
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.

The Scope of Poverty in Darlington, Welfare Reforms and the Partnership Response

2. The Director of the Darlington Partnership attended our meeting to give us an update on the work which has been undertaken to date through the Darlington Partnership to understand poverty in Darlington and how the Partnership is working with the Council and its partners to provide appropriate interventions for those in crisis. The poverty issue was raised through the Partnership by Tim Grant, Principal of Darlington College who wrote to the Leader of the Council explaining that they were seeing for the first time, students who were ill because they had not eaten that day as their family had no food.
3. There are almost 11,000 working age adults, 4,500 children aged 0-17 and 3,000 pensioners in Darlington who are living in households with a disposable income of less than £13,312 per annum who are classed as living below the 'poverty line', as defined by the agreed international measure used throughout the European Union.
4. In addition, we were also advised of an Assembly held by the Darlington Partnership which focussed specifically on Welfare Reforms and their impact on Darlington. The Partnership is aiming to mobilise resources to ensure that all agencies and partners are working effectively together to mitigate the impact of welfare reforms on individuals, families and communities and we were advised of the work which is being done to achieve this such as an on-line shared booking system which will allow participating agencies to make referrals to each other; the development of a chart of service provision to enable professionals 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 they provide to people affected by welfare reforms.
5. Welfare Reforms is an area of work we have previously undertaken some work on and it is on our work programme to continue to monitor.

Sustainable Community Strategy

6. Members will be aware that the current Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) is currently being refreshed and updated in the light of the changed financial and economic circumstances since its approval in 2008 and we have, as have all other Scrutiny Committees, been given the opportunity to develop appropriate

mechanisms to enable the SCS to be updated.

7. The SCS is an important document for the Borough and, together with the Vision which has been approved by Council, will enable us and our partners to all focus on the same vision, outcomes and conditions whilst considering our roles and the steps we need to take within our own organisations.
8. Our work programme over the next Municipal Year will be aligned to the key outcomes of the SCS and we will continue to monitor performance against those key outcomes for those areas which our Scrutiny Committee has responsibility.

Co-Production Work

9. We have been updated on the current work currently being undertaken between the Council and the voluntary sector to look at how we can use co-production to deliver services in Darlington in the future and tackle the challenges that we face.
10. Regular meetings are held 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 and how partner organisations can work together in the future in the design and delivery of those services.
11. Further information on the progress of this work will be reported to our next meeting in April.

Direct Payments

12. We also had a presentation on direct payments, which are payments, made by the Council, to those residents who have been assessed as meeting the eligibility criteria for needing support from social care and who would like to arrange and pay for their own support.
13. The aim of direct payments is to encourage individuals to be as independent as possible and to encourage maximum individual choice and control. Our presentation covered 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 which was now available to those people who were in receipt of a direct payment.

Council Housing Stock Heating and Insulation

14. As part of the work we have been doing in relation to fuel poverty and the advice the Council offers to tenants and to vulnerable adults and groups within the Borough, we received a report on the current position in relation to the Council's housing stock with regards to heating and insulation and the work currently being undertaken to tackle fuel poverty issues.
15. We were advised that all Council properties with cavities are insulated and all lofts insulated with at least 150 millimetres of loft insulation; that 67 of the Council's new

build properties benefitted from Solar PV; and that the Council had leased seven Council housing property roofs to Sadberge Renewal Energy Limited, a local private based company, to support PV installations to enable tenants to benefit. Off-gas households are particularly affected by fuel poverty and there are a number of households within the Borough which are off-gas, 145 of which are Council properties, however, we were advised that the majority of those properties were being considered for inclusion in a project with Northern Gas Networks to connect to a gas supply next year.

16. There is an increasing trend in the number of tenants who report condensation and damp issues mainly due to not adequately heating and ventilating their homes because of concerns around high energy costs and we need to encourage residents to change their behaviour to prevent this as condensation dampness is regarded as a major public health risk.

Housing Services Team – Roles and Responsibilities

17. Housing Services covers a wide range of services and we have received a brief update on the areas of work which the individual teams are involved with to help us to gain an understanding of the roles and responsibilities.

Councillor Bryan Thistlethwaite
Chair of Adults and Housing Scrutiny Committee