



KENSINGTON AND CHELSEA ADVICE FORUM

16 March 2022, 10:00am – 11:30am
Virtual meeting via Zoom

Chair: Angela Spence (AS), KCSC
Minutes taken by: Fenn Reynolds (FR), KCSC

| Item | Notes | Action |
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| 1 | <p>Welcome and Introduction– Angela Spence, CEO, KCSC</p> <p>Agenda</p> <p>AS welcomed everyone to the forum and went through the meeting ground rules.</p> | |
| 2 | <p>Community Protects: Covid-19 & Vaccine Awareness Grant Update – Linda Thomas, Futurebright Solutions</p> <p>Presentation</p> <p>Linda Thomas (LT) began her slide deck by summarising the grant, funded by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) to deliver an initiative that supports community groups to engage local populations, with a specific purpose:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o To raise awareness within communities who have the lowest rates of COVID-19 vaccine uptake o To promote uptake, and Public Health guidance o To understand local issues and barriers o To understand the effects of Long COVID <p>The budget is released through Public Health teams, the bi-borough team are working through KCSC and One Westminster to engage with the wider community and voluntary sector in each borough.</p> <p>Funding is available to CICs, registered charities, community groups/smaller advice groups. Funds will cover, among other things, project overheads, staff and volunteer costs, and venue hire.</p> <p>The scope of the project cover initiatives that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Minimise practical barriers to vaccine access o Tackle misinformation o Increase trust around vaccine safety o Improve reach of official messages deeper into communities o Provide insight and feedback to Public Health on needs and issues, including those affected by Long COVID o Work with audiences with lower vaccine uptake, e.g. young people, pregnant women, minority ethnic communities, etc. | |

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| | <p>Support is available during the application process, and 1-2-1 sessions with each successful project will commence from April onwards.</p> <p>The deadline for the funding is Monday 21 March at 12pm. Confirmation of the successful bid will be w/c 28 March, and project activities are to be completed by 31 July 2022.</p> <p>This concluded LT's presentation.</p> | |
| <p>3</p> | <p>Proposed Changes to the Housing Allocations Scheme – Elrica Degirmen & Wendy Thomas, Policy & Strategy, RBKC</p> | |
| | <p>Presentation</p> <p>Elrica Degirmen (ED) began by talking through the slide deck. ED noted that Housing Allocations includes both council stock housing, but also housing that is received nominally by housing associations and registered providers.</p> <p>Since the most recent policy review in 2017, engagement work and a 12-week consultation has taken place which closed in February 2022. RBKC are looking to work with teams to both revise the policy, and to communicate changes to those on the housing register.</p> <p>Sections that ED noted as areas that RBKC were looking to explore include tackling overcrowding, bedroom sharing and waiting time points. ED opened the floor to questions on specific areas.</p> <p>A member asked regarding prevention points, whether ED could expand more on the encouragement of residents to move into the private sector. ED responded that due to the lack of social housing, one of the main tools to prevent households from becoming homeless and going in to temporary accommodation is to encourage them to move into the PRS (Private Rented Sector). This is done on a voluntary incentive basis.</p> <p>Currently, if a household is on the housing register and they elect of their own accord to move into PRS housing, they would then lose their status on the housing register. One of the considerations is that those who voluntarily move into PRS at any stage would remain/ qualify for the housing register even if they move out of borough.</p> <p>In the slide deck, ED notes that feedback from focus groups found that residents suggested helping people move out of RBKC if that is what want, to give people more choice in where they live. Another member, working for a housing charity, noted that they would be keen to see resident engagement work on this topic, as it differs what they see in their own work. The member then went on to ask how long these residents could stay on the housing register for. ED responded to this point by noting that the proposal wasn't time limited, but is up for discussion.</p> <p>A member queried the number of people in total who were currently on the register, and whether there is cut off point where the points reflecting a residents housing needs are so low that they are excluded from the register or bidding. ED estimated approximately 3000 households on the register, 2000 of which are in temporary accommodation. In response to the points question, ED said that there</p> | |

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| | <p>are some households that have received 0 points, but remain on the register seeking sheltered housing.</p> <p>ED expanded about penalties, contextualising the current situation whereby homeless applicants are duty discharged if one suitable offer is refused, and therefore no further offers are made. Non-homelessness applications are suspended for 12 months if two refusals are made over a 12 month period. ED noted that in practice she hasn't seen this happen. Temporary accommodation residents can be suspended from bidding if they have significant rent arrears, and can resume bidding after the debt is cleared.</p> <p>Responses from the consultation indicated that people should be able to decline more offers without penalty, and that some people were confused and worried about being penalised for declining an offer. Considerations to be made included removing all sanctions except for those who have a homelessness duty accepted.</p> <p>On the topic, another member asked a question regarding penalties for homeless families that fall in to areas. They made the point that temporary accommodation anywhere is expensive, and that often the small amount of money provided through benefits doesn't cover the full amount of rent, and therefore they will always be in arrears.</p> <p>Wendy Thomas (WT) responded by noting that when someone goes into temporary accommodation, an affordability check takes place and there is a write-off if benefits won't cover both rent and living costs.</p> <p>A member noted that this session has been useful, but has raised 100 questions with their organisation, and requested a follow up. WT noted that she would welcome that and that sooner rather than later would be good.</p> <p>A member said that given that Kensington and Chelsea has the highest number of properties owned by Russian oligarchs and that their funds are likely to be frozen, has it been suggested that those houses are used for people waiting for housing. They expressed that they hoped that RBKC are liaising with the government about this. WT said that she'd have to speak to a lead member on that, as that information hadn't percolated down. An exercise around empty homes has taken place, and WT said that there will be an officer who will be looking in to filling empty homes.</p> <p>This concluded this section.</p> | <p>AS to explore options for future meeting</p> |
| <p>4</p> | <p>Cash First – Baljit Badesha, Director, Nucleus Legal Advice Centre</p> | |
| | <p>Baljit Badesha (BB) introduced the Household Support Grant that advice agencies are administering with The K&C Foundation. BB stated that the Cost of Living has risen 3%, but is likely to rise to around 8% in October, which is more like to be around 11-12% for poorer households, dependent on what they spend their money on. Mainly food, rent and fuel is affected.</p> | |

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| | <p>BB added context by noting that after the £20 Universal Credit uplift was removed, a Household Support Fund was given to local authorities to be split in to help with rent, and to help with fuel and food costs.</p> <p>K&C Foundation, working with Age UK, Citizens Advice and Nucleus were approached by RBKC with funding, and subsequently approached other funders for match funding, for a programme designed to provide emergency cash for fuel, food etc.</p> <p>Emergency payments can be made up to £1000, so arears can be cleared if need be. BB noted that it should be seen as a wider effort by advice agencies to tackle underlying issues, and goes alongside advice services.</p> <p>BB moved on to explain Cash First, a programme to provide emergency cash directly to clients in a preventative measure against their issues getting bigger – for example in the case of the five-week waiting period for Universal Credit.</p> <p>The programme works, once a client is approved, by providing that client with a code that they can use at a cash machine. The client doesn't have to be part of a bank or have a bank account, and the idea behind this is to prevent the money being swallowed up by an overdraft or to pay a loan etc.</p> <p>Regarding referrals, BB noted listed the partners as Citizens Advice Kensington & Chelsea, World's End Neighbourhood Advice Centre, Age UK Kensington & Chelsea and Nucleus. Any of these organisations can be approached.</p> <p>This concluded this section.</p> | |
| 5 | Breakout Groups – Networking and Catch Up | |
| | <p>The session was broken up into two groups for a catch-up on where organisations are at in their work.</p> | |
| 6 | Member Updates | |
| | <p>Julia Pena (JP) from The ClementJames Centre updated on events including a Community Energy talk by Green Doctors, who will be taking referrals for their services. Her contact email is julia@clementjames.org</p> <p>Ann Goodger (AG) of the Dalgarno Trust spoke about NHS Advance Health Checks taking place as part of the Grenfell recovery programme. Two sessions will take place on 24 March and 7 April, and AG encouraged other organisations to do, as it's a great opportunity for residents to be with a GP for 30 minutes.</p> <p>BB introduced Megan Redhouse, Nucleus' new Service and Development manager. BB noted that there is potential for more walk in sessions for clients popping up over the coming weeks.</p> <p>AS promoted the Integrated Care Partnership (Place-Based Partnership) information event taking place on 23 March.</p> <p>This concluded the forum.</p> | |

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| 7 | Close | |

ATTENDANCE LIST

| | Name | Organisation |
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| 1 | Aida Morales | World's End Neighbourhood Advice Centre |
| 2 | Angela Spence | KCSC |
| 3 | Ann Goodger | Dalgarno Trust |
| 4 | Arantxa Gaba | Citizens Advice Kensington & Chelsea |
| 5 | Baljit Badesha | Nucleus Legal Advice Centre |
| 6 | Fenn Reynolds | KCSC |
| 7 | Jacky Peacock | Advice4renters |
| 8 | James Barrell | Shelter |
| 9 | James Cairns | Citizens Advice Kensington & Chelsea |
| 10 | Julia Pena | ClementJames |
| 11 | Laurence Wilson | Citizens Advice Kensington & Chelsea |
| 12 | Megan Redhouse | Nucleus Legal Advice Centre |
| 13 | Rob Kelly | AUKC |
| 14 | Russell Conway | Oliver Fisher Solicitors |
| 15 | Sarah Simms | Crosslight Advice |
| 16 | Yawooz Izzat | Westminster Supplementary School |

The information above will appear in minutes for this meeting which will be made available to all the attendees and published on KCSC's website.