

Agenda Item 3

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HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES AND OLDER PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

8 NOVEMBER 2016

(7.15 pm - 8.50 pm)

PRESENT: Councillors Councillor Peter McCabe (in the Chair),
Councillor Brian Lewis-Lavender, Councillor Laxmi Attawar,
Councillor Stephen Crowe, Councillor Mary Curtin,
Councillor Suzanne Grocott, Councillor Sally Kenny,
Councillor Marsie Skeete and Saleem Sheikh

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Mark Allison and Councillor Tobin Byers

Simon Williams (Director, Community & Housing Department)
and Dr Dagmar Zeuner (Director, Public Health) Paul Dale,
Assistant Director of Resources, Stella Akintan (Scrutiny Officer).
Patrice Beveney Senior Mental Health Commissioning Manager
and Liam Williams Director of Commissioning, Merton Clinical
Commissioning Group.

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies were received from Councillor Abdul Latif, Councillor Stephen Crowe attended as a substitute.

2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

none

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

The surname Ball to be replaced with the correct spelling 'Bull'

The chair reported that Hayley James has resigned as a co-opted member, a letter of thanks will be sent on behalf of the Panel.

The Chair paid tribute to the recently deceased Andrew Wakefield who attended the last meeting of this Panel. He will be remembered for his tireless work on behalf of disadvantaged communities.

4 BUSINESS PLAN UPDATE 2017-2021 (Agenda Item 4)

The Assistant Director of Resources reported that there are no new savings in Adult Social Care and public health.

The Chair invited members of the public to address the panel.

Sarah Henley, local resident informed the panel that last year she was able to go to the cinema which is essential because being at home 24 hours a day is very boring and it is important to go out. However now that her welfare benefits has not been increased, a trip of this nature is beyond her means. Her personal savings are running out fast. As a result she has been put on anti-depressants. Every night she has to decide whether to use her personal assistant to help her use the toilet or alternatively to use a continence pad. She is concerned about what will happen when her money runs out as she does not want to go into residential care.

Lyla Adwan- Kamara, Chief Executive of Merton Centre for Independent Living informed the panel that many of the cuts have been made without being available for scrutiny. The five year approach to the Medium Term Financial Strategy means that many of the cuts are buried or nodded through without adequate consideration. Disabled people are being told to do less, wear nappies and can no longer go out. The council do not have the right to do away with rights and dignity. There are three modest things that could make a difference:

Decline to approve a further £2 million worth of cuts to adult social care.

Support the implementation of the 2% council tax precept

Start talking, listening and engaging with Merton Centre for Independent Living.

The Chair highlighted that this panel has taken the Adult Social Care Savings very seriously and last year made a reference to Cabinet which had a direct impact on the budget proposals.

Andy Whittington, Chief Executive of Merton Mencap informed the panel that Merton Mencap supports people with learning disabilities and runs a range of projects in the borough. These are now under threat. Merton is one of eight boroughs not to raise the council tax precept, even though there would be no actual financial increase for residents as it is offset by the reduction in the Greater London Authority precept. There has been a reduction in day centre offer and many people cannot afford to pay additional costs to cover the shortfall. The council are urged to support increase in the precept otherwise there will be even greater reductions in social workers, employment support and people will lose choice and control over their lives. Family carers need more help not less.

The Director of Community and Housing said he would respond to the themes raised rather than comment on individual issues. One of the issues is that people often have to go to agency because of the difficulties in finding a personal assistant. Agency costs are often higher which leads to difficult choices. The Director reported that he has to work within a balanced budget and therefore has to look at solutions which do

not cost the council more. The department are currently contracting for home care and are seeking to work with agencies to provide personal assistants at a lower hourly rate.

Although people may feel like their well-being is being compromised and there is a reduction in home care hours, the reality is that they have increased. New demand for services has meant that costs are rising but they still need to be managed within the current budget envelope.

