

SOCIAL SERVICES & HOUSING COMMITTEE

29 JUNE 1999

Present: Councillors Barnard (Chairman), Bayle, Bettison, Mrs Clifford, Mrs Doyle, Egan, Miss Haydon, Mrs Hirst, Jones, McCormack, Mrs Pile, Ryan, Mrs Shillcock, Mrs Sutcliffe, Thompson and Worrall.

Apologies: Councillors Harrison and Wheaton.

Councillors Beadsley and Veakins also attended.

111 Substitute Members

The Committee noted the attendance of the following substitute Members under Standing Order 38:

Councillor Jones for Councillor Wheaton
Councillor Thompson for Councillor Harrison

112 Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 16 March 1999 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

113 Housing Sub Committee

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Housing Sub Committee held on 11 May 1999, as set out in Appendix A hereto, be received.

114 Social Services Sub Committee

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Social Services Sub Committee held on 8 June 1999, as set out in Appendix B hereto, be received.

115 Joint Advisory Sub Committee on Children's Services

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Joint Advisory Sub Committee held on 9 June 1999, as set out in Appendix C hereto, be received.

116 Glenfield House – A New Supported Housing Project for People with Mental Health Needs (Item 1)

The Director of Social Services and Housing reported on the proposal to develop a new supported housing project for people with mental health needs which had been supported by Members at the meeting of the Social Services and Housing Committee held on 19 January 1999.

Recent high profile Department of Health enquiries had highlighted deficiencies in mental health provision nationally and resulted in a number of key recommendations that had been taken into account in developing plans for improving services locally. Following a joint appraisal by Housing and Social Services in relation to the current residential unit at Banbury it was proposed that the project be transferred to Glenfield House which was formerly used as a sheltered housing scheme for older people. Glenfield House is a larger building offering more flexible accommodation and provides self-contained flatlets for residents. It has the scope to act as a base to develop a wider range of community mental health services for the Borough, including outreach work, respite care and emergency accommodation.

In considering the proposals the Committee noted the contents of a petition, a copy of which was tabled, in which the residents of Coningsby had expressed a strong objection concerning the future use of Glenfield House. The Chairman reported that it was planned to have further consultation with local residents in order to allay their fears.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) the Committee confirms the re-use of Glenfield House as a supported housing project for people with mental health needs;
- (ii) the Committee supports the proposals to convert the building and set up the new project in line with the implementation plan outlined in the report;
- (iii) the Committee confirms the re-use of 16-21 Banbury for general housing needs and to be used to provide temporary accommodation for homeless families in the Borough and
- (iv) a further report be prepared on the implementation plan for Banbury when it becomes available for occupation.

117 Swedish Houses, Tilehurst Lane, Binfield (Item 2)

Following the decision taken at the December 1998 meeting of the Housing Sub Committee to consult tenants of the properties in Tilehurst Lane, known as the "Swedish Houses", regarding the future of the properties, the Director of Social Services and Housing informed the Committee that two Registered Social Landlords had been invited to put forward proposals for the redevelopment of the site.

The Committee noted that tenants would have to vote in favour of the redevelopment option. All secure tenants would have a vote and at least 51% of those entitled to vote must express a view. Of those voting 51% must support the recommendation before it could proceed.

A Member and Officer Group had met to receive presentations by the two Registered Social Landlords and had compared both against evaluation criteria which included value for money, proven development and management skills, rent policies and nomination arrangements and pro-active approach to tenants views and requirements. The outcome of the evaluation was that Beacon Housing Association offered the best overall approach and benefits to the tenants and the Council.

RESOLVED:

- (i) that Beacon Housing Association be selected as the Council's partner to proceed with the consultation with the residents of the Swedish Houses;
- (ii) a tenant ballot be conducted as soon as the second stage of the consultation is completed
- (iii) subject to a vote in favour of redevelopment final details of the scheme be agreed and the site transferred to the Beacon Housing Association at terms to be agreed with the Borough Valuer in consultation with the Director of Social Services and Housing and the Chairman of the Social Services and Housing Committee
- (iv) the final tenant ballot be undertaken on behalf of the Council by the Electoral reform Society
- (v) in the event of a vote against redevelopment the future of the Swedish Houses be reconsidered by the Committee.

