

Message from the Chief Exec

28 September 2009

Dear Colleagues,

You know you're living in interesting times when our two main political parties are fighting not over who's going to cut public spending, but who's going to cut public spending in the most responsible way.

The ongoing recession and the squeeze on public spending mean that the next few years will be very tough for all ALMOs.

No matter what happens at next year's general election or with the current consultation over the future of HRA funding for local authorities, we will continue to face increasing financial pressures.

So it's not a question of if we're going to have to increase efficiency savings and reduce spending; it's a question of by how much. Barnet Council estimates it may need to reduce spending by as much as 20 per cent over the coming years.

That means there are some tough decisions ahead. All of you who were with us at the beginning of the year will know that our last budget setting was very tight. If anything, the budget for 2010-11 will be even tighter.

I am determined that these financial pressures should not derail us from continuing to improve our services to residents. It is a credit to all of you that our overall performance has improved over the past few months despite our increasing efficiencies. I am also determined that we do everything possible to avoid any compulsory redundancies.

Through these briefings I want to make sure that all of you are aware of the various efficiency savings we are considering. Some of these relate to our current terms and conditions of employment, so they may impact you directly. We have been in discussions for some time with the unions over these.

Most of you will already be aware of proposals to replace the current essential car user allowance with an enhanced mileage allowance, and reduce flexi time entitlement to one day a month from mid October.

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Some of the other areas we are looking at include:

- A possible freeze on pay increases or increments
- Offering a reduced working week of four days to staff on a voluntary basis, subject to the needs of each service area
- Reviewing relocation allowances, which were phased out by Barnet Council a few years ago
- Reviewing pay provision for long-term sick leave. Currently we offer six months full pay and six months half pay, which is extremely generous compared to other organisations. We are looking at reducing this to three months full pay and three months half pay, with a possibility of retaining the current offer for critical illnesses
- Looking at options for improving maternity provision

I will keep you informed about these proposals, and our more general progress on the 2010-11 budget, in future briefings.

I also want to hear from you, whether you have any views on the proposals or suggestions for other efficiencies we could make. I would stress that all comments are welcome. It is very important that we have a full and frank discussion as an organisation on the best way ahead.

Finally, I know some of you will have been disappointed by a recent articles in the Barnet Press that some of our estates are “no go” areas.

I visited our regen estates a few days ago with Derek Rust and our Lead Member for housing, Cllr Richard Cornelius, and we were struck by just how well maintained and cared for they were. Tina, Deeion, Darryn, Mark and all our staff working on regen really do not deserve such negative articles.

I didn't recognise the picture presented by the local paper and – what's most important - I sincerely doubt that our residents would either. It's just a shame that “estates look fantastic” doesn't make for a newsworthy headline.

Tracy Lees .