

MINUTES of the meeting of the Social Care and Housing Scrutiny Committee held at Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Thursday, 13th March 2003 at 10.30 am

Present: Councillor Mrs. L.O. Barnett (Chairman)
Councillor Mrs. J.P. French (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors: Mrs. P.A. Andrews, Mrs. W.U. Attfield, Mrs. J.A. Carter,
M.R. Cunningham, D.J. Fleet, Mrs. E.M. Saunders, D.C. Taylor.

In attendance: Councillors Mrs E.M. Bew Cabinet Member (Social Care) and D.W. Rule Cabinet Member (Education)

58. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence received.

59. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

There were no substitutions made.

60. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

61. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 31st January, 2003 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

62. SOCIAL CARE AND STRATEGIC HOUSING PERFORMANCE INDICATORS 2002/03 – ANALYSIS OF THIRD QUARTER

The Committee received a report of the third quarter's performance indicators for Social Care and Strategic Housing.

The Finance and Information Service Manager presented the report. He advised the Committee that if social services maintained its two star status it would be continue to have additional financial flexibility allowing it to carry forward underspends on central government grant allocations. It was possible this could total £2 million but given social care's effective maximisation of grant allocations the actual figure would be lower'.

He noted that the report had been prepared on an exception basis and that some indicators collected annually or based on Department of Health questionnaires could not be included in the report.

He highlighted the following points on the detail of the indicators:

- That whilst child protection reregistrations during the year had fallen from the highest performance category into the lowest, underlying performance remained

good. He explained the reason for the drop in performance noting this indicated how, when dealing with small numbers of people, relatively small fluctuations could significantly affect the performance statistics.

- In relation to the three adults services performance measures in the lowest performance category he acknowledged that previous reports had highlighted the need to improve performance in these areas. He commented that it was possible that grant money may help improve performance against the indicator for increasing the percentage of clients receiving intensive home care compared to clients receiving residential care throughout the year, noting that this was an Local Public Service Agreement (LPSA) target. In respect of the other two indicators he felt that inaccurate recording and measurement meant that the true level of performance was not being reflected.
- That regarding the LPSA targets, performance against the four indicators for adults services had yet to reach the required level and some targets were very challenging. However, the signs were that performance was moving in the right direction. The targets for childrens services were measured annually but the signs again were encouraging. The housing PSA target was extremely challenging and the Head of Strategic Housing was working with Herefordshire Housing on the matter. At this stage it was not possible to comment on performance against the target.

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

- That the format of the report should be modified to put performance in context, with the presentation of the statistical information in the appendix to the report made clearer and more closely linked to or combined with the commentary.
- That the continuing appearance of three particular adults services measures in the lowest "investigate urgently" category was cause for concern.

The Director of Social Care and Strategic Housing assured the Committee that work was being undertaken to try to improve performance and slow progress was being made. She expected that the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) would comment on the position. The outcome of the Joint Review by the SSI and the Audit Commission was also likely to encourage priority to be given to these areas. However, if improvement was not achieved over time it had to be recognised that there was the prospect of intervention by the SSI.

- The County Treasurer noted that as part of the budget process for 2004/2005 service provision would be reviewed and there would be an opportunity using the performance management framework to identify whether additional resources were needed to improve performance.

RESOLVED:

That (a) the areas in Adult Services in the "investigate urgently" category be noted with continuing concern;

and

(b) suggestions as to how the situation is to be improved be welcomed, with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman to be kept informed and a report to be made to the next meeting on the issues relating to Adult Services, noting also the request for a revised format for the performance report as a whole.

63. SOCIAL SERVICES BUDGET MONITORING 2002/03 – QUARTERLY REPORT

The Committee were informed of the budget monitoring position for Social Services for the third quarter of 2002/03.

The Head of Business Services reported that there was a reduction in the overspend compared with the second quarter indicating that the measures to achieve savings were having some effect. However, as reported to the Committee in November this was at a cost to service delivery.

There was particular pressure on the Adults Services budgets. A number of people were awaiting permanent funding for nursing and residential places. Delay in the provision of this care had a potential impact on hospital waiting lists through delayed discharges. Proposed legislation would mean that, where people were waiting in hospital for social services to become available, Councils would have to reimburse the hospital for the cost of the bed the person occupied. This was still under discussion. However, the potential impact was significant. The report described negotiations with health partners which had resulted in additional funding to provide for both long term care and further intensive home care. It stated that whilst this would assist in minimising the service impact of the recovery plan it would not significantly reduce the overspend.

