



MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT & SCRUTINY PANEL

THURSDAY, 27 JULY 2006 11.00 AM

PANEL MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillor Mrs Joyce Gaffigan
Councillor Yvonne Gibbins
Councillor Harrish Bisnauthsing
Councillor Stephen Hewerdine

Councillor Peter Martin-Mayhew (Chairman)
Councillor Bob Sandall
Councillor Mrs Judy Smith (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Mrs Mary Wheat

OFFICERS

Care Services Manager
Housing Solutions Manager
Housing Solutions Team Leader
Scrutiny Officer
Scrutiny Support Officer

15. COMMENTS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Mr Cox from the district compacts asked about why the number of days that properties were void was not adhered to. The Chairman indicated that he would respond to the question outside the meeting.

16. MEMBERSHIP

The Panel were notified that Councillor Brailsford was substituting for Councillor Mrs Bosworth for this meeting.

17. APOLOGIES

An apology for lateness was received from Councillor Mrs Wheat.

18. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None declared.

19. ACTION NOTES

The action notes from the meeting held on 8th June 2006 were confirmed as a correct record with the following amendment to minute 8 Street Drinking the conclusion to read:

That the Community DSP suggests that the following areas be designated as restricted alcohol consumption areas under the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001:

Grantham Town Centre specifically the Market Place, Westgate, St Peter's Hill, Dysart and Wyndham Park also the paddock area off St Catherine's Road.

Stamford Town Centre specifically the area around Broad Street, Red Lion Square and the Recreation Ground and the Meadows.

20. FEEDBACK FROM THE EXECUTIVE

None.

21. CARE SERVICES - SHELTERED HOUSING

Conclusion

That the Care Services Manager be invited to a future meeting of the Panel to further discuss sheltered housing specifically for young vulnerable people.

The Care Services Manager thanked the panel for the opportunity to give a presentation on sheltered housing. He apologised for the amount of information that he had given members but said he would be happy to come back to a future meeting and discuss any issues that the panel had. The presentation covered the Warden Service/sheltered housing, Supporting People (SP) issues, the Helpline Community Alarm Service and the Service and Business Plan for 2006/07. He began with the sheltered housing and referred to the 40 schemes within the district, which were visited on a regular basis by a scheme manager, that amounted to currently 1313 tenants. The number of dwellings within the scheme varied and also the rurality of some scheme meant that some scheme managers looked after more than others. Most schemes had community centres and all units were connected to the 24hour Care Centre in Grantham, which was open 365days a year and provided support and an emergency service at all times to ensure that help and assistance was readily available. Scheme managers worked 9.00am – 5.00pm but outside these hours mobile staff were on hand to provide an effective and efficient response if required. This was a fairly unique service delivery at least in Lincolnshire. Typical duties of a scheme manager were then listed and the Care Service Manager stressed that Supporting People (SP) was to support people to live independently not care for them. He referred to the “one size fits all” service that was available in 2003 and the findings of the Best Value Review and satisfaction survey that were undertaken. As a result of the findings of the BVR and satisfaction survey a new flexible level of service was now offered from core to level 4.

- Core Monthly visit
- Level 1 A weekly visit

- Level 2 Monday, Wednesday & Friday visit
- Level 3 Daily visit including weekends
- Level 4 Twice daily visits

Currently there were only a handful of tenants, which had the level 4 service. These services were in the main paid for by the SP grant. Eligibility for the SP grant was that if you were in receipt of housing benefit then you would get the SP grant.

The costs for the new levels of service were:

• Core	Monthly visit	£3.19
• Level 1	A weekly visit	£6.76
• Level 2	Monday, Wednesday & Friday visit	£11.00
• Level 3	Daily visit including weekends	£41.97
• Level 4	Twice daily visits	£81.62

Following the introduction of the SP programme in 2003 a formal support plan was introduced for each resident which the scheme manager completes on a regular basis. This monitors the residents and if required the scheme manager can arrange extra visits if necessary. The current levels of service were then discussed. Assumptions were made following the survey carried out in 2003 when residents were asked, "*If you had a choice, how often would you like to be visited?*" The service charges were calculated on assumptions made from the results of the survey, which had caused problems as the number of take up for the different levels of service has not materialised.

Supporting People had been extremely helpful and agreed to change the SP contract which the Council had to deliver this "new" service. They agreed to pilot the scheme, as they wanted to assess the idea of choice and flexibility with a view to extending the service to a wider area in Lincolnshire. Although problems have been encountered the residents really do like the opportunity to have a choice and following the recent satisfaction survey the question "*Overall how do you rate the support you receive?*" of those who responded 96% were satisfied. The Care Service Manager said there was still a lot of work to be undertaken and there were concerns that the proposals of the Lincs SP would not help a long term solution, but he would be pushing the current service for accommodating choice relating to individual needs as this seemed to be what the residents wanted.

The following questions were then asked:

- Was a complaint procedure in place for residents? *The Care Services Manager replied that the council had its own formal complaints procedure which was available to any resident. In addition the scheme manager had a local complaints booklet in which local complaints were noted and responded to.*
- Were scheme managers trained to respond to these complaints? Yes.
- How was the SP grant accessed? *If a resident received housing benefit*

they would automatically be entitled to the SP grant.

- How did scheme managers keep track of vulnerable people within sheltered housing? *The Care Services Manager said that problems had been encountered in the past but Tenancy Services did work closely with Care Services and the council now had a sensitive lettings policy, which since its introduction had seen a reduction in complaints and neighbour problems. Also scheme managers now accompanied prospective tenants to viewings of accommodation.*
- How did the service cope with the Black Minority Ethnic groups? *All staff had the relevant training and everyone was treated fairly.*
- What will happen if the housing stock is transferred? *All RSL would be subject to SP conditions and therefore the SP grant conditions would remain the same.*
- Concern was expressed that a lot of complaints concerning vulnerable people were in the 35 – 45 year age range, why did it seem that older people were not seen as vulnerable in today's climate? *The demographics in South West Lincolnshire were changing as generations change and there was a national drive to offer floating support rather than designated schemes to include a range of flexible services for all age ranges.*
- Did all staff working with vulnerable people have an enhanced CRB check? *Yes as part of the 2003 review all staff have enhanced CRB checks. Are they reviewed regularly? Not sure currently how they are reviewed.*
- Did those residents on the service level 4 all have to pay the £81.62? *All those residents who currently receive the level 4 services were in receipt of SP grant. The SP see the cost as a small price to pay in order for people to live relatively independent lives and to keep their "own front door".*
- What access do residents have to financial benefits? *Scheme managers actively encourage all residents to apply for those benefits to which they are entitled and they will help fill out the necessary forms for them.*
- Will the SP grant continue after 2010? *This was up to the government and the comprehensive spending review.*
- How certain are we that diverse groups are not discriminated against, what safeguards are in place? *At the recent council meeting the offer document to tenants were agreed. This document contains allocation policy that any new housing association would have to undertake to treat everyone equally and fairly.*
- What was discussed at visits? *Daily life, what goes on, general chat, whatever the residents wants to talk about.*

Reference was made then made to a recent incident that happened at a Stamford scheme where the scheme manager was not aware that a vulnerable person had moved in to the premises which had caused problems. The Care Service Manager was not aware of the incident and said that often any problems were dealt with locally by the scheme manager.

The Care Services Manager then briefly outlined the workings of the helpline

service which monitored 40 South Kesteven sheltered housing schemes together with 20+ other housing providers' schemes including South Holland DC stock, plus nearly 2,000 private individuals which amounted to 5,500 connections. He outlined who the service was for and referred to the preventative technology grant of which Lincolnshire's share was £1.2m. This offered the opportunity to put telecare out to the wider community to access support in appropriate situations. New choices offered by Telecare included the use of sensors and communications technology to provide remote support to people who were vulnerable at home, for example sensors which could detect falls. The future of the helpline service would be via alarm telephones.

He concluded his presentations by saying that a desktop review of sheltered housing would be undertaken looking at how to make the service more efficient and effective. He was aware of the concerns being expressed by LSVT but the service would remain the same and so would the conditions if transfer went ahead. Currently work was being undertaken for the helpline service to be accredited under the Telecare Services Association & National Accreditation Scheme. SP was constantly changing and work was needed to make sure that all policies and procedures were fit for purpose.

Further comments were made about the complaints procedure and the incident at Stamford together with how terminology always seemed to separate the BME groups. As the presentation had been geared more towards the older generation it was agreed that the Care Services Manager be invited to a future meeting to look at sheltered housing and the younger generation.

22. PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING

The Housing Solution Manager briefly referred to the performance related information, which had been circulated with the agenda and gave stark information about homelessness. The presentation would hopefully give a broad idea about the service offered by the Council which was underpinned and driven by legislation outlined in the Housing Act 1996 part VII, Homelessness Regulations 2006 and the Homelessness Act 2002.

There was a team of officers that offered a front-end service with advice and assistance to people. A suite of information leaflets which offered broad advice in various languages was available together with a website. Nothing was taken at face value and all circumstances were investigated with advice being given to help prevent homelessness. Housing Solutions worked closely with Tenancy Services to help stop instances in the past whereby a tenant had been evicted by the Council and promptly walked back into the offices as homeless.

The Housing Solutions Team Leader then spoke to the Panel about the preventative agenda, which was being driven forward by the Government. The Council now had an initial homelessness enquiry form which started the ball rolling, so that information could be obtained and options considered and resolved before the need for a formal homeless claim was made. Partnerships with outside agencies such as the CAB were part of the preventative agenda and the Housing Solutions Team Leader referred to training which she had

recently carried out with volunteers at the CAB on housing advice. All options were looked at when a homelessness enquiry was made including home visits, negotiation with family members and mediation where necessary. The successful landlords forum had helped the section improve access to private landlords. If someone presented as a non-priority need and the Council's statutory duty did not apply they would be given advice and information of where to tap into facilities that were available outside of the Council. Housing Solutions involvement included:

- Taking claims
- Investigations – a homelessness investigation could take 6/7 weeks and include medical issues, mortgage arrears etc
- Temporary accommodation
- Decisions
- Allocations
- Reviews
- Performance Indicators

The Housing Solutions Team Manager then listed the examples of those people who had a priority need to be housed which included pregnant women and those vulnerable as a result of having been a member of HM regular forces i.e. naval, air or military. People who were unintentionally homeless could be split into those who had a priority need and those who did not. The council had a duty to accommodate those with a priority need but also to provide advice and assistance to those who did not. She then discussed the main duties owed to an applicant who was intentionally homeless and what definitions were used for intentionally homeless and how deliberate acts or omissions made people intentionally homeless.

When a decision was given to an applicant it was clearly documented. If the applicant wished to have his/her case reviewed then a special form was completed together with any messages or new supporting information and a senior officer not involved with the original application went through all the information including any new information available, this was an informal review. If the applicant was still not happy with the review, than a formal review would be carried out by the Housing Review Board. The applicant could submit written representations and each review had to be within eight weeks of the request. All record keeping pertaining to any homelessness requested was documented and kept in the relevant case file.

A comment was made about the partnership with the CAB with concern being expressed about the CAB funding for the future. The Housing Solutions Team Leader said that the current partnership arrangement was a one off. Bids had been requested and the CAB had been successful, the Scrutiny Officer said that the core funding was a separate issue and not one for this panel; it was the responsibility of the Resources DSP. Further questions were asked about BME groups, this question was a standard one used to help to understand the make-up of the community.

