

BUDGET AND FINANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Budget and Finance Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday, 24th January 2012 at 6.30pm in the Scrutiny Meeting Room, Civic Offices, Telford

PRESENT: Councillors R. Sloan (Chairman), R Evans, A. Lawrence, C. Mollett, S. Reynolds, C. Turley and R. Williams (Co-optee).

Also attending: Cllr. G. Green; Clive Jones, Head of Family & Community Services; Paul Taylor, Social Care Specialist; Stephanie Jones, Scrutiny Group Specialist.

BFSC-28 MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting of the Budget and Finance Scrutiny Committee held on 5th January 2012 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

BFSC-29 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllrs. K. Austin, A. Stanton; Ken Clarke, Head of Finance.

BFSC-30 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllrs. R. Evans and C. Mollett declared an interest as Ironbridge Parking Permit holders.

BFSC-31 SERVICE & FINANCIAL PLANNING STRATEGY 2012/13-2014/15

The Head of Family & Community Services provided the following information in relation to questions 1-7 on the table of information requested by members:

1. The procurement process for early intervention services, including HomeStart, had changed from a rolling contract basis to tendered contracts to improve the delivery of services against specification. The bidding process was about to start and it was hoped that HomeStart would submit a bid.
2. Youth Initiatives had projected savings of £95k in 2013/14. It was not anticipated that the savings would have a major impact on services. Youth services had been re-designed as part of the re-structure so that more could be delivered with less resource, including supporting the voluntary sector to extend provision. The proposals for the Youth Offer had been out for consultation, including with the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee, and would be sent to members for information. It was emphasised to members that there were no plans to close youth clubs, and that where there was a demand they would remain open.

3. Domestic violence provision had projected savings of £30k in 2013/14. There may be changes to the way the service is delivered, but the offer would remain and there would be no impact on the security measures or availability of accommodation for victims of domestic violence.
4. Jigsaw provides 30 education places and 12 residential places. The school was being looked at as part of a wider review of SEN provision as part of the Placements Strategy. The review would identify what was needed and any gaps in provision. Consideration was being given to whether the service would be re-tendered or could be delivered in-house. The existing provider contract may be extended as an interim measure while the review was being completed to ensure the provision was right. With regard to the residential accommodation, the Council's aim was to increase foster care provision and reduce dependency on residential homes, which may mean that not all four homes would be needed and other options for the houses were being considered. A report would be taken to Cabinet in due course.

Cllr. Green suggested that the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee could review Jigsaw provision in more detail at a future meeting.

5. Teen pregnancy services had projected saving of £18k in 2012/13 and £20k in 2014/15. The number of teen pregnancies was falling but still remained above statistical neighbours. The savings had been identified from making efficiencies and it was not anticipated there would be an impact on direct service provision. The service would be embedded within early intervention so that the team would identify those at risk. It is possible that the existing teenage pregnancy sub-group would be integrated into a working group looking at risky behaviour.
6. The Street Pastor project had been a huge success as evidenced by the excellent case studies and reductions in reported crime. The volunteer project had been funded through a joint investment to which the Council contributed £5k for training from the Safer Communities grant. Some of the grant funding used would be transferred to the Police & Crime Commissioner (PCC) when elected, and it is possible that the Street Pastors would need to bid into the PCC for further funding. It was hoped that a bid would be considered favourably given the excellent results.

Members commended the excellent work and results of the Street Pastor volunteers. The Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee received regular reports and fully endorsed the project. A Member's suggestion that Town & Parish Councils in the relevant areas could be approached for a funding contribution would be taken up. During the discussion, members were told that the pastors were looking at extending their role in to other early intervention work.

7. A number of early intervention grants had been brought together into one grant and allocated using the government's funding formula in line with the revenue support grant. Some of the original grants merged to create the EI grant were population based.

The Chairman thanked the Head of Service, and welcomed assurances that the proposed savings discussed would be made mainly through efficiencies and have limited impact on front-line services.

The Social Care Specialist provided the following information in relation to questions 13-17 on the table of information requested by members:

13. Supporting People budgets had been introduced in 2003 when the government divided the housing benefit budget into benefit payments based on financial need, and support needed to help people maintain tenancies. The types of service included help in maintaining a home or tenancy, advice and advocacy, help in making claims and maintaining the safety and security of the tenant in the property. The Supporting People grant had reduced year on year and stood at £3.9m for 2011/12 and would reduce by £200k in 2012/13 and £200k in 2013/14. The funding was spent on a range of accommodation (e.g. sheltered housing, extra-care) and support for various groups (e.g. elderly, homeless, victims of domestic abuse, adults with learning difficulties, people with mental health or physical and sensory needs, teen pregnancy, substance misuse, ex-offenders etc.).

