

It was acknowledged that it had been a challenging year, with Brexit and the Economy being a higher priority for the Government at present. There had also been a frequent changeover of Housing Ministers since 2010, with the last one being in place for only seven months.

Reference was also made to the high rise flats owned by the Group that required recladding. None of the flats were located in the Pendle area, and Members were assured that the funding of this work would have no impact on the rest of the Group.

He continued by providing details of new homes that had been built in Pendle in 2016 and 2017 and plans for development in 2018. A new joint venture with the Council and Barnfield was also being considered.

He concluded the presentation by reporting on Newground Together, a charity that made a social impact by improving health and wellbeing, improving neighbourhoods and supporting people into training and employment.

Following the presentation he answered questions from Members.

50.

REVIEWS

Disabled Facilities Grants

The Team had agreed to gather information on the current Disabled Facilities Grants process after receiving a request to review the level of funding available. The original statement submitted in support of the request had stated that the maximum funding allocation was £30,000 which was then effectively reduced by fees and VAT. It was believed that the latter could be claimed back by the Council. It was also stated that, in the past, any amount over £30,000 used to be met by Lancashire County Council (LCC) in the form of a grant, and then later as a loan charged to the property. It was understood that this was no longer the case.

To assist with the review, the Environmental Health Manager presented a briefing note for consideration which addressed the issues raised and provided facts on the Disabled Facilities Grants process.

It was explained that the maximum funding available for a Disabled Facilities Grant was set by 'The Disabled Facilities Grants (Maximum Amounts and Additional Purposes) (England) Order 2008' and was currently £30,000. The Grant was mandatory under an Act of Parliament and was strict in what adaptations could be provided using this funding. The Act also set out the process of referral and application. Pendle Council did not currently offer discretionary grants for adaptations outside the scope of the mandatory grant or where there was a funding shortfall. However, Lancashire County Council did still provide funding for top ups, although this was subject to strict criteria.

At Pendle, a home improvement agency service was offered to assist applicants with the application process. The agency managed the whole process from completion of the application; obtaining estimates; and supervision and management of contractors, to completion of the work. The fee for this service was 12.5% of the cost of the work, or a minimum fee of £250. If applicants chose not to use this service, there was still a fee of 7.5% of the cost of the adaptation to provide assistance with the application form, the production of a schedule of works and light touch contractor supervision.

The fee for the agency service was currently under review, although it was in line with neighbouring authorities that offered the same/similar service. However, the fees were higher than

Scrutiny Management Team (23.01.2018)

those of Burnley Council, which did not offer this service, but charged a flat fee of £960 for every grant approved.

It was noted that the majority of work carried out as part of a Disabled Facilities Grant was exempt from VAT. Where a bedroom was provided, that element of work was subject to VAT at 20%. However, as the supply of goods and services was to the applicant, this could not be recovered by the Council.

The level of funding received by the Council for the provision of Disabled Facilities Grants was set by Central Government annually. It was provided to LCC as part of the Better Care Fund and then distributed to local councils in line with criteria set in 2005, based on the waiting list at that point in time.

The allocation to Pendle Council in 2017/18 was £835,572. An additional £75,815 was received following the budget in November 2017. By comparison, Burnley Council had received £2.035 million.

It was noted that the criteria had not been reviewed since 2005 despite waiting lists changing significantly and Council representations being made to Parliament.

Pendle currently had 106 referrals on the waiting list, dating back to October 2016. Lack of funding to facilitate the grants added to the waiting time. By the end of this financial year the total funding available to Pendle was expected to be over committed. In contrast, it was reported that other authorities would have an underspend.

RESOLVED

That this Team expresses concern at the way in which funding for Disabled Facilities Grants is allocated to district councils and requests that appropriate representations be made to Lancashire County Council, the Member of Parliament for Pendle and the Government for a review of the current criteria for distribution of the funding.

51. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The recommendations of the Communities and Local Government (CLG) Committee following its inquiry into the effectiveness of local authority overview and scrutiny committees were reported for information.

Pendle had submitted a response to a survey of councils which had formed part of the evidence considered.

It was noted that under the existing scrutiny function, Pendle had in very large part followed the recommendations as set out. It would continue to do so under the new committee system arrangements which would come into effect from the Annual Council meeting this year.

52. COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS STRATEGY

The Neighbourhood Services Manager submitted an update on the implementation of the Countryside Access Strategy 2014-18. There were four main objectives for the strategy and the performance against these objectives was detailed in the briefing note. Progress on specific actions in the strategy was also provided.

The Team praised the work of the Countryside Access Officer and acknowledged that the capacity to carry out work had been severely reduced by staff cuts and a limited budget.

53. LCC HEALTH SCRUTINY CO-OPTEE'S REPORT

Councillor W. Blackburn, the Council's co-optee on the Lancashire County Council Health Scrutiny Committee submitted an update on that Committee's work over the last six months.

A verbal update was also provided on a meeting held earlier in the day at which discussions had been held regarding the transfer of care, particularly from hospitals to social care and cuts to the health budget.

54. POLICE AND CRIME PANEL UPDATE

Councillor D. Whipp, the Council's representative on the Lancashire Police and Crime Panel submitted an update on the provisional police funding settlement 2018/19. It was explained that funding for the police primarily came from the following sources –

- Grants from the Home Office
- A proportion of local council tax (known as the precept)

It was noted that in the latest funding settlement, the Government had frozen grants from the Home Office, and any budget increases had to be found by raising council tax precepts.

Councillor B. Newman, the Council's substitute representative on the Panel provided a verbal update on a meeting of the Panel that had taken place the previous day. He confirmed that the council tax precept had been raised by £12 per year for a Band D property.

He also reported that there was to be significant investment in IT and further clarification was being sought on how this money would be spent.

55. EQUALITY OBJECTIVES

It was noted that the Council's equality objectives had last been set in 2014.

New equality objectives had since been developed for 2018-2022 and were submitted to the Team for consideration. The information was noted.

56. HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE SCRUTINY PANEL

The draft minutes of a meeting of the Health and Social Care Scrutiny Panel held on 12th December, 2017 were submitted for information.

57. WORK PLAN

The Team's work plan 2017/18 was submitted for information.

58. EXECUTIVE WORK PROGRAMME/FORWARD PLAN

The Executive Work Programme and Forward Plan for the four month period commencing 1st February 2018 was submitted for consideration.

CHAIRMAN _____