

# MINUTES OF INFORMAL MEETING OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 9 June 2021  
(7:02 - 9:20 pm)

**Present:** Cllr Jane Jones (Chair), Cllr Dorothy Akwaboah (Deputy Chair), Cllr Toni Bankole, Cllr Donna Lumsden, Cllr Olawale Martins, Cllr Fatuma Nalule, Cllr Simon Perry, Cllr Ingrid Robinson, Cllr Paul Robinson and Cllr Phil Waker

**Also Present:** Cllr Maureen Worby and Cllr Cameron Geddes

## 1. Declaration of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

## 2. Minutes (31 March 2021)

The minutes of the meeting held on 31 March 2021 were noted.

## 3. Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) - Quality Assurance and Progress Update Report

The Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health Integration (CMSC) and the Commissioning Director for Care and Support (CD) introduced a report on the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), providing a brief narrative as to the context behind the move of the MASH into Children's Care and Support in September 2020, as well as the various challenges that had been facing the service at a time of unprecedented demand, which had increased in part due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Whilst considerable progress had been made since the move of the service, it was acknowledged that it would take some time to address residual issues within the system, along with the escalating demand pressures.

In response to questions from Members, the CD and the Strategic Director for Children's and Adult's Services (SD) stated that:

- The quality of referral into the MASH often proved problematic. Work was needed within the Early Help system to ensure that all colleagues and partners could identify and articulate risks in the correct way. This was particularly important when considering the high-pressured MASH environment stemming from the high volume of demand, with clear information proving vital to assist the Council to make the right decisions for its young people. It was also emphasised that those receiving the MASH referrals needed to be curious and to use the Multi-Agency information to better support their decision-making, gaining a deeper understanding of the history of the child and their family.
- The largest referrer into the MASH was the Police.
- The importance of the Early Help system, sitting underneath MASH and acting as a first point of contact, could not be understated as this provided the opportunity for early intervention. This would not only greatly help children and young people before any issues could escalate but would also prevent a higher volume of demand coming through to the MASH service.

- There was a disparity between schools that referred into the MASH, and those that did not. The Council was strengthening its relationship with schools, with the MASH now having regular meetings with the schools' Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs) to discuss issues and provide advice in advance of referrals. The Council was also in the process of arranging similar quarterly meetings with the Police.
- It was vital that the new MASH model had the right agencies wrapped around families and included key components of colleagues in Community Solutions, who were excellent at helping residents to navigate various issues. Whilst the primary focus needed to be on the highest level of risk, support from all Council services and partners was needed to address all levels of need.
- A recent visit from the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (OFSTED) had acknowledged the journey of change and clear programme of improvement for MASH, as well as the challenges facing the service. A draft OFSTED letter was likely to be received by the SD in advance of the Committee's next 7 July 2021 meeting, and if this was the case, it would be shared with the Chair before this meeting, for comment.

#### **4. General progress update regarding A2020 Scrutiny Recommendations - KLOE 4**

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Social Housing introduced a general progress update regarding the Key Line of Enquiry 4 (KLOE 4) recommendations to arise from the Ambition 2020 Scrutiny Review. This was followed by a presentation by the Head of Leisure, Parks and Heritage (HL) around the parks elements of the recommendations. The latter highlighted a variety of work that had been undertaken within the parks themselves, projects that had been supported by the local community, increased social media engagement and LBBB website improvement. Six of the Borough's parks had received external recognition as part of the Green Flag Scheme and the Borough had also improved significantly as part of the Good Parks for London Accreditation scheme, moving from 24th (2017) to 17th (2020).

In relation to several questions from Members, the HL stated that:

- Section 106 (S106) money that came in specifically for parks, were about particular projects that would take place. The Council would develop a scheme of works and would then project plan this, monitoring this through its normal management processes. The Council would report through its Capital and Assets Board, where S106 money and funding was monitored and reviewed, making sure that funding was being spent in the way intended. The Head of Housing and Asset Strategy (HH) commented that it may be useful to have a future item on how the Council made best use of S106 money.
- The Council had made improvements to eight of its parks in the Borough. However, a full replacement of a park scheme or play area cost in advance of £250,000 to put into place. The Council had recently worked with local community groups who sourced their own funding for Valence Park, and match-funded this money to support the community group. With other parks, the Council was replacing equipment as and when it was needed,

but there were a significant number of areas where the whole park needed replacement. The Council was working through its 25 parks and open spaces to see where it could make improvements and investment was needed.

As the housing and Reside updates submitted as part of item 5 also related to item 6 on the agenda, the Committee agreed to the HH's request to address both housing reports simultaneously and to ask any questions following the next presentation.

#### **5. Report requested by recommendation 13 of A2020 Scrutiny Review - Impact of change to Reside's affordability threshold**

The HH presented a report on the impact of change to Reside's affordability threshold, in line with the Housing Allocations Policy. He outlined the different tenures that Reside were providing, which were set at a range of rent levels to meet different types of housing need in the Borough. It was explained that the rationale behind the changes made to the Housing Allocations Policy were due to Reside's future expansion and to ensure that the Reside intermediate tenure would be more affordable, meaning that residents could use their in-work benefits as part of their affordability assessments. If residents could demonstrate that they had been paying their rent in their previous home, Reside would also use this as evidence that they could afford their property. The Managing Director for Reside (MD) stated that by the end of 2022, Reside would have increased its housing stock by 50% and would have over 3,000 homes at a range of tenures by the end of March 2025.

In response to questions from Members, the HH and MD stated that:

- The Council had approached the Greater London Authority (GLA) about the risk of those in shared ownership becoming stuck, as there could be a point where tenants started to staircase and buy more of the shares for their home, only to struggle when they looked to sell, as they were dependent on finding someone else who would buy their shares. The Council had suggested that the GLA create a Pan-London scheme, matching people across parts of London who wished to buy and sell, to facilitate this process.
- The Council needed to develop a local response through Reside to help those stuck in shared ownership, such as through guidance and the potential for the Council to buy back shares from tenants and resell these. As lots of shared ownership tenures were through Reside, the Council and Reside had more levers to help people around this and these needed to be explored.
- Many of Reside's shared ownership customers were first-time buyers.
- Reside ensured that all purchasers were able to view the property that they were buying. It also worked with Savills as its sales agent, who had a reputable panel of solicitors who had a wide knowledge of the shared ownership model; however, purchasers also had the option to use a different sales agent if they wished.
- Reside worked with the Council's Legal team to ensure that it could share as much information as possible with the panel of solicitors around what people were buying, the terms and conditions, service charges and to provide accurate estimates. The MD reviewed every memorandum of sale

that came through, and he had regular meetings with Savills to ensure that customers that were being put forward had evidence of deposits and an income. Savills would approach the MD if any customer was on the cusp of affordability and together, they could look at each case in more detail.

- Shared ownership was often less an affordability issue, and more of customers not understanding what they were buying. Reside put time in to help purchasers understand this, including creating videos for clients around how to service elements within their flats rather than paying someone to do this for them. However, it was acknowledged that more could be done to help clients understand their responsibilities.
- Reside had not seen arrears on shared ownership properties during the pandemic. They had also not been approached by any mortgage providers in relation to issues and had only been approached by tenants for general support during the lockdown. Reside had noted a decrease in the percentage of shares that tenants were buying, with more buying shares for 30% and entering shared ownership at a lower level. This could present an increased risk if these tenants were affected by a change in their circumstances, but Reside were willing to work with tenants should issues arise.
- The Government had recently changed the rules around shared ownership, meaning that buyers could now purchase a minimum property share of 10%. There were also reforms to reduce the amount that tenants could staircase by, to 1%. Reside did not yet know if there would be any local discretion as to this and would monitor closely.
- With shared ownership, there was a rental element on unsold equity and then increases to this each year, based around the rise in Consumer Price Inflation (CPI), which would increase over time. As Reside had a 'young' shared ownership portfolio, it did not have the experience of being able to see the effects of these increases over time. Reside needed to monitor the effects of compounding on rent increases and regularly review the data to ensure that tenants were not struggling.
- With prices being variable in the Borough, Reside had noted some reluctance from lenders and were discussing how it could increase the lender pool.
- Reside would need to consider the Government's proposals around shared ownership in more detail in relation to new builds and grant funding. It would also work with commissioners to ascertain how it could provide best value around resident service charges, to avoid heightened costs.
- Reside did not apply a service charge on top of its rents. Tenants would receive one charge, regardless of their type of tenure. However, for shared ownership properties, the tenant would pay a service charge on top of the rent for the proportion that they did not own.
- Affordability assessments were undertaken at the point of letting. Reside ensured that it got the most up-to-date information to undertake these assessments and ensured that two-way conversations were had with those working in Reside and potential tenants.

As a result of the presentation, the Committee:

- Emphasised the need to think through the Shared Ownership scheme and any potential implications for residents, such as not correctly understanding the terms and conditions when buying into the scheme.

- Requested some information on staircasing and sales, to gain a wider understanding of the scheme.
- Requested that a Member Briefing session be provided for all Councillors, to enable them to gain a better understanding of affordable housing, due to the vast number of questions that the Committee had in relation to this.
- Recommended that communication be improved with potential tenants, to better understand what they were looking for and could afford.
- Recommended that any questions around sustainability were emailed to the Chair or the clerk, to be passed onto the relevant officer.

## **6. Work Programme**

The Chair informed Members of the progress of the 2021/22 Committee Work Programme, the Committee's previous suggestions and her conversations with Portfolio Holders. The finalised Work Programme would be presented to the Committee for agreement at its 7 July 2021 meeting.