

Overview of Responses and Recommendations

Budget Proposals 2024/25: Reduce funding for gully emptying and bridge maintenance		Service Director: Jon Winstanley Author: Peter Walker		8 February 2024 Version 1 (Scrutiny Commission)	
Proposal:	To reduce the annual funding by:				
	Programme	Budget reduction (£)	% of budget		
	Bridge maintenance	£80,000	44%		
	Gully emptying	£50,000	25%		
	Total	£130,000	32%		
Total budget 2023/24:	£384,050	Initial proposed saving 2024/25:	£130,000 (32%)	Recommended saving 2024/25:	£80,000
No. of responses:	<p>In total, 279 responses were received through the survey. The breakdown of responses is as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 263 - A resident of West Berkshire • 6 - A visitor to West Berkshire • 11 - A West Berkshire business owner • 12 - Employed by a West Berkshire business • 6 - Employed by West Berkshire Council • 15 - A Parish/Town Councillor • 1 - A District Councillor • 1 - A partner organisation • 0 - A West Berkshire Council service provider • 13 – Other <p>We also received direct responses from Reading West & Mid Berkshire CLP and Newbury CLP, Thatcham Town Council, and Tilehurst and Basildon Parish Councils. We received no petitions.</p>				

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Key issues raised:	<p>The focus of most comments was on gully emptying, the increased risk of flooding, and the impacts that is likely to have. These include damage to roads and properties, increased insurance claims, impacts on mental health and possible loss of life. Whilst there were fewer comments on bridge maintenance, it was noted that this would have to be managed carefully for safety reasons. The proposal to reduce gully emptying and bridge maintenance was considered most likely to increase future costs. Weather experienced this year has already demonstrated that drainage needs improving.</p> <p>Over 96% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed (84%) with the proposals for gully emptying, whereas it was 72% for bridge maintenance.</p>		
Equality issues:	No issues were raised during the consultation, that weren't already included in the EqIA stage one.		
Suggestions for reducing the impact on service users:	Suggestion	Council response	
	Consider different gully designs.	There are no alternatives.	
	Maintain gully emptying where there is a risk of flooding, where most people would be adversely affected, and when storms are forecast.	Works would be prioritised where most risk has been identified.	
	Allow residents to clear gullies, or parish councils to award private gully cleaning contracts.	Residents and parish councils can keep gullies clear of leaves.	
	Ensure surface water road drains are cleared regularly. Increase road sweeper activity to remove leaves and debris.	Additional clearing will cost more money.	

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	Provide a better response to public identification of blocked gullies.	The Council has invested in a new reporting tool which is working well.	
	Provide more flood defences and better drainage.	The Council has invested in flood alleviation schemes across West Berkshire in partnership with the Environment Agency. Another is underway in Thatcham, and further schemes are being considered.	
	Ensure land owners clear their ditches.	Although we have powers, this is resource-intensive and takes time.	
	Issue sandbags.	The Council policy is not to issue sandbags as they are generally not very effective, and there are considerable environmental issues with their use.	
	Install traffic lights where roads are likely to flood.	The cost of installation, operation and maintenance would not be efficient use of resources for temporary problems. Emergency lights may occasionally be installed.	
	Limit HGV movements and consider weight limits for heavier vehicles.	Where bridges are deemed to be at greater risk, weight limits are introduced.	
	Do not allow developments in flood plains.	All developments are considered against Council policies.	
	Better communication.	The Council has provided improved communication regarding flooding including how to register for warnings and owners' responsibilities.	
Alternative options for applying the	Suggestion	Council response	
	Saving could be made for one year only.	There is no specific information to indicate that West Berkshire Council will be in an improved financial position in one year's time.	

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saving in this area:	The contract could be renegotiated or brought back into the Council.	The contract is currently under review and will need to be retendered by 2026.	
	The contractor could do a better job.	Contract performance is monitored regularly, and the contractor is meeting Key Performance Indicators.	
	Surface water road drains should be cleared regularly.	Additional clearing will cost more money.	
	Parish councils could contribute.	We would welcome any contributions.	
	Local farmers may be cheaper than contractor.	They are unlikely to have the required specialist equipment, and there would also be issues with insurance.	
	Look at technological advancements for monitoring.	The Council are already looking at, and introducing, technological advances.	
Suggestions for income generation:	Suggestion	Council response	
	Introduce speed cameras.	Income from speed cameras goes to the Police.	
	Charge for discretionary services. Generate solar energy from roofs and above car parks.	These are already being actively happening, or in progress.	
	Increase council tax. Receive adequate government funding.	Levels are set by government.	
Increase charges for use of community spaces and halls. Ensure full occupancy of Council-run care homes. Allow more	These are matters for other parts of the Council to consider.		

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	housing. Keep the green bin subscription and increase with inflation.		
Officer conclusion and recommendation as a result of the responses:	Given the largely negative views on reducing spend on gully emptying, and the impacts this could exacerbate, this is not recommended. Although reducing bridge maintenance spend was also mostly negative, very few comments were received and it is recommended that this budget is reduced for a limited time of one to two years.		

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