

Homelessness and Hardship Scrutiny Review

Conclusions and Recommendations

CONCLUSIONS

During the course of the review, Members examining a wide range of information about current and future services, changes in the funding landscape and benefits legislation, opportunities for growth and ways in which the Council and its partners work to maximise these opportunities, both locally and at a strategic level. Members understood that that NCC Supporting People funding changes represent a further development to a significant shift that started in 2012, moving to an enabling culture and encouraging people to be as independent as possible. This includes changed ways of working, providing packages of support and an aim to improve services as well as reduce costs. The approach has involved realigning parts of services and the resources associated with them, rather than having one pot of money and a defined process as in the past. Public Health monies are also now in the mix and the focus of the remaining Supporting People budget will be upon vulnerable adults, including older people and those with mental health issues. Members noted that the Chair of Adult Social Care and Health Committee is seeking ongoing dialogue with districts and with third sector providers about contract management with an element of collaboration in respect of Vulnerable Adult Services going forward.

In respect of the future of Elizabeth House and Nottinghamshire Hosing Advice Services, the implication is that funding is secure from April 2015, but that it may cease in 2016 unless an alternative solution is found. NCC is working with Framework to assist Elizabeth House in financial remodelling, focusing on homelessness prevention accommodation and offender accommodation and finding alternative funding streams. Framework is currently the contract holder for Crisis Mental Health services.

Members noted that there is a need to engage the involvement and potential investment of CCGs, who have a potential role to play in supporting Elizabeth House, particularly due to their focus on care in the community and in the light of the NHS Trust's targets to reduce the pressure in the acute sector. The key to this is the provision of sufficient aftercare, which Framework is well placed to deliver. Additionally, unitary authorities like the City Council have the statutory responsibility for housing with Nottingham Homes, and Gedling must look to Gedling Homes and consider how that organisation's role might impact more on Homelessness prevention in the future. Members were made aware of a change in approach with regard to older peoples services, moving away from the traditional warden aided complex approach as the service provided had no direct link to need. Members noted that the reason Homelessness was not made a priority in the NCC Supporting People Budget restructure is that the statutory responsibility lies with the districts.

Members were nevertheless encouraged by the assertions of the Chair of Nottinghamshire County Council's Adult Social Care and Health Committee that the County is committed to working together with Gedling Borough Council in the financial remodelling of specialist services to relieve homelessness and hardship.

Key areas for consideration in Gedling are therefore:

- Vulnerable people
- How GBC and NCC can work together
- Joint services, i.e. commissioning prevention services for CCGs in the South of the County.

Members would like to thank Cllr Weisz in advance for agreeing to take up with the Health and Wellbeing Board issues identified by the review of apparently limited drug and alcohol treatment programmes in the Borough.

In visiting Elizabeth House and local Sure Start Children's Centres, Members were impressed with the level and range of support and signposting available within the Borough, noting however that more could be done to strengthen referral mechanisms, ensure the quality of longer term support for those with complex needs (i.e. the treatment of drug and alcohol dependent residents) and to more effectively publicise the gateway services available in local communities through access centres, children's centres, GP practices and Health Centres.

Members were also concerned to hear that DWP presence had been subsequently withdrawn from Sure Start centres.

Being aware of a number of large scale developments underway in the Borough, Members were of the view that Gedling Homes and Localities coordinators must be involved in informing the local plan and the mix of housing stock on those sites. The danger of providing the wrong balance of housing being that too many people attracted in from outside the Borough could potentially force Gedling residents into hardship.

Members were satisfied that the Council is taking a strong lead in drawing together partnership approaches to mitigate hardship and homelessness, however felt that we would benefit from examining good practice across the country in order to ensure continuous improvement in coordination, communication and problem solving around those partnerships and approaches.

Members commended the Council's support for national and local pastoral initiatives, and would like this ethos to translate further into the ability to be as flexible as possible to help individuals to overcome specific barriers and resolve 'one off' problems as well as longer term issues.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Working Group makes the following recommendations to the Portfolio Holder for Health and Housing and associated partner organisations:

Homelessness and Housing

1. Gedling Borough Council, in partnership with Nottinghamshire County Council and our district collaboration agreement partners, to broker dialogue with NNE CCG and other CCG Leads via the Health and Wellbeing Board to help secure future funding for Elizabeth House services beyond April 2016,

focusing on high need individuals that have a high impact on local health services.

2. Gedling Homes to consider providing a ring fenced number of supported accommodation flats for complex move-on cases referred from Elizabeth House.
3. The potential for Framework /Elizabeth House services to receive Crime and Disorder Partnership funding also should be explored.
4. The Council to explore previous good practice and good practice of other Authorities in influencing developers to ensure the most appropriate housing mix on new developments in the Borough. (i.e. an occasion when the Council worked proactively with a developer on Teal Close (Pepper potting, New Housing Markets).)
5. The Council and partners to consider holding a stakeholder event to address mixed housing stock, inclusive development and the maximisation and streamlining of specialist advice and support; to include CAB, Credit Union, registered housing providers and anyone with a stake in financial inclusion. – see **Tameside Money Inclusion Network (MiNT)** best practice.
6. Ensure that the aspirations and plans of Gedling priority neighbourhoods and Neighbourhood Planning areas and the knowledge of local social housing providers are taken into account in pre application discussions on major development sites.
7. The Council to revive the reporting back mechanism for representatives on key outside bodies, i.e. Gedling Homes, which was in place when we had the Committee System.
8. Seek to influence the development of more one and two bedroom properties in the Borough.

Hardship

9. The Council to continue to raise public awareness and advocate against the dangers of payday loans and encourage more people to invest in the credit union as well as to borrow, which improves sustainability and increases access.
10. The Council to lobby on the issue of energy poverty and support a reduction in the higher tariff costs to individuals associated with pre-paid meters be included in the review.
11. Greater publicity to be given to the services and facilities provided by local Sure Start Children's Centres in order to increase registration, to include:

- Concessionary access provided for Children's Centre staff to use our Leisure and Community Centres to conduct outreach sessions.
 - Use of the digital screens in Leisure Centres and the Civic Centre to promote Children's Centre Services.
 - Health Visitors to promote registration with Children's Centres at the two year child health check.
 - GP Surgeries to be more proactive in publicising and referring patients to Children's Centres.
 - GBC Housing Needs Service to strengthen referral links from their customers to Sure Start services.
 - Gedling BC Contacts magazine to run a feature raising awareness of what Children's Centres can provide.
12. Alongside vocational development work currently underway within the Gedling Employment and Skills Group communities and localities to be encouraged to access external funding for the provision of community based training and life skills. An ideal scenario would be for Gedling residents to have access to a year round calendar of local courses and personal development opportunities.
 13. Improve the level of specialist medical and social support available to those at risk of, and moving on from, alcohol and drug dependency and homelessness.
 14. Training and awareness to be made available to GPs and frontline staff in alcohol /drug dependency issues, sources of referral and treatment.
 15. The Health and Wellbeing Board to reinstate / enhance availability of drug and alcohol recovery programmes that clients can attend locally, supported by Elizabeth house staff and Framework support workers.
 16. The NNE CCG to consider commissioning informed health advocacy for those in hardship and dependency situations.
 17. Under our commitment to the Armed Forces Community Covenant, enhance support for ex-military personnel at risk of dependency, hardship and homelessness by strengthening referral links to SAFFA and other Service benevolent organisations.
 18. Consider the provision of DWP outreach at Elizabeth House, and the reinstatement of DWP outreach in Sure Start Children's Centres.