

**Minutes of the People Services Scrutiny Committee**

**Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> November, 2015 at 6.00 pm**  
**in Committee Room 2 at the Council House, Dudley**

**Present:**

Councillor M Attwood (Vice-Chair in the Chair)  
Councillors C Baugh, R Body, P Bradley, A Goddard, J Martin, S Phipps, C Perks, D Russell, D Vickers and Mr A Qadus.

**Officers:**

M Williams - Chief Officer Environmental Services (Lead Officer) (Place Directorate); T Oakman - Strategic Director People, M Bowsher - Chief Officer Adult Social Care, D Harkins - Chief Officer Health and Well Being, M Joseph – Interim Chief Officer Children’s Services (People Directorate), I Newman - Chief Officer Finance and Legal Services, P Bengé – Finance Manager, K Cocker – Finance Manager (Children’s Services), R Cooper – Head of Financial Services and H Shepherd - Democratic Services Officer (Resources and Transformation Directorate).

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17 **Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors N Barlow, D Hemingsley, M Mottram, G Simms, S Tyler; Mrs M Ward and Reverend A Wickens.

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18 **Appointment of Substitute Members**

It was noted that Councillors S Phipps, A Goddard, J Martin and D Russell had been appointed as substitute members for Councillors N Barlow, S Tyler, M Mottram and D Hemingsley, respectively.

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19 **Declarations of Interest**

No member made a declaration of interest in accordance with the Members’ Code of Conduct.

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20 **Minutes**

**Resolved**

That the minutes of the People Services Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 22<sup>nd</sup> September, 2015, be approved as a correct record and signed.

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21 **Public Forum**

No issues were raised under this agenda item.

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22 **Appointment of a Scrutiny Development Group – Children’s Services**

A report of the Lead Officer was submitted on the appointment of a Scrutiny Development Group – Children’s Services, comprising of all Members of the People Services Scrutiny Committee with a terms of reference to focus on the scrutiny of issues concerning Children’s Services.

**Resolved**

That a Scrutiny Development Group – Children’s Services, be established, comprising of all Members of the People Services Scrutiny Committee with a terms of reference to focus on the scrutiny of issues concerning Children’s Services.

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23 **Medium Term Financial Strategy**

A joint report of the Chief Executive, Chief Officer Finance and Legal Services and the Strategic Director People was submitted to consult the Scrutiny Committee on the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) to 2018/19, with emphasis on those proposals relating to the People Services Scrutiny Committee terms of reference. Items directly related to the People Services Scrutiny Committee were those concerning the People Directorate, as set out in paragraph 29 of the report and appendices A and B of the report submitted.

In presenting the report, the Chief Officer Finance and Legal Services referred to paragraphs of particular importance and stated that the proposals had provisionally been set on the forecast based on the Chancellor’s Summer Budget and the implied reduction in funding to unprotected areas. Definitive Revenue Support Grant (RSG) and other government funding allocations would not be confirmed until December, 2015.

Specific attention was directed to the table in paragraph 34 of the report submitted summarising the base budget forecast, spending pressures, saving proposals and redundancy costs. It was stated that there would not be sufficient funds available to balance the accounts for 2016/17 and all Directorates had been requested to provide additional saving proposals. A special meeting of the Cabinet had been arranged for January, 2016, to consider further budget proposals and to set a lawful budget with a further budget report being presented to Scrutiny Committees as necessary in the January/February cycle of meetings.

Arising from the presentation of the report and appendices to the report submitted, Members asked questions, raised issues and made comments on the budget proposals as follows:-

(At this juncture, Councillor R Body declared a non-pecuniary interest in relation to all matters relating to allowances paid to foster carers and homeless young adults, as he was a carer for homeless teenagers.)

- It was confirmed that the £50.6m deficit funded from balances referred to in paragraph 34 of the report was in addition to £19.6m proposed savings identified in paragraph 29.
- The cuts were considered to be “astronomical” and life changing and Officers were questioned as to what services would not be provided or reduced to achieve the necessary savings and the impact this would have on the community.
- Could the allowance paid to Dudley’s foster carers be increased to compete with agency foster carers to avoid additional agency costs?
- How would the savings referred to in Appendix B, in relation to the following, be achieved?
  1. Restructure the integrated youth support service.
  2. Develop a more integrated approach for children and young people in the area of safeguarding and early help to include Children Centres.
  3. Redesign the early help offer for Dudley to prevent children escalating to become looked after.
  4. Alignment of contract prices at New Bradley Hall with market conditions.
  5. Re-provision of long term residential care and reablement at Russell Court.
  6. Review the scope, capacity and efficiency of the Dementia Gateway service.
  7. Review efficiency, effectiveness and investment in supporting people and voluntary sector commissioned services.
  8. Creation of a Library, Archives and Adult Learning mutual.
  9. Restructure of Public Health management and staffing posts.
  10. Review investment efficiencies in Public Health commissioning arrangements.
- What percentage of children were cared for by agency foster carers and what percentage cared for by Dudley’s foster carers, and what was the cost difference between the two provisions?
- Are frontline officers safe in their working environment?
- The public’s perception and expectations of the Council needed to change, as services could not continue to function and operate in the way that they had previously.
- Collective and partnership working with voluntary and community services, the NHS and the Clinical Commissioning Group needed to be developed to help support services that were at risk.

