

29 January 2016

Nick Forbes
Leader of Council
Newcastle City Council

Dear Nick

Newcastle City Council's Budget proposals for 2016/17 Consultation Response from Newcastle Council for Voluntary Service

Newcastle Council for Voluntary Service is the local support and development (infrastructure) organisation for the voluntary and community sector in Newcastle.

Our overall aim is to improve the quality of people's lives in Newcastle by promoting social action. We do this by:

- Supporting and developing local organisations to thrive
- Networking and involving local organisations to engage
- Representing and influencing on behalf of the voluntary and community sector

Central Government funding

Over the last few years we have consistently expressed the view that the way Local Government is now funded is unfair and gives least to the areas of greatest need. This unfair allocation and the additional problems of future funding are well-illustrated in the 'Ambition in the Age of Austerity' document. The dramatic shift in Government Housing Policy, the low Council Tax base in Newcastle, the challenge of the importance of the Business Rate makes the task very difficult. The previous cuts of £191million, the underfunding of the Care Act, and the increased responsibilities on Local Authorities make the task almost impossible.

Voluntary and community organisations are increasingly seeing the impact of Central Government policy on the people we support (our beneficiaries). The impact of Welfare Reform, cuts in benefits, dramatic shifts in housing policy, the decrease in council services and loss of overall support has made life extremely (and unnecessarily) difficult for many of our residents and communities. In the reports Newcastle CVS produce we have highlighted the growing impact of austerity and poverty within local communities, whilst at the same time noting the increasing inequalities. We are able to give you stories and support your campaigns and lobbying to try to improve the situation. A number of reports locally and nationally, are showing the widening of the gap between the richer and poorer communities in our city, region and country; despite it previously decreasing.

We share the Council's irritation with Central Government statements which give the impression that Local Government has been more than adequately funded. Since 2010, much of the funding has shifted from being needs-based to being population based which has a major impact on many (northern) cities. The recent 'permission' to raise the Council

Tax by an additional 2% gives the impression this would solve any problems, when the reality is this would only cover around 10% of the actual costs of social care.

We recognise that 50% of the revenue budget is spent on supporting children and adult social care and so would support the Council Tax being increased by up to 2% and also the 2% social care precept.

Process

Newcastle CVS has promoted the budget consultation exercise through its website, e-inform, holding two meetings for the sector in November and January (attended by over 60 people), circulating notes from these meetings and encouraging our members to engage and respond. Two staff members and a trustee attended the meeting earlier this week on the Cooperative Communities Service. At the two meetings that CVS hosted, there were presentations by the Assistant Chief Executive, the Director of Resources and the Director of Commissioning, who also answered questions. We also encouraged voluntary organisations to send us questions, which were submitted in advance of the meeting; some of these questions were answered at the meeting and we were informed that we would receive written responses to the other questions; unfortunately this has not happened yet.

We appreciate the timetable is extremely tight given the need to set a budget at the March Council meeting and final figures on the actual amount of government support were not available until mid-December, but there are a number of organisations who feel conversations could have been started a lot earlier. Once the General Election had taken place in May last year and the Chancellor announced his July budget it was obvious there would be further and highly significant reductions in support to local government. The Government's changes to Housing Policy have also worsened the problem. Tony Kirkham was very accurate when he came to the November meeting with voluntary organisation representatives, so the question is given the early knowledge of the likely situation, why weren't conversations begun earlier with partners around transformation?

The current consultation process is mainly electronic, respondents have to use Let's Talk website and are invited into six surveys and a topic wall. A general email address for responses was made available only last week. It is likely that many people would not know what was happening, other than through local media or know how to engage in it. We recognise the difficulty of having to provide a mass of specific information and how this gets interpreted by the community. There have been meetings with specific communities – at the Carers Centre, the Elders Council, through ourselves etc. We are aware of only two public meetings on the Communities Services and the meeting that we attended had only four attendees (two were CVS staff and one our trustee), however we assume the evening meeting would be better attended. Clearly there have been discussions at Scrutiny Committees. A number of the IAAs note consultation processes with users, carers etc, but it isn't clear how these are happening.

Council officers informed us that those voluntary organisations that would suffer direct reductions in funding were told in advance of papers coming out, so that they could prepare their staff. Obviously for some organisations these reductions could be a highly significant part of their income and make them non-viable. The situation is different for each organisation and we are sure they will be making individual representations to you. We would highlight the gearing impact of funding voluntary organisations as sometimes council funding provides the core grant that makes it easier to attract additional funding from external sources. Also voluntary organisations are able to engage and maximise the use of volunteers making a service even more cost-effective, and adding to the Social

Value. So a cut of one pound to a voluntary organisation can result in a much greater loss of several pounds worth of activity.

Throughout the consultation we heard that the huge financial challenges faced by the Council meant a retraction to providing purely statutory services. However the conflict is that many of these services offer high levels of prevention and deter and delay the use of more expensive and intensive statutory services. In the same way that the Council is investing capital money in renovating the Civic Centre so that it can be let out in future years and generate an income, this invest to save policy could be applied to a number of the proposed cuts.

A number of voluntary sector colleagues noted the Newcastle Fund investment (although the actual information on organisations funded is not in the public domain) and wondered about the relationship between this, the budget, Ward Committee funding and general contracts and grants. There is to be a review of the Newcastle Fund, and this needs to be looked at alongside these other resources as some organisations believed that the Newcastle Fund was being used to fund some initiatives that would be otherwise lost. Whilst it is clearly the right of the Council to decide what funding is used for, organisations would appreciate clarity and that there could be more rational ways to deliver voluntary sector funding.

A further point that was raised by many organisations is that the impact assessment process related to separate proposals rather than groups of people e.g. not all of the proposals that impacted on children could be seen under 'Children's Services'; not all the impact on residents who had dementia were clearly highlighted (my colleague at Dementia Care has written to yourself, illustrating how six different sets of proposals have an impact). It is the cumulative impact that is important and this is not taken into account.

The voluntary sector is also facing the new Living Wage in April onwards as well as pension auto enrolment. Whilst recognising Council employees are already on a Living Wage and have access to a pension, this is not the case for all voluntary organisations. Clearly these additional cost pressures will be significant for many of our members – particularly those information that provide domiciliary care, residential care, and support to people. These services help people to live independently and maintain a good quality of life and the impact of welfare reforms on people with disabilities, the loss of the Independent Living Fund, and the reduction in services (NHS and local authority) could cause a tipping point.

The proposals are written in a way to illustrate Council posts – numbers and Full Time Equivalents, but they do not illustrate the job losses in the voluntary (and private) sector. Clearly a significant amount of the £700,000 cut in care packages for people with learning disabilities is used to pay for support staff. Indeed the papers not only show no posts lost, they identify a team of 9.3 FTE Council staff to establish this proposal. Many of these cuts will result in the loss of posts in the voluntary and private sector, and this should be, at least acknowledged.

A number of voluntary sector representatives felt that they had lost touch with council officers and commissioners over the last few years, and there were insufficient forums where issues around service and impacts could be discussed. There was a loss of systematic on-going conversation and engagement with the Council. We understand the loss of capacity (as it has also affected the voluntary sector) but this needs addressing. Over the last two years we have several examples of lost opportunities because of the Council's failure to engage and its lack of capacity.

These are very difficult times for everyone, but we believe in the value of partnerships and on-going discussions. There should have been conversations with partners earlier on what could have been done jointly to minimise some of these cuts. Voluntary sector investment is less likely to come through local government; there are more opportunities through Big Lottery funding, national trust and foundation funders, European funding and other sources. Conversations should start earlier with thematic groups, not necessarily looking at specific cuts, but instead exploring what can be delivered together, and maybe differently, for Newcastle's communities. Instead of cutting funding for voluntary and community organisations we believe the Council should be working with us all to transform services.

