

Housing Scrutiny Committee - 6 September 2016

Minutes of the meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Committee held at Committee Room 5, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD on 6 September 2016 at 7.30 pm.

Present: **Councillors:** O'Sullivan (Chair), Andrews (in part), Erdogan, Gantly, Hamitouche, Heather, O'Halloran and Picknell.

Co-opted members: Rose-Marie McDonald and Jim Rooke.

Also present: **Councillor:** D Ward

Councillor Michael O'Sullivan in the Chair

207 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item A1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Gary Doolan and Marian Spall.

Councillor Raphael Andrews submitted apologies for lateness.

208 DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item A2)

Councillor Gary Heather for Councillor Marian Spall.

Councillor Raphael Andrews for Councillor Gary Doolan.

209 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS (Item A3)

None.

210 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (Item A4)

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 11 July 2016 be confirmed as a correct record and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

211 CHAIR'S REPORT (Item A5)

None.

212 ORDER OF BUSINESS (Item A6)

No changes were proposed to the order of business.

213 **PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item A7)**

None.

214 **HOUSING SERVICES FOR VULNERABLE PEOPLE: SID AND WITNESS EVIDENCE (Item B1)**

(a) Agreement of SID following the comments of the Disability Housing Panel

The Committee considered the comments of the Disability Housing Panel and the proposed changes to the scrutiny initiation document.

The proposed changes were agreed, subject to an amendment to widen the scope of the assessment of housing advocacy services for vulnerable people. It was agreed that the Committee should consider the housing advocacy services available to all vulnerable residents, not only council tenants. It was suggested that further information on this matter could be considered as written evidence. It was also noted that advocacy services and the way in which organisations communicate with vulnerable people at risk of losing their home could be raised with housing associations under the regular RSL scrutiny item.

It was agreed that references to 'bed blocking' in the appendix be amended to 'delayed discharge'.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That the comments of the Disability Housing Panel be noted.
- (ii) That the SID be agreed as set out in the paper submitted, subject to amending the final bullet point under section 2 of the scope to read 'Advocacy services available for vulnerable *people* at risk of losing their home'.
- (iii) That references to 'bed blocking' in the appendix be amended to 'delayed discharge'.

(b) Witness Evidence Plan

It was agreed that a wide range of service users should be invited to give evidence to the Committee. It was also suggested that a visit to service users would be useful.

The Committee requested that written evidence be provided in advance of meetings where possible.

RESOLVED:

That the Witness Evidence Plan be agreed, subject to the following amendments:

- An open invitation to service users to attend a future meeting to give evidence;
- A visit to service users be arranged.

(c) Context of the review

Paul Byer, Service Development Manager, presented the SID appendix to the Committee, which detailed the council's additional support services for vulnerable people.

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The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- The annual programme of visits to vulnerable tenants evaluated a range of factors, including the condition on their home, if any repairs or adaptations were required, if benefits advice was needed, and if a smoke alarm was fitted. Although it was not possible to visit every vulnerable tenant annually, it was advised that 400 vulnerable tenants were visited every year. Officers ensured that different residents were visited each year, however it was not possible to advise of the maximum waiting time for a home visit. The Committee queried the effectiveness of the visits and the proportion of tenants aged over 75 visited each year.
- Floating support services were available for vulnerable people with more complex needs, such as drug and alcohol dependencies, or those at risk of losing their tenancy.
- The handyman scheme was available to all borough residents, including those living in housing association properties. Works were carried out by caretakers and staff were trained to identify vulnerabilities.
- It was confirmed that all residents could be referred to the fire service for a home safety visit.
- The assisted decoration and discretionary repairs services were only available to council tenants. It was advised that housing associations may have their own similar discretionary services.
- Although officers had previously reviewed the effectiveness of the home adaptations service, it was advised that adaptations were not routinely reviewed for effectiveness and customer satisfaction. The Committee commented on the possible financial exploitation of vulnerable people and the need to ensure that residents have confidence in the council's contractors.
- It was queried how vulnerable residents knew about the range of services available to them. In response, it was advised that residents were referred to services and information was available on the council's website. The service had minimised the number of leaflets produced as these were not thought to be effective.

The Committee thanked Paul Byer for his attendance.

(d) Evidence from Adult Social Services

Claudia Thompson, Assistant Director of Adults Integrated Care Services, made a presentation to the Committee on the social care needs of residents and the joint work between Housing and Adult Social Services.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- The Care Act 2014 had been the biggest change to the social care framework for 60 years, introducing new duties and consolidating existing legislative requirements. The Act required social services to work closely with its health partners and introduced a vision for 'wellbeing' which was not previously outlined in legislation.
- The framework introduced by the Care Act was more outcome focused and placed a greater emphasis on personal choice in the care received.
- It was noted that Islington took a 'strength based approach' in which the council assessed what vulnerable people could do independently and then worked to support vulnerable people in the areas they struggled with.
- Joint commissioning took place with Public Health and Islington Clinical Commissioning Group to ensure a coordinated approach.

Councillor Andrews entered the meeting.

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- Following a question, it was advised that residents could find out about the council's adult social care services through the website or by contacting the council. The service also targeted promotion to specific groups, such as carers. The take-up of all services was monitored.
- It was noted that the council's supported accommodation services were often based outside of the borough. All services were regularly reviewed to ensure that they met residents' needs. The service sought to move those in supported accommodation closer to the borough when possible.
- A member highlighted recent casework involving vulnerable tenants and their entitlement to social housing. Officers advised that housing entitlement would depend on the particulars of the case and offered to take this up outside of the meeting.

The Committee thanked Claudia Thompson for her attendance.

215 ESTATE SERVICES MANAGEMENT SCRUTINY REVIEW: 12 MONTH UPDATE (Item B2)

David Salenius, Principal Housing Manager – Estate Services, presented the report which set out progress against the Committee's recommendations.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- Since the scrutiny review the service had focused on maximising income, including through the refurbishment of garages. It was noted that the letting of garages at Maryland Walk on a commercial basis would generate income of up to £45,000 in 2017/18. The refurbishment of garages for general use was expected to generate up to £72,000 per annum.
- Officers had investigated the potential of offering caretaking and other services to external organisations on a commercial basis. It was advised that the council's service had a higher cost compared to commercial competitors and further market testing was required.
- Work was underway to improve caretaking facilities which did not meet minimum health and safety standards.
- Following a question, it was advised that there had been recent problems with the use of leaf blowers due to concerns about the transportation and storage of petrol. Officers were working to resolve this issue and had investigated the procurement of electric leaf blowers, however it was concluded that these were not as effective and the purchase would represent a capital loss.
- A member highlighted problems with lumber dumping on the Andover and Six Acres estates, suggesting that the current waste arrangements were not satisfactory. Officers advised that the protocol was for caretakers to move dumped lumber to specific collection points and for the lumber to be removed within 24 hours. Work to resolve performance issues was ongoing.
- Following a query, it was advised that a few hundred garages could not be let as they either required repairs, needed to be cleared, or were earmarked for future residential development. Officers commented that it was difficult to significantly increase the refurbishment programme within existing resources.
- It was noted that there was greater demand for garage space in the south of the borough that resulted in a waiting list for garage space.

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- The Committee commented on the benefits of communal gardening, which included increasing community cohesion and improving the attractiveness of estates. It was suggested that further work was required to advertise such opportunities.
- The Committee considered the cost of garage rent. It was suggested that the cost of rent was beyond the means of some residents, however it was noted that the cost was cheaper than commercial alternatives.

The Committee thanked David Salenius for his attendance and for the progress made in implementing the recommendations.

RESOLVED:

That the progress made in implementing the recommendations be noted.

The meeting ended at 9.25 pm

CHAIR