MINUTES OF
HEALTH AND ADULT SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 19 August 2015
(6:00 - 6:50 pm)

Present: Cllr Eileen Keller (Chair), Cllr Peter Chand (Deputy Chair), Cllr Sanchia Alasia, Cllr Edna Fergus, Cllr Adegboyega Oluwole and Cllr Hardial Singh Rai

Also Present: Cllr Phil Waker

11. Declaration of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

12. Minutes - To confirm as correct the minutes of the meeting held on 16 June 2015

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 June 2015 were confirmed as correct.

13. Call-in of Cabinet Decision - Review of Local Welfare and Crisis Support Schemes to Vulnerable Residents with options for the Local Emergency Support Service

The Lead Member of the Committee, Councillor Keller, read out a briefing note explaining the purpose of the meeting which was to hear a call-in of Cabinet’s decision on 23 June 2015 to cease funding a Local Emergency Support Service (LESS) in the borough and use the remaining additional revenue support grant to develop two pilots for supporting identified cohorts of vulnerable residents. She stated that the call-in was submitted by herself and Councillor Chand on the grounds that Cabinet’s decision was not based on sufficient information about what future provision of the service would be. She explained that given that the current service supports local residents who find themselves in an emergency or crisis situation, she and Councillor Chand felt strongly that there needed to be more information and clarity around the future model for provision and what its outcomes would be.

After explaining the procedure for hearing the call-in, Councillor Keller reminded attendees that the decision had not been called-in on the basis of any aspect of the current arrangements for provision as both she and Councillor Chand were on the Citizen’s Advice Bureau Board and to do so would have amounted to a conflict of interest. She asked attendees to focus all discussions at the meeting on the service provision going forward rather than the current arrangements for provision.

Councillor Worby, the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health, opened her response to the call-in as follows:

- The decision taken by Cabinet on 23 June 2015 was not an easy one to take and a lot of thought had gone into how the Council could best support residents in a sustainable manner going forward. The Council has a duty to prevent people from getting into a crisis and the decision was based on the
vision to create an offer that would help vulnerable groups become more resilient to austerity.

- In the ongoing climate of limited resources the Council would have to make difficult decisions. This Authority would need to reduce its spend from £150 million to £80 million and it would not be possible to do this without substantially changing what services it delivered and how.
- The current level of funding was a ‘drop in the ocean’ compared to the level need of in the borough.
- The Council must ask what it can do best with the level of funding it currently has. The Adult and Community Services (ACS) Department held a welfare and advocacy workshop with statutory and voluntary sector partners in April 2015 to discuss this. The importance of undertaking a mapping exercise to identify those most in need was discussed. There was consensus that services would be more effective if they were targeted at specific cohorts and focussed on identifying the most vulnerable residents earlier on in their journey.

Councillor Worby then went on to respond to the call-in as follows:

- The reason for the call-in was that it was felt that the Cabinet decision should have been based on more detail around the two planned pilots which would start after the cessation of the LESS in its current form at the end of September 2015. She could not provide comprehensive detail on the operational side of the two pilots as the specifications were being developed, and the call-in had put a pause on this work; however, she could provide an outline of what the pilots would aim to achieve.
- The first pilot would offer a mentoring and debt management service, which would be targeted at single, ‘non priority’ homeless people aged between 18 and 35. This group was viewed as most at risk if the current LESS provision was ceased as people in this group were least likely to be eligible for other services and support. This pilot would provide mentoring for an identified group of people to support them with debt management and help them build ‘money sense’.
- The second pilot would focus on supporting residents in fuel poverty. The ACS Department would rely on data to target households with the highest levels of fuel poverty and work with them intensely to support them use fuel more efficiently. A ‘thermal’ image of the whole borough had just been commissioned for these purposes.
- The idea behind both pilots was to create schemes that were targeted, intervened early and made tangible differences to people’s lives by promoting self empowerment and resilience.

Councillor Worby stated that she would, in an ideal world, like the Council to deliver both preventative and reactive services in order to support residents in a crisis; however, due to the Government’s austerity cuts, it was not possible to do both. If the Council did not make the right choices at this stage in relation to how best to use the current fund, she feared that the situation for the most vulnerable residents would become even worse.

Councillor Keller asked where people could go for support in a crisis from 1 October 2015 onwards and whether there was further detail on the two pilot schemes such as precisely what services they would offer and how, who they
would be run by and where they would be based.

Councillor Worby stated that the first pilot scheme would be effective from 1 October 2015 to offer mentoring and debt management support. She reiterated that at this stage she could provide an outline of the aims of the two pilots but not the detail such as where they would be based. The two pilots would be tendered out and local voluntary sector organisations would have the opportunity to bid. In terms of direct support for people facing a crisis, certain people would be eligible for help under the Discretionary Housing Payments fund, section 17 (of the Children’s Act 1989), support from the Citizens Advice Bureau and food banks. As outlined in the June Cabinet report, the ‘BanD Together’, ‘Community Champions’, ‘Community Checkpoints’ and the ‘BanD Together Routemaster’ initiatives would support people to access the right services. However, the reality was that there would be some people who would not be eligible for any support and would have to rely on friends and family.

Councillor Chand asked if the two pilots would only provide ‘sign-posting’ support rather than direct support to those facing a crisis or emergency. Councillor Worby stated that there would be an element of sign-posting but direct support would also be provided. She stated that she wished to make it clear that the pilot schemes would not replace the current LESS service; the main aim of the schemes would be to carry out early preventative work with targeted, identified cohorts of the most vulnerable people.

In response to a question, the Corporate Director of the ACS Department (CDACS) outlined the timetable for the open tendering process and stated that bids would have to be received by 18 September 2015.

Marie Kearns, Contract Manager for Harmony House, stated that the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) undertaken for the 16 February 2015 Cabinet report, ‘Options for Providing Support to Vulnerable Residents’, which recommended only a reduction of the LESS service, was almost identical to the EIA provided for the 23 June 2015 Cabinet report, which recommended the cessation of the LESS Service. She asked why a separate and specific EIA of the cessation of the LESS service appeared not to have been carried out. Councillor Worby stated that the available fund, relative to the level of need, was so small that the difference between cessation and reduction was minimal, which was reflected in the EIAs for both Cabinet reports.

Ms Kearns asked whether the Cabinet Member and the ACS Department were aware that the Child Poverty Action Group won a judicial review in 2014 against the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) after which the DWP was required to consider the impact on equality and discrimination and complete the ongoing review of local welfare provision before they made a decision to cease funding Local Welfare Assistance Schemes. As a result of the judicial review the welfare schemes were funded for a further year. The CDACS stated that the EIAs for both the February and June Cabinet reports outlined thoroughly the potential impact of a reduced LESS service for the duration of the contract period (March to September 2015), after which the LESS in its current form, would cease, and therefore, this situation was different to that of the judicial review case Ms Kearns had just referred to where the equality duty was not considered.

The Select Committee retired to consider its decision in line with the procedures.
After the Committee deliberated the call-in and the responses received at the meeting, the Lead Member outlined the decision of the Select Committee to attendees.

The HASSC agreed:

- not to refer the matter back to Cabinet and,

- to request that the ACS Department presents a further report at its meeting on 4 November 2015 providing more detail on how the two planned pilots will support identified cohorts of vulnerable residents.

The Scrutiny Officer was asked to liaise with the ACS Department with regards to the detail that should be provided in the report for the 4 November 2015 meeting.