

## Minutes of the Environment and Housing Scrutiny Panel 26<sup>th</sup> September 2013

**Present:** Cllr Alexander, Cllr Bloch, Cllr Bull, Cllr McNamara (Chair), Cllr Stanton and Cllr Weber

**In attendance:** Cllr Allison, Cllr Bevan, Cllr Brabazon, Cllr Egan and Cllr Strickland.

Haringey Council: Ann Cunningham, Matthew Gaynor, Phil Harris, Katherine Heffernan, Michael Kelleher, Stephen McDonnell.

Veolia: Lynn Davis and Pascal Hauret

### 1. **Apologies for absence**

1.1 Apologies were received from Cllr Gibson.

### 2. **Declarations of interest**

2.1 None received.

### 3. **Deputations**

3.1 None received.

### 4. **Minutes and actions points of last meeting**

#### Waste Management Group

4.1 At its last meeting, the panel requested that performance data supplied to the Waste Management Group should also be presented to the EHSP, as this would assist in monitoring waste and recycling performance. It was noted that as this group was no longer meeting, there could potentially be a role for the EHSP in receiving and monitoring such data.

**Agreed:** That a briefing or short paper is prepared for next meeting (19<sup>th</sup> November) to outline how the role of the Waste Management Group can link with the EHSP in the future.

#### Consultations and community groups

4.2 It was noted that there was no definitive list of community groups held within the organisation for consultation purposes. Consultations that require the inclusion of local community groups is generally undertaken through HAVCO (who have a distribution). The panel noted that Area Committee lists were now held by the Committee team (and not the Enablement Service).

### 5. **Cabinet Q & A - Housing**

#### Cabinet Member for Housing

5.1 The Cabinet Member for Housing attended to respond to panel questions on local housing policy and practice issues. Below is a summary of the main areas covered in this session.

#### *Welfare Reform*

5.2 It was noted that welfare reforms had presented a number of challenges for tenants and for local housing services. As of September 2013, 689 families had their

Housing Benefit reduced under Benefit Cap proposals. Cumulatively, local households will lose over £3m as a result of this change. Of those affected households, 2/3 will lose up to £50 p.w. and 1/3 over £50p.w.

- 5.3 As a result of other welfare reforms social housing tenants will receive reduced Housing Benefit where they are deemed to be in under occupancy (Bedroom Tax or Spare Room Subsidy). Locally, these changes will affect over 2,500 households who rent accommodation from the Council or other local social landlords.
- 5.4 The panel noted that the above reforms have placed considerable pressure on local tenants and housing services. In particular, reforms have contributed to a rise in homelessness and increased demand for temporary accommodation. In addition, a general increase in demand for housing across the capital has led to higher rental values, which in turn has increased costs for the Council where it has placed households in the private rented sector.
- 5.5 The panel noted that the local Housing Advice Service Hub based at Apex House has provided information, advice and support to tenants affected by the welfare reforms. This service had been nationally recognised as performing well.

#### *Decent Homes*

- 5.6 It was noted that 945 homes would be improved through the Decent Homes programme in 2013/14. In addition, 4,600 homes will be improved over the period 2014/15 to 2015/16 from funding via the Decent Homes programme and the Council's own contributions. There will be changes to the governance structure for Decent Homes programme to help bring greater clarity to planned home improvements.
- 5.7 The panel were unclear as to how the final Decent Homes programme of works was decided, when work was scheduled, and the timescales of when these decisions were communicated to local tenants, leaseholders and members. This was an acknowledged shortcoming, and the panel received a pledge that such communications would improve in the future.
- 5.8 The panel sought clarification on the issue of kitchen repairs when an upgrade was clearly needed although the property was not included within the Decent Homes improvement schedule. The panel noted that if repairs were needed, this should be included within general repairs and maintenance assessments.
- 5.9 The panel heard that for some estates the physical infrastructure was so poor that general repairs or improvements could not practically be encompassed within the Decent Homes programme. In this context, it was acknowledged that a regeneration approach would be needed to improve local housing and would require extensive community consultation and involvement. A policy paper outlining these proposals was expected at Cabinet in October 2013.
- 5.10 It was important that the Council was open and transparent about future social housing improvements, and to this end, the panel noted that all tenants and leaseholders would be informed at the end of October which homes were to be included within Decent Homes improvement programme and those estates which

would need to be developed as part of a broader regeneration strategy. The panel noted that face to face meetings would be held with residents and leaseholders in excluded schemes and that 12 months notice would be given for regeneration plans.

