

Board will rely on help from government to run Edinburgh's health services

by Joseph Anderson Local Democracy Reporter

Edinburgh health body will rely on The Scottish Government to bridge a £17.8m overspend, according to a new report.

A financial update on the Edinburgh Integration Joint Board (IJB), which is a partnership between NHS Lothian and The City of Edinburgh Council, reveals a degree of uncertainty over the future provision of services due to the financial impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

Through the IJB, the council and local NHS board provide services such as care homes, day services, mental health provision and prescription services.

In July, the IJB agreed a budget of £708.6m for the 2020/21 financial year, but is now forecasting an actual spend of £726.5m, with health and council chiefs depending on the Scottish government to bail out the joint board.

A report, published ahead of the IJB's next meeting on Tuesday 27 October 2020, indicates the joint health board is expecting further government funding: "Towards the end of September, the cabinet secretary announced a funding package totalling

£1.89bn to support health and social care costs.

“Of this, NHS Lothian received £78.3m, including £18.1m for the four health and social care partnerships in the area.

“Both the accompanying letter and ongoing feedback from Scottish government officials emphasised the intention to fully fund the financial impact of Covid-19.

“Until further allocations are received this clearly remains a risk for all health and social care bodies across Scotland.

“Although the updated financial projections provided by partners continue to show an overspend by the end of the year, these do not currently reflect: all the funding either currently confirmed; or funding which has not yet been received, but where the Scottish government has given a commitment.”

The council projects an overspend of £8.1m on the services it provides for the partnership during 2020/21, including an extra £3.9 on care in the community

The report indicates this is due to the impact of coronavirus: “Initial evidence is that a number of factors are influencing this, including packages being set up to compensate for other services which are not available during the pandemic (e.g. day services); where family and community support is proving more difficult to sustain as lockdown eases and people return to work, and as an alternative to care home placements.”

Meanwhile, NHS Lothian is anticipating an overspend of £9.8m on the services it provides for the IJB, caused largely by an additional £2.2m for general medical services, including GP surgeries, an additional spend of £1m on mental health services and a £2.9m overspend on prescribing.

The overspend in prescription services is caused largely by the scarcity of the antidepressant Sertraline, according to

the report: "The main cause of the price spike appears to be in relation to the short supply of an antidepressant drug, Sertraline, along with a change in the usual mix of medicines.

"The price of Sertraline has been reducing lately, bringing the overall cost per item down, but there is still uncertainty about the level of the recovery possible in year and a £2.9m overspend is currently forecast."

In addition to the financial pressures exerted on the IJB by the coronavirus pandemic, the joint health board is also trying to make in year savings of £15.9m.

The report adds: "There is a clear risk that agreeing stringent additional savings at a time of significant uncertainty could lead to unnecessary public concern at a time when the country is facing an escalation in the measures required to fight a second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"For this reason, it is recommended that officers continue to work through the implications of the funding received, in order to provide the board with more informed advice on the extent to which additional savings are required."

The Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS) is a public service news agency : funded by the BBC, provided by the local news sector, and used by qualifying partners. Local Democracy Reporters cover top-tier local authorities and other public service organisations.