

Minutes



Allocations Customer Focus Group Date 21st August 2008 @ Hounds Gate

Present: Group Members - Sheila Thwaites, Leasehold Forum (Chair), Ennis Peck, Tenancy and Estate Management Forum (Vice Chair), Kate Bowley, Leasehold Forum, Cynthia James, BME Forum, Lynn Mitchell, Sheltered Housing, Graham Ward, Board Member, Val Schneider, Board Champion for Disability, Sue Lomax, Housing Registration and Allocations Manager, NCH, Pat Greenwell, Policy Officer, NCC
Guests Novlette Lewis, Housing Aid, NCC, Anthony Dixon, Housing Support and Strategy, Stuart Anderson, Phoenix Futures

Apologies: Sue Taylor, Assistant Director Housing Services, NCH, Bernadette Lawley, City Lettings Manager, NCH, Angie Knight, HomeLink Team Leader, NCH.

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Minutes and Matters Arising

The minutes of the last meeting were approved as a true copy.

It was noted that Val's name was spelt incorrectly.

It was also noted that as there are two members of the group with initials ST. We will use STH for Sheila Thwaites and ST for Sue Taylor.

BME forum representative - Cynthia is now attending as the BME representative.

HomeLink website - Although it was thought the issue was resolved by Angie after the previous meeting, Graham is still having difficulty with the HomeLink website. Graham is liaising directly with Marketing. Cynthia also informed group of difficulty with access. Angie Knight to liaise with marketing team and IT to try to resolve the problems.

Local and Sensitive Lettings - Kate requested update on the local lettings areas in Sneinton as

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discussed in the last meeting. Angie Knight to provide update for next meeting.

Support Needs and Risk Assessments – Cynthia requested that forensic social worker representatives were invited to a future meeting, in addition to Social Workers from Adult and Children’s Service to discuss how their work links with allocations. Sue Lomax to arrange for a future meeting.

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Ennis reiterated that NCH needs to ensure that support is provided to families with support needs. Concern was raised by the group members with regard to costs of damage to property when tenants did not have the necessary support to maintain tenancies and behave in an appropriate manner. Sue highlighted the work being carried out to review the existing support needs and risk assessment framework and to ensure that needs assessments and risk assessments are embedded throughout NCH procedures. This is to be a regular item on the agenda for this meeting.

Structure of Allocations and Lettings Teams – Ennis reported that he had been invited to inspect more empty properties to ensure quality of properties which were ready to let, as discussed at the last meeting. Graham had not, however received any communication about these inspections. Lynn and Val said that there appeared to be a problem with communication to Tenant Inspectors and Forum members. Sue to pass on comments to relevant officers in the Best Value Team .

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2. Homelessness and Support Services

Novlette Lewis gave a presentation to the group with regards to the structure of the Homelessness and Gateway Service and the roles of Housing Aid Staff (see attached).

Graham stated he was impressed with regards to how much the Homelessness service has developed for the better with regards to customer focus and the support which is now available to Homeless people.

Novlette went on to inform the group of improved partnership working arrangements which are being developed between Nottingham City Homes and Nottingham City Council. This will ensure Housing Aid staff interact with, and provide support to people who are at risk of losing their home before they are actually evicted. Anthony reiterated that a risk management approach was being introduced where such referrals are made to support services. It is in everyone's interest to find a solution to help people to stay in their homes rather than be continually moved on.

Stuart asked if it was only women who were considered for priority need in the case of domestic violence. Anthony confirmed that men will still be considered for priority rehousing by reason of domestic violence in the same way that women are. Anthony did state, however that there was a lack of 'refuge' accommodation specifically for men. At the moment the service provided for men is more of a support role, than provision of temporary accommodation.

Cynthia asked about Nottingham's local connection criteria and voiced concerns that people living in rehabilitation facilities within the City, but who were not being funded by the City would not access the relevant support needed. Anthony explained that our policies prioritised Local people and confirmed that support would be available to people from their Home area.

Cynthia also voiced concerns about the NCC complaints service being unclear. Novlette informed group that complaints should be directed to the service managers for the specific service the complaint relates to.

