

SOCIAL CARE & INCLUSION SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

Thursday 19 November 2009 at 6.00 p.m.

Panel Members present

Councillor Oliver (Chair)
Councillor Ault
Councillor Douglas-Maul
Councillor Martin
Councillor Paul
Councillor Barton
Councillor Robertson

Other Members present

Councillor D. Pitt (Chair, Regeneration Panel)

Portfolio Holder present

Councillor McCracken

Other Portfolio Holders present

Councillor Andrew (Regeneration)

Officers present

Margaret Willcox	Assistant Director – Adult Services
Mel Davies	LINK Contract Manager
Lyn Eshelby	Shopmobility Manager
Chris Gregory	Business Development Manager
Steph Simcox	Finance Manager
Matthew Underhill	Scrutiny Officer

Invitees

Andrew Moulton	Chair of Shopmobility Town Centre Walsall Management Board
----------------	--

40/09 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received for the meeting from Councillor Woodruff and Councillor Clarke.

41/09 SUBSTITUTIONS

There were no substitutions for the duration of this meeting.

42/09 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest or party whip identified at this meeting.

43/09 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting were noted.

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 6 October, copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

44/09 SHOPMOBILITY SERVICE VALUE FOR MONEY (VFM) REVIEW

The Chair guided the Panel that this item had been moved up the agenda to enable a number of Members and officers to attend. Councillor Martin introduced the report (annexed) explaining that she had undertaken a review of the service with officers responsible for its management. The review assessed the service against a number of key criteria – cost, efficiency and effectiveness. This included benchmarking the service against other local shopmobility services, as well as hearing the views from service users. The Shopmobility Manager and Business Development Manager provided guidance to the Panel regarding the process for undertaking the review:

- Shopmobility Town Centre Walsall has operated for three and half years, based in the Saddler's Shopping Centre. It is a busy service providing support for seven-hundred and fifty members. It has also successfully increased the number of bookings and membership;
- The Shopmobility Manager explained that the Service provides mobility equipment and advice and instruction on the suitability and use of mobility scooters and wheelchairs. In addition, staff provide a wealth of information relating to other services and resources, making referrals and sign-posting other services: including the Welfare Rights Service, Blue Badge, Occupational Therapy and health referrals;
- The Service is overseen by a Management Board, which includes representation from a number of local organisations such as the Centre for Independent Living (CIL);
- The financial challenges faced by the Council mean that the Service regularly faces funding shortfalls. Funding has previously been sourced from the Local Authority Business Growth Incentives (LABGI) scheme and the Working Neighbourhood Fund (WNF). Officers are currently seeking WNF funding. Funding difficulties continue in the current financial climate with a £15,000 to £20,000 shortfall anticipated for the financial year 2011-12. However, this does provide some time to find alternative funding from similar sources;
- The VFM process had highlighted that the service was not well resourced by comparison with other local services. However, it is also recognised that it would not be appropriate to reduce the services that are offered, for example, a reduction in operating hours would impact on service users. There appears to be little opportunity for making savings within Shopmobility Town Centre Walsall which is already delivering a high quality service with very limited resources;
- The VFM document sets out a number of solutions, including a number of less palatable options, including moving the service away from Council control. A more acceptable proposal may be to continue meeting the funding gap through grant funding;
- A further proposal for the future of the service is to seek to operate as a combined service with the CIL as this would support the delivery of reciprocal services. This would also enable both services to benefit from economies of scale. A possibly more aspirational option would be to relocate the service within the new Tesco development or another major developments, such as the Waterfront;
- A combined service with the CIL is favoured by those officers responsible for the operation of Shopmobility. It is also recognised that critical for the future is the identification of a more prominent location for the service. The current location of the service limits the potential for significantly increasing membership;

- In addition, a proposal for a move towards charitable status in conjunction with the CIL offers the prospect of being able to access funding not available to the Council;
- Cllr Martin added that the Ring and Ride service provides critical support for the successful delivery of Shopmobility. However, Ring and Ride vehicles are not permitted to set down in the bus terminus at the entrance to the Saddler's Centre.

