

ADULTS AND HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

4th March, 2014

PRESENT – Councillor Thistlethwaite (in the Chair); Councillors Harman, D. Jones, Kelley, Knowles, Lister, S Richmond and York. (8)

APOLOGIES – Councillors Hutchinson, B Jones and J. Lyonette, (3)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillors Copeland and Newall.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Ann Workman, Assistant Director Adult Social Care, , Pauline Mitchell, Assistant Director Adults and Building Services, Duncan Clark, Interim Assistant Director – Commissioning, Seth Pearson, Director of Darlington Partnership, Hazel Neasham, Head of Housing, Sharon Raine, Head of Organisational Planning and Peter Roberts, Consultant – Sustainable Community Strategy.

AH31. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

AH32. MINUTES - Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meetings of this Committee held on 7th and 14th January, 2014.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes be approved as correct records.

AH33. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATGEY – The Head of Organisational Planning gave a presentation on the achievements and performance against the key delivery themes included in the 2008 -2021 Darlington Sustainable Community Strategy, One Darlington: Perfectly Placed (also previously circulated).

The presentation included statistical performance information in respect of those key indicators where information was available since 2008, and it was reported that, in the main, improvements were evident across the indicators, however, the economic indicators had not shown the expected improvement which was as a result of the current economic climate.

The Head of Organisational Planning reported that, although the current Strategy had previously been approved for the period 2008 -2021, it had been agreed to revisit and refresh that Strategy in the light of the Council's current financial position and the significant changes to the national economic situation and that Cabinet and Council had developed a 'Vision on a Page' (also previously circulated) which set out updated outcomes and new conditions to reflect that current climate. The Vision had been developed in a way which showed the overall role of the Council in driving forward the vision for Darlington and would enable all partners to focus on the same vision, outcomes and conditions, whilst developing a statement about their own roles and the steps they would need to take within their own organisations.

Particular reference was made to eight outcomes which were contained within the Vision which had been identified as key for its continued delivery and Members were

requested to consider what they felt were the most important key performance indicators to measure achievement against those objectives and how, through the work of the Scrutiny Committee, it could contribute to ensuring progress towards the outcomes.

Discussion ensued on the revised SCS document which was currently being developed, its purpose in ensuring that the Council and its partners all focussed on the same vision, outcomes and conditions; the reliance on other partners and agencies to be able to deliver the Vision; the need to engage communities and build on some of the work which was already in place such as the good friends scheme; the role of the Council as a supporter/enabler; and those key outcomes which were within the remit of this Scrutiny Committee and where it could focus its future work programme.

It was reported that further work on developing the detailed delivery of the Vision was currently being undertaken and that a draft Sustainable Community Strategy document would be submitted to a future meeting of this Scrutiny Committee for Members consideration.

RESOLVED – That the report be received and that further discussions on those outcomes which fall within the remit of this Scrutiny Committees take place at the next ordinary meeting of this Scrutiny Committee scheduled for 22nd April, 2014.

AH34. THE SCOPE OF POVERTY IN DARLINGTON, WELFARE REFORMS AND THE PARTNERSHIP RESPONSE – The Chief Executive submitted a report (previously circulated) providing Members with an update of the work undertaken through the Darlington Partnership to understand poverty in Darlington and how the Partnership was working with the Council and its partners to provide appropriate interventions for those in crisis.

The Director of the Darlington Partnership informed Members of a letter which had been received by the Leader of the Council from the Principal of Darlington College which highlighted concern for students who were ill because they had not eaten as their family had no food and that it had been suggested that a short term enquiry group should be formulated to take evidence from front line organisations and seek solutions to effectively relieve the impacts of poverty.

It was reported that almost 11,000 working age adults, 4,500 children aged 0-17 and 3,000 pensioners in Darlington were living in households with a disposable income of less than £13,312 per annum, who were classed as living below the “poverty line” as defined by the agreed international measure used throughout the European Union and that, of these families, 66 per cent had at least one person working.

Particular reference was also made to an Assembly which had been held by the Darlington Partnership which focused specifically on Welfare Reforms and their impact on Darlington and it was reported that the Partnership was aiming to mobilise resources to ensure that all agencies and partners worked effectively together to mitigate the impact of welfare reforms on individuals, families and communities and that the work being done to achieve this included; an online booking system to allow referrals between the participating agencies, the developments of a chat service

provision to enable professional to identify sources of help and make referrals and the creation of an observatory and problem solving group to enable front line agencies to co-ordinate the support provided to those affected by welfare reforms.

Discussion ensued on the membership of the observatory and problem solving group; the support being made available in particular wards through community settings to those in crisis and the possible extension of that support to additional wards ; work being undertaken by the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee in relation to child poverty; the findings of the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) regarding the rise in the number of pay day loans being taken; zero hour contracts and the living wage; the issues faced by pensioners in poverty; and the possible longer-term effects on the Council's Council Tax and rental income.

RESOLVED – That the report and the work being undertaken be noted.

AH35. CO-PRODUCTION WORK – The Interim Assistant Director – Commissioning gave a presentation on the work currently being undertaken between the Council and the Third Sector to look at how co-production could be used to deliver services in Darlington in the future.

The presentation outlined the background, concept and key elements of co-production, which involved partnership working to seek to achieve a valued outcome which would empower citizens and communities to contribute; time, willpower, expertise and effort, and to have greater control over service decisions and resources in the future.

The Interim Assistant Director – Commissioning reported that regular meetings were taking place with Council Officers and democratically elected representatives via the Third Sector Organisations from Age UK, Darlington Association on Disability, First Stop and Mind to discuss how services could be delivered differently in the future and how partner organisations could work together in the design and delivery of those services.

It was reported that the current work was focussing on the development of rules of engagement and that this Scrutiny Committee could be updated on the progress of this work in the future.

RESOLVED – That the presentation be noted and that a progress report on the development of the rules of engagement be submitted to next ordinary meeting of this Scrutiny Committee scheduled for 22nd April, 2014.

AH36. DIRECT PAYMENTS – The Assistant Director – Adult Social Care gave a presentation on Direct Payments, which were payments, made by the Council, to those residents who had been assessed as meeting the eligibility criteria for needing support from social care and who wished to arrange and pay for their own support.

It was reported that the aim of direct payments was to encourage individuals to be as independent as possible and to encourage maximum individual choice and control and particular reference was made to the factors to consider for a person to receive a direct payment which included mental capacity to consent to a direct payment and

the ability to manage those payments and to the support process, including support provided by Darlington Association on Disability, which was now available to those people who were in receipt of a direct payment.

Discussion ensued on the type of support the direct payment could be used for; the current take-up rates of direct payments within Darlington and the monitoring role which was in place to prevent any possible misuse of the payment.

RESOLVED – That the presentation be noted.

AH37. COUNCIL HOUSING STOCK HEATING AND INSULATION – The Director of Neighbourhood Services and Resources submitted a report (previously circulated) updating Members on the current position in relation to the Council's housing stock with regards to heating and insulation and to the work currently being undertaken to tackle fuel poverty.

It was reported that off-gas households were particularly affected by fuel poverty and we were advised that there were currently 145 Council properties which were off-gas, however, the majority of these were being considered for inclusion in a project with Northern Gas Networks to connect to a gas supply in the next year.

It was also reported that all Council properties with cavities were insulated and all lofts insulated with at least 150 millimetres of loft insulation and that 67 of the Council's new build properties benefited from Solar PV with seven Council housing property roofs being leased to Sadberge Renewable Energy Limited, a local private based company, to support PV installations to enable tenants to benefit.

Particular reference was made to the measures taken to address heating and insulation issues, together with a number of future considerations and discussion ensued on the increasing numbers of tenants who reported condensation and dampness mainly due to not adequately heating and ventilating their homes because of concerns around high energy costs.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

AH38. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES AND SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE HOUSING SERVICES TEAM – The Director of Neighbourhood Services and Resources submitted a report (previously circulated) providing Members with an overview of the services currently provided by the Housing Service Team.

The submitted report referred to the teams within Housing Services which included; Housing Options, Asset Management, Tenancy Empowerment, Lifeline Services, Housing Tenancy and Housing Administration and Accounts and it was reported that these teams worked together in a cohesive manner to fulfil the roles which included; the operation and management of the housing waiting list, the provision of a comprehensive Housing Option service, allocation and management of the Council's stock and housing estates, the provision of money advice and tenancy support, the collection of rents and outstanding debt recovery, support to tenants to maintain their agreements, ensuring the housing stock was properly maintained and the provision

of Lifeline Services to all tenants in sheltered housing and both private and Council housing.

RESOLVED – That the report be received.

AH39. WORK PROGRAMME – The Director of Neighbourhood Services and 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 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.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted and that further discussions thereon take place at the next ordinary meeting of this Scrutiny Committee scheduled for 22nd April, 2014.