

Briefing to: Housing Support Services to Vulnerable People O&S Working Group

Briefing from: Head of Communities

Date: 26 February 2021

Subject: Serco Postcode Checks Details

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Purpose / Summary

To provide information requested by Members at the Working Group on the 22 January 2021:

- (a) providing elected Members with access to responses to PCC enquiries;
- (b) enabling elected Members to be included as consultees as part of the PCC's within their wards; and
- (c) how elected Members could feed into the Sefton Multi Agency Forum

Recommendations

Members consider the information provided and

1. Agree to receive a quarterly report from Serco on PCC activity
2. Provide opinion on areas that are suitable for procurement
3. Provide 6 monthly updates to Cllr Hardy in advance of her meeting with LCR Lead Members chaired by Cllr Liz Parsons.

1. Introduction

1.1 At its meeting on the 22 January 2021 the Housing Support Services to Vulnerable People O&S Working Group Overview & Scrutiny Housing asked whether elected members could be

- (a) providing elected Members with access to responses to PCC enquiries;
- (b) enabling elected Members to be included as consultees as part of the PCC's within their wards; and
- (c) how elected Members could feed into the Sefton Multi Agency Forum

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2. Postcode Checks

- 2.1 Members will recall that Serco's property procurement arm will approach the Local Authority with the property address and postcode of the property they wish to procure. This is known as a postcode check (PCC). The LA has 3 days to reply as to whether to grant approval for the procurement or not. The checks that the LA will make to determine whether a request can go ahead are:
- Crime, Hate Crime and Anti Social Behaviour levels – the Police are consulted
 - Capacity with local GPs and Health Services for additional population – the CCG are consulted
 - Capacity with local schools for additional pupils – Schools Regulatory Services are consulted.
 - Concentration of Asylum Properties – Housing Strategy are aware
- 2.2 Given the high number of PCCs the LA receives and the time required to turn around the responses to these requests and given the number that in reality follow through and become asylum accommodation, it isn't feasible to provide elected members with access to each response. There is also the sensitivity of sharing potential commercial arrangements between Serco and private landlords.
- 2.3 A potential solution is to ask Serco to provide a quarterly report giving the total number of PCCs they have requested in the quarter, the number we have refused and the reasons why and the number of properties that actually follow through to become asylum accommodation. Whilst this would not be at ward level it would provide assurance to members that officers and partners were considering each PCC on its own merits.
- 2.4 Given the 3 day deadline for turning each PCC around it simply would not be manageable to consult members. Furthermore refusals need to be evidence based as outlined in 2.1 and not subjective opinions.
- 2.5 We can seek opinion from members however in looking for suitable areas for procurement. We can request quarterly, areas where Members feel there are significant numbers of properties already and any other issues they feel we should be aware of in local communities.

3. Sefton Multi Agency Forum

- 3.1 As outlined at the meeting on the 22 January 2021 the Sefton Multi Agency Forum (MAF) hasn't met in over 12 month due to Covid. I will be looking to restart the MAF in the Spring, even initially as a virtual meeting. It is up to the discretion of Sefton as to whether elected members attend or not. I would

suggest seeking the Cabinet Member's view on who should attend and whether it is a decision for Cabinet to select a representative.

- 3.2 An alternative solution for elected members to input their experiences into the system is to do so via Cllr Hardy's attendance at the 6 monthly meeting with other LCR Lead Members chaired by Councillor Liz Parsons from Liverpool CC. I could ensure that 4 weeks prior to the meeting I seek any issues elected members are encountering and provide Cllr Hardy with a briefing note enabling her to raise these issues at an LCR level.

4. Summary

- 4.1 Members have asked for further information on PCCs and the Sefton MAF. The suggestions have been considered and where not possible an alternative has been suggested.

5. Recommendations

- 5.1 Members consider the information provided and
1. Agree to receive a quarterly report from Serco on PCC activity
 2. Provide opinion on areas that are suitable for procurement
 3. Provide 6 monthly updates to Cllr Hardy in advance of her meeting with LCR Lead Members chaired by Cllr Liz Parsons.

Steve Martlew
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