

## ADULTS AND HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

18<sup>th</sup> June, 2013

**PRESENT** – Councillor Thistlethwaite (in the Chair); Councillors Mrs D. Jones, Kelley, Knowles, S. Richmond and York (6)

**APOLOGIES** – Councillors Harman, Hutchinson, B. Jones, Lister and J. Lyonette(5)

**OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE** – Ann Workman, Assistant Director - Adult Social Care, People Group, Hazel Neasham, Head of Housing, Alan Glew, Head of Place (Programmes and Projects), Place Group and Janet Walke, Senior Business Officer, Resources Group

**AH1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST** – There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

**AH2. RESOLVED** – That meetings of this Scrutiny Committee be held at 9.30 a.m. for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2013/14.

**AH3. MINUTES** – Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of a meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 23<sup>rd</sup> April, 2013

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

**AH4. WORK PROGRAMME** – 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 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 to ensure that it contributed to the strategic aims of the Council.

It was reported that the possibility of undertaking a joint piece of work with the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee in relation to young and adult carers had been discussed at the last meeting of the Monitoring and Co-ordination Group and that this work would now be taken forward.

Members also requested that an update report on the impact of the Welfare Reforms, specifically in relation to Housing Benefits, be submitted to the next meeting of this Scrutiny Committee and reference was also made to the current position in relation to Telehealth and Telecare and to the possibility of re-commencing that piece of work.

**RESOLVED** – That the current status of the Work Programme be noted.

**AH5. CHALLENGING PERFORMANCE :MAKING A DIFFERENCE** - The Senior Business Officer, Resources Group, gave a presentation on the Council's Performance Management Framework which was adopted in 2012.

Discussion ensued on the role of Members, particularly Scrutiny Members, in challenging performance across service areas within their remits; the key performance measures which had been identified through service and delivery plans; the monitoring and challenge processes already in place and the remedial action taken following that challenge to address underperformance and improve outcomes for customers; the definition of some of the key PI's; their current performance and the role of this Scrutiny Committee in scrutinising areas of concern within its remit.

The Head of Housing and the Assistant Director Adults Social Care gave some background and an explanation around some of the key performance indicators which were included in the presentation.

**RESOLVED** - That the thanks of this Scrutiny Committee be extended to the Senior Business Officer for her informative presentation and that, where appropriate, any performance information which is available be used to inform any future work programme of this Scrutiny Committee.

**AH6. FRANCIS REPORT** – The Assistant Director, Adults Social Care gave a presentation on the issues and implications for this Council and its partners following the findings of the Mid-Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust Public Inquiry (the Francis Inquiry) into care at Stafford hospital between 2005 and 2008.

The Assistant Director outlined the background to the Inquiry, which examined the actions of the hospital and the roles of those organisations with oversight, together with the findings and conclusions which had resulted in 290 wide ranging recommendations being made.

It was also reported that, although the inquiry had related its findings to within the NHS, there were specific recommendations that were aimed at local authorities as well as more general findings which were applicable to any organisation whose actions impacted on the quality and safety of services provided to the public and that detailed plans to address the recommendations would be developed in partnership with all partner agencies.

Particular reference was made to those recommendations which particularly referred to the role of Council's Scrutiny Committees and discussion ensued on the need for this Scrutiny Committee to have access to detailed information about complaints, taking into account patient confidentiality, and the operation of the complaints process within this Council.

**RESOLVED** – That the thanks of this Scrutiny Committee be extended to the Assistant Director Adult Social Care for her presentation and that further work be undertaken by this Scrutiny Committee in line with the recommendations as, and when, appropriate.

#### **AH7. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN AND BUDGET SAVINGS PROPOSALS**

– The Director of Resources submitted a report (previously circulated) together with a report (also previously circulated) which had been considered by Cabinet at its meeting held on 9<sup>th</sup> April, 2013, in relation to a number of budget savings proposals which would deliver £2.252 million in 2013/14 and £3.337 million of savings, following full implementation.

It was reported that a number of the proposals, which had been approved by Cabinet on 9<sup>th</sup> April, 2013, related to areas within the remit of this Scrutiny Committee and discussion ensued on whether it wished to undertake any further work at an early stage to identify and scrutinise the potential risks and impacts associated with the proposals or to defer consideration to enable the full impact of the proposals to be assessed at a later date.

**RESOLVED** – That consideration of this item be deferred to give time for the proposals to be embedded and that any impact be re-assessed at a later date if necessary.

#### **AH8. WELFARE REFORMS :SUPPORT TO COUNCIL HOUSING TENANTS –**

The Director of Place submitted a report (previously circulated) updating Members on the impact and challenges the Welfare Reforms were having on the work of Housing Services and the way in which those challenges were being addressed.

The submitted report referred to the significant impacts the Welfare Reforms had for many Council tenants and particular reference was made to the impact of the introduction of the Bedroom Tax in April 2013 and, in the longer term, the introduction of direct payments of Housing Benefit in 2014 as part of the implementation of Universal Credit which, it was anticipated, would have an even greater impact. It was however, reported that, since the introduction of the Bedroom Tax in April 2013, there had been no significant increase in rent arrears.

