

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY & OLDER PEOPLE
POLICY AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT COUNTY HALL,
CHELMSFORD ON 14 JULY 2011**

Membership

- | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| * W J C Dick (Chairman) | |
| * L Barton | M Page |
| P Channer | * R A Pearson |
| J Dornan | * Mrs J Reeves (Vice-Chairman) |
| * M Garnett | * Mrs E Webster |
| C Griffiths | * Mrs M J Webster |
| * E Hart | * Mrs J H Whitehouse (Vice-Chairman) |
| | B Wood |
| * S Hillier | |
| * Present | |

The following also were in attendance: Councillor T Higgins (as a substitute Committee Member), Councillor A Naylor (Cabinet Member) and; P Coleing, Co-Chair and Ms M Montgomery, Deputy Co-chair of Essex AH&CW Older People's Planning Group.

54. Attendance, Apologies and Substitute Notices

The Committee Officer reported apologies had been received from Councillors P Channer, C Griffiths and B Wood.

55. Declarations of Interest

During the meeting Councillor Higgins declared an interest for Item 58 as she was a carer for a person with learning difficulties. Whilst not a member of the Committee, P Coleing also declared a general interest for item 58 as he was a director of the Tenant Participation Advisory Service.

56. Minutes of last meeting

The Minutes of the Committee held on 9 June 2011 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

57. Information Portal for Adult Social Care

The Committee received a report (CWOP/30/11) from Martin Chaney, Website Content and Strategy Manager, outlining preparation and issues in connection with the migration of the content from the Putting Essex People First Information Gateway Portal to the main Essex website. George McDonald, Web Content Editor, and Steve Parr, Senior Web Developer were in attendance to introduce the item and provide further oral evidence.

(a) Introduction

The aim of the migration was to provide a single point of reference for adult social care links, enforcing web site standards usability and accessibility criteria onto the Portal, consequently providing a more robust environment as well as bringing the look and feel in-line with corporate branding. Content on the web site was continually reviewed for accuracy. Access to the Portal would be via The 'Easy Guide to Services' link.

During the subsequent discussion Members specifically raised and/or highlighted the following:

(b) Presentation issues

- (i) the Portal site should be functional and tailored to the various needs of the user so as to not deter people and disenfranchise any of them;
- (ii) there seemed to be no highly visible options to change the presentation into larger font or 'easy read' format; It was acknowledged that the microsite font was slightly smaller than the font to be used on the main ECC web site but it was still felt that the font size needed further review.
- (iii) links were not clear with the use of blue text not legible to those who were sight impaired;
- (iv) the site seemed 'too busy' with too much information being presented. Members felt that consideration should be given to streamlining the presentation of information and only providing what was really needed;

(c) Accessibility

- (i) the link for 'BrowseAloud' or similar software should not be at the foot of the page but be more visible and easily accessible for those with very limited computer skills (i.e. a clear label saying 'hear this page' or similar). It was noted that 'BrowseAloud' software needed to be downloaded onto a users machine whereas the ECC website used a different software that required no download by the user;
- (ii) there seemed to be too many 'clicks' and pages to navigate to obtain information;
- (iii) the Web Content Team were looking at appropriate accessibility testing. Members suggested that, in particular, the People's Parliament, the Disability and Employee Network (DEN), Essex Coalition of Disabled People, and Sensory Planning Groups should be consulted on the user friendliness of the site. Details of the suggested planning groups, together with an appropriate contact, were provided to Mr McDonald after the meeting. It was noted that the DEN had given some early feedback and would be consulted again;
- (iv) basic foreign language translations were provided using a Google Translate link at the foot of the page, free of charge, but it did have some limitations. However, anecdotal evidence had suggested that some of the translations had highlighted that there was too much jargon in the text and Members stressed the importance of using plain English.
- (v) A telephone helpline number with links to Contact Essex and Social Care Direct would be in a prominent position for those that could not

- find the information they required on the site and/or did not wish to further navigate through the pages;
- (vi) the website had to be designed to meet the needs of users not what ECC thought should be provided;
 - (vii) Longer term the Web Content Team were looking at web chat functionality. Initially this could be via a text conversation using a link to the Contact Essex call centre.
- (d) System testing and user feedback
- (i) there was concern that there had been insufficient consultation with user group representatives at design stage;
 - (ii) whilst an equality impact assessment had been undertaken approximately 18 months ago, when the first business case had been considered, it was stressed that a further assessment should have been undertaken prior to the migration having commenced. It was **agreed** that a further assessment should now be completed;
 - (iii) Adult Health & Community Wellbeing, as subject matter expert, would be the ultimate owner of the information on the Adult Social Care Portal and they would need to ensure suitable checks and balances were in place to ensure ongoing accuracy;
 - (iv) the web team would use a Google package to identify how long users were staying on a page and certain other behaviour patterns to interpret how users generally were navigating around the site. However, there was no hit counter which, in any case, could give misleading results. In addition, consideration was being given to using further software that would encourage users to indicate how successful their visit to the site had been. However, there were cultural and behavioural barriers to overcome as people generally disliked surveys and response rates to these types of exercises were not good.
- (e) Conclusion

In summary, the Committee felt that the presentation and accessibility of information on the Adult Social Care Portal needed significant redesign to meet user expectations and needs, and invited the witnesses to return and update the Committee further in October after seeking further user feedback from appropriate user groups.

58. Residential Homes – Learning Difficulties

The Committee received a report (CWOP/31/11) from Maria Warren, Senior Strategic Commissioning Officer, and Janice Shwky, Services Manager Residential and Short Breaks, who were also in attendance to introduce the item and present further oral evidence, together with Nick Presmeg, Commissioning and Delivery Director. The report set out developments in ECC residential care services for people with a learning disability in Essex.

- (a) Background

ECC ran and staffed six residential care homes offering a mixture of long stay and short break places. New development of supported housing in the county was currently limited although the private sector was increasingly looking to work with ECC to develop and deliver housing for people with a Learning Disability.

Turnover in the existing supply of accommodation was low and a recent programme to optimise the utilisation of voids in shared housing stock for people with a learning difficulty had been successful, with the remaining voids being assessed in partnership with the Registered Provider's to determine whether they were sustainable going forward. It was proposed to decant current service users into supported accommodation voids, where appropriate, whilst maintaining their circles of support and independence by placing them as close to their current accommodation as possible so as to minimise concerns and anxiety.

The Chairman opened the session by expressing concern that the Committee had previously made recommendations to expand supported living provision in Essex and the Committee were still looking for significant evidence of such expansion. Members stressed that they wanted to see people taken out of an institutionalised environment and placed into supported living wherever possible. Members were keen to emphasise that there were a variety of ways that supported living accommodation could be provided without it being run directly by ECC. However, it was important that there was continuity in service provision for those in transition and a good standard of care maintained for all service users.

During the subsequent discussion the following were raised and/or highlighted:

(b) Choice and control

There was a national commitment to encouraging as many people as possible to have choice and control over their home including having their own front door key if appropriate. However, it was stressed that this created a significant challenge as service users all had different requirements and expectations with some wanting placement individually whilst others wanted a supported living environment that also accommodated their own informal support group. As a consequence, the moving process could be slow in order to relocate these informal support groups at the same time. It was confirmed that people would not be moved against their will if they wanted to stay close to their family or informal support network. In addition, risk control and safeguarding were vitally important considerations when re-homing vulnerable people.

(c) Suitable properties

Members encouraged the increased use of void properties wherever feasible. It was stressed that suitability would be determined by a number of different considerations including the surrounding community support network. A wrong resettlement care package for a person with learning difficulties could take a long time to be corrected.

The service worked closely with district and borough councils in identifying possible suitable accommodation for supported living. However, a significant proportion of supported living housing stock was converted ex- NHS premises and often these were outdated in terms of being suitable for supported living. Members encouraged ECC to continue to liaise with borough and district councils in Essex to highlight the opportunities to use vacant accommodation for supported living as part of the local housing and development strategies.

Members queried the unutilised accommodation in privately run residential homes that could be used for those with learning difficulties. It was stressed that often the accommodation was not appropriate for use as supported living, especially for younger adults. A significant part of residential accommodation was not administered by ECC but by private companies.

(d) Young people

Members emphasised the importance of the benefits of continued living in the community for those young adults transitioning from Children's Services. In particular, resources should be targeted to meeting the needs of young individuals so that their living arrangements could replicate the normal living pathway for young adults wherever possible (i.e. living together in informal support groups).

(e) Involvement of other organisations

Members suggested the involvement of other voluntary organisations, such as the YMCA, in running some supported living schemes. Planning and commissioning officers were already in discussions with borough and district councils, and other partners, in trying to develop an inclusive and joint approach towards future provision. Particular attention was being given to tailoring support packages for people who had been in institutionalised care for all or considerable part of their life so as to enable them to be moved into the community.

(f) Individual reviews

All service users would require a full review to establish individual capacity to live more independently. The service had already acknowledged that family members were expressing anxiety and concern over the reviews. The full review process could take up to three years as they would be processed in a programmed way, first assessing those users who were NHS supported and then other priority groups to follow. These reviews would assess the service user's appetite for relocation, their level of understanding of the implications of the move and whether they needed someone else to be appointed as a personal representative to look after their interests. During the course of this process, work would continue with service users to further empower them and further develop their personal skills. It was stressed that these reviews were separate from the regular annual statutory review to assess the appropriateness of care packages which would continue as a separate process.

(g) Night care

There was a project to review the cost effectiveness of night care arrangements. Some users required waking night support whilst others required sleeping night support. However, there could be less carer support needed through removing duplication in the provision of carers where groups of service users were housed together. It was noted that changes in housing benefit and the independent living fund could be an issue for those needing a second bedroom for night support workers.

(h) Community 'key ring'

The feasibility of the use of community 'key ring', whereby students or other community service volunteers could be employed as helpers to support a number of service users in return for free or reduced accommodation rate was being investigated. It was acknowledged that there were a number of safeguarding issues to be resolved with such a scheme as well as the need for a number of service users, and the volunteer, to be living within close proximity of each other. In addition, where the level of required support was very low, certain users may not qualify for assistance.

(i) Conclusion

It was **agreed** that there should be a further update at a future meeting. The witnesses were thanked for their attendance and then they left the meeting.

59. **Southern Cross**

The Cabinet Member for Adults Health and Community Wellbeing updated the Committee on the latest position of Southern Cross Healthcare Group PLC (SCH). SCH had previously announced that all their residential homes were to transfer to new providers as part of a financial restructuring plan. Southern Cross Healthcare was responsible for 16 Care homes in Essex and a further 5 homes out of the county with Essex citizens residing in them.

Southern Cross's landlords were being asked to nominate alternative providers for their properties. In all cases, these new providers would need to satisfy the requirements of local authorities and regulators. ECC were in continuing dialogue with SCH who were working with all stakeholders to ensure business continuity. ECC were content that all reasonable steps had been taken to ensure the safety and continuity of care for all Essex residents and to ensure that residents and their carers were well-informed and reassured throughout this period of reorganisation. The Cabinet Member thanked all the ECC staff involved in this issue for all their hard work.

60. **Final Report: Absence Management in the Adults Health and Community Wellbeing Directorate**

The Committee received a report (CWOP/32/11) providing a summary of progress in managing sickness absences following the Committee's recent review of the AHCW Directorate's absence management performance. Improvements in performance reported during the scrutiny period were sustained throughout 2010/2011 culminating in an end of year sickness absence rate of 3.4% against a target of 4.5%. This represented a significant improvement over the previous financial year. The target for 2011/12 had been set at 3.2% and current performance was on target for the year to date.

The next phase of the implementation of ePayroll would include the introduction of online recording of sickness absence which should improve the speed and access of management information on absenteeism.

61. Blue Badge – Interim Report

The Committee received a report (CWOP/33/11) outlining the main Government changes to the Blue Badge scheme which would be introduced nationally in January 2012. Cheryl Arthur, Manager Customer Service, Telephony, and Sue Hawkins, Commissioning & delivery Director, ESCD & Safeguarding Essex were in attendance to introduce the item. Under the changes, Blue Badges would be issued through a centralised system for the whole of the UK, although the applications would initially be processed and reviewed locally with an option for local authorities to charge a fee. The badges would have an anti fraud holographic design. There would also be a move towards independent mobility assessments by mid 2012 to assess eligibility.

The Contact Essex call centre had taken over responsibility for the issue of Blue Badges in Essex a year ago and had since then reduced the processing times for applications from 8-10 weeks to 2 or 3 days. Whilst there would be some advantages to being part of a national scheme, Members were concerned that the issue of Blue Badges could take longer under the new centralised system and undermine the significant service improvements achieved in the past year in Essex. There were already a significant number of process issues that officers were feeding into various focus groups for the project. In addition, it was anticipated that each local authority would have a service level agreement with the private company that would be responsible for the issue of the Blue Badges and that ECC could push for the inclusion of contractual penalties in their agreement for the delayed issue of badges. There would also be an opportunity for fast tracking applications at extra cost.

Councillor Hillier would follow up with Basildon Borough Council to clarify that eligibility for bus passes and blue Badges should be unconnected. Details of the new process for authorising and implementing new parking bays would be provided to Councillor Higgins.

Members discussed the abuse of entitlements to use disabled parking spaces, stressing that the award of a blue badge was to the person and not to the vehicle, and that other family members or friends should not be using the badge to get preferential parking spaces.

The witnesses were thanked for their update and invited to return to update the Committee at an appropriate time once the new issuing system had commenced.

62. Forward Look

The Committee received and noted the Forward Look (CWOP/34/11). A further updated document would be circulated to Members to include, amongst other matters, a review of the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, the outcomes from the Prevention Agenda and Village Agents. Members were invited to submit other areas for suggested scrutiny.

63. Dates of Future Meetings

It was noted that the next meeting would be held on Thursday 8 September 2011.

The meeting closed at 12.17 pm.

Chairman