

ADULTS AND HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

6th March, 2012

PRESENT – Councillor Thistlethwaite (in the Chair), Councillors Harman, Hutchinson, B. Jones, Mrs. D. Jones, Kelley, Lister, Maddison and York. (9)

APOLOGIES – Councillors L. Haszeldine and Knowles. (2)

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Pauline Mitchell, Assistant Director – Adult Social Care and Housing within services for People and Miriam Davidson, Director of Public Health Darlington Borough Council/NHS County Durham and Darlington.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillor Copeland.

AH10. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

AH11. MINUTES - Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 15th January, 2012.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes be approved as a correct record.

AH12. WORK PROGRAMME 2011/12 – The Director of Resources submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to the work programme items scheduled to be considered by this Scrutiny Committee during the current Municipal Year.

The submitted report outlined those areas where this Scrutiny Committee had previously identified it would like to focus its work over the next Municipal Year and also emphasised that the work programme was a rolling programme and any Member of this Scrutiny could request an item to be included provided that a Quad of Aims had been submitted to the Scrutiny Committee prior to ensure that it contributed to the strategic aims of the Council.

The submitted report outlined the original Work Programme and requested Members to reconsider the Work Programme to accommodate further issues that need to be included and approve a number of Terms of Reference for some additional items.

RESOLVED - (a) That the current status of the Work Programme be noted.

(b) That the submitted Terms of Reference in respect of the Adults Autism Strategy, the Allocation of Accommodation and the Introduction of Tenancy Strategy and Policy appended to the report be approved.

AH13. A REVIEW OF THE KEY MESSAGES IN THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH ANNUAL REPORT 2009/10 AND THE ACTIONS TAKEN TO ADDRESS THE RECOMMENDATIONS – The Director of Public Health County Durham and Darlington submitted report (previously circulated) presenting the findings of the review of actions that had been taken in response to the key messages from the annual report 2009/10, which focused on the health of older people with contributions from this Council and a guest chapter co-authored by Age Concern Durham and Age UK Darlington.

Miriam Davidson, Director of Public Health County Durham and Darlington introduced the report and highlighted that both men and women were living longer due to improved health and social care and that Darlington's population was ageing and by 2020 over 40 per cent of the total population would be aged 50 years plus and approximately 10 per cent would be aged 75 years and older.

The submitted report highlighted the range of actions that had been taken in relation to the response to the key messages and it was reported that work had been commissioned to ensure that older people not only had access to good quality health care services but they had access to opportunities to maintain good health and independence.

The Chair informed the Committee that a Special Meeting of this Scrutiny Committee and Health and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee would be arranged to consider the Darlington Dementia Collaborative final report and to be informed of the key outcomes from the report.

Discussion ensued on the screening programmes for conditions more prevalent in later life, the Dementia Collaborative and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) report on Dignity and Nutrition for Older People. Questions were raised in relation to the pathway of diagnosis of dementia, the social intervention within care homes, the responsibility of this Authority in relation to dignity and nutrition within the private care homes and the difference in care provided in care homes. Suggestions were also raised in relation to this Committee undertaking a piece of work to explore quality data from CQC on care homes.

RESOLVED – (a) That the actions taken to address the key messages in the Director of Public Health Report 2009/10 with the overall aim to help people get the most from later life be noted.

(b) That a representative from Tees Esk and Wear Valley NHS Foundation Trust be invited to attend the special meeting of Adults and Housing Scrutiny Committee and Health and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee to present on the pathway of diagnosis of dementia.

AH14. ALLOCATION OF ACCOMODATION: GUIDANCE FOR LOCAL HOUSING AUTHORITIES – The Director of People submitted a report (previously circulated) informing Members of the issues identified within the Government's consultation on the proposed changes to the statutory guidance on social housing allocations in England.

The Assistant Director, Adult Social Care and Housing reported that the Government have recognised that there was a significant shortage of social housing and as a consequence in many areas only people who were in the highest levels of housing need were able to access Social Housing, which has led to concerns in relation to high concentrations of people with multiple needs and that current Allocations Policies reduced the opportunities for those who were seeking work or were working.

The submitted report highlighted that the proposed new guidance was intended to assist authorities to take advantage of the provisions in the Localism Act 2011 and give back local authorities the freedom to manage their own waiting lists, and make it easier for them to move existing social tenants to more suitable accommodation.

It was highlighted that allocations for Darlington were managed by the sub-regional Choice Based Lettings Scheme 'Compass' and that a jointly agreed allocations policy was already in place, which was currently been reviewed by the Steering Group to ensure that it addresses changing needs.

Members considered the Council's initial response to the questions that were attached to the Governments consultation and were informed that the specific impacts of the introduction of a flexible local approach was not likely to be challenging for either Compass or Darlington.

Discussion ensued on the possibility of restrictions/limits being placed on individuals who could apply for access to the waiting list and what is happening across the Tees Valley region.

RESOLVED – (a) That the report be noted.

(b) That the review that is being undertaken by Compass Members form the basis for any changes to the Allocations Policy.

(c) That the main features of any revision to the Allocations Policy be considered as part of the draft Strategic Tenancy Policy.

(d) That officers explore the restrictions on individuals who can apply for access to the waiting list and report back to this Scrutiny Committee at a later date.

AH15. INTRODUCTION OF TENANCY STRATEGY AND POLICY – The Director of People submitted a report (previously circulated) informing Members of the requirement on all Local Authorities to publish a Tenancy Strategy, that provides the framework for future delivery of new affordable homes and the issues that need to be addressed. All stock retention authorities are also required to publish a Tenancy Policy which reflects the Tenancy Strategy.

The Assistant Director, Adult Social Care and Housing highlighted that the Governments housing reforms had given affordable housing providers greater freedoms that would allow them to provide new tenants with a fixed term tenancy if it was felt to be more appropriate than offer a lifeline tenancy, determine the length of the fixed-term offered to each tenant on an individual basis, set out the criteria to determine whether or not to re-issue a new tenancy at the end of a fixed-term and build new homes and re-let homes under the new affordable rent tenure.

The submitted report outlined the purpose of the strategy and highlighted that it had to be introduced within 12 months from 15 January 2011, the date when the relevant provision of the Localism Act came into force and that all Tees Valley Authorities aimed to reach agreement on a Sub-Regional Tenancy Strategy by November 2012.

Particular reference was made in relation to the need of regular monitoring and reviewing of the strategy to ensure that it continued to reflect the needs of Darlington and it was thought that an initial review within the first 12 months of implementation would be prudent and that monitoring the impact of the strategy would be done through a range of sources.

Discussion ensued on concerns in relation to setting a strict policy in relation to where fixed term tenancies might apply or not be reissued if this approach differed significantly from neighbouring authorities, the staffing and cost implication in relation to the appeals process and the need for more information in relation to fixed term tenancies before any recommendations and decisions were made and to also seek what other Local Authorities were doing across the Tees Valley region.

RESOLVED – (a) That the report be noted.

(b) That further information be sought in relation to providing new tenants with a fixed-term tenancy and also clarify what other Local Authorities have agreed on this across the Tees Valley region.