

# **Merton Council**

## **Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel**

**4 December 2014**

### **Supplementary agenda**

4 Adult Education in Merton - Options Appraisal

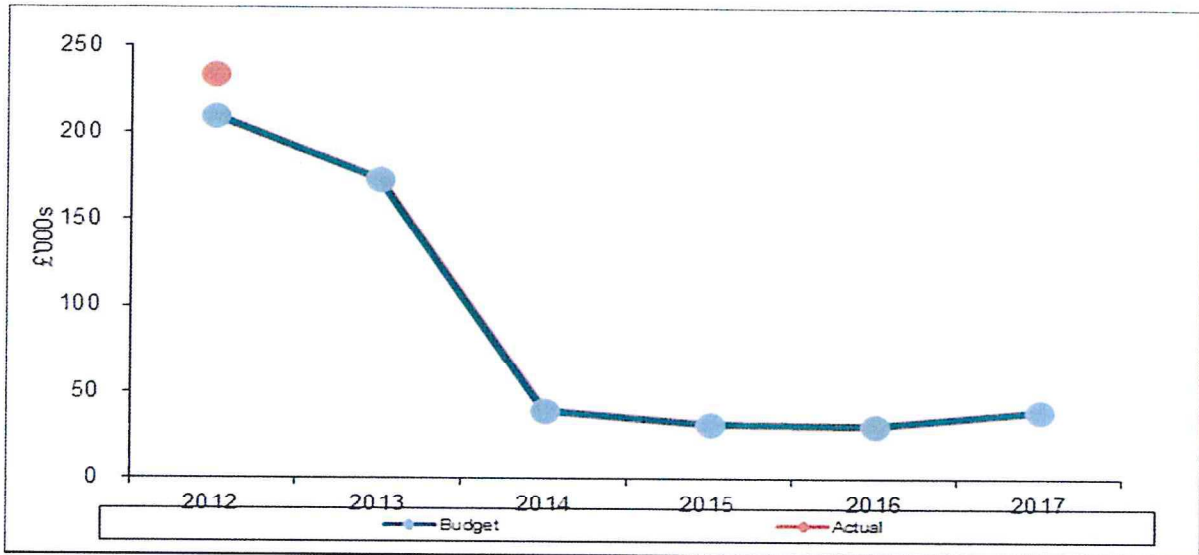
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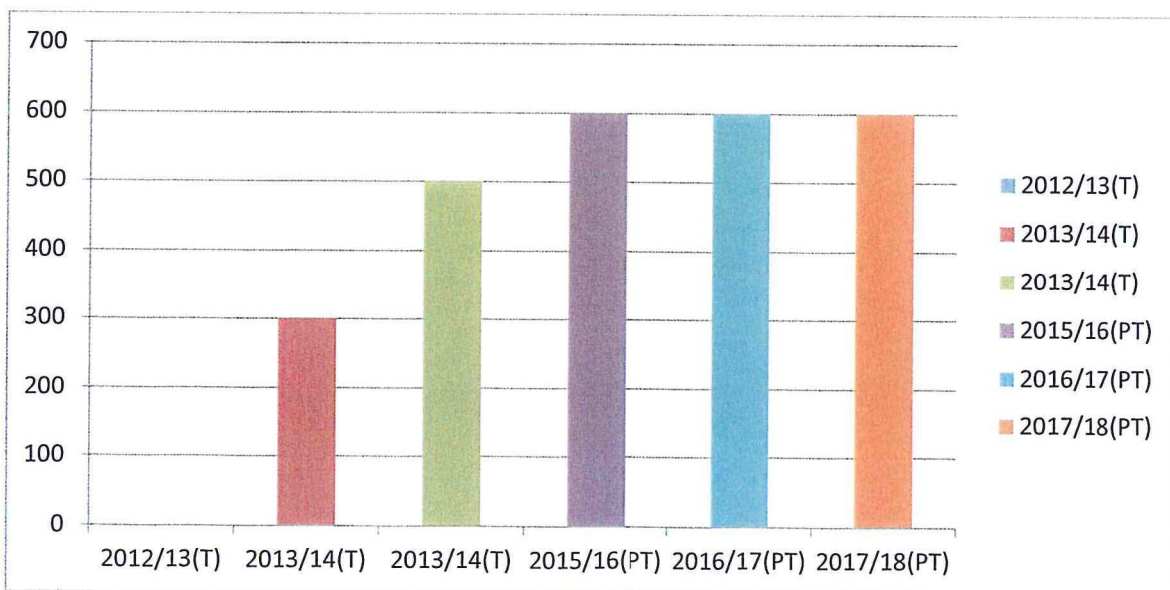
**London Borough of Merton Service Plans 2012/13 to 2017/18**

**Community and Housing on Merton Adult Education**

- Council Funded Net Budget:**



- Number of Commercial Learners:**



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Laid round by Sue Hubbard

## Proposed Changes to Merton Adult Education Service

Presented on behalf of Merton Adults First, a forum for the carers of adults with a learning disability.

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I represent Merton Adults First, Below are arguments against the closure of Whatley Avenue MAE in terms of how it will adversely affect the many **adults with a learning disability (LD)** who attend courses there.

They travel to Whatley from **all parts of the borough** because it provides an intimate, friendly and **non-threatening environment**. For them, attendance is not just about going on a course. They can move around freely and independently because of its familiarity, go to the cafe (where the staff are likely to know them by name) and socialise with people unlike themselves – in other words **feel and function just like other people** – which, for them, is their dearest wish. The sense of safety, support and self- confidence that Whatley provides cannot be underestimated.

Adults with LD have to work hard to function in the so-called normal world. The effort that most of them make to do so is extraordinary. Routine is important. One small change, which for others might seem slight, can put their whole life (and that of their carers) out of balance and create many problems – emotional, practical and financial.

**The proposed or possible changes seem to include:**

- 1. Attendance at a larger college such as South Thames:** This would be too intimidating for most LDs - just finding their way around. Strangers can be, or appear to be, intimidating - for some just the fear of this deters participation. South Thames lacks the dedicated facilities or resources that MAE has. Some people from Sutton attend Whatley because **Scola does not meet their needs**.
- 2. Buying in tutors for specific courses:** Although we've been told that the same tutors will be delivering courses, in practice this promise is unrealistic. Casual tutors bought in will not have the same expertise as the current tutors.
- 3. The use of a variety of sites:** LDs often attend different courses and would find it difficult to travel to different places. **Travel support and/or training is likely to be in short supply** given the loss of five jobs in the Merton LD team announced yesterday and plans for six new cuts in adult social care, including changes to day services and reductions in the level of support offered. Reference: <http://democracy.merton.gov.uk/documents/b6817/Supplementary%20agenda%20Monday%2010-Nov-2014%2019.15%20Cabinet.pdf?T=9> . Evening courses for LDs at MAE have already been cut because of **lack of escorts and support**. The taxi card scheme allows for only a finite number of journeys. An alternative site specifically for LDs would cost a great deal to equip and would not enable them to mix with others unlike themselves, thereby increasing their sense of difference.
- 4. Commissioning a private provider:** While this might relieve Merton of financial responsibility it will not ensure the provision of an appropriate service that knows and serves the needs of the local community. Care agencies are commissioned by Merton and they are poorly monitored and often fail their clients. In addition, where are these providers to be found? The alternatives are just not out there. There is already a dearth of activities both in and outside of day centres.
- 5. Providing courses at existing day centres:** While this might seem to be a viable option, given the loss of day centre staff, full time attendees not get any change of environment. Depression and boredom levels are quite high in this group.

**If MAE is to close or change, it is likely that many adults with LD will simply stop attending *any* courses.** For some of the more able, going to the College is their only activity. Those who live alone face increasing isolation. One Mencap report, 'Stuck at Home: *the impact of day service cuts on people with a learning disability*' surveyed 151 local authorities and found that **one in four adults with LD get out of their house for only one hour a day**. Reference: <http://www.mencap.org.uk/day-service-cuts> (2012).

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