

SOCIAL SERVICES AND HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Social Services and Housing Scrutiny Committee held in the Conference Room, Ty Nant, Prestatyn on Thursday 10th January 2008 at 10.00 a.m.

PRESENT

Councillors J. Chamberlain Jones, S. Davies, D. Hannam, N. J. Hughes, N. Hugh-Jones and M. A. Webster.

Councillor J. Thompson-Hill attended in respect of item no. 5 on the agenda.

Observers : Councillors J. R. Bartley, R.E. Barton, M. Ll. Davies, P.A. Dobb and G.C. Evans.

ALSO PRESENT

Corporate Director Social Services, Head of Adult Services, Performance Management Development Manager (C. Macleod), Safeguarding and Reviewing Manager (S.Trehearn), Scrutiny Support Officer (S. Price) and Committee Clerk (Mrs J V Pring)

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Members stood in silent tribute in memory of Councillor Tom K Hodgson who passed away on 8<sup>th</sup> January. During his three years as Chair of the Committee Councillor Hodgson had made a significant contribution to the work of social services and housing in Denbighshire and had earned the respect and affection of his fellow Committee Members and officers. He would be greatly missed.  
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624 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR FOR THE MEETING

Members agreed that the positions of Committee Chair and Vice-Chair should be deferred to a future meeting. It was proposed and seconded that Councillor N J Hughes be appointed Chair for the meeting. It was therefore

***RESOLVED** that Councillor N. J. Hughes be appointed Chair for the meeting and the positions of Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee be deferred to a future meeting.*

625 URGENT MATTERS

There were no urgent items.

626 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 6th December 2007

***RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 6th December 2007 be approved.*

Matters arising

Item 5 (Support to Foster Carers) The Scrutiny Support Officer reported that there was a need to appoint representatives to attend two forthcoming meetings. It was subsequently agreed that:-

- i) Councillors J. Chamberlain Jones and M.A. Webster would represent the Committee at a meeting to discuss the establishment of a dedicated Emergency Duty Team with neighbouring authorities which was scheduled to take place at 1.30 p.m. in Wrexham on 28th January 2008, and
- ii) Councillor M A Webster would be the Committee's second representative at the Joint Scrutiny meeting to consider the draft Health, Social Care and Well-Being Strategy at 2 p.m. on Thursday 17th January 2008.

627 CSSIW PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

The Corporate Director introduced Mr Rob Gifford from the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) who had been invited to present the CSSIW's report on Denbighshire's Performance Evaluation of Services 2006/07 (copies of which had been tabled at the meeting). She explained that the report had been based on a self evaluation together with evidence collated by the CSSIW and material submitted by the Directorate. Its purpose was to assist the Authority in developing its own programme for improvement and to assist the CSSIW and other inspectorates and auditors to plan their work. Mr Gifford was pleased to confirm that the Authority had continued to maintain the modernisation of its service delivery. He stated that a number of key performance indicators had shown considerable improvement and there was evidence of a greater focus on core objectives. With the aid of a powerpoint presentation Mr Gifford provided statistics and commentary on the performance of individual services and highlighted the main strengths and weaknesses together with the priorities for improvement and areas for further examination.

In response to a question from Councillor N Hugh-Jones, Mr Gifford agreed that the inclusion of previous data would be useful for comparison purposes and he would bear this in mind when presenting future evaluation reports. He also acknowledged that more work was required to refine some of the indicators.

In response to a question from Councillor J R Bartley on the relatively low number of younger adults with a learning disability being supported in the community, the Head of Adult Services suggested that this could be due to the interpretation of the data used. He added that the rate had now stabilised.

Members were pleased at the significant progress made in the past year in reducing the percentage of looked-after children who had three or more placements. This reflected the significant efforts made by the Authority to plan and manage effective placement matching and accurate recording arrangements. Slightly less encouraging was the percentage (18%) of looked-after children who had experienced one or more school changes a figure which had remained high for several years. However officers pointed out that the analysis showed that many of the moves had been made for positive reasons under the Authority's Managed Moves Policy.

