

## **ADULTS AND HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

24th April, 2012

**PRESENT** – Councillor Thistlethwaite (in the Chair), Councillors Harman, L. Haszeldine, Hutchinson, B. Jones, Mrs. D. Jones, Kelley and Knowles. (8)

**APOLOGIES** – Councillors Lister, Maddison and York. (2)

**OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE** – Anthony Sandys, Head of Revenues and Benefits and Mark Humble, Strategic Commissioning Manager Learning Disability and Mental Health, within Services for People.

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE** – Dr. Helen Pearce and Anne Cahill, Tees Esk and Wear Valley NHS Foundation Trust.

**AH16. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST** – There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

**AH17. MINUTES - Submitted** – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 6th March, 2012.

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

**AH18. MINUTES** – Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of the Special Joint Scrutiny Committees on 21st February 2012.

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

**AH19. 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 Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults and Telehealth Care appended to the report be approved.

**AH20. IMPACT OF THE HOUSING BENEFIT REFORMS** – The Director of People submitted a report (previously circulated) updating Members on the impact of the Housing Benefit Reforms that were introduced in April, 2011.

Anthony Sandys, Head of Revenues and Benefits introduced the report and highlighted that in April, 2011, the Department for Work and Pensions had introduced a significant programme of reform to the Housing Benefit and Council Tax benefit scheme including the reduction of Local Housing Allowance rates for people claiming housing benefit in privately rented accommodation, changes to the direct payment provisions to landlords for people claiming housing benefit in privately rented accommodation, increases to deductions from Housing Benefit and Council tax Benefit for non-dependents living in the household and restrictions on the amount of Local Housing Allowance single people under thirty five could receive.

The submitted report outlined that many of the reforms had affected people living in privately rented accommodation and that there had been an increase over the last few years in the number of people in the private rented sector claiming Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit due to the economic climate.

Particular reference was also made in relation to the longer term reforms which would be implemented from April, 2013, including an overall maximum limit on benefits one family could claim, which would be around £26,000 each year, or £500 per week, the proposal of the Government replacing Council Tax Benefit with new Council Tax Support schemes, Local Welfare Provision replacing the Social Fund, Universal Credit replacing all existing means tested benefits and direct payment for social rented tenants.

Discussion ensued on the effects the reforms would have on homelessness, how the Department for Working Pensions calculate the distribution of Discretionary Housing Payments funding to Councils, whether there was provision for more hostels and the need for an action plan with options on how we can support organisations.

**RESOLVED** – That the report be noted.

**AH21. FULFILLING AND REWARDING LIVES: THE STRATEGY FOR ADULTS WITH AUTISM IN ENGLAND** – The Director of People submitted a report (previously circulated) providing Members with the opportunity to scrutinise the Adult Autism Strategy action plan and to consider whether this Authority was meeting the statutory guidance set by the Government in relation to meeting the needs of adults with autism.

The submitted report highlighted that following the Autism Act 2009 that was published in November, 2009 the Government published the Adult Autism Strategy ‘Fulfilling and Rewarding Lives’ in March, 2010, which outlined a number of key actions and recommendations for central government, local authorities, the NHS and jobcentre plus. In response to that this Authority has developed a local action plan to deliver the outcomes of the strategy.

Mark Humble, Strategic Commissioning Manager Learning Disability and Mental Health outlined the progress that had been made in Darlington so far and highlighted that in 2009 Durham and Darlington Council’s and the PCT formed the Autism Service Development Group, which meets to develop joint services across the area and Darlington also plays an active part in the regional Autism group that looks to share best practice and develop a strategic response to supporting people.

Particular reference was also made in relation to the employment pathway that was currently being developed in conjunction with jobcentre plus for people with a learning disability, that would include a pathway to support people with autism. Initial plans were also in place to a hold

a market event at the Dolphin Centre on 22nd may, 2012 for local providers who could meet the needs of individuals with autism.

Dr. Helen Pearce, Tees Esk and Wear Valley NHS Foundation Trust presented on the pathway of diagnosis of autism and explained the work that the NHS had undertaken in relation to delivering on the statutory guidance in terms of better training, diagnosis, transition to adult services and local planning and leadership and that in some of these elements we appeared to be well ahead of other local authorities.

Discussion ensued on the number of adults with autism within Darlington, the need for early intervention to detect individual's needs and to help stop any deterioration to individual's health and life style, the need for professionals to gain the correct training for individuals to be diagnosed correctly, to include the awareness raising of autism with the Police force within the action plan to prevent any potential problems, the transition from child to Adult Mental Health Services and the potential for an autism summit to be arranged to include key stakeholders to seek and understand the current position for people with autism and their carers to help develop the action plan thereon.

**RESOLVED** – (a) That the report be noted.

(b) That work of officers in relation to the action plan be commended.

(c) That an autism summit be arranged that will include key stakeholders to seek and understand the current position for people with autism and their carers to help develop the action plan thereon.

(d) That a further report and updated action plan be brought to this Scrutiny Committee at the end of the year to enable this Scrutiny Committee to monitor the action plan.