

BUDGET AND FINANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Budget and Finance Scrutiny Committee held on Monday, 23rd April 2012 at 6.30pm in the Scrutiny Meeting Room, Civic Offices, Telford

PRESENT: Councillors R. Sloan (Chairman), K. Austin, R. Evans, A. Lawrence, C. Mollett, A. Stanton, C. Turley and R. Williams (Co-optee).

Also attending: Cllr. P. Watling, Cabinet Member Children & Young People; L. Johnson, Interim Director of Children's Services; K. Perry, Assistant Director Children's Safeguarding; C. Jones, Assistant Director Family & Cohesion Services; Stephanie Jones, Scrutiny Group Specialist.

BFSC-39 MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting of the Budget and Finance Scrutiny Committee held on 1st February 2012 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

BFSC-40 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllr. S. Reynolds.

BFSC-41 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

BFSC-42 CARE PLACEMENTS

The Chairman reminded members that this meeting had been arranged to look at the costs of care placements in more detail following questions raised at the previous meeting. The key question Members wanted to address was what steps were being taken to ensure that the provision of care placements remained within budget in 2012/13. The Cabinet Member and officers were invited to present reports relating to the issue.

Cllr. Watling, Cabinet Member for Children & Young People, said that he welcomed the opportunity to speak to the Committee and felt that responsibility for children in care was an issue for all members as corporate parents and cut across party lines. He was confident that a clear preventative strategy was in place which would lead to a reduction in the number of children needing to come into care. He could not guarantee that care placements would remain within budget as this was an uncontrolled cost, and there was an upward national trend in the number of children coming into care during the recession. However, he assured members that children and young people needing help would get the right service at the right time, and over time this would have an impact on care numbers.

Laura Johnston, Director of Children's Services, said that the service restructures had been completed with teams now in place and ready to start work. The number of children in care in Telford & Wrekin had been benchmarked against All England, regional and statistical neighbour averages which showed that Telford & Wrekin was performing slightly better than all other non-shire authorities in the West Midlands except Birmingham.

Karen Perry, Assistant Director Children's Safeguarding, presented a "scorecard" which had been developed to monitor the effectiveness of the strategy over time. This provided data in three key areas:

Numbers: this showed the monthly trend in the total number of children in care, the number of new children in care (CIC) by age and as a % of the CIC population and the number of children leaving care by age range and reason. Admissions data would monitor patterns so that the approach could be adapted e.g. towards key age ranges. The reasons for discharge would help identify how discharge could be supported, focussing on safe return home or to alternative permanent placements eg adoption.. It was noted that 60 of 123 children discharged in 2011/12 had returned home safely.

Costs: a cost analysis showed total placement costs, the number of children by placement type as a proportion of overall spend, monthly spend against budget by placement type and average weekly unit costs. A key aim was to bring overall costs down and to reduce the average weekly unit cost of care (currently £832) in particular by increasing the number of internal foster care placements (average weekly unit cost £279) and reducing the number of residential care placements (average weekly unit cost £3,493). Costs were also high due to the length of care placements, and there would be a focus on returning children home safely more quickly. Research had shown that children should not be moved home too quickly before it was safe, but that there could be a tendency for placements to "drift" and the longer a child remained in care, the more difficult it became to return them home. Placement duration would be monitored closely.

Performance: a number of indicators had been selected to monitor performance. Some were national indicators sets (NIs) which Telford & Wrekin continued to monitor, although national targets no longer existed. A RAG rating had been applied to each indicator to compare performance in 2012 with 2011.

- The % of CIC aged 10-16 in foster placement or placed for adoption was positive, although performance was slightly lower than 2011.
- Performance on adoptions within best interest timescales was very good and significantly better than All England and Statistical Neighbour (SN) averages. The 100% target had only been missed due to one case where complex health needs had caused an acceptable delay.
- 30 new fostering households had been approved, including 20 mainstream foster carers and other kinship and respite carers. Nine mainstream foster carers had de-registered making a net gain of 11 against a target of 14. However, there was a good on-going recruitment campaign and ideas to speed up the process.
- Performance on all other indicators had improved and was better than All England or SN averages where data was available.

