

Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee

24 October 2017



Durham County Council's Housing Function

Joint Report of Lorraine O'Donnell, Director of Transformation and Partnerships and Ian Thompson, Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services

Purpose of the Report

- 1 This report provides members with background to Durham County Council's housing function prior to an overview presentation by Lynn Hall, Strategic Manager for Housing, Regeneration and Local Services. The presentation will cover an overview of the housing function and statutory duties, a summary of the work of housing solutions including key headline statistics and the up and coming challenges.

Background

- 2 The Economy and Enterprise OSC is responsible for the scrutiny of the Council Plan 'Altogether Wealthier' priority theme and associated actions. The Committee's terms of reference include examining key policies and services within the 'sustainable neighbourhoods and rural communities' priority.
- 3 The Economy and Enterprise OSC has previously considered a number of housing related issues such as:-
 - Durham County Council's Housing Strategy
 - The Housing White Paper
 - Housing Solutions – including homelessness and Durham Key Options
 - Affordable Housing
 - Housing Regeneration including renewal schemes
 - Private sector housing including empty homes, Private Landlord Accreditation Scheme and Selective Licensing
 - The LSVT process which established the County Durham Housing Group and the performance of the group on an annual basis
 - Chapter Homes

- 4 The committee's work programme for 2017-18 identifies a number of housing related issues to be considered by the committee including detail of:
- The performance of the County Durham Housing Group
 - The progress of the Housing White Paper
 - The progress of Durham Key Options lettings policy and the new marketing scheme
 - The further development of the Chapter Homes scheme
 - The progress of the Housing Strategy
 - The further development of the Homelessness Strategy including detail of preventative initiatives/schemes
 - Projects/schemes undertaken with the private rented sector

Durham County Council Housing Functions

- 5 Durham County Council has a number of housing functions which fall within the responsibility of Councillor Kevin Shaw, the Executive Member for Strategic Housing and Assets. These functions are:-
- Understanding housing need and the production of the Housing Strategy
 - Enabling the delivery of the Housing Strategy
 - Working closely with the Homes and Communities Agency
 - Ensuring Affordable Housing is available and overseeing the Affordable Homes Programme for Durham
 - Maximising the benefits of housing development
 - Strategic Fuel Poverty / Energy Efficiency
 - Specialist housing schemes and older persons accommodation
 - Rural enabling
 - Monitoring performance of Large Scale Voluntary Transfer Housing Providers
 - Coordination of the Choice Based Lettings Scheme - Durham Key Options
 - Delivery of the poverty agenda via the Council's Poverty Action Plan
 - Housing Regeneration activity
 - Statutory Homelessness, a duty to find accommodation for those clients who meet the legal requirements
 - Prevention of Homelessness
 - Gypsy Roma Traveller Site Management
 - Housing management of rented properties owned by Chapter Homes
 - Private Sector Housing
 - Home Improvement Agency including home loans and the delivery of Disabled Facilities Grants which is a statutory function.

- 6 A number of these functions are delivered by Housing Solutions and some are jointly delivered with other parts of Regeneration and Local Services including Spatial Policy and Regeneration and Development.

Housing Solutions - Aims

- 7 Housing Solutions delivers a customer based service as well as a strategic role. Its aims are to improve property condition and housing management standards, assist clients to move to more suitable accommodation and assist clients to stay at home and live independently.
- 8 These aims are delivered by a range of functions including, Homelessness Prevention, Private Sector Housing, Housing Regeneration, Durham Key Options and Home Improvement Agency.

Customer profile

- 9 Clients can contact Housing Solutions via the Housing Advice Line, a referral from a partner agency or by the use of an online portal. From April 2016 to April 2017 16, 184 clients made contact. One off advice may then be provided or further work required with one of the specialist officers.
- 10 The main reason for clients requiring specialist help and advice was due to financial difficulties, this trend has been consistent for the past two years. The most popular age range of clients contacting is aged 25 to 44 and the main household type is single males.
- 11 The main reason for clients contacting housing solutions who are threatened with homelessness is from clients living in the private rented sector where a section 21 notice requesting them to leave the property has been served.

Performance and delivery

- 12 The work of housing solutions contributes to the improvement of property condition and housing management standards. For example, financial assistance is offered to owners to improve properties via low interest loans, disabled facilities grants are completed, a number of energy efficiency measures have been delivered and 106 private landlords are registered as part of an accreditation scheme.
- 13 In 2016/2017, 1341 clients in housing need were assisted through a variety of tools to either move or stay at home. Some of the assistance includes, provision of adaptations, resolving housing benefit problems, referrals to partner agencies for supported accommodation, victims of domestic abuse remaining at home via the remain safe scheme and referrals for financial assistance for clients via the Discretionary Housing Payment Policy.
- 14 Housing Solutions aims to prevent homelessness and this approach has been used for a number of years, during 2016/2017 528 homeless applications were completed and 171 were accepted as requiring the statutory duty to secure accommodation. This trend has remained consistent over the last few years.

- 15 A number of families have been supported via the Humanitarian Support Programme and through the work of the Family Intervention Project, once again contributing to the prevention of homelessness.

Up and coming challenges

- 16 The **Welfare Reform Act 2012** provided for the introduction of a new government benefit for people of working age Universal Credit (UC). It is administered by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), who are responsible for leading the roll out of this project and ensuring that appropriate support frameworks are in place for claimants.
- 17 UC is available for **working age** people whether they work part-time, full-time or are unemployed. It will replace a number of welfare benefits and credits with a single monthly payment. The benefits to be replaced include, Housing Benefit (HB) (currently administered by local authorities), Income Support , Income based Job Seekers Allowance , Employment Support Allowance Child Tax Credit, and Working Tax Credit.
- 18 The 10 Jobcentres in County Durham are scheduled to go live with the UC Full Service over a 6 month period between October 2017 and March 2018. However, some of our residents may go live on an earlier or later date if DWP have linked them to Jobcentres outside County Durham boundaries. Details of the phasing are shown in the table below:

Job Centre	Roll Out Date
Peterlee	October 2017
Seaham	October 2017
Bishop Auckland	December 2017
Consett	December 2017
Crook	December 2017
Stanley	December 2017
Chester le Street	March 2018
Durham	March 2018
Newton Aycliffe	March 2018
Spennymoor	March 2018

- 19 Based on the lessons learnt from the roll out in other areas it is anticipated that the number of clients contacting housing solutions who are in financial difficulty will increase. This is because there is a waiting time for a UC payment and client's struggling to cope with personal budgeting skills.
- 20 **The Homeless Reduction Act 2017** sets out new duties on English local authorities with the aim of preventing homelessness. The Act requires councils to help **all** those who are threatened with homelessness (prevention duty) to stay in their accommodation or find alternative accommodation (relief duty). The implementation date is April 2017 and this will mean additional work for the officers in order to comply with the legislation.

Recommendations

21. Members are asked to note and comment on the information in the above report and the presentation provided to members at the meeting.

Background papers:

Welfare Reform Act 2012

Homeless Reduction Act 2017

Economy and Enterprise OSC – Scrutiny of Housing Issues – 29 October 2015

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Appendix 1: Implications

Finance – Not Applicable

Staffing – Not Applicable

Risk – Not Applicable

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty – Not Applicable

Accommodation – Not Applicable

Crime and Disorder – Not Applicable

Human Rights – Not Applicable

Consultation – Not Applicable

Procurement – Not Applicable

Disability Issues – Not Applicable

Legal Implications – Not Applicable