

Minutes of the meeting of Adults and wellbeing scrutiny committee held online on Tuesday 26 January 2021 at 2.30 pm

Present: Councillors Elissa Swinglehurst (chairperson), Jenny Bartlett (vice-chairperson), Sebastian Bowen, Helen l'Anson^{*1}, Tim Price, David Summers and Kevin Tillett

In attendance: Councillors Liz Harvey (Cabinet member - finance and corporate services), David Hitchiner (Leader of the Council)^{*2} and Ange Tyler (Cabinet Member - Housing, regulatory services, and community safety)

Officers: Ben Baugh (Democratic services officer), Susie Binns (Team manager (welfare and financial assessments)), Kate Coughtrie (Deputy solicitor to the council), Lee Davis (Head of prevention and support), Samantha Evans (Senior lawyer), Andrew Lovegrove (Acting Deputy Chief Executive (S151)), Jenny Preece (Governance support assistant) and Paul Smith (Assistant director all ages commissioning)

[notes: ^{*1} Councillor l'Anson left the meeting part way through agenda item '21/22 budget saving proposal amendment' and took no part in the voting thereon; ^{*2} Councillor Hitchiner joined the meeting part way through the same item as a non-voting attendee.]

28 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from committee member Councillor Seldon. Apologies had been received from Councillors Crockett (cabinet member - health and adult wellbeing) and Councillor Watson (cabinet support member - adults and communities). Apologies had also been received from Stephen Vickers (director for adults and communities).

29 NAMED SUBSTITUTES (IF ANY)

Councillor Summers was present as a substitute for Councillor Seldon.

30 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

31 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

No questions had been received from members of the public.

32 QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

No questions had been received from councillors.

33 21/22 BUDGET SAVING PROPOSAL AMENDMENT

Note: In addition to the report and appendix published in the agenda, a supplement had been circulated before the meeting which contained presentation slides and identified a

correction to references, made at the last meeting held on 13 January 2021 and in the documents for this meeting, to the effect that the savings gap was £320k and not £330k.

The chairperson reminded the committee that, at the last meeting, a budget saving proposal had been suspended as a consequence of a recent High Court judgement (minute 25 of 2020/21 refers). This additional meeting had been convened to consider an amended saving proposal and to determine any recommendation that the committee wished to make to Cabinet.

The head of prevention and support explained the presentation slides which detailed the amended savings proposal for income generation of £0.52m, comprising: £200k by applying a 3.9% increase to pension income received in 2020/21 that had been put on hold; £312k by applying a 2.5% increase to state retirement income and review of occupational / private pension income from April 2021; and £8k through conducting reviews of nil charge payers and disability related expenses to identify changes in circumstances. The team manager (welfare and financial assessments) provided an overview of the graphs included in the presentation slides.

The head of prevention and support and the team manager (welfare and financial assessments) responded to questions from committee members, the principal points included:

1. It was confirmed that the uplifts in retirement income in 2020/21 and 2021/22 would be taken into account when setting the charges for care and support services.
2. The savings proposals were based on the assumption that the Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG) and Personal Expenses Allowance (PEA) rates set by the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) would remain frozen in 2021/22; the committee was informed that these allowances had been frozen since 2016.
3. Undertaking a review of nil charge payers and disability related / household expenses was described as 'normal business' but would be subject to increased focus by the financial assessment team for 2021/22.
4. It was noted that the increased charges would affect pension age service users receiving care and support in their own home or in care homes.
5. It was confirmed that the savings gap which the budget saving proposal amendment sought to address was £320k and not £330k.
6. It was acknowledged that the use of a different value axis for the 'people receiving care and support in own home' graphs for 'increased charge state pension 3.9%' and 'combined 3.9% and 2.5%' had been unhelpful and there was a need for statistics and graphs to be presented consistently;
7. The committee was provided with assurance that services users were notified about increased charges and were signposted proactively to the appeal process, and advice and support was available to service users on accessing benefits that they were entitled to.

8. An overview of the appeals process was provided and it was noted that appeals could be lodged using a form or by letter. The assistant director all ages commissioning added that an independent advocacy service was commissioned to provide support to service users; on average, 450 people had an advocate at any one time.

The attending cabinet members were invited to comment, the principal points included: the committee was thanked for holding this additional meeting and for the questions that had been raised; officers were thanked for reviewing the options available in order to deliver on the savings target; it was noted that financial assessments were undertaken carefully by officers; it was recognised that the proposals involved difficult decisions which would have a material effect on service users; and the committee was advised that the savings programmes would be monitored.

In response to a question from the chairperson, the head of prevention and support confirmed that the graphical representation of 'people receiving care and support in own home' who would be impacted by the increased charges would be amended prior to cabinet.

The committee then agreed the following resolution.

Resolved to recommend to cabinet:

That the amended budget saving as proposed be accepted.

34 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Monday 29 March 2021 at 2.30 pm

[* note: an additional meeting of the committee was arranged subsequently for Wednesday 24 March 2021 at 9.30 am]

The meeting ended at 3.24 pm

Chairperson

