



London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham

Housing, Health And Adult Social Care Select Committee Minutes

Tuesday 15 February 2011

PRESENT

Committee members: Councillors Andrew Johnson (Chairman), Stephen Cowan, Oliver Craig, Charlie Dewhirst, Gavin Donovan, Marcus Ginn, Steve Hamilton and Rory Vaughan (Vice-Chairman)

Co-opted members: Maria Brenton (HAFAD)

Other Councillors: Joe Carlebach and Lucy Ivimy

Officers: Geoff Alltimes, Benedict Hefford, CE H&F Homes - Nick Johnson, Sue Spiller and Gerald Wild (Interim Assistant Director, Housing Options)

Expert Witnesses: Peter Okali, Chief Executive CaVSA, Kamran Malick, Director HAFAD and Rachel Orr and Kate Webb, Shelter.

Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust: Dr Mark Palazzo, Director Specialist Services; Professor Nick Cheshire, Director of Circulation Sciences and Renal Medicine; Don Neame, Communications; Mr Michael Pearse, Trauma and Orthopaedics Consultant and Lesley Stephen, Director of Performance, Planning and Information

44. MINUTES AND ACTIONS

The Chairman stated that he had agreed to change the order of the agenda and item 8 and then item 7 would be taken before item 4.

Councillor Cowan referred to the Winter Flu Vaccination Update and stated that he had requested a full report in respect of the lack of flu vaccine by his GP practice for two weeks and, in his role as Leader of the Opposition, would be writing to Dr McCoy.

RESOLVED THAT:

1. The minutes of the meeting held on 18 January 2011 be approved and signed as an accurate record of the proceedings.
2. Progress with the acceptance and implementation of recommendations and outstanding actions be noted.

45. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Iain Coleman and Peter Tobias and Ms Sarah Whiting.

46. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Carlebach declared an interest in respect of items 4 and 6.

47. LBHF AND THE 3RD SECTOR

Mr Hefford introduced the report, which set out the Council's strategy for working with the 3rd sector.

The Chairman then invited Mr Peter Okali, Chief Executive CaVSA and Mr Kamran Malick, Director HAFAD to respond to the report.

Mr Okali stated that CaVSA H&F was an organisation funded by the Council to provide infrastructure support to third sector groups and organisations and to facilitate networking between groups. There were some 700/800 very active organisations within Hammersmith and Fulham, with an average of 20 volunteers per organisation and a income of £50,000 or less. Some 30% recorded no formal income and were dependent on volunteer staff.

Mr Okali raised specific issues in respect of the report:

- the Government's Big Society; how it looks and whether there was a shared vision in Hammersmith and Fulham;
- the preventative agenda and Supporting Your Choice Programme and the cost for organisations to participate;
- the grant application process and the cost to organisations;
- and
- cross borough commissioning and how boroughs would share information in respect of the needs which they were trying to address.

Mr Malick stated that he would present an opinion from the voluntary sector, rather than speaking on behalf of HAFAD.

Mr Malick commented on specific aspects of the report:

- The move by the Council from short term grant funding to the allocation of two/four year grants, which specified outcomes, but left organisations to determine the type and model of service they wished to deliver to achieve the outcomes was welcomed. However, the difference between commissioning services and grant funding, as set out in the report, was not absolutely clear.
- The influence of Kay Reeve, Supporting Your Choice Programme Manager, had helped to develop very good relationships.
- Cross borough commissioners would struggle to understand the service required as they were removed from the area.
- Commissioners, at times, appeared to struggle to understand how services operated on the ground, and some officers had demonstrated poor skills, such as understanding organisational budgets and service specifications.
- There were issues in respect to the timeliness of contract issue and renewal.
- There were different processes between departments.

Mr Malick recommended that the Council should move towards an outcomes approach for commissioned services, i.e. the difference the service had made for an individual resident, as opposed to an outputs monitoring approach, for example, the number of telephone calls made and home visits undertaken.

Councillor Dewhirst queried the development of Supporting Your Choice in respect of carers and those people who needed care. Benedict Hefford responded that the Council was moving away from the historical arrangements of commissioning specified services from a range of providers to individual budgets for carers' breaks, and acknowledged that there was more work to be done.

Councillor Craig queried the Council's response to the Government's Big Society and whether funding was attached. Ms Spiller responded that the Director of Finance and Corporate Affairs was leading this work. There were no funding streams available to local authorities, but there was likely to be funding directly available to the 3rd sector via the Big Society Bank.

Ms Brenton stated that the Big Society Bank would charge interest at commercial rates.

