

AT A MEETING

- of the -

**HEALTH, SOCIAL CARE AND
INCLUSION SCRUTINY PANEL** held
at the Council House, Walsall on **27
JULY 2006** at 6.00 p.m.

PRESENT

Councillor Oliver (Chair)
Councillor D.Pitt (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Ault
Councillor Barton
Councillor Griffiths
Councillor Micklewright
Councillor Robertson
Councillor Woodruff
Councillor Harris

OFFICERS PRESENT

David Martin (Executive Director Social Care & Supported Housing)
Kathy McAteer (Assistant Director, Adult Services Social Care & Inclusion)
Sue Byard (Assistant Director - Strategic Housing)
Andrea Potts (Head of Supported Housing)
Brandon Scott-Omenka (Head of Quality and Performance Management)
Nikki Ehlen (Scrutiny Officer)

1/06 APOLOGIES

Apologies for non attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillor McCracken.

2/06 SUBSTITUTIONS

The chair advised the panel of the following changes to the membership of the committee for the duration of the meeting: -

- Delete: Councillor McCracken
- Substitute: Councillor Harris

3/06 DECLERATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

Councillor Pitt declared an interest as an employee of the West Midlands Ambulance Service.

4/06 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

That the minutes of the meeting held on 20 June 2006, copies having been previously circulated to each member of the panel be approved and signed by the chair as a correct record.

5/06 FEEDBACK FROM WORKING GROUPS AND SPECIAL MEETINGS

Councillor Woodruff informed members that the Health Scrutiny Panel would be meeting with Stella Forsdike (tpct) and Sue James (Chief Executive of Walsall Manor Hospital) at the next panel meeting on 3 August 2006. She explained that this was to provide an update on the Black Country review and Private Finance Initiative (PFI).

KEY DISCUSSION ITEMS

Councillor Oliver informed members that the panel would be receiving a presentation from Andrea Potts on Homelessness.

6/06 OVERVIEW OF HOMELESSNESS ISSUES

Andrea Potts (Head of Supported Housing) introduced herself to the panel and presented an overview of homelessness issues in Walsall.

(annexed)

Andrea gave elected members a series of leaflets produced for service users.

(tabled)

During the presentation Andrea referred to slide 2 and explained to the panel that the service provided had changed due to direction given by the government.

Councillor Barton asked Andrea if it was possible for people to obtain advice on finding a property. Andrea said yes and that she would be providing panel members with details of this throughout the presentation.

Councillor Barton asked if a young person was evicted from the family home were they able to approach the council. Andrea replied that yes anybody could come to the council for advice. She stated that often people's aspirations and housing options do not match, but that the 'options interview' undertaken, provides a realistic choice for people seeking housing.

Andrea informed the panel that the Council was in a better position than it was some years ago, and it was recognised that the Council had an understanding of housing problems.

Members discussed the problems that people face when delays were experienced in receiving housing benefit. Andrea advised members who deal with people in this situation to book these individuals in for a housing options interview. She further explained that it was possible for officers to go out and visit landlords to resolve these issues.

Councillor Micklewright discussed the stigma around 'hostels'. Andrea explained that the council did not use 'hostels' to accommodate homeless families. All temporary

accommodation was self contained and therefore not classed as hostel accommodation. She stated that ideally people would be directly re-housed but where this was not possible, people were housed in 'self contained homeless projects'.

Members discussed how unsuitable 6 month tenancy agreements were, Andrea stated that it was possible for prevention officers to visit landlords and negotiate extended tenancies but acknowledged that many landlords preferred to issue short tenancy agreements.

Members further discussed housing benefit problems within the council and Andrea explained that a court would not evict a household if the reason for rent arrears was proven to be due to a delay in housing benefit.

Councillor Robertson thanked Andrea and complimented her on her commitment and enthusiasm. He asked what the average length of stay in temporary accommodation was; Andrea replied that the average length of stay for a family was 91 days in 2005/06 (13 weeks). She stated that this compared very favourably with other authorities.

Councillor Robertson asked officers if targets for rough sleeping existed. Andrea informed the panel that yes and there was a Best Value indicator (BV 202). Members were informed that in November 2005 there were no identified rough sleepers; this was the first official count.

Andrea informed the panel that the service area had been invited to lead on the sub regional housing action plan.

