

Minutes

SOCIAL SERVICES, HEALTH AND HOUSING POLICY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

27 March 2013

Meeting held at Committee Room 5 - Civic Centre,
High Street, Uxbridge UB8 1UW



HILLINGDON
LONDON

	<p>Committee Members Present: Cllr Judith Cooper Cllr Josephine Barrett Cllr David Benson Cllr Sukphal Brar Cllr Pat Jackson Cllr John Major Cllr June Nelson Cllr Mary O'Connor</p> <p>LBH Officers Present: Neil Stubbings (Deputy Director of Housing, Residents Services) Charles Francis (Democratic Services Officer)</p> <p>Also Present: Perry Singh, Assistant Director of Housing, Regeneration & Major Projects London Borough of Brent</p>	
55.	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TO REPORT THE PRESENCE OF ANY SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (<i>Agenda Item 1</i>)</p> <p>Cllr Peter Kemp, substitute Cllr Josephine Barrett.</p>	
56.	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN MATTERS COMING BEFORE THIS MEETING (<i>Agenda Item 2</i>)</p> <p>Cllr Mary O'Connor declared a non-pecuniary interest as Chairman of Hillingdon Mind.</p>	
57.	<p>TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 27 FEBRUARY 2013 - TO FOLLOW (<i>Agenda Item 3</i>)</p> <p>Were agreed as an accurate record.</p>	
58.	<p>TO CONFIRM THAT THE ITEMS OF BUSINESS MARKED IN PART I WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PUBLIC AND THAT THE ITEMS MARKED PART II WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PRIVATE (<i>Agenda Item 4</i>)</p> <p>All items were considered in Public.</p>	

59. **UPDATE ON WELFARE REFORMS** (*Agenda Item 5*)

The Deputy Director of Housing, Residents Services introduced the report. He explained that the meeting would be examining how the welfare reforms might affect Local Authorities across London and what the implications for Hillingdon might be.

Apologies were provided from Angelo Iuliano, Benefits Operations Manager, Southwark Council who was unable to attend the meeting. Perry Singh, Assistant Director of Housing, Regeneration & Major Projects, London Borough of Brent provided a presentation on the main welfare reforms and the following topics were discussed:

- Local Housing Allowance Caps
- Size criteria for Social Sector Tenants
- Local Council Tax support
- Overall Benefit Cap
- Universal Credit

In the course of discussions, the following points were raised:

- **Credit Union Jam Jar Accounts** – It was noted that these had been set up by Southwark Council as a form of savings account and had proved to be a valuable resource to support tenants who found budgeting a challenge although the take up was very low. The Committee asked officers if such a scheme might be used in Hillingdon similar to the credit union facility.
- **Carers** – It was noted that the rationale of the reforms was to reduce the spending deficit and to promote employment. In the case of carers, it was noted that they were not exempt from the Caps and in economic terms, it was often more cost effective for carers to look after friends or relatives than find employment and purchase care as they would be worse off. The Committee agreed that it was important for Local Authorities to examine how they supported carers given the significant savings they provided to the Authority, Health Service and a host of the other organisations.
- **‘Navigators’** – The Committee heard how Brent Council had a Navigator team consisting of 6 dedicated officers which were tasked with working with the most vulnerable households to assist them through the welfare changes. The Committee enquired whether Hillingdon might consider a similar scheme in the future but accepted that there was a resource issue.
- **Prevalence of Domestic Violence** – The Committee highlighted that officers needed to be very aware of the potential for the increase in cases of Domestic Violence as a result of the monetary changes and the impact this would have on family cohesion. Officers confirmed that they would be monitoring this area.
- **The importance of co-located teams** – The Committee heard how co-located teams had been used to good effect in Brent and enquired whether this would be the case in Hillingdon (use of Citizen Advice Bureau and Job Centre Plus). Officers confirmed that this was the case.
- **Troubled families and the protection register** – The

Committee highlighted that it was essential that troubled families and those particularly at risk were provided with appropriate advice, guidance and assistance especially if they need to move. Officers confirmed that there was close working with Children and Families.

- **Challenge of Direct Payments** – How does the Council support residents to make informed choices? – the Committee was concerned that those people not used to budgeting would be placed in financial hardship as a result.
- **Education and Training or practical alternatives** - (like Credit Union). The Committee urged officers to ensure adequate resources are made available to maximise work opportunities.
- **Robust Response to Homelessness Applications?** - Officers confirmed that homelessness applications would increase as the effect of the welfare reforms took hold. In respect of homelessness applications and evictions officers confirmed that the Council had a range of options in place to address the issue and Housing staff had / were receiving training about the welfare reforms to enable them to assist residents. However, if homelessness acceptances increased then there was a danger this would impact on the General Fund.
- **House moves and transition** – The Committee highlighted that in those cases where families had no other option but to relocate, it was vital that the Council had appropriate procedures in place to support people through the transitions process.
- **'No contact'** - The Committee noted that despite the efforts of officers, 176 people whom would be affected by the welfare reforms had chosen not to engage with the Council. The Committee agreed that it was essential that a strategy was put in place to support those people those that are not engaging with the Council.
- **Implementation** – Errors concerning disabled children and changes of circumstance potential issues? The Committee was concerned about the impact on Residents.
- **Recent trends in Hillingdon** – It was noted that Bed and Breakfast accommodation had doubled in the last 6 months.
- **Private Sector Leasing** - numbers had decreased as landlords will not renew leases.
- **Homelessness** - no increase in acceptances yet, but approaches have increased by 10%. More evictions and repossessions are anticipated.
- **Not sustainable** – topping up Housing Benefits to the levels before the benefits cap are applied would lead to a year on year increase of at least 2% to the Council Tax bill. Therefore solutions must be found.

Resolved –

1. **That the information be noted, discussed at the next meeting and be reported back to the Cabinet Member for Social Services, Health and Housing.**

60.	<p>CABINET FORWARD PLAN (<i>Agenda Item 6</i>)</p> <p>The Committee discussed the Forward Plan and no items were identified for discussion at the April 2013 meeting.</p> <p>Resolved -</p> <p>1. That the report be noted.</p>	
61.	<p>WORK PROGRAMME (<i>Agenda Item 7</i>)</p> <p>Reference was made to the work programme and timetable of meetings.</p> <p>Resolved –</p> <p>1. That the report be noted.</p>	
<p>The meeting, which commenced at 7.00 pm, closed at 8.55 pm.</p>		

These are the minutes of the above meeting. For more information on any of the resolutions please contact Charles Francis on 01895 556454. Circulation of these minutes is to Councillors, Officers, the Press and Members of the Public.