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Scrutiny Homes Sub-Committee

Meeting held on Tuesday, 16 April 2024 at 6.30 pm in Council Chamber, Town Hall, Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Leila Ben-Hassel (Chair);
Councillor Adele Benson (Vice-Chair);
Councillors Kola Agboola, Sue Bennett, Claire Bonham, Danielle Denton and Ellily Ponnuthurai

Also Present: Councillor Lynne Hale and Chrishni Reshekaron and Rowenna Davis (joined online)

PART A

35/24 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on the 29 January 2024 were approved as an accurate record.

36/24 Disclosures of Interest

There were no disclosures of interest made at the meeting.

37/24 Urgent Business (if any)

There was no urgent business for the consideration of the Homes Sub-Committee at this meeting.

38/24 Period 9 Financial Performance Report - Housing

The Sub-Committee considered a report set out on pages 23 to 32 of the agenda, which provided the Council's financial performance as at Period 9 (December 2023) for the Housing Directorate (General Fund, Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and the Capital Programme).

Orlagh Guarnori, Head of Strategic Finance, introduced the report. She highlighted that at period 9, the expectation for the General Fund was to break even against the budget of £23.9 million. Nonetheless, she noted that there was a crisis within the London housing market, which was creating significant demand for services. In response to this situation, officers prepared best- and worst-case scenarios for emergency and temporary accommodation, estimating an end-of-year overspend of approximately £4 million for 2023-24. For the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) in 2023-24, a £12 million overspend was predicted, primarily due to £8.6 million in responsive repairs and an additional £3.4 million for disrepair and legal costs.

- Susmita Sen – Corporate Director of Housing
- Orlagh Guarnori – Finance Manager
- Beatrice Cingtho-Taylor - Director of Housing, Homelessness Prevention & Accommodation
- Sue Hanlon – Director of Assets
- Lara Ashley – Housing Transformation Lead
- Simon James – Change Manager

The first question from the Sub-Committee concerned the timeliness of the report and why a more up-to-date report was not provided. The officers explained that this period was recently presented to the Cabinet, and they were still working on calculating the year-end figures.

The next question asked whether officers anticipated any significant changes to the budget between period 9 and year-end. The officers responded that their forecasts were expected to be accurate, as a large proportion of the required investments and overspend on repairs were identified last year. A supplementary question addressed achieving the savings targets by the end of 2023-24. The officers assured that the anticipated savings were embedded in the forecast, and they still expected to meet these targets.

The Sub-Committee then inquired about changes to accommodation arrangements when an asylum seeker receives the right to remain and its impact on Council's finances. The officers explained that once asylum seekers receive the right to remain, housing responsibility shifts from the Home Office to a local authority. This transition impacts the Council financially, but it has been closely working with the Home Office at the pre-decision stage to minimise the impact. The officers noted that they predominantly worked with families, but many asylum seekers in Croydon arrived alone in the UK. Since it was challenging for individuals to afford accommodation, they are signposted to agencies offering financial support to minimise the risk of rough sleeping. The Sub-Committee further questioned the financial impact. The officers explained that while it was initially identified as a financial and demand risk, the Council had developed effective control and management mechanisms to minimise the risk and financial impact. They assured the Sub-Committee that the risk, although currently small, was being continuously monitored and reassessed.

The Sub-Committee then asked about the number of people being granted the right to remain. The officers responded that they have access to and monitor this data, including analysing the number of people released from the Home Office. The Sub-Committee expressed interest in learning more about training and employment opportunities for people granted the right to remain in future meetings.

Next, the Sub-Committee questioned the disability grant and why only half of it had been spent since the beginning of the year until period 9. The officers explained that the grant value was estimated based on the number of applications, but eligibility criteria meant not every application was successful.

They assured that if the grant was not spent, it could be rolled over to the next year and mentioned exploring different ways to utilise the grant. The Sub-Committee challenged the delivery of the grant and the waiting list for adaptations. The officers acknowledged the waiting times and noted they were working on the backlog to minimise delays. The officers explained that they had recently recruited an additional occupational therapist.

