

Budget Proposals 2019/20: Mental Health First Aid Training

Consultation Summary Report

Why we consulted?

Over the last nine years we've had to make savings of £60 million as our central government funding, the Revenue Support Grant (RSG), has reduced and the need for social care support has increased. We've done this by becoming more efficient at what we do, by reducing some of our administrative functions and increasing our income. Throughout this period we have done our best to protect your services.

Six years ago, the RSG was worth £24 million to the council and was reduced to just £100,000 last year. In 2019/20 there will be no grant and our costs will exceed our income. As a result, we'll need to find a further £7 million in savings or income generation. Much of this will come from becoming a more efficient council, however, 14 proposals, amounting to approximately £300,000, have been identified from services that will impact the public.

It was these proposals that made up the Budget Proposals 2019/20 consultation.

Approach

We published all the public facing proposals on our website on 12 November 2018 with feedback requested by midnight on 23 December 2018.

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 Portalⁱⁱ.

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 taken into account. Feedback was then invited through an online form and a dedicated email address. Hard copies of the proposal documents and surveys were also made available on request.

As well as publishing the consultations on our website, we also emailed members of the West Berkshire Community Panel (around 400 people) and members of the West Berkshire Mental Health Forum, notifying them of the exercise and inviting their contributions. Heads of Service also made direct contact with those organisations directly affected prior to them being made publicly available.

Finally, we issued a press release on the 12 November 2018, and further publicised our consultations through our Facebook and Twitter accounts. We also placed posters in our main offices and other council properties e.g. libraries, and made them available to WBC Councillors and Parish and Town Councils to put up in the wards/parishes.

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Proposal Background

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)ⁱⁱⁱ courses help people to learn how to assist someone with mental health issues. They give people the confidence to have supportive conversations around mental health, and the knowledge to signpost individuals, who may need to recover or manage their symptoms, to the appropriate treatment. In doing this, mental health issues can be addressed sooner, which can prevent symptoms from getting worse.

We've funded MHFA courses for staff, school staff and voluntary sector organisations since 2014, and have trained over 600 people. Annually, we subsidise the programme at a cost of £8,500, which covers instructor costs, room hire, teaching materials and refreshments.

Legislation Requirements

There is no legislative requirement to provide this service.

Proposal Details

To cease subsidising the current Mental Health First Aid training programme at an annual cost of £8,500 and to deliver the training through a 'West Berkshire Wellbeing' traded service^{iv} from 1 April 2019.

All delegates will pay for courses. The cost of each course is as follows and includes course materials from MHFA England, refreshments and onsite car parking:

- Mental health awareness (half day course) - £100 per person
- Mental health champion (one day MHFA course) - £190 per person
- Mental health first aider (two day MHFA course) - £290 per person

This will provide a more sustainable option and allow the service to continue.

Consultation Response

Number of Responses

In total, 9 responses were received.

One of the respondents identified themselves as a user of the service, seven as residents, one as a Parish/Town Councillor, one as a partner organisation and two as other.

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Summary of Main Points

Of the nine responses, seven either strongly disagreed or disagreed with the proposal to cease subsidising the current mental health first aid training.

Overall, there was a feeling that cutting this funding seems to contradict the work that the Health and Wellbeing Board is doing around mental health, especially as mental health is currently one of their top priorities. One respondent commented that by ceasing the funding, it appeared that WBC are not interested in reducing mental health stigma or supporting people with mental health issues.

A voluntary sector organisation commented that they are supporting residents that have been sign posted by the council in order to save money. They have a view that the council are asking the voluntary sector to pay in order to support people who receive help from the council.

One respondent suggested that there is a collective, social benefit to be gained from the mental health first aid courses, which includes reducing costs in other parts of the system (e.g. other parts of the council, health service, criminal justice system etc.), which therefore justifies a subsidy for the provision.

There was a general comment about local government cuts to services which have affected those most at need the hardest, and that savings should be found elsewhere.

One person agreed that people should pay to attend courses.

Summary of Responses by Question

1. Are you...?

(N.B. respondents were able to tick more than one option)

	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
Or anyone you care for, a user of this service	1	8.3%	11.1%
A resident of West Berkshire	7	58.3%	77.8%
Employed by West Berkshire Council	0	.0%	.0%
A Parish/Town Councillor	1	8.3%	11.1%
A District Councillor	0	.0%	.0%
A service provider	0	.0%	.0%
A partner organisation	1	8.3%	11.1%
Other	2	16.7%	22.2%

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2. **How far do you agree with the proposal to cease subsidising the current Mental Health First Aid training programme at an annual cost of £8,500, and to deliver the training through a 'West Berkshire Wellbeing' traded servicev from 1 April 2019?**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Strongly agree	1	11	11.1
Agree	1	11	11.1
Neither agree nor disagree	0	0	.0
Disagree	2	22	22.2
Strongly disagree	5	56	55.6
Total	9	100.0	100.0
Not answered	0	.0	
Total	9	100.0	

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 respondents recognised that mental health conditions disproportionately affect certain vulnerable groups (such as people with learning disabilities, BME groups, LGBT groups, homeless people etc.).

People with mental health conditions could be affected by this proposal, as there will be less people trained to spot the first signs of a mental health condition. This could lead to an increased expenditure as people could seek help at a later stage, when their mental health condition is much more serious, and consequently harder to treat.

One respondent wanted reassurance that there would be no adverse consequences in reducing this funding.

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.**

Comments included:

- Advertise spaces that are not taken up for free
- Fund Healthwatch and Eight Bells for mental health to run courses

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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.**

Suggestions for funding included:

- Obtain funding from the Better Care Fund, in consultation with partners
- Increase council tax
- Lobby central government. WBC should try to get more funding from the government to enhance the provision of Mental Health related measures.
- Run a local lottery
- Turn off council lights
- Turn road lights when Christmas lights are on
- Charge proportionally for companies depending on number of employees

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 name and email address below.**

No responses received to this question.

7. **Any further comments?**

I understand that the Health and Wellbeing Board wasn't consulted in advance about the proposed cuts. Was that an error or an indication of the regard in which other parts of the council regard that body? What does it say about having a joined up, strategic approach?

I really don't believe that public views will make any difference to what the council will do. It is time that the members stood up and backed an over budget spend en masse or resign. The government needs to know how the cuts affect disproportionately vulnerable people.

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

Rachel Johnson
Senior Programme Officer
Public Health and Wellbeing
31/12/2018

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*

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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.

All the responses have been provided verbatim as an appendix to this report. Whilst this summary seeks to distil the key, substantive points made, it should also be read in conjunction with the more detailed verbatim comments to ensure a full, rounded perspective of the views and comments are considered.

ⁱ <http://www.westberks.gov.uk/budgetproposals>

ⁱⁱ <http://info.westberks.gov.uk/consultations>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://info.westberks.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=35650>

^{iv} <http://info.westberks.gov.uk/westberkswellbeing>

^v <http://info.westberks.gov.uk/westberkswellbeing>