

QUESTIONS FOR ORAL REPLY

Questions received from Nathan Hardman, Governor, La Fontaine Academy

1. How is Bromley Council collaborating with free school groups and Central Government to ensure there is a sustainable increase in primary school capacity for Bromley Children, and suitable sites are identified and secured for free schools?

Reply

Officers from Bromley Council are in regular dialogue with free school proposers, operators, and the DfE to support Free School providers where proposals address identified needs in terms of pupil places. This includes liaison on potential sites and in the case of La Fontaine Primary Academy the Council has provided temporary use of an existing school site whilst discussions take place on a permanent location for the school.

2. Which free school groups (or academy trusts) is Bromley Council supporting to address the shortage in Central Bromley reception places?

Reply

The local authority is working with a range of academy trusts, free schools, local authority maintained schools, and faith schools in central Bromley to address the growing demand for school places. This includes:

- Supporting La Fontaine to achieve a suitable central Bromley location
- Supporting Harris Shortlands Primary Academy and the delivery of its new school at Kingswood House
- Supporting the Aquinas Multi Academy Trust to expand Parish CE Primary School from 2 to 3 Forms of Entry
- Supporting E21C Multi Academy Trust to expand Scotts Park Primary from 2 to 3 Forms of Entry
- Expanding St Georges CE Primary school from 1.5 to 2 Forms of Entry

Questions received from Jane Crockett

1. So, given that reserves have risen since I left, why are frontline services still being cut?

Reply

The “Draft 2015/16 Budget and Update on the Council’s Financial Strategy 2016/17 to 2018/19” on the agenda outlines the Council’s approach to reserves which are one-off monies that are contributing to enable sustainable income opportunities as well as help manage financial risks.

A combination of inflation and cost pressures continuing whilst the Council faces significant ongoing reductions in Government funding, results in a potential budget gap of over £53m per annum by 2018/19, even if the Council agrees the savings proposals in the report.

The ongoing funding reductions will impact on the Council’s ability to meet some statutory service levels and the provision of services that matter to our residents. We will endeavour to protect front line services where possible but they cannot be fully protected during the ongoing austerity period.

2. If you’re saying that frontline services have to be cut (youth services) then have you considered outsourcing?

Reply

Every opportunity is considered for services. In this case the proposal before Members is to remove the service budget and funding, so a market solution would not be possible.

Supplementary Question

Have charities been considered?

Reply

The Leader understood that the third sector and others would be willing to consider providing services in the future.

3. So, with these cuts coming to the youth service, what will Bromley do to help the pressure that will then be imposed on the police, schools, social services etc?

Reply

The Leader explained that implications of decisions are assessed before they are made. Should it be decided to remove the funding, its impact would be ameliorated, at least in part, by the close working of partners in Bromley. If there were to be a deteriorating situation through unintended consequences, and a recognition that any new arrangements were not working, consideration would be given to bringing the service back in-house.

Supplementary Question

Jane Crockett indicated that she had seen a change amongst young people in the area of the borough where she lived and suggested that any deteriorating situation would worsen should there be more cuts.

Reply

The Leader preferred that the Council was not faced with the current budget pressures. In the circumstances it was necessary to strike a balance on priorities and to compose a sustainable budget.

In relation to services that would no longer be provided by the Council, it could be expected that the services would be either delivered in a different way by other providers or not provided.

QUESTIONS FOR WRITTEN REPLY

Questions received from Lynn Bird for written reply

Why are Bromley Council seeking to save £60 million from essential public services when the Council's net assets have increased by over £70 million between March 2013 and March 2014 when there are areas of Bromley facing severe and enduring social deprivation?

Reply

The Council's net assets, as reflected on the balance sheet, do not necessarily represent the funding available to provide services and include operational and investment properties and cash flow items partly offset by long term liabilities.

The main reason for the £70m increase in net assets between 31st March 2013 and 31st March 2014 was a reduction in the Council's long term liabilities following a review by the Council's external actuary and does not reflect any increase in funding for services.

It is a legal requirement for the Council to produce a balanced budget and many of the assets relate to operational properties used for the provision of services to our residents. Inflationary demands, continued service pressures and significant reductions in government funding result in the need to find savings of over £60m in the next four years. The Council does hold some reserves but the policy relating to the use of these reserves, which will be reported to the next meeting of the Executive, recognises that reserves are one-off monies which cannot be utilised to fund on-going expenditure. The assets will continue to be reviewed as part of the Council's ongoing wider financial strategy of looking at economic growth, investment opportunities and disposal options in order to deliver long term savings and generate sustainable income opportunities to protect key services as far as possible.