Subsequently, the Sub-Committee inquired about the impact of legal cases on the HRA. The officers explained that they were working through 550 legacy disrepair cases and had not yet seen a downward trend. They added that approximately 30 new cases were arising each month, which was slightly lower than at the beginning of the year. They were working towards achieving zero new cases by the end of the next financial year.

Finally, the Sub-Committee asked about the number of voids and their financial impact. The officers explained that over the last 12 months, they had been working extensively on clearing the backlog of long-term voids. At least 650 voids were cleared in the last year, and they continuously monitored the number of voids in the Borough. The officers mentioned that monitoring voids and related work would become more efficient with the implementation of the NEC system.

Actions

Following the discussion of this item, the Sub-Committee was reassured that the underspend for homes adaptation would be rolled over to next year and that the Occupational Therapist vacancy was finally filled to address the current backlog. In response to Committee Members' concerns on the backlog of homes adaptations, Officers agreed the following action ahead of the next meeting:

- To provide committee members with information on how the Housing Department would triage and prioritise cases for occupational therapists when working on reducing the backlog, to ensure that the most urgent cases are addressed as a priority.

39/24 Culture Change in Housing Update

The Sub-Committee considered a report set out on pages 33 to 42 of the agenda, which provided an update on Culture Change in Housing Directorate.

The report was introduced by Lara Ashley, Housing Transformation Lead, who summarised the progress made and detailed the key priorities and future plans. She noted that the initial conditions for cultural transformation were quite challenging, which significantly influenced the timeline for implementing the culture change. She estimated that satisfactory results could be expected within three to five years across the directorate. Following the presentation, Councillor Hale underscored the importance of including all staff members in the transformation journey. She also encouraged the Sub-Committee to

contribute ideas and suggestions to help ensure that the housing services are delivered in a respectful and empathetic manner.

- Cllr Lynne Hale – Cabinet Member for Homes
- Susmita Sen – Corporate Director of Housing
- Orlagh Guarnori – Finance Manager
- Beatrice Cingtho-Taylor - Director of Housing, Homelessness Prevention & Accommodation
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- Lara Ashley – Housing Transformation Lead
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The Chair then opened the floor for the Sub-Committee to ask questions. The initial inquiry was about how the Council ensured that the culture change work was extended to the Council's contractors. The officers explained that while the primary focus was on their staff, the Council played a crucial role in selecting contractors who aligned with the desired values and approach towards working with residents. They highlighted that residents were significantly involved in the procurement process. Furthermore, the officers emphasised the importance of monitoring KPIs to ensure that contractors delivered services in the agreed manner and with due respect. They also noted the seriousness with which complaints against contractors were handled and mentioned the possibility of offering customer service training to contractors, provided it was financially feasible. Following this, the Sub-Committee asked whether it would be possible to include a specific section on culture in the procurement process. The officers confirmed that monitoring elements such as the politeness and courtesy of contractors and the speed with which they resolved issues were already incorporated into the process, although these aspects were not explicitly labelled as 'culture'.

The Sub-Committee's next question referred to the recording and monitoring of calls in the contact centre. The officers confirmed that calls were indeed recorded and monitored within the repairs contact centre. They further emphasised that action was taken when behaviour deviated from the set standard. Officers noted the importance of clearly defining behaviours and standards, and then monitoring adherence to these. They highlighted that implementing monitoring and disciplinary frameworks required time and needed to be introduced gradually. Further queries were raised regarding whether calls between contractors and residents were recorded, and if the Council had access to these recordings. The officers explained that they currently did not have the facilities to record interactions between the Council's contractors and residents but mentioned that exploring this possibility could be considered. Despite not having access to recordings, the officers reassured the Sub-Committee that they actively investigated the reasons behind cancelled jobs. They also confirmed that behavioural standards were established and communicated to contractors, with the Council conducting mystery shopping exercises to monitor compliance. The Sub-Committee also inquired whether the contractors themselves recorded their calls. The officers responded that phone contact between contractors and residents was generally limited, as bookings were usually managed

through the Council, indicating minimal direct phone interactions that would require recording.

Subsequently, the Sub-Committee inquired about the morale and workflow of the staff within the Housing Directorate. The officers explained that the Directorate comprised various groups of staff, each requiring different approaches due to their distinct needs. It was noted that some staff members were less willing to engage in the transformation journey, necessitating additional time and effort. The officers also stressed the importance of continually seeking feedback during staff engagements and making ongoing improvements based on this feedback. The Sub-Committee then asked what measures were being taken to boost staff morale. The officers responded that keeping staff well-informed about the transformation journey, including its actions and milestones, was crucial. Additionally, a new staff award scheme had been introduced across the entire Council to recognise outstanding contributions. They mentioned that once the competency model was fully established, it would be integrated with the directorate's recognition system. Furthermore, as part of the customer care training programme, a specific recognition system for exemplary customer service was to be implemented. The officers also highlighted that Council-wide benefits were available to all staff members.

The Sub-Committee then inquired about how the cultural transformation within the Housing Directorate was integrated into the broader People & Culture Transformation Strategy. The officers explained that they had representation on the Workforce Board, which serves as the central body where all cultural strategies within the organisation converge. This integration provided an excellent opportunity to collaborate with other departments, particularly in areas critical to Housing such as leadership development. The officers also noted that the Housing Directorate had volunteered to be an early adopter of the new leadership programme currently being procured.

Following this, the Sub-Committee raised concerns about complaints related to the size of the patches allocated to housing officers and queried how the ongoing cultural transformation would address this issue. The officers admitted that they could not provide extensive details at this stage, but assured the Sub-Committee that the allocation of patches and workflow considerations were integral to the ongoing restructuring of the directorate.

Subsequently, the Sub-Committee sought clarification about how the work on cultural change was prioritised alongside statutory obligations. The officers responded that their approach was tailored to meet specific needs. The cultural change team worked closely with different services within the directorate to identify areas facing the most significant challenges, thereby facilitating impactful change. They also highlighted that the current stage of the restructuring process was a crucial factor in identifying the cultural change activities and priority level.

The Sub-Committee inquired about the performance management of staff under the cultural change programme, particularly querying the officers'

confidence in implementing the appropriate performance measurement tools before the deadline stipulated by the Exit Strategy. The officers explained that they were required to provide monthly assurances to the regulator, demonstrating that they were on track with their objectives. They also confirmed that both the regulator and the directorate had confidence in the ongoing work. Additionally, from a staffing perspective, the officers highlighted the critical role of appraisals in the performance monitoring process. Further probing by the Sub-Committee focused on how progress was being monitored in relation to the cultural change. The officers responded that their monitoring included reporting on tenant satisfaction measures and assessing the outputs from the appraisal process. This approach ensured that they had a comprehensive view of the progress being made under the cultural change initiative.

Finally, the Sub-Committee inquired about measures to enhance staff's understanding of autism. The officers explained that improving awareness of autism was integral to their commitment to uphold high customer service standards and to recognise the diverse characteristics of residents. They noted that this initiative was part of an ongoing effort to gather data to better understand the characteristics of the Council's tenants. This data would enable officers to tailor their responses appropriately to meet the needs of all residents effectively.

Actions

Following the discussion of this item, the Sub-Committee agreed the following actions to follow-up after the meeting:

- The Sub-Committee agreed that they would like to scrutinise patch allocation for housing officers alongside the review of the new Housing Allocation Policy.
- The Sub-Committee agreed that a visit to the contact centre would be organised along with mystery shopping.
- The Sub-Committee requested additional information on how the housing department's staff performance management is assessed effectively, incl. how one-to-one meetings between members of staff and their managers are monitored and what is done to ensure they are taking place considering historic issues of many staff not having regular supervision meetings.
- The Homes Sub-Committee asked for confirmation that contractors and sub-contractors are recording their calls with residents, and if so, whether the Council has the right to access them when a complaint is made and to proactively monitor customer standards are being met. This is to address the numerous instances where tenants relay information to the council which is contradicted by the contractor/sub-contractor.

Conclusions

Following its discussion of this item, the Sub-Committee reached the following conclusions on the information provided:

- The Sub-Committee commended the work of the Housing team in putting together a comprehensive culture change programme to improve the culture within the workforce, recognising that a significant amount of the work that had already been undertaken in short timescales. Members asked leading officers to pass on their thanks to all members of staff involved.
- The Sub-Committee recognised that a key challenge to the pace of delivery was down to capacity issues within the service, alongside ongoing recruitment challenges.
- The Sub-Committee commended the use of effective graphics to supplement the information provided in the report, making the information on culture change more easily accessible for all.

Recommendations

Following its discussion of this item the Sub-Committee agreed to submit the following recommendations for the consideration of the Executive Mayor:

- Although the Homes Sub-Committee recognised there had been significant work undertaken to improve the culture of the work force within the Housing Service, there was concern about whether this extended to staff employed by contractors and subcontractors and would recommend that monitoring whether housing contractors/sub-contractors' culture meet the Council's expected standards, be included in the scope of the Housing Culture Change Transformation Programme.
- The Homes Sub-Committee recommends that the Council encourage their contractors to take part in the Chartered Institute of Housing campaign '[It's not okay](#)' which aims to tackle stigma in social housing.
- The Homes Sub-Committee recommends that the possibility of including a section on culture in the procurement process, be explored.
- The Homes Sub-Committee recommends that non-financial staff rewards/benefits are explored to improve staff morale and attract people to the workforce.

40/24 Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024-2029

The Sub-Committee considered a report set out on pages 43 to 116 of the agenda, which introduced the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024-2029. As well as setting out the statutory requirement to produce a 5-year plan, the report sets out the methodology used in its development as well as setting out a summary report of the process used to consult residents and

partners and achieve a consensus for the key themes identified in the strategies priorities.

Susmita Sen, Corporate Director of Housing, and Simon James, Change Manager, introduced the report, highlighting it as a key strategic document and a significant step forward. They explained the consultation process used to develop the strategy and summarised the key findings. Councillor Lynne Hale, the Cabinet Member for Housing, stressed the importance of this strategy and its impact on the entire Borough.

- Cllr Lynne Hale – Cabinet Member for Homes
- Susmita Sen – Corporate Director of Housing
- Orlagh Guarnori – Finance Manager
- Beatrice Cingtho-Taylor - Director of Housing, Homelessness Prevention & Accommodation
- Sue Hanlon – Director of Assets
- Lara Ashley – Housing Transformation Lead
- Simon James – Change Manager

Then the Chair opened the opportunity to ask questions, initially focussing on the consultation and user experience. The first question considered how the strategy reflected how the service was operating under the new operating structure. The officers responded that the purpose of the Homelessness Strategy was to provide a direction for the directorate. It was also explained by the officers that the Homelessness Strategy was a statutory document, and the basis of the restructure was based on meeting those statutory requirements. It was further mentioned that the previous structure was not focused on prevention which was one of the main statutory requirements, and changes to the structure had to be made before the Strategy was developed.

Subsequently, the Sub-Committee asked whether there were any unexpected findings from the consultation, and if so, how they were implemented into the strategy. The officers explained that there were mixed opinions on rough sleeping – part of the respondents wanted the Council to provide more support to homeless residents and part of them would like the Council to focus on tackling anti-social behaviour related to homelessness.

The next question asked by the Sub-Committee asked the officers to reflect on the consultation and explain what could had been done to increase the number of people who engaged in the consultation. The officers explained that when compared to other London Boroughs, the turnout was relatively good. It was also added by the officers that people were also asked about homelessness-related matters during the engagement for the development of the Housing Strategy. Then, the Sub-Committee further inquired about what had been done to engage with young people. The officers acknowledged that this would need to be improved in upcoming consultations. The officers mentioned that they worked with community partners to engage with young people in the Borough. It was also highlighted that officers had been working with Children's Services to improve the engagement with young people.

Then the Sub-Committee moved to questions on the key priorities. The first question asked by the Sub-Committee considered whether there was any hierarchy or weights assigned to the priorities. The officers explained that there was no hierarchy between, or weights assigned to the priorities. However, it was explained that the priorities were interrelated, therefore could not be progressed separately.

The next question asked about the impact of people moving to the Borough due to lower rents compared to other London Boroughs and its effect on housing supply for Croydon residents. The officers acknowledged this challenge, noting the lack of statutory provisions to rely on. Nonetheless, they explained that the Council had been using its influence to make an impact, actively increasing its visibility to landlords and other local authorities along as monitoring and working with authorities that placed people in Croydon.

The Sub-Committee further questioned how the Council planned to improve its cooperation with landlords to ensure their willingness to work with the Council. Officers had identified the biggest obstacle as officer's response time to the landlords but assured the Sub-Committee that there have been recent improvements in this area. They added that through dialogue with stakeholders, the Council was working to build a portfolio pipeline of potential investment opportunities.

The next question posed by the Sub-Committee concerned the first priority and whether the officers in the restructured services had received appropriate training. The officers explained that some training had already been delivered; however, more was scheduled as they were in the process of procuring a provider for customer care training. Currently, training was being delivered in specific areas, including technical skills. The Sub-Committee then expressed concerns about the lack of changes resulting from the training and asked what more could be done to improve the customer experience. The officers acknowledged that the desired outcomes of the restructure had not yet been achieved. They committed to reviewing the restructure after six months and explained that some improvements had been hindered by recruitment difficulties. However, the officers assured the Sub-Committee that they were making appointments to permanent positions and had created additional team leader roles.

Councillor Davis, Chair of the Scrutiny & Overview Committee, expressed her concerns regarding the service and the recent restructure following her visit to Crisis Skylight Croydon. She asked how the new strategy and delivery plan incorporated lessons from previous restructures and whether the current work considered the urgency of the situation. The officers assured the Sub-Committee that they still believed the new structure was the correct approach. This confidence was echoed by other local authorities, advisors, and government bodies. However, they acknowledged that there were challenges six months into the restructure, emphasising that such changes require significant time and effort. The officers also highlighted external challenges, such as increasing homelessness. Officers explained that starting from a very poor baseline meant the improvement journey would take three to five years.

The officers also stressed that they never expected the restructure to deliver the desired results immediately, as they had been working through significant backlogs and dealing with poor-quality data. As the service moved towards fulfilling its statutory requirements, they were having more difficult conversations about the level of support the Council could provide to the residents.

The next question from the Sub-Committee focused on the second priority, specifically the timeliness of developing and reviewing a protocol for care leavers. The officers explained that the delivery dates mentioned in the plan were deadlines, and many of the actions were likely to be completed much earlier. They assured the Sub-Committee that some improvements related to care leavers had already been implemented, such as having an officer based in the hospital. Additionally, the Council had introduced a pilot scheme, and its effectiveness, along with other arrangements, was being continuously reviewed and amended as necessary.

The Sub-Committee then addressed the third priority, questioning how officers planned to reduce reliance on temporary accommodation. The officers outlined a twofold approach: firstly, focusing on prevention, and secondly, providing necessary support to those already in temporary accommodation. They also emphasised that the Council was prioritising collaboration with housing investors to ensure an adequate supply of affordable housing.

The next question from the Sub-Committee asked what the Council could do to support individuals who could technically afford private sector rent but lacked the deposit or did not meet other eligibility criteria. The officers explained that this work was not specifically mentioned in the strategy, as it was already part of their 'business as usual' operations. They further mentioned that the Council aimed to improve the promotion of available support and ensure residents had designated points of contact. The support provided by the Council included a discretionary payment fund that could be used to cover deposits.

