
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.

Darlington Housing and Building Services Tenant Scrutiny Panel – Report on Void Properties 2014

2. We have received a report from the Tenant Scrutiny Panel on a review it has undertaken on the procedures and policies used for processing void properties. The Tenant Scrutiny Panel was established to enable tenants to look at the delivery of services provided by Housing and Building Services and this is the first piece of work the group has undertaken. Two representatives of the Scrutiny Panel attended our meeting to present the findings and recommendations which had also been presented to Senior Officers of the Council and we were advised of the progress and current situation in relation to the implementation of those recommendations.
3. As mentioned, this is the first report of the Scrutiny Tenant Panel and this process has been a learning curve for everyone involved. We would like to place on record our thanks to the Panel and look forward to receiving its next report once the second area for review has been agreed in the New Year.

Homeless

4. **Service** - We have received a report outlining the services provided by the Housing Options Team in relation to homelessness and how that Service performs in the delivery of those services. We were advised of the preventative approach to homelessness which has been adopted in Darlington and the on-going work to develop those approaches in partnership with statutory and voluntary sector organisations, which was proving successful in minimising the numbers who actually become homeless.
5. We are aware of the challenges ahead as the number of homeless has begun to increase and more complex cases are being dealt with, and we will need to ensure that there is adequate support and advice available to support those individuals. The Housing Team will continue with its work to develop preventative approaches and, as a Scrutiny Committee, we will also be taking part, at the beginning of next year, in the consultation process on the revised Homelessness Strategy.
6. **Strategic Review** – As part of the proposals contained within the Medium Term Financial Plan, Officers have undertaken a strategic review of the commissioned services for people who were homeless or were at risk of homelessness with a

view to making savings of up to £300,000.

7. We were advised that, following the review, four individual services have been commissioned and tendered for and the contracts have been awarded to commence on 1 January 2015. The Council currently spends £1.2 million on commissioned services for people and it is predicted that savings of £205,000 will be met by 2015/16 and that on-going work will achieve the further savings and we will continue to monitor this. There will be no significant impact on clients.
8. We did discuss the number of 16 and 17 year olds who presented as being homeless and the establishment of a temporary housing options worker post for one year to work in the Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub, to focus on those youngsters alongside Children's Services and Housing to ensure that the Council was fulfilling its statutory responsibility.

Dementia Strategy for County Durham and Darlington

9. Earlier this year, we, together with the Health and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee, participated in the consultation exercise on the draft Dementia Strategy for County Durham and Darlington which was subsequently approved by the Health and Well Being Boards of Darlington and County Durham.
10. The Strategy, which was developed by a Dementia Strategy Task Group comprising a number of organisations within County Durham and Darlington aims to ensure that the needs of people with dementia and their carers are planned for the future and we have received an update on the progress of the implementation of the actions which are to be focussed on over the next three years to address the challenges faced.
11. We were advised of some of the key early achievements which affect Darlington residents and were particularly pleased to hear about the establishment and opening of 'The Arcade', within the basement of the Age UK premises in Bradbury House, which had been established as a dementia friendly environment and was now well used by people with dementia; the delivery of dementia training to all key staff, including GP's and front-line staff, including the introduction of Dementia Champions who would now be able to deliver training to others; and the development of a 'roadmap' as a single point of information for people looking for support and advice.

Performance Management Framework

12. As all other Scrutiny Committees, we have received a presentation on the revised approach to performance management within the organisation which has been adopted to enable an assessment of the achievement of the One Darlington: Perfectly Placed outcomes and the performance of services delivered by the Council which contributed to the achievement of those outcomes to be monitored.
13. Detailed graphical information was also presented showing the summary of performance for Quarter 2 which specifically related to this Scrutiny Committee and we discussed a number of those indicators which related to housing services and

revenues and benefits. Following a question by a Member, it was reported that further work was still required on a value for money assessment methodology for inclusion in the performance clinic information and that this would be completed in readiness for the 2015/16 performance clinics.

14. We have a special meeting in January 2015 and we will be looking, in detail, at the performance information in relation to Adult Social Care at that meeting. It is envisaged that this performance information will enable us to question and challenge Officers on individual indicators and will help inform our work programme going forward.

Medium-Term Financial Plan 2015/16 – 2019/20

15. Again, as with all other Scrutiny Committees, we have been requested to provide a response to Cabinet on its proposals in relation to the Medium-Term Financial Plan for 2014/15 to 2019/20.
16. We received a presentation giving an overview of the current financial position of the Authority; the anticipated further savings which were required by 2020, over and above the current planned savings; the savings achieved to date; progress on the three key areas which it had been agreed would offer the best prospects of the Council being in a position to continue to serve the public well into the long-term i.e. Building Strong Communities, Spending Wisely and Growing the Economy; what the Council spends its money on; and the significant on-going financial challenges and risks ahead.
17. As a Committee, we are kept up-to-date on the implementation of the Care Bill which will have a significant impact on Adult Social Care and we will discuss this more fully at our special meeting in January 2015.

Housing Review Account – Medium-Term Financial Plan 2015/16 to 2019/20

18. Cabinet have agreed to consult on proposals for the revenue budget, rent levels and service charges for the Council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for the financial year 2015/16 and we have agreed to support those proposals.
19. In relation to rent levels, we were advised that the proposal to implement an average weekly rent increase for 2015/16 of 3.43 per cent was in line with the maximum allowed by Government for the purpose of calculating housing benefit payments, and would ensure sufficient funds for investment in the housing stock. We were also advised that 71 per cent of tenants would have this increase covered by benefits payments.

Capital Programme

20. Cabinet has also proposed a 2015/16 Capital Programme for consultation, which we have supported. The majority of the funding for capital expenditure in relation to housing is from the Housing Revenue Account and we have been informed of the priorities identified through the Housing Business Plan which will be funded from the estimated capital resources for 2015/16.

Councillor Bryan Thistlethwaite
Chair of Adults and Housing Scrutiny Committee