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HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES AND OLDER PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

11 JANUARY 2021

(7.15 pm - 9.18 pm)

PRESENT: Councillors Peter McCabe (in the Chair), Thomas Barlow, Nigel Benbow, Pauline Cowper, Mary Curtin, Jenifer Gould and Linda Kirby

Co-opted Members Diane Griffin

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Tobin Byers (Cabinet Member for Finance), Rebecca Lanning (Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health) and Nick McLean)

Stella Akintan (Scrutiny Officer), Richard Ellis (Head of Adult Commissioning), Caroline Holland (Director of Corporate Services), Phil Howell (Assistant Director for Strategy and Improvement), John Morgan (Assistant Director, Adult Social Care), Dr Dagmar Zeuner (Director, Public Health) and Hannah Doody (Director of Community and Housing)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Mr Saleem Sheikh and Councillor David Chung. Councillor Joan Henry attended as a substitute.

2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

There were no declarations of pecuniary interests

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as a true and accurate record.

4 IMPACT OF COVID-19 IN MERTON - VERBAL UPDATE FROM THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH (Agenda Item 5)

The Director of Public Health gave a short presentation highlighting that:

Infection rates are very high with approximately 300 new cases per day in Merton. This is in turn having have an impact on the NHS in Southwest London.

Attendance at test centres has increased and they are now working at capacity Care homes have the high rates of outbreaks. There is increased testing within care homes and the majority of cases are asymptomatic.

There were 13 deaths between 12th to 18th December which is the highest in this wave of the pandemic.

The Director of Public Health gave an overview of the asymptomatic testing process.

RESOLVED

The Chair thanked the Director for her work during the Pandemic

5 BUDGET AND BUSINESS PLAN 2021-25 (Agenda Item 4)

The Director of Corporate Resources gave an overview of the budget position highlighting that:

New savings were presented at the November Cabinet meeting highlighting that the current budget gap is £11.7 million rising to £12.8 million in 2022-2023 and £13.9 million in 2023-2024. Neither the local government settlement nor Covid funding will be sufficient to reduce the gap as a result there will be further savings presented to Cabinet on the 18th January.

The Equality Impact assessments have been provided and service plan information details new ways of working as part of recovery and modernisation programme and the impact of savings in service areas. There will be a special scrutiny meeting on the 17th February to feed back to Cabinet by the 22nd February.

A panel member asked about the detail of the adult social care grant within the spending review. The Director of Corporate Services reported that there had been some increases in the Social Care Grants this will be reported to Cabinet in January. The information was not received in time to be included within the savings pack.

CH100 Review of in-house day-care provision. The Director of Community and Housing reported substantial engagement had taken place prior to the pandemic with people with learning disabilities, their carers and the voluntary sector on the type of day opportunities that was needed and wanted in the future. Many younger people transitioning through the system have made it clear they would like to be able to access a range of activities including in the evenings and at weekends rather than just traditional Monday to Friday day centres. While Leyton Road Day Centre is a new, state of the art building, others are not such good condition. The JMC building has been described as not fit for purpose due to layout and need for renovation. There were also decreasing numbers of people attending the day centres prior to Covid as older people chose lunch clubs and other community options. The Director emphasised this is not about closing day care, rather re-modelling, and working with service users to develop a provision to meet the needs of the community.

The Assistant Director of Adult Social Care added that two of the four day centres had remained open during the pandemic for small numbers of socially distanced

customers. To meet the needs of other residents a community outreach model with different groups was used during the pandemic and this model could be built upon moving forward.

A panel member said service reviews are important, but expressed concern that this is a budget led review leading to a 15% cut in services. Also, an external consultant is being used to conduct the review rather than local provision such as Merton Mencap. Although some young people who want different things, those with complex needs, need to attend day centres.