118 Quarterly Operations Report (Item 3)

The Director of Social Services and Housing presented the Quarterly Operations Report on the activities of the Social Services and Housing Department for the period to June 1999. The report summarised current issues affecting the department and the attention of the Committee was drawn to the work being undertaken in respect of the Preparation for Compulsory Competitive Tendering for Housing Management Services, and the development of a Youth Offending Team. Reference was also made to staffing resources and the need to focus them in order to meet targets set by the Government.

RESOLVED that the Quarterly Operations Report be received.

119 Provisional Outturn 1998/99 and Commitment Budget 2000/01 – 2002/03 (Item 4)

The Director of Housing and Social Services reported on the latest projected out-turn expenditure for the financial year 1998/99 and drew the Committee's attention to issues likely to have an impact upon the budget in future years. In drawing attention to a reported underspend of £1.504m on an expenditure of £14.910m the Director explained that the reasons for this had been reported to the Committee throughout the year but the report analysed the reasons for the major variations.

The Committee noted that it was very difficult to make accurate forecasts for those services which were demand led and some of the figures had been based on the best available information before transition into the Unitary Authority which had proved to be inaccurate.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) the provisional outturn expenditure for 1998/99 of £14.910m be noted and

- (ii) the Commitment Budget for 2000/01 to 2002/03 be noted.

120 Major Repairs and Improvement Programme (Item 5)

The Director of Social Services and Housing introduced a report outlining progress on the 1998/99 programme and the preparatory work for the 1999/2000 programme.

Reference was made to the installation and improvement of Central Heating programme where the provision of new gas supply pipes had caused delays and the Chairman advised the Committee that a meeting with British Gas had been arranged for 22 July to discuss the matter.

RESOLVED that the progress made on the projects be noted.

121 Children's Service Plan and Community Care Plan Updates (Item 6)

Following approval by the Committee in March 1998 of the Community Care and Children's Services Plans for the new Unitary Authority it was agreed that the 3-year plans be updated annually following consultation. The Director of Social Services and Housing reported on the final drafts of the yearly update which incorporated new requirements and objectives following the publication of the Social Services White Paper, the launch of the Quality Protects Initiative and announcement of the modernisation grants in support of these objectives.

Referring to the progress being made against the targets identified in the main plans Members were concerned that all the information required to assess progress was not always presented and suggested that a Performance Indicators Focus Group be established to examine means of presenting and interpreting statistics in future documents.

RESOLVED that

- (i) the updates to the Community Care and the Children's Service Plans be endorsed and
- (ii) a Performance Indicators Focus Group be established to examine means of presenting and interpreting statistics for inclusion in future documents.

122 Housing Strategy (Item 7)

The Government requires local Housing Authorities to complete an annual statement of their Housing Strategy and detailed statistical returns on the Housing investment Programme. In 1998/99 the Department had been requested to submit a Housing Strategy Statement and Forward programme covering the three-year period to 2002.

The Director of Social Services and Housing reported that it was not expected that a completely new document would be produced but that the submission made last year would be updated where appropriate. A further statement of Housing Strategy for 1999/2000, which had to be submitted to the Government Office for the South East by 30 July 1999, was attached as an Annexe to the report.

RESOLVED that approval be given to the Further Statement of Housing Strategy 1999/2000 for submission to the Government Office for the South East and that the document be circulated for consultation during the summer.

123 Proposals for a New integrated Departmental Emergency Response Service (Item 8)

At its meeting in January 1999 the Committee supported general proposals to integrate the Social Services Emergency Duty Team and the Forestcare Control Centre Team to provide an integrated and co-ordinated Borough wide “out of hours” emergency response service.

The Director of Social Services and Housing reported that the Emergency Duty Team was one of the small number of County wide services remaining as a joint arrangement between the six Unitary Authorities. The former County staff team had been transferred to Bracknell Forest Borough Council with a commitment to review the service and to examine how it could integrate with the Boroughs other emergency and out of hours provision.

The service review had been completed and detailed proposals for a new structure, details of which were attached as an Appendix to the report, to be funded from within existing budgets, identified. Consultation on the proposals had taken place with the other Unitary Authorities, the staff and union representatives.

RESOLVED that

- (i) support be given to the implementation, with effect from 1 September 1999, of the new structure to integrate the Social Services Emergency Duty Team and the Forestcare Control Centre team;
- (ii) the existing staff be integrated into the new structure according to the staff protocols agreed with the Head of Personnel and Training and
- (iii) the changes be achieved within existing budgets.

