

Corporate PDS Panel – 27th May 2020

Statement from Councillor Robin Moss

Good afternoon,

I am asking that the scrutiny panel considers reviewing the current B&NES corporate outsourcing arrangements, not just in light of the Covid-19 emergency, but also that there have been concerns about the lack of flexibility, the quality of service & value for money even prior to this year.

The use of the private sector to provide home care & associated services has resulted in staff surveys showing high levels of dissatisfaction & internal monitoring reports showing service delivery being 'red flagged' as poor.

There have been consistent national & local reports that residential care providers are under severe financial strain. This is likely to get worse as the increased PPE costs as well as social distancing reducing the number who can be accommodated reduces. As the private sector business model prioritises return on capital investment as a key element of costs (rather than the public sector's interest loss or interest payment) there will always be a gap between what it is possible to provide with funding provided & what you actually end up getting for your money.

Outsourcing our services does not outsource our responsibility as a local authority. Outsourcing does however make it more difficult to respond to crises, it makes it more difficult to introduce improvements when quality is deteriorating & it is increasingly a more expensive option.

I believe there needs to be a debate on how local councils provide their services, what is appropriate in the private sector, what should be in 'house' & where the co-operative & '3rd sector' should be used. B&NES, like many local councils, is a substantial contributor to the local economy. We should be making sure our money stays as far as possible in the local economy, & where it goes into the private sector it should be local businesses who pay UK tax.

The current financial crisis does mean we have to look not only at what services we provide, but also how we provide those services. It is an opportunity to move away from the 'private profit is best' nostrum, that may have benefited shareholders in the past, but which has failed to benefit residents.