

# **MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE ADULTS & HEALTH SCRUTINY PANEL HELD ON THURSDAY 14TH NOVEMBER 2024, 6.30 - 10.00pm**

## **PRESENT:**

**Councillors: Pippa Connor (Chair), Cathy Brennan, Thayahlan Iyngkaran, Mary Mason, Sean O'Donovan & Felicia Opoku**

**Co-opted Members: Helena Kania**

## **24. FILMING AT MEETINGS**

The Chair referred Members present to agenda Item 1 as shown on the agenda in respect of filming at this meeting, and Members noted the information contained therein'.

## **25. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Sheila Peacock.

## **26. ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS**

None.

## **27. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Cllr Pippa Connor declared an interest by virtue of her membership of the Royal College of Nursing.

Cllr Pippa Connor declared an interest by virtue of her sister working as a GP in Tottenham.

Cllr Thayahlan Iyngkaran declared an interest as a consultant radiologist and a deputy medical director.

Helena Kania declared an interest as a co-Chair of the Joint Partnership Board.

## **28. DEPUTATIONS/PETITIONS/ PRESENTATIONS/ QUESTIONS**

None.

## **29. MINUTES**

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved as an accurate record.

**RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 19th September 2024 be approved as an accurate record.**

## **30. ACTION TRACKER**

Cllr Connor noted that she had requested further information regarding the response to action point 4 on Continuing Healthcare (CHC), specifically on why the CHC funding for patients in Haringey appeared to vary from other areas of the country. A response on this had not yet been received.

## **31. APPOINTMENT OF NON-VOTING CO-OPTED MEMBER**

Dominic O'Brien, Scrutiny Officer, updated the Panel that, following further conversations with the proposed new non-voting Co-opted member, the current intention was to bring the report on the appointment to the next meeting of the Panel on 17<sup>th</sup> December 2024.

## **32. SCRUTINY OF THE 2025/26 DRAFT BUDGET / 5-YEAR MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY (2025/26 - 2029/30)**

An introduction to the reports for this item was provided by Neil Sinclair, Head of Finance (People). Referring to the report for the Cabinet meeting earlier in the week, Neil Sinclair explained that:

- The opening position for the planning of the revised Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) was a budget gap of around £14m.
- In addition to this, the increased pressures for 2025/26, mainly in Adults and Children's services and housing demand, totalled around £39.6m of which around £15.1m was in Adult Social Services (see Table 1 in the Cabinet report).
- New savings and management actions had been identified to reduce the budget gap, but the revised budget gap was now £32.1m (see Table 5) and so further work was required across all services to be able to deliver a balanced budget.
- It was noted that the pressures on demand-led services were not fixed and had changed since the assumptions that were made in setting the 2024/25 budget the previous year. Demand for services and market prices were constantly moving (particularly due to inflation uplifts) and there were significant challenges in estimating future demand and costs.
- Based on current estimates, the cumulative total budget gap would be £132.8m by 2029/30 (see Table 6).
- Some headline figures on additional funding for local government had been provided by the Government at the Budget in October 2024 but information about the detailed financial settlement for Haringey was not yet available.

- A number of changes had been made to the Council's capital programme to reflect reduced affordability (see Table 7). This impacted on some schemes related to Adults & Health.

The Panel then asked questions about the budget gap and the impact of the budget pressures which were set out in Appendix 1:

- Cllr Connor asked how the risks of the budget gap could be mitigated and how the pressures in Adult Social Care could be addressed. Neil Sinclair said that, from a finance point of view, there was a recognition that the pressures were not steady or stable and so they had improved the modelling for this to provide the best estimate possible to support decision making by the service. Beverley Tarka, Director of Adults, Health & Communities, responded that the pressures in high-demand services were an area for the whole Council to address. The overall approach was therefore to interrogate every line of spend for the Council, establish improved efficiencies and ways of working and also transformational work which could take some time to bed in.
- Asked by Cllr Iyngkaran how demand was predicted and what the current trends were, Beverley Tarka explained that there had been a significant increase in recent years for over-65s, both in terms of number of cases and also the complexity of care needs, which was similar to national trends. The forecasting in the previous year had not taken account of the Council's significant waiting list for Care Act assessments and there had been a concerted effort recently to reduce the backlog leading to a spike in cases. Forecasting accuracy had since been improved. In relation to younger adults with statutory needs, she said that there was a positive picture with people living longer. People were coming into the service, usually at the age of 18, and required services for a significant period of time which was a challenge. Some areas could also be a niche market which meant that providers could aim to negotiate at a high cost and so, by the five North Central London (NCL) boroughs coming together, it helped to manage the pricing. Neil Sinclair added that data sets, including those produced by the Office for National Statistics, were examined to understand population trends and complexity needs.
- Cllr Connor asked what confidence the Panel could have with the future projections. Beverley Tarka said that a benchmarking exercise of statistical neighbours was carried out on unit costs of care, in which Haringey performed well. This was based on the previous year, so increasing costs then had to be factored in. One provider in particular had increased its charges by 36% when their contract came to an end, which the Council was not in a position to pay, so there were commissioning challenges in terms of the reaction of the market to higher overall costs. The NCL arrangements were helping to manage the market challenges. There had also been conversations with housing colleagues about addressing accommodation supply for younger people with support needs as this was an area that could drive up costs.
- Cllr Mason raised the issue of early intervention and prevention and about the Housing teams working together with Children's and Adult Social Care. Cllr Lucia das Neves, Cabinet Member for Health, Social Care & Wellbeing, noted that there had been significant recent structural changes in the Council to

improve this and to reduce silos and miscommunication. She added that every area of the Council was under pressure and so, as fast as the Council could build, it was still not enough and so this was a core challenge which required a focus on improving living conditions for people with the highest need. Beverley Tarka added that there were some excellent examples of early intervention and prevention in Haringey but reiterated that currently the adult social care budget was not sufficient to meet statutory obligations and so it was extremely challenging to fund this kind of work.

- Cllr O'Donovan noted that £600m of additional funding for adult social care had been earmarked by the Government in the recent Budget and queried how this was likely to be used. Cllr das Neves responded that, while any additional funding would not be difficult to allocate given the existing shortage of funds for statutory services, the Budget had also created additional pressures for service providers with the increase in employers' National Insurance and the increase to the National Minimum Wage which was likely to be a factor when contracts were renewed. She added that some additional funding had been earmarked for the NHS and so she was interested in how this could be used collaboratively at a local level.
- Cllr O'Donovan requested details about funding for co-production work and for services to support people, particularly in times of crisis. Cllr das Neves responded that there were some important initiatives ongoing which were not very expensive including warm spaces, Reach & Connect, befriending support, the Council Tax reduction scheme and the use of the Household Support Fund for pensioners in need of winter fuel support. These were all important in terms of keeping people well and out of hospital. She added that some resources had been allocated to looking at how co-production could be improved and that there was a commissioning co-production group which would be involved in ideas for how to make savings and to deliver services in different ways.
- Cllr Connor referred to Table 1 in the Cabinet report (page 155 of the agenda pack) which stated that the additional forecast service pressures for 2025/26 were £15.1m, but that in 2026/27 this dropped to just £930k before rising significantly again in subsequent years. Neil Sinclair explained that the £15.1m addressed the budget gap for 2025/26 but then there was a new baseline for 2026/27 with funding of £6.57m built into the MTFS for that year. This meant that only £930k of additional funding was required for 2026/27 based on the current modelling. Thereafter, other increases in costs and inflation factors were built into the modelling which accounted for the further pressures. Cllr Connor queried whether the 2026/27 figures were realistic, noting that drawdown of reserves had been required in previous years when pressures had been higher than originally forecast. Neil Sinclair reiterated that they were aiming to address the budget gap based on the modelling being undertaken to ensure that the right budget envelope was used as the starting point. Cllr Connor acknowledged this but expressed concerns that the current forecast for 2025/26 represented a risk. **(RECOMMENDATION)**
- Cllr Connor referred to Table 2 in the Cabinet report (page 158 of the agenda pack) which showed significantly different levels of savings in different years. Neil Sinclair responded that the savings total reflected the profile of individual

