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these issues be addressed in conjunction with the Panel and proposals be reported to this Committee at a later date.

The Director further reported that the amended regulations strengthened the Panel's focus on adoption. The Council had also used this Panel to recommend the approval of foster carers. The appropriateness of continuing this arrangement was now brought into question, because some of the issues dealing with the approval of foster carers as a resource for the department were different from those dealing with adoption. It was therefore proposed that the Adoption Panel constituted under the regulations should no longer recommend the approval of foster carers, but a similar group be set up to do so. This Panel would have a similar mix of representation, but the independent and social worker representatives would be chosen because of the contribution they could make in the field of fostering rather than adoption. Instead of the present Adoption and Fostering Panel meeting fortnightly, the Adoption Panel and the Fostering Panel would each meet 4 weekly.

**(A) RECOMMENDED - That subject to the approval of the Policy and Resources Committee**

- (i) the consideration of fostering issues be removed from the Adoption Panel and be allocated to a separate Working Party known as the Fostering Panel to meet in alternate fortnights;
- (ii) the Director of Social Services be given delegated powers to (a) Appoint the Agency Social Work members on the Panel; (b) Appoint the independent representation on the Panel; and (c) Accept the recommendations of the Panel on behalf of the Council.

**(B) Resolved -**

- (1) That Councillor M J Green be appointed to serve on both the Adoption and Fostering Panels for a period of one year, Councillor J G Stedmon be appointed to serve on both Panels for a period of two years and Councillor M Groves be appointed to serve on both Panels for a period of three years.
- (2) That checks on prospective members of both Panels be carried out with the Police, NSPCC and departmental records or other local authority records.
- (3) That other issues arising from the amended regulations be addressed in conjunction with the Adoption Panel, and proposals reported to this Committee at a later date.

31. **FUTURE SERVICES FOR PEOPLE WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES**

Further to minute 139 (5/3/97) and minute 26 (1/7/97), the Director of Social Services reported on the anticipated growth in the number of adults with Severe

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Learning Disabilities, needing both residential and day-time occupational services, the current types of service provided and possible future directions.

There were in Wirral 1000+ adults (over the age of 19) and 685 children identified as having severe learning difficulties. Of the 1000 adults, 400 were known to live with family carers, mostly parents and some other relatives, 164 lived in hostels or group homes provided by Social Services, 108 had places in independent sector homes/hostels in Wirral and 35 were living in placements out of the borough. Of the remaining approximately 300, some lived in their own accommodation while others did not access any social services as yet, so that their living arrangements were not known. The Social Services budget for all purchasing and provision of accommodation for Adults with Severe Learning Disabilities was £4.754 million. This budget was substantially overspent in 1996/97 with numbers of places having to be purchased in homes outside the borough as Social Services homes were fully occupied. It was impossible to forecast with real accuracy the accommodation needs year by year, but given the age profile of family carers and the special needs factors, it seemed reasonable to assume that at least 100 new beds were likely to be needed over the next 3-5 years and of those, 25 would be required for people with special care needs. Continuing work was needed with the Health Authority to develop a more accurate forecast of exactly what type of accommodation was going to be needed.

With regard to day care, Social Services in Wirral provided a total of 620 places in Day Centres, offering a service to some 700 plus people. Of those places, 113 were for people with special care needs and 20 were for older service users. In addition, the Department purchased a small number of places from the independent sector. The total Social Services budget for Day Care, both purchasing and provision, was £3.17 million. The Director reported that some people, particularly those with special needs, will always need day centre places, but the Department will have to develop alternative activities outside day centres to cope with the difficulties in planning for what was a steadily increasing, though small, number of vulnerable people, requiring some service at different levels for different individuals. Staff at day centres have already started organising such activities and the review of services will continue to look at options for this.

The Director further reported that the Committee had already agreed proposals on the Community Living Strategy in which it had been proposed that people move from hostel settings into tenancies, offered by Housing Associations, in smaller settings. Most of those moving into such units in the first instance would come from Homes owned and run by the Authority or from Homes run by the independent sector, where the local authority purchases places. There were financial implications attached to this policy and the Director proposed that in future, all independent living schemes were organised in such a way that they: (i) provide tenancies on a rented basis to residents where housing benefit was claimed to a level to cover all the maintenance responsibilities and the furnishings and fittings of any communal areas; and (ii) ensure that every tenant was assessed by the DSS for

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benefit levels according to their need for support and that each tenant was then charged at the rate of dependency assessed for the care package he or she needs.

**Resolved -**

- (1) That the Committee notes the report and agrees that officers pursue the directions described to develop services.
- (2) That the Director reports back to a future meeting of this Committee on the results of consultations with users.
- (3) That the Committee agrees that in independent living situations, tenants in receipt of the Disabled Living Allowance Care Component and/or the Severe Disability Premium, be charged the amount offered by those benefits to contribute to the cost of their care packages.

32. **COMMUNITY CARE (DIRECT PAYMENTS) ACT UPDATE**

Further to minute 131 (5/3/97), the Director of Social Services reported that the Direct Payments Act came into effect in April, 1997. However, the final version of Practice and Policy Guidance on the implementation of the Act was received in May, 1997, while draft Guidelines on Accounting and Financial Management of the Act from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy were received in June for consultation. Wirral had responded to the consultation, requesting clarification on a number of issues. Direct payments had the potential to have a significant impact on the Social Services Department budget and the way it provides services, particularly if the plan of the previous Government to consider extending direct payments to people over 65 in 1998 was followed.

In light of the expectation that a full direct payments system would be implemented by September 1997, funding for Living Options Independent Living Project which offers advice on accessing the Independent Living Fund and runs a pilot direct payments scheme was allocated for the six months between April and September 1997. Since this was not likely to be in place before April 1998, Living Options would require the second half of their annual funding - £15,251 in order to be able to continue the project. This amount had remained unallocated in the voluntary sector budget.

**Resolved -**

- (1) That the report be noted.
- (2) That funding for the Living Options Independent Living Scheme be allocated to cover 1 October 1997 to 31 March 1998 for the sum of £15,251.