

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL
SCRUTINY PANEL ON THE 2015/16 BUDGET

10.00am 8 JANUARY 2015

COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Mitchell (Chair)

Also in attendance: Councillors Littman and Simson

PART ONE

10 PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

- 10.1 Cllr Simson declared an interest as a trustee of the Youth Collective.
- 10.2 The press & public were not excluded from the meeting.

11 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

- 11.1 The draft minutes of the 06 January meeting were not yet ready to be agreed – panel members will consider these and the draft minutes of the 08 January meeting at a later date.

12 CHAIR'S COMMUNICATIONS

- 12.1 There were none.

13 BUDGET DISCUSSION

- 13.1 Witnesses at this meeting were:

- Pinaki Ghoshal (PG), Executive Director Children's Services
- Richard Butcher Tuset (RBT), Head of Policy & Performance
- Linda Beanlands (LB), Commissioner Community Safety
- Peter Castleton (PC), Community Safety Manager
- Sarah Tighe-Ford (STF), Equalities Coordinator, Communities Team

Children's Services

- 13.2 PG told members that Children's Services spending could be classified under three areas: schools; high need specialist services; and less specialist work in areas such as

early help, prevention, support for young people with Special Educational Needs (SEN), schools support, youth services, and children's centres.

- 13.2 There is relatively little opportunity for the council to make savings in schools spending: most of this funding is ring-fenced for specific purposes. There is the potential to make savings in specialist services over the longer term via more effective early help and preventative services reducing demand for high-cost specialist interventions such as taking children into care, and the council and partners are very much engaged in this area: e.g. via the development of the Early Help Hub (EHH) and the MASH (multi agency safeguarding hub), and the formation of an integrated 'adolescent' support service for our most vulnerable young people. However, in the short-term, there are relatively few savings to be made while demand remains at current levels.
- 13.3 In consequence, a large percentage of the savings planned are inevitably focused on the third category of services. Key elements here include a focus on more efficient provision of home-school transport; a re-design of SEN services following the recent SEN review (due to be reported to a joint meeting of Children's Committee and the Health & Wellbeing Board on 03 February 2015); the development of a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with schools that accurately captures the cost to the council of schools support; and improved intelligence, such as that already coming through the EHH, which will be used to improve commissioning.
- 13.4 In answer to a question from DS on the achievability of home-school transport savings, PG told members that there were achievable without significant negative impacts. There is a local culture of expectation in terms of the local authority providing transport to school, but whilst it is important that the council continues to support those who need and have a statutory right to support, in general the onus should be on parents taking responsibility for travel to and from school.
- 13.5 In response to a query from LL about the cumulative impact of savings plans on vulnerable children and families, PG told members that these risks would be mitigated by the ongoing work to ensure that services delivered to families are better integrated, more efficient, and more effectively personalised. For example, where children exhibit challenging behaviour we will be moving to offering more support to help families understand and manage their own children's needs rather than just supporting a range of professionals to deal with it outside the home.
- 13.6 In answer to a question from LL on the dangers of making short term savings before long term improvements are in place, PG assured members that he was alert to this danger. The MASH and the EHH provide an important safety net here – much more effectively so than the services they replaced.
- 13.7 In response to a question from GM on the impact of a series of savings on low income women and families, PG told members that we need to be clear about the financial situation we are facing: there is less money available to us and we need to make hard choices. It is important that we use the funds we do have in the most efficient way possible – and this relies upon us having and using the best possible intelligence. We also need to benchmark our services against those in other areas to ensure that we get best value for money. For example, most local areas do not fund extended services for schools; this is something that schools could do more to support locally. Similarly, the

council is an outlier in subsidising its community learning services. Other city providers run a successful service without subsidising their offers and it seems sensible to follow their lead.

- 13.8 In answer to a question from GM on the changing role of schools, PG agreed that there were opportunities to encourage schools to do more to share the cost of a range of services that they benefit from. Since PG came into post he has been very active in strengthening the council's challenge to schools. We have seen a marked improvement in partnership working, but much more could be done. For example, schools are the biggest referrer to the EHH and already spend a good deal on early help (although they don't necessarily badge it as such). However, this provision tends to be undertaken in isolation from other agencies and sometimes from other schools. If the council, the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and schools came together collectively to commission early help services then we would potentially see much better outcomes for young people.
- 13.9 In response to a query from DS on savings to third sector Youth Services, PG told members that Youth Services should be a key part of city early help provision. It is important that we move to a model in which youth workers are embedded in the early help system.
- 13.10 In answer to a question from DS about the pattern of referrals into the EHH, PG told the panel that referrals were largely in line with city demographics, with younger children and families being referred for help as well as teenagers. There are important links here with the Stronger Families Stronger Communities programme.
- 13.11 In response to a query from GM about youth offending, PG told members that there had been a significant reduction in the numbers of young people coming into the system, so much so that it will be possible to delete some vacant posts in the YOS team. Re-offending rates remain high, although the trend is positive. It is important that we maintain a focus on this area. GM agreed, noting that the figure for new entrants had fallen across the country, largely because the police have new powers to deal with offenders outside the court system.
- 13.12 In answer to a question from LL on the achievability of budget projections for high needs specialist services, PG informed members that this was a volatile area that could be impacted by events outside the council's control (for example, a high profile abuse case such as that of 'Baby Peter' could increase the number of children referred for and taken into care). Whilst these risks cannot be wholly mitigated, they can be reduced by better partnership working and by initiatives such as the MASH. It is also important that we manage residential costs properly (a similar point applies to disability placements).
- 13.13 In response to a query from DS about the potential risk of schools opting out of buying council support services, PG told members that most schools do not currently opt out although they could do. It is important that the council offers high quality, value for money support to schools and also important that the council understands the costs associated with providing services: currently some services are financially self-sustaining; others are effectively subsidised by the council, but necessarily so as they mitigate risks for which the council is liable; and others are run at a loss – a position which is not tenable in the long term.