Recent reports including from the Kings Fund and in-year survey of the financial position has highlighted that there is nearly a half billion pound forecast overspend on social care across the country, therefore this is a national problem and not unique to Merton. The council has to meet its statutory duties within a balanced budget. Individuals on the receiving end of this may find it difficult but we must work together to find solutions and consider what friends, family and neighbours can do to support those in need. This is in line with our definition of “promoting independence” which has been part of the last two consultation packs.

We have developed a model in Merton to keep day centres open unlike some authorities who have closed them, leaving people to access activities with their personal budgets. However we are now more limited in the choice and range of activities that can be offered. We are trying to recruit volunteers and currently eleven new people have been appointed. The subject of day centres is itself part of a more detailed scrutiny review.

The Director acknowledged that, although there are no new savings for next year outside what has already been agreed, it was a legitimate matter for scrutiny to look at the impact to date of savings. He offered to bring a report on the impact of the savings to a future panel meeting if this is what the panel wanted.

The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health said he had met with the voluntary sector to discuss these issues and would be happy to do so again. Many of the comments raised related to the process as much as the end results. We must ensure that we agree on the process.

A panel member asked for clarification about how the mitigation fund had been used to offset the impact of the social care savings. The Assistant Director of Resources has said that there is currently a £5 million overspend in Adult Social Care and a variety of measures are being used to reduce it including the use of the fund. No further decisions can be made about the mitigation fund until the overspend is under control.

A panel member asked if comparative information from other councils can be provided. The Director reported that there is data available and he will bring it to the next meeting.

Panel members had a further discussion about the mitigation fund and expressed concern that the fund was due to be set aside to delay the impact of the savings and

there is no clear understanding of the current position.

A panel member said more information is needed in relation to the current position with adult social care savings specifically those that should have been made and the reasons for the adult social care overspends. The Chair said this will be discussed in more detail at the next meeting.

RESOLVED

The Director of Community and Housing to provide a an update on the impact of the adult social care savings to the next meeting

5 MERTON IMPROVING ACCESS TO PSYCHOLOGICAL THERAPIES SERVICE (Agenda Item 5)

The mental health commissioning manager gave an overview of the report highlighting that the service is performing well on waiting times but not so on access to the service and recovery.

A panel member asked if there is follow up if people make initial contact then but do not attend appointments. The Mental Health Commissioning Manager reported that three attempts are made to establish contact with the client.

A panel member expressed concern that six weeks could be too long to wait for an appointment. The Mental Health Commissioning Manager said the service should prioritise people according to need and will confirm that this is the case. The Director of Commissioning added that the model is not designed to treat acute conditions but rather support health and wellbeing.

The Director of Public Health said she understood that there is a prevalence of low level mental health need in the community yet the service is struggling to find clients. She sought clarification as to whether the service treats people who also have drug and alcohol issues. The Senior Mental Health Commissioning Manager said they do, although the client must be sober to benefit from the service. We do need a better understanding of people's reluctance to access the service, it could be due to confidence issues.

RESOLVED

Merton Clinical Commissioning Group to provide data on the proportion of over 65s and younger age groups who access the service.

MCCG to provide clarification that those clients accessing the service are prioritised according to their level of need.

6 PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FOR THE FIFTY FIVE PLUS AGE GROUP (Agenda Item 6)

The Director of Public Health gave an overview of the report stating that the shrinking budget reflects the range of services which can be provided. There is a difficult balance between prevention and acute needs. Services are focussed on high risk patients such the falls and diabetic service. The team are also developing a digital offer which can reach a large number of people and is cost effective.

The team are also looking at ways to develop a health promotion environment. This includes encouraging people to use the stairs rather than the lift. They are also looking at opportunities in working with the leisure department and ways to increase volunteering.

A panel member asked how they support people in danger of falling. The Director reported that this is a high priority area and can provide balancing training although it can be hard to identify those at risk.

A panel member asked how small charities that provide physical activity for the 55 plus can get funding. The Director reported they can use a range of measures including seeking volunteers and asking for donations for their work.

RESOLVED

The Director was thanked for her report and attending the Panel.

7 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 7)

The work programme was noted.

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