

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE HOUSING AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY PANEL HELD ON TUESDAY, 10TH DECEMBER, 2024

MEMBERS: Councillors Mahmut Aksanoglu, Kate Anolue, Lee Chamberlain, Tom O'Halloran, Edward Smith and Doug Taylor

Officers:

Joanne Drew (Strategic Director of Housing & Regeneration), Richard Sorensen (Head of the Housing Advisory Service), Neil Wightman (Director of Housing Services (residents)), Jane Creer (Committee Secretary)

Also Attending:

Cllr Ayten Guzel (Cabinet Member for Housing)

1. WELCOME & APOLOGIES

Cllr Mahmut Aksanoglu (Chair) welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Margaret Greer.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received regarding any item on the agenda.

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

Action points from the previous meeting were noted to be outstanding; officers would be reminded.

The Chair confirmed that he sent a response to Action for Enfield on behalf of the Panel and would circulate a copy to Members.

AGREED the minutes of the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Panel held on 21 October 2024.

4. HOUSING RESIDENTS WHERE ACCOMMODATION IS AFFORDABLE

Cllr Ayten Guzel, Cabinet Member for Housing, provided an introduction to the report which set out an update on the implementation of the National Placement Policy. The housing crisis in London and beyond had a major impact. Placing homeless households in hotel accommodation was unsuitable and costly. The supply of privately rented accommodation continued to reduce. The Council had adopted a new Placement Policy from June 2023, amended in November 2023, to offer private rented accommodation on a

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national basis. As a result there had been a sustained fall in the use of hotel accommodation. Officers confirmed the high demand for assistance and the growing gap between benefits and rents, and did not see any other way forward than to continue this policy.

Questions were invited from the Panel.

In response to Members' queries, it was confirmed that where someone was employed in the borough in stable employment, that would be taken into account and that some accommodation was still secured locally. In respect of accommodation in other areas, a suitability assessment was carried out to try to match each household's needs and the location, and a three stage appeal process was available. Contact was maintained with Enfield Council at the beginning, and Enfield still had a duty if the family became homeless within two years. Members suggested there should be a standard timeframe (at potentially 3 or 6 months afterwards) for a follow-up process on the placements, while acknowledging that the priority of the service was to prevent homelessness. The Cabinet Member and officers confirmed that a way to follow up would be investigated.

It was confirmed that transport links were also taken into consideration in placing households, and how easy the area was to reach from Enfield and for the family to establish themselves permanently and to create a new life there. The tenancy agreement on the property would be between the landlord and the tenant, for a minimum of two years.

In response to further queries, officers confirmed that the gap between rents and benefits was now so extreme that almost no privately rented accommodation in London and the South East was going to be affordable. The Council had to look further and further afield for accommodation as the scale of the crisis had grown and the supply shortage of properties worsened. Many private landlords had also left the market. Lobbying of the government by councils including Enfield continued. Additional funding was expected from April 2025: details of our allocation were awaited.

Officers provided further clarification to Members that legislation was based on councils would be discharging their duty using the private rented sector, and there was a need for a fundamental review of how the homelessness system worked across the UK. The Council had to explore all options including long term leasing of properties and purchasing properties in more affordable areas of the country.

Officers clarified the definition of temporary accommodation, and that beyond six weeks the council was more restricted in what would be considered suitable accommodation. Difficulty in finding temporary accommodation in Enfield was also exacerbated by other authorities also making use of properties in the borough.

Officers also provided clarification on the find your home scheme. This was not confined to the borough and did provide assistance to secure a private

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rented property, but it was difficult for anyone to find an affordable rent. The national placement policy however had incentivised people to look very hard and to consider many options, but realistic options were limited.

5. CONSULTATION ON CHANGES TO THE ALLOCATIONS SCHEME

Cllr Ayten Guzel, Cabinet Member for Housing, provided an introduction to the report which set out considerations on the consultation on a review of Enfield's Housing Allocation Scheme. The proposed changes to the scheme would align the allocations policy with the national placement policy, and were listed in detail in the report. It was also highlighted that the Council wanted to give more priority to severely overcrowded families, and additional priority to those families who had been living in temporary accommodation in Enfield for more than ten years. The consultation had begun on 11/11/24 and would close on 02/02/25: responses from all were encouraged and views from Members were welcomed. Officers confirmed that so far there had been a good response to the consultation and over 300 people had sent in their opinions.

Questions were invited from the Panel.

In response to Members' queries, clarification was provided in respect of direct offers (urgent need) and choice based lettings (largely based on points accumulated), and Part VI and Part VII of the Housing Act, covering allocation of social housing stock and prevention of homelessness respectively. For direct offers, a suitable direct offer would be made which was the single offer.

Members welcomed the proposals and deemed them necessary; and were pleased to note the large response to the consultation.

In response to queries regarding overcrowded families, the Cabinet Member clarified that she asked for this prioritisation as she was aware from her casework of difficulties experienced by large families in crowded homes, and there were families waiting for over ten years for larger properties. Children did not deserve to have to live in overcrowded and deprived conditions. Data showed that only around 100 households would be categorized as severely overcrowded and it was felt they should be prioritised.

The Chair extended congratulations to the officers on the current consultation response rate, and the Panel's agreement with proposals detailed in the report, which would help officers moving forward with allocation of housing and assistance to residents.

6. COUNCIL HOUSING SERVICE PLAN - 6 MONTH UPDATE

Cllr Ayten Guzel, Cabinet Member for Housing, provided an introduction to the report which provided an interim update on progress against the Council Housing work plan. Feedback on the work plan was welcomed from the Panel. Attention was drawn to the new engagement forum – Enfield 500 – to which over 250 residents, tenants and leaseholders were already signed up.

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The approach to anti social behaviour, and the good repairs service were highlighted. A forthcoming project would focus on re-charging and enforcement action against tenants who did not adhere to terms and made unauthorised adaptations to properties.

Officers confirmed that the work plan aligned with the Regulator of Social Housing Consumer Standards. They also highlighted that tenant satisfaction measures were showing an increase in satisfaction across many areas of the service.

Questions were invited from the Panel.

In response to Members' queries, it was clarified that some of the actions referenced in the table were created mid-plan, such as the roving security pilot which was an additional action.

Members requested that future update reports included more metrics and context to the issues; how the service functioned and whether it was improving, referencing the Key Performance Indicators. Officers confirmed that tenant satisfaction measures would be available and submitted to Cabinet in March 2025, but there were improvements in areas which mattered most to residents.

In response to queries regarding the launch of Repair Sense, it was advised that the data enabled greater understanding and targeted action on repairs. There would also be introduction of a video conferencing facility to work with residents who would be able to take videos in real time to show to officers and technicians to help with assessments and diagnostic checks. This remote service would be more flexible. The post inspection process could also be done online, leading to a more modern and cost-effective repairs service.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member and the officers for their thorough reports and responses.

7. WORK PROGRAMME 2024/25

The Panel noted the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Panel Work Programme for the remainder of 2024/25.

8. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Noted the next meeting of the Panel would be held on Tuesday 4 February 2025, 7:00pm in the Conference Room at the Civic Centre.

The Chair took the opportunity to extend wishes for a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

The meeting ended at 8.07 pm.