A summary of the Panel's discussion is as follows:

- The Chair expressed the view that it was a positive report which demonstrated that the service is proportionally more cost-effective than similar services locally. He felt there was significant value in linking the service with the CIL as well as seeking charitable status;
- Following a Panel query the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration explained that positive initial discussions have been held with Tesco. These discussions form part of wider consideration of the development of a number of relocated and shared services as part of the overall regeneration of Walsall. He also explained that part of the existing challenge faced by both the Shopmobility Town Centre Walsall and the CIL was the high level of rent and the proposed re-location presented the opportunity to reduce costs. He explained that the current location of the service was modelled on services elsewhere which were also based in multi-story car parks. However, unlike Walsall Shopmobility, other shopmobility services elsewhere often enjoyed low cost or rent-free accommodation.
- The Chair of the Regeneration Panel highlighted the importance of effective promotion of the service. It was also important that the service continued in order that the Council is able to respond to the increasing number of elderly people within the borough. It was also vital that the needs of these service users were reflected in the redevelopment of the town centre, for example, avoiding the inclusion of unnecessary kerbs.
- In response to a further Panel query the Shopmobility Manager explained that in terms of generating income through retail, the service currently sold a range of shopping-related disability equipment which generated small administration and handling fee income rather than significant profit. However the service would welcome the opportunity to follow a more retail outlet type operating model. Following a further query, she explained that some national retailers based in the town centre sponsor scooters;
- The Chair of Shopmobility Town Centre Walsall Management Board explained that the Shopmobility Service did not only provide important support for those with disabilities to access the town but also prevents people from becoming isolated at home. In addition, those with disabilities contribute significantly to retail in the town, with estimates suggesting that this group is worth around £4,500,000 to the economy annually.

The Panel voted unanimously to endorse the report and to recommend to Cabinet the proposals for the service as set-out in the VFM review document.

Resolved:

That the Panel recommends the following proposals for the Shopmobility Service:

- 1. pursuing links to Working Neighbourhoods Funding;**

2. combining premises with Walsall Centre for Independent Living to provide a better location for both services;

and;

3. exploring charitable status in conjunction with the Centre for Independent Living.

Following the conclusion of this item the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, the Chair of the Regeneration Panel, the Shopmobility Manager and the Business Development Manager left the meeting.

45/09 LOCAL INVOLVEMENT NETWORK (LINK)

The LINK Contract Manager introduced the briefing note (annexed) explaining that the newly appointed host organisation, Black Country Housing Group (BCHG), had been in post for three weeks:

- The contract with the outgoing host organisation, the Carer's Federation, was terminated on 2nd November 2009. The final invoice related to the concluding period of that contact is currently being awaited. Once received this will be reviewed prior to a final payment being made;
- Existing host staff have transferred to BCHG and completed a successful office move to accommodation in the town centre. This new location for the host was also requested by the Walsall LINK;
- BCHG has already met both informally with the LINK, as well as officially at a LINK Board meeting earlier in November. In addition, contract review meetings have been undertaken between the Council, BCHG and Walsall LINK as part of the drive to deliver an increasingly effective LINK on behalf of local residents.

46/09 LINKS TO WORK

The Assistant Director introduced the report (annexed) explaining that work was being undertaken to ensure all opportunities were being considered for those in at-risk posts:

- A twenty-nine week redeployment package has been developed, in addition to the statutory seventeen week job trial, these can continue for a further twelve weeks rather than this period being taken as lieu of notice;
- At this stage twelve of the sixteen in at-risk posts have expressed an interest in voluntary redundancy, with a further two interested in early retirement;
- A summary of the Panel's discussion is as follows:
- The Chair invited Steve Mellor, Unison Representative, to set-out a number of queries. He expressed concern regarding the absence of an open and transparent process. He was aware that one individual had agreed to be put at risk in order to start a job trial. The process has seemingly been delayed and the individual had now been at-risk for ten or eleven weeks with the associated uncertainty resulting in them suffering from a significant degree of stress. In his view it appeared that the job trial had been blocked by senior management. Responding to this query the Assistant Director explained that this related to a job trial for one of those in an at-risk post within the team managing the Future Jobs Fund. The process had

been delayed due to the complexity of the associated paperwork relating to the external funding for the post. However, it is now expected that the paperwork will be completed shortly. Following this issue being escalated to senior officers it has also been agreed to re-start the job-trial process for this individual;

