

Budget Proposals 2024/25: Reduce litter bins and dog waste bins

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.

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 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

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In total, West Berkshire Council maintains and empties approximately 785 litter bins and 255 dog waste bins throughout the district. This includes locations along the public highway, within town centres, residential areas, selected laybys, and parks and open spaces.

Our waste contractor empties litter bins along the public highway, within town centres, residential areas and selected laybys when they are full or nearly full based on their own inspections, checks done by council staff or following reports from members of the public.

Litter bins and dog waste bins in parks and open spaces are emptied by our grounds maintenance contractor up to three times per week. The grounds maintenance contractor also empties a total of 105 litter and dog bins on behalf of 19 parish councils in the district.

It is not possible to recycle waste placed within our general litter bins due to the amount of non-recyclable waste placed within them. Waste placed within our recycling litter bins is recycled as often as possible, depending on the level of contamination within the bin when it is emptied.

Dog waste is no longer considered to be a biohazard and therefore it can be deposited in any public litter bin or your black wheeled bin at home.

Legislation Requirements

The Environmental Protection Act 1990 places a duty on local authorities to ensure that the public highway (and any other relevant land they are responsible for such as parks and open spaces) is, in so far as is practicable, kept clear of litter and refuse. We comply with this through the litter picking and street cleansing operations we run. The provision of litter and dog waste bins is not a statutory requirement and therefore we are not duty bound to provide them to the extent currently available.

Proposal Details

- To remove approximately 340 litter bins on a permanent basis (equivalent to 44% of the total number)
- To remove approximately 230 dog waste bins on a permanent basis (equivalent to 90% of the total number)
- To reduce the frequency of emptying some dog waste bins and litter bins in parks and open spaces from three occasions per week to two
- To cease emptying dog waste bins and litter bins on behalf of a number of parishes; we will work with them to identify an alternative contractor

Our street cleansing and litter picking service, and Town and Parish Council maintained litter bins are not affected by this proposal.

In order to allow for the increased capacity the council will, over time, seek to replace dog waste bins with covered litter bins.

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These proposals will have a combined annual saving of approximately up to £90,000.

Consultation Response

Number of Responses

In total, 986 responses were received.

We received 0 petitions.

Summary of Main Points

The overwhelming majority of responses strongly disagreed with the proposed changes. Concerns were voiced regarding the potential adverse impacts on the environment, as well as the health and wellbeing of residents, particularly younger, older, and more vulnerable individuals. The prevailing sentiment conveyed a strong belief that the proposal offers no benefits, would affect everyone, and could lead to an increase in litter and dog waste in the environment. Consequently, there was a resounding call not to proceed with this proposal.

Summary of Responses by Question

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

	Number	Percentage
A resident of West Berkshire	874	88.64
A visitor to West Berkshire	26	2.64
A West Berkshire business owner	40	4.06
Employed by a West Berkshire business	49	4.97
Employed by West Berkshire Council	46	4.67
A Parish/Town Councillor	32	3.25
A District Councillor	0	0
A partner organisation	2	0.2
A West Berkshire Council service provider	2	0.2
Other	12	1.22

2. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following proposals?

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- i. *To remove approximately 340 litter bins on a permanent basis (equivalent to 44% of the total number)*

	Number	Percentage
Strongly agree	14	1.48
Agree	21	2.22
Neither agree nor disagree	16	1.69
Disagree	119	12.58
Strongly disagree	776	82.03

- ii. *To remove approximately 230 dog waste bins on a permanent basis (equivalent to 90% of the total number)*

	Number	Percentage
Strongly agree	19	2.01
Agree	19	2.01
Neither agree nor disagree	18	1.91
Disagree	50	5.3
Strongly disagree	837	88.76

- iii. *To reduce the frequency of emptying some dog waste bins and litter bins in parks and open spaces from three occasions per week to two*

	Number	Percentage
Strongly agree	18	1.91
Agree	102	10.83
Neither agree nor disagree	88	9.34
Disagree	131	13.91
Strongly disagree	603	64.01

- iv. *To cease emptying dog waste bins and litter bins on behalf of a number of parishes; we will work with them to identify an alternative contractor*

	Number	Percentage
Strongly agree	17	1.81
Agree	34	3.62

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Neither agree nor disagree	72	7.66
Disagree	131	13.91
Strongly disagree	724	77.02

3. What do you think we should be aware of in terms of how these proposals might impact people? For example, do you think they will affect particular individuals more than others?

There is a widespread perception among respondents that these proposals will have a broad impact, affecting everyone, as voiced by the majority of participants. Notably, there is a genuine concern that the safety and wellbeing of children and young families will be compromised, posing risks to public health. Additionally, respondents expressed apprehension about the potential harm to the environment, anticipating an increase in litter and dog waste on the ground. Some participants also highlighted the potential impact on the elderly and less mobile individuals, emphasising concerns about slip and trip hazards.

4. If the decision is taken to proceed with one of these proposals, do you have any suggestions for how we can reduce the impact on those affected? If so, please provide details.

A significant portion of respondents, forming the majority, strongly advocated against its implementation (41%). Additionally, a notable percentage expressed the belief that reducing the impact was not feasible.

On a positive note, a considerable number of participants suggested that effective communication and education about the proposal could help mitigate its impact. Furthermore, a notable percentage recommended increased enforcement against littering and failure to pick up dog waste, while another group suggested leaving bins in identified hot spot areas as a practical solution.

5. Do you see any benefits or opportunities that may arise from these proposed changes? If so, please provide details.

The overwhelming majority of respondents, accounting for 88%, expressed the view that there are no benefits associated with this proposal. Additionally, a smaller percentage acknowledged the only perceived benefit to be the cost saving mentioned as part of the proposal.

6. 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.

A notable portion of respondents expressed the view that it wasn't their responsibility to provide suggestions, as it falls under the purview of Council staff. Other respondents suggested reducing Council staff numbers or adjusting

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the wages and benefits of current staff to achieve savings. Another recommended that the Council should manage its finances more efficiently.

Overall, there were over 70 suggestions, with a prevailing theme urging the Council to enhance financial management and reduce spending on non-statutory services/schemes such as Faraday Road football, pedestrianisation, Newbury Wharf, 20mph speed limits, and cycleways.

7. If you, your community group, or organisation think you might be able to help reduce the impact of these proposals, if the decision is taken to proceed with one of them, please provide your contact details below.

108 people or organisations provided contact details.

8. Any further comments?

In response to the invitation for further comments, a significant portion of respondents, constituting approximately 25% of the total, emphatically stated that the proposal should not proceed. Many among this group emphasised the need for more litter and dog bins, not fewer.

Additional comments expressed strong disapproval, with terms such as 'disgraceful,' 'madness,' and 'irresponsible' used to characterise the proposal. A prevailing sentiment in this subset of respondents was the belief that the proposed changes would exacerbate the situation rather than improve it.

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

Paul Hendy
Countryside Manager
&
Daniel Warne
Waste Manager
Environment
18/1/2024

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>