

COUNCIL
16 MAY 2024

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.

CAMHS Update

2. We welcomed the General Manager, Children and Young People's Services, Durham and Tees Valley who provided members with a presentation to provide an annual update on the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) for Darlington.
3. The presentation covered areas including the current framework for planning and delivering mental health services, the current clinical transformation model and pathways through the service along with details such as average wait times and the different services offered. Key pressure areas were highlighted along with plans to receive further funding in the near future to assist with these pressures.
4. Questions were raised that included details on staff shortages in the service with information provided that CAMHS currently has a 50% vacancy rate for medics with lack of applicants being the cause of this. A further question was asked regarding addressing parents of children requiring the mental health services with the response that this is a large part of the care offer with specialist staff available to speak to parents to offer support and help stimulate parental cooperation.
5. Discussions were held regarding quality of data with members being informed that the service is currently transitioning to a new patient record system alongside the manual capture of data where needed to ensure data integrity. Further discussion surrounded the average wait time of 463 days for neurodevelopmental assessment due to referral demand outpacing capacity following a 300% increase in referrals compared to pre-pandemic levels and members were provided with details of contact that is maintained with patients during this period.
6. Members noted the content of the presentation with a further update to be arranged in 12 months' time.

Community Mental Health Transformation

7. We welcomed the Associate Director of Partnerships and Strategy - Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust, who provided a presentation to highlight the core aims of community transformation, the current vision for the future alongside projected impact of care and an update on the recently opened Darlington Connect outlet in Darlington town centre.

8. Members expressed the notable progress of the service, in particular praising the increased access to talking therapies for residents and the reduction in waiting times from 6 months to 28 days.
9. Discussion was held as to whether the Darlington Connect outlet could be better publicised with confirmation that a celebration event is being planned along with press releases and members suggested that promotion in Council publications would also be useful. Further points included members of the public presenting at Darlington Connect with unrelated issues with confirmation provided that such individuals are signposted to the correct services.
10. We noted the content of the report, the positive work being undertaken and look forward to a further update in 12 months.

Council Plan 2024-2027

11. We welcomed the Strategy and Policy Manager and the portfolio holder for Health and Housing who presented the Council Plan 2024-2027 and its intent to provide strategic direction to the Council - and council services - defining core values, priorities and shaping delivery in the coming years with public consultation on the draft plan being open until 25 April 2024.
12. Members were informed that the core values outlined in the document, if met in decision making, will ensure positive progress towards overall goals and from which strategies will be produced such as the New Homes Strategy and Health and Wellbeing Plan.
13. Discussion was held with regards to the presentation of the document with a member expressing that they feel a more effective layout would be to present the core values within the first pages for increased visibility particularly to the public who view the document. A further member noted that they welcome the plan's focus on inequalities with Housing's emphasis being to provide quality housing together with an effective homelessness strategy.
14. We noted the content of the report and Council Plan and members were encouraged to share the plan with their networks and to complete the survey before 25 April 2024.

Housing Services Asset Management Strategy

15. We welcomed the Assistant Director – Housing and Revenues who presented the report that sets out how Housing Services will ensure the efficient and effective management of our homes, as a core requirement of meeting our landlord services function. We were informed that the Tenants' Panel has been consulted on the draft policy and they have given their full support to the proposals and key aims of the strategy. It was also highlighted that a review of the strategy will be organised once new decent homes standards are released.
16. A member raised discussion that it would be beneficial to potential tenants if they were provided with a breakdown of predicted bill costs when considering their choice of housing. Officers took this on board and informed members that a stock condition survey

will be carried out on all council properties that will also include validation of energy efficiency certificates.

17. We considered the report and support its onward submission to Cabinet.

Housing Services Vulnerability Policy

18. The Assistant Director – Housing and Revenues presented the Housing Services Vulnerability Policy which ensures that we meet the diverse needs of our tenants, through the need to provide adaptable services, which takes our tenants, and their household's needs into account, whilst ensuring we meet regulatory and legal requirements. The report sets out our aims, including how we will record any of our tenant's vulnerabilities on Council systems and how we will use this information in the way we provide our services, the decisions we make and how we refer to other statutory and external organisations. The Tenants' Panel has been consulted on the draft policy and have given their full support.
19. Members were in agreement that it is useful to be aware of tenants' vulnerabilities and to provide appropriate responses to this. A discussion was held regarding the varying degrees of vulnerability with the suggestion that checks be performed at regular intervals to ensure that information remains correct in cases of temporary vulnerability. Officers confirmed that new residents are asked if any vulnerabilities are present and checks are carried out on a 6-monthly basis for any changes in status.
20. We considered the report and support its onward submission to Cabinet.

Work Programme 2023/24

21. 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 work programme and items can be added as necessary.
22. A member recommended that an update be provided to this scrutiny committee on the Air Quality Strategy in the production of the new work programme 2024/25

Councillor Mary Layton
Chair of the Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee