

**These minutes are draft and subject to confirmation at the next meeting of the sub-committee**

## **Housing Sub-Committee**

**25 September 2017**

Present: Councillor S Cox (Chair)  
Councillors A Arkle, K Bolger, L Darke, John  
Hunter, P Oliver, M Thirlaway and J Walker

### **HO11/09/17 Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M Madden, N Huscroft, P Mason and A Newman.

### **HO12/09/17 Substitute Members**

No substitute Members were reported.

### **HO13/09/17 Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest or dispensations were reported.

### **HO14/09/17 Low Level Anti Social Behaviour Review**

The sub-committee received a final update report in relation to the Low Level Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Review that had been carried out by a Tenant and Member review group in 2014/15. An officer from the Participation and Advocacy Team, along with 3 tenants that had served on the review group, were in attendance to present the update. Members were reminded that the review had been agreed because corporate complaints showed that low level ASB could be difficult to resolve; the ASB might not be serious enough to warrant legal action but complainants reported it was having a serious impact on their lives; and there was a need to promote greater understanding of key service roles in tackling ASB and the complexities of managing low level ASB.

The remit of the group was to review how low level anti-social behaviour was managed and made recommendations relating to communications and expectations; prevention of low level ASB; actions taken; partner working; support to victims and compliance with the Respect ASB Charter for Housing. A report with 41 recommendations was finalised in June 2015. The report had been well received by the Cabinet Member and Head of Housing, Environment and Leisure. Of the 41 recommendations, 25 were agreed, 6 were partially agreed and explanations were given as to why 9 could not be implemented. An action plan was appended to the report which set out all the recommendations and relevant actions that had been taken. The recommendations taken forward were monitored on a quarterly basis through the Respect Service Development Group.

A final meeting of the group was held on 25 July 2017. It was agreed at this meeting that the review was complete and that monitoring satisfaction with the way low level ASB was handled would be monitored by the Neighbourhood Housing Group and the tenant and scrutiny resident panel. The officer and tenants in attendance delivered a presentation that set out key achievements of the review.

It was highlighted that one important thing that came out of the review whilst, was the need for consistent information about what was expected of tenants. As a result of this a 'Being a good neighbour' booklet was produced and given to all new tenants, along with frequently asked questions on Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour. The review also ensured that issues were tackled relating to keeping victims informed, as a lot of dissatisfaction from residents was caused by people not knowing what was happening with their case.

The review had also highlighted and impacted upon the need for a better diary sheet process. As diary sheets were a vital part of collecting evidence, changes were made to help people complete and return them. Support included access to dictaphones to help those unable to write out the diary sheets. A further area identified by the review was that people needed help with their gardens. Whilst untidy gardens were not an easy problem to solve, helping people to help themselves was a positive step in improving the situation. This was done through the purchase of gardening tool packs, so people had the facilities to tidy their own gardens and this left officers more time to help those that couldn't help themselves.

The sub-committee was informed that, whilst the review did not uncover any major problems with youth ASB, it was recognised that there was a need to improve the way that youths were perceived. In order to try and achieve this, community building projects had been held where young and old people came together to share experiences and engage in activities. The tenants identified residents and councillors working together and talking to residents in focus groups, along with the improvements made, as high points in the review. Low points related to the time taken to complete the review and the restructure changes to the housing service which impacted on the implementation of several recommendations. It was noted that whilst all the actions had been implemented and the review was complete, there was a need to continuously review and update the way ASB was tackled and the support provided to victims.

Members commented that, in relation to youth ASB, it was easy to engage with young people willing to get involved in community activities. Members asked what was in place to engage with young people not willing to put themselves forward for engagement activities. It was explained that engagement activities take place in parks and that if young people are engaged in any ASB, the police take names and addresses and pass this information to the council. The young people are then contacted and signposted to positive activities they could take part in.

The Chair thanked the tenants and officer for their attendance and presentation. The positive outcomes of the joint review were emphasised and it was highlighted that further opportunities should be taken in the future to undertake further joint working.

It was **agreed** to note the report.

### **HO15/09/17 Universal Credit Communication Plan**

The sub-committee was presented with an update on the roll out of Universal Credit (UC). North Tyneside had gone onto UC 'Live Service' from November 2015 which applied to single claimants who would have normally made a new claim for job seekers allowance. From February 2018, the authority will move to the 'Full Service' where the customer group will be expanded to include virtually all working age claimants including couples and families; therefore the number of claimants will significantly increase.

Members were informed that UC replaced 5 current working age state benefits: Housing Benefit (HB), Income Support (IS), Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), Job

Seekers Allowance (JSA) and Tax Credits. UC simplified both out of work and in work support into one benefit operated by the Department for Work and Pensions. It allows claimants to move from out of work to in work and remain on the one state benefit; only the amount received would fluctuate. It was highlighted that UC was paid calendar monthly in arrears and direct to the claimant (including any entitlement to Housing Costs). Claimants would generally wait 6 weeks before the first payment would be made, though this could be longer. Alternative Payment Arrangements could be put in place in certain circumstances, which would allow the Housing Costs element of UC to be paid direct to the landlord or the UC payment to the claimant made on a weekly/fortnightly basis rather than a calendar month. The advanced payment would need to be repaid over a period of 6 months.

The sub-committee learnt that under Full Service, UC claimants must set up an on line account from which to submit a claim and to manage the claim on an ongoing basis, i.e. to notify change in circumstances, check payments, send and receive work messages with a work coach and log activity in seeking employment. The expectation would be for claimants to spend 35 hours per week looking for or preparing for work. Obligations around finding and preparing for work would be agreed through an individual Claimant Commitment. It was estimated that there would be a 6 fold increase in the number of claimants during the first year of the Full Service, with 14,000 residents claiming by February 2019. The local authority had asked Job Centre Plus to provide postcodes of all residents in receipt of UC, so that this information could be mapped across the borough and support targeted.

The sub-committee discussed the support that would be provided to residents in order to manage the change to UC. Small amounts of funding had been provided to North Tyneside Council and its partners to provide Personal Budgeting Support (PBS) and Assisted Digital Support (ADS). PBS was currently provided by the Citizens Advice Bureau and ADS through the Council's Education to Employment Team; these arrangements would continue throughout 2017/8 and potentially into 2018/9. In relation to the impact on residents, it was noted that (as of 4 September 2017) there were 250 council tenants claiming UC (Live Service) and of these 211 (84%) were in arrears. The average arrears per tenant of £643 was high compared to the average arrears of £357 for a tenant not on UC. This was attributed to the delay in payments and the inclusion of Housing Costs within the UC payment. The increase in arrears had created more administrative demand on the Housing Service, along with more signposting for support to help with budgeting. The level of arrears and the need for support was expected to rise significantly as more claimants were moved onto the Full Service.

In order to plan for the Full Service roll out, a working group had been established with officers from North Tyneside, ENGIE, the Community and Voluntary Sector and DWP who met on a monthly basis to discuss implementation and support to residents. A copy of the current UC communication plan was appended to the report. The plan identified all the people that were being updated, in what form and the frequency. A spreadsheet was also appended to the report which listed various press activities, updates and training events (for officers).

Members discussed the requirement for claimants to manage their claim on line and that not all would have access to broadband, with take up across the borough at around 70%. It was acknowledged that the government included access to wifi with a smart phone as being digitally connected. Members highlighted the difficulties that could occur when trying to fill applications out on a smart phone and expressed concern that even if digitally connected, people might not have the ICT skills to effectively manage their account online. Officers explained that a leaflet was available which mapped ICT facilities across the borough (at libraries and job centres) and included information on where the nearest metro

stations were. Whilst most venues did not have someone permanently on site to provide support to people using the ICT, claimants could arrange an appointment with a member of the Employment and Skills Team, who would meet them at a specified venue. Concerns were also raised as to the cost of people travelling via public transport to access ICT support if they do not live within walking distance of a library or job centre.

The Chair thanked the officers for the report presented and information delivered. The sub-committee would monitor the impact of the Full Service once roll out had begun in February 2018.

It was **agreed** to note the report.