

COMMUNITY & ADULT SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

2 DECEMBER 2015

Present: County Councillor McGarry(Chairperson)
County Councillors Carter, Lomax and Sanders

45 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Ali Ahmed and Chris Davis.

46 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Declarations of interest were received from Councillors Sanders and Lomax.

Councillor Lomax declared a personal interest in Item 5 as he lives in Sheltered Accommodation.

Councillor Sanders declared a personal interest in Item 5 as she volunteers at a night shelter.

47 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 November 2015 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairperson.

48 : HOUSING ALLOCATIONS

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Susan Elsmore, Cabinet Member for Health, Housing and Wellbeing, Sarah McGill, Director Communities, Housing and Customer Services and Jane Thomas, Assistant Director Communities and Housing to the meeting.

The Cabinet Member made a statement in which she commended Officers work in this area, she added that this was a new Policy which had been introduced in January with the full agreement of the Registered Social Landlords (RSL's) colleagues. Amendments were being made in the same year that the policy was introduced which shows the attention that is being given to what is a very important matter.

Members were provided with a presentation on the Housing Allocations Policy which included information on; Reason for the Scheme, New Allocation Scheme, Aims of the Scheme, Operational Experience, Housing Need, Why Further Changes are needed, Housing (Wales) Act – Homelessness, Local Connection, Overcrowding, Under Occupation, Accommodation for Older People/Physically Disabled People, Helping to Address Other Priorities, Timeline and Monitoring.

The Chairperson thanked officers for the presentation and invited questions and comments from Members:

- Members asked for further clarification on the priority status of released prisoners and were advised that they no longer receive priority, this was removed under the new legislation.
- With reference to people being released from Hospital, Members asked whether this should be funded by primary Care if they are still under the care of the hospital. Officers explained that they have developed Step-Down which is funded by the Intermediate Care Fund through Welsh Government Grants. If someone is released from hospital and are homeless then it's the Council's responsibility. The Director added that not all people coming out of hospital have a continuing health care need; more Step-Down was needed and maybe a more formal agreement with Health Colleagues needed to be considered, it was added that speedy decisions rather than rows about funding were important.
- Members asked why the Policy was being amended so soon after implementation; with deficits in the current policy Members were concerned that the same position could be seen in a years time, and asked whether things could be done with Officer discretion rather than spending on Policy change. The Cabinet Member explained that this was a wholesale change of legislation, lots of work requiring sensitivity by Officers had been done. The Cabinet Member added that she had asked for some things to be delved more deeply into; It was noted that the Cabinet Member is receiving less correspondence from AM's/MP's on the waiting lists now. Officers added that they had known the Policy would be needed to be changed especially in relation to homelessness; they try not to use Officer discretion as they need to be fair and not subjective although there was always a rule for Management in extreme cases. It was also added that there would be further changes needed in relation to no one bedroom properties being allocated to people under 35 years of age; it was important to respond to what was happening.
- Members asked how Policy change would impact on supply issues, as there were references made within the report to Immediate and Urgent supply issues. Officers agreed that Policy Change alone wont change needs and that the Private rented sector was needed too. The Director added that it was important to recognise the RSL partners critical role, the need to understand changes and hold each other to account. The Cabinet Member added that the Policy would also provide greater visibility for people in what they could expect and the time they could expect to wait.
- Members commended the amount of work that had been done in conducting the interviews and asked whether Officers had a sense of what effect the changes would have on the waiting list and also on the housing stock. Officers advised that the waiting list would not be reduced, although screening forms may help with this as people who think they wont be successful then wont complete the forms. With regards to Stock it was noted that this needed to include the housing partnership programme, the number of voids was also important as it was currently 1.5% of stock, so this needed to be let quickly.
- Members discussed housing need for care leavers, the importance of working with Looked After Children teams and sought confirmation that there was active engagement ongoing. Officers advised that lots of work goes on with

Children's Services Prevention Service to try to get children home to family, all accommodation is pooled. With regards to support packages, the first 16 weeks they get a support package and after that if it is considered that support is still needed they go back to previous arrangements. It was important to check that all bases are covered and there are no gaps.

- Members discussed larger accommodation and when people are asked to downsize if for example their older children have moved out. Officers advised that there was no facility to force them to downsize, they can only be encouraged.
- Members asked about the band around the over 50's and where the focus on this had come from as there was nothing in the legislation. The Cabinet Member advised that in the review of the Policy as new things were made visible then Officers were concentrating on them.
- With regards to overcrowding, Members asked whether there were any properties in the private rented sector that were over 4 bedrooms. Officers explained that there tended to be larger properties closer to the city centre and work needed to be done to determine whether these were available. When asked how the overcrowding figures had been arrived at Officers explained that they had spent a long time looking at the waiting list numbers and dividing them up into bands that wouldn't put too many people in the higher bands.
- With reference to Older person accommodation, Members asked if they were encouraging people to stay in their community, how did this fit with people with high needs competing for the same accommodation. Officers explained that they wouldn't bypass high need and conceded that more work did need to be done in this area. The Director added that history has taught that incentive schemes don't always work, what does work is the place that people are going to so the offer has to be attractive; the process was very complicated, the resource was very scarce with a huge demand, this needed to be dealt with sensitively and based on good evidence. Members were assured that people with high priority needs were housed since the refinements and this will be measured.

