

HEALTH, SOCIAL CARE & INCLUSION SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

Thursday 10 July 2008 at 6.00 p.m.

Panel Members present

Councillor T. Oliver (Chair)
Councillor C. Ault (Vice-chair)
Councillor M. Bird
Councillor H. Sarohi
Councillor C. Micklewright

Also present

Jackie Brannon
Rev. Mark Kinder – St. Paul's Church
Patti Lane – Clubbers Ministry
Sam Leach – St. Paul's Church
Mary Smith – Glebe Centre
Vicky Smith – Glebe Centre

Officers present

Sue Byard – Assistant Director – Strategic Housing
Margaret Willcox – Assistant Director – Adult Services
Andrea Potts – Head of Supported Housing
Alison Jarrett – Head of Service – Finance
Julie Jones – Homelessness & Housing Service
Manager
Nigel Imber - Group Accountant - Service Projects &
Older People
Craig Goodall – Acting Principal Scrutiny Officer

09/08 APOLOGIES

Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillors I. Robertson and V. Woodruff.

10/08 SUBSTITUTIONS

The following substitution to the panel was submitted for the duration of the meeting:-

- Delete: Councillor I. Robertson
- Substitute: Councillor H. Sarohi

11/08 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

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

12/08 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS.

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 5 June 2008, copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

(annexed)

13/08 TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

The panel noted the training opportunities as detailed in the agenda.

14/08 FORWARD PLAN

The forward plan as at 7 July 2008 was submitted.

(annexed)

Resolved

That the forward plan be noted.

15/08 HOMELESSNESS IN WALSALL

Members received presentations from invited guests from the Glebe Centre, St. Matthews Church and St. Paul's Church followed by a presentation from Andrea Potts regarding tackling homelessness in Walsall.

The Chairman welcomed the invited guests to the meeting and explained that he invited them to the meeting following reports on homelessness in the local press.

Rev. Kinder explained that the numbers of homeless people and sofa surfers (people who are have no home of their own but stay with friends/family) in Walsall was higher than the official published figure. This was known due to the substantial interactions with homeless people through the Glebe Centre and separate direct assistance. He noted that the prescribed Government model for how to conduct the count presented limitations.

He reported that homelessness was a complex issue to tackle as it often included additional issues such as debt and drug and alcohol addiction. He appreciated that there was some provision available to assist homeless people but he felt that this was not sufficient.

He stated that he wanted to begin a process of talks with the Council to discuss the delivery of homelessness support as many of the organisations assisting homeless people relied solely on donations and volunteer support.

Mary Smith informed Members that the Glebe Centre (GC) was open 9.30am-4.30pm each day and had 500 visitors a month. The GC offered cheap food, clothing and support to its visitors.

Approximately 70/80% of its visitors were homeless with 30% of homeless visitors not claiming the benefits that they were entitled to as they were of no fixed abode. This led to individuals to commit crime in order to survive.

She explained that a halfway house was needed to take homeless people off the streets and prepare them for life in their own home. Quite often a homeless person gets home they are quickly evicted by the landlord for allowing other homeless people to stay with them.

Patti Lane reported that every Friday night she assisted in operating a outdoor facility in Walsall town centre that provided hot drinks. She thanked the Council's Chief Executive for standing with them for two hours recently. She explained that homeless people needed help to assist them off the streets.

Andrea Potts gave a presentation to Members on homelessness in Walsall.

(annexed)

The following are the principle points from the presentation and the ensuing discussion:

- Rough sleeping figures were counted annually through an annual hotspot check which informed the Best Value Performance Indicator. It was recognised that this indicator was limited which was why the Council's housing strategy was committed to undertaking a quarterly count in conjunction with service providers and the third sector. It was acknowledged that the indicator only provided a snapshot in time of homelessness in Walsall that was subject to variances throughout the year.
- It was acknowledged that there was a cohort of approximately 60-70 people with complex housing / social issues presenting to different agencies in the Walsall area.
- It was important that homeless people accessed the services that were available to them. It was noted that homeless people often had a reluctance to engage with organisations like the Council so it was important that other providers and the third sector encouraged homeless people to access services.
- It was noted that not all the homelessness services were funded or operated by the Council. The services provided by the Council were equivalent to those provided by similar sized local authorities.
- The homelessness service had a staff budget of £700,000 and a commissioning budget of £79,000. The commissioning budget broke down as follows:
 - £20,000 to the third sector
 - £15,000 to the prevention fund
 - £10,000 to the Domestic Violence Forum
 - £30,000 for a Prevention Officer
 - £4,000 for information technology systems
- In terms of networking for homeless peoples services the Council was happy to act as the co-ordinating body. It was important that a range of partners who provided services to homeless were involved in this meeting, for example organisations that assisted people with drug and alcohol addiction. It was suggested that the invited guests would benefit from engaging with Walsall Voluntary Action.
- A Member expressed the opinion that the homelessness strategy should be amended to provide more outreach support to engage homeless people. It was explained that the council had recently commissioned 'Hi's and Low's' to provide outreach work to homeless people. Hi's and Low's were currently assisting 20/30 individuals.
- Mark Kinder commented that the range of services available to support homeless people was impressive. The major problem was accessing these services at the time they were required, for example at evenings and weekends.
- It was explained that a service directory was available containing contact details for all homelessness service providers.
- A 'single point of entry' to homelessness services was an area that was being explored for services funded via Supporting People grant. One existed already for

housing advice via the Council's first stop shop but not specifically for Supporting people funded services .