- Written responses to the following questions were requested:-
  1. Over £10m of pressures relating to non delivery of Better Care, Assessment and Independence and complex and inclusion and mental health, how are these figures broken down?
  2. Details on £2m of savings in the redesign of the early help offer for Dudley to prevent children escalating to becoming looked after?
  3. A saving of £0.5m to maintain reablement service capacity and delivery via alternative business mode, what is this new alternative?
  4. A saving of £3m over three years to review efficiency, effectiveness and investment in supporting people and voluntary sector commissioned services, details as to where these savings would be achieved.
  5. Details about the Library, Archives and Adult Learning saving over three years of £1.5m.
  6. Over £2.5m from Public Health Grant, details were requested?
  7. How many full-time equivalent posts will be lost with the proposals put forward within this directorate?
  
- Members disagreed with MP's pay rises when essential services were at risk which would have a huge impact on ordinary people's daily life.

Arising from the comments made and questions raised, the Strategic Director People and relevant Chief Officers responded, where appropriate, as follows:-

- The Council faced difficult decisions and challenging times ahead, as the same level of service that was currently provided could not be sustained. Alternative ways of operating, including working with the voluntary sector to deliver services that had previously been provided by the Council would be explored.
- The amalgamation of Children's Services, Adult and Community Services and Public Health had identified internal silo working and duplicated roles. Efficiency working and the redesign of the services would alleviate duplication.
- The Directorate would continue to work hard to prevent a breach in statutory functions occurring and to ensure the right level of service was provided to the relevant people. Statutory functions would not be compromised but alternative and more efficient ways of providing those functions would need to be implemented.
- It was agreed at the meeting of the Cabinet in June, 2015, to increase the allowance paid to Dudley foster carers and to undertake a recruitment drive to encourage an uptake in internal foster carers. Dudley foster carer numbers were low and therefore private agency foster carers were used, however an increase in internal foster carers would alleviate agency costs.

- The new People Directorate had inherited a range of problems in relation to spending and performance pressures. Work had been undertaken to reduce the high number of looked after children and to review all children's care history. A panel had been implemented to scrutinise all placements and to ensure value for money was achieved. It was considered to be more cost effective for placements to be brought back into the borough but that the welfare of the children was paramount. Work was also being undertaken to develop a robust and effective early intervention package to prevent children and young people from entering into the care system which would result in a reduction in the need for high cost provisions.
- As a result of the exceptional work and the re-organisation of the Children's Services Division, the number of looked after children in Dudley had started to decline and budgetary savings were being made for the first time in a number of years.
- An integrated approach of services provided at Children Centres would be developed, incorporating health visitors and midwife services to eliminate duplicated services and to develop a family hub to cater for 0-18 year olds to meet efficiency targets.
- A positive response had been received from Schools in regards to the possibility of transferring assets, in particular the 'time for twos' initiative into Schools, which would enable the School to develop an understanding of a child's needs prior to them commencing school.
- The savings indicated in relation to New Bradley Hall had already been met via the transfer of the service to Black Country Housing Group.
- The effectiveness and capacity of the provision and facilities provided at Russell Court would be reviewed. No decision with regards to the future of the service had been made.
- There were currently three dementia gateway provisions within the borough, all of which were not currently full to capacity. The Chief Officer Adult Social Care confirmed that at present there was a 66% utilisation rate and therefore a full review of the service would be undertaken to look at better use of capacity and to explore how the service could be maintained to continue to meet statutory requirements.
- Partnership working with the Clinical Commissioning Group and other service providers was essential and would provide the Council with the opportunity to redesign and improve services.
- It was stated that a Library, Archives and Adult Learning mutual was a 'not for profit' organisation but would be able to bid for funding that the Council could not access. It was envisaged that no libraries or archives would close but changes would be made to how the facilities operated. A public consultation would be undertaken to establish users views on proposed changes which included a change in opening hours.

- Public Health had previously been excluded from the Corporate Restructure but following the merger of the service with the Council, it had emerged that there was duplication within the existing structure and some responsibilities should be undertaken by partner organisations. A restructure of Public Health would now take place and it was anticipated that the streamlined structure would result in a loss of 19 full time equivalent posts.
- The integration of contracts, services and joint working would mitigate the impact in Public Health commissioning arrangements and help to deliver efficiency savings.
- Details with regards to the percentage figures in relation to the number of children being cared for by the different foster carers and the difference in costs between the private agency and internal carers would be provided following the meeting, however the cost was not a straight forward issue as each individual would be dealt with on a case by case basis.
- Regular risk assessments were undertaken and health and safety protocols were in place to protect frontline staff. It was incumbent on staff to ensure they remained safe and reported any concerns. Staff welfare would continue to be paramount.

Members praised Officers for their responses, reflecting a change in the approach of the service and Directorate.

### **Resolved**

- (1) That the Cabinet's proposals for the Medium Term Financial Strategy to 2018/19, taking into account the considerations set out in paragraph 44 of the report and appendices to the report submitted, be noted.
- (2) That the Strategic Director People provide written responses to the questions raised, as indicated above, to all Members of the Scrutiny Committee.

The meeting ended at 7.50pm.

CHAIR