

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE HOUSING SCRUTINY PANEL HELD ON THURSDAY, 11TH FEBRUARY, 2021

MEMBERS: Councillors Guner Aydin, Elif Erbil, Alessandro Georgiou, Margaret Greer, Saray Karakus, Edward Smith and Hass Yusuf (Vice Chair)

Officers: Joanne Drew, Director of Housing and Regeneration, Richard Sorensen, Head of The Housing Advisory Service, Susan O'Connell, Governance and Scrutiny Officer, Andy Ellis, Governance and Scrutiny Officer.

8. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The Chair, Cllr Elif Erbil welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Susan Erbil and Cllr Gina Needs, Cabinet Member for Social Housing.

9. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

10. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 1 DECEMBER 2020

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 December were agreed.

Matters Arising

It was confirmed that the review of the Customer Voice is progressing, with a report due to go to Cabinet in May.

11. HOUSING ADVISORY SERVICE AND ALLOCATIONS POLICY

Joanne Drew introduced the item and Richard Sorensen took Members through the presentation.

1) It was noted that Cabinet had agreed a range of measures to support people who are at risk of homelessness or who have become homeless. Early intervention prevention has been key and the aim is to reduce the number of residents in temporary accommodation for long periods.

2) To support this work, the new structure within the Housing Department is now being recruited to. The Housing Advisory Service is in its early stages.

3) The new service aims to enabling everyone to access a stable, secure and decent home regardless of tenure.

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- 4) A breakdown in the number of homes in the borough, highlighted that of the total 125,370 homes, 8% are local authority homes, 7% are registered provider homes and 27% are private rented homes.
- 5) 5,500 homes are used as temporary accommodation.
- 6) There are currently, 3100 homeless households in Enfield, in addition to 157 older people waiting for sheltered housing. In a good year, the Council has approximately 350 properties to let. As a result of the pandemic, far less people are moving, therefore the number of vacant properties available is significantly reduced.
- 7) The main points of the former housing allocations policy were explained. The new policy will not involve quotes but will be points driven, allowing greater transparency. A local connections criteria will be introduced and there will be more collaborative working between Social Services and Health Services.
- 8) Communications to date have included newsletters to Temporary Accommodation tenants, the website has been updated, 2000 enquires have been generated and PSL tenants have been contacted.
- 9) Under the new allocations policy, high priority will be given to those with health or social care needs, in addition to those who may be downsizing. Medium priority will go to those in overcrowded or temporary accommodation. A lower priority will be given to those who's situation will improve over time.
- 10) Greater priority will be given to disabled people, families with sick or disabled children, people transferring and homeless households moving to the private rented sector.
- 11) Less priority will be received by households with no other needs or no local connection.
- 12) The new scheme aims to reduce the period of time a family may be housed in temporary accommodation. There is a points incentive to be a successful tenant in the private rented sector which wasn't available under the old scheme. The points available are increased by 10% annually for private rented sector tenants.
- 13) Tenants who have been in temporary accommodation since November 2012 (pre- localism) will be allocated 750 points if they move in to the private rented sector and will be allowed to bid for properties. For those tenants remaining in council temporary accommodation, they will receive 650 points but will not be permitted to bid for properties. They will receive one direct offer of suitable accommodation. In reality, there are some families who have been in temporary accommodation for over a decade and the most helpful approach is for them to enter the private rented sector.
- 14) The governance of the new scheme was detailed, including a number of panels, for example, the Strategic Housing Allocations Board, under a 'One Council' approach.
- 15) In summarising the key issues, it was noted that a lot of tenants would need to move to the private rented sector and people who remain in temporary accommodation will have reduced choices.
- 16) The pandemic resulted in a ban on evictions, however, as lockdown measures are eased, there will be a backlog of evictions which are likely to be evident towards the end of March.

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The Chair thanks Joanne and Richard for their presentation and asked Members for any comments or questions.

17) It was noted that the presentation included more information on the Allocations Policy than originally circulated to Members.

18) Following a question relating to evictions it was reiterated that with a hold on evictions coming to an end, a backlog in the court process is likely to result in many tenants becoming homeless in the coming months.

19) Local Housing Allowance rates are based on rents and limited by legislation but a question was asked whether this would improve the position of tenants. It was noted that some families may benefit but some single tenants may not as a result of the this combined with the benefit cap.

20) It was confirmed that the model for eviction rates can be identified by using financial data attained via council tax, a view of the housing market in Enfield and the number of border-line evictions. What is less difficult to predicted is the effect of a long period of lockdown on people's physical and emotional health.

21) The main criteria for measuring success was identified as ensuring everyone has access to a safe and secure home. The balance of the housing market has to change between temporary accommodation and the private rented sector.

22) The Housing Gateway has out-performed its business plan and is able to offer secure tenancies and supports financially challenged families who face barriers to housing.

23) In response to a question relating to modelling factors which are outside of the Council's control, it was noted that there are limits as to what can be modelled, for example, a year ago we would not have considered the vast impact of the pandemic. We do have in place contingency plans to deal with worst case scenarios.

24) Camden Council devised this scheme 10 years ago and it has had a dramatic, positive effect, although they have a very different housing market. We have adapted the scheme to meet our needs in Enfield.

25) Quality of accommodation is an issue that is being approached.

The aim is to reduce the number of families in temporary accommodation to under 500, with nobody spending more than 6 months in this sector.

26) It was confirmed that rates for temporary accommodation are twice the market rate and it wasn't uncommon for a family to be in temporary accommodation for 14-15 years.

27) Families for who English is a second language are offered translation services via the Language Shop and all letters contain advice on how to have letters translated.

28) Enfield has 136 4-bedroom properties, with hundreds of large families requiring this size of property. As the Council doesn't have the stock, we need to be honest with families in this position and the private rented sector needs to be the focus.

29) In response to a question relating to referrals from other London Boroughs, it was confirmed that Enfield has joined a coalition with 20 other boroughs to work to reduce the level of price inflation that existed previously. In addition, a higher-level review of temporary accommodation is being carried out across London.

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30) It was suggested that a summary of the new scheme could be provided in bullet point format, to allow Councillors to share the information with residents.

The Chair summarised the discussion and thanked officers for their presentation.

12. WORK PROGRAMME 2020/21

The work programme was noted and the following items were confirmed for the next meeting of the panel.

- Responsive Repairs – to include an update on cladding issues, following recent Government announcements.
- The Role of Housing Associations.

13. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The date of the next meeting was noted as 15 April 2021.