

Questions from Councillors

Question from Cllr Nick Ireland

At a previous Cabinet meeting I spoke with the Adult Services Executive Director concerning the funding provided by and relationship with Dorset Council to an adult constituent of mine (X) with special needs.

He kindly engaged the relevant manager and I met with him and a finance / assessment officer very soon afterwards to explain the detail and was subsequently provided with several responses.

Without going into specifics, the issue breaks down into two items, one of which I wish to raise.

X had to move from Disability Living Allowance (DLA) to Personal Independence Payment (PIP).

The amount X receives from central government is still the same enhanced payment amount and X's needs have not changed. However, Dorset Council have reduced X's income by not permitting a proportion of X's payment for night care to be disappplied from the financial assessment when this was previously done.

Th effect of this is to reduce X's income by £125/month. X has no other income (and never will) and is entirely dependent on benefits and parental support.

The Disability Rights Association highlight that moving from DLA to PIP SHOULD NOT be an excuse for local authorities to disadvantage their dependants when their needs have not changed and that the disapplication should be continued.

The responses I have received from Dorset Council are that the current policy is based on guidance in the Care Act and also from the National Association of Financial Assessment Officers (NAFAO). However, they also acknowledge that some local authorities are continuing with the practise of disapplying a proportion of PIP income for assessment purposes.

Whilst I am well aware of the current funding crisis facing this council, and in particular those services we provide to Adults and Children, it seems both absurd and completely inequitable that a Dorset resident with extensive care needs is penalised by an arbitrary change that this council has the discretion to ignore, yet has failed to do so. X's needs have not altered and if they do, they certainly won't improve.

Will the cabinet member please provide a rationale for continuing this unfair state of affairs or announce an immediate change in this council's approach to supporting X and our other residents with extensive care needs?

Question from Cllr Maria Roe

Low Carbon Dorset, the three year programme funded by the European Regional fund will end in December 2020 and all projects must be completed by June 2020.

The programme has been extremely successful and has helped local businesses, the public sector and community organisations to realise projects which otherwise may not have come to fruition.

The project has included giving free technical advice, workshops, networking events, and low carbon grants.

Will the Council be able to continue any elements of the programme next year?

Question from Cllr Nick Ireland

Agenda item 7 (Q2 Budget Report) as a recommendation asks that Cabinet "note the impact that any overspend will have on reserves and the general fund" yet the outcome isn't explicitly stated.

"What was the reserve level when Dorset Council was formed on the 1st April 2019, how much of that reserve has already been committed to this year's budget, how much more reserves are expected to be used to address the ongoing challenges in balancing the budget and what is the final reserve level expected to be once this financial year has been closed down?"