

Housing & Community Safety Scrutiny Sub-Committee

Tuesday 24 February 2015

7.00 pm

Ground Floor Meeting Room G02A - 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

Membership

Councillor Tom Flynn (Chair)
Councillor Ben Johnson (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Vijay Luthra
Councillor Claire Maugham
Councillor Damian O'Brien
Councillor Martin Seaton
Councillor Johnson Situ
Cris Claridge
Miriam Facey
John Nosworthy
Michael Orey

Reserves

Councillor Neil Coyle
Councillor Karl Eastham
Councillor Gavin Edwards
Councillor David Hubber
Councillor Lorraine Lauder MBE
Councillor Hamish McCallum

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Contact Fitzroy Williams on 020 7525 7102 or email: fitzroy.williams@southwark.gov.uk

Members of the committee are summoned to attend this meeting

Eleanor Kelly

Chief Executive

Date: 16th February 2015



Housing & Community Safety Scrutiny Sub-Committee

Tuesday 24 February 2015
7.00 pm

Ground Floor Meeting Room G02A - 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

Order of Business

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PART A - OPEN BUSINESS

1. **APOLOGIES**

2. **NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR DEEMS URGENT**

In special circumstances, an item of business may be added to an agenda within five clear working days of the meeting.

3. **DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS**

Members to declare any interests and dispensations in respect of any item of business to be considered at this meeting.

4. **MINUTES**

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To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the open section of the meeting held on 26th January 2015.

5. **COUNCILLOR LEO POLLAK - DEPUTY CABINET MEMBER OF EXCELLENCE IN DESIGN**

To discuss excellence in design as your role of Deputy Cabinet Member.

6. **TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION & HOMELESSNESS - UPDATE**

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DISCUSSION OF ANY OTHER OPEN ITEMS AS NOTIFIED AT THE START OF THE MEETING.

PART B - CLOSED BUSINESS

Item No.

Title

Page No.

**DISCUSSION OF ANY CLOSED ITEMS AS NOTIFIED AT THE START
OF THE MEETING AND ACCEPTED BY THE CHAIR AS URGENT.**

Date: 16th February 2015



HOUSING & COMMUNITY SAFETY SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Housing & Community Safety Scrutiny Sub-Committee held on Monday 26 January 2015 at 7.00 pm at Ground Floor Meeting Room G02A - 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

PRESENT: Councillor Tom Flynn (Chair)
 Councillor Ben Johnson (Vice-Chair)
 Councillor Vijay Luthra
 Councillor Martin Seaton
 Councillor Johnson Situ
 Michael Orey

OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT: Councillor Richard Livingstone

OFFICER SUPPORT: Gerri Scott – Strategic Director of Housing and Community Services
 Paul Langford – Head of Operations
 Jonathon Toy – Head of Community Safety and Enforcement
 Shelley Burke – Head of Scrutiny
 Fitzroy Williams – Scrutiny Officer

1. APOLOGIES

1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Cris Claridge, Councillor Damian O'Brien and Councillor Claire Maugham. Councillor Karl Eastham reserve member would be replacing Councillor Maugham for this meeting.

2. NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR DEEMS URGENT

2.1 There were no urgent items.

3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

3.1 There were no disclosures of interests or dispensations.

4. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 21 October 2014 and 25 November 2014 be agreed as a correct record.

5. ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR AND NOISE TEAM - DISCUSSION

5.1 The chair invited Jonathon Toy (Head of Community Safety & Enforcement) to give a briefing on anti-social behaviour and the noise team to the sub-committee.

5.2 The Head of Community Safety & Enforcement reported that he would present the noise service and anti-social behaviour separately. Members were informed that Southwark offers a fairly comprehensive noise service, which responds to about 8,000 calls per year and operates from Monday to Thursday (8.00 – 2.30 a.m.) and at the weekend the service was extended to (4.00 - 4.30 a.m.) depending on the demand for the service.

5.3 The service was adjusted according to the season, two teams operating during the winter period, and three teams during the summer period.

5.4 Members were informed that in the past officers had tended to respond to and deal with statutory noise issues and this had been a particular issue to some residents. An example given was a qualified noise officer would need to identify noise in relation to both the source and how it was affecting the person complaining about it, often this would mean attending the home/business and making sure the noise was of such a level that it affects a reasonable person. Many residents do not want someone knocking on their door, they just wanted the noise to stop and for officers to be proactive in their approach.

5.5 During the last few months when noise officers hear about a noise nuisance they spoke to the person or address causing the nuisance and asked for something to be done about it, like reducing the level of noise. This was something officers were developing as a service and would respond to residents needs.

5.6 The Head of Community Safety & Enforcement stated Anti-Social Behaviour officers had been looking long and hard into the

concerns of local residents. Officers had been considering how the service operates and how often issues were dealt with on a single issue basis, an example given was a licensed premise where when a nuisance was reported the licensing officer would go along and respond.

- 5.7 If the council were dealing with trading standards issues the trading standards officers would respond to those matters and the same with anti-social services. A good way to move forward would be to adopt a much more multi-agency approach. Anti-social behaviour was not isolated to estates or public realm areas, quite often it crosses over a number of issues and requires a much greater multi-faceted response, sometimes dealing with business, residential or freeholder premises and that was the kind of service the council now needs to be provide. Officers were working with the cabinet member about how the council could design the services to have a multi-agency response.
- 5.8 Members were informed that if there was one issue that still required some more work it would be the drug supply markets, not necessarily in terms of high profile business premises but particularly the open use of cannabis that was so prevalent to local residents and which officers have a lot of concerns.
- 5.9 The sub-committee were informed that last week there was a joint operation with the police and council in relation to an area around Lindsey Street that related to a number of drug related activities. There were a number of arrests, good work had taken place with community safety, housing, police and other services. Interestingly there were business premises involved in this activity and not only about residential issues and pressures, it was a mixture of things going on and the council needed to make the best use of resources as this may be the best approach for the future.
- 5.10 The chair thanked the Head of Community Safety & Enforcement for the introduction and welcomed the insight into the work going on in the department.

Noise Service

- 5.11 A member asked what can officers do if the person making the noise refuses to turn down the noise?
- 5.12 The Head of Community Safety & Enforcement reported if the noise officer knocked on the door and believed there was an issue and asks the person to turn the noise down and they were to say no, the officer would then look at the statutory powers that they had and consider serving a notice or take further action of entering the premises and removing the equipment making the noise, which was a course of action that they had within their powers but would not wish to do in the first instance. There were prosecution powers

available but there were a number of steps that would need to be taken in advance.

