
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 :-

Work Programme

2. We further discussed the work programme and the work we are undertaking. As you will see from this report safeguarding adults remains a priority for us and we will continue to include this in all aspects of our work programme. We will soon be starting our next task and finish review group work in relation to safeguarding and the areas covered will include financial assessments for the calculation of an individual's contribution towards the costs of care and the guidance and support to people in relation to this; medication and polypharmacy in care homes; the Dementia Strategy and Dignity in Care, particularly in relation to incontinence.
3. We will also continue to receive reports on the impact of the Welfare Reforms and its effects on Council tenants.

Nutrition in Care Homes Task and Finish Review Group – Final Report

4. We have considered the final report of the Nutrition in Care Homes Task and Finish Review Group which was established to look at nutrition and hydration in those care homes currently contracting with this Council.
5. The Task and Finish Review Group met on a number of occasions and, as part of its investigation, received information from a Senior Specialist, Focus on Under-nutrition Dietician, undertook both announced and unannounced visits to a number of care homes and examined standards in relation to Nutrition and the relevant Quality Standards. .
6. In reaching its findings 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.
7. I would also like to take this opportunity to thanks those Members and Officers who participated in this work. Work in relation to safeguarding adults remains a priority for us and we will keep Council informed of any further work we undertake.

Francis Report - Presentation

8. The Assistant Director, Adults and 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.
9. The presentation highlighted 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 we had a discussion around how we could achieve this and it will be included as part of our work programme.

Budget Saving Proposals

10. Cabinet, at its meeting held on 9 April, 2013, agreed a number of budget savings proposals, some of which related to areas within the remit of our Scrutiny Committee, and we were requested to consider whether we should undertake any further work to identify and scrutinise any potential risks arising from those proposals at an early stage of implementation.
11. We agreed that it would be more appropriate to allow time for the proposals to be embedded and we will assess any impact at a later date if necessary.

Welfare Reforms: Support to Council Housing Tenants

12. We have received an update report on the impact and challenges the Welfare Reforms, specifically the Bedroom Tax which was introduced in April 2013, are having on the work of Housing Services and the changing role of that service to adapt and meet those challenges.
13. The Welfare Reforms, as Members will be aware, will have significant impacts for many Council tenants and Housing Services are working very closely with those tenants to mitigate the impact and have introduced a number of measures to try to reduce the increasing risk of rent arrears by helping them to address some of the issues created by debt.
14. We did however, note that, since the introduction of the Bedroom Tax, there had been no attributable increase in rent arrears.
15. We will continue to receive update reports on the impact of these Reforms.

Home Improvement Scheme

16. A review of the current Home Improvement Service, known as 'Care and Repair' is currently being undertaken by Officers and we were consulted on the work being undertaken as part of that review to enable our views to be fed into Cabinet.

17. There are four elements to the Home Improvement Service, which is currently delivered by Three Rivers Housing and the key aim of the review is to enable all the statutory functions, including advice, information and financial assistance, as they supported a statutory function to be retained, with that element of the service which was not statutory i.e. the handypersons service being decommissioned.
18. We did discuss the take up of the Handyperson's Service and the impact of decommissioning that service on the elderly who relied on the service and we felt that, if Cabinet did decide to decommission this in view of the current financial constraints, discussions needed to take place on how the service could be delivered through the voluntary sector.

Challenging Performance, Making a Difference

19. We received an informative presentation on the Council's Performance Management Framework which was adopted in 2012 and discussed the role of Members, particularly Scrutiny Members, in challenging performance across service areas within their remits and how they could use the information to inform and assist with any future work programme topics.

Councillor Bryan Thistlethwaite
Chair of Adults and Housing Scrutiny Committee