

Part I

Electoral Divisions affected:
Preston City Centre,
Preston South East,
Preston West,
Preston Central South, and
Preston Central North

Decommissioning of Dispersed Accommodation Support Service in Preston
(Appendix 'A' refers)

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Executive Summary

The proposal relates to the proposed closure of a visiting housing support service to dispersed properties funded by Lancashire County Council.

An Equality Analysis has been completed and is attached at Appendix 'A'.

This is deemed to be a Key Decision and the provisions of Standing Order No. 25 have been complied with.

Recommendation

The Cabinet Member for Adult and Community Services is asked to approve the decommissioning of the service and implement the decision immediately in order to facilitate the ending of the service on 29 November 2015 or as soon as possible thereafter.

This decision should be implemented immediately for the purposes of Standing Order 34(3) as any delay could adversely affect the execution of the County Council's responsibilities.

Background and Advice

This service is delivered by Methodist Action North West, an established provider of services to homeless people in the Preston area. Methodist Action North West originally agreed to provide 21 units of dispersed accommodation (i.e ordinary flats in different parts of Preston) to which they delivered short term visiting support.

The service was originally targeted at clients from the Fox Street supported housing project who faced additional barriers in securing move on accommodation due to their background and/or level of support needs. As such the move on support service helped to avoid bed blocking at the 20 unit Fox Street supported accommodation service.

The County Council contracts for 111 visiting support hours at a cost of £82,000. The contract sum does not include payment for the accommodation used within the service which is met through rents and service charges.

Since the development of the original dispersed service there have been significant changes in the operating environment which are now impacting on the service and its strategic relevance to key stakeholders.

These include the following developments:

- 1) Refurbishment of the Fox Street building in 2006/7 and elimination of the dormitory type layout leading to a reduction in capacity from 34 units to 20 units. This in turn reduced the pressure for move on accommodation.
- 2) The end of a 'direct access' service at Fox Street which tended to attract people from across and from outside Lancashire, given its city centre location and proximity to train and bus terminals. New arrangements are now in place which have led to the service now being used primarily by referrals from Preston City Council's Housing Options Team.
- 3) Development of a social lettings agency, 'A Place to Live' (APTL), in Preston in 2011/12, also run in partnership with Methodist Action North West, which rents properties from private landlords on long leases in order to provide affordable and accessible homes for local people. The service is used by Preston City Council to assist homeless people and has also been used to re-house people from the Fox Street Community.

Over time the accommodation element of the Safeguarded People (SP) funded service has become merged with "A Place to Live".

The support element of the SP funded service is still commissioned as a dedicated service to people moving on from Fox Street although this has not always been the case in practice and is one of the reasons why the service's strategic importance has been under review.

If the service is decommissioned the properties will continue to be available as accommodation and it is the short term support service from the dedicated Methodist Action North West team that will not be available from the current dedicated support service.

- 4) Feedback from Preston City Council that the dispersed accommodation support service is not a strategic priority in the new operating environment, particularly given the pressure on budgets.

Decommissioning Proposal

This report therefore incorporates the following primary reasons for proposing the decommissioning of the service:

- 1) A requirement to deliver budgetary savings;
- 2) Changing strategic priorities of Preston City Council and the County Council;
and
- 3) The availability of alternative and more cost effective support services to meet needs -outlined more fully in the Equality Analysis report attached at Appendix 'A'.

Consultations

The County Council's Supporting People team has consulted with the following on the proposal to decommission this service:

- Preston City Council's Head of Advice Services/Housing Options Team
- Methodist Action North West
- Current and Ex Service Users
- Other service providers who could provide alternative support ie Calico's County Wide Floating Support Service

Implications:

This item has the following implications, as indicated:

Risk management

Financial

Decommissioning of the service will result in savings of £82,000 per annum.

Legal

A decision of this nature which could potentially have a significant impact upon the quality of life of service users is most likely to be challenged by way of a judicial review of the process.

Such a challenge in these circumstances is unlikely to be brought by the present provider given that the County Council has been working with the provider, Methodist Action North West, since late 2014 to prepare for changes to their Lancashire funded services. Moreover the proposal to end the service on the 29th November 2015 has come from the provider who wishes to end the service at the same time that its other new contract for supported accommodation at Fox Street, Preston begins. This will allow them to provide for some re-deployment opportunities for staff affected by the

decommissioning of the service. Therefore any risk of challenge by the incumbent provider will have been significantly reduced.

Existing service users may challenge the decision although this has been reduced as a result of the direct consultation with service users which took place in early August 2015, during which reasonable timescales for the ending of this short term support service were shared with service users. Alternative reasonable support services are available and are currently being put in place by Methodist Action North West and the county wide Calico Floating Support service with effect from the proposed end date of 29th November 2015.

This decision could potentially impact upon the Article 8 rights of service users (Article 8 European Convention on Human Rights-the right to home, private and family life) as the services are provided in conjunction with service user's living arrangements. Specifically in this case access to the accommodation may be dependent on the service user having adequate support services in place. Local authorities are entitled to take such decisions provided they are necessary and proportionate and in accordance with the Convention. In the circumstances the County Council has taken the decision in order to adjust its priorities to deliver services within a reduced budget provision. The potential for a challenge arguing that there has been interference with Article 8 rights is limited by virtue of the nature of the accommodation (i.e. short term). The service users have no legitimate expectation that they will reside in the accommodation on a long term basis in any event. The authority has balanced the impact upon service users affected by the decision against the wider needs of others in the area with greater or similar needs in relation to the existence or otherwise of alternative provision.

Personnel

Methodist Action North West has been informally preparing for some time for the closure of the service and two out of the three staff employed at the service have now left. Any remaining staff who are attached to the service are currently in the middle of a 30 day consultation period linked to the start of the new Fox Street contract and the end of the dispersed support service. As a result the provider seems to be complying with its responsibilities to its staff in terms of employment contracts thereby reducing the risk of challenge from any remaining staff around a failure to consult on the end of the service.

Equality and Cohesion

The County Council has completed an equality analysis (attached as Appendix 'A') for the purposes of establishing the impact of closure on any service users with protected characteristics.

The full report includes:

- An analysis of the current and former users of the service in terms of any protected characteristics;
- A brief outline of the consultation process;
- An assessment of alternative or substitute services that may be available; and

- The rationale for proceeding with the planned decommissioning as originally proposed.

The main finding from the Equality Analysis is that the proposed closure of the service will have a disproportionately negative effect on groups of people with protected characteristics. However adequate alternative services will be available to meet service user needs and offset any minor negative impact.

List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Tel
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None

Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate

N/A