

Appendix J - Budget Consultation response summary

The Council undertook a budget consultation on a range of proposed savings between the 27th November 2023 and the 11th January 2024. Overall, the Council received 2,491 responses to the online consultation per the below:

Name of Proposal	Number of responses
Close or find an alternative provider to run Willows Edge Care Home	280
Reduce contributions to community transport	84
Reduce frequency of parks, open spaces and verge maintenance	165
Reduce funding for gully emptying and bridge maintenance	279
Reduce litter bins and dog waste bins	986
Reduce opening hours at Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRC)	190
Reduce weed spraying treatment	136
Restructure Adult Social Care (ASC) care home charges	54
Restructure funding for Adult Social Care transport services	59
Restructure parking fees and charges	258
Total	2,491

The Council also received other responses, some during the in person sessions at leisure centres attended by members of the public during the consultation period as well as other individual responses. All of the responses are taken into account in the individual responses included as appendices to this paper.

As a result of the consultation exercise, the following changes or continuation with the proposals have been made to the proposed savings for Full Council to consider as part of the Budget setting recommendations. A further equality impact assessment has been undertaken in respect of the Community Transport saving. Where savings are lower than the proposed amount, this places a need for further savings to be delivered elsewhere across the Council and are included within the overall budget papers:

Proposal	Original saving proposed / £k	Revised savings proposed / £k	Summary from the consultation exercise	Further Equality Impact Assessment?

<p>Close or find an alternative provider to run Willows Edge Care Home</p>	<p>Up to £500k</p>	<p>Up to £500k – part year effect of £250k</p>	<p>C80% of respondents are against Option 1, closing Willows Edge, with 73.2% strongly disagreeing. While c 43% disagree or strongly disagree with Option 2, transferring to another provider, c43% agree or strongly agree with this option and c14% neither agree nor disagree. Given this response and also the supply and demand challenges that have further developed in the last few months, we recommend pursuing Option 2.</p> <p>We are aware that two potential providers have already expressed an interest, one via the consultation.</p> <p>We recommend developing an Invitation to Tender to identify and select potential providers. Given the budgetary pressures, we recommend that we should aim to select a provider by 20th June 2024. If we are unable to proceed with Option 2 at this point, we should seek to close the home unless there has been a very material change in circumstances.</p> <p>We recommend that subject to legal review, we should seek to include Birchwood and Notrees in the ITT, with providers given an option to bid for provision at 1,2 or all 3 homes.</p>	<p>N</p>
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Reduce contributions to community transport	10	0	The impact of this proposal would be a reduction in funding (based on this year's allocations) of between £3 and £37 per group each week, or 29 pence per passenger journey provided. Although the overall view of this proposal was negative, measures suggested by respondents should enable providers to recoup lost Council funding. It is therefore recommended to accept this proposal.	Y
Reduce frequency of parks, open spaces and verge maintenance	220	55	Most of the respondents are against this proposal. Concerns raised include the likelihood of areas looking unkempt and the potential to attract antisocial behaviour, risk of litter, dog poo and other hazards being lodged in long grass. On the positive side, there will be benefits for local biodiversity at a time where there is a local and national ecological emergency. Adoption of this proposal will come with some operational challenges as the contractor staff remaining may not have enough spare capacity to respond quickly to non-routine tasks or urgent requests e.g. to clear specific sightlines. This option is still available to decision makers because of the challenging financial situation. Officers have noted the risks	

			associated with this proposal and will be ready to implement the changes if approved.	
Reduce funding for gully emptying and bridge maintenance	130	80	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.	N
Reduce litter bins and dog waste bins	90	0	It is noteworthy that this proposal has garnered the largest number of responses out of all the budget proposals consulted on, indicating a significant level of community engagement with this topic. The overwhelming majority of these responses expressed strong opposition to the proposal. There is significant concern that the proposal will lead to increased instances of littering and dog fouling. Nonetheless, this remains an option that decision makers can approve because of the Council's challenging financial situation. Officers wish to recommend this option for consideration by decision makers. If	

			approved, suitable mitigation will be put in place to manage stakeholder expectation through communications and ensuring the areas with highest footfall are suitably provided for.	
Reduce opening hours at Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRC)	59	59	The predominant sentiment from respondents indicates substantial support for the proposed change. There were a few concerns raised about whether the proposed hours would impact more on selected users such as those who prefer to visit the sites earlier in the day. Having considered the range of respondent feedback, officers wish to recommend this proposal to decision makers.	
Reduce weed spraying treatment	20	0	Most respondents strongly support the proposal, primarily motivated by environmental considerations. However, some concerns were raised including worries about the potential negative impacts on disabled and vulnerable individuals, as well as those with allergies, if the weed growth becomes excessive. Other concerns raised were about the loss visual amenity within the district, potential hazards for drivers and pedestrians, and the perception that cost	

			savings might be outweighed by increased road repairs. The officer recommendation is to proceed with the planned reduction of weed spraying along sections of the public highway, transitioning from two applications to one per year, effective from 1 April 2024 (which result in a £12k saving).	
Restructure Adult Social Care (ASC) care home charges	78	78	It is appropriate to increase the fees for those individuals who can pay the full cost and other Local Authorities that use our care homes. The recommendation is to proceed with this proposal.	N
Restructure funding for Adult Social Care transport services	200	170	The recommendation of Adult Social Care is to proceed with this proposal.	N
Restructure parking fees and charges	500	500	Given the fairly even split between those in favour and those against the proposal, and the fact that this is seen as the least painful of the ten proposals within the public consultation, it is recommended that this proposal is accepted, with the amendment to allow the first hour of parking in Lambourn car park to be free of charge.	N