

<b>Committee:</b>	<b>Date:</b>
Community and Children's Services Committee	07/11/2019
<b>Subject:</b> Housing Management Update – Miscellaneous Projects	<b>Public</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Director of Community and Children's Services	<b>For Information</b>
<b>Report author:</b> Liam Gillespie, Head of Housing Management	

## **Summary**

This report is being provided to Members in response to several matters raised during a recent presentation on social isolation on the City's housing estates.

It is intended to give Members an update on various projects that are currently underway with the Housing Division, and to provide reassurance that the areas of concern identified in the presentation are either already being addressed or are due to be addressed soon.

## **Recommendation**

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

## **Main Report**

### **Background**

1. A presentation was delivered to this Committee on 9 October by Dr Roger Green, reporting on the outcome of a study he had conducted into the issue of social isolation on our housing estates.
2. Dr Green highlighted some areas that he recommended for further examination by officers in the Housing Division. This report has been written to update Members on several projects and areas of work that address the matters highlighted in the presentation.

### **Review of Community Engagement Activity**

3. In July 2019, we commissioned the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) to undertake a 'Smart Review' of our current community engagement activity. TPAS is a not-for-profit organisation with expertise in tenant engagement, and they provide advice and support to landlords on resident engagement and involvement strategies.
4. The Smart Review is an independent assessment of our service and it will examine how we are performing against our own standards, as well as any applicable

regulatory standards. The final report will also make recommendations around good practice in resident engagement for us to consider.

5. TPAS has already conducted a desktop study and examined relevant documents such as our Resident Communications and Engagement Strategy, as well as holding interviews with key officers in the Housing Division. Focus groups have also been held with officers and residents to look at what we do currently, and how we can change or improve.
6. TPAS will submit a report to us on their findings and this will form the basis of a more detailed review by officers of our community engagement work. Officers have identified a need to expand the reach of our engagement work to estates outside the Square Mile and we will look at how this can best be achieved within the constraints of the resources available.

### **Housing Estate Community Centres**

7. The Housing Division manages seven community centres on its housing estates. These centres vary in size and the range of facilities on offer. While some are increasingly popular, some are used relatively rarely. All our centres are available for use or hire by our residents and by non-residents, community groups and commercial users.
8. Following an internal audit of the management of these centres back in 2018, a review was carried out by officers in the Housing Division and new policies and procedures were introduced for managing the facilities.
9. Golden Lane Community Centre was used to pilot new ways of working following its refurbishment, and processes employed have been introduced at other centres.
10. An extensive programme of activity is delivered at Golden Lane by a multitude of providers, and the Centre is used regularly by residents and community groups who pay a reduced rate or use the space free of charge. Members may be aware that a resident-led group expressed an interest in one day running the community centre. Officers remain open to the idea of a community group managing the centre, should a financially viable model be identified, and discussions remain open on this issue.
11. To build on this work, and in response to the audit recommendations, a Community Centres Strategy was approved by Members in July 2019, which sets out our aims and objectives for the community spaces on the City's housing estates for 2019–2024. One of the stated objectives is to use the centres to deliver activities that promote social inclusion, personal wellbeing and community cohesion.
12. The Strategy also includes an aim to provide better facilities, and an asset management plan will be created to identify areas for improvement. Most of the facilities are in very good condition or better, and some (for example, Golden Lane, Avondale Square and Holloway) are either new or have recently been extensively refurbished.

13. Two centres – Lammas Green and Windsor House – have commercial licensees using the facilities as nurseries. Both nurseries operate during the day, Monday to Friday, during term times only, and are available for use by residents outside these hours. Both facilities were seldom used prior to these uses being approved. The income is used to offset the running costs for the facilities.

## **Pets Policy**

14. The Housing Service's Pets Policy was last approved by the Housing Management and Almshouses Sub-Committee in May 2017, following a resident consultation exercise. It is now due for review again, and officers will begin this process in early 2020.
15. Members may be aware that residents are not currently permitted to keep dogs in their homes, other than assistance dogs, unless they have access to a self-contained garden, which very few of our residents do. This has been the case for many years, and resident consultations (most recently in 2015 and 2017) have resulted in this policy being maintained.
16. It was the case that cats were also not permitted, but this aspect of the policy was relaxed in response to residents' comments during the last consultation.
17. Officers are aware that some residents would like to keep a dog, and that keeping a pet brings many benefits to people, especially those who are socially isolated. However, there are some genuine housing management concerns arising from allowing residents to keep dogs, particularly in housing stock that is made up almost exclusively of blocks of flats with shared gardens.
18. These issues will form part of the planned consultation exercise, and a full report on the outcome will be presented to Members as part of the policy review process.

## **Playgrounds and Play Equipment**

19. There are 17 playgrounds and multi-use games areas on our estates; some larger estates have several facilities. These are inspected regularly by estate staff, and specialist independent contractors carry out regular scheduled checks to ensure that the facilities are safe to use.
20. We are planning to extensively overhaul seven playgrounds and games areas on four estates over the rest of this financial year and the next (at Avondale Square, Windsor House, York Way and Middlesex Street estates).
21. Residents on these estates will be involved in planning the replacements, and they will be consulted for their ideas on what they would like to see in the improved play facilities.
22. Where safety concerns are identified with play equipment, officers will restrict access to the equipment in question, or sometimes entire playgrounds, to minimise or remove the risk of anyone being injured while using it. This has meant that some

facilities have been decommissioned (for example, at Windsor House) but the current project will address this and bring the areas back into use.

23. Our play facilities have been inspected and given notional life expectancies based on their current condition. This information will be included in the revised five-year asset management plan.

## **Conclusion**

24. This report is intended to provide reassurance to Members that the matters referred to in Dr Green's presentation of 9 October are being addressed by officers. Members will note that work was already underway in many of the areas discussed.
25. Further updates will be provided to this Committee, or the Housing Management and Almshouses Sub-Committee, as work progresses.

## **Appendices**

- None

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