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OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 6.9.2017

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 6 SEPTEMBER 2017

COUNCILLORS: Derek Levy (Chair), Abdul Abdullahi, Guney Dogan, Nneka Keazor, Michael Rye, Edward Smith.

STATUTORY CO-OPTES: 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: Anne Stoker (AD Children's Social Care and Principal Social Worker), Grant Landon (Service Manager Practice & Partnerships), Laura Martins (Acting Strategy & Policy Hub Manager), Susan Sharry (Head of Housing Strategy), Andy Ellis (Scrutiny Officer), Elaine Huckell (Committee Secretary)

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WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting. Apologies for absence had been received from Tony Murphy and Alicia Meniru and for lateness from Councillor Nneka Keazor.

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DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

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HOUSING ALLOCATION SCHEME UPDATE ON CONSULTATION

Laura Martins (Acting Strategy & Policy Hub Manager) and Susan Sharry (Head of Housing Strategy) presented a report on the consultation being undertaken on the Housing Allocations Scheme. Councillor Levy explained that this was the first time an item was presented to OSC for pre-decision scrutiny. Comments would contribute to the consultation which ends on 8 September 2017.

The following issues were highlighted by Laura Martins :

- The Housing Allocations Scheme was being reviewed in order to continue to prioritise applicants fairly whilst ensuring that it meets

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current legal requirements. It aims to help in the prevention of homelessness and temporary housing pressures and to effectively manage estate regeneration. An undertaking was made in 2012 that the scheme would be reviewed at this time.

- The scheme aims to simplify the process. There are severe pressures on social housing in the borough and whilst the scheme will not solve this problem it is hoped that members of the public will be able to understand as clearly as possible the realistic options available to them.
- One of the main challenges has been to ensure that people who would be most affected by the policy would be able to take part in the consultation. As part of this, 10 community sessions have been held and also a meeting with 'registered landlords' group would take place on 8 September 2017. Officers have also engaged directly with communities and discussions held with community groups. There have been advertisements in the local press and the council website. As at the time of this meeting there had been 577 responses
- The responses currently indicate that a lot are in favour of the proposals. It is apparent that the aim to reach people affected by the policy has been realised with 32% of respondents claiming either Council Tax support or Housing Benefit. 24% have a disability or long term health problem and 26% of respondents are from a BME community.
- Responses will be analysed and evaluated, and a report would be shared and discussed with the Executive Management Team and the Cabinet Member by early October 2017. The final version of the Housing Allocation Scheme document will go to Cabinet in February 2018. The scheme will go live in 2018.

Councillor Smith said the new scheme proposals do not appear to be very different from the existing ones, it appears to mainly 'fine tune' the policy. He spoke of the large number of questions in the survey (approximately 50 to 60) and said it was positive that we had received a significant number of responses. He said the issues were very thought provoking.

In answer to a question from Councillor Levy about whether help had been given to people to guide them through the survey process, it was answered that support had been provided including that given for community groups.

Susan Sharry spoke of the key proposed changes to the scheme:

- The number of 'demand groups' to be reduced from 6 to 5, with existing Enfield Council and housing association tenants together under Group 1. There continues to be a group 'Enfield Council's estate regeneration applicants with decant status'.
- The register would indicate a 'cut-off' position so that if people do not have enough points they will not be able to bid. This is to ensure people have a realistic understanding of their chances.
- There is a proposed 'auto- bidding' process for those who are currently not bidding for properties although they may be in the most need. This

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is particularly relevant for those who are in 'long term' letting accommodation which is expensive for the local authority.

- Previously only applicants with children under 15 years could bid for properties with gardens, this would no longer be the case and it is proposed that this would now be open to all.
- Where points were allocated regarding 'employment' and were previously thought to be 'unclear' this would be clarified.

The following issues were raised:

- Applicants will be provided support and advice on how to use the bidding system. For applicants on the system who fail to bid despite help being provided they will be linked to the auto-bidding system and a bid will be placed automatically.
- Every year a lettings plan is approved by the Lead Member for Housing and Housing Regeneration where a quota of properties are assigned to each of the 'demand' groups.
- Councillor Rye spoke of the 'local connection' criteria, which he said could be considered as a contentious issue. He asked if this was based on case law and if other local authorities use the same time period as Enfield or whether this could be changed to 5 years? It was confirmed that this was determined by case law.
- Councillor Rye said some may consider it to be appropriate for a 'harsher' process to apply for those people who are living in properties that are being 'under-occupied' to encourage them to 'down-size'. It was explained that for people with a larger property looking to down-size this is being encouraged by a higher number of points being allocated to them. Officers were also working closely with people to enable them to move to a smaller property. However, this is not always possible because of their requirement for high quality properties in their desired location.
- It was suggested by Councillor Rye that there be a more prominent role for members in dealing with difficult housing situations that arise, in a similar way to how the former 'housing panel' operated.
- There were concerns raised about the new IT systems needed to ensure the new scheme could be launched. Details of costs/ suppliers would be provided. **Action:** Laura Martins/ Susan Sharry.
- It was requested that a geographical map be provided showing the location of consultation responses. This would be provided with the final report.
- It was confirmed that those people who became homeless prior to November 2012 were awarded a higher level of points as we cannot discharge our duty by an offer of suitable accommodation into the private rented sector.
- Concerns were raised about people who have been bidding for an incorrect property –i.e where the property may only be for a person with disabilities. It was confirmed that at present officers verify applications. The new IT system should ensure that applicants are given a warning when entering inappropriate information.

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- Under the section regarding advertisements for available homes - where mention is made of the type of tenancy being offered, such as secured or assured tenancies - it was confirmed that these were legal terms.
- In section 3.3 which refers to Household income, assets and savings – it was mentioned that applicants would not qualify for the housing register if their income is considered high enough for them to be able to afford alternative housing in the private sector – it was asked if we had an idea of what these figures would be. It was thought approximate figures to be used would be savings of £50K, family income of £70K pa. and a single income of £40K pa.
- It was thought there was a lot of manual input to operate the scheme at present, the new system should allow for more standard letters to be put in place. It was anticipated that it should allow for applicants to be kept better informed.
- It was thought more should be done to provide more desirable properties for those people wishing to downsize – to enable larger properties to be released.
- Reference was made to the Government's proposal for 'time limited' tenancies, this was a voluntary proposal put forward to local authorities. Enfield had decided against this proposal.

Councillor Levy said it was encouraging that the consultation had received so many responses and he thanked Laura Martins and Susan Sharpy for their report. It was noted that the report of the consultation response would be discussed with the Executive Management Team, Council and Cabinet member by early October 2017.

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FOSTERING & ADOPTION SERVICES IN ENFIELD

Anne Stoker (AD Children's Social Care and Principal Social Worker), presented the reported which updated the Committee on the work of the Fostering and Adoption Services between April 2016 and March 2017. She highlighted the following:

- In 2016/17 Enfield recruited 12 foster carers and were looking to increase the number this year.
- There is an on-going challenge as the number of foster parents leave the service although it should be remembered this is often because they go on to adopt the children they have been caring for, also some have left due to retirement. The team is actively recruiting.
- Ten children were adopted in Enfield in 2016-17. It was noted that there has been a significant increase in Special Guardianship Orders (SGO's) and this is substantially higher than the other North London Consortium boroughs. The increasing number of SGO's are made by Courts rather than Placement Orders. SGO's enable children to stay in their family.

The following issues were raised

- It was asked if the large shift to SGO's meant that children stayed with their birth mother. It was answered that children would be moved to be looked after by family or friends. It was thought this would usually result in a more positive outcome for the child as they may stay with a friend's family or other family member so they would not need to leave their school. It was driven by what the child wants and probably allows for better contact with the parent.
- That in an emergency situation it may not be possible to match a child with all characteristics of the foster parent. On those occasions it is necessary to find the safest place for the child.
- Although events/ advertising is sometimes undertaken for prospective foster parents, Anne Stoker said she is hesitant about how we advertise as it is important that children are not treated as commodities. Meetings of prospective foster parents and children would happen when we already have an expression of interest.
- It was confirmed that the reason why there had been an overspend regarding Children's Services allowances, this was because of the large increase in the number of SGO's where an allowance is paid. Such an increase had not been expected and it was acknowledged that as this was a demand led service nothing could be done to reduce the cost.
- In answer to a question whether there were problems in finding adoptive parents for children with disabilities, it was stated that this had not been a problem in Enfield because of the good work of the joint service which ensures that the needs of the children and foster parents are met.
- It has been acknowledged that the DfE scorecard indicators to benchmark performance are not sufficiently sensitive to reflect the range of circumstances of the children and families involved.

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ENFIELD SAFEGUARDING CHILDRENS BOARD (ESCB) ANNUAL REPORT

Grant Landon (Service Manager Practice & Partnerships) presented the Annual report of the Enfield Safeguarding Children Board. He highlighted the following:

- The Safeguarding Board is comprised of agencies and partners across Enfield to analyse, scrutinize and offer challenges to ensure the safeguarding of children across the borough.
- The Alan Wood review of local safeguarding children boards in May 2016 recommended significant changes to the way safeguarding arrangements are structured in the country. We have continued to prepare a business plan with a summary giving the key priorities.
- One of the specific safeguarding concerns is 'Child Sexual Exploitation/ Missing/ Trafficking' and it was pointed out that there will be an

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Overview and Scrutiny Workstream for 2017/18 on 'Human Trafficking/ Modern Slavery' the lead member for this will be Councillor Rye.

