

**SOCIAL SERVICES TRANSITION AND HOUSING COMMITTEE**  
**6 JANUARY 1998**

Present: Councillor Angell (Chairman), Councillors Bayle, Egan, Harrison,  
Miss Haydon, Mrs Hayes, Mrs Hirst, Jones, Mrs Pile, Ryan,  
Mrs Shillcock, Symonds, Mrs Sutcliffe and Worrall

Also in attendance:  
Councillor Bettison

Apologies for Absence were received on behalf of:  
Councillors Grayson and McCormack

401. **Minutes**

The minutes of meetings of the Committee held on 9 and 30 September 1997 were approved as correct records and signed by the Chairman.

402. **Mr Martin Hughes**

The Chairman welcomed Mr Martin Hughes newly appointed to the post of the Head of Adult Services, who would be joining the authority on 19 January 1998.

403. **Minutes - Sub Committees**

The Committee received the minutes of the Housing Sub Committee on 23 September, Social Services Sub Committee on 2 December, Joint Advisory Sub Committee on Children's Services (informal meeting) on 22 October and Tenancy Conditions Sub Committee on 10 November 1997 and officers answered members questions thereon.

With regard to the Joint Advisory Sub Committee on Children's Services held on 22 October, members noted one addition to the membership of the Early Years Development Partnership.

**RESOLVED** that, subject to the inclusion of a special needs representative on the membership for the Early Years Development Partnership within the minutes of the Joint Advisory Sub Committee for Children's Services, the minutes of the meetings of the Housing Sub Committee of 23 September 1997, the Social Services Sub Committee of 2 December 1997, the Joint Advisory Sub Committee on Children's Services (informal meeting) 22 October 1997 and Tenancy Conditions Sub Committee of 10 November 1997, as reported at Appendices A, B, C and D respectively, be received and noted.

404. **Service Plan for Social Services and Housing 1998/99 (Item 1)**

In a detailed report the Director of Social Services and Housing submitted the outline draft Service Plan for 1998/99 covering three broad areas of service provision within the new Social Services and Housing Department, namely Adults, Children's and Housing Services.

All local authorities had a mandatory duty to produce a Children's Service Plan and Community Care Plan on a three yearly basis with annual up-dates. Accordingly, outline drafts had been produced of both plans on the basis of consultation with a range of voluntary

groups and statutory agencies, as well as drawing on work undertaken by the County Council in producing its Local Area Plan.

The impact of the Revenue Support Grant had produced a budget of £15.97m for the provision of Social and Housing Services and details of the proposed distribution of the budget, largely based on the disaggregation process carried out by the County Council and further shaped by projected demands and pressures based on demographic profiling of the population of the Borough, were detailed and officers answered members questions thereon.

Further to detailed questions and responses from officers and debate, it was

**RESOLVED** that the outline draft Service Plan for Social Services and Housing for 1998/99 be adopted as the basis for detailed service planning.

#### 405. **Revenue Budget 1998/99 (Item 2)**

The Director of Social Services and Housing and the Director of Corporate Services submitted a joint report considering the revenue budget for 1998/99 which had been prepared within the framework set by the Strategy and Policy Committee at its meeting on 17 December 1997.

It was noted that the provisional Local Government finance settlement, which had been announced in early December, had set the Council's Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) and capping limit at £76.17m. Overall the settlement provided for an increase in SSA of less than 1% after adjustments on nursery vouchers and community care special transition grant were made. However the settlement had been heavily skewed towards Education with an increase in the Education SSA of 3.1%. Overall the Social Services SSA for 1998/99 was £12.74m, which represented a reduction of 5.6% compared to 1997/98. In real terms it was noted that the Social Services SSA had been adversely affected by changes in the methodology used to calculate the elderly residential components of the formula and this single change had reduced the SSA by £1.15m. The Leader of the Council had arranged to meet the Minister for Local Government on 12 January 1998 at which this and other methodology changes would be raised.

With regard to the Special Transitional Grant (STG), it was noted that, the actual level of demand faced by local authorities had exceeded that which had been anticipated, and that the grant had been extended for a further year. A grant of £558,000 had been allocated to Bracknell Forest for 1998/99.

Throughout the autumn detailed preparations had been made to disaggregate the County Council's budget and prepare estimates of this Council's budget requirements for 1998/99. As such the budget preparation process for the year had been unique in that much of the base level data was not held by the Borough Council. However, work on the disaggregated budget had resulted in a number of adjustments being made to reflect three areas; technical adjustments to correct budgets which would not support the current levels of service; the full year affect of previous policy decisions, and a number of changes to reflect inevitable diseconomies of establishing a unitary authority. Details of these areas were reported.

With regard to pay and price increases, it was noted that the Strategy and Policy Committee had indicated to committees that they should resist the cost of inflation increases on running expenses budgets where possible, however there were some areas where this was not possible and a list of such items was detailed for Members' consideration.

A list of the pressures and developments facing the Committee were noted. These pressures amounted to an additional £405,000 in 1998/99 and it was agreed that these items should be

recommended to the Strategy and Policy Committee for inclusion in the Committee budget. With respect to economies, the budgets had been carefully scrutinised to identify where good housekeeping/efficiency measures may be possible to allow the Committee to set an affordable budget. Accordingly a list of such items was presented for the Committee totalling £361,000. The key element of the efficiency measures involved setting a target vacancy of £236,000. This would require the Director of Social Services and Housing to manage vacancy rates to ensure that overall staffing costs were contained within the revised allocation. Such an approach had the major advantage of retaining flexibility for the Director to react to service demands as they became better known during the year through adjusting staffing levels as necessary within the departmental structure and the financial target.

Under guidelines provided by Strategy and Policy Committee, fees and charges would be increased by an average of at least 6% with the exception of certain specified Social Services charges which were based on unit costs or were determined by the Department of Social Security and proposed revised charges were presented for the Committees consideration.

Given the technical nature of the report, the Chairman allowed questions of a detailed nature and officers responded thereon.

**RESOLVED** that:

- (i) the Committee agrees its draft base budget for 1998/99 as £15,970,000; and
- (ii) the Committee requests Strategy and Policy Committee, when considering the Council's budget for 1998/99, to:
  - (a) add an allowance for inflation to the following running expenses budget:

	Budget £000	Additional Inflation £000
External Placements	6,503	195
External Domiciliary Purchases	922	28
Foster Care Payments	536	16
Rates, Water and Sewage	43	1
Contact Cleaning	14	4
Homelessness	84	3
Others to be identified	-	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,102</b>	
Total addition for inflation	-	277

- (b) approve the potential service development/pressures and economies identified in the report at Appendices E and F respectively; and
- (c) increase fees and charges from 1 April 1998, as detailed in the report at Appendix G.

**406. The Planning Process and the Role of Elected Members (Item 3)**

The Director of Social Services and Housing reported that members of the Social Services Transition and Housing Committee in Bracknell Forest had been involved in a process of

learning and development over the past two years which had required considerable commitment to the need to understand the breadth of responsibilities being transferred to the local authority. This supported a debate as to the role of elected members in the planning process and the extent to which members should or need to become involved in the detail, as opposed to setting and approving the overall direction of service developments and determining the strategies and priorities for individual services.

The need to close the gap between members current level of knowledge and understanding had been recognised by the Committee. At the same time members would wish to ensure that their views had been considered in the shaping of individual agreement of the Council's policies, priorities and procedures and several methods of achieving this were considered.

**RESOLVED** that in order that members continue to increase and develop their knowledge of Social Services, officers are requested to provide, at the next meeting, a programme for policy review reports to this Committee and a programme for service reviews by reports to the Social Services Sub Committee.

407. **Revised Budget 1997/98 (Item 4)**

In a report, primarily for information, the Borough Finance Officer presented the revised budget for 1997/98 for the housing programme area.

**RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

408. **Terms of Reference - Delegations to Officers (Item 5)**

Further to Minute 78 (17 June 1997) and 222 (9 September 1997) the Chairman reported that the Social Services Transition and Housing Focus Group had met again on 9 December to consider additional powers to the Social Services and Housing (Policy) Committee, the setting of terms of reference for the Social Services Sub Committee, and establishing and setting terms of reference for Social Services Appeals Sub Committee. The Focus Group had originally agreed terms of reference for a Registration and Inspection Advisory Panel, although this matter had been put on hold after the meeting of the Focus Group to allow further consideration on a possible Berkshire wide scheme.

A further meeting of the Focus Group would be necessary to deal with the Registration and Inspection Advisory Panel when further details were known how to deal with delegations to officers.

**RESOLVED** that:

- (i) the additional terms of reference for the Social Services and Housing Committee, as detailed at Appendix H, be approved and recommended to the Council for consideration;
- (ii) the terms of reference for the Social Service Sub Committee be as set out at Appendix I;
- (iii) the Council establishes a Social Services Appeals Sub Committee with terms of reference as detailed at Appendix J; and

- (iv) the situation regarding the Registration and Inspection Advisory Panel - Children and Adults - be noted and further consideration of this issue be given at the next meeting of the Focus Group.

The meeting commenced at 7.30pm and concluded at 10.05pm.

**CHAIRMAN**