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HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES AND OLDER PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

12 JANUARY 2016

(19.15 - 20.50)

PRESENT Councillors Councillor Peter McCabe (in the Chair), Councillor Brian Lewis-Lavender, Councillor Mary Curtin, Councillor Suzanne Grocott, Councillor Sally Kenny, Saleem Sheikh, Hayley James, Councillor Laxmi Attawar and Councillor Michael Bull, Councillor Joan Henry.

Caroline Holland (Director of Corporate Services) and Simon Williams (Director, Community & Housing Department) Stella Akintan (Scrutiny Officer)

Councillor Mark Allison Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Councillor Caroline Cooper-Marbiah Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health,

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Brenda Fraser and Myrtle Agutter.

2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

There were no declarations of pecuniary interest.

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

A panel member pointed out a number of typographical errors from the 10th November minute:

On page 2 row 12 it should read “higher Level” rather than lower level.

On page 4 point 3 it should read “if” rather than “of”

On page 8 row 3 it should read “Manager” rather than Manger

RESOLVED

The minutes were agreed by the Panel

4 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THE 22ND OCTOBER (Agenda Item 4)

Agreed by the Panel as a true record of the meeting

5 BUSINESS PLAN UPDATE 2016-2020 (Agenda Item 5)

Caroline Holland gave an overview of the report stating that the paper to cabinet included information in relation to freedom passes, the cut in the public health grant as well as amendments to the February savings. The report was published before the final local government settlement; therefore some of the details are still to be confirmed. There will be an approximate £10 million loss in the revenue support grant for the council by 2020. Departments are trying to identify savings as far forward as possible to plan in the most appropriate way.

The Director of Community and Housing said we need to find £1.6 million of new substitute savings as some of the previous savings were not achievable. It is no longer possible to get below inflation costs from providers. The new replacement savings are in two main areas. We are bringing forward staff savings to 2017/18 and 2018/19 to 2016/17, thus making the total saving in one year 16/17 rather than phasing it over three years. This is challenging and increases delivery risks. The aim continues to be to protect frontline services. The second broad area of savings will be to de-commission services in meals on wheels, Imagine and South Thames Crossroads.

The Director said he had already reported to this panel that we are now moving into the phase where the low to medium impact savings had been realised and subsequent savings are likely to have a significant impact and be even more difficult to deliver. The Cabinet meeting in February will take into account all the comments from scrutiny as well as the results of the Adult Social Care consultation. The Director was also keen to hear the views from this meeting and all feedback would be brought together to develop the most appropriate solutions.

A panel member sought clarification that the most vulnerable people will still receive their care. The Director of Community and Housing said we have a statutory duty to meet needs. We will target scarce resources to meet the needs of the most vulnerable. The Director also highlighted that every individual will be assessed on the basis of individual need, and officers have not been given prior targets to reduce support packages for individual customers. However, across all customers and through following a promoting independence approach, it has been possible to reduce support overall.

A panel member asked if the department has considered sharing services with partners such as the NHS to make savings. The director reported that this is a future possibility but we will not be able to achieve this for 2016/17. In the future we will be exploring options for sharing commissioning and operational delivery. The Chair allowed members of the public who had submitted a request in advance to address the panel.

George McAdam, Adults First

Mr McAdam said he was terrified at the cuts levied against the vulnerable and those with learning disabilities. We should raise council tax by 2% and lessen the impact of £5 million worth of cuts. This round of cuts will mean there will be fewer staff who are less qualified staff. This will mean people with learning disabilities will be less well

cared for. This puts extra pressure on carers who in turn can become sick, which increases the likelihood of people being taken into care homes. We need to raise council tax or use reserves and convince the people of Merton it is money well spent.

Sue Hubbert, Carers Partnership Group

Their organisation has already received 8 case studies of people who cannot take anymore. Both the carers and the cared for are ageing so they need more support, not less. The council claims it has consulted across the borough however there is no proper impact assessment. Austerity affects people in all sorts of ways.

Lyla Adwan – Kamara, Merton Centre for Independent Living

A number of commitments have been made and it was thought that the full £5 million cuts would be on the table and a 2% increase in council tax would be considered. However the report was issued to the panel on the 8th January with only £1.8 million available to discuss. Labour has refused to increase council tax. People in Merton are clear about impact. We can choose to look away or say enough is enough but please do not say you didn't know.

Carole Mathurin

A carer for more than half my life, current care package includes three hours from crossroads, if this is decommissioned where will support come from. The council provides direct payments but there is no –one available to help people access the support and there is no time to look for it. There needs to be more money for the support service.

John Mayes, South Thames Crossroads

Has been a trustee at South Thames Crossroads for fifteen years and there has been a 90% customer satisfaction rate. It will be a disaster if Crossroads is decommissioned, this will not lead to savings at all as carers will need to find other solutions with additional pressure on care homes and hospitals. Expenditure will be five times more than if the council didn't cut services.

Sarah Henley

Sarah told the panel that she has cerebral palsy and is worried that the cuts will mean that she is not able to make personal choices about her activities as she needs a personal assistant at all times. She already spends two hours per day on her own. She enjoys the freedom to live an independent life like everyone else.

