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Elders Council of Newcastle's Response to Newcastle City Council's Budget Proposals 2024-25

Members of the Elders Council welcomed the opportunity to discuss the proposals with officers to get a clearer understanding of the proposals and their implications.

This year we were invited specifically to discuss the budget changes within Adult Social Care. Older people in Newcastle are far more than recipients of care and make a significant contribution to life in the city, not least through their involvement in voluntary work. The council will be turning to the voluntary sector to underpin the budget changes we therefore would have welcomed the opportunity to discuss the broader budget proposals.

We appreciate that the lack of capacity to offer local events/drop-ins has impacted on the level of response to the budget consultation from individuals and that the online consultation has limited reach resulting in minimal response to something that affects significant proportion of the population.

1. Is the proposal clear and easy to understand?

Many of the proposals are fairly clear and easy to understand. We have commented below where further information is required.

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

Section 2 Being Well in Communities 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 is presented as the largest "savings" item and may represent a significant change in meeting the expectations of older people and their carers of services. We hope that the review of care packages will be a continuous process and always positive for existing and new recipients, otherwise the important service will fail. Whilst we fully support preventative approaches over the long term we are concerned that basic care services will be severely impacted by the changes leaving services unable to meet basic care needs of many people.

Section 3. Investment in Home First Team.

We welcome this and support the principles. However, this is presented as a major budget saving, and we would appreciate further explanation and information about what the NHS role will be and how any gaps in service will be managed.

Section 4 Consolidation / Improving of Initial Care Assessments

This seems a very positive approach with the aim of maximising people's independence and need for long term packages. However, it is worrying that this is presented as the third biggest budget saving. Can this be clarified, and more detail provided?

Section 20 Resources : delete vacant posts in Adult Social Care

No details are given about ASC and the general statement "without any service impact" – can this be further clarified to ensure that there will be no negative impact on service users?

Section 28 Full Service & Funding Review of Loan Equipment Store

This seems a very necessary reorganisation and we hope leads to better equipment utilisation and shorter waiting lists.

Section 29 Shared overnight response offer

This seems an organisation efficiency operation of a very vital service for vulnerable persons. We hope it can be achieved safely. Is this an area where smart technology and appropriate monitoring centres can, or will, be used?

Section 31 Aligning Funding from Disabled Facilities Grant with ASC Budgets.

This seems very sensible. We hope it leads to reducing the waiting lists that are complained about by clients and potential clients.

Section 32 Managing Adult Social Care Waiting Lists

It seems in 2023/4 there was around £653,000 available to seek out ways to reduce ASC waiting lists. There is no mention of achievements here, only the comment that “the programme will not continue at the same level”. It would be helpful to have more explanation. It is important that waiting lists can be minimised.

Section 33 £500,000 Funding for Asset based short term projects in Communities.

It is stated this is funding available only in 2023/4. There is no detail of how this fund has been utilised. It was understood at the presentation that the fund was not spent and would not be available in the next financial year. This is an important matter that should be detailed. Supporting communities and the voluntary sector is vital and this would have provided essential investment into communities. We would like further reassurance that organisations already funded will continue to be supported.

Section 34 Refocusing Occupational Therapy Offer

Occupational therapy is a key service in hospital discharge, assessments, and care packages. It seems incongruous that there will be staff reductions. An increase in the capacity of such a unit is important if savings attributed to sections 2,3,4 and 31 are to be achieved along with better health for older citizens. This seems an area where very close cooperation and even integration with the NHS needs more than just studying to minimise potential negative impacts to service users.

Other concerns are as follows:

The proposals are predicated on the voluntary and community sector having the capacity to maintain a range of local offers. There are risks that the 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. This is the lowest proportion of funding the voluntary sector has received. Adult social care should be seeking solutions in more areas of delivery in more detail with voluntary sector providers who already provide value for money and savings for the council. This could help match the council’s commitment to embedding services within local communities.

Section 9 Increase in permit parking fees

The projected amount of £30,000 seems small, and inconsistent with aspirations of more public transport and non-car journeys. It also seems incongruous with the income generated from the extra charges proposed in sections 13,14, 24.

Section 35 Concerns about City Life and online only formats.

Our members and a lot of older people are very concerned about digital exclusion. People who are the most in need of the information in City Life will no longer have

access to it. Copies in libraries are welcome but there are many who are unable to access libraries. Elders Council provides information on benefits entitlements and services and are also one of the few organisations who still provide hard written copy and audio information to older people in the city, where a significant proportion of our membership and older people across the city do not access online information. We welcome the opportunity to work with Newcastle City Council to broaden our reach with accessible information formats and supporting younger older people to think about their future choices in housing, health and social care.

At Elders Council we also know from our own work that even 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.

Year on year when service changes are made to reduce budget costs, we ask what impact previous reductions have had. You may well discuss this internally, but this information should be available to the public.

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

Elders Council members would be interested to know how the combined authority can 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.

Planning and prevention - 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.

Front Door – Following the feasibility study led by the Elders Council we welcome the consideration by NCC of such an approach to handling public contacts and guiding people through the maze of adult social care and other service information. With appropriate resources Elders Council can support the proposal to develop the Front Door services and involve local VCS organisations.

Age friendly – we recommend Newcastle City Council strengthen its commitment to becoming an age friendly city by nominating a cabinet member with specific responsibility for older people. This would greatly support our advocacy for older people within future budget consultations as well as other areas.

Information – we think there could be a range of options for enabling better access to information. Supporting the costs of the Elders Council hard copy publication

“The Echo”, using the community champions/volunteers to deliver more widely within their own communities, including using neighbourhood networks to distribute specific messages.

4. 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.

5. 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?

What is the budgetary impact of home working? Are there further savings that can be made by changing how staff work, this could be analysed, and results shared with the public.

What are the plans for exploring use of technology to increase efficiency, e.g. use of AI for some administrative tasks.

We appreciate the challenges which the Council is facing when Government does not have a long-term plan to address & support 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.

Anne Raffle, Chair

Clare Levi, Executive Officer

Elders Council of Newcastle

19th January 2024