The Head of Community and Housing Strategy and Partnerships said the budget relates to the whole of direct provision, the amount of savings are still to be determined but the maximum would be 5%. The Head of Community and Housing Strategy and Partnerships agreed to circulate figures on maximum cost to the panel

The Director of Community and Housing said stakeholder groups including Mencap will be involved in engagement on the re-design of services. The external consultant is an organisation with a proven track record in working with learning disability services and is very experienced engaging with residents and carers. They are needed as they are providing extra capacity as officers time is taken up leading on the councils response to the pandemic.

A panel member expressed concern about the future of services at Eastway Day Centre. The Assistant Director of Adult Social Care said prior to the pandemic there was capacity for thirty places at Eastway but due to long term reduction on people wanting to attend on average there was between five to eight attendees per day. The review will look at all options and consider what is best to alleviate loneliness and provide activities in peoples own homes and communities. Prior to the pandemic Merton had Lunch clubs that are popular and thriving and have an important role going forward.

The Director of Community and Housing said the council is responding to the climate emergency and will review use of buses and will look at a range of options including the use of public transport where possible.

Councillor Thomas Barlow expressed concerned that this savings proposal and review is being conducted at the wrong time due to; the current workload in the department, the level of need in the community and difficulties in engaging with people during the pandemic. The Equalities Impact assessment highlights the stress to service users and carers during a consultation process and vulnerable people are already facing mental health challenges due to the pandemic. The Vice-Chair formally proposed that the panel ask Cabinet to reconsider saving CH100 during the pandemic period.

Councillor Nigel Benbow seconded the proposal.

In response to questions the Director of Community and Housing reported that this Panel was consulted on plans to merge Eastway and Woodland day centres. Some money was invested money to make the facilities accessible and dementia friendly.

The Director of Community and Housing said the savings will be realised in 2022-2023. The overall Learning Disability Transformation Programme could take 3-5 years to complete. It is important not to lose the work undertaken prior to the pandemic on the Learning Disability offer and day opportunities in particular.

Councillor McCabe asked the Director of Corporate Resources to explain the consequences of rejecting savings proposals. The Director reported rejecting savings will increase gap and further savings will need to be found. There have been concerns as some local authorities are struggling to set a balanced budget. The Local Government Settlement has not closed the gap. The Director said this is one of the most complex and challenging budget gaps she had ever had to deal with.

The Director of Community and Housing, the Assistant Director of Strategy and Improvement and the Head of Community and Housing Strategy and Partnerships gave an overview of the detail of savings:

CH101 Review of in-house LD residential provision

CH102 Dementia Hub re-commissioning

RESOLVED

The Healthier Communities and Older People Overview and Scrutiny Panel ask Cabinet to reconsider saving CH100 (Review of in-house day-care provision) for the following reasons:

The engagement process may cause some anxiety to vulnerable groups who are already facing mental health challenges during the pandemic.

Social distancing will make it difficult to conduct an effective engagement process

The Community and Housing Department is already managing significant workload pressures due to the pandemic.

6 IMPACT OF COVID-19 IN MERTON - VERBAL UPDATE FROM THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF ADULT SOCIAL CARE (Agenda Item 6)

The Assistant Director of Adult Social Care gave an overview on the latest position with hospital discharge reporting that there is pressure across the system including a reduced work force but increase in patients. The teams completed a lot of planning with partners in health in preparation for the current surge. There is currently capacity within the system and teams are working hard to maintain this and working closely with partners on a daily basis.

The Assistant Director reported that Shielding was re-introduced on 20 December, there are 6500 vulnerable people shielding in Merton. The Community Hub has been commissioned to support this group, there is a structure in place from the first wave.

The Assistant Director of Strategy and Improvement gave an overview of the vaccine rollout in Merton reporting that a detailed presentation with the most up to date information had been prepared and shared with Panel members. He reported that this is an NHS programme of rollout which began initially with the Pfizer vaccine, through hospital hubs for the workforce and Primary Care Network sites for residents over 80 years old. The programme is now also rolling out the Oxford Zeneca vaccine and during January and February the community roving teams and mass vaccination centres will come on stream to administer the vaccines.

RESOLVED

The Chair thanked officers for their updates

7 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 7)

The Panel noted the work programme