



Minutes

SOCIAL CARE, HOUSING AND PUBLIC HEALTH POLICY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

28 November 2018

Meeting held at Committee Room 4
Civic Centre, High Street, Uxbridge

	<p>Committee Members Present: Councillors Jane Palmer (Chairman), Duncan Flynn (Vice-Chairman), Judith Cooper, Alan Deville, Ian Edwards, Tony Eginton, Janet Gardner, Becky Haggar and Paula Rodrigues</p> <p>LBH Officers Present: Mark Billings – Housing Manager, Debby Weller – Policy and Strategy Manager (Housing), Rod Smith – Service Manager – Tenancy Manager, Gary Collier – Health and Social Integration Manager and Anisha Teji – Democratic Services Officer</p>
44.	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TO REPORT THE PRESENCE OF ANY SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (<i>Agenda Item 1</i>)</p> <p>There were no apologies for absence.</p>
45.	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN MATTERS COMING BEFORE THIS MEETING (<i>Agenda Item 2</i>)</p> <p>Councillor Judith Cooper declared a non – pecuniary interest in agenda items 5 and 6 as she had a relative who would be applying for universal credit. She remained for the discussion of the items.</p> <p>Councillor Becky Haggar declared a non-pecuniary personal interest in agenda item 7 as it distantly related to matters involving Central North West London NHS Foundation Trust. She remained for the discussion of all items.</p>
46.	<p>TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (<i>Agenda Item 3</i>)</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the minutes from the meeting on 28 November 2018 were approved as an accurate record.</p>
47.	<p>TO CONFIRM THAT THE ITEMS OF BUSINESS MARKED AS PART I WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PUBLIC AND THAT THE ITEMS MARKED AS PART II WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PRIVATE (<i>Agenda Item 4</i>)</p> <p>It was confirmed that there were no Part II items and that all business would therefore be conducted in public.</p>

48. **COMMITTEE REVIEW - WITNESS SESSION 3 UNIVERSAL CREDIT AND OTHER WELFARE BENEFIT CHANGES** (*Agenda Item 5*)

The Council's approach in its capacity as landlord

Rod Smith, Service Manager – Tenancy Manager introduced the report and provided an oral summary of the key points. Mr Smith also provided the Committee with some updated figures in relation to appendix 4 universal credit (UC) performance and activity measures.

It was reported that UC presented two main risks to the Council in its capacity as a local authority landlord:

- 1) higher levels of rent arrears; and
- 2) as a result for the higher level of rent arrears, a higher number of evictions.

In summary, the Committee was informed that UC was one of a number of risk factors which needed to be effectively managed by the Council to maximise its income stream and the potential for long term tenancy sustainment.

Members commented that it was an excellent and outstanding report that provided detail information. It was clear after reading the report what action needed to be undertaken by the Council.

During Member questions, it was confirmed that full roll out of UC was on 24 October 2018. Two postcodes had been rolled out in July 2018. In relation to people on UC since 24 October 2018, 25 % had not been paid. This was not expected to stay at this rate as it was primarily due to waiting period.

Members were concerned about the enormity of the impacts of preparation on staff dealing with claimants transferring to UC. Members were mindful of the services transforming in to a mini social services and queried whether staff had the appropriate training and experience to deal with increased caseloads. Mr Smith explained that it was important for staff to also be taken on to the journey, and tools and training provided for claimants was also mirrored in staff. The Council was keen to shift the mind-set and culture and wished to empower staff. It was important to train officers cross the whole organisation so that everyone could provide advice on UC. Officers also confirmed that resourcing at this stage was adequate, but further resource would be provided by way of UC migration officers.

Members queried how officers were dealing with vulnerable claimants and whether these claimants understood the process. It was explained that generally speaking, from officer experience, claimants tended to have a basic understanding of UC. There was support available, regular risk assessments and the verifications process highlighted any causes for concerns. If concerns were highlighted during the verification process, then officers would be allocated to claimants that needed help.

Members noted the different categories on the UC risk assessment form and considered the categories to not be clear cut. Members were concerned about claimants that fell in one but not all of the different categories, however officers assured Members that verification process allowed officers to properly assess claimants. Communication was key in this instance.

It was noted during Member questions that before projecting the end journey picture, officers were keen to get an idea on numbers and case work to allow them to work with

finance to model projections. Officers explained that a model was necessary to start looking forward and identify a new scale of risk.

Further to witness session 1, Members were still concerned about IT literacy and claimants being able to use computers to complete forms. Officers confirmed that this would be picked up during risk assessments.

Preparatory work being undertaken

Debby Weller, Policy and Strategy Manager outlined the preparatory work being undertaken to support the roll out of UC. She provided an oral summary of the report.

Members noted the key points:

- A UC Project Group had been created to facilitate an integrated response to challenges posed by the roll out of UC. It had a variety of members ranging from Hillingdon officers, to key partners such as JCP and CAB.
- The UC Project Review Group had developed a plan within the following work streams - resources; processes and procedures; communications (internal and external); training; and system support and customer insight.
- A risk log was maintained covering items such as council tax arrears, impact on call centre volumes and increase level of debts.
- Since April 2018, 36 UC claimants had sought housing advice from the homelessness prevention team; 21 were single people and 18 of these had a support need.
- There had been a number of changes to the roll out of UC as detailed in the report.
- Statistics showed that out of 905 UC claimants in Hillingdon – 325 were in employment and 579 were not in employment.
- There had been a focus on training housing officers and officers across the Council, to raise awareness of UC and what was expected of them.
- There had also been a focus on external partnership working. There are Council link officers in place for the Credit Union and the Citizens Advice Bureau to foster collaborative working and support vulnerable residents. Council officers had been working very closely with DWP at all stages of the process.
- The most recent Hillingdon Landlord Forum was held on 20 November 2018. Landlords themselves were able to apply for an alternative payment arrangement via the Gov.uk website. Other items discussed included issues regarding backdating of payments which is only allowable for 1 month under UC and had resulted in some difficulties, and delayed payments. Recent statistics show that 94% of claims were now being received on time.
- The Landlords Forum also heard from the Council's Welfare Reform and Tenancy Sustainment Manager about how the Council as a landlord had prepared for UC. This included using all contacts with tenants by officers to assist in identifying vulnerable tenants; encouraging tenants to pay a bit extra and build up a buffer; advising clients of the need for email addresses, bank accounts and access to computers; providing information on support available and how to access it. Information was provided on the Tier 1 and Tier 2 risk assessments used by DWP that assist in identifying vulnerabilities.
- Members noted that in appendix 9, the Universal Credit flyer, there was a material mistake as it indicated that Hillingdon would accept new claims/change of circumstances for Universal Credit from 24 October 2018 for single newly unemployed people. The error was that the requirement to claim UC was extended from that date from single individuals to all new benefit claimants and those with changed circumstances (except the limited exceptions such as those over

retirement age).

RESOLVED:

- 1) That officers be thanked for the report and their efforts.**
- 2) That the report be noted.**

49. **HOUSING ASSESSMENTS** (*Agenda Item 6*)

Mark Billings, Housing Manager presented the report detailing the homelessness assessments process at the London Borough of Hillingdon.

A summary of the key points raised are detailed below.

It was reported that housing authorities had a duty to carry out assessments in accordance with the Homelessness Reduction Act in all cases where an eligible applicant was threatened with homelessness or was actually homeless. Further, there was a duty to provide temporary accommodation during the relief duty if the client fell into a reasonable preference category. The Council had an online portal to register for assistance if a person was at risk of homelessness and once the form had been completed it would be allocated to the Council's housing advisors. There had been focus on trying to avoid people slipping through the net. There were a range of agencies that the Council often sign posted referrals too including Credit Union, Citizens Advice, P3 and Trinity.

Mr Billings informed the Committee that if a client approached the homelessness service due to domestic violence, the client would be assessed using the usual HRA assessments process. The Council collaborated with other councils in relation to domestic violence and was signed up to reciprocal agreements with other West London boroughs and on pan London basis. If refuge placements needed to be provided, this would be handled via the national domestic violence helpline to ensure a safe and suitable placement. Overall, the Council had dedicated staff for dealing with domestic abuse and a comprehensive strategy in place.

