

PRESENT

Committee Members

Cllr Mary Weale (Chair)
Cllr Will Pascall (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Gregory Hammond, (Vice-Chair, Housing & Communities Select Committee, Vice-Chair, Licensing Committee)
Cllr Walaa Idris, (Chair, Family Services Select Committee)
Cllr Dahabo Isse
Cllr Lucy Knight, (Chair, Adult Social Care and Health Select Committee)
Cllr Claire Simmons, (Chair, Housing and Communities Select Committee)

Others Present

Cllr Sarah Addenbrooke, Lead Member for Communities and Community Safety

Council Officers

Maxine Holdsworth, Chief Executive
Callum Wilson, Strategic Director of Grenfell Partnerships and Corporate Transformation
Dan Hawthorn, Executive Director of Housing Needs and Social Investment
Kojo Sarpong, Director of Housing Needs
Jacqui Hird, Scrutiny Manager
Yusuf Olow, Senior Governance Co-Ordinator

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Thaxter and Councillor Bennett.

Apologies for lateness was received from Councillor Yankson.

Councillor Knight notified the Chair that she would be required to leave the meeting early.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

3 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Chair highlighted a spelling error in the minutes that were circulated with the meeting papers. This had since been corrected.

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 March 2024 were confirmed as a correct record.

4 UPDATE ON FUTURE GRENFELL SUPPORT CONSULTATION (2024-2028)

Callum Wilson, the Strategic Director of Grenfell Partnerships and Corporate Transformation and Councillor Sarah Addenbrooke. Lead Member for Communities and Community Safety, updated the Committee.

The report provided an overview of the consultation and the timescales for the next phase. Mr Wilson expressed his thanks to the local community for attending the consultations and providing feedback.

The consultation posed challenges when dealing with circa 800 people closely affected by the Grenfell tragedy whose needs, experiences and expectations differed.

The Committee heard that restorative justice had been helpful as had conversations relating to prioritisation. The consultation looked not only at what did and did not work, but also examined whether programmes that did work would be appropriate in the future.

Mr Wilson took the committee through the remaining process in relation to the existing consultation. The finalised report will go to the Leadership Team before it is presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 17 July 2024.

In response to questioning from the Committee, Mr Wilson confirmed that the External Scrutiny Team (EST) had started their consultation though most of the work would not be undertaken until the model of future services was established. It was envisioned that the future scrutiny programme would see greater control given to residents.

Future funding of organisations that had previously received Grenfell related funding was discussed with Mr Wilson disclosing that most of the funding was spent on the voluntary sector. The next phase may see less expenditure on voluntary organisations following community consultation which appeared to favour other priorities; though Mr Wilson cautioned that the consultation had not concluded. Voluntary organisations had already been informed that they may not secure replacement funding.

In response to questioning from the Committee, Mr Wilson said that attendees at the consultation suggested funding for new approaches such as alternative therapies, drama/arts, additional support for children, additional support for adults and respite provision enabling community members to spend time outside the area. However, there was no consensus though the community wanted more control which had been factored in. Mr Wilson said that this did not preclude the involvement of voluntary organisations but that the model would be different.

During the consultation residents had highlighted housing and health issues as a priority. However, the Committee questioned whether the allocated budget on Grenfell should be used on housing and health as these were statutory requirements of the Council already. The Committee also noted the proposal to fund advocacy, though the Council already provided funding to the Citizens Advice Bureau for this purpose.

The Committee recalled that the NHS was also carrying out a review of its Grenfell related support and, in response, Mr Wilson said that they were seeking to co-ordinate with the NHS. To facilitate this, the NHS sent officers to observe the consultations held by the Council to learn from, and avoid duplication of, the Council's approach. The Committee requested that the NHS be invited to provide a report on their future plans for Grenfell related support and for representatives to attend.

Action: Scrutiny Manager

Discussion moved to the lessons that had been learned and how the process would be applied again when it comes to consultations. Mr Wilson emphasised that high levels of outreach were important most notably door knocking highlighted that since the publication of the report on 3rd May 2024, 100 additional responses had been received following a door knocking exercise.

The length of consultation was important with Mr Wilson, by way of an example, drawing a distinction between a ten-minute conversation on the doorstep and a two-hour workshop; both approaches have merits, and it was important to determining which was appropriate. Consultation approaches taken by other organisations and Councils had also been examined and, where appropriate, incorporated.

Councillor Dr Mona Ahmed, as representative of Notting Dale Ward and at the invitation of the Chair, commented on the report emphasising that development of new models needed to empower residents with knowledge; especially if these models gave residents control of personal grants and overseeing budgets.

The Committee asked for the Leadership Team report to be circulated for comment. The Committee also said it wanted to hear more in the future about what had been applied and where.

Action by: Strategic Director of Grenfell Partnerships

The Chair concluded the discussion.

5 REPORT OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT & SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN

Kojo Sarpong, Director of Housing Needs and Dan Hawthorn, Executive Director of Housing and Social Investment addressed the Committee.

