

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 11 APRIL 2018**

**COUNCILLORS**

**PRESENT** Derek Levy, Abdul Abdullahi, Michael Rye OBE and Edward Smith

**ABSENT** Guney Dogan and Nneka Keazor

**STATUTORY CO-OPTEDS:** *1 vacancy (Church of England diocese representative), Mr Simon Goulden (other faiths/denominations representative), Mr Tony Murphy (Catholic diocese representative), Alicia Meniru & 1 vacancy (Parent Governor representative) - Italics Denotes absence*

**OFFICERS:** Paul Sutton (AD, Youth & Service Development), Joseph Fitzgerald (Families & Adolescent Support Team Manager), Lee Shelsher (Head of Customer Experience & Libraries), Nicholas Foster (Complaints & Access to Information Manager), Dionne Grant (Statutory Complaints Manager), Susan O'Connell (Scrutiny Officer), Stacey Gilmour (Committee Secretary)

**Also Attending:** Lily Hassan (Enfield Youth Parliament)

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**WELCOME & APOLOGIES**

Councillor Levy welcomed all attendees to the meeting and extended a special welcome to the Enfield Youth Parliament attendee. Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Nneka Keazor and Tony Murphy, Co-opted Member. It was noted that Councillor Toby Simon was substituting for Councillor Nneka Keazor. Apologies for lateness had been received from Councillor Michael Rye.

As it was the last meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the municipal year 2017/18 and before the Local Election on 3 May 2018, the Chair Councillor Levy thanked all participants of the Committee, past and present, for their hard work and for keeping the committee fully formed over the past four years, three of which had been in his care as Chair.

He advised that all reports from the Working Groups were now being concluded and would come forward to a future meeting.

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**DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

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**HOMELESS 16/17 YEAR OLDS**

**RECEIVED** a report from Paul Sutton, Assistant Director, Youth & Service Development and Joseph Fitzgerald, Families & Adolescent Support Team Manager.

**NOTED:**

- i) The Family and Adolescent Support Team's (FAST) primary objective is to promote and safeguard the well-being of the young person and prevent family breakdown and homelessness.
- ii) The service focuses on two main areas of work: Firstly, it aims to provide a rapid family support service to vulnerable young people aged 11 to 15 and their families, where there is a risk of family breakdown. In this aspect of its work the team undertakes intensive work with families for up to 9 months.
- iii) Secondly in regard to 16 and 17 year olds it tries to prevent homelessness through use of mediation etc. and if young people cannot stay at home then support them into independent living.
- iv) The overarching principle of the FAST is that children and young people are best looked after within their families and it endeavours to ensure families stay together and fundamental to that work is building individual and family resilience.
- v) Joseph went on to speak a bit more about the service and advised that the FAST is a small team, made up of three social workers and a triage officer.
- vi) The key to this service is mediation and in view of this case loads are kept low in order to carry out intensive and targeted work.
- vii) The number of referrals into FAST has reduced significantly in the last year. This is firstly as a result of significantly reduced capacity to a change in the way the service is now set up. Secondly there has been a significant decrease in the numbers of young people approaching FAST for accommodation. The reason for this is that FAST has been delivering a consistent message to young people and families; that a full and comprehensive assessment of the young person and family's needs will be carried out before any decision is made on eligibility for supported accommodation
- viii) The service has got much better at targeting the appropriate young people effectively and is now focusing much more on family work. The team is not turning young people away but is working well to keep more young people at home within the family unit, which is a very positive outcome as evidence shows that young people do much better at home. Where however this is not possible the young people are closely supported into independent living.
- ix) Charts were provided within the report detailing information on the numbers of referrals to the FAST over the past three years, and the resulting outcomes of these referrals as a result of the work undertaken by FAST.

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- x) The Adolescent Support Team (AST) is currently looking to create another team to focus solely on the 11 to 15 year olds, leaving Joseph and his small team to concentrate solely on the 16 and 17 year olds.
- xi) 16 and 17 year olds who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness can self-refer to FAST or can be referred from other agencies e.g. Colleges, Youth Offending Unit and Single Point of Entry (SPOE) etc.
- xii) 11 to 15 year olds can be referred to FAST by Children's Services Referral and Assessment Team, once an assessment has been undertaken if it is assessed that there is a risk of family breakdown which could lead to a young person entering the care system.
- xiii) As can be seen from the data provided, the FAS Team are successful and becoming increasingly so in preventing family breakdown and ensuring young people remain at home.
- xiv) Case studies were provided as an illustration of the type of work FAST undertake with young people and their families at risk of homelessness in order to support them to live at home (as in case study 1), or to return home to the care of their families after a period of time in supported accommodation (as in case study 2). Discussions took place around the case studies and it was agreed that the information provided was most interesting.

