

**COUNCIL**  
**25 APRIL 2019**

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**OVERVIEW OF ADULTS 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 Adults and Housing Scrutiny Committee has undertaken.

**Community Equipment Service**

2. We have received an update on the Community Equipment Service which is available to residents of Darlington and is provided by Medequip. The current contract which was awarded to Medequip with effect from 1 April 2015 for a five-year period, is to be extended for a year during which time the contract will be reviewed. This review will utilise focus groups and available data and will seek to review of the range of equipment that is available.
3. As the current contract is commissioned across five partner organisations, it has been difficult to get Darlington specific data in relation to performance, however this is something which will be available in the future.
4. We were informed that no formal complaints had been recorded about the service since 1 April 2018, and were pleased to note the introduction of an issues log by the Council's Occupational Therapy Team which will be reviewed and any issues will be raised directly with Medequip on a quarterly basis.

**Darlington Preventing Homelessness Strategy 2019-2024**

5. We received the draft Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019-2024 which is now out for public consultation.
6. The main aim of the strategy is the prevention of homelessness and rough sleeping, and five key objectives support the strategy. An Action Plan is in place which sets out the key actions to deliver the objectives.
7. A new partnership group will be established to oversee the delivery of the strategy. This will consist of statutory and voluntary agencies that deliver a wide range of services, some of which are related to wider needs beyond the specific issue of homelessness.
8. We were informed of a six per cent increase in the number of people who were approaching the Council for assistance, which is much lower than the increase that was expected following the introduction of the Homeless Reduction Act. This is in part due to the Council and its partner's preventative approach to dealing with homelessness.
9. We raised concern regarding begging in Darlington and the processes in place to address this. The Council's Housing Options Service, which consists of multi-agency officers, undertake checks on anyone who is found to be begging to identify those that are genuinely homeless and find solutions to address this. We were

reminded of the 'Have a heart, give smart' campaign which aims to educate and raise awareness that giving money to those who beg is not the best way to help them.

### **Review of Customer Engagement**

10. We welcomed representatives from the Tenants Panel to this Scrutiny Committee to receive an update on the review of customer engagement in housing services and the recommendations identified by the review.
11. The review has identified the need to change the method of communication with tenants. The survey found that 72 per cent of tenants have access to the internet, which supports a shift towards a digital means of communications. Engagement via Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp groups have been tested and well received and will encourage younger tenants to engage.
12. A Tenants Forum is to be established, consolidating a number of existing Tenant Panels and the scale of digital communications will be increased. Members were pleased to note that the existing Readers Panel, responsible for reviewing Housing Connect and other documents produced by the Council, was a success.
13. We were pleased to note the high level of engagement by tenants within their local community and this engagement at a local level will be further tested through a programme of events in local communities.

### **Performance Indicators**

14. We have received information on the Quarter 3 performance against those key performance indicators for 2018/19 which are within the remit of our Scrutiny Committee.
15. In relation to both Adult Social Care and Housing Services, Officers were satisfied with the Quarter 3 performance across their areas.
16. Particular reference was made to the Performance Indicator HBS025, Number of days spent in Bed and Breakfast, which is showing an increase as a result of the introduction of the Homeless Reduction Act and is reflected as a national trend.

### **Work Programme**

17. We continue to give consideration to the Work Programme for this Committee and have agreed the schedule of reports to be submitted to future meetings.

**Councillor Marjory Knowles**  
**Chair of Adults and Housing Scrutiny Committee**