

All political parties on council call for social care services overhaul

Edinburgh Council's five political parties will unite in a call to overhaul how social care services are funded and managed in the city in a move to improve financial transparency and put decision making "into the hands of councillors".

A rare all-party motion being tabled in the City Chambers says political groups share "deep concern" about the funding situation facing the city's Integration Joint Board (IJB), a partnership between the council and NHS responsible for the planning and delivery of adult health and social care services in the capital.

It comes amid frustration among councillors at being asked to plug a £14.2 million gap in the IJB's budget without "sufficient clarity" on "why and how" it emerged.

The motion, set to be unanimously agreed at a full council meeting on Thursday calls for a "recalibration" of the council's relationship with the IJB and NHS and a wide-ranging review to determine "where all responsibilities lie" and how a "general shift away from short-terms thinking" could be achieved.

Cllr Phil Duggart, Conservatives, said the end goal was to “provide better outcomes for patients and better opportunities for staff” whilst “bringing more of the decision making into the hands of councillors”.

He said for a long time the IJB has been “a world of fantasy accounting”.

A “litany of failures” with the management of Edinburgh Health and Social Care Partnership (EHSCP) were uncovered following an inspection ordered by the Scottish Government earlier this year.

In a damning report published in March the Care Inspectorate said there were “significant weaknesses” including “insufficient leadership” and an “inadequate level of support for unpaid carers” which had caused “too many people and carers not receiving services at the right time or place”.

This was followed by the resignation of EHSCP chief officer Judith Proctor. Councillors have timed their motion backing a change in management style with the arrival of her replacement, Pat Togher, who will take up the top job next week.

In June £33 million was slashed from the IJB’s budget as Board members were warned service cuts would “certainly lead to more lives lost”. But with a £14.2 million financial black hole remaining, council bosses said every penny of the £13.7 million underspend from last year would need to go towards health and social care or it would face further devastating cuts.

The city’s SNP group has argued a portion of the sum should be set aside to fund a winter fuel payment for vulnerable children and reverse planned cuts to Education Welfare Officers, among other proposals. A final vote on how to utilise the underspend will go ahead at Thursday’s meeting however a majority of councillors are expected to back the

recommendation to allocate the full amount to the IJB.

SNP Councillor Lesley Macinnes, who will table the all party motion, said: "This year the city council was asked to fill a substantial EIJB funding gap with additional Council funding.

"This led to a great deal of productive discussion among elected members of all parties about how we can prevent this happening again and, at the same time, ensure that services continue to be delivered effectively for all those who need them.

"We are looking for greater transparency and closer working with the EIJB and NHS Lothian to help us ensure that CEC funding is appropriate and that we have a more effective longer term relationship. We need to deliver many vital services through the EIJB for many families and individuals in Edinburgh.

'This year we will be sending an additional £14 million to the EIJB. This is money that could be spent on a number of different Council priorities, including support for the most vulnerable in our city. By re-setting the relationship with the EIJB we are stating clearly that we do not want to see this funding gap return next year.'

by Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter