

Dear Members.

Re: Joint Budget Scrutiny Committee meeting dated 23rd November 2020

Firstly, can I apologise for my non-attendance at the Scrutiny meeting but I was taking some annual leave that week and also neither of my Heads of Service were able to attend the meeting as they had existing meetings dealing with the COVID-19 second wave.

Secondly, in answer to the question raised by Cllr Trollope i.e. as to whether any additional costs have been built in to future budgets for people with a learning difficulty? The answer is no we have not built any additional funding in to the budget as it is impossible to identify the future impacts of the COVID-19 virus on people with a learning difficulty or any other areas of our service provision. There has been much discussion about the impact of social isolation and loneliness as a result of the pandemic and how this may have impacted on people mental and physical wellbeing, it may be sometime before we see the full impacts come through to health and social services.

We are currently supporting those people with learning difficulties who live in supported accommodation who have not been able to attend day services due to its closure, by providing additional funding for staff for times when they would have been attending day services from the Emergency Hardship fund.

The Directorate has had to make the difficult decision to close day services at the beginning of the outbreak as it would have been impossible to have been able to maintain social distancing within our buildings and could have resulted in the further spread of the virus across this vulnerable group of people, many of whom also may not have been able to attend due to their vulnerability and may have been shielding. We also had to make the difficult decision to close our respite provision at Augusta House for the very same reasons.

However, we have been mindful of the impact these closures will have had on individuals and their families and therefore have introduced outreach provision to support people one to one in their own homes or to take them out in the community to give families a break. However, we have not been able to provide this to every individual or family who attends day services due to the intensive nature of providing one to one support. We are depending on families contacting us when they feel they require support. We are also looking to develop a virtual online day support for people who have previously attended day service and their families / carers which we will hope will provide another layer of support and wellbeing.

In addition, we have re-opened Augusta House but with a reduced number attending and the period they attend for, we have been giving individuals and their families 3 days of respite with a day for deep cleaning before the next person is provided with respite for 3 days. So we are trying to give individuals and their families some support but clearly not as much as they may have been able to have prior to the pandemic.

We are hoping these measures will support both individuals and their families to manage and maintain some wellbeing during these incredibly difficult times, it is only at the end of this pandemic when the vaccine is provided to those who previous attended our services will we know what the full impact will be and whether the measures we have put it place have managed or maintained individuals and families physical and mental wellbeing. We are hoping that the small support we have been able to give will reduce the impact but we will only really know when we get back to the new normal and what that may look like.

Your sincerely,

Damien McCann

Corporate Director of Social Services