

## **CABINET – 19 OCTOBER 2010**

### **ITEM 4 – QUESTIONS FROM COUNTY COUNCILLORS**

Questions received from the following Members:

#### **1. Cllr Liz Brighthouse to the Cabinet Member for Adult Services:**

“Can the Cabinet Member for Adult Services please confirm the following:

The number of people that are currently in receipt of the Alert Service in the County;

The proportion of those people who pay for this service currently;

The proportion of people for who the charges listed in the revenue monitoring report will be ‘new’ charges;

Whether the Council has consulted users on these charges;

Whether these charges have been through the Adult Services Scrutiny Committee?”

#### **Answer:**

#### **The number of people that are currently in receipt of the Alert Service in the County**

From 4 October 2010, approximately 3,300 people.

#### **The proportion of those people who pay for this service currently**

None. All of these people are eligible to receive the service free of charge based on their support need and financial eligibility.

#### **The proportion of people for who the charges listed in the revenue monitoring report will be ‘new’ charges**

None, as per the eligibility criteria mentioned above. The charges will apply to other people who wish to buy into the service because they believe that it offers a valuable service that they would like to use.

#### **Whether the Council has consulted users on these charges**

There was no need to consult existing users because they are unaffected by the charges.

#### **Whether these charges have been through the Adult Services Scrutiny Committee?**

Adult Services Scrutiny Committee has discussed the Alert Service on several occasions although they have not discussed the specific charges. The eligibility and charging policy was signed off by Cllr Jim Couchman and Paul

Purnell, Head of Service; and also formed part of the contract award decision taken by Cllr Jim Couchman under the delegated authority in February 2010.

## 2. Cllr John Sanders to Cabinet Member for Transport:

"I share with residents of Oxford the disappointment that, contrary to clear written promises by the County Council in 2006 that residents parking charges in Oxford would only be increased by the RPI, you have seen fit to approve an increase in these charges by 25% to cover "costs". As these charges and their RPI indexing were part of a Traffic Order which was the result of extensive consultation, how is it that this Traffic Order can be replaced without further similar consultation?"

### Answer:

"I too am disappointed that we are in a situation where we have to consider this increase; however the County Council has to cover the administration cost involved, I must remind Cllr Saunders no decision has yet been taken to approve a rise in permit charges. The variation of the Traffic Order has been out to statutory consultation and will be reported back to Cabinet Member Decisions at the end of November for a decision on whether or not to implement, taking into account responses to that consultation. The Council has complied with statutory requirements with regards to the level of consultation required to amend the Traffic Order."

## 3. Cllr Roy Darke to the Leader:

"Can the Leader please provide some detail on the number of customer complaints received by the Council since the beginning of the year, how that number of complaints compares to previous years, whether he expects the number of complaints to rise in light of the cuts being implemented by his government and this Council, and whether he will put in place extra resources for dealing with that eventuality?"

### Answer

The number of formal customer complaints received by the authority is below.

	12 months to 31 Mar 2010			6 months to 30 Sep 2010		
	Children	Adults	Total	Children	Adults	Total
Statutory social care complaints	80	88	168	45	55	100
Corporate complaints			135			80
<b>Total:</b>			<b>303</b>			<b>180</b>

Customer complaints, as recognised by the Local Government Ombudsman and as included in the statistics above, do not include objections to the government's or to the council's *policy decisions*. Complaints, as recognised by the Ombudsman, are

concerned with issues of maladministration i.e. the manner in which the council's services are delivered (e.g. error, delay etc) and not to the decisions about them (unless those decisions are themselves procedurally flawed).

Consequently, objections to policy issues are regarded as part of the general democratic/political engagement with the council, such as the recent Big Debate consultation/listening events. There is therefore no direct consequential link between 'complaints about cuts' and the issue of resources.

I should remind Councillor Darke that what I might describe as "his government" had already pencilled in cuts in revenue spending of 20% and in capital spending of 50%. They just never bothered to tell the public as they approached a General Election. The coalition government, having inspected the national finances and the mountain of debt they have inherited has decided to aim for a reduction in revenue spending in the public finances of 25% and to maintain the previous government's target of cutting capital spending by 50%. I certainly hope it will not be necessary to divert very scarce funds to dealing with complaints or inquiries from the public when we need to concentrate our resources on the front line if we are to help in bringing the national spend back into balance after an unbalanced national budget in every year since 2001.