Graham raised an individual case wherein someone who have severe learning disabilities was evicted from their property. Concerns were raised as to whether the relevant support was offered to the tenant before the eviction

took place. Both Anthony and Sue informed group of action which would be taken under the support needs assessment process before any eviction took place and reassured the group that eviction is the last resort after all other avenues have been exhausted.

Anthony gave a presentation on supporting people building on the earlier discussion of the development of improved working arrangement between NCC and NCH to ensure that timely support is offered.

Anthony explained his role and responsibilities for Supporting People Strategy, Homelessness Strategy and Older people strategy. The strategies are developed to ensure that vulnerable people have access to the support and services which they want/need.

Anthony gave further details of the Gateway Project which is a single point of access and assessment for hostel accommodation. The Gateway covers 800 bed spaces with different projects covering different vulnerable groups. Previously people had to contact all the different hostels directly and each hostel would carry out their own assessment but now the gateway provides one point of access and one assessment process.

Sheila asked why there appeared to be more temporary accommodation in particular areas of the City e.g. Sneinton. Anthony agreed that Sneinton does have a lot of hostel accommodation but that no new hostels have been set up since 2003. It would be ideal if the Hostels were dispersed evenly throughout the City. The move to support based services and prevention of homelessness will hopefully result in more support and less need for accommodation based services in the future, Accommodation provision will then be reviewed.

Cynthia mentioned people were vulnerable going when into some of the hostels because

of the potential for specific problems of some hostel dwellers to be taken up by new hostel residents e.g. problems with drink and drug addictions. Anthony reassured the group that Framework, who ran the hostels referred to, had a strict drug policy and were in liaison with the police. However due to the nature of the particular client group's problems, workers try to minimise harm to individuals and encourage residents to address their problems. This has to be balanced against the need to risk manage taking into account the needs of the wider community.

Kate mentioned that people passing in the immediate vicinity of some of these hostels often felt intimidated. Anthony explained that it is a condition of the licence agreement in the Albion (for example) that people do not loiter around the hostel. However if the residents are not doing anything illegal there is a limit to action that the accommodation provider can take. Neighbourhood wardens are employed in these areas and hostel residents are encouraged by their support workers to engage in meaningful activities as part of the risk assessment framework.

Val asked about training to sustain tenancies. Sue informed of support packages developed as part of the support needs assessment and also of the proposal to introduce pre-tenancy workshops. Anthony also informed the group about developments planned for the service in relation to housing and employment links. Housing Aid have just been successful in securing funding to deliver a Housing Options service which will see these type of services being developed and implemented over the next five years.

Ennis asked if the assessment team had specific assessment skills. Novlette confirmed that the staff who carried out the assessments were employed specifically because they had these skills. Sue informed group that Housing Aid were going to carry out some training for NCH staff in

order that NCH can develop their assessment processes.

Ennis also asked for confirmation that checks were made to verify homelessness and that when temporary accommodation was given that people were actually using the temporary accommodation. Novlette reassured the group that stringent checks were made at the outset and during any stay in temporary accommodation.

The group thanked Novlette and Anthony for their presentations and confirmed that they had found the discussions to be very informative.

3. NCC/NCH Joint Working Plan

Sue gave out copies of the NCC/NCH joint working plan. The plan will be discussed in more detail at the next meeting.

4. Self Assessment

Sue informed the group that the self assessment exercise was close to completion and that feedback sessions have been arranged for the beginning of September for those who attended the self assessment workshops. Individual invites will be sent out.

5. Performance and Regulatory Cttee Report

Sue gave out copies of the recent report which was presented to the Performance and Regulatory Committee. The report informed of Allocations out-turns and monitoring and scrutiny of the Allocations Service. All future reports will also be presented to the group for discussion.

6 Any other business

Attempts have been made to contact the original chair of the focus group (Kay Loft) however no response has been received. Therefore in view of the continual absence, the group re-elected a new chair (Sheila Thwaites), former Vice Chair and subsequently a new Vice Chair (Ennis Peck). Sue will write to Kay to formerly inform her of decision.

7. Date of Next Meeting

23rd October 2008 Board Room, Hounds Gate

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Homes and places where people want to live