

HEALTH AND PARTNERSHIPS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

16 January, 2015

PRESENT – Councillor Newall (in the Chair); Councillors Crichlow, Macnab, EA Richmond, H. Scott and J. Taylor (6)

APOLOGIES – Councillors Donohue, I. Haszeldine, Nutt, Regan and S. Richmond. (5)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE –

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Catherine Whitehead, Assistant Chief Executive, Ken Ross, Public Health Principal and Anthony Sandys, Head of Revenue and Benefits

HP47. - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – Councillors Newall and Macnab both declared interests in Minute HP48 below as they were on the Board of the Citizens Advice Bureau. There were no other declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

HP48. - MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL PLAN – 2015/16 TO 2019/20 - Submitted – A report (previously circulated) of the Chief Officers Executive which had been considered by Cabinet at its meeting held on 2nd December, 2014, proposing a Medium-Term Financial Plan for 2015/16 to 2019/20 for public consultation.

The Assistant Chief Executive gave an overview of the current financial position of the Authority; the anticipated further savings which were required by 2020, over and above the current planned savings; the savings achieved to date; progress on the three key areas which it had been agreed would offer the best prospects of the Council being in a position to continue to serve the public well into the long-term i.e. Building Strong Communities, Spending Wisely and Growing the Economy; what the Council spends its money on; and the significant on-going financial challenges and risks ahead.

It was reported that the three specific areas within the Plan which were within the remit of this Scrutiny Committee were Strategic Grants to the voluntary sector, Public Health Re-commissioning of services and the Local Welfare Provision Grant loss.

Members were advised that, in relation to strategic grants, although the original timetable for the review had assumed a saving of £100,000 in 2015/16 and a further £95,000 in 2016/17, there was an anticipated shortfall of £45,000 in the original savings with an anticipated saving of £50,000 in 2015/16 rather than the £95,000. It was reported that Cabinet had made a number of decisions at its meeting on 6th January, 2015, which would assume that savings of £81,000 would be delivered in 2015/16 with any future savings being dependent on the outcome of reviews which would take place over the next twelve months and upon future commissioning activity.

It was reported that Cabinet had agreed to cease the strategic grant funding to the Citizens Advice Bureau from March 2015, to enable commissioning arrangements to be looked at; to continue the funding to Evolution until September 2015, to enable an infrastructure review to be undertaken; and to continue to fund the other recipients of strategic grants to enable a review of these services to be undertaken which would link to the work across the health and social care remit.

The Public Health Principal updated Members on the progress to date in achieving the identified savings in relation to Public Health Services. It was reported that a Public Health Board had been established to look at the priorities for public health and commissioning decisions to ensure that the best outcomes with the funding available were being achieved and that the savings for 2015/16 had been identified and the Group were comfortable that the target would be achieved.

Discussion ensued on the intervention and preventative work which had been undertaken to date, public health services which had been re-commissioned such as the substance misuse and sexual health contracts, and the opening of the Healthy Darlington Hub within the Dolphin Centre as an extra facility to those already provided and the early indications of its success, particularly in reaching some priority groups.

Particular reference was also made to the work currently being undertaken by the NHS and the Darlington Clinical Commissioning Group in relation to the Obesity Pathway and it was suggested that this Scrutiny Committee might wish to look at this further.

In relation to the proposed loss of the Local Welfare Provision Grant of £486,000, Members' views were sought on Cabinet's proposal within the Medium-Term Financial Plan to allocate additional resources within the budget to cover the withdrawal of that grant so that the services provided through it could be continued. It was reported that, if agreed, it was proposed that the money would be directed towards providing continued crisis support and tackling the causes of crisis, including financial advice, affordable loans and tackling fuel costs and that further work would need to be undertaken to develop an eligibility criteria and adopt a local scheme.

The Head of Revenue and Benefits reported that Darlington's social fund had, to date, been highly successful in providing both crisis support for people in immediate need and community care support to help people to remain or move back into the community after a period in supported or unsettled accommodation and discussion ensued on the amount of funding which had been given out under the scheme in the last financial year; the need to change the nature of the existing scheme and channel any future funding into advice services in order to reduce the numbers needing crisis support; the type of support given under both crisis support and community care support; links to the Financial Inclusion Strategy which was currently being developed; and the development of a referral pathway to direct those needing support.

RESOLVED - That, having considered the information provided at this meeting, the Efficiency and Resources Scrutiny Committee be advised that this Scrutiny Committee is satisfied with the progress in relation to those items included within the Medium-Term Financial Plan 2015/16 to 2019/20, within its remit and specifically supports Cabinet's proposal to allocate additional resources of £486,000 for the continuation of the services currently covered by the Local Welfare Provision Grant.

HP49 - CAPITAL PROGRAMME - Submitted – A report (previously circulated) of the Director of Neighbourhood Services and Resources which had been considered by Cabinet at its meeting held on 2nd December, 2014, to propose a 2015/16 Capital Programme for consultation.

RESOLVED – That the report be received.