



Havering
LONDON BOROUGH

INDIVIDUALS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE, 22 JUNE 2017

Subject Heading:

Hostel Improvements

CMT Lead:

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Policy context:

**Housing Service restructure,
transformation and improvements –
addressing demand management
issues**

Financial summary:

**No impact of presenting information
itself which is for information/scrutiny
only**

The subject matter of this report deals with the following Council Objectives

Communities making Havering

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Places making Havering

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Opportunities making Havering

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Connections making Havering

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SUMMARY

On 4 April 2016 the Housing Services restructure took place resulting in a new hostel service. This report provides an update on the progress since that decision.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That Committee:

1. **Notes** the progress made to date in the hostel service following the housing restructure that came into effect on 4 April 2016
2. **Notes** the positive feedback by the Chartered Institute of Housing following their inspection 7 to 9 December 2016.
3. **Notes** that a draft action plan for improving the hostel service will be agreed with the CIH and will form the basis of a further review in January 2018.

REPORT DETAIL

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Havering Council owns and manages three hostels in the borough; Abercrombie House in Harold Hill, Queen Street Villas in Romford and Will Perrin in South Hornchurch.
 - Will Perrin Court has 46 rooms plus an Emergency room - all are family rooms.
 - Abercrombie House has 37 rooms plus an emergency room - 10 rooms are single rooms and have single person occupancy. The remainder are family rooms.
 - Queen Street Villas has 11 rooms – all are family rooms.
- 1.2 In late 2014 the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) undertook an inspection of the Housing Service and made the following recommendations in relation to the hostels:
 - Re-evaluate the roles and responsibilities of the hostel worker and manager posts to ensure the service responds effectively to the needs of residents.
 - Improve support available for those placed in the hostels including agreed support plans.
- 1.3 The CIH also commented that ‘the combination of shift patterns together with full cleaning responsibilities, repairing and decorating duties makes recruitment difficult to the current hostel officer role. Moreover, the role is further complicated with the challenges of working with people who have recently been made homeless’.
- 1.4 Following on from the CIH inspection a restructure of the Housing Service was undertaken which came into effect in April 2016.

One of the key drivers for the restructure was to introduce a tenancy sustainment / tenure neutral model of working through which all new entrants into housing would have their support needs assessed and a formal plan agreed with their key support providers i.e. social care, NELFT, Westminster Drugs Project etc. The key principle is to provide the support at the earliest opportunity to enable tenants to better

maintain their tenancies in the longer term, thus reducing the demand on the Council and other key agencies at a later date.

- 1.5 Having reviewed the hostel service, it became evident that the service could not deliver the new model of working. The staff at the time were providing 24/7 cover but were providing little more than a caretaking service; they were not carrying out any support work with residents or sign posting them to any support agencies.
- 1.6 To better facilitate the tenancy sustainment model a new staffing structure was put in place consisting of a manager and six officers with specialist support backgrounds covering drug and alcohol abuse, domestic violence, mental health, probation, child support and housing. The team operates from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday – all other hours are covered by security. The security and cleaning services are currently being provided by the Council's corporate contractors.
- 1.7 Ahead of the implementation of the restructure and whilst the new team was being recruited, a number of hostel residents attended the Lead Councillor for Housing's housing surgery raising immediate concerns regarding the management of the hostels.
- 1.8 This resulted in an immediate review of the hostels and an improvement action plan being drawn up (See Appendix A). One of the principal actions from the plan was to bring in a specialist hostel agency (Women's Aid Refuge) to provide support in recruiting, training and mentoring the new manager and team and to work with the Tenancy Sustainment Services Manager in establishing a best in sector service.

2. TRANSFORMING THE SERVICE

- 2.1 We are currently just over a year into the restructure and the feedback that we have been getting from residents has been very positive. This has been supported by the most recent CIH Hostel Audit, undertaken in December 2016, in which Domini Gunn (Director, CIH) stated that her return to the hostels was one of the most uplifting experiences of her professional life. We are quite obviously proud of this feedback which has come on the back of a considerable number of challenges that we have faced along the way. The principle ones are highlighted below along with the action that we have taken to address;

- **Transitioning the Service – Staffing**

Issue presenting - there were a multitude of issues including; existing staff effectively disengaging once they knew that they would not be appointed to the new team leading to high levels of sickness absence, an increasing number of complaints from residents and new staff about the attitude of the existing staff including allegations of scaremongering about the new service, theft and a failure to act.

Action taken – management met with staff to address concerns but also to set out continuing responsibilities; some staff were released early and disciplinary action was discussed with others.

- **Transitioning the Service – Management Issues**

Issue presenting – it became evident very early on that there were major gaps in the way that the service had been previously managed. The new team has encountered multiple security, safeguarding, ASB and criminal issues particularly in relation Will Perrin Court where there have been allegations of drug dealing, drug taking, prostitution and criminal damage taking place in and around the hostel.

Action Taken –

1. Safeguarding training prioritised for new staff.
2. Security
 - a. Additional security agreed for a period to manage admission to the hostel
 - b. Photo identification is being introduced to all three hostels
 - c. CCTV is being reviewed to ensure coverage is complete
 - d. A 'no visitor' policy is being discussed with residents for a set period of time
 - e. Community Wardens are undertaking regular patrols and the safer neighbourhoods / police are being asked to visit all three sites on a regular basis
 - f. All residents are being reminded of their responsibilities and the action that the council can take if they breach their licence agreements which ultimately could lead to the council discharging its duty.
3. Multiple safeguarding referrals made by the new team – only a couple of referrals had been made previously
4. Referrals to Children's Services have resulted in children being removed due to the risk of harm in three cases.
5. Homelessness duty discharged on three individuals
6. Injunctions x 3 – excluding individuals from one of the hostels
*4 to 6 above – this is the first time that such action has taken place in the hostels
7. A new system of escalating warnings is being drawn up to address bad behaviour. The process seeks to ensure that warnings will go with the resident as they progress through tenures.

- **Support**

Issue Presenting – Residents were not having their support needs assessed and there was little contact, if any, with support agencies. As a result residents were moving from the hostels into settled accommodation without any handover to the tenancy officers who would be unaware of any need for any continuing support.

- Action Taken: Support plans are being put in place with key support partners and agencies for all residents. The initial reports are highlighting a sizeable percentage of residents requiring on-going support and that a number have high support needs potentially highlighting a gap in the current level of support provided in housing in the borough. This is being addressed.

The service has recently introduced a 12 month pilot counselling service with the Women's Aid Refuge with a view to working with a number of highly vulnerable residents to try and break their cycles of adverse behaviour. The pilot will be fully

evaluated and if successful a cost benefit analysis will be undertaken to consider the benefits of widening the scope of the service.

- **Improvements**

Issue Presenting – The hostels have an institutional feel and look to them which is unlikely to have a positive effect on residents' wellbeing. Moreover, in their current state the hostels do not reflect the image of how the Housing Service would like the hostels to be viewed. The aim of the service is to at least make the hostels welcoming to residents for their stay.

- Action Taken – An improvement budget of £150k was agreed by Housing Board. An improvement plan has been agreed for each hostel and is currently being delivered. Our key priorities have been to provide play facilities for children, both internally and externally, and to improve security on all three sites.

- **Policies & Procedures**

Issue presenting - there are hardly any written policies and procedures for the new team to work with.

Action taken – the key policies and procedures have been identified with the Women's Aid Refuge (WAR) and we are currently drafting these in order of priority.

- **ICT**

Issues presenting – Connectivity to the Council's ICT systems was very poor and staff were not operating on OHMS (the Housing Management system). What written records were being maintained were haphazard.

Action Taken – we have upgraded the lines to speed up connectivity and trained the staff on accessing the OHMS system and maintaining electronic case files.

- 2.2 Before the new structure was put in place hostel residents were not allowed access to the communal grounds at any of the three sites. The reasons for this are historical but at Will Perrin Court this decision was made to appease local residents when the hostel was opened.
- 2.3 This was the first matter that residents asked us to address when we met with them. Several residents referenced the adverse impact that this decision was having on them and their children's wellbeing particularly during the Summer months. As a result we have opened the communal gardens to residents and are monitoring the position.

3. FUTURE PLANS

- 3.1 The aim of the service is to be best seen in sector by 2018 and for this to be endorsed by the CIH.
- 3.2 The ever increasing demand on the homelessness service is resulting in the Council looking at alternative methods of increasing the provision of good quality housing accommodation. One of the strategies to be progressed is increasing the number of rooms available by utilising temporary modular accommodation and decommissioning sheltered accommodation at Queens Street.

IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

Financial implications and risks:

None of this covering report

Legal implications and risks:

None of this covering report

Human Resources implications and risks:

None of this covering report

Equalities implications and risks:

None of this covering report

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Appendix A – Hostel Improvement Plan