

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE HOUSING SCRUTINY PANEL HELD ON MONDAY, 11TH MARCH, 2024

MEMBERS: Councillors Kate Anolue (Chair), Josh Abey (Vice Chair), Nicki Adeleke, Adrian Grumi, Nelly Gyosheva, Tom O'Halloran, Eylem Yuruk, George Savva MBE, and Jim Steven

Officers:

Joanne Drew (Strategic Director of Housing and Regeneration) and Neil Wightman (Director of Housing Services (Residents))

Also Attending: Councillor George Savva, Cabinet Member for Social Housing

1. WELCOME & APOLOGIES

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Cllr Chamberlain who was substituted by Cllr Steven.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No Declarations of Interest were received.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

AGREED the minutes of the meeting held on 12 December 2023. Cllr Savva advised that he had given apologies for this meeting, but this had not been recorded in the minutes.

4. SOCIAL HOUSING ALLOCATIONS

RECEIVED the report of Richard Sorenson (Head of the Housing Advisory Service)

Neil Wightman (Director of Housing Services (residents)) presented this item with Joanne Drew (Strategic Director of Housing & Regeneration).

Neil Wightman provided a short update on social housing allocations this year. He drew the Panels attention to the key points in the report listed under the main considerations section (numbers 2-6) in the report.

Since the scheme was last amended four years ago the numbers on the housing register have doubled to 7,500. The number of properties allocated

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yearly is approximately 450, this has been consistent over the last few years. Demand far outstrips supply of properties.

Good progress has been made on the decant of both Shropshire and Cheshire House and advised that these households have been given significant priority to be moved through the decant process.

Whilst the highest demand is for three bedroomed properties the majority of properties becoming available are one and two bedrooms. The report includes tables of allocations by bedroom size and by the means categories of these allocations. The emergency and exceptional take the highest number of the Lets, the majority of these being decants.

There is currently a government consultation on social housing allocations.

In answer to questions:

Neil Wightman agreed to provide members with figures of how many social housing allocations are outside of Enfield. Members were advised that this is a fairly low figure. Action Neil Wightman

A further update was provided on the decanting of the Shropshire and Cheshire House. There were around 170 tenanted homes in total, currently down to 34 and half of these have put expressions of interest on other properties. Officers are still working on this on a daily basis.

It was confirmed that the Shires is being decommissioned which means that the council will no longer be letting these buildings, looking at alternative options instead.

There was further discussion on the review of the allocations policy with regards to objectives, principles, and emerging ideas. This will be a light touch review as only 4 years since the last review. There are some clear decisions and priorities to be looked at such as overcrowding and who is best to get the scarce resources available. It was agreed that the review consultation could be presented at the next Housing Scrutiny meeting.

Overcrowding is a difficult issue; the report shows that only 16 large bedroom properties have been allocated this year. The Council's development programme will deliver some larger properties between now and August. As these are small numbers the review will look at what can be done to manage this, including what other authorities are doing on this issue. Looking at what support can be provided families in their homes living, supporting them to manage. It should be noted that we will never be able to meet demand.

Last year a 10-year fixed term tenure was introduced. It is hoped that after this period these larger properties are no longer required. Larger families with older children could look at putting them in split into 2 smaller properties, this is on the decants Where there is underoccupancy was Incentives are provided to encourage downsizing such as money per bedroom being given

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up and top priority to choose properties that they would like to move to. There will be a marketing and promotional campaign later this year to encourage people to downsize.

Members felt that the points system is confusing and more could be done to help people to understand how this works. Officers agreed to take this issue back and look at how this could be explained better. Action Neil Wightman

The government consultation includes:

- a 10-year UK connection test, if connection cannot be proved then would be unable to go on any register in the country. Currently, Enfield use a local connection test where you must prove a connection in 3 out of 5 years (aggregate).
- Also proposes income test, we already use in Enfield though government could set figures at a UK threshold, Enfield will respond that we the threshold is local not national
- ASB is included looking at having exclusions from the register due to ASB and grant possession against social housing tenants where they are 3 proven examples of ASB
- There is an element on where fraudulent declaration, most local authorities do look at this already. The consultation is looking to strengthen measures against fraudulent application declarations.

Fraudulent applications are taken seriously in Enfield not only will people be removed from the register the local authority will name and shame.

Figures requested on number of reclaimed properties; officers advised that this will be included in the future update.