The next question from the Sub-Committee focused on priority five, specifically how the Council planned to measure improvements in property and management standards and whether tenants or landlords were required to provide basic safety certificates (e.g., electrical and gas safety, and EPC rating) for tenancies. The officers explained that the private sector team verified all basic safety certificates for properties the Council leased. Additionally, the Council regularly engages with landlords through the Private Sector Landlord Forum to maintain these standards.

A supplementary question from the Sub-Committee probed how the Council supported good landlords to continue providing high-standard housing in the Borough and addressed the issues with landlords providing poorer accommodation. The officers detailed that support for proficient landlords was facilitated through the private sector team and the Private Sector Landlord Forum. For those performing poorly, legislative mechanisms were in place to manage compliance.

Concerns were raised by the Sub-Committee about the level of attendance at the Private Sector Landlord Forum meetings and whether there were any strategies to improve participation. Officers suggested that a prime opportunity to promote these events was during engagement with landlords to arrange property assessments for the stock condition survey. They also emphasised the importance of supporting landlords as the decent home standard becomes applicable to the private sector, ensuring they are well-informed and equipped to meet these standards. The subsequent question asked by the Sub-Committee considered the stock conditions review for private sector properties. The officers explained that it was a part of the damp and mould assurance, and the funding was coming from Public Health. It was further highlighted by the officers that this work involved providing guidance to the landlords and signposting to them if necessary.

The next question from the Sub-Committee addressed the issue of letting agencies who worked with landlords providing substandard properties, and whether there were any efforts to improve letting standards. The officers confirmed their awareness of the poor practices associated with certain letting agencies, noting that monitoring of such issues was ongoing. They also highlighted that the current records and analysis of complaints were well-maintained. However, they acknowledged that a formal project to specifically address letting standards had not yet been commissioned.

The next question from the Sub-Committee pertained to priority six, focusing on the reinstatement of partnerships with the voluntary sector. Officers clarified that while the partnership had not formally ceased, it had diminished in recent years. They noted that efforts to reinvigorate this partnership had only recently commenced. As part of these efforts, officers had already visited many partners during the consultation process. They added that the next step would involve developing arrangements that are mutually beneficial for both the partners and the Council.

The Sub-Committee then inquired whether there were plans to establish a designated point of contact for charities operating within the Borough. The officers expressed their intention to collaborate with the voluntary sector to determine their expectations from the Council and to devise the most effective solution. Additionally, they emphasised the importance of the Council retaining a flexible approach to accommodate these needs. Regarding the implementation of a single point of contact, the officers provided assurance that should the voluntary sector find this approach beneficial, they would be prepared to facilitate it.

Subsequently, the Sub-Committee inquired about the measures in place to hold Housing Associations accountable for providing poor and inadequate services. The officers clarified that they do not have regulatory authority over Housing Associations, which limited the action and escalation processes available to them. However, they expressed an aspiration to collaborate with the boards that regulate Housing Associations. This collaboration could

include the implementation of common standards to ensure better service quality.

The next question from the Sub-Committee addressed whether the Council had considered participating in walkabouts on housing association properties with officers, councillors, and residents. The officers noted that housing associations likely organised such walkabouts and could invite councillors to join. However, they explained that the Council's involvement would be limited due to capacity constraints.

Subsequently, the Sub-Committee inquired whether the Council would consider a programme to purchase properties from landlords intending to sell their properties and as a result terminate tenancies. The officers confirmed that they had initiated a buyback programme, but at this stage, they were not considering occupied units. Currently, the focus was on acquiring former Council housing, for which they were developing appropriate criteria. The officers also assured that they were actively collaborating with local authorities that had similar programmes to maximise the use of available grants from the Greater London Authority (GLA) and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Communities (DHLUC). They added that while all options were being considered, there was concern about purchasing occupied properties from private landlords due to the potential market implications and the risk of encouraging other landlords to terminate tenancies.

The next question from the Sub-Committee focused on the time it took to place a homeless individual in emergency accommodation and the use of StreetLink. The officers explained that when a person sleeping rough was reported through StreetLink, this information was directly transmitted to the service provider within the authority. They further detailed that this service was due for re-procurement and that they were actively working to enhance the specification, including clarifying the expectations of what the contractor should be provide.

The next question from the Sub-Committee addressed customer service, querying why establishing customer service standards was not considered an urgent priority by the Council. The officers acknowledged the need for improvement in this area and explained that the service was currently facing significant backlogs, alongside the challenges of implementing structural changes and managing the increased demand for services. They noted that the introduction of the NEC system had enhanced their understanding of service operations and the associated pressures, an insight that was not possible before its implementation.

Subsequently, the Sub-Committee inquired about how the Council planned to monitor and evaluate the delivery of the Homelessness Strategy, along with everything else that was already being monitored. The officers explained that they monitor progress through the existing governance programme and structure. They added that monitoring would continue through a refreshed set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), which are integral to both the Mayor's Business Plan and the internal processes within the directorate.

The final question from the Sub-Committee focused on the Council's approach to preventing homelessness and the specific tools being used. The officers clarified that the choice of tools depends on the underlying causes of homelessness. They mentioned that the Plan identifies the three most common causes of homelessness, and efforts are underway to develop targeted tools to address these. As an example, they noted that for cases of no-fault eviction, funds available to assist with rent increases or deposit payments.

Actions

Following the discussion of this item, the Sub-Committee agreed the following actions to follow-up after the meeting:

- It was agreed that once the new set of KPIs (including impact metrics) were finalised, it would be shared with the Sub-Committee on a regular basis.
- Additionally, there was a confirmation needed on whether the Council provides information to the Greater London Authority's rogue landlord register.

Conclusions

Following its discussion of this item, the Sub-Committee reached the following conclusions on the Housing Department's Draft Homelessness Strategy:

- The Sub-Committee expressed their concern about the effectiveness of the restructured homelessness front door service in light of the feedback provided by local homelessness charity workers, as well as from local Councillors' casework on housing and homelessness casework where issues were not duly escalated and vulnerable residents falling through the cracks without having an officer assigned to their case.
- The Sub-Committee agreed that the Homelessness strategy should be focused on ensuring that the basic service provision was delivered to expected standards first, before delivering further improvement workstreams.
- The Sub-Committee expressed concerns that a number of workstreams in the strategy's delivery plan that were focused on prevention had timescales 2 to 3 years down, contradicting the strategic objectives of maximising prevention, thus pressures on the General Fund Budget.

Recommendations

Following its discussion of this item the Sub-Committee agreed to submit the following recommendations for the consideration of the Executive Mayor:

- The Homes Sub-Committee recommends that a review of the new housing homelessness service structure is conducted to provide reassurance that it is meeting its intended outcomes and where these are not being achieved, that an action plan is developed to address these failings as a priority.
- The Homes Sub-Committee recommends that prevention workstreams within the Homelessness Strategy Delivery Plan are fast-tracked wherever possible, including hospital engagement.
- The Homes Sub-Committee recommends that the Council identifies high performing local authorities and engages with them to learn from best practice on how to build more effective working relations with private sector landlords to maintain tenancies where possible.
- The Homes Sub-Committee recommends that the Council introduces a gas, electrical and EPC document check for private sector tenants claiming housing benefits.
- The Homes Sub-Committee recommends that the Council establishes a designated point of contact for the charity and voluntary sector for all housing and homelessness-related matters.
- The Homes Sub-Committee recommends that the Council takes a more proactive role in facilitating good practice amongst housing associations established in the borough e.g. on nomination rights and organising estate walkabouts with tenants and local Councillors.

41/24 Work Programme 2023/24

The Sub-Committee noted the report.

The meeting ended at 9.40 pm

Signed:

Date:

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