

Minutes

SOCIAL CARE, HOUSING AND PUBLIC HEALTH POLICY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

25 March 2021

Meeting held at VIRTUAL - Live on the Council's
YouTube channel: Hillingdon London



	<p>Committee Members Present: Councillors Philip Corthorne (Chairman) Heena Makwana (Vice-Chairman) Judith Cooper Alan Deville Tony Eginton (Opposition Lead) Janet Gardner Becky Haggar Paula Rodrigues Steve Tuckwell</p> <p>LBH Officers Present: Mark Billings, Head of Housing Options, Homelessness and Standards Debby Weller, Housing Policy Manager – Homeless Prevention Service Tony Zaman, Corporate Director of Adults, Children and Young People Services Steve Clarke, Democratic Services Officer</p>
52.	<p>Apologies for Absence and to report the presence of any substitute Members <i>(Agenda Item 1)</i></p> <p>No apologies had been formally received. It was noted that Councillor Cooper was yet to join the meeting.</p>
53.	<p>Declarations of Interest in matters coming before this meeting <i>(Agenda Item 2)</i></p> <p>Councillor Corthorne declared a non-pecuniary interest during item six as he had previously held the position of Cabinet Member for Social Services, Housing, Health and Wellbeing. Councillor Corthorne remained in the meeting and took part in the discussion on this item.</p>
54.	<p>To receive the minutes of the previous meeting <i>(Agenda Item 3)</i></p> <p>It was highlighted that on page three of the agenda, under the second bullet point within minute number 49, where the minutes stated 'Early health interventions', this should be read as 'Early help interventions'.</p> <p>It was noted that Members had requested further information on the Zero Carbon Commitment item which wasn't included in an update sheet disseminated to Members. It was noted that the item was due to come back to the Committee in a more detailed manner and that a date would be set in the Committee's work programme.</p> <p>RESOLVED That, subject to the requested changes, the minutes of the meeting</p>

dated 09 February 2021 be approved as an accurate record.

55. **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** (*Agenda Item 4*)

It was confirmed that all items were in Part I and would be considered in public.

56. **UPDATE ON THE HILLINGDON HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY 2019 - 2024** (*Agenda Item 5*)

Part way into the following item, Councillor Cooper joined the meeting.

Mark Billings, Head of Housing Options, Homelessness and Standards, introduced the item noting that it had been a legal requirement for local authorities to have a homelessness strategy since the Homelessness Act 2002. Recent changes in legislation had made it mandatory for the strategy to include attention to Rough Sleeping. The Council's current five-year strategy went live in 2019 and was primarily based on six priority workstreams as highlighted in the officer's report. Individually, the workstreams highlighted key areas of up-stream homelessness prevention, access to affordable housing options and the importance of partnership working. As a whole, the six priority areas showed the Council's intention to lead change and support the Borough's most vulnerable residents. Further to this, officers highlighted the Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy action plan which went into further detail of the workstreams.

It was noted that the coronavirus pandemic had emphasised the importance of having an accessible and responsive service for residents. In response to the government's 'Everyone In' scheme, over 250 rough sleepers had come through the Council's service since April 2020 and a highly successful new rough sleeper hostel was opened within an extremely tight timeframe in March 2020. It was highlighted that, in the government's annual rough sleeper report, published in February 2021, Hillingdon was highlighted as the Borough with the largest drop in rough sleepers in England over the past year. The pandemic had seen an increase in homeless approaches to the service; worryingly, a significant number of these approaches had been in relation to domestic abuse cases.

Although officers welcomed the government's moratorium on evictions, there were concerns of an increase in homelessness when courts were scheduled to reopen at the end of May 2021. Members were informed that, although it was difficult to predict, modelling work was underway looking at potential pressures on the service, specifically assessing what could be done to increase availability of housing in both the private and public sector, and how the Council's own housing stock is put to use.

Members commended officers on their detailed report and were encouraged by the positive reaction to the immense challenges posed by the coronavirus pandemic. Members were also enthused to hear about the resumption of the homelessness forum and landlord's forum which would be held online.

Members queried the report's reference to domestic abuse advocates who were due to assist with the upskilling of staff; Members wanted to know whether the advocates had been identified. It was confirmed that two female officers from within the service had been identified to assist with offering a more specialised service for residents approaching the service from a domestic abuse setting. It was also noted that the

service was pushing towards obtaining Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance accreditation.

The Committee sought reassurance from officers that work was being done to advertise the options available to residents with regard to downsizing their properties. Officers were keen to promote downsizing options and highlighted key ongoing work to increase awareness of down-sizing.

Members also requested clarification on the term 'temporary housing' and noted that what was deemed temporary could vary significantly. It was highlighted that when a family or household required emergency placement, they would be placed into temporary housing whilst the service conducted an assessment of their needs; subject to approval of their homelessness case, they would then be placed into a suitable and affordable housing option, however they would remain in the temporary housing until the local authority could find them a suitable option, either through social housing or a private rented property. It was noted that this process had been known to last for several years, nevertheless the term 'temporary housing' was used because the housing solution was not deemed a permanent settlement. Further to this it was noted that every service user had a housing plan and the service would be in semi-regular contact with them assess their circumstances; Members highlighted that service users should be informed at point of entry that the duration of their temporary housing solution could span anywhere from months to years.

Members questioned accessibility to the service and concerns were raised that rough sleepers may not have a method of accessing the Council's website to find housing advice. Officers highlighted that there was an outreach team who were out in the Borough most nights of the week and residents could also report rough sleepers using the Street Link tool which helped to quickly notify the service of rough sleepers. It was also noted that as part of the Council's response to the coronavirus pandemic, where most public facing services abandoned in person service interaction, the homeless reception stayed open for the majority of 2020. Officers also noted that in response to the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, an online self-service system had been developed making access to housing advice and services easier for those with some form of internet access. It was emphasised that priority six of the Homelessness Prevention Strategy played a role in having residents and potential service users be aware of how they can access the service.

With regard to the Young Person Housing Advice Service, which was currently run by P3, Members wanted some detail as to how this service was being expanded in 2021. It was highlighted that P3 were commissioned by the Council to run the service for 18 – 25 year olds, the pandemic had impacted the way in which the service had to be delivered. Nevertheless P3 maintained a very approachable service specifically for young people who may have complex needs. Discussions had taken place with the Cabinet Member for Housing, Environment and Regeneration as to how the provision could be enhanced with the intention being to deliver a one stop shop for young people at risk of homelessness. Members requested information on the age ranges of rough sleepers in the Borough, officers informed Members that the information would be provided in due course.

The Committee were informed that part of the MHCLG Rough Sleeper grant allowed the Council to commission extra supported housing units over the last couple of years. A key partner in this was Trinity Homeless Projects, who brought on an additional 40 bed spaces in 2020 through houses in multiple occupancy, the homes were designed to be smaller than traditional hostel style housing which facilitated a pathway to independence for residents. Further to this it was noted that the Rough Sleeper grant

was allowing for increased provision in 2021 and Trinity Homeless Projects would be supplying a further 10 bed spaces in the next year. Members were encouraged by the development of partnership working and thanked officers for the vital service they provide in the Borough.

RESOLVED That the Social Care, Housing and Public Health Policy Overview Committee noted the officer's report and the progress made in delivering the Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019 – 2024.

57. **Committee Review: MAKING THE COUNCIL MORE AUTISM-FRIENDLY: DRAFT REPORT** (*Agenda Item 6*)

The Chairman introduced the item noting that a draft report with recommendations had been prepared and was being presented to the Committee to endorse its submission to Cabinet. Members had discussed the findings that they wished to form the basis of the report at the 19 January 2021 meeting and were now able to make amendments as they see fit.

It was highlighted that recommendation two drew attention to the embedding of autism awareness training into the new starter induction and structured ongoing learning and development programme for key front-line staff who would, by the nature of their roles, be likely to interact with autistic residents.

With regard to recommendation three, it was noted that recommendation had been pitched towards exploring the feasibility of improving online accessibility for residents with autism by providing further access to, and information about, Council autism services on the Council's website. Members noted the challenges in harmonising a one door approach to autism services when a number of different bodies, including the Council, the NHS and local charities, provided services to that regard. Further to this it was highlighted that the Better Care Fund had a specific workstream around the integration of care and support for people with learning disabilities and/or autism. The Committee were minded to include in their work programme, a report pertaining to this strand of the Better Care Fund and how access to services is made less restrictive for residents with autism.

An alteration to the narrative of recommendation eight was suggested. Although the Committee emphasised the tremendous work that Hillingdon Autistic Care and Support do in the Borough, to allow for a more holistic and encompassing recommendation, the Committee sought to recognise the work of all organisations providing services to residents with autism in the Borough. The following re-wording of recommendation eight was proposed:

"That Cabinet recognises all the Council's strong partnership relationships with organisations and providers supporting people with autism in Hillingdon."

The Committee were supportive of the amendment to recommendation eight.

Upon the matter of Education and Health Care Plans (EHCP) and Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND), it was noted that the scope of the review pertained to the way in which residents with autism access and interact with public facing Council services and not necessarily the statutory service provision for residents with autism. The Chairman also highlighted that the Head of SEND would be sharing a positive update with Members shortly in relation to assessments and accessibility of EHCPs. The Committee were minded to add to the work programme an item regarding the

improvement of assessment and accessibility to EHCPs for children with learning disabilities and/or autism.

Concerns were raised as to the accessibility of applying for the Disability Living Allowance (DLA) through the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP); it was noted that Members felt a Council advisor, on hand to assist individuals with applying for the DLA, would be a valuable asset to the Borough's residents with disabilities. It was noted that the matter could be explored either as a one off standing item or outside of the Committee environment as the scope was broader than the autism focussed nature of the current review.

Members were minded to add to the report, reference to a Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGO) report released shortly before the commencement of the review, in which the LGO found the Council to be at fault for not providing the reasonable adjustments required for a resident with autism when accessing a Council service. Members found the report to highlight the pertinence of the review and that it should be referenced within the Committee's final report to Cabinet. The Democratic Services Officer agreed to draft some wording to be included in the report, which could then be signed off by the Chairman and Opposition Lead.

RESOLVED That the Social Care, Housing and Public Health Policy Overview Committee:

- 1) **Agreed the change to the wording for recommendation eight;**
- 2) **Agreed that reference be included in the report to the 2019 Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman report, the wording of which was to be drafted by the Democratic Services Officer in consultation with the Chairman and Opposition Lead as required;**
- 3) **Delegated any minor drafting changes required prior to the report's submission to Cabinet to the Democratic Services Officer, in consultation with the Chairman and Opposition Lead as required;**
- 4) **Agreed the final report and recommendations in principle and endorsed its submission to Cabinet for due consideration.**

58. **MINUTES FROM THE CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL MEETINGS ON 12 NOVEMBER 2020 AND 11 FEBRUARY 2021** (*Agenda Item 7*)

The Chairman noted that he was looking forward to attending the annual meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel. Some Committee Members who sat on the Panel highlighted that the forum was more informal than traditional committee meetings but valuable thanks to the involvement of young people within the forum.

It was highlighted that an OFSTED inspection had taken place shortly before the February meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel but it had not been mentioned at the February meeting. Officers confirmed that they were happy to share the findings of the report with Members through a briefing note.

RESOLVED: That the minutes Corporate Parenting Panel meetings dated 12 November 2020 and 11 February 2021 be noted.

59. **Forward Plan** (*Agenda Item 8*)

It was highlighted that, from April, the Forward Plan document would be more extensive both in terms of timeframe and detail.

	RESOLVED: That the Social Care, Housing and Public Health Policy Overview Committee noted items going to Cabinet.
60.	<p>Work Programme (<i>Agenda Item 9</i>)</p> <p>The Chairman drew attention to the earlier requests for further detail on the Zero Carbon Commitment with regard to housing, the learning disabilities and/or autism workstream of the Better Care Fund, and the improvements to assessments and accessibility to EHCPs for children with SEND.</p> <p>RESOLVED That the Social Care, Housing and Public Health Policy Overview Committee noted the contents of the Work Programme and agreed any amendments to be made.</p>
	The meeting, which commenced at 7.00 pm, closed at 8.01pm.

These are the minutes of the above meeting. For more information on any of the resolutions please contact Steve Clarke on 01895 250693. Circulation of these minutes is to Councillors, Officers, the Press and Members of the Public.