

MINUTES of the meeting of Adult Social Care and Strategic Housing Scrutiny Committee held at The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Monday 25 January 2010 at 9.30 am

Present: Councillor PA Andrews (Chairman)
Councillor AE Gray (Vice Chairman)

Councillors: ME Cooper, H Davies, BA Durkin, MJ Fishley, KS Guthrie,
MD Lloyd-Hayes, JE Pemberton, GA Powell and RV Stockton

In attendance: Councillors LO Barnett, WLS Bowen and PJ Edwards

164. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no Apologies for Absence.

165. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

There were no named substitutes.

166. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest.

167. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 14th December 2009 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

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

There were no suggestions from Members of the Public for issues for future scrutiny.

169. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2009/10

The Committee received a report on the financial position for Adult Social Care and Strategic Housing revenue budgets for the period to 30 November 2009.

The Principal Accountant reported that the overspend for social care stood at £2.6m an increase from the previous month of 120k. This had largely been caused by an increasing demand on homecare within Learning Disabilities and Older People as a result of a combination of additional hours which had been approved at panel following reassessment as well as increasing client volume and needs. There were still a number of residential voids which were being brought to panel to ensure that those places were filled first.

The Principal Accountant went on to say that in order to deal with the financial pressures faced by the Community Equipment Store, a number of small items would be removed from the list of equipment provided by the Store where these could be bought locally at minimal cost. These items were, on average, under £10. The Store was in the process of producing an explanatory leaflet which would inform clients where to purchase these small items. By 1st April purchase order processing for the Store would go on-line, which would provide managers with more accurate information.

The Principal Accountant went on to say that there were a number of actions within the recovery plan which were currently being worked on. For example, out of County placements had been reviewed and as a result, Monmouthshire and North Somerset had agreed a one-off backdated payment to the Council of £125k. Social workers were working with three clients within high cost residential care with a view to moving them into supported accommodation which would have an annual financial saving of £120k. At this point in the year many of the recovery actions were not likely to have a significant impact on the outturn for 2009/10. However the full year affect is likely to contribute to a more stable position for 2010/11.

Within the Strategic Housing Service, there continued to be a reduction in the number of homeless clients placed within bed and breakfast accommodation. The number of singles has reduced by 5 due to the transfer of clients into temporary accommodation.

In the ensuing discussion, the following points were made:

- A Member pointed out that it was important that Social Workers should notify people going into homes that they were liable for residential care fees. The Associate Director of joint Commissioning added that there would be a more robust process in place in order to ensure that those who were able to pay for their care did in fact pay for it. The principle was enshrined in UK legislation under the Charging for Residential Accommodation Guide (CRAG) 2009
- In reply to a question from a Member, the Associate Director of Joint Commissioning said that the public would be provided with a leaflet which outlined where the small items that had previously been held in the Community Equipment Store could be purchased. There would be a target cost of less than £10 for each item.
- In reply to a question from a Member, the Principal Accountant said that she felt almost 100% confident that all the figures for the packages in the report were correct. The Associate Director of Joint Commissioning added that there a legacy of data was being dealt with that had to be cleaned. There were a number of staff working to ensure that all payments to Frameworki matched, and that the data was cross referenced. The Service would be in a much better position in the next financial year.

The Associate Director of Joint Commissioning went on to say that the technology that was being invested in was fit for purpose. Robust Electronic Home Care monitoring systems and Frameworki should both be in place by the next financial year, and she was looking forward to seeing the Home Care Packages linked to financial services. Other authorities had put a similar system in place, and it would sit outside the main Council system so that both Council staff and providers would be able to access it.

RESOLVED:

That;

- a) the current and forecast budget overspend be noted with concern and that the recovery plans to address the situation were supported.**

and;

- b) given the demographic profile of the County and high expectations of a quality services from both Central Government and service users, in order to prevent similar overspends in 2010/11, a substantial increase in the base budget was required.**

The Committee received a report on progress towards the achievement of national performance indicator targets and other local performance indicators for the Homelessness Services.

The Head of Strategic Housing Service reported that the Service used a number of indicators to measure its performance. The principle one was NI 156 (Number of households in temporary accommodation). The target for 2009/10 and 2010/11 was 82, from a baseline of 163 that had been set in December 2004. A number of initiatives that were being put in place meant that he was confident that the Service would achieve its target by Year-end.

The Head of Strategic Housing Service went on to report that the Service also reported against (BVPI 213 Homelessness Prevention). Under this indicator, the number of households assisted under the 1996 Housing Act had increased from 536 in 2008/09 to 621 in 2009/10. The proportion of cases in which homelessness had been prevented had risen from 43% to 47%. Overall homelessness was prevented in 397 cases during 2009/10 compared to 289 in the previous calendar year.

He went on to say that the number of people presenting as homeless per quarter had increased as the year has gone on from 94 at the end of Quarter 1 to 110 at the end of Quarter 3. The number of acceptances had reduced slightly. As at 8 January 2010, Homelessness Prevention Officers were dealing with 426 active prevention cases. This represented a significant number of cases and was due in part to changes in service delivery including improving face-to-face access for customers to Housing Advice Service.

In the ensuing discussion, the following points were made:

- In reply to a question from a Member regarding the rise in homelessness as a result of the violent breakdown of relationships, the Head of Strategic Housing said that the Community Safety Partnership Team were focusing on domestic violence. Unfortunately the patterns of behaviour inherent in those involved in these cases meant that they were likely to return to an abusive relationship. There was a sanctuary scheme in Herefordshire which provided secure rooms in the houses of potential victims of domestic violence.
- A Member congratulated the Homelessness Team on their work, but pointed out that there was still a great deal of overcrowding in homeless accommodation.

RESOLVED:

That;

- (a) the report be noted;**
- and;**
- (b) areas of concern continue to be monitored.**

171. REVIEW OF HOUSING ALLOCATION

The Committee received the Housing Allocations Policy, as recommended by the Home Point Partnership Review Group. The Head of Strategic Housing Services reported that the Scrutiny Review of the Homepoint Allocations Policy had identified a number of policy suggestions for consideration, and the policy before the Committee was still in draft form.

He went on to say that the changes to the Allocations Policy were outlined in the report. Of particular importance was the change to clarify the procedure for officers to add or change bids when applicants to whom the full homelessness duty is owed were not applying regularly for properties, or for suitable properties. The aim was to ensure that applicants worked proactively to secure settled accommodation through Homepoint, and would also help reduce the average length of stay in temporary accommodation.

He went on to say that Policy wording had been added to confirm that a Discharge of Homeless Duty could be achieved through an allocation by a private landlord to a property through an Assured Shorthold Tenancy. This would ensure that applicants were aware that best use was being made of all available housing options for discharging homelessness duty. In addition, preference given to those needing adapted properties for medical need had been strengthened. The policy aimed to ensure applicants were clear that their suitability for an adapted property could override relative banding. Registered Providers were increasingly consulting with Occupational Therapist's in matching adapted property to suitable applicants, and the Review Group wished to see the appropriate letting of adapted property maximised.

In the ensuing discussion, the following points were made:

- In reply to a question from a Member, the Home Point Manager replied that the County would be obliged to house young people placed in care in Herefordshire from out of county.
- In reply to a further question, the Home Point Manager said that young people in foster care could expect to be housed from the age of eighteen, and a waiting time was built in for these individuals when they turned seventeen.
- A Member expressed her concern regarding overcrowding, and pointed out that anyone who was above the Silver Band in the current scheme would find it very difficult to successfully bid for accommodation. The Home Point Manager replied that seventeen properties were available each week, and every effort was made to accommodate people on the waiting list, but it was conceivable that many in the Silver and Bronze Bands would not be rehoused. A waiting list system would not improve the situation, as Registered Providers would not allocate people to overcrowded accommodation in order to let a household move from an existing house. There were currently 800 cases in the Silver Band, and 50 cases of overcrowding.
- In reply to a suggestion from a Member, the Head of Strategic Housing said that there were plans for three projects that would provide young people with construction skills whilst renovating empty properties. These were sheltered schemes that provided housing whilst the training was ongoing. The Team would continue to look at opportunities, and would feed ideas into the Homelessness Strategy Group.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

172. UPDATE ON THE REVIEW OF THE FAIRER CHARGING POLICY

The Committee received an update on the progress of the review of the Fairer Charging Policy for non-residential care services. The Associate Director of Joint Commissioning reported that a range of services were covered under the umbrella of day care, unlike in the rest of the country. It was important that it should be clear that the eligibility was for day care provided by professional staff, rather than by local clubs. She was not in favour of raising charges for community cohesion clubs in rural areas, as these organisations were an important way to maximise the independence of those who used them.

She went on to say that respite care for carers should not be charged for. The County was heavily dependant on carers, and any charges for respite would be detrimental to their work.

In the ensuing discussion the following points were made:

- A Member pointed out that as older carers lost their benefits at the age of 65, it would be inappropriate to charge carers for day care.
- In reply to a query from a Member, the Associate Director of Joint Commissioning said that charging families a fee for telecare services for older relatives had been considered, and an appropriate level of charge would be considered after further consultation, bearing in mind the extreme sensitivity which surrounded any introduction of charging.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

173. JOINT STRATEGIC NEEDS ASSESSMENT 2009

The Committee received a report on the key findings from the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA), which was approved by Cabinet on 18 December. The Associate Director of Integrated Commissioning reported that the document represented an important milestone, and provided common ground upon which to commission services.

A Member pointed out that, according to the JSNA, the number of people aged over 85 and over in the County was expected to more than double by 2026 to 10,200. This sort of demographic trend would have a significant impact on future budget for Adult Social Care.

RESOLVED: That the implications of the County's ageing demographic should be recognised, and that provision should be made in future Adult Social Care budgets to address their needs.

174. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee noted its Work Programme.

RESOLVED: That the work programme be approved and reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The meeting ended at 12.35 pm

CHAIRMAN