- Domestic Abuse/ violence against Women and Girls - A new Joint Targeted Area Inspection framework introduced early 2016 to understand how effectively agencies in the area respond to specific issues for a six month period. The theme was children living with Domestic Abuse.
- Radicalisation and Prevent – the Board works closely with the Prevent service in the Community Safety Unit.
- Safeguarding Boards would continue to change and adapt to meet future challenges, the three key areas to bring together are the Police, Health (CCG) and Social Services.

The report was NOTED and the following issues raised:

- Members thanked Grant Landon for his encouraging report. It was suggested by Councillor Smith that it may be helpful for an assessment to be made if more detailed performance data/ figures were available to show trends. It was stated that in many situations there was limited data obtainable. The main issues related to the increased demand for help and support and the borough's attempts to ensure this is met.
- That consideration be given as to whether it is feasible/ beneficial to combine the four reports that relate to Children's Services at this meeting into one for future OSC meetings.
- Councillor Levy referred to the possibility, in future, that an OSC standing workstream be established for Children's issues.

Grant Landon was thanked for his report update.

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ENFIELD ANNUAL INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICERS (IRO'S) REPORT 2016/17

Anne Stoker, presented this item which updated OSC on the annual IRO report April 2017 to March 2017.

She highlighted the following:

- Independent Reviewing Officers represent the interests of looked after children and there are 7.5 officer posts in the borough. They also chair the Child Protection conferences.
- There was a decline in the number of children subject to child protection plans of approximately 10%. It was thought this may be due to the use of the 'signs of safety model', which have put clear safety plans in place which are easily understood by parents and professionals.
- This is a demand led service with more complex issues as more families move into the borough. The process is well managed with clear plans in place.

The following issues were raised:

- It was questioned whether we should be concerned as the number of children being looked after and their issues have increased although the number of children subject to a child protection plan had declined? Anne referred to the consistent approach used to support families and that social workers were using the same clear protection/ safety plans as previously.
- The rates of adoption for looked after children was queried and it was thought to be approximately 14%. It was pointed out that there have been changes to allow for young people over the age of 18 to stay with their foster carers. Anne mentioned that more young people were coming later into care.
- It was confirmed that when a child who is subject to a child protection plan moves into Enfield from another borough then we would assume responsibility for this.
- The report was helpful as it enabled comparisons/ trends to be made.

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ENFIELD ANNUAL LOCAL AUTHORITY DESIGNATED OFFICER (LADO) REPORT 2016/17

Anne Stoker, presented this item which updated OSC on the annual LADO report April 2017 to March 2017.

The following was highlighted:

- The role of the LADO is undertaken by the Service Manager of Safeguarding and Quality Service who is responsible for overseeing investigations, alerting senior council officers to allegations of a serious nature and making referrals to the Disclosure and Barring Service. She also offers advice and guidance to staff where there are low level concerns.
- There were 50 allegations during the year which met the threshold for formal LADO involvement and 10 of these allegations (20%) were substantiated.

The following issues were raised:

- It was confirmed that in some instances where a person is found guilty i.e that allegations are substantiated, then they may receive a prison sentence.
- There is evidence that allegations have been covered up in the past in other authorities/institutions. We need to be sure that this would not happen in Enfield. Although insufficient evidence may have resulted in an allegation being unsubstantiated all referrals were logged for the future.
- It was asked how often there are cases of whistleblowing. It was answered that this happens occasionally, in which case only the highest level of officers would investigate, in order to protect the

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whistleblower. In the past we have received anonymous letters and these are always looked into.

Anne Stoker was thanked for presenting the reports.

AGREED

That consideration be given as to whether it is feasible/ beneficial to combine the four reports that relate to Children's Services into one for future OSC meetings.

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WORK PROGRAMME 2017/18

It was noted that there would be more Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings this year compared to last year. This includes a joint meeting with Crime Scrutiny held on the 11 July 2017, on knife crime and a joint meeting with Health Scrutiny to be held on the 8 November 2017.

Workstreams agreed for 2017/18 include

- Human Trafficking/ Modern Slavery – Lead Member - Michael Rye
- Transport Connectivity – Lead Member – Nneka Keazor
- Primary School Exclusions – Lead Member – Guney Dogan

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MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

AGREED the minutes of the meetings held on 25 July 2017 and 14 August 2017.

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DATE OF NEXT MEETING

12 October 2017 – Business meeting

Items for discussion

- Meridian Water and
- Retail in Town Centres.

Councillor Levy thanked everyone for attending the meeting

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