Hillingdon as a whole was better at identifying rough sleepers. A Rough Sleeping Initiative had been introduced which includes regular searches at Heathrow Airport and in other parts of the Borough to identify homeless people and try to help them. Since the introduction of the project 25 rough sleepers had been taken off the streets. The project was worth around £400k but produced a lot of positive results.

Members commented that this was a useful and detailed report. Members were delighted to see domestic violence being mentioned, monitored and taken seriously.

During Members questions, it was noted that London Heathrow Airport (LHR) was the home to a majority of rough sleepers. Members queried whether the Council was taking any action to put any action on LHR for allowing this. It was reported that LHR was like its own village and there were roughly 40 -50 rough sleepers every night. This had been feedback to LHR and there had been some discussions. Mr Billings confirmed that they were looking at trends and apply pressure to Heathrow.

It was noted that the police's approach was to leave the rough sleepers unless they were being disruptive. It was further noted that many rough sleepers were not residents of Hillingdon. However, Mr Billings explained that if it was possible, the outreach team would look into reconnecting the non-resident rough sleepers to their local areas. The

initiative had only been introduced in early September 2018 and it was just getting started.

Members considered housing 25 rough sleepers was amazing, however queried whether the forecast of numbers was expected to increase. Mr Billings confirmed that it depended on individual circumstances, as some rough sleepers did not want to be homed. Work was being undertaken by the Salvation Army.

Members questioned the sustainability of the intervention project. It was confirmed that with the current resourcing level, it was sustainable, spending was provided from central government. Even when the funding stopped there was still an expectation for the service to be delivered in line with HRA.

It was noted that Trinity and Heathrow Travel Care had both been fantastic services.

Members raised concerns about CAB that were not always helpful in signposting people. Members questioned whether more could be done as CABs had a duty of care towards people and whether this could be challenged. Mr Billings confirmed that this had been a great year for partnership working.

RESOLVED:

- 1) Thanked officers for the comprehensive detailed report.**
- 2) Noted and welcomed the useful report, particularly in reference to domestic violence.**

50. **BETTER CARE FUND PLAN - UPDATE** (*Agenda Item 7*)

Gary Collier, Health and Social Care Integration Manager, introduced the report on the Better Care Fund Plan and provided an oral summary of the key highlights.

The Better Care Fund Plan is a government initiative introduced in 2014/15 intended to improve efficiency and effectiveness in the provision of health and care through closer integration between health and social care. The primary focus of the 2017/19 plan was on older people (people aged 65 or over). In summary, Mr Collier provided the Committee with details on the progress on delivery of the plan in 2018/19. He highlighted the good work being done as well as some of the challenges. One of the key challenges identified was maintaining workforce stability in a high employment area.

Members commented that it was a great report and it was clear to see how much hard work had gone into the initiative. Members were pleased with the work that had been completed thus far.

Members queried the reason for emergency admissions from care homes not being on track. Mr Collier referred to the considerable amount of work being undertaken by partners to support care homes but added that 13 care homes in Hillingdon had seen a change of manager during the period covered by the report, which was a significant factor contributing to instability. There had also been an expansion of three care homes within a short space of time.

Members requested further information in relation to emergency admission targets, delayed transfers of care and percentage of people aged 65 and over still at home 91 days after discharge from hospital to reablement.

Members raised concerns in relation to the NHS being available seven days and that local targets were not being achieved. It was noted that a seven day NHS was a national policy priority in order to ensure that the quality of care did not decrease at weekends. The Committee was informed that there were a number of dependencies to seven day working being delivered and this included having the necessary infrastructure in place within the Hospital, which was being addressed. Members were advised that there would be appropriate alignment of social care resources to support the Hospital once this was in place.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That officers be applauded for their positive work and great report.
- 2) That the report be noted.

51. **CABINET FORWARD PLAN** (*Agenda Item 8*)

RESOLVED: That the forward plan be noted.

52. **WORK PROGRAMME** (*Agenda Item 9*)

RESOLVED: That the work programme be noted.

The meeting, which commenced at 7.00 pm, closed at 8.36 pm.

These are the minutes of the above meeting. For more information on any of the resolutions please contact Anisha Teji on 01895 277655. Circulation of these minutes is to Councillors, Officers, the Press and Members of the Public.