

SCRUTINY REVIEW - HOMELESSNESS ALLOCATIONS AND LETTINGS POLICY

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 19 OCTOBER 2006

Present: Councillors Bevan (Chair), Bull, Baker, Edge, Egan and Harris

1. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** (Agenda Item 1): Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor Adje. Apologies for lateness were received from Councillors Bull, Baker and Edge.
2. **URGENT BUSINESS** (Agenda Item 2) – see agenda item 7 below.
3. **DECLARATION OF INTEREST** (Agenda Item 3) – None notified.
4. **MINUTES** – The Minutes of the meeting held 23 August 2006 were agreed and signed.
5. **DRAFT HOUSING CHOICE LEAFLET – A SINGLE LANE OFFERING HOUSING CHOICE AND MEETING LOCAL NEEDS** – Agenda Item 5:

The Panel considered the above draft 'points' leaflet and agreed that more work was needed on this. They considered and compared a number of similar literatures from various Local Authorities and expressed a preference to a leaflet similar to that produced by LB Enfield in terms of layout and style. They also wished to see a Ready Reckoner included in the leaflet to encourage applicants on the Housing Register to work out their points level. However it must be stressed in the leaflet that the Council was not bound in any way by the self judgement of Customers. The only valid points calculation would be that undertaken by the Council. Council Officers would take each Customer through the calculation of points. The Panel was also keen to ensure that information about the Council's Prevention and Options Service and other housing schemes should be included in the leaflet.

Agreed that a further draft of the 'points' leaflet be produced and circulated to Members of the Panel.

Housing Fraud

With regards to potential housing fraud it was agreed that the Legal Department should be consulted to find out whether there was a standard statement from the Council on fraud that could be included in the leaflets.

Prevention and Options.

With reference to the Prevention and Options Scheme the panel suggested that the Re-Housing Service produce an information leaflet to sit alongside the Homes Connections the Points leaflets.

6. **DRAFT ACTION PLAN** – Agenda Item 6

The Panel considered the draft action plan emanating from the Scrutiny Review. The Panel was pleased to note that action had been taken to implement the recommendations. The implementation of some recommendations was still in progress. The Panel noted the following:

Task 5 - Staff Training

Members wanted to attend part of the training session for staff and it was agreed that members would be provided with the content of the training programme.

Task 7 – Housing Application Form and Housing Benefits

The Panel requested a copy of the new Housing Application Form. They wished to ensure that new tenants were required to indicate the likelihood of claiming housing benefit when they applied to Homes for Haringey. Also that the application form included the necessary permission for the release of data information on the Housing Register. The Action Plan should consider all the various Housing Benefit related elements raised by the Panel and each element should be reported upon. It was agreed that the Policy & Procedures Officer would report back on each area in December 2006.

Task 12 - The Housing Register

The Housing Register had not been reviewed for a number of years and needed to be re-evaluated. The purpose of the current re-evaluation was to ensure that the register was up to date and reviewed on a regular basis thereafter. The Panel was informed that the re-evaluation was in progress; letters had been sent to all tenants on the Housing Register; the closing date for response from tenants was 8th October 2006. Tenants were expected to respond to the letter indicating whether they wished to remain on the Housing Register and to enable the Re-housing Service to ensure the correct awarding of priority points and accurate matching of individual housing needs. Reference was made to difficulties encountered with the letters sent out to tenants as it appeared that not all tenants had been reached. However the Panel was assured that measures had been put in place to make sure that all tenants were contacted. Concern was expressed regarding the possibility that some vulnerable tenants might be disadvantaged as a result of any confusion over the issuing of letters. It was suggested that all tenants known to Supporting People Scheme should be identified and visited to ensure that they were not disadvantaged.

It was agreed that further update was needed on the review of the housing register and that Paul Horgan, (Project Manager), be requested to provide a briefing note to update members in December 2006 when the new register is established. The Panel wished to be informed of the result of the modelling impact assessment relating to the local connections and good neighbour factor points, to ensure that the proposed weighting was appropriate.

Task 14 - Under occupation scheme

The Panel wished to ensure that action was taken as early as possible in cases of under occupation to check that any under-occupation was managed sooner rather than later or indeed at all. Members wished to verify that this was clearly covered in the Procedures Manual to ensure that early action was taken in all cases.

Task 19 – Procedures Manual

It was agreed that a copy of the Procedures Manual should be circulated to Members on the Panel on completion, for information purposes only.

Equalities Impact Assessment.

It was agreed that a copy of the Equalities Impact Assessment would be circulated to Members of the Panel for information.

Prevention & Options Service

Members were keen to visit the Prevention and Options Service in Wood Green and it was agreed that arrangements would be made to enable individual members to do so.

Changes to the Lettings Policy

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee to have details of any changes to the Lettings Policy signed off by the Executive.

7. URGENT BUSINESS – Agenda Item 7

Variation to the Terms of Reference of the Allocations & Lettings Scrutiny Review.

With regards to the variation to the terms of reference of the Scrutiny Review, Councillor Harris stated that she was under the impression that there would be an item on the agenda of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and that 'overt' discussion would take place on the terms of reference. It was noted that the variation to the terms of reference was included in the final report of the Allocations & Lettings Policy Review which was agreed by the Committee. In endorsing the recommendations in the report, the Committee also agreed the variation to the terms of reference.

This misunderstanding was explained and the Chair of Overview & Scrutiny Committee was pleased that this matter had been satisfactorily clarified and stated that in future procedures for dealing with any variation to terms of reference for review panels should be more explicit and adhered to.

Councillor John Bevan
Chair