The submitted report outlined the current position in respect of those Council tenancies initially affected by the Bedroom Tax and those potentially affected by the introduction of Universal Credit, together with the work of Housing Services in trying to make contact with all those affected to discuss the implications and options for dealing with any loss of income and a number of changes in the way in which housing services were being delivered as a result of the welfare reforms which included mutual exchanges, revisions to the Housing Allocations Policy and process, the re-designation of some properties, where appropriate and there was a sound business case, from four to three-bedroomed properties; a more flexible approach to rehousing tenants in rent arrears, provided it improved the financial position of the tenant by moving to smaller accommodation and arrangements were in place to address the arrears; and work involved in gathering more detailed information on the personal and financial circumstances of tenants.

Reference was also made to the introduction of a dedicated Money Advice Service for Council tenants and a number of other initiatives which the Council could undertake to reduce the increasing risk of rent arrears by helping tenants to address some of the issues created by debt.

**RESOLVED** – That the report be received and the changes in the way in which Housing Services are being delivered as a result of the Welfare Reforms be noted.

**AH9. REVIEW OF HOME IMPROVEMENT SERVICE** – The Director of Place and the Director of People submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting Members' views on a review of the Home Improvement Service.

It was reported that the contract for the current Home Improvement Service, known as 'care and repair', which had been due to expire in March 2013, had been extended for a further period of six months to September 2013, to enable a comprehensive review of the service to take place and the submitted report set out the future options available to this Council in re-tendering the Contract.

Reference was made to the four elements of the Home Improvement Service (Disabled Facilities Grants, General Advice and Information, Financial Assistance Loans and the Handyman Service) which were currently delivered by Three Rivers Housing Association and which covered both statutory and non-statutory services, together with the key aim of the review to retain all statutory functions including advice, information and financial assistance as they supported the Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) statutory function.

Particular reference was made to the Handypersons element of the service which was non-statutory and to a proposal that that part of the service be decommissioned due to the financial constraints of the Council and discussion ensued on the impact of this on elderly residents who relied on the service; usage of the service; and the need to ensure that discussions were on-going, if the service was decommissioned as part of the Contract, about how the service could be delivered through the voluntary sector.

Updated information on the Equality Impact Assessment which had been undertaken as part of the review was given at the meeting.

**RESOLVED** – That Cabinet be advised of this Scrutiny Committee's view that :-

(i) the existing Home Improvement Service contract should be extended for the period 1<sup>st</sup> October to 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2014;

(ii) that the Home Improvement Service should be re-tendered to include the provision of :-

Disabled Facilities Grants  
General Advice and Information  
Financial Assistance loans

(iii) the Handyman's Service should be decommissioned and should not for part of the re-tender specification but, that alternative self-financing models or alternative models as outlined in the Equality Impact Assessment mitigation be further explored outside of the tender process; and

(iv) the procurement of the contract should be designated as a strategic procurement by Cabinet

**AH10. NUTRITION IN CARE HOMES – (i) Notes of a Meeting - Submitted –** The Notes (previously circulated) of a meeting of the Nutrition in Care Homes Task and Finish Review Group held on 1<sup>st</sup> May, 2013.

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

**(ii) FINAL REPORT** – The Director of Resources submitted report (previously circulated) together with a final report (also previously circulated) of the Nutrition in Care Homes Task and Finish Review Group which had been established by this Scrutiny Committee to look at nutrition and hydration in those care homes currently contracting with this Authority.

It was reported that the Task and Finish Review Group had met on a number of occasions and, as part of its investigation, had received information from a Senior Specialist, Focus on Under-nutrition Dietician, undertaken both announced and unannounced visits to a number of care homes and had examined standards in relation to Nutrition and the relevant Quality Standards. .

It was also reported that following the work, the Task and Finish Review Group had concluded that it was confident that there was sufficient evidence to ensure that the Quality Standards in relation to nutrition and hydration within care homes were being met and that any issues which might occur in the future would be dealt with promptly and efficiently by Officers within the Contracts Team.

**RESOLVED** – That the following recommendations of the Group be approved :-

(a) the thanks of this Task and Finish Review Group be conveyed to the Assistant Director – Adult Social Care and all the staff within the Contracts Team for the support and advice given during this investigation;

(b) the thanks of this Task and Finish Review Group be conveyed to Rachel Masters, Senior Specialist, Focus on Under-nutrition Dietician for her initial involvement and presentation which gave Members the background to enable them to undertake the investigation;

(c) this Task and Finish Review Group is re-assured that Focus on Under-nutrition is involved with the care homes currently contracting with this Council and is actively involved in monitoring and giving advice and training to their staff on nutrition and hydration; and

(d) this Task and Finish Review Group is confident that there is sufficient evidence to ensure that the Quality Standards in relation to nutrition and hydration within care homes are being met and that any issues which might

occur in the future would be dealt with promptly and efficiently by Officers within the Contracts Team.

**AH11 – ADULT SAFEGUARDING TASK AND FINISH REVIEW** – Submitted – The notes of a meeting of the Adult Safeguarding Task and Finish Review Group held on 12<sup>th</sup> March, 2013.

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