Members referred to the high cost of providing services in rural areas and felt that Denbighshire's low population needed to be taken into account. There were also concerns that those with mental health needs were not defined in specific categories. In thanking Mr Gifford for attending the meeting, the Chair welcomed the positive evaluation and trusted that the improved standards would be maintained.

RESOLVED that the report be noted and the Committee's thanks be conveyed to staff responsible for the improved standards..

628 BUDGET 2008/09 UPDATE

The Lead Member for Finance Councillor J. Thompson Hill, presented a report, previously circulated, advising Members of progress with the budget setting exercise for 2008/09 with specific reference to the Social Services and Housing Directorate. Members views were required on the proposals for cost saving and the directorate's prioritisation of the bids for additional resources for service pressures in the next financial year.

The report referred to papers submitted to Cabinet relating to the provisional Assembly funding settlement for the period 2008/09 to 2010/11 together with the likely impact of inflation bids for additional resources. The poor level of financial support from the Assembly would make it difficult for the Council to provide additional

resources for services and keep Council Tax increases low, without identifying further savings.

The Directorate's current proposals were detailed in Appendix 1 and 2 attached to the report and a detailed commentary was provided setting out the key messages and emphasising the need for a proactive approach particularly in relation to future demographic pressures.

The latest budgetary position was that a 3.5% increase in Council Tax would allow for pressures of £500k in Social Services and Housing, thus leaving a significant shortfall in funding. This posed particular challenges for Adult Services in view of the increase in demand for the learning disability and physical disability services and the steady growth in the number of older people accessing services.

The report reminded Members that the suggested 3.5% Council Tax had been arrived at after the Directorate had identified efficiency savings of £675k for next year, by far the highest amount across all directorates. It would therefore be extremely difficult to deliver essential services if further savings were required to be made by the Directorate.

Officers would continue to manage budgets prudently and plan effective strategies for the future. However, in the short term, there was likely to be a shortfall of £500k even if the Performance Improvement Grant money for Homelessness was continued. Attempts were being made to identify further areas for savings in order to help reduce the gap between the allocated budget and the cost of service provision. During the discussion Councillor J Chamberlain Jones referred to the additional grant funding provided by the Assembly and felt it would be useful during her discussions with local Assembly Members to have access to such information in order to see the full picture and to be able to argue the Authority's case. Officers acknowledged the Member's comments and the Financial Controller confirmed he would be able to assist members with relevant information if required.

The Corporate Director drew Members' attention to the table of Prioritised Demographic and Statutory Pressures on Appendix 2, stating that projections of client groups and take-up of services would mean that the shortfall would be considerable as services would still have to be provided in accordance with statutory requirements and eligibility.

Councillor N Hugh-Jones queried whether it was acceptable that the Welsh Assembly was aiming to increase their reserves whilst cutting back on the settlement to local Authorities.

At this juncture (11.40 a.m.) the meeting was adjourned for a refreshment break.

On resumption of the meeting, the Head of Adult Services reiterated the comments made by the Corporate Director relating to the accurate forecasts made in previous years in respect of clients known to the department who would need to access services. Work was currently being undertaken on changing the spectrum of services provided but this would not have an effect in the short term.

Additionally the implications of the 'Vale of Glamorgan' ruling in respect of the level of fees paid to care homes were discussed with indications that other councils were having to increase their fees to mitigate the risk of successful legal challenges.

The Corporate Director advised that in terms of managing the situation, the Directorate would need to look at various ways of trying to minimize the shortfall, including the use of 2007/08 underspends and further consideration of the prioritised pressures. Any further possible savings would be submitted to the Committee as soon as this had been undertaken.

After further discussion it was:-

RESOLVED that the Committee:-

- (a) notes the high level of savings identified against targets achieved by the Social Services and Housing Directorate and supports the proposed allocation of revenue underspend from its 2007/2008 budget towards next year's service pressures;
- (b) recommends against making further savings from the Directorate's budget above those already identified owing to the impact additional savings would have on essential service delivery, and
- (c) strongly supports the Directorate's bid for funding for the prioritized demographic and statutory pressures, as contained in table 1 of appendix 2 to the report.

629 COMMUNITY SERVICES FRAMEWORK

The Head of Adult Services presented a report, previously circulated on the draft Community Services Framework for 2008-11(a copy of which had been attached to the report) which had been developed by the Local Health Board in conjunction with its partners and was currently out for consultation. The Framework provided an outline of how the LHB planned to commission and deliver enhanced community based services to provide for and improve the health, social care and well being of the local population. It formed a key element of the Denbighshire Health, Social Care and Well-Being Strategy (HSCWB), particularly in relation to the delivery of community based services.

Denbighshire's Community Services Framework was due to be finalised by the end of March 2008 although it would be refined over time. Crucial information such as the modelling of the future volume of community services had yet to be included. Members considered the six questions set out on the Consultation Response form in Appendix 2 and it was agreed that the following observations on the draft Framework be submitted for consideration :-

The Social Services and Housing Scrutiny Committee supported the provision of services within the community, however it was imperative that the vision was adequately resourced in terms of staff and other resources on the ground.

Members also advised that they supported the Level 5 services for people with complex needs but the Committee felt that therapy services – particularly physiotherapy – warranted greater prominence.

The Committee reviewed the four localities identified for Denbighshire by the Primary Care Estates Strategy. Members were concerned that the 'South' locality was too large and should be divided into Dee Valley and Ruthin (including the surrounding locality) areas.

Finally, the Committee outlined its significant concerns regarding the transfer of service provision from acute health care settings to community health care / local authority social care support settings. The Committee agreed that these transfers must be accompanied by the transfer of adequate resources to provide the additional services, and that this needs to be closely monitored to ensure that the community services model is adequately resourced.

RESOLVED that the observations as referred to above, be submitted to the Denbighshire Local Health Board.

630 SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN IN DENBIGHSHIRE DECEMBER 2006 – DECEMBER 2007

The Safeguarding and Reviewing Manager presented a report, previously circulated, updating Members on the work of the Denbighshire Safeguarding Children Board in progressing the safeguarding agenda and addressing the areas of improvement identified in the 2006 Review of Children's Services inspection report.

The Board was established in October 2007 in response to statutory regulations and was now the key mechanism for co-operative working between agencies to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people in Denbighshire.

Since its inception the Board had made significant progress in developing and reviewing its work programme in order to meet its broader safeguarding responsibilities. Much of the work was being taken forward by a structure of multi-agency sub groups and details of their respective remits were provided in the report. Details of other aspects of the work and activities undertaken were also included together with the identification of areas for improvement and the Board's future direction. Following a period of consultation with Conwy County Borough Council agreement had been reached to establish a joint local Board covering both Denbighshire and Conwy. This would help to reduce costs and would provide a greater capacity for meeting the broader agenda. Arrangements had yet to be finalized but it was anticipated that the first meeting of the joint Board would be held in the Spring/Early Summer of 2008.

Councillor J Chamberlain Jones referred to a specific issue she had previously raised with the Head of Children and Family Services, which she understood would be covered within today's report. It was agreed that this matter would be pursued outside of the meeting with the officer concerned.

RESOLVED that the progress made in addressing the areas of improvement identified in the 2006 Review of Children's Services be noted.

631 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Support Officer presented a report, previously circulated, on matters for consideration in respect of the Committee's future work programme. A copy of the Work Programme had been attached as an appendix to the report. The report referred to a request from the Corporate Director to defer the review of work between Social Services and Education to address the issues highlighted in the Estyn report to be deferred to the February meeting. This was agreed.

Live issue

- Rhyl Primary Care Centre. The Scrutiny Support Officer informed Members that a further meeting had been arranged by the Local Health Board with Rhyl practices to take place within the next few days and that the Committee would be apprised of progress in due course.

Members noted that nine items had been scheduled for the February meeting. The Scrutiny Support Officer advised that if all these reports were submitted on time, a number of them would have to be deferred or dealt with for information in order to set a manageable agenda for the next meeting.

RESOLVED that the Work Programme be approved.

The meeting closed at 1.15 p.m.