#### *Tenancy Strategy Consultation*

- 5.11 The panel noted that the Council had recently concluded the consultation on new Tenancy Strategy and changes to Housing Allocation Policy. All 10,500 households on the housing register were consulted and notices placed in local publications journals and newsletters from which approximately 450-500 responses had been received. Final proposals developed from the consultation would result in significant changes to local social housing provision.
- 5.12 Members of the panel indicated that the consultation for such important developments in social housing provision was inadequate. In particular, the panel suggested that:
- Consultation proposals were too complex (seeking simultaneous responses on different strategies/policies);
  - Supporting documentation was overwhelming;
  - There was insufficient face to face engagement with local tenants;
  - Homes for Haringey residents panel had not been consulted;
  - There was limited equalities impact information available.
- 5.13 The panel noted that the consultation formed part of the Equalities Impact Assessment (e.g. determining what groups should be consulted) and that the formal EqIA would be published to support any final decision. It was requested that consultation responses, analysis and EqIA are submitted to the panel.

**Agreed:** that the consultation responses, analysis and EqIA for changes to the Tenancy Strategy would be submitted to the panel.

#### *Affordable rent model*

- 5.14 The panel noted that under new affordable rent model, new properties and existing tenancies becoming available could be let at up to 80% of the market rent. This model was expected to generate additional income for social landlords to assist in homebuilding programmes. It was estimated that this would result in a £100-140 increase per week for renting a 3-4 bedroom home in Haringey.
- 5.15 The panel noted that some registered housing providers had already begun to introduce tenancies under the affordable rent model, where 5 year fixed term tenancies had been offered. It was also noted that a number of registered providers had 'flipped' all housing stock from social rent to the affordable rent model.
- 5.16 The panel were concerned that the introduction of affordable rent model would mean a significant increase in rent for those properties included in this programme. It was suggested that the level of income needed to afford such homes may exclude many local residents on the social housing register and open up to other tenants in other areas of the housing market (e.g. those currently renting in the private sector where rental prices are high).

#### *Homes for Haringey reintegration with the Council*

5.17 The panel noted that under the recently published restructure plans, executive leads for both Homes for Haringey and the Council's Community Housing Service would be merged in to a singular Chief Housing Officer post. There were concerns among the panel that this would herald the re-integration of Homes for Haringey within the council. The panel was concerned that such a reintegration would lead to a loss of accountability and focus for Homes for Haringey.

5.18 The panel noted that there were no plans to merge the two housing bodies. Proposals for the new Chief Housing Officer post were still being consulted upon, but if approved, it is hoped that the new unified role would be in a better position to identify:

- Local housing problems and solutions;
- Service areas where there is duplication and where efficiencies can be made;
- How both services can work in a more joined up way in the future.

#### *Freeholds of council house sales*

5.19 The panel sought to clarify whether the Council was seeking to dispose of the freeholds it held on those properties which had been sold under the right to buy scheme. It was noted that the council would look at overall objectives and policies for this area and undertake a cost benefit analysis of obligations involved in either retaining or selling freeholds. It was noted that without the freehold, the Council may find it difficult to complete necessary capital repairs.

#### *Registered Housing Providers*

5.20 The panel and other members present noted that whilst many registered housing providers were providing a good service to local tenants, a few had fallen below the standards expected. This was seen in a number of ways:

- Unresponsive repairs service;
- Communications sent to tenants;
- Poor engagement with local services;
- Failure to develop effective services (partnered working) on jointly managed estates.

5.21 The panel noted that it would be undertaking some further work with local registered providers during 2013/14. In addition, it was noted that the main Overview & Scrutiny Committee were scrutinising under occupation reforms in the social rented sector and would also be seeking to engage local providers. To these ends, it was noted that a singular survey would be developed and distributed to registered housing providers that owned/ managed stock in Haringey. The purpose of this survey is four fold:

- To ascertain how providers have communicated with tenants regarding welfare benefit changes and affordability of tenancies;
- To obtain information how tenants have been supported as a result of under occupancy changes (and other welfare changes);
- To identify arrangements for scrutinising local performance (such as repairs);
- To identify how EHSP can liaise with scrutiny structures (or tenant engagement organisations) within registered housing providers.

5.22 The Chair thanked the Cabinet member and officers for attending and responding to questions from the panel.

## 6. Cabinet Q & A - Environment

6.1 The Cabinet Member for Environment attended to answer questions on this portfolio. The following provides a summary of the key areas of panel discussion.

### *Waste and recycling*

6.2 The panel noted a number of key developments for waste and recycling in the borough:

- The Borough wide recycling rate had increased significantly to 35.14% in 2012/13. It was acknowledged that further work would be required to reach 40% target by 2013/14.
- The introduction of food waste from flats had been piloted at a number of estates. Feedback from the pilot sites is now being evaluated with a view to a planned borough wide roll-out in June 2014.
- A new contamination policy has been developed to reduce the incidence of contamination and increase volume of waste eligible for recycling.

6.3 It was noted that there were approximately 6,000 calls to the Veolia customer contact centre each month. Of these contacts approximately 30-40% were operational enquires, 50% were service requests and the remainder were complaints. The panel were made aware that Veolia actively monitors and assesses the nature of all contacts to guide and inform work planning and to help target resources and activities effectively (e.g. hot spots for fly tipping).

6.4 The need for resident engagement and education to promote recycling was also underlined by the panel. This was a recommendation from a report in the panel's work programme in 202/13. The panel indicated that it would be following up this recommendation in 2014.

### *Coordinated monitoring and reporting - enforcement*

6.5 The panel noted a number of key achievements in this area:

- 1,598 requests were received by noise enforcement team in Q1 2013/14, 70% of which were visited within 1 hour.
- A new highways contract, jointly procured with other authorities, has been agreed for street lighting. This new contract will lead to reduced unit costs for this service.

6.6 In respect of noise enforcement, the panel noted that the high volume of service requests but did question the suggested responsiveness of the service. It was suggested that some form of mystery shopping exercise is undertaken to assess this.

**Agreed:** the Cabinet member would undertake a mystery shopping exercise with noise enforcement to gauge service response.

6.7 Members of the panel noted that observed faults in neighbourhood street scene (e.g. potholes, street lighting, dumped rubbish, graffiti) were frequently not rectified unless members had reported the issue. Whilst many Council operatives (or contractors) were active in local neighbourhoods on a day to day basis, the panel questioned whether there was any coordinated system in place for identifying and reporting such

problems when they were observed (e.g. street sweepers notification of fly tipping, parking enforcement of potholes etc).

6.8 In addition to the above, the panel was also concerned as to what internal monitoring systems were in place for individual contracts or issues (e.g. fly tipping, graffiti, street lights) to ensure effective reporting and rectification of problems where they occurred.

6.9 It was acknowledged that officer reporting for all areas could be improved and that there were a number of developments to assist. Firstly, it was noted that an APP had been developed which would allow reporting of problems via mobile phone. Users of the APP can report a wide range of street issues including waste, fly tipping, potholes and street lights. Reports are sent directly to Veolia and a response provided to the reporter. The council will be able to reconcile reports and actions taken by Veolia. The scheme is to be launched in October 2013.

**Agreed:** that a short 5 min demonstration of the new reporting APP is given at the next meeting of the EHSP.

6.10 The panel also noted that the Environmental Champions scheme, a network of environmental volunteers, was being reinstated. It was anticipated that this would help to build local intelligence and inform the work of council enforcement officers.

**Agreed:** that an outline of the Environmental Champions programme is brought to the next meeting of the EHSP.

#### *Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGV)*

6.11 The panel noted ongoing concerns with HGVs and their use in prohibited areas. As HGVs continue to use roads within the Harringay Ladder, part of which they are excluded, there was uncertainty as to the agency that has overall responsibility for enforcement and the effectiveness of current enforcement methods.

6.12 The panel noted that Traffic Management does monitor local pinch points for HGVs and where collisions occur and it was confirmed that the Harringay Ladder and Wightman Road were two local hotspots for such incidences. If the panel were aware of any other local pinch points, these should be reported to the Head of Traffic Management.

6.13 It was confirmed to the panel that the council is responsible for enforcement for HGV restrictions on local roads, though this is difficult through mobile cameras (vehicles) as they could not provide necessary coverage. The Council is currently developing a business case for the installation of automatic number plate recognition system (ANPR) which it is hoped will deliver more effective enforcement. If there is a sound business case for this development, a new monitoring and enforcement process could be in place before the end of the year.

**Agreed:** the outcome of the business case for the introduction of ANPR enforcement for HGV enforcement to be presented to the panel at its next meeting.

6.14 The panel noted other significant developments within this portfolio area:

- Major street improvements have been agreed from Wood Green through to Turnpike Lane with work starting in 2013/14, and similar street improvements already taking place in Green Lanes will be completed by March 2014;
- All parks with Green Flag status were retained in the latest annual assessment.

## 7. Budget Monitoring

- 7.1 The panel noted the two reports submitted on budget monitoring and the key highlights within these:
- There is a forecast overspend in Planning of £292k relating to a shortfall in Building Control income;
  - There is a £2.7million service pressure in the community housing service mainly relating to increased demands within the temporary accommodation budget.
- 7.2 The panel noted that a significant contributory factor to financial pressures within the temporary accommodation budget was welfare reform. A number of reforms (Benefit Cap, lowering of Local Housing Allowance, under occupation) have reduced the financial support available to local households. The cumulative loss for tenants through the Benefits Cap was estimated to be approximately £3m p.a., whilst for under occupation (bedroom tax) cumulative losses were expected in the region of £2.5m p.a..
- 7.3 Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) is a fund to support local tenants in financial difficulty. It was noted that the total DHP grant to Haringey for 2012/13 was £2.8m, and whilst this represented a small uplift on previous allocations, this would be insufficient to meet local demands (see 7.2). For example, £216k was earmarked within the DHP grant to ease the financial impact of the bedroom tax, less than 10% of the expected cumulative loss for tenants as a result of this reform.
- 7.4 The panel noted that there were pressures on each of the three strands of the Housing Revenue Account:
- Company account (Homes for Haringey): forecast overspend of £90k mainly relating to repairs;
  - Homes for Haringey Managed account: forecast overspend of £470k (income collection and welfare reforms);
  - Retained account: £18k overspend forecast mainly as a result of the Community Alarms budget.
- 7.5 The panel noted that the main Overview & Scrutiny Committee was assessing the impact of the bedroom tax as part of its work programme for 2012/13. This would include an assessment of how this benefit change has impacted upon tenants in the social rented sector and how landlords have responded. As well as hearing evidence from the Community Housing Service, Homes for Haringey and other social landlords, the Committee will also be talking to specialist agencies (Shelter, National Housing Federation, Chartered Institute of Housing) and other local authorities. The Committee will also be consulting with affected tenants.

**Agreed:** that members of the EHSP be sent a copy of the Overview & scrutiny Committee scope of the under Occupancy in Social Housing.

## 8. Performance Monitoring

- 8.1 There was insufficient time to consider this item and the decision was taken to defer this to the next meeting in November.

**Agreed:** performance monitoring agenda item would be reassessed at the November EHSP meeting.

## 9. Scrutiny review of the new waste and recycling service – follow up report

- 9.1 A report was submitted by Single Front Line updating the panel on progress in implementing agreed recommendations from its review of the new waste and recycling service which was completed in October 2012.

### *Miltons*

- 9.2 It was reported that a further consultation had been undertaken with residents in the Milton's area to gauge satisfaction with the waste and recycling collection service (residents had experienced problems of too many waste receptacles). It was noted that 28/130 households responded of which 50% were dissatisfied with current arrangements. It was decided that there would be no service alteration as a result.

### *Contamination policy*

- 9.3 It was suggested that HMOs were a continual problem with non-compliance with waste and recycling collection systems. It was noted that in supporting the implementation of the new contamination policy, Veolia were working with local landlords. Officers had attended the local landlord's forum to help raise awareness and promote compliance. Officers were also working with the Private Sector Housing Improvement Team to support the operation of the discretionary licensing scheme.
- 9.4 It was noted that out of over 40,000 residual waste collections every week, between 400 and 500 were contaminated (approximately 1%). A Fixed Penalty Notice system supported the new contamination policy, though no data was available as yet on whether any had been issued.

**Agreed:** that the panel receive a short brief on the waste contamination policy outcomes at its next meeting in November (practical options leading from the policy).

- 9.5 The panel were concerned about the current level of recycling on local estates managed by social landlords (Homes for Haringey and other registered providers). It was suggested that further work should be undertaken to engage and educate residents of the benefits of recycling and to promote compliance with local recycling collections systems. The panel noted that a new food waste collection system was being rolled out in June 2014 and this would provide a further opportunity to engage with residents in flats and other estate properties and to promote recycling.
- 9.6 It was suggested that there were often small scale examples of good waste and recycling practice in the community though this work wasn't always acknowledged or recognised. As a result, the panel were concerned that the learning points from this work was not fully captured and potential opportunities to replicate it more widely were missed. It was suggested that Veolia should engage with local community



groups to explore the possibility of commissioning small projects to support such initiatives.

- 9.7 The panel questioned whether all street sweepers were equipped to pick up dog excrement from the pavement, as there appeared to be some local inconsistency. Veolia noted that street sweepers should be equipped to deal with dog excrement and this should be undertaken routinely. Whilst it was noted that the number of complaints about removal of dog excrement had declined, Veolia noted that it was always looking to improve performance on this issue.
- 9.8 It was confirmed to the panel that street sweeping would continue to be undertaken twice weekly and that there were no plans for streets to be swept on a needs only basis.
- 9.9 The panel discussed waste monitoring and reporting in the community, where the panel perceived that that this could be improved. It was noted that Veolia were installing 'google type' cameras on to waste collection fleet as this would provide photographic snapshots of dumped waste. This information could then be reviewed and guide further street enforcement work.

## **10. Registered Housing Providers – follow up report**

- 10.1 The Head of the Housing Enablement Service presented the report on the follow up to recommendations of a scrutiny review of registered housing providers (RHP) that was completed in 2012.
- 10.2 The panel noted that whilst some recommendations had been completed, overall there was a lack of progress in implementing the agreed recommendations of this report. It was noted that the Housing Enablement Team had many competing priorities and had also undergone a restructure which had inhibited its ability to fully implement all recommendations.
- Agreed:** that clarification is sought on the role of Cabinet (members) and senior officers in monitoring the implementation of previously agreed recommendations contained within scrutiny reports (i.e. after recommendations have been approved by Cabinet).
- 10.3 The panel noted that Housing Enablement Service now worked on an area based approach, with two officers supporting wards along a broadly east to west split.
- 10.4 The service is reviewing the Partnership Agreement that it has with local RHPs. This is an agreement between the Council and local RHPs which sets out the Councils expectations for engagement, stock rationalisation and local housing management standards. It is anticipated that this new agreement will help bring greater clarity to the relationship between the Council and RHPs.
- 10.5 The panel noted that stock rationalisation (which forms part of the partnership agreement) by local RHPs was being undertaken Haringey. This may help to streamline local housing management arrangements. It was noted that Housing 21 was about to transfer stock over to another provider and Family Mosaic Board were considering stock rationalisation.

**Agreed:** that the draft Partnership Agreement would be presented at a future meeting of the EHSP (date to be confirmed).

10.6 It was noted that there were very few 'levers' with which to work with registered housing providers as they are independent and autonomous organisations.

10.7 The panel noted that a new regulatory framework for social housing was introduced in April 2012. Under the new framework, the Tenant Services Authority was abolished and a 'backstop' regulatory function is provided by the Homes and Community Agency for housing providers for which serious failing have been identified. In this context, it was suggested that tenants have less protection.

10.8 The panel noted that further work with RHPs was being planned, including a survey of local providers (see 5.21). In addition, it would be important to coordinate any planned work of the EHSP with that of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee (under occupancy of social housing). It was agreed that the Housing Enablement Service would be consulted in scoping this work.

**Agreed:** Housing Enablement Service to be consulted in scoping further work with RHPs.

## 11. Strategic Enforcement Scoping Report

11.1 The panel noted and agreed the scoping report for its work on strategic enforcement.

## 12. Strategic Enforcement – update

12.1 The panel received a presentation which provided an update on work completed to date to support the work of strategic enforcement.

12.2 The panel noted that informal meetings had been held with a range of enforcement officers to help scope this work, raise awareness of the work of the EHSP and to identify issues for further investigation. Enforcement services consulted included:

▪ ASBAT	▪ Licensing
▪ Neighbourhood Action Team	▪ Planning Enforcement
▪ Parking Service	▪ Building Control
▪ Council Tax Investigations	▪ Housing Benefit Investigations
▪ Private sector housing	▪ Regulatory (environmental health, trading standards, noise, pollution)

12.3 Analysis of feedback provided at these informal meetings noted that there was a positive response to the proposed work of the EHSP. As well as identifying good practice for coordinated enforcement, the sessions identified a number of general challenges for enforcement:

- Supporting legislation was multiple, complex and in some cases inadequate to support effective action;
- Due process was often lengthy;
- Complexity, time and inadequacy of legislation often inhibits delivery of a precise conclusion to enforcement;

- Volume and nature of enforcement requests lead to competing priorities.

12.4 In addition, the sessions identified a number of organisational challenges for coordinated enforcement:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Information Technology:</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Risk averse (data protection);</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Public expectations on what can and cannot be enforced and how enforcement action is communicated.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Perception that joint enforcement work based on <i>informal relationships</i>– institutional risk that this may be lost;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Data rich organisation - but not effectively shared (need to develop shared intelligence);</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Access to external data sources could be improved;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Access to existing internal enforcement databases;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Incompatible systems (software, viewing platforms, training)</li> </ul>

12.5 The panel also noted that there would be positive response to proposals to develop a selective licensing (private housing) scheme across the borough, as this would be beneficial for coordinated enforcement, as it:

- Creates a central registry and base tool through which to engage landlords and coordinate enforcement;
- Fosters common enforcement approach;
- Sets out a clear penalty regime.

12.6 The panel noted that the survey of enforcement officers had been distributed and would be analysed and presented at the next meeting of EHSP.

### 13. Work Programme

13.1 The panel noted and approved the work programme.

### 14. Environmental Community Groups in Haringey

14.1 The panel noted that a range of community groups would be invited to attend future meetings to discuss work that they were undertaking in Haringey.

### 15. Feedback from Area Committees

15.1 None received.

### 16. Date of future Meetings

16.1 These were confirmed as:

- 19<sup>th</sup> November
- 2<sup>nd</sup> December (budget)
- 28<sup>th</sup> January
- 24<sup>th</sup> February

The meeting closed at 9.45pm