

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE PEOPLE AND FAMILIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT COUNTY HALL, CHELMSFORD, ON MONDAY 2 NOVEMBER 2015**

County Councillors:

* I Grundy (Chairman)	T Higgins
D Blackwell	* P Honeywood
* R Boyce	* R Howard
* J Chandler	* A Jackson
* M Danvers	* M McEwen
K Gibbs	* V Metcalfe
A Goggin	* J Whitehouse
C Guglielmi	* A Wood
* A Hedley	

Non-Elected Voting Members:

Mr R Carson

Ms M Uzzell

\*present

The following Members were also present:

Councillor R Madden

Councillor J Young

The following officers were present in support throughout the meeting:

Robert Fox

Scrutiny Officer

Matthew Waldie

Committee Officer

The meeting opened at 11.00 am.

**1. Apologies and Substitutions**

The Chairman reported the receipt of the following apologies:

<b>Apologies</b>	<b>Substitutes</b>
Cllr A Goggin	Cllr A Hedley
Cllr C Guglielmi	Cllr V Metcalfe
Cllr T Higgins	Cllr J Whitehouse
Mr R Carson	--

**2. Declarations of Interest**

It was noted that several Committee Members were also District, Borough or City Councillors.

**3. Minutes of Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the People and Family Scrutiny Committee meeting of 10 September 2015 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

**4. Questions from the Public**

There were no questions registered from Members of the Public.

## **5. Call-in on Decision on Housing related support funded older people's services**

Members received PAF/20/15, setting out the notification of the call in and the Paper relating to Housing Related Support Funded Older People's Services, which had been agreed at Cabinet on Tuesday, 20 October 2015.

The Chairman asked Councillor Danvers, as Member calling in the decision, to speak.

### **A. Member making a Call-in**

Councillor Michael Danvers addressed the meeting. Having thanked the Cabinet Member for the helpful informal meeting in the previous week, he stated:

- The decision has been made before sufficient information had been gathered, to identify who would be affected by this decision; therefore the decision should be deferred to provide the opportunity to assess this impact
- Contrary to what has been suggested, pensioners are not now generally more affluent and many may not be able to find £100 easily
- This will have a substantial impact all around the county, but will affect the poorer areas more. Compare the projected cuts in Chelmsford (26%) and Rochford (22%) with those in Tendring (52%) and Tendring (42%)
- Funds should be used from the NHS Better Care Funds
- The Nuffield Foundation states that 215,000 people have lost the use of day care facilities since 2110; these are the people who are the most vulnerable and likely to benefit most from the alarm system
- Social Services should be seen as more sacrosanct than other areas, alongside Education (whose budget is protected). Age UK estimates that, across the country, out of the 2,000,000 people in need of care and support, 800,000 receive no formal support; and Essex must recognise its proportion of these individuals
- A study was made of Hampshire County Council, which had already adopted a similar policy, and this led to reports of negative outcomes
- The decision should be rescinded and an impact study is requested, to see how this would affect vulnerable people
- If the decision is not rescinded, then officers are asked at least to be pro-active in assuring people will not suffer, rather than just asking local authorities and providers to "do their best"

### **B. Members' Questions to the Caller-in**

The Chairman invited Members' questions.

Cllr Danvers confirmed that his concerns targeted both streams of money identified in the report (one for services and one for alarms, as there remained work to be done in identifying where funds are going and how they are being used.

### **C. Response of Cabinet Member**

Councillor Dick Madden, Cabinet Member for People and Families, addressed the meeting.

As a preamble to his main points, he offered what he regarded as key information about the current situation:

- Essex County Council currently contributes £4.1 million per year towards HRS services for Older People.
- That money goes directly to districts and their housing providers. ECC does not have contact with the individuals who may benefit from the service and has no record of either their names or addresses.
- Essex County Council's contribution is discretionary – that means we elect to do this and there is no statutory requirement to do so. At a time when budgets are stretched it is therefore important that we consider how the taxpayers' money is spent
- The current arrangements are a legacy from 2003 when the Supporting People Programme was introduced. The arrangements are therefore based on the accident of historic legacy rather than on individual need.

However, the current service is not providing the best Value for Money.

I understand the natural emotion that people feel when they hear that an elderly man or woman might lose their alarm. But where there is a social care need we will assess that need and put in place appropriate support.

Our priority is to ensure that limited public resources go to those that most need them. It cannot be best use of public money where a provider might receive significant funds for community alarms and yet a significant proportion of their residents may not have a social care need and may have the financial resources to support themselves.

These services are not 'needs-led' and not targeted - ECC is paying for people who do not need these services. We may even be paying twice if we have already put in social care support.

Where somebody affected by this decision believes they have a social care need they can be referred to us for a proper assessment. But alongside need there is also the issue of fairness. The cost per week for Housing Related Support services varies widely across the County, with some services costing much more than that of other similar services elsewhere. For example, the cost in Basildon is over £11 per week, while a similar service is provided for just over £2 in Tendring.

This price discrimination is something we need to address - it is quite unfair that people pay different amounts for the same service, depending on where they are and who provides the service. This also means that the public subsidy is inefficiently allocated, as in low cost areas every pound goes further.

This is not value for money – and this is something we are trying to address by this decision. That is why we are introducing caps on contributions from the taxpayer.

I want to improve Housing Related Support services for Older People – giving support to those that really need it, and guiding fair prices for everyone across the County.

It is important that members understand that Essex County Council is investing significant money (about £28 million) in Independent Living with nearly 2,000 new housing units to be built. This is a far better alternative to sheltered housing and a way of promoting the independence of people into old age.

In addition, members will be fully aware of the proud record we have of freezing council tax for each of the last five years. That has also benefitted vulnerable people. A person in average Band D property would be paying £125 more per year now if this council had increased council tax by 2% a year for the last 5 years.

This is currently a general, non-targeted grant and we cannot be sure that everyone who benefits should be benefitting; so, at a time when our resources are limited it is important we focus them on need.

This is a difficult and emotive decision but one I believe the committee should uphold

- i) Dave Hill, Executive Director for People Commissioning, as first witness, addressed the meeting. He emphasised that these are not statutory services, but result from a decision taken in 2003 to make these payments. The Government provided a subsidy for this until 2010, when funding was withdrawn. At this point, several authorities decided to withdraw funding from the service, but Essex decided to continue. The service itself is provided by the districts and not the County Council.
- However, the County Council is statutorily required to provide targeted services and assess people's need for services. If anyone comes into any difficulty because of the reduction in services, they can come to the County Council and be assessed. A direct line has been set up to provide access to assessment for those referred by the districts or their sub-contractors
  - Technology has moved on over time. In 2003 a community alarm was the only option available, but now more things are available. For example, people can use smart phones and Telecare and Telehelp, which can remotely monitor people's activity within their homes. These are provided on the basis of assessment and may be paid for by the client, in whole or in part, or by the County Council, according to the client's ability to pay
  - The Better Care Fund (BCF) is paid for and spent by agreement between the County and the NHS. Its broad aim is to keep people in their own homes and communities. It does not serve as a general fund; all the money is targeted and every penny is already budgeted for. There are no spare funds available
  - The County Council has consulted with the 53 providers of the service about the proposals, eliciting 20 responses (3 strongly objecting, 6 objecting, 6 neutral and 1 in favour)

- Disproportionality. There are two distinct groups receiving these alarms: 1, a community alarm, which comes as part of a package, within sheltered housing. The County Council would subsidise this, even if the individuals did not want it or even need it; 2, “Dispersed” alarms, ie those with access to a community alarm in the individual’s own home. Each district has its own scheme, and the costs vary significantly across the county. Harlow DC has decided to issue a high number of dispersed alarms. The County Council is not subsidising these at all, therefore the impact may be greater in certain districts more than others, even though the County Council is applying a simple formula across all districts, which is based purely on the number of community alarms provided.
- ii) Dr Mike Gogarty, Director for Public Health, as second witness, addressed the meeting with regard to the relationship between these changes and the likely impact on hospital admissions and residential care:
  - The Department of Health funded Whole System Demonstrator Pilot Project, which is the definitive study on this, has shown there is no evidence that community alarms have an impact on either hospital admissions or residential care; regarding the impact of sheltered housing on admissions, there is little evidence of any impact, and anecdotal evidence suggests there is none at all.

#### **D. Members’ Questions to the Cabinet Member**

The Chairman invited questions from Members.

Cllr Danvers pointed out that he had not been provided with the information provided by the last comments and he suggested that he should have been fully apprised of it, as he was trying to base his argument on evidence.

In response to a question on the number of actual users of technology, Mr Hill pointed out that there were 6,000 people in residential care in Essex, and 20-21,000 people receiving support such as home re-ablement, but he was unsure of the number benefitting from the use of technology. He estimated “several hundred”. In response to this, it was suggested that this lack of accurate figures backed up the proposal that the decision should not be taken for another year. However, Cllr Madden reiterated that it was up to the providers on how the funding was used. The County Council had no control over that, only relying on the districts to bring those with potential needs for assessment.

Concern was expressed over the discrepancy between costs in different districts for the same products (a difference of £2 against £11 was cited). Cllr Madden acknowledged that he should be held responsible for the use of public money. He added that he has been trying to work with providers over the past 18 months, pointing out to them the differences. The proposal here was an attempt to redress some imbalance.

County Council will continue to deal with those with needs; Cllr Madden did not wish to see anyone losing out because of these changes, but he did wish to see a more equitable process.

Cllr Jackson left the meeting at this point.

The current funding is £4.1 million; the intention is to reduce this to £2.6 million for this financial year and next; after that, it was not possible to predict.

Equality Impact Assessment. One Member asked how the withdrawal of the funding could be described as having a positive effect. In response, Mr Hill suggested that there will be two elements to this. The first will be the effect on individuals, which may not be positive but is likely to be low; the second applies to the process and this may be construed as being positive, in being more consistent and clearly allocated in future.

In response to a question on the whether the districts, in referring people for assessment, were aware of what the County Council expects, so that nobody is missed out, Cllr Madden confirmed that the appropriate processes were in place. Mr Hill confirmed that he intends to write to each district and their sub-contractors, with the eligibility criteria, and ask them to inform the County Council of any individual who in their view is in need of an assessment.

Regarding the sheltered schemes, Mr Hill confirmed that in effect, this money is subsidising the Housing Revenue Fund; and with reference to the provision of technology within homes, these can be provided in either publically or privately owned homes.

#### **E. Members' Comments and Decision**

Members noted that, based on what they had heard today, the Committee could either accept the decision or ask that it be referred back to either the Cabinet (as the decision-taker), or to the Council.

One Member suggested that it would be preferable to consider how to improve practices before implementing the changes brought about by the decision. Cllr Madden pointed out that in effect, officers were already working on making improvements, in their dialogue with providers, and taking greater control.

A motion, that there had been adequate scrutiny and so the decision could stand, and so it should take effect at the conclusion of the meeting of the Committee, was proposed and seconded. This motion was carried, with 8 votes for, 1 vote against, and 2 abstaining.

#### **6. Date of next meeting**

The Committee noted the date of the next meeting: Thursday 12 November 2015, Committee Room 1, at 10.30 am.

The meeting closed at 12.15 pm.