

ADULTS AND HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

10th January, 2012

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

APOLOGIES – Councillors Thistlethwaite and York. (2)

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Pauline Mitchell, Assistant Director – Adult Social Care and Housing, Hazel Neasham, Head of Housing, Chris Harris, Housing Asset Manager and Janette McMain, Housing Team Leader within services for Place and Heather McQuade, Finance Manager for Housing and Adult Social Care within Resources Group.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillor Copeland.

AH6. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

AH7. MINUTES - Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of the this Scrutiny Committee held on 8th November, 2011.

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

AH8. (1) OVERVIEW OF HOUSING – (a) Housing Options including Choice Based Lettings and the Key Point of Access – Janette McMain, Housing Team Leader gave an overview of the Housing Options Team and highlighted the statutory duty of the Local Authority and the criteria that the Council must follow in relation to assessing claims of homelessness. It was reported that from 2008 to 2011 there had been an increase in the number of clients that had sought advice from the Housing Options Team peaking in 2010 with over 2300 clients.

During the presentation the Housing Team Leader informed members of the background of the Key Point of Access (KPA) which was a joint project between First Stop Darlington and this Council funded by Supporting People, that aimed to help people in Darlington who were currently homeless, or at a risk of becoming homeless due to problems that they need support with. The KPA pathway plan was highlighted and it was reported that in the last year there had been 642 clients who had accessed the system with 336 of those cases still open, 229 clients receiving floating support or have been placed in step down accommodation or self-contained accommodation and at present there were 137 clients on the waiting list. It was also highlighted that at present officers were exploring the procurement process for temporary accommodation to enable Bed and Breakfast businesses to tender for the service and make them aware of client's needs.

As part of the presentation members were also informed of Compass the choice based lettings scheme which was made up of partner organisations including neighbouring local authorities, Erimus Housing, Tristar Homes, Coast and Country Housing and Housing Hartlepool, which operate in the Tees Valley sub region and was designed to offer more choice and involve applicants in selecting a new home. The process for accessing and prioritising applications was highlighted and it was explained that each client was banded according to their needs. Vacant properties were advertised on a weekly basis and applicants were invited to place bids for properties, which ensured openness, transparency and a customer led approach.

Discussion ensued on the accommodation that was made available for homeless people, whose responsibility it would be to pay for any damages in temporary accommodation, the high demand for council housing, the referral system that is in place for homeless people who have no connection/links in Darlington and the overall costs of the administration of the KPA scheme.

(b) Housing Revenue Account and Asset Management Strategy – Pauline Mitchell, Assistant Director, Adult Social Care and Housing gave an overview of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and informed members of the HRA subsidy system reform which would be devolved to local authorities to manage themselves and meant that this Council would gain full control of their housing income and expenditure. In return for being able to manage our own HRA, each council who have their own housing stock would be allocated a share of the national housing debt, totalling some of £28 billion.

During the presentation members were also informed of the Government's plans to reinvigorate the Right to Buy scheme and one for one replacement proposals that were out for consultation at present, which set out the Government's intention and commitment to increase the caps on Right to Buy discounts, to encourage more tenants to take up the Right to Buy. It was also highlighted that 75 per cent of the sale of each home sold under the Right to Buy scheme had to be given to Central Government and that only the remaining 25 per cent of the sale could be retained by the Council.

Chris Harris, Housing Asset Manager also gave a presentation on the Asset Management Strategy that aimed to provide the framework to develop detailed planned maintenance programmes that deliver commitments made in the Housing business plan and intended to support decisions in relation to re-investment to ensure the sustainability of the stock in the future. The objectives of the Asset Management Strategy were highlighted. The presentation also covered the work that had been completed in relation to the sheltered accommodation and Extracare investment, the current estate regeneration projects at Skerne Park and Cockerton; other planned programmes that would be undertaken in terms of fencing, replacement of defective paving, garage repairs, roofing and pre-paint joinery and decoration in 2011/12; new Council Housing that had been built at Richmond Close, Beadnell Close, Burnside Road and Dinsdale Close; adaptations and particular reference was made in relation to the budget for 2011/12.

Discussion ensued on the Government's plan to reinvigorate the Right to Buy scheme and the implications that this would have on Darlington, the procurement process for the rebuilding/renovating schemes that were on-going and whether the work would be contracted in house to Building Services rather than externally, the budget for 2011/12 and the concerns that the issues that have occurred during the Parkside Regeneration project would not occur at Cockerton.

(c) Tenant Enforcement – Hazel Neasham, Head of Housing gave an overview on the Tenancy Enforcement policy and procedure that were approved by Council and the Darlington Community Safety Partnership and applied to all tenants to ensure that they and their neighbours could live in without conflict. It was reported that there were eight management officers that dealt with low level cases on their patches and there were two specialist officers that dealt with the more serious and complex cases, who work closely with Community Safety, Police and Probation and Children and Adult Social Services. The enforcement actions that were undertaken in both 2010 and 2011 were highlighted together with the Wards affected.

(d) Tenancy Support – The Head of Housing also gave a presentation on the Tenancy Support scheme that was established to support people for up to ten hours per week in both council and private rented accommodation into independent living. The aim and benefits of the scheme were highlighted together with the support available to vulnerable adults with multiple and sometimes complex needs. Particular reference was made in relation to the cost of the scheme and it was highlighted that at present this Council received £121,000 per annum from the Supporting People funding but this was to reduce by 10 per cent in 2012/13 and that in the last twelve months 107 clients had been supported with 95 of those clients completing their support and were still in settled accommodation.

(e) North East Regional Review of Health Needs of the Ex-Service Community Recommendations – Members questioned the current position in relation to the recommendations of the North East Regional Review of Health Needs of the Ex-Service Community that related to housing matters and the Assistant Director of Adult Social care and Housing responded and reported that all of the recommendations specific to this Council had been addressed, although, the majority of the recommendations were regional issues and that Gateshead Council were leading on those.

RESOLVED - (a) That the content of the presentations be noted and thanks of this Scrutiny Committee be extended to all officers for the informative and interesting presentations.

(b) That a report be brought back to this Scrutiny Committee on the North East Regional Review of Health Needs of the Ex-Service Community recommendations once the regional group have met.

(2) 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 namely, Personal Budgets, Role of Carers and the Director of Public Health's Report 2009/10 'Keeping Older People Healthy'. Cabinet had requested views on the proposals contained within the Medium Term Financial Plan and this Committee has established a Review Group to consider the proposals within its remit.

RESOLVED – (a) That the report be noted.

(b) That the Terms of Reference for the Audit of recommendations from the Director of Public Health's Report 2009/10 'Keeping Older People Healthy in Darlington' be agreed.

(3) REVIEW GROUPS AND TASK AND FINISH REVIEWS – Discussion ensued on the presentation that Members received on the Housing Benefit Reform Review Group and it was suggested that a copy of that presentation be circulated to Members of this Scrutiny Committee and that a report be brought to this Scrutiny Committee in April informing them of the impacts of the reforms.

RESOLVED – That a report be submitted to this Scrutiny Committee in April updating Members on the impacts of the reforms.

AH9. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN TASK AND FINISH REVIEW GROUP FINAL REPORT – The Director of Resources Group submitted a report (previously circulated) presenting the outcome and findings of the Task and Finish Review Group established by the Adults and Housing Scrutiny Committee to scrutinise the budget proposals contained within the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for the period 2012/13 to 2015/16, within the remit of the Adults and Housing Scrutiny Committee and the future impacts on services.

RESOLVED – That the Adults and Housing Scrutiny Committee endorse the conclusions and following recommendations of the Medium Term Financial Plan Task and Finish Review Group and be submitted to the special meeting of the Efficiency and Resources Scrutiny Committee on 26th January 2012 :-

- (a) **Review of Support and Consultation with Older Adults** – That the Group welcome the review and that the Adults and Housing Scrutiny Committee be informed of the outcomes of the review.
- (b) **Review of Carers Service Contracts** – That the Group welcome the review and that the Adults and Housing Scrutiny Committee be informed of the outcomes of the review.
- (c) **Finance Protection Service** – That the Group agree with the implementation of the charges.
- (d) **Adult Transport Provision** – That the Group raise their concerns on the review and that this Scrutiny Committee be informed of the outcome of the review.