

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

**THURSDAY, 8 DECEMBER 2016 AT 7.00 PM**

**MINUTES**

**PRESENT:**

**Members:**

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

**Under Standing Orders**

Councillor Averil Lekau (Cabinet Member for Housing & Anti-Poverty)

**Officers**

Director of Central Services, Assistant Director of Finance (Advice & Benefits), Assistant Director of Regeneration, Assistant Director for Employment and Skills, Chief Officer Asset Management and Repairs Service, Development Officer, Corporate Development Officer and Committee Officer

In the absence of the Chair, Members agreed that Councillor Ashikodi take the position of Chair for the duration of the meeting.

**Item**

**No.**

**1 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Linda Bird, Bill Freeman and Christine May, and Alison Cullen (Tenant Representative).

**2 Urgent Business**

There was no urgent business.

**3 Declarations of 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

##### **Resolved -**

That the minutes of the meeting of the Housing and Anti-Poverty Scrutiny Panel held on 6<sup>th</sup> October 2016 be agreed and signed as a true and accurate record.

#### 5 Accessing Affordable Housing in the Royal Borough of Greenwich - Best Value Update

The report was introduced by the Assistant Director of Regeneration.

In response to a question from the Panel, the Assistant Director of Regeneration confirmed that the housing White Paper due in the new year would set out government policies and the reinstatement of the Housing Grant Programme. He advised that the Greater London Authority's (GLA) 2016-21 prospectus had now been released and bidding would open from January to April 2017. The Royal Borough would be meeting with Housing Associations before 31<sup>st</sup> January to discuss potential bids.

The Assistant Director of Regeneration was able to confirm that like other local authorities, the Royal Borough was hoping there would be further consideration given by the Government to councils being able to borrow from councils where headroom still existed within their Housing Revenue Account. This would be further addressed in the February Affordable Housing report.

**Action: DRES**

With regard to housing larger families, the Development Officer advised that the Royal Borough negotiated with Registered Providers on a scheme-by-scheme basis to offer a proportion of family sized accommodation. The Assistant Director of Regeneration would confirm the number of families currently waiting for 4/5 bedroom homes who were not able to afford accommodation of this size.

**Action: DRES**

In response to a question from the Panel, the Assistant Director of Regeneration advised he was currently discussing the issue of affordable housing with the Assistant Director of Housing. Together they would be investigating how the private sector was being used to tackle this problem and how affordable housing could be implemented locally. This would be picked up in the future Housing Strategy.

**Action: DRES**

The Panel requested a focus on private rented sector accommodation in relation to affordable housing and it was agreed that an update on the private rented sector model would be provided at the next meeting and picked up in the future Housing Strategy.

**Action: DRES**

The Panel was aware of other local authorities buying properties off plan and expressed a desire for the Royal Borough to look into this from a commercial aspect. The Panel felt the Royal Borough needed to develop a model of delivery that was based on local need. This would be picked up in the future Housing Strategy.

**Action: DRES**

The Panel was encouraged by the number of landlords who had taken up training by the Landlord Accreditation scheme. The Cabinet Member confirmed that an HMO training package to address poor management of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) in the borough would be introduced imminently.

Discussion about Section 106 agreements arose in relation to using these to improve access to affordable housing. The Panel felt that consideration should be given to how to achieve the best deal from these agreements.

Ms Eileen Glover was invited to address the Panel. Ms Glover felt the report offered a wide range of actions to improve the number of properties available to rent in the borough and she noted that the initiative to identify illegal tenancies had been especially successful. However, she was concerned about properties that were vulnerable to Right-to-Buy and felt that the impact of Right-to-Buy on the Royal Borough's housing stock over the next 20 years needed to be assessed. She was hopeful this would be addressed in the current review's final report in February.

Resolved –

That the report be noted.

## **6 Review of Affordable Housing in the Royal Borough of Greenwich**

The report was introduced by the Assistant of Director of Regeneration.

The Panel wanted to draw comparisons between the Royal Borough and other local authorities in order to benchmark the Royal Borough's current response. This request would be addressed in the February Affordable Housing Report.

**Action: DRES**

## **Resolved –**

That the report be noted.

## **7 Impact of the Welfare Reforms**

The report was introduced by the Director of Central Services.

The Assistant Director of Finance (Revenues and Benefits) was asked to address the Panel. He confirmed that 80% of potential cap cases were one parent families. He advised that local arrangements for the agreement were good but there were still some issues to resolve. The rollout in Greenwich was minimal and amounted to approximately 100 cases per month.

In response to the abolition of the national Council Tax Benefit (CTB) scheme, the Assistant Director of Finance advised that public consultation on the Royal Borough's Local Council Tax Support scheme (LCTS) had commenced on 19 November 2017. The public had been asked to respond to two key questions:

- 1) Do you agree or disagree that the new scheme should reduce maximum entitlement to Council Tax Support for working age people by up to 15% of the total amount of Council Tax paid - this will mean everyone of working age paying something towards their Council Tax?
- 2) Do you agree or disagree that the Council should, instead of making reductions to Council Tax Support, increase Council Tax by up to 3% to pay for the new scheme?

Members felt these questions were appropriate.

The Panel was encouraged that the Royal Borough did not place people in temporary accommodation outside the Borough and hoped this would continue. They were concerned with the 200% increase of households residing in temporary accommodation since 31 March 2011 but understood the pressures the Royal Borough was experiencing.

The Assistant Director for Employment and Skills and the GLLP Project Manager addressed the Panel to discuss the Greenwich Local Labour Project (GLLP) which had been introduced as part of the Royal Borough's response to the benefit cap. The Assistant Director for Employment and Skills explained to the Panel that participants were provided with ongoing employment support throughout their placement and were tracked for two years thereafter. The GLLP Project Manager advised that of the 80% tracked, 84% were still in

employment. The outcome was that participants had avoided homelessness by securing sustained employment. Case studies of successful council interventions would be circulated to the Panel.

**Action: DRES**

The Panel was impressed by the onward employment figures and felt that the work carried out as part of this project had been excellent.

In response to a question from the Panel, the Assistant Director for Employment and Skills confirmed that all households that were expected to be affected by the increased cap had been written to and invited to engage with the Welfare Reform Team. The GLLP Project Manager advised that officers from Greenwich Local Labour and Business (GLLaB) and the Welfare Reform Team held weekly case conferences to discuss a plan of action for prioritised cases. Those affected by higher amounts had been prioritised first.

**Resolved –**

That the report be noted.

## **8 Asset Management and Repairs Service Delivery**

The report was introduced by the Chief Officer Asset Management and Repairs Service.

The Chief Officer had noticed a decrease in complaints to the service and a reduction of email traffic to his inbox from dissatisfied customers. He credited this in part to spending his first three to four months with the Royal Borough working alongside tradespeople to understand their frustrations, and he continued to do this twice a month. It was intended that this would build the expectation of other managers to do the same.

It was the Chief Officers aim to introduce values-based job descriptions to the service and to generate a shift in culture in which customers were regarded as an integral part of the service rather than a consequence of the process. The Panel was encouraged by this approach.

The Panel felt the service was too fragmented and that a more holistic approach should be offered. It was suggested that upskilling of staff be carried out in order to expand their capabilities, thus enabling them to deal with low level repairs. The Chair would bring this discussion to the attention of the Leader.

**Action: Chair of the Housing & Anti-Poverty Scrutiny Panel**

Councillor Steve Offord left the meeting at 8.30pm.

The Chief Officer advised the Panel that a lot of positive work was being carried out around the apprenticeship agenda and that several events to increase the number of apprentices in the service would be held over the coming year.

**Resolved –**

That the report be noted.

## **9 Review of Tenant Engagement**

The report was introduced by the Chair.

The Panel queried the involvement of the Cabinet Member for Housing and Anti-Poverty on the project group for this review. This would be raised and clarified with the Chair of the project group.

**Action: Councillor Mehboob Khan**

**Resolved –**

That the Project Statement for the Review of Tenant Engagement be agreed.

## **10 Commissioning Future Reports - Specification of Requirements**

The report was introduced by the Chair.

**Resolved –**

That the work items scheduled to be presented to the meeting of the Housing and Anti-Poverty Scrutiny Panel on 8<sup>th</sup> February 2017 be noted.

The meeting closed at 8.45 pm

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Chair