

minutes



Meeting SOCIAL SERVICES STANDING SELECT COMMITTEE

Date Tuesday, 19th November 2003 (commencing at 10.30 am)

membership

Persons absent are marked with `A`

COUNCILLORS

Chris Baron (Chair)
Joe Lonergan MBE (Vice Chair)

A	John Bell	A	Peter D Prebble
A	Mrs Sue Bennett		Chris Preston
	Steve Carroll	A	R S Robinson
A	Rod Kempster		Rita Sharpe
A	J T A Napier		K Walker
A	R Needham		

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE

Councillor M Brandon-Bravo
“ B Smith

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors John Bell, Sue Bennett, J T A Napier, and Richard Robinson.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

None.

THE SUPPORTING PEOPLE PROGRAMME IN NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

Mr Dillon, Assistant Director of Social Services explained that this was a major Government initiative to transfer housing related support. He indicated that in two tier authorities it was the County Council that took the responsibility and was expected to oversee the programme. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister set a lot of expectations as to how the scheme should be implemented across the country and the County Council was expected to work in partnership in formal ways.

Within Nottinghamshire Social Services had taken on the role of oversight of the programme. The administration grant was ring-fenced and a team had been recruited to oversee the programme.

Ruth Rigby from the Social Services Department gave a presentation to the Select Committee. She indicated that the mission statement set by the Office for the Deputy Prime Minister was that the Supporting People programme offers vulnerable people the opportunity to improve their quality of life by providing a stable environment that enables greater independence. It had a Best Value methodology, which would deliver high quality and strategically planned housing – related support services which were cost effective, reliable and complement existing care services. The planning and development of services would be needs led, which had not been the case historically. Supporting People was a working partnership of local government, with Primary Care Trust's and Probation, service users and support agencies.

Service users were anyone in any form of supported accommodation and anyone who received housing related support wherever they lived. These were people with mental health needs, people with learning difficulties, homeless people, women at risk of domestic violence, recovering drug/alcohol users, young people at risk, refugees and older people. The majority, however, were older people. Housing related support services included emergency alarm systems, maintaining security, arranging adaptations, life skills training, advice on budgeting and management and a small historical amount of cleaning tenants homes. Warden services were funded to enable people to remain in their own home.

Ms Rigby indicated that the Core Strategy Development Group comprised officers from commissioning bodies ie the County Council, Primary Care Trust's, the District Councils, Probation, with provider organisation representatives and housing representatives. Councillor Dick Anthony was the Chair of the Commissioning Body. The grant given for the Supporting People programme had been fixed by identifying the funding in place on the 31st March 2003. The grant for Nottinghamshire in 2003/2004 was £28.5 million. Around 20,000 people received Supporting People funded services with 88% of recipients being older people, 2.5% people with mental health needs, 2.4% people with learning disabilities, 2.1% homeless people and 0.4% women fleeing domestic violence.

Nationally there was a review of Supporting People funding. Locally, a systematic review programme of all services was going on in order to assess the strategic relevance, service quality and value for money of existing services. The aim was to reconfigure existing services so that gaps can be met. A 5-year Supporting People Local strategy was being developed which would identify development priorities.

Councillor Baron commented that Ashfield had its own call centre for warden aided and supported housing. Elderly people in private accommodation were not able to use it. He wondered if they would now be able to do so. He referred to the people receiving services and commented that young person's tenancies, which were drug and alcohol related did not appear to be focussed on. Ms Rigby stated that historical funding had transferred and a lot of that had been paid through Housing Benefit and was only paid to tenants. It was recognised that a lot of people in their own homes struggled for community alarms and they would want them to be available to everyone. With regard to the split in services between different groups she stated they had identified services, for example, homeless people and recovering drug and alcohol users which focussed on young people. They would be identifying gaps with a view to focussing on these. She added that they were aware that people were moving in to bedsits. With bed and breakfast accommodation people had moved

into these either because of a lack of support or availability of other accommodation. She indicated that she would like to see homeless provision meet the needs of those presented. She referred to Ashfield, which was looking to establish a new homeless hostel where we would look to provide support. She stated that the current funding was at the level required to fund the existing services and it was hoped for at least the same in future years. She pointed out that these were uncertain times, as the review by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister would look at how funding was allocated. If significant cuts had to be made we may have to remove some services. She added that the 5-year strategy would show where we wanted funding to be allocated. She indicated that Supporting People had played an important part in the best value review of the promotion of independence.

Councillor Carroll commented that some organisations in the voluntary sector had been excluded from the bidding process for providing services for budget and debt management but they still provided a service. Ms Rigby stated that there had been an opportunity with Transitional Housing Benefit to develop new services and this had been available to any organisations. Some organisations were more proactive than others. The task for the Department's Supporting People Team was to review services provided and look to see if value for money was being obtained. She added that the unit costs were quite high in the county and that they would be agreeing reductions with some providers. Work on a value for money basis was critical, as it would inform the Office of Deputy Prime Minister's funds for future years.

