

Transcript: Budget Consultation Introduction

This is a transcript of a video in which Graham Jones, Leader of West Berkshire Council, introduces a public consultation on proposals for the Council's budget in 2019/20.

Hello, I'm Graham Jones, the leader of West Berkshire Council.

As a businessman here in Lambourn and part of the local community, the services West Berkshire Council provides are as important to me as they are to you.

As Leader, with fellow Councillors I have the responsibility of protecting and improving those services on behalf of us all

I want to tell you about changes to how West Berkshire Council is funded and changing demand for its services

This year West Berkshire Council has £124.5 million pounds to spend on services. Protecting our most vulnerable residents is an important part of what the council does.

We spend almost half our budget on adult social care and our children and family service.

Every one hundred pounds we spend is broken down like this.

£33 is spent on adult social care and £11 goes to our Children and Family Service.

£13 is spent on our waste service,

£6 on education and £5 each on our transport and countryside service and a Better Care Fund managing health and wellbeing.

Public Protection and Culture, Development and Planning and Prevention and Safeguarding together account for another £6

There are also some services which support frontline delivery – £10 goes towards customer services, human resources and housing, as well as supporting our democratic processes in West Berkshire.

The final £11 is spent supporting our capital investment programme to help deliver new schools, roads and much more.

Three quarters of the funding we receive to deliver these services comes from local residents through council tax.

We get almost a fifth from local businesses through rates they pay with the remainder coming from a national Better Care Fund and a number of other smaller grants.

Our government funding has reduced substantially in recent years and mainly through the removal of a central government payment known as the Revenue Support Grant.

Just six years ago this was worth twenty four million pounds to the council. This represented £1 in every £5 the council spent.

This year it is worth just £100,000 and next year the grant will be removed completely and we will get nothing.

Our budget would look considerably different today if we were still receiving the fund.

Funding is reducing but at the same time demand for services is increasing.

The need to support vulnerable adults through our adult social care provision is increasing significantly as it is right across the country.

Looking after the most vulnerable in our society is a priority for the Council and it is right that we do what we need to do in order to support them.

Our support ranges from young adults who cannot live independently or need help to do so through to our elderly and frail residents who need support to continue living in their own homes or require more intensive support in nursing or residential care.

Our adult social care staff – those who work in care homes, out in our communities and in supporting roles – work hard and care about the people, their families and carers they support. It is an important role and I am proud of the work we do in this area.

Our council is adapting to a reduction in the amount it has to spend on local services and at the same time an increase in the demand for its services.

This year we have had to save more than five million pounds – bringing the total saved to more than 60 million pounds in the past nine years.

We've done this by becoming more efficient at what we do and we are now a smaller organisation for it.

Whilst the overall council budget has fallen the amount raised locally has increased. In recent years we have reluctantly - taken the decision to increase council tax to generate income and to reduce the impact on frontline services.

We have done our best to protect the services we know you value the most.

However, it has been impossible to make these savings while completely protecting the frontline. As a result we have had to save money by reducing services or looking for opportunities to generate income.

Next year we have to find savings or generate income to cover a seven and a half million pound shortfall between the money we will have to provide services based on the anticipated increases in demand.

We are currently consulting on some budget proposals for next year which will impact on frontline services.

Before we make our decisions we want to understand what impact they would have on the people who use those services and how that impact might be mitigated.

I hope that as a resident you will take the time to visit our website to review our proposals and have your say.

No decisions will be made until the consultation has closed and councillors, alongside senior officers, have had a chance to consider the feedback from our communities.

The consultation is open until Sunday 23 December with the budget going to Councillors at their meeting next March.

Thank you for taking the time to listen today. West Berkshire is a fantastic place to live in, to work in and to visit.

Our communities are tight-knit and many residents volunteer and help make their communities safer, tidier or better in so many different ways.

As resources become scarcer the valuable work they do will become even more important.

To all of those people who get involved in their communities I want to say thank you for your time, ideas and energy. It really does make a difference.