

## JOINT TEAM WITH THE PENSION SERVICE

### PROGRAMME AREA RESPONSIBILITIES:

### SOCIAL CARE ADULTS AND HOUSING CORPORATE AND CUSTOMER SERVICES

CABINET

14TH JULY, 2005

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### Wards Affected:

County-wide

### Purpose:

To approve the setting up of a 'Joint Team', an integrated partnership between the Department of Work and Pensions and the Council, potentially incorporating the Welfare Rights, Housing Benefit and Fairer Charging Teams.

### Key Decision:

This is a Key Decision because it is likely to be significant in terms of its effect on communities living or working in Herefordshire in an area comprising one or more wards. It was included in the Forward Plan.

### Recommendations:

- That (a) it be agreed in principle that the Joint Team approach be adopted; and
- (b) a project team be created with representatives from Herefordshire Council (Revenue and Benefits, Social Care, and Economic Regeneration), the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and the Voluntary Sector.

### Reasons

This will enable Joint Team to support the local community to access benefits and entitlements including Pension Credits, carry out assessments on an individuals ability to contribute to the cost of social care and provide information and advice to meet the needs of older people and their carers.

Joint Teams can deliver a number of benefits including:

- increase our ability to contact and support the most vulnerable members of society.
- increase net take-up of entitlements and services
- reduce duplication of effort

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Further information on the subject of this report is available from  
Geoff Cole, Head of Culture, Leisure and Education for Life  
Tel: (01432) 260721 Email: gcole@herefordshire.gov.uk

- enable customers to provide details of their personal circumstances only once.
- Improve the quality of life and independence of older people, by intervening before the time of acute need.
- provide an integrated service to today's and future pensioners.

## Considerations

1. Nationally, there is a demographic shift towards an ageing population – by 2021 there will be more people over 80 than there are children under 5. This situation is reflected locally with a significant and growing proportion of the county's population over 60 (currently 21%, but predicted to rise to more than 33% within ten years).
2. Research presented by the Audit Commission in the report "Older People Independence and Well Being", highlighted that income is a key factor in promoting independence. Additional income results in a greater level of physical independence, an enhanced sense of autonomy, greater social participation and engagement with their wider family and community, a strengthened sense of identity and enhanced dignity.
3. The Department of Health Green Paper, "Independence, Well-being and Choice", setting out the future of adult social care, recommends that a greater focus should be placed on preventative services, to allow for early targeted interventions, with an emphasis on preventing problems. It identifies the importance of economic well-being, with the ability to meet costs arising from specific individual needs. Having an adequate income depends on individuals being well informed as to the support they can access. This will be achieved through partnership working with the Council and Department of Work and Pensions, to develop new models of service delivery and the streamlining of assessments.
4. The Department of Health has launched the "Partnership for Older People Project" initiative, to invest in innovative projects that promote and sustain preventative work, in order to improve the physical and mental health, well-being and independence of older people. In partnership with the PCT and Voluntary Sector a bid has been submitted to create a 'prevention matrix'. This will involve the development of a range of prevention services, which will increase the number of people who are helped to live at home and reduce the number of emergency admissions to hospital care. The work of the Joint Team, will be an essential component of this prevention matrix.
5. "Link-Age", a strategy produced by the Department for Work & Pensions in association with the Local Government Association, recognises that for too many older people services are difficult to access. They have to contact different organisations and provide the same information and documents again and again, often at times of illness or crisis.
6. Link-Age promotes the development of a holistic, integrated service for older people, initially through the bringing together of the Pension Service, Local Authority and Voluntary Sector to form Joint Teams. These Joint Teams will provide a "one stop service" for customers and stop the duplication of activity across the different agencies.

7. The aim of the Government is to achieve 100% of all local services to work in Joint Team by March 2006. Currently 36 local authorities are working as Joint Teams
8. LPSA 2 has targets that relate to the uptake of some benefits by people over 60 years old and relate to the development of the Joint Team. These benefits are Pension Credits, Attendance Allowance and Council Tax Benefit.
9. Other relevant service developments and initiatives to be taken into consideration such as The Partners of Older People Project, Herefordshire Council Older People Strategy.
10. A Joint Team is an integrated partnership between The Local Pension Service and the local authority. It is dedicated to developing processes that reduce duplication and focus on improving the service to the customer. Members of the Joint Team are authorised via a Memorandum of Understanding to carry out administrative functions, such as information gathering and verification, on behalf of each of the partners and the Department of Work and Pensions. Joint teams can also seek to identify other needs the older person (or their carer) may have e.g. visiting officers could look to see whether an older person needed help with minor home repairs and signpost to an appropriate service.
11. Joint Teams include, as a minimum, all pensions Local Service Staff within the geographical area of the local authority as well as an appropriate staffing commitment from the local authority, namely Housing Benefits, Fairer Charging and Welfare Rights. It is also advisable to include representatives from the Voluntary Sector and other stakeholders such as the PCT. Management responsibilities come under a single board.
12. There is considerable flexibility to develop the Joint Teams in a manner which reflects local needs, and within Herefordshire it will be possible to draw on the good practice developed through the LPSA1 Signposting scheme, connecting older people to a variety of low prevention services.
13. The Project Team, in accordance with Prince 2 project management principles, will explore models for joint working, which will forge closing links between the agencies, allow for information sharing at a local level and the development of a single point of access to the service. The project team will draw up plans to manage, monitor and evaluate the change process. It is envisaged that the Joint Team is developed in stages, which will provide an opportunity for regular reviews and reports back to Cabinet, as and when appropriate.

## **Alternative Options**

To maintain existing working structures and practices. This would not result in service improvements or efficiency savings.

## **Risk Management**

To avoid adverse impact and disruption on other associated council services the process of developing a joint team must be managed incrementally and evaluation carried out throughout.

## **Consultees**

Department of Work Pension, ABLE, Age Concern, Citizens Advice Bureau.

## **Background papers**

None identified.