A panel member said there have been too many cuts in this area and they had tried to get the council to look at other areas. They queried if council reserves can be used as a one off payment until savings can be realised through developing a partnership with the NHS. The Director of Corporate Resources said there has been a reduction in the reserves. There are capital reserves we are using to reduce the cost of borrowing so to avoid making savings earlier than planned.

A panel member thanked the Directors of Corporate Services and Community and Housing for their difficult work in this area. They have friends who are carers and understand how difficult it can be. The council is required to set a balanced budget and while some people can afford an increase in council tax others cannot. It is

important that the council does all it can to challenge central government on the cuts in funding.

A panel member sought clarification that there will be a cut in funding in the continence service. The Director of Community and Housing reported that we are continuing to invest in the Age Well programme and investment must be even more targeted. The continence service will not be specifically funded by the council but this does not necessarily mean it will cease. It is hoped the service can continue and alternative sources of funding found as incontinence leads to other issues such as isolation.

A panel member asked what the impact will be of reducing home care hours. The Director of Community and Housing reported that it will be based on individual need but could mean that people are left in bed for longer and receive fewer visits. A panel member asked about the impact of de-commissioning South Thames Crossroads. The Director of Community and Housing said he understands the need to support carers we are looking at alternatives and will support those who are eligible.

A panel member asked what the impact will be if the caring role breaks down. The Director of Community and Housing said we want to avoid the high costs of nursing and residential care. We need to use our limited resources to prevent situations coming to a crisis point which necessitates the need for high cost care.

A Panel asked about the further 10% cuts in staff who carry out assessments. The Director of Community and Housing said this may mean longer waiting times for assessments fewer reviews will take place and less staff to monitor contracts. However we are planning to mitigate these risks through implementing new information systems which will result in less time recording information and more time with clients. Also flexible working is expected to increase productivity.

A panel member said people do not give enough time to voluntary work and we need to change our attitudes and culture towards voluntary work. We should compile a dossier for national government about the cumulative impact of austerity across the council, voluntary sector and faith groups. In recognition that not everyone can afford a 2% increase in council tax can we run a campaign in My Merton about the challenges we are facing locally and give people the option to contribute to the community fund. The panel member would like to see action taken and investigated swiftly.

A panel member asked how we can make cuts by spending £7 million on wheelie bins and if this money is available to help vulnerable people. The Director of Corporate Resources said there no money in the capital programme for this project so we cannot save any money from ending the wheeled bins borough wide service

A panel member asked if contributions from businesses could support South Thames Crossroads. The Director of Community and Housing said it would be unrealistic to expect any business to completely support the service. Discussions are continuing

about the scope for managing the service with less council funding. Future models are likely to look at building partnerships and working along side volunteers.

The Panel RESOLVED to ask Cabinet to:

1. reconsider the overall reduction in support packages, specifically CH02 and CH29 (page 82 of consultation report on the supplementary agenda):
 - CH02–“ promoting independence – efficiencies to be found in the hospital discharge process and by enabling customers to regain and maintain independence”
 - CH29 – “older people – managing crisis (including hospital admissions to residential care) This would include a number of activities to reduce admissions to residential care placements. WE would be looking to families to continue to support people at home for longer. This would fit in with our overall approach to enable independence.”
2. Reconsider de-commissioning the South Thames Crossroads service for carers (CH60 – set out on page 80 of the consultation report on the supplementary agenda). The Panel noted that 72 carers would lose their support services.
3. Reconsider the reduction in the assessment and commissioning staffing budget, specifically savings CH04, CH20, CH58 and CH22 (on pages 78 and 79 of the supplementary agenda) that would impact on service users:
 - CH04 – “reduce management costs and reduction in staffing costs – Access and Assessment. Staffing restructure to deliver efficient processes and building on planned shift of some customers to manage their own processes”
 - CH20 – “staffing reductions in Assessments and Commissioning teams. Staff savings 12FTE to be deleted in 2016/17 across all service areas. Reduction in the ability to carry out assessments and reviews, social work support, safeguarding activities, DOLs responsibilities and financial assessments”
 - CH58 – “Staffing reductions in Assessments and Commissioning teams. Reduction of a further 19-23 FTE posts, in addition to the 12FTE in CH20. Total FTE affected is 30-35 for 16/17”
 - CH22 – “ Commissioning Employees – staff savings – 4FTE to be deleted. Reduced capacity to monitor quality within provider services, reduced capacity to monitor performance within services and a reduced capacity to proactively work to sustain and develop a local provider market”

The reference was unanimously supported by the Panel.

6 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 6)

The Panel noted the work programme.

7 IMPACT OF BUDGET SAVINGS PROPOSALS ON SPECIFIC VULNERABLE GROUPS. INCLUDING RESULTS OF THE ADULT SOCIAL CARE CONSULTATION (Agenda Item 7)

8 SAVINGS PROPOSALS CONSULTATION PACK (Agenda Item 8)