

AT A MEETING
- of the -
**AIDS AND ADAPTATIONS
WORKING GROUP** held at
the Council House, Walsall on
11 October 2006 at 6.00pm

PRESENT

Councillor Ault
Councillor Griffiths
Councillor Micklewright
Councillor Oliver
Councillor Woodruff
Sue Byard

Mark Wade

Nikki Ehlen

Assistant Director – Strategic
Housing
Housing Standards and Improvement
Manager
Scrutiny Officer

01/06 TO AGREE A LEAD MEMBER

The group decided that there would be a lead member for this working group and agreed that this would be Sue Byard.

02/06 APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for the duration of this meeting.

03/06 TO AGREE A COURSE OF ACTION

Sue Byard informed the group that her intention was to give a historical overview of the service. Sue introduced Mark Wade as one of her four service managers with responsibility for Housing Standards and Improvement.

Members agreed the suggested work programme (tabled).

RESOLVED

That the working group follows the suggested work programme.

04/06 AIDS AND ADAPTATIONS

Mark Wade introduced himself to the group and presented an overview of housing services (annexed). He explained that he would be describing where the service had come from and the plans that were in place for the future.

Sue Byard gave a brief description of the service historically, when it was inherited by Social, Care and Inclusion.

Councillor Woodruff asked if the Council had a sufficient number of Occupational Therapists and how many agency staff were employed.

Mark Wade said that he was able to get this information, and would distribute it through the scrutiny team.

Councillor Griffiths asked if there was a date when the service was transferred to Social, Care and Inclusion.

Officers replied that the service transferred to Social, Care and Inclusion on 1 April 2005, and emphasised that this was transferred as a failing service.

Councillor Ault asked about the progress of bulk ordering of jobs. Sue Byard said that currently a tender was being piloted, and 15 tenders had been received, and 5, had been appointed.

Councillor Ault asked if this work had started. Officers explained that 5 tender applicants had been appointed to act as consultants and Mark Wade was currently distributing work.

The group discussed the plans to have a lift contract in place.

Sue Byard explained that previously every single job had to be tendered creating huge delays, which was not cost effective for the Council.

Officers stated that the Council was working towards a national average of 20 weeks for the completion of works time. This would take a couple of years due to huge workloads.

Mark Wade stated that contracting bulk cases achieved increased value for money. Sue Byard emphasised that at this stage it was a pilot to discover if this provided a better service to customers.

Councillor Micklewright asked if contractors provided the Council with a completion date of work. Officers explained that if work was not finished within the estimated timescale penalties could be imposed.

Sue Byard advised that it was cost effective for private businesses to complete work in a shorter space of time.

Councillor Micklewright asked if there was an independent body that regulates the prices charged to local authorities.

Mark Wade explained that there was a schedule of rates that allows the Council to set prices for building work. This prevents variations in prices set by different contractors.

Councillor Micklewright asked if it was possible to reclaim adaptations when the occupant became deceased.

Mark Wade explained that the grant was governed by national legislation, and the only conditions placed on the grant, were that private landlords must continue to give tenancy to the occupant for 5 years or repay the cost of the adaptation. Also if the occupant sells their home within 15 years and received a repair grant the Council requested the money back.

Members made points of clarity relating to the waiting times. Mark Wade clarified that the average waiting time target for 2006/07 was 40 weeks. Officers stated that these figures were average, but that they would be able to break them down at the end of the financial year.

Mark Wade informed the group that if a property requires large scale work, consideration was given to whether the occupant could move to a more suitable property.

Councillor Griffiths asked officers what action was taken when occupants did not want to move to an adapted property. Officers explained that this would depend upon the individual case, although it would be unusual for this to happen.

Officers informed the group that prior to the creation of the adapted property database it was very difficult to match people to suitable properties.

Councillor Ault congratulated officers on the work they were completing in sensitive situations.

Mark Wade stated that the service area was attempting to improve the service they provided by reducing grant processing time.

Councillor Micklewright asked how the service was funded. Mark Wade explained that it was a mixture of funding received from both the Government and provided by the Council.

Mark Wade advised members that the 'Smartcare' scheme provided an initial small scale assessment, which enabled a non specialist person to assess individuals using a web based system. Mark volunteered to provide members with more information if it was required.

Councillor Griffiths asked what percentage of staff the service had employed to achieve increased results. Mark explained that when they inherited the service there were 2 members of staff, and currently there were 12 members of staff doing casework and technical support.

Councillor Ault asked how the adaptations were maintained and insured.

Officers explained that maintenance was written into the contract with the builders, and insurance of the adaptation was covered by the property insurance.

It was agreed that the contact details of the team would be sent to members through the scrutiny team.

Councillor Oliver asked when the nature of the problems with the service became apparent.

Sue Byard said that it was clear in 2004 after the housing inspection. Sue explained the process that was taken to identify the problems with the service.

Officers stated that the Council and Occupational therapists had service level agreements to agree who does what function.

Mark Wade stated that there was an adaptations steering group which consisted of the OT team, Housing Standards & Improvement Manager, Mark Wade, and Principal Environmental Health Officer, Chris Parkin.

Councillor Oliver asked what the level of new referral was, after clearing the backlog of people waiting for an assessment.

Mark Wade explained that approximately 200 new referrals had come in between July and October. Mark explained that the service was meeting new referrals and not extending the backlog.

RESOLVED

That

- the contact details of the team would be sent to members through the scrutiny team
- the number of occupational therapists and agency staff employed by the Council would be distributed to members

06/06 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The group suggested the following dates as potential future working group dates

- 19 December 2006
- 1 February 2007

07/06 TERMINATION OF THE MEETING

There being no further business the meeting terminated at 7.35