

## HEALTH AND PARTNERSHIPS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

15 April 2016

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

**APOLOGIES** – Councillors Nutt and Tostevin (2)

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE** – (0)

**OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE** – Ada Burns, Chief Executive, Elizabeth Davison, Assistant Director – Finance and Human Resources, Pauline Mitchell, Assistant Director – Housing and Building Services, Hilary Hall, Head of Strategy and Commissioning, Mary Hall, Senior Engagement Officer and Karen Graves Democratic Officer.

**EXTERNAL REPRESENTATIVES** – Michelle Thompson, Healthwatch Darlington.

**HP60. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST** – Councillors Newall, Regan and H Scott each declared a non-pecuniary interest in relation to Minute HP61 below.

**HP61. MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2016/17 TO 2019/20** – The Scrutiny Committee met to discuss those proposals contained in phase 2 of the next round of spending reductions as contained within the Medium Term Financial Plan 2016/17 to 2019/20, which were specifically under its remit.

The Scrutiny Committee considered the following proposals in relation to the core Offer and the Impact Assessment Forms :-

**D1 – Darlington Partnership** – Reference was made to the impact assessment in relation to the proposal to end the Council's contribution to the running costs of Darlington Partnership and Darlington Cares which could incite reductions in subscriptions from other public service organisations. The proposal also included the deletion of 1.5 posts and would see a net budget reduction of £13,425 by 2020/12.

Scrutiny was advised that there was no obligation on a Council to provide this service and many local authorities had dismantled their partnerships. Darlington had retained its Partnership, as it galvanised good things for the town, and the authority was regarded as having the overview.

Discussion ensued on the role of the Partnership and the consultation period relating to the MTFP.

**Futures Fund – Local Strategic Partnership** – Reference was made to the proposal to include, in the Futures fund, a budget of £13,000 to ensure business, public sector, voluntary organisations and the Council continue the partnership to develop and deliver solutions to problems and opportunities.

**S11 – Engagement Team** – Reference was made to the impact assessment in relation to the proposal to disband the non-statutory Engagement Team resulting in the deletion of 2.5 posts. The Team play a key role in the financial inclusion agenda and represent the Council at various regional and sub-regional groups particularly in relation to veterans and the Voluntary Sector. The proposal would see a net budget reduction of £100,742 by 2020/21.

Discussion ensued on the support for adults through the Good Friends Scheme and the lack of support for children. Members were advised that an emerging trends report had recently been produced and child poverty had been identified as a key priority.

**S12 – Discretionary Rate Relief** – Reference was made to the impact assessment in relation to the proposal to cease discretionary rate relief, up to a maximum of £2,000 per organisation, resulting in a net budget reduction of £34,000 by 2020/21.

Scrutiny was advised that £14k out of a budget of £34k had been utilised last year; it was a complex procedure; a robust policy was being introduced; and the service would continue until 2018 as notice of cessation had to be lawfully given.

**S13 – Social Fund Budget** – Reference was made to the impact assessment in relation to the proposal to withdraw Social Fund which would affect Crisis Support and Community Support, included the deletion of two posts and would result in a net budget reduction of £357,941 by 2020/21.

Scrutiny was advised that this non-statutory service had been taken over from the DWP and the proposed add-back of £170k comprised £50k for crisis support and £120k for community support. Community support was relevant in particular to people in supported accommodation to enable them to move on and provided basic essentials, including recycled furniture, through Frade and Kings Church. Redundancies would not occur as the reduction in staff would be managed by natural wastage.

Discussion ensued on information that would be made available on the NEPO (North East Procurement Organisation) Portal as part of the tendering process, ensuring that funds were spent wisely and allocated where most support was needed and how best achieved.

The proposals in relation to the Social Fund Budget were to be further discussed at a Task and Finish meeting on 25 April 2016.

**S14 – Strategic Grants** – Reference was made to the impact assessment in relation to the proposal to withdraw all strategic grants by September 2016 resulting in a net budget reduction of £232,117 by 2020/21.

Discussion ensued on work being undertaken to measure the organisational impact as some organisations were affected in many ways; feedback being gathered to be considered as part of the MTFP process; and the sensitivity of the information involved.

It was stated that some organisations would struggle and signposting to available funding opportunities would be provided; and organisations were being encouraged to share buildings and administrative support.

The proposals in relation to Strategic Grants were to be further discussed at a Task and Finish meeting on 25 April 2016.

### **Futures Fund –**

**Crisis Support and Community Care Fund** – Reference was made to the proposal to include, in the Futures Fund, a budget of £170,000 to maintain half of the current funding and identify voluntary sector organisations to manage the fund which would increase the reach of the fund and may help to sustain the voluntary sector.

**Financial and Debt Advice and Welfare Rights Service** – Reference was made to the proposal to include, in the Futures Fund, a staffing budget of £50k to stimulate and support the development of the voluntary sector in Darlington.

**Community Development and Engagement** – Reference was made to the proposal to include, in the Futures Fund, a budget of £50k to stimulate development of the voluntary sector in Darlington.

**HP8 – Healthwatch Contract and Complaints Advocacy** – Details were supplied of the core offer budget to deliver a local Healthwatch, Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DOLS) and Independent Complaints Advocacy for which a grant of £67,514 is received.

Scrutiny were advised of the statutory functions provided by Healthwatch, the free support for people to complain about the NHS through the Independent Complaints Advocacy (delivered through a north east consortium) and the statutory duties relating to DOLS.

Particular reference was made to the new contract value from April 2017 being set at the national funding level for Healthwatch, equating to £63,000 as opposed to its current budget of £131,000.

Discussion ensued on the possibility of CCG funding being made available; funding opportunities from other ad hoc bidding processes e.g. NHS England; and the impact on residents of Darlington of a reduced Healthwatch service.

It was stated that the only benefit Darlington Healthwatch had from the national Healthwatch organisation was the branding, it was a totally independent company and as a charity had access to bid for pots of money for specific projects. Healthwatch had an influencing role and could seek funds nationally. Healthwatch Darlington also provided advice to other Healthwatch organisations which it was hoped would evolve.

**RESOLVED** – That the information provided at this stage be noted.