

SCRUTINY REVIEW PANEL 1 – INEQUALITIES

MINUTES

Thursday 8th September 2016

PRESENT: Councillors: Ciaran McCartan (Chair), Jon Ball, Theresa Byrne, Paul Conlan, Fabio Conti (Vice-Chair), Tejinder Dhimi, Swarn Kang, Dee Martin, Mohinder Midha, Karam Mohan, Ian Proud & David Rodgers.

Other Members Present:

Cllr Hitesh Tailor - Portfolio Holder for Health and Adult Services

Ealing Officers Present:

Dave Baptiste - Head of Housing Development
Jack Dempsey - Head of Allocations and Accommodation
Lynne Duval - Lead Officer, Housing Demand
Georgia Laws - Graduate Housing Officer
Anna-Marie Rattray - Scrutiny Review Officer
Maxine Sawford - Housing Graduate Trainee
Lee Teasdale - Democratic Services Officer
Mark Wiltshire - Interim Director, Safer Communities & Housing

External Attendees:

Steve Davies - Regional Head, St Mungo's
Sukhdeep Dhillon - Outreach Worker (South Asian Lead), St Mungo's

1. Apologies for Absence
(Agenda Item 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Sarfraz Khan.

2. Declarations of Interest
(Agenda Item 2)

There were none.

3. Matters to be Considered in Private
(Agenda Item 3)

There were none.

4. Minutes (29.06.2016)
(Agenda Item 4)

The Panel considered the minutes of the first meeting of the Panel which had taken place on 29 June 2016.

The Chair advised that Panel that the sanction rate statistics which had been requested at the meeting were attached to the briefing note (on file) for information.

Resolved: That the minutes of the previous meeting of the Panel held on 29 June 2016 be agreed as a true and correct record.

5. St Mungo's Broadway Outreach Services to Rough Sleepers – Annual Report 2015/2016

(Agenda Item 5)

The Chair invited Steve Davies, the Regional Head of St Mungo's Broadway Outreach Services and Sukhdeep Dhillon, Outreach Worker and South Asian Lead in Southall for St Mungo's Broadway Outreach Services, to address the Panel in regards to St Mungo's Annual Report for 2015/2016 and further report on the work they undertook in the borough.

Steve Davies stated that Elizabeth Ursell, Manager of St Mungo's Ealing, had hoped to attend the meeting but unfortunately had to tender apologies.

St Mungo's Broadway Ealing Outreach Team had been commissioned by London Borough of Ealing Housing to deliver an assertive outreach service, which targeted and engaged rough sleepers throughout the borough.

The focus of the service was to make lasting differences to the lives of vulnerable individuals and the community as a whole and to then measure the outcomes.

The rough sleeping 'hot spots' within the borough were Southall and Acton. With St Anselm's Church and the Havelock Estate in Southall, and the South Acton Estate and Acton High Street being the areas of highest concentration.

In October 2014 St Mungo's Broadway funded a part-time nurse to work with the Outreach Team. The post was a pilot to help develop the borough's health response to rough sleepers with unmet health needs. Following this, a successful funding bid was placed with the Better Care Fund to run a two year service from August 2015. This included a full-time nurse and two days per week language specific support. The aim of the service was to reduce emergency admissions/re-admissions, reduce A&E attendance and reduce delayed discharges.

The service made use of referrals from many sources to locate and offer help to and 'build bridges' with those living rough. The Committee were advised of the 'No Second Night Out' approach. A 'No Second Night Out' service based out of Shepherds Bush offered 25 beds, which provided 72 hours of accommodation, during which time Officers tried to reconnect service users back with where they had originally come from. Unfortunately, this service was extremely popular and used by seven separate services, meaning that it was usually full.

The Committee were also advised of the importance of early intervention to save money in the long run. TB was highlighted as a major concern for some rough sleepers, and the longer that it remained untreated, the more chance there was that it would mutate into an untreatable variant and increase the risk of fatality.

It was stated that many rough sleepers in the Southall area were undocumented and had no recourse to public funds. This also led to difficulties in trying to reconnect them with the area from which they came. St Mungo's worked closely with Refugee

Action and the Home Office in making sure that all work in reconnecting undocumented migrants was undertaken within the correct legal frameworks.

The opening of the Hope for Southall Street Homeless Shelter had proved very helpful. The service brought a new approach to supporting rough sleepers in Southall. A 14 bed assessment centre/night shelter had opened on 6 January 2016 and had been running at either full or high capacity ever since. St Mungo's, together with Refugee Action, was supporting all clients accessing the assessment centre to help move them away from rough sleeping. The outcomes so far included a striking difference being seen in the health and wellbeing of those who accessed the service. Those with heavy drinking issues were being helped to tackle the problem, and A&E admissions were dropping as a result.

The Chair thanked the attendees for their introduction and invited Panel Members to comment and ask questions.

The Chair opened the questioning by asking about public referrals. As the most vital resource for locating rough sleepers, what was done to help promote referrals and what could Councillors do through their surgeries?

It was advised that the process for referrals had been made very simple through the 'Street Link' 24/7 phone service. This was now also available as a smart phone app, and it was hoped that Councillors would download it and also help to advertise it to the wider community.

The Chair queried why numbers of rough sleepers had doubled across the last few years. It was stated that there were many 'upstream' factors involved with recent welfare reforms having a notable impact. There were concerns that further forthcoming welfare cuts and rent caps would also have an impact.

Councillor Conti asked about the success rate of the 'No Second Night' approach in Shepherds Bush. It was stated that it had been a very successful model, with around 75-80% of users not returning to rough sleeping.

Councillor Conti then made reference to the Hope for Southall Street Homeless Shelter. What was the average length of stay at the shelter? And following their stay, where did the majority of service users move on to?

It was advised that there was no set period for anyone staying at the shelter, and that each individual case varied significantly, many users though did stay for several weeks. St Mungo's tried to help service users stay in the UK where possible, where accommodation was offered, which could be for anywhere within the UK. Close work also took place on 'reconnection'; with the local MP and the Indian High Commission closely involved.

Councillor Rodgers stated that the work being undertaken by St Mungo's was to be commended and that the Panel should look to recommend that St Mungo's continue to receive the support of local authorities. The 'Street Link' app was also considered to be very useful and should be promoted on a wider basis. Councillor Rodgers felt that the homelessness problem was combated more proactively in London than many other major western cities, and the forms of intervention offered by services

such as St Mungo's played a large part in this and proved to be highly cost effective in the long run.

Councillor Byrne queried why the gender balance for rough sleeping (approximately 90% male to 10% female) was so pronounced? It was stated that migrant rough sleepers were usually male as they would come to the country in search of work to support families at home. It was found that women in crisis situations often had a better support network. Also when relationships failed, it was predominantly women who were able to retain the home, particularly where children were involved. It was noted though that the females who were rough sleepers often had particularly complex issues, which required a higher level of intervention than most male rough sleepers.

Councillor Kang asked if there were any further ways in which the Council could assist St Mungo's in their work. It was advised that at the present time St Mungo's had to move out of the premises used as their administrative hub due to a rise in rents. In the short term this meant that St Mungo's had to operate directly out of a hostel.

Councillor Mohan asked about how dependent St Mungo's were upon the help of volunteers. It was explained that they were highly dependent upon the vital work of volunteers, with around 15 volunteers currently working around Ealing. More volunteers were always welcomed, though training volunteers was a time consuming process that required a lot of commitment.

The Panel were advised that a mobile TB Screening van which visited the borough had now been developed further to become a 'one stop shop' for health screening. The van would be visiting the borough on Tuesday 20th September if any Members were interested in seeing it in action.

Cllr Tailor advised the Panel that the Health and Wellbeing Board had been considering issues around mental health and homelessness. With particular note given to how too many people who had to visit A&E's were in a crisis concerning mental health and homelessness. It had been agreed that an initial pilot would take place to work with local departments and mental health services to identify the 'top 10' regular attendees at A&E and to concentrate preventative services on this group.

The Chair then thanked the St Mungo's representatives for their contributions and drew the item to a close.

Resolved: That the report submitted by St Mungo's Broadway Outreach Services on issues related to rough sleeping in the borough be received.

6. Housing Supply and Demand in Ealing (Agenda Item 6)

The Chair invited Mark Wiltshire - Interim Director of Safer Communities & Housing; Lynne Duval - Lead Officer for Housing Demand; Jack Dempsey - Head of Allocations and Accommodation; and Dave Baptiste - Head of Housing Development; to address the Panel on housing supply and demand issues in the borough.

Lynne Duval opened by advising the Panel on current trends. Since 2012/2013, the Housing Demand Service had seen a significant increase in the number of homeless applications year on year. Over the last year there had been fewer acceptances than in 2014/2015, but this reflected a higher number of successful preventions as the Council worked with clients to sustain their tenancies or assist them to find alternative affordable accommodation before they lost their homes. Officers aimed to improve prevention activity in future months by dealing with private rented sector breakdown at the earliest possible opportunity.

Concerns were raised in regards to the forthcoming four year benefits freeze. Problems resulting from the freeze would include:

- Additional numbers of households becoming homeless from the private sector as they would no longer be able to afford market rents.
- A requirement for more generous incentives to landlords if the Council was to retain tenancies the borough.
- Less properties being affordable and therefore suitable, resulting in a need to rehouse residents outside of London. Where this was not possible for reasons of suitability, the Council would have to meet any rental shortfalls, resulting in additional costs to the Council.
- Where the Council was forced to place a household in cheaper more affordable areas outside of London there will be a risk of legal challenge and associated costs.

The Council had a proactive approach to preventing homelessness and always looked to make early interventions to seek resolutions before a situations reached crisis point. The current primary issues affecting the prevention of homelessness were considered to be:

- Existing landlords electing to seek other tenants and better financial deals.
- Households at risk of homelessness struggling to find alternative affordable housing.

Jack Dempsey then spoke to the Panel about property acquisition. The Panel were advised that over the last two years it had become more difficult to acquire long term temporary accommodation leased units within available subsidies and to assist benefit dependent households with a private sector home. Council Officers were taking a number of different approaches to acquiring additional temporary accommodation units. These actions included:

- Building on the hostel portfolio to provide an alternative to bed & breakfast accommodation – Action was taking place on this, with work about to begin on a major refurbishment of the Poplars Hostel in Greenford, which would increase the capacity from 32 rooms with shared facilities to 59 self-contained units.
- Modular Homes – Modular homes would provide 100 units for households currently in bed and breakfasts across three sites in the borough. The Council

was to lease the units, so would be able to either hand them back once the land was required for alternative use, or they could be moved to another vacant site for further use.

- Use of Regeneration Units – The Council had continued to make use of regeneration units on Council housing estates. These generated income for the HRA and provided good quality temporary accommodation.
- Property Purchase Scheme – The Council had purchased 77 properties in the private sector. 49 of these were within the Council's boundaries and 15 of them were on regeneration projects that the Council was involved with.
- Engaging with Private Landlords – The Council continued to engage within existing private landlords and were actively looking for new landlords and letting agents that the Council could acquire properties from. As a result of a DCLG grant, the Council was in the process of appointing two additional Acquisitions Officers to find more accommodation in new geographical areas where supply was affordable to low income households.
- Sub-Regional and Partnership Working – Other Local Authorities in the local area had been worked with closely to pool knowledge and expertise, and to ensure a consistency in the service and financial offer made to landlords.

Dave Baptiste was then invited to advise the Panel on work being done to increase the housing supply by delivering new housing developments in the borough.

The latest housing trajectory forecasted that 7,035 new homes would be completed over the five year period between 2015/2016 and 2019/2020. This would exceed the Greater London Authority's target of 1,297 homes per year (i.e. 6,485 over five years).

Provision for affordable homes was considered. It was stated that there were three main routes to the provision of affordable homes:

- Council led (including the Broadway Living scheme and estate regeneration).
- Housing association delivery programmes.
- Private sector via S106 agreements.

There were nine housing estates across the borough in the process of being regenerated, with more planned. These would deliver around 6,000 new homes by 2028, and half of these would be for affordable/social rent or shared ownership. The other half would be for private sale to help to subsidise the affordable homes.

Ealing Council had also entered into a Sale and Development Agreement (SDA) with property developers Hills. This agreement would involve the transfer of a number of small sites in Ealing's ownership to Hills in return for the delivery of approximately 214 mixed tenure homes. Overall, some 87 of the units developed would be new affordable homes, which would be built on land to remain in Ealing's ownership.

The Chair thanked the Officers for their initial overviews, and invited Panel Members to comment and ask questions.

The Chair opened the questions by asking about how much the Council had benefited following the agreement by London Council's to align their pricing structure for Landlords. It was advised that it had helped a great deal and had been 'bought into' by all parties. It helped to deliver pricing clarity and also helped to make sure that there was parity between nightly and leasing rates.

The Chair also asked about a marketing strategy being developed by Officers to increase awareness of the Council's offer to private landlords. How would this be promoted? It was advised that a key part of the marketing strategy was to engender a culture shift, which would lead to more proactive work by Officers to ring and chase up landlords, to look into new areas, and to improve the website and create a 'Brand Ealing'.

Councillor Conti asked about temporary accommodation. How many households were in temporary accommodation and how much of the accommodation was owned by the Council? It was advised that presently around 2400 households were in temporary accommodation, with the Council owning around a third of the stock, the majority resided in third party properties.

Councillor Conti then asked about the resident interface on offer. Was the interaction with service users appropriately respectful, with an appropriate level of training provided to advisors? And was this monitored?

It was agreed that service users always needed to be treated with the upmost dignity. These were difficult times for advisors though, as they were in a situation where they had to turn down the large majority of applications and frequently leave people residing in bed and breakfast accommodation. Lynne Duval stated that as the Head of Service she would not tolerate any reports indicating disrespect shown to service users.

Councillor Proud asked if service users who turned down offers of accommodation were fully informed of the potential outcomes from turning down a property. It was advised that officers looked to ensure that service users receiving an offer were as well informed as possible.

Councillor Proud also made reference to an elderly couple within his ward that were looking to downsize their property to free it up for a larger family, but the levels of bureaucracy they had faced in trying to do this had made it very time-consuming and difficult for them. Could this be simplified?

It was advised that the Council did try its best to give a priority to under-occupation issues, and an extra member of staff had been hired to concentrate on this area. Five under-occupants had been helped to move properties over the previous month.

Councillor Rodgers expressed concern about the costs the Council faced in meeting its housing obligations, with £6.5m in excess of what could be recovered from Government having to be funded to meet statutory requirements. Officers agreed that it was a difficult situation, with the £6.5m being the shortfall between the subsidy and what was paid out in rent. There were significant extra costs on top of this, such as issues around caps and arrears (around £600k at present).

Councillor Rodgers stated that the Council should look at its capacity for increasing the number of properties available for temporary accommodation, arguing that if the Council were to invest now, it would benefit from the larger stock in future. Could the Council borrow at current low interest rates to fund such a scheme? It was also queried whether the Council could do more to invest in new creative forms of tenure, such as co-operative schemes like the LILAC project in Leeds.

It was advised that where possible, officers were looking for wholesale sites to purchase. The current market was a difficult one and required constant engagement with developers. Every site the Council had was competed for, so the Council frequently looking for creative ways of delivery in partnership with others.

In response to Councillor Byrne's question about the criteria used to determine whether housing was affordable, the panel were informed that 40% of gross income being spent on housing was considered affordable. Council rents were approximately £100 a week and housing association rents £150 a week. Shared Ownership properties were usually considered affordable up to £600,000 on 25% ownership. Councillor Rodgers suggested that affordability should be based on the net household income and not gross income and referred to the new Deputy Mayor for Housing's intention to increase the amount of affordable housing being built in London.

Councillor Ball queried why regeneration units were only considered to be suitable for temporary accommodation. It was advised that most regeneration unit sites had a demolition order in place or a set timeline in which the site must be passed on for vacant possession. Therefore, it was considered unfair to the families involved that there may be any permanence to their residence in such locations.

Councillor Mohan stated that there were empty properties in Southall which blighted the neighbourhood and could be regenerated and put to use. It was advised that a robust scheme was now in place for empty properties and lots of formerly empty properties were now being brought back into use. It was stated that if Councillors knew of empty properties within their wards, they should inform officers, who will investigate whether the Council could make use of the property.

Councillor Mohan then made reference to the scheme being run in partnership with Shepherds Bush Housing Group which would allow a young person to move into a two year placement in social housing, to enable them to work to obtain the skills and employment to be able to reside independently. Were there figures available on the amount of placements of this kind that were currently being undertaken and/or available?

It was advised that the Council funded up to 10 placements in the scheme presently, there were some capacity issues at present though, and problems had also arisen when it came to finding flats for young people who wanted to move on from the scheme, generally though it had been considered successful. Jack Dempsey confirmed that he would feedback further information on outcomes from the scheme back to the Panel.

Councillor Conlan asked if there was scope for further increasing the Council's stock of modular homes. It was advised that the Council was looking at this as modular

homes paid for themselves in around five to seven years, and so were a cost effective solution.

The Chair then thanked the Officers for their contribution to a use and wide ranging debate.

Resolved: That

- (i) the report considering issues pertaining to housing issues in the borough be received; and
- (ii) officers be asked to feedback on the outcomes arising from the young persons housing placement scheme.

7. The Impact of Poor Housing on Health (Agenda Item 7)

The Chair invited Georgina Laws, and Maxine Sawford, Graduate Housing Officers to address the Panel with a presentation which highlighted the impact of poor housing upon the health of residents in the borough.

Mayhew Harper Associates had been commissioned to undertake an in-depth analysis of Ealing's private rented sector. One of the key findings arising from the report was that the rapid increase in private rented properties had led to a fall in standards such as dilapidation, overcrowding and anti-social behaviour.

There was a direct link between poor housing conditions and physical health problems, with an increase in related diseases and physical injury. In order to quantify poor housing, a measure often used was the Housing Health and Safety Rating System, which was used as a means to identify risks arising from a series of 29 hazards including:

- Damp and mould, excess cold/heat
- Pollutants
- Lack of space, security or lighting, or excessive noise
- Poor hygiene, sanitation, water supply
- Accidents
- Collisions, explosions, structural collapse

It was estimated that over 20% of properties in the private rented sector in Ealing had a 'category 1' hazard, which was twice the number seen in social housing.

Whilst there was a clearly defined link between poor housing and poor physical health; the link was harder to demonstrate with regards to mental health. But for many individuals, it was clear that there was a link between poor mental health and insecure housing.

This led to wide ranging mental health consequences, such as growing evidence suggesting that pre-school age children were at risk of developing mental health issues such as anxiety and depression as a result of poor housing.

The Chair thanked the Officers for their presentation and invited Panel Members to comment and ask questions.

The Chair opened the questions by asking about what Ealing as a Council was doing well, and what more it could do to help tenants.

Councillor Conti asked about category 1 hazards that the Council could help to combat. It was also queried if health issues arising from poor housing were reported back by the NHS.

The vast majority of category 1 hazards found were cases of overcrowding. It was stated that the Council would never place a tenant within a property with a category 1 hazard, and that these hazards 'evolved' during the tenure.

The health costs to the NHS were huge, with it being estimated that billions of pounds could be saved if poor housing hazards were addressed. The NHS was unable to report directly back to Councils on poor health resulting from poor housing. The majority of evidence was gathered from random surveys. The Council was on the verge of sending out its next house condition survey, which would hopefully gather further evidence.

Councillor Ball asked how a category 1 hazard was defined. It was explained that strict criteria was in place for defining hazard levels and that scientific principles were followed in assessing risk, this was a national set of criteria and not just London specific. When a hazard was defined as a category 1 risk, the local authority had a duty to deal with it, for category 2 risks, the local authority had discretion on their approach.

The Chair thanked all present for their input and drew the item to a close.

Resolved: That the report and presentation considering the impact of poor housing on the health of residents in the borough be received.

8. SRP1 Work Programme 2016/2017

The Chair advised the Panel that the next meeting would consider education attainment and use of the pupil premium.

Councillor Conti advised the Panel of a visit to foodbank in Southall which had taken place, and had provided very useful insight into the work undertaken by the foodbanks for an unfortunately increasing level of custom. The Chair stated that another visit would be arranged on a weekend for any further Panel Members who would find it insightful.

9. Date of Next Meeting (Agenda Item 8)

It was noted that the next meeting of the Panel would take place on Thursday 17 November 2016.

Councillor Ciaran McCartan, Chair.

The meeting ended at 9.20pm.