

Budget Proposals 2024/25: Restructure funding for Adult Social Care (ASC) transport services

Consultation Summary Report

Why did we consult?

The council is facing unprecedented financial pressures. From historically high inflation increasing contract costs, to rising housing costs and through to large increases in cost and demand in supporting our most vulnerable residents with social care, the council has some major cost increases.

In 2024/25, we need to find £14.2 million in savings or income generation. This figure is based on the assumption that Council Tax increases by 4.99% overall in line with previous government referendum limits. We have identified £12.2 million worth of savings and income generation, of which approximately £1.75 million comes from proposals that require public consultation.

Through extensive internal discussions and meetings with our service providers, we've identified 10 proposals.

For more information please visit <https://www.westberks.gov.uk/balancing-our-budget>

Approach

We published all the public facing proposals on our website on 27 November 2023 with feedback requested by midnight on 11 January 2024.

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 and Engagement Hubⁱⁱ.

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 considered. Feedback was then invited through an online survey, and hard copies of the proposal documents and surveys were made available on request.

Adult Social Care (ASC) wrote to all individuals who currently had transport that would be affected to advise them of the consultation proposal, and we also had direct contact from 5 individuals or their families either by email or phone to discuss the impact of the proposal.

As well as publishing the consultations on our website, we also emailed members of the West Berkshire Community Panel (around 2,500 people), local stakeholder charities, representative groups and partner organisations notifying them of the exercise and inviting their contributions. Service Directors contacted those organisations directly affected prior to them being made publicly available.

Finally, we issued a press release on 28 November 2023, and further publicised our consultations through our social media accounts and residents' e-newsletters. We

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also placed posters in our main offices and other council properties e.g. libraries and family hubs and made them available to WBC Councillors to put up in the wards/parishes.

Proposal Background

West Berkshire Council's Adult Social Care Service currently provides a transport service to 196 clients, either through the in-house service or taxis. This is normally to attend day services, which provide care and support for disabled, vulnerable and older people.

Many clients receive the mobility element from either the Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or the Personal Independence Payment (PIP), which is paid to support any additional cost for transport due to their illness or disability. This benefit can't be included in the financial assessment process when assessing an individual's contribution towards the cost of their care package.

Of the clients that currently receive a transport service:

- 46 clients aren't in receipt of either the mobility element of DLA or PIP, this is mainly because they are in receipt of Attendance Allowance (AA) that has no mobility element
- 28 clients are in receipt of the low rate of the mobility element, which is currently £26.90 per week
- 117 clients are in receipt of the high rate of the mobility element, which is currently £71.00 per week

The remaining 5 individuals receive transport under the Mental Health Act 2007 and aren't affected by this proposal.

Legislation Requirements

The Care Act 2014 governs what services the council should and should not provide as part of an individual's care package. Transport doesn't have to be provided as part of an individual's care package, and we are one of the few local authorities that still does.

Proposal Details

- To remove transport to and from the day services as part of an individual's care package and to offer a transport service that will be charged at a flat rate of £5.00 per journey (one way) for those individuals that are unable to get to the day services by another means, for example, taken by family or public transport.

This proposal will save the council approximately £200,000 per year.

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Consultation Response

Number of Responses

In total, 68 responses were received, 59 responded through this proposal.

There were no petitions and 9 people inadvertently responded through the community transport proposal.

Summary of Main Points

The main points raised were that it would adversely impact individuals financially and could lead to increased social isolation.

Summary of Responses by Question

1. Which of the following best describe you? Please select all that apply.

	Number	Percentage
A user of the service	17	28.81
A resident of West Berkshire	37	62.71
A visitor to West Berkshire	0	0
A West Berkshire business owner	1	1.69
Employed by a West Berkshire business	3	5.08
Employed by West Berkshire Council	2	3.39
A Parish/Town Councillor	2	3.39
A District Councillor	0	0
A partner organisation	2	3.39
A West Berkshire Council service provider	1	1.69
Other	8	13.56

2. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal to remove transport to and from the day services as part of an individual's care package, and to offer a transport service that will be charged at a flat rate of £5.00 per journey (one way) for those individuals that are unable to get to the day services by another means?

	Number	Percentage
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Strongly agree	13	23.03
Agree	5	8.47
Neither agree nor disagree	6	10.17
Disagree	10	16.95
Strongly disagree	25	42.37

Those individuals that strongly disagreed or disagreed to the proposal did so on the basis that it would have an adverse financial impact on individuals and individuals may choose to not go to the day centre that could lead to social isolation or carers could go into crisis.

Those individuals who strongly agreed or agreed considered it reasonable for those individuals who were in receipt of a mobility element of either Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence Payment to be charged a flat rate fee for the transport they used.

There were several suggestions of either a lower flat rate fee each way or that the fee proposed should be for a return journey and not each way.

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?

Some of the respondents felt that the proposal would affect older people less than it would affect younger people with either a learning disability or Autism, whereas other respondents felt that this was the other way around.

There was also concern that it would stop vulnerable individuals from having contact with other people and would lead to social isolation or carer breakdown.

There was also a suggestion that carers would have to give up working if this proposal went ahead as they would have to look after the vulnerable individual rather than them going to the day centre.

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.

Suggestions to reduce the impact were to either reduce the cost proposed, transition the change and give plenty of notice or to look at using minibuses instead of taxis.

