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OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 7.11.2019

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON THURSDAY, 7 NOVEMBER 2019

COUNCILLORS

PRESENT

Susan Erbil (Chair), Achilleas Georgiou (Vice-Chair), Tolga Aramaz, Sinan Boztas, Bernadette Lappage, Edward Smith and Glynis Vince.

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:

Joanne Drew (Director of Housing), Nick Martin (Head of Service Temporary Accommodation), Anne Stoker (Director of Children and Family Services), Angela Bent (Head of Service Practice Improvement & Partnerships, Children's Services), Florah Shiringo (Head of Early Help and Protection), Matt Bowmer (Interim Director Finance & Commercial), Claire Johnson (Head of Governance, Scrutiny & Registration Services), Elaine Huckell (Scrutiny Secretary)

Also Attending:

Councillor Gina Needs (Cabinet Member Social Housing), Simon Alin (Press)

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WELCOME & APOLOGIES

Councillor Susan Erbil welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies had been received from Councillor Lee-David Sanders and Councillor Glynis Vince was substituting for him. Apologies were also received from Councillor Guner Aydin, Fay Hammond and Tony Murphy.

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DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

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TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

Councillor Gina Needs (Cabinet Member Social Housing) introduced this item and together with Joanne Drew (Director of Housing) and Nick Martin (Head of Service Temporary Accommodation) a report was presented on Temporary Accommodation. The report set out how the Temporary Accommodation

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service is run and the role of 'Housing Gateway' in helping to support the council to meet and discharge its homelessness obligations.

A report by the Smith Institute on 'Why is Enfield facing high levels of homelessness and what are the options for change?' had been circulated with the report and it was noted that a report on the future of the Homelessness service had been submitted to Cabinet in September 2019

The report explained how the temporary accommodation service works and the main reasons why there were such high levels of temporary accommodation in Enfield.

The following points were raised:

- It was asked how the ambition to ensure there are no households in temporary accommodation for more than 6 months would be achieved. Nick Martin explained that there would be a different approach introduced, with more resources used to help people at an earlier point to prevent homelessness. A new intelligence-based IT system would highlight people who are at risk and they would be supported. The IT model is being developed and would be used from April, it is anticipated it would take a year to mobilise. It was mentioned that sometimes people may be reluctant to move into alternative accommodation which may be inferior to their existing residence. Some people are legally entitled to a council home and cannot be moved into private rented property.
- In answer to a question about the length of time people spend in temporary accommodation it was stated that whilst the average time is 2½ years there have been cases of people being in temporary accommodation for 20 to 21 years.
- There would be incentives for people to sustain their tenancies (extra points allocated) to try to prevent people from becoming homeless.
- It was noted that support packages are provided in Croydon and it was asked what support is provided for people in Enfield. An answer was given that we refer people to other housing providers, and that we will be improving the information and advice available so people can make informed decisions. We would be setting up a 'housing academy' to equip tenants with the skills and training needed to sustain future tenancies in the private sector.
- Reference was made to the number of older residents who would be happy to downsize to smaller properties if they were available. Joanne stated that they were working on this, investment was needed to provide a better offer for residents.
- Councillor Smith spoke of his support for this initiative for early interventions to prevent people from becoming homeless. He said he would like officers to report back on this in 12 months and provide an update.
- It was noted that it was often cheaper for other local authorities to rent properties for their residents in Enfield than in central London, the amount of Private Rented Sector (PRS) properties available for Enfield is therefore less. It is estimated that approximately 60% of PRS

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properties in Enfield are rented to LA's other than Enfield. Similarly, Enfield has rented properties for residents outside of the borough, for example in Harlow. It is anticipated that Enfield will join 'Capital Letters' which is a collaboration between London boroughs working together to improve housing options for homeless households with an aim to reduce competition between boroughs. A report is to be submitted to Cabinet on this.

- Members noted that in some situations it is necessary for residents to be placed in properties out of the borough, for example in cases of domestic violence.
- It was mentioned that by having additional people coming into the borough as a result of cheaper rents, this is having a detrimental effect on Enfield services - for example, with extra school places needed.
- The net loss for Enfield for temporary accommodation in 2018/19 was £7.9m.
- Reference was made to placements in Harlow from Enfield. A number of residents had stated that they were happy to stay in Harlow and did not wish to move back to Enfield. It was noted that the process of discussions with Haringey are ongoing on exchanging properties as Haringey have 600 households placed in the Enfield area and we have 300 placements in the Haringey area. It was noted that these were mainly studio or one-bedroom properties.
- There were now more stringent controls for all London boroughs on nightly paid accommodation, with reduced rates set in 2014..
- A table on page 4 of the report shows the 3- year budget profile for temporary accommodation/ homelessness which shows an anticipated £1.8m decrease in the budget for next year (2020/21) compared to this year (2019/20). It was asked how we can expect such a drastic decrease. Joanne Drew referred to significant targets for turning around properties and that resources for this in future will be under the remit of the Head of Service, Temporary Accommodation.
- It was noted that we were investigating the viability of a social letting's agency with a mixed rent model, Local Housing Allowance, intermediate, and an additional market rent option (Enfield Let).
- It was questioned whether Enfield could or should provide additional funding to subsidise rent levels. It was pointed out that by doing this, we would rapidly reduce the number of properties that could be provided. At present, the priority was to be able to maximise supply.

