

**COUNCIL**  
**26 JANUARY 2023**

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**OVERVIEW OF HEALTH AND HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

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1. Since the last meeting of the Council, the following are the main areas of work the Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee has undertaken.

**Children and Young People's Services Darlington**

2. Scrutiny welcomed a presentation from the General Manager – Durham and Tees Valley Community Children and Adult Mental Health Service (CAMHS), Tees, Esk and Wear Valley NHS Foundation Trust on the Children and Young People's Services for Darlington, with details provided of the work being undertaken in the three key areas, patient experience, workforce and service delivery.
3. Members noted the findings from the recent CQC report published in September 2022 following the inspection in July 2022, the evidence of positive changes were outlined and that further improvements are still required.
4. The wait times to assessment and treatment for non-neuro referrals and wait time for specialist neuro assessment were outlined and we welcomed details of the next steps for the service.
5. We raised concerns regarding services for children with autism and the General Manager Durham and Tees Valley Community CAMHS informed Members of the range of services commissioned for children with autism.
6. Discussion ensued regarding plans for reducing wait times and following a question regarding lived experience, we were advised that a young person with lived experience has been employed to lead on co-creation with young people and works closely with the parent/carer forum in Darlington. We also noted the intention of the Trust to employ peer support workers.
7. We also discussed capacity and demand for services and the Keeping In Touch (KIT) process and we look forward to receiving further updates on autism-specific services for Darlington residents and the process for contacting residents on the waiting list/keeping in touch.

**Community Transformation NHS England: Tees Valley**

8. We also welcomed a presentation from the Service Manager, Adult Mental Health Darlington and Specialist Services, updating Members on the work being undertaken to review the mental health system as part of the Community Transformation NHS England: Tees Valley.

9. Scrutiny were reminded of the core aims of the community transformation and were provided with details of the principals and vision of the transformation which included local community support, community hub and treatment and intervention services, all of which would be supported by care navigators.
10. We were advised of the work being undertaken in Darlington, which was being led by the 700 Club, noting that a physical location for the community hub has been identified in Darlington, this will be a resilience centre staffed by trained third sector staff and is due to be finalised in the new year.
11. Details were also provided of the reconfigured teams in the Trust, including the remit of each team and we also noted the recognition received for the work to date. We noted the expected outputs through the model and Members welcomed in particular the holistic offer for patients, who will receive a package of care from TEWV and system partners.
12. We discussed the location of patient assessments and safeguarding arrangements, noting that an accessible clinic is operating from the Dolphin Centre to undertake new assessments and that in relation to decision making, governance arrangements are in place and a multi-disciplinary team established with oversight of decisions made for patients.
13. Members were informed that a directory of services available via the community hub would be made accessible and work is being undertaken to provide one stop shops in the wider community using established local hubs and groups.
14. We look forward to receiving an update on the community hub at a future meeting of this Scrutiny Committee.

### **Housing Services Low Cost Home Ownership Policy**

15. We received a report on the draft Housing Services Low Cost Home Ownership Policy prior to its consideration by Cabinet on 7 March 2023.
16. The policy outlines the range of home ownership options available for Council properties, covering Right to Buy, Rent to Buy and Shared Ownership options for residents who would like to own their own home but are unable to afford to purchase a property outright from the open market.
17. We noted the consultation undertaken with the Tenants Panel and that the Panel are in support of the proposed policy.
18. This Scrutiny Committee supports the onward submission of the draft Housing Services Low Cost Home Ownership Policy to Cabinet for approval.

### **Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy Update**

19. Members welcomed an update from the Assistant Director Housing and Revenues on the progress against the Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, noting that of the 28 actions in the strategy, all had either been completed or remained ongoing due to continuing demands on services.

20. Reference was made to the new “Ending Rough Sleeping for Good” strategy that was published by the Government in September 2022. Scrutiny have agreed, in light of this strategy, the existing pressures on the Homeless and Housing Options services and as all actions in the Council’s strategy have successfully been completed or delivered on an ongoing basis, that the Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy action plan for 2023-24 be reviewed and refreshed. We welcome an update at a future meeting of the Committee.
21. We also received an update on the homeless services provision during 2022. Members noted the continued significant increase in demand for Homeless and Housing Options services and the impact of the lifting of the ban on Section 21 (no fault) evictions in June 2021 on homeless presentations and requests for housing advice.
22. Members were pleased to note that that despite the significant challenges, everyone in need of emergency accommodation has been provided somewhere to stay, and most of the people placed in emergency accommodation have now been moved to more permanent housing.

### **Performance Indicators – Quarter 2 2022/2023**

23. We received Quarter 2 performance data against key performance indicators for 2022/23.
24. Members were advised that data was available for nine of the twelve Housing and Culture indicators and that of the twenty-four Public Health indicators, eight had new data available at Quarter 2.
25. We noted that of the nine Housing and Culture indicators, four indicators were showing an improved performance compared to the same point in the previous year whilst five indicators showed a performance not as good as that recorded at the same time in the previous year, and of the eight Public Health indicators, two indicators were showing performance better than the previous year whilst six indicators were showing performance not as good as the previous year.

### **Work Programme**

26. We have given consideration to the Work Programme for this Committee for the Municipal Year 2022/23 and possible review topics. The work programme is a rolling programme and items can be added as necessary.

### **Medium-Term Financial Plan**

27. As with all Scrutiny Committees, we have had the opportunity to respond to Cabinet, via the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee, on the proposals in relation to the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2023/24 to 2026/27.
28. Members noted the report and as part of the consultation process we submitted a majority view that whilst additional funding from the Local Government finance settlement has improved the position of the MTFP for 2023/24, Members remain

concerned regarding the medium to long term and the potential requirement for a review of service provision.

29. A minority view was also submitted as part of the consultation, to support Cabinet's proposal in relation to the proposed Council Tax increase of 2.99 per cent plus a 2 per cent Adult Social Care Precept and the Schedule of Charges.

#### **Housing Revenue Account – MTFP 2023-24 to 2026-27**

30. The Assistant Director Housing and Revenue provided Members with an update on the key decisions within the HRA for 2023-24 which included a proposed revenue expenditure of £26.557M, a proposed Capital Programme of £24.585M and a proposed rent increase.
31. In relation to the proposed rent increase, Members noted that Councils had the discretion to inflate rents by CPI plus 1 per cent, which would mean a rent increase of 11.1 per cent for 2023-24. Taking into account the current economic pressures faced by tenants and balancing this with increased costs of maintaining and improving Council housing and the need to deliver the Councils ambitious capital and energy efficiency programmes, that an increase of 5 per cent was recommended which equated to an average £3.69 increase in weekly rents. We also noted Cabinet recommendation that service charges be increased by an appropriate inflationary amount.
32. We noted the consultation exercise that was undertaken with the Tenants Panel and that the Panel fully supported the proposed increase on the annual rent charge, were in support of the spending priorities and energy efficiency work to help reduce tenant's energy bills.
33. We discussed in particular the service charges and raised concern in relation to the increases. Members were advised that over 70 per cent of Council tenants had their rent and most service charges covered by Universal Credit or Housing Benefit payments, and that a mid-year review of the service charges for gas and electricity would be undertaken.
34. Overall Members of this Scrutiny Committee are in support of the average weekly rent increase of 5 per cent for 2023/24, increases to the garage rents and services charges, the budget, Housing Business Plan and capital programme.
35. We have requested that Members concerns regarding the increases in service charges and the impact on residents and concerns in relation to the Council's Housing Revenue Account subsequent to 2023-24 be noted.

**Councillor Wendy Newall**  
**Chair of the Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee**