

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 21 June 2010 at 9.30 am

Present: Councillor PA Andrews (Chairman)

Councillors: H Davies, BA Durkin, PJ Edwards, MJ Fishley, KS Guthrie, MD Lloyd-Hayes, JE Pemberton and RV Stockton

Co-opted Member Mr R Kelly (Voluntary Sector Representative)

In attendance: Councillors LO Barnett, JG Jarvis and AT Oliver

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors AE Gray, ME Cooper and GA Powell.

2. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Councillor PJ Edwards substituted for Councillor AE Gray.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 31 March 2010 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

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

There were no suggestions for future scrutiny.

6. PRESENTATION BY THE CABINET MEMBER (ENVIRONMENT AND STRATEGIC HOUSING)

The Committee received a presentation from the Cabinet Member (Environment and Strategic Housing).

During his presentation, the Cabinet Member highlighted the following areas:

- That delivering affordable housing was one of the key priorities within the Sustainable Community Strategy. Herefordshire had the worst housing affordability ratio of all local authorities in the Region. The delivery targets for 2009/10 for affordable housing had been achieved, and the Service expected to achieve the target of 170 houses for the current year.
- The Audit Commission had undertaken an inspection, and said that the County had some of the highest standards of affordable housing in the Country

- That there were rules within the Unitary Development Policy (UDP) that gave preference for housing to Gypsies and Travellers. This was not necessarily the most appropriate way forward, and greater emphasis should be given to the needs of Gypsies and Travellers by providing more appropriate sites. The Travellers site in Madley had not been used for a long time, and it would be sold off, the money ring fenced to buy a new site in consultation with Traveller families.
- That the Mortgage Rescue Scheme had been recognised at national level as being best practice.

The Chairman thanked him for his presentation.

In the ensuing discussion, the following points were answered by the Assistant Director, Homes and Communities:

- That encouraging more landlords to provide rental accommodation from the private sector was a long standing problem, landlords often perceived that assured short hold tenancies made it difficult to evict tenants who were not paying their rent so they took a risk averse approach when choosing tenants.
- The targets for delivery of affordable homes for the forthcoming two years would be reflected in the Local Development Framework (LDF) figures, but he expected them to be in the region of the high 200's. It was expected that delivery by 2025-26 would be around 400 a year. The initial targets reflected a challenging market, as developers were not developing sites

The Cabinet Member replied to a Member's comment, and said that he agreed that a target of 170 houses with a waiting list of over five thousand people was an insupportable situation, but it was a reflection of the reality faced by the Council. There was no available funding from the Homes and Communities Agency. It should be borne in mind that of the total number on the waiting list, only a hundred actually required urgent re-housing at this time. Attempts had been made to create empty flats above shops, but the Council had received no support from the absentee landlords who owned the commercial properties and grants were unavailable

He went on to say that the density of the build of affordable housing did need to be higher than other developments, but agreed with a Member that the provision of appropriate garden space was essential. He disagreed that the County was producing sub standard housing, and said that all houses were built to EU Standard 3, which was far higher than they were required to build. No block building was allowed on sites, and homes were built to the specific needs of the Housing Associations.

The Assistant Director, Homes and Communities concurred with comments from Members that consideration would be given to finding ways to encourage the single occupants of larger homes occupied to move into accommodation more suited to their needs, thereby freeing up properties for families.

Resolved: That the presentation be noted.

7. SAFEGUARDING BOARD, ADULT SOCIAL CARE - IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME

The Committee received a presentation on the work of the Adult Safeguarding Board. In her presentation, the Consultant, Adult Safeguarding, highlighted the following areas:

- Increases in rate of referrals by 38% indicated the success in raising awareness of Adult Safeguarding across the County, but that there were implications for resources.
- 30% of referrals were located in a care facility and 30% of alleged abusers were provider employees. The highest rate of abuse was psychological in nature, followed by actual physical abuse.
- Progress had been made in providing an up to date safeguarding framework and a revised safeguarding process.
- The Safeguarding Partnership had been re launched, with increased partnership working. A broad range of partners had been identified from across the West Midlands, and there was close working with the PCT and in the area of medicines management.
- The IT system had been redesigned, which meant that it was easier to record data and draw conclusions from case recording.
- There was a need to develop the standing subgroups links to other strategic boards, including the Herefordshire Safeguarding Children's Board (HSCB) and Safer Herefordshire.

The Associate Director said that there had been an enormous increase in workload in this area and, as a result, an additional team had been put in place. In the ensuing discussion, the following points were made:

- That when a referral was made, there was 24 hours to decide whether it was a safeguarding issue, or whether it should be signposted to another service. The Locality Team then had seven days to put in place a Strategy Development Team which had four weeks to conduct an investigation. Some of these took longer, some were shorter.
- The Consultant, Adult Safeguarding said that she believed that the balance between the strategic strength of the Safeguarding Board and the number of front line teams was appropriate.
- that there had been 144 referrals in the previous year. False allegations were made, but there was a risk management process in place to ensure that they did not have an untoward impact.
- A leaflet was available which outlined safeguarding issues and contained a phone number for residents of care homes to ring if they were experiencing problems. There were two senior practitioners always available to answer concerns.
- There was a difficulty in promoting safeguarding, as most adults didn't realise how vulnerable they were, or what abuse they were suffering. Promotion was done to professionals in the field, which was an appropriate way forward given the limited funds available to the service. There was a public information strategy that was promulgated through lunch clubs and community networks.
- Funding of £200k for the previous year had been sufficient to recruit additional staff. This was now part of the ongoing baseline budget for the Service.

