

Elders Council of Newcastle

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Elders Council of Newcastle's Response to Newcastle City Council's Budget Proposals 2023-24

1. Is the proposal clear and easy to understand?

The proposals are clear and easy to understand but members of the Elders Council also welcomed the opportunity to discuss the proposals with officers to get a clearer understanding of the proposals and their implications.

Access to the budget papers and understanding the implications of the proposals relies heavily on people being able to access the information and respond on-line. We appreciate that the information has also gone out in CityLife and that there are face to face meetings with particular groups such as Elders Council, Connected Voice etc. We would be interested to know whether the lack of capacity to offer local events/drop-ins has impacted on the level of response to the budget consultation from individuals.

1. What consequences or impact do you think there might be as a result of the proposal?

Being Well in Communities Phase 2 and Phase 3

Elders Council supports the principles of the Being Well in Communities programme and is pleased to be playing a part in the community-based activity to support the shift towards a more individually tailored approach which focuses on people's strengths and local support networks. However, this represents a significant change in meeting the expectations of older people and their carers of services. It will severely test the ability of care services to change their ways of operating and the voluntary and community sector's capacity to respond to these changes. To do this well is not a quick process.

Other concerns are as follows:

- This is a very ambitious savings target (Phase 2: £2,300,000; Phase 3 £940,000) to achieve within a year, particularly given the delays in the Government bringing forward any longer-term planning for Adult Social Care Reform and the current challenges of staff recruitment and retention within both the NHS and the social care sectors.
- The proposals are predicated on the voluntary and community sector having the capacity to maintain a range of local offers and there are risks that sector will not have the capacity to deliver and this could lead to the uneven distribution of community assets in the city and even greater inequality.
- The proposals show that the Council wants to take a more preventative approach encouraging people to seek information before they need care and support or are in a crisis. On the whole, we do not prepare well for our later lives and investment needs to be made into enabling us to do so. Elders Council is currently working on ways of encouraging people to think ahead by putting the essentials in place (e.g. will, power of attorney) but also by encouraging people to think ahead about their homes, neighbourhoods and local support networks. We welcome the opportunity to work with Newcastle City Council on this.
- At Elders Council we also know from our own work that, once people are receiving care and support, they find it very difficult to understand and navigate the system, particularly if their key contact person changes frequently. We would like to see more investment in support and advocacy which can help people to use services more efficiently and effectively.

We will re-structure the housing team

Elders Council sought clarification of the impact of this change. We understand that it relates to losing one post within the housing team. We hope that this will not impact on the Council's ability to produce a housing plan which takes account of the housing needs of older people. Whilst we appreciate that the Council has taken significant steps to improve the quality and availability of specialist housing for older people, we also welcome steps to improve and further develop Care and Repair Newcastle's offer. Evidence shows that most people want to continue to live in their current home, which makes it even more important that they can be supported to do so by accessing adaptations, repairs and retrofit in a timely manner which makes their homes fit for purpose.

Organisational efficiency and effectiveness

There is a saving of £7,012,373 under the proposal to reduce external interest cost through continued internal borrowing. This is a very substantial saving and highly commendable. We hope it is a robust proposal. It does, however, raise the question that if internal borrowing does not achieve the projected £7M savings then what are the additional measures that the Council has in mind to achieve the savings.

2. What do you think could be done to reduce any negative consequences of the proposal?

Elders Council members would be interested to know whether the recently announced NE Devolution Deal will contribute to mitigating some of the Council's budget pressures. Although this will not impact directly on Adult Social Care budgets, the potential to invest in adult learning and skills development and transport may have longer term positive impacts.

Elders Council is also interested to know whether Newcastle City Council continues to be committed to becoming an age-friendly city as this is not evident in the current political portfolios. The Elders Council interests are not solely focused on older people who are in need of care, but on the wider issues which make Newcastle a good city in which to grow old. In this respect, Elders Council will continue its commitment to support the Age Friendly Newcastle group in its work and in developing an action plan to form part of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, so that the wider issues of learning, employment, housing, transport and neighbourhoods continue to be worked on. Elders Council recommends that Newcastle City Council renews and strengthens its commitment to becoming an age-friendly city.

3. Do you think the proposals are fair and reasonable given the amount of money the Council will have in the future?

Elders Council appreciates the challenges that the Council is facing. Taking account of our comments above, the proposals are generally fair and reasonable. However, we note that there is no mention of prevention and advocacy, both of which are critical to enabling people to make more effective and timely use of higher cost services. We are pleased that no cuts are being proposed to the provision of cultural and physical activities which are so vital to enabling people to age well. However, we would like to know more about the partnerships between the Council and the cultural, leisure and sporting sectors to deliver these essential community-based activities.

4. Do you think there are other ways in which the Council could make the savings set out in this proposal?

Has the potential for sharing/pooling services with other local authorities in the region been explored fully? Are there ways in which this could reduce back-office costs for the Council?

We appreciate the challenges which the Council is facing when Government does not have a long-term plan to address social care. We understand that the short-term funding to manage hospital discharges and winter pressures creates work

without enabling long term plans to be put in place. Elders Council is willing to support the Council in lobbying Government for a more effective, longer-term solution.

The Elders Council also endorses budget submissions made by Connected Voice on behalf of the VCSE sector.

Elders Council of Newcastle
Board of Trustees

11th January 2023