The following questions/comments were raised:

- Q. How do you manage young people who are desperate to get out of home but aren't really able to?
- A. The young person is treated as a child in need. We work with them in an aim to increase their independent living skills. We work closely with their social workers and assessments are reviewed every six months.
  
- Q. How do you filter which referrals you accept, given the fact that with reduced resources you no doubt have to be more stringent in this process?
- A. All 16-17 year olds who self-referred are accepted. With regards to 11-15 year olds these young people will be referred through the SPOE (Single Point of Entry) Assessment Team. Where the referral has not been accepted as a social worker case mediation has been agreed for the younger groups. We have become much better with our data so we are now better assisted to refer the right people to the right place at the right time.
  
- Q. Is the gender/ethnicity of the Social Workers important when working with and engaging with the young people? For example would a female young person find it easier to talk to a female Social Worker?
- A. Yes this is an important issue as often a young person will find it easier to talk to a Social Worker from a different ethnic origin than their own. This also applies to male/female Social Workers when a young person might feel more comfortable discussing their issues with someone of their own sex, or vice-versa. The engagement that takes place is very much relationship based social work so this is a key aspect.

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- Q. What do you feel has attributed to the reduction in 16-17 year olds being placed in supported accommodation?
- A. A few years ago it was recognised that the cultural message was that a 16-17 year old could just turn up at the Council and get housed. The system in place was viewed as a way of getting accommodation. The message is now clear to young people that, although they can still refer themselves to the service we will listen but we will also talk to their parents, offer support, mediation and other intervention measures before offering supported accommodation. This has very much helped change the cultural way of thinking amongst young people.
- Q. Councillor Levy felt confident that the current model is working well. However are there any concerns that Councillors should look at going forward or any particular challenges where member support is needed?
- A. We have a good equilibrium at the moment. Judicial reviews had posed a difficulty in the past but we now have far better assessments in place and far better recording of information. This has enabled us to demonstrate that a young person had made an informed decision regarding their situation and the offers of support that had been made when they were 16/17 years old. This has greatly assisted in addressing the issues around judicial reviews.
- Q. What does the service need to ensure that no young people fall through the net?
- A. Any young person coming into care is very costly therefore realistically it is in our interest to keep young people in the family home, which evidence proves results in much better outcomes.

The Chair thanked Paul and Joseph for a broadly very positive report.

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### **ANNUAL CORPORATE COMPLAINTS**

**RECEIVED** a report from Nicholas Foster, Complaints Manager HHASC.

#### **NOTED:**

- i) The report provided an update of complaints handling between October 2016 – December 2017 regarding complaints handled under the Council's corporate complaints scheme.
- ii) There has been a marked improvement to the service since the last report to OSC in February 2017. There had been some real challenges since the Enfield 2017 online systems were implemented but these had now been addressed and accessible and transparent systems are now in place to listen to customers and residents via the website, phone, email and face to face.
- iii) Enfield Council are now moving to a more resolution driven approach and the process is geared at solving complaints as early as possible and as informally as possible as a result of which formal complaints are decreasing.

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- iv) More than 90% of complaints are resolved at First Stage and the numbers of complaints to the Local Government Ombudsman have also reduced.
- v) Further information was provided on the complaints procedure. Complaints are handled by the central Complaints and Access to Information Team. The team is also responsible for co-ordinating all members' enquiries, school appeals and statutory requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act or Data Protection Act.
- vi) The Council aims to resolve concerns and complaints as soon as possible, therefore contact from customers is initially presented to the team or person responsible for delivering the service where dissatisfaction has arisen, so that the matter can be addressed.
- vii) Where attempts for resolution have been unsuccessful, the complaint will be handled under the two-stages. Information was provided on the First and Final stage of the process.
- viii) The complaints policy promotes early resolution of complaints. This approach ensures that swift action is taken to resolve the matter for complainants with the need to go through the formal complaints procedure. The Council aims to deal with informal complaints within 5 working days.
- ix) Charts were included in the report providing a quarterly breakdown of complaints and concerns that were resolved informally during October 2016 – December 2017.
- x) Information was provided on the Complaint Themes and Causes. These included council tax, housing benefits, waste – missed collections/recycling, highways and housing repairs.
- xi) Further discussions took place in relation to the Local Government Ombudsman. The Complaints and Access to Information Team work in partnership with services to ensure that timely responses are made to Ombudsman's enquiries and appropriate settlements are negotiated to achieve resolution.
- xii) Positive outcomes within the service have contributed to a decrease in the numbers of complaints escalated to the Ombudsman. During 2016/17 there were 135 complaints dealt with by the Local Government Ombudsman. This compares with 157 in 2015/16 and 154 in 2014/15. The numbers of Ombudsman complaints in Enfield are low when compared with our closest neighbours.
- xiii) It was also noted that in some instances, complainants prematurely contact the Ombudsman without having gone through the Council's internal processes. In these circumstances the Ombudsman would refer the matter to the Council to be dealt with.
- xiv) The Ombudsman usually highlights significant issues of concern within their annual letter. It was noted that, unlike some Councils, no concerns were raised within the letter to Enfield.
- xv) Moving forward the team aims to build on its current successes by:
  - Working with ICT to improve the functionality of the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) electronic system to improve efficiency in the end to end process;

