

The Economy, Housing and the Arts Policy and Accountability Committee Minutes

Monday 2 July 2018

PRESENT

Committee members: Councillors Rory Vaughan (Chair), Zarar Qayyum, Rowan Ree, Ann Rosenberg and Adronie Alford

Other Councillors: Lisa Homan

Officers: Justine Dornan (Private Sector Housing and Energy Officer), Elizabeth Fonseca (Environmental Quality Manager), Glendine Shepherd (Head of Housing Solutions), Jo Rowlands (Strategic Director Growth and Place), Mark Brayford (Assistant Director Growth and Place), Daniel Miller (Resident Involvement & Service Improvement Manager), Janey Carey (Head of Resident Involvement & Improvement), David McNulty (Assistant Director, Operations).

1. APPOINTMENT OF A VICE CHAIR

Councillor Adronie Alford was elected as Vice-Chair for the 2018-19 Municipal Year.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Rory Vaughan explained that, whilst it did not constitute a conflict of interest for the purposes of the Council's code of conduct, due to his professional role he would be unable to be involved in discussion of national economic policy issues should they arise at the Committee and so may need recuse himself should such discussions arise at future meetings. However, he did not expect such discussions to arise often, if at all.

4. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 January 2018 were agreed to be accurate.

5. AN INTRODUCTION TO SCRUTINY IN HAMMERSMITH AND FULHAM

The Committee Co-Ordinator introduced the report which provided an overview of the scrutiny process within the Authority.

RESOLVED

That the item be noted.

6. THE COUNCIL'S HOME ENERGY STRATEGY AND MEASURES TO TACKLE FUEL POVERTY

Justine Dornan, (Private sector and Housing Officer) gave a presentation on the fuel poverty initiatives undertaken by the Council and outlined the following key areas:

- The Healthier Homes project was initiated and funded under the Public Health Investment Fund from the end of 2014 to March 2017. This aimed to reduce fuel poverty and hazards in the homes of vulnerable residents to improve quality of life and reduce GP visits and hospital admissions through grants and enforcement action.
- The service achieved this by working in partnership with local third sector organisations i.e. Bishop Creighton, Citizens Advice, Fulham Good Neighbours, Crosslight and Age UK.
- In terms of outcomes: 250 referrals were received to the main project and 208 through the Council's debt advisor. In addition, 47 households had boilers installed, replaced, or repaired.
- Training: Nine Healthier Homes training sessions were held for Council Staff, NHS and third sector organisations. A series of informal presentations were made at GP surgeries, residents' groups, and community champions.
- Healthier homes visits took place to identify issues and refer on where necessary.
- Funding: Affordable Warmth Solutions is distributing the Warm Homes Fund and LBHF has successfully bid as part of a consortium for funding to allow home visits and small measures for residents. The Council aimed to tap into existing funding streams to get the best deal for residents.

Justine Dornan presented two case studies about energy efficiency and explained how the individual circumstances had led to a number of social care referrals.

Councillor Zarar Qayyum asked if there was a case study to illustrate how a household which was struggling financially, could seek advice about reducing

heating costs. Justine Dornan explained that officers were unable to cite a case study, but in such cases, they would assist the resident by referring them to a debt advisor. Councillor Zarar Qayyum enquired about outreach opportunities and whether there was any assistance available to residents for skills and training. In response, Justine Dornan confirmed that outreach services were usually provided through Social Services or organisations such as Mind and Bishops Creighton's. It was noted that officers had not branched out into providing employment / skills advice, and, presently, assistance focused around maximising the amount of benefits a person could claim, new boilers and insulation to save money. Justine Dornan confirmed that Doctor Edwards and Bishop Kings Charity, Fulham provided Relief in Need grants which were used for essential items of daily living including kitchen appliances, beds, furniture and clothing.

Councillor Adronie Alford highlighted the work that was conducted by the Hammersmith United Charities, which invested in people and communities. The Committee noted the importance of ensuring all homes were kept warm, to combat illness and officers were asked whether they insulated old housing stock. Justine Dornan explained that installing loft insulation was a fast and effective way of improving heat retention and was seen as a quick win. Secondary glazing was also beneficial, although this was slower and more costly to install. Councillor Adrione Alford asked for further information on the grant funding which could be used for windows. Justine Dornan said that grants concerned lofts and boiler works but not windows.

Councillor Lisa Homan spoke about the current climate of grant funding and it was noted that government grants, energy companies and third sector groups provided finance to assist the elderly. Demographic change meant that, increasingly, elderly residents were living in older properties which required regular maintenance. This meant that residents were often property rich but cash poor and unable to meet these ongoing costs. Councillor Homan explained that loneliness amongst the elderly (especially those in the private rented sector) was an increasing problem and officers needed to be vigilant when making home visits to try and ensure the Council provided assistance where possible.

Councillor Rowan Ree said that early intervention was key and asked how officers ensured they were aware of all the funding streams which could be accessed and applied for. In response, Justine Dornan explained that officers used fuel poverty networks and worked in partnership with colleagues across London to make sure they were conversant with the available funding streams. Details were provided on the Warm Homes Fund and how this operated.

The Chair commented that the report underlined the importance of energy efficiency, as well as the cross-working with Adult Social Care. As some of the cases appeared to be reactive, he asked how the referral process worked. Justine Dornan explained that officers informed residents about the steps they could take to improve energy efficiency and the services available to them. In some cases, residents self-referred but it was noted that in many cases, the Council's partners made referrals. The Chair asked about the

strategic level and whether there was a strategy to place residents with service providers. Justine Dornan explained that officers provided advice and guidance through the Council's Press Office and in those cases where young children were involved, officers advised families to contact Children's Centres. However, the advice about home energy and fuel poverty was not aimed at young people. The Chair confirmed that further work needed to be done in the future with young families to address this gap.

The Chair asked what steps officers took to tackle fuel poverty in the private rented sector, how the Council liaised with landlords and what the cost implications were. Justine Dornan explained that the Council worked with landlords to ensure a minimum standard of heating was offered to tenants and if complaints arose, enforcement action was taken by Environmental Health officers. One of the difficulties officers faced was the conversion of larger single occupancy residences into flats. Councillor Homan explained that the Council received referrals to sheltered housing from Adult Social Care and Glendine Shepherd, Head of Housing Solutions, confirmed that in these cases, specialist Housing officers would oversee the referrals process.

Councillor Zarar Qayyum asked about those Council tenants which were struggling to pay their rent and whether advice was provided on fuel providers. Justine Dornan confirmed that Housing provided advice on changing providers and tariffs to reduce fuel and water cost. Councillor Zarar Qayyum asked if figures could be provided on the number of Council tenants with rent arrears, high energy bills and what could be done to assist them.

RESOLVED

1. That the Committee noted and commented on the proposed and ongoing work to reduce fuel poverty.
2. That figures be provided on the number of Council tenants with rent arrears and high energy bills.

7. RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT UPDATE

Janey Carey, Head of Resident Involvement & Improvement, provided an update on how the Council was working with council housing residents from street properties, small blocks, estates, and sheltered housing to improve the services they receive. The presentation provided an overview of the key involvement initiatives, including the main achievements to date and areas of future focus.

The Resident Involvement Strategy was developed with residents and aimed to:

- 1) Place greater control and influence at the hands of our residents, making us more accountable for the housing services they receive.
- 2) Deliver 'More Involvement, Better Involvement' by working with residents to identify and break down barriers to engagement.
- 3) Promote social inclusion and support thriving and vibrant communities.

Officers explained the Resident Involvement Team worked with over 400 residents in three main ways which were:

- 1) Through resident-led service improvement groups that focused on improving a specific area of the Housing Service by reviewing the performance, processes, and customer service, and working together to agree suitable improvements.
- 2) Through informal involvement such as task-and-finish groups on a certain subject, estate inspections, mystery shopping, focus groups, surveys, newsletters, community events, a Reading Group, and involving residents in officer recruitment.
- 3) By working with over 30 Tenants & Residents Associations (TRAs) to support and develop community projects and address local delivery needs.

Details were provided on the role and responsibilities of the three resident-led service improvement groups which were: the Repairs Working Group, Estate Services Working Group and Investment Group. In addition, it was noted that the Council had recently established a Fire Safety Plus Advisory Group and was in the process of developing Communications and Inclusion workshops.

Janey Carey explained how resident satisfaction was measured, the actions taken to support communities and how the Council assisted residents to use community halls, rooms and hub offices to their best advantage.

Concluding her remarks, Janey Carey explained that officers would be reviewing the existing strategy, engagement structure and current vision in line with the administration's 2018 manifesto to "*work out with residents to find the best way forward rather than just doing things to them*". It was noted that this work would inform the new strategy for 2018-22 which would be based on the following aims:

- 1) Improving the Housing Service by continuing to work with residents.
- 2) Identifying untapped involvement opportunities at an estate and borough-wide level
- 3) Identifying new ways to work with residents from street properties, small blocks, and gap sites to specifically address their needs.
- 4) Gaining increased insight from resident's views and opinions.
- 5) Improving digital involvement and engagement opportunities and how to reach those typically less-engaged.

Councillor Homan thanked officers for the presentation and expressed disappointment at how few residents and tenants were present compared to previous PAC meetings. She highlighted that residents in street properties and small blocks were a cause for concern and there was scope to improve engagement with these groups. Officers confirmed that invitations had been circulated in the usual way by emailing all Tenants & Residents Association contacts and involved residents as part of the Get Involved mailing list. The unusually hot weather may have contributed to a decline in attendance figures. Commenting on the work so far, Councillor Homan said that officers had done a fantastic job and significant progress had been made to improve resident involvement since the inception of the strategy.

