

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

21 February 2007

STATEMENT OF THE COMMUNITY SERVICES PORTFOLIO HOLDER (Adult Social Care, Economic Development, Library and Information Services, E-government and Communications)

COUNTY COUNCILLOR CHRIS METCALFE

Commission for Social Care Inspection Star Rating

Each year the Commission for Social Care Inspection announce the Star Rating for Councils providing social care services for adults and older people. The rating excludes Children's Services, which are now regulated separately as part of the Children and Young People's Service.

The Directorate has maintained its two star rating for 2005/06. This is a positive achievement, given the tougher targets set by the Commission, and the challenging financial environment within which staff were working.

The Commission's judgement is that many aspects of our service delivery are strong. However, there are areas for improvement, in particular helping more older people to live at home.

A programme of work focusing on improving this and other services is already underway within the Directorate. I trust that this, together with the change to the Fair Access to Care Services criteria, which I will discuss separately, will result in the Directorate continuing to maintain and improve its star rating in the future.

Fair Access to Care Services

Under Fair Access to Care Services, the government requires that we state the level of assessed need for which we are able to provide social care to adults. Until recently, in order to meet the Council's key objective of providing affordable care, we have only been able to support individuals assessed as having 'critical' needs.

I am delighted to announce that members of the executive offered their full support to a recent proposal to relax the eligibility criteria, and we are now able to offer care and support to adults whose needs are assessed as 'substantial'.

Operating at a 'critical' level has made it difficult for us to deliver on key performance indicators, such as older people helped to live at home. In addition, The Government White Paper *Our Health, Our Care, Our Say* sets out the expectation that we will move towards providing preventative care for the wider community.

It will continue to be necessary to manage the budget effectively, but this change will allow us to address care issues at an early stage, which could make a real difference to service improvements as well as performance outcomes.

I would like to acknowledge the splendid work done by staff in managing the financial situation, particularly the difficult decisions that frontline staff have had to take when assessing the needs of clients.

New Outcomes Framework for Performance Assessment

From 2006/07, the Commission for Social Care Inspection are introducing a new performance framework, the 'New Outcomes Framework for Performance Assessment'. The framework is based on the seven social care outcomes from the White Paper, *Our Health, Our Care, Our Say* plus two additional measures on leadership, and commissioning and use of resources. The performance measures will be based on outcomes and experiences for service users, and it will present a 'harder test' for authorities.

This means that we have to show that our services are making a difference to users now, and are also helping to improve their lives in the longer term. We must demonstrate that we actively promote our services so that the public know about them, and that we treat people fairly when they approach us for help.

The New Outcomes Framework also seeks to ensure that resources are fairly distributed within the community, and not focussed on specific groups. A percentage of the total score will relate specifically to the care and support given to groups such as older people, those with physical and sensory impairments, and carers.

Overall, this will prove to be a testing set of performance criteria for the Directorate, but work is already underway to ensure that we are able to meet the challenge.

Archive Service Star Rating

North Yorkshire County Council's Record Office has recently completed a self-assessment pilot scheme for local authority archive services. The pilot was run by The National Archives, the government department with responsibility for setting standards in information and records management across the UK.

The assessment measured six aspects of performance, including Customer Responsiveness and Searchroom Services. I am pleased to announce that the County Record Office achieved a two star rating, with an overall score of 62.5%, against a national average of 55%.

I am advised that improvements to the Archive Service within existing resources are likely to allow us to achieve the top three star rating within three

years. It is important that we do so, as The National Archives plan to repeat the exercise annually, and are currently in discussion with the Audit Commission about incorporating the results into performance assessment ratings.

The Benefits of Partnership Working

North Yorkshire County Council has entered into a formal Joint Working Partnership with the Pension Service, which is part of the Department for Work and Pensions, so that the council's team of benefits and assessment officers and the Pension Service's team of visiting officers do not duplicate each other's work. Anyone helped with their benefits by one of the council's team will see the claim being processed as if they had dealt directly with the Pension Service, without having to provide any further information or evidence.

It is vital that vulnerable people receive the benefits they are entitled to because this helps them to buy the support they need to maintain their independence for as long as possible. The new partnership with the Pension Service is giving people quicker access to the services that they need.

The Benefits and Assessment Team carries out around 7,000 financial assessments a year for adults who have care or housing-related support needs and makes over 1000 benefit claims on their behalf. Claims made on behalf of service users are increasing income into the local community by nearly £55,000 per week. The team is already working closely with the seven District Councils in North Yorkshire to ensure speedy processing of council tax and housing benefit claims.

County Councillor Chris Metcalfe