**Thurrock Mental Health Service User & Carer Forum
14th July 2014, 2.00pm – 4.00pm
The Main Hall, The Beehive**

**Attendees:** Toni Sailba (Mind), David Rundell (Mind), Jeanette Lambert (Mind), Jacqui Webster (Mind), Marie Budge (Cariads), Stuart Rouse (Mind), Anthony Auger, Harpal Kang (Mind), Ian Evans (Thurrock Coalition), Michelle Dawson (Thurrock Coalition).

Apologies: Sheila Auger, Susie Nankivel, Alison Petit

**1. Welcome & Introductions**

**2. Presentation from Thurrock Council Housing Allocations Department Alaine Bunce (Housing Solutions Lettings Manager)**

* Housing Allocations are dealt with under Part 6 of The Housing Act 1996
2002 (amended)
There is also provision for Council’s to keep a Housing register
* Choice based lettings have been operated in Thurrock for 7 years
92% of properties are advertised on the Internet and in the Enquirer –
* Around 10% of properties are kept back for emergencies
* There is usually a period of around 6 - 8 weeks in which houses are empty before they are ready to be let

The Housing Allocations Team also deals with issues using the Allocations Policy including “Reasonable preference” this covers situations like:

* Over crowding
* If someone is moving to receive family support e.g. Ockendon to Stanford
* Fire / flood – emergencies
* The Localism Act deals with the issue of local priority – i.e. what is advertised to whom
* Closed housing register – qualification criteria
* 5 year connection

- Immediate family

- If someone works in Thurrock (for at least 16 hours per week) or if the person is a volunteer or carer (for at least 16 hours per week).

- If you break your connection (i.e. it’s not continuous), you have to start again

- Working households 1 = years.

* 15% of housing stock is reserved for Local Connections
* Additional priorities – armed forces – cumulative preference

On April 1st 2013 – The Allocations system moved from “Gold, Silver, Bronze” banding to a “1-5” Banding system.

* The Council has around 10,300 properties – (1000 managed by housing associations) Let: 998
* Void time – 32 days

**The Bandings:**

Band 1

* Dire need – death – domestic violence, property condition
* 10 people on the list
* Management panel – make the decision - Nobody stays in Band 1 very long (Except where waiting for adapted property)

Band 2

* Medical priority – split in two. Band 2 consists of under occupiers (mainly)
* Medical priority – consultant and Triage system – The following question is asked: “How your housing affects your health?”
* Housing Liaise with Grays hall. CPN – ask them the above questions
* Not always cut and dried
* Short / med term
* High rises – jump risk
* Housing has “In house” occupational therapists in their team
* Looking at individual circumstances
* Housing management panel – referrals from Grays hall. Draft a report and then present it to Panel.

Bands 1 – 3

* 1 offer (having bid on the property) unless a “bad fit” e.g. 26 stairs – accept a refusal - adaptations – wet room – “as seen” (i.e. the Council will not change a wet room back into a bathroom

Bands 3 – 5

* Reasonable preference groups (including downsizing) – cumulative factors 2 + factors eligible for band 2

Band 4

* For people not adequately housed – lacking one bedroom
* Assessments – policy – 106 pages – index, glossary
- bidding
* Downsizing - £1000 per room

Band 4 & 5

* 3 offers – if refuse all 3 – individuals are suspended from being able to bid for a period of 2 years

Bands 1 to 4

* The date and effective date is relevant to the process

Band 5

* Transfers – no housing need – but want to move
* Desire / like / want
* Go on the housing register – 25% of properties
* Done in date order

**3. Questions re: Housing Allocations to the speaker**
**Q** Are animals allowed in Council properties?
**A** Yes, at the housing officer’s consent, No new pets are allowed but if you speak to the housing officer, they will be able to make a decision on a case-by-case basis

**Q** What training relating to mental health awareness has been given to housing officers?
**A** Officers receive regular training from Grays Hall and other training at least once a year. If you see the front line staff you can ask them to make an appointment for you with the housing team, that will have received the training. Housing is based on the 4th floor, and advocates are also welcome. Staff receive training in customer care, appropriate signposting. E.g. bidding, extra support, people management, as we recognise that Housing is important and can be an emotive subject. Staff are also given refresher training and updates.

**Q** The Codes and Guidance seem huge and difficult to understand
**A** The code of guidance is smaller now, case law – we treat everybody as an individual

**Q** In relation to the Bedroom tax, how easy is it to manage? What help is available?
**A** It is possible to apply for a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) for up to 3 months – Suggest that you speak to the Housing Department. It is possible to extend the DHP for longer (on a Discretionary Basis)

**Q** How do I get put on to the mailing list to receive information about properties that I can bid on?
**A** Give me your name and address today and I will put you on the mailing list

**Q** What is the age for children sharing a room (“The Bedroom Standard”)?
**A** If the children are of the same sex then when the oldest child reaches 21, if it is a boy and a girl then the age is 10 years old.

**Q** What percentage of the Housing stock is run by Housing associations
**A** Around 1000 properties

**Q** If a family or persons are homeless – Can they rent privately?
**A** Yes you can use private landlords, the council will give you the contact numbers

**Q** In relation to the Housing Allocations and the penalties for “bad tenants”, how are mental health issues taken into account when it comes to the behaviour of the tenant? I.e. The behaviour criteria could disproportionately affect people with mental health conditions – is this taken into account?
**A** Yes, we look at what the best next step would be in terms of support and available options. There is a process to go through before any notice is served. Thurrock Council Housing Department has only ever suspended 1 person, this can range from 6 months – 2 years.

**Q** Do you have interpreters?
**A** Yes we do.

**Q** How long are properties boarded up for?
**A** Not all properties are boarded up, only ones that are at risk, it is about 32 days and sometimes longer if major works need to be carried out.

**Q** What is assisted bidding and can I get help with it? Do I have to apply online?
**A** Support is available from the housing register team, they take your detais – phone, bidding list. You tell them what type of property you’re looking for and where and they look at what’s available and they can bid for properties your behalf – if you then turn it down, it doesn’t count against the limit, because you haven’t bid on the property personally.

The speaker informed the group about Thurrock Council’s website and how to get to the housing department. page to access the bidding process.

The Forum said that it was a good presentation, very easy to understand and it helped not having a PowerPoint, it helped having some facts and figures and they know that the housing dept. is a small and busy team

**4. Break**

**5. Minutes & Matters Arising from the previous Forum meeting (May 2014)**

Ian explained that he had talked with Les Bellingham about making the Forum into a sub group of Disability Partnership Board so that the Forum feedback can feed into the Decision Making Process and to increase the Voice of members of the Forum. The group agreed that this is positive, useful and helpful

The group asked if they could have a diagram (like a tree) of the different boards to show how they feed into one another
**Action:** Ian can sent out a copy or hand out a copy at the next forum meeting

Ian informed the group that the questions from the last forum meetinghave been sentto Andrew from JCP (Job Centre Plus)

Ian asked if the group would like the Forum minutes and agendas to be put on the Thurrock Coalition website as a record and for people to view
**Action:** The group are in agreement for this to be done by Ian

**Action:** Request an MH Training update from Bill Clayton – For September

**6. Future meeting topics**

Personalisation – September meeting (next meeting)

Gender equality (SERICC) – November meeting

**Action:** Ian to make a list of suggested questions for the next meeting, as a prompt for the forum to ask the speaker

If you have any question you can email or contact Ian with them

**7. Date of Next meeting (if the room at The Beehive is available)**

Monday 15th September 2014 – 1:30pm (Tea/Coffee) 2pm – 4pm (Meeting)