

Housing Scrutiny Committee - 8 September 2014

Minutes of the meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Committee held at on 8 September 2014 at 7.30 pm.

Present: **Councillors:** O'Sullivan (Chair), Kay (Vice-Chair), Andrews, Fletcher, Williamson, Diner and O'Halloran

Councillor Michael O'Sullivan in the Chair

- 10** **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item 1)**
Councillor Erdogan and Councillor Andrews for lateness
- 11** **DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item 2)**
None
- 12** **DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS (Item 3)**
None
- 13** **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (Item 4)**
RESOLVED:
(a) That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 14 July 2014 be confirmed and the Chair be authorised to sign them
(b) That the information requested in minute 9(b) in relation to the current street charges in the borough be circulated to Councillor Fletcher
- 14** **CHAIRS REPORT (Item 5)**
The Chair stated that the report back on the progress of the Tenant Management Scrutiny review recommendations would now be considered at the meeting of the Committee on 02 December 2014
- 15** **ORDER OF BUSINESS (Item 6)**
The Chair stated that the order of business would be as per the agenda
- 16** **REGISTERED PROVIDERS - PRESENTATION (Item 7)**
Denise Lewis, Housing and Adult Social Services, was present and made a presentation to the Committee, a copy of which is interleaved.

During consideration of the report the following main points were made –

- Members expressed the view that it was intended for the Committee to look at some Registered Providers and conduct a mini scrutiny with some concise recommendations to the Executive
- Members expressed concern, that although the practice was not widespread, some Housing Associations were selling off expensive properties to fund developments outside the borough to which the Council would not be given nomination rights. In some cases these properties had been given by the Council to Housing Associations in the past. The Committee felt that this was unacceptable and should

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be an addition to the review for this practice to be investigated to ascertain the reasons for this

- In response to a question it was stated that only 10% of RSL'S housed homeless families
- In response to a question it was stated that where necessary work was undertaken with the Corporation of London but this was on specific cross border developments and not usual practice
- The Council had little control over whether Housing Associations disposed of their stock
- Reference was also made to the review needing to include how RSL's managed tenant engagement, particularly where they had engaged in major stock transfers
- Whilst the Council encouraged RSL's to develop there was often an issue with capacity and some Housing Associations chose to prioritise existing tenants over new building schemes
- Members expressed the view that they should be provided with a list of RSL's operating in the borough, the number of units that they manage and details of their assets and sources of income if this is available
- Members stated that it would be useful to look at any scrutiny reviews carried out by other Local Authorities into RSL's

RESOLVED:

(a) That the Director of Housing and Adult Social Services include the suggestions referred to above and arrange for witness evidence to be provided from a large, medium and small RSL in the borough, including a specialist provider to future meetings of the Committee

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(b) That the Director of Housing and Adult Social Services provide Members with details of RSL's operating in the borough together with the other information requested above

DHASS

(c) That reports from other Local Authorities that have carried out scrutiny reviews into RSL's be circulated to Members for information

HDS

The Chair thanked officers for their presentation

17 SCRUTINY REVIEW - ESTATE SERVICES MANAGEMENT - PRESENTATION/SID (Item 8)

David Salenius, Principal Housing Manager – Estate Services, Housing and Adult Social Services, was present for discussion of this item and laid round a document for Members of the Committee, a copy of which is interleaved.

Members considered the circulated Scrutiny Initiation Document.

During consideration of the report the following main points were made –

- A Member expressed the view that the SID should include how services were provided to tenants with additional needs, such as the disabled, long term sick etc. and propose improvements in this area
- The Committee also needed to look at the provision of street cleaning services and estate cleaning services to ensure a joined up approach is being taken and witness evidence from Environment and Regeneration be added to the list of witnesses in the SID

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- Reference was made to the Special Projects staff and it was stated that recruitment to outstanding vacancies is currently taking place
- A Member referred to the Health and Safety hazards caused by tenants having plants, buggies etc. on landings and walkways on estates and that despite her reporting this no action had been taken. David Salenius stated that if details were provided following the meeting he would investigate this. However it was noted that some estates were provided with balcony boxes for tenants
- In response to a question it was stated that funding for estate improvement schemes was allocated usually by Tenants and Residents Associations however proposals from Ward Councillors were considered and surveys of tenants carried out in addition to proposals put forward by the Estate Services Management team
- A Member referred to problems with illegal parking on estates and it was stated that parking enforcement was dealt with by a contractor, however if there were problems Members could contact him and he would ensure that the contractor targeted any problem estates
- Members expressed the view that there was a need to look at the role of caretakers to undertake additional functions on estates and that this should be added to the SID. In addition there should be details provided of any work that is currently contracted/sub contracted out
- Reference was made to the fact that £666,000 had been spent in 2013/14 on scaffolding for non responsive repairs and that the Council should consider setting up its own house scaffolding team as this may prove cost effective. David Salenius responded that whilst this was not his responsibility he sure that any cost effective measures were being investigated by the new 'in house' service

