CRIME AND DISORDER SELECT COMMITTEE

SCRUTINY REVIEW OF PROTECTION OF VULNERABLE OLDER RESIDENTS LIVING AT HOME

1.0   Executive Summary

1.1   This report outlines the findings and recommendations following the Crime and Disorder Select Committee's scrutiny review of Protection of Vulnerable Older Residents Living at Home.

1.2   Concerns have been raised in relation to crimes in local neighbourhoods, specifically those against vulnerable older people living at home. A specific incident occurred on the 16th February 2019 involving the burglary of an elderly woman in the Hardwick area of Stockton which, on the 19th February 2019, led the Council's Executive Scrutiny Committee to agree to refer the issue to the Crime and Disorder Select Committee for further review.

1.3   This review aimed to support local residents who may be vulnerable due to their individual circumstances, including age and housing arrangements. It undertook an assessment of local relevant public services and how they contribute to the protection of the vulnerable, as well as an assessment of local community infrastructure and whether more support was needed to help promote safety and wellbeing of vulnerable residents.

1.4   The Committee found that the number of reported incidents in Stockton-on-Tees involving victims aged 80 or over had decreased over the last two years, though the reasons for this were unknown. Whilst concerns were raised around a potential lack of reporting which could be due to a number of factors such as the age of the victim, communication difficulties, or lower expectations of the Police, this reduction may also be a reflection of the proactive work being undertaken through the numerous partnerships that exist across the Borough to protect vulnerable older people.

1.5   Whilst noting the number and variety of crime prevention initiatives, and future commitments / plans, outlined by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner and Cleveland Police in relation to the protection of older people, the Committee are well aware that this review comes at a sensitive time for both organisations following the recent HMICFRS PEEL assessment on Cleveland Police (published in September 2019). The poor grading around the effectiveness of the Force to reduce / prevent crime and protect vulnerable people is highly concerning, particularly in relation to the failure to identify vulnerable victims and failing to provide adequate safeguarding.

1.6   A key feature of Cleveland Fire Brigade's provision are the Home Fire Safety Visits – the Committee welcomed the high number of visits undertaken across the Borough during 2018-2019 which plays a significant role in identifying risk and preventing potential fire-related issues.

1.7   Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council provides an array of Adult Social Care services which assist older people at home, ranging from early intervention to longer-term support. Responding to any safeguarding concerns underpins all services, and it is hoped that the introduction of a new information system will enhance data collection and sharing around vulnerability.

1.8   OneCall is the Council's assistive technology and response service, and the Committee recognised the positive work that had been undertaken in recent years, particularly in light of limited resources. The recent results of the service's first CQC inspection ('good' across all areas) is testament to the endeavours of the small but dedicated team. Continuing efforts to raise the profile of this service (including via partner organisations) are to be welcomed, though considerations around resourcing is required to ensure that any increases in demand can be satisfied.

1.9   A key partner in terms of social accommodation, Thirteen Housing Group provide both Extra Care and Sheltered Housing schemes, as well as dispersed bungalows, across the Borough. With regards the Sheltered Housing service, the Committee felt that older residents and their families needed to be clear on the assessed level of contact they should be receiving, and that Thirteen should ensure a robust mechanism is in place to monitor if these contacts are occurring as required. Bearing in mind the reason this review was instigated, Thirteen should also provide clarity on the locking mechanisms fitted to some of their properties, as well as liaise with SBC Adult Social Care around the identification and provision of recognition equipment for vulnerable tenants, and consider specific training on dealing with older vulnerable people for its Neighbourhood Co-ordinators. Where possible, any learning from Thirteen should be cascaded to other Registered Providers / private landlords operating within the Borough to further the protection of vulnerable older people living at home.

1.10   Throughout the review, organisations stressed the importance of working in partnership, and that the relationships evidenced during the Committee's information-gathering were critical in protecting older people and promoting safety and wellbeing. To this end, more widespread buy-in of E-CINS (information / communication system used to support the management of vulnerable people) would enable key organisations to identify and share details of those older people who they consider to be 'vulnerable', and avoid people falling through gaps.

1.11   The review's focus on those aged 80 or over was queried by some contributors, as 'older' does not necessarily mean 'vulnerable'. The Committee also found inconsistencies over what different organisations constitute an 'older person' as, and the subsequent data that is (or is not) collected in relation to this cohort (some could not provide specific data on the 80+ age-group). It was noted that older people living at home may not want help (even though their families may want them to have help), and that organisations need to work sensitively to ensure any needs are identified and met, whilst maintaining, as far as possible, an older person's independence.

Recommendations

The Committee recommend that:

1) **The Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) and Cleveland Police provide assurance around the measures put in place to address the failings highlighted in the Force's recent HMICFRS PEEL assessment around identifying vulnerable victims and providing adequate safeguarding.**

2) **Thirteen extend its older people support service to tenants in the Borough's dispersed bungalows on a needs basis (in line with neighbouring Local Authorities).**

3) **Thirteen provide assurance around the provision and installation of robust locks that give its tenants adequate security in their own homes, and for any learning on the provision of locks to be cascaded to other local Registered Providers / private landlords.**

4) **Thirteen provide further assurance around the mechanisms in place to monitor if the number of calls / visits to those tenants requiring support were being conducted.**

5) **Thirteen liaise with Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) Adult Social Care around the identification and provision of recognition equipment for vulnerable tenants.**

6) **Thirteen consider specific training on dealing with older vulnerable people for its Neighbourhood Co-ordinators, in addition to more in-depth anti-social behaviour training.**

7) **Catalyst collate a list of local befriending initiatives offered by the VCSE sector and partner organisations (including SBC OneCall, Thirteen and Cleveland Fire Brigade), for circulation to vulnerable older people living at home (which can also be advertised via Stockton Information Directory).**

8) **OPCC and Cleveland Police consider and strengthen their partnership working with Age UK Teesside.**

9) **SBC consider ways in which its current community transport can be used to facilitate access for older people to community-based activities / groups.**

10) **Catalyst undertake an audit of VCSE organisations to establish transport capacity which may support greater accessibility for older people.**

11) **SBC and Catalyst produce an easy-read document listing the main contacts for support / advice which can be circulated via Stockton News and by local VCSE organisations to older people living in their own homes across the Borough.**

12) **There is a continued push for greater buy-in of E-CINS to foster a joined-up approach across all organisations in identifying and sharing details of those older people who they consider to be 'vulnerable'.**