

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **SOCIAL CARE, HEALTH & HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in Committee Room 2, Council Offices, High Street North, DUNSTABLE, Bedfordshire LU6 1LF on Thursday, 15 October 2009

PRESENT

Cllr Miss A Sparrow (Chairman)
Cllr A M Turner (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs P Freeman
Mrs R B Gammons
Mrs S A Goodchild

Cllrs Ms A M W Graham
J Kane

Apologies for Absence: Cllrs Mrs J Freeman
P Rawcliffe

Substitutes: Cllrs P Hollick

Members in Attendance: Cllrs P Williams,
R A Baker

Officers in Attendance: Mr B Carter – Overview & Scrutiny Manager
Nick Costin – Head Private Sector Housing
Mr D Jones – Assistant Director
Commissioning
Mr T Keaveney – Assistant Director Housing
Services
Ms Mitcham – Head of Business
Infrastructure
Ms M Peaston – Senior Democratic Services
Officer
Mr E Thompson – Assistant Director, Adult
Social Care

Others in Attendance Mr Smith – Bedfordshire LINK

SCHH/09/45 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs Jeanette Freeman and Peter Rawcliffe. Apologies were also received from Julie Ogle, Director of Social Care Health and Housing, Andrew Morgan/Bedfordshire PCT and Muriel Scott, Bedfordshire PCT. Cheryl Powell, Overview and Scrutiny Officer was represented by Bernard Carter, Head of Overview and Scrutiny.

SCHH/09/46 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 September 2009 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

SCHH/09/47 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

SCHH/09/48 Chairman's Announcements and Communications

The Chairman gave details of the following items:-

1. The East of England Scrutiny Chairs' Forum on 20 November 2009 at the Rowley Mile Conference Centre, Newmarket;
2. The Homelessness Strategy which was on the agenda for the last meeting but not considered due to circumstances on the day would be brought to the December meeting;
3. With the agreement of the meeting, in view of the Director's absence item 17 Directorate Budget Management would immediately follow item 11 Government Proposals for Review of Council Housing Finance.

SCHH/09/49 Petitions

No petitions had been received.

SCHH/09/50 Public Questions, Statements and Deputations

There were no public questions, statements or deputations.

SCHH/09/51 Disclosure of Exempt Information

No exempt information was anticipated.

SCHH/09/52 Call-in

There had been no matters of call-in.

SCHH/09/53 Requested Items

There were no specific requested items.

SCHH/09/54 Local Involvement Network (LINK)

Bob Smith, Interim Vice-Chairman and Finance Officer of Bedfordshire LINK presented a brief report. In addition to the report before the Committee he advised on the following matters:-

- An Executive meeting of the LINK would take place on 30 October 2009 to discuss the timing of the division of Bedfordshire LINK into two

separate LINKs to reflect the areas of the two unitary authorities Bedford Borough Council and Central Bedfordshire Council;

- The LINK host was testing e-training;
- The LINK would be providing the lay representative to take part in visits to surgeries under the GP practices review. In response to a question it was noted that this would not be conducted as a “mystery shopping” exercise but the LINK representative would be looking at matters from a patient’s perspective.

The Committee thanked Mr Smith for his report.

SCHH/09/55 **Government Proposals for Review of Council Housing Finance**

The Committee considered a report in relation to consultation on the Government’s proposals for the reform of Council Housing Finance and also received a presentation. The slides are attached to these minutes at **Appendix A**.

The Committee was advised that unlike many other local authorities, Central Bedfordshire Council had no historic debt in relation to council housing. Comments were made that whilst it would seem to be unfair that this Council should take on part of other local authorities’ debt in relation to Council housing it could nonetheless be a pragmatic approach to do so as the Council would be able to “self finance” its Housing Revenue Account and deliver long term investment in its stock.

In response to questions as to whether this matter was likely to reach a conclusion before the next General Election it was noted that this was unlikely unless all local authorities were in agreement, as other matters would probably take a higher priority.

Members noted that if the Government’s proposals went ahead there could well be opportunities for local authorities to build some new Council housing.

A comment was made that changing interest rates could impact on the repayment of the debt taken on. It was unclear whether special arrangements would be put in place regarding interest rates.

A comment was made that core and non-core services in relation to housing management, for example steps to manage anti-social behaviour, should be clarified in the consultation. It was noted that there could possibly be a need for further legislation in this area.

A number of questions were asked in relation to the consultation and Members considered that without considerably more detail, they were unable to provide a definitive steer to the Portfolio Holder. Views were expressed that in the absence of sufficient detail the Committee would support the Local Government Association’s approach but would also be willing, if there was

sufficient clarity, to adopt a pragmatic approach and take a positive approach to the proposals.

