisation, can contribute in helping to alleviate the impact of this proposal? If so, please provide details of how you/they can help.

There were a number of comments about CAWB recruiting more volunteers.

8. Any further comments?

None

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

Andy Day
Head of Service
Strategic Support
17 January 2018

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.

ⁱ Central Index Page – <http://www.westberks.gov.uk/budgetproposals>

ⁱⁱ Consultation Portal - <http://info.westberks.gov.uk/consultations>

ⁱⁱⁱ CAWB website - <https://citizensadvicewestberkshire.org.uk>