

ADULTS AND HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

7th January, 2014

PRESENT – Councillor Thistlethwaite (in the Chair); Councillors Harman, Hutchinson, B Jones, D. Jones, Kelley and Knowles (7)

APOLOGIES – Councillors Lister, J. Lyonette, S. Richmond and York (4)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillor Copeland

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Ann Workman, Assistant Director, Adult Social Care, Peter Akers, Housing Asset Management and Elizabeth Goodchild, Green Economy Officer

AH22. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

AH23. MINUTES – Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of a meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 5th November, 2013.

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

AH24. 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.

Particular reference was made to the piece of work this Scrutiny Committee was undertaking in relation to safeguarding adults and to the commencement of the next strand of that piece of work which related to medication in Care Homes and domiciliary care. The Assistant Director, Adult Social Care briefed Members on an initial meeting which had been held with a number of partners to identify their individual experiences and concerns in relation to medication in care homes and domiciliary care and that discussions had been held on how Members of this Scrutiny Committee could be involved in any further work.

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

(b) That a Task and Finish Review Group be established comprising Councillors Harman, Hutchinson, Kelley, B. Jones, D. Jones, Knowles and S Richmond to undertake some further work in relation to Medication in Care Homes and

Domiciliary care and that visits to a number of care homes by those Members be arranged as an initial starting point.

AH25. HOUSING BUSINESS PLAN 2014/15 – STRATEGIC OPTIONS - The Director of Place submitted a report (previously circulated) advising Members of the strategic options being considered as part of the Housing Business Plan 2014/15.

The submitted report outlined the purpose of the Housing Business Plan 2014/15, which covered the 30-year period from 2014/15, but which was reviewed annually, to ensure that the Council had a financial plan which was sustainable and focussed investment towards strategic priorities to ensure that housing properties were maintained to the Darlington standard and reflected Council tenants' key priorities.

Particular reference was made to three key strategic priorities which had been identified during the development of the Business Plan, which related to the regeneration of Red Hall to address poor performing stock particularly within the Courts area and in the light of major planning and development works at Lingfield Point and the East Urban Fringe; the development of new housing to meet local need, to support the General Fund through the receipt of New Homes Bonus and to support the Housing' Services Business Plan; and to provide new cost effective accommodation and support options for children and social care clients together with the resources available to deliver on those priorities and the different options as to how resources could be aligned against the priorities.

Discussion ensued on the Red Hall Regeneration project, particularly in relation to the building of new housing around the estate to improve the tenure mix and attract additional services with the estate such as food shops, small businesses and health care; the primary reasons for building new homes which included the need for affordable housing within the Borough; the generation of income, through the Governments New Homes Bonus scheme into the Council's General Fund; and as an income stream in terms of rental income to the Council.

Particular reference was also made to statistical data that almost 20 per cent of fuel poor households nationally were in rural locations; to a number of Council properties within the rural part of the Borough which were off gas areas and used electric heating and to the work which was being undertaken in relation to those properties to increase energy efficiency and to assist them in reducing heating costs, such as the installation of double glazing and composite doors; and to the feasibility of this Council installing solar panels on Council housing stock to generate income and to reduce tenants' energy bills.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted and that a briefing note on the possible use of solar panels on Council housing stock be circulated to Members of this Scrutiny Committee.

AH26. FUEL POVERTY – ADVICE TO TENANTS AND TO VULNERABLE GROUPS – The Director of Place submitted a report (previously circulated) updating Members on the fuel poverty issues nationally and locally and the advice and support given to Council tenants and vulnerable groups within the Borough.

The submitted report outlined the definition of 'fuel poverty'; the three main factors which contributed to it i.e. rising energy costs, inadequate heating and insulation and low income; the work currently being undertaken by the Council and its partners to tackle fuel poverty through a variety of measures at a range of strategic, delivery and support and advice levels; the launch by the Government of an annual competition and standards review entitled a 'Green Levy Review' of social and environmental levels on energy bills, together with proposed changes to streamline, improve and simplify the Green Deal and the rising energy costs over at least the next 17 years based on the National Audit Office projections.

Discussion ensued on the impact of fuel poverty on the elderly and vulnerable groups and the need to ensure that advice and support was available to them in relation to the options available to reduce their energy costs; the key challenges facing the Council in addressing energy efficiency measures and to planned works to a number of tenant's properties as part of a two-year energy efficiency programme; the role of Warm up North and the Green Deal which allowed households to benefit from many different types of energy efficiency improvements with help to meet the upfront cost as long as the energy cost saving over the lifetime of the improvement was greater than the cost of the improvement; the need to promote Darlington's Big Community Switch as an innovative way for consumers to group together to buy energy; the use of the Council's Social Fund to award gas and electricity top-ups to those in crisis and immediate need; advice and support given by external partners and the need to ensure that the Council's housing stock had adequate heating and insulation.

RESOLVED - That the report be received and the Officers be requested to submit a report to a future meeting of this Scrutiny Committee on the current position in relation to the Council's housing stock in terms of heating and insulation.

AH27. ADULT SOCIAL CARE NE REGIONAL PEER CHALLENGE – The Director of People submitted a report (previously circulated) together with presentation slides (also previously circulated) outlining the key messages and outcomes from the Adult Social Care Peer Review which took place from 19th to 21st November, 2013.

The submitted report outlined the key areas which the Team had been requested to consider which included how the assessment and care management function was operating at the present time, and how might this develop/be developed in the future; how do staff and organisational culture support Adult Safeguarding as an integral element of the assessment and care management function, and with wider partners and partnerships, including the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub?; how are staff and other resources deployed to deliver safe and effective services, and to improve quality of assessment/packages of care?; and how does existing provision impact on the assessment and care management function, including RIACT (The Responsive Integrated Assessment and Care Team) Reablement service, Learning Disability Life stage Service, and in-house provision?.

It was reported that a part of the review, the Team had held interviews and discussions with Councillors, Officers and Partners; focus groups with managers, practitioners, frontline staff, and service users and carers; and had considered a

number of documents provided by the Council, both in advance of, and during the Challenge.

The Assistant Director Adult Social Care reported that the initial feedback from the Team had been extremely positive and had identified many strengths in the Council's Adult Social Care Service and that, once the final report had been received, discussions would take place on the next steps.

RESOLVED – That the report be received and the final report be circulated to all Members of this Scrutiny Committee once it is available.

AH28. VISIT TO KINGS CHURCH AND FRADE – The Director of Resources submitted a report (previously circulated) advising Members of visits to the Kings Church and FRADE which had been undertaken by some Members of this Scrutiny Committee on the 7th and 8th November 2013, respectively.

RESOLVED – That the report be received.

AH29. VISIT TO MULTI-AGENCY SAFEGUARDING HUB - The Director of Resources submitted a report (previously circulated) advising Members of visits to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub which had been undertaken by some Members of this Scrutiny Committee on the 12th November, 2013.

Discussion ensued on the involvement of the police within the Hub and a Member requested that further information be submitted to a future meeting of this Scrutiny Committee on the success and achievements of the MASH

RESOLVED – That the report be received and that a representative of the Police and the Head of Review and Development be invited to a future meeting of this Scrutiny Committee to give an update on the work and achievements of the MASH.