

**ROYAL BOROUGH OF GREENWICH**  
**HOUSING & ANTI-POVERTY SCRUTINY PANEL**

**TUESDAY, 11 APRIL 2017 AT 7.00 PM**

**MINUTES**

**PRESENT:**

**Members:**

Councillors Tonia Ashikodi, Bill Freeman, Mehboob Khan, Matthew Morrow, Steve Offord and Nuala Geary

**Under Standing Orders**

Councillor Averil Lekau (Cabinet Member for Housing & Anti-Poverty) and Councillor David Stanley (Chair of Overview & Scrutiny)

**Officers**

Assistant Director, Regeneration Enterprise and Skills (Transportation), Assistant Director, Community Services (Housing), Sustainability Team Leader, Corporate Development Officer and Committee Officer

**Others in Attendance**

Kate Griffiths, National Management Trainee

In the absence of the Chair, Councillor Khan proposed and was seconded by Councillor Offord, and it was agreed by the Panel, that Councillor Ashikodi be Chair for the duration of the meeting.

The Chair varied the order of business and took Item 8 after Item 4, Items 5 and 7 together, then Item 6.

**Item  
No.**

**I Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Christine May and from Alison Cullen.

Apologies for leaving early were given by Councillor Mehboob Khan.

## **2 Urgent Business**

There was no urgent business.

## **3 Declarations of Interest**

With regard to Item 6, Councillor Bill Freeman stated that he was an employee of Lewisham Homes but that it did not constitute an interest.

### **Resolved -**

That the list of Councillors' memberships as Council appointed representatives on outside bodies, joint committees and school governing bodies is noted.

## **4 Minutes**

A Member raised a query as to whether a previous action point with regard to the call for a strategic housing function had been completed. A Member noted that there was to be a strategic review of the function.

The Chair confirmed that the Leader of the Council had been written to and commented that clarification of the housing function situation could be expected in the future.

### **Resolved -**

That the minutes of the meeting of the Housing and Anti-Poverty Scrutiny Panel held on 8 February 2017 be agreed and signed as a true and accurate record.

## **5 Quarter 3 Performance Reporting - Housing** **7 Asset Management & Repairs Services Performance**

The Chair agreed to take Items 5 and 7 together

The reports were presented by the Assistant Director, Community Services (Housing). The missing information from Item 5 Appendix A (first bullet point of the Woolwich Estates Project) would be circulated to the Panel.

**Action: Community Services (Housing)**

In response to questions from the Panel about homelessness the Assistant Director, Community Services (Housing) replied that homeless households were only to be given temporary accommodation outside the borough, or put in shared accommodation, as a last resort, however, the Royal Borough of Greenwich was now facing escalating demand which meant an increase in the accommodation being outside of the Borough. There was no target for acquiring properties for homeless people from accredited landlords as it was a continuous process; it was recognised that the private sector was a fundamental issue with regard to tackling homelessness. The main way the Council sought to reduce homelessness was through preventive services, and there was a lot of specialist teams who worked with relevant agencies on the matter and it was that partnership which helped keep homelessness low.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Anti-Poverty stated the aspiration was not to have any homeless households placed out of the Borough.

In response to questions from the Panel on rough sleepers the Assistant Director, Community Services (Housing) explained that the Council supported the pan-London No Second Night Out project. Funding was being used to develop rough sleeping provision in partnership with Thames Reach and London and Quadrant. Funding was used to allow rough sleepers to travel to various places for accommodation. The Royal Borough of Greenwich had a low number of rough sleepers, and there were no known entrenched rough sleepers. Some individuals upon assessment were found not to be rough sleepers but rather fell under Nil Recourse. Rough sleeper statistics would be circulated to the Panel.

**Action: Community Services (Housing)**

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Anti-Poverty noted that Thames Reach currently had more facilities than the number of rough sleepers. After accommodating rough sleepers they then had to find the right pathway for that individual to bring them back into the community.

In response to questions from the Panel on refuges for domestic abuse victims the Assistant Director, Community Services (Housing) stated that he was not aware of any issues with the existing provision. Housing Services used refuges as well as the Her Centre and also made use of the sanctuary scheme which allowed individuals to stay in their own home. The basic policy was to invest in prevention. Information about local refuge centres would be circulated to the Panel.

**Action: Community Services (Housing)**

The Panel queried whether the Tenancy Services rent collection rate of 99.44% was due to low rent. The Cabinet Member for Housing and Anti-Poverty commented that while low rent was a factor a lower level of service charges was also an important factor. A problem for tenants was where they chose a property on the basis of low rent and then found it had a prohibitive service charge.

With regard to questions from the Panel about Performance Indicators the Assistant Director, Community Services (Housing) said some services were targeting under occupancy, some tenants had adjusted to the bedroom tax but some were getting discretionary housing benefit and so there was less motivation for them to change property. For ombudsman enquiries the aim was to tackle all cases in the round as a high priority hence the 100% target. Asset management performance indicators were reviewed, there was some concerns which needed to be addressed but it was expected that there would be an improvement over the municipal year.

### **Resolved –**

That each report be noted.

## **6 Scrutiny Review of Community Participation within Tenancy**

The report was introduced by Kate Griffiths, National Management Trainee, and the Assistant Director, Community Services (Housing)

In response to questions from the Panel Kate Griffiths, National Management Trainee, said the new Housing Service Panels would be service/subject focused rather than geographically based; the Borough Wide Housing Panel would retain input from local areas. The recommendations were similar to provisions in a number of other local authorities, but it was emphasised that provision of services varied across local authorities. The Virtual Panel was something that was still to be defined, but consideration would be given to access by the disabled or those without IT skills; it had been noted from comments received that some people said they did not attend meetings and they had to look at how they got them involved. Kate Griffiths, National Management Trainee detailed the training that would be given to Panel members. The Assistant Director, Community Services (Housing) added that some sort of tenancy priority budget could be considered as part of the review.

The Chair of Overview and Scrutiny said he supported the Officers' recommendation. He noted that tenants had indicated that they valued

contact with Ward Councillors, and so that contact needed to build in. He stressed that the review needed to address the issue of bringing in a greater range of people.

Members discussed the issue of public attendance at Housing Panels. It was queried how attendees would be contacted and reminded of matters. It was recognised greater use needed to be made of social media.

Kate Griffiths, National Management Trainee and the Assistant Director, Community Services (Housing) confirmed communication was being looked at, and that social media would be used as a means of improving attendance. They were to set up an Interactive Database and there would be targeted invites.

Members emphasised that if Housing Panel meetings involved Councillors then they should not clash with other Council meeting dates.

The Chair agreed to a member of the public addressing the Panel.

Eileen Glover addressed the Panel. She said the current Housing Panels did not know that they were to be replaced. While accepting the use of social media she noted that not everyone was connected to social media; the concern was that only those who were connected would get involved and those who were not would be effectively disenfranchised. She did not feel that the Council's website and Greenwich Info were satisfactory. It was felt that the new Borough Wide Housing Panel would be disconnected from local estates. Her concern was that the proposals were elitist and that local people would feel ignored.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Anti-Poverty noted that what was before them was recommendations which were still being processed and had not yet been ratified and so that it would premature to make a definitive statement to the current Housing Panels.

### **Resolved -**

That the report be noted.

## **8 Utility companies and fuel poverty in Greenwich**

The report was presented by the Assistant Director, Regeneration Enterprise and Skills (Transportation) and the Sustainability Team Leader.

In response to questions from the Panel the Sustainability Team Leader replied that Greenwich Peninsula District Heating Network was nearing completion. Some of the Energy Trust Grants money was available to provide funding for initiatives such as insulation. There was money available under the Energy Company Obligation scheme to introduce energy saving measures during home renewal programmes. Energy providers did not have their data based on Boroughs, or by Wards. The Groundwork team did undertake a holistic check of properties and occupants that they visited.

Information about premium energy loans to be circulated.

**Action: Regeneration, Enterprise and Skills**

In response to questions from the Panel about storage heaters the Sustainability Team Leader said there was a programme to replace storage heaters in Council properties. The geographical location of remaining storage heaters in tenancies in the Borough to be circulated.

**Action: Regeneration, Enterprise and Skills**

In response to questions from the Panel about the free insulation offer the Sustainability Team Leader suggested that possible reasons for the low take-up of the free insulation offer could be because occupants already had sufficient loft insulation, they lived in a ground floor unit, or that they did not want to deal with an unsolicited caller. Officers were not satisfied that there had been a sufficient take up of the offer; the anti-poverty steering group would look at better identifying those properties that needed it. A stock survey was being undertaken at the moment and that was expected to lead to better targeting of those in need. Members suggested that more vulnerable residents, whether that be due to age or language or culture, might had had more confidence in responding if leaflets contained the Royal Borough's logo and supplied details of Ward Councillors. Members indicated that more analysis was required to understand why there was a low take-up of the free insulation offer, and sought further information on what had been done to follow up where there had been no response.

**Action: Regeneration, Enterprise and Skills**

In response to questions from the Panel about creating a local energy company or acting as an intermediary as a direct way to tackle fuel poverty the Assistant Director, Regeneration Enterprise and Skills (Transportation) stated the matter of what intermediary energy supply options the Borough can explore would be discussed with the lead Cabinet Member. This matter would be reported back to the Panel.

**Action: Regeneration, Enterprise and Skills**

In response to a question from the Panel about solar energy the Sustainability Team Leader said there were no plans to install solar panels on Council blocks as there had been a substantial reduction in the feed-in tariff, but they would consider the matter when they were more economically feasible. The Royal Borough of Greenwich did not work directly with the Carbon Trust but with the GLA. Members suggested that the Carbon Trust Chair be invited to a future meeting of the Panel to discuss best practice and initiatives to reduce carbon footprint.

**Action: Regeneration, Enterprise and Skills**

**Resolved -**

That the report be noted.

The meeting closed at 8.47 pm

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Chair