savings which came on stream with different timings and speeds of delivery. The individual savings were set out in full in Appendix 2. Beverley Tarka added that this exercise was carried out every year based on the best information available but that the savings could change if circumstances also changed.

- Cllr Connor queried the current situation with “invest to save” projects that may be in progress. Beverley Tarka explained that the case had been made for the establishment of a Change Board which had a programme management team to support the analysis, delivery and monitoring of progress associated with “Category A” projects.
- Cllr Iyngkaran referred to paragraph 8.14 of the Cabinet report (page 168 of the agenda pack) which stated that the focus was to identify efficiencies that improved processes with no impact on outcomes for residents and queried whether this was realistic. Beverley Tarka responded that this related to the cross-cutting efficiencies and also the process of looking at all spending line-by-line. Service reductions related only to non-statutory services as statutory services were essential. Cllr das Neves reiterated that the delivery of statutory services was a whole Council responsibility so it was necessary for all parts of the Council to consider how things could be done in a more effective and efficient way.
- Cllr Mason queried the knock-on impact to Council services of budget pressures in the NHS. Beverley Tarka observed that hospital discharge was the dominant narrative but that there also needed to be a significant emphasis on admissions avoidance through early intervention and prevention and that this was a national discussion. Another important area was Continuing Healthcare and the challenges of working in partnership to ensure that residents with high health needs got a fair outcome despite the budget pressures. She also noted that there had been a statement from the Government about funding flows and that it was important to work in partnership to enable funding to flow from the NHS to the community and also to grow the evidence base for preventive work from enables admissions avoidance. She also confirmed that this was relevant to mental health, noting that mental health social workers now worked under the local authority.
- Cllr Mason asked about the communications strategy with service user groups regarding the proposed savings. Cllr das Neves agreed with the importance of this and reported that an information campaign had recently started to explain where the Council spends money and that this would develop further as the consultation was published. It was also important to continue to talk about the positive impact of adult social care on people’s lives.
- Cllr Brennan spoke about more people remaining in their own homes rather than in care homes and queried whether this could be causing people to be more likely to be eligible for social care funding rather than NHS funding. Beverley Tarka responded that there were strict criteria for Continuing Healthcare assessments but that this would not be dependent on where people reside. Cllr das Neves added that it could be difficult for individuals and their families to know what eligibility they had for NHS funding.
- Cllr Brennan highlighted the importance of carers coffee mornings and Beverley Tarka concurred, noting that it was a high-value, low cost activity, that

the Council had been funding these for many years and would continue to do so.

The Panel then asked questions about the Cross-Council savings which affected all Departments as set out in Appendix 2:

Staffing Efficiencies (page 177 of agenda pack)

