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HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES AND OLDER PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

10 NOVEMBER 2015

(19.15 - 20.25)

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

Councillor Mark Allison Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance.

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

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

none

2 BUDGET AND BUSINESS PLAN (ROUND 1) (Agenda Item 3)

The Director of Corporate Services said the council is facing a £15.3 million gap over the next four years. A budget report went to Cabinet in September which addressed issues such as inflation, council tax, the capital programme and revenue to fund it. Undelivered savings in the medium term are under review. If they cannot be delivered departments may need to find alternative savings.

Councillor Suzanne Grocott asked the Panel to agree the following motion:

That the Healthier Communities and Older People Overview and Scrutiny Panel to review the weightings used to determine departmental savings targets and their appropriateness in relation to the previously approved "July principles".

Councillor Bull seconded the motion

The Chair asked for clarification about the proposal and how the weightings should be re-adjusted. Councillor Grocott responded that she would need to see figures for each department to understand the impact of any changes to the current weightings. The rationale for the motion was based on the fact that the weightings have been in place for the last five years since the 2011 July principles were agreed; there has been no further discussion about whether they are still appropriate..

The Director of Corporate Services said reducing the weighting for Community and Housing Department to 0.75%, the same as Children Schools and Families, will have the following impact on savings to be found:

£240,000 increase for Children, Schools and Families

£319, 000 increase for Corporate Services

£457, 000 increase in Environment and Regeneration

Offset by a £1,016k reduction in savings for Community and Housing. This is on the basis of controllable budgets, with shortfalls in savings rolled forward.

The Director of Corporate Services said the Cabinet reviewed the weightings at their September meeting and it was agreed that no changes were required at this time.

Councillor Grocott said there needed to be greater clarity for maintaining the same levels as Community and Housing should not be at a lower level than Children School's and Families.

A panel member said all departments are under strain and a change in one area will have a detrimental impact on another area.

A panel member said this is an issue of transparency of the criteria used to make the decision.

Councillor Mark Allison Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance said this issue is on the agenda for Council next week and a full discussion will take place in that forum. Councillor Grocott said she hoped the Panel would agree the motion which would mean less of a debate would be required at Full Council.

Those in favour of the motion:

Councillors; Grocott, Bull and Brian Lewis-Lavender.

Those against the motion:

Councillors; Peter McCabe, Sally Kenny, Laxmi Atwar, Brenda Fraser, Mary Curtin.

Therefore the motion was not supported by the Panel.

The Chair invited the Director of Community and Housing to provide an overview of the adult social care savings.

The Director of Community and Housing said we are moving to difficult territory in regards to making savings as the easier savings have now been made. Some previous savings will not be achieved. We can no longer maintain an 0% uplift to

providers. We are now moving to making staffing cuts and contract changes as there are no other choices. There are risks as the department will be making some process changes at a faster pace than they would ideally like to. A staff consultation will help to determine the new structure.

The Director of Community and Housing continued that while South Thames Crossroads is a valued service, it is a more expensive option and difficult to target services, therefore this organisation will be decommissioned and other options pursued.

It is proposed to decommission the Meals on Wheels Service in line with what some other local authorities have done. Most people will be able to buy cheaper food from the retail market and heat their meal in a microwave. The department will work with those who are not able to do this.

CH02 – Money is being left in place for this, with a new emphasis on peer support and recovery principles.

CH51: Winter pressures funding may mean that some money is provided by the Department of Health, if this funding does not materialise alternative savings will be required.

The Chair invited Peray Ahmet Unison branch secretary to address the Panel:

The union understands that many of the cuts to adult social care are due to the loss of central government funding. However councillors are asked to consider the speed and scale of the cuts and subsequent impact upon staff and local residents. There are 30-35 staff cuts proposed for 2016/17. Councillors were asked to consider why these are being brought forward and if this will be deliverable in the timescale and the impact this will have on residents.

A panel member asked how much of the staff savings is budget alignment and how much is for vacant posts and how much for redundancies. The Director of Community and Housing said the department seeks to minimise redundancies and will be consulting with the union on the best way to take this forward. The process review will be difficult but it is achievable. The current rate of contact time with clients is low

because the time spent processing information. New information systems will allow people to spend more time with customers.

A panel member said the council is in a difficult budget position. Are there a bank of volunteers to support services, what will happen to those who depend on carer services. The Director of Community and Housing said we will not be completely relying on volunteers. Carer Support Merton provides some services for those who are eligible and we are discussing how to build on this,

A panel member expressed sadness at the decisions that the council needed to make and enormous sympathy for those who are impacted by them.

Councillor Peter McCabe expressed thanks to South Thames Crossroads for their contribution to the local community over a long period of time.

RESOLVED

The Panel noted the Budget Report.

3 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CARE ACT 2014 IN MERTON (Agenda Item 4)

The Director of Community and Housing gave an overview of the report and said the Care Act is the biggest consolidation of care legislation in fifty years. Many of the duties had existed before. The aim of the Act is to make care services fairer and to promote wellbeing as well include the rights of carers.

A panel member asked if we will be focussed on prevention and the Director of Community and Housing said we will maintain a small and focussed prevention programme.

A panel member asked how the voluntary sector and the council will work together to provide information and advice. The Director of Community and Housing said this is already in place. Seven voluntary organisations are working on a network basis to give information and advice. We also have Merton-i, an online information access point.

Hayley James said there has been an increase in demand for information and advice. Merton and Lambeth Citizens Advice Bureau took 87 calls in one day and will be working with partners to develop a Merton Advice Brand.

RESOLVED

The Panel noted the Care Act report

4 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

none