

FUTURE DIRECTION OF NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

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1. Purpose

- 1.1 To provide an outline proposal for the development of integrated local service centres and related changes in the structure of Neighbourhood Services.

2. Summary

- 2.1 The report includes the context and reasons for proposing changes, together with objectives to be achieved. An outline of a model is provided with explanations for some services being delivered as separate discreet units.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 The Committee is asked to:
- (a) comment on the report;
 - (b) approve the outline proposals; and
 - (c) agree to receive a more detailed report at the next meeting.

4. **Background**

Context

- 4.1 The Committee approved changes to the structure of the service at a special meeting on 9 December 1998.
- 4.2 The focus was mainly on the senior management structure, but some possible developments were flagged up in the report.
- 4.3 The strategic plan included a number of objectives relating to the proposed changes such as objective 2.1 “to develop a carefully planned approach to local services”. The West Bletchley Pilot Project is one of the milestones and is a means of testing the impact of local service delivery.

WHY CHANGE?

- 4.4 The benefits of greater integration of housing, social care and primary health care are already being demonstrated through the “action research” of the West Bletchley Locality Pilot Project.
- 4.5 They are consistent with the Council’s values. In some respects these are better demonstrated by the Senior Management Structure rather than through front line service delivery. For example housing services are very decentralised (with 8 offices) but Social Care is highly centralised and fairly specialised in its organisation.
- 4.6 The status quo is not an option. The Housing Committee agreed in June 1999 to a review of office locations as part of its annual work programme.
- 4.7 The processing of benefits was centralised in July 1999. The Housing Improvement Team (repairs and voids) supports the centralisation of repairs through the development of a call centre; proposals are to be presented to the next Housing Committee. Whilst it is considered that the benefits of these changes will outweigh the disadvantages, some of the local offices will no longer be viable.
- 4.8 Pressure on the Housing Revenue Account and the General Fund also requires us to find ways of reducing management and support costs and focus our limited resources on front line services.
- 4.9 These developments suggest the need to review why we provide some services. What is the statutory basis and do they fit with strategic/corporate/partnership plans?
- 4.10 Another crucial question is, can they be delivered more effectively?

Which gives rise to:-

- (a) What should be available in local offices?
- (b) What is more appropriate as a back office function?
- (c) What Council services in addition to those provided by Neighbourhood Services

could be provided from the same outlet?

- (d) What services from other agencies, such as Primary Health Care, could either be co-located or jointly provided?

4.11 The review of health services, currently taking place through the “Health Economy Re-configuration Project Board” and Section 31 of the new Health Act (Making a reality of Partnership in Action) facilitating greater flexibility (pooled budget, lead agency, transfer of functions) provide real opportunities to transcend traditional boundaries and achieve a more holistic service delivery.

OBJECTIVES

4.12 It is suggested that the previously agreed objectives for restructuring (Special Neighbourhood Services Committee 9 December 1998) are largely still relevant and any proposals should be measured against them.

4.13 The changes must:-

- (a) Result in better customer services
- (b) Promote integration
- (c) Provide responsive consistent management
- (d) Ensure sufficient specialist skills and knowledge
- (e) Minimise risks
- (f) Provide clear accountability
- (g) Facilitate locally based partnerships
- (h) Anticipate change e.g. health, Primary Care Trust, new legislation
- (i) Maximise resources available to the front line
- (j) Achieve more sustainable service delivery
- (k) Facilitate effective performance and financial management
- (l) Achieve management workload parity

5. Issues and Choices

5.1 The starting point has been to consider what existing services might be made available from a local service centre.

- 5.2 The working assumption is that there would be 4 centres. The geographical location and boundaries have deliberately not been examined at this stage. There could, of course, be some satellite offices or local surgeries. Proposals will need to consider having access points which do not merely reflect the concentration of Council housing, but are able to respond to the needs of the growth areas within Milton Keynes.
- 5.3 The model might include relocating some services from Saxon Court to a local centre (and vice versa) which could provide services for all four centres (an example might be services for some people with a sensory impairment or some back office financial support services).

THE ANNEX ILLUSTRATES THE MODEL

- 5.4 The main Neighbourhood Services which would be provided through a local centre would be:-
- (a) Housing management functions including allocations/lettings and rent collection.
 - (b) Developing community safety services.
 - (c) Homelessness applications/provision of temporary accommodation.
 - (d) Money advice.
 - (e) Sheltered housing management*
 - (f) Social work services for older people and people with a physical impairment.
 - (g) Home care services*

*The nature and timing of devolution will depend on reviews/Best Value follow up work.

- 5.5 All centres would be staffed by well trained customer services officers who would provide some advice and information on a range of services. They would also give a preliminary view on whether eligibility criteria for a service are met and “sign post” the person to the next stage e.g. full assessment, provision of “simple service”, referral to voluntary sector etc.
- 5.6 The model assumes there will be a Neighbourhood Manager for each centre but separate housing and social care teams, although they would work closely together. Some matrix arrangements will be required to provide appropriate professional supervision to supplement the line management accountability.
- 5.7 The Neighbourhood Manager would also be required to promote effective local inter-agency collaboration and ensure locality public information is made available. Another function could be to contribute to the assessment of local needs and be involved in the commissioning of locality services..
- 5.8 Services provided outside the local centres would be:-
- (a) Benefits

- (b) Repairs
- (c) Shared Ownership (and Right to Buy)
- (d) Mental Health Services

(work is progressing on the development of a joint service with Health based on the 4 existing Community Mental Health Teams).

- (e) Learning Disability Services.

(a resource centre approach bringing together day services and field work is to be proposed. It should be noted that both mental health and learning disability services are more discreet services with referrers and users being more likely to wish to make direct referral, rather than via local centres).

5.9 Further work on how the following would fit into the proposals is required:-

- (a) Hospital Social Work Team
- (b) Occupational Therapy Service
- (c) Rehabilitation Services
- (d) Residential and Day services

5.10 If there is in principle support for the outline proposals, early discussions would need to take place with other Council Directorates and Agencies, especially the Primary Care Group, with regard to the inclusion of some of their services and the potential for sharing office accommodation.

5.11 More detailed staffing structures and costings would need to be early priorities together with staff and Trade Union consultation. A project plan, with timescales, would be an essential requirement.

6. **Implications**

6.1 Environmental

Proposals will need to achieve more sustainable service delivery. An assessment should be made of the impact on resources, use of buildings and travel.

6.2 Equalities

It is essential that the Council's equalities policies are adhered to during the implementation of the proposals.

6.3 Financial

The specific changes which are proposed must be contained within the current budget. Further work must include a detailed financial appraisal.

6.4 Legal

There are no direct implications.

6.5 Staff and Accommodation

Staff and Trade Unions will be consulted on the implementation of all proposals.

7. **Conclusions**

7.1 The proposals provide the basis for improving service delivery through the promotion of further integration and anticipate changes such as new legislation.

Background Papers: Report to Special Neighbourhood Services Committee - 9 December 1998.