

MINUTES of the meeting of Adult Social Care and Strategic Housing Scrutiny Committee held at WRVS Centre, Vicarage Road, Hereford on Monday, 17th October, 2005 at 10.00 a.m.

Present: Councillor Mrs. M.D. Lloyd-Hayes (Chairman)
Councillor Mrs. P.A. Andrews (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors: Mrs. E.M. Bew, R.B.A. Burke, K.G. Grumbley,
J.W. Hope MBE, R. Mills, Ms. G.A. Powell and P.G. Turpin

In attendance: Councillor Mrs. L.O. Barnett (Cabinet Member Social Care Adults and Health)

10. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Mrs B Millman and Ms M James Voluntary Sector representatives.

11. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

There were no named substitutes.

12. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

13. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 10th June, 2005 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

14. SUGGESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ON ISSUES FOR FUTURE SCRUTINY

No suggestions were received.

15. PERFORMANCE/BUDGET MONITORING 2005/2006

The Committee considered a report on performance and the budget.

The report stated that there were a number of areas where performance was not expected to meet the target. In part this was considered to be due to difficulties in data collection part way through the year and the ongoing difficulties of recording information using the client index system.

The Commission for Social Care Inspection had recently issued its draft performance assessment report following the Annual Review meeting in July 2005, which once finalised would be presented to a future meeting of the Committee.

It was noted that an action plan for recovery was being prepared and that the financial implications of increasing performance would form part of the budget

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planning process for 2006/07 linking to the Annual Operating Plan.

It was also reported that the Government Office for the West Midlands had assessed Herefordshire's Housing Strategy 2005-2008 as being fit for purpose, confirming that the Strategy identified the housing issues facing the County and that there were robust plans in place to address them. The Government Office would now work with the Council and monitor the achievement of outputs identified in the Plan.

In presenting the section of the report on the budget 2005/06 the Director of Adult Social Care and Strategic Housing advised that there had been significant increases in the projected overspends on both the Social Care and Strategic Housing budgets as set out in the report. The projected social care budget overspend of £584,000 had now risen to £755,000, before the carry forward overspend of £714,000 from 2004/05 was taken into account. The projected overspend of £497,000 on the Strategic Housing budget had risen to £706,000, almost entirely owing to the cost of temporary accommodation for those presenting themselves as homeless.

The Director advised that demographics were driving demand for services, in particular for older people and those with a learning disability, placing increasing pressure on the social care budget. As the report showed these pressures were also impacting on performance.

In the course of discussion the following principal points were made:

- Concern was expressed about the consideration being given to forming a joint team comprising Welfare Rights staff and staff from the Department of Work and Pensions. It was suggested the concept was flawed. It appeared that no lead department had been appointed, no budget provision had been allocated and there were no terms of reference other than to provide advice to those aged over 60. There appeared to be a danger of replicating a service already available from the voluntary sector. It was proposed that a report on the issue should be made to the Committee.
- It was suggested that some of the issues presented as success stories in the report were as yet only proposals. It was requested that in future reports evidence of successes was provided.
- Concern was expressed about the Committee's ability adequately to scrutinise performance on the basis of the information currently being provided to it. It was noted that work was being carried out across the Council to enhance the reporting on performance management and link activity more clearly to financial resources. This would enable judgments to be made on what it would cost to achieve a particular level of performance and whether that was a realistic objective.
- In response to a question about performance against targets C29 and C30 (people with a physical disability and those with a learning disability helped to live at home) it was suggested that underperformance was attributable to the problems with data collection. The reasons for underperformance in relation to target C32 (the number of older people helped to live at home) were thought to be more complex and attributable in part to the proportion of wealthier older people in Herefordshire. This meant that performance against that target may be difficult to improve.

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- Clarification was sought as to whether the ruling that some services were ineligible for support from the supporting people grant had contributed to the increased overspend on the social care budget. It was noted that the implications arising from the likely re-distribution of Supporting People Grant nationally suggested that Herefordshire could face a reduction of 5% per annum in Supporting People grant. This reduction in grant would be increased in real terms by virtue of the additional impact of no inflationary uplift being applied to the Supporting People grant each year.
- It was proposed that in view of the evident and unsustainable budget pressures the Cabinet Member (Social Care Adults and Health) should be urged to make a careful reassessment of the budget with a view to establishing a realistic budget for 2006/07.

The Assistant County Treasurer commented that it is not easy to assess the budget for 2006/7 clearly at this point in time because there may well be, for example, new placements before the year end which could significantly affect 2006/7. The Adult Services Budgets were extensively reworked in the light of commitments at the start of each financial year.

RESOLVED:

- That (a) the report on performance and the budget be noted with concern;**
- (b) areas of concern continue to be monitored;**
- (c) in the light of the evident and unsustainable budget pressures on the adult social care and homelessness budgets in particular the Cabinet Member (Social Care, Adults and Health) be urged to make a careful reassessment of the budget with a view to establishing a realistic budget for 2006/07;**
- (d) a report be prepared on the proposed formation of a joint team comprising Welfare Rights staff and staff from the Department of Work and Pensions;**
- (e) a report be prepared illustrating the demographic pressures on services;**
- and**
- (f) clarification be provided on whether the rules governing expenditure from the Supporting People grant had had a bearing on the increased social care budget overspend.**

The meeting ended at 10.35 a.m.

CHAIRMAN