

The Chair noted that Jim Rooke had passed away. Jim had served as a co-opted member and observer on the Committee since 2014 and was previously appointed to the Housing Executive. Jim was an active member of the community who had campaigned on tenant issues for a number of years. The Committee observed a minute's silence.

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

No changes were proposed to the order of business.

261 **PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item A7)**

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

262 **SERVICE REVIEW GROUP: MANAGEMENT OF EXTERNAL COMMUNAL AREAS (Item B1)**

The report was presented by Anne Cannon, a resident and member of the Service Review Group.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- The Service Review Group had evaluated how external areas were managed, and in particular considered how Housing Services dealt with dog fouling, bulk refuse collection, and general cleanliness.
- The Committee noted and considered the recommendations of the Service Review Group. The Service Review Group had also identified areas of good practice.
- The Service Review Group had visited the St Luke's Estate and had met with a caretaker; it was observed that the caretaker had a good relationship with residents and that communication with the Area Housing Office was good. A member of the Committee advised that this was not consistent with the experiences of some local residents and commented that the estate had not had a permanent caretaker for the past two years. It was advised that this would be reported back to the Service Review Group.
- The Committee acknowledged that dog fouling was a particular issue for visually impaired people and wheelchair users. A member of the Committee highlighted the Service Review Group's recommendation to consider painting dog excrement in bright colours and suggested that this would have an additional cost which may be better spent on cleansing and enforcement.
- The Committee suggested that further work was needed to raise awareness that dog excrement could be placed in all public bins. It was suggested that providing free bags may also help to reduce incidents of dog fouling.
- It was suggested that increased enforcement through the issuing of fixed penalty notices may help to reduce dog fouling. However, it was advised that these were not able to be issued on private land or land owned by housing associations.
- The Committee considered recent incidents on fly tipping and queried if further liaison with the Police and inspection of CCTV footage would lead to the identification of offenders.
- A member of the public queried if further partnership work between boroughs could increase intelligence on those who repeatedly fly-tip waste.

The Committee thanked Anne Cannon and members of the Service Review Group for their contribution.

RESOLVED:

That the recommendations of the Service Review Group be received.

263 **HOUSING SERVICES FOR VULNERABLE PEOPLE: NOTES OF SCRUTINY VISIT & DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS (Item 2)**

a) Notes of Scrutiny Visit

Noted.

b) Draft Recommendations

It was advised that members of the Housing Disability Panel had been consulted on the draft recommendations.

RESOLVED:

That the recommendations be agreed.

264 **HOUSING PERFORMANCE - QUARTER 3 2016/17 & ANNUAL EXECUTIVE MEMBER PRESENTATION (Item 3)**

Councillor Diarmaid Ward, Executive Member for Housing and Development, made a presentation to the Committee on the performance of Housing Services; and introduced the performance report for Quarter 3 2016/17.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- Repairs satisfaction was 89%, which was considered good. It was also noted that the First Time Fix rate was 85%. It was thought that further improvements in performance would result from the introduction of the new repairs ICT system.
- It was commented that the council's joinery workshop had a particular specialism in sash windows. The Executive Member hoped that in future the council would be able to trade its repairs services commercially to generate income.
- It was reported that many operatives were enthusiastic about multiskilling as they considered that this would be beneficial to their careers.
- Communications around damp and mould had been reviewed and were now written in a more helpful tone.
- The Committee discussed the online repairs reporting system. It was acknowledged that some residents did not have ICT skills and it was suggested that these people could be assisted by providing training to resident associations and community groups on how to report repairs online. It was also suggested that awareness of the system could be raised through digital notice boards.
- It was suggested that allowing residents to pick an appointment time and date would be a positive further development to the online repairs reporting system.

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- It was explained that online repairs reporting was only applicable to directly managed properties, however it was hoped that Partners and other housing providers would introduce similar reporting mechanisms.
- The Committee commented on the need to rigorously scrutinise Partners' performance.
- Whilst the reduction in the use of temporary accommodation was welcomed, it was noted that the Homelessness Reduction Bill would likely increase the duties of local authorities without providing adequate additional resources.
- The Executive Member set out the factors which were taken into account when determining a homeless application. It was noted that domestic violence was a factor in around a third of homelessness cases. The most prevalent cause of homelessness was the end of a tenancy.
- There were 20,000 applications on the housing register and the number of severely overcrowded households had increased by 100 over the past year. Concern was expressed that the sale of higher value council housing to be implemented through the Housing and Planning Act would further reduce the council's ability to house vulnerable people.
- In response to a question, it was confirmed that the council provided advice to housing applicants who were unlikely to be accepted for council housing. It was also noted that the housing register was regularly reviewed to remove applicants who were no longer actively seeking council accommodation in the borough.
- The average points needed to successfully bid for a studio flat had slightly decreased over the past year. This was because there was less demand for studio flats in comparison to one-bedroom properties, and most applicants qualified for a one-bedroom property.
- The Committee expressed concern at housing associations selling their properties in the borough and queried if the council challenged housing associations on the resulting loss of nomination rights. In response, it was advised that there was no legal requirement for housing associations to inform the council when their properties were sold however officers were considering how the supply of housing association properties in the borough could be monitored closer.
- The Islington Lettings scheme was being reviewed. It was commented that the scheme faced significant competition from local lettings agents.
- The Committee raised concerns about housing fraud and in particular council properties being advertised for sub-let through online services such as Airbnb. The Executive Member had engaged in discussions with Airbnb about this.
- The Committee discussed how the implementation of universal credit would affect the housing service. It was advised that the council could apply to receive payments for rent directly from tenants' benefits if they were in a high level of arrears. It was suggested that the council should seek direct debit payments from tenants on universal credit to reduce the likelihood of them entering arrears.
- In response to a question, it was advised that around 1,000 households were paying the Bedroom Tax. Some of these households were claiming Discretionary Housing Payments.
- The Committee noted the council's new build developments and queried if shared ownership was an effective use of subsidy, given that many shared ownership properties in the borough were only affordable to higher income households. In response the Executive Member acknowledged that shared ownership was increasingly unaffordable, particularly in the south of the borough, however commented that there was a need for intermediate housing options.
- It was suggested that the council's quarterly housing performance should be benchmarked against larger housing associations for comparative purposes.

The Committee thanked Councillor Ward for his attendance.

RESOLVED:

That progress against key performance indicators in Quarter 3 2016/17 be noted.

265 UPDATE ON TENANT LED ORGANISATIONS (Item 4)

The report was presented by Joanne Walters, Tenant Management Team Leader.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- Islington had 23 tenant led organisations which managed around 3,100 council owned properties.
- It was highlighted that many of the tenant led organisations had substantial surpluses. Whilst it was acknowledged that some tenant led organisations had invested in local amenities through play equipment and outdoor gyms, it was noted that this was not feasible for all organisations.
- The council had a role in overseeing the work of tenant led organisations. It was noted that legislative requirements, particularly in relation to health and safety, data protection and safeguarding, had changed significantly since some of the organisations were established in the 1970s and 80s and there were therefore risks which needed to be addressed. The Committee commented on the importance of auditing tenant led organisations for compliance with legislation.
- The sale of higher value council housing through the Housing and Planning Act presented a risk to the sustainability of tenant led organisations and local communities.
- The Committee noted the amount of officer time in supporting tenant led organisations and queried if the council could sell services to these organisations in the same way in which schools procure training from the council. In response, it was commented that this could be explored, however the council had an interest in ensuring that tenant led organisations were well run and received comprehensive training on matters such as safeguarding. For this reason providing services at no cost to the organisations was beneficial.
- It was queried if tenant led organisations could be encouraged to invest their surpluses in the council's new build programme.
- A member commented that tenant led organisations were often very efficient and provided good quality services to residents.
- It was advised that the allowances received by tenant led organisations were calculated in relation to the council's own budgets and generally these organisations had not experienced budget reductions.
- Following a question, it was advised that tenants wishing to make a complaint about a tenant led organisation should complain to the organisation in the first instance. Any unresolved complaints could be followed up by the council if required.

The Committee thanked Joanne Walters for her attendance.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

266 **HOUSING AND PLANNING ACT UPDATE (PRESENTATION) (Item 5)**

Maxine Holdsworth, Service Director for Housing Needs and Strategy, made a presentation to the Committee on the implications of the Housing and Planning Act.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- The Committee welcomed that the government's proposed 'tenant tax' had been dropped. This would instead be implemented by housing providers on a discretionary basis. Islington Council had confirmed that it would not be implementing the policy. The council had written to all housing associations operating in the borough and all had responded to confirm that they would not be implementing the policy, with the exception of Hyde Housing Association.
- The Committee expressed concern at the sale of higher value empty properties, noting that the council may be forced to sell a third of its empty properties each year, providing all receipts to the treasury to fund Right to Buy discounts. It was thought that the sale of Islington's properties could generate up to £200m a year for the treasury whilst worsening the already severe housing crisis in the borough. It was commented that a decrease in the council's housing supply would significantly impact the council's ability to meet the housing needs of residents, including vulnerable people.
- The council would be unable to continue to offer lifetime tenancies, however further detail was awaited on the full implications of this.
- The Committee welcomed the proposed Greater London Authority Affordable Housing and Viability Supplementary Planning Guidance, which was intended to increase the supply of genuinely affordable housing in London.
- It was thought that the benefits cap would have a significant effect on some housing association and private sector tenants. It was expected that homelessness would increase as a result. Members requested a breakdown by ward of the number of families expected to be affected by the benefit cap, and suggested that members could receive training on homelessness issues.
- The Committee considered that the recently published Housing White Paper lacked meaningful content to respond to.
- A member advised of the 'Alternative Housing Awards' facilitated by the Unite Union Housing Workers Branch, which recognised housing associations for poor performance.

The Committee thanked Maxine Holdsworth for her attendance.

The meeting ended at 9.35 pm

CHAIR