

Learning Disability Services Task and Finish Group

2nd meeting – 16th of July 2015

After the inaugural meeting of this group more councillors were added to the committee which resulted in the stellar display of four councillors being present today – which is actually worse than the last meeting's five councillors. This was because two councillors failed to show up without apologies and because Cllr Hitchens and Cllr Rawlins made apologies for their absence.

The meeting began with a presentation by Caroline Byrt, the interim head of Adult Social Work and Care Implementation, addressing points raised at the last meeting. Firstly, the meeting was given information regarding the number of people accessing the service in different age groups. An amendment was made to the preliminary figures; this meant that the final figures show that there was a rise in accessing the service across every age band from 18 and up in the financial year 2014-2015. The amendment was made to correct an administration error.

The next point of discussion was information regarding the Advocacy Agency. Paul Johnson from Community, Children and Families outlined how an Advocacy Hub launched this March had replaced three other advocacy groups. This Advocacy Hub is being run by MenCap Manchester, who have changed their name to Better Things. Referrals are currently low but they have increased from the start of the service. This is being done through marketing and by engaging with people using the service. There have currently been 80ish referrals in total to the service – about 20 are related to Learning Disabilities.

Information and examples were provided of how the service engages with users and their families. These include coffee mornings which occur about four times a year. Points raised by Councillors included, Cllr Newman's query as to what impact the ILF (independent living fund) changes were having in Manchester, Cllr Craig wondered if the service's communication with those it worked with was as clear and simple as it could be and Cllr Watson wondered whether more services would be developed like Marillac House¹. The representative of the service replied that information on ILF would be supplied, effort was made to get the balance between providing overly complicated material and risking patronising those it was in correspondence with.

Caroline Byrt drew attention to a section of the report which noted that a consultation had been undertaken with Self Advocates (people who use the service) and their families. Overall they wanted to have a named professional, more of some services, choice and control, flexible person-centred support, employment opportunities, better communication, better transition and safer public transport. She also drew attention to a new online service which is being launched in six weeks which will provide information to service users and signpost people who may not require a support package to relevant services.

The Councillors all agreed that they should meet with the self advocacy group themselves and also observe one of their meetings (the group is called People First). Cllr Andrews is

¹ Marillac House is a recently opened property which offers supported accommodation to those with Learning Disabilities. This service enables residents to live more independently than if they lived in private accommodation.

already on this board and said that he found the meetings to be very illuminating and that it was a pleasure to hear the blunt views of people who receive services from the Council.

Cllr Watson then raised her concern that a few individuals may have packages which are very expensive. She believed that these high packages were potentially bringing down the level of service for the majority and that this was unfair. She then asked what was being done to lower the cost of these packages. Caroline Byrt replied by stating that the Shared Life scheme was identifying new ways of providing services and that reassessment was involved in this. There was then a lengthy discussion about how much data concerning cost of care packages could be released. Cllr Andrews was concerned about protecting the privacy of individuals while Cllr Watson wanted more information to be available. No clear decision was made at the meeting so it was agreed that arrangements would be made later. (MS – Cllr Watson's views were the first things that really concerned me in the meeting. While I may not agree with every decision made to cope with a lower budget, or the decision to lower the budget, I can appreciate the difficulty in making these decisions. However, the tone of Cllr Watson's statement shocked me. It is not the person receiving the service's fault that they are costing a lot of money.)

The meeting ended with some discussion around what would be covered at the next meeting.

Overall the meeting displayed the pressures faced by the service by having to adapt to new national legislation and to cuts carried out by the Council. Some of these challenges can probably be met by using services differently. However, I am yet to be convinced that there is a clear enough plan on how this will work over the coming years. I will be very interested to attend the next meeting and hear the views of the self advocacy group. I am worried that when cuts are made there is a temptation to find savings by cutting large care packages simply because they are large, without due attention to the needs of that individual.

The above is not an exhaustive record of the meeting but my own honest impressions.

If you have any questions contact me at: mschreibke@hotmail.co.uk