

**Notes of the Community Focused Efficient Council Scrutiny Meeting held on
Wednesday, 3rd November 2010 at 6.00 pm in the
Scrutiny Meeting Room, Civic Offices, Telford**

Present: Councillors Clive Mollett (Chairman), David Chaplin, Angela McClements, Bill Tomlinson and Co-optees Maurice Viney, Roy Williams.

Also in attendance: Cllr. Stephen Burrell; Laura Johnston, Head of Safeguarding; Tracy Smart, Senior Finance Manager; Paul Taylor, Social Care Specialist; Emma Cope, Principal Accountant; Fliss Mercer, Policy and Value for Money Manager; Stephanie Jones, Scrutiny Officer.

Apologies: Councillors Louise Lomax, Adrian Meredith.

<u>Minute/Action</u>	<u>Action to be taken by</u>
1.	The minutes of the last meeting noted without change.
2.	<p><u>Safeguarding and Corporate Parenting</u></p> <p>Members considered the report of the Head of Safeguarding on national and local issues impacting on the financial position of the Safeguarding and Corporate Parenting service area and the actions being undertaken to mitigate their impact.</p> <p>The following points from the report were highlighted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• That the picture in T&W is in line with national trends. Benchmarking information was tabled• Actions to address the findings of the Thorpe & Regan review are being put in place, although capacity issues had initially delayed implementation.• The additional investment in the service should start to have an impact on costs from the last quarter of the financial year, as placement numbers and the unit cost of placements reduce. A huge amount of work had been put into the placement strategy.• The use of agency staff had been unavoidable to meet statutory requirements, but strategies put in place to recruit and retain staff had shown some success. <p>The following responses were given to questions raised during the presentation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The aim is to reduce reliance on agency workers and reduce costs. NQs had been recruited where possible, but had to be balanced with experienced staff to get the right skills mix. Good agency staff are encouraged to apply for jobs, but they positively choose agency work for the flexibility and higher pay rates. T&W offers a market weighting to attract people into the hard-to-recruit areas and is working regionally to establish cost and quality controls with other authorities. Staff are offered as much support and flexibility as possible, although this can be difficult in such a tough and demanding area – but the turnover of social workers has improved and is more stable than 2 years ago. A recent recruitment campaign for 5 social workers had attracted 6 employable applicants, so all had been recruited. The average additional cost for an agency worker was not available at the meeting but figures would be provided.• The Council would not be able to fulfil its statutory duty

without using agency staff, and existing staff would leave if they weren't used.

- It had not been possible to avoid using external residential care. Some children and young people need specialist, individual care which had not been available in the borough and could not be provided by foster carers. Some needed to be placed out of borough for safety reasons. All out of borough placements are monitored constantly so the child/yp can be brought back into the borough as soon as appropriate.
- Recruitment of foster carers had been very successful, including attracting carers from the private sector. Payments to foster carers had been improved and although not as high as private agencies, the council provided a good level of support which had assisted recruitment and retention. The recruitment process had been speeded up following a LEAN review, and the number of enquiries meant that an external agency was being used to expedite assessments as there was no internal capacity for this. The aim was to increase internal foster care placements by 14 extra per year.
- The costs relating to non-CiC Costs had risen following the Southwark Judgement whereby young homeless people of 16-17 were deemed "in need" and the authority had a statutory duty to accommodate them.
- There was no statistical information available about the cost to the authority of safeguarding children from families who had recently moved into the borough, but it was not thought to be a huge number
- Trend information was used to analyse the underlying factors leading to the reduction in unit costs. The better focused FC recruitment campaign and streamlining of the application process had meant new FCs were coming on line and in time would lead to more significant savings on unit costs.
- The retention rate of FCs in T&W was better than the national average. FCs usually drop out in a planned way at the end of a placement so there is little undue disruption to the child/yp. If FCs need a gap in caring, the service works with them to accommodate this.
- Costs of CiC are monitored by senior management on a weekly basis. The Head of Safeguarding approves all children coming into care and all external placements. Constant efforts are made to reduce overspend.

Cllr. Burrell made the point that the Council has a statutory duty to provide for children in care, and that the authority had made a huge investment in safeguarding and corporate parenting. The numbers coming into care had increased significantly nationally, but in T&W the increase had been more contained. The number placed with our own FCs had increased and the unit cost had reduced. Cllr. Burrell commended the work of officers and said that the situation would be considerably worse without their good management.

Member's comments:

- That the team had done a "cracking job"
- That the Council should allocate more funding to the SCP budget in the first instance and there would be no objection if this happened
- That consideration should be given nationally to pay scales

for social workers as they had not kept pace with other professionals in the last few years

AGREED

To note the report

3. Adult Social Care

Members considered the report of the Head of Adult Social Care on Adult Social Care Revenue Budget/Forecast Outturn 2010/2011. The committee was asked to note that this was the first time in years that the service had been in a position of overspend.

The following points were highlighted from the report:

- The service enables the council to meet its statutory requirements under community care legislation, and funds care for various categories of people as described in the report.
- A key pressure on costs had been the tightening up of CHC funding, as well as demographic trends, higher customer expectations and the withdrawal of ILF funding.
- Costs in previous years had been met by increased budgets and additional investment in the service, but the projections for 2010/11 did not fully anticipate the number of people coming out of the NHS system. There are high level discussions with the PCT.
- The future is set to worsen and there was uncertainty about national funding and policy. The coalition had announced an extra £1bn annual funding for adult care, but the impact of this had to be assessed (if this is “new” money or from the health budget). A White Paper on adult care is expected in the autumn. The major review of adult and children’s care is looking at ways of driving out VFM from existing contracts (although are hitting a ceiling) and cost saving strategies such as rehabilitation and re-enablement.

The following responses were given to questions raised during the presentation:

- That some of the proposals in the health White Paper are welcome and may put the authority in a stronger position to influence the health and social care agenda.
- The transition to GP commissioning could potentially create a temporary vacuum but in Telford GP consortia are working though what is required and are in discussion with the PCT to ensure a smooth transition.
- Unlike CHC funding which is not means tested, adult social care is means tested so the authority tends to pay the majority of costs. People with over £23.5k in savings pay the whole cost of care until the level of savings is reduced to below this amount. The authority is then responsible for paying contributions based on an assessment of income. Under the Charging for Residential Accommodation Guide (CRAG) regulations, the authority fixes a charge and those unable to pay are assessed on their ability to pay a proportion of the costs. The formula is very complex.
- Some PCTs provide lower levels of CHC than T&W and the availability of other local provision such as community hospitals needs to be taken into account. Benchmarking

data has only been available for 2 years, but it was thought that the shift from NHS to Local authority funding has gone too far too quickly.

- The PCT makes the initial assessment to determine if needs are health related (NHS funded) or social (local authority funded). Clients can appeal to the PCT and then the SHA. Most people affected are vulnerable, and the Council can help make families aware of their rights and advocacy services.
- If at all possible the council wants to avoid cutting non-statutory services. Nationally more needs to be invested in prevention and other support initiatives such as Age Concern so that fewer people take recourse to the community care system. There may have been a tendency to “over-assess” needs so that too much support is provided too soon, instead of providing re-ablement services. There were some positive signs in the CSR – T&W has received had received £220k for re-ablement, and as a Council we need to make sure the £1bn allocated nationally accrues to local people.
- Children and adult services work very closely together and liaise on budgets so that transition is not an issue for most children. More could be done to plan re-ablement from an earlier age. The most difficult group is age 16-17 with mental health issues; at 18 the person becomes eligible for community care support and the authority then has a statutory duty of care.
- Under the 1993 NHS Community Care Act, the local authority sets a fair access to care threshold (FACT) for entry to community care services. T&W has set the threshold at “substantial” (from low/moderate/substantial/critical). If a person’s needs are assessed above the threshold (substantial or critical) the authority has a legal duty to meet the needs. If needs are assessed below the threshold (low/moderate), there is no legal duty to meet the needs but the authority recognises that it should provide services and that intervention at this stage can prevent deterioration and higher costs later on.
- In line with national trends, the authority commissions services and is not a provider. As part of the major review of social services, the option of in-house services was being examined, but not thought likely at this point.
- Opportunities for joint commissioning/procurement with other organisations and authorities were being explored for high cost services. Efficiency gains had been made from the joint assessment team with Shropshire, joint mental health teams with Shropshire and Staffordshire and joint re-ablement team with the PCT.

AGREED:

- **To note the report**
- **That equivalent data for the number of supported clients for the previous 3 years, including the number in residential care would be provided.**

4. Budget Engagement and Communication

Members considered the report of the Policy and Value for Money Manager and the Head of Communications on the

budget engagement and communication process with local people.

The following points were highlighted from the report:

- That because of the financial climate, budget consultation had started earlier than usual in January 2010
- Consultation is an on-going dialogue, not an one-off exercise
- The aim is to understand what services are most important to local people and what are less important to help determine spending priorities
- As many people as possible are engaged in the most cost effective way
- The report outlined the engagement programme for Phases 1 & 2 designed to reach a broad mix of people representative of the whole community. Methods included large surveys, consultation with community/user groups, interactive Spend & Save exercises with an on-line version being launched in November.

The following responses were given to questions raised during the presentation:

- The Citizen's Survey covers 10,000 households selected randomly from across the borough, which equates to a tenth of all households. The response rate is good at around a third. MV commented that he had been resident of T&W for over 30 years but never received a random survey from the Council. FM said this was possible, even with longstanding residents simply because the survey is random, but that all parts of the borough were surveyed equally.
- The response rates from each area are analysed to ensure the process is equitable. Members can make a difference to the response rate by promoting the survey to ward residents.
- Suggestions from the £££s for Projects scheme have also been used as a means of ascertaining local priorities.
- It was found that groups did not always prioritise the services they need e.g. senior citizens had prioritised affordable housing for younger people.
- The Community Panel (Phase 2 detailed survey) currently includes about 1,350 people. The aim is to increase this to 2,000 and to ensure the Panel is kept refreshed and representative.
- All comments received by members of the public are read personally by the Policy and Value for Money Manager so that all points are taken into consideration.
- Partners are consulted as a group via the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), and individual Heads of Service pick up budget issues with counterparts in other organisations.
- An overview of the results of public consultation can be presented to the CFEC scrutiny committee

Member's suggestions:

- That the Spend & Save exercise should include asking groups to identify services they use that they would be prepared to have cut
- That more help should be made available to support the £££s for projects bids so that expectations and costings are realistic.

AGREED

- To note the report, and the good work being done
- That the results of the consultation would be presented at a meeting in January

5. Forward Plan

The forward plan was noted without change.

6. Time and date of next meeting

Wednesday, 1st December at 6.00pm in the Scrutiny Meeting Room