

SOCIAL CARE & INCLUSION SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

MONDAY 29 November 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 I Azam Councillor L Rattigan
Portfolio Holder Present	Councillor B McCracken
Health Panel Members Present	Councillor M Yasin (Chair)
Other Members Present	Councillor M Bird (Leader of the Councillor) Councillor C Towe (Portfolio Holder – Finance and Personnel)
Officers Present	Paul Davies – Executive Director, Adult Social Care & Inclusion Lloyd Haynes – Finance Account Manager Sean Cook – Head of Access, Assessment & Care Management John Fell - Head of Strategic Development Matthew Underhill – Scrutiny Officer

53/10 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received for the duration of the meeting from Councillor V Woodruff and Councillor B Douglas-Maul

54/10 SUBSTITUTIONS

Councillor L Rattigan has substituted for the remainder of the Municipal Year for Councillor J O'Hare.

55/10 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

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

56/10 DRAFT REVENUE BUDGET PROPOSALS 2011/12 FOR CONSULTATION

The Executive Director, Adult Social Care & Inclusion introduced the report (annexed). The main points of the report and subsequent discussion were as follows:

- The government debt of £109m has meant that councils will receive at least 28% less funding over the next four years. The impact on Walsall council is expected to be a funding reduction of between 7-11% in 2011/12, with reductions also anticipated in the following three years. Formula grant funds around 55% of the council's overall net budget requirement and this will have a significant impact on the services that can be delivered. During the next four year period it is expected that £80m of savings will have to be achieved, with a further assumption that there will be a council tax freeze;
- The council's Working Smarter programme aimed to reduce costs, eliminate waste and improve services. It is expected that back office services including finance, personnel and business administration will be reduced by £2.22m. It is anticipated that this programme will enable the council to reduce costs by £16.6m, with increasing savings delivered as the programme develops. In summary, Working Smarter means cutting out waste, spending less, changing the way we work and improving services. Current draft proposals include restructuring council management and staffing, as well as restructuring and merging some services and changing the way some other services are operated;
- It is proposed that £1.4m will be invested into services for vulnerable people to meet the increasing numbers of local residents needing care. It is anticipated that by redesigning current working practices and redesigning the types of services that are delivered to adults needing care and support over £3.53m of cost savings can be achieved. A reduction in 149 posts forms part of the restructure of the service. At the same time, this action will promote independence for service users and remove duplication of support from the council's care management team and local providers. The restructure of services has also included removal of hospital patient discharge delays with a council officer now managing contracts on behalf of the whole local health economy;
- It is also proposed to change the means by which the council charges for services. This includes moving to a benefit based system which will result in more local residents paying for the services they receive. However, many will pay less than under the current system. A comprehensive public consultation process is also underway regarding the proposals.
- The overall impact of the proposed changes will be the delivery of more efficient and effective services;
- The Executive Director explained that the reduction of 149 posts includes 55 that are currently filled and 94 that are vacant. Those staff in at-risk posts automatically enter the redeployment pool, with some successfully commencing new roles. However, a number of those at-risk staff have indicated a strong interest in either voluntary redundancy or early retirement. A targeted programme of identifying potential candidates for voluntary redundancy forms part of this process. However, posts within teams, rather than individual post-holders, have been identified as at-risk;
- Officers were confident that following the restructure the right skills would be retained within services. Further training and enhancement of existing

skills were planned to ensure that staff were able to work with increasing numbers of people with a range of needs. This process would support keeping the most vulnerable adults within the borough in their own homes;

- This is part of fundamental changes to service delivery, including the removal of unnecessary bureaucracy to produce a more timely and efficient service which meets the needs of local residents. Other programmes will also have an increasing impact on services. For example, personalisation, which focuses on self-directed support for individuals, will mean that it is critical that dependent services are robust but established within the context of moving people away from this type of support to more independent lifestyles;
- Officers agreed with the Chair that the impact of funding changes equated to around an 8.5% reduction in expenditure, with significant savings in excess of £3.5m proposed. The Chair explained that while he had no difficulty with the direction of travel for services, he highlighted proposals for moving from the current fairer charging for services system to a benefits-based approach as an example of where it would be difficult to understand the effect of changes until they are felt by individuals. He also expressed the view that the savings targets suggested that there had previously been significant waste. The Executive Director observed that it was necessary for services to respond to a changing national agenda to ensure that services were fit for purpose. It may have been the case that in the past council services had not kept pace with the key objective of enabling people to remain in their own homes;
- Officers explained that it was possible that up to 50% of the 2,200 local residents who received services currently did not make a contribution. However, there are also many instances of individuals either paying too little or too much for the services they receive. It is estimated that should benefits-based charging be introduced, approximately one third of service recipients would be worse off, a third better off and one third would stay the same. Officers were confident that there was capacity within the Welfare Rights team to meet the demand of ensuring that all service users received all the benefits to which they were entitled. In fact, the difficulties lay within the current fairer charging system which meant that the Welfare Rights team did not appear in the process at an earlier enough stage. The Executive Director explained that the current restructuring process would ensure that services were future-proofed. Proposals included significant investment of £2.5m in services, together with significant inefficiencies which can be driven out of the service;
- The Portfolio Holder for Social Care and Inclusion observed that it was critical to find a way forward and deliver restructured services in a challenging financial context. The proposed reduction in posts was a reflection of the current funding environment, although she also recognised the importance of retaining key skills within the service. The Leader of the Council explained that it was now important for residents to appreciate the need to contribute to the services which they received. He also gave a commitment that, should it prove necessary, additional resources would be provided to ensure that the Welfare Rights team was able to meet demand in relation to ensuring that individuals receive their full entitlement of benefits.

Resolved:

That the Panel accept the current direction of travel in terms of the proposed direction of travel regarding restructuring of services. However, concerns remain over the possible impact of some of the proposed changes on individual service users, this being difficult to fully assess at present.

57/10 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Chair informed Members that the next Panel meeting would held on 17 January 2011.

The meeting terminated at 6:55pm

Chair:

Date:

