



KENSINGTON AND CHELSEA ADVICE FORUM

Tuesday 8 September 2020, 10.00am – 11.30am
Virtual meeting via Teams

Chair: Joe Batty (JB), KCSC
Minutes taken by: Zina Serageldin (ZS), KCSC

Item	Notes	Action
1	<p>Welcome and Introduction – Joe Batty, Senior Community Development & Engagement Officer, KCSC</p>	
	<p>Agenda</p> <p>JB welcomed everyone to the forum and informed them that unfortunately, Peter Ryan and Dee Solanki from the Department of Works and Pensions were unable to attend to present on ‘Challenge areas and opportunities’, due to technical difficulties.</p>	
2	<p>Introduction to Daniel Ferlance Head of Homelessness, RBKC and update on the homelessness and rough sleeping strategy consultation – Daniel Ferlance, Head of Homelessness RBKC, Linda Lauris, Prevention Manager RBKC and Rob Shaw, Housing Strategy and Policy Manager RBKC</p>	
	<p>Housing Needs-The Future presentation</p> <p>Daniel Ferlance (DF) who joined the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea Council (RBKC) as Head of Homelessness from the London Borough of Southwark introduced himself. The environment he came from was heavily into partnership work and prevention which he would like to take forward in terms of focus in RBKC.</p> <p>At the heart to DF’s values system is the question “What if it were you?”, central to this is empowerment to enable solutions. DF highlighted the different stages that people needing help are seen by borough Councils across London. The aim for the team is to increase prevention and reduce relief. The plan is to get to people before they are in crisis and improve the outcomes with this earlier intervention. This will include going out to venues to meet people rather than hold surgeries at the Town Hall and to have conversations with individuals rather than relay on written correspondence.</p> <p><u>Homelessness Strategy</u></p> <p>A proposed eight-point plan is being presented to the RBKC Executive for approval. DF stresses that partnership work would be at the heart of what he would like to achieve. Periodic data will now be issued showing what is being done and how. Work on improving the lack of information on key services is being carried out.</p> <p>Daniel.Ferlance@rbkc.gov.uk 07812 148 528</p> <p>Key discussion points following on from the presentation included:</p>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparedness for the increase in homelessness when the ban on evictions is lifted was raised. This is expected to have a great impact on the centre of the borough. The Homelessness Team would like to be ahead of the curve then this occurs. It is hoped that the survey being carried out will allow for as many people as possible to be helped before they reach a crisis situation. • Nucleus had visited all departments in the homelessness services team in Southwark, they felt the work done there was excellent. • Figures in the presentation charts are based on H-CLIC (Homelessness Case Level Information Collection) data submitted to central government between January 2020 and March 2020. Interest was raised in actual numbers being helped and comparison with numbers in other boroughs especially given the expected rise. • Private accommodation is very difficult to find in the centre and South of the borough where a high increase in evictions is expected. DF acknowledge the challenges that RBKC and most London boroughs will face. The aim is to identify people and give them an option to move where they would like to live if local accommodation cannot be sourced. • There are two access points to temporary accommodation – emergency and long term possibly outside of the borough. The Council’s duty of care is only discharged after suitable accommodation has been secured. The length of time spent in temp accommodation is currently too long. Lobbying is still taking place so that families can remain near their networks. Alternative options are also being looked at. • Work is being done with other local authorities to ensure that families introduced to private landlords and given a two-year contract who are evicted following this period are not refused assistance by that local authority. A gap in need resettlement and support for those placed in private sector has been noted. There is currently less likelihood of having a housing officer for those placed in the private rented sector DF will be looking at introducing that into the new service design for RBKC • Engagement with residents needs to be looked at in-line with other Council services. What matters is that information and engagement with residents on key questions is being shared. The next consultation on the allocation scheme will adopt this approach of soft engagement with resident to make sure they are there at the beginning and that they shape some of the ideas being taken forward before a more formal stage is launched. 	
3	<p>Council Tax Reduction Consultation – Andrew Wilson, Training officer RBKC - Benefits Service</p>	
	<p>Council Tax Reduction Consultation</p> <p>Andrew Wilson discussed a banded income scheme he and the housing benefits service team wish to propose to address the issue of Council Tax reduction and repeat billing for households on Universal Credit.</p> <p>These issues have been in existence for some time, households have been unable to get onto instalment plans or have had plans overridden by a new bill. Now with almost 3000 households in the borough on universal credit and with that number expected to increase, the team feel that the matter has to be addressed.</p> <p>The banded scheme for Council Tax Reduction is not a perfect scheme and has with an inherent unfairness. The scheme has tried to mitigate this as much as possible by making the proposal as generous as possible. Most people will get the most income tax reduction possible, more than that on the current scheme but</p>	

