

SPECIAL HEALTH SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

Wednesday, 9 April, 2014 at 6.00 p.m.

Conference Room, Council House, Walsall

Panel Members Present

Councillor M. Longhi (Chair)
Councillor D. James (Vice-Chair)
Councillor M. Flower
Councillor V. Woodruff

Officers Present

Keith Skerman
Andy Rust

318/14 Apologies

Apologies were received on behalf of Councillors E. Russell and R. Burley

319/14 Substitutions

There were no substitutions for the duration of the meeting.

320/14 Declarations of interest and party whip

Councillor V. Woodruff declared an interest as an employee of Walsall Healthcare Trust.

321/14 **Local Government (Access to Information) Act, 1985 (as amended)**

Resolved

That the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the items set out in the private agenda for the reasons set out therein and Section 100A of the Local Government Act, 1972.

322/14 **Walsall Society for the Blind proposal to cease minibus service**

The Chair of the Health Scrutiny Panel informed members that this issue had been reported in the local press, and it was considered appropriate for the Panel to debate. A request was sent to the Walsall Society of the Blind to provide an opportunity for Board Members to give an explanation of the proposal to cease the minibus service. Board representatives declined to attend and instead sent a statement for the Panel to consider.

The statement was read out for the Panel and Members of the Public to consider (annexed).

Paragraph 1; -

Brenda Brady, a service user of Walsall Society of the Blind was invited to address the Panel. Mrs Brady stated that originally Service users were not consulted about the termination of the mini bus service. This only happened because service users demanded that it continued. The cost of the day centre was discussed, as new users had to pay £15 to attend for the day, an additional £6 mini bus charge and for any refreshments or activities during the day. It was noted that this was prohibitively expensive and deterred people from attending, which in turn reduced demand for the mini bus service. Service users stated that they felt that management at the Walsall Society for the Blind wanted to close the day centre.

Members asked how the Board were elected, Service Users were not aware of the process for electing new Board Members.

Paragraph 2 –

Service users informed the Panel that there was a charge of £6 per day for transport and service users had raised £7,000 to contribute to transport funding through fund raising events. However buses would now be sold off despite them having a 12 month MOT.

Paragraph 3 and 4 –

The use of alternative forms of transport was discussed. Service users expressed concern at the use of taxi firms as current arrangements meant that vulnerable users were taken from the front door, and helped on the bus whilst the driver also ensured that the house was secure. When service users were dropped off they were also taken to their front door and their welfare was ensured.

The Chair expressed concern that the statement did not indicate that firm alternative arrangements have been made or the statement did not expand on how volunteers would be used.

Paragraph 5 –

Mr Bostock a service user stated that figures of 1705 service users had been exaggerated, and this made the percentage of people using the transport service look small.

Service users stated that there was an officer who visited individuals and assessed them soon after they have received a diagnosis. This officer is also available if anyone is in trouble.

The Executive Director for Social Care and Inclusion explained that the Council made a financial contribution to the following services; -

- Registration of information and advice service, to keep a statutory register and give advice/info to help blind/partially sighted people
- Money is provided for a eye clinic liaison service
- A small grant is provided towards the overall cost of the building for the whole society

The Chair asked that these figures were sent to him by e-mail.

Councillor Pete Smith stated that the treasurer's report of Walsall Society for the Blind suggested that the Council provided £105,798 to the society.

Service Users stated that the building was provided to the Society of the Blind rent free for 70 years from Caldmore Housing. The Panel were informed that the Society does not provide anything to the service users free of charge, the only thing that they do provide is the building. Refreshments, days out, celebrations are all paid for by service users.

The financial position of the Society of the Blind was discussed, and it was suggested that the Society had available funds to pay for the minibus service. It was also stated that Council austerity measures would have not had an impact on the Society as suggested in their statement.