Councillor Lonergan stated that there was a need to be clear what were the eligibility criteria. He referred to the reference to the 5-year plan that would move funds around. He added that there was a need to know how this would work and the effect on the winners and losers. He expressed concern about the accountability over the scheme, as there was only the involvement of one County Councillor on the whole Commissioning Body. He asked about how co-operation was carried out with the City Council. In response Ms Rigby stated that the scheme was needs led. The first task was to look at funding and assess need or demand and cost. She anticipated that we would see money move over the years. The Department had identified gaps, which they would try and solve. Providers would be asked for information about how services are used and if not the Department would see if the need was continuing. She added that she was accountable for seeing that the budgets balanced. She commented that traditionally Housing Benefit had not been needs led. The Supporting People Team reviewed the service, not the needs of the individual, as they did not assess individuals. It was likely in the future to look at how services were accessed and whether they are needed. She added that when the Department entered into long-term contracts they would be looking at eligibility.

Mr Pearson commented that with Housing Benefit there had been no value for money analysis and, no needs or quality analysis. He pointed out that the Strategy Implementation document was a crucial one and he wondered how Members and the Select Committee could be involved. Mr Dillon, Assistant Director of Social Services stated that there was a range of inherited services which had not been based on needs. The existing service was locked into these but the vision would now be different but change had to be managed. He commented that there had been no accountability before but that now parties were expected to work together and reach decisions that were transparent. The intention was to give them more clarity. There was a strong accountability to stay in budget and the County Council would be responsible if the budget was overspent. He indicated that there was

ODPM guidance on the partnership arrangements and that the involvement of one County Councillor was written into this together with one representative from each District, Probation and the Primary Care Trusts. He agreed that it looked unbalanced but the Office for the Deputy Prime Minister stated that all decisions of the Commissioning Body must be unanimous. The Office for the Deputy Prime Minister would decide if agreement could not be reached.

Councillor Brandon-Bravo asked if there was not a risk of a lack of focus on other groups given that 88% of the recipients were older people. Ms Rigby stated that the strategy document was the one that would focus developments. She pointed out, however, that there were very high unit costs for some types of accommodation. This was comparatively cheap for older people; it was approximately £6 per week nationally compared with £4 in Nottinghamshire. The average spend in two tier authorities was comparatively low whereas in unitaries there was a focus on higher cost provision, for example, the homeless. She added that the Office for the Deputy Prime Minister was aware that it was necessary to have cross-authority arrangements, as there was movement between the City and County. She added that the teams worked closely together and shared providers. A cross-authority group was being set up. Mr Dillon stated that the strategy had to be finalised next year and that it would not be easy to reach agreement. He felt that more consultation in the preparation would help and it would be useful if this was brought to the Select Committee as part of the process. Councillor Baron stated that he would want the Select Committee to have time to input into the process.

Councillor Rita Sharpe commented that care leavers were a vulnerable group and wondered how they linked into this. Ruth Rigby stated that care leavers were being supported on this scheme and that the statutory responsibility for housing had fallen on Social Services. She pointed out that District Councils had lead housing responsibilities for teenage parents.

Councillor Preston stated that there was a need to be aware of the strategy of each organisation as Primary Care Trusts, and District Councils would all have their own priorities. He commented that if there was a joint strategy most housing was not modernised and to keep elderly people in their own homes there was a need to understand that modernisation and adaptation to properties was essential. There was a need to base this in reality as grants at the moment could be limited. He agreed that vulnerable categories of young people needed looking at.

Councillor Napier wondered who was the senior partner in the partnership. He asked about links with the Strategic Health Authority and Mental Health Trusts and how our services linked with their priorities. He asked what influence we had on external providers in the County and referred to a company from Dover who had bought a property in East Markham and moved a number of adolescents into it. Ms Rigby stated that an event had been held yesterday where partners had started to look at gaps and the meeting had been very positive. She indicated that the strategy would be developed and difficult decisions would need to be taken. She added that she felt there were positive relationships at the moment. She referred to Home Improvement Agencies of which there were two in the county at the moment which provided advice to mainly owner occupiers. There was additional resources from the Office for the Deputy Prime Minister for this and they would be looking to expand provision across the country. She pointed out that the Supporting People grant was revenue funding which could not be used to alter buildings. There was a need to link

to the Housing Corporation and she would like to have an influence on how it spends its funds. She stated that there was a link with the Health Trust particularly around learning disability. She added that there currently were no links with the Strategic Health Authority and there was probably a need to develop this. Mr Dillon explained that health representation was through the Primary Care Trusts but the County Council was the lead.

In response to a question from Councillor Baron, Ruth Rigby stated that she anticipated changes in the distribution of services over time. She explained that current services had been provider led rather than need and she expected it to change to reflect need.

It was agreed that the Overview Select Committee be asked to approve that work on the Supporting People strategy be included in the work programme of the Committee for June 2004.

The meeting closed at 11.47 am.

CHAIR

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