

Response by the Cabinet Member with Responsibility to the Report of the Home Care Scrutiny Task Group

Introduction

1. I very much welcome this report and acknowledge the considerable work that has gone into preparing it. I would like to thank all Councillors and Officers involved in the scrutiny exercise. I am particularly grateful to the Scrutiny Committee for highlighting the remarkable success story of home care which has seen an increase of 57% in the numbers of service users and 67% increase in hours provided in the last five years (see page 5).
2. I am pleased to note the extent to which both in-house and externally provided home care services are well regarded by service users (paragraphs 9 & 10). I would endorse the view that the services provided both sectors are of high quality.
3. This success follows a re-organisation of the service in 2004 whereby the development of block contracts and the transformation of the in-house service to an intensive, assessment and specialist service have enabled more older people to be supported at home. During the last six years the proportion of care provided in-house has reduced from 60% to around 35%.
4. I am totally committed to home care services and enabling more vulnerable people to remain living independently at home. The financial and demographic challenges will not divert us from this commitment, because (a) it is the stated preference for most people to remain at home and (b) it is in most cases a more cost-effective solution than institutional care.

Response to Recommendations and Conclusions.

5. Regarding the recommendation in Paragraph 70 about the number of assessments undertaken, we believe that information is already shared between the various professionals, and that the processes are relatively streamlined given current regulatory requirements. Nevertheless the service will look again at this issue to see if any further improvements can be made.
6. Regarding the structure and roles and responsibilities (see paragraph 46) it is acknowledged that the structure is complex, but the organisation of a very large and dynamic service is unavoidably so. However, the service will re-examine current roles, ensuring that the skills and expertise of the Senior Home Care Assistants are fully utilised in the planning process through closer working with Service Planners (see paragraph 72).
7. Concerns in paragraphs 47 and 73 regarding communication with front line staff are noted. Although considerable efforts are made in several ways to communicate with staff, the service will re-double its efforts and will review its methods of communication. It has to be noted that in the management of a dispersed workforce, communication will inevitably be an issue.

8. *“Given the expected increasing demographic pressures on the service, we are concerned that, unless the budget, management, organisation and processes of the home care services are robust, the Council could have great difficulty in providing an effective and motivated service in the future”* (second paragraph of page 2). In response, I would say that the remarkable performance demonstrated above would not have been achieved without robust budget, management, organisation and processes. There is indeed a challenge in maintaining that robustness in the face of demographic pressures, especially in terms of budget.
9. An annual survey of staff and service users is recommended in paragraph 77. A small number of surveys with specific staff groups have been undertaken, but a full staff survey will be organised during the next financial year. Service users are already surveyed on at least an annual basis as this is a regulatory requirement.
10. The recommendation in paragraph 78 regarding pressure being brought to bear on the Government for increased funding, through the LGA and local MPs, is accepted. In addition, direct representations will be made to Government.
11. The Directorate already has medium to long-term plans for Home Care, (see paragraph 79) contained within the various strategic commissioning documents. In accordance with these strategies, there has been significantly increased investment in home care over past years as well as phased disinvestment in residential care to fund that additional home care. We would be happy to share the plans with Councillors and would be delighted if more Councillors were to take an active interest in Adult Social Care issues.
12. We will ensure Councillors are kept updated on key national policy matters through the Members Bulletin, briefings and seminars. (see paragraph 81)
13. We fully appreciate the financial challenge in future years (see paragraph 84). It should be noted that the only significant growth allocations in the 2007/08 budget and in the three subsequent years of the Medium Term Financial Plan are for Adult Social Care, totalling £13.6m over and above inflation. This clearly demonstrates the Council’s commitment to these services.
14. The quotation in paragraph 86 from the LGA report regarding eligibility criteria highlights the fact that authorities are likely to move to providing services only for people assessed as having “critical” or “substantial” needs. It must be noted that under the Fair Access to Care Services regime, this Council’s policy has been to provide services only to people with “critical” or “substantial” needs since April 2003.

Other Matters of Clarification

15. In paragraph 14 of the report, high levels of satisfaction are reported by service users about the front line staff and lower levels of satisfaction with

office staff. This outcome is not surprising given the closer relationship service users experience with front line staff. Even with office staff, three times the number of service users are satisfied than the number dissatisfied.

16. In paragraph 31 it is suggested that the costs for monitoring the independent sector contracts are hidden, perhaps implying that there is some sort of hidden subsidy. It is part of management's functions to monitor and manage the independent contracts, which enable the Council to provide more home care hours at a lower unit cost.
17. Paragraph 41 highlights issues regarding the centralised Call Centre model. Councillors are reminded of the overall policy of mobile and flexible working and centralisation of office accommodation which have achieved significant efficiencies.
18. Paragraph 44 talks of the Frameworki system being more time consuming. It should be noted that this system is more robust and the report function more effective than previous systems.
19. Paragraph 64 shows the numbers of people helped to live at home – it must be noted that this includes support other than home care, e.g. Meals on Wheels.

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