

Scrutiny Committee Comments on Financial Challenges Workshops

Adults Scrutiny Committee – 30 November 2016

Seven members (including one replacement member) of the Adults Scrutiny Committee attended the Adult Care Financial Challenges workshop, together with the Executive Support Councillor. The Committee members have agreed to put forward the following comments to the Executive.

Demographic Modelling

A key element of the Adult Care budget planning is demography. There had been a historic assumption since 2011/12 of demographic pressures of between 3% and 4% per annum. As part of the presentation, the Committee members were advised that this assumption no longer applied and the budget pressures had been 'rebased' resulting in a reduction of a £1.801 million in the expected budget pressures, against a previously anticipated sum of £8.501 million. The Committee members supported this rationale, and the continued activity analysing demography. As a result of the rebasing budget pressures of £6.7 million remained.

Importance of Prevention and Promoting Health and Wellbeing

The Committee members emphasised the importance of services, which supported prevention and promoted overall health and wellbeing. Helping people to live as independently as possible for as long as possible would always assist in reducing the pressures on the Adult Care. To this end, the Committee members also supported developments with technology, including information technology, as a means of enabling people to live independently.

Working with NHS Commissioners

The Committee members reflected on the degree to which the commissioners of Adult Care and the commissioners of NHS services could further develop their joint working, within the currently configured local NHS structures. The Committee members recorded their support for continued close working with NHS colleagues to ensure that members of the public received high quality services.

Social Care Precept

The workshop meeting raised the issue of the Social Care precept and how this was used. It has been clarified as follows: the additional funding derived from the Social Care Precept (£4.7 million) has been used to deal with nationally recognised pressures in Adult Social Care responsibilities. Locally these include demographic pressures and the impact of the national living wage. This additional funding was used to help fund these specific gross pressures identified across Adult Care which totalled £7.882 million in 2016/17.

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee – 25 November 2016

The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee held a Budget workshop on 25 November 2016 to consider the financial pressures facing Children's Services.

Key comments from the Committee were as follows:-

General

It was queried when Scrutiny would be engaged in the discussions for the second and third year budget reductions. The Executive Director for Children's Services agreed to raise this with the Executive Director for Finance and Public Protection.

Readiness for school

Concerns were raised as to whether services would be lost in children's centres to deliver the proposed savings. Officers confirmed that the savings would be from contract efficiency, managerial reductions and re-design of services delivered through a range of community facilities.

Learn and Achieve

Concerns were expressed about the consequence of the reduction in the cutting of grass verges for enabling safe walking routes to school. There was a need for a joined up approach so that certain grass verges were prioritised to ensure the continuation of safe walking routes to school. It was confirmed that Officers were endeavouring to do this.

It was confirmed that the loss of the Education Support Grant would be managed at a corporate level.

Children are Safe and Healthy

With regards to the new Early Help service, concerns were expressed about whether workloads would increase for staff. It was confirmed that there was no reduction in the number of frontline staff through re-structuring, and the reductions were at a managerial level. Caseloads would continue to be monitored closely, although it was noted that Social Worker caseloads were increasing and that this had been identified as a cost pressure.

Cost Pressures

Concerns were raised about the increase in the number of out of county residential placements and the associated costs. Officers confirmed that out of county residential placements and costs were closely monitored to see if any could be brought back in to Lincolnshire. Cost pressures for out of county, supported accommodation and kinship and associated places were noted and supported.

Concerns were expressed about the increasing caseloads for social workers as a result of the increase in the number of referrals. The Committee strongly supported the request for extra funding for additional social care staff to respond to this increase in referrals.

Community and Public Safety Scrutiny Committee – 14 December 2016

The Community and Public Safety Scrutiny Committee held a budget workshop on 14 December 2016 to consider the financial pressures for this service area. The workshop produced the following comments for consideration by the Executive:

- The level of overlap and inefficiency in the voluntary sector was highlighted as an area for future consideration to ensure funding is used effectively.
- The proposal to use reserves for 2 years to mitigate impact in relation to Financial Inclusion support was supported.
- The option for 400k operational efficiencies from the Library & Information Services contract was welcomed, but the need for additional information to be presented to scrutiny was highlighted.
- Concerns were highlighted regarding any future savings or reductions from the Fire & Rescue and Emergency Planning budget.
- A greater focus on Traded Standards being developed as a traded service was supported. However, concerns were highlighted in relation to the regulatory role of Trading Standards moving forward.
- Exploring further opportunities for income generation in the Registrars & Coroners was supported as a priority.

