

More social care cuts creating fear in Edinburgh

A sense of “dread and fear” is being felt in Edinburgh as the city faces cuts in vital health and social care services – which bosses warn would have a “direct impact” on people if approved.

Proposals to tackle a projected £16.7million gap in the budget for council care services being tabled next month will include closing care homes and cutting grants to third sector organisations.

It is hoped the burden can be eased using unspent council cash left over from last year, however councillors are yet to make a final decision on how to allocate it.

Significant funding challenges remain for Edinburgh Health and Social Care Partnership (EHSCP) despite a £33m cut made in June, which resulted in an employability scheme for people with severe mental health issues being axed – but still left a £14.2m spending deficit which has since increased by £2.5m.

Moira Pringle, chief financial officer for the Edinburgh Integration Joint Board (EIJB) which has oversight of the Partnership, said the longer the delay in drafting a plan to close the remaining gap, the “more extreme” it would have to be.

EIJB chair Cllr Tim Pogson told a meeting of the Board on Thursday he was concerned people would become ‘unnecessarily

alarmed' at the financial plan when it is published next month as a decision to use £13.7 million of council underspend from 2022-23 would negate the need to go ahead with it in full.

Service user representative Allister McKillop said there was already "a sense of dread and fear" about the impact further cuts would have.

"There is absolute panic and despair within our community," he said. "People are incredibly concerned.

"I just sometimes despair that we're talking about things like this and we're not remembering it's people. To make any more cuts, the harm is already happening.

"We're taking about people's lives, they've already been seriously impacted by the cuts we've already introduced. There's places that have closed, there's a very small amount of money that was taken away from a very important service and without a blink of an eye.

"We don't know what's happened to the people that have been removed from that service – we don't seem to care."

Mr McKillop said carers and service users were already "on their knees".

He added: "I'm getting more and more people phoning up, families in tears who don't know what to do because so many services have been cut."

An additional savings plan set out earlier this year included increasing outsourcing and "closing off" some non-residential care provision, reducing the number of care homes and respite placements and reducing grants to anchor and third sectors organisations which support "those in need including marginalised, disadvantaged, migrant population, those in poverty and homeless" – however officials said this approach, which would have "wide ranging impacts", was not recommended.

Interim chief EIJB officer Mike Massaro-Mallinson said these would be contained in the proposals coming forward in October.

He warned more cuts would have a “direct impact on services and people”.

He added: “We do our best to mitigate any risk, but at the same time we do believe it is going to have an impact on people and services.”

On October 9 – the day before the EIJB meets to address the remaining budget gap – a special meeting of the council’s Finance and Resources Committee will decide whether to allocate a £13.7 million underspend from last year to health and social care, which would significantly ease pressures on services.

And a spokesperson for Edinburgh Integration Joint Partnership said: “Despite the challenges posed by a significant budget deficit we have been able to put together a package of reforms which will not only cut the deficit in a manageable way over 3 years, it will allow us to improve services for the people of Edinburgh.

“This is being achieved through initial investment to pro-actively assess and improve the care packages for people in Edinburgh. In some instances this will lead to care being increased, and in other cases it will lead to a reduction in the package only where this is appropriate for the needs of the person and with better access to community services.

“By using a person-centred approach the EIJB can deliver better results for people and save money over the course of the strategy. In addition, through the use of stronger commissioning and an improved “digital front door” for people looking to access services, the deficit reduction will be made through creating a modern service, fit for the future.”

by Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter



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