How did officers know when false information was given. When applications

were progressed the applicant had to sign to say the information was correct. Reference was made about people who left prison for certain crimes and who was notified to which the Housing Solutions Manager referred to the Multi Agency Public Protection Panel and the meetings they held with various bodies such as the police, the probation and social services.

One member referred to the misconceptions that abounded about how people actually came to get accommodation from foreign countries and couldn't something be done to "set the record straight"? The Housing Solutions Manager replied that there were strict guidelines governing applicants from EU countries and these were adhered to, unfortunately there would always be an element of mistaken belief by some of the public about how homelessness and housing allocation was dealt with no matter what was said.

The possibility of a hostel for South Kesteven was raised and it was acknowledged that there was no local hostel with the nearest being at Lincoln and Nottingham with no guarantee that anyone sent there would get a place. Unfortunately, funding was required and there were simply no resources available. The team worked with the resources that they had available to the best of their ability.

The Chairman on behalf of the panel thanked the Housing Solutions Manager and the Housing Solutions Team Leader for an interesting presentation.

23. REPORTS FROM WORKING GROUPS

Conclusion

That a report on the findings following the recent Audit Inspection of Housing be presented to the next meeting of the Panel.

The Housing Solution Manager referred to the recent Audit inspection, the results of which would be known in three or four weeks time and suggested that the Strategic Housing working group be utilized once the outcome of the inspection is known. A report would be submitted to the next panel meeting following the audit report.

24. BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The Housing Solutions Manager referred to the BVPI 183a and indicated that there was specific criteria for figures to be included with this performance indicator and he did not want to mislead the panel members that bed & breakfast accommodation had not been used to date. It had, but not under the criteria used for the PI. A panel member referred to a void premise at Stamford and the Chairman indicated that if she passes the details to him, he would look into it for her. The Scrutiny Officer referred to the anti-social behaviour indicators and reminded members that Mr McWilliams had indicated at the last meeting why the figures were in the red. A response to the DSP's request for

more resources for this section was still awaited from the Portfolio Holder. The criteria for BVPI 78a was being revised and the Scrutiny Officer had been assured that these figures would be amber for the next month. The average time to re-let council houses was decreasing and it was hoped that by the end of the year the figure would be in the green.

25. WORK PROGRAMME

Conclusion

That the issue of travellers be added to the work programme for discussion at a future meeting of the Panel.

The Scrutiny Officer informed the Panel of a few changes that had been made to the work programme following the publishing of the Forward Plan which related to timescales. Two new items had been added; Wake House Bourne, disposal of premises and LSVT stock ownership. The Panel were asked if they had anything specific which they wished to put on the work programme. A request was made for the subject of travellers to be discussed at a future meeting. The subject of LSVT was raised due to concerns, which some councillors had following the publication of the financial details, however as the council had made a decision on the offer to tenants the previous week, it was felt that it was too late to discuss the subject.

A member asked if the time of the meetings could be earlier possibly 10.00am, with less on the agenda to enable those items that were on the agenda to be discussed in more detail. It was suggested that a future meeting be held in Stamford, possibly in the Arts Centre.

The Scrutiny Officer confirmed that members of the CDRP would be willing to attend the next meeting of the panel to discuss their work.

26. REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES

Members noted and thanked Councillor Mrs Wheat for her report on the Community Care for the Elderly

27. ANY OTHER BUSINESS, WHICH THE CHAIRMAN, BY REASONS OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES, DECIDES IS URGENT

A short presentation was given by the Care Services Manager on the proposed new development at Worth Court, Bourne that was being undertaken by LACE Housing Association in conjunction with Longhurst Housing Association following the successful submission of a bid for funding to the Housing Corporation to develop an extra care housing scheme on the site. It was hoped that the project would be completed by March 2008 and the council would have nomination rights.

28. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 1.45pm.