



## BIRMINGHAM LINK REPORT BACK SHEET

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Title /Purpose Of Meeting :	Oct 12th - Jan 8th 2012 Bham City Council (BCC) Consultation
Date:	Nov 2nd 2011 - time 6.30 p.m. - 8.30 p.m.
Members Attending :	Co-Chair Mental Health Action Group Bham LINK
Also Attending :	Approx 40 people (30 public - 10 BCC Staff)
Venue :	Sutton Coldfield United Reform Church

The Mental Health Action Group (MHAG) is part of the Birmingham Local Involvement Network (LINK) which operates its activities and actions under the Local Government Public Involvement In Health Act 2007 . (See Part 14 Section 221 (2b) and there-on for examples of LINK prescribed activities).

The MHAG may try to aid the improvement of Health and Social Care services/outcomes /consultations where it feels there is case for that to improve the Carer/User quality of experience . It may refer matters to the Health & Adult Overview Scrutiny Committee where it feels consultation practice is flawed or problematic . It may issue reports and expect a response from NHS or Local Authority bodies charged with commissioning social-care services

The Birmingham City Council opened a budget consultation on Oct 12th running until Jan 8th 2012 . Quote from their website :

*"Citizens of Birmingham are being invited to have their say on the city council's 2012/13 budget during the most extensive public consultation ever staged on the authority's finances.*

[Download the budget consultation document](#)

*Cllr Randal Brew, Cabinet Member for Finance, and Chief Executive Stephen Hughes today (October 12) launched the consultation – which seeks views on the ways the council will have to make new savings of £65million next year as its latest contribution to helping reduce the national deficit."*

Source : [Birmingham budget consultation begins](#) By [geoffc](#) – October 12, 2011 Posted in: [Budget Views](#), [News](#)

The MHAG's core interest in this wider B'ham City Council Budget consultation running officially between Oct 12th 2011 and Jan 8th 2012 is the "Supporting People" (SP) issues together with views expressed by Carers /Users /Public/ Provisioners/Commissioners inside the current consultation. (see page X of this Report-back for a description of the client group mixture)

There are in this Budget consultation new proposals to cut 3.8m of SP provision as an additional cut on top of others already planned ( £12.8 million ) .

More of the background can be obtained through the MHAG's first report-back of the MHAG's involvement in this : [Click For Alexander Stadium Oct 27th Reportback HERE](#)

The MHAG is also part of the broader networking function of LINK that has other Action Groups , and it may collect information to pass on information to them too . The MHAG within its broader Independent LINK function, can take a view regarding a consultation's adequacy of methods, especially when informed by the public themselves when they are critical of it . Public criticism was markedly seen and noted on Nov 2nd at the Sutton Consultation . What follows in this report-back is intended as a reasonable selection of the nights consultation event, but it is not a complete record of the 2 hours proceedings

### **The Information Available On The Night Of Nov 2nd**

The main B'ham City Council consultation document (30 pages) prefaced by the Stephen Hughes BCC CEO letter, was available to everyone in the hall. At this event so was another well produced part-colour document : "Savings Proposal Fact Sheets" .

This appeared to be a part improvement on the Alexander Stadium event I attended on 27th Oct 2011

A Director of Legal Services gave the "Overview" (as he fairly termed it) of Bham City Budget proposals and he outlined that "£400 million " was to be saved over 4 years as a proposal now being re-consulted upon (The first consultation had been flawed and a High Court case had stated that ) .

The 30 page document prefaced by Stephen Hughes CEO letter already mentioned here, did in fact give the figure £350 million savings and the Director later responding to a public query and trying to resolve this contradiction said , there was : "*some extra to save now*" and: "*that had to be taken account of*".

This was confusing and not as well explained or elaborated upon as it could have been. It would have been better to have had a finance director there with a grasp of some of the potential discrepancies part caused by a complicated revised re-consultation

## The Public's Broad Criticisms Of The Consultation At The Sutton Event :

The public attending this Sutton event were actually very critical of the consultation .

- There were many remarks about elected councillors not being available . Within the first three sets of remarks alone were two statements about no councillors being present . This was also then echoed later by others separately in different parts of the meeting . There were high feelings about this and a sense of a lack of accountability.
- There were broader comments critical of this type of consultation process and one was a well articulated view about the need for a deeper engagements; devolving power, and using administration more efficiently to create savings of 10% across the Council . For that it was observed, it needed councillors not to be absent, but engaged far more .
- There were a few questions as to why there were no consultations in Erdington and Handsworth and 2 people had come from Erdington - one only hearing about the consultation : *"by accident"* . This was an indication there needed to be improvement in cross city access to consultation events
- There were questions and concerns about why the broad "Overview" budget consultation (Oct 12th - Jan 8th 2012 ) had embedded within it , other types of more specialist consultations (Adult & Communities and Supporting People provisions) and were they going to be given the same amount of lawful time (90 days) to be consulted upon that the broader consultations were being given ? [I have met carers/Users and public before and afterwards who have raised this query ]
- Supporting People provisions were mentioned in various ways with great concern (comments boxed & highlighted in pale yellow ) :

*" You will not get away with this ! Who will take responsibility for the deaths of vulnerable people in the city through under-provisioning ? "*

*"Supporting People provision creates early intervention value: for every £1 used it is saving £2 in services people would have to use without it . Why is extra savings proposed on it it now so disproportionately compared to other areas of proposed savings ? "*

Below shows the information regarding Supporting People provision the BCC Consultation was showing at this particular event .

