

## **SOCIAL CARE AND INCLUSION SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL**

TUESDAY 15 January 2013 AT 6.00 P.M.

**Panel Members Present:** Councillor T. Oliver (Chair)  
Councillor B. Douglas-Maul  
Councillor D. Barker  
Councillor R. Burley  
Councillor L. Rattigan  
Councillor J. Rochelle  
Councillor D. Coughlan

**Officers Present:** Rose Collinson, Interim Executive Director (Children's Services)  
Andy Rust, Head of Joint Commissioning  
Suzanne Joyner, Head of Community Care (Partnerships)  
Lloyd Haynes, Finance Manager - SC&I and Finance Projects Team  
Lynn Hall, Head of Benefits  
Matthew Underhill, Committee Governance & Business Manager

### **227/13 APOLOGIES**

There were no apologies received. The Chair advised the Panel that Rose Collinson was currently acting into the statutory role of director of Social Care & Inclusion. A interim appointment to the post of Executive Director of Social Care & Inclusion was expected shortly.

### **228/13 SUBSTITUTIONS**

There were no substitutions for the duration of the meeting

### **229/13 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP**

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

### **230/13 MINUTES**

The Panel reviewed the minutes of the previous meeting.

### **Resolved:**

**That the minutes of the meeting held on 20 November 2012, copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.**

## **231/13 THE EFFECTS OF THE GOVERNMENT'S CHANGES ON WALSALL BOROUGH**

The Head of Benefits introduced the report. The following is a summary of the report and subsequent discussion:

- It was explained that the attached report had been produced by consultants early in 2012 and so was based on the information available at that time. It considered the impact of government benefit changes on Walsall residents. This included that by 2014 3,000 claimants were anticipated to be entirely removed from the benefit system. A reduction of 5,100 in those receiving incapacity benefit (IB) or employment support allowance (ESA) was also anticipated compared with the current total in receipt of over 13,000. The report anticipated that by 2013/14 the changes will have a total impact on the local economy of £23.2m;
- It was explained that the council had taken action in response to the anticipated impact on social tenants by working with Registered Social Landlords and private landlords. This includes assisting with signposting social tenants to the Welfare Rights team in order to maximise their benefit income. It was anticipated that approximately 25% of all social tenants (784) will experience a 25% drop in housing benefits, the remaining 75% (3,400) will experience a 14% drop. It was explained that the introduction of the benefit cap had been delayed until September 2013 which would assist local residents in the short term. Following a Panel question it was explained that efforts were being made to prioritise those social tenants with the greatest level of need, this included those with significant debt problems, while others were being signposted to Jobcentre Plus;
- The Chair and other Members agreed that they found the report very depressing with decisions taken at national level having a significant impact on residents in Walsall. Following a Member query officers agreed to update the report to reflect the potentially positive impact on the local economy which might be produced by those who would no longer be eligible for ESA and whom might then move into employment. A Member highlighted her concerns regarding the impact of the benefits changes on children in effected families. Following a further query it was explained that RSL's had taken the lead in supporting their tenants, while the council had taken the lead on tenants with private landlords. The Member also pointed out that foster carers were not exempt from the bedroom tax. In response it was explained that this was an issue and in the first instance it was anticipated that these families would be given a top-up payment to cover the cost of the bedroom tax. A similar approach would be taken to tackle the immediate difficulties faced by others following the changes. However, officers agreed with a Member that the initial use of discretionary housing payments would not solve the long term impact. In terms of the impact of the changes, including the reduction in housing benefit entitlement, on social tenants with disabilities it was explained that work would be undertaken with those whose homes had been adapted to their needs to seek to maximise their benefit entitlement and enable them to remain in the property.

**Resolved:**

**That the report be noted.**

## 232/13 TASTE FOR LIFE MEALS SERVICE UPDATE

The Head of Joint Commissioning introduced the report. A summary of the subsequent discussion was as follows:

