

Overview and Scrutiny Housing Sub-Group

Minutes of the meeting held on 22 June 2009

Present

Councillor Flanagan - In the Chair
Councillors Ankers, Helsby, Isherwood, Loughman, McCulley and Royle.

Present by Invitation:

Councillor Andrews, Executive Member for Neighbourhood Services
Councillor Cowell, Executive Member for Environment

Officers Present

Paul Beardmore, Director of Housing
Keith Davies Head of Homelessness
Gail Heath – Head of Housing Strategy
Sarah Henry, Head of Research and Intelligence
Nicola Rea – Principal Manager, Asylum and Refugee Service
Susan Triggs, Assistant Director of Adult Social Care
Carolyn Whewell, Scrutiny Support Officer

H09/04 Temporary Accommodation for Homeless Families

A report of the Director of Adult Social Care was submitted detailing the statutory duties and provision of homelessness services in Manchester.

The report highlighted that the City Council had a duty to provide accommodation for homeless people. The Department for Local Government and Communities had set all local authorities the target of reducing the use of temporary accommodation in homelessness cases. In Manchester, the target for 2010 was 331 and MCC is making excellent progress in meeting this target. To ensure this target was met, the Homelessness service made use of private sector housing to reduce the need to place homelessness people in temporary bed and breakfast accommodation. There was also increased focus on preventative measures to reduce the requirement for temporary accommodation. The number of homeless people in temporary accommodation on 31 March 2009 was 404. This was below the set target to be achieved by this date of 415.

A member sought clarification on how the service managed the number of homeless people allocated housing in different wards across the city, particularly in the social housing sector. The Assistant Director of Adult Social Care reported that officers tried, wherever possible to rehouse families in the area of their choice but that this is not always possible. The current spread of homelessness families allocated social housing was largely proportionate to the spread of Registered Social Landlords (RSL) in the city. Where the private sector was used, landlords were encouraged to limit the number of homeless families placed in any one area.

In response to further questions, the Assistant Director of Adult Social Care reported that every effort was made to allocate housing to an area where a local connection could be established. An example was given for cases of families with children; the family was likely to be housed near their school to ensure some continuity in the child's education. A member queried whether homeless people were guaranteed a place in the ward where they could demonstrate a local connection. The Assistant Director of Adult Social Care reported that they were able to choose specific areas within the first four weeks but where suitable accommodation could not be found, they were placed elsewhere in the city. People were offered the opportunity to be placed on the waiting list for their chosen area after this.

Members of the Sub Group acknowledged the reduction in the number of homeless people in temporary accommodation and congratulated the service on their efforts to achieve the 2010 target. Members requested a further report to be brought back to a future meeting of the Sub Group to provide detailed case study examples of the homelessness service.

The Chair sought clarification on how the service supported to victims of domestic violence in response to a number of queries from local residents. A case was highlighted where the victim was not rehoused and therefore potentially at risk once the perpetrator was released from jail. Members expressed concern that designated places of sanctuary were not suitable where action could be taken sooner. A further report was requested on how the homelessness service provided support to victims of domestic violence in places of 'sanctuary' and what action was taken to protect victims and the perpetrator is a possible threat to the victim after release from jail.

Decision:

1. To congratulate the homelessness service in the reduction in the number of homeless families placed in temporary accommodation.
2. To request a report on homelessness case studies to outline good practice examples of where the service had made a difference to families in terms of prevention of homelessness, use of the private sector and the wider support offered.
3. To request a report on how the housing service reacts to incidences and supports victims of domestic violence.

H09/05 Allocations – Confidential Report

A confidential report of the Director of Housing was submitted to outline how the Allocations Policy and how the collection of data contributed to the work on the Local Area Agreement Community Cohesion targets. The discussion around the issues in this report took place in private.

Members commented that the level and validity of the data captured was not sufficient to draw conclusions about the demand for social housing of particular groups and the contribution this has made to community cohesion. In particular, they

were concerned that the ethnicity categories to inform the baseline data were taken from the 2001 census and were therefore out of date. Members stressed the importance of an up to date evidence base to support the promotion of community cohesion in areas across the city. The Head of Research and Intelligence informed members that council had formed a Population Statistics Task Group to co-ordinate data sources in order to provide a relevant and consistent corporate approach to data capture and engagement.

The Chair informed officers that the Sub Group were confident that social housing was fairly allocated on a needs basis across the city but were concerned that there was no robust evidence base to counteract the public perception that housing allocation was unfairly distributed. The Sub Group agreed that the Communities and Neighbourhoods Overview and Scrutiny Committee should carry out a wider piece of work on the housing, library provision and environmental impact elements of community cohesion that fell within the terms of reference of the Committee.

Decision:

1. To note the report
2. To recommend that the Communities and Neighbourhoods Overview and Scrutiny Committee undertake a wider piece of work on the elements of community cohesion that fall within the terms of reference of the committee including
 - how local libraries respond to the needs of the local communities to provide relevant material for different groups in the community.
 - review the environmental impact of the increasing population
 - review how the housing allocation policy encourages mixed and diverse communities in Manchester

H09/06 Work Programme for the Housing Sub Group

The work programme of the Housing Sub Group was submitted for consideration.

Decision:

To agree the work programme of the Housing Sub Group