

Housing Sub-Committee

26 March 2018

Present: Councillor S Cox (Chair)
Councillors L Darke, M Green, John Hunter, M
Madden, A Newman, J O'Shea, M Thirlaway
and J Wallace

HO34/04/18 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors K Bolger, P Oliver, P Mason and J Walker.

HO35/04/18 Substitute Members

Pursuant to the Council's constitution the following substitutes were appointed:

Cllr J O'Shea for Cllr K Bolger
Cllr M Green for Cllr J Walker
Cllr J Wallace for Cllr P Mason

HO36/04/18 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest or dispensations reported.

HO36/04/18 Minutes

It was **agreed** that the minutes of the meeting held on 26 February 2018 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

HO37/04/18 Police and Crime Commissioner

The Chair welcomed Vera Baird, Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) for Northumbria, and Janice Hutton, Chief Superintendent (Northern Area Commander) to the meeting. The PCC and Chief Superintendent had been invited to provide an update on the delivery of the Police and Crime Plan 2017-21 and to answer any questions that members had in relation to policing matters.

The PCC began by reminding the sub-committee of her role, which was to seek and represent the views of the public, which was reflected in the priorities contained within the Police and Crime Plan. The PCC was not involved in the allocation of resources to deliver policing matters but observed and scrutinised how the plan was delivered.

It was noted that the PCC and local neighbourhood policing had an excellent relationship with the local authorities Community Safety Team and the relevant Cabinet Member. The work that had taken place in relation to recruiting and training victims of anti-social behaviour to act as peer supporters to other victims was highlighted as a flagship piece of work. The PCC had provided funding for other local authorities in the region to replicate the support arrangements that had been developed in North Tyneside. Members referred to the positive working relationships in place that work to share information in relation to tenants to help resolve issues and provide support to meet individual needs. Members asked if this would be able to continue in the same way following the introduction of new

26 March 2018

data protection rules due to come into force May 2018. It was confirmed that data sharing would be able to continue under the General Data Protection Regulation in order to facilitate coordinated work.

Members were informed of the latest position in relation to police funding. It was noted that cuts to the government grant and funding over the past 5 years had brought about significant challenges. In total 1000 police staff (across all departments) had been lost. In February 2018 it had been agreed to increase the Council Tax precept by 12.2%, which calculated to a £12 (annual) increase for a Band D property. It was explained that had this increase not been implemented, a further £5million would have been lost from the budget. When consulting with residents in relation to the funding, there was around an 80% acceptance of the need to increase the precept. It was noted that police forces will have to work on and deliver back office efficiencies in order to have the right to increase the precept next year.

It was highlighted that residents within the Northumbria policing area were getting value for money as the force had a higher level of victim satisfaction rate than any other area of the country. In particular, 94% of domestic violence victims (of the cases that had been reported) were happy with the support they received from the police. Members were informed that crime figures had increased overall across the Northumbria policing area but that a large proportion of the increase was attributed to an improvement in crime recording. Northumbria was now 92% compliant with crime recording statistics; the second best force in the country.

There had been an increase in the number of sexual harassment and child exploitation cases reported, which was seen as an increase in confidence to report such issues. There had been a decrease in the level of anti-social behaviour across all areas of North Tyneside, with North Shields seeing a 17% reduction in reported incidents. It was however anticipated that this would rise again come the summer months. There had also been a decrease in the number of burglaries across three quarters of the borough, though there had been a 4% increase in the North Shields area. Figures also demonstrated that there had been an increase in violence against people. This was mainly an increase in harassment and stalking cases rather than physical violent crime.

A Member raised the issues of financial and online fraud and how these types of crime were on the increase, with national media often reporting on such stories. The PCC and Chief Superintendent were asked what information and support was available for people facing these sorts of crimes. It was noted that police representatives often hold business meetings with companies to demonstrate how easy it is for accounts/businesses to be infiltrated and offer advice on low level protection measures.

The home office was driving a campaign aimed at protecting vulnerable old people from cyber crime. Individuals could obtain advice relating to fraud on the police website, which included useful tips on password protection. The Chief Superintendent highlighted that neighbourhood teams would be happy to arrange to talk to groups of people about cyber fraud and security. It was noted that people were often embarrassed to report occurrences of cyber fraud and in the past not always seen to be a victim of crime. This perception had now changed and police officers received special training to help support victims of cyber crime. It was highlighted that many companies that sell computer software come into contact with instances of cyber crime but do not have established links with the police. It was suggested that such companies could be of assistance in helping the police due to the amount of time spent on looking into issues related to cyber fraud.

The Chair thanked the PCC and Chief Superintendent for their attendance and for the interesting and informative presentation given to the sub-committee.

It was **agreed** to note the information provided.

HO38/04/18 Homelessness Reduction Act

The sub-committee received a report and presentation which updated Members on the Homelessness Reduction Act implementation project. Members of Housing sub-committee had received a report on 24 July 2017 introducing the Homelessness Reduction Act. Since that time the Code of Guidance had been developed by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government. The Act was due to come into force on 3 April 2018. The council had appointed a project manager in January 2018 to oversee the implementation of the Act. The governance structure and project team were now in place and a project implementation plan had been approved by the project board.

The introduction of the Act presented many challenges for the council which included a projected increase in demand at a time of increased budgetary pressure; enabling and facilitating a cultural shift (e.g. training for officers); developing and enhancing partnerships to raise awareness of the legislation and their duties; and supporting non-priority homeless applicants. In preparation for the implementation of the Act on 3 April 2018, the project team were carrying out a review of procedures; preparing training packages for staff and partners; and reviewing the homeless service to ensure it aligned with the new legislative duties.

Members were reminded of the prevention, relief and main duties that would be brought in by the Act. The prevention duty was to take 'reasonable steps to help the applicant secure that accommodation does not cease to be available'; the relief duty to take 'reasonable steps to help the applicant secure that suitable accommodation become available' and the main duty related to the existing Section 193 of the Housing Act 1996 'to secure that accommodation is available for occupation by the applicant'.

Another key change brought about by the act was the duty on other public services to refer potentially homeless applicants to the local housing authority. Work would be done with partners to raise awareness of the duty that will be placed on them, including the NHS, job centres and prisons. Concern had been raised that GPs had been omitted from the list of public services with a duty to refer. It was thought that charities such as Shelter and Crisis would lobby for the list of bodies with a duty to refer to expand. A further change was that homeless prevention would become local connection blind. This meant that anyone in the country could present to North Tyneside at risk of being homeless and the authority would have to carry out the prevention duty to assess the individual and provide a personalised housing plan.

The sub-committee was informed that early lessons had been learnt from authorities that had piloted the changes brought about by the act. These demonstrated a 29% increase in referrals; allocated government funding was not adequate to meet the requirements of the act; new job descriptions would be required for all officers and it represented a different way of working (to how homelessness had previously been dealt with). It was noted that there was Homeless Burdens Funding and Temporary Accommodation Grant Funding to help meet the increased demands of the new legislation. This provided a total of £319,980 over 3 years. This was not ringfenced funding therefore did not have to go towards supporting homelessness; however, in light of the level of resource needed, it was agreed that most of the funding would go towards implementing the Homelessness Reduction Act. This funding would facilitate the appointment of 2 new posts: one to work with single homeless applicants and one to work with the private rented sector.

26 March 2018

Members asked whether, without the need for a local connection, applicants would approach several local authorities to see which would offer the best support for them. It was acknowledged that this may well happen and that there was nothing to prevent an applicant doing so, though the authority would only have a responsibility to provide the prevention duty. If local authorities get a reputation for being good at prevention, they could be targeted by applicants for support.

Concern was expressed that people currently would not know to contact the council if they were faced with homelessness. Officers stated that the website was currently being re-designed to combat this and that work was being done with partner organisations to ensure they knew where to direct people. A member of the committee also asked if an individual would have to start again in the process if the threat of homelessness had gone away only to return 6 months later. It was explained that the individual would have a personal housing plan developed, which would not cease to exist once they had been rehoused or homelessness had been prevented. An officer would get in touch after whichever resolution had been sought and this post care would continue for 2 years.

It was **agreed** to note the contents of the report and presentation.

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(signed by the Chair of Housing sub-committee
Cllr A Newman)