- Cllr Connor noted that this saving involved a 5% reduction in staffing budgets across all Directorates and queried whether this would put greater pressure on service delivery in adult social care. Beverley Tarka said that Adult Social Care had high levels of agency staff which could be less cost efficiency than permanent staff. There had therefore been a drive to reduce the number of agency staff to achieve savings, though there were challenges in the market to do this. There was also a programme of apprenticeships and social work training to enable career progression for people as permanent staff from an early stage. Jo Baty, Interim Director of Operations, added that there had been some analysis of staffing which had found that some agency staff were in business critical roles and it was hoped that they could be moved onto temporary contracts where appropriate. In addition, the implementation of the localities model was about making services more efficient and effective at grassroots level so the intention was to protect roles there because that would bring more efficiencies further down the line.
  - Helena Kania queried why the reductions were set at 5% across the board as the potential to do this could vary in different services, particularly when the delivery of statutory services needed to be protected. Beverley Tarka said that this had been a personal suggestion from herself based on detailed information about the cost of agency staff, the spans of control of managerial staff and vacancy factors so she was confident that this would not have an impact on service delivery.
  - Cllr lyngkaran requested further details of the strategy to convert agency staff to non-agency staff as this was particularly challenging to achieve. Beverley Tarka responded that this had been an ongoing area of work for some time and that agency staff represented over 25% of the workforce in this area. She acknowledged that some staff were 'career agency staff' who would not want to become permanent staff, some of whom had already left. However, others wanted to convert to permanent contracts but that did take some time to achieve due to the need for assessments and HR processes. She was confident that this process, combined with the apprenticeships/training and wider recruitment, would lead to a higher proportion of permanent staff. Cllr das Neves added that there were various reasons why people would want to work in Haringey and were positive about the vision and values of Haringey. Cllr lyngkaran suggested that the Panel should monitor progress in this area including the number of agency staff that moved over to permanent contracts.
- (RECOMMENDATION)**

Digital Transformation (page 178 of agenda pack – under Culture, Strategy & Engagement savings)

- Asked by Helena Kania about the impact of savings related to the digital transformation budget on adult social care. Sara Sutton, Assistant Director, Partnerships & Communities clarified that this was about a transformation programme to improve the front door offer and to improve efficiency of services with Adult Social Care which would deliver savings rather than being about cuts. In terms of the impact on residents, the Council would focus on a partnership and collaborative approach across Directorates and partners in the voluntary and community sector to focus on digital inclusion for residents who may face barriers to digital access.

Leisure Services Means Tested Discounting (page 182 of agenda pack – under Environment & Resident Services savings)

- Cllr O'Donovan noted that this proposal involved means-testing discounting for leisure services membership rather than a blanket discount for customers aged over 65 and highlighted the benefits to health of gym membership, particular for over-65s, in view of the previous conversations about prevention. He suggested that there could be joint scrutiny work in future about how the health and well-being service could have an input into the promotion of leisure services. Cllr Connor noted that this could be added to the Panel's work programme. **(ACTION)**

The Panel then asked questions about the savings specific to Adults, Health & Communities as set out in Appendix 2:

Connected Care Review (page 181 of agenda pack)

- Asked by Cllr Connor for further details about how this saving would be achieved, Beverley Tarka explained that Connected Care was a 24-hour emergency service provided by the Council for older, vulnerable people. There were three aspects to the service:
  - Assistive technologies (which was in the process of moving from analogue to digital).
  - The installation of equipment in people's homes.
  - A monitoring and response service.

Beverley Tarka reported that the service had been operating at a loss of around £800k per year and that, based on benchmarking of practice in other Boroughs, there were other delivery models that could be more efficient and cost effective. This review was therefore intended to deliver these savings through an improved model. Cllr Connor queried why the existing budget was highlighted as £200k. Neil Sinclair clarified that this figure represented the current revenue budget available for the service but that, as it was running at a loss of £800k, this was a pressure on the wider Adult Social Care budget.

- Cllr Connor suggested that the Panel should be provided with details of the implementation of this project at a later date as there was a risk that moving to a different model would not fully reverse the loss-making position.

**(RECOMMENDATION)**

Day Opportunities Commissioning Review (page 181 of agenda pack)

