

SOCIAL CARE & INCLUSION SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

THURSDAY 7 October 2010 AT 6.00 P.M.

Panel Members Present

Councillor T Oliver (Chair)
Councillor A Paul (Vice-Chair)
Councillor D Turner
Councillor J Barton
Councillor M Burley
Councillor B Douglas-Maul
Councillor I Azam
Councillor Woodruff

Officers Present

Paul Davies – Executive Director, Adult Social Care & Inclusion
Andy Rust – Head of Vulnerable Adults and Joint Commissioning Unit
Lloyd Haynes – Finance Account Manager
Paul Cooper – Customer Care Manager
David Lockwood – Housing Standards & Improvement Manager
Matthew Underhill – Scrutiny Officer

30/10 APOLOGIES

There were no apologies received for the duration of the meeting.

31/10 SUBSTITUTIONS

Councillor I Azam has substituted for the remainder of the Municipal Year for the late Councillor A Griffiths.

32/10 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

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

33/10 MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting were noted.

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 2 September 2010, copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

34/10 MAJOR ADAPTATIONS AND DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT (DFG)

The Housing Standards & Improvement Manager introduced the presentation (annexed). The main points of the presentation and subsequent discussion were as follows:

- Delivery of the programme is split between Regeneration and Social Care and Inclusion. An Occupational Therapist assessment is followed by a referral to Housing. Subsequent elements of the process include determining whether an individual qualifies for additional support such as a Heating Through Warmth (HTW) grant, works designed and priced through to scheme approval and on site monitoring to completion within agreed timescales. The Ombudsman recently highlighted the service as a exemplar of best practice;
- In line with a Cabinet requirement contractor prices are fixed until April 2013. In fact all prices that have been agreed are at a level below which the council has previously paid. In addition, a set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) have been set with contractors to enable residents to receive a robust and consistent standard of service. For example, contractors must inform the council within 21 days of agreeing to undertake work of the exact start date. The speed of the process has also increased as where as previously quotes had to be sort from three or four contracts a schedule of rates is now operated. While a national framework agreement with an established lift manufacturer is also used further reducing delay;
- An increasing number of DFGs are within permitted development and do not require planning permission resulting in work being undertaken more quickly. Close working with Planning has led to faster approvals, although some schemes must be considered by the Planning Committee;
- Streamlining of schemes under £12,000 includes the introduction of a simple application form and process which has resulted in faster approvals and officer time re-allocated to more complex schemes. In the case of schemes of under £5,000 it is estimated to save 75% of time from referral to approval;
- Savings have also been made by the introduction of leasing arrangements. For example the council will lease a stairlift to a resident for 10 years after which ownership passes to the resident. However, if the stairlift is no longer required after a shorter period the council would receive a refund of the cost on a sliding scale;
- In respect of target setting, where streamlining of existing applications takes place it is not possible to deduct the original period of time from referral to approval. At present the average period of time in weeks from referral to approval is 49 weeks, although it is anticipated that this will soon fall to 48 weeks. At present the process includes three to four weeks for drawings to be prepared, planning takes up to six weeks, with approval taking three to four months for complex schemes. This marks a significant improvement in the process which had previously taken up to eighteen months;
- In responding to Panel queries, the Housing Standards and Improvement Manager explained that much of the work undertaken had successfully reduced the time of the referral to approval process. However, there were instances where individual residents requested that works are delayed by a number of weeks in order to enable families to adjust to the impact of schemes. Further challenges exist where individual need increases requiring additional services and results in a further lag between referral

- and approval;
- Performance figures also include applications made by residents in which the council does not participate. This was approximately 5% of all applications. Officers agreed to provide guidance to Members setting out both a combined total and separate totals for council-assisted and private individual applications;
- The Executive Director, Adult Social Care & Inclusion acknowledged the importance of providing the fastest service possible to local residents, particularly given the distressing circumstances in which individuals sometimes find themselves. However, services had to be delivered within a budget which demanded that priority was given where need was greatest.

Resolved:

That officers will provide Members with guidance setting out combined and separate totals for council-assisted and private individual applications for major adaptations.

35/10 STATUTORY COMPLAINTS

The Customer Care Manager introduced the report (annexed). The main points of report and subsequent discussion were as follows:

- New regulations aimed at improving the quality of local resident's experience of services were introduced in April 2009. For example, prioritising the local resolution of complaints. This might include discussion an acceptable timescale for resolution with a complainant e.g. 10 or 20 days followed by the completion of a Complaint Handling Plan to support the effective investigation of the complaint. As a consequence of the new regulations the Quality Assurance process has witnessed quality managers responses improve by 25% over the year. Leaflets are also freely available to enable service users to complain should they wish;
- A joint working protocol with health has been developed by a Walsall led Black Country Forum to ensure the successful management of complaints;
- Officers and the Panel also highlighted the success and continued importance of the use of mediation, while Learning from Complaints (LFC) continues to be undertaken. Following a Panel query the Customer Care Manager provided guidance in relation to LFC forms completed respect of Attitude/ behaviour of staff that of 11 cases, 5 were related to service users perceiving staff as being rude with only a small percentage of complaints upheld. Where staff are proven to have been unprofessional this is tackled. The Executive Director, Adult Social Care & Inclusion explained that staff regularly have to support service users who are often vulnerable and in stressful and difficult positions. However, while there are 8,000 open cases at any one time of which the number of complaints received represents a small fraction, customer service remains a priority.

36/10 QUARTERLY FINANCIAL MONITORING

The Finance Account Manager introduced the report (annexed). The main points of the report and subsequent discussion were as follows:

- The revenue outturn position for 2010/11 is forecast to be breakeven. In excess of £1.3m of savings, including over £700,000 in relation to the

Government's emergency budget remained on target. Action taken includes holding vacant posts and reducing the use of agency staff to £500,000, which represents a quarter of the spend in the last financial year. Where overspends exist Executive Director Management Team (EDMT) action plans have been implemented. Managers understand the importance of being forthright and possessing foresight to help deliver savings;

- The Executive Director, Adult Social Care & Inclusion explained in relation to the significant underspend forecast on vacant posts that it included re-alignment and restructuring while maintaining the safe delivery of services. The use of agency staff has been reduced with temporary appointments the first option now considered and substantial savings achieved.

37/10 BUDGET SETTING FRAMEWORK & TIMETABLE 2011/12 – 2014/15

The Finance Account Manager introduced the report (annexed). The main points of the report and subsequent discussion were as follows:

- The budget process will form part of the working smarter programme;
- The Panel will have the opportunity to consider the budget over the course of two meetings during November this and January next year.

38/10 THE CURRENT FINANCIAL PRESSURES & RISKS FACING SOCIAL CARE

The Finance Account Manager introduced the presentation (annexed). The main points of the report and subsequent discussion were as follows:

- In terms of the national context it was anticipated that phased reductions in budgets would be required between now and 2015/16 of up to 25%, rather than immediate and significant reductions. It was not known if additional funding might be made available to offset these reductions, although a cap on council tax increases is anticipated;
- There are significant variations in spending in certain areas of local service delivery when compared with other councils. This is likely to be due to locally high numbers within specific client groups including, older people, adults with disabilities and adults with mental disabilities.
- Within Adult services work undertaken to meet reductions includes the Joint Commissioning Unit Business Plan which has the objective of achieving savings through changing existing practices. For example, at present 200 people are sent outside of the borough to receive residential care. This is both expensive and results in funding being spent outside of the borough. It will be important in the future that these and similar service users are provided with more cost-effective support within their local community. The Executive Director, Adult Social Care & Inclusion also explained that resources were now being used more effectively and within budget. For example, the use of placements external to the borough is no longer permitted unless there is a compelling business case. The impact has been a significant increase in demand from social workers to use locally operated services;
- Other activity includes sharing of best practice includes visits to other councils within and outside the region.

39/10 COMMISSIONING THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR

The Head of Vulnerable Adults and Joint Commissioning Unit introduced the report (annexed). The main points of the report and subsequent discussion were as follows:

- Services from the voluntary sector are commissioned on a professional basis using three year rolling Service Level Agreements (SLAs) and performance delivered against a contract;
- Officers also work with Walsall Voluntary Association with the aim of assisting voluntary organisations to improve how they operate;
- Commissioned voluntary sector organisations are required to produce an agreed set of performance data as well as use open book accounting;
- The commissioning of services from the voluntary sector is based on the principles established by the Compact agreement. This requires a three year funding commitment and provides financial certainty for voluntary organisations. The council also ensures that good notice of its intentions is provided well in advance of the conclusion of the three year period;
- Following a Panel query, the Head of Vulnerable Adults and Joint Commissioning Unit explained that voluntary organisations operated with paid employees;
- Officers agreed to provide Members with guidance detailing the voluntary sector organisations with whom the council works for the provision of services.

Resolved:

- **That officers will provide Members with guidance detailing the voluntary sector organisations with whom the council works for the provision of services.**

40/10 RETHINK DAY OPPORTUNITIES & REDESIGN FOR ADULTS WITH MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

The Head of Vulnerable Adults and Joint Commissioning Unit introduced the report (annexed). The main points of the report and subsequent discussion were as follows:

- Officers have been working with Rethink to review the quality of day care services, particularly at the Archway Centre and Schoolhouse. This was prompted by the requirement to modernise and make efficiency savings.
- The design of the new operating model has been led by Rethink which seeks to move away from the building based support approach. The objective is to deliver support through community based rather than council centred services. The remodelling of services would mean that existing buildings were no longer required and services could be delivered for less, representing significant cost savings;
- At present service users attend these centres over significant periods of time with little evidence of benefit. Officers explained that the current approach might in fact stymie an individual's journey of recovery by making service users dependent on day centre care. Instead the objective was to

wrap services around an individual and assist them in returning to their community.

41/10 WORK PROGRAMME 2010/ 11 AND FORWARD PLAN

The Panel's work programme 2010/11 and the Forward Plan were noted

42/10 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Chair informed Members that the next Panel meeting would held on 18 November 2010.

The meeting terminated at 7:40pm

Chair:

Date:

