

Notes from the meeting of the Budget Scrutiny Panel Phase 2 – Public Health & Wellbeing – 12 January 2024

Present:

Corporate Scrutiny Committee Members

Cllr Lyn Buckingham (Chair)
Cllr Lora Lawman (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Jim Hakewill
Cllr Anne Lee
Cllr Paul Marks
Cllr Steven North
Cllr Russell Roberts

Apologies were received from Cllr Zoe McGhee (Cllr Lee substituting)

Executive Members

Cllr Lloyd Bunday (Finance and Transformation)
Cllr Jason Smithers (Leader of the Council)
Cllr Helen Howell (Deputy Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Sport, Leisure, Culture & Tourism)

Observers

Cllr Emily Fedorowycz

Public Health & Wellbeing Officers

Jane Bethea (Director of Public Health)
Shirley Plenderleith (Assistant Director of Public Health)
Kerry Purnell (Assistant Director Communities & Leisure)

Finance Officers

Janice Gotts (Executive Director for Finance and Performance)
Mark Dickenson (Assistant Director for Finance and Strategy)
Claire Edwards (Assistant Director for Finance Accountancy)
Maria Idoine (Strategic Finance Business Partner)

Democratic Services Officers

Ben Smith (Head of Democratic Services/Statutory Scrutiny Officer)
Louise Tyers (Senior Democratic Services Officer)

The Committee considered a presentation by the officers of Public Health and Wellbeing, which outlined the proposed 2024/25 directorate budget and the key risks relating to services the directorate delivered.

During discussion, the principal points were noted:

Public Health

- i) Members welcomed the progress that was being made with public health.
- ii) Mental health in schools was a very significant issue as it could affect the whole family and the school. It was queried how were they being supported? In response, the Director of Public Health confirmed that since the pandemic, increasing levels of anxiety with young people had been seen, along with increases in self-harm. Public health was delivering a Schools Resilience Programme which included building resilience, providing CAMHS funding and Reach, a youth counselling offer.
- iii) With mental health for young people, schools had indicated that there were long waiting lists to access services, it was asked how waiting times were being monitored? Officers advised that a mental health collaborative oversaw mental health. The ICB commissioned services and public health identified gaps and saw its role to fill those gaps. There was a national problem accessing mental health services and public health had a role in identifying issues and using funding in an innovative way.
- iv) At the request of Members, the Director explained how the funding for drug and alcohol treatment was allocated, with three areas covered – children's, families and adult treatment. Members asked how decisions were made about deciding that funding was spent in these areas rather than mental health for children and young people. The Director explained that all programmes were subject to review. There were some mandatory functions, for example substance treatment and there were other funding bodies for children's mental health.
- v) It was acknowledged that our needs did not always align with the priorities of central government. It was accepted that there was often tension in meeting priorities, but that the Council undertook needs assessments to understand what our priorities were. A Health and Wellbeing Strategy was being developed to meet local needs.
- vi) Part of public health's role was supporting the NHS in identifying where there was a gap in provision. We had a key role in influencing the system and working in an integrated way with the NHS was a good opportunity to integrate services around people, for example substance abuse and mental health.
- vii) In response to questions around recommissioning of services, officers advised that when a service was looking to be recommissioned, a health needs assessment was undertaken and there would also be engagement with the market. One of the biggest increases in the costs of recommissioned services was Agenda for Change, where there had been salary increases which needed to be covered.

- viii) Disaggregation was not always best value when it cost more for each council to deliver a service. The Director confirmed that there was an excellent relationship with WNC and disaggregation led to greater control of services but there was a need to keep within budget. If it was thought that disaggregation would put the Council at risk, officers would argue against it. The Leader affirmed that disaggregation was about getting the best service for residents and it was not always about money, but it needed to be remembered that our needs were different to the West.

Communities and Leisure

- (xi) In response as to what was happening with the Kettering Art Gallery, the Assistant Director of Communities and Leisure confirmed that the library had recently moved into the Cornerstone building. There was an issue with the ground floor of the building, particularly with rain, and those issues could not be fully mitigated until the roof was watertight.
- (xii) Officers were asked to explain the proposed saving of £692k in 2025/26 for domestic abuse funding. Officers explained that if the government did not continue with funding then it would become a pressure on our budget and decisions would need to be made. A funding announcement was expected to be made shortly.
- (xiii) With regards to the refugee resettlement programme, once a person was granted asylum it was queried what impact that had on the Council? Officers confirmed that there were different funding streams for each programme. It was accepted that there was some strain around housing when a person was granted asylum as they had 28 days to vacate the temporary accommodation they were provided with. For NNC, there had been three cases and it was working with housing around the options for their transfer to settled accommodation. There was no intention to use the general fund as there was separate funding received from the government.
- (xv) The Kettering Leisure Village had been on the Executive Forward Plan for January but had not come forward. Officers confirmed that the business plan, with a full assessment of the options, would be considered by the Executive in March and prior to that by the Place and Economy Scrutiny Committee in February.
- (xvi) It was queried whether each venue within the Culture, Tourism and Heritage Business Plan should be separated and each have their own profit and loss accounts. The Assistant Director confirmed that each venue had been brought together to maximise efficiencies, but each venue had its own separate accounts. The Deputy Leader advised that Chester House, and the other venues, had been brought together in a single service wide plan. The Chester House Estate had been subsidising the other venues. There had been five years of investment into Chester House and in two years it would become self-sustainable, which would benefit the Council.

Action: The separate profit and loss accounts for each venue to be provided (noting they may be commercially sensitive and not for publication).

(xvii) It was questioned what Chester House was costing as the Council was giving a subsidy to a venue which was competing against other private venues and whether the proposed replacement of the greenhouse was value for money? Officers advised that the Council's contribution to Chester House was expected to be zero, by 2027/28 and that they would also be looking to increase commerciality of other parts of the service. There was an ambition to refurbish the greenhouse and develop its use and appropriate funding sources would be examined.

(xviii) Officers were asked to look at the Business Plan as there appeared to be some minor inconsistencies through the document.

Action: Officers to look at the figures in the Business Plan and to share the outcome with the Committee.

End of Meeting