

**Minutes of the Adult, Community and Housing Services Scrutiny
Committee**

**Monday, 7th July, 2014 at 6.00 p.m.
in Committee Room 2 at the Council House, Dudley**

Present:

Councillor M Hanif (Chair)
Councillor R James (Vice Chair)
Councillors R Body, I Cooper, A Goddard, Z Islam, J Martin, D Perks, K Turner,
D Tyler and D Vickers.

Officers:

M Williams (Assistant Director, Customer Services), (Lead Officer to the Committee), M Bowsher (Assistant Director for Quality and Commissioning), D Channings (Assistant Director of Housing Services) and K Buckle (Democratic Services Officer).

1 **Welcome**

The Chair welcomed all those present to the meeting, following which introductions were made.

2 **Declarations of Interest**

In accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, the following interests were Declared:-

Councillor K Turner declared non-pecuniary interests in Agenda Item No's. 5 – Annual Scrutiny Programme 2014/15, 6 – The Care Act – Implications for Dudley and 7 – Housing Futures Board as Chairman and Trustee Director of Age Concern, Stourbridge and Halesowen, Director of Right To Buy Services Limited and being a private landlord for properties in Dudley and other areas.

3 **Minutes**

Resolved

That subject to the inclusion to Minute No. 38 – New Bradley Hall – Up-Date and Next Steps – that a member of the public had referred to a provider with a proven track record being required to provide care services at New Bradley Hall, the minutes of the meeting held on 4th March, 2014, be approved as a correct record and signed.

4 **Annual Scrutiny Programme 2014/15**

The Committee considered a report of the Lead Officer and Director of Corporate Resources on the items proposed and suggested for inclusion in the Annual Scrutiny Programme for detailed consideration during 2014/15.

Following a concern raised by a Member, the Lead Officer reported that following a review last year there was a revised process to be followed in relation to the addition of further items to be scrutinised, which would involve the items being recommended to the Overview Scrutiny and Management Board for inclusion in this Committees Annual Scrutiny Programme.

Councillor J Martin wished to add Welfare Reforms to the Annual Scrutiny Programme and following further discussion, it was agreed that the possibility of this would be explored further following the presentations in relation to the two items proposed and suggested for inclusion in the Annual Scrutiny Programme.

Following further discussion it was

Resolved

That the proposed items contained in the Annual Scrutiny Programme for 2014/15, as referred to in paragraph 3 and Appendix 1 to the report submitted, be endorsed.

5 **The Care Act – Implications for Dudley**

The Committee considered a presentation of the Assistant Director for Quality and Commissioning on the Care Act – Implications for Dudley. The presentation was circulated to Members and was available on the Council's Committee Management Information System (CMIS).

The content of the presentation was to outline the key changes the Care Act would make for those accessing care services including details of personal budgets for allocating a sum of money to an individual, the enforceable rights that carers would qualify for and deferred payments for the cost of care at home.

The Assistant Director for Quality and Commissioning outlined other changes including the provision of counselling, advocacy, information and advice and the legal obligation upon the Council to have Safeguarding Boards.

The new duties and powers to provide prevention and reduction measures, the duty to provide an information service and a general duty to shape the market so as to secure diverse provision of services were outlined together with the significant duty imposed on the Care Quality Commission.

The current and new charging arrangements for residential care and care at home were outlined, and it was noted that in relation to the new rates, although the assessed contribution rate had increased this rate also included the value of a property. Details were also provided in relation to the new charging arrangements and the Care Cap and it was demonstrated that in most cases the new charging arrangements would not impact upon the current client base.

It was noted that people would remain responsible for a contribution towards general living costs and when a person has care and support needs but does not qualify for financial support from the local authority, they are still able to request that the local authority arrange the care and support that they require.

Following the presentation by the Assistant Director for Quality and Commissioning and the suggested potential areas for further scrutiny, Members asked questions and the Assistant Director for Quality and Commissioning responded as follows:-

- That the role of day care services under the Care Act and costings would be provided;
- In relation to state funded care shared rooms were no longer allowed under the Care Act.
- That In relation to an individual having to contribute towards the first £72,000 of care costs in their lifetime, that this cap would be from April 2016, and any retrospective contributions towards care costs would not be taken into account in order that all those accessing care services are in the same position relating to the cap;
- Work had commenced in relation to the provision of advocacy services;
- That there were 36,000 unpaid carers in the Dudley Borough and Members could chose to invite a number of carers organisations to future meetings of the Committee in order to examine carers rights and how they would be supported under the Care Act;
- That modelling work was being undertaken in relation to the financial readiness for the implementation of the Care Act and this work would provide an indication of the gap between need and the provision of services;

Following further detailed discussion in relation to the potential areas for further scrutiny it was suggested that Support to Carers and the Readiness of Information and Advice Systems be scrutinised to include the financial implications at the September meeting of the Committee.

Members were in general agreement that they also wished to scrutinise the following areas:-

- Financial Implications of the Care Act: modelling work, cost pressures, the care cap, impact on self funders, residential nursing and day care fees, maximising income for carers:
- The Effectiveness of the Adult Safeguarding Board including how the quality of care will be monitored and how effective the Safeguarding Adults Board was;

- Market Shaping and ensuring that there was adequate choice within the Dudley Borough including the financial implications of the themes above for scrutiny at the meetings of the Committee scheduled to take place in January and March, 2015.

Resolved

- (1) That the information contained in the presentation and comments made arising from the presentation, as indicated above on The Care Act – Implications for Dudley, be noted.
- (2) That the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services be requested to submit a report to the September meeting of the Committee in relation to Support to Carers and detailing the information outlined above in relation to Carers.

6 **Housing Futures Board**

The Committee considered a presentation of the Assistant Director of Housing Services on the Housing Futures Board.

The Assistant Director of Housing Services also provided feedback from the Institute of Housing Conference that she had recently attended and reported on the work of the Housing Futures Board, which was established with the Cabinet Member and Shadow Cabinet Member for Housing and Community Safety, and the further detail that was required in relation to the Dudley Boroughs housing stock and housing need going forward in order for the Council to position themselves to meet the housing needs of residents in the future.

The Assistant Director of Housing Services advised that the largest area for housing demand was in relation to young single people and there was a need to ensure that the right provision was made for this area of housing demand.

It was noted that investigations would be undertaken in relation to existing Council housing stock and whether there was a need to demolish, given the lack of interest in maisonettes and multi storey properties, and it was crucial that there was a housing stock in place that was fit for purpose.

Suggestions for Scrutiny were outlined and following these suggestions, Members asked questions made comments and observations as follows:-

- A request that a Member of the UK Independence Party become a Member of the Housing Futures Board.
- Whether there should be a review of existing Council Housing stock year on year;

- Whether the additional funding from the Local Growth Fund would be ongoing;
- That given the difficulties faced by young single people obtaining housing, a suggestion that options for young single people to acquire a part share in properties and subsequently owning a percentage of properties should be investigated;
- In relation to void properties, was there a geographical trend in relation to the areas where people were reluctant to rent those properties?
- Could options be explored in relation to those properties that were difficult to rent?
- Was there a reason why tenants were not represented on the Housing Futures Board?
- The possibility of converting maisonettes into one or two bedroom properties;
- Concerns in relation to any loss of revenue resulting from the impact of the reinvigorated right to buy scheme discount and the possibility of the maximum discount applying;
- That the right to buy scheme placed credibility and respect back into properties and was rewarding to long term Council tenants;
- The possibility of working with partners in order to house young single people;
- That the needs of young people should also be focused upon when investigating remodelling existing council housing stock;
- The need to discover the owners of town centre properties in order to encourage them to rent their properties;
- The impact of the welfare reforms on rent arrears and the council's current position in relation to arrears and the need to update Elected Members with those details;

The Assistant Director of Housing Services responded to Members questions as follows:-

- Council Housing stock was reviewed year on year given competing demands and the impacts of the Welfare Reforms;
- The Local Growth Fund was a two year grant only;
- Shared ownership had not proved successful in the past;
- That it was primarily maisonettes and multi storey void properties that were proving difficult to rent;
- That the sustainability model was important as it was a question of what Council Housing stock should be maintained and could be sustained in the future;
- There was a loss of income to the Council in relation to those properties that were difficult to rent and the additional financial burden due to the obligation on the Council for the payment of Council Tax;

- That a Tenants Board was to be formally enacted in October and specific links would be forged with them, the Housing Futures Board and this Committee.
- That conversions in the Dudley Borough were not as successful as purpose built properties and the need to ensure that through conversion, further problems are not created thus resulting in a failure to sustain the new housing model;
- The reinvigorated right to buy scheme had some inbuilt protection in relation to new properties for some time in the future;
- That information held in relation to private landlords and the type of properties they owned would be accessed and provided to Members as part of the scrutiny process;
- That currently the impact of the new Universal Credit and the replacement of Disability Allowance was awaited and updates in relation to the impact of the Welfare Reforms on rent arrears would be emailed to all Elected Members as and when they were available;

The Lead Officer to the Committee also undertook to provide all Elected Members with regular updates in relation to the Welfare Reforms and Universal Credit.

Members were in general agreement with the suggestions for Scrutiny and the inclusion of the needs of young people when scrutinising Council Housing stock especially in relation to sustainability remodelling.

Resolved

- (1) That the information contained in the presentation and comments made arising from the presentation, as indicated above on The Housing Futures Board, be noted.
- (2) That approval be given to the suggestions for Scrutiny contained in the presentation with the addition of including the needs of young people in Council Housing Stock sustainability modelling.
- (3) The Assistant Director of Housing Services and the Lead Officer to the Committee be requested to provide regular updates to all Elected Members in relation to the impact of Welfare Reforms upon Council services.

The meeting ended at 7.45 p.m.

CHAIR

ACHS/6