

Report of Executive Member for Housing and Development

Meeting of:	Date	Ward(s)
Executive	4 January 2018	All

Delete as appropriate	Exempt	Non-exempt

SUBJECT: Housing Scrutiny Review of services for vulnerable people – Executive Member response
1. Synopsis

1.1 On 28th September 2017 the Executive received a report from the Housing Scrutiny Committee about their review of housing service provided to vulnerable residents. The report highlighted 14 recommendations to improve housing services to vulnerable residents.

2. Recommendations

2.1 To agree the responses to the recommendations made by the Housing Scrutiny Committee set out in section 4 of this report and to note progress to date

2.2 To agree that officers report back on progress the Housing Scrutiny Committee in 12 months' time

3. Background

3.1 In September 2016, the Housing Scrutiny Committee started a review looking at the effectiveness of the housing services provided to vulnerable people

3.2 The main objectives of the review were:

- To identify and assess the housing options and additional housing services available to vulnerable people
- To confirm that the council's services are accessible to vulnerable people
- To assess how vulnerable people and their particular needs are identified by housing services

4. Response to recommendations

4.1 **Recommendation 1 - Housing Services should clarify their definitions of vulnerability and disability, and how these relate to each other.**

Response – The review highlighted that Housing Services should strive to know more about their residents and in terms of disability and vulnerability. Currently, disability and health conditions are categorised on iWorld (the housing management database) and staff can view these details when accessing resident records. The existing categories are being reviewed with a view to making them more meaningful.

More importantly, it is planned to add additional information to the database that will show what service adjustments staff need to make to meet the needs of the resident as a result of their disability or vulnerability (e.g. wait longer at someone's door for an answer or make contact with resident through carer or support worker). This may entail some specific development to the iWorld database.

4.2 **Recommendation 2 - Housing Services should further publicise the shortage of council housing in order to set realistic expectations of what residents may be able to successfully bid for. It is recommended that anonymised case studies are used where appropriate to illustrate the shortage of housing and to help disabled and vulnerable people choose the 'best available option'.**

Response – It is generally recognised that there is shortage of general needs social housing that allows vulnerable and disabled people to live independently. Whilst the council does publicise information on the availability of housing and the number of points needed to successfully bid for housing, we intend to strengthen publicity by:

- Making information on the shortage of housing more prominent on the council's website
- Add GIS (interactive) maps to the council's website to show:
 - The distribution of council properties by bedroom size and split by ward
 - Distribution of council owned wheelchair and adapted properties
 - The number of council owned lifetime homes

4.3 **Recommendation 3 - That the information on housing services for vulnerable people be reviewed to provide a comprehensive resource, setting out the services provided by the council, eligibility criteria, any limits to that support, and advice on how to access services that the council does not provide. This should be provided in a range of accessible formats, as required by legislation.**

Response – There is already information about the services available for vulnerable people available on various parts of the council's website.

We will look to improving this information by creating a disability housing page that will pull information together from other parts of the council's website and include links to other internal and external organisations that support people with vulnerabilities and disabilities. We will also make this information available in other formats, as required.

4.4 **Recommendation 4 - Key online customer processes be reviewed to identify and close gaps in accessibility. All housing transactions should be able to be carried out without use of a telephone or having to visit council offices; the introduction of a web chat function would be welcomed. However, it should also be recognised that exclusively online services are not accessible to all.**

Response – The council strives to ensure that its on-line services are available to all residents. The council has recently reviewed the accessibility of its web pages and there is now a dedicated accessibility section on the website, which includes BSL videos about key services (e.g. housing benefit appeals and choice based lettings). There is also a "BSL Live" function that allows BSL users to communicate in real time with the council. The council's website also provides information on various methods people can use to make accessing information easier, such as:

- Increasing the size of text on web pages
- Magnifying the screen
- Making IT devices to talk to users

Housing Services will involve the Disability Housing Panel when reviewing or investigating the feasibility of moving more housing services on-line and will investigate the feasibility of providing a web-chat function for some services.

Housing will also consider setting up more e-forms for service requests and will promote the use of existing e-forms more widely.

- 4.5 **Recommendation 5 - The council should review its information governance responsibilities and data sharing agreements to ensure that the support needs of residents are known to the services that need this information. It is important that housing services and contractors can access residents' data securely to enable them to provide high quality services to vulnerable people.**

Response – Housing Services will work with other sections in the council to identify ways of sharing information more effectively in a way that will be of benefit to residents with disabilities or vulnerabilities.

It is acknowledged that residents who tell Housing Services about their disability or vulnerability feel frustrated if they have to repeat this information to other sections in the council, but staff have to follow data protection guidelines when sharing information and will need to take account of more stringent data sharing requirements with the introduction of the General Data Protection Regulation, which comes into force in May 2018.

- 4.6 **Recommendation 6 - Consideration be given to how the voices of vulnerable people can be heard earlier in decision-making processes on procurement, commissioning and designing services; and how vulnerable people can be further involved in service monitoring and evaluation**

Response – Housing Services are working with the Housing Disability Panel to ensure that future panel meetings are more structured so that panel members have more opportunity to get involved in the design of services and give better feedback on existing services.

Some future meetings will focus on co-production where we invite panel members to get involved in designing services at the design, concept or proposal stage. Other meetings will give panel members the opportunity to scrutinise and evaluate existing services and give recommendations for improvement.

- 4.7 **Recommendation 7 - Housing Services should review how staff are trained, kept up to date, and access information on how to best support tenants with additional needs. This review should be in conjunction with service users, to identify knowledge and skills gaps and agree how these should be resolved. Staff need to understand how additional needs will have a practical impact on their work and their interactions with residents.**

Response – Housing Services will review how staff are trained to support residents with additional needs. A training needs analysis will be carried out to assess the various skill sets needed for different job roles and we will look to embed the necessary training in induction for new staff and annual appraisal of existing staff. The Housing Disability Panel will be invited to review existing training and help design future training.

- 4.8 **Recommendation 8 - A comprehensive needs matrix should be developed to enable housing services to record the needs of vulnerable and disabled people in greater detail. This will help to ensure that staff have the right resources and are aware of how they need to adapt their services for those with additional needs.**

Response – This will be addressed as part of the response to recommendations 1 and 7. We will review and clarify our definitions of vulnerability and disability to help staff know what service adjustments they should make to improve and tailor service delivery more effectively to different individuals and groups. Through better staff training we will help staff more fully understand the needs of different groups and enable them to take a more empathetic and understanding approach to all residents.

- 4.9 **Recommendation 9 - When moving into a council property, disabled and vulnerable tenants should be consulted on the repairs and adaptations that are required to the property. The works to be carried out should be confirmed in writing with indicative timescales to ensure that both the council and the tenant have mutually agreed expectations.**

Response – Disabled and vulnerable people are given extra support when bidding for council properties where required, and are also given extra assistance when viewing empty properties. Where possible adaptations to properties are carried out in advance of a new tenant moving in and timescales for this are negotiated with tenants. On occasion, minor adaptations may be carried out shortly after a tenant moves in but this should not disadvantage the tenant in anyway.

Housing Services will work with Occupation Therapy services to tighten up this process to help ensure that tenants understand how the adaptations process works and will publish information on the council's website to help manage expectations.

- 4.10 **Recommendation 10 - Housing services should publish the standards which they seek to meet when communicating and engaging with disabled and vulnerable people, and should consider reviewing service standards and feedback mechanisms with service users.**

Response – As mentioned under recommendation 4.6, the Housing Disability Panel will be more involved in helping Housing Services work more effectively with vulnerable and disabled people. We will ask for the panels feedback on existing service standards and review them in light of the panel's comments. We will then publish any revised service standards on the council's website.

The recommendations from the current scrutiny review of housing communications will also help with the design of any revised service standards.

- 4.11 **Recommendation 11 - In order to develop the relationship between the council and local communities, consideration should be given to making the Housing Operations service more 'holistic', whereby a greater range of services are provided to residents on a more local basis.**

Response – The Homes and Communities division (formerly Housing Operations) aims to provide an enhanced housing management service to residents. This will be done by getting to know residents better by gathering improved information on their health and support needs and helping improve their health and wellbeing, resilience and also helping them to better manage their finances and find employment.

The Homes and Communities service will also work more closely with residents on the co-design of their future services. The Housing Disability Panel have already had opportunities to provide input into the new service and will have further involvement as the new service is developed and implemented.

- 4.12 **Recommendation 12 - Housing Services should set clear expectations for contractors about working with disabled and vulnerable residents; this should include standards for staff training and accessibility. Compliance should be enforceable and regularly monitored to ensure that contractors are compliant with relevant disability legislation and that they are responsive to the needs of vulnerable and disabled people. Housing contractors should also be required to report any welfare concerns they have to the Housing service.**

Response – As part of the procurement process for any new contract at Islington, tenderers are required to declare if they have in past 3 years had any complaint upheld against them by the Equality and Human Rights Commission on grounds of unlawful discrimination. Tenders may be rejected as non-compliant if a complaint has been upheld and the council is not satisfied that sufficient measures have been put in place to prevent similar unlawful discrimination reoccurring. In addition, all tenderers are required, as part of their tender submission, to sign up to support the Islington Charter for Fairness and Equality. As part of the tender process, contractors' submissions are partially assessed on how they propose, through the delivery of the contract, to promote equality and diversity issues and ensure their service offer meets the needs of disabled and vulnerable residents. These commitments form part of the contract the contractor has with the council. In addition, standard terms within the council contract

require the contractor not to unlawfully discriminate within the meaning and scope of the law and any related regulations, including within the Equality Act 2010 or similar.

The contractor's performance against these commitments is monitored through the regular contract monitoring meetings during the term of their contract.

In order to help support existing contractors to better meet the needs of disabled and vulnerable residents a guidance pack will be produced by Housing Services. This pack will be formally issued to contractors during a contract monitoring meeting and use of the pack will be a contractual requirement. The pack will include the following:

- Details of any revised services standards covering best practice on communicating with vulnerable or disabled residents.
- Details of the council's minimum expectations with regard to contractor staff training on the issues of disability and vulnerability and how services delivered by the contractor should take account of different needs. Where contractors are unable to deliver such training the council will offer places on courses it delivers to its own staff.
- A reminder for the contractors of the process they must follow to report back to the council any concerns they have about a resident or a member of their household related to unmet needs and additional support required as a result of disability or vulnerability or safeguarding.
- Additional information will be included setting out expectations and services available related to interpretation and translation and Make Every Contact Count (MECC)

4.13 **Recommendation 13 - Liaison between housing, social services and NHS services be reviewed in regards to hospital discharge arrangements; to ensure that reception centres and other relevant housing services are aware of care needs and that disabled and vulnerable people are fully supported.**

Response – Due the shortage of temporary accommodation, it can sometime be difficult to source suitable accommodation when a homeless person is being discharged from hospital at very short notice. Equally, when an existing council tenant is discharged from hospital at short notice, there may only be a very limited time to get necessary adaptations made to their property before they return home.

Housing Services are working closely with Adult Social Services and NHS services to ensure hospital discharges are managed as effectively as possible. Where a homeless person is being discharged from hospital, there is a dedicated manager in the council's Homelessness Assessment Team for the hospital to contact before discharge. Where an existing council tenant is being discharge from hospital, there is also a dedicated manager in one of the Area Housing Offices for the hospital to contact before discharge.

We will review how we work with social services and NHS services to see how we can tighten up this process, particularly in relation to disabled and vulnerable residents. One improvement that is currently being explored is seeing if it is feasible for the hospitals to inform housing at the point of admission (rather than discharge) if a patient is a council tenant or homeless to give Housing Services more time to find suitable housing for them.

4.14 **Recommendation 14 - Service user groups should be invited to participate in the forthcoming review of the Council's housing management services, and other service reviews as appropriate**

Response – As mentioned under sections 4.6 and 4.11 of this report, we intend to involve the Housing Disability Panel in the future working arrangements of the Homes and Communities Service. Housing Services also have three other established resident groups that get involved in the design of services and give feedback on, and scrutinise, existing services, namely:

- Housing Service Review Group
- Leasehold Reference Group
- Housing Management and Repairs Reference Group

5. Implications

5.1 Financial implications:

Whilst the report proposes the implementation of a number of improvements and changes to current working practices, relationships and procedures within Housing, across the Council and with external partners. It is not anticipated that these changes in ways of working will require additional funding.

5.2 Legal Implications:

The council is under a duty to have due regard to the need to achieve the goals identified in paragraphs (a) to (c) of s149(1) of the Equality Act:

- (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

The council is also under a duty to make reasonable adjustments to the delivery of its housing services to ensure that disabled and vulnerable people can use the services and can communicate & engage with the Homes and Communities division.

Consideration of the council's equalities responsibilities is evidenced in the responses to the recommendations made by the Housing Scrutiny Committee.

5.3 Environmental Implications

There are no significant environmental implications related to the recommendations outlined in this report, although making information for residents available in a variety of formats, as well as on-line, may involve the printing of leaflets

5.4 Resident Impact Assessment:

The council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and to advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations, between those who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it (section 149 Equality Act 2010). The council has a duty to have due regard to the need to remove or minimise disadvantages, take steps to meet needs, in particular steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities, and encourage people to participate in public life. The council must have due regard to the need to tackle prejudice and promote understanding.

A Resident Impact Assessment (RIA) has not been completed at this stage. Where the proposals in the report may have equalities implications for residents, RIAs will be undertaken. For example, an RIA would be completed as part of consideration of moving more services on-line.

6 Reason for recommendations

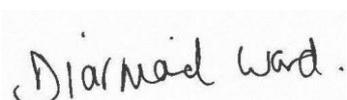
- 6.1 This report details the Executive Member's response to the recommendations of the Housing Scrutiny Committee and how Housing Services intend to meet the committees' recommendations

Appendices: None

Background papers: None

Final report clearance:

Signed by:



Executive Member for Housing and Development Date 15 December 2017

Report Author: Paul Byer, Service Improvement and Involvement Manager
Tel: 020 7527 4005
Email: Paul.Byer@islington.gov.uk

Financial Implications Author: Lydia Hajimichael
Tel: 020 7527 5160
Email: lydia.hajimichael@islington.gov.uk

Legal Implications Author: Marina Lipscomb
Tel: 020 7527 3314
Email: marina.lipscomb@islington.gov.uk