In the course of discussion it was noted that many practical questions remained to be addressed if the proposed legislation relating to delayed discharges was implemented. The Director of Social Care and Strategic Housing reported that discussions in the West Midlands were seeking to focus on achieving agreement that any money reimbursed to the Health Service would be retained within the primary care system and used to improve home support and home care.

RESOLVED:

- That**
- (a) concern continue to be expressed that “savings” are achieved at a cost to service delivery;**
 - (b) it be requested that officers investigate all possible alternatives;**
- and**
- (c) the financial assistance from Health Care partners be noted with pleasure.**

64. HOME POINT HEREFORDSHIRE – UPDATE REPORT

The Committee were updated on the development and operation of Home Point, the Choice-Based Lettings Pilot Project, which commenced operation on 23rd October 2002.

The agency had been set up in partnership between the Council and the County's five largest Housing Associations with the aim of providing affordable housing and greater choice using the County's first common housing register. The update report described the service, its origins, and how it worked and included performance statistics for the first four months of operation. The Interim Head of Strategic Housing Services commented on the operation of the scheme and the advantages it was considered to have brought. The conclusion was that the first four months had proved a great success. Indeed the biggest challenge had been coping with the sheer volume of work the success of the agency had produced and in particular the

number of telephone calls. Additional funding had been made available for two temporary members of staff for 11 weeks and this had already brought about improvement in the response to phone calls and processing of applications. The longer-term position needed to be reviewed. The report also described other work which had been undertaken to review and improve the service.

In response to questions the Interim Head of Strategic Housing Services commented as follows:

- That not all landlords within the County were party to the agreement and these would continue to operate their own letting policies. Work was continuing to encourage them to join Home Point
- That the establishment of the agency had enabled a clearer picture to be generated of the level of affordable housing available to let.
- He clarified the operation of priority card scheme devised to help emergency and accepted homeless cases and explained how the scheme had been modified to ensure that whilst homelessness needs were met all the prime properties were not being allocated to this group.
- In response to a suggestion that there was a perception that the system favoured people who were not locally based he commented that this should not be the case and if there were any specific examples he would investigate them.
- That the role of Home Point was to advertise properties. Landlords retained their own letting policies which would address the issue of trying to ensure that tenants would fit in with other residents.
- It would be possible to explore the possibility of encouraging landlords to persuade people to move into smaller accommodation as their needs changed and this became appropriate.

The following additional points were made in the course of discussion:

- That the employment of additional temporary staff had clearly been beneficial and there was concern about what might happen when these staff were withdrawn.
- That action needed to be taken to raise awareness of the respective roles of Home Point, Registered Social Landlords and the Council so that it was clear who was responsible for each aspect of service delivery.
- That a report should be made to a future meeting to enable the Committee to explore the overall strategy for the provision of housing addressing issues of affordability and size of properties including scope for extending some properties.
- That staff should be congratulated on the work undertaken to date, whilst recognising the need to keep progress under review.
- The Director of Social Care and Strategic Housing commented that Home Point was a partnership albeit led by the Council and it would be important to seek to encourage the partners to increase their contribution. She acknowledged that assistance with staffing resources might be one contribution which could be made.

- The Interim Head of Strategic Housing explained the way in which applications were assessed. It was proposed that further consideration should be given to an appeals process.

RESOLVED:

- That**
- (a) those involved be congratulated but the need to keep progress under review noted;**
 - (b) a report be made to a future meeting to enable the Committee to explore the overall strategy for the provision of housing;**
 - (c) action be taken to raise awareness of the respective roles of Homepoint, Registered Social Landlords and the Council;**
- and**
- (d) the wish that a procedure be formulated to allow for appeals against the banding allocated to applicants be considered.**

65. CITY REVIEW OF DAY SERVICES FUNDED BY SOCIAL SERVICES

The Committee were updated on the City Review of Day Services funded by Social Services for adults with a learning disability.

The report explained the reasons for the review which had been undertaken and how it had been conducted. A Steering Group had examined the range of services offered across the City, identified gaps in provision and potential ways in which these could be met. A consultation exercise had been undertaken on a range of options and a Development Plan prepared for implementation. A Day Service Modernisation Plan was also being prepared for the County as a whole of which the findings of the City Review would form a large part. In accordance with the requirements of the Department of Health each service had to be assessed using a toolkit. This would help to develop a plan for each service in line with the overall Modernisation Plan.