- 5.13 A member stated there was an example in his ward recently where bins were moved to provide access for a person with a disability, but the collection of the bins was disturbing another resident and so you have a situation of competing needs of different residents, how would such a situation be resolved?
- 5.14 The Head of Community Safety & Enforcement reported that there were processes within the council, and an issue such as that would be dealt with in a joint approach with the cleansing team and environmental enforcement team who would undertake the work in terms of actions against bins left out at the wrong times and causing other issues. Officers would work with highways as well.
- 5.15 Members were informed that there was a partnership tasking group within this borough, which was a multi-agency council lead and met fortnightly meeting, which deals with a whole range of council related and police services to look at how we can respond to issues that come within our borough over a two week period.
- 5.16 The Head of Community Safety & Enforcement stated that often it would be a multi-agency issue that arises and officers would advise that parking should do this piece of work and get housing in to do another piece of work and perhaps get the wardens to undertake some work in this area, this work would be co-ordinated through the fortnightly meeting. Officers also rely on councillors to report any issues, a good example being the Rockingham Estate where parking, noise team, police, SASBU and a range of different services were working together. The officer agreed to the members forwarding the details of this particular case to him.
- 5.17 A member stated that people had different noise tolerance and he had thought that officers had noise equipment to measure noise levels, but now understood that noise officers just listen, how do you measure noise levels?
- 5.18 The Head of Community Safety & Enforcement stated noise disturbance was subjective, noise officers were qualified to a certain level and had qualifications in noise acoustics. They were trained to recognise what the level of noise was and have to base it around reasonableness of the disturbance in terms of what would affect a reasonable person.
- 5.19 The member stated if the noise team were called out, sometimes people have their windows open and the noise was coming from the outside, do they ask the resident to close the window so they can measure from inside or do they measure with the window open?

- 5.20 The Head of Community Safety & Enforcement reported that they have got to base it on a level of reasonableness, there may be a number of reasons why they may feel that the noise was so loud outside, whether the windows were open or closed or whether there was a particular issue around where they may take action.
- 5.21 In the summer time people do open their windows and this could happen where noise levels outside are at an intolerable level. We do not want to say is that it is not statutory nuisance, we would want to say could you turn your music down as it was very loud at this moment in time.
- 5.22 The chair stated that both Councillor O'Brien and himself had spent time with the noise team on the night shift, and one of things that struck him was that was officers' safety was most at risk from residents who were told that noise was not a nuisance, rather than the people making the nuisance. What do we do to protect officers in those situations and to educate residents about what their job was?
- 5.23 The Head of Community Safety & Enforcement reported that there were a range of back office functions, the officers have to report where they are and where they are going and report back to the call centre or liaison points on their visits and where their going next, there was a constant checking process.
- 5.24 Members were assured that if there was an address with an issue, that gets flagged on the system and officers were alerted and warned in case there was a specific issue. Officers were trained in how to deal with particular situations and they are encouraged that if they were in confrontation they should step away, not to remain in that situation and deal with it at another time.
- 5.25 The officer stated that the point about officers being more at risk from the person reporting the nuisance and being told it was not an issue was interesting and he would be willing to explore more with the sub-committee. He further reported that officers were responding to people who genuinely believe there was a noise issue because of other health related problems that they face and that caused officers some real challenges.
- 5.26 A member asked what would you advise councillors to do with repeated reports of noise nuisance? Councillors and officers were not being believed, but if they had something in black and white based on the average noise expectation most people would respond to that positively.
- 5.27 The officer advised members to involve other health based professionals to help with some of these cases, officers were now looking to directly involve health professional services in cases to provide help and support.

- 5.28 Members were informed that officers would like to get to the point where we were very clear around the offer that officers were making, and what the expectation was at the service being providing, if there was a noise issue officers would do something about it, if other agencies are required we would involve them.
- 5.29 A member of the public stated that the noise from youths gathering in the stairwells was a real problem, they were sometimes persuaded to go away but would then return later on, it affects life on the estate especially with older people and some of them were very difficult to deal with and were very cheeky, this situation had been going on for the last 4 years.
- 5.30 The chair stated that this would be taken onboard with the anti-social behaviour discussion later on in the meeting.
- 5.31 The chair stated with regards to staff safety, the night he went out with the team he was aware of the flag system which keeps up on any dangerous situations they may come across. The team he was with were directed to a particular address, the call centre did not see a flag but one of the officers recognised the address and asked the call centre again, they reported again there was no flag. The officer then called their own team it was picked up that the address had been flagged as a problem address. The chair asked were there issues with the call centre?
- 5.32 The Head of Community Safety & Enforcement reported that officers were working very closely with the call centre to improve the level of both handover and checking of information and assured members that it was improving.
- 5.33 One of the things that officers have been working on closely with the call centre managers was that they had an officer that controls the activity of the noise service that comes through and officers have been talking about having that officer based within the noise team, so it would be easier to have that hand over. There were systems in place and officers were moving in the right direction.
- 5.34 A member asked what were the service challenges that officers were facing with regards to being pro-active to increasing noise activities?
- 5.35 The Head of Community Safety & Enforcement reported that the reason why the night time economy team was introduced to Southwark 3 years ago was recognition of the vibrant night time economy that was coming to the borough and that has been successful and developed some very good relationships with a lot of the major clubs, and we have the ability to be a lot tougher on clubs that are not managed properly.

- 5.36 If the Council was to going to make the best of the services we have it has got to be with the multi-agency approach as that would be the best way forward, we have got teams of skilled people that can deal with a range of issues in a vibrant night time economy concerning pubs, restaurants, clubs and bars. There are ways of managing businesses within the nighttime economy, we want to encourage a vibrant and mixed business community.
- 5.37 A member asked can officers link particular groups of people coming from a bar or club because the council could penalise those businesses?
- 5.38 The Head of Community Safety & Enforcement reported that officers were getting better in linking some of the clubs, bars, fast food take away and taxi ranks. Officers had a good idea about what was a well run club, effectively managed with the right level of supervision, door staff and ability to support customers as they come and go from the club. Some clubs were very large and would always provide challenges but officers would always be tough with clubs that are not managed effectively.
- 5.39 A member stated that he had a few issues with noise, and officers had gone around and the noise was sporadic and officers had reported back that the noise was not there, do you have any thoughts on that?
- 5.40 The Head of Community Safety & Enforcement reported that any noise calls that come in are a priority, he would still encourage people to contact us, quite often those sporadic noise issues come back regularly, it is a matter of keep on telling us, keep a log and build up the evidence and action will be taken.
- 5.41 The chair stated that he had the Croydon application on his phone which measures and describes noise levels, is this a gimmick?
- 5.42 The Head of Community Safety & Enforcement stated the reason why we hesitate to ask people to record the noise is that when it comes to evidence you can not honestly say as officers that noise came from that place at that time, it was often the qualified officers evidence that was required and that was the challenge for officers.
- 5.43 A member recalled discussing the call centre and integrated records in 2012, and recalled there would be flags on all records and that would take 18 months. What was causing the difficulty in integrating records of this nature, when we want to identify dwellings causing a problem? What is causing the delay and can you give us a firm time frame when the integration would take place?
- 5.44 The Head of Community Safety & Enforcement reported that he could not give a firm time frame, there were a number of systems

that needed to be looked at and they were not at the same stage in their development or quality of information. The system that the noise team used was called APP and still needs work to be done to bring it up to date then it has to be integrated. Work was being carried out through different departments.

- 5.45 It is a collective responsibility and ambition as a council that we have a good dialogue across the different departments with regards to the issues, we have to keep reviewing the information as an ongoing piece of work.

