

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

10th October 2007

STATEMENT OF THE COMMUNITY SERVICES PORTFOLIO HOLDER (Adult Social Care, Library and Information Services)

COUNTY COUNCILLOR CHRIS METCALFE

New Adult and Community Services Management Board Appointment

I am pleased to advise you of the recent appointment of Mike Faulds to the post of Assistant Director – Commissioning and Partnerships. Mike will join us from Cornwall County Council where he has worked in both strategic and operational management roles, more recently specialising in commissioning. He therefore brings a wealth of experience to this key role.

Mike will take up his responsibilities with the Council in the New Year.

Digital Pen and Paper

We are currently trialling an innovative way of working which improves the way that vital information about service users is shared between different organisations. People needing care services may receive visits from a number of different organisations, including the County Council, District Council, voluntary organisations and the NHS. They all need the same sort of information, and the service user can find that they repeat themselves on numerous occasions to different staff.

The Single Assessment Process or SAP has been running in North Yorkshire since 2003, and it aims to share information with the consent of the service user, so that they only have to give their details once. Recently a new tool has been introduced to further improve the process. Staff take notes using a digital pen, which contains a tiny camera, and special digital paper. The pen captures what has been written, and the information is transferred securely using a mobile phone to a shared database.

The service user is given a copy of the information straight away, and it can be shared with trusted family members or other professionals who might visit them. Staff also report that using the digital pen they are able to spend more time with the individual, and less time filling in forms. The process gives the service user more control over their own records, which is very much in tune with the new direction for social care services. We believe that this is the largest trial of digital pens and paper in the UK, and I am very pleased that North Yorkshire is leading the way in the use of this technology.

Directorate Best Practice Awards

I was delighted to be invited to present awards to staff who had been recognised for their achievements in improving services. The Adult and Community Service Best Practice Awards are presented annually and seek to recognise and share good practice, so that where real improvements for citizens have been achieved, these can be replicated across the county.

There were many outstanding examples of staff actively striving to improve the services that they deliver. Winners this year included a project to raise awareness of services for the over 50s by promoting them in libraries, and an innovative service delivering an out of hours care at home service for older people in the Craven area.

Dementia Awareness – Staff Success

Between January and March 2007, 101 Adult and Community Services staff, mainly Resource Workers, were enrolled onto a distance learning course on dementia awareness. With a rapidly ageing population, dementia is an increasingly common condition, and it can be very demanding for those who provide care.

I am pleased to report that our staff had a 100% success rate, and that one of them was selected for the 'outstanding student' award.

The training will result in real improvements in service for people with dementia, as the staff are putting a number of ideas that they learnt from the course into practice. There is already a waiting list for the next intake, demonstrating the commitment of our staff to providing the very best care.

Book Therapy

A successful partnership between our libraries and colleagues working in the health sector is being extended across the county.

Research demonstrates that people suffering from mild to moderate depression can be helped by having access to good self-help materials as part of their treatment. The book therapy scheme allows health professionals to recommend titles from a collection of self-help materials held in libraries.

The scheme was piloted in the Harrogate, Hambleton and Richmondshire districts in 2005/6 and was so successful that it is now being introduced at other libraries across the county. The original booklist has been updated after consultation with York and North Yorkshire PCT and the Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Trust and now includes books, audio books and a list of websites.

This is an extremely positive example of how we can work with partners to deliver an enhanced service to citizens.

Upgrades to Public Access Computers in Libraries

I am delighted to announce a major upgrade of the County Council's public access library computers. The popularity of this service has been growing since the installation of the People's Network over three years ago. This upgrade brings a range of improvements for our citizens, and puts us at the cutting edge of technology.

Developments include faster computers with a range of new software and improved access to multimedia content such as podcasts, radio and video clips from, for example, the BBC. The new PCs also offer improved accessibility features, such as large text and text to speech conversion.

During 2006 over 404,000 individual computer sessions were logged in North Yorkshire's libraries. Our surveys show that over half of the people using our PCs do not have access to a computer at home, so we are playing a vital part in helping people to cross the 'digital divide'.

In addition, a new wireless broadband connection is now available in Northallerton Library, giving business travellers, commuters, tourists and shoppers the ability to access email and the internet on their own laptops via a wireless connection.

Access to Services

The Council continues to develop its approach to increasing accessibility services. At the forefront of this is the Council's Customer Service Centre which is the main focal point for telephone calls into the County Council. The centre operates as a switchboard for the whole of the County Council. In addition the centre has for a number of months now been resolving highways enquiries that would previously have been made to individual depots and helping to resolve other enquiries of a general nature.

Since the 3 September 2007 the Customer Service Centre has been dealing with all telephone enquiries that would previously have been made to the Adult Services Customer Relations Units. These calls cover a range of adult and children's social care issues. A specialist team has been recruited from existing CRU staff to operate within the Customer Service Centre. The centre offers extended opening hours from 8.00 am through to 8.00 pm on a week day as well as opening from 9.00 am through to 5.00 pm on a Saturday. Staff from the Customer Service Centre are working closely with managers from Adult Services to ensure that this new method of service provision operates smoothly and provides a high quality service to customers. Early indications are that the increased accessibility provided by the customer service centre has led to an increase in social care related calls by approximately 25%. This increase in demand in itself presents challenges in terms of capacity however it also indicates the demand that exists for a more accessible service.

In the month of September alone the Customer Service Centre responded to approximately 36,000 calls with an average response time of around nine seconds.

One of the difficulties that the Customer Service Centre has experienced is the major changes that have been taking place to the Council's telephone infrastructure. This has led to some difficulties for some customers in contacting the Council whilst this work has been ongoing. These problems are not related to the development of the Customer Service Centre.

In conjunction with the Customer Service Centre face to face advice is being provided in joint customer access centres that are being developed in conjunction with district partners. The County Council has a target to develop 34 access points across the county and work continues to realise this target.

County Councillor Chris Metcalfe