Communities

- 13.14 RBT told members that the community and voluntary sector is very important to the city, with every £1 spent with the third sector estimated to generate £13 in other benefits. However, given the scale of the savings required from the council and other public sector bodies, public funding for the sector will inevitably come under increasing pressure in the coming years. It is therefore vital that we understand what the third sector (including social enterprises and faith groups) offers the city and how best to support it through a period of significant change.
- 13.15 In consequence, the council has invested in Community Works in order to support third sector transition. The council is also reviewing the current three year grant programme. In general we are likely to see a move away from grants to commissioning the sector (via the commissioning prospectus) to deliver specific services or outcomes. The council is also actively looking at national and international best practice in terms of identifying alternative income streams to support the third sector – for example encouraging philanthropic support for infrastructure projects.
- 13.16 In addition, the council is looking at its third sector contracts and commissions as part of the Value for Money (vfm) third party spend review. This review will seek to identify opportunities to increase efficiency and reduce duplication across the council's contracting and commissioning.
- 13.17 The council is also using a matrix impact approach to focus on key third sector organisations across the city, looking at how healthy they are, how resilient to change they are likely to be, and what can be done to support them to remain sustainable.
- 13.18 This year has also seen consultation with Community Works with regard to the draft budget plans. The tight time-scales for the budget make this process inherently challenging, but some good progress has been made since last year, and we are starting to move in the direction of a more collaborative approach to budget setting with our third sector partners. More needs to be done though.
- 13.19 Going forward, the council will need to decide what services beyond those required by statute it wants to continue to support – the third sector needs to understand whether particular funding streams, such as three year grants funding, are going to be retained or discontinued.
- 13.20 The future is likely to see a growing role played by faith organisations across the city, and the council will need to further develop relationships with this sector.
- 13.21 In response to a question from DS about how the budget plans support community resilience, RBT told members that it was essential that the third sector was in a position to support increased community resilience. The city has a good track record of the city community and voluntary sector effectively managing significant change, for example in terms of the recent rationalisation of advice services. The move from grants funding to commissioning will also support the council's ability to target support where it is most needed. Future public sector funding for the third sector is likely to further community resilience by focusing on support for employment.

It is also important that the council supports community resilience by adopting a ‘can do’ attitude to community plans. The council is too often so risk adverse that it risks blocking worthwhile community-led ideas.

- 13.22 In answer to a question from LL on the impact of budget savings plans on women in disadvantaged communities, STF told members that certain groups of people are the heaviest users of council services – women, disabled people, older people, young people. Significant reductions in council funding will inevitably have a disproportionate impact on the groups that use services the most. However, it is important that the council identifies and monitors trends in terms of Equality Impacts, so as to best understand where it most needs to intervene. Having really good intelligence, and talking directly to communities, is key here.

RBT added that it was increasingly important that Equality Impacts were mapped across public services, not just the council. Good work has already been undertaken via the City Management Board, but more needs to be done.

Community Safety

- 13.23 LB told members that the council’s plans to change Community Safety provision were only part of the picture across the city; changes to police, probation and the court service also needed to be factored in. This adds complexity and makes it even more important that the council works together with its partners to mitigate the impact of savings plans.
- 13.24 Resources for Community Safety are reducing, but demand is increasing in key areas. These include: domestic violence, sexual violence, child sexual exploitation, serious and organised crime, modern slavery and trafficking, harmful traditional practices, and re-offending by serious offenders. We need to target resources in these areas.
- 13.25 Some Community Safety work has been included in the recently re-profiled Public Health Substance Misuse Services contract (elements of services for street outreach and for prolific offenders). This represents good value for money without any negative impact on service delivery. There may be the potential to include some of the Communities Against Drugs work in the SMS contract.
- 13.26 Budget plans include a proposal to delete a vacant Prevent (domestic terrorism) post. However, there is the prospect of some Home Office funding here.
- 13.27 Transferring some responsibilities to the PH team has meant that capacity has been maintained in reducing hate crimes and in community engagement.
- 13.28 The council commissioner for violence against women and children is now a shared post with East Sussex County Council, reducing the burden of costs.
- 13.29 Environmental Project Officers have been transferred to the council’s Communities team to make best use of the considerable overlap with this service.

- 13.30 In response to a question from LL about protecting and enhancing intelligence functions, LB told members that high quality intelligence was very important. We are working with the Police & Crime Commissioner and with Sussex Police to share intelligence more effectively, particularly in terms of Serious and Organised Crime and Child Sexual Exploitation. Services have also been thinking innovatively here: for example by training Environmental Health officers who inspect restaurants and other businesses to be aware of trafficking issues.

- 13.31 PC told members that Community Safety has doing more work to support the police – and particularly Police Community Support Officers to manage their most difficult cases. There is also a growing role in supporting ‘mainstream’ services such as Housing Associations and the council’s Housing service.

- 13.32 In response to questions about Community Safety’s role in building community resilience, LB told members that the service had been involved in the successful ‘One Voice’ meetings bringing together the council’s Chief Executive and Executive Leadership Team with representatives of BME and Muslim communities. There is scope to do more in terms of bringing communities together with public sector decision-makers.

- 13.33 In answer to a question from DS about the potential cumulative impact of budget plans on particular groups, such as women, LB told the panel that she shared their concerns, but hoped that effective planning across agencies, pooled budgeting, better integration with safeguarding services, and a greater focus on early intervention would ameliorate some of this impact.

14 THE NEXT STEPS

The meeting concluded at Time Not Specified

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of