

PUBLIC QUESTIONS FOR CITY EXECUTIVE BOARD - THURSDAY 12 FEBRUARY 2015

Agenda No Item

3. Public Questions

Item 7 Budget_ Jane Johnson

Item 11 Allocation of Grants from Cutteslowe Community Association



INVESTORS
IN PEOPLE



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Public Question for CEB from Jane Johnson

Item 7 Budget:

Officer's answers in bold

We would be grateful if Councillors could consider allowing some Council Tax Exemption for people on long term ESA. This could be paid for by re-valuing the top band of Council Tax.

The Council could create an exemption for ESA, or increase the premium in CTRS for such cases. To date it has not chosen to adjust the CTRS scheme, however it will be reviewed again in 2016/17.

The Council does not set the Valuation Bands- these have been set by legislation and cannot be amended. This question should be posed to Central Government.

This is a request for a level playing field for claiming Council Tax benefit. At the moment people in receipt of Council Tax benefit can also get free prescriptions, free dentist & optical care and also reduced rates for evening classes and some leisure services.

People on housing benefit can also get these.

However there are circumstances where people in their 40s or 50s are living on a permanently very low income, (the same as that of someone on total benefits), but still have to pay for prescriptions, dentist, optician etc. This is manifestly unjust.

If their income is the same then I do not understand why they would not be in the same position- able to receive benefits. Age is not a barrier to being able to apply for help.

Case Study - Dave

Dave worked hard and got a mortgage, and also paid into his occupational pension. Later in life he unfortunately developed a severe illness.

He is certified by his medical consultants as being permanently unable to work. He is 'medically retired' and has to draw his occupational pension early. This is approx £600 a month to live on.

The only benefits he can claim are DLA (or PIPS) and ESA. (The ESA is termed "contribution based" because of his pension.)

Dave only has his occupational pension of £600 a month and sick benefits ESA and DLA, totally approx £1100 a month live on, including his mortgage and all the expenses of maintaining his own accommodation. *Dave's Council Tax is £105 a month (£1050 a year), even with single person discount.*

In addition, he has to pay for prescriptions, dentist, optician, and other council amenities such as evening classes, hospital transport etc.

Dave's doctors advise him he will not be able to work again and he has had detailed benefits advice which verify this situation.

Dave's family feel this is an unequal situation, and penalises people for "doing the right thing". If Dave had never worked or paid into his pension the State would in fact have to pay more in total benefit for him.

Dave's doctors advise him he will not be able to work again and he has had detailed benefits advice which verify this situation.

If even a small amount of council tax exemption could be granted, this would open the door for Dave to claim free prescriptions, dentist etc and enable Dave to access activities and services that would improve his quality of life.

Based on these figures Dave isn't deemed as being on a low income for CTRS purposes, none of the income he receives is disregarded. I appreciate that he has other expenses but he has none that are disregarded for CTRS purposes. When calculating a persons' entitlement to Benefit we have to abide by Government legislation in working out their income against their needs allowance.

We call upon the council to consider this and stop penalising people who have lived independent and responsible lives but are unable to work through no fault of their own.

We are now one of a small and diminishing number of councils who have maintained the same level of support to residents under our CTRS scheme as was afforded under CTB.

**Questions from the Public:
City Executive Board, Thursday 12 February 2015**

Question from Dr Shirley McCready, Trustee, Cutteslowe Community Association

Answer from Cllr Mike Rowley, Board Member for Leisure Contract and Community Partnership Grants

Regarding item 11: GRANT ALLOCATIONS TO COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS 2015/2016

Background: For 10 years, Cutteslowe Community Association (CCA) has provided a 3-week summer holiday play-scheme to ~55 local primary school children, age 5-11 years, 80% of whom are from families on benefits and including disabled children with support from Parasol. It is funded mostly from grants from charitable trusts, local churches, individual donations and support from the City. Year on year, funding is harder to raise and in 2014 the play-scheme was very close to being cancelled.

We applied for £10,000 from the City's Open Bidding scheme, which would cover half of the 2015 play-scheme's cost but were awarded only £2,500. The panel commented that, whilst the need was strongly evidenced, the cost of the play-scheme was excessive at £24 per child per day compared to £15 for the Council's holiday programme. They considered that the 4 trips, costing £4,000 in total, should be charged to the families involved, and not subsidised.

Questions:

Given the fact that the CCA is not subsidised and has to cover all costs, including its premises and admin, and considering the age group catered to, does the figure of £15 per child per day for other schemes compare like with like?

We are keen to work with the Cutteslowe Community Association to help make the play scheme sustainable. Unfortunately this is by far the most expensive play scheme in Oxford per head, and is therefore not benefitting nearly as many children as the other play schemes.

Would the panel be willing to reconsider the decision to fund only 25% of the sum requested?

What the CCA have asked for would be a 200% increase on the funding they received last year, and given the above considerations and the very tight financial situation, we unfortunately cannot justify this. However, Cutteslowe is an area of deprivation, which is why we will partially fund the play scheme. In addition, officers will work with the CCA to help develop future proposals.

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