- It was acknowledged that homeless former military personnel were a problem particular to London and the South East and not a regular feature in Walsall.
- Julie Jones advised that work was undertaken with prison inmates before they were released to assist in resettlement once released. Margaret Smith informed the meeting that she had met three homeless people in the last week who had recently been released from prison.
- It was acknowledged that a night shelter for homeless people was not the best solution as experience elsewhere showed that this type of provision could perpetuate homelessness.
- What was required was more capacity in the current support schemes and additional partnership working between the private, public and voluntary sector. It was important that a range of options were available for people in an emergency.
- Mark Kinder explained about a successful scheme that was being operated by the Emmaus Project which was working with Walsall Housing Group (WHG) to take on a house and create a homeless community.
- The Welfare Rights Service could help homeless people claim the benefits that they are entitled to.
- Hi's and Low's were engaged on a short term contract.
- The Citizens Advice Bureau are setting up a Court desk at the Courts to assist people with debt issues before hearings.
- It was noted that individuals could experience problems obtaining a house through WHG if they had fallen into rent arrears in the past. It was noted that WHG / other social landlords would expect to receive at least a small payment to repay the debt each week prior to the person being offered another property. It was unlikely that WHG / other landlords would waive the outstanding amount completely.
- The Glebe Centre received lottery funding for an alcohol worker that expired next year. It was noted that the Council could only fund specific schemes for short time periods. It was suggested that the Safer Walsall Partnership could be a source of further funding for the Glebe Centre.
- A Member enquired whether or not section 106 monies gained through the Development Control Committee could be used to fund homelessness projects?

Patti Lane handed in a petition to the Chair which called for the Council to make proper provision for the needs of homeless people in Walsall. The Chair accepted the petition.

The Chair thanked the invited guests for attending the meeting and sharing their views with the Panel. He invited them back to a further meeting of the Panel in six months time so that the issues could be monitored.

Resolved

That the issue of homelessness in Walsall be reconsidered in six months.

16/08 COMMISSION FOR SOCIAL CARE INSPECTORATE ACTION PLAN

Members were informed of progress in delivering the Commission for Social Care Inspectorate (CSCI) action plan, significant developments that impact on service delivery and that a full progress report will be submitted to the Panel's next meeting.

17/08 FINANCIAL MONITORING

Members were informed of the closing financial position for Social Care and Inclusion in the financial year 2007/08.

Nigel Imber reported that the 2007/08 outturn position had turned out better than expected. The whole directorate was £125K overspent by the end of year. This was achieved through tight budget management, corrective actions and additional funding received from Walsall tPCT. Budget pressures had been caused by the increased cost of individual care packages within younger adults and learning disabilities and a growth in numbers of Older People with Mental Health needs.

An indicative 2008/09 forecast demonstrated a £500k overspend by the end of the year. This is because £500k of procurement savings would possibly be unachievable. Margaret Willcox commented that when the Council originally anticipated this procurement saving, food and fuel prices had been lower. This economic climate could not have been anticipated at the time the savings target was set.

Members requested a report on corrective action being undertaken to the next meeting.

Resolved

That the corrective action plan to rectify the budget for 2008/09 be presented at the next meeting of the Panel.

18/08 PERFORMANCE MONITORING

The Panel received the Social Care and Inclusion scorecard measures for the fourth quarter/year end outturn for 2007-2008.

Brandon Scott-Omenka informed the Panel that a new scorecard would be presented to the Panel at its next meeting that included existing indicators and the new national indicator set. He drew the attention of Members to paragraph 2.3 of the report that proposed reporting on red indicators that had gone red and dropped a CSCI rating band or gone red and also ranked at two CSCI rating bands or less. The Panel noted this change to the future reporting method.

Following a question from the Chair Members were reassured that targets for housing had been set and were not 'to be reviewed' as listed in the appendix.

In response to a question Margaret Willcox explained that there were staffing issues in three areas, namely:

1. Housing 21
2. Intensive Home Care
3. Learning Disabilities Services

Margaret Willcox noted that staff turnover was high within social care at Walsall. She added that pay levels and delays with job evaluation were increasing the problems.

She further reported that sickness levels were of major concern. Investigations had revealed that long term absenteeism was the main cause of the problems. Each case was being reviewed so that decisions could be made about the future work force.

In response to a question Sue Byard explained that waiting times for aid and adaptations were increasing as resources were being directed at reducing the waiting list.

19/08 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 28 August 2008.

The meeting terminated at 7.43 pm.

Chair:

Date: