

Elders Council of Newcastle's Response to Newcastle City Council's Budget Consultation

January 2022

General

We commend Newcastle City Council on presenting a clear and comprehensive set of budget papers which set out the context and the many challenges facing the Council in setting a balanced budget.

Given the significant cuts to the Council's budget over the last 11 years, there are limitations on what can be provided *differently* to deliver efficiencies and savings and we would be interested to know in what areas the Council is no longer able to deliver services or where these are significantly reduced.

Adult Social Services

- We welcome and support 'Being Well' and the redesign of services and can see the potential for this to improve the quality of services and conditions and satisfaction for the workforce. We would welcome the involvement of family advocates in the monitoring of the impact of these changes.
- We welcome the concept of community neighbourhoods and extra support for those communities with low asset bases together with the increased co-ordination of services on a geographical footprint. We are pleased that the Elders Council is actively involved in this work and the commitment to involve local communities taking an asset-based approach.
- We would like to see the concept of 15/20 minute neighbourhoods adopted in Newcastle, with a tighter definition of what we mean by neighbourhoods and investment in local amenities and community hubs. **There is a risk that the investment in city centre regeneration results in impoverished local high streets and amenities.**
- We welcome and support the integration and coordination of services.
- **We are concerned about whether Social Services can really achieve the savings of £4.5 million being put forward for 2022-23 given the level of change this will mean for service providers and those receiving services.**

- We note that the 'discharge to assess' process is predicated on the NHS providing funding for up to 4 weeks post-discharge and that there is no long term guarantee that this funding will continue. We know the importance of a proper, supported discharge process in enabling older people to be in the right place with the right support and the importance of the funding being available to support this.
- We welcome the fact that there is a commitment to continue the funding for reablement for 6 weeks, as this service has always been valued by older people and their carers.
- We would be interested in further information on the audit of Direct Payments and whether any underspend is as a result of people not being able to find the services they need.
- We understand that there is no clarity as to how the £5.4b announced by Government will filter down to the Council and we welcome the offer of a briefing and update on Health and Social Care Reform.
- We would be interested in knowing more about the Council's policy regarding the commissioning of care home places. We are particularly concerned about whether the Council commissions care home places from care homes owned by companies external to the UK (ref. Panorama programme and press reports). **We would welcome further information on how the Council might use its Social Value policy to commission locally.**
- Given the impact of COVID on the care home sector, we commend the Council on the work of the Care Homes Collaborative and congratulate partners on the recent HSJ award. We hope that this work will continue to ensure that the sector is better prepared for future emergencies of this kind and to ensure that staff are trained to high standards and the quality of services continues to be monitored alongside the work of the Regulator.

Housing

- Provision of good quality and suitable housing is central to the Council being able to achieve its plans for Adult Social Care Transformation.
- We are interested in how the Council will address the tensions between its ambitions for 'more and better homes' and 'a clean, green, safe environment'. 'More' housing could just mean more loss of green spaces, wildlife habitat and farmland as well as generate more carbon emissions and air pollutants if sited on the far edges of the city with little public transport. **We are also concerned that**

insufficient attention is being paid to the quality and affordability of planned new housing stock.

- **We are also concerned that the important question of improving current building stock, which is where most people will still live in 50 years time, requires further attention.** This has consequences that reverberate through sustainable green city ambitions, rising fuel poverty, general health improvement and the demand for social services.
- **We are concerned that insufficient attention is being paid to the provision of suitable housing for older citizens.** The Newcastle Future Needs Assessment states that over the next 20-plus years (2020 to 2043), we expect the largest change in age groups within Newcastle to be an increase in the later-life population (people aged 65 and over), from an estimated 43,227 people in 2018, to 55,623 in 2043.
- Although the provision of more specialist housing, in particular small scale assisted living across the city, is welcome, we know that a significant number of older people would prefer to stay in their own homes. We know that national government has allocated further investment in Disabled Facilities Grants and we would be **interested in further information** about how this has impacted on Care and Repair Newcastle and the speed with which they are able to support residents with adaptations. We know that the length of time people wait for the assessment and implementation of adaptations is very frustrating for people who are in need of these changes.
- **Older people need practical support to enable them to stay put** (e.g. handyperson scheme or consider their housing options, ranging from opportunities to discuss their options through to practical support to declutter or move if this is their choice. Evidence shows that by providing a comprehensive range of 'little bit of help' of this kind will enable older people to live independently for longer.
- **Affordable housing in the city we feel needs much more emphasis.** We know funding is difficult from our close association with the Future Homes Association (FHA) project on the Helix site. This project intends to provide 66 affordable and sustainable multi-generation units but still has a funding gap to surmount.
- If the Housing Annuity Leaseback Model is judged successful by all parties this could be one route to expand the housing offer for older people.

- The Housing Revenue Account Budget seems to indicate that YHN cost is about 24% of rental income. **This seems a high ratio for property management** but may be justified.

Digital by Default

- We know that Digital by Default does not work for everyone. From the small amount of work we have done to support older people to go on-line, we know that: some people simply do not want to embrace it; some people cannot afford the devices or broadband to enable them to effectively access services on-line; even people who are digitally engaged, struggle with completing forms etc on-line. A recent report from Manchester is highlighting how some older people are struggling with digital devices in their homes e.g. washing machines; heating systems and getting into a real pickle as a result. We are in conversation with colleagues at Newcastle City Council on how we might work together to address some of this. **However, we still need some access to face to face advice and support and community hubs are probably the best places to offer this.**
- 'City News' is an important channel of communication and can include clear communication of what exactly will be changing and how, quantitatively and qualitatively. People need to know what they are likely to get and how much, roughly speaking, it will cost them. Only then can they meaningfully plan for the future.

Arts and Culture

- We welcome the fact that Newcastle City Council has been able to sustain some investment in arts and culture, particularly given how badly affected this sector has been during COVID. Elders Council benefitted from an excellent creative writing artist's residency. With a modest investment, this project was a lifeline to those who participated and has produced very tangible results.

Other funding sources

- We see no mention of any benefits and extra funding for Newcastle from the North of Tyne Combined Authority.

- We note that Gateshead received £2.1 m from the Government's Community Renewal Fund. Did Newcastle benefit from the same fund, and if so, how is the funding being used?

Parklife

- We would welcome more information about Parklife given the level of investment (£14.2m).

