

ADULTS AND HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 18 December 2018

PRESENT – Councillors Knowles (Chair), Copeland, Kane, Lister, Lyonette, Mills, M Nicholson and Storr

APOLOGIES – Councillors Donoghue and York

ABSENT – Councillor Grundy

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE –

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Elizabeth Davison (Assistant Director Resources), James Stroyan (Assistant Director Adult Social Care), Pauline Mitchell (Assistant Director Housing and Building Services), Ken Davies (Housing Strategy Officer), Barbara Copson (Performance Manager) and Shirley Burton (Democratic Manager)

AH25 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Copeland declared an interest in Minute AH33 below as she rented a garage from the Council. There were no other declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

AH26 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THIS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 30 OCTOBER, 2018

Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of this Scrutiny Committee held on 30 October 2018.

RESOLVED - That the Minutes of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 30 October 2018 be approved as a correct record.

AH27 CARE QUALITY COMMISSION (CQC) - INSPECTIONS

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.

The presentation covered the Commission's role in monitoring, inspecting and regulating services to make sure they meet fundamental standards of quality and safety and it was reported that its findings, including performance ratings which help people to choose their care, were published. Where poor care was identified, it uses its powers to take action against those responsible

It was reported that the service regulates care homes, hospitals, domiciliary care, doctors/GP's dentists, clinics, community services and mental health services and there were eight inspectors working across the Darlington, Durham and Hartlepool local authority areas.

Discussion ensued on the Inspection regime and how often inspections were undertaken; work with partners and the public to collate information about service providers and the position in relation to the inspection regime of domiciliary service providers.

RESOLVED – That the presentation be noted and the thanks of this Scrutiny Committee be extended to the CQC representative for attending the meeting.

AH28 DEVELOPMENT OF THE PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2019-24

The Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report (previously circulated) advising Members of the work being undertaken to develop a new Preventing Homelessness Strategy to cover the period 2019-24, which was being developed taking into account the changes that had been introduced through the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

It was reported that the Strategy focussed on five key areas which reflected the current national and local policy context of prevention by intervening at an earlier stage and ensuring that there were the right types and levels of housing and support available to reduce the risk of homelessness. This was an area which was included in the Council's current strategy and would continue a path that the Council had already adopted with positive results.

The Assistant Director, Housing and Building Services reported that there had 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 homelessness application had reduced and this was attributed to the success of the preventative work undertaken once an applicant had approached the Council for assistance.

Discussion ensued on the number of programmes to ensure that no-one in Darlington needed to sleep rough, including programmes that intervened at an early stage to avoid the crisis of losing a home.

Reference was made to a recent rough sleeper count which found only three people were sleeping rough in Darlington, all of whom refused assistance when approached and it was reported that support would continue to be available to them.

Members expressed concern that begging in the Town Centre was associated with homelessness, and were advised that this was not the case. The Council's Housing Options Service ensured that anyone who was found to be begging was approached to see what assistance could be given to them and they had found that virtually all those begging in the Town had a home and work was on-going to address the begging issued through a multi-agency approach.

RESOLVED – That the update be noted and that the full draft Strategy be submitted to the next ordinary meeting of this Scrutiny Committee scheduled for 12 March 2019.

AH29 CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT IN HOUSING SERVICES

The Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report (previously circulated) outlining the arrangements in place to review the way in which the Council engaged with its tenants, in accordance with statutory requirements.

It was reported that the Government's Housing Green Paper which had been published in the Summer had 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 that this would be taken into account in the review alongside the need for increased use of digital means of engagement as a form of communication.

Reference was made to the way in which the Council currently engages with its tenants through a number of formal panels which were made up of volunteers, however, it was reported that this was becoming increasingly difficult to recruit to the Panel and further work would be undertaken with the Tenant's Customer and Scrutiny Panels to develop options for how we engage with tenants in the future.

RESOLVED – That the final recommendation from the review be submitted to a joint meeting of this Scrutiny Committee and the Tenants Panel representatives scheduled to be held on 12 March, 2018.

AH30 SYRIAN REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS UPDATE

The Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report (previously circulated) outlining the work being undertaken by the Council in relation to the Syrian Refugees and the Asylum Seeker Project operated by G4S.

