

ADULTS AND HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

16 December, 2014

PRESENT – Councillor Thistlethwaite (in the Chair); Councillors Culley, Harman, Kelley and S. Richmond (5)

APOLOGIES – Councillors Hutchinson, D. Jones, Knowles, Lister, J. Lyonette and York (6)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillors Copeland and Newall. (2)

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Pauline Mitchell, Assistant Director Housing and Building Services, Sharon Raine, Head of Organisational Planning, Hazel Neasham, Head of Housing, Yvonne Hall, Service Manager, Development and Commissioning, Debbie Spence, Business Manager, Organisational Planning and Nicola Childs, Supporting People Officer, Development and Commissioning.

REPRESENTATIVES OF THE TENANTS SCRUTINY PANEL - Keith Miller and Arthur Raper.

AH21. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

AH22. MINUTES – Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 21st October, 2014.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes be approved as a correct record.

AH23. DARLINGTON HOUSING AND BUILDING SERVICES TENANTS SCRUTINY PANEL – REPORT ON VOID PROPERTIES 2014 – The Director of Neighbourhood Services and Resources submitted a report (previously circulated) together with a report (also previously circulated) of the Tenant Scrutiny Panel advising Members of the work it had undertaken in relation to a review of the Council's void property process.

The submitted report outlined the background to the formation of the Scrutiny Panel and the work which it had undertaken in relation to the void property process which included the aim of the piece of work and the assistance and information they had received from Council Officers to assist with its review.

Particular reference was made to the key findings of the review and to a number of areas which had been highlighted, which included the need for a dedicated team of staff to deal with voids; the programming of the cleaning process; increased visits to Introductory Tenants and the use of hand-held devices for Building Services staff and it was reported that Officers had responded to each of those areas where appropriate.

Discussion ensued on the positive work undertaken by the Tenant Scrutiny Panel; the work being undertaken by the Council to create a Hoarding Policy and to possible areas of work the Scrutiny Panel may look into in the future.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted and that the thanks of this Scrutiny Committee be extended to the Tenants Scrutiny Panel.

AH24. HOMELESSNESS SERVICE – The Director of Neighbourhood Services and Resources submitted a report (previously circulated) advising Members of the role of the Council's Housing Options Team with regards to homelessness and how it performed in the delivery of those services.

The submitted report outlined the Council's legal responsibilities in relation to its homelessness duty; the requirement under the Localism Act 2011 for local authorities to produce a Homelessness Strategy at least every five years; the level of homelessness in Darlington; and the preventative activities that the Housing Options Service provided either directly or in partnership.

Discussion ensued on the on-going work to develop and adopt a preventative approach in Darlington to either reduce the risk or break the cycle of homelessness; its devastating impact on those who experienced it; the upward trend in the number of cases where homelessness had been prevented; the range of needs of those that presented during 2013/14; the support and assistance provided; and the need to signpost to those services.

It was reported that the approach in Darlington had been very successful in minimising the numbers who actually became homeless and that it was amongst the best performing authorities both in the region and nationally, however, there were challenges ahead as homelessness had begun to grow in recent times with more complex cases being dealt with and that there was often a need to build a team around individual in order to provide effective support.

Members were also advised that the revised draft Homelessness Strategy was currently being drafted ready for publication in 2015/16 and that Members would be involved in the consultation process which was scheduled to commence in January 2015.

RESOLVED – That the report be received and that Officers be requested to provide further information to Members on the CIPFA benchmarking costs for the provision of the Homelessness Services and the breakdown of cases between statutory and non-statutory homeless.

AH25. REVIEW OF COMMISSIONED HOMELESS SERVICES – The Director of Commissioning submitted a report (previously circulated) advising Members of the outcome of a strategic review of homeless services which had been undertaken by the Development and Commissioning section within the People Group.

It was reported that, as part of the saving proposals in the Medium Term Financial Plan, the Development and Commissioning Team had been requested to undertake

a strategic review of the commissioned services for people who were homeless or at risk of homelessness with a view to saving approximately £300,000.

Members were advised that, following the review, four individual services had been commissioned and tendered for and that the contracts had been awarded to commence on 1 January 2015, with predicted savings of £205,000 being achieved by 2015/16.

Discussion ensued on the positive support pathway created to help young people with more managed and planned accommodation moves and greater educational and family support through a range of organisations, the creation of a temporary housing options worker post within the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub to focus on young people becoming homeless, and the organisations that had been successful in winning the four service contracts.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted and that a progress report be submitted to this Scrutiny Committee in six months' time.

AH26. DEMENTIA STRATEGY FOR COUNTY DURHAM AND DARLINGTON – Pursuant to Minute AHHP3/May/14, the Director of Commissioning submitted a report (previously circulated) updating Members on the progress made in respect of the implementation of the Dementia Strategy for County Durham and Darlington.

The submitted report outlined the background to the development of the Strategy and it was reported that the Council was working in partnership with Clinical Commissioning Groups across Durham and Darlington, Durham County Council, local Healthwatch organisations and providers of dementia services to implement the Strategy, which aimed to ensure that the needs of people with dementia and their carers were planned for or the future.

It was reported that although the Strategy was in its early stages of implementation, there had been a number of successes to date which included the establishment and opening of 'The Arcade' within Age UK's premises at Bradbury House, which had been developed as a dementia friendly environment and was being well used by people with dementia; the dementia training being delivered to all key staff, including GP's and front line staff, with the introduction of Dementia Champions who could deliver training to others; and the development of a 'roadmap' as a single point of information for people looking for support and advice.

Discussion ensued on the early successes achieved through the dementia strategy; the training that had taken place within Darlington Borough Council where approximately 100 members of staff had been trained over just six sessions and the ongoing developments in place to continue positive outcomes going forward.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted and that further updates be submitted to this Scrutiny Committee.

AH27. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK – Pursuant to Minute AH18/Oct/14, the Assistant Chief Executive submitted a report (previously circulated)

updating Members on the revised approach to performance management within the organisation which had 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.

The submitted report detailed the baseline performance of One Darlington: Perfectly Placed together with updates on performance for the period April to September 2014. A presentation was given to supplement the information contained within the submitted report.

It was reported that through the Performance Clinic process, the Assistant Directors, Directors and Chief Executive had robustly monitored and challenged performance during the first two quarters of the year and it was also reported that further work was still required on a value for money assessment methodology for inclusion in the performance clinic template, which would be carried out over the coming year for the 2015/16 performance clinics.

Discussion ensued on the excellent performance in relation to the recovery of rents and council tax debt, the reasoning behind the upward trend in the use of Bed and Breakfast style temporary accommodation and the effect of the housing development at Red Hall on the management of void figures.

RESOLVED – That the current position in relation to Performance Management be noted and that the performance figures for Adults Social Care be discussed at a special meeting of this Committee scheduled for January 2915.

AH28. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2015/16 TO 2019/20 – Submitted – A report (previously circulated) of the Chief Officers Executive which had been considered by Cabinet at its meeting held on 2nd December, 2014, proposing a Medium-Term Financial Plan for 2015/16 to 2019/20 for public consultation.

Members also received a presentation, at the meeting, 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.

Discussion ensued on the need to involve communities and support partnership working, the implementation of the Care Act and the impacts on Adult Social Care

and the need to communicate to residents what Council Tax revenue is spent on and the range of services provided.

RESOLVED – That the report be further considered at a special meeting of this Scrutiny Committee scheduled for January, 2015, to enable a response to be formulated as part of the consultation process.

AH29. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT – MTFP 2015/16 TO 2019/20 – Submitted – A report (previously circulated) of the Director of Neighbourhood Services and Resources which had been considered by Cabinet at its meeting held on 2nd December, 2014, to propose the revenue budget, rent levels and service charges for the Council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for the financial year 2015/16 in the context of the HRA Medium Term Financial Plan to 2019/20 and the 30 year Business Plan.

It was reported that the revenue from rental agreements was ring fenced for Housing Stock and that it was key to create a balance between raising rent and developing the Council's Housing Stock. The submitted report outlined the proposal to implement an average weekly rent increase for 2015/16 of 3.43 per cent, in line with the maximum allowed by the Government for the purpose of calculating housing benefit payments which would ensure sufficient funds for investment in housing stock. It was highlighted that 71 per cent of tenants would have the increase covered by benefits payments.

The submitted report also outlined the proposed development of the Council housing stock with a possible growth of up to 90 new dwellings; the regeneration work that was planned at Red Hall to include a demolition project, and provisions of external wall insulation, double glazing and new doors throughout the estate.

Discussion ensued on the supportive views received from the Tenants Board on the proposals; the good quality of the Council's housing stock and the work moving forward to include a focus on empty property regeneration.

RESOLVED – That the report be received and that this Scrutiny Committee supports Cabinet's proposals.

AH30. CAPITAL PROGRAMME – Submitted – A report (previously circulated) of the Director of Neighbourhood Services and Resources which had been considered by Cabinet at its meeting held on 2nd December, 2014, to propose a 2015/16 Capital Programme for consultation.

It was reported that the majority of funding for capital expenditure in relation to housing was from the Housing Revenue Account and that, although the Council was able to supplement Government funding from its own resources, such as capital receipts and borrowing, the ability to do so was severely limited in the current economic climate. There was however, a need to maintain the buildings and assets

which the Council owned and provision needed to be made for this within the Council's overall strategy.

Discussion ensued on the priorities identified through the Housing Business Plan to be funded from the estimated capital resources for 2015/16 and to possible use of solar panels on council houses.

RESOLVED – That the report be received and that this Scrutiny Committee supports the Cabinet's proposals.

AH31. WORK PROGRAMME – The Director of Neighbourhood Services and Resources submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to the work programme items scheduled to be considered by this Scrutiny Committee during the current Municipal Year.

The submitted report outlined those areas where this Scrutiny Committee had previously identified it would like to focus its work and also emphasised that the work programme was a rolling programme and any Member of this Scrutiny could request an item to be included provided that a Quad of Aims had been submitted to the Scrutiny Committee to ensure that it contributed to the strategic aims of the Council.

RESOLVED – That the current status of the Work Programme be noted.