Anti-Social Behaviour

- 5.46 The chair stated that the police were stretched, how much pressure was that putting on the council in terms of the budget, are we confident of dealing with anti-social behaviour at a time when there was less police resources than in the past?
- 5.47 The Head of Community Safety & Enforcement reported that the council had to get the very best out of partnerships that we work with, the police were facing the same financial pressures as the council. Both will have to work together and share resources, the multi-agency approach had to be the way forward and we have to look at area based issues more than single item issues, what we come across was a series of different problems that revolve around the same people who move from area to area, the focus needs to be on area based action, we need to be challenging low level crimes.
- 5.48 A member stated that the Borough Commander priorities were burglary and robbery even though drug abuse was important, he recognised there were two issues of tackling cannabis usage and dealing which can be more associated with gangs, was there a difference between the council and police priorities?
- 5.49 The Head of Community Safety & Enforcement reported the police have their priorities which would be described as the MOPAC 7, which would be burglary, robbery, commercial burglary, criminal damage etc and were measured on performance in relation to those priorities. Violence with injury was discussed.
- 5.50 The issues on the ground that were fed to the council in relation to anti-social behaviour included drugs. The officer stated that a multi-agency approach would be the best way forward, the police and council need to combine resources to deal with those areas. Those people who are smoking cannabis on the stairwells may well be the same people involved in robberies, it needs to be dealt with on an area basis.
- 5.51 A member stated that he was at a ward panel meeting recently, where there was an excellent ward policing team and the sergeant

reported that according to MOPAC 7 that the level of incidents had dropped by up to 40% in some cases. That did not match with what people were telling him that they were experiencing on the street, and the fear of crime was different to experiencing crime. He was interested that MOPAC 7 indicators were driving the police to re-priorities areas which were helping them to get good performance ratings but not necessarily delivering across the board to make sure our communities were safe and secure.

- 5.52 The Head of Community Safety & Enforcement stated that the question would be better answered by the Borough Commander than himself, but reassurance was a priority for the police without any question, the reassurance figures for Southwark were high at the present. He further reported that what residents tell officers on the ground in terms of their experience was what they experience every single day and that officers need to be working closely within a multi-agency approach in order that they get the message across that crime levels robbery or burglary were going in the right direction.
- 5.53 A member asked when will you next meet with the Borough Commander to discuss progression towards an integrated approach of detecting both low level and serious crime within the borough?
- 5.54 The Head of Community Safety & Enforcement reported that he had a conversation with the Borough Commander this morning and met with the Superintendent last Friday and reached an agreement to join some services together and would hope that over the next 6 to 12 months that would be a fully integrated process.
- 5.55 A member stated that an area which had not been discussed this evening was CCTV.
- 5.56 Councillor Situ reported that last week there was a massive joint operation by the council and the police services in the Bermondsey area which resulted in 13 individuals being arrested for drugs dealing, anti-social behaviour and significant crimes which had affected the area. Without the four months of joint operation from both the council and police we would not have got to that position. The sub-committee were assured that serious drugs dealings was still on the police radar, which was an important issue which our residents were raising on estates.
- 5.57 The Head of Community Safety & Enforcement stated CCTV was a very effective tool. We would want to measure the outcome in terms of the recordings and how many of those recorded crime incidents do we turn into arrests. That figure was going up all the time, officers were seeing a 20% increase and being commended by the police team in terms of the level of input we have had.

- 5.58 The Head of Community Safety & Enforcement welcomed members and co-opted members of the sub-committee to visit the new CCTV screens to see the effectiveness of the system.

RESOLVED: That members of the sub-committee arrange a date and time to view the CCTV system with the Head of Community Safety & Enforcement. The following councillors stated that they wished to be included on the visit, Councillors Tom Flynn, Ben Johnson, Johnson Situ and Martin Seaton

6. EVICTIONS REVIEW - OUTCOMES REPORT

- 6.1 The chair welcomed councillor Richard Livingstone (Cabinet Member for Housing), Gerri Scott (Strategic Director of Housing & Community Services) and Paul Langford (Head of Operations) to the meeting and invited them to update members on the review.
- 6.2 The Strategic Director of Housing & Community Services reported that 330 evictions had been carried out and officers looked at a sample of those cases. Members were assured that most systems were operating effectively, there were a few areas of inaccurate record keeping and members would see in the recommendations that training had been put in place for officers.
- 6.3 The sub-committee were anxious to be assured that the Mr AA case was not endemic within the department, that although there were a couple of areas where officers need to do better overall, that case was isolated in terms of customer practice.
- 6.4 The Strategic Director of Housing & Community Services stated there were areas for improvement and a number of recommendations that would keep officers focused. This had been a useful exercise for officers, issues were picked up during supervision and team meetings, but doing a quarterly review of a sample of cases would keep officers focused for the future.
- 6.5 The Head of Operations reported that the basis of the report was focused on the grounds for eviction, timescales in the application of any court orders, the presence of the correct orders and how officers dealt with the removal and storage of goods.
- 6.6 The key findings that came out of the review were around record keeping. Solid record keeping keeps officers honest and operating in an effective way, out of the 66 cases that were looked at which included one referral from a councillor, only one case was found that was unclear and required further investigation, officers spoke to a member of the special investigations team who recalled the eviction and clarified that nothing was left in the property, this information should have been on the system.

- 6.7 The Head of Operations assured the sub-committee that specific fields now required specific information which has tidied up the documentation of the system.
- 6.8 The presence of officers at evictions was extremely important and immediate recommendations had been put in place regarding the named officers at evictions i.e. the RSO and income team leader, and the IT changes will be in place by the 1st February 2015.
- 6.9 A member asked with the further recommendations coming in on 1st February 2015, will the next review be reported to the Strategic Director of Housing & Community Services?
- 6.10 The Strategic Director of Housing & Community Services stated that the review would be reported to her and informed members that there was a performance management framework in place and senior management team that looks at performance information on a regular basis. This will be pushed into the performance management framework so the quarterly review of evictions will be reported to the senior management team.
- 6.11 Officers want the recommendations to be fully adopted and checked on a regular basis and this will go through the performance management framework including the senior management team and Councillor Livingstone as the cabinet member for Housing.
- 6.12 A member asked was there a need to look any further than the two years for cases of the officers concerned with Mr AA eviction?
- 6.13 The Head of Operations reported that these were very experienced officers, one officer had not worked again for the council since that situation and was on long term sick. The other 3 officers' cases were looked at and there were not any issues arising from the review.
- 6.14 A member asked a question in relation to recommendation 5 of the report, where in the system are the checks and balances that allow you to spot something that might go wrong before it goes wrong?
- 6.15 The Head of Operations explained that issues needed to be recorded properly and timing was key in ensuring that officers going back to court from the earliest date of which the original procession order was sorted so that the clock starts ticking right back at the start. It was noticed from the review that there were 2 cases where officers went back that they would have contravened the 6 year, had we not have gone back.
- 6.16 The Strategic Director of Housing & Community Services stated there were strong supervision mechanisms in place, one to one with officers, review of case load on a weekly basis, team meetings

as well as training and development. Management were looking at performance in the moment as well as looking at it retrospectively particularly around rent arrears and illegal occupancy. There is very close scrutiny on an ongoing basis of people's current case loads and what they were doing with them so officers were not looking at things after the event in those areas.

