

AT A MEETING
of the
**CPA HOUSING IMPROVEMENT
PLAN WORKING GROUP** held at
the Council House, Walsall on
Monday 22nd November, 2004 at 6.00 p.m.

PRESENT

Councillor I. Shires
Councillor R. Walker
Councillor J. Burton
Councillor J. Coughlan
Councillor C. Ault
Councillor D. Pitt
Councillor M. Yasim

Sue Byard
Kathy McAteer
Andrea Little
Shirley Williams
Mark Inglis

1. Selection of Chair

Councillor Ian Shires was selected as chair of the working group.

2. Terms of Reference

The key aim of the working group was to improve outcomes for service users and the following terms of reference were adopted;

- a. To scrutinise all matters relating to the delivery of the CPA Housing Improvement Plan and the Re-inspection of Housing Services.
- b. To scrutinise the impact of the delivery of the CPA Improvement Plan and Re-inspection of services on outcomes for service users and on the delivery of performance indicators and targets.
- c. To review and scrutinise the development of partnership working in the delivery of the Improvement Plan.
- d. To encourage the council as a whole, its executive and other Scrutiny Committees to take into account the implications of their policies and activities on the delivery of housing services that promote social inclusion.
- e. To evaluate and review the effectiveness of the Improvement Plan.
- f. To seek and take into account the views of vulnerable adults and other customers of the housing service.
- g. To inform Overview and Scrutiny Committee(s) of its ongoing work programme.

3. CPA Implementation Plan and Planned Re-inspection

Jason MacGilp gave an outline presentation on the above theme. A self assessment on the service was programmed for May 2005 with a re-inspection in July 2005. Therefore, for scrutiny to have an impact on this re-inspection it would have to take account of this timetable.

The presentation is annexed.

4. (a) Housing Strategy

Sue Byard outlined the position regarding the Housing Strategy for Walsall MBC. The key issue for members was to focus on meeting the needs of local people and that council targets should reflect that priority. Choose and Move was discussed and how to help everyone with a housing need using all aspects of the local housing market, not just social housing provision. Information was circulated on the Empty Property Strategy and the Black and Minority Ethnic Housing Strategy. A possible focus for the working group was access to housing services by local people.

The presentation is annexed.

4. (b) Homelessness

Andrea Little outlined the position regarding homelessness in Walsall. Improvements had been made in service provision though much remained to be done, particularly with black and minority ethnic customers. Preventing homelessness against the main causes was a key target for the council. Access to housing services was a cross cutting issue affecting all the areas of work.

The presentation is annexed.

4. (c) Disabled Facilities Grants/Occupational Therapy

Shirley Williams outlined the current position with the above services and highlighted areas of concern including recruitment issues, waiting times and budgets. Problems with these issues were national and all councils were finding it difficult to provide a quality service. Work was underway to address recruitment problems, including successful recruitment of 5 unqualified staff who will be trained to undertake less complex assessments. Actions to increase professionally trained Occupational Therapists through a trainee scheme will have a longer term impact on local services. Members raised issues about equal access to these services and about how the council communicated and consulted with local people.

The presentation is annexed.

5. Work Plan for the Group and Next Steps.

It was agreed that the working group should concentrate on making an impact before the planned re-inspection in July 2005. Officers agreed to do some further scoping of the key issues and would present options to members at the next meeting. The group would meet in mid January and again in March and April to progress the work prior to self assessment. Members agreed in the meantime to work with officers to gather more in-depth information.

Councillor Coughlan would do some work regarding access to housing services. Councillor Walker would look at the information available to local people. Councillor Ault would look at the DFG/OT issues.

All members would report their findings to the next meeting.

It was agreed that there would need to be a narrow focus to make an impact, but that the group would like a progress report on the improvement plan in March 2005.

Key Actions

Councillors Coughlan, Walker and Ault to meet with relevant H&SC officers and report back to next meeting of the working group.

Officer Group to meet and scope the work programme and prepare options for the next meeting of the working group

Scrutiny Team to identify meeting dates in the new year and publish them at the next meeting.

H&SC Officer to progress main issues in improvement plan in March 2005

H&SC Officers to provide jargon free digestible information for members of the working group.