

MINUTES of the meeting of the Social Care & Housing Scrutiny Committee held at Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Monday, 24th November, 2003 at 10.30 a.m.

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

Councillors: Mrs. A.E. Gray, K.G. Grumbley, Mrs. J.A. Hyde, R. Mills,
Mrs. J.E. Pemberton, Ms. G.A. Powell and P. G. Turpin

Voluntary Sector Ms M. James, Mrs B. Millman.
Representatives

In attendance: Councillors Mrs. L.O. Barnett, P.E. Harling and W.J.S. Thomas.

25. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Mrs E.M. Bew.

26. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

There were no named substitutes.

27. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

28. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 13th October, 2003 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

29. UPDATE ON A SERIOUS CASE REVIEW ACTION PLAN (SOCIAL SERVICES)

Further to the report in July, 2003 the Committee received an update on the Social Services aspects of a serious case review (part 8) action plan.

The Head of Social Care (Children) reminded the Committee of the background to the case. The detailed action plan, prepared in response to the findings of the review carried out in accordance with the provisions of Part 8 of the guidance issued jointly by the Department of Health, the Home Office and the Department for Education: "Working Together to Safeguard Children", was appended to the report.

The Head of Social Care (Children) advised that all the tasks in the action plan had either been completed or would be completed as scheduled.

In response to a question the Head of Social Care (Children) confirmed that there would be ongoing audit of cases both internally by the Council and externally by the Area Child Protection Committee (ACPC). Other agencies were responsible for their own responses to the Plan. The ACPC would maintain an overview and received a schedule of the Council's planned audit work. However, he advised that the ACPCs were not statutory bodies and across the Country were not well resourced. It was

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possible that Government proposals would lead to changes and put matters on a statutory footing,

The Director of Social Care and Strategic Housing added that following the joint review of Social Services by the Audit Commission and the Social Services Inspectorate an internal audit was being undertaken on case files and confirmed that arrangements for the appropriate supervision of Team Managers were in place.

RESOLVED: That progress against the Social Services part of the Serious Case Review Action Plan be noted and staff congratulated upon it.

30. GREEN PAPER: EVERY CHILD MATTERS

The Committee was invited to whether it had any comments on the Green Paper: Every Child Matters which it would like the Executive to take into consideration in preparing its response.

The Head of Social Care (Children) reported that the Green Paper sought to focus on four main areas: supporting patients and carers, early intervention and effective protection; accountability and integration, locally, regionally and nationally; and workforce reform. He welcomed the child centred approach and emphasised how important it was that this focus was not lost sight of in discussions of proposals in the Green Paper about new structures.

The Director of Social Care and Strategic Housing commented that the aim must be to develop models of best practice that made things safer for children. A report on a child concern model for Herefordshire was shortly to be reported to Cabinet and would be brought to the Committee in due course. The Director highlighted the following aspects of the Green Paper:

- Delivering the support to parents and foster parents envisaged in the Green Paper would require significant investment over time. The Green Paper was not explicit that resources would be provided. The Corporate Parent Working Group had already expressed the view that the foster parent role should be enhanced and resourced.
- In relation to accountability and integration there were proposals to create statutory Local Safeguarding Children Boards to replace Child Protection Committees, which were welcomed, and to require the appointment of a Director for Children's services, accountable for local authority education and children's social services and a lead Council Member for children. The Local Government Association, Association of Directors of Social Services and Chief Education Officers were all requesting that there should be local flexibility in determining these accountability arrangements.
- It was also proposed that Children's Trusts be established by 2006 which seemed a very tight timescale. There was also a question as to whether Herefordshire could sustain a Trust.
- There was a question mark over how far the arrangements would support every child. The Green Paper was not wholly inclusive.
- That the sharing of information between agencies was at the core of safe responses. This was always problematic and the Director expressed the view that the solution was a national framework imposed by legislation.

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In the ensuing discussion the following principal points were made:

- There was a clear need for sufficient finance to support the proposals.
- There should be a national framework prescribing arrangements for sharing information between agencies
- That there should be local flexibility to determine structural arrangements to reflect local circumstances.
- The Head of Social Care (Children) acknowledged that teachers were in a position to identify problems, but it was important to be able to draw on the experience of other professionals to ensure that a sense of proportion was kept and a consistent approach followed. The child concern model for Herefordshire sought to provide a framework to achieve these aims. A change of culture would however be needed for the model to work effectively.
- That a breakdown in communication between agencies had been at the heart of the Victoria Climbié case. It was suggested that the response to the Green Paper should be a joint response by relevant major partners within the County. The Director of Social Care and Strategic Housing reported that it was expected that the Council's response would reflect the view of the Primary Care Trust but was uncertain as to how feasible it would be to submit a single response
- That a further report on how Herefordshire might be taking the matter forward should be made to the Committee's meeting in April 2004.
- That when the Government's intentions were clear the Council should focus on working closely with its partners in the County to implement the requirements.
- That as the issues in the Green Paper fell within the remit of a number of Scrutiny Committees the Strategic Monitoring Committee should be asked to consider which Committee should have the lead scrutiny role.
- It was noted that the Green Paper included a target that by March 2004 no homeless family with children should be placed in bed and breakfast accommodation, unless in a short term emergency. In response to a question the Head of Strategic Housing advised that the Council had set itself a harder target within its Local Public Service Agreement of not using bed and breakfast accommodation at all. He explained measures being taken to try to attain this target.

RESOLVED:

That (a) the Executive be requested in formulating its response to consider the following points:

- **the need for there to be sufficient resources made available to support the proposals, which affect every child;**
- **the need for local flexibility to determine structural arrangements to reflect local circumstances;**
- **the need for a national framework prescribing arrangements for sharing information between agencies;**

- **there would be strength in relevant major partners in the County submitting a single joint response.**
- (b) the Strategic Monitoring Committee be asked to determine which Scrutiny Committee should take the lead role in scrutinising issues resulting from action taken by the executive pursuant to the Green Paper;**
- and**
- (c) that subject to (b) above a further report be submitted to the Committee in April, 2004.**

31. BETTER CARE HIGHER STANDARDS ANNUAL USERS REPORT

The Committee considered the results of the Better Care Higher Standards Annual Users Survey.

It was reported that an annual report had to be submitted to the Department of Health showing performance against key standards of service in Health, Social Care and Housing Services for adults over 18 years old having long term needs. The annual report itself was appended to the report. It was noted that the local Health Trusts had to approve their contribution and the Committee was being asked to consider the aspects relating to the Council.

It was reported that the results showed a maintained or improved performance for every standard for which the Directorate was responsible. However, some areas allowed for further improvement and remedial work was ongoing especially on standards linked to performance indicators. It was noted that discrepancies remained between the survey results and the performance statistics.

It was suggested that a rather high proportion of users appeared not to have known how to complain if they had wanted to do. The Head of Social Care (Adults) advised that the procedure provided for a leaflet to be issued with the User's Care Plan but she would check that staff were complying with this requirement. She also agreed to send Members a copy of the complaints leaflet for information.

It was also noted that a high number of users had said that overall the help received from Social Services was excellent.

RESOLVED: That the Better Care Higher Standards annual report be noted.

32. HOME ENERGY CONSERVATION ACT 1995

The Committee considered the seventh annual progress report on the Home Energy Conservation Act project.

It was reported that the Act placed a duty on Energy Conservation Authorities to draw up strategies to improve energy efficiency in all housing and to report annually on progress made in implementing them.

Within Herefordshire a pledge had been made in 1996 to help reduce energy consumption by 30% over a 15 year period. An overall improvement had so far been made of 11.18%.

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The annual report gave examples of the programme of activities being undertaken to reduce energy consumption and the Committee sought further detail on a number of the initiatives and the way in which they were promoted.

The Private Sector Housing Manager commented that whilst benchmarking was difficult the Authority compared favourably with Authorities in the West Midlands and Wales. Although current performance statistics would suggest the target of a 30% reduction would not be achieved data collection was difficult. For example the Do It Yourself market was not currently included in the calculations.

It was noted that the project had important health implications and measures such as assistance with insulation were a proactive way of preventing illness, improving properties and helping people to stay in their own homes.