- A Member observed that 580 residents in receipt of meal provision or assistance via Taste for Life was a small figure. The Member expressed disappointment that the report did not include a list of those who have taken up the option of establishing luncheon clubs and similar facilities. Members also expressed concerns that the report did not provide any new information and lacked any quantifiable information regarding those making use of the service and those who had elected not to use the service. The Head of Joint Commissioning explained that 580 represented a significant rise from the original 300 residents who had initially opted to use the service. He also noted that the council no longer directly commissioned the service but instead signposted and assisted individuals in making use of a number of local providers. It was therefore difficult to know what was happening in terms of the delivery of the service to local residents. A Member suggested that each of the organisations who operated luncheon clubs or similar should be asked to make a return regarding the use of their services and the views of service users regarding the quality. A Member also highlighted concerns regarding the effectiveness of the council's sign-posting of services particularly in the light of an ageing population and the likely increase in demand.
- The Chair noted that the Panel had supported the decision to end the meals on wheels service. However, he pointed out that a duty of care existed for the council and Members towards these residents. He queried how the Panel would be able to know if ending the meals on wheels service was the right decision without the appropriate information in terms of take up of Taste For Life and the alternative arrangements being made by those who had chosen to opt out. Officers agreed to provide a report updating the position with the original 300 residents who had been in receipt of the meals on wheels service. It was proposed that the report would provide details of the signposting activity undertaken by the council, as well as the work undertaken to support self-funders.

### **Resolved:**

**That a report be provided updating the position with the original 300 residents who had been in receipt of the meals on wheels service. In addition the report will provide details of the signposting activity undertaken by the council, as well as the work undertaken to support self-funders; and**

**the report be noted.**

## 233/13 CARERS STRATEGY

The Head of Service (Community Partnerships) introduced the presentation. The following is a summary of the presentation and subsequent discussion:

- It was explained that a new Carer's Strategy had been developed in 2012. Work undertaken to get structures and processes in place to support the strategy was continuing. This includes the development of a Carer's Board based on a multi-agency approach. The Board will receive regular updates from identified lead officers in relation to progress on a range of areas for carers in Walsall. Significant partnership links have also been established including with Dudley and Walsall Mental Health Trust and the council's Children's Services. In addition, a series of working groups have been established. The work currently undertaken includes a review and revision of the carer assessment process. Other activity includes raising awareness of carer issues. Other notable activity was an event in December 2012 to mark "carer's rights day" which was aimed at sharing information on carer's rights and the support available, while the Head of Service (Community Partnerships) has been appointed as Regional Lead for Carers;
- It was explained that the draft Care and Support Bill aims to significantly strengthen the role of carers. This includes the introduction of a carer's support plan with an associated assessment and individual budget, with responsibility placed on the council to ensure that the assessment is undertaken.
- Following a Member query in terms of the funding of the proposed carer's support plan it was explained that the guidance previously received from the Government was that all new legislation would be introduced with funding attached. A Member highlighted the important work she was aware of in the promotion and signposting of carers to services. This included coordinated activity of the Integrated Young People's Support Service (IYPSS) and the Carer's Centre. In response to a Member query it was explained that the council could review individual circumstances in determining whether a carer was entitled to make use of respite care and that one-off payments could also be made available. This process would be undertaken in a fair and equitable way, with an eligibility assessment undertaken. Total funding of this support was forecast to be around £300k for 2012/13. The meeting agreed that there were individuals in the community who were carers but who perhaps were not officially recognised as such. It would be important that they were made aware of the support available. The Interim Executive Director for Children's Services pointed out that signposting of support could be undertaken by a range of different stakeholders in the community including the council, GPs and pharmacists;
- It was proposed by the Interim Executive Director for Children's Services that the carer's guide that officers had agreed to revise at the previous Panel meeting be produced. This should include details of the respite care available and that contact should be made with carer's organisations for any further information that could be incorporated into the guide. She emphasised this could then be circulated to carer organisations and Members. She also stated that it would be important for the guide to then be regularly updated.

**Resolved:**

**That the Carer's guide be revised and circulated; and  
the presentation be noted.**

## **234/13 DRAFT REVENUE BUDGET 2013/14 FOR SOCIAL CARE & HEALTH PORTFOLIO**

The Head of Joint Commissioning introduced the report. The following is a summary of the discussion

- It was explained that budget savings required for the next financial year were £1.7m. A significant proportion of these savings would be made through the conclusion of amendments to the Housing 21 contract. Officers also explained that significant funding support would also continue to be provided for the cost of adaptations to the properties of homeowners with disabilities. The ultimate repayment being made via a charge being placed on the property. In addition, a number of one off costs for redundancies would mean that in the medium and longer term budget savings would be achieved.

**Resolved:**

**The Panel noted the draft budget proposals.**

## **235/13 WORK PROGRAMME 2012/13 AND FORWARD PLAN**

**Resolved:**

**That the work programme and Forward Plan be noted.**

## **236/13 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The Chair informed Members that the date of the next meeting would be 4 March 2013 at 6.00pm.

The meeting terminated at 7.30 p.m.

Chair:

Date: