

## COUNTY COUNCIL

5 DECEMBER 2018

### QUESTIONS FROM AREA ACTION PARTNERSHIPS

#### 3 TOWNS AAP

The 3 Towns Partnership has been developing work as part of the Older Persons Social Isolation Fund allocated to all AAPs this financial year. A network meeting of over 16 organisations from across the area who deliver activities for older people came together to map what's happening locally and to identify organisational support needs.

As a result of the network meeting we now have a timetable of current activities and would like to share it with frontline workers from partner organisations who are likely to come into contact with those that are isolated, and to ask for some assistance in looking at identifying the barriers to participation of those in the 3 Towns who are isolated.

Which sections of Durham County Council currently engage with residents aged 50 and over who potentially could be socially isolated, and how can the 3 Towns Partnership work in partnership with other sections of the County Council to share information with residents and identify potential barriers to participation to consider and as a result direct action?

#### RESPONSE

Firstly, can I thank the 3 Towns Partnership for their question.

There are a number of services the Council and our partners provide which offer support to older adults who may be vulnerable and socially isolated. These services include:

Adult Care – Providing social care services following an assessment of need by a social worker or social work assistant.

Care Connect – providing emergency support via an alarm system and tele care devices. This includes annual home visits to review circumstances. Also provides a home from hospital service.

Housing Solutions – supporting other and disabled people to live more independently in their own homes through the provision of adaptations and equipment.

Fire and Rescue - Providing home safety visits to vulnerable and often socially isolated residents. Offering information and advice as part of this service.

Community Policing - Supporting vulnerable victims of crime.

Provide access to wellbeing for life which can support people to make changes to their life and access to a wide range of community activities to reduce social isolation

Contacts from each area would welcome a discussion with the AAP. Officers will share those contact details with you to enable a future meeting to be arranged.

## **EAST DURHAM AAP**

East Durham Trust, with financial support from the AAP, have made over 1,000 interventions where people have been adversely affected by the introduction of Universal Credit since its roll-out in October last year. Cases have included the provision of Food Parcels, Debt Crisis, Threats of Homelessness, Disconnected Gas and Electric and Benefit Sanctions to name a few.

Could the Council advise us what support it is providing to organisations dealing with people tackling issues brought on by Universal Credit and other welfare reforms?

## **RESPONSE**

Thank you for your question.

Universal Credit (UC) has now replaced a number of welfare benefits and credits with a single monthly payment, for all new claims made by working age single people, couples or families. The benefits replaced include Housing Benefit, Income Support, Income based Job Seekers Allowance, Employment Support Allowance, Child Tax Credit, and Working Tax Credit. We are still waiting to hear when the Government will move claimants who are already receiving these individual benefits onto Universal Credit, though national roll-out is planned for 2023.

Since 2012 when the austerity programme began we have been working closely with our partners and local organisations to understand the impacts of the changes and introduce mitigating actions wherever we can, and this includes those residents affected by UC.

The Council's housing solutions team continues to support social and private landlords offering advice, guidance and support to tenants facing financial hardship. This can include helping with applications for council schemes including Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) and Council Tax Reduction or accessing help on fuel poverty via a Home Energy Advisor at the North East First Credit Union, which the Council has granted funded since 2016. Since April this year, 919 energy advice visits have been made resulting in a combined saving on energy bills, fuel debt write off and Warm Homes Discount grants of over one hundred thousand pounds.

Since 2013 the council has awarded over 7,400 Discretionary Housing Payments to help residents with their rent. We have spent over £6.5 million on DHP awards with claimants receiving an average award of over £800. This is a huge help to those who need it most.

The Council, is currently only one of two local authorities in the North East to have retained entitlement levels for Council Tax support within the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme in line with that which applied under the national Council Tax Benefit regime prior to 2013/14. The policy has protected vulnerable residents at a time when welfare reform changes have had a significant adverse impact with over 27,000 of all claimants currently receiving 100% council tax discount.

As members are aware, the Council has allocated its 14 Area Action Partnerships (AAPs) with an annual grant each of ten thousand pounds since 2013 to deliver grass roots projects aimed at helping those affected by welfare reforms and poverty. Projects funded include: Welfare Rights support in the Stanley and 4Together AAPs; UC assistance in the Durham, 3 Towns, and Teesdale AAPs; and Employability projects in the Bishop Auckland and Shildon and East Durham Rural Corridor AAPs. In 2017/18 alone over 2,215 beneficiaries were supported through AAP projects.

Funding has also been provided for an employment and employability initiative which supports individuals by helping them become closer to the employment market, or to assist those who would like to explore self-employment as a route to improving their life chances. Since 2014, over 1,010 local people have been supported into employment and a further 120 residents have set up their own businesses.

This council continues to provide a budget of one million pounds for its Welfare Assistance Scheme (WAS) despite government funding for the scheme being withdrawn. The scheme provides food, hygiene products and utilities to residents suffering hardship and provides furniture and white goods to help residents settle or remain in the community. Many other councils have cut this vital support. Recent changes have been made to provide additional support for those affected by universal credit, and to complement and augment the Daily Living expenses provided under the this scheme, annual grants of £50,000 have been made to the Durham Foodbank and £2,700 to East Durham Trust's FEED Project.

Residents of the County continue to struggle with the Government's ongoing programme for welfare reform and the lasting impacts of the recession which has seen our County, and this region, suffer much more than others. These impacts cut across all of the Council's strategic themes and have implications across the entire council. The Council will continue to respond and work with our partners to provide as much support as we can.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all staff at the council for their continued generosity. Year after year they tirelessly support many good causes, and beneficiaries include some of the organisations which are helping those residents impacted by the government's changes to welfare and

austerity. This year this includes providing much needed donations of basic food items and Christmas treats which will be made into hampers and distributed via the Durham Foodbank and donating toys and gifts which the Salvation Army will distribute to children and young people.