

## **ADULTS AND HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

### **MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN TASK AND FINISH REVIEW**

2nd December, 2011

**PRESENT** – Councillor Thistlethwaite (in the Chair); Councillors Harman, Kelley and Maddison.

**OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE** – Murray Rose, Director Services for People, Pauline Mitchell, Assistant Director Adult Social Care and Housing, Chris Sivers, Assistant Director Development and Commissioning within Services for Place, Elizabeth Davison, Assistant Director Finance, Heather McQuade, Head of Finance for Housing and Adult Social Care within Resources Group.

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE** – Councillor Curry.

**Purpose of the Meeting** – To scrutinise the budget proposals contained within the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for the period 2012/13 to 2015/16, within the remit of this Scrutiny Committee and the future impact on services.

#### **Discussion :**

The Assistant Director, Finance gave Members an overview on the preparation of the MTFP and advised the Group that the Council's Business Model was based around three central questions – What services the Council would provide; How were the services delivered; and Who would provide the services. The budget proposals contained within the MTFP relevant to this Scrutiny Committee were highlighted together with the future impact on the services faced with budget savings (Appendix 14) and the detailed proposals (Appendix 15). Members were informed that the two saving proposals in relation to Severe Disability Premium Disregard and Review of Eligibility Criteria for Adult Social Care were consulted on as part of last year's budget proposals and that they had recently been agreed by Cabinet.

Particular reference was also made in relation to the zero based budgeting approach which was detailed in Appendix 12 and outlined all the services provided by the Council that had been systematically considered alongside the outcomes the council wants for the Borough and the evidence based on what works. It was explained that there were three recommended actions for each service with the majority of the recommendations being the absolute minimum service level to meet statutory requirements and the other two recommendations being Added Value one services and Added Value two services.

Members scrutinised and discussed each of the proposals and their impacts relevant to this Scrutiny Committee which included a review of support and consultation with older adults, a review of Carers Service contracts, Financial Protection service – charging and a review of Adults Transport.

Discussion ensued on the review in relation to the support and consultation with older adults which particularly relates to Growing Older Living in Darlington (GOLD) to try and target the work more closely, develop community and social networks in a more streamlined way. Chris

Sivers, Assistant Director, Development and Commissioning advised members that review was currently being undertaken by commissioners and that from the evidence provided it was suggested that longer term savings on adult social care budgets could be realised by fewer adults needing care at an early stage as a result of an increase in this type of support. It was intended that new arrangements would be self-financed within three years and that a research report had been commissioned and that the outcomes were being examined. A number of questions were raised by members in relation to whether this work would be linked to My Darlington Plus, the limitations of using mobile telephones and website and that other means should be looked at, the difficulties trying to expand groups such as Neighbourhood Watch, the relationships between the Council and the voluntary sector organisations and who's responsibility it was to take the lead on the review, whether a list was held of all voluntary sector organisations, how the Council communicates with organisations and whether the support and consultation to older adults was a statutory duty of the Council.

In relation to the review of the current contracts and operational element of Carers Service and redesign against specific outcomes, it was anticipated that the duplication internally and externally would be addressed. Members questioned the timescale involved in the review, the uncertainty around the wording of the description of the proposal, whether there was enough staff to undertake all of the work in relation to the review and how the review will be undertaken.

Members considered the proposal in relation to charging for elements of the financial protection service, where the Financial Protection Team provide a deputy service to clients who do not have the capacity to look after their own financial affairs. Elizabeth Davison, Assistant Director, Finance explained to members that the Council would only deputise for a client if a court had appointed the Council to do so and that a standard fee had been set by the Court for Council's to charge and that a number of other Local Authorities had already implemented the charges. Discussion ensued on the £16,500 threshold which had been set by the Court to state that no clients would be charged for the service if their assets were lower than the set amount, the number of clients that the Council currently act for, whether the fees would apply to clients that the Council currently deputise for, whether the service was a statutory duty for the Council and the process of the Council being appointed to deputise for a client.

With reference to the review of adults transport provision the Assistant Director, Adult Social Care and Housing informed members that individuals who currently received transport or a direct payment in lieu of transport provision may no longer receive the service as a result of a review of their needs and that individuals with a Learning Disability and some older people would most likely be affected. The Group questioned the overall budget for adult transport, the eligibility criteria for individuals to qualify for transport, the time scale of completion of the review, how the savings had been identified without the review being completed, whether a panel was in place to assess the outcome/findings of the review and the impacts on individuals and how often the validation panel meets to monitor the impacts of assessments.

Members expressed their concerns in relation to the on-going reviews and that no specific timescale for completion was in place as the same team of officers were undertaking the work involved in the reviews, and that until the reviews had been completed they were not aware of the specific outcomes and were unable to comment on those.

**IT WAS AGREED** – (a) That the note of this Task and Finish Review Group be submitted together with the recommendations listed below to the Special meeting of the Adults and Housing Scrutiny Committee scheduled for 10th January, 2012 :-

- (i) **Review of support and consultation with older adults** - That the Group welcome the review and the Adults and Housing Scrutiny Committee be informed of the outcomes of the review.
  - (ii) **Review Carers Service Contracts** – That the Group welcome the review and that this Scrutiny Committee be informed of the outcomes of the review.
  - (iii) **Finance protection service** – That the Group agree with the implementation of the charges.
  - (iv) **Adult Transport provision** – That the Group raise their concerns on the review and that this Scrutiny Committee be informed of the outcome of the review.
- (b) That should Members have any further questions they be directed to the Democratic Officer to forward to the relevant officers.