

Dear Councillor

BUDGET PROPOSALS & OLDER PEOPLE

The Older People's Council (OPC) is very concerned about the Budget proposals and the impact that they will have on older people across Brighton & Hove. Whilst we recognise that Councillors will be considering the additional precept of 2% for Adult Social Services it is clear that this will not be sufficient to mitigate the impact of the reductions across a range of services. We also have had no indication that there will be any significant changes to the proposals made to the Policy & Resources Committee on the 3rd December. The Adult Social Care strategy states that "it is essential that the budget strategy includes a clear focus on reducing the level of demand for long term care and support." But, we have increasing demand and frail, disabled & elderly people will continue to need & deserve care & support.

Home Care - support & care in the home needed with time to care

Many older people in the City are on low incomes and live alone. We have over 10,000 pensioners on Pensioner credit and a much high proportion of older people living alone - 41% compared to 31% nationally. We are particularly concerned that the work being undertaken to keep older people supported in their own homes will be undermined if there are not sufficient services and this will inevitably have a knock on affect on hospital services. The current proposed cut of £500,000 over 4 years to the home care service is crucial in this regard. We cannot but see this as leaving many people under supported and we are particularly concerned about the quality of support provided if funding is being cut in this crucial area.

Community Meals

The importance of healthy eating is clear and malnourishment in older people a recognised problem. Whilst there is a contractual change with regard to community meals which is currently being dealt with, nevertheless, the proposed reduction of £34,000 in the budget must necessarily mean less support from the Council to those in need of community meals. This is a vital service to many people and needs to be retained and supported.

Tower House

Members of the OPC have visited Tower House & seen the high quality service provided for clients many of whom have a range of complex needs. It is difficult to see where such a specialist service will be provided elsewhere and the transport provided to reach the service is also crucial for those with limited mobility.

Friendship groups reduce social isolation which as we know is a key factor in health breakdown. We do not believe that the time frame given to investigate alternatives with regard to cost, have given the Tower House service sufficient time to explore ways in which to retain the service. Premises with specialist facilities are rare and should be retained to meet future needs in the City. The budget proposals show a gross budget of £366,000 for Tower House but with a net budget of £299,000 so there is a far smaller cost gap than some of the discussions have indicated. We would urge a further look at the alternatives & costs given the 2% ASC precept so that much more detailed consideration can be given to retention of this facility.

Bus Passes

The OPC believe that very few people in the City know about the proposal in the budget to restrict the use of bus passes until after 9.30 in the morning & 11.00 at night. This will affect 39,500 older people and 5,839 disabled people across the City. For those that need to travel to medical appointments, social activities, volunteer groups there will be a large impact for a small financial saving. For those that live in Saltdean, Hangleton & Knoll, Patcham or Mile Oak that need to get to the County Hospital by 10.00 there will be a knock on affect across the City. Many thousands of pensioners are on low incomes as are many people with disabilities. Transport is a lifeline for many pensioners and this change will be a further blow to thousands of people across the City. The speculative saving of £40,000 is a drop in the ocean compared to the money the Council is gaining from parking and will be seen as such.

Public Toilets

For older people access to a public toilet is often a critical issue. The proposed cut of £200,000 over 4 years to our public toilets leading to closures and reduced opening times is of real concern. The emphasis on tourists access to public toilets as more significant than residents is also insensitive and unfair. We hope that there will be a reconsideration of this proposal, particularly as the campaign to get more businesses to open up toilets to non customers has not been particularly successful as noted in The Equality Impact assessment (EIA). The EIA also recognised that this proposal will have an impact on older people & those with chronic medical conditions.

Libraries

Many older people find libraries a life line not only for books, but also as warm buildings in the winter. Many older people are concerned about the proposals for moving Hove Library and question the costings presented. Building cost estimates are notoriously unreliable and so the savings projected highly questionable. In addition, the proposals with regard to Hollingbury & Westdene are of particular concern. With regard to the closure of Hollingbury library older people are to be encouraged to use Patcham and it is suggested that Home Delivery Services would be provided. We are not convinced that the resources are available for the Home Delivery Service particularly as this service is dependent on volunteers. Finally, the

reform of delivery services to residential & sheltered housing seems to go counter to many of the views expressed. On the Home Delivery service 12 units were interested whereas 25 were not yet the recommendation suggests that this should go ahead in 18 of the 25. If older people are asked for their views, then their response should be respected.

Day Services provided by Voluntary Groups

Much of the emphasis in the direction of travel of the Council is on the services provided by the voluntary sector. We were therefore surprised to see within the budget proposals for monies to be cut from the service provided by St John's in 2016/17 and Somerset Day Centre in 2019/20. They provide services that are well used and appreciated by older people and we are concerned that the revised model for day services proposed in the budget will reduce the current range of services available.

Finally, the Older People's Council is aware that the budget round is extremely difficult. However, we would anticipate the additional precept being proposed will allow some reconsideration of current proposals. The services provided to older people are in the main to those most vulnerable and in need of support. Many will have made a significant contribution to the City during their lives and have no alternatives for assistance. We would urge that Councillors reconsider some of the swingeing cuts to services for older people and in particular to some of the areas outlined above.

Yours faithfully,

Mike Bojczuk Chair
Penny Morley Secretary
Older People's Council