

ADULTS AND HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

31st March, 2015

PRESENT – Councillor Thistlethwaite (in the Chair); Councillors Culley, Harman, D. Jones, Knowles and S. Richmond (6)

APOLOGIES – Councillors Hutchinson, Kelley, Lister and York (4)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE –

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Ann Workman, Assistant Director, Adult Social Care, Pauline Mitchell, Assistant Director, Housing and Building Services, Sharon Raine, Head of Organisational Planning, Janette McMain, Housing Team Leader and Val Rutherford, Tenant Empowerment Manager.

AH41. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

AH42. MINUTES – Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of a meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 3rd February 2015.

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

AH43. THE CARE ACT – AN UPDATE ON PROGRESS – The Director of Commissioning submitted a report (previously circulated) advising Members of the work undertaken to date in relation to the implementation of the Care Act which would come into effect on 1st April, 2015.

It was reported that, although good progress had been made both locally and regionally, the Care Act presented all Local Authorities with a complex and demanding project plan that was currently working with a significant number of unknowns.

The submitted report outlined those major challenges faced, particularly as the Council progressed towards April and the first tranche of changes that the Act outlined; those areas where demand on capacity might be following its implementation; work done both locally and regionally to date, together with specific updates on the two work-streams which this Scrutiny Committee had previously requested an interest in becoming involved with in relation to the workforce and finance; and the current position in relation to the consultation on the Care Cap which ended today.

Particular reference was made to the requirement on this Council to provide information and advice to all its residents, whether or not they had 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 care arose and the specific work being undertaken by it and its partners to be equipped to provide advice services and signposting to residents.

Discussion ensued on the duty within the Act for the Authority to provide independent advocacy for those who met the qualifying condition and it was reported 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.

RESOLVED – That the report be received and further updates be provided as, and when, appropriate.

AH44. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT – QUARTER 3 – The Head of Organisational Planning gave a detailed graphical presentation on the performance management information in relation to those service delivery indicators within the remit of this Scrutiny Committee as at Quarter 3.

The presentation focussed on the Healthy and Independent and Enough Support when Needed indicators in relation to adult social care and it was reported that the Housing based indicators would be better reported at Quarter 4.

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.

RESOLVED – That the current position be noted.

AH45. CHANGES TO THE STRUCTURES OF CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT IN HOUSING SERVICES – The Director of Neighbourhood Services and Resources submitted a report (previously circulated) advising Members of a review which had been undertaken to consider how the Council engaged with its customers in relation to the planning and delivery of housing services in the future and the means by which this was undertaken.

The submitted report referred to the way in which the Council had, more recently, engaged with its customers, which had proved to be largely successful; a number of significant developments which were driving 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.

It was reported that, from April 2015, the transition from the existing structure for engaging with customers on housing services would commence and a new structure comprising three distinct areas of activity that incorporated or re-designed some of the existing functions would be introduced, which had been welcomed by the Tenants Board.

Discussion ensued on the possibility of non-Council tenants being able to participate within the structure and to the more appropriate involvement of those tenants in the

overall work which was being undertaken by the Organisational Planning Unit in relation to community engagement and development to meet the Building Strong Communities condition within the Sustainable Community Strategy; and the partnership working between that piece of work and work being undertaken by individual services.

RESOLVED – That the report be received.

AH46. PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2015-17 – The Director of Neighbourhood Services submitted a report (previously circulated) seeking Members' comments on the proposed Darlington Preventing Homelessness Strategy 2015-17 (also previously circulated).

The submitted report outlined the requirement for all local authorities, under the Homelessness Act 2002, to develop a Homelessness Strategy every five years, based on a review of the local homelessness situation and it was reported that the key aims and objectives of the 2015-17 Strategy focussed on further strengthening the Council and its partners approach to prevention.

It was reported that the numbers who were approaching the Council for help had been showing a consistent but small increase over the past five years and that this was presenting a key challenge within the new strategy.

Particular reference was made to the completion of a recent peer review of homelessness services which had been funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and it was reported that the feedback was that the Council were providing excellent services and, in particular, homeless prevention was highlighted as very successful and on an upward trend, and that partnership working had also been highlighted as being positive and pro-active.

RESOLVED - That the report be received.

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AH407. 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 Committee could request an item to be included provided that a Quad of Aims had been submitted to ensure that it contributed to the strategic aims of the Council.

RESOLVED – That the current status of the work programme be noted.