

minutes



Meeting SOCIAL SERVICES STANDING SELECT COMMITTEE

Date Tuesday, 16th December 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		Peter D Prebble
A	Mrs Sue Bennett		Chris Preston
	Steve Carroll	A	R S Robinson
	Rod Kempster		Rita Sharpe
A	J T A Napier		K Walker
A	R Needham		

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE

Councillor M Brandon-Bravo

MINUTES

The minutes of the last meetings of the Select Committee held on 4th and 19th November 2003 were confirmed and signed by the Chair.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from:-

Councillor John Bell
“ Sue Bennett
“ J T A Napier
“ R Needham
“ R S Robinson

It was agreed that a letter be sent to Councillor Mrs Sue Bennett to convey the Committee's best wishes for a speedy recovery.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

None.

RESPONSE TO THE REVIEW OF CHILDREN'S RESIDENTIAL SERVICES

Marcie Taylor, Assistant Director of Social Services introduced the report on Cabinet's response to the recommendations of the review of children's residential services. She indicated that the Department had accepted the comments about the title of the Therapeutic Residential Service and will be changing the title. Specialist support service had been suggested but this would be confirmed. She stated that there was a need to identify an alternative to the Pleasley property. The Department were looking for a property in Broxtowe, Rushcliffe or Gedling but had not been able to identify a suitable property. There was a need to release the Pleasley home for this. Full consultation on the proposals was planned and it was hoped to have a number of options. She explained that Woodland View provided 3 beds plus one emergency bed. It was a requirement of the National Care Standards that the Department was able to place children in emergencies. She explained that Lawn Place was in the process of being registered by the National Care Standards Commission. She added that it could take four beds but it was not deemed to be suitable and had been reduced to three.

Councillor Baron stated that the Select Committee would like to assist if a new policy was being brought in and would like to be involved at an early stage through a Study Group. Councillor Lonergan stated that he had not liked the use of the term therapeutic home and was pleased this was to be changed. Marcie Taylor suggested that Members of the Select Committee could join the Planning Group but Councillor Baron stated that this would not be appropriate.

It was agreed to set up a Study Group consisting of Councillors Steve Carroll, Keith Walker, Chris Baron, Rod Kempster and Joe Lonergan.

Marcie Taylor reported that there was no capital funding for the removal of the CLASP building behind the Big House at Edwinstowe. She added that if the building was demolished there may be difficulties in obtaining planning permission in the future. She indicated that the Health Service were not able to provide match funding at the moment, but discussions however were ongoing. Councillor Baron commented that some of the bedrooms at the Big House were large and could be split into two thereby increasing respite provision. Marcie Taylor stated that this was being looked into but would have revenue implications and there were structural problems with the building. They were also looking at increased day care. In response to a question from Councillor Preston, Marcie Taylor stated that as part of the funding came from North Nottinghamshire Health Authorities it was therefore only a facility clients from North Nottinghamshire could access. Councillor Lonergan stated that the CLASP building had been a controversy for some time and that the Department had been reporting back on this for the last 10 years. He stressed that it was about time something was done. Marcie Taylor stated that all funding opportunities were being explored.

With regard to Lawn Place, Marcie Taylor stated that the sale of the property would not produce enough capital to buy elsewhere and there was not any funding currently in the capital programme. The number of beds had been reduced from four to three and the home was deemed suitable by the National Care Standards Commission. She commented that there were issues around spaces and that the Managers used local parks. She added that the Manager addressed local issues with neighbours. She pointed out that there had been an issue with one particular child who had caused damage. She indicated that they were monitoring maintenance and looking to see how they could make the building more robust. They were hoping to complete the evaluation of the building to determine if a bid should be made for next year's capital programme. Councillor Lonergan commented that problems had been caused by the plasterboard partitions. He did not support moving from the premises. He pointed out that the staff wanted limited changes to the office. He thought it prudent to keep and look after the property.

Marcie Taylor reported that the Cabinet had not agreed to ringfence the maintenance budget. There was a commitment to maintain the property to a high standard and if it was not it would not continue to be registered by the National Care Standards Commission. She added that they were monitoring the spend on maintenance and it was estimated that £15,000 per property should meet usual expenditure. Councillor Baron commented that if the maintenance budget was not ringfenced properties may end up deteriorating like The Ridge had in the past. He pointed out that homes were capital assets which needed to be looked after.

With regard to the recommendation concerning reviewing staffing levels at Minster View to enable the service to operate at full capacity, Marcie Taylor stated that this needed to be addressed as part of the best value review of disabled children and a further report back in January would be made. Councillor Lonergan stated that this was a long standing problem. He commented that the Cabinet Member claimed that beds were being filled but he still thought there were four or five beds not filled. He thought that the staff review was taking too long and that it was a shame that we had this facility which was not filled. Councillor Preston stated that he would like to see details of the requests for respite care which were refused in the January report.

It was noted that there would be a further report to the January meeting.

"EVERY CHILD MATTERS" – GREEN PAPER ON CHILDRENS SERVICES

Mr Farrow from the Social Services Department introduced the report. He explained that Margaret Hodge, the Minister for Children had a vision of a partnership between the family and the statutory services to bring up children. He commented that in Nottinghamshire we had worked well with partners and developed a joint response to the Green Paper. In addition 200 young people had been consulted. He indicated that young people generally felt that adults should listen more and be better at meeting them on their terms and feedback decisions to them. They would like to see more out of school activities. Our response welcomed the thrust of joining up but felt further work was needed about how youth justice and health were to be included. It was felt that the Green Paper did not give enough emphasis to safeguarding children. It was also felt that the thinking around childrens health had not been well thought out. More emphasis was needed of the youth service – it was hardly mentioned in the Green Paper. They had a role to reach out to the disaffected. It

was felt that the targets should be joined up and holistic. The role of the voluntary sector needed to be valued.

Mr Farrow stated that the timescale seemed bizarre and the Government wanted by 2006 Childrens Trusts established everywhere. He pointed out that we were developing Pathfinder Trusts for disabled children and it was felt that we should evaluate and learn lessons from these before more Trusts were established. There was a desire to establishing a Director of Child Services, but locally we would like to have discretion on how this is put into practice.

Councillor Lonergan congratulated the officers' efforts in their response. He felt that the Green Paper was basically "a knee jerk reaction" to the Climbie case and that there were a lot of unknowns in the proposals. He commented that one or two poor authorities in London was leading to all authorities having to change. Nottinghamshire was a good authority but was also having to change but nobody knew what would happen and it was a worrying time. Mr Farrow agreed there was a huge change agenda. Throughout it he agreed that we had to be careful to hold on to excellent practice in Nottinghamshire. He pointed out that joined up work was being piloted for example through Sure Start and extended schools programme. He agreed that Nottinghamshire had had excellent inspection reports for example from the Social Services Inspectorate but there was room for better working together between Social Services and the Health Service. There was still room to improve although we started from a good base. In response to a question from Councillor Preston, Mr Farrow stated that the Department had started the process of talking to health about the implications of the Green Paper.

PROGRESS ON ADOPTION BEST VALUE REPORT

Rachel Coombs from the Social Services Department introduced the report on progress of the best value improvement plan relating to adoption services. She commented that it had been hoped that the timescales would have improved. She indicated that measures were being taken which would hopefully mean that in six months time there would be a reduction. She pointed out that a major issue was delays with the court process and they were approaching this in a number of ways. She indicated however that delays were getting longer at the moment. Councillor Baron commented that one of the main reasons why the Department's bid for beacon status for the adoption service had failed was because of the high average time for adoption. He commented that this had not improved at all even though a third Adoption Panel had been created. Councillor Preston commented that he was conscious of external factors which were not in our control. He thought that there was a need through the Cabinet Member and other authorities to draw to Government's attention the delays caused by the courts. He felt however it was important to provide a good comprehensive service rather than one which was based solely on speed. He stated there was a need to bring the staffing levels up so that the Department was always fully staffed up.

Councillor Lonergan commented that the best value plan had suggested that extra staff were recruited because the recruitment of adoptees was crucial. He pointed out that we had failed to fill the staff required and therefore not got the adoptees. He could not understand why it had taken so long. He commented that we had been criticised because of the longevity of the process and we needed to find out how other authorities dealt with this. Councillor Baron suggested that we could learn from

other authorities about their best practice. He agreed that the judicial process was out of our control. Rachel Coombs stated that all posts had targets and each one was keeping to their targets. She added that we were well ahead of recruiting adopters. She pointed out that we had a track record of placing older children and with more complex needs and complex contact arrangements which had an impact on the timescales. Councillor Preston commented that we could meet the targets but we would have a less good service. He added that we were making every effort to adopt children if it was in their best interests.

It was agreed that a further report on progress be brought to the Select Committee in June/July 2004.

DISTRIBUTION UNIT STRATEGY FOR THE MEALS SERVICE PROGRESS REPORT

Mr Gibbons from the Social Services Department introduced the report. He indicated that 14 vans had been obtained, 7 are to be leased and 7 are to be purchased.

Councillor Baron suggested that there should be a further update on progress at the June/July Select Committee meeting together with an appraisal on the meals at home service. Mr Gibbons stated that the review process had begun to provide positive indications that it was being effective and that the service was now providing 65% hot meals. Councillor Rita Sharpe stated that it was pleasing to see the progress being made. She expressed concern at how people were reviewed in relation to what was an appropriate meal. She stated that she was against moving to a 100% frozen service. Mr Gibbons stated that the reviews were an ongoing process. He pointed out that if the delivery staff had a cause for concern there would be a review. He commented that people's circumstances changed. He pointed out the fact that they are visited by a limited number of drivers did provide a form of check on their circumstances and that any deterioration was reported back to Headquarters. Headquarters staff then took steps to put matters right by varying the service delivery to meet the revised need. They operated a system where 3 / 4 drivers circulate round 3 / 4 rounds. This was in the interest of continuity of services during times of sickness and annual leave. Mr Gibbons added that there was no future in delivering inappropriate services.

It was agreed that a further progress report be made to the June/July Select Committee together with an update on the meals at home service.

DAY SERVICES MODERNISATION FOR LEARNING DISABILITY SERVICES IN NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

It was agreed that

- (1) The terms of reference of the study group to look into day services modernisation for learning disability services in Nottinghamshire be agreed as set out in the report and
- (2) that a Study Group of up to 5 Members comprising Councillors Sue Bennett, Steve Carroll, Chris Baron and J T A Napier be set up to consider this area of work.

JOINT WORKING BETWEEN THE PENSION SERVICE AND ADULT CARE FINANCIAL SERVICES IN SOCIAL SERVICES

Mr Hannam from the Social Services Department introduced the report. He explained that the aim was for information to be obtained once to check people's incomes and savings before awarding benefits or setting a service charge. This would free people up to give better advice about benefits and access to other services. He pointed out that the City Council would not now be a partner. He added that the Minister of State was very keen for this joint work to proceed and wanted 70% of all local authorities to be involved by October 2004. He stated that the Pension Service outreach workers involved in the scheme were not the people who processed pensions. The arrangements were meant to build on fairer charges. He added that we would want to get District Councils involved in the scheme and it was hoped to carry out a pilot with Newark and Sherwood. He commented that Nottinghamshire was one of the first local authorities in the country to go ahead with the joint scheme. Councillor Carroll commented that with fairer charges one of the issues was over the capability of the team to deliver. He wondered if there was the capability to deliver these proposals. He welcomed the idea of there being one visit. He asked about the involvement of the voluntary sector.

Councillor Lonergan commented that the Strategic Joint Management Board sounded like a quango and he felt that there was a loss of democratic accountability. He thought that there was a secret agenda of regionalisation and that this was just another step. He commented that service users had to give permission to pass information to other agencies and he wondered how we would put this request to people. He pointed out that people's information was spread across the whole spectrum and he thought we were moving to a 1984 Orwell type system. Councillor Preston thought that the proposed joint working was exciting with a one stop shop with bodies coming together. He thought that it was useful when the scheme was looked at from the users prospective. He agreed that the voluntary sector was important.

Mr Hannam stated that fairer charging was working quite well but that there were some staffing problems. He added that it seemed quite popular and that £2m in additional benefits had been provided to people in the first year. He commented that there was a lot of enthusiasm from service users and the voluntary sector to have a one stop shop but he accepted that there would be data protection issues. He stated that customers permission was sought to exchange information. He accepted that this was an issue although it was found that most people were happy to spread information as it saved them time. He stated that they would be working with the voluntary sector and would make sure that the Community Legal Service Partnership was updated. He stated that they would be setting up a new board and it was about co-operation. He added that it was about joining up and he hoped that it should work quite well. He agreed that it was a big change and that there was an issue about Member involvement. Councillor Rita Sharpe saw this as a process supporting people in the community. The single access was about making it easier for people and seemed sensible. The issues about structures were another issue but she fully supported the process to make things easier.

SOCIAL SERVICES SELECT PROGRAMME OF WORK

The programme of work was noted.

The meeting closed at 11.55 am.

CHAIR

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