	<p>problems of fluctuating income will still present households with problems prioritising payments.</p> <p>A Housing Benefit style scheme where local councils administered universal credit would have been a preference. The Department for Works and Pensions did not favour this proposal. Council tax benefits are unsupported by the rest of the system, funding has declined as have resulting staffing levels.</p> <p>Over the last two years 63 Councils across the country have moved into a banded income scheme.</p> <p>There is a consultation period which ends on 13 September 2020. A report will be presented to the RBKC leadership team on 8 October summarising problem that needs to be solved, listing options available and why the scheme has been selected as the only one available to them. Included will be the consultation response analysis.</p> <p>Key discussion points following on from the presentation included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation is on the Council's website on the benefits page. All people on UC have received a paper copy of the consultation. • Expanding it by putting a paragraph to cover people who have got into arrears because their earning patterns have not been enough to cover the taxes Applications received and granted Discretionary relief 	
4	<p>Update from Nucleus - Baljit Badesha, Director, Nucleus</p>	
	<p>A decision was made early on to close the office to ensure the safety of staff and service users. Although initially unprepared for remote working staff were up and running quickly but isolation and remote working was not ideal. Nucleus was able to set up systems including the purchase of laptops and the use of SLACK Wi-Fi telephones, through funding, that enabled everyone to work as a team and make use of expertise within the team to continue a service for clients that has been running well.</p> <p>The next stage was trying to get back to the office to provide a skeleton service of sorts. All existing clients were contacted by Nucleus it took up resources but highlighted how many people were being supported by the government (evictions on hold, food parcels, Council tax on hold) and how many had additional support requirements. Surprisingly the average age of people making enquiries had dropped by 10 years. This was mainly for employment, loss of family, debt and housing (more private sector and challenges for younger people including eviction).</p> <p>There is an open door policy where possible, Monday to Friday 10am – 4.30pm, to catch people who are not used to or unable to technology, require language and literacy support or want the reassurance or seeing someone to pass on information/documents. This also applies to phone lines which are open.</p> <p>A consultation to see what was holding people going back or from returning to work was carried out. The loss of an office environment was apparent. Bubbles have been formed based on the types of work done and who they needed to work with. This has been a boost to moral even though it is currently only about 20% of the team go in one day a week. Volunteers are helping keep the reception area open but this is only being used for document drop off and people who can not access technology but this is not being advertised in any way.</p>	

	<p>Nucleus saw a three- fold increase in April/May 2020 from 50 queries to 150 queries a month. This while furlough protections were still in place and before mass redundancies start.</p> <p>Employment cases referred for specialist advice graph shared following the meeting.</p> <p>Nucleus are still in touch with existing client groups and getting new client referrals. An increase in under 65s requiring help with food vouchers has been noticed, this has correlated with a decrease in their income. Debt queries are high and housing and employment queries have gone up. There is concern about debt and housing when council tax bills start going out again. BB noted that there is a need to develop webforms for referrals to make them information rich.</p> <p>Focus is on providing a service for the groups already in the system while providing a service for the groups who have never been in contact with the benefits system before now contacting them. Work is continuing on increasing housing and on funding bids.</p>	
5	Organisational updates	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Judith Blakeman (JB) was concerned about the difficulty in locating RBKC consultation information. JB committed to contacting the Council to see if something centralised could be organised to remedy this. <p>BB suggested that a request for this link to be added to bills and letters sent out should be made.</p> <p>Following the meeting the following link to the RBKC Current consultations page was circulated.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> JB drew the members attention to the Grenfell Network Group mailings being out. A link to the 9 September 2020 mailing was provided Grenfell Network Group news bulletin. BB let the group know that a new housing service was starting to prevent homeless. It is funded by KC Foundation and will be open to referrals from other agencies first. There is not much a resource for this but they are interested in the post holder going out and working with other community organisations. JB suggested connecting with organisations providing food. <p>BB will send JB details.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> JB explained that a KCSC team member will be ringing organisations to ask how they have weathered the Covid-19 situation. Please expect a request to respond by phone or by e-mail. AS feedback that funding for 2020-2021 corporate grants funding is expected to remain the same. This would be confirmed. <p>Other boroughs are looking at localised track and trace. When information is available an update will be provided.</p> <p>RBKC has set up a test centre at KCC details will be circulated.</p>	<p>JB</p> <p>JB</p> <p>BB</p> <p>All</p> <p>AS</p> <p>AS/JB</p> <p>JB</p>

	If you have any items you would like KCSC to focus on for the next meeting please e-mail Joe , Angela or Zina .	
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ATTENDANCE LIST

	Name	Organisation
1	Abby Simpson	Marie Stopes UK
2	Adrian Cooper	North Kensington Law Centre
3	Alex Gajic	Portobello Business Centre
4	Andrew Wilson	Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC)
5	Angela Spence	Kensington and Chelsea Social Council (KCSC)
6	Ann Goodger	The Dalgarno Trust
7	Arantxa Gaba	Citizens Advice Kensington and Chelsea
8	Baljit Badesha	Nucleus
9	Becky Austin	The ClementJames Centre
10	Benjoly M.L. Bapindikwa	French African Welfare Association (FAWA)
11	Bupinder Verdi	Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC)
12	Dr Julie Scheiner	Change Grow Live (CGL)
13	Joe Batty	Kensington and Chelsea Social Council (KCSC)
14	Judith Blakeman	BME Health Forum
15	Osama El-Amin	Westway Trust
16	Robert Shaw	Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC)
17	Rozie Beaumont	Nucleus
18	Sarah Sutton	Checkmate!
19	Sarah Sutton	Crosslight Advice
20	Sibel Whitehead	Supportmatch Homeshare CIC
21	Sophie Fitzhugh	Rugby Portobello Trust
22	Sophie Fitzhugh	Rugby Portobello Trust
23	Vittoria De Meo	FOR WOMEN CIC
24	Zina Serageldin	Kensington and Chelsea Social Council (KCSC)

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.