RESOLVED:-

1. to note the contents of the report and the presentation;
2. to advise the Portfolio Holder that in the absence of sufficient detail the Committee would support the LGA's approach but would also be willing, if there was sufficient clarity, to consider a pragmatic and positive approach to the proposals.

SCHH/09/56 Directorate Budget Management Report

The Committee considered the Budget Management Report 2009/10 as at 31 August 2009 which was included in the papers for the Executive for 13 October 2009 on pages 181-223, and focused on the position for Adult Social Care Health and Housing.

The Assistant Directors provided comment and responded to Members' questions in the absence of the Director. It was noted that for Social Care Health and Housing the forecast variance represented £4.3 million but that budgetary savings were continually being sought and a number of actions had been planned. In some budget heads the level of spending still needed to be corrected. It was noted that during the transition process to the unitary authorities in Bedfordshire, significant variations had occurred such that additional monies were allocated to Bedford Borough Council which impacted on the Central Bedfordshire Council budgetary position.

Members were aware that the changes in the population, for example children growing into adults and adults living longer and in some cases with complex needs, impacted on the social care services and hence the budget. It was noted that there had been spending pressures on the social care budget at Bedfordshire County Council, the legacy care authority, which had been inherited by Central Bedfordshire Council.

A comment was made that there was a need for a medium term financial plan to enable modelling, which had not been carried out so far either by the legacy care authority or by Central Bedfordshire Council.

RESOLVED to note the report.

SCHH/09/57 Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy - Issues and Options Paper

The Committee considered a report setting out the issues and options for consideration with regard to the development of the Council's Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy. It was noted that having the Strategy in place would enable the Council to meet the legislative requirement for local authorities to develop a policy for providing households with financial assistance to improve their homes.

Members noted that the Strategy must be based on responding to local need. It was noted that option 5 on page 75 of the papers, relating to Home Loan Support and Relocation grants, should not be overlooked even though such grants had not been successful in South Bedfordshire as they provided an alternative to clients not eligible for other forms of assistance. A comment was made that this option offered good value for money and would be a missed opportunity if it was not included.

It was noted that the list of options set out on page 75 of the papers were not specifically set out in priority order. Members considered that it would be useful to address them in order of priority so that the most important matters would be more likely to be targeted.

Members were advised that this was the first part of the consultation which would continue over the next few months before the draft Strategy was brought back to the Committee for further consideration. The draft Strategy would finally be submitted to the Executive in March.

RESOLVED:-

1. to approve all the recommended options for Central Bedfordshire Council Renewal Policy set out on page 75 of the submitted report for inclusion in the Strategy;
2. that the bulleted issues listed at option 2 on page 75 of the submitted report be addressed in the Strategy in priority order;
3. that the Committee would review the draft Strategy at the November or December 2009 meeting of the Committee before it was submitted to the Executive in March 2010 for approval and adoption.

SCHH/09/58 Directorate Overview: Services to Carers

The Committee received a presentation on improving the quality of life of carers in Central Bedfordshire. The slides are attached to these minutes at **Appendix B**.

The Committee then went straight to consideration of the next item without comment, having been provided with the supporting context.

SCHH/09/59 Central Bedfordshire Council and NHS Bedfordshire Joint Delivery and Spending Plan for Carers

The Committee received a report setting out the provisions in the National Strategy for Carers for breaks for carers. Details were provided as to local provision of grants through NHS Bedfordshire and Central Bedfordshire Council for carers together with proposals which had been undertaken for reviewing the needs of and services to carers locally. The outcome of consultations had been drawn together in a draft joint action plan for implementing the National Carers' Strategy which was set out at Appendix B of the submitted report.

Members considered the action plan and commented that although there were a number of outcomes listed as being of amber status, Central Bedfordshire Council was achieving well in this area in comparison with other local authorities. In response to a question regarding support given to carers of people who were self-funding it was noted that the Council worked in partnership with the organisation Carers in Bedfordshire. This organisation targeted all carers included carers of people who were self-funding.

Questions were asked as to the levels of support for carers in the rural areas and whether they were aware of and could access support and advice sessions. In response a suggestion was made that it might be possible to carry out some mobile outreach work targeting carers in the rural areas.

A suggestion was made that further support for carers for example through carers' cafes would be welcomed.

Members asked questions in relation to paragraph 15 on page 81 of the papers which stated that no specific amount of the £350,000 NHS funding had been allocated directly to residents of Central Bedfordshire or Bedford Borough. It was noted that discussions had been held with NHS Bedfordshire about identifying a specific sum for Central Bedfordshire residents. The response had not been positive so it was considered more constructive to seek to achieve a robust position through proactive work. A suggestion was made that this matter could be raised at the forthcoming Health Conference which the Committee's Chairman would be attending.

