

PEOPLE SELECT COMMITTEE

A meeting of People Select Committee was held on Monday 4 November 2024.

Present: Cllr Marilyn Surtees (Chair), Cllr Paul Weston (Vice-Chair), Cllr John Coulson (sub Cllr John Gardner), Cllr Ian Dalgarno, Cllr Eileen Johnson, Cllr David Reynard, Cllr Andrew Sherris (sub Cllr Niall Innes) and Cllr Barry Woodhouse.

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

Also in attendance:

Apologies: Cllr John Gardner, Cllr Niall Innes, and Cllr Hugo Stratton.

PEO/34/24 Evacuation Procedure

The Committee noted the evacuation and housekeeping procedure.

PEO/35/24 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

PEO/36/24 Minutes

AGREED the minutes of the meeting held on 7 October 2024 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

PEO/37/24 Progress Update on Previously Agreed Recommendations - Review of Cost of Living Response

The Committee considered a progress update including assessments of progress following implementation of the recommendations from the Scrutiny Review of Cost of Living Response. This was the first time the update had been presented to the Committee, and all recommendations were on track.

The pension credit drop-in sessions that had taken place were noted and dates for further sessions would be confirmed. It was questioned whether any events would take place in Billingham, as there had not been a session in the town and were informed that there was due to be an engagement event held in Billingham in January 2025 where several services and agencies would be giving advice, including on pension credits. However, it was noted that more events were needed in Billingham.

Members were also informed that the work of the Fairer Stockton-on-Tees team had been shortlisted for several APSE Awards.

The Committee were also presented with an update on the School Uniform Action Plan. It was highlighted that work was ongoing to ensure pre-loved uniforms were available in a range of settings rather than schools only, as well as encouraging the use of the term eco-uniforms. This was welcomed by the Committee.

The school uniform survey conducted by Stockton & District Advice & Information Service was also highlighted. The results of the survey would be shared with schools to try to influence their uniform policies to ensure that parents were able to purchase items from a wider range of retailers. It was noted that the Northern Education Trust had updated their policy.

AGREED that Progress Update be noted, and the assessment of progress be confirmed. The next progress update would be presented in six months.

PEO/38/24 Scrutiny Review of Disabled Facilities Grant

The Committee received feedback from the Assistant Director of Housing & A Fairer Stockton-on-Tees, following a meeting held with Thirteen regarding adaptations in their properties. Members had previously been informed that the number of tenants of registered housing providers applying for DFGs had increased in recent years, and Thirteen had a commitment in their stock transfer agreement to spend £1m per year for 30 years from the transfer (2010). The key issues from the meeting included:

- Thirteen had stated that they were spending more than the £1m commitment for the past four years. They had been asked to provide a list of adaptations made to properties, which properties these had been made to, and the number of tenants on their waiting list. This information would be shared with the Committee once received.
- Thirteen were not carrying out some adaptations such as entry level showers to single storey properties e.g. first floor flats but would grant permission for these adaptations to be carried out via a DFG.

Members questioned whether adaptations remained in registered provider properties once the person vacated the property. Officers informed that currently properties were being advertised on Tees Valley Home Finder with the adaptations, and these were only being removed from the properties if they were no longer viable. The reasons for the adaptations no longer being viable included coming to the end of their lifespan or no longer under warranty.

Members further questioned whether officers were informing registered providers tenants making DFG applications to apply to their landlord for an adaptation. Members were informed that tenants of registered providers were entitled to apply for a DFG and an application would not be refused due to their landlord. However, DFG's were means tested and an application may be refused due to this, whereas if they had applied direct to their landlord the adaptation may be approved. Officers were explaining this to applicants.

The Customer Survey data, which included results from April 2024, was noted. It was highlighted that while the results were positive, the questions asked focussed on the works being carried out, and it would be useful in future to also ask for feedback regarding the application process and waiting period.

The Committee also considered the feedback from the workshop that Foundations carried out with the DFG team in September 2024. The feedback highlighted the team's commitment to supporting residents, their strong collaboration with social care and the effectiveness of the fast-track process for stairlifts and ramps. It also recognised the challenges the team faced due to staffing issues but acknowledged the

recent recruitment of an experienced DFG Manager that would bring valuable expertise. The feedback highlighted several areas for improvement, and these focussed on enhancing communication with applicants during the waiting period, ensuring detailed information was provided, and streamlining processes. The key issues highlighted were:

- Applicants would benefit from a “map” of where they were in the process
- An apprentice had been appointed, and the team were looking to appoint another member of staff in the new year.
- The legislation for DFG’s only required two quotes, however, due to the procurement process, three quotes were currently being requested. This could be explored with the procurement team.
- The website could be updated to link to the adapt my property website, which was a simple toolkit designed to advise if an application was likely to be successful.
- Foundations recommendation to remove the means test for adaptations under £5,000 may not speed up the process for an individual, as they would still be added to the waiting list for works.
- Foundations had also recommended to extend the choice of materials when carrying out adaptation and conduct post-completion visits, however clients were already given a choice of materials and post-completion visits were already being carried out.

AGREED that the information be noted.

PEO/39/24 Chairs Update and Select Committee Work Programme 2024 - 205

Consideration was given to the Work Programme.

The next meeting would be informal and held on Monday 2 December 2024.

AGREED that the Work Programme be noted.