- 6.17 A member asked do officers have access to a checklist that they can go through before they get to the point of eviction?
- 6.18 The Head of Operations assured members there were checklists for every stage of the process for officers and a further point was the review proved to be extremely useful and no fundamental flaws that had been found in the procedures both in the initial review or this review. It was about ensuring the application of those procedures.
- 6.19 The chair stated the sub-committee were discussing officers covering up and welcomed the details contained in the report. One of the issues brought up in the court judgement was that 2 ward councillors had raised the issue and were worried about it. With the ongoing review and the checks that officers would be doing where would be a good place for ward councillors to feed into the system, rather than members inquiries?
- 6.20 The Strategic Director of Housing & Community Services stated that any ward councillor should always come straight to the head of service or strategic director if they have any serious issues at all.
- 6.21 A member stated there was 1 case that was forwarded from a councillor which all looked fine, could you tell us why the councillor forwarded a case which turned out to be of no problem, did they have concerns about the case? Could you share that with us?
- 6.22 The Strategic Director of Housing & Community Services reported that she had information on that case and it was about the eviction itself and whether the eviction should have taken place and what happen to the person subsequently. She had full details and would share them with members, outside of the meeting.
- 6.23 Councillor Livingstone stated that looking at ongoing performance management officers could send an e-mail out to all councillors asking for any cases when looking at the next quarter review. Perhaps the exercise could be repeated so that councillors know to identify those cases so we can look at them as part of the ongoing performance management.
- 6.24 A member asked who was responsible to ensure that all the necessary paperwork and procedures are followed prior to the eviction being effected, what level was that?

- 6.25 The Head of Operations reported there were different parts to the process depending on the nature of the eviction, whether it was due to illegal occupation or rent arrears.
- 6.26 The Strategic Director of Housing & Community Services reported with regards to Mr AA's case it was how the eviction was carried out, there was an issue with the 6 year window of opportunity but the other issue was the fact that when the eviction took place it did not have the relevant officers in attendance and the goods were removed and not stored in accordance with the procedure.
- 6.27 A member asked if officers do not follow the procedures, what were the sanctions and has the level of risk been raised?
- 6.28 The Strategic Director of Housing & Community Services reported the sanctions had always been the same, if people do not do their jobs they were disciplined. The recommendations specify fields must be completed by the officer attending the eviction and secondly that the manager was contacted while that eviction was taking place.
- 6.29 A member asked how do we empower tenants and councillors to provide the best service possible? And is the procedure comprehensive enough?
- 6.30 The Head of Operations reported that the procedures were on the council website and available to everyone, all procedures undertaken in any area of the directorate by officers involve tenants in reviews, there was always room for improvement but the systems were in place to evolve.
- 6.31 Councillor Livingstone stated the issue here was not so much that the tenant did not know the procedures, the tenant knew the procedure pretty well and had 3 stays of the eviction process through going through the court process and that was why it ran out of time. The difficulty was not that he did not understand the procedures the problem was officers did not follow the procedures in the correct way.
- 6.32 That was the critical error, the most serious thing that the council can do as a landlord was to evict a tenant and that had significant consequences to individuals, so if ward councillors become aware of issues in terms of evictions then let the strategic director and cabinet member know so we can look into it and make sure things are being done correctly.
- 6.33 A member asked before the case goes as far as the eviction taking place, was there some kind of checklist between the legal and the housing operations team to make sure all the necessary checks have been carried out? Do you have any early warning systems in place i.e. tenancy checks?

- 6.34 The Strategic Director of Housing & Community Services reported it was very hard to get approval to evict a tenant, the burden of proof was on the evidence presented to the judge in order to get an agreement to evict was significant and our legal colleagues were very cautious and made sure we had water tight cases when going to court.
- 6.35 In this case there was a stay, so effectively the judge was not satisfied and said he was going to give the tenant another opportunity, and this can go on for some time, so the evidence you present had to be very thorough to get to evict in the first place.
- 6.36 In response to early warning systems, officers carry out 50% tenancy checks of all tenants on an annual basis, last year officers completed 100% tenancy checks. The council was probably in the best position it has been in for many years in terms of knowing who is living in our housing stock. We were also the best in the country on acting against illegal tenants.
- 6.37 A member asked if the tenant was allowed to re-enter the property to collect their goods, they may not want to leave the property and you may need to go to court to get them back out? In terms of storage of evicted tenants goods for 28 days, where was the cost implication after 28 days?
- 6.38 The Head of Operations reported that with regards to re-entry, this was managed by officers working with the tenant before the eviction, tenants were always given the opportunity to take their goods out of the property and officers would provide help or support if required.
- 6.39 There were many cases where goods had been stored, and after 28 days the goods had not been collected, these were dealt with on a case by case basis. Officers on many occasions had to work with families and make arrangements for the goods to be cleared. There was a point where the council had to take a harder line but officers do try to be supportive, the cost of storage was minimised to the council.
- 6.40 A member stated the AA case was a matter of officers covering up, the recommendations contained in the report were focused on tightening up procedures which was not the problem. Would it be possible to have an independent person present at evictions to verify that council officers had followed the procedures correctly?
- 6.41 The Strategic Director of Housing & Community Services reported if the review had revealed half of the cases were wrongly recorded or that there were issues, she would have agreed with the members and looked at how officers carry out evictions, whether we needed to have some independence in terms of witnessing

what went on, but we did not find that for the vast majority of cases.

- 6.42 The evictions were carried out properly and in a very small minority of those cases the administration was poor, the recommendations contained in the report would tighten that up. Most of the staff do a very good job, this case was reported at the last meeting and was a clear example of staff not doing a good job and covering up and they have been dealt with through procedures.
- 6.43 Councillor Livingstone stated there were a number of things that went wrong in this case, the issue of timing, proper documentation and sign off none of which were present. The issue of the resident services officer not being present at the eviction and after the event the collusion of 3 officers to jointly agree statements covering each others back. They did not change the records they colluded on the statement, the record was absent and that was clear that things had not been done properly.
- 6.44 A member asked about IT hardware, some boroughs equipped their housing officers with tablets, so when they were out they could update records instantly, was that something we did as a authority?
- 6.45 The Head of Operations reported that the project that was passed to him recently and on the 29th April 2015 we should go live with the first two applications. The process of the tenancy visit, reporting repairs and following through the repairs progress. He and the Head of Maintenance and Compliance had been sponsoring this project, working with Northgate and others to try and get something in place.
- 6.46 A member asked could officers give an update on those officers that were found guilty of gross misconduct and what was their current employment status?
- 6.47 The chair stated that if it was possible for officers to answer the question from councillor Ben Johnson outside of this meeting.

Meeting ended at 9.00 p.m.

