

Submission from Hastings and St Leonards Local Strategic Partnership (LSP)

This submission is made on behalf of the Hastings and St Leonards Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) which brings together organisations from across the statutory, private and voluntary sectors. The objectives of the partnership are to establish long-term and joint-strategic approaches to promote the regeneration of the town and the wellbeing of its residents.

For organisations across the statutory and voluntary sector, continued funding reductions make closer partnership working essential to optimise the use of resources and avoid duplication of services. The principles of early intervention, prevention and “joined-up” approaches between public sector partners and with our voluntary sector colleagues are all essential to help each individual resolve the issues which have a negative impact on their health and wellbeing.

With these principles in mind the LSP would like to place on record a number of concerns which result from the proposed budget reductions to social care budgets. While we appreciate the scale of the challenge facing East Sussex County Council and partners who face increasing reductions to core budgets, we are agreed that the proposed funding reductions will disproportionately affect those urban areas of the county with the highest levels of deprivation.

The LSP is concerned that the proposals are disproportionately directed towards prevention services. We believe this is short sighted and will undoubtedly lead to increased demand for acute services in future. The County Council’s stated objective to avoid situations where unplanned hospital admissions or visits to A&E occur is dependent on a network of support or preventative services. The disinvestment of such services is a retrograde step which will impact on and undermine the good progress we have made in regenerating our town and tackling the issues faced by our most vulnerable residents. Indeed cuts of the magnitude would in our view lead to increasing levels of deprivation in areas such as Hastings.

To understand the magnitude and impact of the proposed cuts there is an absolute requirement for more detailed impact and equalities assessment to be undertaken. We are concerned that such assessments do not form part of the consultation, neither do the proposals seem to be underpinned by any needs assessments. We also believe that a clear analysis should be presented not just detailing how these budget proposals will impact but how the wider set of year-on year service reductions since 2010 have disproportionately impact on key thematic areas and services.

As you will be aware Hastings has many complex issues and is an area with profound health inequalities. A higher than average number of residents are living with a long term health conditions which places pressure both on the health and social care system but also on family members who provide care and support in an unpaid capacity. In this context we believe that the proposed £422,000 reduction in

carers support will make it more likely that carers will be less likely to cope, or have to leave work in order to fulfil their caring responsibilities.

The proposals set out significant reductions in funding to accommodation and community based housing support alongside the Discretionary East Sussex Support Scheme, all of which are vital in tackling the continued rise in homelessness. Homeless applications in Hastings have increased by 127% over the past five years. This compares to a 53% increase across the rest of East Sussex, not including Hastings. East Sussex is itself considerably above the national increase of 2% and regional increase for the South East of 30%. The number of people living in temporary accommodation in Hastings has increased by 100% over the same period. The LSP notes with concern the extent to which supporting housing provision has been reduced, not just in these proposals but year-on-year.

Preventing homelessness has been identified as a high priority by the government. The new Homelessness Reduction Act gives local housing authorities new duties to prevent homelessness at an early stage, which will increase demand for these services. However, local housing authorities cannot deliver the requirements of the Act alone – homelessness is everybody's business. Reducing funding to preventive services is not in keeping with national policy direction. The proposed reductions to preventative services will increase the number of people who need to access more expensive statutory services.

The Homelessness Reduction Act will further increase demand for these services and partners will not be able to meet this without effective support services in place. Home Works and STEPS have extensive experience working with vulnerable groups, many of whom would struggle to engage with traditional statutory services. Home Works and STEPS also have the relevant expertise to continue to work with local authority housing departments to implement the new duties under the Act.

Accommodation-based support services are essential in developing tenancy readiness skills and links to related services, including drug and alcohol addiction services, employability programmes and training. Without these services in place, many people with multiple and complex would be unable to access help, advice and support and become vulnerable to repeat homelessness. Further, increases in rough sleeping impacts public perception of broader community safety issues, including anti-social behaviour linked to problem drinking and drug addiction. People sleeping rough are also more likely to be the victim of crime. Issues of cuckooing locally have been widely reported and the LSP is concerned that any loss of existing support services could leave more vulnerable young people open to exploitation.

Preventive services are essential in reducing demand for more expensive secondary provisions. The proposed reductions run counter to these principles and will exacerbate rather than mitigate the problems we are seeking to address.

The LSP believes that closer working between all those involved in meeting the needs of vulnerable sections of our community is needed. The county council needs to commit to working with colleagues in the borough councils, police and health colleagues as well as the voluntary sectors to maximise efficiency in service delivery.

This should include pooling and sharing data as well as the joint commissioning of services where applicable.

It is vital that those areas of the county with the highest demand are prioritised when it comes to from the funding of services for vulnerable groups. We are of the view that there is an opportunity to devolve funding for accommodation based support and community services to local areas and lower-tier authorities where service can be better tailored to local need. Further monitoring also needs to be undertaken to explore potential to commission bespoke services for specific vulnerable groups, particularly if this can be aligned with external funding opportunities.

We hope these comments are helpful in assisting the County Council take an approach which can protect the interests of vulnerable people and begin to achieve the systemic changes to reform the delivery of Health and Social Care services envisaged by the East Sussex Better Together programme.