

People Scrutiny Committee RPPR Board – Comments to Cabinet

1. The People Scrutiny RPPR Board discussed in detail the savings and draft Portfolio Plans for the Adult Social Care and Children's Services Departments at its meeting on 10 December 2018. The meeting was attended by Councillors Davies (Chair), Clark, Ensor, Field, Galley, Sheppard and Webb. Set out below is a summary of the key matters on which the Board sought clarification, together with its concluding remarks in relation to each Department.

Adult Social Care

2. With regard to the savings plan, the Director clarified that the average spend on the social needs element of the Working Age Adults activity is significantly higher in East Sussex than in other local authorities in the region. Furthermore, initial findings indicate other local authorities have achieved these lower levels of demand via the deployment of more effective signposting practices. It was also clarified that there is no direct evidence that savings in this area will be shunted across to other organisations, such as voluntary groups. However, the Director confirmed that the Department will, if the saving is agreed, undertake consultation and an Equality Impact Assessment so as to ensure it understands the implications of savings for this area of activity.

3. With regard to Meals in the Community, it was clarified that the full cost of the meals is between £4 and £8 and that the withdrawal of the £4.10 subsidy will mean clients will need to meet the full cost themselves. The Director also confirmed that the saving for the Meals in the Community activity will be a part-year saving and that with regard to the Working Age Adults activity, the Department expects to make a full year saving in 2019/20.

4. With regard to the Adult Social Care and Health draft Portfolio Plan, the Director confirmed that funding for the Better Care Fund for 2019/20 is in place. However, the Director also confirmed that the additional £2.6m funding for the following year will be managed through the Better Care Fund assurance process and that this will mean the NHS will have greater control over how this funding is spent in future.

5. The Director clarified that the reductions in Income and Net Recharges listed in the Revenue Budget are the result of changes in how the Department and the NHS work together. For example, more NHS nursing staff are now seconded to the Department.

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6. Given the scale of savings previously required of Adult Social Care, the Board agreed that the savings identified for the next financial year are relatively modest. Furthermore, Members were grateful for the work undertaken by the Department and agreed that in the context of the Core Offer, the proposals are realistic. However, the Board expressed a particular concern regarding the proposed removal of the subsidy described under the Meals in the Community activity. The Board therefore asked that Cabinet are mindful of the potential impact of this proposal on the finances of the most vulnerable service users which this subsidy supports.

7. In addition, the Board asked that the wording under the Operating Principles section of the Adult Social Care and Health Portfolio Plan be amended so that the Strong Partnership item includes reference to working in partnership with voluntary organisations.

Children's Services

8. With regard to the Safeguarding Services activity listed in the savings plan, the Director informed Members that the Department had developed a proposal which represents the 'least worst option' available to it. The only other significant potential source of savings within the Safeguarding service area available to the Department relates to the number of social workers it can deploy. However, the Department is clear that reductions in this area would have a much greater negative impact on the vulnerable children and young people this activity area supports.

9. In response to a query regarding the savings plan for Early Help activities, the Board were informed that the Department's strategic review of this area is ongoing. As a result, Members would be given an opportunity to comment on a detailed Early Help savings plan early next year.

10. The Board expressed concerns about the impact of proposed savings on school attendance (under the I-SEND: Inclusion Services activity). In response, the Department agreed that attendance in East Sussex is a particular challenge. However, given the necessary reduction in funding for preventative services, the Department had reluctantly concluded that it would not be able to provide the same level of direct working with parents as before. The Department also confirmed that it retains some statutory responsibility in this area and support for this will continue (for example, with regard to instances of very poor school attendance). Members were also informed that schools retain a responsibility to promote high levels of school attendance.

11. In response to the Board's questions regarding the impact of the savings plan for the Standards and Learning Effectiveness Service (SLES) activity, the Department confirmed that its strategy in recent years had been to focus on supporting schools to support themselves. The Department believes this strategy had left schools better placed to cope with the reduced levels of support it will be able to offer in future, although the Department was clear that there was an increased risk that some schools will underperform in future.

12. The Board queried the lower than national average target relating to the proportion of pupils in all schools who will achieve the expected standards at Key Stage 2 (Performance Measures and Targets in the draft Portfolio Plan). In response, the Board were informed that this was an area of continuing challenge for the Department and schools. Whilst the Department was ambitious and there had been some improvements this year, the targets represent a realistic picture of what it believes can be achieved in the coming three year period.

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13. The Board understood the difficult funding position facing the Children's Services Department. Within this context therefore, the Board recognised that officers and the relevant Lead Members had worked hard to deliver a realistic 'Core Offer' savings plan. However, and whilst accepting the difficult situation facing the Department, Members asked that Cabinet note the Board's regret at the impact of the proposed savings on services that support children in the county.