

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2012/13 to 2015/16 – TASK AND FINISH
REVIEW

28th NOVEMBER, 2011

PRESENT - Councillors Crudass, Curry, L. Hughes, B. Hutchinson, Lister, T. Richmond and C. Taylor; D. Moyes and B. Egan.

OFFICERS – Murray Rose, Director of People, Jenni Cooke, Assistant Director Children, Families and Learning Brett Neilson, Finance Manager and Allison Hill, Democratic Officer.

APOLOGIES – Councillors J. Vasey and Wright; and T. Fisher.

DISCUSSION:

The Democratic Officer submitted a draft Terms of Reference for the Review of the Medium Term Financial Plan for Members approval.

Members scrutinised and entered into discussion on the budget proposals contained in the Medium Term Financial Plan 2012/13 to 2015/16, relevant to this Scrutiny Committee, and the future impact on the services faced with budget savings (Appendix 14).

Discussion ensued on the proposed reductions to the budget for support to involve young people in the production of the Children and Young People Plan; a reduction in Children's Centre Funding; Stopping Post 16 Free Transport Provision; a Review of transport of pupils to Greenfield/ Woodham Schools; Review of early years/childcare development service and reducing the service by the equivalent of 1 FTE officer; reduction of the training element in the Parenting Programmes budget; reduction in services to 12-19 years (Youth and Connexions Service); and for Secondary School Home to School Transport to increase the free transport provision from 2 miles to 3 miles.

Members also examined the savings identified through the management of services and budgets (Appendix 11 in the Cabinet Papers) and through 'Who' delivers the service in relation to the Review of Local Authority Education Services by not replacing of the Head of Education Services and a member of staff in the Capital and Assets Team; a Review of the Youth Offending Services; Childcare Sufficiency Audit; a review of Commissioning arrangements for 11-19 year olds; a review of Information Services in People Group; and converting school crossing patrol sites to traffic controlled sites. All of which gave full details of the savings which are anticipated to be made by 2015-16.

Reduce Support to involve young people in the production of the Children and Young People Plan - With reference to the reduction in the support to involve young people in the production of the Children and Young People Plan Members were reassured to learn that youth engagement work will continue however the budget provision for a joint post with eVOLution will be removed.

Reduction in Children's Centre Funding – This will impact on George Dent Nursery, however this is monies which they had not yet received and would not impact on the continuous operation of George Dent Nursery which will remain open. The Nursery were due to receive some funding as part of the planned expansion of children centre funding but this will no longer be possible as the focus will now be on those most vulnerable. This nursery is not in a targeted ward however funding will still be provided for the 30 % of deprived children within the five deprived wards for them to be able to access the remaining centres.

Stop Post 16 Free Transport Provision - Members discussed the proposal to cease the post 16 free transport provision, currently provided to 257 students. Savings will amount to £59,000 but due to a phased introduction this will take up to 5 years to achieve. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities will continue to receive transport support.

Review of transport of pupils to Greenfield/Woodham Schools - Members also discussed the cessation of transporting pupils to Greenfield School and Woodham Community College which are in County Durham. 29 pupils are currently transported out of the Borough and the majority of these families live in rural areas of Darlington and would therefore receive free transport to a Darlington school. To make this change would bring the Council into line with neighbouring authorities like Durham and Stockton who do not pay for transport of pupils into Darlington schools from outside of the Borough.

Secondary School Home to School Transport - Regarding Secondary School Home to School Transport and the increase of free transport from 2 miles to 3 miles, Members were advised that Darlington's policy is currently more generous than many in the country and to increase it to 3 miles will only bring it in line with statutory minimum requirements. Members were reassured to learn that any changes will not affect children who live more than two miles from the nearest school at which a place is available, pupils attending faith schools more than 2 miles from their home and if they live in a designated area for Association Transport to a named school. Changes will not impact on pupils already in school and for those due to commence school in September, 2012. It is being recommended that a variation to the transport policy be introduced for Year 7 pupils from September 2013 therefore any savings will not be made until 2013/14.

Review of Early Years/Childcare Development Service - Regarding the budget proposal to reduce the Early Years/Childcare Development Service to the equivalent of 1 FTE, Members welcomed the fact that the reduction will be achieved by reducing the working hours of existing employees, who have elected to, rather than having to enforce redundancy of one employee. There is currently a team of 9 and the reduction will be an equivalent to 1 full

time employee and not one employee. Members did express some concerns regarding any reduction in this service as they felt that Early Years and Childcare Development was an important service and it was important for young people to have a good start. There is currently 153 private/voluntary sector children care provisions and the budget savings will impact on the services provided to the private settings. Members generally agreed that by reducing hours and not officers it will retain the current level of expertise in the service.

Parenting Programmes Training - With regard to the proposal to reduce the training element of the Parenting budget, Members were advised that there are currently a number of fully trained staff to ensure the level of service is maintained and it is intended to collaborate with other authorities in the future to share expertise and staff. The Parenting Co-ordinator post will be retained and will ensure high quality parenting programmes. Members however did express some concerns that this is fine for now but does not allow for the replacement of trained practitioners who may leave the service in the future.

Reduction in Services to 12-19 yrs (Youth and Connexions Service) - Members also discussed in detail the proposed reduction in services for 12-19 year olds (Youth and Connexions Service) and the reduction of the overall budget by £300k over two financial years 2012/13 and 2013/14. The first phase being to lose 3 Connexions workers (amounting to £150K). There are currently two vacancies equating to 2 FTE which will be withdrawn. From September, 2012 there will be a new duty on schools and academies to provide independent advice and careers guidance themselves. It is expected that when this happens the Council will lose government funding. It is the intention that the Council will still retain Connexions workers who will focus on the vulnerable groups giving advice and guidance. Phase two will reduce the budget by a further £150k by a further reduction in posts and supporting budgets, based on evidence gained during 2012 to inform the reductions. Supporting budgets include activities participation, 'Dosh' monies, casual workers, the chill out café and 70 voluntary and independent youth services across the town.

IT WAS AGREED – That the budget proposals be noted and that should Members have any further questions these be directed to the Democratic Officer. A further meeting to discuss will be arranged if necessary. The note of this Task and Finish Review will be submitted to the meeting of Children and Young People Scrutiny scheduled for 9th January and any recommendations therefrom will be submitted to the Special Meeting of Resources scheduled for 26th January, 2012.