

Council leader 'shocked' as local care board gives £3m surplus cash to NHS

Health chiefs have been accused of taking all the benefits from local services and leaving a council to foot the bill in a row over a £3million bail out.

East Lothian Council leader Norman Hampshire said he was 'shocked' when members of its joint health and social care board agreed to hand its £3million reserves to NHS Lothian to help with an overspend.

And he said the decision did not mirror the partnership agreement he thought the local authority had with the health service accusing NHS bosses of deciding that "any savings made will all be kept by the NHS and all the costs will remain with the council."

Mr Hampshire's comments came a week after the IJB agreed to a recommendation from its chief financial officer to commit its reserves towards an overspend on NHS provided services in the county which was estimated at over £4million.

Board members were told that they could not be left with a surplus of money in their reserves at the end of the financial year if either of their partners were facing an overspend.

And they were reminded that last year the board handed £1.9million in its reserves to East Lothian Council to help

fill a gap in its social care budget.

The IJB oversees health and social care services which are jointly funded by NHS Lothian and the council and is made up of representatives from NHS and council.

The board was asked to agree to give the remaining reserves to NHS Lothian while “recognising the IJB’s responsibility to support its partners and

that the IJB used its reserves 2023/24 to support the council” and approved it by five votes to three.

Councillor Hampshire told a meeting of East Lothian Council this week that he was ‘really, really unhappy’ about the decision.

He said: “Right across the council, services are struggling to keep up with the demand on them.

“I was really shocked that the IJB took a decision to transfer £3million of its reserves back to NHS Lothian meaning the current overspend that is there, if it (savings) are not delivered, which is currently in excess of £3million just now will fall back onto this council.

“My understanding of the partnership we got into with the health board through the IJB was that we were to do everything we can together to try and get people out of hospital quickly and keep them in their own home not allowing them to be transferred back into hospital.

“That would result in significant savings for the NHS and benefit both the NHS and social care services in the community.

“However it seems now the NHS has taken the decision that any saving that are made will all be kept by the NHS and all the costs will remain with the council. That is not the partnership I thought we had signed up to and I am really,

really unhappy about the decision taken and I will be writing to people to try and get this changed.”

NHS Lothian declined to comment saying the decision was a matter for the IJB.

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter