

Business Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee
23 April 2014
Item 4 – Public Questions and Answers
Agenda Item 6: Call-ins – Children’s Service Contract Arrangements and Extensions

1) What level of cuts for this budget did central Government impose on Barnet? It has been reported in Parliament at 6% - why then is Barnet imposing a 25% effective cut to out of school provision at Mapledown? (Kristine Canavan, parent)

The Government’s spending review has reduced the amount of money available for the Council to spend over the coming years. Over the past three years to 2013/14 the Children’s Service has reduced budgets by over £12m (c.20% of the budget) across a range of areas. Over the next two years the Council is proposing savings of around £39 million.

The balance of savings to be consulted on across the Council for 2014/15 were agreed at Cabinet in November 2013. The proposals put forward took into account previous budget savings and funding for statutory functions. They included savings of £4.44m for children’s services, around 8% of the current budget, c£400k of which were in relation to short breaks services, which has not previously experienced a budget reduction.

2) Can the committee please explain why the respective Cabinet Member did not visit Mapledown School before these cuts were proposed? (Tina Kwabi, parent)

Cllr Thompstone has visited many of the 118 schools within the local authority and many of the additional services for children (including those in care and care leavers), families (including those in relation to fostering and adoption placements) and other education settings both within Barnet and in other local authorities. These visits began before Cllr Thompstone took responsibility for this portfolio less than 12 months ago and have continued. Mapledown School is due for such a visit as are all such providers within Barnet in due course.

3) Did the Council consult the parents of the students at Mapledown School before the decision on cuts to the Short Breaks budget was taken about how this might affect them and seek views? (Jill Eden, parent)

The Council consulted with residents, schools, contracted providers, and other stakeholders on budget proposals for 2014/15. This consultation was to gain a fuller picture of how we could minimise the impact of budget reductions on services

wherever possible. The budget reductions were carefully considered for each service provider, and a systematic process was followed; including a needs assessment and public consultation on the future of short breaks services in 2013 and a service utilisation analysis. As part of the budget consultation process commissioners also met with each service provider – including Mapledown School – to discuss how savings and efficiencies could be made within their service.

4) Was an individual Equality Impact Assessment undertaken of the effects of the Short Breaks cuts on Mapledown School for Disabled Children? Was there an EqlA on the effects of other local individual services which will be affected? (Sue Wilkins, parent)

There was a comprehensive Equality Impact Assessment on the proposals for Short Breaks Services, including Mapledown School. This was provided to Cabinet for consideration alongside the budget proposals.

5) Has the Council assumed in its calculations that these cuts will not require additional public funds to replace them? Will any money actually be saved? And if so how much? Can the Cabinet please say what, if any, consideration has been given to the additional costs which might arise as a result of the negative impacts of these cuts? If so, which parts of the budget will pick up those costs? (Teresa Bull, parent)

Short breaks are one of a range of services that provide support to disabled children and their families, and the Council has a statutory responsibility to provide such services. The Council is fully meeting its statutory duty within the terms laid out in the relevant legislation. This is the case regarding all of Children's Services and there is always consideration given to the impact of reductions in one area of service, and its interrelation to other areas of provision.