

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY PANEL (BUDGET) HELD ON MONDAY 19TH DECEMBER 2016

PRESENT:

Councillors: Kirsten Hearn (Chair), Mark Blake, Toni Mallett, Liz Morris and Reg Rice

Co-optees/Non Voting Members: Uzma Naseer (Parent Governor Representative) and Luci Davin (Parent Governor representative)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None.

2. ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Mallett stated that she was a governor at Broadwaters.

4. DEPUTATIONS/PETITIONS/PRESENTATIONS/QUESTIONS

None.

5. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2017/18 - 2021/22

Councillor Elin Weston, the Cabinet Member for Children and Families, introduced the proposals within the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) relating to Priority 1 of the Corporate Plan. She stated that they needed to be seen within the context of the very severe cuts that there had been to local government funding since 2010. In this period, funding had been reduced by 40%. This had impacted considerably on the Council's ability to provide services, especially in the light of increases in demand. The intention was nevertheless to ensure that young people were adequately safeguarded. The proposed savings came to just below £4 million and were proportionately less than were being proposed for other areas of Council activity. The Panel noted that the original saving proposals for 2017/18 were £4 million. The current proposed savings were also around £4 million but were spread across two financial years.

In answer to a question, regarding the ability to achieve the savings Jon Abbey, the Director of Children's Services, reported that there was a degree of confidence that

all of the nine savings proposals were achievable. There was a planning process linked to each of them to ensure that they were delivered and this included assessment of risk. Timeliness, modelling, confidence of those leading change and Equalities Impact Assessments were all considered as part of this.

Notwithstanding this, he stated that it could be difficult to be precise regarding statutory responsibilities with some areas yet to be fully determined. However, he felt that the proposals were feasible and learning obtained from the previous MTFs had been taken into account. A question was asked as to whether the level of funding necessary to run a service was safe. In response, he stated that there was a need to consider this. He felt that it was in the range of £42 to £48 million and funding levels were now getting close to critical levels. Less had been spent by relevant services each year but it was acknowledged that services for children and young people had a role in contributing to Council savings. However, there was a need to ensure that there was still capacity to safeguard effectively. If the budget continued to go down, careful thought would need to be given as to how services might be delivered in the future.

A question was asked about the impact of poor housing on the numbers of children entering the care system in the light of a recent report from Shelter which had made a correlation. The Cabinet Member stated that housing issues could contribute to children being taken into care but the cause was most likely to be a range of issues. She was not aware of any specific proposals regarding housing that were likely to impact directly on children and young people. She was nevertheless aware that benefit changes were likely to have an impact. In answer to a question, she stated that savings had been put in year one which were felt to be possible to implement quickly.

The Panel considered the individual proposals as follows;

1.1; Service Re-design and Workforce

The Cabinet Member stated that this proposal aimed to make services more responsive to needs and delivered in a timely manner and that thresholds were applied appropriately.

Neelam Bhardwaja, Assistant Director for Safeguarding and Social Care, reported that the changes aimed to ensure that contacts were dealt with at the right stage, using a triage or single point of entry to services. Consideration would be given to when contacts took place and changes made to shift patterns would reflect this.

In respect of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs), the experience in other boroughs suggested that approximately £100k could be saved through them being externally commissioned. OFSTED had also rated IROs services that had been commissioned externally in some local authorities that it had inspected as good.

In answer to a question regarding spending on agency staff, Mr Abbey stated that there was a need to have a stable workforce. Measures to improve recruitment and retention had been taken and it was hoped that these would make the Council more

competitive. However, there had always been a percentage of staff that were agency. Fifteen per cent of staff were currently from agencies. Some agency staff had joined the Council's workforce and it was hoped that others would. £1.5 million had already been saved through this. The Panel noted that all of the senior management team were now permanent Council staff.

The Panel noted that moving to external commissioning of IROs was the most easily achievable saving of this group. In answer to a question regarding thresholds, Ms Bhardwaja stated that there was no intention to increase them. These were, in any case, set externally by the London LSCB.