Economic Scrutiny Committee – 29 November 2016

The Economic Scrutiny Committee held a budget workshop on 29 November 2016 to consider the financial pressures for this service area. It was highlighted that the budget trend for Economic Development in recent years had resulted in a 50% reduction since 2013/2014. Officers highlighted that for 2017/18 the Economic Development budget was stable but was in the High/Very High Risk category and key priorities would include; the ongoing attraction of external funding, helping partners to support the Council's objectives and the development of creative ways of extending the budget.

The workshop produced the following comments for consideration by the Executive:

- The need to ensure a focus on developing skills and training for young people was highlighted as a possible priority. In addition, the need to develop the right skills for Lincolnshire was stressed, including:
 - An increase in the required types of apprenticeships for the skilled areas needed to grow the economy.
 - Support the development of closer working and co-operation between Lincolnshire Colleges and training providers.
 - The possible development of a Public Sector Apprenticeship Scheme to develop the skills needed for Lincolnshire.
- The need to ensure that international trade agreements work for Lincolnshire and support small and medium sized local businesses was highlighted.
- The need for the Council to act as an effective facilitator for 'match funding', rather than a provider was identified as a future priority. It was suggested that partnerships are important, but time consuming, and therefore Economic Development should focus on those partnerships that achieve the most impact – the LEP, major foreign owned business, universities, and Midlands Engine.

- The importance of establishing the next stage of major projects was identified, to continue to develop the infrastructure to support development in Lincolnshire. It was also suggested that officers continue to look at ambitious projects to work with partners such as the Ministry of Justice, MoD, etc.
- It was agreed that in the future, projects would need to be of sufficient scale to have a tangible impact and be focused to obtain the best return. There was also a need for creative thinking and an increased synergy between different services to ensure added value is achieved.
- The possibility of Economic Development being established as a chargeable service was suggested, in order to make the most effective use of the skills and experience from this area. However, it was recognised that the team is small and that chargeable activity must not distort the team's LCC work programme.
- The need for priorities to be assessed to determine shared benefits when working with partners was supported. This is to ensure that all partners that share the benefit of a project or an investment make a contribution to the scheme.
- A desire to see pooled funding for the benefit of the County was identified as a possible future goal. This should focus on developing strong partnerships for Lincolnshire.

Environmental Scrutiny Committee – 2 December 2016

The Environmental Scrutiny Committee held a budget workshop on the 02 December 2016 to consider the financial pressures for this service area. Cost Pressures identified for 2017/18 included the increased costs of mixed dry recyclable materials, business rates, disposal of mattresses & road sweepings and a general increase in volume of materials received.

The workshop produced the following comments for consideration by the Executive:

- The need to ensure that future efforts were targeted in a focused way was highlighted, with more priority given to areas where funding can have a bigger impact.
- The ongoing importance of carbon reduction was suggested as a future priority, specifically the need to progressively invest to save initiatives.
- The SCORE project was identified as an area for future consideration, to ensure that the work undertaken with Lincolnshire Schools was maintained and built upon. It was also suggested that a project similar to SCORE be undertaken on the Council's own estate and recommended that Corporate Property consider the possible benefits of improved energy efficiency.
- The need to protect Flood Schemes where property level flooding is involved was highlighted as a key priority area for consideration. There was also concern about the potential reduction in smaller localised schemes.
- The need to maintain the current threshold for considering flood incidents under section 19 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 was highlighted.

Highways and Transport Scrutiny Committee – 28 November 2016

The Highways and Transport Scrutiny Committee held a budget workshop on 28 November 2016 to consider the financial pressures facing Highways and Transportation. It was highlighted that the proposed 2017/18 Savings for the Highways Revenue Budget would be £3.38m. In addition to the planned service reductions additional pressures and savings included - construction inflation (averaged 3.65% pa equivalent to approx. £650k pa), asset growth (circa £100k pa) and the introduction of the Living Wage.

The workshop produced the following comments for consideration by the Executive:

Structural Maintenance (Savings = £0.53m)

- Concerns were highlighted in relation to the reduction in minor maintenance work due to the proposed reduction in divisional area maintenance teams. The importance to continue the repair of signage was highlighted as a possible priority area, particularly when this signage was linked to the enforcement of Traffic Regulation Orders.
- The importance of assessing the potential long term increase in costs was highlighted, due to the reduction in routine maintenance and whether this could result in greater potential costs in future years.

Environmental Maintenance (Savings = £0.77m)

- The removal of amenity grass cutting was raised as an area of concern due to the potential impact unkempt verges could have on the economy and tourism in Lincolnshire. Several different areas were highlighted for consideration, these included:
 - Whether an analysis on the possible economic impact of the removal of amenity grass cutting would be undertaken.
 - That there was a need for improved communication and joined up working with District and Parish Councils to provide cost effective services to the people of Lincolnshire. It was stressed that communication with local councils is essential as part of the change process.
 - That consideration be given to amenity grass cutting becoming a supplementary charged service with the option for local communities, public and private sector organisations being able to pay for the service in areas where it would have a positive impact. It was suggested this could follow a model similar to the sponsorship of roundabout advertising, etc.
- The one treatment a year weed control currently provided as part of the Highway Asset Management Plan was queried. It was suggested that due to the limited effectiveness of just one treatment a year the current level of weed control appeared to be of little value. A member suggested that this area might be reviewed to determine the impact the cessation of this service would have on the highways structure, and whether the current service level offers value for money.

Safety Maintenance (Savings = £1.22m)

- The service reduction in gully emptying and drainage cleansing to less than one cycle per annum and emergencies was highlighted as an area of concern. There was concern about the impact on the public and the increased risk of localised flooding and complaints.
- There was concern that the possible increase risk of localised flooding due to the reduction of Safety Maintenance could be perceived as moving the cost and risk on to residents through potential increased insurance premiums, etc.

Other Maintenance (Savings = £100k)

- Concerns were highlighted about the need to ensure that self-service options were fit for purpose and that the public needed to have confidence in the options available under the proposed new operating model.

Transportation (Passenger Transport Unit)

- Members highlighted areas of work such as the 'Max Respect Scheme' and queried the sustainability of these projects in the current financial climate. Officers confirmed that there needed to be a change of focus and for the limited resources to be used in a more effective way.
- Concerns around the Community Transport Hub development were highlighted by members, specifically in relation to the viability of schemes due to managed withdrawal of grant funding. There were also concerns that schemes may fold due to the increased levels of work required to join a CT Hub.
- Members highlighted concern in relation to accessibility issues due to the proposal for no new accessible bus stops. The impact/risks of this proposal under disability discrimination legislation were highlighted as a concern.

Value for Money Scrutiny Committee – 22 November 2016

The Value for Money Scrutiny Committee held a budget workshop on the 22 November 2016 to consider the financial pressures for this service area. The workshop produced the following comments for consideration by the Executive:

ICT Strategy and Support

- It was highlighted that there was a need to be aware of annual license costs and consider whether this spend could be capitalised if purchased for multiple years.

Property Strategy and Support

- It was suggested that the property rationalisation programme continue to be a priority, in order to achieve savings on property rental costs. The need to consider an increased scope for generating income from the Council's property portfolio was also highlighted as a key future priority.

Commissioning

- The importance of prioritising income generation activity, such as providing a traded commissioning service to schools, academies and continuing to promote shared services across Lincolnshire was highlighted. The need to develop a more entrepreneurial council was also recommended as a way to introduce new ideas into the current commissioning model.
- It was suggested that additional work be undertaken to assess the feasibility for income generation from council services. The possibility for a Council building company was highlighted as a positive example of fresh thinking.

Business Support

- It was highlighted that this diverse service area covering a wide range of service where the potential impact of reduced funding was substantial. A member of the committee recommended that the saving expectation for Business Support should be reconsidered.

- A traded or commissioning model for Business Support was supported as a potential priority as an innovative way of developing the service further.

Strategic Communications

- The need to consider a move towards more effective methods of communication activity was highlighted as a potential future priority. This should focus around greater digital engagement with self-serve subscriptions available for residents to register for.
- The need to minimise the cost of providing content was highlighted as an area for future consideration. It was suggest that platform improvements in IT would aid in achieving future savings in providing media content.

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