

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

6 January 2014

PRESENT – Councillor C. Taylor (in the Chair); Councillors Crumbie, Galletley, L. Hughes, Hutchinson, Kelley, Vasey and Wright. (8)

APOLOGIES - Councillors Crudass, Lister and E.A. Richmond; Mr. T. Fisher, Mr. Fitt and Ms. M. Regan. (6)

STATUTORY CO-OPTees – Mr. M. Frank. (1)

NON-STATUTORY CO-OPTees – Ms. E. Coltman and Mr. D. Moyes. (2)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillor C. Hughes.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Jenni Cooke, Assistant Director, Children, Families and Learning.

CYP27. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS – There were no declarations of interested reported at the meeting.

CYP28. MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2014/15 – 2019/20 – Submitted – A report (previously circulated) of the Chief Officers Executive which had been considered by Cabinet, at its meeting held on 13th November, 2013, proposing a Medium-Term Financial Plan for 2014/15 to 2019/20 for public consultation.

It was reported that, if approved, the Plan would put in place a two year sustainable plan together with the proposal for the use of reserves to bridge the budget deficit and give the Council; its partners and the public the opportunity to test out the new approaches and build learning and capacity to deliver financial sustainability in 2016/17 and beyond.

Particular reference was made to the use of reserves over the next two year to bridge the budget deficit and it was highlighted that the Council was carrying a very significant risk in terms of the need to reduce expenditure and that it was essential that cost reductions were delivered on time so that the level of reserves did not become inadequate in future years. It was reported that there were options available if the proposals were not achieved to further reduce expenditure by looking at the future provision of discretionary services which, at this point, it was still proposed to retain if the proposals were not achieved, however, Officers were optimistic that the proposals would be achieved and there was a clear intention and vision to ensure they were, however, it was requested that Scrutiny Committees, as part of their work programmes, look and highlight any additional potential areas which could be identified to bridge the gap from 2016/17 and beyond and the vigorous and pro-active approach needed by this Scrutiny Committee to support the implementation.

The submitted report also made reference to the three building blocks of Building Strong Communities, Spending Wisely and a Growing Economy and Members

particularly discussed the changing role of Councillors in assisting with Building Strong Communities.

It was also reported that each Scrutiny Committee has a role in looking at specific areas within their individual remits and it was reported that the findings following any work would be reported back to a special meeting of Efficiency and Resources Scrutiny Committee to co-ordinate a response to Cabinet and also to formulate an early view on the strategy and the direction of travel; the use of reserves and the risks over the next two-year period.

With regard to Children's Services specifically, it was reported that the service was the second largest spend of this Council but much of the service was statutory and therefore less scope to make the necessary savings. A business case was submitted around the potentially adverse impact of any reduction in discretionary services and it was agreed to recommend maintaining discretionary services that would reduce the number of children who would require care or protection and so ultimately making a saving in children's social care.

The controllable spend in children's social care is the number of children looked after at any one time. As the number increases (average of £50,000 per child per year) then so do other costs such as legal costs, travel etc. There are currently 189 young people looked after and there have been 210 in the past. The proposal is to continue to provide an effective preventative service, closely aligned to partners and to social work teams, to provide early support for families where there is a risk the child may come into care.

It was reported that work will be undertaken to reduce the cost of placements, through reviewing the fostering service and making greater use of brokerage of placements.

Discussion ensued on the work being carried out across the Tees Valley on the Fostering Framework; the recent success in increasing In-house fostering and also increased numbers of adoptions and special guardianships; model work being undertaken with schools to fund family support roles based in schools and the intention to roll out to other schools if successful; schools returning to the Educational Psychology Service; continued multi-agency working through the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) for better outcomes for young people; public health funding for commissioning school nurses and health visitors; and the extension of troubled families funding.

Members discussed the national increase in the number of children looked after and the requirement to monitor closely the increased case loads and the additional pressures on the social workers. Members also considered the role of the social workers and ways in which they could be assisted by better use of technology.

RESOLVED – That the proposals in the Medium Term Financial Plan 2014/15 to 2019/20 be noted.