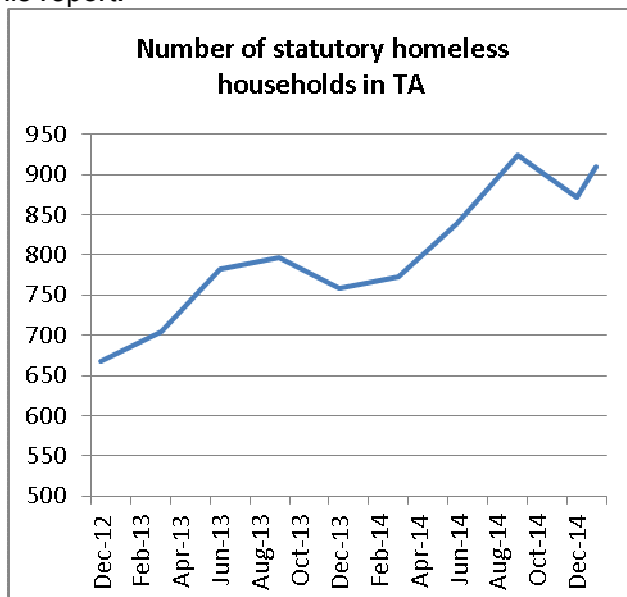
CHAIR:

DATED:

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|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Item No. | Classification: Open | Date: 9 February 2015 | Meeting Name: Housing and Community Safety Scrutiny Sub-committee |
| Report title: | | Temporary Accommodation and Homelessness | |
| Ward(s) or groups affected: | | All | |
| From: | | Leigh Richman, Service Group Manager – Temporary Accommodation, Procurement and New Initiatives | |

Background

1. This briefing note is designed to update the Housing and Community Safety Scrutiny sub-committee of the acute issues facing the borough in delivering its statutory responsibilities for providing temporary accommodation (TA) for homeless households and specifically the budget pressures into 2015-16.
2. London’s housing crisis is well-known. Like other local authorities, there are overwhelming cost pressures facing the Council, with huge challenges in accommodating homeless households who require temporary accommodation.
3. Each year Temporary Accommodation, Procurement and New Initiatives (TAPNI) devise a model around supply and demand for temporary accommodation. The model looks at a number of assumptions including economic factors which may affect **demand** as well as market and internal issues which affect **supply**.
4. The number of households in TA to whom the Council owes a housing duty has increased over the last two years from 668 in December 2012 to 910 in January 2015, a rise of 36%. Issues around demand i.e. the Council’s approach to dealing with increasing numbers of homeless applications are dealt with later in this report.



5. The current figure of 910 does not include the following numbers of non-homeless households to whom we have an obligation to temporarily house:
 - 71 households who applied to the Council as homeless but the Council has decided it does not owe a housing duty. They will be given notice of eviction;
 - 83 single people with support needs awaiting supported housing;
 - 65 households who have No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) but to whom the Council owes obligations under the 1989 Children Act.

6. There are four principal types of temporary accommodation which the Council uses. The first two are accounted for within the Housing Revenue Account, the latter two fall within the Council's General Fund.
 - Council hostels. There are 16 hostels which the Council owns and manages, providing temporary accommodation to around 240 households at any one time.
 - Estates pending regeneration. The Council currently uses around 280 properties, primarily on the Aylesbury Estate but also on the Elmington Estate and Maydew House, pending vacant possession being required.
 - Private Sector Leasing (PSL) or Housing Association Leasing arrangements. This is where the Council or another Registered Provider leases accommodation from landlords to accommodate homeless households (currently around 165 properties used for this). There are also 290 private sector leased properties being used to divert people from applying to the Council as homeless.
 - Bed and Breakfast (B&B). This nightly-paid accommodation is used when we have nowhere else to place homeless households. It is a mix of shared accommodation and self-contained accommodation. As at 30 January, there were 414 households in B&B (331 homeless households and 83 single people awaiting supported housing) in addition to NRPF households and those whose homelessness applications have been rejected. Some 80% of B&B is now out of borough.

Costs of temporary accommodation

7. As mentioned above, hostels and estate properties are accounted for within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and are a highly effective form of temporary accommodation. They are managed efficiently. Rent collection rates at 97.5% is very high for short-term accommodation and void turnaround times (void to let) are 11 calendar days for estate properties and 3.6 calendar days for hostels. Occupancy checks are carried out four times a year and customer satisfaction is at nearly 90%. Hostels and estate TA generate surpluses for the HRA.

8. PSLs and B&B are accounted for within the Council's General Fund. Whilst PSLs are designed to be cost neutral (helped by income collection and void achievements) B&B is extremely costly for the authority's general fund.

9. The strategy for the authority must be to place the cost burden and risk of supplying temporary accommodation away from the general fund and into the HRA.

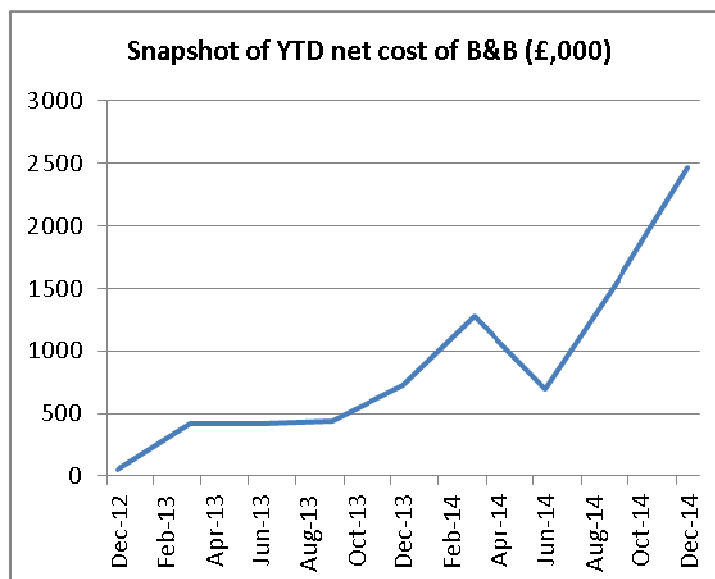
Cost of temporary accommodation by type, per property based on income/ expenditure figures (December 2014- month 9).

| | | Month 9 | Projection p.a. |
|-------------------------------|--------------|---------------|-----------------|
| In house hostels | HRA | £3500 surplus | £3,500 surplus |
| In house managed estate TA | HRA | £5300 surplus | £6,500 surplus |
| In house leased accommodation | General Fund | 0 | 0 |
| Bed and Breakfast | General Fund | £6400 loss | £6400 loss |

Hostel figures include £2800pa recharged from GF to HRA as part of accounting realignment. If the stress of TA was on the HRA then surpluses in hostel provision would be greater.

