

AT A MEETING
of the

**HOUSING IMPROVEMENT
PLAN JOINT WORKING GROUP** held at
the Council House, Walsall on **Tuesday 9
August 2005** at 6.00 p.m.

PRESENT

Councillor C. Ault
Councillor Barton
Councillor D J Pitt
Councillor Walker
Sue Byard (Head of Housing Services)
Andrea Little (Head of Supported Housing)
Kathy McAteer (Assistant Director Adult
Services)

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

Members were advised there was no party whip. Councillor D J Pitt declared a personal non prejudicial interest and stated that his brother is the portfolio holder for housing.

**EXTRACT OF MINUTES FROM EXTRACT FROM HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE
SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL 21 JUNE 2005.**

RESOLVED

That the extract resolution detailing the re-establishment of the CPA Action Plan Working Group for municipal year 2005/6 and the membership of the group be noted.

NOTES OF MEETING

RESOLVED

That the notes of the meeting 28 April 2005 be agreed as an accurate record.

MEMBER INVOLVEMENT IN MYSTERY SHOPPING

Andrea Little advised that following a discussion at the previous meeting, a table had been prepared to assist members in their mystery shoppers role to critically test where leaflets and information was or was not available. Officers stressed that this was a very valid and critical piece of work for members to participate in and explained that information has to be on site emphasising that this had been tested at the last CPA inspection. In addition, officers advised that a learning point from the last inspection

was that emergency telephone numbers should be visible from the outside of buildings and suggested that this should be tested when members carry out the mystery shopping exercise.

Officers tabled a draft member's mystery shopping document. Members welcomed the idea, and the opportunity to participate in this useful exercise.

Members discussed the possible venues to be visited during this mystery shopping exercise and asked for officer's guidance. It was suggested by officers that a trial be undertaken initially and suggested the Civic Centre, Darlaston and Bloxwich Libraries. Officers explained that a number of new leaflets were currently being developed and would be published soon and the final publication dates would determine when the trial would be. Members agreed it was important to have primary centres to visit and secondary centres and that the Civic Centre and Darlaston and Bloxwich Libraries should be the first points to carry out the mystery shopping exercise.

Councillor Ault requested clarification whether there was a poster that advised where service users could go for help and advice or to get a leaflet. Officers advised there was not at this time and entered into discussion relating to posting information posters at key points where it was not possible to display all leaflets. Andrea Little agreed that it would add value to have a poster saying where to find documents that were not available at that point.

After a further period of discussion it was

AGREED

1. That the mystery shopping exercise should be undertaken in Autumn 2005.
2. That the primary visits should be to the Civic Centre, Darlaston and Bloxwich Libraries.
3. That the development of an information poster be undertaken by officers.

ACTION

- To finalise the mystery shopping checklist sheets and circulate to members advising of dates in Autumn and locations to visit.
- To draft a poster and bring back to the work group at next meeting.

CPA HOUSING IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The draft report to cabinet was submitted:-

(see annexed)

Members were advised that several amendments had been made to the document and an amended report was tabled: -

(see annexed)

In particular officers referred to improvement actions :-

- 107 – revised target for developing the leaflet on adaptations with services users.
- 112 – Agenda of partnership boards to work with user groups to design ways to gain systematic feedback.
- 113 – additional funding has been made available to undertake consultation work, rather than a new post.
- 115 – the out of hours review action plan is currently being implemented.

Officers indicated that the excellence plan referred to in the document was developed using Key Lines Of Enquiry and was an exceedingly large document . It was explained that the excellence plan details a range of services for our pathway to excellence and is part of a larger piece of work.

Councillor Ault asked if the officers felt the service area was a head of itself. Sue Byard advised that officers knew what needed to be done to meet the new audit Commission Inspection Harder Test and advised members that the service area had built the path to excellence on the new criteria. Andrea Little advised that the Key Lines Of Enquiry used to develop the excellence plan were necessary to achieve the 3 star status and absorb into the day job.

Members were advised that the excellence plan would be submitted to the next meeting of the Housing Improvement Plan Working Group.

AGREED:

That the revised improvement plan be forwarded to Cabinet and that the draft report be amended to include a paragraph emphasising that scrutiny has monitored and passed forward comments to cabinet.

Actions: Officers carry out amendments and forward to Cabinet;
The Excellence plan be submitted to the next work group meeting

HOUSING INSPECTION ACTION PLAN – PROGRESS UPDATE

Sue Byard was in attendance at the meeting to give members a verbal update to the current position.

Sue explained the action plan ended at the end of July 2005 so there was no 'progress' to report other than which had already been discussed under the previous agenda item.

The Housing Excellence Plan is the document that this group will receive progress updates on although the size of the document will mean exception reports only will be undertaken at these meetings unless members had a particular interest in a subject area.

It was agreed that members noted the verbal update.

NEW PROCEDURES – OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST ASSESSMENTS AND
DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS

Sue Byard was in attendance at the meeting and introduced two documents; the Disabled Facilities Grant and the Disabled Facilities Grant – update flow chart.

(see annexed)

Kathy McAteer outlined the Disabled Facilities Grant update emphasising that there are a number of factors that can affect each stage of the process. As such she confirmed that no timelines were currently set and that every individual case may be affected by different factors, and that where they are on the waiting list depends on individual circumstance.

Kathy McAteer outlined improvements in waiting times for OT assessments. In February, just under 2000 people were on the waiting list and that it was taking 2 years for category B cases to receive an assessment, she advised that this has now reduced to 760 people on the waiting list and that the waiting time for new category B cases was reduced to 22 weeks. She further confirmed that the waiting time for category A cases to get an assessment was now 8 weeks. Members welcomed the reduction in waiting time and felt this was excellent progress.

It was explained to members that there were two teams working within the occupational therapy service; a special team brought in to deal with the backlog of cases giving the new people applying a much improved service.

Sue Byard advised that adaptations to properties would not show great improvement in the overall figures at this time. She advised that new applicants were being dealt with more efficiently but the backlog of cases would impact on the overall figures and that she hoped more detailed information would be available at the next meeting.

In response to questions Sue Byard advised that people now have a start date for works to commence and should know what is happening with their individual cases. It was felt that the shortage of contractors who carry out works maybe cause a problem with the volume of works required. Members requested further information relating to contractors, officers said this could be provided to the next meeting of this working group.

Members discussed the smaller works carried out to properties such as, ramps, steps, hand rails etc, and were advised that some of the small jobs were being carried out by Walsall Housing Group for their tenants. Sue Byard advised that some of the ramps and smaller works were also carried out by the integrated community equipment store. Sue Byard confirmed that her section deals with the building works and larger adaptations.

Members were advised that the number of adapted properties throughout the borough was currently being mapped both private and RSL properties and that this information would be distributed at the next meeting.

There followed a further period of discussion about the data base of information. Sue Byard advised that it was difficult to match vacant properties that were suitably

adapted to the areas that people wished to live and that the data base was based on working with service users on categories to match vacant properties appropriately.

There followed a discussion about recycling of adapted properties and recycling of equipment in adaptations. Members welcomed the effective recycling of equipment and adapted properties. Sue Byard agreed to provide a verbal update at the next meeting on the adapted properties register.

AGREED

That information as previously outlined be presented to the next working group meeting.

Actions:

Verbal updates on

- Information re- contractors
- Data base of Adapted properties

DATE OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Members agreed that the next meeting of CPA Housing Improvement Plan Joint Working Group be arranged to take place late October 2005 and that meetings should be planned every eight weeks thereafter.

Officers agreed to notify members of the date of the next meeting and provide a programme of meetings for the remainder of the municipal year to the next meeting.

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 7.00 p.m.