

London Borough of Islington

Housing Scrutiny Committee - 26 May 2016

Minutes of the meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Committee held at Committee Room 5, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD on 26 May 2016 at 7.30 pm.

Present: **Councillors:** O'Sullivan (Chair), Erdogan, Gantly, O'Halloran, and Picknell.

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

Councillor Michael O'Sullivan in the Chair

184 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item A1)**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Marian Spall and Mouna Hamitouche.

185 **DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item A2)**

None.

186 **DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS (Item A3)**

None.

187 **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (Item A4)**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 19 April 2016 be confirmed as a correct record and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

188 **CHAIR'S REPORT (Item A5)**

The Chair reported that the Housing and Planning Act had received royal assent and that further changes to national housing policy would be implemented through secondary legislation.

189 **ORDER OF BUSINESS (Item A6)**

No changes were proposed to the order of business.

190 **PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item A7)**

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

191 **MEMBERSHIP, TERMS OF REFERENCE AND DATES OF MEETINGS (Item B1)**

RESOLVED:

That the membership, terms of reference and dates of meetings of the Housing Scrutiny Committee for the municipal year 2016/17 be noted.

192 **RSL SCRUTINY: HYDE HOUSING ASSOCIATION (Item B2)**

Lee Daly, Head of Housing Services, and Chyrel Brown, Regional Director of Resident Services, made a presentation to the Committee on the performance of The Hyde Group.

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The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- Hyde owned or managed over 50,000 homes across London, the south east, and the midlands. Since 2005 the organisation had agreed to four stock transfers with Islington Council and had invested in the regeneration of housing stock.
- Hyde sought to develop innovative housing and was in the process of carrying out 15 garage conversions at the Hyde Village Estate. The organisation would have 2,194 units in the borough following the completion of Hyde Village and regeneration of the Packington Estate.
- The regeneration of the Packington Estate was to increase the number of homes from 558 to 700. It was noted that 475 of these would be general needs units.
- The satisfaction of Hyde residents with their repairs service had increased by 10% to 82% over the previous year. It was commented that some residents had a poor perception of the service and the organisation was working to make improvements, especially in regard to the time taken to complete repairs and keeping residents informed.
- Hyde's anti-social behaviour service had a satisfaction rating of 83%. The organisation considered this to be positive however was reviewing the service in order to improve the level of resident support, as this aspect of the service had only received a satisfaction rating of 67%.
- It was noted that rent arrears in Islington were above target at 5.24%, however this was comparable to other organisations.
- Hyde provided its residents with employment, training, money and debt advice through its Hyde Plus service. This was considered to be a service valued by residents. 154 Islington residents had received advice over the previous year. It was expected for this number to increase following the implementation of welfare reform and universal credit.
- The Committee noted problems with damp and coldbridging at Alderwick Court and commented that this had previously been considered by the Health and Care Scrutiny Committee. The organisation was seeking to work with the council and residents to find alternative accommodation; it was explained that residents affected by the damp would receive additional priority on the council's housing register. A member of the public explained the health issues her family had experienced as a result of the damp. Hyde and the affected residents had found it difficult to engage with each other and the Committee expressed regret at the deterioration of this relationship.
- One challenge to the organisation was managing the performance of its outgoing grounds maintenance contractor, as the contract had been re-tendered and a new contractor would be commencing work in July 2016.
- The Committee noted that Hyde carried out the repairs for Partners' properties and it was suggested that Hyde could better engage with the Partners resident forum. A member of the Partners resident forum thought that Hyde's repairs service required improvement and that the organisation's satisfaction surveys did not provide sufficient scope for explaining any problems experienced. The Committee noted that Hyde's satisfaction surveying was carried out by a third party and requested a copy of the survey questions.
- A discussion was had on the ancillary services provided by Hyde such as community centres. The Committee suggested that hiring Hyde's community facilities was unaffordable for some residents. It was noted that some estates had communal areas which could be hired by residents.
- It was confirmed that Hyde's repairs service was carried out through a partnering contract with Mears. Operatives were highly trained however the organisation was seeking to increase the number of multi-trade staff. A Mears contractor was

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embedded within Hyde's customer service team in order to best understand feedback from residents. It was confirmed that residents receiving repairs should receive a text message in advance of their appointment.

- Hyde was committed to its relationship with Mears and had no plans to bring its repairs service in-house, however recognised the value of direct labour organisations.
- The Committee noted the importance of fraud detection in relation to housing allocations, especially due to the limited supply of affordable housing in the borough.
- The Committee requested further information on the profile of Hyde properties in Islington.
- Hyde commented on the challenges presented by welfare reform, universal credit and the Housing and Planning Act. The organisation considered that further work with its partners and increased efficiencies would be required, and this could partially be met through the organisation's proposed merger with L&Q. The organisation was also carrying out service reviews in order to realign services to its residents' priorities and was working to improve voids performance in order to decrease the number of empty homes. In terms of the effects on residents, it was thought that providing employment and money advice would help tenants to pay their rent when facing increased financial burdens and develop the sustainability of communities.
- It was confirmed that Hyde did not re-paint void properties unless considered necessary, however a paint pack was available to new tenants on request.

The Committee thanked The Hyde Group for their attendance.

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RESPONSIVE REPAIRS: DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS (Item B3)

The Committee considered the draft recommendations of the Responsive Repairs scrutiny. The recommendations were approved, subject to an amendment for clarity to Recommendation 6.

The Committee thanked the Head of Repairs and Maintenance for his contribution to the review.

RESOLVED:

That the draft recommendations be approved, subject to Recommendation 6 being amended to read: 'The Committee recognises that estate services co-ordinators and caretakers have a wealth of knowledge about their area and suggests that their relationship with the repairs service be developed further, as these staff may be able to assist in the diagnosis of communal repairs, assist with communication, *and champion resident needs in partnership with Resident Liaison Officers*'.

194

SCRUTINY TOPICS 2016/17 (Item B4)

The Committee noted that communications, noise nuisance and key worker housing had been suggested for review in 2016/17. It was advised that the constitution required the Committee to identify one main topic for review and the Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee could assign another review topic to the Committee as required.

Following a discussion, the Committee identified 'Housing Services for Vulnerable People' as the review topic for 2016/17. In particular, the Committee expressed an interest in reviewing the housing options for vulnerable people, the additional services offered to vulnerable tenants, how vulnerable tenants and their particular needs were identified, how the council communicated and engaged with vulnerable tenants, benchmarking council services and identifying best practice, and joined up working with adult social care.

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It was suggested that housing associations' approaches to housing for vulnerable people be added to the list of standard questions for registered providers attending committee meetings.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the Committee review 'Housing Services for Vulnerable People', subject to approval by the Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee;
- 2) That the Committee undertake any further reviews as instructed by the Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee;
- 3) That a draft work plan and scrutiny initiation document be submitted to the next meeting for consideration.

The meeting ended at 8.50 pm

CHAIR