- Additionally, the characteristics of children and carers were monitored so cultural and ethnic backgrounds could be taken into account as part of the matching process

Karen explained that the scorecard was work in progress and further refinements may be made to ensure the right data was collected.

Members then received the Action Plan which set out the range of activities for proactively managing the number and costs of care placements, showing the anticipated impact on numbers and outcomes, the anticipated financial impact and progress against implementation for each activity. Clive Jones, Assistant Director Family & Cohesion, highlighted two key work streams which were fundamental to delivering both service and cost improvements:

- The focus on commissioning e.g. the reconfiguration of Jigsaw provision, the implementation of a regional residential framework contract, looking at local commissioning to support families with the most complex as part of Strengthening Families.
- Family Connect, the single point of contact to children's services. This would enable earlier intervention and problem resolution delivered through a multi-agency approach which would reduce the need for expensive care placements. The model has been implemented in other authorities including Devon and Knowsley where it had made a positive impact on outcomes. Family Connect will be launched fully in Telford & Wrekin over the next few months.

Following the reports, further information was provided in response to Members' questions and comments:

- With regard to the increase in the number of children in care, the criteria for bringing children into care had not changed since the Baby P case, but agencies did have a greater awareness of the signs of neglect and abuse and were more prompt in making referrals. Advice had been sought from a local judge as to whether unnecessary applications were being made by Telford & Wrekin, and assurance had been given that the cases referred were appropriate. The criteria would not be changed to reduce costs: the safety of the child and integrity of the Council were paramount. Even with marginal cases, finance was not a factor. From a budget point of view, the focus was on funding preventative work to reduce the need for care placements and on better ways of providing support for families, and not on whether a child should come into care or not.
- There were many different types of intervention. Services had been joined up to take a "whole family" approach to tackling presenting issues. Family Connect Advisors and the Triage team will be aware of all available interventions, including adult services. Given the budget situation it is necessary to use resources effectively targeted resources towards pockets of disadvantage and families with the most complex problems. We also plan working with the voluntary sector and people in their local communities to develop low level preventative support such as the kind provided by extended families and neighbours. Cllr. Lawrence suggested that a creative approach to developing community support networks was required.

- Members wanted to know whether the Council used the register of births to routinely contact or mail-shot families with information about children’s services including nurseries: Cllr. Lawrence felt it was important to reach all families and that by targeting resources at pockets of deprivation, families with problems in more affluent areas could be missed. Officers responded that the issue was not how many people were contacted, but how effective that contact was. Resources were limited, and concentrated on engaging the most disadvantaged children with universal services to reduce the risk of them slipping through the net, and (through the Strengthening Families strategy) on supporting the most challenging families . Early Years provision was essential, and the children’s centres and nurseries had received continued funding. The idea of registering births in children’s centres was being explored.
- Paul Watling again emphasised that the Council needed to meet its statutory duties, but that the budget for preventative services needed to be protected to mitigate against incurring avoidable statutory care costs. Karen Perry said that it was also important to ensure that children in care received the best possible service from social workers and that efforts were being made to provide consistency of support and to minimise changes of social workers. Cllr. Stanton was pleased to hear this as the issue of changing social workers had been raised by children and young people in care at a previous scrutiny meeting.

At the end of the discussion, Members agreed that although the spend on the care placements budgets was difficult to control the , the Committee needed to be assured that what was being spent was being spent in the right way. A further report was requested to come back to the Committee in six months.

RESOLVED - that a further report be brought to the Committee in six months.

BFSC-43 FORWARD PLAN

The next meeting would be at 6.30pm on 15th May was agreed for the next meeting to look at the costs of Supporting People services, subject to confirmation by the Scrutiny Officer.

The meeting ended at 7.50 p.m.

Chairman:.....

Date:.....

What is Supporting People and why invest in the services?

In 2003 the Supporting People (SP) programme began commissioning services to meet the housing related support needs for a range of vulnerable people.

