



Bath and North East Somerset Local Involvement Network

Report to B&NES Wellbeing Policy Development & Scrutiny Panel, 16 March 2012

1. LINK's Visits to Care Homes

Since we last reported on this project, LINK representatives have carried out two visits to care homes in B&NES. The first took place on 1 February, and was to *Heather House*, a private care home in Batheaston, registered for both personal and nursing care. The second visit took place on 24 February to Cleeve Court, a home in Twerton provided by the Council through a contract with *Sirona*, the new Community Interest Company that took over the provision of Community Services. Cleeve Court caters for the "frail-elderly" and for patients with dementia.

The LINK plans to visit more care homes, and will produce a report on this work when its programme is complete.

2. HealthWatch

Over the weekend of 3rd/4th February, three days before the House of Lords were due to consider them, the Government issued a number of significant amendments to the HealthWatch sections of the Health and Social Care Bill. At the time of writing this report, there has not been time to understand the full impact of the amendments (if they are accepted by Parliament). One of the proposals is that Local HealthWatches will not be "statutory bodies" (as they would be in the Bill as it currently stands). Instead, they will be "non-statutory corporate bodies" and social enterprises (which are defined specifically in the amendments). This would give local authorities a freer hand in the form Local HealthWatches take. Some are hailing this as the end of their independence and autonomy.

We will continue to try and understand the proposals fully, although there will no doubt be further guidance at Regional or National level.

3. Home Improvement Agency Commissioning

On 23 January, the LINK's Chair wrote to Malcolm Hanney regarding the LINK's concerns over the current commissioning exercise for a West of England Home Improvement Agency service. Councillor Hanney passed our comments on to Simon Allen as the Councillor leading on this, and he replied to us. This correspondence is self-explanatory, and copies of both these letters are attached to this Report.

Diana Hall Hall

Chair, B&NES Local Involvement Network

6 March 2012



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23 January 2012

Dear Councillor Hanney

West of England Home Improvement Agency Commissioning

The B&NES Local Involvement Network feels that it must draw B&NES Councillors' attention to the situation regarding the commissioning of a West of England HIA service. The LINK is concerned by the risk that a jointly commissioned service for the whole Avon area may threaten the quality of the service that residents receive under the current arrangements, which the LINK feels are very good.

A related concern is that, although this service clearly sits within the health and wellbeing interests of the population, the LINK was not included as a key participant in the design and implementation of the consultation. We feel that this service provides important ways of connecting with the more vulnerable sections of our population, and that it should be recognised that the contact it has with these people gives it a place in the wider health and social care system. It's workers do, in fact, have a place in this system, and can form an important means of connecting with people who might otherwise have little contact with the wider health and social care services that can help them. We have been impressed with the way this is done by the current service provider, and are concerned that it should be an important consideration in the selection of any new provider.

Having looked into the way that the current commissioning exercise has been conducted, we feel that an important opportunity has been missed by not including the views of the LINK in the design of the specification for the service, and in the design of the consultation process.

After investigating the structure of the commission we feel that if we had been consulted we would have been able to positively change the questions asked in the engagement document to gain more pertinent information. We also feel that the current tendering exercise is being driven largely by cost-saving aims, with too little concern for the important connections with other parts of the health and social care system.

We are also particularly concerned about the lack of weight given to the concept of localism within the tendering process, and to the needs of our most vulnerable citizens who, in our view, are receiving a high quality and much-valued service from the current provider, who puts great emphasis on an appropriate social model for the service it provides.

Yours sincerely

Diana Hall Hall
Chair

cc Councillor Simon Allen

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Date: 7 February 2012

Dear Diana

Re: West of England Home Improvement Agency Commissioning

Thank you for your letter of 23 January 2012 concerning the re-commissioning of Bath & North East Somerset's Home Improvement Agency (HIA). I have agreed with Councillor Malcolm Hanney that I will respond to your letter as the provision of home improvement or "care and repair" services sits in my Cabinet portfolio.