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Scrutiny Initiation Document be approved subject to the following additions –
- How services are provided to tenants with additional needs
 - The provision of street cleaning/estates cleaning services and improvements for a more 'joined up' approach and the addition of a representative from Environment and Regeneration be added to the list of witnesses
 - The role of caretakers and whether there were additional duties that could take on on estates
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- (b) That if Members had any further proposals for addition to the SID these should be provided to the Chair and Head of Democratic Services for consideration
- (c) That any problems relating to landings and hallways and illegal parking on estates, as referred to above, be reported to the Principal Housing Manager, Estate Services, for investigation

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The Chair thanked officers for their presentation

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HOUSING ALLOCATIONS - PRESENTATION (Item 9)

Karen Lucas, Head of Housing Needs, Housing and Adult Social Services, was present for discussion of this matter and made a presentation to the Committee thereon, a copy of which is interleaved.

During consideration of the report the following main points were made –

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- It was noted that there was an uneven spread of voids in the borough with 16 voids in Barnsbury, 36 in Highbury East with 118 in Bunhill and 130 in Mildmay
- RSL's could not refuse Council nominations for housing, except where there were too higher needs for general housing
- Some applicants were not accepting RSL properties as they were not able to afford the rent
- In response to a question about the accommodation being provided for children leaving care it was stated that there were none in temporary accommodation and Housing, in partnership with Children's Services, had set up a small hostel for use by Children's Services and she could confirm that there were no care leavers in bed and breakfast accommodation
- In response to a question it was stated that the average number of points required for rehousing were 152 points for a bedsit, 193 for a 1BR, 222 points for a 2BR, 211 for a 3 BR and 260 for a 4BR but there were variations between wards as to the number of points required
- Reference was made to the fact that it would be useful to have information as to the main factors that determine how people are allocated accommodation, including how many next generation residents have been allocated accommodation
- In relation to the measures that the Council adopt to encourage tenants to downsize, it was stated that tenants were incentivised to downsize as to the number of bedrooms they give up, and assistance was given to help them with removal costs and officers assist with the process
- In response to a question about the average turnaround time for a void, it was stated that this information would be circulated to Members following the meeting but once returned to Housing these were usually let within a few weeks
- Reference was made to the Choice Based Lettings website and that this needed to be improved in order to provide more information as to details of the properties in order that people can make a more informed choice as to whether to bid for them. This was even more important in the instances where prospective tenants suffered from a disability or other impairments
- In response to a question as to the rent guarantee for tenants who downsize and how long this lasted for it was stated that this information would be provided to Members following the meeting

RESOLVED:

- (a) That Members be provided with information as to the main factors that determine how people are allocated housing including how many next generation residents have been allocated accommodation

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- (b) That details of the average turnaround time for voids be circulated to Members of the Committee for information

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- (c) That Members be circulated with details of the rent guarantee for tenants who downsize

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FLATS OVER EMPTY SHOPS - PRESENTATION (Item 10)

Ian Tagg, Procurement and Development Manager, Housing and Adult Social Services and Ellis Turner, Principal Environmental Health Officer were present and made a presentation to the Committee.

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During consideration of the presentation the following main points were made –

- Whilst the Council were committed to bringing empty properties back into use there had been a reduction in 2012/14
- Street surveys were undertaken to identify and verify empty properties
- Assistance was given to owners to bring properties back into use and as a last resort the Council could take enforcement action
- As at April 2014 447 properties had been empty over 6 months and a street survey was being undertaken to verify this and flats over shops would be identified as part of the survey
- An additional licensing survey was taking place in Caledonian and Holloway Roads with a sample survey of private rented units and this area had a large number of flats over empty shops. There were 1907 units in Holloway Road and 1267 in Caledonian Road and the survey was attempting to access 1 in 3 properties. Following the survey the results would be assessed for the need for an additional licensing scheme
- In future formal letter would be sent out to owners to increase the number of empty properties identified
- Reference was made to the fact that the Council were now taking proactive measures to identify empty properties and to ascertain the need for an additional licensing scheme

The Chair thanked officers for their presentation

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WORK PROGRAMME 2014/15 (Item)

Members expressed the view that the work programme contained too many items to enable them to effectively scrutinise all the topics listed.

RESOLVED:

(a) That the Chair be requested to consider revisions to the work programme and these be submitted to the next meeting for consideration

(b) That the Leaseholder Valuation Tribunal item scheduled for the meeting on 2 October be deleted from the agenda and circulated to Members for information

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The meeting ended at 10.00 pm

CHAIR