

Councillor Peter Morton, Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing, refuses to extend consultation period

Letter to Sarah Miller 16 February 2015

Dear Sarah,

Re: request to extend the consultation period on the budget

The engagement exercise is designed to ensure that people can feed into development of budget proposals. We want to be as clear and open as possible about emerging proposals, ensuring that people can feed into the process. However, Budget Council, while setting the footprint for council expenditure, will not be making decisions on individual service changes.

If we decide to take forward proposals that are currently being discussed, much more detailed consultation will follow based on detailed plans before any decisions are taken, having regard to all the facts and having assessed all the options.

We accept that the timescales are tight, but we felt it was better to be as clear as possible about emerging ideas for savings. This gives people the opportunity to inform our thinking before detailed plans are developed, at which point decisions are taken. Very few councils are engaging with residents at this stage, instead preferring to wait until they have detailed plans. There is no requirement to engage at this stage but we took the decision that we wanted to be open with people, accepting the difficulties around having conversations in what is a very restricted timetable.

Unfortunately it will not be possible to extend the current engagement programme because of the requirement of Cabinet to make recommendations on the Budget at its February 10th meeting. A report needs to be prepared by February 2nd and we would like sufficient time to consider responses before recommendations are made on the Budget.

In terms of your specific points:

- (1) We ensured that advocates were present at engagement events to relay information and help people engage with the process.
- (2) The information in the consultation document is a high-level overview of budget proposals, the purpose of which was to signpost where full information on budget proposals is available. We directly communicated to and engaged with all groups of people potentially affected by proposals to make people aware and ensure that they can participate in the engagement process. Meetings at day centres were arranged before Christmas and followed-up in the first week of January. In addition, this week advocates returned to each day care setting to talk to users individually and to ensure that their views are fed into the process.
- (3) Unfortunately, as set out above, the timing of the engagement process is dictated by the timing around publication of budget proposals in December and the requirement of Cabinet to make recommendations on February 10th.

(4) The Council sent out more than 1,200 printed consultation packs to community groups, which included a postal survey and pre-paid envelope. Printed packs were also made available in libraries and other public points. All representations made via emails and letters have been included, as indeed will all the feedback from events with service users.

Just to reiterate, I do understand the points that you have made and I would like to reassure you that should proposals be further developed after Budget Council much more detailed consultation will happen before any decisions are taken. I would also like to reassure you that in the hundreds of responses that have been made so far through the engagement process concerns around the provision of day services for people with complex needs have come through very clearly and I recognise the concerns that are being expressed.

Yours sincerely

Cllr Peter Morton