

PEOPLE SELECT COMMITTEE

A meeting of People Select Committee was held on Monday 13 May 2024.

Present: Cllr Marilyn Surtees (Chair), Cllr Ian Dalgarno, Cllr John Gardner, Cllr Niall Innes, Cllr Eileen Johnson and Cllr Hugo Stratton.

Officers: Haleem Ghafoor, Sam Dixon (Adults, Health and Wellbeing) and Michelle Gunn.

Also in attendance:

Apologies: Cllr Paul Weston (Vice-Chair), Cllr David Reynard and Cllr Barry Woodhouse.

PEO/7/24 Evacuation Procedure

The Committee noted the evacuation and housekeeping procedure.

PEO/8/24 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

PEO/9/24 Minutes

AGREED the minutes of the meeting held on 8 April 2024 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

PEO/10/24 Action Plan for Agreed Recommendation - Review of Cost of Living Response

The Strategic Lead for A Fairer Stockton-on-Tees presented an action plan setting out how the agreed recommendations from the Scrutiny Review of Cost of Living Response would be implemented and target dates for completion.

The overall aim of the review had been to consider SBC's response to ensure the Council effectively supported the current and emerging needs of its residents, whilst also informing ongoing and future activity.

Actions were focused on the development of an Anti-Poverty Strategy and Action Plan as well as providing further advice and support to both staff and residents. There was also a separate action plan presented for recommendation 2 – “that the council continues to work with schools and governors to address the issues around the affordability of school uniforms and provide option to expand the provision of pre-loved uniforms are explored”. Timescales to implement actions ranged from April 2024 to May 2025.

Key issues highlighted and discussed were as follows:

Members questioned whether free school meals had been considered in the development of action plans and the possibility of an “opt out” system to remove the stigma for pupils requiring extra support was discussed.

It was noted that residents were not always aware of the support they are eligible for, and that an important outcome of the review was that services would be reaching out to residents.

The Committee welcomed the action plan for addressing the affordability of school uniforms and expansion of pre-loved uniforms provision.

AGREED that the Action Plans be approved, and a progress update be provided November.

PEO/11/24 Scrutiny Review of Disabled Facilities Grant

Consideration was given to the Scope and Project Plan of the Scrutiny Review of Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG), a mean tested grant for up to £30,000 for adaptations to homes to make it suitable for an individual's needs. The overall aim of the review was to consider how the Council could deliver the service in the most effective and efficient way whilst still meeting vulnerable resident's needs, as well as exploring whether sufficient support was being offered to enable residents to secure a DFG.

Key contributors identified were Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council Officers, Foundations to give information on best practice from other Authorities, and those that had been in receipt of a DFG.

The Committee received a background presentation from the review's link officer, the Housing Regeneration & Investment Manager. The presentation covered:

- What is a DFG
- Funding
- Eligibility
- Housing Assistance Policy
- Process for accessing a DFG
- Timescales
- Government Target Timescales
- Current Pressures

Key issues discussed included:

- Carrying out adaptations allowed individuals to live independently and stay in their homes for longer, preventing pressures on other council and health services.
- If the adaptations required exceed £30,000 the extra cost had to be self-funded, to assist with this the Council had a Housing Assistance Policy which provided individuals with various loan options.
- The waiting list for DFG was discussed, and it was noted that there were 181 on the Housing Regeneration & Investment waiting for approval, which was currently 12 – 24 months. Once approved, and dependent on the type of adaptation, the works would be complete within 6-12 weeks. Officers noted that Building Services Unit had 44 on their waiting list for entry level showers and this would take 4-5 months to complete.
- The Council had to report their timescales for delivering a home adaptation on an annual basis and were currently at approximately 150 days.
- The budget for DFG was discussed and it was noted that there had to be nil balance at the end of each financial year. Officers explained that due to the nature of the work, some adaptations would require payments across two

financial years which proved difficult when balancing the budget and there was a need to have a 'buffer' across years.

- It was noted by the Committee that forecasting the need for adaptations was important, and officers informed that Foundations should be able to provide further information regarding this.
- The customer journey was identified as a key focus for the review. It was noted that customer satisfaction surveys were carried out at the end of the process, which tended to be favourable, but not during the process. It was also noted that there were two services sending out separate surveys.
- There had been a 10% increase in tenants of registered providers requiring a DFG in 2023/24, which was 40% of the overall DFG Budget.
- Members wished to examine the role of the housing providers when their tenants required adaptations including whether they funded renovations, what happened to the adaptation when the tenant no longer lived in the property, and whether the types of properties required were considered when building social housing.
- Members requested to consider the government recommendations for delivering DFGs in more detail in the first instance.

AGREED that the draft scope and project plan of the review be approved.

PEO/12/24 Chair's Update and Select Committee Work Programme 2024-2025

Consideration was given to the Work Programme.

The next meeting would be held on Monday 3 June 2024. The Disabled Facilities Grants policy will be presented to the Committee along with the government's guidance for Local Authorities issued in 2018.

AGREED that the Work Programme be noted.