

West Berkshire Council responses to questions submitted by the WBDA and WBNA as part of 2012/13 savings proposals.

Question submitted by WBDA / WBNA	WBC response
<p>1. Does WBC recognise that if it cuts grants and contracts to the voluntary sector it loses more than it cuts?</p>	<p>The Council fully recognises the value of VCS organisations which is why it invests over £3m a year in this sector. However, the scale of the reductions required of the Council make it impossible to ring fence this area of funding.</p>
<p>2. In targeting sick, disabled and elderly people and failing to take any action to increase Council tax, is the Council overlooking to include the most obvious course of action, namely to increase Council Tax by about 4%, which is less than the rate of inflation. In failing to do this does the Council recognise that it will be in breach of the Disability Discrimination Act and other human rights legislation?</p>	<p>The Council has not targeted the sick, disabled and elderly in its savings proposals. The proposed savings requiring an EIA statement represent £2m of approximately £9m of savings - or around a fifth of the total savings required for 2012/13.</p> <p>The Council is proposing a council tax freeze for residents with the assistance of a grant equivalent to a 2.5% council tax rise (£2m). <i>IF</i> the Council was to increase council tax by 4%, as suggested, this would raise an additional £1.2m. However, any council tax rises in excess of 3.5% will trigger a referendum within the district with residents being asked to vote on this level of council tax.</p> <p>In line with its duties under the Equality Act 2010, the Council is gathering feedback on the budget proposals for adult care and support services. As part of this process, responses to the different proposals are being invited from the public and specific interested groups. By doing this, the Council seeks to clarify the impact of the proposals on protected groups and explore ways in which such impact may be reduced. The consultation will also inform the Council of any possible alternatives to its proposals. All of this information will be</p>

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	available to the Council's Executive for councillors to consider when making a final decision.
<p>3. Does the Council recognise that cultural services budget is a low priority that should take a greater proportion of any cuts that may be needed and that the Education success rates indicate the opportunity to correct current overspend on education and that the sale of any non-performing Council assets is now an urgent priority?</p>	<p>There is always a need to balance the requirement for universal services, such as the Cultural Service with the requirements to maintain satisfactory services for the disadvantaged and that process will be followed. Any overspend in Education services will be brought close to balance by the end of this financial year. The Council has already made a significant reduction to its real estate requirements and is in the process of drawing up plans for the disposal of redundant assets. The time frame is such that this is unlikely to impact upon budgetary proposals for 2012-2013.</p>
<p>4. Why has the Council ignored the advice of CIPFA, instead taking the advice of a Council Officer, whose list of reasons for retaining an additional reserve above the recommended minimum includes several reasons that are cited FOR utilising the reserve at the present time?</p>	<p>The Council has not ignored CIPFA's advice. CIPFA's advice is as follows:</p> <p><i>'CIPFA and the Local Authority Accounting Panel do not accept that a case for introducing a generally applicable minimum level of reserves has been made. Local authorities, on the advice of their chief finance officers, should make their own judgements on such matters taking into account all the relevant local circumstances.'</i></p> <p>The council officer making this decision is the s151 officer, a statutory post for councils who oversees the financial framework for the Council.</p> <p>In setting the minimum reserve level, the Council is also</p>

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	mindful of CIPFA's statement that <i>'it is not normally prudent for reserves to be deployed to finance recurrent expenditure'</i> .
<p>5. Has the Council investigated the merits of sharing its Chief Executive Officer and other senior Officer posts with another Local Authority and if so, why have such ideas not been implemented?</p>	<p>Making as many savings as possible through efficiency, and doing things differently so as to protect front line services, is at the core to our strategy for dealing with the cuts in central government support of 28% over 4 years.</p> <p>Some district councils, with much smaller budgets than West Berkshire, have shared Chief Executives but we are not aware of any unitary councils doing so. The role is demanding and we currently believe it is appropriate for the Chief Executive to concentrate on West Berkshire.</p> <p>The Council's management structure is very lean - some 25% below the average cost. By April we will have one Chief Executive and two corporate directors.</p> <p>Rather than share the role across authorities, our Chief Executive also takes on the role of corporate director with all the Council's support functions - such as Finance Legal and others - reporting directly to him rather than through another. Ultimately this creates a much bigger financial saving.</p>
<p>6. What is the justification for the Council having at least nine layers of staff? Such a number of supervisory and management layers is disproportionate to size and need, inevitably incurring inefficiencies in</p>	<p>It is not clear what the 9 layers of staff refers to. West Berkshire Council is a relatively small organisation. To continue to live within our means, last year, the Council had to remove over 180 posts (more than 10% of the workforce). For 2012/13, another 60 posts are being removed across the authority:</p>