Mr Sarpong explained to the Committee that, following a complaint, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) had made a finding of maladministration against the Council and published a Public Interest Report. The Council received the LGSCO's decision on in December 2023, but it was embargoed until 14 March 2024 when it was published on the LGSCO's website. Public Interest Reports were rare, and Mr Sarpong disclosed that it was only the second one in five years.

Mr Sarpong then took the Committee through the circumstances that led to the complaint being made;

- The complaint related to the Council's treatment of an application for accommodation by a homeless resident who had fled domestic abuse; and

- The applicant was not offered temporary accommodation as they were staying with friends; and
- The Council accepted the prevention duty but did not issue a personal housing plan (PHP) until 11 weeks after the application; and
- The alleged abuser was not a relative of the applicant, nor personally involved, but was the partner of the applicant's sibling, which resulted in Council officers not treating it as a domestic abuse case.

The applicant made a complaint and went through the Council's two stage complaint process. The complaint was not upheld at Stage 1. The Council later acknowledged the issues raised by the complainant and upheld the complaint at Stage 2. However, the Council did not offer compensation nor was temporary accommodation provided. The complainant subsequently escalated the issue to the LGSCO who found against the Council.

The LGSCO found that a PHP should have been issued when the complainant first contacted the Council and temporary accommodation provided. The LGSCO also found that the Council should have treated the case as a domestic abuse case.

The Committee asked what action was being taken to address the training requirements highlighted in the report.

The DHN said that ongoing training was being undertaken in relation to the provisions of the Family Law Act 1996 and the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 when considering homeless applications. Regular updates will be provided to staff on changes to the legal provisions whilst the induction of new staff will include training in both acts. As part of the training, staff would be trained to look out for signs of domestic abuse as sometimes applicants do not disclose abuse at the first appointment.

The Committee noted that, as mitigation to the LGSCO the Council cited the increase in homeless applications and IT issues and sought information on whether the Council had addressed the issues cited as mitigation.

Regarding IT issues, the Mr Sarpong by way of example, cited software gaps resulting in applications not being properly recorded in relation to data provided to central government. Those issues had now been rectified.

A data cleanse had been undertaken to ensure that cases were being recorded correctly and Mr Sarpong assured the Committee that the overall data was accurate.

The Committee heard that there had been an 8% increase in homeless applications in the 2023/24 fiscal year. This followed a 17% increase in 2022/23. Training was being undertaken to manage the rising number of applications. However there had been challenges with staff absences and high caseloads. A high proportion of staff had no previous experience in dealing with homeless people whilst experienced staff had left the sector.

In response to further questioning from the Committee, the Mr Hawthorn said that the Leadership Team was aware of the challenges that the Council's housing services

faced and the pressures on staff. However, Mr Sarpong added that staff motivation was a challenge as the job often involved delivering outcomes that clients do not seek; this was an issue affecting all inner London boroughs.

The Committee, seeking assurance, asked that the number of staff who have completed the training be provided and those for whom training is still required.

Action by: *Director of Housing Needs*

Responding to questioning on lessons learned, the Mr Sarpong said that a Domestic Abuse Lead had been appointed and outlined their responsibilities; including overseeing how clients who disclose they are fleeing domestic abuse are treated. Discussion was held on the definition of domestic abuse and Mr Sarpong said the Domestic Abuse Lead had a background in assisting people who had experienced domestic abuse.

The Committee sought information on what action the Council was taking to implement the recommendations of the LGSCO. Mr Sarpong regularly met with his team to discuss performance and reported his findings to Mr Hawthorn. The Lead Member, Councillor Addenbrooke, was provided with weekly updates, and Mr Sarpong and Councillor Addenbrooke meet every two weeks. A quarterly report would be provided to the Leadership Team going forward.

The complaints process was discussed and Mr Hawthorn acknowledged that there had been issues, however he highlighted that shortcomings in the initial response at Stage 1 were picked up in Stage 2, albeit the LGSCO disagreed about the appropriate remedy.

The Committee suggested that there was in some parts of the team a culture of hastily dismissing complaints and not taking them seriously; a point accepted by both Mr Sarpong and Mr Hawthorn. How complaints were dealt with would be subject to more stringent oversight including meeting with managers to oversee and regularly review complaints procedures.

The Committee noted that a recording system for PHPs had not been available when the legislation changed and that the backlog had therefore not been reported in any KPIs. The Committee concluded that this had a council-wide lesson that there should be a review of training and software capacity when new legislation is introduced.

Mr Sarpong and Mr Hawthorn cautioned that complaints were frequently complex and often the Council could not always address the complainant's request owing to limitations on the amount of social housing and other options available. The Committee acknowledged this but highlighted the LGSCO's criticism of the time it took the Council to agree a PHP with the Complainant expressing concern that the information on the number of homeless assistance applications compared with number of PHPs issued was not readily available.

The Committee requested a written follow up to Leadership Team report.

Action By: *Director of Housing Needs*

The Chair concluded the discussion.