The Chairperson thanked the Cabinet Member, officers and other witnesses for attending the meeting, giving their presentations and statements and for answering Members questions.

AGREED – That the Chairperson writes on the Committee's behalf to the Cabinet Member to convey their comments and observations

49 : SUPPORTING PEOPLE LCP AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RECOMMISSIONING - UPDATE

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Susan Elsmore, Cabinet Member for Health, Housing and Wellbeing, Councillor Daniel De'Ath, Cabinet Member for Safety, Engagement and Democracy, Sarah McGill, Director Communities, Housing and Customer Services and Jane Thomas, Assistant Director Communities and Housing to the meeting.

The Chairperson invited the Cabinet Members to make statements. Councillor Elsmore made a statement in which she stated that these were difficult times and circumstances; it was unclear what the level of cuts would be in this area, the Welsh Government Association had suggested between 5-20%; funding was going down and demand for services was increasing. The new legislation places greater perspective on duties and in line with the Corporate Plan Priorities aims to protect the most vulnerable people.

Councillor De'Ath made a statement in which he stated it was a very serious and difficult time for these services, the money received from the Welsh Government was now allocated throughout Wales; there was lots of uncertainty but work was being undertaken with other partners and agencies. Work being undertaken by Alun Michael –Safer Lives would be shared with the Committee in March 2016.

The Chairperson thanked the Cabinet Members for their statements and invited questions and comments from Members:

- Members noted that the pressure on Domestic Violence support services was increasing and that maybe consideration should be given to funding being allocated per head of population.
- Members asked what could be done with decreasing funding and increasing demand. Officers stated that a lot of work was ongoing in understanding better the need, the example of separate waiting lists in different homelessness areas was given, these were now all in one place and included hostels and supported living; there was better identification of need and prioritisation with this better information, which also then helps to inform officers and the Community Mental Health team. It was added that there was also lots being considered in terms of promoting independence, reducing the hours of support etc. and the proposed approach to funding reductions from the report was outlined. Officers added that the amount of funding reduction was not yet known but that 5% would not be too bad by 20% would cause very significant problems.
- Members discussed the work being done on the relocation of refugees and how this work would dovetail with the needs of the people in the City already. The Cabinet Member stated that they needed to be mindful that this would be different funding streams and that she would come back to a future meeting to answer this question.
- Members noted the mention of Floating Support, Challenges, Preventative Measures etc. and asked whether there was concern about creating increased costs in the future if the service is taken away and whether other options have been considered. Officers stated that this was a very genuine concern, there were lots of voids in the system so there was some scope to make some cuts. There would be increased reviews as some people receive support for longer than they need it, so it was important to move people through the system faster to create efficiencies; people needed to be made aware of what is available to them from RSL's, Hubs, Independent Living Services when they don't need floating support, it was important now to be specific.

- Members made reference to Competitive Tendering and asked how a race to the bottom could be prevented. Officers stated that robust specifications were needed, to keep the price down and keep the quality; the ratio needed to be right. The Cabinet Member added that as stewards of public funds they are required to commission.
- Members were concerned about the increasing number of homeless people and how reduction in funding would affect them, officers explained that it would be through the level of support provided and preventative work, although they noted that it would be challenging.

The Chairperson thanked the Cabinet Member, officers and other witnesses for attending the meeting, giving their presentations and statements and for answering Members questions.

AGREED – That the Chairperson writes on the Committee’s behalf to the Cabinet Member to convey their comments and observations

50 : COMMITTEE BUSINESS REPORT

At the Committee meeting on 16 September 2015 Members discussed how they wished to deal with future reports concerning committee business, such as correspondence reports and work programme reports. Members decided to combine these within an overarching Committee Business report.

This report provided the Committee with the latest update on correspondence. The Committee received copies of correspondence sent and received in relation to matters previously scrutinised by this Committee.

This report also provided the Committee with information on the work undertaken by the Performance Panel and sought approval to seek clarification on how Performance Indicators are set to inform the RAG status.

The report also sought views on which areas should be considered for the next Deep Dive. Members considered that Care Pathways could open up other issues such as Direct Payments and it was agreed that the Scrutiny Officer would scope this out.

Members were provided with the Task Group report and asked if any amendments were needed and if it could be endorsed to go to Cabinet. No amendments were proposed.

Members discussed scrutiny of the Budget; it was noted that it was out for consultation from 11 December 2015 until mid January 2016; Committee will want a pre decision of the report that will go to Cabinet on 18 February 2016, so Members were asked to consider a date for the next meeting prior to this.

RESOLVED to:

- I. Note the content of the consultation schedule attached at Appendix A of the report;

- II. Agree the approach to take with regards to the Corporate Quarter Two performance report;
- III. Agree which areas to prioritise for further in-depth scrutiny;
- IV. Agree any further nominations to sit on the performance panel to undertake the prioritised areas for in-depth scrutiny;
- V. Endorse the Task and Finish Group report for submission to the Cabinet.

51 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Community & Adult Services Scrutiny Committee was scheduled for Wednesday 6th January 2016 at 5.00pm in CR4, County Hall, Cardiff.