

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (COMMUNITY WELLBEING AND SAFETY)

MINUTES of a meeting held on 2nd October, 2006.

Present: Councillor Mrs. M.E.J. Birch (Chairman); Councillor R.F. Curtis (Vice-Chairman); Councillors R.J. Bertin, Mrs. J.E. Charles, P. Church, J. Clifford, S.C. Egan, C.L. Osborne, Mrs. A.J. Preston, Mrs. M. Randall, A.J. Readman, Mrs. S.I. Sharpe, K.R. Stockdale, Mrs. M.R. Wilkinson and C.J. Williams.

Co-opted member: Mr. C. Curtis (Vale Housing and Homelessness Forum).

Also present: Councillors Ms. M.E. Alexander, C. Franks, Mrs. V.M. Hartrey, G. John and G.C. Kemp.

358 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE -

These were received from Councillors Ms. R.M. Birch and W.C. Vaughan.

359 MINUTES -

RECOMMENDED - T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 4th September, 2006 be approved as a correct record.

360 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST -

No declarations were received.

361 REPORT OF A MEETING -

The following report of a meeting of the Housing Sub-Committee held on 4th September, 2006 was accepted:

Present: Councillors Mrs. M.E.J. Birch, J. Clifford, R.F. Curtis, S.C. Egan and A.J. Readman.

Also present: Councillor J.W. Thomas.

(a) Appointment of Chairman -

RECOMMENDED - T H A T Councillor R.F. Curtis be appointed Chairman for the current municipal year.

(b) Appointment of Vice-Chairman -

RECOMMENDED - T H A T Councillor S.C. Egan be appointed Vice-Chairman for the current municipal year.

(c) Apologies for absence -

These were received from Councillors P. Church, Mrs. A.J. Preston, Mrs. S.I. Sharpe and K.R. Stockdale.

362 “FULFILLED LIVES, SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES” (REF) -

On 6th September, 2006, Cabinet’s views were sought on the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) Consultation Paper “Fulfilled Lives, Supportive Communities” - A Strategy for Social Services in Wales Over the Next Decade.

The consultation document proposed four main propositions, which would form the future direction for Social Services in Wales:

- The document concluded that the present boundaries of social services were about right, but that more emphasis needed to be placed in influencing national and local policy and in supporting partnerships that promoted community cohesion and social inclusion. The document argued that services needed to be rebalanced towards earlier support to improve outcomes and grasp opportunities for prevention rather than simply concentrating on those with the most intense needs. The document aimed to draw fewer children into services which substitute for family care keeping more children within their own families and help more people remain at home. Behind these proposals lay assumptions about how responsibilities should be allocated between the citizen and the state. Parents were responsible for rearing their children. The state should act vigorously to support them in discharging those responsibilities, only substituting for them where it was essential to do so. The document assumed that social services would be available to anyone whose difficulties qualified them for help, regardless of how those difficulties came about.
- The second proposition on which the paper was founded was that social service ought to remain a responsibility of local government in Wales. WAG suggested a number of ways of strengthening the way in which those responsibilities were exercised and improving outcomes for users. Whilst there had been a history of mixed performance, social services now had a much higher priority which was linked to record levels of investment and care delivery. The connections that local government provided to education, housing, economic opportunity and their new statutory duties to work more closely with other agencies such as the NHS as substantial

strengths on which to build. Over recent years stronger links had also been established with the independent and voluntary sectors to the benefit of clients. For these reasons WAG concluded that local councils should continue to be the main vehicle through which social services were commissioned. The rationale for this approach was that, for reasons of democratic accountability, core service continuity and links with other key services such as housing and education and the wider social inclusion agenda, local government remained the right place for social services.