Councillor Robertson discussed the issue of empty properties and bringing them back into use. Sue Byard explained that work on empty property was being done within existing resources and that ideally the service would like an 'empty property officer'. She explained that it was difficult issue because property owners were put off by the cost of renovating a property.

Councillor Oliver discussed Best Value Indicators and raised concerns that 'gatekeeping' was used as a method to achieve targets. He asked what the principles were behind a 'homeless' application. Andrea stated that there were several reasons why a person may become homeless and several reasons why they may not be defined as homeless. She requested that if elected members encounter any cases where they feel housing problems have not been dealt with appropriately they should contact her.

Councillor Griffiths thanked Andrea and said that he was encouraged by the information he had received, he added that he now felt better equipped to deal with any cases he may have to deal with.

Councillor Woodruff asked who monitors Bed and Breakfast accommodation in Walsall. Andrea Potts responded by explaining that colleagues in supported people monitor those bed and breakfast providers receiving SP funding, however unfortunately there were no management arrangements to monitor the quality in commercially run bed and breakfast accommodation. Councillor Woodruff asked if bed and breakfast provision was within the borough. Andrea Potts stated that

occasionally it was necessary to house people outside of the borough but that it was preferred that they were moved back in the borough as soon as possible.

Members discussed eligibility for a homelessness application, Andrea pointed out that asylum seekers were not eligible to apply for homelessness or to claim benefits. She encouraged members to refute inappropriate and untrue misconceptions about housing of asylum seekers.

7/06 ROLLING WORK PROGRAMME

The panel agreed to constitute an aids and adaptations working group. Membership of the group was agreed as:

Councillor Oliver
Councillor Griffiths
Councillor Micklewright
Councillor Ault
Councillor Woodruff

Councillor Oliver suggested that initially this met in late September, if possible.

In terms of the work programme Councillor Oliver suggested that the panel consider it informally and react to any issues that occur.

RESOLVED

That the panel constitute an aids and adaptations working group with membership as set out in the body of the minutes and a remit to be agreed at the working group.

8/06 PERFORMANCE AND MONITORING INFORMATION

Brandon Scott-Omenka introduced himself to the panel and informed members that the Delivery Improvements Statement outturn would be brought to the next panel.

9/06 PERFORMANCE INDICATOR SCORECARD 2005/06 OUTTURN

Brandon gave a presentation which proposed a set of performance indicators for scrutiny to consider, and gave examples of how a scorecard containing these may look. He said that he would welcome comments from members.

(annexed)

Brandon informed members that the proposed scorecard would be brought on a quarterly basis to give members an idea of how the service area was performing.

The panel discussed information provided on the scorecard; Brandon explained that accurate explanations would be given when targets were not being met.

Councillor Harris asked who the targets were set by, and questioned if ambitions exceed achievability. Kathy McAteer explained that targets were based on forecasts of what was achievable, but if targets are not sufficiently challenging managers could be criticised for being under-ambitious. Kathy gave an example of a performance

indicator where the council was given clear direction from CSCI to set the indicator at a certain minimum target. Councillor Harris asked Kathy McAteer if she agreed that the targets were not achievable. Kathy McAteer stated that she considered the targets to be achievable.

Dave Martin stated that targets were intended to be stretching but also achievable. An indicator that was not on target by year end might have seen substantial improvement in relation to other comparable councils. In these cases Council would not experience undue criticism from CSCI.

Officers explained that members should not presume that red indicators indicate that the council was performing badly; officers explained that some targets are perverse and sometimes better outcomes for service users may be achieved although the target was not being met – for example when people had moved into residential care from NHS long term provision.

Brandon informed the panel that when the scorecard was presented to the panel a report would accompany it.

Dave clarified that it was the system and the headings of the scorecard that members were being asked to comment on. Councillor Oliver confirmed that the panel agreed with the principles of a scrutiny scorecard.

RESOLVED

- It was agreed to ensure that the RAG system was clear for those panel members with colour blindness by indicating not only by colour but also by tone and in writing.
- The 12 identified indicators were agreed
- Any indicator that was a cause for concern as identified by the Executive Director at the Strategic Performance Board would be added to the scorecard.

09/06 TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

The panel noted the training opportunities.

TERMINATION OF MEETING

There being no further business the meeting terminated at 7.35 p.m.

Chairman

Date

