

Balancing the books

The Council has been forced to make £40m savings in order to set a balanced budget for 2015/16.

This comes on top of savings of £93m that the Council has already made since 2010 and is likely to be followed by another £45m savings to balance the books in the next two years.

The reason for these savings is that the funding that the Council gets from central government is falling, while the population and demand for services from the Council continues to rise.

The Council has also chosen to freeze Council Tax once again this year, to offer some help to those struggling with the cost of living. The Council has now frozen council tax in five of the last six years. The result has been a real terms saving in the tax you have paid to the Council of almost 12%.

Where are savings coming from?

Savings will continue to come where possible by getting better deals on our contracts, by reducing management overheads and through joint working with others. Around 45% of new savings this year are linked to greater efficiency and effectiveness.

But because of the level of savings needed, there will inevitably be an impact on the level of service we are able to provide in some areas. No area of spending can be spared savings, as those who tried the Big Budget Challenge online simulator found out.

Nearly half the Council's net budget is spent on adult social care and children's social care. While councillors try and protect these very important and often life changing services as far as possible, some savings will have to come from here otherwise there would be very little money left for any other service at all.

Savings in these areas include:

Adult Care cost effective care packages: £2.68m will be saved by making sure that a consistent approach is taken in meeting care and support needs in the most cost effective way. This may result in some community based packages of care ending or being reduced where needs can be met in different and more cost effective ways.

Learning Disability care packages: We are looking at how we provide care to adults with learning disabilities and challenging the organisations who deliver this care to provide the most cost effective service. In addition we have consulted on extending the existing charging policy in adult social care to include adults with learning disabilities in supported accommodation.

Remodelling day centre services: The Council will be consulting on a review of all day service provision. This is to further promote choice in line with the requirements of

personalisation ie service users having greater independence and choice over the service they receive. Savings of £1.3m are envisaged.

Access to childrens' social care services: Savings of £5.5m over two years are proposed. These include measures to reduce the number of children's social care assessments by directing those who do not need social care to the right services earlier, using the Government's Troubled Families Grant to fund early intervention work, reducing more expensive residential placements and recruiting more of our own foster carers, including specialist carers. The Council will also be consulting on changes to children's centres that would lower the costs of providing reception and administration, reduce the unit cost of working with each family by bringing all costs down to the level of the best performing centres and reducing the number of families to be worked with by a third.

Savings across other areas include:

Parks and Open Spaces service: £108,000 will be saved by reducing management costs.

Street cleaning: £400,000 will be saved by reducing the frequency of sweeping across the borough.

Voluntary and community grants: £1.5m will be saved from a budget of almost £6m. Though the level of cut is likely to lead to some organisations closing and some loss of services no longer deemed to be a priority, the remaining grants budget will be able to provide a good range of VCS support ensuring that the sector is able to remain an active partner in meeting the needs of Lewisham residents.

Youth service: savings of £1.4m have been agreed. This includes a reduction in front line youth provision – two youth centres (Rockbourne and Ladywell) will no longer have council-run youth services in them. Alternatives are being put in place, including finding alternative youth provision through the voluntary sector to deliver services at Rockbourne, and to open the Ladywell Adventure Playground during some evenings. Other non-youth service provision at both sites will not be affected and will continue to run.

Cultural and community development: savings totalling £240,000 will be made in the arts and sports budgets and in leisure management. However the budget for the local assemblies will not be affected.

Full details are published on the Council's website with the papers for the meeting of Mayor and Cabinet on 11 February 2015.