

HEALTH AND HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 30 August 2023

PRESENT – Councillors Layton (Chair), Baker, Crudass, Dillon, Holroyd, Mahmud, Mammolotti, Pease and Mrs Scott

APOLOGIES – Councillor Johnson

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillors Roche, Allen and Curry

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Anthony Sandys (Assistant Director - Housing and Revenues), Ian Thompson (Assistant Director Community Services), Ken Ross (Public Health Principal), Claire Gardner-Queen (Head of Housing), Matthew Hufford (Communication and Engagement Co-ordinator) and Hannah Miller (Democratic Officer)

HH7 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

HH8 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THIS SCRUTINY HELD ON :-

(1) 14 JUNE 2023

Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 14 June 2023.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 14 June 2023 be approved as a correct record.

(2) 28 JUNE 2023

Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 28 June 2023.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 28 June 2023 be approved as a correct record.

HH9 CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY 2021-2024 UPDATE

The Communications and Engagement Co-ordinator gave a presentation (previously circulated) updating Members on the Customer Engagement Strategy 2021-2024.

The presentation outlined the Engagement Strategy and the Council's aims; details were provided of the increased customer engagement in 2022/23, with events being held in new locations and Estate walkabouts continuing; and particular reference was made to the engagement event in Lancaster Close and an estate walkabout in Skerne Park.

It was reported that the Council continued to be a member of Tpas, promoting, supporting

and championing tenant involvement and social empowerment in social housing; details were provided of the Housing Webpage and an overview of the Tenants Panel; and reference was made to the Community Engagement Fund which had been set up by Housing Services to support community projects in areas where Housing Services own properties.

Members noted that the second edition of Housing Connect was due in August 2023, was accessible online and delivered to every tenant; the engagement work undertaken with refugee families; and a customer satisfaction survey was being undertaken in 2023/24.

Details were provided of the regulatory standards; investment in staff including further training provided for staff in 2022/23; and Members were informed of the next steps for 2023 and 2024.

Discussion ensued regarding estate walkabouts and how these were prioritised; Members highlighted concerns regarding feedback to residents when a concern was reported and were assured that work was being undertaken to improve feedback to residents including the use of the Council's website, noticeboards and You Said We Did.

Further discussion ensued regarding the tenants panel, including how this was advertised to tenants and their involvement in the management of complaints received by the Council.

RESOLVED – That the presentation be noted.

HH10 HOUSING SERVICES ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR POLICY ANNUAL REVIEW

The Head of Housing gave a presentation (previously circulated) providing Members with an annual update on the anti-social behaviour (ASB) policy.

It was reported that the policy was approved by Cabinet in 2022 to ensure the Council was meeting the Regulator of Social Housing consumer standards; the aims of the policy were outlined; and reference was made to prevention, early intervention and support and enforcement action.

Members were provided with details of performance, noting that 444 cases involving tenants were opened in 2022/23; details were provided of the main reasons for ASB complaints; and it was reported that 424 cases were positively resolved in 2022/23, with the majority of complaints being resolved through early intervention.

The presentation outlined the work undertaken in the last 12 months along with planned work for the next 12 months.

Following a question, Members were informed that action plans were agreed with residents following a complaint being made in relation to ASB, with regular feedback provided to the resident; and an additional tenancy enforcement officer had been appointed to enable increased engagement with residents.

Members queried the allocations procedure when a tenant was evicted from a council owned property; and queried the Council's engagement with Ward Members when complaints were received.

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

HH11 HEALTH AND SAFETY COMPLIANCE IN COUNCIL HOUSING

The Assistant Director – Housing and Revenue submitted a report (previously circulated) updating Members on the health and safety compliance standards for Council housing stock and performance against these in 2022-23.

It was reported that the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) sets a number of consumer standards, which social housing providers must comply with; and the Council has well established and robust processes in place to monitor health and safety compliance in relation to its Council housing stock.

The submitted report provided details of the areas where compliance was monitored on a regular basis, including asbestos, electrical, gas, fire, fire door and water safety, and damp and mould.

Particular reference was made to the legal requirements set out in the Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022 in respect of fire door safety; Members were informed that whilst there were no specific issues with the existing fire doors within the Council's housing stock, due to the age of the doors and the lack of certification in relation to any previous installation and testing, the Council deemed the fire doors as not compliant with the new regulations; and as part of the door replacement programme, 236 blocks and approximately 1,200 doors affected by the new regulations would be replaced.

Reference was also made to the Stock Condition Survey undertaken in 2022-23, which identified that of the 10 per cent of the Council's stock surveyed (550 properties) by an external contractor, 5 had issues with condensation or ventilation not working and 8 had signs of damp and mould (or 1.5% of the properties inspected), although none of these were classed as serious hazards; and that the Council had recruited its own Stock Condition Surveyor who would carry out a rolling programme of stock condition surveys on 100 per cent of Council homes.

Members commended the work of the housing team in relation to damp and mould; discussion ensued regarding the procurement process in respect of the door replacement programme; and recruitment and retention of Gas Safe Engineers.

Members requested further details regarding the number of Council properties containing asbestos, the number of incidents whereby legionella was identified in a Council property; and the structure of the stock condition survey team.

RESOLVED – (a) That the contents of the report be noted.

(b) That this Scrutiny Committee continues to consider reports on health and safety compliance in Council Housing on an annual basis.

HH12 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH - LIVING IN DARLINGTON AND RESPONDING TO THE PANDEMIC 2022/2023

The Interim Director of Public Health submitted a report (previously circulated) sharing the Director of Public Health Annual Report for 2022/23 with Members and wider stakeholders.

It was reported that the Annual Report has a particular focus on how some of the community responded to the COVID 19 pandemic and how they see their future; and that the Annual Report is the last report of Penny Spring as Director of Public Health due to her retirement in June 2023.

The submitted report stated that it is a requirement of the Director of Public Health under the 2006 NHS Act to produce an annual report; the subject of the annual report for 2022/23 is how young people, families and staff in Darlington responded to the pandemic and how it affected their lives; and the report is presented in a video format produced with students from Darlington College, using the testimony of individual young people, families and staff.

Members requested context regarding the Covid-19 inequalities in the wider determinants.

RESOLVED – (a) That the Annual report of the Director of Public Health 2022/23 be received.

(b) That the testimony of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on lived experience be noted.

(c) That the legacy and ongoing impact of the pandemic on local people living and working in Darlington be noted.

HH13 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS QUARTER 4 - 2022/23

The Assistant Director – Housing and Revenues, Assistant Director – Community Services and Director of Public Health submitted a report (previously circulated) providing Members with performance data against key performance indicators for 2022/23 at Quarter 4.

Details were provided of the 36 indicators reported to this Scrutiny Committee, six indicators were reported by both Housing and Culture and 24 by Public Health.

It was reported that at Quarter 4, 20 of the 36 indicators showed performance better than from when last reported; 13 indicators showed performance not as good as when last reported; and 1 indicator showed performance the same as when last reported.

Particular reference was made to the increase from the previous year in rent arrears of current Council tenants in the financial year as a % of rent debit; the decrease from the previous year in the amount of rent collected as a proportion of rents owed on Council homes; the increase in the average number of days spent in Bed and Breakfast accommodation; and the increase in the number of positive outcomes where homelessness had been prevented.

Following a question regarding HBS025 – Number of days spent in Bed and Breakfast, Members were advised that the increase was due to a variety of reasons and that a breakdown would be provided to Members; and Members queried the method used to measure physical activity in the adult population.

Particular reference was also made to improvements in relation to the rate of prevalence of smoking among persons aged 18 years and over and the significant improvements in the rates for the successful completion of drug treatment increased for opiate users.

Discussion ensued regarding prevalence of overweight children at reception and Year 6; Members were advised that the figures for Darlington reflected a national trend and Members were informed of a range of activities in place to address obesity in children and young people.

Further discussion ensued regarding vaping; the possible causes for the increase in the under 75 mortality rates from respiratory disease; and the work being undertaken to encourage breastfeeding.

RESOLVED – That the submitted report be noted.

HH14 WORK PROGRAMME

The Assistant Director Law and Governance submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to this Scrutiny Committee's work programme and to consider any additional areas which Members would like to suggest be included in the previously approved work programme.

Members gave consideration to the proposal to establish a task and finish group to undertake a review of physical accessibility to health care and ancillary care.

Discussion ensued on the current work programme; Members requested that the CAMHS update and Primary Care (to include GP access to appointment) be brought forward to an earlier meeting of this Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED – (a) That a task and finish review group be established to undertake a review of physical accessibility to health care and ancillary care.

(b) That the work programme be updated to reflect discussions.

HH15 HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD

Members were informed that the Board last met on 16 March, 2023 and that the next meeting of the Board was scheduled for 7 September, 2023 which would include an update on health inequalities in Darlington and a review of the Terms of Reference for the Board.

RESOLVED – That Members look forward to receiving an update on the work of the Health and Wellbeing Board at a future meeting of this Scrutiny Committee.