- The third proposition was that local authorities should remain both providers and purchasers of social services, employing some staff directly and buying in other services from the voluntary and independent sectors. Discussion was required around is the current “mixed economy” model correct or should there be a further shift in favour of “enabling” authorities, in which services would be procured by tender and contract, rather than largely provided by the local authority themselves? If so, which services should be considered for resourcing and which should remain in-house? Should there be more encouragement for the involvement of not for profit providers, or should there be a revival of the role of the public sector itself?
- Finally, the paper proposed a model for staffing social services which sees it, essentially, as a highly trained and skilled occupation, led by social workers qualified through three-year degree programmes and supported by a wider range of other social and residential care staff. Other professions have moved in, in recent years, towards more plural patterns of service provisions. Pharmacists have new prescribing rights. Nurses run minor injury units. Classroom assistants free up teachers time. Should social services follow this pattern? For example, this document concluded that qualified and skilled social workers were needed to work with vulnerable children and their families because of that vulnerability and because of the complex judgements which those working in such circumstances have to make, day in and day out. Is it agreed that the extent to which social workers have to work alongside and negotiate with other professionals, demands the best trained, critically reflective practitioners, exercising judgement? Or is there a case for redefining and refocusing our work force assumptions, employing fewer more highly qualified people, freed up to do what only they are able to do supported by more people to undertake a narrower range of less demanding functions.

Cabinet had,

RESOLVED - T H A T the views of the Scrutiny Committee (Community Wellbeing and Safety) and its partner organisations be sought on the “WAG consultative document “Fulfilled Lives, Supportive Communities” - A Strategy for Social Services in Wales Over the Next Decade.

Having considered the detail of the report, it was

RECOMMENDED -

- (1) **T H A T** the contents of the consultation document be noted.

(2) T H A T, with regard to the third proposition, whilst recognising the need for a “mixed economy” model, it was felt that this should not be at the expense of a revival of the role of the public sector itself.

(3) T H A T, with regard to the fourth proposition, the case for redefining and refocusing the workforce assumptions and employment of more highly qualified people, supported by other staff to undertake a narrower range of less demanding functions be supported.

363 SOCIAL SERVICES BUDGET ACTION PLAN (REF) -

Cabinet on 20th September, 2006, had considered a report which outlined options for addressing the current budget issues within Social Services. In 2003/04 the Council had established a management fund of £5m. for Community Services. The fund had been available for the following purposes:

- “Invest to Save” Initiatives and preventative measures;
- Abnormal demands for services;
- Continued use in line with the Children’s Placement Strategy.

Since 2003/04, the Service had used the fund as follows:

- 2003/04 £1.4m.
- 2004/05 £2.3m.
- 2005/06 £4.6m.

On 6th September, 2006, Cabinet had considered the financial monitoring report which predicted that the overspend in the current financial year would be £5.5m. The Director of Community Services had been charged with developing an Action Plan to identify how spending across Social Services could be reduced by £5m. in order to deliver a balanced budget for Social Services.

Cabinet had received an Action Plan that had been developed and which identified proposals across the following service areas:

- Community Care and Health Services
- Children and Family Services
- Strategy, Performance Management and Commissioning
- The whole Directorate.

Cabinet had,

“RESOLVED -

(1) T H A T the Action Plan be referred to the Scrutiny Committee (Community Wellbeing and Safety), the Scrutiny Committee (Corporate Resources) as the lead Committee and to the Audit Committee.

(2) T H A T the Action Plan be referred to the Social Services Budget Working Group, the membership of which to be revised to consist exclusively of the Leader of the Council, Deputy Leader, the Cabinet Member for Social and Care Services and the leaders of all the other political groups (without substitution).

(3) T H A T an independent adviser be appointed to support the Chief Executive and the Leader in considering the Action Plan and its recommendations.

(4) T H A T due to the serious nature of the current budget situation, the proposals in the Action Plan with the exception of decisions requiring formal Cabinet approval be implemented with immediate effect.”

Members of the Scrutiny Committee were advised that, if the actions identified were not taken, other equivalent savings would have to be found, and that the actions identified attempted to avoid the need for frontline service cuts.

Having considered the proposed budget Action Plan, individual Members expressed the following views:

- Concern was expressed that, even before the proposed Budget Action Plan was implemented, the Council was not meeting its responsibilities.
- The Council should hold consultation meetings with voluntary organisations, the Local Health Board and the public.
- Monies need not necessarily be found exclusively from within the Social Services budget.
- Concern was expressed that the proposals could adversely affect Delayed Transfers of Care.
- The results of the Joint Review had not been published and it was possible that some of the proposals in the Action Plan could adversely affect services that may be identified as “failing”. The view was expressed that the results of the Joint Review should feed into the budget Action Plan exercise.
- It was difficult to support the proposals in the Budget Action Plan in view of the monies being spent by the Council on OneVale.
- Details of Action Plan Ref. CCH18 were requested.
- The Council should not make budget cuts in Support Services but from other areas of the Social Services budget.
- Vulnerable persons should be affected least of all by the cuts.
- Business process re-engineering should be considered.

- Some of the proposed actions penalised well performing managers.
- It was too late to make a difference during this financial year, and efforts should concentrate on the next financial year.
- The Social Services Inspectorate for Wales should scrutinise the Budget Action Plan.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Social and Care Services responded as follows:

- The Social Services budget must be brought back to its base budget. The longer this was put off, the more difficult it would be.
- The proposals had been discussed with officers.
- The Council must achieve what it can.
- The expenditure on "OneVale" had been mentioned. It must be realised that much of the expenditure on this initiative had been committed, and, furthermore switching the expenditure for OneVale to the Social Services budget would not solve the underlying problems.
- Cross-party talks were being held with Brian Gibbons AM to discuss the funding problems facing many Social Services Authorities in Wales.

Having considered the Social Services Budget Action Plan and the comments made thereon, it was

RECOMMENDED -

(1) T H A T representatives of voluntary organisations, Local Health Board and members of the public be invited to attend the next scheduled meeting of the Scrutiny Committee (Community Wellbeing and Safety) to be held on 23rd October, 2006 to express their views on the proposals contained in the Social Services Budget Action Plan.

(2) T H A T the Chairman of Scrutiny Committee (Corporate Resources) and Scrutiny Committee (Community Wellbeing and Safety) be invited to attend any future meetings with Brian Gibbons AM at which the funding of Social Services in Wales would be discussed.

364 REVENUE AND CAPITAL MONITORING FOR THE PERIOD 1ST APRIL, 2006 - 31ST AUGUST, 2006 (DCS) -

The report presented the position in respect of revenue and capital expenditure for the period 1st April, 2006 - 31st August, 2006 regarding revenue and capital budgets.

The Committee were advised that the projected out-turn for 2006/2007 revenue budget was for a balanced budget for the Housing Revenue Account and a deficit of £5,649,000 on the General Fund Services. Any deficit would have to be met from the un-earmarking of specific reserves.

In respect of Public Sector Housing, the current favourable variance of £32,000 was largely due, at present, to staff vacancies across the section and rent income being higher than anticipated due to less rights to buy sales. Any favourable variance at the year end would increase the Housing Revenue Account balance which was ring-fenced.

With regard to Private Sector Housing, it was estimated that this service would out-turn on target. The current favourable variance of £72,000 was mainly due to staff vacancies.

With regard to Children's Services, the Service was currently showing a projected deficit of £2,431,000, an increase of £144,000 on the previously reported figure. This increase was mainly due to one child's placement.

Community Care and Health showed a probable out-turn deficit of £3,068,000 which reflected the level of commitments on Residential Placements, Nursing Home Placements, Domiciliary Care Package and Social Worker costs. The actions currently being taken to curtail the overspend were not being reflected in current expenditure levels. As these savings became apparent, they would be reflected in future monitoring reports.

As previously reported, the Catering Service was currently showing a projected deficit of £150,000 due to losses incurred by the Trading Account. This deficit was due to a fall in the number of meals being supplied and may increase to £175,000 if, from September, meal numbers continued to decline. As the deficit related to the School Meals Service, it was anticipated that any deficit at the year end would be funded from savings identified in Policy Committee.

With regard to the anticipated deficit on the General Fund Services, Members enquired if other local authorities were in a similar position, and were advised that much evidence was being gathered at present. A recent meeting of the WLGA Co-ordinating Committee had agreed to hold all-party meetings with Brian Gibbons AM on this issue.

RECOMMENDED - T H A T the position with regard to the 2006/07 Revenue and Capital Monitoring be noted.

365 SUPPORTING PEOPLE - SUPPORTING PEOPLE OPERATIONAL PLAN 2006/07 - 2007/08 (REF) -

Cabinet on 20th September, 2006, had been requested to adopt the Draft Supporting People Operational Plan 2006/07 - 2007/08 and were requested to authorise its submission to the Welsh Assembly Government by 30th September, 2006.

Supporting People was the policy and funding framework for delivering accommodation based support to vulnerable people in different types of accommodation and across all tenures. In line with the guidance, the Council had established a Supporting people Planning Group to co-ordinate and develop the Supporting people Operational Plan. Membership of the Group was made up of officers from the Housing and Community Safety and Community Care and Health divisions of the Council's Community Services Directorate, the National Probation Service, the Vale Local Health Board and the Voluntary Sector.

Cabinet had,

RESOLVED -

(1) T H A T the Supporting People Operational Plan 2006/07 - 2007/08 be approved.

(2) T H A T the use of the Urgency Procedure and Article 13 of the Council's Constitution be invoked to enable the Supporting People Operational Plan to be submitted to WAG by 30th September, 2006.

(3) T H A T the report be referred to the Scrutiny Committee (Community Wellbeing and Safety) for information.

Scrutiny Committee, having considered the contents of the Operational Plan,

RECOMMENDED - T H A T the contents of the Plan be noted.

366 DEVELOPMENT OF BARRY HOSTEL (DCS) -

Committee were informed of progress made in the project to develop the existing Barry Hostel building, Gladstone Road, Barry, into a base for Community Care and Health Teams.

The following progress had been made since the last report to Scrutiny Committee:

- Project Board membership had been agreed and the first meeting of the Project Board was held in August 2006;

A Project Brief had been prepared and agreed by the Project Board;

- Liaison with Community Care and Health Team Managers had taken place to ascertain staff numbers, equipment and any special considerations for their service;
- Discussions had taken place with Property Services officers on the use of the building, planning requirements, numbers of staff to be

accommodated and a possible new layout. From these discussions, drawings had been prepared.

- The development had been the subject of an initial costings exercise by a quantity surveyor;
- The Local Authority Energy Manager had examined the building with a view to the inclusion of low carbon and green technology in the specifications and with a view to possible grant aid for these;
- A Managers' Workshop had been held with Community Care and Health Managers to discuss the new development and to engender a positive approach to the Barry Hostel development from managers and staff;
- A further managers' meeting had been held to examine the revised plans for the building;
- A meeting had been arranged to discuss the needs of the staff and building with regard to ICT requirements.

The Project Board had considered and agreed an initial development timetable, taking into account the need for final agreement on the design of the building and the Vale of Glamorgan Contract Standing Orders.

RECOMMENDED - T H A T the progress made on the Barry Hostel development be noted.

367 REPORT OF A SERIOUS CASE REVIEW FOLLOWING THE DEATH OF A CHILD (DCS) -

Committee were informed of the findings of a Serious Case Review following the death of a child, and of the action being taken to address concerns identified by the Review.

The circumstances and death of the child and the apparent system failures that gave rise to the Serious Case Review was set out in the Executive Summary by the Independent Overview Author, attached as Appendix 1 to the report.

In terms of lessons for the Council, the issues identified within the report were principally those associated with recognising the presence of risk factors and making sufficient assessments. There were also significant lessons about how agencies worked together and shared information.

Whilst there were a number of lessons to be learnt, it was notable that the report of the Serious Case Review had highlighted areas of good practice with the family. These included:

- the relationship between the general practitioner and mother, and the attempts made to try and meet her needs through the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service;
- the Police following up the Domestic Violence referral and attempting to ensure that mother was aware of services;
- mother being offered a highly relevant psychological intervention by the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service;
- the Community Midwife making an early referral to Children's Services having assessed the risk to the baby;
- the Sure Start Team working hard to engage and support the mother;
- the Voluntary Housing Support Agency working to engage the parents and to follow through and communicate with other agencies.

The Area Child Protection Committee, as the Commissioner of the Review, had incorporated the recommendations of the Serious Case Review within its Annual Business Plan. Of the 12 recommendations and 29 associated recommendations, 41 in total, 29 had been fully completed. Of the 12 remaining, significant progress had been made against each, with a majority of these recommendations only requiring limited remaining work.

RECOMMENDED -

(1) T H A T the findings and conclusions of the Serious Case Review as set out in the Executive Summary be noted, together with the action being taken to address concerns identified in the Review as contained within the Action Plan, attached at Appendix 2 to the report.

(2) T H A T the resource implications associated with addressing the concerns raised be noted.

368 ITEM WHICH THE CHAIRMAN HAD DECIDED WAS URGENT -

RECOMMENDED - T H A T the following item which the Chairman had decided was urgent be considered.

369 PLANNING FEES FOR CHILD MINDERS (REF) -

Urgent by reason of the need to submit a response to the Planning Committee prior to the next meeting

Planning Committee on 27th September, 2006, considered draft proposals received from the WAG in respect of reducing the fees for the submission of planning applications relating to child minding, and consideration was given to formulating this Council's response. WAG was canvassing for views in respect of whether planning application fees for changes of use and Certificates of Lawful Development for childminders working from their own homes should be reduced by 50%, there being some concern that the current fee payable could act as a barrier to some would-be child minders.

Members were advised that planning permission was not required where the number of children looked after were 6 or fewer and that the number of such applications received annually were not many.

In the draft response appended to the report, attention was drawn to the fact that WAG had only recently agreed a stepped increase in planning application fees which had resulted in an increase in the current year of 20% and next year of 10%. The increase had been put in place in order to ensure that local planning authorities were sufficiently funded to cope with the ever-growing development control workload and it was, therefore, seen as illogical to wind back those recent fee increases given that any beneficial effect had yet to be received. In addition, it was suggested that ad hoc tampering with the traditionally uniform planning fee structure could create a dangerous precedent, and that the proposed changes were ill-conceived and poorly thought out.

Whilst recognising the rationale behind the content of the draft response, Members expressed the view that, given WAG's aim of encouraging childminding provision, WAG might consider other funding mechanisms through which that could be achieved. In order to allow full consideration of such issues, including other potential ways in which the Council and its partners could provide incentives to attract additional childcare provision (all of which were outside the remit of this Committee), it was

RESOLVED - T H A T the report and the appendices thereto be referred to both the Scrutiny Committee (Community Wellbeing and Safety) and to the Cabinet for consideration prior to the Planning Committee formulating a response (in respect only of the proposed changes to the Planning Fees in Wales) in order that a rounded response could be forwarded to WAG by the due deadline of 10th November, 2006.

Scrutiny Committee having considered the decision of the Planning Committee

RECOMMENDED - T H A T the proposals to reduce the fees for the submission of planning applications relating to child minding be supported.

370 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC -

RESOLVED - T H A T under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part 4 of Schedule 12A (as amended) of the Act, the relevant paragraphs of the Schedule being referred to in brackets after the minute heading.

371 SOCIAL SERVICES BUDGET ACTION PLAN (DCS) (EXEMPT INFORMATION - PARAGRAPH 20) -

Arising from discussions earlier in the meeting, the Director outlined his intentions with regard to Action Plan Ref. CCH18 "To challenge the current contract arrangements with Hafod Housing in regard of two older people's homes in the Vale", and it was

RECOMMENDED - T H A T a report on this item be brought before a future meeting of the Committee.