Should a household be evicted they would be unlikely to be accepted through the allocations service and as would be viewed as intentionally homeless. However, through the Homelessness Service advise and support would be provided.

Further clarification sought on UK wide connection test, at present this test does not exist. It is not yet known how this will work in terms of people who have not got recourse to funds. This is likely to be different from the local test. Not sure how many people would be affected where other authorities have looked at this it is between 6-8%. It will be the local authority's responsibility to determine the UK connection. It is suggested that there will be a range of exceptions such as those fleeing domestic abuse. The Homelessness legislation does not dovetail perfectly to the Allocations review.

It was agreed that a further update come to the next meeting on changes to be made to the allocations policy.

5. **ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOUR (ASB)**

RECEIVED the report of Neil Wightman (Director of Housing Services (residents)).

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Neil Wightman presented this item which provided a review against the new policy introduced last year.

Enfield has seen an increase in ASB offences in the last 12 months, the figure in the report is for ASB in general across the borough not just ASB in Social Housing. There has also been an increase across London but at a lower level.

The Housing team will be taking responsibility for ASB on Housing estates, previous management detailed under 5 in the report. This is currently in transition and training is ongoing.

The new policy is very clear that we will not tolerate ASB. There is a clear distinction between ASB the council can control and what is a crime and a police matter. There is a good relationship with the police.

The 12 service standards are detailed under point 11 and these are beginning to be tracked. The report contains a table (point 12) details the types of ASB Enforcement Action and the Responsible Service.

The Council is looking to increase enforcement action and potential possession actions to send out a clear message that the Council will be tough on ASB. A target will be set this year.

Questions were then taken on the report and the service.

Paragraph 8 of the report relates to COVID, anecdotally the increase in working from home with people spending more time at home could have affected this.

Should you be evicted it is likely that they would be considered intentionally homeless, it is rare to be accepted after ASB resulted in an eviction. It is a very high test to meet court thresholds for evictions. This process is lengthy, and the Council must show that everything has been done to support the household prior to eviction. Often perpetrators are often also victims. Advise and support provided through the Homelessness Service. tough problems to solve, where help needed will work with other agencies to try to resolve situation.

Members felt that it is helpful to make very clear to households what ASB is the Councils responsibility and what is not and should be referred to the police.

It was confirmed that the drugs activity mainly related to cannabis use in flats, but there are hotspots of more serious drugs and will work closely with the police on this.

The report refers to the introduction of a noise app to help manage noise cases. Officers agreed to circulate more information on this. Action Neil Wightman.

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Following Members request officers agreed to circulate details of main housing association providers to assist councillors when dealing with residents on ASB on these estates. Action: Neil Wightman

It was clarified that the figures under 17 relates to residents or family members living in Enfield. The figures listed here will include repeat offenders and priority on dealing with focus on those who persistently offend, and training is ongoing on this. The Government Consultation is helpful relating to this The Council is looking to serve more notices, which last for a year, even if these do not proceed to court these do have a high impact often with improvements seen and Acceptable Behaviour agreements being drawn up to regulate behaviour.

Members were advised it is unknown why ASB overall is higher than in London. In terms of Housing related ASB figures data has not been collected as to whether this has gone up or down.

After the withdrawal of funding for extra police officers on estates an increase on ASB on these estates has not been seen. It should be noted that service had been declining for a year prior to removing. Alternative partnership, meetings were put in place and additional resources made available through partnership working.

The improvement in satisfaction ratings it was felt was due to making sure that residents are kept informed even if no further progress is made at this stage. The council's publicity on zero tolerance is also helpful in showing that ASB is not acceptable.

With regards to domestic abuse there is already strong partnership working with SOLACE for example. The Council is working towards DAHA (Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance) accreditation. This is a national qualification. It would mean that the council would look at all procedures, policies, partnership work, how we protect victims. If this were to be achieved would allow a high level of service for the victims of domestic abuse. It takes approximately one year to achieve qualification; the council is committed to starting the process.

Members were surprised to see domestic abuse classified as ASB as opposed to serious crime. It is classified this way so that where it happens in a social home the Council can also look at civil action, such as excluding individual from the home.

Officers were thanked for their time.

6. WORK PROGRAMME 2023/24

NOTED the work programme. A further item was added to the next meeting on an update on changes to the Allocations Policy.

7. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

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The date of the future meeting was noted as follows:

Monday 22 April 2024