- Asked by Cllr Connor for further details on what services would be impacted by this saving, Beverley Tarka explained that this proposal was at an early stage but that it was for a commissioning review of existing learning disability and mental health day services to examine how to deliver a more cost-effective, high quality offer in an area that currently involved a spend of around £7.5m. However, this did not involve a reduction in the day opportunities offer. On the figures, Neil Sinclair said that this involved some broad assumptions about how the service could be delivered at a lower cost.
- Asked by Cllr Connor about the implications for Clarendon Recovery College, Beverley Tarka explained that the service was expected to move to Canning Crescent in the future and so this would be an ideal opportunity to develop a new business model for the service. The service involved support such as therapeutic sessions and a cleaning/hoarding service.
- Cllr O'Donovan queried how the review would be funded given that there was a zero figure in the table for 2025/26. Beverley Tarka clarified that no savings were anticipated in 2025/26 but that there would be a co-produced approach to this, involving the Commissioning Co-Production Board that was already in place.
- Cllr Mason proposed that the Panel should have sight of the outcomes of the Review. **(RECOMMENDATION)**

Integrating Connected Communities (page 181 of agenda pack)

- Asked by Cllr Connor for further details on this saving, Cllr das Neves said that the Connected Communities programme had been interrupted and changed by the need to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic and the proposal was to look at how the service was being delivered now, particularly in relation to prevention and other issues discussed earlier in the meeting. Sara Sutton added that, with the localities approach, there was an opportunity to look at fully integrating the Connected Communities model into the Adult Social Care structures. The work delivered through the localities model was supporting those most at risk of needing care and support so was a way of targeting early intervention and prevention. She added that the team collaborated with voluntary and community sector organisations, some of which were commissioned by the Council. There was therefore an opportunity within these arrangements to refocus some of the work to ensure the right funding flows from the NHS to support early intervention and prevention in the community.
- Cllr Mason noted that the existing budget for this service was £750k, but that the saving for 2025/26 was listed as £700k. Sara Sutton explained that Connected Communities was funded from various sources such as the Better



Care Fund, so the saving quoted could be realised and repurposed elsewhere. Cllr Connor queried what percentage of the overall budget the £750k represented. Neil Sinclair confirmed that the £750k represented the General Fund contributions but there were other sources of funding in addition to this. Sara Sutton explained that some elements of the funding were agreed on an annual cycle and some of this was not yet known for 2025/26, but the overall budget for 2024/25 was £1.2m. This included funding for the financial support team currently based within Connected Communities which would be retained but in a different part of the organisation.

- Cllr Opoku requested clarification on whether the funding from additional sources would continue after the transfer. Sara Sutton confirmed that it would continue with the funding being repurposed for use within adult social care.
- Asked by Cllr Connor whether the transfer would involve staffing reductions, Sara Sutton confirmed that it would and that part of this involved the adjustment to management spans of control as previously mentioned. Mitigations included that some individuals were taking up social work apprenticeships and that some were on fixed term contracts which would end.
- Cllr Connor queried how this information would be presented in the public consultation. Beverley Tarka said that this was in development and acknowledged that the details of this proposal would need to be broken down and made more accessible. **(RECOMMENDATION)**
- Asked by Cllr Mason for further details of where the savings would be made, Sara Sutton said that the resources would be integrated into the adult social care structure which wouldn't mean further reductions, but that the opportunity the savings were about the management spans of control.
- Asked by Cllr Mason how the model would be co-produced, Jo Baty said that there were two main avenues for this. One of these was the existing stakeholder and residents/service user groups represented through the Joint Partnership Board and then the localities model also provided an opportunity to talk to people in geographical settings. Sara Sutton added that there was now alignment in terms of primary care to locality and some community services so there were conversations about what integrated neighbourhood teams would look like and how it would support co-production and achieve better outcomes. Cllr Mason suggested that local Councillors should be consulted on this approach in specific areas as they knew their neighbourhoods and would be able to put the teams in touch with different groups. She also recommended that details of developments in this area should be brought to the Panel at a later date. **(RECOMMENDATION)**
- Cllr O'Donovan emphasised the importance of keeping the best of the things that Connected Communities provided, for example referring people to specialist advisers on employment/education or helping with mediation on housing and other issues. He also noted that there were informal community organisations that did great work but were not necessarily in contact with the Council and should be spoken to as part of the co-production approach. Beverley Tarka highlighted that the repurposed version of Connected Communities would not have the full range of tasks that it did in the past such as on housing advice as the focus would be on prevention to help with reducing

pressure on Adult Social Care. Cllr O'Donovan therefore suggested that, as this would represent a loss in terms of the advice sector and the support available in certain areas, the local community and voluntary sector needed to be made aware of this as there could be extra pressure on their services as a consequence. **(RECOMMENDATION)**