A ring fenced programme and administration grant used to be in place however the ring fence and administration grant have been removed in recent years and monies are now included in the area based grant received by the Local Authority. All Supporting People services are contracted services provided by external providers. The commissioning, contracting and monitoring of these services now sits within the Care and Support Commissioning and Contracting Unit.

The SP programme grant currently funds 39 contracts throughout the Borough of Telford & Wrekin and these provide housing related support, community alarm services and support in extra care housing to the most vulnerable client groups in the area. All costs for the provision of these services are reflected in the contract prices, there are no additional costs other than the management of the contracts for which there is a risk based approach that forms part of the contract management and monitoring for all Care and Support contracts.

Supporting People had a budget of approximately £3.9 million (10/11), £3.7 million (11/12), £3.5 million (12/13) and £3.3million (13/14) to help vulnerable people to maintain or establish independence giving them a better quality of life.

All SP services are currently undergoing a major review in order to redesign the model for the future. This will ensure services are delivered based on need and also are as cost effective as possible enabling the team to achieve the savings targets up to 2014.

Housing related support services play an important role in preventing vulnerable and older people from entering other, more costly, long term services by helping them establish and maintain independence either:

- In their own homes with the use of floating support and/or community alarms (Floating Support is support that is delivered to the person and is not tied to a particular location or accommodation listed under a contract hence it can be delivered to a person in their own privately owned accommodation)
- In specialist accommodation provided to them such as accommodation based support schemes or Sheltered Housing schemes.

Examples of the Support provided and the benefits realised by Service Users can be found in the service user case studies in Appendix 2.

The lowest cost Supporting People services are our Sheltered Housing schemes and Community Alarm services. These services are aimed at helping to keep older people in their own homes or at the very least out of expensive residential care for as long as possible yet in a safe environment.

Community Alarms, which can be used in a person's own home to help maintain independence, also have the added benefit of being the foundation to support the use of telecare equipment. This can be a more cost effective way of offering support to traditional social care increasing independence furthermore.

The benefit of these services is their preventative nature. They delay the use of more expensive Social Care Services by helping all types of vulnerable people to establish and maintain independence. Supporting People services are a valuable tool in reducing the number of people needing social services funded residential and care packages at an earlier stage, this is clearly evidenced in the information contained in Appendix 1.

In particular, with an ageing population in the Borough, it is recognised that there is an increasing demand for social care services and the continued delivery of lower level support services will help reduce the number of older people needing assistance from social services, keeping them out of services for longer and also reducing the level of service that people might need when they finally do access services.

Recent research (See appendix 1) indicates that through our £3.4million investment in Supporting People services a net benefit of approximately £10.3 million is realised by preventing of the use of more costly services.

Without investment in services to help older people maintain their independence the impact on social care and health services will be unsustainable. Most older people want to remain in their own home for as long as possible and if they require care or support, want it provided there. 63.4% of the 65+ population live in owner occupied accommodation and it is in these circumstances that Supporting People Floating Support services can also be valuable. Many stakeholders share the opinion that an adverse impact would be felt should Supporting People services be reduced, evidence of this can be found in Appendix 2.

“Floating support is a highly effective tool for tenancy sustainment across all tenures, and if an appropriate support package is available, people with quite high support needs can successfully enjoy a tenancy in the private rented sector”¹

Support to develop sustainable tenancies and community skills is also an effective homeless prevention tool and people who have experienced homelessness have found floating support has been effective in assisting them to get back on to their feet and develop their confidence.

The benefits of Supporting People are so great that, in an ideal world, more services should be considered. These benefits are appreciated by both Service Users and Stakeholders and are highlighted in Appendix 2.

The vulnerable client groups supported are:

- Older people (including frail elderly)
- Homeless families, including those experiencing domestic abuse
- People with mental health needs
- Young people including teenage parents
- Single homeless including rough sleepers and offenders
- Adults with learning disabilities
- People with physical and sensory needs
- People with substance misuse problems including drugs and alcohol

All the services report against the 5 service outcomes :

- Economic wellbeing
- Enjoy and achieve
- Be healthy
- Stay safe
- Making a positive contribution

Typical tasks that an SP service would deliver include:

- Help in maintaining their home or tenancy
- Advice, advocacy and liaison
- Help in maintaining finances and benefit claims
- Help in gaining access to other services
- Help in establishing social contacts/activities
- Help in establishing personal safety and security
- Peer support and befriending
- Help in maintaining safety/security of dwelling
- Access to local community organisations

¹ *Accessing the Private Rented Sector Sept 10*, Nacro's Work Programme for NOMS 2010-11

QUOTED INFORMATION FROM COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT RESEARCH TO EVIDENCE THE BENEFITS OF SUPPORTING PEOPLE

Communities and Local Government (CLG) recently commissioned Cap Gemini to undertake a study into the financial benefits of the Supporting People programme. A report was produced titled "Research into the financial benefits of the Supporting People programme" which is publicly available.

The study acknowledged that SP provides strategically planned housing-related services which are typically parts of packages of support and potentially other services (which may be provided by the public, private or third sector). This research estimated the financial benefits of the SP by considering what the financial impact would be if SP funded services were replaced by the most appropriate positive alternatives for meeting the group's needs (i.e. the approach which would, in the absence of Supporting People, provide the highest degree of independent living).

For some clients the most appropriate alternatives would be the arrangements which they receive at the moment but without the support enabled through Supporting People. This might mean, for example providing a homeless family with accommodation, benefits, support through Job Centre Plus and so on, but not advice on how to maintain a tenancy or access services and utilities in their new home. In these cases some financial impact arises from withdrawing the service, and any additional financial impact arises through the costs of adverse events (such as loss of tenancy) that would now be more likely to happen to the service recipient than would have been the case had SP not been withdrawn.

For others, the best alternatives would be arrangements which required a different, more intensive form of intervention (referred to in this report as 'escalated arrangements'). This might mean, for example, providing residential care to an older person. In these cases the financial impact arises primarily through the costs of the alternative service or intervention when compared to the cost of providing the SP service, although the effect on levels of adverse events is also a factor.

The findings of this work are that the best overall estimate of net financial benefits from the Supporting People Programme is £2.77 billion per annum (against an overall investment of £1.55 billion).

As this research was approached through estimating the impact of withdrawing or replacing the Supporting People intervention, the findings can also be taken to indicate that the costs of supporting the individual through SP are lower than the overall costs of either withdrawing or reducing support or of switching to a more intensive form of support offering a lower degree of independent living.

This analysis suggests that, within the overall net benefit of £2.77 billion, the removal of Supporting People services would lead to:

- increased costs in the areas of health service, homelessness, tenancy failure, crime and (in particular) residential care packages; and
- corresponding reductions in cost in the areas of SP services, housing costs social services care and benefits and related services.

Further to this initial study CLG then provided Local Authorities with a Supporting People financial benefits model. The model was designed to calculate an approximate estimate of the financial benefits of Supporting People (SP) funded services for a particular Local Authority.

It did this by considering two alternative scenarios; a baseline scenario (where clients in the group are supported with packages that involve Supporting People funding) and a counterfactual scenario (where clients are supported with packages that do not involve Supporting People funding). Because, typically, not using Supporting People services results either in the use of more expensive support packages or support packages that expose clients to risks (such as the risk of prolonged hospitalisation) that carry costs, the cost of support under the baseline scenario is typically lower than that under the counterfactual scenario. The difference is the “net benefit” of the Supporting People services; and this is the benefit that the model calculates

When applied to Supporting People services in Telford & Wrekin the Net benefit of the Supporting People Services was estimated at £10.3 million when based on an investment of £3.4million from Supporting People.

In addition to the financial benefits, there are a range of other valuable but uncoded benefits from Supporting People services which should be considered in any thinking about the broader social value of those services.

These vary from client group to client group. In summary they are:

For clients

- Improved mental and physical health
- Improved quality of life
- Greater choice in options of where and how to live
- Increased participation in the community and decreased isolation
- Decreased fear of crime
- Increased ease of access to appropriate services
- Improved involvement in the community
- Increased stability, and in particular greater housing stability, allowing people
- to deal with issues in their lives
- Increased access to appropriate services
- Improved educational and health outcomes for children
- Reduced fear of crime
- Reduced anti-social behaviour
- Acquisition of life skills such as cooking, shopping and management of
- finances
- Keeping families together
- Reduced risk of death (through being a victim of crime).

For others

- Reduced burden for carers, allowing improved relationships with the people being cared for and others
- Reduced anti-social behaviour
- Greater participation in the community by Supporting People clients.

STAKEHOLDER, PROVIDER AND SERVICE USER EXTRACTS FROM THE SUPPORTING PEOPLE NEEDS ANALYSIS - EVIDENCE OF HOW SUPPORTING PEOPLE HELPS

Supporting People providers, stakeholders and customers have been asked what they thought would happen if SP funding was reduced or cut. Here is a selection of the comments:

“Reducing SP services for any client group would be devastating as support is proven to turn service user’s lives around. Tenancies would fail, increasing homelessness in the borough and vulnerable people wouldn’t receive support, and heightened child and adult protection issues would be experienced.”

“Cutting or reducing SP services would lead to concerns around quality and experience of support staff employed. Services would be limited, probably with stricter criteria, and ultimately leading to service users receiving inadequate support and re-entering other services in the future. The impact would be felt through other services and there may also be an increase in hospital admissions. SP currently covers all of the aftercare of service users after rehabilitation services. If SP ended social care services would need to pick this area up and may end up replacing one effective service with another more costly one that is not able to target low level preventative work.”

“If SP services were reduced or stopped quality could be affected and the impact felt in other areas. Homelessness and other social issues could increase, impacting hugely on other council budgets. Current services help people to become stronger, improve their life skills and stand up for themselves. They often give people the security and safety of somewhere to live, with support, and allow people to become self sufficient. Early support from support staff enables service users to eventually have the confidence to carry out tasks without support.”

“Reducing or stopping SP services would be devastating as SP changes service user’s lives. There would be more failing tenancies, re-offending would increase and there would be an increase in homelessness. If SP were reduced public safety could also be at risk as there would be no one there to support clients to prevent homelessness.”

“If SP services were reduced or stopped quality and availability would be reduced. There would be an adverse impact on care budgets as the need would still be there and it would impact community care eligibility. Current services help people feel independent, safe and in control of their own lives. Service users are able to enjoy and gain support to do activities such as gardening, cooking, shopping and day to day tasks. They also like living in their own home where they have independence and their own front door and feel confident in dealing with emergency situations.”

“If SP services were reduced or stopped, quality may be compromised and the service user may not be able to remain independent. The regular contact from the support staff is appreciated and reassuring. Staff are aware of service user’s changing needs. Support helps people feel safer, able to cope better and improves quality of life.”

“Reducing or stopping SP services would result in a reduction to the effectiveness and quality of service. If no support was available there would be potential loss of tenancies, debt problems, other social problems and increased substance misuse.”

Service User Case Study 1

I have been asked to offer my view of the service Supporting People gave to me, and still gives me if necessary.

I got into my situation over many years through being unemployed and then not being able to keep a job for very long due to my alcohol addition. Because things are cumulative, the further I got into debt, the worse it became.

You will perhaps be asking how I came to find out about Supporting People.

As I was once again on benefits, Incapacity Benefit this time I wanted to know what the paperwork meant that I kept receiving from Telford & Wrekin Council about my benefits, how much I owed and how it was calculated. It was suggested that I spoke to the person at my Registered Social Landlord who dealt with benefits.

When I spoke to the person who dealt with these I was told about Supporting People and the service offered, because I told her that I had a pile of unopened mail at home, mostly from creditors. Apparently I was not the only person who leaves mail unopened, because they can't cope with mounting debt.

I was contacted by Supporting People who did an evaluation as to whether they could help me or not and, when it was decided that they could, it was arranged for a support worker to come and see me.

At our initial meeting my support worker went through all my mail with me and sorted it into primary and secondary debts that needed to be sorted out. She helped me to apply for money from trusts and phoned different creditors for me to arrange for manageable amounts for me to pay either monthly or fortnightly.