Specific budget proposals

The following are comments on the specific proposals, from a voluntary sector perspective, based on the discussions at meetings, and comments from representatives and providers:

1) IIA 1 Learning Disability Review of Care Packages

This proposal involves removing £700,000 from the budgets of 700 people with learning disabilities. There appears to be a new review team being set up to do this - with on-costs this would be £660,000; i.e. the majority of the money that would be saved by the proposal. To set up 9.3 WTE posts at this level whilst making cuts to very vulnerable people doesn't seem fair, and it is unclear how this process would cost £660,000. The assumption is that in future years the assessment team would be only a 1.5 FTE permanent increase in posts.

We believe this process to be flawed as although we were assured that this process would be dynamic, there is clearly an assumption that reviews would result in a loss of support, and hence the savings would be made. What if the reviews identified that additional support was needed? Talking to some of our colleagues who provide these services, they made the point that this would be very difficult to manage from a workforce perspective; people could have fluctuating needs; although people with learning disabilities could need less support in some instances over the years, many people needed more support.

One provider gave the example of a young woman who had two staff, was reviewed and the social worker suggested she needed only one staff member; within a week she would 'kick off', there would be a safeguarding review and a second staff member re-instated; this pattern reoccurred on a regular basis.

Some of the £700,000 is being used to employ voluntary and private sector staff, probably low paid workers, PAs, care assistants, so although this does not impact on council-employed staff it will have a major impact on the jobs of others. This will also impact on carers. The impact of the National Living Wage from April 2016 is likely to have a disproportionate effect on the hourly rates paid for care so more support might be lost than is identified.

2) IIA 2 Removal of funding for Lunch Clubs

This is an area where there should have been much earlier discussions with voluntary sector providers. Although the mitigation notes the Council 'will seek to working with partners to find alternative service model', it is probably too late to realistically bring in new models of delivery before these services close in two months time.

Although the proposal refers to Chain Reaction, this project works with much smaller numbers. Chain Reaction has not worked long enough to be audited and

extrapolated. Chain Reaction involves paid staff. What is the view of the three Chain Reaction providers that this apparently free alternative is feasible? There is an inference that volunteer-led support is free, this is clearly not the case.

A key concern is these clubs provide a major role in combatting social isolation and loneliness felt by a number of older people. They can be the key element of prevention that support people to live independently in the community. This could have a knock-on impact on health and social care services.

The posts cut are all in the voluntary sector and contribute towards income for voluntary organisations e.g. hiring of community based halls. This loss of income could destabilise some organisations.

Has there been any analysis on the geography, socio-economic and diversity of the users of this service? What about the impact on carers?

We would suggest further work to be done on this to look at different solutions. Could there not be a discussion with some restaurant owners, hoteliers, cultural venues, food providers e.g. Greggs about social value and a more philanthropic way of approaching this issue. Two months is not a realistic time frame.

3) IIA 3 Removal of subsidy for non-statutory mental health support.

The removal of this funding for Launchpad, which is the Newcastle's only peer-led mental health organisation appears to be proposed at the wrong time. Given the major consultation on 'Deciding Together', and other changes in mental health services, this is the wrong time to do this. Has this been discussed at the Adult Mental Health Partnership Board? Could the NHS not be approached to contribute to this valuable group? The cuts are to a voluntary sector worker.

4) IIA 4 Reduce the number of adult social work and care management staff

It is hard to work out the implications of this 19% cut in social work staff – we recognise this covers a variety of roles. Some voluntary organisation staff have shared with us their current concerns about the loss of experienced staff. and the problems this currently causes. The shift from specialist to generic workers (e.g. sensory disabilities team) is still causing problems for users and carers.

Whilst we recognise there would need to be a full and proper consultation with the workforce, it is hard to work out what this would mean in practice. We would need to see the current and proposed structures. How many posts currently filled?

Of particular concern to providers was the inevitable increase in waiting times and lists, potential delays in hospital discharges and caseload management. From a user and carer perspective there are questions about the full implementation of self-assessment and reviews, particularly for people with mental health needs and fluctuating conditions.

Is this not an area for further discussion with the NHS, particularly around hospital discharge from Newcastle Hospitals? It is in no-one's interest to have people occupying hospital beds just because they are waiting for a Social Worker. This also causes particular distress to some users and carers.

5) IIA 5 Close Older Persons Dementia Specific Resource Centre

This proposed closure of Byker Lodge goes against the dementia strategy. It isn't clear if there have been any discussions with the NHS or voluntary sector providers. Clearly the Council will have to commission beds elsewhere, and they should be with providers who specialise in supporting people with dementia. Have there been any conversations with

specialist dementia services providers about opportunities for staff (unclear about the application of TUPE), given their knowledge of supporting people with dementia? Have there been any discussions with the NHS about the future use of the building, given all the current discussions about a stepdown unit in Newcastle?

6) IIA 6 Reshape and seek alternative funding for the Recovery and Support Team

These proposals affect the Scrogg Road Service and the wording in the proposal is not final, so what discussions have actually taken place with the NHS and YHN? What will happen to those service users, and their carers, who do not live in YHN housing? How does this fit into 'Deciding Together'? Has the proposal been to the Adult Mental Health Partnership Board? Could some of the YHN service really be funded through the HRA?

Given the income of over £1million, it does not seem financially sensible to possibly lose this service with 29 FTE posts to save £170,000. Have there been any discussions with mental health voluntary organisations about different types of models to deliver these services, considering the income generated?

7) IIA 7 Care and Support within the Home – reduce Carer Support Allocation (Self Directed Support)

This proposal was of concern to a number of providers because of the negative impact on users and carers. If the need has been assessed, how can the formula be changed with any risks, given these users and carers have been identified in the last 21 months as needing these services? A quarter of the savings are lost in implementation by the creation of further assessment staff.

Again this is a prevention service which could mean that there are greater costs to the health and social care budgets, as well as personal costs to users and carers. Some of this funding is currently used to pay for additional support from voluntary and private organisations and individuals so there will be jobs lost outside the Council workforce.

There is the issue of cumulative impact as people affected by this proposal, are likely to be affected by several other proposals, and this is not highlighted in the assessment papers. The impact of the National Living Wage from April 2016 is likely to have a disproportionate effect on the hourly rates paid for care so more support might be lost than is identified.

The IAA notes there will be engagement through Newcastle CVS and On The Hoof – we have not been contacted about this.

8) IIA 8 Reducing the care and support budget : adults living in their own homes

This proposal caused major concern to several representatives as similar to the one above this service has a major 'prevent' impact, and if removed could cause significantly higher costs to health and care systems and have major negative impacts on the wellbeing and health of service users and carers.

The assessment paper notes it can't impose 'blanket guidance' and then notes Newcastle Council spends more and so should be cut. Some of the proposed savings (£200,000) will be invested in additional social work reviewing capacity – not to try to ensure priority needs are met, but to respond to likely complaints and legal challenges.

Again it is suggested that Newcastle CVS and On The Hoof will be engaged and used to distribute information – we have not been contacted about this proposal.

Given the current discussions and resources spent on discussing health and social care integration, surely it would be a better use for funds to be invested in keeping people living independently with dignity in their own homes?

Again a cut of this nature (£1,174,000) will have a major impact on voluntary and private sector jobs, even if it does not reduce council jobs. The impact of the National Living Wage from April 2016 is likely to have a disproportionate effect on the hourly rates paid for care so more support might be lost than is identified.

Both IIA 7 and 8 are major cuts to vulnerable people. If someone needs support, then they need it, regardless of the budget. Again the inference is assessments will reduce costs

9) IIA 9 Care and Support within the Home – Alternative funding for health related care calls

It is not clear where this proposal fits into the current conversations on integration? It is unclear if it is just the NHS who provides this service or also some private and voluntary sector providers. It is important to ensure users and carers not caught in a battle between the City Council and the NHS. Have discussions started yet with the NHS on this proposal?

10) IIA 10 Inclusion and Early Help : Open access advice services

Clearly advice services (provided by both Citizen's Advice and Search) provide a significant amount of support and generate additional income for people in need. It isn't clear from the figures in the report on the totality of the Advice Compact and the income generated by the Council's own services and others covered through the Advice Compact. It might be helpful to conduct zero-based review of advice services.

There are differences between the figures quoted in the proposal and those on the CA website – we are not in a position to judge, but believe that decision-makers need the full and accurate picture before proposals can be agreed. Again this is a prevention issue in that the provision of this service supports people's wellbeing and (certainly mental) health and deters them from more costly statutory services. Voluntary organisations are able to use volunteers to increase the gearing effect. Core funding can generate other funding.

It was agreed to use £114,000 for open access advice services in 2016/17 from the Newcastle Fund at the November Cabinet meeting and there needs to be clarity if the Newcastle Fund is being used to minimise budget cuts. We are not against this, but as the Newcastle Fund is to be reviewed, this issue needs clarification. There is also an identified need for a service supporting people through appeals and contesting decisions.

Although the digital strategy and having information on the internet is helpful, many people who seek advice have minimal IT skills, poor levels of literacy, don't have English as a first language and are scared and don't know what to do.

There were not early discussions with Search and Citizen's Advice on these proposals which could have enabled them to seek additional support from elsewhere. Has support from the NHS been considered? Possibilities have been raised recently of the CA using council premises in order to save rent – but it isn't known how much time is left on their present lease, whether the options offered meet their needs, and how the move costs will be paid.

This reduction of £293,000 means a significant loss of jobs in the voluntary sector and loss of a number of volunteers (who are supported by paid workers).

11) IIA 11 Closure of Childcare at Statutory Homeless accommodation

This proposed closure of childcare at Cherry Tree View means there is a loss of specialised services for this vulnerable group of children, and also some peer support. It is

not clear if there are sufficient alternative spaces and places close by the accommodation. Also providers will not be happy having a rapid turnover of children, and whether the funding would be rapidly available to deliver this. Although it is suggested that young people could access the city's youth services, there are cuts proposed elsewhere for the youth service. There were no early discussions with Children North east, the provider, which could have enabled them to start to seek funding elsewhere.

This proposal would result in job losses in the voluntary sector.

12) IIA 12 Withdraw contribution for volunteer led community support for women and children who have experienced domestic abuse

This is a small service providing intensive support to these vulnerable families. Again discussions started with the provider in November, not allowing them sufficient time to explore other forms of funding.

This proposal would result in job losses in the voluntary sector

13) IIA 13 Removal of funding for older people's prevention service

This proposal to remove funding for the Handyperson and Navigator services and the Trades Register might well have an impact on other services. An increased charge might deter some users and this could increase dependence and reduce the ability to cope in the community. It isn't clear from the proposal whether sponsorship or other business opportunities have been considered or whether there have discussions with appropriate social enterprises.

14) IIA 14 Remove funding for telecare

The loss of this service could result in the greater use of health and social care services, reduce independence and reduce people's ability to cope with living in the community. As a third of the users were self-funders, could this not be promoted to others and maybe also to social landlords? This needs multidisciplinary discussions to include voluntary and community organisations as well.

15) IIA 15. Charging policy for looked after children

It is not clear how this will be administered, who administers the charge (and at what cost) and what action could be realistically expected to be taken against parents who refused to pay.

16) IAA 16 Remodel the children's social care workforce remodelling

We agree with the cross-authority approach and that this should have been done before now. However we are concerned of the impact on Looked After Children and the levels of risk involved (particularly considering the high numbers in Newcastle). It is hard to visualise what this means in practice as clearly there will have to be a consultation with staff. The use of vacancy and turnover management increases the pressure on the remaining staff. It will take time to introduce some of the transformation models, and it isn't clear how risk will be managed in this bridging period. It isn't clear from the proposals how these changes will deliver the amount of savings stated.

The loss of Parent Carer Participation Worker post is particularly felt by parents of children with learning difficulties as there are a number of concerns around transition between child and adult services and this independent post provides advocacy and support. The North East Special Needs Network was not involved early enough in the process to consider alternative sources of funding.

It isn't clear whether an alternative to Viewpoint e.g. the Momo app (mind of my own) is being considered.

17) IIA 17 Review of the contact service

No comment

18) IIA 18 Reduce Commissioned Targeted Youth Support Service

This proposal would result in the funding for commissioned youth services to drop from £448,000 to £348,000. This service was above £750,000 before it was commissioned as a single service four years ago; so it has more than halved. Newcastle currently spends just below the level of other similar authorities, so this will reduce it further. There is insufficient information in this proposal. There was no early discussions with the JAM consortium about this proposal, which will result in the loss of voluntary sector jobs (many youth workers are employed on a part time and sessional basis)..

19) IIA 19 Reductions in Connexions budget

This contradicts all the work done on NEETS, Newcastle 2020, the Education Challenge work, and the current Task Group on Education and Skills. We support the recommendation of the Task Group that this should be the responsibility of NECA as clearly there are economies of scale and young people might need to travel to get a more appropriate service.

20) IIA 20 Fairer Housing unit

It is not clear how this will be achieved.

21) IIA 21 Library and Customer Services Network

This proposal involved the reduction of hours across libraries and Customer Service Centres. If opening hours are cut, how does this fit in with income streams e.g. room hire, cafes etc? What is the point of a local library open for only 18.5 hours a week; could there not be active discussions with voluntary and community groups, other statutory services and potentially business partners about sharing space to keep the building open during other times? The proposal assumes keeping the buildings so if things improve can increase hours; and we appreciate this approach, but couldn't there be a greater role for volunteers, which did not involve job substitution. There is a need to consider a more rational use of the buildings.

How does this fit in with the Digital City where the library is the only free source of ICT in many parts of the city? A lot of homework is now done on computer and there will be impacts on more disadvantaged children, who don't have home PCs so the opening hours should be staggered. There are currently queues and rationing of computers in some libraries e.g. the maximum of an hour on a computer in the East End library. This is particularly important for people who have to demonstrate they are searching for jobs or else they get sanctioned by DWP. There needs to be discussions with other providers of IT support and computers in the geographic areas where library hours are going to be reduced.

We agree with rationalising the digital, audio and e-book service so it is centrally managed. The proposal raises working with partners to share costs, is the voluntary and community sector included in this? Would it make sense for some of the smaller libraries to move to nearby community facilities, rather than the other way around? Newcastle CVS is willing to be involved in facilitating discussions around this. There could be imaginative solutions such as the tenant also acting as the caretaker in return for free rent.

The proposal recognises, as we do, that libraries are much more than places where books are exchanged and they can be the hub of local communities.

22) IIA 22 Reduction in funding to Kenton Park Sports Centre and Newburn Activity Centre

We note there are further cuts proposed in future years.

A number of people with disabilities use Newburn Activity Centre, as specialist equipment is held here. This is a further cut for people with disabilities given the proposed reductions in personal budgets etc. NAC has just recently (April 2015) employed staff that were previously seconded by the Council, and might need some HR support in managing this level of cuts. Could the Council offer HR support to both sets of trustees? Can support be given to them to help them apply for funding from other sources? Does the NHS pay towards any of the facilities or activities here?

Will both organisations be given sufficient time to help them apply to external sources for funding? Could an organisation be commissioned to help them actively apply for other sources of funding?

The impact statement and engagement process was not filled in.