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- Using intelligence from complaints and other forms of customer feedback to proactively resolve concerns before they become complaints and improve Council services by addressing the underlying causes of complaints.

The following questions/concerns were raised:

- Q. Of the 135 complaints to the Ombudsman how many of these were premature? It would have been useful to have seen a breakdown of these statistics and a copy of the Ombudsman's letter.
- A. Nicholas apologised for not including this information in the report but agreed to forward this to the Scrutiny Officer to include with the minutes. He did however point out that this information was available on the Ombudsman website.

**Action: Nicholas Foster/Susan O'Connell**

- Q. It would also have been useful to have seen data on the average amount of time a complaint takes to go through the process. Without this information we cannot say how efficient this process is.
- A. This data can be provided. However, it should also be recognised that an indicator of success is not how quickly we send a letter but more importantly whether the complaint has satisfactorily been resolved.
- Q. Out of interest what are the Council Housing complaints usual about, and do these come from leaseholders or tenants?
- A. The complaints do come from the leaseholders but are usually from the tenants and are generally related to repairs not being completed satisfactorily or on time. They have been some ongoing challenges with current contractors, but these contracts are now up for review and a bigger piece of work is taking place around this issue. It was acknowledged that there was not a good history regarding the procurement of this out of house service, and the suggestion was that it is often beneficial to bring a service back in house therefore having people accountable.
- Q. When does a complaint end? If it starts again and is the same issue from the same resident how is this managed and dealt with?
- A. Repeat complaints of the same issue are not logged as a new complaint. We would however chase the appropriate service for a resolution.

The Chair thanked Nicholas for his interesting and informative report.

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### OSC WORKSTREAMS FOR 2018/19

Discussions took place regarding the OSC Workstreams for 2018/19 and the following comments were made:

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- i) It was felt that the resource is currently insufficient to fully support OSC and the workstreams and this needs to be addressed going forward.
- ii) Members agreed that the level of engagement on both sides had been somewhat indifferent this past year especially with regards to interest in and attendance at workstreams.
- iii) It was also suggested that OSC had been too ambitious this past year, with too many workstreams which had put added pressure on Officers. It was felt that for 2018/19 there should be less workstreams, these should then be advertised so that members could then put their names forward for what they were interested in which would hopefully result in better member engagement.
- iv) The Chair, Councillor Levy said that scrutiny is a very vital part of the process and it would therefore be sad to see ambition relaxed as he felt that this would weaken the process. He agreed that an increase in resource was needed to support OSC and the future workstreams.
- v) Councillor Abdullahi suggested that meeting attendance should be recorded and published on the website.
- vi) All members agreed that the role of scrutiny needs to be flagged up very strongly during the induction process for new Councillors.
- vii) Councillor Smith said that in his opinion, the current Leader of the Council does not view the role of scrutiny highly enough. Services and Officers need to be interrogated continuously to ensure improvements and better services.
- viii) Councillor Rye said that in his twenty years on the council he has never known such a lack of interest and engagement from back benchers. He felt that the groups needed Whip and leadership support from their relevant parties.

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#### WORK PROGRAMME 2017/18

Councillor Levy felt that the Work Programme for 2017/18 had worked well and more OSC meetings had taken place during 2017/18 in order to accommodate items which were important for the Committee to address.

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#### MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS HELD ON 22 FEBRUARY 2018 AND 13 MARCH 2018

**AGREED** the minutes of the meetings held on 22 February 2018 and 13 March 2018.

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#### DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

**NOTED** that the provisional Call-In meeting scheduled to take place on the 19 April 2018 had been cancelled.

The dates of future meetings will be agreed at the meeting of Annual Council on 23 May 2018.

