

ADULTS AND HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 12 March 2019

PRESENT – Councillors Knowles (Chair), Copeland, Donoghue, Kane, Mills and M Nicholson

APOLOGIES – Councillors Lister, Lyonette and Storr,

ABSENT – Councillors Grundy and York

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillors S Richmond

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Christine Shields (Assistant Director Commissioning, Performance and Transformation), Anthony Sandys (Head of Housing and Revenues), Ken Davies (Housing Strategy Officer), Sukdev Dosanjh (Head of Service), Kevin Kelly (Head of Learning Disability and Mental Health) and Shirley Burton (Democratic Manager)

AH36 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

AH37 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THIS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 18 DECEMBER 2019

Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of this Scrutiny Committee held on 18 December 2018.

RESOLVED - That the Minutes of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 18 December 2018 be approved as a correct record.

AH38 COMMUNITY EQUIPMENT SERVICE

The Director of Children and Adults Services submitted a report (previously circulated) providing an update on the Community Equipment Service available to residents in Darlington, and giving an update as to how the service was currently working.

The submitted report outlined the statutory obligation of the Council to provide a community equipment service and it was reported that the provision of community equipment was a key element of the Council's strategy to increase independence through a focus on prevention, rehabilitation and care in people's own homes. The submitted report detailed case studies which set out how the Council, using the service, had supported people to live independently in their own homes.

It was reported that the community equipment service contract had been awarded to Medequip with effect from 1 April 2015 for a five-year period and that no formal complaints had been recorded about the service since 1 April 2018. An issues log had been introduced by the Council's Occupational Therapy Team which would be reviewed and any issues raised directly with Medequip on a quarterly basis.

Discussion ensued in respect of the renewal of the contract with Medequip and particular reference was made to the difficulty in obtaining Darlington specific data to measure the performance of the service. The performance data had been identified as a key development for 2019/20 and that this, together with focus groups, would help to inform the decision to renew contract with Medequip beyond 2020.

RESOLVED – That the current performance of the Medequip contract and the continuing vital support that the Community Equipment Service provides, be noted.

AH39 DARLINGTON PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2019-2024

The Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report (previously circulated) presenting the draft Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019-2024 (also previously circulated) which had been approved for consultation.

The submitted report outlined the requirements under Section 1(1) of the 2002 Act for the Council to review homelessness for their area and publish a homelessness strategy based on the results of that review every five years, together with more recent guidance which required homelessness strategies to be rebadged as Preventing Harmlessness and Rough Sleeping Strategies. It was reported that both the Homeless Reduction Act 2017 and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018 had impacted on the content and structure of the strategy with the main aim of the strategy being to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping with five key objectives supporting it.

It was reported that an Action Plan was in place which set out the key actions to deliver the objectives of the strategy and a new partnership group would be established to oversee the delivery of the strategy. Due to the complex challenges that are associated with homelessness, the partnership would consist of statutory and voluntary agencies that deliver a wide range of services, some of which would be related to wider needs beyond the specific issue of homelessness.

Members were advised that there had been a six per cent increase in the number of people who were approaching the Council for assistance, which was much lower than the increase that was expected following the introduction of the Homeless Reduction Act. This was in part due to the Council and its partner's preventative approach to dealing with homelessness.

Members expressed concern regarding begging in Darlington and questioned what processes were in place to address this. It was confirmed that the Council's Housing Options Service, which consisted of multi-agency officers, had undertaken checks on anyone found to be begging to identify those that were genuinely homeless and find solutions to address this and Members were reminded of the 'Have a heart, give smart' campaign which aimed to educate and raise awareness that giving money to those who beg was not the best way to help them.

RESOLVED – That the report be received.

AH40 REVIEW OF CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT

The Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report (previously circulated) updating Members on the results of a review of customer engagement in housing and giving an update on the proposed changes resulting from the review.

The submitted report referred to the difficulties in the recruitment of tenants to the current engagement model, the need for a shift towards digital means of communications; a proposed reduction in the number of editions of Housing Connect and the use of social media for engagement including Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp groups. It was also proposed that a Tenants Forum be established, consolidating a number of existing Tenant Panels; and that the proposed changes would be implemented in April 2019 and be completed by March 2020.

It was reported that there had been a high level of engagement by tenants within their local communities and that this engagement at a local level would be further tested through a programme of events in local communities.

Members of the Tenants Panel who were in attendance at the meeting gave their support to the proposed changes, stated that the new methods of engagement would be more inclusive and the digital approach would encourage younger tenants to engage.

RESOLVED – That the proposed changes to the customer engagement model in housing, be noted.

AH41 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS Q3 - 2018/19

The Managing Director submitted a report (previously circulated) updating Members on the current position against those key performance indicators which were within the remit of this Scrutiny Committee for the period of October to December 2018.

In relation to the Adult Social Care indicators, the submitted report provided the performance position in relation to ten performance indicators and in relation to Housing Services, performance against all six performance indicators.

Reference was made to the performance indicator HBS025, Number of days spent in Bed and Breakfast, which was showing an increase as a result of the introduction of the Homeless Reduction Act and was reflected as a national trend.

RESOLVED – That the report be received.

AH42 WORK PROGRAMME

The Managing Director submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to this Scrutiny Committee's work programme for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2018/19 and going forward into the 2019/20 Municipal Year.

RESOLVED – That the report be received.