



OLDER PEOPLE'S SERVICES

**REPORT OF THE OLDER PEOPLE'S
SERVICES REVIEW SCRUTINY GROUP**

MAY 2004

1 Background

1.1 The Older People's Services Scrutiny Review Task Group was established by the Community Care and Housing Select Committee at its meeting on 3 September 2003. It was agreed that the task group should comprise six Members, three each from the Liberal Democrat and Conservative groups. The members appointed to the task group were:

- Councillor Barbara Alexander (chairman);
- Councillor Peter Argyle;
- Councillor Paul Bryant;
- Councillor Billy Drummond;
- Councillor Denise Gaines: and
- Councillor Julian Swift-Hook.

1.2 The task group had been set up with a broad remit, with a report to be produced after six months. At its first meeting on 23 October 2003, Members discussed the more detailed areas on which the review would focus. A number of potential areas were considered:

- improving quality of life for the elderly;
- care home beds etc;
- carers and their problems (including the roles of families and neighbours);
- getting people home(the progression there, rehabilitation etc)house size and suitability, sheltered housing;
- finance issues, including new expenditure;
- speed of assessment;
- houses with levels of care, integrated communities;
- meals;
- Primary Care Trusts and "one man band" services;
- public transport (to keep healthy and for getting about);
- activities (keep healthy – then recovery is better);
- respite care.

1.3 Members recognised that other possible items might be put forward and that, in any case, it was clear that the task group could not realistically tackle all the items listed within the six month timescale it had been set. It was therefore agreed, in view of the perceived urgency of problems surrounding delayed transfers (bed blocking) that this should be the main focus of the review. It was also agreed that other related issues might be considered, depending on the progress of the review. Such related issues included:

- care home bed places;
- sheltered housing;
- care in the community.

1.4 The task group recognised that, in order to carry out the review effectively, there was a need to update Members of current developments. Members attended a number of

learning activities during the review. Before the task group held its first meeting, the Chairman shadowed social service staff, attended a resource panel, and attended the Council's Service Improvement Day focusing on older people.

- 1.5 The Members of the task group wish to record their gratitude for the help and assistance provided by a number of people in carrying out this review. These include Petula Bollon, the warden at Walnut Close Day Centre, the social services staff at Theale, and staff from the Community Care and Housing service grouping and from the scrutiny team.

2 Introduction to the Review

2.1 Sources of evidence

2.1.1 The following witnesses provided oral evidence for the review:

- Margaret Goldie – Corporate Director (Community Care & Housing);
- Kathy Turberfield – Group Accountant for Community Care & Housing.

2.1.2 The task group wishes to place on record its gratitude for the time and helpful information given to it so willingly by these witnesses.

2.1.3 The task group made visits to the following establishments/activities:

- Walnut Close Day Centre;
- Hampstead Norreys Friendship Circle.

2.1.4 The task group issued and analysed a survey to voluntary organisations in the area. This asked the following questions:

- How do you view the role of the Council's Social Services?
- From your experience, how would you compare this Council's performance with that of other councils?
- How do you view the relationship between your organisation and the Council?

2.1.5 Individual Members of the task group also:

- attended a briefing on care for older people;
- shadowed social service staff at Theale;
- attended a meeting of the Resource Panel;
- attended the Council's Service Improvement Day focusing on services for older people.

2.2 Meetings

2.2.1 The review was carried out between October 2003 and June 2004 and involved five meetings of the task group on the following dates:

- 23 October 2003;
- 20 November 2003;
- 15 December 2003;

- 20 May 2004; and
- 11 June 2004.

3 Evidence gathered

- 3.1 The task group heard that, until 1993, funding for older people's services was from two major sources, the Department for Social Security (means tested) and local authority social services, which were subject to cash limited budgets. In bringing in changed arrangements, the government provided a special transfer grant for three years.
- 3.2 Local authorities target services on those in need. The degree of need that can be met varies from authority to authority dependent, in part, on the financial resources they have available. In West Berkshire, we can only provide services to those older people who are assessed as having the highest category of need. Increases in the older people's population provides local authorities with a large problem and a choice, in effect, between higher levels of Community Charge or helping fewer older people.
- 3.3 The task group heard of the various factors that affect the financial situation in West Berkshire. Local government reorganisation in Berkshire established six unitary authorities and this led to the loss of economies of scale and top heavy management structures. The Council does poorly in its financial settlement from the government. West Berkshire is judged to be a "well off" area and, as a result, the financial settlement is decreased so that more deprived areas can have theirs increased. The Council's grant for social services is 147th out of 150 in the whole country. The grant we receive for care home places covers £160-165 per head per annum, while in London the grant covers £750-800.
- 3.4 Witnesses explained that the Council provides services to only 10% of those eligible. Need is assessed at four levels. Level 1 relates to critical need and Level 2 to substantial need. The Council used to be able to provide services for Levels 1 and 2, but can now only meet Level 1 cases. In 1999, the Council had a "one in, one out" policy, so that one older person leaving the care system was replaced by another. In 2000, this was replaced by a "one in, two out" system. Money is the key issue and can only be managed by making people wait.
- 3.5 Members heard that the number of care homes, especially smaller ones, has declined. The price paid for care homes has been held down. In West Berkshire, to pay a "fair" price would cost an additional £300,000 per annum. A new home has been established in Gaywood Drive. Changes to Dorothy Court will create 60 more nursing places, belonging to the Council. Prices, at £500 per week, will be affordable. Willows Edge has 38 dementia beds. Members heard of staffing problems linked to the particular difficulties of dementia care.
- 3.6 Members heard of a Panorama programme entitled "A Carer's Story". This highlighted the perceived shortcomings of home care visits of as little as 15 minutes each. West Berkshire has 800 such short visits each day. The system has now been changed, so that all new cases will have visits of at least 30 minutes duration. One problem is the administration of medication. Here, measured doses help, but some pharmacists are looking to payment for providing this service.

