

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY & OLDER PEOPLE POLICY
AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT COUNTY HALL, CHELMSFORD AT
10.00 AM ON 11 APRIL 2013**

Present:

W J C Dick (Chairman)

P Channer

M Garnett

E Hart

T Higgins

S Hillier

Mrs J Reeves (Vice Chairman)

C Riley

E Webster

Mrs J H Whitehouse (Vice-
Chairman)

Also in attendance were Councillors J Aldridge (Cabinet Member, Adults Social Care) (Items 4 & 5) and A Naylor (Cabinet Member, Health & Wellbeing) (Items 4 & 5).

1. Attendance, Apologies and Substitute Notices

The Committee Officer reported apologies had been received from Councillors Barton (substituted by Councillor Higgins), Griffiths, Madden and Wood.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were none.

3. Minutes of last meeting and matters arising

The Minutes of the Committee held on 14 March 2013 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman of the meeting.

4. Personal Budgets Audit

The Committee considered a report (COP/15/13), which sets out the results of the Internal Audit Report 2012/13 – Personal Budgets, as well as the subsequent action plan, which aims to address the issues raised in the Internal Audit report. Karen Wright, Director for Safeguarding Practice & Development, Internal Standards & Governance, and Ros Wilson, Service Manager, ISG, were in attendance to introduce the report and respond to Members' questions. Karen Bellamy, Counter Fraud Manager, was also in attendance, in the capacity of the Committee's "expert witness".

The Internal Audit Report raised concerns about the signed personal budget agreements, recovery action and the review of financial monitoring. It was pointed out that some improvement had been seen in these areas, but more was required.

Members expressed concern at the lack of controls: eg where the audit had revealed that the signed agreement could not be located in 4 out of 28 test cases. If this accurately reflected the actual figures, it represented about 400 missing agreements. Members pointed out that the Council was dealing with

public money, and must do its utmost to look after it appropriately. Ms Wright pointed out that the latest audit had shown some improvements since the previous one. However she admitted that there were some slippages of which she had been unaware, which had resulted in less progress than had been anticipated. She added that these figures gave previous results, before the present system was in place. The intention was to use pre-payment cards in future and work was progressing on this (the previously chosen provider not having fulfilled its contract). A number of local authorities already used such a system.

As part of the new system, some improvements were noted: better overall training for some staff, involvement of practitioners, to ensure the right things are being considered, better recording of data, checking on the actual signing of documents. All new service users had to go through the new system.

The Chairman suggested that the amount where auditable receipts should be produced be reduced from £500 to £200.

Ms Wright pointed out that each service user had a support plan, and very few of them deviated from this. The money was not simply available from a cash machine, and many parties would keep their own records, for Inland Revenue purposes. One suggestion was that service users should keep account books.

Councillor Aldridge pointed out that the most significant aspect of this audit was that the number of service users involved has risen, but the monitoring process has not been able to keep up with this rise. It was imperative to maintain appropriate monitoring, and to ensure that all monies were fully accounted for. He expected everything to be in order by June.

The Chairman pointed out that Internal Audit's report was little different to the previous one, and the recommendations stemming from that review had not been adopted – eg that relating to debt recovery. Ms Wright informed Members that if there were issues of this kind with a service user, payments were stopped until these were resolved, and this was made clear from the outset.

In response to a query on how much would need to be recovered, Ms Wright suggested it should not be necessary at all, if the assessments had been carried out properly. All those who had received cash should have had an annual review at least.

In conclusion, the Committee asked that:

- Ms Wright report back to the Committee in September
- The possibility of reducing the receipt figure to £200 be considered
- The percentage figure of those receiving cash payments be produced
- All clients should obtain receipts for any expenditure. (It was agreed that Ms Wright should liaise with Internal Audit, to agree a suitable approach to receipts.)

5. Ageing Well Task and Finish Group

The Committee considered the final report (COP/16/13) of the Ageing Well Task and Finish Group. Councillor Whitehouse, as Chairman of the Group, introduced the item.

The Report contains 15 Recommendations, coming under four headings: Highways and Passenger Transport, Loneliness and Isolation, The Voice of Older People, and Health and Wellbeing of Older People.

There have been few major changes from the draft that was considered by the Committee in March, but she drew attention to a few points.

- Reports had been received from Devon and Suffolk. It was noted that Devon holds training courses for older people, and target them with regard to issues of particular relevance
- For those no longer able to use their own transport, there is not only a strong element of social isolation, but it can be a very emotional issue for those concerned, as they lose an element of their independence. The provision of some kind of opportunity to discuss such issues would be welcome
- If Highways increased resource into pavements, this would lead to a decrease in resource needed for reablement
- Given that Members can sign forms for driving licence renewals for those aged 70, consideration should be given to mandating the inclusion of an eyesight test as part of this process

Councillor Aldridge commended the Report. He made three points:

- The withdrawal of a licence, as had already been referred to. This ties in well with loneliness/isolation issues. However, it does need some analysis of accident rates, to see how necessary it is
- The rejection of organisational blue badges (Recommendation 6). This needs to be challenged, so that the County Council can take the best course of action
- Issues relating to older people. This should be followed through by his successor.

Councillor Naylor also addressed the meeting.

- She suggested that there already exists a substantial amount of statistical information on accident rates, etc, with regard to older drivers
- There is no spare money to spend on any courses for older people (or other groups). In response to this, Councillor Whitehouse suggested that these courses should be self-financing, with paying attendees. This was the approach taken by Suffolk, for their courses.

The Chairman noted these remarks and pointed out that the Scrutiny Board will consider this Report after the elections. He thanked all those involved with the Task & Finish Group for their efforts, particularly in the relatively short time available.

6. Dates of future meetings

It was noted that no schedule has yet been drawn up for the meetings of any scrutiny committees after April.

7. Chairman's Final Comments

The Chairman pointed out that this would be the final meeting of this Committee in its present form, as a new scrutiny structure would be in place after the May elections. He drew Members' attention to the work carried out by the Committee over the past 4 years and thanked them for their contributions during that time. He also noted the support provided by officers over that period. He hoped that those Members who were not standing for re-election would enjoy their "retirement", and wished success to those who were standing again.

Councillor Riley expressed the Committee's thanks to Councillor Dick for his chairmanship over the four years.

He suggested that one important message he would like to be conveyed to the Scrutiny Committee was that Members' were frustrated by the outsourcing and purchasing of services and wanted to ensure that, where services were outsourced, actual delivery remained at an appropriately high level.

The meeting closed at 11.30 am

Chairman