

Social care services could face cuts in Midlothian

Social care services could face cuts in Midlothian after bosses warned they may have to 'stop spending' until March next year.

A meeting of Midlothian councillors was today told that services in the county are already overspent by £5.2million this year.

And Midlothian Health and Social Care Partnership's chief officer Morag Barrow said it faced 'unpalatable' choices as demand for care outstripped savings already introduced.

She told the meeting that pressure on services had led to a series of meetings where options could see the Integrations Joint Board (IJB) which oversees health and social care "stop spending between now and March" adding they had "very little wriggle room" left.

Asked what services could be affected Ms Barrow said: "Options will involve care homes, care home packages , day care and hospital wards."

Her comments came after Councillor Derek Milligan raised concern about a 'disconnect' between the IJB budget and council spending decisions.

He told fellow councillors: "There is nothing alerting the public to the troubles we are having balancing the books."

Councillor Milligan pointed out that the IJB provided services

which in the eyes of the public were coming from the council despite coming from a different budget as he urged the local authority to hold talks with the IJB before it has to make planned cuts public.

He said: "To the public these are council services provided by the IJB, it is a council worker who comes to their home. It is not the IJB who they go to to raise concerns, it is their councillors.

"The disconnect between the IJB and the council has never been greater and we need to do something about it."

However fellow councillor Colin Cassidy said stepping in ahead of the IJB making its decisions could be seen as interfering in its operations.

Ms Barrow told the meeting a report on the options available to the IJB to try and recoup the overspend would be put to its members in the next couple of weeks but warned "none of the options are palatable".

The meeting heard the IJB had introduced a wide range of savings to try and reduce costs but it was being outstripped by growing demand for services.

Following the meeting a spokesperson for the partnership stressed 'stopping spending' would not mean a block on new care packages, or care home placements.

They said: "Every option will be risk assessed and the safety of residents will be paramount. However, health and social care can only provide services within the budget it has."

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter