

Council – 13th April 2015

Portfolio Holder report - Social Care

1. Labour Manifesto Commitments

Efficiencies – There have delivered a reduction in senior management – there have been two posts deleted in Social Care and Inclusion (1 Assistant Director and 1 Service Manager).

Protecting vulnerable people –the administration has passed on all additional government funding to frontline social care services (eg. winter pressures, DTOC grant)in both 14/15 (total £985k) and 15/16 (£1.5m). It has also planned for the lowest budget reduction in 15/16 (£3.5m) in social care the council has set for over 4 years to protect vulnerable adults.

The option to close Fallings Heath from the July Cabinet, led to consultation and a decision to retain the Fallings Heath respite care home. This was achieved in response to users and carers feedback and significant efficiency savings have been achieved without closure.

Support local initiatives – the partnership with the NHS in community preventative work with older people has started in the pilot of a locality project in Darlestone preventing hospital admissions. The plan is now to roll this out across the borough over the next few months.

2. Achievements since July 2014:

The delivery of £10m cost reductions in Social Care & Inclusion – albeit with an additional £2.5m overspend arising from legacy costs and demand.

Cross council preparations for the Care Act being implemented from April 2015 including developing the carers services and a website development to improve advice and information.

There has been a fundamental review of community care charging, and an extensive consultation which got 1300 responses, prior to a decision to change to fair a comprehensive new policy. We also reviewed all community service customers charges and reached final payment agreements on outstanding debt of around £2.7m to clear up the legacy of over 4 years.

Despite high demand on hospital services by older people, we have maintained low admissions to care homes by successfully supporting and reabling people in their own homes.

This administration has supported the Manor Hospital through a difficult year in meeting demand for emergency care – we have one of the lowest delayed discharges in the region.

We secured Better Care Fund approval from the NHS, and reached an agreement with the CCG on this pooled budget of £24m being hosted by Council with ambitious plans for integration of health and social care.

We redeveloped a 4 bed unit at the Hollybank reablement unit in the autumn to cater for complex needs of older people discharged from hospital.

We commissioned with Children's Services a new client record management system – installation is in progress alongside modernising our processes and improving efficiency.

We relocated all social care staff from Allen Centre into Town Hall, and vacated half of Electrium Point in rationalising the service's property and improving efficiency.

Issues

Maintaining the quality and affordability of care services – we are doing this through tenders for homecare and care homes. The very low prices the Council has paid in recent years has led to difficulties in the reliability and quality of supply in the local care market and will cause pressure on budgets as this is corrected.

Reducing overall cost of care through better systems/efficiency and social work support to meet budget targets – the best practice approach being adopted will help people meet their needs in part through better access to social “assets” and help the overall reduction of commissioning budgets.

Eliminating waiting lists for assessments and reviews, and implementing new Care Act requirements for carers, safeguarding, and prevention are key quality and performance objectives for 15/16 to improve the outcomes for vulnerable people who were previously not receiving a prompt service.

Restructuring and improving outcomes for inhouse services (daycentres, employment support) will be the focus of reviews this year as we showed in the Fallings Heath consultation we can achieve both improved service and lower costs.

The council is meeting Better Care Fund targets with NHS partners and ensuring accountability to Health and Wellbeing Board.

Further internal efficiencies are being delivered through reductions in management numbers and a change in form and function to target resources towards the front line.

Money, Home, Job achievements in 2014/15

2014/15 has been a challenging year for the Money, Home, Job service but it has continued to reduce costs while striving to give customers the help they need, when they need it.

Between June 2014 and February 2015, we reduced the time it takes to process new benefit claims from 72 days to 19 days. We now process new claims faster than the national average (23 days). Improving the turn around time has enabled us to process more claims and reduce the new claim backlog from 868 to 399 (a 39% reduction). We also now process changes in circumstances within 9 days (when the national average is 10). All landlords receiving regular housing benefit payments now receive electronic payments rather than cheques which has also delivered cost savings.

Preparation is underway for the implementation of Universal Credit in Walsall on 22nd June 2015. Initially it will only affect single people living alone who are making a new claim for job seekers allowance. The Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) has confirmed that Willenhall jobcentre has not been included as part of the Walsall Universal Credit role out. Instead it will be part of the Wolverhampton role out in December 2015 as a large proportion of customers claiming benefit at that Jobcentre live in Wolverhampton postcodes.

A review of exempt accommodation providers is underway following reports that vulnerable residents were being exploited. People were being evicted at short notice, left without essential food and furniture and having control of their personal finances taken away by some providers. Under Housing Benefit rules, Exempt Accommodation rates can only be paid to not-for-profit organisations that provide care, support or supervision for the tenants living in their schemes. The rules allow the council to pay an increased level of rent to Exempt Accommodation providers as it is often more costly to meet the housing needs of vulnerable groups than those without needs. The council is reviewing exempt accommodation providers to ensure that these additional costs are fair and reasonable and that they are delivering the services that they should be.

We continue to answer as many telephone calls as possible. 88% of calls to the benefit enquiry line and 82% of calls to the council tax enquiry line were answered by an advisor. Of the callers who did not reach an advisor, a significant proportion hung up when advised of their position in the queue. Previously customers were not informed of their position in the queue and were unaware how long their wait could be.

In response to feedback received by Cllr Shires from Walsall Deaf Centre, we launched a trial 'security pin' service in March 2015. The scheme allows Deaf or hard of hearing customers to access Council Services more easily and quickly. The trial scheme works in a similar way to telephone banking, allowing a hearing third party to

advocate on a customer's behalf. Previously we would not have been able to share information with advocates, as we could not verify over the phone whether the customer had given their permission to access information on their behalf.

First Stop Shop continues to diversify and make improvements to services (including issuing of parking permits, payment of parking fines, school admissions and transport, trading standards and environmental health). The blue badge service has improved, we now accept card payments over the telephone, new procedures have also reduced average processing times by 2 weeks. All customers automatically entitled to receive a blue badge now have their applications submitted to the national blue badge service on the same day that the form is received by the Council.

Welfare Rights officers have played an instrumental part in the development of the new charging policy for social care. Welfare Rights fronted all 25 of the information sessions for the public and are now working on implementation of the policy. This will involve putting resource aside to assist with validation of financial data and completing financial assessments to enable a smooth transition to the new charges. 8,651 individual referrals were made to the Welfare Rights team in the current financial year. As a result of this work customers have received over £9.5 million in new awards of welfare benefits so this year and assistance to resolve or manage £2.4 million in debts.

Housing officers have achieved outstanding results in reducing youth homelessness, following the decommissioning of the young homelessness provision funded by the Joint Commissioning Unit on 30.09.2014. An evaluation of the decommissioned provision showed that 54% young people who used the provision did not achieve improved outcomes and were often left in financial hardship following their stay in supported housing. We learnt that the expensive support we had commissioned was not working and we needed to do something different. Decommissioning the previous service saved £200k. The remaining £517k is being used in a pilot scheme run in partnership with WHG for 18-24 year old homeless young people (including young care leavers). Previously we funded 97 units of accommodation for young people, this has been reduced to 30 funded places in the new scheme, with more focus on homeless prevention measures.

The funding covers 30 personalised packages of care including accommodation costs and also a personal budget for each young person involved in the scheme. The properties are fully furnished and include a kitchen start up pack. Feedback from the young people with places on the scheme has been fantastic.

2,914 households have been prevented from becoming homeless by receiving support to remain in their own homes or moving into alternative accommodation. We continue to utilise our Spend to Save Fund, spending £50k on administration fees, deposits and rent in advance to secure 116 customers and their families' accommodation in the private rented sector. Working in partnership with Midland Heart we have also successfully moved six of our most entrenched rough sleepers off the streets into supported accommodation. A pilot service is operating with Wilbraham Court to help former rough sleepers move into their own independent accommodation. Nine people have been successfully moved into their own

tenancies. Eight people still remain in those tenancies and one person was supported to return back to their parents.

655 residents were helped with enquiries about poor housing conditions or disputes they had with their landlord. This included negotiation with landlords to improve the condition of properties, and where negotiation failed, service of 20 legal notices. We continue to improve the quality of houses in multiple occupation and issued 11 new licenses including renewals. We now require a higher standard of energy efficiency in properties (at least equivalent to an energy performance certificate banding of at least E). 428 households have had Disabled Facilities Grants approved this financial year (£2.6m). We have increased the number of major adaptations completed this year, 438 completions compared with 402 in 2013/14. The fuel switch scheme has proved extremely popular. 1,844 residents have been helped to register, of which over 500 have switched, making estimated annual savings on their fuel bills of over £105k. In addition we have secured £20k of external funding to help very vulnerable residents improve their heating by installing new boilers.

Councillor D. Coughlan,
Portfolio holder for Social Care

2nd April 2015