

COUNCIL
28 SEPTEMBER 2023

OVERVIEW OF HEALTH AND HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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

Customer Engagement Strategy 2021-2024 Update

2. We welcomed a presentation from the Communications and Engagement Co-ordinator updating Members on the Customer Engagement Strategy 2021-2024.
3. Scrutiny were provided with details of the aims of the strategy and the increased customer engagement in 2022/23. We noted that events are being held in new locations and Estate walkabouts are continuing.
4. We were provided with details 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.
5. Members noted the engagement work undertaken with refugee families and that a customer satisfaction survey was being undertaken in 2023/24. We welcomed the investment in staff including further training provided for staff in 2022/23 and Members were informed of the next steps for 2023 and 2024.
6. We discussed in particular estate walkabouts and how these were prioritised. Members highlighted concerns regarding feedback to residents when a concern is reported and we were assured that work is being undertaken to improve feedback to residents including the use of the Council's website, noticeboards and You Said We Did.

Housing Services Anti-Social Behaviour Policy - Update

7. Members received a presentation from the Head of Housing, updating Members on the Housing Services Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Policy, which was approved by Cabinet in 2022 to ensure the Council was meeting the Regulator of Social Housing consumer standards.
8. We were provided with details of the performance including the main reasons for anti-social behaviour complaints. We were pleased to note that 424 cases were positively resolved in 2022/23, with the majority of complaints resolved through early intervention.
9. We noted the work undertaken in the last 12 months and welcomed an update on the planned work for the next 12 months.

10. Following a question, Members were informed that action plans are 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 has been appointed to enable increased engagement with residents.
11. We queried the allocations procedure when a tenant is evicted from a council owned property and the Council's engagement with Ward Members when complaints are received.

Health and Safety Compliance in Council Housing

12. We received a report from the Assistant Director Housing and Revenues, updating Members on Health and Safety Compliance in Council Housing.
13. The presentation outlined the performance results for 2022-23 in relation to Asbestos, electrical safety, gas safety, fire safety, fire door safety, water safety and damp and mould.
14. We noted in particular the legal requirements set out in the Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022 in respect of fire door safety and 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. Members were advised that as part of the door replacement programme, 236 blocks and approximately 1,200 doors affected by the new regulations will be replaced.
15. Members commended the work of the housing team in relation to damp and mould and have requested further details regarding the number of Council properties containing asbestos and the number of incidents whereby legionella has been identified in a Council property.

Annual Report of the Director of Public Health – Living in Darlington and Responding to the Pandemic 2022/2023

16. Members welcomed a report, sharing the Director of Public Health Annual Report for 2022/23, which has a particular focus on how some of the community responded to the COVID-19 pandemic and how they see their future. The Annual Report is the last report of Penny Spring as Director of Public Health due to her retirement in June 2023.
17. We welcomed the presentation of the Annual Report via video format, produced with students from Darlington College and using the testimony of individual young people, families and staff.

Performance Indicators Quarter 4 – 2022/23

18. We received an update on performance against key performance indicators for 2022/23 at Quarter 4.
19. We noted that of the 36 indicators reported to this Scrutiny Committee, 20 showed performance better than from when last reported, 13 showed performance not as good as when last reported and 1 indicator showed performance the same as when last reported.

20. 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.
21. We noted in particular the 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.
22. Members raised concern regarding the prevalence of overweight children at reception and Year 6. We noted that the figures for Darlington reflect a national trend and were informed of a range of activities in place to address obesity in children and young people.
23. 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.

Work Programme

24. We have given consideration to the Work Programme for this Committee for the Municipal Year 2023/24 and possible review topics. The work programme is a rolling programme and items can be added as necessary.
25. We have agreed that a task and finish group be established to undertake a review of physical accessibility to health care and ancillary care.

Councillor Mary Layton
Chair of the Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee