

## MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE HOUSING SCRUTINY PANEL HELD ON THURSDAY, 30TH SEPTEMBER, 2021

**MEMBERS:** Councillors Anne Brown, James Hockney, Ayten Guzel, Edward Smith and Hass Yusuf

**Officers:**

Joanne Drew (Director of Housing and Regeneration), Richard Sorensen (Head of the Housing Advisory Service), Jane Creer and Tanya Elcock (Governance and Scrutiny Team)

**Also Attending:** Councillor Gina Needs, Cabinet Member for Social Housing

### 1. WELCOME & APOLOGIES

Councillor James Hockney, Chair, welcomed all attendees to the meeting.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Ergin Erbil.

### 2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

### 3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

AGREED the minutes of the meeting held on 15 July 2021.

### 4. BUILDING SAFETY-INCLUDING CLADDING COMPLIANCE WITH BUILDING SAFETY BILL

RECEIVED the report of Abigail Ellis, Investment & Resident Safety Programme Director.

NOTED

1. The verbal introduction by Councillor Gina Needs, Cabinet Member for Social Housing.
2. Members' agreement that more training around building safety responsibilities would be useful, to enhance knowledge.
3. Key points of the report highlighted by Joanne Drew, Director of Housing & Regeneration. Members were invited to raise questions and comments.
4. In response to Members' queries regarding the fire safety measures, it was confirmed the inspection regimes and responsibilities were set out in Para 5 Table 1 of the report. It would be important to educate residents for them to also take responsibility for in-flat testing. It was also confirmed

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there was a stay-put policy for residents as the best way to manage an incident.

5. In response to Members' queries regarding lack of Fire Fighting lifts, it was advised these had not been raised by the Fire Brigade as a deficiency. Further to a risk based review informing the lift replacement programme, they were not a recommended solution in blocks. However, officers would re-check and would seek the perspective of the Fire Brigade.
6. Officers provided more information on premises information boxes (PIBs), and that information on vulnerable residents and those with mobility issues would be included, and would be part of the responsibilities of the new role of Building Safety Managers.
7. It was confirmed that access on estates for emergency services vehicles was kept under review, and the Council had a system in place.
8. Members asked for an estimate of the numbers of additional staff and of the additional cost in implementing the measures. It was estimated that the Council would require a team of Building Safety Managers and an investment around £800k per annum by April 2023. The HRA business plan was being reviewed. There was potential for LBE Building Control to provide services as the Building Control Authority and collect fees for those services.
9. Officers would check with the private sector enforcement team whether further checks on standards would be required in future, if the same checks applied to private developments.
10. Regarding the Fire Safety Programme, Officers provided information on slippages and pressures on materials and labour, and the prioritisation and phasing of works.
11. The role of care takers at blocks was discussed. As Cabinet Member, Councillor Needs asked to be advised of any issues of concern. Ward councillors would be contacted with the schedule of annual estate walkabouts and invited to join them. The appropriate contacts for residents to report issues were on information boards in each estate block.

The Scrutiny Panel AGREED to:

- (i) Request further feedback from the Director of Housing & Regeneration on fire fighting and evacuation lifts, and the Fire Brigade officers and unions' perspective.
- (ii) Request further feedback from the Director of Housing & Regeneration on resource and staffing implications of the new measures to the Council, and on enforcement of private developments.
- (iii) Recommend training on the legislative changes for the portfolio holders and key members.
- (iv) Recommend an information campaign / education for Council tenants on fire safety measures.

### **5. TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION LEVELS AND STRATEGY TO REDUCE**

RECEIVED the report of Richard Sorensen, Head of the Housing Advisory Service.

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### NOTED

1. Councillor Gina Needs, Cabinet Member for Social Housing, introduced the report and gave credit to officers for their achievements.
2. The presentation by Richard Sorensen, Head of the Housing Advisory Service, setting out the context of the housing situation in the borough, and the number of households living in temporary accommodation. The updated slide presentation would be circulated to Members. The Council's objectives were highlighted, and that the focus on prevention was showing success.
3. Officers responded to the Chair's queries regarding Brickfield House and recent media coverage, confirming that there had been an independent report into the management of the building, and that the issues were specific to this building. The report had found that while the building was generally well managed, there were some specific improvements which could be made. An action plan was being implemented in response to the report. Officers also highlighted the problem of long term use of accommodation intended as emergency housing, and the challenges of large numbers of single parent families and vulnerable residents living in close proximity, of pandemic lockdowns, and of short supply of private rented accommodation.
4. In response to Members' queries regarding leasing, the work with landlords, the selective licensing scheme, and the advice line put in place during the pandemic were highlighted.
5. Officers provided advice for councillors on progressing tenants' issues. Problems of capacity in the Home-finders team were acknowledged and this had been dealt with by the introduction of a new system. There had also been recruitment of new case workers, which would help speed up responses.
6. Councillor Smith asked about the effect of the ban on evictions during the pandemic. It was advised that whilst there had been fewer evictions, the Council had dealt with the challenge of the 'Everyone In' scheme to assist rough sleepers and had secured funding for more year round accommodation.
7. In response to further queries regarding inducements to landlords and relative costs to the Council of nightly rented accommodation and other private temporary rented accommodation, this was outlined and a written note was also requested to be sent to Members for further clarification.
8. Councillor Brown expressed concern regarding the lack of enough family sized or properly affordable housing for people on low incomes. Officers clarified the affordable housing definition, and that the Council aimed for best use of existing housing stock and as much family oriented housing and affordable intermediate products as possible.
9. In response to the Chair's queries, Enfield Council's efforts in reducing temporary accommodation levels were confirmed as bucking the national trend, and better than neighbouring boroughs. A decision had been taken not to place people outside the borough and to try to work to re-shape the local private rented sector.
10. The Cabinet Member and officers were thanked for attending and presenting the strategy.

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### **6. WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2021/22**

NOTED that the report in respect of Retention of Staff in Housing Department would be received at the next meeting, along with the other two items marked on the panel's work programme for the December meeting.

### **7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

NOTED the date of the next meeting was Tuesday 7 December 2021.

The meeting ended at 9.20 pm.