
Successes and Challenges facing Housing and Community Safety

HOUSING

Challenges: Enough affordable housing in the district. Working closely with Planning and member champions to try and square this circle. Welfare reform continuing to impact so HERO needs to be extended. DFG process ensuring that the in house service makes savings but provides quality service for community

Successes:

The HERO service goes from strength to strength and we are meeting with other Councils and organisations to further sell the merits of HERO service. Pat Smith presented at a London Capita conference and I have made contact with the Leaders of Swale and Tonbridge and Malling councils to see if there is any scope to sell HERO services to them.

Peter Fleming has written to Housing Minister: Kris Hopkins to see if HERO can help with the Government's Homelessness & Health agenda. HERO is cost neutral to SDC but we are hoping to generate income from the service by expanding it further.

DIYSO scheme with Moat has been a huge success. London Local Authorities have now taken on our model as excellent innovation and Pat Smith, Carol Clark and I are attending a launch where SDC will be mentioned as the innovators. This scheme has won runner up in two National awards .

WELFARE BENEFIT

Challenges: Universal Credit continues to be delayed with the resulting uncertainty for staff and Benefit frauds will move to SFIS but other frauds will stay with SDC (e.g. Council Tax).

Successes: Housing Benefit

The team have coped well with the first year of many benefit reform changes with the impact on residents being kept to a minimum. The average number of days to process new claims has reduced from 41 days in 2012/13 to 28 days in 2013/14. The average number of days to process changes of circumstances has reduced from 17 days in 2012/13 to 10 days in 2013/14. Benefits activity levels in 2013/14 were 14% higher than 2012/13 and 44% higher than 2011/12.

Benefit Fraud

Anti-Fraud Team's continued success in finding and sanctioning benefit fraud offenders. Discovered £288,000 of overpaid Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit and Council Tax Support. Uncertain future of the team with the start of the Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS – within DWP) in February 2016.

COMMUNITY SAFETY

Challenges: To continue to keep the District safe and meet residents expectations with fewer resources. The Anti-Social Behaviour Crime & Policing Act 2014 will introduce simpler, more effective powers to tackle anti-social behaviour. Guidance is to be published in October. To meet the objectives In the Community Safety Action Plan.

Successes

The Leader and I successfully lobbied Ann Barnes for Automatic Number Plate Recognition Cameras in the district in strategic locations to be decided. We were also successful in achieving additional officers in the District to be based and report for duty in the District. The porous borders model has stopped. Kelly Webb and I presented our work on e-safety at the Kent and Medway Community Safety Conference in Ashford on 4 June.