

FURTHER NON- PRIORITY QUESTIONS

1. From Councillor Oonagh Moulton to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration:

In light of the serious accident involving a jogger at the junction of Durnsford Road and Arthur Road in the last few days, will the Cabinet Member now listen to the concerns of local residents and agree to introduce a 'Green man phase' at this junction to allow pedestrians to cross the street safely on Arthur Road?

Reply

The Council does not have details but was contacted by a resident saying there was an accident. We contacted the police, however they advised that they only have information on fatalities and they were not aware of any accidents.

There is merit in introducing a pedestrian phase and it is something that has been refused by TfL in previous years. However, at a meeting with TfL just before Christmas we advised them of Merton's intention to introduce a pedestrian phase and it was agreed that it would be considered subject to the basic modelling and design approval etc. It has been added to next year's programme (TfL funded) for investigation.

2. From Councillor Gilli Lewis-Lavender to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health

Many residents are understandably upset that funding is being cut to support much needed in house day care services at the High Path and All Saints centres for residents with learning and physical disabilities?

This service brings much joy to the people who visit on a regular basis. It also gives much needed respite for relatives and carers.

I was most surprised to see this cut on the Cabinet agenda of 10th November yet it was not included on the agenda of the 12th November's Healthier Communities and Older People O&S Panel. I am now told that this item will not be considered until the next O & S Panel meeting on 16th January.

Given the council's duty under equalities legislation to ensure that Merton's disabled residents are able to play a full part in our local community, how does the Cabinet Member justify her proposed cuts? Does she recognise that these facilities are essential both to the users and their carers and will she agree to withdraw her proposals and reinstate this much need service? What other cuts is she planning to try and slip through in this manner?

Reply

As the Councillor will be aware, the council is facing a £32m funding gap due to unprecedented cuts in our funding from central government. These government cuts are affecting all councils across the country with many being faced with difficult choices such as closing libraries, day centres, children's centres and other valued services and facilities.

Government policy is also affecting the services we can continue to afford to provide in Merton. I agree that many residents will understandably be very upset at the impact these government cuts are having. Any assistance Cllr Lewis-Lavender can give in lobbying her Conservative colleagues in government to put a stop to these damaging government cuts to council funding would be greatly appreciated.

However, despite consistent cuts to our funding from central government over the last four years in Merton we have worked hard to reduce the impact on the most vulnerable residents. As in previous years Cabinet have agreed that Children's Services and Adult Social Care should take less of a share of the cuts compared to other departments. However, due to the severity of government cuts no area can be entirely protected from cuts and we need to look at every aspect of council services to see where we can make savings. As a business-like council we have increased efficiency and invested in new ways of working that have reduced costs. However the severity of these government cuts means that services will inevitably be affected.

I am aware of the importance of day opportunities for our service users and carers, and we will continue to provide them. However we think it's right when money is tight to review what everyone gets and ensure we are focussing on our core priorities.

We have provided a wide range of in-house day services in Merton for a number of years, including 'Outreach' activities which take place in the evenings and at weekends. One of the ways we will achieve savings will be to work with our customers and their families to agree their priorities for this type of support. Originally Outreach was supposed to be an alternative to organised day time activities, but over time many people have taken up these trips as well as attending centres during the day. If someone is content to swap a day at the centre for an evening activity this will be part of their new package. No-one will be asked to reduce their core day time package except in these circumstances. We understand that day time respite is valuable to carers and will seek to preserve this. A consequence of these changes will be that over time there will be less choice of activities at the centres, but we will ensure that customers will be safe, stimulated and provided with support for personal care needs.

Increasingly we will also be working more with volunteers to provide additional activities, and we are currently working with Merton MENCAP to investigate sharing resources to benefit our day service customers.

We have worked hard over the past few years to reduce the cost of our day services by deploying our staff more flexibly, reducing management and administrative costs and providing transport in different ways. We will continue to explore all of these options to make savings, but are confident that we can continue to offer a safe range of day services in Merton for everyone who currently attends an in-house service.

As the Councillor will be aware, this year's budget process has followed the same process as in previous years. Scrutiny is currently assessing all savings put forward and will report back to Cabinet in the usual manner. The final decision on the budget proposals is not taken until the council meeting on 4 March. We very much value the input of Scrutiny and we continue to operate in a transparent manner and in partnership with our Scrutiny colleagues.

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