

Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Thursday, 25th February, 2021.

Present:- Councillors Hulme (Chair), Ajaib, Begum, Matloob, Minhas, S Parmar and Sabah

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillors Dhaliwal, Gahir and Nazir

Apologies for Absence:- Councillors Kelly and M Holledge and Trevor Pollard (Residents Panel Board)

PART 1

53. Declarations of Interest

Councillors Hulme and Minhas declared that they were the Council appointed representatives on the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority, They remained and participated in the meeting.

54. Minutes of the meetings held on 6th January 2021 and 9th February 2021

Resolved - That the minutes of the meetings held on 6th January 2021 and 9th February 2021 be approved as a correct record.

55. Member Questions

None had been received.

56. 2021 Census

The Strategic Programme Management Office Manager outlined details relating to the 2021 Census. It was noted that Census day was on 21 March 2021 and information collated informed local authorities in shaping policy for planning and development, education, transport, housing and resource allocation. Although this was the first time the census was being held digitally, to ensure it was accessible and inclusive as possible a range of support services were being offered including guidance and support in different languages, field staff contacting households and the option of requesting a paper questionnaire. The role of elected members in promoting the census was outlined and included developing community liaison contacts, supporting local publicity and media relations and encouraging residents to take part.

A Member asked where individuals could get further information regarding completion of the census or to request a hard copy form and was informed that a national helpline would be available from 1 March 2021. Reference was made to how field staff would gain access to flats or other gated properties and it was noted that details regarding what arrangements were in place would be circulated to the Panel.

Resolved – That details of the presentation be noted.

57. HRA Tenanted Stock Landlord Statutory Compliance Update

The Neighbourhood Contracts & Business Services Manager set out the current position in regards to all areas of statutory compliance in HRA tenanted stock and requirements that were continuing to be delivered by Osborne and the RMI Client Team working together with third party auditors. It was highlighted that a target of 100% compliance on electrical installation/testing was at risk due to the latest national lockdown and access issues to properties. The areas of focus for this final quarter included water/legionella remedial works, domestic stair lift servicing and electrical works.

During the course of discussion, Panel Members raised the following points:

- Timeframe for procurement process and works carried out for properties where asbestos had been identified. Tenders for works were due to be invited in April and it was anticipated that the selection process would take up to ten weeks, following which a five year programme would put together.
- Details as to why the Domestic Stair Lifts Servicing compliance rate was currently at 54%. It was identified that the Council did not have a servicing regime for all lifting equipment and records that were available on the installation of these adaptations were unreliable and servicing inadequate. Osbornes had been instructed to carry out a survey to identify properties where lifting equipment had been installed and remedial works commenced in September 2020 with six monthly servicing implemented from November 2020.
- A Member asked for further details in relation to the installation of fire doors and how many required replacing both for domestic properties and communal areas. It was agreed that this information would be circulated to the Panel. The Neighbourhood Contracts & Business Services Manager confirmed that all fire risk assessments were up to date and that no Improvement Notices had been issued by the Fire Authority.
- Concern was raised that following water risk assessments in June 2020, only 21 out of 53 hazards identified had been completed. Panel Members were informed that it was anticipated that all outstanding works would be completed by the end of February 2021.

Resolved -

- a) That details of the report be noted.
- b) That the Panel receive a six monthly update report on HRA Tenanted Stock Landlord Statutory Compliance.

58. The Home Improvement Agency

The Panel received a report which detailed the changes and progress on the Home Improvement Agency (HIA) service. Members were reminded that the HIA was a local not for profit organisation, funded and supported by local and central government; that provided advice, support and assistance to elderly, disabled and vulnerable people who owned and lived in their own property. Assistance was given in adapting homes to enable individuals to remain independent in their own homes.

An independent audit of the HIA was commissioned by the Council, to improve outcomes due to concerns about the current service – which included lengthy waiting times involved in delivering adaptations to customers, communication with service users and protracted processes between housing and social care teams. The audit made a number of detailed recommendations as set out in the report. Members were also reminded that the HIA service would be transferred to Adult Social Care effective from 1 April 2021.

During the ensuing discussion, Panel Members and Councillor Gahir, speaking under Rule 30, raised the following points:

- Reasons as to why an ineffective service had been operating for a lengthy period of time and what measures were being implemented to ensure that this did not continue when responsibility for delivery transferred to Adult Social Care. It was envisaged that transfer of services to adult social care team, under the management of the Occupational Therapy Team Leader, would ensure a more co-ordinated approach to delivery of services.
- Referring to the HIA Waiting List for improvements, Members requested that detailed breakdown of information be provided to show:
 - the number of grants approved by age of the disabled person
 - maximum / minimum value of grants approved
 - Number of owner occupiers applying for Disabled Facilities Grant
 - Impact on individuals caused by delays in adaptations being implemented
 - Number of cases/requests received, approved and declined
 - Information relating to individuals making the referrals
 - Time period for getting on the waiting list
 - Timeframe for completion of outstanding cases
 - Number of applications granted and percentage of the budget spent

It was agreed that the information would be circulated to the Panel.

Referring specifically to the audit recommendation to re-examine the support given to the limited number of cases where it was considered more appropriate to move than make adaptations, the Panel were informed that

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details of the availability of such support and how it was publicised would be circulated.

It was brought to the Panel's attention that although records were maintained the current system was not fit for purpose. Records in future would be kept electronically with case records kept up to date and all activity recorded contemporaneously by staff.

Members expressed concern regarding the underspend in the budget and asked whether this would be carried to the next financial year. It was explained that a similar sum would be available for the next financial year. It was agreed that the report would be scheduled earlier on the Panel's work programme for the municipal year 2021/22 to monitor the budget and ensure that funds available were being used.

Resolved – That details of the report be noted.

59. Forward Work Programme 2020/21

Following discussion earlier in the meeting on the Home Improvement Agency agenda item and queries relating to the process involved in securing a dropped kerb, it was agreed that the matter would be scheduled on the work programme for a future meeting of the Panel.

Resolved – That details of the work programme be noted.

60. Members' Attendance Record 2020/21

Resolved – That the details of the Members Attendance Record be noted.

61. Date of Next Meeting - 13th April 2021

The date of the next meeting was noted as 13th April 2021.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.03 pm)