- Steve Mellor also raised a further concern regarding some of those in at-risk posts and a number of concerns regarding the way information had been communicated. This included some of those in at-risk posts still awaiting letters which they were advised on 9th November 2009 that they would receive regarding requests for early retirement or voluntary redundancy. The Assistant Director explained that an important but lengthy process of determining and then advising individuals of the most appropriate option was underway. For example, in terms of the potential impact for some following the changes to pension rules next April for those over fifty but under fifty-five. For a number of those in at-risk posts it is likely that the most suitable option may be to take early retirement and then look for redeployment. A further requirement of the process is that as there is a fixed amount of funding, to ensure a fair and equitable process it is necessary to base the calculations for these decisions on the total number of those in at-risk posts rather than only those who have expressed an interest at this stage;
- Following a further query the Assistant Director explained that instances of voluntary redundancy would be funded by the Council. However, the costs of early retirement would be met by the West Midlands Pension Fund;
- Following a further Panel query the Assistant Director explained that it was her understanding that a dedicated HR officer continued to be directly involved with supporting those in at-risk posts in identifying suitable alternative employment opportunities. However, she agreed to confirm the position and report back to Panel Members;
- The Panel agreed that it was important that clear information was communicated to avoid any unnecessary confusion or distress. It was also crucial that the appropriate route was identified for each individual and speedy resolutions achieved for any problems in undertaking the process;
- The Portfolio Holder for Social Care and Health observed that it appeared that a number of issues had arisen as a consequence of how some apparently definitive statements had been made and how they had been received by those in at-risk posts. She emphasised that the vulnerability of the client group had been recognised and a policy had been agreed which included a thorough job-match process, as well as giving job-trials where potentially suitable roles have been identified. The Portfolio Holder concluded by explaining that some delays have been a consequence of changes in processes.
- The Chair observed that it was important that the broader issue of how the Links to Work service supports the access of the disabled in Walsall to employment continued to be considered by the Panel. Officers agreed to bring an update to the Panel to a future meeting.

Resolved:

That:

- 1. the Assistant Director would provide guidance to Panel Members regarding the participation of HR in supporting those in at-risk posts in identifying alternative posts.**

and

2. that an update on the activity of Links to Work will be provided at a future Panel meeting.

46/09 QUARTERLY FINANCIAL MONITORING

The Finance Manager introduced the report (annexed) explaining that the anticipated outturn position for this financial year was approximately £200,000. However, this would only be achieved if the corrective action plan was delivered which itself was subject to a number of risks. Under the RAG rating system, a total of over £600,000 of Red risks, forecast as overspends, existed including in relation to anticipated contractual savings within Young Adults with Disabilities (YADS), Learning Disabilities (LD) and Mental Health (MD). Amber risks, in relation to overall savings expected to be achieved during the current financial year, totalled just under £1m. This included anticipated savings in relation to the independent sector residential and nursing for YADS of £186,000. She explained that the newly appointed Joint Commissioning Manager would also be reviewing the financial position throughout Social Care and Inclusion. It is the view of the management team that a key priority is the protection of vulnerable adults. In addition, surplus funding which was to be utilised within 2010/11 for the Housing 21 scheme has been authorised to remain within the Social Care and Inclusion budget this year. This will enable it to be used rather than necessitate demands being placed on the Council's overall reserves, however will put further pressures on the budget for 2010/11. In response to a Panel query the Finance Manager explained that nationally and locally demand for services was growing while the amount of funding available was declining. This meant that difficult decisions would now need to be made regarding those services that could be delivered and those it was no longer possible to fund.

47/09 SHAPING THE FUTURE OF CARE: CONSULTATION

The Assistant Director provided an update explaining that following discussions with the political groups regarding the green paper consultation it was agreed to submit a reflection of the views expressed. Following submission the Council is now on a list of those contributors that the Government can contact for further feedback:

- The feedback included expressing concerns regarding the absence of ring-fenced funding;
- The observation that partnership working is essential, including joint-appointments, and shared systems for management and accounting;
- The importance of the adoption of national standards to ensure consistency. It was also crucial that those standards reflected different levels of dependency;
- It was also agreed that a response to the consultation would not include selecting one of the three options for funding the new arrangements. Instead, Members have requested that funding is based on a taxation system relating to affordability or earnings. Further, it was the view of Members that an insurance-based approach was not appropriate. However, if this approach was adopted Members would want to understand the impact on National Insurance;
- Within the submission a request has been paper for the Government to report back on the wider policy in relation to the White Paper and the associated timescales. (The White Paper is currently due in February 2010);

During the following the discussion it was observed that there appears to be some uncertainty regarding the definition of personal care under the proposals, as well as the

need for assurances for those under sixty-five. The important role of the third sector within the new arrangements was also highlighted.

48/09 WORK PROGRAMME 2009/10

It was agreed that the Panel would receive a report from the Personalisation working group at a future meeting. The Work Programme and Forward Plan were noted.

49/09 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Chair confirmed the date of the next meeting was 30 November 2009.

The meeting terminated at 7:36 pm

DRAFT