



Kensington & Chelsea Advice Forum

Tuesday 11 September 2018, 10.00am – 12.30pm
Committee Room 1, Kensington Town Hall, Hornton Street, W8 7NX

Chair: Joe Batty (JB), KCSC
Minutes taken by: Alice Lowry (AL), KCSC

Item	Notes	Action
1	Forum meeting commences – minutes of the last meeting & matters arising	
	Joe introduced himself to the forum and explained that he was chairing on behalf of Angela Spence who sent her apologies. The minutes were approved however there were two matters arising. Alice will re-send the PIP leaflet to group members and liaise with RBKC about the new online housing benefit form which needs testing.	AL to resend PIP leaflet AL to chase up housing benefit form action
2	Update on the role of RBKC Environmental team within the private rented sector – Anju Sidhu, Bi-borough Team Manager, Private Housing & Health Service	
	<p>Private rented sector presentation</p> <p>Anju introduced herself to the group and began by explaining what national drivers were shaping the service the RBKC Environmental team provide (listed in presentation) and driving factors for the local area. She explained that they were doing a lot of work around:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focusing on fire, damp and mould growth, excess cold etc. • Responding to complaints – she said the team do respond to complaints but residents need to use the triage system which is currently under review • Houses of multiple occupants (HMO's) licensing has been focused on. Nearly 200 houses have not been licensed as they still need fit and proper landlords. • Gathering intelligence <p>Discussion points after the presentation included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A group member asked Anju how many people were in the Private Housing & Health Service department. She was concerned about housing associations being put to one side and private rented sector solely being focused on. Understaffed and need weight and power needed to get housing associations. Anju explained the Environmental Team were reviewing their triage complaints system due to concerns over its effectiveness. The department is under resourced and they are looking at hiring new staff members. • A member suggested that residents themselves may not know how to use complaints systems put in place. Should there be training put in place for residents on estates so that they are aware of how to use the system? Another member argued that the majority of housing estates already have these 	

	<p>measures put in place.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The group discussed how the environmental team have been focusing on reviewing buildings with cladding in the borough. Anju said that the team post Grenfell had been given a list of properties by the Home Office which were of concern. The team had sent out officers to check the buildings and gone through validation exercises with building surveyors. 	
3	<p>Update on local housing matters – Robert Shaw, Special Projects Lead, RBKC Housing Team</p>	
	<p>Update on local housing matters presentation</p> <p>Robert updated the group on progress with the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA). He explained that in principle the Housing Reduction Act has the best intentions but the legislation is tricky. The main updates included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> New housing advisors An upgraded IT system to enable reporting to Government (HCLIC) but implementation has been problematic for most boroughs. Rob explained that the government is unsure what it wants to report on yet. Further staff training will be implemented including customer skills to ensure staff can explore with residents what they want the service to provide for them. Updating main pages on the website to reflect HRA changes. The complexity of homeless cases has increased. The level of challenge has also increased for the Council due to distrust from residents. The Housing Team is working with St Mungo’s to help single people access the private rented sector accommodation. <p>The key questions which arose included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What work was being done within the borough regarding provision for rough sleepers. Rob stated that provision in the borough was actually very good – the actual amount of entrenched rough sleepers in the borough is between 20-30. However he did say that there has been an increase in the more challenging cases. One group member asked whether there has been an increase in rough sleepers from Eastern Europe. Robert said that in 2016-17 there was an increase in migration to West London but he would need to look into this further. <p>Robert then moved on to update the group on the Local Lettings Plan for the Lancaster West Estate.</p> <p>Key questions asked by the group included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> One group member asked about the voids on the Lancaster West Estate and about how long these properties are being kept empty for. Robert explained that some of these are being used as part of a refurb consultation with a company called W11. He expressed that there was a need to move quickly but that it was also key to get this right. The Wider Grenfell Rehousing Scheme was then discussed and the deadline for residents to decide whether they wished to return to their previous properties. Robert stated that the 20th September deadline was a soft one. One group member was concerned about the Local Lettings Plan and whether there was an Equality impact assessment. Robert stated that this was currently in progress. Another group member counteracted this and said that they had 	<p>RS to find out about Eastern Europeans sleeping rough for JB</p>

	spoken to the Equality & Human Rights Commission who said that the quality and impact assessment was barely legal. The group member met with them in March and is still waiting to hear back for feedback.	
4	Ethical Debt Collection – Mark Stewart, Head of Customer Operations, Enforcement & Recovery, RBKC Ethical Debt Collection presentation Mark gave an overview of what ethical debt collection is. Ethical debt collection is essentially the process of collecting debt in a positive manner which enhances the reputation of the Council amongst residents, providing a transparent service from end to end. The Hammersmith & Fulham model was launched in 2017 and they have been working alongside 1st Credit -an award-winning debt purchaser, known for taking a highly ethical approach to debt collection – in particular treating customers fairly. The aim was to reduce the amount of cases taken to court by reducing the “heavy handed” use of bailiffs which can strain the public. Mark said that RBKC are currently looking at their literature and website to improve engagement with residents regarding council tax debt. They are also looking to improve current services such as direct debit payments etc. and differentiate people who can’t pay their council tax as opposed to people who could pay but haven’t due to forgetfulness etc. and then looking at how to help both strands. Key discussions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A group member wanted to know how staff members identify vulnerable people in debt and whether staff would take into account information from advice agencies. Mark said that they can only take into account issues when they are presented to them and once they have any information they will flag it on to the system so they can engage with the resident and signpost them. The group member said this was not always effective. 	
5	Update from the Department for Work and Pensions – Dee Solanki, Partnership Manager, Department for Work and Pensions Universal Credit presentation Escalation presentation Dee introduced himself to the group and explained that he and the rest of his team were aware of how the implementation of Universal Credit in north Kensington could upheave residents. He stated that the DWP team have a dedicated work coach solely focusing on cases affected by the Grenfell Tower Fire. He explained that a lot of focus is going into the digital platform for Universal Credit and that the DWP were giving money to the Council for digital assistants who could support and advise residents accessing and navigating services. He also informed the group that the DWP were working with landlords and on alternative payment arrangements. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group members were keen to find out the names of the escalation strategic leads. AL to find out leads and circulate in PowerPoint from DS. The group were also told that when Universal Credit went live there would also be a direct number advice agencies could contact if there were any issues. • A member asked whether there were people specifically working on Grenfell cases (around claiming benefits). Dee explained that the DWP were working closely with the Local Authority and other organisations such as The Curve to ensure that cases are dealt with appropriately. 	AL to find out strategic leads from DS
6	Update from strategic meetings and members on current services	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was an update from the Grenfell Scrutiny Committee and discussions around the deadline for the Wider Grenfell Rehousing Scheme. One group member agreed to email Joe to speak to Faisal to see if it was possible to put something on Grenfell Speaks. • Both Citizens Advice and members of Emma Dent Coades office explained that they were focusing a lot of their resources on the issue of the Grenfell Wider Housing Policy and the deadline. A discussion was then had on the possibility of organising a meeting with the residents who are affected by the policy. 	Holly to find out if there is an update on a date from EHRC
7	Discussion and agreement on proposed agenda items for future meetings	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members were keen for Mark Stewart to return to the forum to update members on ethical debt collection. • Members were keen for the Council to attend the next meeting to discuss how the implementation of Universal Credit has affected the borough. 	Al to contact MS to present at next forum
8	AOB	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members of Emma Dent Coades office said that they had a dedicated inbox for DWP emergencies. DWP workers at the meeting said that their staff members were not familiar with it. 	

ATTENDANCE LIST

	Organisation
1	Action Disability Kensington & Chelsea
2	Carers Network
3	Citizens Advice Kensington & Chelsea
4	DWP
5	Edith Durham Community
6	KCSC
7	K&C Forum for Older Residents
8	Mad Alliance/NSUN
9	Notting Hill Genesis
10	Nucleus L Advice
11	Office of Emma Dent Coad MP
12	Oliver Fisher Solicitors

13	RBKC
14	RBKC Benefits
15	World's End Neighbourhood Advice Centre