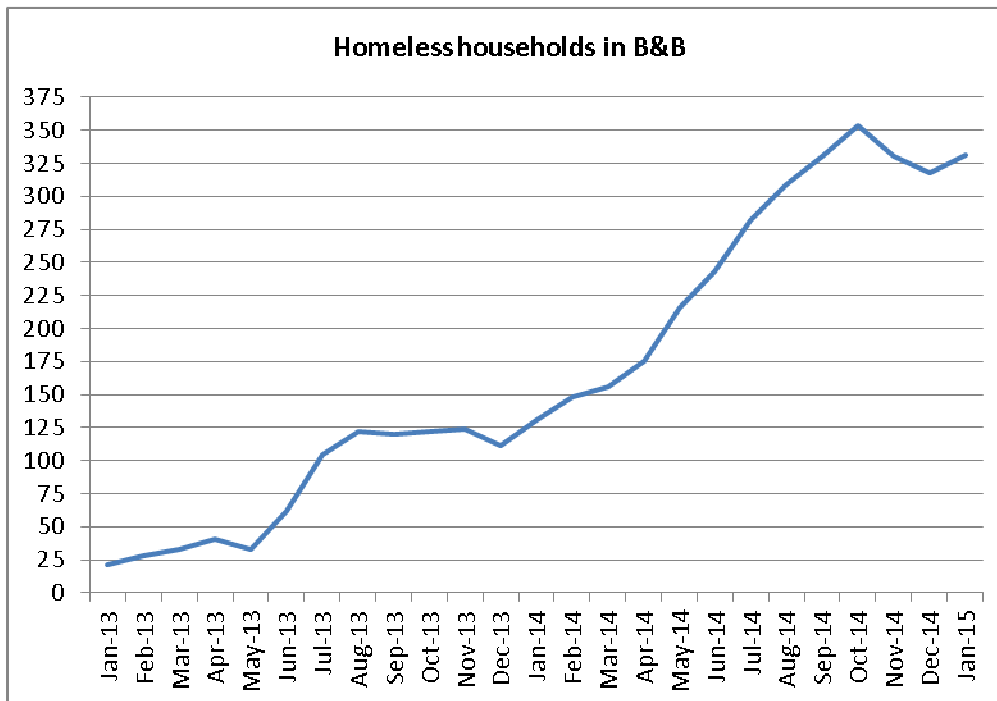
Bed and breakfast

10. The above table highlights the acute cost pressures of providing B&B accommodation.
11. In terms of net expenditure on B&B (ie cost of the accommodation after rent and charges have been collected), the deficit has increased from £52K in December 2012, £727K in December 2013 to nearly £2.5m in December 2014.



12. Spend was within the budget provision for 2012-13 and 2013-14. There will be a significant overspend in 2014-15 of an estimated £1.3m, even after mitigation from paying lower prices to hoteliers.
13. We have a proud record of ensuring that no family remains in B&B with shared facilities for over 6 weeks. However, with so many households in B&B and a lack of alternative provision, we are anticipating breaching this achievement which has both a reputational and cost impact for us in terms of penalties from the Ombudsman which other boroughs have incurred.
14. The Authority has sought to reduce B&B costs in a number of ways:

- The Strategic Director of Housing and Community Services has signed up to the London Councils agreement not to breach locally agreed ceilings for nightly paid accommodation.
 - Southwark has led discussions which placed the ceiling on the rates local authorities are prepared to pay within our sub-region.
 - We will not be asking providers to supply breakfast for new residents moving into B&B. This is designed to contain costs and reduce charges to residents. In addition, breakfasts are not especially popular with residents.
15. The increased reliance on B&B provision over the last two years is stark. Excluding those awaiting a supported housing project, the number of statutory homeless households in bed and breakfast has increased by 1500%, rising from 21 in January 2013, to 331 in January 2015.



16. This reliance on B&B and the associated cost pressures have been made more acute for a number of reasons including increasing demand, which is dealt with later in this briefing.
17. Even if rising demand can be curtailed and TA numbers stabilised, there is the challenge of dealing with providing accommodation for existing households to whom the Authority has a statutory duty. This is because of on-going supply-side pressures.

Supply

18. Since April 2012, the numbers of available properties on regeneration estates used as temporary accommodation has fallen from 386 to 282. However, in the last few months the number has stabilised. This is due to the recent increase in the number of properties on the Aylesbury Estate. The new properties have made up for the losses in Maydeu House (currently being emptied) as the Elmington Estate is decanted.

19. Further, the number of properties the Council and Registered Providers lease for temporary accommodation has collapsed. Owners are able to obtain much higher rents by letting their properties to the professional market, letting them on higher nightly rates back to Councils or selling their asset. Since April 2013, our leased supply has reduced from over 600 properties to 455. Two Registered Providers are ending their schemes and a third appears to be increasingly unviable. As leases come to an end, we are only able to renew 20% of them through our in-house scheme.
20. Because of this contraction in supply, the number of households in B&B accommodation has risen to levels not recorded in 15 years.

Bridging the supply gap

21. With B&B numbers rising and alternative TA supply continuing to contract, the Authority is exploring some innovative measures to alleviate the cost pressures. We intend to maximise opportunities within the Council's Housing Revenue Account for self-funding TA and whilst doing this, minimise costs to the General Fund. We are seeking to:
- Supply new hostel accommodation, through acquisition and new-build;
 - Establish a joint procurement vehicle with investors to purchase properties which LBS will lease to use as TA.
22. Specifically, the following will come into effect in 2015-16:
- New Willow Walk hostel on old hostel site, providing 54 new units (April 2015 – artist's impression below);
 - Good Neighbours House conversion to hostel – 37 new units (June 2015);
 - Northcott House leasing of hostel – providing step down accommodation for 42 single people (March 2015);
 - Joint procurement vehicle – 50 properties.



23. This totals a new supply of around 180 units, potentially reducing the B&B population (homeless and vulnerable single people) to 280 but this is still based on a standstill position and will be partially negated if PSL supply continues to reduce in the way anticipated. Further, it does not allow for placing NRPF households.
24. The service has also set up further plans to mitigate the losses to the general fund although many of these will not be experienced before March 2016:
- Continue joint procurement vehicle in 2016-17 – 50 further properties;

- New hostel at Sedgmoor Place to replace existing – 40 new units and similar amount on an Old Kent Road site;
- Seeking to acquire former LBS care homes/ buildings;
- Building moveable modular/ container-type accommodation to use on temporary available sites which are pending redevelopment.

Several other London authorities are taking similar measures in their areas.

25. Our further aim is to keep our housing solutions as local as we can for Southwark residents when sourcing new temporary accommodation and also when discharging our housing duty into the private sector. This is in contrast to other London Authorities who are sourcing accommodation in large towns and cities.
26. The overall focus is to contain the burden within the revenue-generating HRA. There will also be a clear exit strategy should the accommodation no longer be needed. For example, older hostels can be disposed of, new hostels can be converted into general needs accommodation and modular housing can be moved/ re-used or sold. Further, the authority may seek to use this form of hostel accommodation for households who have no recourse to public funds, thus saving costs for other Council departments.
27. TAPNI and Supported Housing Services work in close partnership with the CAB and Council departments and have held two major tenant events. These events include workshops on paying rent, managing money, being a good neighbour, getting involved in the community, joining libraries and leisure centres and recycling. These events are designed to prepare temporary accommodation tenants for their Council tenancies; participating residents are given certificates and have been a notable success. The last of these events was held on 4 February 2015 and 89 households in temporary accommodation successfully completed the training, with attendance figures estimated at over 250 people.

Comments from Housing Options and Homelessness

Housing Solutions and homelessness prevention

28. The homelessness prevention and housing advice work helps keep people in their homes and responds to those in the greatest need. The Housing Solutions service adopts a fair and manageable approach to homelessness prevention and aims to deliver improved services to customers seeking assistance. The approach of the Housing Solutions service is to ensure from the first point of contact the Housing Solutions service will seek to maintain applicants in their existing accommodation where appropriate. This will reduce the demand for temporary accommodation, going forward and help facilitate planned, rather than emergency moves.
29. The purpose of Southwark Council's homelessness service provision is to provide housing in emergency situations. It should be viewed as a safety net and not, as some may see it, as a way of speeding up the process of obtaining council or housing association accommodation. The Localism Act 2011, provided powers that local authorities may discharge their homelessness duties by housing applicants in private rented sector accommodation, and the Housing

solutions service fully supports this approach due to the declining availability of affordable housing in Southwark.