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<p>communication, precision in service delivery and cost. What action is planned to correct the anomalies?</p>	<p>included within this are a corporate director and 4 heads of service.</p>	
<p>7. The consultation briefing paper lists 10 areas for cost reduction; with the following target savings [listed] totalling £1,797,000. The roundness of the individual figures suggests that the proposals are to an extent a financial hacking exercise, where the consequences are not a prime consideration. What measures will be put in place to ensure that all individuals in need continue to receive valid assessments and the quality and amount of service and support they need?</p>	<p>The savings do follow careful consideration of potential impact, and reflect realistic targets for each area. We were particularly careful not to set unrealistic targets around the setting of guide prices for services, so that the current range of provision is not undermined.</p>	
<p>8. Which voluntary sector contracts are affected and what specific amounts are involved?</p>	<p>Children's Services PALS - £3,100 A2 Dominion - £3,100 Dingley - £10,000, Crossroads - £10,800 Mencap - £23,000</p>	<p>Policy and Communication Citizens' Advice Bureau - £11,000 West Berkshire Volunteer Centre - £2,410 Community Furniture Project - £592 Relate - £240 Newbury Shopmobility -</p>

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	<p style="text-align: right;">£8,000</p> <p>Adult Social Care</p> <p>The proposal for the Adult Social Care services provided from the voluntary and community sector is to reduce the overall contract value by an approximate 10% - or £85,000. We are currently reviewing the services provided by each organisation in order to achieve this aim. Where the annual contract value is above £50,000 we will look to retender the service in line with the Council's constitution. Below are listed the total 2011/12 value of payments to VCS organisations against which the intended level of savings (of 10%) can be inferred.</p>

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	<p>Age UK Berkshire: £72,039 Alzheimer's Society: £6,000 Basingstoke Rape & Sexual Abuse Centre: £5,297 Berkshire County Blind Society: £19,300 Harbour Group: £5,100 Kingsley Centre: £85,090 Learning Disability Development Fund: £63,000 Loose Ends: £2,200</p> <p>Newbury Crossroads: £264,980 Princess Royal Trust: £55,000 Reading Crossroads: £19,900 Reading Deaf Club: £7,000 SE Citizen Advocacy service: £17,500 Stroke Care: £37,209 Thames Valley Positive Support: £5,200 WEBCAS: £17,900 WB Citizens Advice Bureau: £20,747 WB Mencap: £299,146</p>
<p>9. Why is the voluntary and community sector being targeted with regards to service commissioning, with no apparent regard to the effectiveness and efficiencies that sector provides, relative to the private sector? Why are no private sector contract cuts envisaged?</p>	<p>The Council's 2011/12 revenue budget contains a sum of £3.2m which either supports the delivery of services through VCS organisations, or provides general grants to organisations operating in this sector. The Council does recognise the importance of the VCS in providing cost effective services but is unable to ring fence these organisations from potential budget reductions given the scale of the savings required.</p> <p>The Council will be exploring the possibility of renegotiating all contracts where this is both appropriate and possible.</p>

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<p>10. Will WBC ensure that those needing help with water rates, water debt, other debt, Flexible Home Improvement Loans, heating grants, and similar are directed towards the help they may need and will WBC ensure that advice and advocacy services are commissioned accordingly?</p>	<p>It is in the interests both of individuals and the Council that all people claim their full entitlement and seek all appropriate support with finances. Our Welfare Benefits team offer help in ensuring people apply for all available benefits.</p>
<p>11. Will the Council engage with the local voluntary sector to look into the hidden costs of disability in a meaningful way before WBC revises its charging criteria?</p>	<p>We encourage, and will respond to, any submissions from local voluntary sector organisations about the costs of disability, as part of this consultation.</p>
<p>12. Will WBC issue a detailed analysis of how the proposed £700,000 extra income from charging is made up, to help identify whether the basis is fair and justified?</p>	<p>£100k from the charging for double-up care. £200k from no longer allowing for extra expenditure on items which have been added locally to the list of allowances (water rates and building maintenance). This local position was in addition to the guidance issued nationally. £400k from removing allowances currently included as Disability Related Expenditure where the local position is more generous than the minimum national guidance.</p>
<p>13. What percentage reduction is £150,000 within the Personal Budgets heading and are the proposed savings targeted at certain individuals or situations?</p>	<p>We are continuing to increase the proportion of people who receive a Personal Budget, and next year intend that Personal Budgets will be the default option for all people receiving long-term services. As such, Personal Budgets will account for the</p>

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(Examples are needed as to where WBC has lacked the creativity it previously assured was to happen, now apparently only shown by some other Councils).	majority of the £34m spend within Adult Social Care. As outlined in the draft Council Strategy, we will focus on assisting people to find more cost effective use of their budgets, and recouping from individuals allocated funds which they have not spent and do not require, or are being spent inappropriately.
14. Is the Fair Close hot meals service affected by the proposal to cut the subsidy for the hot meals service?	No. Fair Close is run independently by Age Concern, and is not part of our contract for the delivery of hot meals into people's homes. It is only the hot meal delivery service (currently provided by Appetito) which is the subject of this proposal.
15. What evidence does the Council have that suitable hot meals can be provided at no more cost than at present, noting the value in current services that employ some voluntary input?	The current contribution people make to the cost of meals is £4.20, against an actual cost to the Council of over £6. We do not think that this is good value, and we will assist people in finding alternative sources of hot meals local to them. One response we have recently received was from an individual who was shocked to find out that the meals cost more than the £4.20 she had been paying, as she felt they were not good value, citing the ability to buy supermarket ready meals at 4 for £5.
16. Is the saving of £80k pa re: LD to be achieved by reducing the number of clients, by delaying provision of service, by cutting everyone's budget proportionately or is it a notional saving?	The £80k is to be found by re-negotiating the cost of appropriate services from specific providers, based on an amount for which we can currently purchase local services of an appropriate quality.
17. What criteria will be applied in setting	We will take into account the type of services, and set a guide

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the price guide and price range for residential care costs?	price for which we can currently purchase local services of an appropriate quality.
18. Is the planned saving of £50k pa in the care homes budget to be achieved by reducing the number of clients, by delaying provision of service, by cutting tariffs proportionately, by moving to a single price regardless of quality or is it a notional saving?	The £50k target covers two specific actions: both the guide price for residential, and consideration of the appropriateness of continuing to provide care in people's own home when appropriate residential care could be provided at a significantly lower cost.
19. The proposal to combine, share or otherwise make more efficient the Council's transport facilities appears to save the equivalent of about one minibus and associated driving time pa, which appears conservative in the overall scheme of things. Can the Council confirm that there are no plans to reduce the number of journeys provided?	There are no plans to reduce the number of journeys provided. Savings would be made through the continued integration of transport services, the return of two surplus vehicles, and a reduction in the use of agency drivers.
20. Reference the proposed £500,000 reduction in spending on people who it is known do not need sheltered housing service, can the Council explain why that service should not be stopped immediately, rather than have to go	This service is delivered by support officers employed by the residential social landlords, rather than the Council. It supports people eligible for social care, and also other residents of sheltered housing schemes who are not Adult Social Care clients. Reducing the Council's payment towards this service will impact those individuals who benefit from support, but who

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through a consultation process?	do not meet our eligibility. It is appropriate to give notice of this, and we are in negotiations with the social landlords over the impact of this change.
21. Can the Council identify other situations where those responsible for this mal-administration may have allowed similar situations to arise?	We do not accept that this constitutes mal-administration. We have reviewed previous decisions where we have chosen to provide services beyond the requirements of national legislation and good practice guidance, and are reconsidering some of these. The review of our previous allowances under Disability Related Expenditure is another example where the local position has been more generous than that adopted by other councils, and which we have had to re-consider.
22. How many people in W. Berks currently receive Independent Living Funds (ILF) and what is the total cost to ILF & WBC?	<p>Not part of this consultation, we will need to undertake a further exercise to look into the possible implications of future changes to ILF (due in 2015).</p> <p>However, there are a small cohort of original ILF recipients (pre 1993) who are not known to ASC, as this was not an original qualifying condition for receipt of ILF. WBC still has a duty to support the critical social care needs of vulnerable people, and is required to put a minimum figure into this before ILF could be considered.</p>
23. How many people does WBC estimate would have qualified for ILF since the funds closed to new applicants on 01/05/10 and what has been the extra	<p>See above, not part of this consultation.</p> <p>Again, WBC has to support the critical adult social care needs of people, irrespective of whether they are in receipt of ILF. The closure of ILF has had an impact, with a small number,</p>

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cost to WBC to meet the shortfall?	particularly of adults with physical and learning disabilities, for whom WBC is now funding more of the total cost. This has been flagged up as an extra budget pressure on Adult Social Care.
24. How many people in W. Berks currently receive Continuing Healthcare (CH) and what is the cost to Berkshire West PCT?	Not part of this consultation. Will respond separately, following additional research. The Council is; however, keen to ensure that people, who qualify for services from the NHS through CHC, are in receipt of these.
25. How many people has WBC supported/encouraged to apply for CH since 01/05/10, either because the CH criteria were likely to be met or who would have qualified for ILF?	Not part of this consultation. Will respond separately, following additional research.
26. How many people does WBC estimate that they currently supporting who could apply for CH and how much could be saved by ensuring a transfer of funding?	Not part of this consultation. Will respond separately, following additional research.
27. How many people has WBC supported/encouraged to apply for CH that have been affected by increased charges for their care services?	Not part of this consultation. Will respond separately, following additional research.
28. Does WBC accept that the percentage	Nationally, there has been significant variation in the proportion

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of people receiving CH in W. Berks is 3.3% of the population when the national average is 10.5%?	of people receiving CHC, and there has also been a significant fall in numbers receiving CHC over the past year. WBC is actively reviewing past and current decisions on CHC to ensure people who qualify are in receipt of CHC.