It was reported that the Syrian refugee project had been established in 2016 as a result of the Syrian conflict and the Council had agreed to accept and support ten families initially, however this had now increased to 14 to enable families to be reunited, with 54 individuals now being supported through the programme and that, overall, the project had gone well with all the families integrating well into their locality and communities.

The submitted report also outlined the current position in relation to another 92 asylum seekers being supported in Darlington through the Governments contract with G4S and it was reported that, although the Council was not directly involved in this project and only privately rented properties were used to house the individuals, the housing service was becoming involved in offering support and advice. Where possible, these individuals were signposted back to G4S, however, it was placing an additional pressure on services and an additional Support Volunteer had been employed on a temporary basis to cope with the increased demand and to liaise more closely with G4S and its clients.

RESOLVED – That the report be received.

AH31 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS Q2 - 2018/19

The Managing Director submitted a report (previously circulated) together with information on the Quarter 2 performance against those key performance indicators

for 2018/19 which were within the remit of this Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED – That the report be received.

AH32 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN (MTFP) 2019/20

Submitted – A report (previously circulated) of the Chief Officers Executive which had been considered by Cabinet at its meeting held on 11 December 2018, in relation to the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2019-20 to 2022-23 and proposing a 2019/20 to 2022/23 capital programme for consultation.

It was reported that the delivery of the core offer which was agreed in 2016 remained 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 could still deliver the agreed balanced plan, extend the MTFP and a further £0.600 million had also been identified which could be used to bolster the Futures Fund themes or be returned to reserves.

Discussion ensued on the significant work which had been undertaken through the Adult Social Services transformation project to ensure people received the right level of care and were able to stay in their homes longer, which had reduced the reliance on residential care placements and subsequent savings exceed the estimated target for that area.

Reference was also made to the winter pressures funding of 0.501 million which had also been received for adults in 2018/19 and 2019/20, and it was reported that how this funding was utilised must be agreed in a plan with the NHS.

The submitted report outlined a number of risk pressures which had been identified, however, it was not clear at this stage whether they would definitely come to fruition and the Assistant Director Resources reported that if they did, they would be of significant value and, given the potential impact, it had been considered prudent to recognise them in the budget and, following a review of those risks, it had been recommended that a prudent level would be to include 60 per cent of the total value of the risk contingency line.

Members questioned whether the revenue reserves should be used to reduce the proposed Council Tax increase, however the Assistant Director Finance and Human Resources reported that the reserves were being used to balance the MTFP going forward and the Officers view was that the Council Tax needed to be increased.

RESOLVED - That this Scrutiny Committee has no comment to make on the proposed schedule of fees and charges for those services within its remit and supports Cabinet's proposal in relation to those fees and charges and the proposed Council Tax increase of 2.99 per cent for the next financial year.

AH33 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT 2019/20

Submitted – A report (previously circulated) of the Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services which had been considered by Cabinet at its meeting held on 11 December, 2018, requesting that this Scrutiny Committee consider Cabinet's

proposals in relation to the revenue budget, rent level 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 2022/23 and the 30 year Business Plan.

It was reported that the proposals were in line with the Government's requirements 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.

Discussion also on the decision by the Government to lift the borrowing cap on the HRA and it was reported that, in 2019/20 alone, it would enable the Council to increase its housing capital programme by around £12 million. This could be supplemented with the Homes England grant to provide more than 1000 much need Council homes at affordable rents over the next ten years.

The Assistant Director Housing and Building Services reported that over 180 households had already benefited from the Council's current new build programme which had taken place at various locations across the Town and demand for these houses had been exceptionally high.

RESOLVED – That the report be received.

AH34 AUTISM

The Chair of the Review Group submitted a report (previously circulated) together with the Final Report (also previously circulated) of the Autism Task and Finish Review Group.

The submitted report outlined the background to the establishment of the Review Group to look at the support and advice service available in Darlington for adults with autism and it was reported that the review group had met on a number of occasions during the course of its review and a number of issues had been discussed and considered.

RESOLVED - That the recommendations contained within the final report be agreed and forwarded to Cabinet for approval.

AH35 WORK PROGRAMME

The Managing Director submitted a report (previously circulated requesting that consideration be given to this Scrutiny Committee's work programme for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2018/19 and to consider any additional areas which Members would like to suggest should be included in the work programme.

The Chair reported that a joint piece of work had commenced with the Health and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee on End of Life and Palliative Care.

RESOLVED – That the report be received.