A support plan was agreed between us, and a weekly visit arranged to see how things were going.

Things got a lot better, although there were ups and downs, which were to be expected. I was opening my mail and making payments due. I felt a lot less stressed and looked forward to seeing my support worker.

I was signed off from Support earlier this year as it seemed that everything was in order.

Although I was on Job Seekers Allowance from January, to August, I have now gone back to being on Incapacity Benefit, which in itself causes problems with any budget.

However, I now have the confidence to 'phone or write to companies to arrange reassessments of how much I should be paying. I also know that I can phone the Supporting People service to ask for advice on anything I am not too sure about.

I recommend the Supporting People service to people who might find them as helpful as I have. I would also recommend that whoever holds the purse strings finds a bit more money to enable them to employ a couple more support workers so that they can help even more people.

Service User Case Study 2

I have been asked to provide details and examples of how I have been supported and helped by the Supporting People Service. In order to put this experience into context initially, I will give you a brief history about myself.

I was born in the Telford & Wrekin area in 1954, the year of the 4 minute mile and in some respects, I feel that I have been running ever since!

I was brought up by both parents, we didn't have a lot but were fed, clothed and had a roof over our heads. I finally completed my education at the age of 22.

I have worked primarily of the civil service both at clerical and managerial levels.

I have owned my own house and also lived in rented accommodation.

I have been married and divorced.

I have lived with a husband and my children and I have lived as a lone parent.

I have worked full time and have lived on Benefits.

I have enjoyed good health and periods of ill health.

I have worked hard to achieve normality and a standard of well being for myself and my family.

Alternatively, I have been angry and frustrated with life.

But we are expected to cope, whatever the circumstances. Life teaches us to manage any way we can and to make the best of a bad situation. We have all been there!! So you see, I am not so different from many of you.

I have dealt with a variety of situations and/or events in my life that have really tested my endurance. It is not necessarily the bigger issues that bring you to your knees. You don't even need to see it coming. But when it finally hit me – it was like an express train.

I had struggled desperately and managed to keep my head above water for 3 tortuous years. But I was experiencing health problems and these impacted heavily on my ability to cope with everyday life. Maintenance of my tenancy became an issue and brought me into contact with the Area Manager of my Registered Social Landlord. This was how I found out about the Supporting People Service and a referral for support was made.

I am extremely pleased with the service I have received from the Supporting People Service over the last 12 months. In particular, I am indebted to my support worker for her patience and persistence in trying to resolve various issues. The support has been crucial for me during some confusing and hectic periods of my life.

I live alone, and to be able to discuss matters with someone else is a luxury.

It has enabled me to gain a clearer perspective and her knowledge and experience has been invaluable. I have received information and advice on benefits and received assistance in making appropriate claims. I have received advice and support in respect of debt management and am currently receiving assistance via the community law service as well.

I have received support in developing budgeting skills, a vital tool when on a low income.

I have also received help in respect of repairs to and outstanding maintenance of the property I rent from a RSL.

I can honestly say that matters have stabilised for me in a positive way as a result of using the Supporting People Service.

The biggest negative for me is the length of time everything takes. There are still unresolved issues and this has been down to outside agencies and inefficiencies on the part of their staff.

A lot of it is repetitive and chasing the same issues over and over again which is frustrating and time consuming for all concerned.

No responsibility, accountability. Always got to use phone – no face to face. Never speak to the same person twice regarding an issue. No sense of professionalism, responsibility. Everything is so remote – phone calls cost a fortune that you can ill afford.

There are many areas where support, advice and guidance is needed. It's a mine field out there and very confusing for the uninitiated. Much more painless with a knowledgeable guide.

And yes, there is paperwork as part of the Supporting People Service, but the majority of this is completed by the support worker, following discussion with the client. The support plan and periodic reviews (every 3 months) help you to prioritise and to focus the mind on the matters in hand. It undoubtedly helps to have an independent and objective assessment of each situation as not two cases are ever the same. And remember it is all strictly confidential.

Yes I would and indeed have already recommended the Supporting People service to someone else. I will continue to use it until all relevant problems are resolved.