The Chair asked about the success of resident engagement and whether a set pool of residents simply attended many of the groups on a regular basis. Janey Carey said that the Council was in the process of setting up a database so that it could establish which residents wanted to actively participate in specific start and finish groups.

Councillor Rowan Ree asked whether data gathering agencies such as IPSOS or Mori were used by the Council. In response, Janey Carey confirmed that Housing had considered this option but officers were now working closely with Peter Smith's Policy Team to improve digital inclusion. Councillor Rowan Ree commented there was a danger that officers might focus solely on Council tenants rather than the community as a whole, and where possible officers should look at other funding opportunities to enhance digital inclusion. Councillor Rowan Ree stated that it was also important to try and increase the breadth and scope of resident feedback, as well as to encourage better involvement from residents.

Janey Carey explained that officers were aware how important it was to try and access as wider pool of residents as possible and when officers had worked on estates they had used this to piggy back other forms of work such as investigating how stock transfers were working. Daniel Miller, Resident Involvement & Service Improvement Manager, confirmed that the Council was looking to establish a borough wide forum called the Residents Voice for council housing residents, using a workshop style. Work had also been conducted with the Nextdoor website as a digital platform which had proved quite successful.

Councillor Homan mentioned the Love Where You Live initiative and said this was a good approach to use in the future. Councillor Rowan Ree asked what the most surprising insight had been from the work conducted so far. In response, Janey Carey confirmed that residents were generally happy although repairs issues were raised from time to time.

Councillor Ann Rosenberg asked about disputes between residents and what solutions could be found. In response, Daniel Miller confirmed that in some cases, committees comprising of residents working together on projects could lead to differences of opinion and for disputes to arise. In which case, officers would try and resolve the dispute, but where this was proving difficult, the Council might use an organisation such as CALM to mediate.

Councillor Adronie Alford highlighted the positive work which had been conducted by the Leaseholder Forum and Resident Involvement Panel but expressed concern about gap sites and small estates where it was difficult to engage with residents. Councillor Homan agreed that such sites were a challenge and welcomed any suggestions to improve matters. Daniel Miller confirmed that the Resident Involvement Team were aware of both types of site and these would form part of new engagement activity moving forwards, as well as being integrated into the new Resident Involvement Strategy.

Councillor Zarar Qayyum asked about the Repairs Working Group and how the Council measured performance in a timely manner. Janey Carey

explained that the Council had a Key Performance Indicator dashboard which recorded a number of indices which could be shared with residents. In addition, it was noted that the Repairs Working Group focused on specific issues to investigate how improvements could be made to procedures and processes and officers would then contact contractors to implement any suggested improvements.

Councillor Zarar Qayyum asked about the role of the Investment Group and what it did. In response, Janey Carey confirmed that it worked with council officers and Groundwork to consider what improvements could be made to an estate and how then reviews and agrees resident bids for improvement projects.

Councillor Homan asked those residents present to ask any questions they had on the presentation which had been provided. In response a resident queried how the meeting had been advertised as they had not been contacted in the usual way. Officers advised the resident to liaise with the customer engagement team and committee services to ensure the council held their specific contact details.

The Chair asked a series of questions about outcomes: how the outcomes of forums were publicised, how the Council showed what it had achieved and how it determined how well the current strategy was working? Janey Carey said that mystery shopping generated reports and ongoing improvements made to the usability of websites meant that progress was tangible. Daniel Miller confirmed that officers had developed a resident evaluation feedback form with residents which would be rolled out soon.

In relation to TRAs and Tenant Halls, the Chair asked about the relationships required for these to function for use by the local community. Janey Carey explained that Community Engagement Officers were responsible for working with TRAs and officers were building levels of support within communities to ensure Tenant Halls opened regularly and are operated as intended. The Chair said that running tenant halls placed quite a burden on the local community, especially having the responsibility to open and close them at the appropriate times. It was highlighted that Tenant Halls were key community assets and it was essential to ensure there was close working between all parties so these functioned effectively.

Councillor Zarar Qayyum about local businesses, the arts and scope within the strategy to improve these links. In response, officers confirmed that they were looking at how these operated as well as the important role which could be taken by third sector organisations. Councillor Homan highlighted she was aware that residents from non-Council communities had requested assistance in running their own residents' associations and officers had suggested that a neighbourhood panel format might be an appropriate means of bringing residents together.

The Chair thanked officers and residents for their work, and all present for their contribution to an interesting debate.

8. WORK PROGRAMMING 2018/19

The Chair introduced the item and suggested the following topics might be considered later in the year: The Economy and the Arts, the Industrial Strategy, Place Making and areas of Policy Development. Committee members were asked to consider this list and provide additional suggestions to the next meeting.

Meeting started: 7.05 pm
Meeting ended: 9.00 pm

Chair

Contact officer: Charles Francis
Committee Co-ordinator
Governance and Scrutiny
☎: 020 8753 2062
E-mail: charles.francis@lbhf.gov.uk