

ADULTS AND HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

21 June 2016

PRESENT - Councillor S Richmond (in the Chair); Councillors Culley, Mrs. D Jones, Lister, M Nicholson, T Richmond and Storr (7)

APOLOGIES – Councillors Kane, Knowles and Lyonette (3)

ABSENT – Councillor Grundy

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillors Copeland and Mills (2)

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Kevin Kelly, Assistant Director Adult Social Care, Anthony Sandys, Head of Revenues and Benefits, Tony Martin, Housing Team Leader and Philip Haselhurst, Care Act Implementation Lead

AH1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

AH2. TIMES OF FUTURE MEETINGS - RESOLVED – That meetings of this Committee be held at 10.00 a.m. on those dates as dates as agreed on the calendar of meetings by Cabinet at Minute C130/Mar/16.

AH3. MINUTES – Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of meetings of this Scrutiny Committee held on 19th April and 4th May 2016

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

AH4. UNIVERSAL CREDIT – The Director of Neighbourhood Services and Resources submitted a report (previously circulated) updating Members on the roll-out of Universal Credit in Darlington and the potential impact of residents and Council services.

The submitted report outlined the background to the introduction of Universal Credit which would replace the existing six means tested benefits currently being administered by a number of organisations, and which had begun its roll-out in Darlington in November 2015, with a full roll-out not to be expected to be completed until 2021.

It was reported that Universal Credit began its roll-out at Darlington Job centre on 23 November 2015 and that, as at April 2016, there were 451 Darlington residents receiving the Credit, however, it was early days in terms of the roll-out in Darlington, and the majority of those cases would be non-householders (ie not liable for rent or mortgage payments) and all of them would have initially applied as a single job seeker. The more complex cases, including lone parents, families, people with disabilities, carers and self-employed earners would be unlikely to be able to claim until the digital service went live in 2017.

Discussion ensued on the introduction of the new digital service which would improve the way in which claims were currently being processed, the migration of all existing claims on legacy benefits to Universal Credit from 2018 with a projected completion date of 2021; the difficulty in measuring the impact of the changes on Council Tax collection rates at this stage as the number of people claiming Council Tax Support and receiving Universal Credit was still very low; the length of time taken by the Department for Works and Pensions (DWP) to determine any application for Universal Credit and the subsequent delay in notification to the Council of the outcome, which caused significant problems for both the Revenues and Benefits Section and the Housing Management Team.

Particular reference was made to the effect of the introduction of Universal Credit on rent arrears which, so far, had been minimal, due to the proactive work with tenants by the Housing Management Team; the need to continue with that proactive work for the foreseeable future, particularly once the more complex and challenging cases moved over was emphasised and the need to ensure that Council tenants continued to engage with the Council to enable the appropriate support and advice to be given to prevent on-going rent arrears.

Members were concerned at the amount of time taken by the DWP to process claims and the effect of this delay on vulnerable residents and discussion ensued on a number of schemes which were available to offer support and advice to tenants, such as personal budgeting support through the Council's Money Wise service, a scheme operated by Northumbrian Water to offer a 50 per cent reduction in water rates, signposting to the Credit Union and other possible sources of financial assistance, FRADE and Kings Church, the social fund and the Personal Budgeting Support Service.

RESOLVED – (a) That the report be noted and that a further update report be submitted to this Scrutiny Committee, following the launch of the digital service in Darlington in 2017.

(b) That Officers arrange for Members of this Scrutiny Committee to meet with staff from the Money Wise service to discuss the work they undertake and to look at some anonymous case studies of clients.

AH5. THE CARE ACT – AN UPDATE ON PROGRESS – The Director of Children and Adults Services submitted a report (previously circulated) advising Members of the work undertaken to date on the implementation of the Care Act in Darlington.

The submitted report made reference to a number of work streams which were being undertaken within the project and an update position on each of those work streams was provided.

Particular reference was made to the development of the assessment documentation to ensure that elements of the Care Act were embedded in practice and the Assessment facilitated a cultural change within the community; the development of the use of Care Act Advocacy, which was currently being used appropriately in Darlington and performing well regionally; staff training to ensure that all staff were fully briefed and trained to understand the requirements of the

Act and that those not directly impacted in their day-to-day role understood the potential impacts; and the ceasing of the regional group, which consisted of the 12 North East Local Authorities.

Discussion ensued on the stocktakes which had been undertaken to date with the aim of giving an understanding of both the national and regional position of the Care Act and the expectation that the last stocktake would be issued for completion by the end of July; the key links, at a local level, of the replacement of the Care First system and the Managing Cost of Care Project, which were aligned where deliverables were shared; the quality of Care Act Advocacy; and to the particular e-learning training module which had been rolled out to all staff within Adult Social Care and to other service areas within the Authority.

RESOLVED – (a) That the report be received and that further detailed reports on the progress within the work streams identified be submitted to future meetings of this Scrutiny Committee, as part of the Adult Social Care Transformation Programme.

(b) That the outcomes of the six stocktakes be submitted to a future meeting of this Scrutiny Committee.

(c) That the e-learning training module be made available to all Members of this Scrutiny Committee who wish to undertake it.

AH6. WORK PROGRAMME – The Director of Neighbourhood Services and Resources submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to the revised methodology for this Scrutiny Committee’s current work programme.

It was reported that, arising from this meeting, there were a number of items to be added to the work programme and that it would be updated and submitted to the next meeting.

RESOLVED – That the report be received.

AH7. YEAR-END PERFORMANCE REPORT 2015/16 – Submitted – With the prior approval of the Chair to the matter being treated as urgent, a report (previously circulated) of the Director of Children and adult Services providing Members with year-end performance information for 2015/6, against the Council’s top level scorecard for adult social care.

RESOLVED – That consideration of this item be deferred to the next ordinary meeting of this Scrutiny Committee scheduled for 6th September, 2016.