1.2; Early Help and Targeted Response

The Cabinet Member reported that the Council would continue with its early help approach, which was aimed at reducing escalation and keeping children and young people out of care. Positive results were starting to be seen, with fewer re-referrals.

Gill Gibson, the Assistant for Early Help and Prevention, reported that the proposal was aimed at keeping a very specific cohort of young people out of care and within families. There were no specific staffing changes arising from this and the cost of implementing the proposal was already within the budget. The work would not focus exclusively on adolescents although it was likely to be most successful there. Progress would be tracked constantly and formal review points would be built in.

1.3; Family Group Conferencing

The Cabinet Member reported that the use of Family Group Conferences (FGCs) in Haringey was currently very limited. They were spot purchased and the intention was to use them earlier and more often.

Ms Bhardwaja reported that reported that FGCs adopted a problem solving model and had originated in New Zealand. Evidence from other local authorities suggested that their greater use in Haringey would improve effectiveness. Several of these local authorities had been rated either good or outstanding by OFSTED. In answer to a question regarding whether it would be possible to undertake the service in-house, she stated that she was not aware of any authority that currently did this. In addition, FGCs aimed to be independent.

1.4; Family Based Placements

The Cabinet Member reported that the aim of this proposal was to provide placements closer to home for a small group of adolescents and, in doing so, make savings as such placements were cheaper than residential care.

Charlotte Pomery, the Assistant Director for Commissioning, reported that there were a number of young people who needed a spell of residential care and it was proposed to move them on in a more timely manner once they were ready. The proposal was to place them in a family setting. Work would need to be done though to ensure that appropriate support packages were also available. The target was to

place them within 20 miles of the borough. A Panel Member raised a point regarding the feasibility of this proposal, since young adolescents who had been in care were felt likely to be the hardest to place.

Ms Bhardwaja reported that children could be remanded to secure accommodation by the Courts and, in such circumstances, the Council had to pay for the placement. Young people could also be remanded to care but this did not necessarily need to be secure accommodation. It was rare that a young person was held securely for more than 6 weeks.

The Panel noted additional funding had been provided for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). The transformation plans for CAMHS were aimed at providing earlier intervention.

The Cabinet Member commented that the efficiencies in respect of this were principally about making the service work better. In answer to a question, Ms. Pomery agreed to provide the Panel with details of the exact number of foster carers that there currently were. She stated that recruitment and retention of foster carers was a constant issue.

AGREED:

That the Panel be provided with the figure for the current number of foster carers.

1.5; Care Leavers - Semi Independent Living

The Cabinet Member reported that this proposal was aimed at ensuring that transitional measures to promote financial independence were managed more effectively. Ms Bhardwaja reported that assistance was provided for around a year and was individually focussed. The intention was to provide support a lot earlier so that young people were able to become independent more quickly. In answer to a question, Mr Abbey stated that the proposal aimed to ensure that support was stopped at the right point. It was acknowledged that achieving financial independence could be difficult for young and vulnerable young people but the proposal was not aimed at cutting support but instead managing it more effectively. The Panel noted that support was also provided for unaccompanied minors up to the age of 18, although this was subject to change due to the new Immigration Act.

Ms Bhardwaja commented that there had been a variable level of consistency in how transitional measures were applied. The objective was to prepare young people for independence effectively. The service was facing a bulge in demand due to the bulge in the number of children taken into care in the wake of the Baby P case.

1.6; Adoption and Special Guardianship Order Payments

The Cabinet Member reported that this proposal was aimed at bringing the amount that was paid to adoptive parents in line with those paid by statistical neighbours. Ms Bhardwaja reported that the current scheme was three years old and it would be necessary to implement the new arrangements sensitively, particularly where

agreements were already in place with adoptive parents about financing. The principle that no child should not be adopted due to lack of finance would still apply. The changes were about tightening up the system so just those who needed support received it and it was applied consistently. It was possible to claim additional funding to assist in the placing of children and young people who were hard to place.