30. The route for accessing service provision will be via the on line homelessness application. All applicants will need to complete the on line assessment that will route them to homelessness prevention, housing solutions, mutual exchange, the housing register, discretionary housing payment/financial inclusion etc. The web site will also be improved to offer advice on housing solutions, provide self-help tools and explain service standards and the application process through a service delivery model accessible 24 hours a day. For those who are unable to access services on line, help will be available via the telephone advice service.
31. All homelessness customers receive a formal interview, explaining a broad range of options and suggested solutions to each customer which always includes ways the customer can be helped to remain in their current home, delaying their move out of their current home so alternative accommodation can be arranged, or helping them to find alternative accommodation. More specifically this can include family mediation and help accessing accommodation in the private rented sector.
32. The service from September 2014, provides written confirmation of the advice and assistance that has been given to the customer at the formal interview. This letter will provide the applicant with a clear written record of the officer's understanding of his/her circumstances from the first contact with the service to outcome of the homelessness decision.
33. The Housing Solutions service is working in partnership with the Job Centre Plus, Southwark Works, the Citizens Advice Bureau, the London Mutual Credit Union, Health Agencies, the Services Points across Southwark, MASH, the monthly Money Savvy workshops. Maximus to provide employment and training opportunities for customers, and other local partners to address support, education, employment, financial inclusion and training needs. Therefore, tackling worklessness will be an important focus of the services, as this work will help to prevent homelessness going forward. The financial inclusion work to help to maintain tenancies within the Private Rented sector due to the recently introduced Welfare Reforms and Benefit Caps, is a key element of the council's work to prevent homelessness. This work also aims to increase life opportunities for customers, alongside housing and educational skills classes within schools in Southwark, being developed to help to provide a holistic approach to homelessness prevention. This Welfare Reform work has helped Southwark Council reduce the number of customers affected by the Benefit Cap by 52% within the last 12 months and this performance is the recognised by the Department for Works and Pensions as being the second highest performance in London.
34. The service is now working to clear measurable targets. These targets and outputs will seek to limit the use of temporary accommodation, monitor all homelessness prevention output work streams, increase homelessness preventions, reduce homelessness acceptances and deliver accountable officer performance standards.
35. The Discretionary Housing Payment service is administered by the service and contributes to the efforts to prevent homelessness, reduce financial exclusion and reduce the rent arrears. The Housing Solutions service is currently the 8th highest performing service in England for homelessness preventions.

36. Prior to being interviewed through the homelessness framework, or placed on the housing register, or offered alternative accommodation, applicant's identity will be verified through the corporate fraud 360 IT fraud system to ensure only legitimate applicants are accessing our services. All applicants will be asked to provide their passports which will be electronically scanned at reception to confirm identity and eligibility for service provision. This work has helped to prevent fraud within the service and has led to a reduction of fraudulent applications from people who do not qualify or are eligible to receive a service provided by Southwark Council.
37. The current reasons for homelessness acceptances are recorded as follows:
- 38% - loss of assured shorthold accommodation (Private Rented Sector)
 - 17% - evicted from parents home
 - 13% - evicted from non family and friends accommodation
 - 11% - relationship breakdown violence related
 - 5% - relationship breakdown but non violence related
 - 6% - evicted from Council, Housing Association or non private rented accommodation
 - 2% - mortgage arrears
 - 8% - combination of other reasons
38. The Housing Solutions service recently introduced new procedure manuals, new scripts for all Officers, a new homelessness application, and a best practice guidance for the service and these documents have been produced in partnership with Shelter. Please note this approach to dealing with homelessness applications will be tailored to the needs of each individual customer.
- 30% of homeless acceptances are due to evictions from family, friends or other lodging arrangements. The parent, relative or other party will be contacted by the officer to encourage the family to allow the homeless customer to remain in their home until the council can assist with alternative accommodation. Also at this first contact it will be explained to the parent the consequences of the child being placed into inappropriate and expensive temporary accommodation. This will then ensure the customer is not placed into bed and breakfast accommodation and our homeless duty can be discharged via section 148 and 149 of the Localism Act 2011 and in accordance with the new housing allocations scheme.
 - Eligible homeless customers approaching the council may be offered a private rented property. Customers will be advised to take up the offer and that bed and breakfast accommodation will only be provided in emergencies.
 - A leaflet explaining the new framework is being produced and this leaflet will explain that the service will attempt to fulfil its duties in accordance with the housing allocations scheme and section 148 and 149 of the Localism Act. The leaflet will be handed to the customer at the first appointment and will also be placed on the council's web site. In addition to this, the website application will also explain at each stage that the council will aim to place the homeless customer into a private rented sector property.
 - The applicant will be advised that if the offer of private rented accommodation is refused, they may be placed in emergency bed and breakfast accommodation. A homelessness decision will be made on the day or within 27 days and it is likely that a further offer of private rented accommodation will be made. If this is refused, the council will discharge its homeless duty towards the customer.

- Homeless customers who accept the offer of private rented accommodation will be given band 3 priority.
 - Customers who are processed through the statutory homeless framework will be assessed through the same day decision making team, which will reduce the time spent in emergency bed and breakfast accommodation.
 - 27% of homeless acceptances are the result of private sector landlord evictions. The service provides information and advice to landlords as well as tenants. This advice will be available by e-mail or telephone. The relationship between Southwark and the local private rented sector landlords is absolutely critical to the aims of reducing homelessness in the borough, and a new 24 hour a day 365 day a year housing service will be provided to Private Landlords from March 2015.
 - 6% of homelessness acceptances are due to evictions taking place from the council's own stock or partner housing association stock. The Housing Solutions service produced a homelessness prevention and eviction protocol for Southwark Council and Housing Associations to adopt, and this protocol is helping to reduce evictions.
 - In an attempt to reduce the 2% of homelessness acceptances caused by mortgage repossessions the service will be promoting a Rent a Room initiative. Home owners who have a spare room/s may earn up to £4,250 that can be earned tax free through renting a room.
 - Regular outreach services are now being conducted across Southwark to prevent homelessness through our Welfare Reform and homelessness prevention work. These outreach surgeries are taking place in
39. A new framework of monthly quality and audit checks is being undertaken on all homeless case files. These audits will be undertaken by senior offices within the service and an annual appraisal of 10% of case files will also be undertaken to evaluate our work in this area. The annual audit will be undertaken by an external organisation to promote transparency and excellence.
40. The homelessness applicant's journey though the service framework will be as follows:
- The customer approaches with a housing need.
 - The customer is given clear advice on their options and informed that being accepted as homeless may result in a Private Rented Sector accommodation offer. They are advised that due to competing demands and low supply of social housing, their approach is unlikely to result in an offer of council or housing association accommodation.
 - The customer is advised that the council will seek to prevent them from becoming homeless and help them to remain in their home
 - Where homelessness cannot be prevented and a homelessness application is lawfully triggered the household will be made aware that two routes may be explored simultaneously by Southwark. These are -
 - i) A private rented sector accommodation offer – homelessness prevention route option, and
 - ii) the homelessness application route that will result in a private rented sector offer.
 - The customer will be encouraged to find the private rented sector accommodation for themselves. They may be assisted by the deposit/bond scheme.