- 3.7 The total budget for the Community Care and Housing service grouping is £22.3m, of which £11.7m (52% of the total budget) relates to services for older people. The total employee budget is £6.18m and this includes the cost of agency staff. The costs of purchasing care services from agencies is included in the care services & supplies budget of £9.57m. Of the total employee budget of £6.183m, only the adult services management and the older people management team budgets are not front line. These total around 580k, although the adult services management budget also includes a contingency for winter pressures.
- 3.8 Residential homes appear more expensive in-house than in the private sector, although Members understood that this may not be a like with like comparison. Agency staff costs for home care vary considerably and are subject to negotiation. In general, they are higher than the amount we pay our in-house carers, but full on-costs need to be added to the latter to ensure proper comparison. Provision for home care is currently out to tender. The balance between in-house and agency staff is an issue for consideration.
- 3.9 Members heard that there was little competition in providers of home care. It is proposed to increase the number of rehabilitation beds at Walnut Close. This is not just about avoiding delayed transfers. The rural nature of much of West Berkshire provides a challenge and agencies are not always happy to meet need in these areas.
- 3.10 Members heard of the use of government grants. Carers' grants are used for providing respite. The delayed discharge (bed blocking) grant totals £218k. Of this, 70k is used for nursing home beds, £115k for home care services and the remainder for out of Berkshire hospitals. While it is difficult to compare spending patterns in different authorities, the overall impression of one witness was that the management of resources is good in West Berkshire.
- 3.11 Members were informed that, of the seven Key Thresholds identified for 2003/04, three had been judged to be acceptable, with room for improvement, two to be good and two to be very good. The targets for the Department of Health had been met in all seven indicators. Of the five Key Thresholds that had also been judged in 2002/03, three had shown an improved judgement in 2003/04 and two had remained the same.
- 3.12 The survey results provided useful information for the task group. Some respondents felt that the balance of responsibility between social services and the NHS was appropriate and sustainable, but required true partnership, with effective multi-agency working. Others felt that care in the community would remain inadequate without additional funding for both Councils and the NHS. Concerns were raised about the financial difficulties posed by increases in population and a greater proportion of older people. A number of those responding stressed the need for more effective communication.
- 3.13 Most of those responding did not feel able to comment about how West Berkshire's performance compared with that of other councils. Some of those who did respond to this question were very complimentary, while others highlighted a number of perceived shortcomings, including lack of day centres, residential homes and sheltered housing; level of services and travel concessions; inadequate prior consultation with residents; and provision for those with mental health problems.

- 3.14 Respondents had varying views about their relationships with the Council. One stated that it was originally disappointed with the Council after local government reorganisation, but that “we now seem to be on track”. Another wrote “I have found officers approachable and supportive”, but found the time taken to make decisions frustrating.

4 Conclusions and Issues Arising

- 4.1 The task group was clear from the evidence it received that the Council is working hard to provide effective services for older people. In doing so, it is limited by the financial resources available to it and, as a result, is currently only able to provide services for those older people with the highest level of need. Members felt that every effort should be made to extend services to those with Level 2 need, either by making economies in other areas, or by giving high priority to increasing the budget for older people’s services.
- 4.2 There is a need to strike a balance between quality and cost. A key issue here is the proportion of care packages that are provided directly by the Council and those that are purchased from other providers. This applies equally to residential care services and home care services. It is the view of the task group that a review of the balance between in-house and external provision should be carried out. Members are aware that this is an area that is also being examined by the Procurement Scrutiny Review Task Group.
- 4.3 Members were concerned about the effectiveness of information for older people on the services that might be available to them. The task group believes that this is an area that requires development and that the information provided should include services provided by voluntary and other organisations as well as those provided by the Council. Members felt that the literature published by Age Concern was excellent and there may be some advantage in seeking their cooperation so that the Council may produce an overall information document giving pointers to detailed sources of information. In publicising such information, Members felt that it will be necessary to be clear about what can be delivered, so that the expectations of older people are not raised to unrealistic levels.
- 4.4 Members felt that there were particular issues in the more rural areas of West Berkshire, including the availability of transport. They were aware that a review of services in rural areas in the next two or three years has been suggested, and felt that the needs of older people should have a high focus in such a review.
- 4.5 The task group was keen to promote ways in which older people could be helped to lead active, healthy lives in their own homes and thus not need to be in care homes or hospitals. Possible prevention strategies included activities to keep older people physically fit. Members also believe that activities that were not focused on keeping fit, but provided stimuli that helped to keep older people mentally fit, were extremely valuable. Examples include the activities of some schools in interacting with older people in the locality.
- 4.6 Members were aware that the task group had covered a relatively small area of services to the elderly in this review. They believe that there is a need for a group to

continue to look at this key area of the Council's work and propose the establishment of an Older People's Services Panel to carry out this function.

5 **Recommendations**

5.1 Having considered all the evidence available to it and identified the issues set out in 4 above, the task group agreed to make the following recommendations:

- the balance between in-house provision and that purchased from other providers should be reviewed, for both residential and domiciliary care services;
- the feasibility of more flexible use of beds at Walnut Close Day Centre should be explored, with a view to providing respite provision as well as rehabilitation;
- information on services for older people should be reviewed and improved. This should include services provided by other agencies as well as by the Council;
- fitness and health activities and other activities that can assist older people to maintain an active life in their own homes should be promoted actively;
- the planned review of services in rural areas should have a high focus on the needs of older people, including transport arrangements;
- the Community Care and Housing Select Committee should establish an Older People's Services Panel;
- every effort should be made to expand support to those classified as level 2.