<b>3. Supporting People</b>	
<b>Current Service</b>	<p>The Supporting People programme provides support services to a wide range of vulnerable people to promote independence, and prevent or reduce people's need for more intensive intervention in the future, either from council services, health, or police. In most cases, we pay external agencies to deliver these services.</p> <p>The programme benefits some of the most vulnerable citizens of Birmingham including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women fleeing domestic violence</li> <li>• Young people (including leaving care, at risk of offending, at risk of gun and gang crime, teenage parents)</li> <li>• Homeless individuals and families</li> <li>• Older People</li> <li>• Ex offenders</li> <li>• People with HIV/AIDS</li> <li>• People with substance misuse problems</li> <li>• People with learning disabilities</li> <li>• People with mental ill-health</li> <li>• People with physical and Sensory Disabilities</li> <li>• Gypsies and travellers</li> <li>• Refugees</li> </ul>
<b>Proposed Savings</b>	£3.8m for 2012/13
<b>Changes to Service</b>	<p>A review of how we will deliver the programme within the reduced budget is already in progress. This has included a detailed consultation process with service providers, service users and other stakeholders.</p> <p>A reduced budget would result in a reduction in funding to the voluntary sector, some decommissioning of services and a possible removal of some client groups from the Supporting People programme.</p>

Other comments regarding Supporting People (SP) provisions were about some Users of SP not being able to understand the information in a form appropriate to them .

*"Information is not being given in a form that is simplified enough for them "*

Another comment pointed to a lack of specific detailed information about SP without which people would feel under-informed and not able to give a more studied view :

*"Can we have more figures showing us where the SP cuts will impact across the provisioning sectors"*

Council officers did state there would be specialist areas of consultation within the broad budget consultation designated for SP and Adult & Communities - children and other issues. This created some confusion in a few people who felt matters should have been more focused upon earlier . Some members of the public appeared disgruntled about having to go to more "specialist" consultations in order to have their focused say

From the MHAG perspective the idea of creating "specialised consultations" later in a already stated 90 day legal period of consultation seems to under-perform on good consultation practice. The Council are under unusual pressure however :

All parts of the consultation should be fully and appropriately information-enabled from the start of the 90 day consultation period OCT 12th - as opposed to a later period within it. Later information-engagement on "special parts" creates the danger of short-changing fuller democratic engagement without more intellectually digested information which should be done at the outset of the consultation so people can form concerns even more intelligently . **The earlier the better** . That maximises the potential for engagement .

A Council officer was able to state regarding SP provision that the Cabinet members : *"are very concerned"* and that all views would be taken in account .

### **Equality Analysis Information Availability Concerns**

There were people who were concerned about the Equality Analysis information being shared with the public and the impacts on vulnerable people being able to be studied . One Council officer said Councillors would see the equality analysis information this later . SP issues of concern over homeless , old and refugee peoples were embedded into these points, as were other parts of the vulnerable spectrum of others who might be affected by the Council proposals

The Independent Facilitator, the council were using on the night, commented that the consultation process itself, was part of the way : *"to inform the equality analysis "*. From a MHAG perspective this is partly valid. It is also arguably now valid though to employ a DRAFT Equality Analysis PROCESS , that declares itself too, as open-to-view from the start of the 90 day consultation period. It could CLEARLY state it may be subject to alteration by public evidence given . This is a better way to broker the rights of the public and to broker the duties of the Council and it restores faith in the meaning of "consultation" . **This could be adopted as new practice** .

## Performance Checking By BCC/ Facilitation

Several staff were taking notes and the Council Officers appeared studious about this . BCC had employed a method too of making sure proceedings were recorded . At this meeting there was a great deal to record that I have not touched on here because of time and the predominant MHAG focus .

The facilitator kept order well and did so with some people who some of the public appeared to think were arguably over-keen to make sure their views were known. He did though accommodate everyone well and took those with keen views into account allowing two resolutions to be put and voted on :

### ***"Resolution 1***

***This meeting opposes all the cuts Bham City Council is proposing in the 2012/13 Budget . It further calls for the re-instatement of all the cuts in the 2011/12 budget in particular reversing the massive pay cuts (up to £5000 a year) being imposed on many city council workers . "***

### ***Resolution 2***

***The official rhetoric on the cuts is that we are all in this together . In line with this establishment line it is agreed to support the following :***

***The percentage cut in the 2012.13 budget agreed by the Birmingham City Council will be the same percentage cut in the councillors allowances and pay of the Chief Executive and directors of the council's departments . For example if the council agrees a 10% cut in services for Birmingham people , the allowance of the Council leader and the pay for the Chief Executive will be cut by 10% "***

Votes by hand were taken and it appears the resolutions were majority passed, though it was pointed out by a member of the public that abstentions did not seem to be recorded.

## Further Observations

Some people remarked it was quite notable that there were no officers specifically from Adult & Communities and the only officer there who had some partial connection to them was from "Housing and Neighbourhoods" . He fairly stated he could not comment fully on another department's saving proposals .

[Nov 2011 PBT/Co-Chair/MHAG/LINK]