41. The council needs to be aware of the supply and demand factors relating to the provision of private rented accommodation with rents out performing the Housing Benefit Local Housing Allowance thresholds locally, demand for the private rented sector increasing and a reduction in the private rented market for the council's historic client groups, due to the high value of properties locally in Southwark.

Homelessness demand

42. The number of homeless applications to Southwark Council has markedly increased in the 2014/2015 financial year by 64% from 927 homelessness applications in the 2013/2014 financial year to 1,521 applications in the 2014/2015 financial year. This homelessness increase is also being repeated across London, with 75% of all homelessness customers living in Temporary Accommodation across England being placed into the Temporary Accommodation by one of the thirty three council's in London.
43. The numbers of households approaching as homelessness across London due to evictions from the Private Rented sector has increased to 38%, an increase of 4% in the last 12 months, and the largest group of households approaching as homeless. Another key group of homelessness presentations is family and friends evicting the customer. Homelessness is increasing in inner London at a higher rate than anywhere else in the country. However, in Southwark the percentage of homelessness acceptances is lower when compared to the London average. Therefore, the percentage acceptance rate in Southwark for the 2014/2015 financial year is currently 48% compared to the current London average of 59%.
44. The total number of customers accepted as homelessness in the 2014/2015 financial year is currently 724 households compared to 501 households in the same period in the 2013/2014 financial year a 44% increase.
45. Southwark currently have the 3rd lowest number of homelessness acceptances when compared to the 12 other inner London Council's, with the City of London and Camden Council having lower numbers of homelessness acceptances. However, the trend is one of increasing numbers of homelessness acceptances across London.
46. Unfortunately, homelessness acceptances regionally and nationally are currently at the highest totals since the Department for Communities and Local Government commenced recording this information using the current homelessness framework.
47. Slightly more positive is the fact that Southwark Council is currently preventing more homelessness customers from becoming homeless when compared to other council's in London, and also has the 8th highest homelessness prevention totals when compared with the 326 council's across England. However, this has to be referenced alongside an environment of increased homelessness locally, and regionally.
48. Central Government and the thirty three London council's expect homelessness to increase during the 2015/2016 financial year, and this increase is expected to be similar or even greater than the increases that have taken place in the current financial year.

Our approach to homelessness prevention and decisions

49. Considerable financial and human resources have been committed over the last 12 months developing the officers within the service. This includes extensive training from Shelter, and the Gold Standard team on best practice examples from across the country. This has resulted in the production of a best practice procedure guide for the homelessness and options service to follow, and developing officers through daily mentoring and coaching techniques to improve performance. In addition to this, extensive development training has been provided for all officers on motivational techniques, Safeguarding, and change management.
50. The service introduced new scripts for officers to follow at both the front line reception, and subsequently, at the homelessness interview. These scripts have been produced in partnership with Shelter to prevent homelessness at all times, and to adopt a robust framework for the homelessness decisions made.
51. The best practice manual for officers within the homelessness and housing options service, also compliments a new homelessness application that was introduced in January 2015, and again this homelessness application aims to prevent homelessness from the initial contact with the council. Once again this new homelessness application draws on best practice from across England and was produced in partnership with Shelter.
52. The restructure for the service implemented on the 1st May 2014, resulted in the service following national best practice examples, reducing the handovers of the customers case from three officers to one single officer, who now has complete responsibility for the customers homelessness application from start to finish. Quality audit checks are now built into the new structure to ensure all homelessness acceptances are closely scrutinised.
53. The service was the subject of a quality and mystery shopping exercise by Shelter during 2014, and this will be repeated again during 2015, to drive forward further service improvements for the benefit of the customer and council.
54. The 20 Homelessness and Housing Options officers have been advised of their financial responsibilities for homelessness customers placed into temporary accommodation. Officers are aware that for every 6 customers placed into Bed and Breakfast accommodation equates to the salary of one officer employed within the council, and the expensive nature of placing customers into expensive and inappropriate Bed and Breakfast accommodation has on the educational attainment, impacts on health and well-being of customers.
55. From the 4th September 2014, the council is now in a position to discharge its homelessness duty into the Private Rented Sector both inside and outside of Southwark. This new framework operates in accordance with and compliance with sections 148 and 149 of the Localism Act, and will hopefully help to reduce the numbers of homelessness customers living in temporary accommodation going forward.
56. The new homelessness letters issued to every homelessness customer that receives a homelessness decision now includes reference to the customer being offered private rented accommodation to discharge the council's homelessness duty. This initiative will further show the council's robust approach towards homelessness.

57. The service needs to make continuous improvement, especially in the area of preventing the use of temporary accommodation for homeless customers. The service's main target is to reduce the expenditure in the area of temporary accommodation, with other targets used to support this target. However, the Homelessness and Housing Options service recently received critical appraisal within Inside Housing for "Gatekeeping". The reporting behind this article was factually inaccurate; however, the message of stricter homelessness decision making contained within the article is accurate, and this article is now used as a constant reference point from legal representatives.
58. The service is also receiving increased numbers of legal challenges from legal representatives of the customers relating to the homelessness decisions made. However, the council during the 2014/2015 financial year was successful at court and won 80% of these legal challenges, ensuring a robust homelessness decision making framework is in place.
59. The new structure within the Homelessness and Housing Options will deliver and drive further performance and financial improvements during 2015/2016 financial year, and going forward. However, at a time of a reduction in the supply of available accommodation within Southwark, and an increase in demand this will obviously impact on the council's ability to reduce the numbers of homelessness customers living in temporary accommodation in the future. This can be adequately explained by highlighting an increase of 64% in homelessness presentations due to welfare reforms, growing homelessness numbers in Inner London due to the considerable changes in the housing market, there has been a corresponding 22% reduction in the supply of affordable housing over the last five financial years and an 8% reduction in the last 12 months alone.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

| Background Papers | Held At | Contact |
|-------------------|---------|---------|
| | | |

APPENDICES

| No. | Title |
|-----|-------|
| n/a | |

AUDIT TRAIL

| | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Lead Officer | Martin Green, Head of Specialist Housing Services |
| Report Author | Leigh Richman, Service Group Manager – Temporary Accommodation, Procurement and New Initiatives |
| Version | Final |
| Key Decision? | No |
| CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER | |

| Officer Title | Comments Sought | Comments Included |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|
| Director of Legal Services | N/a | n/a |
| Strategic Director of Finance and Corporate Services | N/a | n/a |
| List other officers here | N/a | n/a |
| Cabinet Member | | N/A |
| Date final report sent to Constitutional Team/Community Council/Scrutiny Team | | TBC |

**HOUSING & COMMUNITY SAFETY SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE
MUNICIPAL YEAR 2014-15**

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| Councillor Lorraine Lauder | 1 | | |
| Councillor Hamish McCallum | 1 | | |
| One Labour vacancy | | | |
| Co-Opted Members | | Total: | 37 |
| Michael Orey (Homeowners' Council) | 1 | Dated: June 2014 | |
| John Nosworthy (Homeowners' Council Reserve) | 1 | | |
| Miriam Facey (Tenants' Council Reserve) | 1 | | |
| Cris Claridge (Tenants' Council) | 1 | | |
| Other Members | | | |
| Councillor Richard Livingstone | 1 | | |
| Councillor Michael Situ | 1 | | |