
OVERVIEW OF ADULTS AND HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

1. Since the last meeting of the Council, the following are the main areas of work the Adults and Housing Scrutiny Committee has undertaken :-
 - (a) **Director of Public Health's Report 2009/10 'Keeping Older People Healthy Living in County Durham and Darlington'** – We invited the Director of Public Health for Darlington to our meeting to present the findings of the review of actions that had been taken in response to the key messages from the annual report 2009/10, which focused on the health of older people with contributions from this Authority and a guest chapter co-authored by Age Concern Durham and Age UK Darlington. We were informed that the Darlington's population is ageing and by 2020 over 40 per cent of the total population will be aged 50 years plus and approximately 10 per cent will be aged 75 years and older. We were pleased with the range of actions taken in relation to the response to the key messages. Work has been commissioned to make sure older people not only have access to good quality health care services but that they have access to opportunities to maintain good health and independence. The Committee was particularly interested in the work that has been undertaken in relation to improving mental health and will be holding a Special Meeting with the Health and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee to consider the Darlington Dementia Collaborative and its key outcomes and also invite a representative from Tees Esk and Wear Valley NHS Foundation Trust to present on the pathway of diagnosis of dementia.
 - (b) **Allocation of Accommodation: Guidance for Local Housing Authorities in England** – Following the number of inter related consultations flowing from the Localism Act 2011 we received a report informing us of the issues identified within the Government's consultation on the proposed changes to the statutory guidance on social housing allocations in England. The proposed new guidance is intended to assist authorities to take advantage of the provisions in the Localism Act 2011 and give back local authorities the freedom to determine which categories of applicants should qualify to join our waiting lists, retain the current 'reasonable preference' categories, introduction of priority for Ex-service personnel and for people who are fostering and adopting and also the introduction of a computerised national mutual exchange scheme. We were informed that the Choice Based Lettings Scheme 'Compass' that this authority use to manage allocations have an agreed Allocations Policy already in place which is currently been reviewed by the Steering Group to ensure it addresses changing needs. We considered this Authority's initial response to the questions that were attached to the Government's consultation and it was pleasing to note that the specific impacts of the introduction of a flexible local approach are not likely to be challenging for either Compass or Darlington and we have requested that officers explore the restrictions on individuals who can apply for access to the waiting list and report back to us at a later date.
 - (c) **Introduction of Tenancy Strategy and Policy** – We considered the scope of the new requirements from the Localism Act 2011 to publish a Tenancy Strategy and Policy that

provides the framework for the future delivery of new affordable homes and the issues that need to be addressed. We were informed that the Governments housing reforms have given us greater freedoms that will allow us to provide new tenants with a fixed term tenancy if it is felt to be more appropriate than offer a lifeline tenancy, determine the length of the fixed-term offered to each tenant on an individual basis, set out the criteria to determine whether or not to re-issue a new tenancy at the end of a fixed-term and build new homes and re-let homes under the new affordable rent tenure. We raised concerns in relation to setting a strict policy in relation to where fixed term tenancies might apply or not be reissued if this approach differed significantly from neighbouring authorities. The need for an appeals process was discussed and we expressed our concerns that this would have staffing and cost implication. We agreed therefore that we would like to consider what other Local Authorities are doing across the Tees Valley region.

- (d) **Work Programme** - We have given consideration to the Work Programme for this Committee for the Municipal Year 2011/12 and possible review topics and in doing so, we have taken into account the reduced resources available and ensured that, in recommending our work programme to Monitoring and Co-ordination Group, that any work we undertake will have demonstrable outcomes and contribute to the work of the Council and its strategic aims and objectives.

Councillor Bryan Thistlethwaite
Chair of Adults and Housing Scrutiny Committee