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

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Suggested alternatives to save money or raise income are:

- Privatised the 3 West Berkshire owned Day Centres
- Consider not doing other projects like the Wharf
- No more bikes lanes
- Ensure individuals that have Motability cars use them instead of the transport
- Reduce the amount of unnecessary staff
- Reduce the heating in offices and schools
- Charge more Council Tax
- Reduce home to school transport

6. If you, your community group, or organisation think you might be able to help reduce the impact of this proposal, if the decision is taken to proceed with it, please provide your contact details below.

- The Yume Project – lisaflackyume@hotmail.com 07884334334
- Interackt – tsippy@interackt.otg.uk 07900867704

7. Any further comments?

“The LA could meet with members of the LDPB to discuss this further.”

“I work in LD day care. It took me 2 hours this evening to get a single, challenging client from the retail park to Thatcham. I have over 25 years experience as a carers. Is WBC suggestion that all I can charge for that is £5? That’s disgusting, I’m shocked. That’s an insults to me, my profession and carers everywhere.”

“If you are going to go ahead with charging £5 per journey each way please ensure this is done for ALL JOURNEYS NO MATTER WHICH DAY SERVICE PROVIDER PEOPLE GO TO. Otherwise people will have no choice but to use more expensive WBC dayservices and smaller private organisations will not afford to stay open. In the long term this will cost WBC more.”

“The Learning Disability Partnership Board brings together members across West Berkshire. Membership is for anyone with a learning disability, their families, parents, carers, community groups, supporter, professionals, day service providers, and in fact anyone who has an interest in adults with a learning disability in WB.”

“Please think twice about this as if the vulnerable adults are forced to cut there usage of day services this could be enough to make the day service unviable which would have huge effects on west berks budget if it has to provide individual carers to cover these hours everyday”

“Individuals mental health will suffer if they cannot access day services leading to further increases to council finances”

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"My husband uses the transport to get to and from the day centre we already pay £30 a month for him to be able to go to the centre. And if he proposes to pay £5 per journey one way comes in that will be an extra £80 a month we will need to find. Since Gareth has started going to the day centre he has made friends that are in the same position as himself. When Gareth had his brain injury he lost a lot of friends and his independence and if he has to start paying more he will have to stop going. It's not just his time going to the centre doing things with people the same as him it's my respite having a little bit of time to myself. As for him going on public transport that would be a NO go we would have to leave at 8am and have to get 2 buses to and from the centre. Our daughter works full time so she is unable to take him and pick him up. This is a rural / semi rural area, with reduced transport links. Transport to services is an important part of people's care plans & should continue."

"Personally, I think I already save WBC a fortune by keeping my daughter at home and caring for all her needs."

"You are focussing only on the financial aspect of this proposal and completely ignoring the welfare aspects of it. I need consistent and stable arrangements in order to stay well; my mother/carer is already very worried about both her and my futures as our household costs increase, and you and the Health Departments are progressively washing your hands of us. We really struggle to see how we will balance the budget as Mum cannot increase her income because of the requirement for her to be able to work very flexibly because of my extreme vulnerability. If the progressive tightening of our budget goes on and Mum becomes unable to look after me, I will die."

"Can't make it any worse for me if the proposal goes ahead and the PIP is unable to cover everything you believe as not on full PIP."

"Disgusting and outrageous proposal hitting those who really need it."

"Just that I would ask that you do look into the specific cases, especially those of people like my mother, and 80 year old lady with Dementia and COPD and is already struggling on Pension Credits."

"It's very regrettable and upsetting having state the following, I understand trying to save money, the mismanagement of managing budgeting wasting on flimsy projects with foresight. That don't have the flexibility that demanding in income to pay for transport. Already unpaid carer while disabled seem keep cutting budgets and become norm as acceptable which come to a tipping point hurting multiple disabled people and no reality on PIP or ESA, I rather be at work, but have multiple disability and pain issues. That UK central government saying it doing more for disabled, it just some speaking with no credibility and this government done more to hurt disabled people, push suicide rate up and say doing everything help. Certainly something going to say on scope website"

"FIND ANOTHER WAY SO SICK PEOPLE WILL NOT SUFFER"

"Please don't do this. The disabled are the most vulnerable in any community, and a wealthy community like West Berkshire ought to be able to prioritise funding so that the most vulnerable are the most protected and supported rather than targeted for further marginalisation through the imposition of prohibitive and possibly discriminatory costs"

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“Review all “nice to have proposed spending such as: Greening, net zero initiatives including LTNs and other “halo initiatives” unless they show a net saving in spend locally with payback within a three year timescale or positive annual contributions in the immediate future. New cycle lanes and pedestrian zones including consultation experiments. New speed limit reduction initiatives where these are not evidenced as necessary through increasing traffic injuries. Potential for staffing cuts associated with initiative creation and spends that will be reduced or delayed.”

“Employ people who understand needs rather than naive wokes who have an agenda to follow and as much experience as a dead cow.”

“only those who get the higher allowance to use against transport should be entitled to use it.”

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

Jo England
Joint Interim Service Director
Adult Social Care
13.1.2024

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.

ⁱ <https://www.westberks.gov.uk/balancing-our-budget>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.westberks.gov.uk/consultations>