- Cllr Connor highlighted a risk of the savings not being achieved in 2025/26 given that co-production work was required as part of this and could take some time. Beverley Tarka responded that this was a straightforward reduction from the General Fund and did not involve a commissioning exercise with a co-produced outcome. The co-production work would be a focus on the preventative activities that would impact on the bottom line for Adult Social Care.

Cllr Connor commented that there was very limited information available in the papers on what the savings proposals actually involved and that this led to the need for additional discussion at the meeting in order to understand them. She recommended that there should be more detailed explanations in the budget scrutiny papers in future years. **(RECOMMENDATION)**

The Panel then asked questions about reductions to the Capital Budget as set out in Appendix 3:

#### Osborne Grove Nursing Home (page 185 of agenda pack)

- Cllr O'Donovan observed that the Panel had previously emphasised the importance of keeping the co-production group informed and was pleased that details of the financial position had been provided to them in writing by the Interim Director of Operations. He also asked whether a meeting would be held with them. Jo Baty acknowledged that it would be important to meet and communicate with them and anticipated that this could take place early in the New Year. This was welcomed by the Panel which emphasised that this dialogue should continue. **(RECOMMENDATION)**
- Cllr O'Donovan asked about the future of the Osborne Grove site, noting that it was currently being used as a homeless shelter. Cllr das Neves acknowledged that the cut in the capital funding for the project was painful, not least because the current Leader of the Council had initiated the project in a previous role as Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care. This decision had resulted from a stringent look at the budget. The current financial position meant that projects such as this needed to be removed from the budget for the MTFS period. This did not mean that the idea for the project had gone away altogether but the current financial circumstances were very challenging. She added that very few Boroughs in the whole country were running a nursing home and that this was about the structures of how social care and nursing care was delivered nationally. The current use of the site as a homeless shelter was a positive one and would continue until around 2026 but no decisions had been made about the site after then.

#### Wood Green Integrated Care Hub (page 185 of agenda pack)

The Panel noted that the Hub was an NHS-led project and that, as the NHS had decided not to proceed with the scheme, the Council contribution would no longer be required. Cllr Connor informed the Panel that she had asked a question about this at a recent meeting of the Joint Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee and was expecting to receive a written reply.

There were no questions raised by the Panel on this item.

#### Locality Hub (page 185 of agenda pack)

- Cllr Connor requested that further details be provided on why the cost of the scheme had been lower than expected. Sara Sutton said that this related to the Neighbourhood Resource Centre. The capital budget originally allowed for consideration of what other hubs may be required and what capital works would be needed to deliver that. However, the current financial position meant that this would be removed from the budget at this point.
- The Panel expressed concerns that this had been a key plank of the initiative to provide integrated Council services and improve the experience of residents but would now not be progressing. The Panel queried how residents would be able to access the new localities approach with no hubs in the centre and west of the Borough.
- Following further discussion, the Panel recommended that further efforts be made to join up services across the Borough and to include the existing locality hub in this while not increasing the capital spend through the development of additional new locality hubs. **(RECOMMENDATION)**

#### Savings Tracker 2024/25 (page 193 of agenda pack)

The Panel then asked questions about the Savings Tracker for 2024/25 as set out in Document B, Part 1:

- Cllr Connor noted that many of the RAG indicators were rated as Amber and asked what level of confidence there was that the savings would be achieved in full. Beverley Tarka explained that the Change Board regularly monitored and reviewed these savings and mitigated them where performance was below expected rates. The targets were challenging but all efforts were being made to mitigate the shortfalls on the tracker.
- Asked by Cllr Brennan what impact any failure to achieve savings would have on the budget shortfall, Beverley Tarka explained that it wouldn't have an impact because the current projections assumed that all savings would be achieved. Where there were shortfalls, mitigations were being put forward as alternative ways of meeting them.
- Asked by Cllr Brennan when these savings were expected to be achieved, Beverley Tarka said that these savings were regularly monitored and there was still confidence that they would be achieved by the end of the financial year due to this work and the mitigations. However, this could not be 100% guaranteed because the figures were regularly changing. Cllr das Neves added that some

areas might underperform and others overperform and that this might form part of the mitigations.

- Cllr lyngkaran expressed concern about the apparent approximation of some of the projected figures with several displayed as being achieved at a rate of exactly 50%. Neil Sinclair acknowledged that, in some cases, the expectation was that only half of the savings would be achieved. Beverley Tarka commented that she was more familiar with more detailed figures rather than these approximations. Cllr lyngkaran said that the Panel needed to see more accurate figures. Cllr Mason added that it was also unclear what date the savings achieved so far were measured from. Cllr Connor proposed that an updated version of the savings tracker should be brought to the next meeting of the Panel which would be held on 17<sup>th</sup> December 2024. This was agreed by the Panel. **(RECOMMENDATION)**

#### Savings Tracker 2025/26 to 2028/29 (page 197 of agenda pack)

Asked to clarify the savings table, Neil Sinclair explained that this set out the multi-year savings during the MTFS period that had been previously approved at the setting of the Budget in March 2024 for the 2024/25 budget.

Cllr Connor commented that the lack of explanatory text for each savings in either Part 1 or Part 2 of the savings tracker presented difficulties for the Panel in scrutinising the individual items. She requested that further details be provided when the revised documents were brought to the Scrutiny Panel meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> December. Dominic O'Brien, Scrutiny Officer, suggested that this information could be provided from the reports/minutes from the previous meetings when these savings had originally been scrutinised. Cllr Opoku suggested that any overlap/impact between savings agreed in a previous year and savings proposed this year should also be made clear.

#### **Recommendations**

Cllr Connor summarised the recommendations of the Panel on the draft budget:

#### **General – pressures and savings**

- The Panel highlighted the risk from the high level of additional pressures to the Council budget, particularly in relation to the extra £15.1m of pressures in the Adult Social Services budget.
- The Panel highlighted the forecast pressures in Adult Social Services for 2026/27 as this was only £930k (Table 1 of the Cabinet report) compared with much higher levels in the other years of the MTFS. The Panel considered that there was some risk of the pressures being revised upwards at the Budget setting process next year, thereby increasing the budget gap at that time.
- The Panel expressed concerns about the higher level of proposed new savings in 2026/27 (Table 2 of the Cabinet report) compared to other years of the MTFS and the potential risk of this impacting on the services that residents received.
- The Panel expressed concerns about the details received about some service providers attempting to raise the cost of services commissioned by the Council at rates that were considerably higher than inflation. The Panel recommended that the Council should be robust in its approach to the procurement from

service providers and vigilant against the risk of being overcharged for services, particularly when compared to the cost of services provided in similar neighbouring boroughs.

### **General – format of budget scrutiny papers**

- The Panel expressed concerns that there was very limited information available in the budget scrutiny papers on what the specific savings proposals actually involved and that this led to the need for additional discussion at the meeting in order to understand them. The Panel recommended that there should be more detailed explanations in the budget scrutiny papers in future years.

### **Savings – Cross-Council**

- In relation to staffing efficiencies, the Panel recommended that it should monitor progress on the numbers of agency staff that were moved over to permanent Adult Social Services contracts and an overall reduction in the proportion of agency staff used by Adult Social Services.