RESOLVED:-

1. to note the contents of the report;
2. to approve the actions and budget as detailed in the Central Bedfordshire Council and NHS Bedfordshire Action Plan for Implementing the National Carers' Strategy, set out at Appendix B of the report;
3. to note that carers referred by Carers in Bedfordshire could apply for funding from an allocated budget of £350,000 held by NHS Bedfordshire, the spending of which NHS Bedfordshire was accountable for to the Strategic Health Authority.

SCHH/09/60 Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults Annual Report 2008/09

The Committee received the Annual Report of the Bedfordshire Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults Board April 2008 – March 2009, together with a report indicating that the Executive would be asked to endorse the Annual Report. It was noted that this covered the last twelve months of Bedfordshire County Council's operation and the period leading up to the creation of the two new unitary local authorities, Bedford Borough Council and Central Bedfordshire Council. The Committee also received a presentation and the slides are attached to these minutes at **Appendix B**.

The Committee noted that the Safeguarding Adults Partnership Board was the strategic group overseeing the local authority's duty to safeguard vulnerable people from abuse through a multi agency partnership. The different forms of possible abuse were noted and a comment was made supporting the proposal that all members of the Committee should undertake training in this area to help them to understand the corporate role. Additional comments were made suggesting that all members of the Committee should undergo the enhanced CRB check.

In response to a question it was noted that the low rate of achieving successful prosecutions in relation to abuse of adults could be for a number of reasons. Sometimes carrying out the investigation was considered sufficient. Sometimes evidence was contaminated by well-meaning action, for example informal interviewing of people, so that the police were unable to pursue an investigation.

Further to the financial implications paragraph on page 104 of the report a question was put as to what other matters the prioritisation of safeguarding adults took precedence over. The Assistant Director indicated that he would provide this information to Committee members after the meeting.

In response to a question regarding the safeguarding of terminally ill people in hospital to protect them from a hastening of their death, it was noted that the hospital based team would take appropriate steps if they thought this was happening.

A comment was made that it could be difficult to ensure terminally ill people received the funding they were entitled to for medical and caring intervention towards the end of their life, nonetheless service deliverers were vigilant in pursuing it.

RESOLVED:-

1. to note the contents of the report and the Annual Report of the Bedfordshire Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults Board April 2008 – March 2009;
2. to endorse the priorities and improvement plan (pages 120-123 of the papers);
3. to endorse Members' commitment to safeguarding vulnerable adults including by the attendance of Members at the safeguarding training programme.

SCHH/09/61 Substantial Variations and Developments of Health Services

The Committee considered a report indicating the need to clarify for local understanding the term "substantial variations and developments of health services". This would indicate the minimum level at which consultation on variations to health services would be triggered.

RESOLVED:-

1. to note the contents of the report;
2. that discussions should take place with Council representatives, local health bodies and the LINK (Local Involvement Network) to reach agreement on what constitutes “substantial” in the local context and a protocol on how consultation on variations to health services should be carried out.

SCHH/09/62 Defining Directorate Performance Indicators

The Committee received a report which provided Members with a brief description of the national performance indicator definitions for Social Care, Health and Housing reported on at the last meeting (10 September 2009).

Members were advised that a review was currently being carried out of the national indicator set and it was hoped that new indicators would be more useful. Government Office East (GO East) would be reviewing the local indicators.

RESOLVED to note the report.

SCHH/09/63 Revised Work Programme

The Committee received and considered its latest revised Work Programme. It was noted that Quarter 2 Budget and Performance Information would not be brought to the November meeting but would instead be brought to the December meeting. Item 6 of the November meeting, Annual Health Check, had now been removed as this was no longer an annual matter. Members were pleased to note that these changes reduced the November agenda to a more manageable number of items.

Members recalled that Bedfordshire PCT had been asked to bring back its strategy, *A Healthier Bedfordshire*, in the autumn after the refresh had been carried out. Officers indicated that the appropriate date for this would be discussed with Bedfordshire PCT.

RESOLVED:-

1. to note the Work Programme subject to the further amendments detailed above;
2. that the date of review by the Committee of Bedfordshire PCT's refreshed strategy *A Healthier Bedfordshire* would be discussed with Bedfordshire PCT.

SCHH/09/64 Date of Next Meeting

The Committee noted that the next meeting would be held on Thursday 5 November at 10.00am at the Council Offices, Dunstable.

Chairman

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Date

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(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 12.40 p.m.)