The report also explained the background to the making of an attendance payment at Widemarsh Workshop and the legal reasons why the Council had discontinued these payments in June 2002. Paragraph 23 of the report advised that a Working Group had been established to look at ways in which people working within Day Provision (including Widemarsh Workshop) could receive expenses or be part of a profit share scheme.

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

- The consultation letter on the City Review attached as appendix 2 to the report was not in plain English. Officers should be reminded of the need for documents to be written in plain English and encouraged to develop this skill.
- The Service Manager, Learning Disability Services, confirmed that those attending Widemarsh Workshop had been properly informed of the discontinuance of an attendance payment. It was unfortunate, however, that this had been one of a number of changes being made at the same time and the position might not therefore have been as well understood as it might otherwise have been. Arrangements were being put in place for regular discussion meetings. The Director of Social Care and Strategic Housing commented that

following a recent meeting she thought that relationships and trust had been improved.

RESOLVED:

- That (a) the report be noted and it be requested that the outcome of the work of the Working Group referred to in paragraph 23 of the report be reported to the next meeting;**
- and**
- (b) officers be reminded of the need for documents to be written in plain English and encouraged to develop this skill.**

66. PROJECT PLAN FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF HOME SUPPORT

The Committee were provided with information on progress in developing the home support service.

The report set out progress since the Committee's consideration of the subject in November, 2002 and its request for a report on the project plan. It was noted that a project plan had not yet been completed and it was proposed to circulate it to Members before the end of March, 2003.

Members emphasised the importance of making progress in this important service area.

RESOLVED:

- That (a) the progress of the Home Support Best Value Review be noted, with concern at the delay, given the impact on budgets and the delivery of services to older people;**
- (b) the Chairman and Vice-Chairman be consulted on the draft project plan;**
- and**
- (c) the final project plan be circulated to Members of the Committee at the end of March, 2003 and presented to the Committee's next meeting.**

67. BEST VALUE REVIEW – ADOPTION AND FOSTERING

The Committee were updated on the progress of the Review and the timescale for presentation of results.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

68. AN INITIAL BRIEFING ON THE 'VICTORIA CLIMBIE INQUIRY' (LAMING REPORT)

The Committee's attention was drawn to the recommendations of this important Inquiry with particular emphasis on the role of councillors and senior officers.

The report outlined the arrangements for Herefordshire's response to the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) on the Laming report's recommendations. The Head of Social Care (Childrens) drew particular attention to the key recommendations about accountability and performance management aimed at Members and senior officers.

It was noted that audits were being conducted by the Home Office and the Department of Health of Health, Police and Social Services. The Council's audit had to be returned by 30th April, 2003 to the SSI. A sample of Councils would receive a follow-up inspection.

RESOLVED: That the current position regarding the Council's response to Lord Laming's inquiry be noted.

69. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered a draft work programme for 2003/2004.

It was suggested that a report on respite facilities should be incorporated into the programme.

RESOLVED: That the framework of the draft work programme, as set out at Appendix 1 to the report, with the addition of a report on provision of respite care, be finalised by the Director of Social Care and Strategic Housing after consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Committee.

70. HEREFORDSHIRE PLAN AMBITION GROUPS

The Committee were updated on progress towards the ambition of improving the health and well-being of Herefordshire People within the Herefordshire Plan.

The report reviewed performance against the specific health and care indicators in the State of Herefordshire Report 2001/2002. It concluded that significant progress had been made towards the health and care ambitions in the plan. There was some evidence that health and well-being of Herefordshire people has improved. However in some areas improvement had been mixed and action was required to bring plans back on track. Where the picture was unclear because of doubts about the validity of the baseline information, reviews had been instituted of the collection and management of the data. It was also evident that in some areas further work was needed to make sure that the chosen indicators better measured what was in the Plan.

Members stated that it was important to ensure that future reports contained evidence to support the statements on performance.

RESOLVED:

That (a) the contents and implications of the report be noted;

(b) the areas of concern continue to be monitored;

and

- (c) **account be taken of the need to ensure that future statements on performance are evidence based.**

In closing the meeting the Chairman thanked members of the Committee and officers for their work, which she thought had been of benefit to the Council and noted the significant challenges which lay ahead.

The meeting ended at 12. 15pm

CHAIRMAN