Councillor Vaughan queried: how the Council saw the relationship with the 3rd sector in the short and medium term; the meaning of 'independence from statutory providers'; and the expectations around the 3rd sector. Ms Spiller responded that the majority of organisations benefiting from grants were small or medium sized organisations, which often demonstrated a lack of innovation in services design in order to expand or enhance the service offer, but instead expected the Council to increase grant funding. A number of local organisations were not sufficiently active in seeking external funding and were over-reliant on grants from the Council. The Council, through CaVSA, informed these organisations of other available funds and expected groups to have realistic funding and business plans in place. In terms of improving organisational robustness, the Charities Commission, quality assurance system 'PQASSO' was recommended.

Ms Spiller stated that the grant application form had been reduced to 10 pages, in consultation with 3rd sector groups. Monitoring expectations were in line with the proportion of services and funds allocated. If possible, the Council would use or adapt information already being provided to other bodies.

Councillor Carlebach considered that the 3rd sector had an important role and undertook some outstanding work, and suggested that, in accessing different types of funding, organisations should solicit trustees with experience of raising funds, to avoid the burden falling on the people who were delivering the services.

Mr Okali welcomed the support to attract other sources of funding, and recommended that the Council continued to work on making grant application forms appropriate.

Ms Brenton raised a number of issues:

- Cross boundary commissioning would be further away from where services were needed and there would be a tendency to commission big organisations out of borough, with no local connections.
- In times of funding reductions in the public sector, the voluntary sector received reduced funding.
- The Council did not consistently issue Service Level Agreements, against which organisations could appeal.
- It might not be possible for HAFAD to continue delivering a children's service as funding had been removed.

Ms Brenton considered that the Council needed to be more business like and stated that she had not seen the Council's Compact in her eight year's experience.

Ms Spiller confirmed to Councillor Ginn that community involvement of LBHF staff might be considered by the Council. Ms Brenton added that officers had been offered a short secondment at HAFAD, but, to date, the offer had not been accepted.

Councillor Cowan asked for clarification of an earlier point in respect of commissioners not understanding budgets. Mr Malick confirmed that, at a monitoring visit by one commissioner, the officer had struggled to understand the budgets, which were routinely produced as a statement of how grants had been spent, and were understood by the trustees. Commissioners did not appear to understand the practicalities of service delivery, for example the service specification for the advocacy service stipulated a maximum of three months support should be available to individuals. However, it was not possible as advocacy work was dependent on supporting the service users to access or negotiate.

Mr Hefford stated that he would ensure that there was capacity to understand budgets and would follow up with Mr Malick. In respect of the specification,

there would always be a gap between the service provider and the more general knowledge of the commissioner, responsible for a whole range of services.

Councillor Cowan queried the provision of services if organisations were unable to raise independent funding. Councillor Carlebach responded that the grant funded organisations provided additional services, which would not normally be available to residents. Some councils had reduced their grant to budget to virtually nothing, but this had not been deemed appropriate in Hammersmith & Fulham, which would continue to fund the 3rd sector as far as possible,

RESOLVED THAT:

1. The committee noted the report.
2. An update report would be added to the work programme.

Action: Committee co-ordinator

48. HAMMERSMITH & FULHAM LINK UPDATE REPORT

The committee received the Hammersmith & Fulham LINK Update Report for information.

RESOLVED THAT:

1. The report be noted.
2. A presentation on completed LINKs projects be added to the work programme.

49. CASE FOR CHANGE: PROPOSED SEPARATION OF URGENT AND PLANNED ORTHOPAEDIC SURGERY

The Chairman welcomed the clinicians and senior managers from Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust.

Dr Palazzo presented the report on the proposed separation of urgent and planned orthopaedic surgery currently based at Charing Cross Hospital and St. Mary's Hospital.

Dr Palazzo set out the case for change for orthopaedic surgery, which accounted for 7% of planned operations and 7.5% of the urgent operations performed at the two hospitals. The objective of the proposal was to improve quality, clinical effectiveness, safety and patient experience. Separate facilities for planned and urgent care were recommended by the Royal College of Surgeons as having the advantage of reduced infection rates; improved care by surgeons specialising in certain types of operations; planned operations not being cancelled by urgent work; urgent work not being

delayed by planned work; and facilitating training and research. In addition, the proposal would support the Major Trauma Centre.

The preferred options with most benefits were:

- Planned surgery at Charing Cross Hospital and urgent surgery at St. Mary's Hospital; and
- Planned surgery at Charing Cross Hospital and urgent surgery at Charing Cross Hospital and St. Mary's Hospital.

Outpatients would continue unchanged on both sites.

Councillor Vaughan queried whether the proposed changes would affect the viability of the Charing Cross site and whether the separation of urgent and planned orthopaedic surgery would be sustainable in the long term, or consolidated at St. Mary's Hospital. Dr Palazzo stated that orthopaedic services would not be consolidated on the St. Mary's site. Only a small number of Hammersmith & Fulham residents were admitted for urgent orthopaedic surgery at Charing Cross Hospital, and they would be taken directly to St. Mary's Hospital. All other Accident & Emergency services would remain unchanged at Charing Cross Hospital.

Charing Cross Hospital could accommodate all planned orthopaedic surgery. An increase in day cases was anticipated, but the requirement to re-mix planned and urgent surgery was not expected. Currently, some surgeons were working in a single department across different sites.

Councillor Cowan queried the facilities available for the Hammersmith & Fulham patients who were currently treated as urgent cases at Charing Cross. Dr Palazzo responded that it was likely that they would be given analgesia, made safe and then transferred to St. Mary's Hospital as an urgent admission. Currently, they would often be added to the end of the planned operation list for the early evening at Charing Cross.

Dr Palazzo stated that whilst there were significant quality gains, there was a marginal financial gain. Ms Stephen stated that there would be some £800,000/£1 million savings in respect of junior doctors rotas. Mr Pearse added that it was essential to separate planned and urgent surgery because of the different care needs of the patients.

Councillor Cowan queried a risk analysis for seriously injured patients. Dr Palazzo responded that they would be taken directly to the Major Trauma Unit at St. Mary's Hospital, in line with best practise.

Mr Pearse responded to Councillor Carlebach that the concentration of patients would facilitate academic research, which was approximately equal on both sites.

Ms Stephen suggested that there would be twelve weeks of engagement with key stakeholders to consider their view and offered to return to the committee in April to provide an update.

RESOLVED:

1. That the report be noted.
2. That an update report on the key stakeholder engagement be provided at the April meeting.

50. HOUSING BENEFIT CAPS

The Chairman welcomed Ms Rachel Orr and Ms Kate Webb, who were representing Shelter.

Councillor Cowan stated that he was disappointed at the brevity of the report and that the information he had circulated had not been appended. The Chairman responded that, as this was the third occasion on which the subject had been before the committee, he was satisfied with the information included and that members had had the opportunity to read the information, which had been circulated electronically by Councillor Cowan.

Mr Nick Johnson presented the report which evaluated the effects of the range of housing benefit caps which would be in place from 1 April 2011. These included:

- Caps on Local Housing Allowance claimable by residents in the private rented sector; and
- Caps on Housing Benefit claimable by residents in Housing Association leased accommodation (leased from private landlords for the provision of homelessness services).

The changes would begin for all new claimants from 1 April 2011, but existing claimants would not be affected by the caps until the anniversary of their claim date plus nine months.

A housing benefit subsidy was paid to housing associations to cover the costs associated with managing the property on the landlord's behalf. Councils were already subject to a cap on the amount of housing benefit subsidy which they could claim for their leased properties, and properties leased by housing associations in relation to homelessness prevention would also be subject to these caps from 1 April 2011.

All households in housing association leased properties whose rent would remain above the caps after April 2011 would have their rents assessed in conjunction with Adult Social Care and Children's Services and other relevant services. The needs of the family would be assessed against a number of criteria, for example: health and medical needs; employment status and cultural and ethnicity-related issues.

The council was working with private landlords and housing associations to mitigate the impacts on residents, focusing on re-negotiations to bring down rents to levels within the caps. It was projected that, out of 23,000 active Housing Benefit claimants in Hammersmith & Fulham, approximately 2,400

households would be affected by the caps: an estimated 1916 claimants in the private rented sector and 546 in housing association leased properties. Approximately 55% of landlords involved in housing association leasing had agreed to lower their rent to within the cap.

A dedicated team of Housing Options advisers and Housing Benefit specialists, called 'HB Assist' had been established to advise affected residents about their options. Where rents could not be re-negotiated, eligible households might apply for Discretionary Housing Payments to bridge the gap between their rent and the caps. Where this was not possible, Housing Options would provide assistance to secure alternative affordable accommodation, either through homelessness prevention services or as part of the Council's statutory housing duties. Temporary accommodation for households accepted as statutorily homeless was regularly procured outside the borough and any additional procurement in response to the caps would be in line with the usual procedures.

Councillor Ivimy, before leaving the meeting, briefly commented on the research to assess the impact of the most immediate changes to Housing Benefits commissioned by Shelter and carried out by Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research. She considered that the report conclusions, which predicted a much higher number of families would be affected, were based on false assumptions and flawed analysis. Key assumptions were that: tenancies would not change; landlords would not reduce their rent; and there would be steady growth in rents.

Councillor Ivimy apologised that she had to leave to attend another meeting, and stated that she would write to Shelter and the committee substantiating her doubts about the research.

The Chairman invited Ms Orr and Ms Webb to respond to the Housing Benefits Caps report and to Councillor Ivimy's comments.

Ms Orr stated that the research assumption in respect of landlords reducing rent was based on the considerable demand in London for rented housing from households not claiming local housing allowance. The Council's assumption of 55% of landlords agreeing to lower rent to within the cap was based on housing association leased accommodation; it was not known that private landlords would operate in the same way.

Ms Orr added that the impact assessment undertaken by the Department of Works and Pensions had made national headlines in respect of claimants whose net rent would be more than the maximum local housing allowance.

Ms Webb stated that the research indicated that the introduction of the cap and using the 30th percentile of the range of local rents as the maximum local housing allowance paid from April 2011, instead of the median average would reduce the proportion of London neighbourhoods affordable to local housing allowance claimants. The proportion would fall further by 2016 as a consequence of increasing local housing allowance rates in line with Consumer Price Index inflation, with neighbourhoods becoming unaffordable to low-income tenants.

Councillor Cowan queried the number of private sector residents with whom the Council would work. Mr Johnson responded that the Council would work with the 317 residents who were direct lettings. Mr Rosenberg responded to further queries that he had spoken to approximately ten landlords in this group. However, it was anticipated that landlords would reduce rents rather than risk void periods. Mr Wild stated that there had not been an increase in approaches from tenants, which would have been expected if landlords were seeking rent increases.

Ms Webb stated that she would not anticipate an increase in homelessness expectations at this stage.

Mr Wild stated that the Council would maintain services throughout 2011/2012 at existing levels.

Ms Orr responded to Councillor Dewhirst that it was difficult to assess how many of the 2,400 affected households would have to move to alternative accommodation. In addition, there would be an impact on Hammersmith & Fulham from people moving in from more expensive neighbouring boroughs.

Councillor Donovan considered that rent reductions could impact on the standard of properties.

Councillor Vaughan queried the size of the HB Assist team and the allocation of additional resources. Mr Johnson responded that there were four officers in the team, which had been funded through the Government grant of £400,000. This grant had been wholly allocated to HB Assist to provide support for affected residents.

Councillor Vaughan queried the support provided for households, which were forced to move. Mr Johnson responded that there was clear criteria for assessment of homelessness, and households not found to be 'intentionally homeless' would be properly supported in the transition to their new accommodation. The Council had a statutory duty to provide appropriate accommodation for households in temporary accommodation.

Ms Webb consider that most councils would experience a long term erosion of affordability.

Councillor Carlebach queried whether modelling had been undertaken to indicate the affect of an improved market. Ms Webb responded that the Cambridge research had made assumptions of low inflation and had considered the effects of assuming higher and lower rent inflation over the period to 2016. The report author had offered to speak to any members of the committee

Councillor Cowan considered that the changes to housing benefits were a significant issue because of the scale of the impact, and urged more research.

RESOLVED THAT:

1. The report be noted.
2. That an update report be added to the work programme.

51. BRINGING HOUSING SERVICES BACK TO THE COUNCIL

Mr Johnson presented the report on returning the management of housing services to the Council on 1 April 2011, at the end of the Decent Homes Programme and contract with H&F Homes. The result of a postal survey of residents indicated that more than 70% were in favour of the proposal.

Mr Johnson responded to Councillor Cowan that any 'don't mind' responses had not been counted. The responses had been assessed by an independent company, and a written response would be provided in respect of the number of residents who had completed the survey.

ACTION: Chief Executive, H&F Homes

ACTION:

A written response to be provided in respect of the number of residents who had completed the survey.

RECOMMENDED:

That the report be noted.

The Chairman thanked Mr Johnson for his work and service to Hammersmith & Fulham.

52. DRAFT HAMMERSMITH & FULHAM DEMENTIA STRATEGY 2011 - 2013: FOR INFORMATION ONLY.

The committee received the Dementia Strategy for information.

53. WORK PROGRAMME AND FORWARD PLAN 2010-2011

RESOLVED THAT:

The work programme be noted.

54. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

12 April 2011

Meeting started: 7.04 pm

Meeting ended: 9.50 pm

Chairman

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