The Chair stated that it was a matter of great and disappointment regret that Walsall Society for the Blind were not able to attend, and there were no indications in the statement from the Society to suggest that the cessation of this service was absolutely necessary. The statement provided does not answer the questions that were raised at the Panel.

Service Users emphasised the hard work that is carried out by volunteers. Concern was expressed about the cost of the mini bus service and how much they were costing, as contradictory figures were being used.

Councillor Pete Smith expressed concern that the statement provided by the Panel did not state the full facts or include the financial contributions made by

service users. The issue of Council representatives was raised and it was suggested that feedback should be sought from all Members representing the Council on outside bodies. It was suggested that the bad publicity from the cessation of the mini bus service may reduce the amount of money the Society receives from donors.

A Member expressed concern that the Council was providing funding to this organisation and the Board representatives were not willing to be held to account. It was suggested that the Charity Commission may be able to provide some assistance to service users who feel that this decision will cause vulnerable beneficiaries serious harm. It was urged that the decision was brought back to the Panel.

Service Users were also advised to contact Centro to find out more about the special needs transport group, who may be able to help provide transport. Ring and Ride was also considered as an alternative option.

Members stated that whilst they would try to support the service as best they can, they can only make comments. It was stated that if possible the following recommendation was sent to full Council for the debate on 14th April.

Resolved

The Health Scrutiny and Performance Panel politely ask that the Walsall Society for the Blind reconsider the decision to cease the minibus transport service to the day centres. On the basis of the information provided, the treasurer's financial report and in lieu of Board Member representation it would appear that Walsall Society for the Blind seem to be in a position to continue the minibus service, if not expand it. The Health Scrutiny Panel believes that this would be in the best interests of service user's health and well being.

The Panel adjourned for 5 minutes.

The Panel reconvened.

323/14 Disposal of Foetal Remains

The Chief Executive of Walsall Healthcare Trust thanked the Chair for inviting him to address the Panel. The Panel were informed that the Trust had received a Freedom of Information request which had led to Officers discovering 86 foetal remains, the remains were thought to be less than 24 weeks into the pregnancy, and these were the result of terminations or miscarriage. Further detail on this was contained within the briefing note (tabled).

It was understood that a backlog arose due to a form not being properly completed. An independent body would be reviewing the reasons how and why this had happened. The Trust were concerned that internal systems did not highlight that this issue at an earlier stage. There was now a revised process for disposing of remains, these new arrangements had been inspected by the human tissue authority. In addition to this the whole NHS has received new advice on the disposal of remains.

The Chief Executive of Walsall Healthcare Trust stated that this shouldn't have happened and offered his sincere apologies to anyone that had been affected by this. It had caused sincere distress when it shouldn't have. Advice had been sought from national organisations to decide how to handle the situation. Direct contact was made with a small number of women (5), because it was in their records that they wanted to know what had happened to the remains. It was decided that they didn't know enough about other cases past or present situations or circumstances to not cause distress. A phone line was established, and in two weeks the Trust received 60 phone calls. Just 2 calls were from people who were directly affected. Those who were contacted or contacted the Trust and were directly affected had their wishes respected about the disposal of the remains.

The results of the independent review were to be taken to the May Board.

The following were principal points of discussion; -

- A clinician's signature was missing from a form that was needed for it to be authorised
- An update should be received by the Panel in the future
- The incident had triggered a set of further investigations
- The remains were in a fridge within the mortuary designed for the purpose of storing remains

The Chair stated that he had been shocked to hear what had happened, and needed to bring this to the Scrutiny Panel to seek assurances for the people of Walsall, however had been reassured by the steps taken by the Trust. The Chair expressed disappointment that certain Solicitors had tried to use the situation to make money without considering people's feelings.

Resolved that; -

Health Scrutiny and Performance Panel Members should receive the independent review report at a future meeting.

324/14 Date of next meeting

It was noted that the next meeting would be 24 April, 2014 at 6.00 p.m.

Termination of meeting

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

Signed:

Date: