

Social Care Services Board - Performance and Finance Sub-Group
Monday 17 October
Update for the Board

Adult Social Care (ASC) Budget Scrutiny

The sub-group was given a briefing on the current savings planned within the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2016-2021. The MTFP included a 2% reduction in ASC spending, including planned savings of £198 million over the five years.

It was highlighted that Health and Social Care Integration, Accommodation, Family, Friends and Community Support and other initiatives amount to approximately 75% of savings. It was noted that around 26% of the necessary savings across the five years were still to be identified.

The sub-group was informed that there was a projected budget overspend of £21 million for 2016/17. A summary of the current budget position and overspend are being reported to the Board on 26 October 2016.

The sub-group raised concerns as to frontline services, and how the Council could continue to meet its statutory duties. The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Wellbeing and Independence stressed that frontline services were being maintained and met statutory requirements.

There was a concern raised as to whether Family, Friends and Community Support initiatives were placing additional burdens on community partners. Officers noted that the service was developing a system that provided better outcomes at less cost through working closely with partners, and reducing the need for unnecessary and costly services.

The sub-group discussed the sustainability of adult social care funding, and what discussions had taken place with central government. There were concerns that the additional powers to raise a specific proportion of the council tax to fund adult social care would not be sufficient to meet demand pressures. It was highlighted that even a significant cut to other services provided by the Council would not resolve the long term challenges of funding social care for adults. Therefore it is essential that the government implements funding changes to make the system sustainable in the long term.

It was questioned how the service was working on prevention and integration with health services. The Cabinet Member highlighted the complexity of funding both acute and preventative provisions, and the challenge in quantifying the effectiveness of preventative initiatives.

The sub-group raised questions regarding commissioning arrangements for Surrey Choices. It was noted with concern that the contract value had increased, and there was a discussion around the relationship between the shareholder board, the Council as a commissioning body, and how changes were being introduced to these arrangements to improve contract management oversight.

Children's, Schools and Families Improvement Report Card

The sub-group was informed that the service still had a number of children on Child Protection Plans (CPP) over 18 months, though this showed signs of continued improvement. Officers explained that there were difficulties in ending plans with the agreement of all partners, as required, due to there being a general aversion to risk amongst them.

The role of the new Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and Early Help were highlighted as being significant developments in terms of improving performance. The Board will receive reports on both topics on 26 October 2016.

It was noted that performance around assessments had improved in three of the four quadrants. There remained a continued challenge in the South East area, the sub-group was informed that this related to reliance on locum social workers and the difficulty in managing performance in this area.

The interim Head of Children's Services expressed the view that the greatest risk for the service at present was the recruitment and retention of social workers. The social work academy was highlighted as an example of steps put in place to address this. The sub-group was also informed that there was scope to build capacity through the use of social work assistants. Members questioned whether this could be expanded into creating social worker apprenticeships as a future option for the service.

It was noted that the recorded instances of missing children over the calendar month was under 50. It was explained that this was partly a result of the numbers of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) within Surrey. It was also noted that Surrey had a large number of UASC compared to other local authorities, and that this had put strain upon social workers in the area. The sub-group discussed the protocols in place for when children went missing, and how this reflected risks to the individual. Examples were cited where vulnerable children had a history of absconding, and how this needed to be managed to ensure a consistent response on each occasion.

The sub-group noted that social worker caseloads of children on CPP and the numbers of Looked After Children were slightly lower than the recommended level. The sub-group discussed how the complexity of cases varied, and this could give a false impression of a manageable workload. Officers discussed the role of managers in assessing social worker capacity and capability in this respect. The sub-group suggested that the caseload levels should be highlighted as a positive when seeking to recruit social workers.

It was highlighted that the new Assistant Director of Children's Services was continuing on from the work of the current incumbent, however it was stressed that the Board had a vital scrutiny role to play in ensuring that the service continued on its improvement path.