

HOUSING PANEL (PANEL OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE)

Monday 4 November 2013

COUNCILLORS PRESENT: Councillors Smith (Chair), Sanders, McCready, Hollick, and Brown. Linda Hill (Tenant Representative).

26. WORK PROGRAMME AND REPORT BACK ON RECOMMENDATIONS

The Panel considered the forward work programme and noted up and coming items. In particular:

- Estate Regeneration – The Panel agreed to take Blackbird Leys as a case study and consider the regeneration proposals that are underway. Councillor Smith and Linda Hill agreed to meet with officers to scope this work for the Panel and noted that members were particularly interested in how residents in the area were engaged and given influence over proposals and outcomes. To report to the December meeting if possible. A suggestion was made by Councillor Hollick to consider resident voting as a way of engagement and expressing opinions.
- Tenant and Resident Involvement Strategy – Agreed to consider how this has been implemented and the outcomes being achieved for tenants. Add to the programme in March or April 2014.
- Councillor Hollick asked the Panel to consider the possibilities of the Council setting a lettings agency in an effort to drive up standards in the private rented sector. Officers outlined that this had been considered by Housing as a method of increasing the supply of affordable rents in the private rented sector. The local housing allowance had made this not worthwhile. The Councils focus on improving quality in this sector is focused in HMO licensing. The Panel asked that officers produce a briefing paper for the Panel on the pros, cons and risks of this suggestion for the Council. To report to the December or January meeting.
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27. PERFORMANCE MONITORING - HOUSING MEASURES, QUARTER 2.

The Panel considered the performance data for Qtr.2 and asked for the following information:

- The STAR survey results are all above the targets we set. Based on these what is our benchmarked position against other public sector providers.
- Details on the methodology used to conduct the STAR survey in particular how many tenants responded and what was the geographical and tenant profile of respondents.
- Satisfaction with parks is disappointingly down (LP013). To provide more detailed information on the survey that produced this result including the methodology used numbers and location of respondents, questions asked and insight from this on reasons for dissatisfaction.

- A number of targets relate to housing supply HC016 – affordable housing for rent delivered/N154 – net additional homes provided/N155 – Number of affordable homes delivered (gross). These targets all show red with explanations that they are likely to be back on target shortly. The Panel would like to see the back ground programme data that produces these figures to better understand delivery.
- The Panel discussed Rough Sleeper in particular trends and the effects of the “no second night out scheme”. Officers reported that the number of rough sleepers is cyclical and largely stable. The no second night out policy seemed to be working and a few tweaks have been made in the policy to counteract criticism that a focus in this area has reduced services and support for those being released from prison and hospital. People in this category are now considered within the scheme if they had previously been a rough sleeper. More work is now being done with entrenched rough sleepers. The Panel wanted to know more detail behind these figures and asked for a briefing showing: the numbers of people helped by the no second night out policy; a breakdown of the figures showing the trends for new and entrenched rough sleepers; the profile of rough sleepers and the current and trend for wait times for hostels. The Panel went on to discuss the future for the no second night out policy should hostel funding reduce during the County budget review. This is problematic and the City is focused on keeping hostel places stable. At the moment there is no contingency should a hostel close.
- Rent collection CS010, CS011,CS013, CS014. Concern was expressed on the rising nature of rent arrears. Officers said that the level of arrears is currently £1.2m (2.4%) which is a rise from £1m (2.3%). We have recently placed another 400 tenants on the direct payments as part of the pilot and we are seeing a spike of arrears which is expected to settle as it did with phase 1 of this pilot. The Panel asked to see more information on the profile of the rent arrears figures. In particular the number of tenants in arrears who are affected by any of the benefit changes and or in the direct payments pilot.

28. FOLLOW UP ON BENEFITS PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The Panel were introduced to the new Revenues and Benefits Manager Tanya Bandekar.

The briefing note showed an improving performance but still off target. This information was updated for October which showed performance for:

- Changes in circumstances as 9 ish days which gives a YTD performance of 11.3 days
- New Claims as 13.2 days which gives a YTD performance of 20.5 days.

There has been a drive in the last few weeks to chase claimants for outstanding information so that their claims can be processed more quickly rather than wait for information to come in. This has had a marked effect on performance. This will take a while to significantly improve the YTD performance result because of the poor start to the year.

In response to a question around the length of time to process new claims and the effects this might have on securing tenancies, officers said they were very aware of this and were trying to be more proactive and work with landlords to try to avoid this.

Coming on stream soon will be e-forms and this along with risk based verification will allow forms to go straight to the “back office” and these have the potential to speed things considerably.

The e-forms will allow claimants to submit claims and changes in circumstances on line. We will be making this known very widely and support will be offered to claimants. The system has been successful in other Councils.

By way of note the Board Member outlined some of the difficulties facing the benefits team and particularly highlighted ATLAS (automated transfer to local authorities system) this is newly introduced and allows the DWP to inform local authorities automatically of changes in circumstances of claimants. The problem is that the old system for doing this has not been switched off so some changes are still arriving through this method. The Council has to check both flows of information to determine what is a duplicate and what is new. If something was missed it would be considered local authority error and would adversely affect our grant claim.

29. NOTES OF THE LAST MEETING

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