### **Savings – Adults, Health & Communities**

- Connected Care Review: The Panel requested that it should be provided with details of the implementation of this project at a later date as there was a risk that moving to a different model would not fully reverse the loss-making position.
- Day Opportunities – Commissioning Review: The Panel requested that it should be provided with details of the outcomes of the review.
- Integrated Connected Communities: The Panel requested that local Councillors be consulted on the approach to integrated neighbourhood teams, in particular about local groups that could be linked into the teams.
- Integrated Connected Communities: The Panel recommended that relevant organisations in local community and voluntary sector should be made aware of the reduction in scope of the Connected Communities work (in areas such as employment, education and housing advice) as this could add further pressure to organisations that provided advice and support to residents.
- Integrated Connected Communities: The Panel recommended that the details of this proposal be broken down and made more accessible when presented as part of the forthcoming public consultation on the Budget.

### **Capital Programme**

- Osborne Grove Nursing Home: The Panel sought reassurance that the Council would continue to engage and communicate with the co-production group for Osborne Grove including through a meeting with them which was anticipated to take place in the New Year.
- Locality Hubs - Given the limitations on the capital budget which meant that the development of additional new locality hubs could not go ahead, the Panel recommended that further efforts be made to join up services across the Borough and to include the existing locality hub in this.

### **Savings Tracker 2024/25**

- The Panel requested that an updated version of the savings tracker should be brought to the next meeting of the Panel which would be held on 17<sup>th</sup> December 2024. Consideration should be given to what further supporting data could be added, including any figures used by the Change Board to monitor and review the savings.

### **33. WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE**

Dominic O'Brien, Scrutiny Officer, informed the Panel of changes to the agenda for the next meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> December 2024, after officers from Adults, Health & Communities had advised that the report on the CQC inspection was not yet expected to be available. The item on Quality Assurance would go ahead as planned and the Savings Tracker for 2024/25 would also now be added after having been deferred earlier in the evening. One additional item would need to be added to the agenda. In addition to these items, it may also be possible to consult the Panel on the second round of budget savings proposals but the timescales for this were not yet clear.

Cllr Brennan suggested that, in addition to the Savings Tracker, it would be useful to review what proportion of proposed savings from previous year had actually been achieved. Cllr Connor noted that information on this was provided to the Panel on a year-by-year basis and that unachieved savings had typically been mitigated in the past, including through the use of reserves. However, a more detailed study of this could be considered as a potential area of future work. **(ACTION)**

Cllr O'Donovan highlighted the difficulties in scrutinising multi-year savings that had been agreed in previous years and were still ongoing as part of the MTFS. Dominic O'Brien agreed that there was insufficient detail on these in the agenda pack for the meeting but noted that the additional narrative text on each of these would be available in the agenda papers from previous years, so could possibly be referred to when the Savings Tracker was considered at the next meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> December 2024. Cllr Connor added that the format of the Savings Tracker had been clearer in previous years. **(ACTION)**

Cllr Mason highlighted the need to consider the impact on services of further overspends this year on next year's budget. In addition, she was not satisfied that the level of cuts that had been proposed in this year's budget would not have a direct impact on service delivery. It was agreed that this could be added as a recommendation and/or put to officers as a question when the second round of savings were proposed later in the budget-setting process. **(ACTION)**

Cllr O'Donovan highlighted the need for further discussions about the cuts to leisure services, perhaps on a joint basis across Panels. Cllr Connor noted that Cllr Buxton may be taking this forward as a future agenda item at the Overview & Scrutiny Committee so would check the next steps for this and report back. **(ACTION)**

Cllr Connor noted that it had recently been agreed by the Panel that an update should be requested on the progress of previous recommendations from the Scrutiny Review on Sheltered Housing. This was ahead of a proposed new Working Group of the Panel which would be visiting a number of sheltered housing blocks in the Borough to ascertain the current issues and concerns. **(ACTION)**

#### **34. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

- 17<sup>th</sup> Dec 2024 (6.30pm)
- 10<sup>th</sup> Feb 2025 (6.30pm)

CHAIR: Councillor Pippa Connor

Signed by Chair .....

Date .....

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