Firstly, I would like to take this opportunity to apologise for the fact that BANES LINK was omitted from the initial list of consultees. I appreciate that whilst officers subsequently met with LINK to remedy this omission, it did delay engagement with LINK on this important issue.

Before coming to a more detailed response to the specific concerns you raise in your letter I thought it might be helpful to set out the background and broader context.

The role of the Home Improvement Agency (HIA) has developed significantly since their inception over 20 years ago. From the sector's relatively modest beginnings - often a single person in the housing department helping people complete forms - they have now become pivotal in helping older, disabled and otherwise vulnerable people to remain independent in their own homes. This is a role we truly value and fully support. Indeed the sector is continually evolving to meet the needs of changes in social care and health policies and the challenges of an ageing population.

It is within this context that the decision to work in partnership with Foundations, the Government appointed advisors on HIAs, and the other West of England authorities to ensure we develop our HIA resource to meet these demands in what is also a financially challenging environment. The result of this partnership is the joint commissioning of a single HIA provider (or possibly a partnership of providers similar to the B&NES partnership of advice service providers) to operate across the West of England.

It is believed that this approach will achieve both financial and non-financial benefits. These are documented more fully elsewhere, including in the report to the 8 February meeting of the Council's Cabinet; however, the key point is that demand is expected to increase by around 15% over the life of the commission and we want to be able to meet this demand without a loss of service or quality and within existing budgets. We believe the approach being taken offers the most effective way of achieving these twin aims, which can, on occasion compete with each other. It is also important to note that whilst the current provider is highly regarded, the Council does need to operate within legislative guidelines on procurement, contracting and competition, and as a consequence, the Council cannot simply renew the contract with the current provider without going through due process.

We fully appreciate that this is a big step and so extensive consultation was undertaken. In Bath & North East Somerset alone this included directly contacting fourteen partner organisations, 240 service users, all Ward Councillors, GP Practices and a report and presentation to the December meeting of Wellbeing Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel. Again, it is really unfortunate that LINK were not initially included in this consultation.

There is a full report on the outcomes of the consultation, which is attached as an Appendix to the report to the Cabinet on 8th February 2012 and can be accessed via the Council's website. In summary, the consultation found strong support for a sub-regional commissioning approach from stakeholders and providers. It is the case, however, that a large number of older people, disabled people and carers, the majority of whom are past or existing HIA clients, do not want the current arrangements to change. Fewer numbers of older people, disabled people and carers, although still a large number, have no concerns about the proposals as long as the service continues to deliver the current high standards. In essence clients across the region have received a good service and they want that to remain. This reflects the high value that service users place in HIA services. It therefore important that the proposed procurement process and contractual arrangements capture the qualities that service users value, select the most appropriate organisation and put in place robust mechanisms to address poor performance.

Coming specifically to your concern that a jointly commissioned service for the (ex) Avon area may compromise the quality and/or result in a loss of local focus and responsiveness, both of these issues were discussed at the Wellbeing PDS meeting in December and assurances were given that: a) the current provider can submit an expression of interest in continuing to be the provider (possibly as part of a partnership) and, indeed, is being encouraged to do so; and b) the re-commissioning process gives sufficient flexibility to enable all four Local Authorities to specify the service offer and outcomes to meet local needs and requirements. It is important to note that the current, highly regarded, provider of the B&NES service is not based in Bath & North East Somerset and this was the case at the time the current contract was let following a re-commissioning process.

I do hope this is helpful in providing reassurance to BANES LINK that there is no reason why the joint commissioning process should compromise either the quality or local focus of the home improvement service offered to residents of Bath & North East Somerset in future.

Yours sincerely

Councillor Simon Allen
Cabinet Member for Wellbeing

Copy: Malcolm Hanney, Chair – Partnership Board for Health & Wellbeing