6 REPSONSES TO THE BUDGET WORKING GROUP REPORT 2024-25

Councillor Pascall, the Vice Chair, updated the Committee taking it through all eighteen recommendations and highlighted the following points;

- In relation to the Savings and Transformation Strategy, a report was due to be provided to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration at its meeting scheduled for 19th June 2024; and
- That 'spend and save' projects should be broken down into select committee areas and the information be included in the quarterly financial monitoring reports that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee receives; and
- The capital programme was reported as part of the quarterly financial monitoring reports. The Working Group recommended that the housing revenue account should be reported at the same time as the rest of the Council's accounts; and
- In relation to funding of the Notting Hill Carnival, Maxine Holdsworth Chief Executive of the Council, disclosed that she had recently met with representatives of the Greater London Authority, to look at the possibilities in relation to establishing a new funding mechanism. Ms Holdsworth said it was unfair that the Council, along with Westminster City Council, shouldered a disproportionate cost.
- Ms Holdsworth, in response to Committee questioning, said that whilst the carnival did generate revenue for the Council, such as the issuing of street trading licences, they did not cover the cost to the Council of hosting it.
- Two additional areas for street trading had been identified but increasing the number of street trading licences would be challenging given space constraints, maintaining the carnival's character, as well as public safety. There were also legislative constraints.
- Councillor Pascall planned to meet with Lisa Taylor, Director of Financial Management in due course in relation to the pace of £100 million investment in Council Net Zero 2030; and
- Regarding transformation programmes including the two percent staff savings., Councillor Pascall said that this was a matter for the Environment Select Committee to pursue.
- Regarding the contract to refurbish Chelsea Bridge, the Environment Select Committee considered a briefing note on 18 March 2024 in relation to what it would entail, possible costs and risks. Councillor Pascall said that pending further information there was nothing further to report and that the Environment Select Committee should pursue the matter going forward.
- In relation to proposed quarterly reports relating to the redesigning of delivery of children and family services to address future budgetary gaps, Jacqui Hird,

Scrutiny Manager disclosed that the annual work programme for the Family Services Select Committee was being drawn up and this would involve liaising with the Chair and officers in relation to reporting. This would also include information on budget proposals relating to improving service efficiency.

- The Family Services Select Committee was due to consider a report on the first year's activities of the 0-5 Strategy on 9 May 2024.
- Councillor Pascall said that the Working Group were supportive of the North Kensington Social Justice Archive. However, it was unlikely that a report for the Family Services Select Committee would be ready before Spring 2025. The Committee asked that the Family and Children Services Select Committee maintain oversight on progress until the report was ready.
- Regular updates on the provision of temporary accommodation would be scheduled for the Housing and Communities Select Committee. The Chair clarified that it would be for the Housing and Communities Select Committee to determine the frequency of reporting. Ms Holdsworth recommended quarterly reporting owing to the volatility of available temporary accommodation.
- Councillor Pascall requested that Ms Hird co-ordinate responses from officers for the Chair of the Housing and Communities Select Committee in relation to a report on the consolidation of the progress and impacts of budget proposals for the voluntary and community sector.

Action by; Scrutiny Manager

Councillor Pascall also requested that Ms Hird co-ordinate responses from officers for the Chair of the Adult Social Care and Health Select Committee in relation to Adults Social Care's duty to provide services under the Care Act 2014.

Action by; Scrutiny Manager

Ms Hird drew the Committee's attention to the ongoing consultation on mental health services in inner-West London. The final decision, which is due to be made later in July 2024. This would have implications for provision of mental health services in the Borough. The Inner West London Mental Health Configuration Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which was scrutinising the proposals, was due to hold meetings in June, July and September. Councillor Knight, in her capacity as, Chair of the Adult Social Care and Health Select Committee is a member of the Committee.

The Chair concluded the discussion.

7 THE FORWARD PLAN AND KEY DECISION TRACKER

The Committee considered the forward plan and key decision tracker and noted the following;

- Developing the medium-term financial strategy has been challenging owing to uncertainty over the housing revenue account.

- A report would be circulated to the Leadership Team in relation to Future Grenfell Support. The report would also be circulated to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee which would be invited to make recommendations.
- The Committee noted that an update on the Housing Strategy 2024-2028 was expected in March 2024 but did not happen and sought clarification.

Action by; Senior Governance Co-Ordinator

- The Committee discussed reporting by Notting Dale Heat of its activities and asked Ms Hird to liaise with Mr Hawthorn to determine the date of the report. Ms Hird suggested that the report could be ready by September 2024, however the Committee indicated that it wanted an update at the next meeting taking place on 19th June 2024.

Action by; Scrutiny Manager

- In relation to Notting Hill Police Station, Ms Holdsworth clarified that the Metropolitan Police was undertaking a property strategy review, and buildings would not be released for sale pending the outcome of the review.

The Chair concluded the discussion.

8 THE ANNUAL SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2023-24

Ms Hird notified the Committee that the NHS had issued a notice under Section 23 of the Children and Families Act 2014 in relation to variation of services. The notice referred to reconfiguration of services in adult community based palliative care in North West London.

The North West London Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee would scrutinise the proposed reconfiguration. Councillor Knight, in her capacity as Chair of the Adult Social Care and Health Select Committee is a member of the Committee. Ms Hird would keep the Committee informed on the reconfiguration proposals.

The Chair concluded the discussion.

The meeting ended at 20:15

Chair