In answer to a question regarding whether the new arrangements would have an adverse impact on people becoming special guardians, which could lead to children remaining in more expensive care settings or settings outside the family, Ms Bhardwaja reported that special guardianship order payments were intended to be means tested but the Council's service had not been diligent in reviewing levels. There was a need to ensure that the scheme was applied in a fair and equitable way.

AGREED:

1. That figures be circulated to the Panel on the annual amount of spending on adoption and special guardianship order payments; and
2. That a report be submitted to the Panel in due course on the impact of the implementation of the refreshment of the payment policy.

1.7; Supported Housing

The Cabinet Member reported that the proposal was to bring together housing related support and, in particular, the service for homeless young people and care leaders.

Charlotte Pomery, Assistant Director for Commissioning, reported that the aim was to ensure that provision was fully utilised. It was hoped that that the remodelled pathway would enable greater use of smaller and more specialised providers. The Panel noted that the savings arising from this would be achieved by year two.

1.8; New Models of Care

The Cabinet Member reported that this proposal was aimed at building and developing new partnerships and obtaining economies of scale from these. There were a number of potential areas where savings could be achieved, including integration of Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) provision, pan London adoption and specialised commissioning.

In answer to a question regarding savings obtained from joint work with other local authorities, Zina Etheridge, Deputy Chief Executive, reported that it was not possible yet to provide detail on these but she was confident that the savings identified could be achieved. There were examples from elsewhere of savings that had been achieved through such measures including the merger of children's services between the boroughs of Richmond and Kingston, which had achieved initial savings of £2-3 million. In answer to a question, she stated that the closer working between the Council and Islington was at an early stage and had yet to deliver savings. Although there was risk attached to the lack of detail on how the savings would be achieved, it

was unlikely that all of the potential areas identified would prove not feasible. She was happy to report back with further detail in due course.

In answer to a question, Ms Pomery reported that commissioning was about finding the right provision. There was a range of maintained services in the borough and a mix between the sectors from which services were provided, with some being commissioned from the private sector.

AGREED:

That an update on progress with the development of the new models be submitted to a future meeting of the Panel.

1.9; Schools and Learning

The Cabinet Member reported that the proposals had been put together to mitigate the loss of £1.3 million from the Education Services Grant (ESG). Rory Kennedy, the Assistant Director for Schools and Learning reported that the ESG was used to fund a range of services including education welfare, school improvement, human resources, internal audit and payroll. The remaining amount of £550,000, which had been transferred to the Dedicated Schools Grant, would be used for carrying out statutory duties. The proposals involved re-prioritisation and redesign of centrally retained early years services and de-delegating the budgets for new redundancy costs and education welfare services. The withdrawal of ESG funding was intended to provide an incentive for schools to become academies.

In answer to a question, he stated that most primary schools used the Council's Education Welfare Service. Schools could buy their human resources provision from anywhere that they wished. Although many schools used the Council's provision, increasing numbers were leaving. Mr Abbey stated that the Council's service was challenged and of variable quality.

Concern was expressed at the potential impact of the loss of ESG grant on school improvement services. Mr Kennedy stated that engagement was taking place with Head Teachers and governing bodies about potential future models. There was a consensus that a Haringey wide service which provided both support and challenge to schools was welcomed and needed.

The Panel was asked if it would be reviewing the proposals for reductions in early years funding, especially with regard to the childcare subsidy provided for nursery schools and local authority nurseries. It was noted that the Panel would be looking at early years provision in due course.

AGREED:

That the effects of the loss of Education Services Grant be monitored closely and that further reports be made to the Panel in due course on progress with the implementation of the proposals.

General Issues

The Panel expressed serious concern at the lack of detail within the proposals in respect of risk modelling given the budget reductions the service was facing. It was felt that the lack of further details, including Equalities Impact Assessments, made it difficult to understand the full impact upon services.

AGREED:

That serious concern be expressed at the lack of detail within the proposals in respect of risk modelling and that a further report on progress in delivering the savings and their impact upon service delivery be submitted to the Panel as soon as these became clear and before the end of 2017.

CHAIR: Councillor Kirsten Hearn

Signed by Chair

Date