

Scrutiny Budget recommendations 2023/24

Welcomes and supports

1. The overall 10.5% increase in the budget and specifically the 18.4% increase in the budget for Children's Services and the 8.8% increase in the budget for Integrated Adult Social Care Scrutiny and looks forward to seeing the resulting improvement in Children's Services and Adult Care recognising the increasing demands in the system;
2. The efforts of Devon County Council staff in continuing to support the most vulnerable people and providing essential services;
3. The endeavours of the Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Schools as a member of the F40 group to continue to press for fairer funding for Devon's Children; and
4. The work done by the Communities team in partnership with District Councils to support those hit the hardest by the increase in the cost-of-living.

Record concern:

5. The realism of achieving the savings outlined across the budget, particularly;
 - a. the £9.6 million in-year savings and particularly the £2.6 million from school transport, anticipating the fees and charges review; whilst appreciating the service has embedded Scrutiny's previous comments and now provides in-house transport; and
 - b. the Integrated Adult Social Care in-year savings set at £30 million; against not yet achieving the in-year savings of £18million, coupled with the continued increase in demand and inflation pressures.
6. Uncertainty around senior leadership changes in Children's Services in supporting the pace of change of the Authority to rise to meet the challenges in Children's and the resulting pressure on the budget;
7. The continued reliance on agency staff in Children's services, acknowledging the progress made in permanent staff recruitment to reduce this;
8. The ongoing uncertainty with government regarding the Special Educational Needs Disability (SEND) high needs block safety value process considering the cumulative deficit of £127 million to the end of the current financial year; and
9. The introduction of the Care Quality Commission inspection regime for Adults will place an additional burden on the Council and its partners. The Committee seeks assurance preparations are comprehensive and vigorous to meet these new requirements.

Cabinet be asked to:

10. Support Scrutiny in their critical friend challenge of the in-year financial position:
 - a. For children's this should include monthly monitoring reporting to Committee members to include direction of travel and value for money in the following areas:
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 - Education Health and Care Plans
 - External Care and SEND placements
 - Recruitment and Retention / Agency figures
 - School transportand trialling this governance approach for 3 months; and
 - b. For Integrated Adult Social Care this should involve regular monitoring reports to Committee including benchmarking with other local authorities where appropriate;
11. Explore the expansion of curriculum support and mental health provision to schools, with a view to providing a broader curriculum creating a positive learning environment for all pupils and especially those with Social Emotional and Mental Health Needs (SEMH) to reduce permanent exclusions and improve attendance;
12. Increase the pace of work to support the needs of key workers by working with Devon stakeholders to embed an essential offer including accommodation, training, and travel. The Scrutiny Committee strongly believes this will help ease the financial burden on the authority;
13. Lobby government to highlight the difficulty of operating services in the financial climate and ask for changes against the following:
 - a. the disparate nature of the grants received in Adult Social Care and the unhelpful impact of piecemeal multiple grants;
 - b. the uncertainty about the anticipated changes to Liberty Protection Safeguards;
 - c. the unknown grant settlement for Public Health and resultant difficulties in plan making;
 - d. the 1-year financial settlement for the Council against demand-led costs, not accounting for inflation and the resulting challenges in developing strategy with financial risk; and
 - e. investment in highways to arrest the ongoing decline in the state of the highway;.
14. Lobby government to request a change in legislation to allow formal Committee/County Council meetings to be undertaken as hybrid meetings;
15. Review how the Council is offering support to the voluntary and Community Sector both through tactical access to grants and clear communication channels of the County Council;
16. Consider additional investment in highways.
17. At the stage when the public health grant is known Cabinet to invest in public mental health; and

18. Recognising the financial challenges of the organisation, Scrutiny approves the reduction to Members locality budgets on the basis that they are reviewed in the future and ask that future changes include consultation with Members.