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**OVERVIEW OF ADULTS AND HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

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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 have further considered our Work Programme and will be commencing a piece of work in relation to adult mental health services and, as part of our on-going work in relation to Adult Safeguarding, we will also be looking at medication in care homes.
3. We have also undertaken visits to FRADE and Kings Church to look at how they operate their Furniture Schemes and the Food Store at King's Church and, if we feel it relevant, we will undertake some further work in relation to these schemes and how the social fund operates to ensure that we make the best use of the resources available to help those most in need.
4. In addition to the above, Members have also visited the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) which has recently relocated to a new office in Darlington Police Station. Members will be aware that the MASH is a multi-agency, co-located service which shares information between agreed partners, in a secure environment with the aim of reducing risks of significant harm to children, young people and vulnerable adults. The Health Service are also locating key staff within the MASH.

**Housing Strategy Annual Monitoring Report**

5. We have considered the first annual monitoring report of the Housing Strategy 2012-17, which had been approved in July 2012. It is pleasing to note that good progress has been made in the first year of implementation and that the Strategy is on course to meet the six objectives with 51 per cent of the milestones being achieved in the first year of a two-year rolling programme and a further 34 per cent on schedule.
6. The only area which is falling short is the provision of housing to meet local needs. However, this is not a problem unique to Darlington and work is continuing to try to increase the number of completions. The forecast number of affordable housing completions, if achieved, will more than meet the target for this year and the shortfall for last year.

7. There has also been a reduction in the number of empty properties from 1,813 last year to 1,550 this year.
8. It is pleasing to note that objective 5 in relation to the provision of good quality and timely advice to tenants to prevent crisis, increase choice and enable access is being achieved, particularly with the impact and challenges presented by the implementation of welfare reforms and the Bedroom Tax and that the vast majority of the milestones in relation to effective support and opportunities for vulnerable groups were being met. We also discussed fuel poverty and the work currently being undertaken in relation to this and we will have a presentation to a future meeting on this as a wider issue.

### **Adult Social Care – Peer Review**

9. We were also advised of a Peer Challenge Review of Adult Social Care took place over three days from 19<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> November, 2013. The Local Government Association led a team consisting of a Director of Adult Social Care, a Lead Member and an experienced Assistant Director from Adult Social Care.
10. The theme for the Peer Challenge was the strategic positioning of Assessment and Care Management, including the present position in relation to use of resources and the effectiveness of adult safeguarding and will help the Council to identify what is working well and highlight where improvements could be made. The feedback from the review will help Adult Social Care to shape its future direction and we will be updated on the outcome when appropriate.

### **Care Bill 2013/14**

11. We have been briefed on the introduction of the Care Bill into Parliament, which is a major step in taking forward the reforms contained in the Government's White Paper – Caring for our Future: Reforming Care and Support and which will modernise social care legislation and will put in place a system which will promote people's well – being.
12. The Draft Bill will have its first reading through the Commons on 29<sup>th</sup> October, 2013, and further consultation thereon will take place until April 2014, with the statute being implemented from April 2015.
13. Some of the key points within the Bill are :-
  - (a) Carers - There is recognition of the key role that Carer's play in supporting those who use care and support. The system would not work without the support they provide. The Bill will therefore extend existing duties on local authorities to assess carers needs, and will for the first time ever, provide a right to support to meet their eligible needs;
  - (b) The establishment of a national eligibility criteria for adult care and support. These will set a minimum threshold for people's care and support needs which must be met by local authorities in all areas. Local authorities will not be able

to restrict eligibility beyond this threshold; and

- (c) The Dilnot recommendations – The introduction of the proposals for a cap on the care costs people should have to pay to meet their eligible needs is likely to see more people approaching the local authority.

14. We will continue to receive briefings on the implementation of the Bill and undertake further work if appropriate.

**Councillor Bryan Thistlethwaite**  
**Chair of Adults and Housing Scrutiny Committee**