Resolved: That the presentation be noted.

8. BUDGET MONITORING 2009/10

The Committee received the Budget Monitoring Report of the financial position for Adult Social Care and Strategic Housing revenue budgets for the period to 31st March 2010. In the ensuing discussion the following points were made:

The Principal Accountant reported that the outturn position showed an overspend of £2,731k. There had been a number of reasons for this:

- There were twelve more clients with complex needs within learning disabilities and an increase in clients coming into the service taking up direct payments. This meant that the learning disability outturn had the majority of overspend of £1,414k.
- There was also an increased number of older people clients, as well as existing clients who were presenting with increased homecare needs.
- The impact of severe weather had led to an increase in the number of clients being admitted to hospital which had provided social care with additional cost pressures. The overspend for older people was £1.14m.

The management team has put in a number of measures to tackle the overspend delivering £1.473m of savings. These included the one-off use of the supporting people grant of £800k. The final outturn had been offset by the Social Care contingency with the remainder of the overspend being offset by underspends in other Directorate There is no deficit carried forward into 2010/11.

Budgets had been re-aligned in order to reflect existing commitments so that Panel are clear on the available budgets. Panel commence the year with adequate resources. This approach resulted in an overall shortfall of £3.5m for integrated commissioning that must be addressed through further efficiency measures and service re-design. Progress is being monitored on a monthly basis within the recovery plan.

The Independent Living Fund (ILF) have recently announced that they will not be accepting any new claims for 2010/11 in order to protect those receiving funding as the budget has now been fully committed. The claims currently accepted for approval total £20k. Claims will only be honoured where an offer letter has been sent.

The Associate Director, Joint Commissioning, said that the situation was far from ideal. It had been complicated by ten learning disabilities cases which had been transferred from Children's Services to Adult Social Care at a cost of £100k each per annum. This meant that the Service would have to deal with an additional spend of £1m a year for the next ten years. As a result, it would be increasingly difficult to balance the budget in 2010/11.

In reply to a question, the Associate Director went on to say that the finance package designed to dovetail to Frameworki would be in place by the Autumn. The Electronic Homecare System was already in place, but did not function without the correct finance IT system.

Resolved

That:

- a) The report be noted;**
- b) The Committee noted that, despite regular assurances that the suitable accounting mechanisms for the Frameworki package would be**

available, its implementation was still awaited. Given the extreme pressures on the Adult Social Care budget it is imperative that the Directorate should have this tool available so that immediate budgetary management is made possible; and;

- c) The Committee welcomes the realignment of budgets, on the assumption that they will now be sufficient to cope with the number of clients with acute needs that the Service has to deal with.

9. ADULT SOCIAL CARE PERFORMANCE MONITORING 2009/10

The Committee received a report on the Adult Social Care Performance Indicators. The Associate Director, Adult Social Care, said that NI139 (Social Care clients receiving Self Directed Support) was the only indicator that was red. The indicator could not be properly addressed until the Frameworki finance management module was in place.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

10. STRATEGIC HOUSING SERVICE PERFORMANCE MONITORING 2009/10

The Committee received a report on the Strategic Housing Service Performance Monitoring. The Assistant Director, Homes & Communities, said that the Service had achieved or exceeded all of its key national indicators.

He went on to say that the number of households assisted under the homelessness provisions of the 1996 Housing Act has increased and the proportion of cases per 1000 households has risen from 4.4 to 6.23. This was as a result of the way the cases were allocated and the new approach that has been implemented within the team to meet the needs of vulnerable people. The indicator associated with this work, LPI 6 (Number of Households who considered themselves as Homeless, for whom casework resolved their situation (Homelessness Prevention) was no longer a national one.

He added that the number of people in Bed and Breakfast accommodation had been reduced from 55 families with children in 2006, to one person.

In reply to a question from a Member, he said that thirty people had accessed the rough sleeping shelter during the hard weather earlier in the year. In all cases there was some sort of resolution to the problems that had caused the individuals to be sleeping rough.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

11. PROGRESS REPORT ON THE ACTION PLAN FOR THE SCRUTINY REVIEW OF THE SUPPORT TO CARERS IN HEREFORDSHIRE

The Committee received a progress report against the delivery of the Recommendations and Executive Action Plan of the Scrutiny Review of the Support to Carers in Herefordshire.

The Associate Director, Joint Commissioning reported that there has been a very significant improvement in the performance of NI 135 (provision of advice and information to Carers), which had exceeded the target that had been set for 2009/10.

The Planning Manager reported that Action 4 in the Plan would be difficult to achieve as a result of the Health and Wellbeing Partnership decision to reduce Area Based Grant funding by 6%.

RESOLVED

That

- (a) the progress to deliver the Recommendations and Actions approved by Cabinet for the Review of Carers Support in Herefordshire was noted; and;**
- (b) the Committee expressed concern that the Area Based Grant funding for carers had been reduced by 6%**

12. 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 12.25 pm

CHAIRMAN