23) IIA 23 Cemeteries and Crematoria

We do not disagree with the increase in fee charges, provided those people on the lowest incomes are supported appropriately

24) IIA 24 Newcastle Enterprise Centres

If this service generates income, why is the Council looking for an external operator? Could this be actively discussed with appropriate voluntary organisations?

25) IIA 25 Neighbourhood wardens

This proposal would remove the Council element of funding so the service would be solely funded by HRA. Therefore it could only provide a service to council tenants. It isn't clear how tenants are consulted or how the service could be delivered only to YHN tenants.

26) IIA 26 Local services - refuse collection and street cleaning

No comment except to note that the new (web-based) Envirocall Service does not provide feedback or give information on what to do if the request is apparently not followed up.

27) IIA 27 Museums and galleries - increased income generation

No comment

28) IIA 28 Newcastle Futures

The Council support to Newcastle Futures would be reduced by £100,000 to £260,000. This is the only cut proposed for the economic development unit and it is 27% of the grant. The paper also proposes some money from the HRA to offset this cut to offer the service to YHN tenants. It is not clear if this has been agreed.

This work is very important for addressing the NEETS issue identified by Newcastle 2020.

Should Newcastle Futures be an independent organisation and be able to attract funding from elsewhere? Newcastle Future engages in voluntary sector activities and is important in getting residents into work.

29) IIA 29 Public safety and regulation

This proposal includes the removal of DARE programme for children and their parents who have been affected by domestic violence and abuse. It is not clear who provides this programme and what consultation has taken place with the provider and what this programme costs. It is not clear whether the provider was contacted early enough to explore other forms of funding. It is not clear how many jobs will be lost by the provider(s) of DARE.

It was difficult to understand the proposal in relation to Safe Newcastle as figures were conflated and it is not clear how many staff will work in this unit, or what their roles cover.

The City Council has a high quality and effective environmental health, trading standards and licensing service and we hope this can be protected.

30) IIAA 30 Contract efficiencies and savings in Public Health

This proposal involves recommissioning programmes of public health to achieve savings of £110,000. We note that some providers are in the voluntary and community sector and that discussions took place in August. This was very helpful as these providers are unlikely to have the same size budgets as other providers mentioned e.g. hospital trusts.

Although we are mentioned as a consultee there has been no contact..

We appreciate the difficulty of the Public Health Department not yet knowing its budget for next year.

31) IIA 31 Public health - sexual health

There are currently 17 providers including the NHS and voluntary and community organisations. Good information was provided in this proposal. The intention is to look at service redesign whilst negotiating with the current contractors to keep the service going until December 2016 and a further IIA will be produced. We believe this is a sensible approach. We appreciate the difficulty of the Public Health Department not yet knowing its budget for next year. There has been no consultation with us yet. Hopefully there will not be a disproportionate loss of jobs in the voluntary and community sector, and indeed there could be opportunities to take on more services.

32) IIA 32. Public health healthy child programme

We note this is a programme of service redesign and again good information is provided. There has been no consultation with us yet. It is not clear what the impact will be of the removal of the ring fence on public health funding. We appreciate the difficulty of the Public Health Department not yet knowing its budget for next year

33) IIA 33 Energy - Newcastle health through warmth

This proposal removes the £25,000 of support for private sector tenants who can't pay the contribution (39 in 14/15) towards energy improvement schemes. We suggest information should be made available about similar support from other companies and charities.

34) IAA 34 Council Tax

This is the proposal to increase the Council Tax by 1.949% in base and introduce the 2% social care precept to make a 3.949% increase in total.

We do not object to this proposal but believe there should have been an increase in Council Tax, every year since 2011 (as set out in our previous responses), except for the years when the Council would have been penalised for this. We recognise the low Council Tax base. We believe the social care precept is inadequate when compared to actual

social care needs. We remain concerned about those residents previously covered by transition but now paying Council Tax. We understand that all local charities are now paying 20% Council Tax.

35) IAA 35 Communities service.

We note the proposal to reduce ward budgets from £505,430 to £295,430. We believe there needs to be a better way for small grant process and alignment with the Newcastle Fund . The division of the budget to wards should better reflect areas and pockets of need. It is not clear how the annual ward meeting will occur, but we recognise there are many ways in which councillors engage with local communities and there are now other initiatives taking place in several wards. However some of these initiatives e.g. in Blakelaw, Elswick and Benwell/ Scotswood have taken a long time to get established and involve voluntary sector partners.

We note there will still be £185,000 support for community buildings, but do not believe this should be done on ward basis, as people and communities from neighbouring wards can also use community buildings. Again this must done in a fair and proportionate way taking inequalities into account.

We are disappointed to note the reduction in supporting asset transfer work, with the budget cut to £77,000; a reduction of £107,000. Organisations have told us that delays have often been due to the Council's legal services responses. If repairs and maintenance can't be subsidised with this level of cut then some transfers might fall through.

We note the reduction in support to the Newcastle Youth Council, but believe this should have been established as an independent entity well before now, so it could have accessed external resources.

We note the proposal to reduce the Communities Team from 23.5 WTE to 10.5 WTE and save a £1 million. We do not understand how 13 WTE posts can amount to £1 million. Given this service is now around a quarter of what it was five years ago, is it still viable? It is unclear what such a small team can be expected to realistically achieve. We do not know why this IAA was issued so late; this resulted in meetings held earlier this week. We are also aware that staff on this team had until 29 January to indicate if they wished to apply for Voluntary Redundancy, and how this relates to an apparent consultation until 8 February.. This is the third major cut for this staffing group and the service. We believe such a small team will be unable to fulfil the demands inevitably made on it and it might be more appropriate to designate certain posts e.g. supporting community buildings and asset transfers, rather than have a common job description.

Concluding comments

The scale of these reductions of £30 million next year, on top of the £191 million in the last five years, with a likely £70 million in 2017- 2019 has never been experienced before by those of us who live and / or work in Newcastle. We are deeply concerned about the cumulative impact of all of these proposals on the citizens of Newcastle, in particular the most vulnerable residents and communities (whether of identity, interest or geography). We have tried to provide a summary of the comments that have been made by our members and put them in an overall context, in relation to how the budget proposals have been presented. However we recognise that many of these issues are related and will have impacts on each other. The size and scale of these cuts, together with the Welfare Reforms are having a massive negative impact on many communities, local businesses, the economy and could lead to a downward spiral. Whilst at the same time we recognise the ambition in Newcastle as a city in which to invest.

However we believe the inevitable focus on the cuts of this magnitude has meant that opportunities have been lost to transform some services and work in partnership. Opportunities are still there and many voluntary organisations would actively welcome discussions with council officers in order to minimise impacts on our city's residents. We have already seen a number of imaginative approaches to retain services for people, and believe these should be further enhanced. We also believe others, such as the Newcastle Hospitals NHS Trust, could use some of their resources to help support our most vulnerable citizens through these difficult times.

Although the budget cuts proposed are not to statutory services, a number of the services offer some form of prevention, often helping people to maintain independence and stay in their own home in the community. A number contribute towards improving health and wellbeing and challenging loneliness. There are genuine concerns that the loss of some of these services could not just impact on the people who use them and their carers, but might also result in greater demands on statutory health and social care services and actually cause an increase in costs, not a reduction.

The voluntary sector has experienced a period of massive change, the loss of significant government grants, the push to larger contracts, the drop in donations, the contraction of grant-making trusts, the closure of the Northern Rock Foundation, and the changes in the NHS have made the sector itself more vulnerable. This is at a time when we are being asked to take on more (unpaid) work and more clients, users and carers are being sign-posted to us. We believe the voluntary and community sector has a number of resources which we are willing to share, but we want to be treated as a serious partner to help get us all through the next four years ahead.

Yours sincerely

Sally

Sally Young
Chief Executive