

Public Document Pack

London Borough of Islington

Housing Scrutiny Committee - 16 November 2017

Minutes of the meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Committee held at Committee Room 4, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD on 16 November 2017 at 7.30 pm.

Present: **Councillors:** O'Sullivan, O'Halloran – substitute, Diner, Gantly,
Gallagher, Hamitouche

Resident Representatives: Dean Donaghy and Rose Marie MacDonald

Councillor Michael O'Sullivan in the Chair

311 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item 1)

Councillors Doolan, Erdogan, Spall and Hamitouche for lateness

312 DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item 2)

Councillor O'Halloran stated that she was substituting for Councillor Doolan

313 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS (Item 3)

None

314 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (Item 4)

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 3 October 2017 be confirmed and the Chair be authorised to sign them

315 CHAIR'S REPORT (Item 5)

The Chair stated that he had attended resident focus groups in relation to Fire Safety and a meeting of the London Scrutiny Network in relation to the Grenfell Fire, and the notes of the meetings had been circulated.

Members stated that they wished to place on record their appreciation to staff who had worked on the Grenfell tragedy and in looking into Fire Safety implications in Islington.

The Chair added that in relation to the Fire Safety witness evidence from the London Hazards Centre, they were not able to attend that evening and he stated that he would contact them with a view to obtaining written witness evidence

316 ORDER OF BUSINESS (Item 6)

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

317 PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item 7)

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

318 FIRE SAFETY SCRUTINY REVIEW: WITNESS EVIDENCE (Item 2)

The notes of the meetings of the sessions attended by the Chair and the briefing note on rehoming residents in the event of the fire were noted by the Committee

The Chair added that he hoped that the Government would provide funding for the necessary works and that the latest advice is that sprinklers are more effective in individual flats, rather than communal areas

319 HOUSING COMMUNICATIONS SCRUTINY REVIEW: WITNESS EVIDENCE (Item 1)

Jo Murphy, Service Director Homes and Communities, Housing and Adult Social Services, made a presentation to the Committee, a copy of which is interleaved.

During consideration of the presentation the following main points were made –

- The remit as a landlord is to 26000 households and 9000 tenants, however there is a greater emphasis on supporting a positive and safe home life beyond (but including) the terms of the tenancy
- Home and Communities have also been joined by the Voluntary and Community Sector team which extends the reach through partners and there is a focus on greater promotion of confidence, independence and resilience
- The areas of focus will be belonging to a community where you enjoy living and can make a contribution, health and wellbeing which enables residents to stay healthy, happy and independent, jobs and money which assists residents to manage money and find work and enforcement where residents and Council's interests are protected
- For staff this means new ways of working, new development opportunities, potential to improve processes, and a key innovation is the new team of Service Ambassadors – front line staff who have come forward to champion resident need, improve links with other Council departments and encourage more joined up working and improved processes
- This will mean more emphasis on partnership working with trusted professional relationships to enable early, supportive and challenging conversations, better placed to support wider Council initiatives, such as channel shift, making every contact count, promotion of early intervention, resilience and prevention. In addition, shared efficiencies through better targeting of scarce resources
- What this means for residents – More emphasis on co-designed services, based on understanding of residents, improved skills/jobs, financial stability, health and social security outcomes, greater sense of belonging, confidence, empowerment and resilience built into all interactions, better use of digital transactions where appropriate, and better experience for residents
- It was noted that the effect of the introduction of Universal Credit, if the results of the pilot in Croydon, are replicated in Islington, will lead to an increase in rent arrears

Housing Scrutiny Committee - 16 November 2017

and work to assist residents to manage their finance and assist in finding work is important and will be a key focus

- Discussion took place as to caretakers and that there is an increased focus on how they could improve the situation of residents. It was stated that there is now good relations between caretakers and management and that ongoing discussions were taking place
- In relation to siting of satellite dishes reference was made to the fact that the installation of a communal sky dish on estates was now not cost effective, however the issue of free view boxes could be investigated
- It was noted that when a repairs operative could not gain access for an appointment a card was left for the tenant advising them that they had called
- In response to a question it was stated that 200 families were known to the Council that would be adversely affected by Universal Credit, however there were many more households who would be adversely affected. The Council would be trying to get messages across that they were there to assist if households required this. Reference was made to the fact that a communications strategy was being developed with some key messages and effective ways of delivering these messages to households
- It was stated that the new model for Housing Operations that was envisaged would be fully implemented for 12 months as work needed to be undertaken with staff and skills in improving letter writing and behaviours were key to improving trust with residents. This will be a learning process and evolve over time, It is also intended to build links with GP's and the Police with a view to sharing information
- Reference was made to the fact that Partners also had to ensure their tenants were aware of the implications of Universal Credit and that it would be useful if the Council did a presentation to Partners on the implications of Universal Credit and the information and assistance that could be given to tenants
- In respect of making Every Contact Count, it was felt that Housing had a key role in spotting early warning signs in cases of vulnerable tenants
- Work is also taking place with VCS organisations and Help on Your Doorstep in identifying vulnerable residents
- Reference was made to the different computer data bases used by Housing and that these should be integrated. It was stated that this is problematic but is being looked at

The Chair thanked Jo Murphy for her presentation

Christine Short, Head of Capital Programme Delivery then made a presentation to Members, a copy of which is interleaved,

During discussion the following main points were made –

- The Capital Programme involves major works to the fabric of buildings, specialist works such as communal boiler replacement, lift overhauls and replacements, mechanical and electrical projects, such as door entry systems, communal lighting CCTV, estate lighting, communal watertank removals, fire protection and kitchen and bathroom renewals
- Cyclical maintenance works are carried out every 7 years
- Most contracts are Partnering contracts – contractors are appointed early in the process so that the Council can work with them in designing schemes and using their expertise

Housing Scrutiny Committee - 16 November 2017

- The aim is to ensure that communications with residents is properly joined up with contractors and is consistent
- Communication with residents is mainly via written documentation – general advisory letters, invites to meetings or letters requiring access, newsletters, legal documentation, but also face to face contact, such as residents meetings, drop in sessions, or specific meetings with individual residents to resolve issues or problems
- Projects have 2 distinct phases – Design stage, and onsite stage. During the design stage of the project the Council staff are more prominent at meetings and initiate communication and they organise an early consultation meeting with all residents
- Leaseholders are invited to Section 20 meetings to discuss costs associated with the works and our best estimate of likely costs
- Once works start on site a shift takes place and contractors take greater responsibility for communications – issuing newsletters, presence on site with staff hut
- Contractors are contractually bound to employ services of resident liaison officers to communicate directly with the Public. Any complaints generated as a result of the work are initially dealt with by the resident liaison officers
- Over the last three to four years there has been an enormous amount of work to improve communications through an improved consultation document, improved financial information for leaseholders, developed document on roles of professional staff, and organised written communications course for all staff
- Areas for improvement recommended by the Service Review Group include – residents wanting more meaningful information around timetabling of works, when to expect works on their block, how long scaffolding will be in place etc.
- In addition, tenants want more information on costs, have more information provided on fire protection works that are being carried out and to have provided executive summaries on letters that are more detailed and complex
- A Member expressed concern at works that had been carried out previously at St.Lukes Estate in 2014 and that this was sub-standard but still no remedial action had been taken by the contractor and in addition Members were of the view that areas of work sub-contracted had little accountability for the standard of work carried out. The Head of Capital Programme Delivery stated that she would investigate and respond to Members thereon in respect of St.Lukes Estate
- Members felt that the booklets that had been circulated in relation to improvement works were good and should be continued and that both leaseholders and tenants, as both paid for improvement works should be informed of the costs of works. The view was expressed that a booklet should be produced on the work pre and post improvement works and the Head of Capital Programme Delivery stated that she would investigate the possibility of this
- A Member expressed the view that Housing Associations appeared to get better quality improvement works than the Council
- In response to a question it was stated that if an independent person was appointed to oversee the quality of contractors work this could also be contentious and add to the costs of the scheme. In addition, the Council Clerk of Works is responsible for assessing the quality of work carried out
- Reference was made to the length of time scaffolding was often in place and this was a safety issue and be a burglary risk and tenants should be informed if this is the case The Head of Capital Programme Delivery stated that occasionally scaffolding was left up longer than intended, however this was avoided wherever possible

RESOLVED:

Housing Scrutiny Committee - 16 November 2017

- (a) That the Head of Capital Programme Delivery investigate the issues raised above with poor quality of work at St.Lukes Estate, any remedial action that has been taken and if not, the reasons therefore
- (b) That consideration be given to producing a booklet, post completion, of works showing the work required prior to works starting and the works post completion

The Chair thanked Christine Short for attending

320 WORK PROGRAMME (Item 4)

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted

321 CAPITAL PROGRAMME SCRUTINY 2015/16 - 12 MONTH UPDATE (Item 3)

Christine Short, Head of Capital Programme Delivery, Housing and Adult Social Services outlined the report.

During consideration of the report the following main points were made –

- Recommendation 1 - It was stated that there should be an annual report to the Committee on the main contractors performance that work for the Council
- Recommendation 2 – Information should be provided on any monies held back on contracts, as a result of contractors poor performance in the previous 2 years
- Recommendation 4 – There should be scrutiny of works sub contracted and sub-contractors also sub- contracting work to ensure accountability for works
- Recommendation 5 – The view was expressed that the benchmarking exercise should be done through the London Scrutiny Network and that the use of smaller contractors should be looked at
- Recommendation 8 – It was stated that there needed to be transparency and resident engagement in any proposals
- Recommendation 9 – It was stated that in future booklets of capital works prior to work taking place and following completion should be produced for residents and leaseholders
- Recommendation 10 – Residents and leaseholders should be provided, where possible, of information relation to tenders and the costs of works
- Recommendation 13 – Members were of the view that an in house capability should be explored to carry out a proportion of planned maintenance and major works. It was stated that discussions were taking place in this regard

RESOLVED:

That, subject to the above comments, the report be noted

The meeting ended at 10.00 PM

CHAIR