RESOLVED: That the latest progress report made under the Home Energy Conservation act 1995 be noted.

33. ADOPTION SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT 2002-2003

The Committee considered Herefordshire's Adoption Service report for 2002-2003.

The report noted that the pressure on placements and the new adoption legislation coming into force highlighted the importance of the adoption service. The Head of Social Care (Children) emphasised the complexity and sensitivity of the Service and the responsibility placed on staff. In response to questions he provided clarification on a number of detailed points relating to the service's operation.

RESOLVED: That the Adoption Service annual report 2002-2003 be received and noted.

34. COMPLAINTS, COMMENTS AND COMPLIMENTS

The Committee considered a report on the operation of the complaints process and procedures.

The report referred to changes introduced, procedures in place, lessons learned, training for staff and links with the corporate complaints system and the West Midlands Complaints Officer Group.

The Head of Social Care (Children) highlighted the improvements resulting from the creation of a Complaints Administrator Post and advised that progress was being made although more work remained to be done. The link with the West Midlands Complaints Officer Group, which formed part of a national forum, provided a useful opportunity to review experiences and develop protocols for local use.

The Director of Social Care and Strategic Housing advised that she considered that a reasonable and safe system was now in place.

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

- It was acknowledged that much could be learnt from informal complaints and confirmed that staff were being encouraged to view such feedback in a positive light.
- That in presenting the information on complaints it would be helpful to know how many complaints were resolved to the complainants' satisfaction and the percentage dealt with at each stage of the complaints process.

RESOLVED: That the report on the performance in relation to complaints, comments and compliments be noted.

35. SUPPORTING PEOPLE INSPECTION

The Committee was informed of the feedback on the inspection of the Supporting People arrangements in Herefordshire.

The report stated that the Council's "Supporting People" programme, designed to providing housing related support to a wide range of vulnerable client groups, had, been subject in September, 2003 to an inspection by the Audit Commission assisted by representatives from the Social Services Inspectorate and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

The Head of Strategic Housing reported that the draft inspection report had now been received. The provisional assessment was that the service was a good, two star, service but with uncertain prospects for improvement. Officers considered to the contrary that the service had promising prospects and would give this view at the feedback meeting that afternoon.

The Supporting People Officer reported that notification had been received that the programme had been awarded Government Grant for 2003/2004 of £7.5 million. This was the level which had been expected but was a significant achievement given that other programmes across the Country faced a deficit. There was a disagreement between Government departments over the finance which should be available for the programme as a whole. In these circumstances the view had been taken that a risk averse approach should be adopted in Herefordshire with a focus on sustainable services.

He thought that the inspection had been rigorous but fair. It was encouraging that the Inspectors had judged that the programme was in a strong position to protect its funding. He added that to an extent it appeared that having set high targets for the programme and achieved a high standard the Council was being assessed against the high expectation which that success had generated. He reported that no Authority had achieved higher than a two star rating for their Supporting People programmes.

The Director of Social Care and Strategic Housing supported the view that the content of the inspection report was reasonable but questioned how, given the standard of the service, the conclusion could be reached that the service had uncertain prospects for improvement.

The Committee agreed that the Inspectors' view on the prospects for improvement appeared to be at odds with the judgment on the success of the Supporting People programme.

RESOLVED: That the Committee's disappointment that having recognised that the service was a good service the Inspectors could then describe it as having uncertain prospects for improvement be recorded and a progress report made to the next meeting.

36. HEREFORDSHIRE PLAN AMBITION GROUPS

The Committee received a briefing on the operation of the Ambition Groups responsible for delivering the ambitions within the Herefordshire Plan.

The Committee had been informed at its previous meeting of the approved arrangements for scrutinising the Plan. The Policy and Commissioning Manager gave an overview of the Plan and the role of the ambition groups. She explained that the Groups faced different requirements and this was reflected in their operation. For example some Groups were required by statute and had statutory targets others had not. She agreed to provide Members with a briefing note on the Plan showing links between the Groups and their key roles.

It was requested that in addition to circulating the briefing note a further report should be made to the Committee's next meeting.

RESOLVED: That a further report on the Plan be made to the Committee in January 2004.

37. PERFORMANCE MONITORING 2003/04

The Committee considered the Social Care and Strategic Housing Directorate's performance indicators for the first 6 months of 2003/4.

A revised appendix detailing performance against the indicators had been circulated to the Committee.

The Head of Business Services drew attention to a revision to the measurement criteria for the indicator relating to the delivery of equipments and adaptations. This now measured the percentage delivered within 7 days rather than 3 weeks. The indicator had fallen into the "investigate urgently" category. It was reported that remedial action was being taken.

The Head of Social Care (Adults) informed the Committee that in relation to delays in discharging patients from hospital for the last three weeks there had been no delays connected to social care within the County Hospital. It was felt that a number of new measures put in place had contributed to this outcome. It would take more time to confirm that this was the case but the signs were encouraging. It was also hoped that the Hospital Trust Board would agree to waive its right to seek reimbursement in the event of a discharge being delayed as a result of social services being unavailable. She added that the Capacity Planning Group was now focusing on admissions to Community Hospitals.

The Director of Social Care and Strategic Housing commented that performance in relation to delayed discharges was a key performance indicator which attracted attention at Government level. A great deal of effort had been made by the Directorate and the Hospital Trust to seek to bring about improvement.

The Director also informed the Committee that the latest performance ratings of Social Services Departments by the Social Services Inspectorate had been issued. The Council had maintained its two star rating. However, whilst Childrens' services were now viewed as having excellent prospects for improvement the verdict on adults services was that they had uncertain prospects for improvement. In other assessments including the recent joint review by the Audit Commission and the Social Services Inspectorate the view had been that adults services had promising prospects.

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The Director had been told that the Inspectorate's view on adults services had changed because there was uncertainty over whether the Council would be able to invest sufficient resources. Older peoples services were due to be inspected by the Social Services Inspectorate in March 2004. This inspection would look at practice, performance and resourcing.

RESOLVED:

THAT (a) the report on Herefordshire Social Care and Strategic Housing performance be noted;

and

(b) areas of concern continue to be monitored.

38. BEST VALUE REVIEW -HOME SUPPORT-UPDATE ON PROGRESS

The Committee considered progress on the implementation of the improvement plan arising from the Best Value Review for Home Support and the development of the short term assessment reablement and review service (STARRS).

The report stated that in seeking to implement the Review's recommendations it had been decided to pilot the development of a reablement service in Leominster. This was to allow all the issues faced by the Council in delivering a service in a rural county with market towns to be taken into account before extending the service across the County. The report outlined the lessons learned from the pilot and it was noted that these would be used in implementing the approach in Ross-on-Wye early in 2004. The most important lesson was the need to engage with the health service and the independent care sector agencies and implement good monitoring arrangements.

The Head of Social Care (Adults) and the Service Manager gave examples of how the service had operated.

In response to questions the Head of Social Care (Adults) acknowledged that more intensive home support was needed. However, this did require investment, contracting and monitoring arrangements and workforce development. Herefordshire was not alone in facing recruitment difficulties but the challenge was perhaps greater than in other areas. A number of options were being examined with a view to developing a more flexible workforce.

RESOLVED

That (a) progress in implementing the improvement plan arising from the Best Value Review for Home Support be noted;

(b) a further report be prepared on staffing recruitment and retention and the proposed extension of the reablement service across the County;

and

(c) a site visit to Hillside Intermediate Care Centre be arranged.

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**39. SOCIAL SERVICES AND STRATEGIC HOUSING BUDGET MONITORING
2003/04 - 6 MONTHLY REPORT**

The Committee was informed of the budget monitoring position for social care and strategic housing for the first six months of 2003/2004.

The Head of Business Services reported that the overspending on Social Care was being reduced but there remained a number of potential financial risks which could affect this position. It also had to be borne in mind that making the reductions did impact on service delivery. An underspending on strategic housing was expected.

The Director of Social Care and Strategic Housing advised the Committee that whilst challenges facing care for older people did not revolve solely around resources she would as part of the budget process be promoting the case for investment in that area of service.

RESOLVED: That the budget monitoring report for the first six months of the financial year be noted.

The meeting ended at 1.15 a.m.

CHAIRMAN