The 5% budget reductions over the last 2 years had been passed onto the providers and absorbed as efficiency savings without significant impact on services. However, it was recognised that it would not be possible to make the further 10% reduction over the next 2 years from efficiencies, and an analysis needed to be done with the providers to consider the options around commissioning and doing things differently. There was the potential to move from the existing building-based approach whereby services are provided, but not necessarily needed, by a tenant, to a needs based approach.

A session was being held with providers on 25th January to start this process, prior to consultation and engagement with service users. Consultation needed to follow due process to avoid the risk of judicial review and this would take time to do properly during 2012/13. For this reason, the aim was to make the £400k saving over two years to take into account the time required for consultation.

Other authorities had taken various approaches. Some had re-tendered all services, but this was time consuming and it was felt that there was a need to ensure work was done first to identify needs. Others had reduced hourly rates to providers, and there could be some scope for this but the level needed to be sustainable. The approach in Telford & Wrekin was to work in partnership with providers to find solutions, for example, identifying areas of duplication between Supporting People and social services, finding people who don't need or aren't using the services provided and opportunities for providers to work together to reduce costs.

The following information was given in response to Members' questions:

- Regarding questions about the risk of spreading the £400k saving over 2 years and thereby potentially putting extra pressure on the 2013/14

budget, members were assured that a £200k saving could realistically be delivered in 2012/13 and historically services had been managed within the overall budget. However, if sufficient savings were not delivered, there may be a need to manage the service down and provide less. This could be difficult with block contracts where money is committed, and why there was a need to move towards needs-based services.

- Around 4,600 people access housing related support. This tends to be smaller amounts and mostly for older people.
- Of the £3.9m budget, around £1.5m was spent on two contracts with WHT, with smaller amounts spread across a number of smaller providers. Members suggested looking at consolidating contracts with the smaller providers and looking at pan-Shropshire contracts. Members were told that one aim was to look at how services could be joined up.
- It was not envisaged that the proposed benefit cap would have any impact on the service.

14. The savings proposals for Meals on Wheels were for 2013/14. WRVS are contracted to run the hot meals service at a cost of £57k per year. This includes 2-3 hot meals per week for around 300 people. There were concerns about the health & safety issues with hot food, and the service did not cover the whole borough. A review with service users would be carried out in 2012/13 to find the best service for the future. An alternative frozen food service was already in place offering small bulk frozen food, a freezer cabinet and microwave. This was cost neutral to the Council.

The Chairman suggested the Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee could review the proposals later in the year.

- 15/16. Graphs were tabled to show year on year expenditure on adult care services between 2009/10-2011/12 and projections for 2012/13, broken down by main client groups. There were around 300 older people in residential care and 300 in nursing homes. Residential care is cheaper than nursing care, but the NHS pays a registered nurse care contribution towards nursing home costs so the cost is lower to the Council than for residential care. The policy driver was to support more people at home to reduce costs of residential accommodation. Most younger adults are supported at home and have lower use of residential care. The number of younger people taking Direct Payments was increasing; the authority had a legal obligation to provide care for eligible people and to advise them of their personal budget so that they may choose to manage their own care. Direct Payments are audited and if money is being mismanaged, it may be withdrawn.

The adult social care service had always been managed within budget until this year. The current overspend related to additional care costs placed on the authority resulting from the withdrawal of PCT funding for some Continuing Health Care (CHC) cases. Discussions were being held with the PCT about the impact on the Council's budget, and the PCT had responded positively. A potential one-off payment by the PCT to the Council to help mitigate the impact of the additional costs was being discussed, and the PCT was also considering budgeting for a national average level of CHC funding

for next year and beyond, which would further relieve pressure on the social care budget in future. Members welcomed this news.

17. The need to follow due process for consultation and engagement on service changes had been discussed in relation to Supporting People, but it was further noted that several authorities had been taken to judicial review and that whilst due process would be followed it was not possible to avoid individual challenges being made.

The Head of Safeguarding was on leave and the item on costs of children in care placements was therefore deferred until the following meeting.

BFSC-32 FEEDBACK ON THE BUDGET CONSULTATION

Members had requested feedback on the budget consultation. Information was not available for this meeting as the consultation had not finished, but members requested a report on the number of people taking part in the consultation for the next meeting.

Some Members of the Committee had attended the public consultation meeting on 17th January and reported that it had been very well attended, although one member had received negative feedback about the lack of an open Q&A session.

BFSC-33 NEXT MEETING

The date and time of the next meeting was noted as 6.30pm on Wednesday, 1st February 2012 and the Chairman reminded Members that the meeting would be to agree the Committee's response to the budget proposals to present to Cabinet. The Chairman thanked Cllr. Turley for contacting the IGMT for the information about the economic impact of the Gorge on the local economy.

The meeting ended at 8.00 p.m.

Chairman:.....

Date:.....