124 Housing Benefit Proposals for Re-organisation and Implementation of the New Verification Framework (Item 9)

The Director of Social Services and Housing reported on the new Verification Framework issued as a guideline for good practice by the Department of Social Security. All Local Authorities were expected to comply with the Framework and a compliance programme to satisfy the requirements had been drawn up.

Funding would be available from the Department of Social Security to help towards the set up costs of the Verification Framework and the Authority had made a successful bid for such funding which would be available providing the system was operating by the end of the current financial year. As part of the compliance programme the Housing Benefits and Fraud Investigation Sections would have to be restructured and details of the proposed structure were included in the report.

RESOLVED that the proposed restructure of the Housing Benefits and fraud Investigation Sections be approved as detailed in the report.

125 **Joint Investment Plan (Item 10)**

An Executive Letter entitled “Better Services for Vulnerable People” published by the Department of Health in October 1997 and sent to all Local Authorities and Health Authorities expected the development of a Joint Investment Plan for Older People including those Older People with Mental Health problems.

The Director of Social Services and Housing reported on the development of a Joint Investment Plan which provides the background to support the Promoting Independence – Partnership Grant Plan which had to be presented to the Department of Health by 31 May 1999.

RESOLVED that the Joint Investment Plan be endorsed.

126 **Promoting Independence – Partnership Grant (Item 11)**

A report submitted to the March meeting of the Committee provided full details of the Modernisation Funds and the planning process for developing services to meet the Modernising Social Services Agenda. Although indicative allocations for the funds had been given in December 1998 the Guidance and Conditions relating to each grant had not been issued until 16 March 1999.

The Director of Social Services and Housing advised the Committee that the Guidance required the submission of a Plan, jointly agreed with the Health Authority, by 31 May 1999. A copy of the Plan was attached as an Appendix to the report and the proposals to be funded by the Grant were identified together with an explanation of their aims and objectives.

RESOLVED that the Promoting Independence–Partnership Plan as submitted to the Department of Health on 31 May 1999 be endorsed.

127 **Home Care (Item 12)**

The Committee at its meeting on 15 September 1998 agreed to tender, on a block contract basis, those services currently purchased as individual care packages in the independent sector. The Social Services Sub Committee, at its meeting on 9 March 1999, agreed the process to be followed for the purposes of tendering.

The Director of Social Services and Housing advised the Committee that it was anticipated that the tender process would be completed and the contracts awarded by 1 October 1999 and it was recommended that the effective start date of the contracts be 1 April 2000.

The Committee was concerned that details of the specification had not been included and asked that they be made available.

RESOLVED that

- (i) the Director of Social Services and Housing, in consultation with the Chairman of the Committee be given delegated authority to approve the list of suppliers and award the contracts to the lowest tenderer or if awarded on a most economically advantageous basis in accordance with CSO 2.2.2;

- (ii) the Committee agrees the change to the timetable for the commencement of the contract
- (iii) details of the specification be forwarded to those Members requesting it.

128 **Secure Accommodation Review Panel (Item 13)**

Under Section 25 of the Children Act 1989 the Local Authority Social Services Department has the power to apply to the Court for an Order authorising the Local Authority to place a young person in secure accommodation.

The Director of Social Services and Housing advised the Committee that there are three routes by which a young person may be placed in secure accommodation. Two of the procedures require all Local Authorities who place children in secure accommodation to appoint a Secure Accommodation Review Panel and to refer cases to it within 28 days of a child being placed in secure accommodation. The role of the Secure Accommodation Review Panel was explained and the Committee noted that the Panel should consist of at least three persons at least one of whom was an independent person who is neither a Member nor an Officer of the Local Authority.

RESOLVED that

- (i) the formation of a Secure Accommodation Review Panel be endorsed;
- (ii) the Panel comprise an Independent Person, one Senior Officer in the Social Services Department and one Member of the Social Services and Housing Committee and
- (iii) Councillor Worrall be the designated Member representing the Social Services and Housing Committee.

129 **Scheme of Delegation (Item 14)**

The Directors of Social Services and Housing and Corporate Services reported jointly on the need for a third volume to be added to the Scheme of Council and Committee Management. This would set out specific delegations to Officers for the day to day management of the Council.

RECOMMENDED that the delegations set out in Annexe A to the Minutes be approved for inclusion in Volume 3 of the Scheme of Council and Committee Management.

130 **Small Unregistered Residential Care/ Children's Homes**

The Director of Social Services and Housing advised the Committee that the regulation of residential care homes is governed primarily by the Registered Homes Act 1984 which when first introduced applied only to homes providing care for adults and some categories of disabled children. The registration and inspection of children's homes was not introduced until the Children's Act 1989 became law. However, the legislation did not provide for the registration and inspection of group

homes for adults or children providing care for fewer than four children or adults. An Amendment Act in 1991 brought adult homes with one or more residents within the regulatory framework relating to small homes except where the only residents are the persons running the home, their employees or their relatives.

The Committee noted that children's homes with fewer than four places still remain outside of any regulatory requirement to be registered. This left a significant gap in the range of measures available to ensure that homes in the independent sector and those run by the Local Authority meet the standards laid down by the Department of Health and Local Authorities.

A policy for the use of Small Unregistered Homes had been evolved and details were contained in an Annexe to the report.

A draft circular recently issued by the Department of Health suggested a voluntary framework for unregistrable children's homes. This had been the subject of discussion by the Heads of inspection Units in various parts of the country and greeted with some scepticism and was generally regarded as an unworkable model that lacks muscle and credibility.

RESOLVED that

- (i) the Committee notes the issues and continuing concerns relating to the absence of a regulatory framework for small group/children's homes;
- (ii) approval be given to the policy as detailed in the report for the placement of children or vulnerable adults in a small group home and
- (iii) the Director of Social Services and Housing convey to the Department of Health the Committee's concerns about the proposed timetable for bringing small unregistered children's homes, as indicated in the White Paper – Modernising Social Services – within the regulatory framework set out in the Children's Act 1989.

131 Social Services Appeals Sub Committee

The Director of Corporate Services advised the Committee that in January 1999 the Council had established a Sub Committee to consider representations before determining whether or not to proceed with a particular course of action.

Under the Children Act 1989 the Council cannot refuse an application for registration as a child minder or cancel the registration of a child minder unless it has first served a preliminary notice upon the applicant/child minder setting out the proposed course of action and affording the applicant/child minder the right to make representations. The person(s) hearing the representations should not have been involved in the decision to serve the preliminary notice and it is considered that the decision whether or not to proceed with the proposed action ought properly to be a Member decision.

RESOLVED that the Committee appoints Councillors Barnard, Mrs Clifford and Miss Haydon to the Social Services Appeals Sub Committee and appoints Councillors Bayle, Egan, Mrs Pile, Mrs Shillcock, Worrall and Simonds as substitutes to the Sub Committee.

132 **Policy for Equipment and Adaptations for Council Tenants (Item 16a)**

The Director of Social Services and Housing referred to the duty of the Local Authority through its Social Services responsibilities, as set out in the NHS Community Care Act 1990, to assess the needs of people in the most need living in the local authority area for the provision of personal social services. This included the provision of equipment to assist with daily living and in some cases, after detailed assessment, adaptations to a persons home.

It was proposed to review the adaptations policy and provide tenants with a leaflet explaining the Councils policy and the options available including the offer of alternative accommodation where a property was under-occupied.

RESOLVED that approval be given to the interim criteria to be used in assessing when major adaptations are not appropriate and a move to alternative accommodation should be recommended and that it be noted that a scheme was being prepared to provide additional assistance and incentives for any tenants underoccupying their properties to move to more suitable accommodation.

133 **Items submitted for information**

The Committee received and noted the following items which were submitted for information only:

Planning for the Millennium - update	(Item 17)
Berkshire Health Improvement Programme 1999/2002	(Item 18)
Social Services Statutory Complaints Procedures – Annual Report April 1998 to March 1999.	(Item 19)
Social Services & Housing Departments IT Strategy & 3 Year Plan 1999/2000	(Item 20)
Urgent Action taken under Delegated Powers – Decision not to proceed with externalisation of Older Peoples Homes	(Item 21)
Urgent Action taken under Delegated Powers – Annual Uprating of Allowances paid to Foster Parents and other Supportive placements	(Item 22)

The meeting commenced at 7.30pm
and concluded at 11.15pm

CHAIRMAN