

COMMUNITY & ADULT SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

6 DECEMBER 2017

Present: County Councillor McGarry(Chairperson)
County Councillors Asghar Ali, Goddard, Jenkins, Kelloway and
Lent

30 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ali Ahmed and Joseph Carter.

31 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

32 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 November 2017 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairperson.

33 : INDEPENDENT LIVING SERVICES

The Chairperson welcomed Jane Thomas, Assistant Director Communities and Housing, Isabelle Bignall Assistant Director Customer Services and Carlyne Palmer, Operational Manager, Assisted Living to the meeting.

Members were provided with a presentation on Independent Living Services, with further details on the Meals on Wheels and Telecare Services. Members also received a presentation on performance in relation to Disabled Facilities Grants/Adaptation, following a deep dive in 2016, after which the Chairperson invited questions and comments from Members;

- Members asked how hard to reach communities were being targeted, and were advised that Officers attend GP cluster groups, Hubs and community groups to show what is on offer. Officers conceded that it was difficult to get to everyone, however there was a plan for the next 3/4 months to have stalls in various events to reach out to communities, GP's also refer people to the ILS. It was noted that some people are concerned that if they make contact they will be referred to Social Care, it was important to continue getting the message out that this is not the case.
- Members asked if the Tenants Federation had been contacted and were advised that they had, the Council had held a stall at the Tenants Federation Conference recently.
- With reference to Step-Down accommodation, Members asked if this was always full. Officers advised that it was currently at 88% capacity and that it was used for hospital discharge as well as for people moving out of their homes for adaptations. It was further added that some people chose not to use the facility and there was still work to be done to break down these barriers.

- Members asked what was being done to reach people in the community who did not know what benefits they could access. Officers explained that all officers who engage with the community are trained, and people who chose to engage can undergo benefits checks. It was noted that there could be more done in terms of advertising the help that is available. Further, the Money Advice Service is now based in the Hubs and officers also engage with Foodbanks.
- Members asked why the Meals on Wheels service had stopped previously and were advised that it had traditionally been part of a Social Services package, this changed when the new Social Services legislation came in and the local authority couldn't pay for the provision of meals. The decision was then taken to try a paid for service.
- Members asked if everyone pays for the service or whether anyone was eligible for a free service. Officers advised that there was no free provision, there was an element of allowance for subsidies where people help with the meal preparation.
- Members asked if the Meals on Wheels service catered for dietary needs and were advised that it does, they provide, vegetarian, vegan, gluten free meals etc. from a full menu; it was hoped to further extend this menu as the customer base grows.
- Members noted the Telecare statistics; 4500 customers, 128,000 calls since April, 6000 of which resulted in an Ambulance being called. Members asked if all of those calls were for the 4500 customers. Officers advised that they were, they were accurate figures. Officers explained that some people never contact them, some people contact them very regularly, and there were lots of calls for reassurance too. People who call regularly would receive a visit to check for things like trip hazards etc.
- Members requested a more detailed breakdown of the statistics and Officers agreed to provide them.
- Officers added that the service was provided for a reason and it was well used. The top percentage of callers would be monitored and staff can put forward a case management review, often the top callers to the ambulance service will tally up with these. Although the figures are large, officers considered it a testament to a good service; officers were proud of the service as it keeps people independent for longer, out of hospital for longer and reduced the burden on the system in other ways.
- Members referred to the budget for the Alarm Receiving Centre and asked if officers were confident with regard to the figures for income, as the target for year-end was £550k and the result was currently £238k. Officers explained that they are able to pick up the shortfall from other areas so the figures will balance. They further explained that they were delayed for just over a year on that target, which was already a stretched target; however they are getting more visits every day and although it will take another year to achieve the target, they believed they would hit the target and sustain it. Members welcomed the suggestion of visiting the Alarm Receiving Centre.

- Members were pleased to see the improvements in adaptation times.
- Members asked how the new framework and timescales were established and were advised that there had been an evaluation of work completed in the past and the timescales these had taken; there were some complexities with timescales such as contractors having to contact people to access property, having to contact organisations such as Dwr Cymru or Planning for some works. Targets had been set taking into account these complexities, and Officers had not wanted to set targets that would fail.
- Members referred to cases whereby people had felt the timescales were too long and asked if complaints were received to this regard. Officers stated that this can vary, works are completed as quickly as possible and if there are going to be delays then the important thing is communication; also communication with contractors is key and this is improved in the new framework.

AGREED – That the Chairperson on behalf of the Committee writes to the Cabinet Member conveying the observations of the Committee when discussing the way forward.

34 : LETTINGS POLICIES IN HIGH RISE BLOCKS BRIEFING

The Chairperson welcomed Jane Thomas (Assistant Director, Communities and Housing) and Ellen Curtis (Operational Manager, Landlord Services) to the meeting.

Members were provided with a presentation on Lettings Policies in High Rise Block Buildings after which the Chairperson invited questions and comments from Members:

- Members asked what constituted a high rise block and were advised that it was above 4 floors, all Cardiff's blocks varied between 9 and 11 floors.
- Members asked if there were any concerns about fire risk in the blocks and if any works were needed. Officers explained that the blocks did not have the same type of cladding as Grenfell Tower, however all blocks were being checked with regards to fire breaks and sprinklers. There were no specific concerns.
- Members noted that 50% of 2 bedroom flats were in Whitchurch in the Hollybush estate, and asked if there had been any increase in general anti-social behaviour or child related anti-social behaviour. Officers advised that there had not been any rise in anti-social behaviour for either.
- Members noted that previously the Council had not let flats in high rise blocks to families with children, but had changed this policy based on legal advice. Members asked for further explanation on this. Officers explained that the Policy had been in place historically, and when they had looked into it they could find no reason why. They had taken legal advice from the Council's own housing solicitor and it was also stated that no other local authority had such a policy in place.

- Members asked if quality of life was taken into account, Officers stated that there simply was not enough housing, the high rise flats were in good locations, close to schools, parks and shops.
- The issue of difficulty in letting these flats previously was noted. Officers stated the people on top of the waiting lists were families and disabled people; they had previously had to go further down the waiting list to fill the flats; now there was a more balanced community mix in the high rise blocks.
- Members asked if there had been any consultation with the people that had lived in the blocks before the policy changed. Officers explained that they haven't gone back to ask them since, but there had been no issues raised.
- Members asked how Officers had addressed the concerns of those who were not supportive of the change in policy. Officers stated that they had addressed what issue they could, for example they were keeping to a density of under 40% with children.
- Members noted that families may have more children while living in the flats and asked how that 40% density could be monitored. Officers advised that currently the density was well under 40%, but they were using Housing Benefit records to monitor this currently. It was noted however that under Universal Credit this information would no longer be available to the Council.
- Members asked when the last risk assessment of high rise blocks was undertaken. Officers explained that they are all done at annually by the compliance team; the fire service also carry out checks and check the Council's own assessments too.

AGREED – That the Chairperson on behalf of the Committee writes to the Cabinet Member conveying the observations of the Committee when discussing the way forward.

35 : COUNCIL HOUSING VOIDS - 12 MONTH REVIEW

The Chairperson welcomed Jane Thomas (Assistant Director, Communities and Housing) and Ellen Curtis (Operational Manager, Landlord Services) to the meeting.

Members were provided with a presentation on Council Housing Voids – 12 Month Review after which the Chairperson invited questions and comments from Members:

- Members were pleased to see that all the recommendations from the Committee's Deep Dive into Voids had been addressed.
- Members noted that they had asked for surveys of tenants leaving properties within 6 months to be undertaken and asked if this had been done. Officers advised that they had looked at this, and there were no people leaving in that timescale, they were conducting exit surveys for all tenants leaving which was useful; people were generally satisfied but some issues had been raised.

- Members noted the move to the three contractors and asked what would happen in the interim. Officers advised that the current contractor was running down jobs and wasn't starting any new jobs, so before the new contracts start there would inevitably be a dip in performance in general voids.
- Members asked what the main reason was for a property becoming void and were advised that the main reason was Deaths at 40%, then people moving into care homes or to live with relatives and people buying their own homes.
- Members asked what the average rent was for a 2 or 3 bedroom house and were advised that it was just under £100 per week.
- Members sought more information on the customer care element of the new contracts and were advised that written into the new contract was a customer care specification which included things like contractors wearing uniforms, carrying ID, communicating with tenants and leaving a job clean and tidy. This included taking away any debris or rubbish from the job.
- Members asked if there had been a re-working of the Complaints Procedure and a framework for Performance Issues developed. Officers advised that the Complaints procedure had been assessed and refreshed. With regards to performance, this had been very specific, officers had sought private legal advice to ensure a robust and very clear process to make penalties/financial deductions if there was non-delivery/non-performance.
- Members noted the 65 day timescale to let a permanent residence and considered this was a long time. Members asked for some examples of the major works that are undertaken in this timescale. Officers explained that many tenants have been resident in a property for many years before they become void. Many tenants do not wish to have updated kitchens and bathrooms etc. as they do not want the disruption. When properties became void, works such as these are undertaken and properties are brought up to WHQS standards with work such as asbestos removal, flattening gardens etc. being undertaken. It was noted however that 25% of properties are quick turnarounds and that properties are always kept safe even if they haven't been modernised.

AGREED – That the Chairperson on behalf of the Committee writes to the Cabinet Member conveying the observations of the Committee when discussing the way forward.

36 : COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Members were advised that the report sets out a summary of the Committee's business since September 2017, which included an update on Correspondence sent and received, an updated Work Programme 2017/18, an update on the joint Inquiry into Drugs and Knife Crime in Cardiff; and an update from the Committee's Performance Panel.

RESOLVED: to note the report.

37 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Community and Adult Services Scrutiny Committee is scheduled for 4.30pm on 17 January 2018.

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