
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 Care Act – An Update on Progress

2. Scrutiny has received a further update on the progress made both locally and regionally in relation to the implementation of the Care Act, which came into force on 1 April 2015. We were advised that, although good progress is being made, the Care Act does present all Local Authorities with a complex and demanding project plan that is currently working with a significant number of unknowns.
3. We discussed the major challenges faced, particularly as the Council progressed towards the first tranche of the changes that the Act outlined; those areas where demand on capacity might be following implementation of the Act; the two work-streams which we have previously expressed an interest in being involved with in relation to the workforce and finance; and the current position in relation to the consultation on the Care Cap, which ended on 31 March 2015.
4. There is a requirement within the Act for the Council to provide information and advice to all its residents, whether or not they have an eligible care need or were known to the Authority in order to aid the prevention agenda and ensure that residents were considering their future care needs long before the need for that care arose and we were advised of the work currently being undertaken with the Customer Services Centre to design a front line information and advice offering service and the involvement of partners in other public services and the voluntary and community sector who were equipped to provide advice services and signposting to residents.
5. We did discuss the duty within the Act for the Authority to provide independent advocacy for those who meet the qualifying condition and we were advised that the Council was currently working with Darlington Association on Disability (DAD) on an advocacy pilot for six months, which would help determine the increase in the number of advocates needed to be commissioned and would assist with tracking the financial impact of the new provision.
6. We did record our concern about the significant challenges the Act presents for the Council and the significant number of unknowns ahead and will continue to monitor this through the work programme.

Performance Management – Quarter 3

7. We received a detailed graphical presentation on the performance management information in relation to those service delivery indicators within the remit of our Scrutiny Committee as at Quarter 3.
8. The presentation focussed on the Healthy and Independent and Enough Support when Needed indicators in relation to adult social care and we were advised that the Housing based indicators would be better reported at Quarter 4.
9. Discussion ensued on the positive trend of the indicators and the work being undertaken which was contributing towards that positive effect and the improved reporting process which was now undertaken which was proving to be extremely useful to Members.

Changes to the Structures of Customer Engagement in Housing Services

10. We were advised of a review which has recently been undertaken to consider how the Council engages with its customers in relation to the planning and delivery of its housing services and the means by which this is undertaken.
11. The Council has consulted with its tenants through the Tenants Board for a number of years and this has been largely successful, however, we were informed of a number of significant developments which have driven the need for change, such as the development of digital technology and the opening of another channel of communication, particularly with young people, through social media, changes in lifestyles and patterns which impacted on when people could be involved and to what extent, and the need for communities to become more self-reliant in view of the economic and social changes that were taking place.
12. The new structure comprises three distinct areas of activity that incorporate or re-design some of the existing functions and the transition from the existing structure took place from April 2015.

Preventing Homelessness Strategy 2015-17

13. We were requested to comment on the proposed Darlington Preventing Homelessness Strategy 2015-17.
14. There is a requirement, under the Homelessness Act 2002, for all local authorities, to develop a Homelessness Strategy every five years, based on a review of the local homelessness situation.
15. We were advised that the numbers who were approaching the Council for help has been showing a consistent but small increase over the past five years and that this has presented a key challenge within the new strategy, which focusses on further strengthening the Council and its partners approach to prevention.
16. The Council has also just had a peer review of homelessness services and the feedback from the review is that the Council is providing excellent services and, in

particular, homeless prevention was highlighted as very successful and on an upward trend, and that partnership working is positive and pro-active. The review did highlight some areas for further improvement and these will be incorporated into the Action Plan.

Councillor Bryan Thistlethwaite
Chair of Adults and Housing Scrutiny Committee