

ADULTS AND HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

19th December, 2017

PRESENT - Councillor Knowles (in the Chair); Councillors Copeland, Kane and Storr. (4)

APOLOGIES – Councillors Culley, Grundy, D Jones, Lister, Lyonette, Mills and M. Nicholson. (7)

ABSENT –

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE –

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – James Stroyan, Assistant Director, Adult Social Care, Pauline Mitchell, Assistant Director, Housing and Building Services, Christine Shields, Assistant Director, Commissioning, Performance and Transformation, Anthony Sandys, Head of Housing and Revenues, Jeanette Crompton, Development and Commissioning Manager, Barbara Copson, Performance Manager and Ken Davies, Housing Strategy Officer.

AH23. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

AH24. MINUTES – Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of a meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 31st October, 2017.

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

AH25. COMMUNITY EQUIPMENT SERVICE – The Director of Children and Adult Services submitted a report (previously circulated) updating Members on the Community Equipment Service provided to residents of Darlington by a company called Medequip and giving an update as to how that service was currently working.

The submitted report outlined the background to the contract for the service which commenced in 2015, and was a service commissioned under a joint commissioning arrangement between the Council, Durham County Council and the three local clinical commissioning groups and which had a contract term of five years with the option to extend for a further two years subject to satisfactory performance.

Members were advised that the contract was working well with current performance against all key targets being met and that regular monthly monitoring meetings were held with performance against the contract being reported to the quarterly Partnership Board.

Discussion ensued on the performance targets within the Contract and Members requested that future reports include information against those targets.

Particular reference was also made to the process for access to equipment over the weekend period; the use of buffer stores which gave urgent access for more general equipment; case studies from clients; and statistical information on the number of complaints received and the need to break down those complaints across the geographical areas served by the Contract.

RESOLVED – That the report be received.

AH26. REVIEW OF TENANCY SIGN UP PROCESS – The Director of Neighbourhood Services and Resources submitted a report (previously circulated) advising Members of a review, undertaken by the Tenant’s Scrutiny Panel, into the way in which tenants signed up for their tenancy.

It was reported that, as the sign up process for a Council tenancy had changed considerably over recent years and was now quite a lengthy and complex process, the Tenant’s Scrutiny Panel had agreed to look at this and make a number of recommendations to best support tenants and to reduce the pressure on them.

Reference was made to the conclusion of the Panel that all of the information that was available to applicants was important but that by making changes to the point at which some information was gathered, the pressure on tenants during the sign-up process could be reduced and that the provision of information could be improved by electronic means and prioritisation. It was reported that the majority of the seven recommendations made had already been implemented.

Four members of the Tenant Scrutiny and Customer Panels attended the meeting to present the report.

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

AH27. WELFARE REFORMS UPDATE – The Director of Neighbourhood Services and Resources submitted a report (previously circulated) providing an update on the roll-out of Universal credit in Darlington, together with the changes to Local Housing Allowances and the potential impact on residents and Council Services.

The submitted report outlined the background to the introduction of Universal Credit which began its roll out in Darlington in November 2017, to residents in limited circumstances, with the full roll out commencing in June 2018 to any resident making a new claim for benefit or reporting a significant change such as a change in address.

We were advised that, as at November 2017, there were 95 Council tenants currently receiving Universal Credit and Housing Officers had been managing their rent arrears successfully, however, with the accelerated roll out from June 2018, this was likely to increase, with predictions showing that by the time Universal

Credit had been fully rolled out in 2022, the level of arrears for those tenants claiming could increase from £588,000 to £1.54 million.

RESOLVED – That the report be received and a further update report be submitted to a future meeting of this Scrutiny Committee.

AH28. PERFORMANCE INDICATORS QUARTER 2 – 2017/18 – The Director of Neighbourhood Services and Resources submitted a report (previously circulated) providing information against the identified key performance indicators as at quarter 2.

RESOLVED – That the report be received.

AH29. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT – The Director of Neighbourhood Services and Resources submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that this Scrutiny Committee consider Cabinet’s proposals in relation to the revenue budget, rent level and service charges for the Council’s Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for the financial year 2018/19 in the context of the HRA Medium term Financial Plan to 2021/22 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 rent and service charge levels and investment in the Council’s Housing Stock. The submitted report referred to the introduction by the Government to introduce a compulsory one per cent reduction in Social and Affordable rents through the Welfare Reform and Work Bill 2015 which meant that the Council had no discretion to increase rents and that all Council tenants would therefore have an average 61 pence reduction in weekly rent.

We were advised that, in 2020, it was expected that the Government would allow Councils to increase rents, although this was not yet confirmed.

RESOLVED – That the report be received.

AH30. WORK PROGRAMME - The Director of Neighbourhood Services and Resources submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to this Scrutiny Committee’s work programme for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2017/18.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.