AGREED

1. The report was NOTED.
2. Members asked officers to provide an update next year, on the initiative for early interventions to prevent people from becoming homeless (November 2020).

The Chair thanked Councillor Needs and officers for this informative report.

Councillor Needs, Joanne Drew and Nick Martin left the meeting at this point.

OFSTED IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Anne Stoker (Director of Children and Family Services) introduced the report. Angela Bent (Head of Service Practice Improvement & Partnerships, Children's Services) explained that the action plan was developed following the Ofsted inspection of Children services in March 2019.

The Ofsted inspection had judged the following four key areas to be judged as Good

- To help and protect children
- The experiences and progress of children in care wherever they live, including those who return home
- The arrangements for permanence for children who are looked after, including adoption
- The experiences and progress of care leavers

The Ofsted inspection identified four areas where further improvement was required, and the improvement plan set out actions undertaken and ongoing actions in respect of the following areas –

- The quality of plans for children in need
- Return home interviews for children missing from home
- Private fostering responses, including timely statutory checks and regular visits to ensure that children live in safe arrangements to meet their needs
- Health information for care leavers.

The following issues were raised:

1. Audit of the quality of CIN (Children in Need) plans - p56 of the report (improvement action para1.3) mentioned that cases would be re-audited in November 2019 to ensure that practice had improved. It was stated that this had been added to our audit programme, reported back in December and we have a robust service audit every six weeks which is, an in-depth review.
2. Members congratulated the service for the positive findings from the Ofsted inspection. Councillor Vince praised the work of foster carers and the support they are given.
3. Officers were asked what they would consider to be the challenges for the service going forward. It was explained there is a process of self-evaluation with an emphasis on continuous improvement. Challenges for the service were due to the complexity of some cases, with hundreds of referrals each week and risks considered on a daily basis, also delays in the court process. It was essential to maintain a high calibre workforce and for us to be confident in their abilities. As part of this, we have a good training programme with a strong network for newly qualified social workers. We link with Kent University as a centre of excellence, who, it is understood will be setting up a base in Enfield.
4. Anne Stoker spoke of the need for consistency in the provision of the service – for example with CIN plans where there have been regular visits with social workers, she would want to hear from the children involved.

5. Members asked for an indication of the scale of the problem when children go missing from a care home. Anne Stoker said a Missing Persons Debriefing Service is now based in the MASH (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub). All missing children are offered an independent debriefing on their return and key information shared with relevant agencies to ensure our ability to keep them safe.

NOTED

Members noted the progress made against the Enfield Improvement Plan following on from the Ofsted Inspection of Children Services in March 2019.

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ANNUAL CHILDREN'S SELF EVALUATION FRAMEWORK ASSESSMENT (SEF) 2019

Anne Stoker (Director of Children and Family Services) and Angela Bent (Head of Service Practice Improvement & Partnerships, Children's Services) presented the report which updated the committee on the Children Self Evaluation (SEF) 2019. The SEF is the Children's Services self- evaluation of the quality and impact of social work practice in the borough over the past year.

The report covers six core areas and the Self- Evaluation should answer three questions:

- What do you know about the quality and impact of social work practice in your local authority?
- How do you know it?
- What are your improvement plans for the next 12 months?

The following was highlighted

- The self-evaluation of the quality and impact of social work practice shows that across children's service practice is improving.
- The introduction of a 6-weekly in-team audit and moderation process gives oversight and provides assurance to senior officers.
- There have been 'Practice days' and we now have 'Practice weeks' which supports protected learning time and enables senior managers to understand how practitioners work with children and their families through practice observations.
- There has been a significant increase in the number of referrals coming through.
- Where a decision has been taken to initiate a Section 47 investigation (the LA statutory duty to make enquiries when a child is suspected to be suffering or likely to suffer harm) a review found the decision making and application of threshold had been appropriate and proportionate.
- There had been an increase in the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people needing to be looked after by the local authority.

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- There had been an increase in children that have been adopted. Enfield is to become part of the regional adoption agency – Adopt London North Regional Adoption Agency
- There are pressures on the team, and it is important that we manage to retain staff

The following issues were raised:

- It was asked why there had been a reduction in the number of adoptive families approved during 18/19 compared to the previous year. An answer was given that matching can be an issue. As Enfield had joined the Adopt London North Regional Adoption Agency from October 2019 it was hoped that there would be a 'bigger pool' which should be beneficial.
- A question was asked about the decrease in the number of foster carer approvals and whether the level of deprivation in the borough would have an effect on this? Anne Stoker referred to a change in legislation which had resulted in less children being adopted, and more being looked after by friends and families under 'special guardianship orders'. She pointed out however that the same processes are undertaken beforehand to determine their suitability. She said deprivation in the borough was not a factor in the number of foster carers.
- The report had referred to there being 382 children in care at the end of March 2019 an increase of 10% from the previous year. A Member stated that the number of children adopted was very small compared to this, and asked approximately how many special guardianship orders were granted in a year? There were approximately 20 guardianship orders granted and of these approximately half were for children who were LAC (Looked after children).
- It was noted that between April 2018 to March 2019 there were 487 episodes of children going missing which was attributable to 158 children. The danger of these children being involved in criminal activity such as 'county lines' was raised. Anne Stoker confirmed that this was of great concern and, also to a greater extent there was a risk to these children of sexual exploitation. She said regular partnership meetings were held through the MASH (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub) and a debriefing system is in place here as it is important to ascertain information and put in place interventions as soon as possible. Members were informed of plays that had been presented primarily for children - 'Chelsea's Choice' and one on County Lines to raise awareness of these issues. It was noted that the plays had also resulted in some disclosures being given.

AGREED

1. Members of OSC supported the development priorities for 2019/20 as outlined within the self-evaluation

Officers were thanked for their reports

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BUDGET PROGRESS UPDATE

Matt Bowmer (Interim Director Finance & Commercial) updated the Committee on the formulation of the Council's 2020/21 Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan 2020/21 to 2024/25.

The following was highlighted:

- The aim is to put in place robust and resilient finances to enable the council to safeguard services and protect the most vulnerable in the borough.
- Progress has been made in identifying savings and income generation initiatives to address the financial gap which were presented to Cabinet in October. The Overview and Scrutiny meeting in December will review the Medium-Term Financial Plan and proceed on to Council meeting in February 2020.
- The Settlement due to be published 5 December will be delayed because of the election. We are hopeful to have this information before Christmas.
- Residents have been given the opportunity to put forward their views on council rate setting and we would engage with interest groups such as voluntary organisations. Briefing papers are being prepared for councillors to engage with residents.

The following issues were raised

- It was mentioned that there still appeared to be a funding gap to find of £3m? Matt Bowmer answered that the bulk of the proposals have been published and the remainder will be shown for the December Cabinet meeting.
- It was asked if it was intended to find further savings or will the balance be funded from reserves? It was thought this would be coming from a variety of sources. There would be a focus to protect funding for customer services and IT.
- There was concern as to whether councillors had received notification of the opportunity for residents to put forward views on council rate setting and whether this had been widely publicised? It was noted that a press release had been given and consultation details were shown on the Council website. Matt Bowmer said we should be mindful of costs involved in the process – last year only 60 responses had been received.
- Councillor Georgiou requested further information in relation to commercial property investment. Mark Bradbury, Director of Property & Economy would attend the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 19 December 2019 when the meeting would be to review the Medium-Term Financial Plan.

NOTED - The Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted

1. The current financial position outlined
2. The opportunity to scrutinise the savings and income generation proposals and the underlying spending and funding assumptions to the meeting of OSC on 19 December 2019.

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3. The future reports to Cabinet with the Tranche 2 proposals in December and to Council for final approval in February 2020.

Matt Bowmer was thanked for his report.

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WORK PROGRAMME 2019/ 20

NOTED

Members noted the Work Programme for 2019/20 and agreed that an invitation be sent to the three Associate Cabinet Members for them to attend a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Meeting on either the 28 November 2019 or the 30 January 2020. If ACM's were unable to attend then the Leader would be asked to attend in their place'.

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DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The dates of future meetings were noted:

Call-In Meeting

- Thursday 14 November 2019

Business meetings of OSC

- Thursday 19 December 2019 (Budget meeting)
- Thursday 13 February 2020
- Thursday 2 April 2020

Provisional Call-In dates

- Thursday 28 November 2019
- Thursday 30 January 2020
- Thursday 6 February 2020
- Wednesday 4 March 2020
- Thursday 26 March 2020
- Tuesday 28 April 2020