

ADULT, COMMUNITY AND HOUSING SERVICES
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday, 11th November, 2013 at 6.00 p.m.
in Committee Room 2 at the Council House, Dudley

PRESENT:-

Councillor Islam (Chair)
Councillor James (Vice Chair)
Councillors Baugh, Body, Evans, Herbert, J Martin, Miller, Mottram, and
Vickers.

Officers

Assistant Director, Customer Services (Lead Officer to the Committee),
Treasurer, Policy and Performance Manager and Team Manager, Customer
Services (All Directorate of Corporate Resources), Director of Adult, Community
and Housing Services, Assistant Director of Housing Strategy and Private
Sector, Assistant Director, Housing Services, Head of Service - Housing
Options, Head of Service, (Housing Management South), Housing Finance
Manager, Head of Commissioning, Head of Finance and Team Manager
(Income) North (All Directorate of Adult, Community and Housing Services) and
Mrs K Buckle (Directorate of Corporate Resources).

20 **APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE**

An Apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor
M Wilson.

21 **DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

No member made a declaration of interest in accordance with the Members'
Code of Conduct.

22 **MINUTES**

RESOLVED

That, the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 24th
September, 2013, be approved as a correct record and signed.

23 **REVENUE BUDGET STRATEGY 2014/15**

A joint report of Officers was submitted on the proposed Revenue Budget Strategy for 2014/15 and the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

In presenting the report submitted, the Treasurer referred to Appendix C of the report submitted outlining the proposed savings in line with the terms of reference of this Committee.

The Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services outlined the approach being taken in the Directorate in order to achieve the savings required, confirming that the level of need and the model of need required was clear including the investment needed in community support. Details of work that would be undertaken with the Clinical Commissioning Group were provided in relation to helping to keep people out of hospitals and reducing the level of dependency that people had on resources and providing a package of care for the lifetime of patients. Details of the funding that would become available from the Clinical Commissioning Group in order to achieve this were also provided.

Arising from the presentation of the report, and Appendices to the report submitted, Members asked questions and raised concerns as follows:-

- The overspend in relation to Looked After Children and how this had arisen;
- How the level of need upon services compared with other Authorities;
- Was it anticipated that the elderly would require care for longer periods of time;
- How confident was the Directorate that the spending and savings outlined in report were accurate;
- Were the figures outlined in report in relation to Health integration achievable;
- How would the Directorate deal with the increase in demand from dementia patients;
- Who were the external providers in relation to the transfer of home care and how did they qualify to provide this service;
- Would the Government remove Local Enterprise Partnerships funding from Local Authorities;

Officers responded to members questions as follows:-

The Treasurer advised that the overspend was in respect of increased social work caseloads increasing and increased numbers of children in care, in particular very challenging high-cost cases, and that further detail would be provided to the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee.

The Head of Commissioning reported that the level of need upon services were comparable with other Black Country Authorities and the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services undertook to provide Councillor Evans with comparable percentage levels of care as they related to the Council and other Black Country Authorities.

The Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services advised that there were a number of ways to invest in and develop different ways of providing services in order to make them more cost effective such as prevention services, increasing the advice and the level of knowledge and working with the voluntary sector and the public in order to achieve this.

She also referred to working closely with providers in order to produce different and new levels of care in order to expedite patients being discharged from hospital and provide continuing care at home for those patients.

The Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services referred to the provision of extra care housing and the continuing work in order to deliver this service upon a more cost effective basis and addressing alternative systems in order to avoid rationing care, should the elderly require this for longer periods of time.

She also referred to the huge amount of work that was being undertaken in order to accelerate the whole service and the Head of Commissioning also advised that each care case would be examined in conjunction with the skills and assets that the Directorate had in the workplace advising that new systems should be in place by August, 2014.

The Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services advised that in relation to the growth figures raised by the Chair, that the Directorate had calculated these on the demographic population and pressures known to the Directorate based on the demand on services. This is combined with benchmarking figures and the Demand Management System that is operated by the Directorate. The Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services also referred to continuing work with General Practitioners in order to diagnose dementia at an earlier stage which was increasing local knowledge of the numbers and demand within this area of the service.

In relation to dealing with the increase in demand for dementia services the Head of Commissioning advised that work was continuing in order to make better use of resources and this would include working with partners to provide the service.

The Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services explained about the Integration Transfer fund being transferred from the National Health Service into Adult Social Care. The national figure was £3.8 billion. A large proportion of the money had already been transferred to the Directorate, and the majority of the funding was used, under a legal section (Section 256) with health partners, to reduce pressures on hospital beds with the main focus on the growing older population. That the Directorate provide additional activity for this investment and then need to ensure some of the funding is used to pay for the life time costs of care for those people who are taken out of hospital.

The Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services advised that the remaining financial transfer being discussed was £1.9 billion nationally and was not new money, it was money which was already being used by the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to fund existing health services. The Directorates route to accessing the money was to join up with health and community

colleagues to develop a plan for integrating the Directorates social care services, once again in order to reduce pressure on hospital beds, thus enabling the CCG to reduce current funding in order to invest in the social care element of those services. It was stated that the Directorates plans were well progressed and were committed to providing excellent community based responses as trusted alternatives for any order person who may currently be admitted to hospital. The Directorate were determined that any unplanned admission to hospital or residential care would be seen as a failure of the whole systems approach.

The Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services stated that if the integration plans were successful it would reduce pressures on the budget, but would not provide a solution for it all.

The Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services referred to the relocation of reablement service beds from two small homes into Russell Court and there was no disruption to people who use this service.

The Treasurer reported on the amount of New Homes Bonus to be top sliced for the Local Enterprise Partnership and confirmed that officers were seeking to secure investment of this money for the benefit of the borough.

RESOLVED

That the Cabinet's Revenue Budget Strategy proposals for 2014/15 and Medium Term Financial Strategy, as set out in the report, and Appendices to the report, submitted be noted and the Cabinet be informed that there were no observations that this Scrutiny Committee wished to make on the proposals.

24 IMPACT OF THE BENEFIT CAP AND REMOVAL OF THE SPARE ROOM SUBSIDY ON INCOME COLLECTION WITHIN DUDLEY

A report of the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services was submitted on the impact of the Benefit Cap and the removal of the spare room subsidy on income collection within Dudley.

Arising from the presentation of the report submitted a member raised concerns in relation to the spare room subsidy and the increase that had resulted in rent arrears, the lack of transitional arrangements that had been put in place by the Government prior to introducing the subsidy and the additional work that had resulted including the demand on Council resources.

A member raised concerns in relation to the large amount of benefits that were being received by some as compared to the average income although it was accepted that there were genuine cases.

Members thanked Officers for the report submitted.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report submitted, on the impact of the Benefit Cap and the removal of the spare room subsidy on income collection within Dudley, be noted.

25 THE IMPACT OF WELFARE REFORM ON DUDLEY HOUSING STOCK

A report of the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services was submitted on the impact of Welfare Reform on Dudley Housing Stock.

The Head of Service, Housing Options distributed to members the data in relation to Walsall Council that reflected how their housing stock compared to the Council's.

Arising from the presentation of the report submitted members asked questions and made comments and the Head of Service, Housing Options responded as follows:-

- She was not aware of any recent cases where tenants were sub-letting their council properties, however two Fraud Officers had been put in post in the Directorate's Anti Social Behaviour team and they would deal with such cases should they arise.
- In relation to the waiting list the majority were those wishing to downsize.
- One hundred and fifteen tenants had downsized in anticipation of the spare bedroom subsidy.
- In relation to high rise accommodation prospective tenants were mainly concerned about mobility problems that may result by moving into this accommodation;
- That a fast track process had been implemented in order to advertise void properties and there was also a show flat open day event at the end of November;

Following a suggestion by a member that some maisonettes could be remodelled and converted into one bedroom flats the Head of Service, Housing Options advised that this would need to be addressed as part of the general Capital Programme.

Members thanked the Head of Service, Housing Options for the content of the report submitted.

RESOLVED

That, the information contained in the report submitted, on the impact on Welfare Reform on Dudley Housing Stock, be noted.

26 RECLASSIFICATION AND REMODELLING OF COUNCIL HOUSING STOCK – OPTIONS PAPER

A report of the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services was submitted on the options for reclassification and remodelling of council housing stock.

Arising from the presentation of the report submitted members asked questions and made comments as follows:-

A member referred to the possible loss in income that may result from re-classification of properties and suggested that parlour type properties could be used to re-house those requiring four bedroom properties.

That offering high rise properties to those with families may pose problems to older residents.

It was recommended that the report submitted be referred to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Community Safety.

The Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services confirmed that the Futures Housing Board already facilitated discussions in relation to reclassification and remodelling of council housing stock with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Community Safety.

She also responded to a question in relation to the council purchasing new build housing stock that could not be sold by developers advising that this had not been investigated but could be an option for the future.

A member requested that ground floor bedrooms in maisonettes should be taken into account when investigating possible re-classification as these were sometimes not used by tenants due to health and safety concerns and that in relation to two bedroom high rise properties the creation of a kitchen diner should be investigated due to many of those properties containing small kitchen areas.

In responding to a question from a member in relation to converting two bedroom maisonettes into one bedroom properties in order to generate income the Housing Finance Manager indicated that this would depend upon the cost of re-modelling and was dependant upon whether tenants already occupying those properties wished to be re-housed and the Council could re-house them.

The Assistant Director of Housing Services in responding to a question from a member advised that the Housing Futures Board would look at the Council's housing stock as to sustainability which would include evaluating areas and addressing the issues of costs and re-housing with the long term sustainability of the proposed re-modelling.

The Head of Service, Housing Options responded to a member's question stating that the Best Use of Stock partnership would look at shared ownership models advising that there was funding available to the Regional Housing Group to work on this.

The Housing Finance Manager referred to the different avenues and agencies used to trace former tenants with rent arrears advising that rent arrears could be revived should a former tenant be traced.

The Assistant Director of Housing Strategy and Private Sector advised that funding from the Local Enterprise Partnership may be available and the Housing Finance Manager reported that this funding could be used for partnership schemes.

A member advised that it may be more cost effective to demolish maisonettes and re-build new properties.

In responding to a member's question the Head of Service, Housing Options confirmed that the Council provided a Statutory Homelessness Service and advised of the process and matters that would be taken into account should the homelessness result from council eviction, stating that every case would be dealt with upon its own merits and there were no blanket decisions.

A member suggested that three bedroom maisonettes could be used to provide accommodation for young people leaving care with those of a young age sharing the accommodation and the Assistant Director of Housing Strategy and Private Sector advised that he would refer this suggestion to the Housing Futures Board.

RESOLVED

- 1 That, the information contained in the report, submitted on the options for reclassification and remodelling of council housing stock, be noted.
- 2 That the report submitted on options for reclassification and remodelling of council housing stock be referred to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Community Safety with the request that the reclassification and remodelling of council housing stock be investigated taking into account the council's resources to do so.

The meeting ended at 9.00 p.m.

CHAIR