



Report to Cabinet

AGENDA ITEM [Number]

Title: Implications for the County Council of the Buckinghamshire Mental Health Trust's Proposals to Change Mental Health Services for Adults and Older People

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Introduction

- 1 On 1 September 2005 the Buckinghamshire Mental Health Trust and the Buckinghamshire Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) began a consultation on proposals to change the way in which mental health services for adults of working age and older people are provided.
- 2 As a primary consultee, the County Council will be producing a response to the Trusts on these proposals. The Adult Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee was concerned about the potentially significant implications for the County Council and its services and has undertaken a short piece of work to understand what the impact could be.
- 3 Members heard from the Mental Health Trust representatives, from officers from Adult Social Care and obtained an 'external expert' evaluation on potential implications from a senior officer from Hertfordshire County Council specialising in mental health matters.
- 4 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has made its findings available to the officer drafting the County Council's response and is pleased to see so many of its concerns reflected in the comments within that document.
- 5 It is important to make clear that the OSC is not generally commenting on specific proposals within the consultation document and the possible effects on service provision for mental health patients. That is the job of the Public Health OSC. This report deals solely with what members of the Adult Services OSC consider should be included in the County Council's response to the consultation.

Findings

- 6 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee agrees with the direction of travel outlined in the document and is satisfied that it is consistent with national thinking and best practice in mental health service provision.
- 7 However, the Committee is concerned about the potential implications of the proposals on the County Council and those people for whom the Trust is, on behalf of the County Council, providing social care services. It believes that the following issues could have a significant impact on the County Council should the proposals be implemented as outlined in the consultation document. The Committee considers it important that the opportunity is taken to reflect these issues in the County Council's formal response to the Bucks Mental Health Trust's consultation 'Putting People First'.

a. Financial Risks

Funding for the Trust comes from both the NHS and County Council. The Committee considers it important that the Trust produces a clear financial map for the whole of its services, detailing agreed financial investments from each agency over time. Members believe this is essential to ensure that that the Trust's vision becomes a reality.

b. Joint Strategy

'Putting People First' is part of the wider health and social care provision. The Committee believes that it is important that these developments are consistent and integrated with the joint health and social care strategy and with the commissioning strategies for adults and for older people.

c. Timescale for Change

The proposals do not include a detailed timeline and it is therefore difficult to assess the adequacy of interim arrangements and potential impact on services and service users. The Committee recommends that the Trust should be asked to provide a timeline with evaluated steps to allow corrective action to be taken if necessary during the implementation process.

In addition, the community services are not yet fully operational and therefore the local evidence to support the decrease in inpatient beds is not available. Should beds be reduced before community services are embedded, people needing inpatient facilities may need to be placed outside the County, with increased costs. The Committee believes this represents a potential financial risk to the County Council. A lower risk strategy may be to pilot the changes in one area before rolling-out across Buckinghamshire.

d. The Embleton Unit, Buckingham.

The Committee considers that should the closure of the Embleton Unit go ahead as proposed, the Trust must firstly ensure that:

- The voluntary sector has, and is supported to ensure it continues to have, sufficient capacity to provide the alternative arrangements outlined without detriment to either existing users of the Embleton Unit or users of services to which Embleton Unit patients might be transferred;
- Transport for service users and carers to new provision enables all those wishing to attend with the ability to do so.

The Trust should also acknowledge that the move from NHS to social care provision could mean that some people who previously received free services would now have to pay.

e. EMI Unit Closure

The Committee understands that the units now providing care for people who are elderly and mental infirm are not fit for purpose. However, members are concerned that at the time of opening, within the very recent past, these units were heralded as ideal. The Committee is concerned that public moneys are spent prudently and that the Trust takes every care in ensuring that any new build will last and will not be considered obsolete within a similar timeframe.

f. Rehabilitation

The Committee understands that rehabilitation close to home is best practice and the preferred option for service users. As such, the Committee would like the Trust to ensure that community support enables this to take place wherever an individual lives in the County.

g. Implications for users of Wexham Park Hospital services

Members learned that the 'invisible' barriers of service provision that exist for South Bucks residents who use Wexham Park have caused significant problems both for the service users and the services themselves. The Committee is supportive of the move to bring these service users 'in-house', but is concerned about the journeys that users and their friends and families will have to take with Aylesbury as the alternative provision. It is important that the Trust acknowledges this and works with local transport providers, users and carers to ensure adequate and appropriate transport systems are available.

h. Workforce Changes

Changing provision from inpatient-based to community-based will require a change in the way in which the Trust's employees work. There is no mention of a workforce development strategy within the consultation document, and the Committee considers it important that the Trust shares its plans for this workforce shift alongside the physical and service changes.

i. Supporting and Enabling Others

The Committee is concerned that the document 'Putting People First' says little about how the Trust will support the voluntary and charitable sectors to provide these and future changes. The Committee would also like to understand how the Trust proposes to engage, encourage and support users and carers in helping to develop services. Carers' support is vital to good mental health services and the Committee considers respite provision essential. Members recommend that the Trust develops its partnerships with these groups to ensure that mental health services are developed and provided to the benefit of all stakeholders.

j. Housing Provision

The Committee is mindful of the need for adequate and appropriate housing provision to ensure housing opportunities are available to move people when needed. Members consider this a key element in getting people better. The Committee would like the Trust to ensure this element is reflected in the commissioning strategy.

k. NHS Changes

The Committee understands that there are significant developments currently affecting the NHS, particularly the probable reorganisation of Primary Care Trusts in Buckinghamshire and the developments in practice-based commissioning for General Practitioners. Members are concerned about how these developments could affect the proposals outlined by the Trust and would seek assurance that any commitments from relevant agencies in relation to the proposals would be upheld by successor organisations.

- 8 In conclusion therefore, the Committee is broadly in agreement with the vision and direction of travel proposed by the Bucks Mental Health Trust in providing stronger and more effective services for adults and older people with mental health problems. However, it is the method in which changes are implemented that will be key in their successful establishment. The Committee believes that there are significant risks to the County Council and its services and service users as the proposals stand and request that Cabinet considers the findings of the Adult Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee when formulating its formal response.

Background Papers

1. *Agendas and Minutes of the Adult Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 14 September 2005.*
2. *Presentation by Jonathan Horbury and Rachel Rothero to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 14 September 2005.*
3. *Notes of discussions with Cathy Kerr, Assistant Director Learning Disabilities/Mental Health, Hertfordshire County Council, 19 October 2005.*