

Review Committee – 8 January 2013

Minutes of the meeting of the **Review Committee** held on **8 January 2013** when there were present:-

Chairman for the meeting: I H Ward

Cllr Mrs A V Hale

Cllr B T Hazlewood

VISITING MEMBER

Cllr M Maddocks

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Mrs J R Lumley, J R F Mason, T E Mountain, R D Pointer and Mrs C E Roe.

OFFICERS PRESENT

J Bourne	-	Head of Community Services
S Neville	-	Strategic Housing Manager
A Lowing	-	Community Planning Officer
P Gowers	-	Overview and Scrutiny Officer
M Power	-	Committee Administrator

1 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 4 December 2012 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

2 DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS UPDATE

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Community Services, which provided an update on the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) process one year after the Committee's recommendations.

Members referred to the ten recommendations made by the Review Committee on 10 January 2012 to the Portfolio Holder for Council Tax Collection, Benefits and Strategic Housing Functions. The average number of weeks from receipt of the Occupational Therapist's recommendation until completion of the DFG works (Local Performance Indicator (LPI) 571) has reduced considerably, achieving the target set of 30 weeks. Work is on-going to maintain this level.

In response to questions, the following was noted:-

- There are and have been issues with the role of the Occupational Therapist (OT) in the process. Essex County Council is currently undertaking a review of its OT service and looking at alternative ways of providing the service.

- Although the OT issue is a major contributing factor to the time delays, and a change in the system would improve the service to the applicant, it would have no impact on the Rochford District Council performance measure as the process from Rochford's perspective does not start until the recommendation is received from the OT. It was recognised, however, that the public would not be aware of this separation of roles. Generally, the figures relating to all aspects of the process are now more accurately and realistically recorded than previously.
- The grant application forms have been amended with a view to making them simpler to complete. Residents who are in receipt of specific benefits are 'passport' through the system and the Papworth Trust will also help applicants to fill in the forms if necessary.
- Rochford District Council has approved approximately thirty grants this year to date, amounting to a committed spend in the region of £200,000.
- At the recent Essex County Council seminar around future service improvements and administration of DFGs, the option of District/Borough Councils employing their own OTs was discussed. Basildon Council recently ran a pilot in which OTs were employed directly by the Council and this option could be explored further by Rochford District Council, dependent on funding issues. In the meantime, the Council continues to use the existing system where Essex County Council employs the OTs and bears the cost. A telephone triage system is in place at the County Council where potential grant applicants are asked detailed questions by experienced OTs to ascertain what level of adaptation is potentially required and whether or not a DFG is the appropriate route. Essex County Council will be contacting Rochford and the other attendees at the seminar shortly to discuss possible options around the use of OTs in the process. Enquiries can be made as to the time it takes from a request for adaptations/a grant being raised to the assessment being completed by the OT.
- It was noted that 60-65% of the total grants paid by Rochford District Council are for level access showers and a change to the application process now allows for level access showers to be granted under a fixed-price contract approach, which is helping to reduce the processing times. Fixed price contracts for stair lifts are more problematical as stair lifts often will need to be tailored to suit the specific person/home. It was noted that Southend Borough Council has entered into a contract with a single contractor for supply of stair lifts; and this option could be explored by Rochford. Although there may be no resultant cost savings, waiting times can be reduced.
- The overall amount of funding for the current year (£307,000) was made up of £150,000 from Central Government, £100,000 from Rochford District Council's capital programme and an additional sum of £57,000 received from Central Government.

The Portfolio Holder for Council Tax Collection, Benefits and Strategic Housing Functions confirmed that the DFG process would continue to be monitored and the aim is to maintain the progress that has been made over the last 12 months.

It was suggested that a further update be provided to the Committee towards the end of 2013/14.

Resolved

That the Committee notes the content of the report, the progress made in relation to the Review Committee's recommendations and the improved average process times for Disabled Facilities Grants.

3 REVIEW OF HOW VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY GROUPS FUNCTION IN THE DISTRICT

The Committee considered the final report of the project team on the review of how voluntary and community groups function in the District.

It was:-

Recommended to RRAVS

- (1) That regular meetings of the voluntary and community sector groups are held within the District, led by the voluntary sector.
- (2) That the use of social media is explored to contact the voluntary groups in the District and to encourage interaction between them.
- (3) That there is representation, at the appropriate level of the Rochford District voluntary sector, at strategic meetings.
- (4) That they look to restructure the CVS to ensure that they can work within their annual funding.
- (5) That they look to try and develop a separate income stream rather than rely solely on grant funding.
- (6) That they investigate the use of volunteers to undertake key roles rather than paying staff to perform those duties.

Recommended to the Executive

- (1) That the profile of Rochford be updated annually and published on the Council's website to assist groups completing funding applications.
- (2) That the Council's website includes a page dedicated to information on voluntary organisations in Rochford, with all future Rochford DC grant aid forms and to include a section providing the opportunity for groups to have

their details in the maps section.

- (3) That the Council publicise the work of the CAB to ensure that the public understand that while the Local Authority fund the work of the CAB, donations from the public are necessary.
- (4) That the Council lobby central government to ensure that various departments such as DWP, provide full advice to their clients, rather than letting the CAB offices around the country deal with the problems that occur because of the lack of clear guidance and assistance from these departments.
- (5) That Estates review the use of the accommodation provided in Rochford and Rayleigh with the CAB to ensure the best use of space.

Recommended to the Citizens Advice Bureau

- (1) That they investigate whether it would be possible to deal with those one off clients, who only need signposting to various agencies, via a telephone advice line rather than a full face to face interview.
- (2) That they investigate whether they are able to claim for time and costs from Government departments when it can be proved that someone has not received correct advice from their employees.

4 KEY DECISION DOCUMENT

The Committee considered the Key Decision Document and noted its contents.

5 WORK PLAN

Members considered and approved the Committee's Work Plan. The following was noted:-

- Arising from the Council's recent Peer Review, the Review Committee will be looking at budget documents prior to their submission to Council. The Committee will be reviewing/commenting on the Council's Treasury Management Strategy Statement for 2013/14 at its meeting on 5 February 2013, prior to its submission to Full Council.
- There will be a resultant need for finance training for the Review Committee in the near future.
- It was requested that the Emergency Planning officer be invited to the Review Committee meeting on 16 April 2013 to advise Members of the procedures in place for dealing with all levels of emergency in the District.
- An invitation would be sent to all Members of the Council to attend the Review Committee meeting on 5 March 2013 on the emerging structure around health and wellbeing in the District.

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The meeting closed at 8.21 pm.

Chairman

Date

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