

London Borough of Islington

Housing Scrutiny Committee - 13 July 2015

Minutes of the meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Committee held at Committee Room 4, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD on 13 July 2015 at 7.30 pm.

Present: **Councillors:** O'Sullivan (Chair), Poyser (Vice-Chair), Andrews, Diner, Erdogan, O'Halloran and Williamson.

Co-opted members: Rose-Marie MacDonald and Jim Rooke.

Also present: **Councillors:** Heather

Councillor Michael O'Sullivan in the Chair

93 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item A1)

None.

94 DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item A2)

None.

95 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS (Item A3)

None.

96 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (Item A4)

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 8 June 2015 be confirmed and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

97 CHAIR'S REPORT (Item A5)

The Chair reported on his recent activities and the latest developments in the housing sector. It was advised that further information on the Government's proposed housing initiatives was expected to be available in the autumn and a report would be made to the Committee on this topic later in the year.

The Chair advised that he had recently visited Circle 33 Housing Association with other members of the Committee, Emily Thornberry MP, and representatives of Jeremy Corbyn MP. The organisation had outlined the changes to be made to their repairs and complaints handling procedures, which included the implementation of a new ICT system. The Chair was pleased with the efforts of the organisation to make improvements in these areas, however expressed that these developments should be welcomed cautiously until tenants experience real service improvements.

A discussion was had on the visit and members expressed a range of views. The Chair advised that there was a need for tenants to organise themselves independently of their housing associations to enable independent scrutiny and advocacy.

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The Chair reminded members that the Health and Care Scrutiny Committee would be carrying out a review of housing and health and further information in regards to how members can participate in this would be circulated in due course.

The Chair had recently attended a useful seminar on the linkages between housing and health and advised that he would circulate related information to members of the Committee shortly.

98 ORDER OF BUSINESS (Item A6)

The Chair stated that the order of business would be as per the agenda.

99 PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item A7)

The Chair outlined the procedure for public questions and the filming and recording of meetings.

100 RSL SCRUTINY (Item B1)

The Chair advised that One Housing had again been invited to attend the meeting to discuss their work and the ongoing situation at Islington Park Street, however had declined to attend.

The Committee expressed their disappointment and concerns with the approach of One Housing. It was commented that members of the Housing Scrutiny Committee would be willing to meet with the organisation at their offices.

RESOLVED:

That a press release be drafted by officers, in consultation with the Chair, detailing the Committee's disappointment with One Housing Association.

101 WORK PROGRAMME 2015/16 (Item B2)

RESOLVED:

That the work programme be agreed, subject to the 'Update on the New Right-to-Buy' item being scheduled for November 2015.

102 CAPITAL PROGRAMMING: SCRUTINY INITIATION DOCUMENT AND PRESENTATION (Item B3)

Damian Dempsey, Group Leader – Quantity Surveyors, presented the Scrutiny Initiation Document (SID), copy interleaved. A discussion was had during which the following main points were made –

- It was confirmed that consideration was given to the sustainability of materials used for capital works.
- It was requested that the review include comparisons with other local authorities and registered providers, the use of local labour, and a possible site visit.
- It was advised that the Council did have a register of local businesses, however these were used infrequently and often at short notice. It was explained that the Council's capital works were primarily carried out by major companies with their own supply chains and sub-contractors.
- It was explained that the Council's current capital works contractors were appointed for a period of up to ten years, at a value of around £40million. For this reason the procurement was required to be advertised through the OJEU. It was suggested that smaller local suppliers may be precluded from applying for contracts of such scale.

- It was advised that specialist works may on occasion require sub-contractors to further sub-contract works, however such instances were rare and this practice was generally discouraged by the Council.
- Councillor Gary Heather advised of recent casework concerning the quality of capital works and suggested that the Committee should consider the accountability of contractors.
- It was suggested that the Committee should consider the unmediated views of tenants, leaseholders and ward councillors. The Chair welcomed this approach and indicated his preference for written submissions to be made.
- A number of minor amendments were made to the SID to further specify the scope of the review.

RESOLVED:

That the SID be approved subject to the following amendments:

- (a) That the word 'residents' be substituted for 'tenants and leaseholders'
- (b) That under the second point of the scope, 'Procurement of Contractors' an additional bullet point be added, 'The quality of completed works and guarantees'
- (c) That under the second point of the scope, an additional bullet point be added, 'Comparisons with other local authorities and registered providers'
- (d) That under the second point of the types of evidence, the third bullet point be amended to read 'The views of tenants, leaseholders and ward councillors, including unmediated written evidence'
- (e) That under the types of evidence, an additional bullet point be added, 'Possible site visit'.

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RESPONSIVE REPAIRS: SCRUTINY INITIATION DOCUMENT AND PRESENTATION
(Item B4)

Paul Lightfoot, Group Leader – Direct Works, presented the Scrutiny Initiation Document, copy interleaved. A discussion was had during which the following main points were made –

- The Responsive Repairs service was in the process of implementing changes to make the service more customer oriented. It was hoped that some of these changes would be implemented before the Committee commenced the review in January.
- The Committee was to receive evidence from a range of officers, including representatives of the Customer Excellence Team.
- Following a question, the timescales for responding to repairs were explained, and it was suggested that the current system led to too many repairs being logged for 2 hour or 24 hour response unnecessarily. A new diagnostic and appointment system would help to better prioritise works and resources. It was also suggested that this could lead to savings by reducing the need for external contractors to meet demand during peak periods.
- It was intended to begin tendering for the new ICT system in the autumn. It was confirmed that officers were considering well-established systems used by other authorities. It was noted that any new system should take into account the needs of disabled residents, particularly those who are registered deaf or blind.
- A discussion was had on the options for cost-recovery in instances of damage to properties being caused by individuals.
- It was advised that officers were working to redesign elements of the service. The Committee requested for further details to be circulated to members when available.
- Councillor Gary Heather advised of recent casework concerning responsive repairs.
- A number of minor amendments were made to the SID to further specify the scope of the review.

RESOLVED:

That the SID be approved subject to the following amendments:

- (a) That under the objectives of the review, the second bullet point be amended to read 'To measure the satisfaction of residents with responsive repairs, and to evaluate the utility of the metrics used'.
- (b) That under the objectives of the review, the third bullet point be amended to read 'To consider how works are reported, planned, prioritised, responded to, and communicated to residents'
- (c) That under the objectives of the review, the fourth bullet point be amended to read 'To evaluate how the service compares to the services of other London Boroughs and registered providers'
- (d) That under the first point of the scope of the review, the second bullet point be amended to read 'Reporting and planning processes, including accessibility for those with disabilities'
- (e) That under the first point of the scope of the review, the third bullet point be amended to read 'How responsive repairs are prioritised and methods of triage employed'.

104 FUTURE APPROACH TO RSL SCRUTINY (Item B5)

RESOLVED:

That the 'areas of enquiry for registered providers' document be approved.

The meeting ended at 8:30pm

CHAIR