

OVERVIEW OF ADULTS AND HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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

Care Quality Commission (CQC)

2. A representative of the Care Quality Commission, the Independent regulator of health and adult social care in England, gave us a presentation on the purpose and role of that organisation in making sure that health and social care services in England provided people with safe, effective and compassionate, high quality care.
3. The organisation monitors, inspects and regulates services to make sure they meet fundamental standards of quality and safety and its findings are published, including performance ratings which help people to choose their care. Where poor care is identified, it will use its powers to take action against those responsible
4. The service regulates care homes, hospitals, domiciliary care, doctors/GP's dentists, clinics, community services and mental health services and there are eight inspectors working across the Darlington, Durham and Hartlepool local authority areas. Working closely with the public and local relationships and partnerships is vital to its work and helps identify good practice and also raise standards of care.

Development of the Preventing Homelessness Strategy 2019-24

5. We have been advised of the work being undertaken to develop a new Preventing Homelessness Strategy to cover the period 2019-2024, which is being developed taking into account the changes that have been introduced through the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.
6. The Strategy focusses on five key areas which reflect the current national and local policy context of prevention by intervening at an earlier stage and ensuring that there are the right types and levels of housing and support available to reduce the risk of homelessness. This is an area which was included in the Council's current strategy and will continue a path that the Council has already adopted with positive results.
7. There has been an increase of 94 applicants approaching the Council for assistance between 2016/17 and 2017/18, however the numbers going on to make a homeless application have been reduced and this is attributed to the success of the preventative work undertaken once an applicant has approached the Council for assistance. The Council has a number of programmes to ensure that no-one in Darlington needs to sleep rough including programmes that intervene at an early stage to avoid the crisis of losing a home.

8. A recent rough sleeper count found only three people sleeping rough in Darlington, all of whom refused assistance when approached. Support will continue to be available to them.
9. We were concerned that begging in the Town Centre is associated with homelessness, however, this is not the case. The Council's Housing Options Service ensures that anyone who is found to be begging is approached to see what assistance can be given to them and they have found that virtually all those begging in the Town have a home and work is on-going to address the begging issue through a multi-agency approach.
10. It is anticipated that the full draft strategy will be available for public consultation in February 2019.

Customer Engagement in Housing Services

11. The Council has a regulatory requirement to review the way in which it engages with its tenants and leaseholders and a review of the current arrangements is currently being undertaken.
12. The Government's Housing Green Paper which was published in the Summer, largely focussed on the future role of tenant involvement in the light of the Grenfell Tower Fire, particularly in relation to health and safety and service provision and this will need to be taken into account in the review along with the need for the increased use of digital means of engagement as a form of communication.
13. As Members will be aware, the Council currently engages through a number of formal panels which are made up of volunteers, however, it is becoming increasingly difficult to recruit to these panels and further work will be undertaken with the Tenant's Customer and Scrutiny Panels to develop options for how we engage with tenants in the future.
14. It is proposed that the final recommendations from the review are submitted to a joint meeting of our Scrutiny Committee and the Tenants Panel representatives in March 2019.

Syrian Refugees and Asylum Seekers Update

15. We have been advised of the current position in relation to the Council's role in rehousing and supporting Syrian refugees and the Asylum Seeker Project operated by G4S.
16. The Syrian refugee project was established in 2016 as a result of the Syrian conflict and the Council agreed to accept and support ten families initially, which has now increased to 14 to enable families to be reunited, with 54 individuals currently being supported through the programme. Overall, the project has gone well with all the families integrating well into their locality and communities.
17. In addition, there are another 92 asylum seekers being supported in Darlington through the Government's contract with G4S. The Council is not directly involved in this project and only privately rented properties are used to house the individuals, however, they have been approaching housing for support and advice in relation to housing, education and health and, although, where possible, they are signposted

back to G4S, this is placing an additional support on services and an additional Support Volunteer has been employed on a temporary basis to cope with the increasing demand and to liaise more closely with G4S and its clients.

Performance Indicators Quarter 2 – 2018/19

18. We have received information on the Quarter 2 performance against those key performance indicators for 2018/19 which are within the remit of our Scrutiny Committee.
19. In relation to both Housing Services and Adult Social Care, Officers were satisfied with the Quarter 2 performance across their areas.

Medium-Term Financial Plan

20. As with all Scrutiny Committees we have had the opportunity to respond to Cabinet on its proposals in relation to the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2019/20.
21. The delivery of the core offer remains extremely challenging with some significant pressures arising in Children's social care, however, through innovative financial investments and increased income from economic growth, the Council can still deliver the agreed balanced plan, extend the MTFP and a further £0.600 million has been identified which could be used to bolster the Futures Fund themes or be returned to reserves.
22. There are a number of risk pressures which have been identified, however, it is not clear at this stage whether they will definitely come to fruition, however, if they do they are of significant value. Given the potential impact it has been considered prudent to recognise them in the budget and, following a review of these risks, it has been recommended that a prudent level would be to include 60 per cent of the total value in the risk contingency line.
23. It is pleasing to note the significant work that has been undertaken through the Adult Social Services transformation project to ensure people receive the right level of care and are able to stay in their homes longer, which has reduced the reliance on residential care placements and subsequent savings exceeds the estimated target for that area. Winter pressures funding of £0.501 million has also been received for adults in 2018/19 and 2019/20, how this funding is utilised must be agreed in a plan with the NHS.
24. Our response as part of the consultation will be to support Cabinet's proposal in relation to the proposed increase in Council tax of 2.99 per cent for 2019/20 and the proposed schedule of fees and charges.

Housing Revenue Account

25. Cabinet has agreed to consult on proposals in relation to the revenue budget; rent levels and service charges for the Council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for the financial year 2019/20 in the context of the HRA Medium Term Financial Plan to 2022/23 and the 30 year Business Plan and we have agreed to support those proposals.
26. We were advised that the proposals were in line with the Government's requirement for all social landlords to implement an average weekly rent reduction each year for four years from 2016/17 of one per cent, which would give an average weekly rent for 2019/20 of £70.53.
27. As Members will be aware, the Government has lifted the borrowing cap on the HRA and, in 2019/20 alone this will enable us to increase our housing capital programme by around £12 million. This can be supplemented with the Homes England grant to provide more than 1000 much need Council homes at affordable rents over the next ten years.
28. Over 180 households have already benefited from the Council's current new build programme which has taken place at various locations across the Town and demand for these houses has been exceptionally high.

Autism Task and Finish Review

29. We have concluded our Task and Finish Review Group into the support and advice services available in Darlington for adults with autism and I would like to thank all those who were involved and contributed to our findings.
30. The recommendations from the Review will now be forwarded to Cabinet for approval.

Work Programme

31. We are still continuing to collate information on the potential effects of the introduction of Universal Credit to residents of Darlington and a joint piece of work has commenced with the Health and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee in relation to End of Life and Palliative Care.

Councillor Marjory Knowles
Chair of Adults and Housing Scrutiny Committee