

## **Estate Services Management** **Housing Scrutiny Report**

### **Introduction**

Following the Housing Scrutiny review meeting in late 2014, it was agreed by the committee that the GMB would compile a detailed report, and submit it as evidence for the committee to consider on many aspects of the caretaking service focusing on estate management.

The following report explains the previous management structure of managing caretakers and repairs staff, to the current system today.

It highlights many difficulties in the current system of management duplication and the inefficiency in this management structure, which clearly is not cost effective to the council and residents of the borough.

Although this type of management structure may have worked in Homes for Islington, it fails to fit in with the integrated structure of Islington Council. This structure is repetitive, inefficient, and costly to our residents.

### **Service Description**

The current service has several layers of management and in each area office there is a serious issue about duplication of caretaking management roles and tasks

The current structure is:

#### **Officer Posts**

- Area Housing Manager
- Estate Services Manager
- Estate Service Coordinator (ESC)
- Quality Assurance Officer (QAO)
- Support Manager
- Support managers Admin support officers
- Administration support staff / Inspectors (only Highbury)
- Independent inspectors
- Resident inspectors (not employed)

#### **Mechanised Services**

- Cleaner Streets Program Manager
- Cleaner Streets Manager
- Assistant Mechanized Service Manager

## Manual Posts

- Mechanised operatives (bulk refuse)
- Resident Caretakers
- Non Resident Caretakers
- Part time Seasonal Grass Litter Pickers
- Agency staff

The **Area Housing Officer** has overall responsibility of the caretaking service within the office structure as well as other main service areas, but not hands on approach.

**Estate Services Manager** again has responsibility of the caretaking service but has caretaking as part of their management duties in their job description

**Estate Service Coordinators** are the main officers who manage the caretaking service with management responsibilities, however the Quality Assurance Officers do the main day to day management of the caretakers although their job descriptions say they assist in reality this is not the case they are more like managers.

**Quality Assurance Officers (QAOs)** deal with all aspects of caretaking and are the main day-to-day link to caretakers, and in fact although their task should be one of supervision and support they have become the real managers by default without recognition.

Most offices now simply treat the QAOs as the main managers when it comes to workload, performance, and day-to-day management but in reality they are performing the tasks of the Estate Service Coordinators who are suppose to manage the caretakers. This confusion and duplication of work is inefficient, costly, and confusing for staff when it comes to caretaking responsibilities.

The QAOs are also responsible for the reporting of day to day repair reporting and estate inspections. However over recent months against the union agreement there has been an introduction of Staff deemed as another layer of "inspectors" when this function is clearly the responsibility of the QAOs.

**Support Managers** are in addition to all the above where there is another layer in caretaking management who are employed to support the estate service coordinators in managing the day-to-day duties, and support duties for caretaking.

If you take annual leave requesting as an example it's for the Estate coordinators to agree, the QAOs to organise, and the support manager to record. This is an inefficient way to manage a service, and there are many other examples. It's this duplication of roles that confuses caretakers, other officers and more importantly residents as to who is responsible for each part of the caretaking management service.

**Support Managers Admin Assistance** are also an addition to the above and are employed to support estate service coordinators, QAOs, and Support

managers, whereas in fact this is the roll that a support manager should be doing and was not part of the original caretaking management structure when the service was changed some years ago. Like the inspectors this post was introduced after the Review and although there maybe some need for admin posts, the layers above should be sufficient to cover this work.

**Administration Assistants / Inspectors.** This is another recently introduced post that has been disputed by the unions as there was no clear recruitment process and why are we introducing more managers posts when its front line post we desperately need.

**Independent Inspectors** are a rollover from Homes from Islington who are a group of staff who were used to independently monitor estates for both repairs and cleaning.

However the roll is now more concentrated on caretakers performance, cleaning, attendance, and ignoring some of the outstanding repairs which is an area we do look to improve as it certainly requires more attentions and a review of costs. This could also fit into the policy and performance Review on Income generation of the return of the Housing Building Maintenance contract from Kier to the council where improving areas of the repairs contract, and selling it to the private market would be a benefit to the residents and the council.

The front line of caretaking has been cut back to the bone whereas the management structures are repetitive and there is a serious element of duplication. The reasons we feel that this is an issue is that the management of caretaking is not attached to the residents service charges and layers of increased management can be hidden in various budgets, whereas the manual side is transparent and open and is related to service charges.

This is why the management of the caretaking service needs a fresh look at a new management structure streamlining the management tasks having a consistent approach across all offices and estates, but rather than losing jobs, we feel there is a need to redevelop and split the management of caretaking into two areas, one line of management for caretaking, and cleaning including inspections, and the other into dealing with estate repairs and selling the new in-house repairs service to the private sector.

Splitting the demarcation between caretaking and Repairs would allow both departments to concentrate on each service area far more than it can at the moment. Currently QAOs who are responsible for reporting and inspecting day-to-day repairs are being bogged down with a caretaking service issues whose resources are decreasing to an all time low as well as caretakers moral.

The same is said on repairs where the QAO spends extensive amounts of time on Repair reporting and chasing, takes them away from managing the caretaking service and sometimes urgency of issues within caretaking are left unmanaged.

Problems have increase where the area housing offices have reduced, yet the caretakers in each office who the managers have responsibilities for have increased, the managers patches have therefore increased, the areas for repair reporting and chasing have increased, managers duties are being duplicated inadvertently, and the management of both estate repairs and caretaking is inefficient, ineffective, duplicated, and in need of review.

Proposed structure for the committee is to go back to a dedicated caretaker Manager solely responsible for managing the caretaking service in each area housing office.

Reintroduce assistant caretaking managers in each area office, who also carry out inspections on cleaning and caretaking duties.

### **Charge Hands**

The previous service allowed the use of on site charhands dealing with day-to-day issues of caretaking. The committee may want to investigate this further as part of any proposed changes to the management of the service. It was far more effective and the response to caretaking problems was instant. It was also an area of natural progression regards promotion.

### **Repairs Staff**

Reintroduce repairs officers who solely report and chase estate repairs, giving the residents one single person who will have responsibility for repairs. These employees can also fit into the possible recommendations of the policy performance review committee on income generation to help sell the repairs service to the private sector and leaseholders at a cost and generate income for the council.

### **Proposed Structure**

#### **Management**

- Area Housing Office Manager
  - Caretaking manager
  - Assistant Caretaking Manager
  - Caretaking charge hands
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- Repairs manager
  - Repairs reporters and chasers
  - Repair inspectors

#### **Manual Workers**

- Resident Caretakers
- Non Resident Caretakers
- Part time workers (predominately women workers)
- Estate Operative

### **Caretaking service fit for a "Future that works"**

There are several problems with the current caretaking stemming from the transfer from hfi and membership of an organisation that homes for Islington was a member of "One Housing Group".

We are a member of this organization that operates within the private housing sector and whose members are housing associations some outer boroughs, and mainly non inner city local authority employers.

### **Housing Estate Services Support Team**

We have a dedicated housing management team which over the years has expanded from one officer to many, we are not sure of this departments responsibility's, apart from look at alternative equipment for the caretaking service but plays no part in repairs.

There are several options to the function of this team one is that the role of this team can be incorporated into a collective responsibility of the caretaking manager's job should this be an agreed way forward.

The current team liaises with some outside bodies such as one housing group, and several housing associations, but not many local authorities that have the same make-up as Islington.

One Housing Group is an organisation that has a one size fits all policy and designed to drive down costs, at the risk of service provision. It can be seen as an outside contractor working across various housing organisations within the private sector.

The problem here is that we can't compare the private sector services with those in public sector.

We need to design our own outcomes and not pay annual membership costs to another outside organisation to do this for us, we can compete and start delivering standards developed in islington, not Barnet, or anywhere else.

At the last presentation management stated that the standards are high which we agree. However there is much room for improvement in service delivery and cost.

A survey used may record the standards as high using a formula designed to give this result, but on the ground the front line service are substantially supporting an expensive management estate caretaking and repair structure.

This is seen as draining front line resources, which results in the service being under resourced and in need of improvement by re-investment, and streamlining the management structure.

### **Caretaking Estate Measurement Scheme**

The caretaking service is the only council service that openly determines the cost to the resident of the borough. Currently the resident's pay a percentage of a global service charge of an accumulation of the overall budget costs.

In other words if you have 200 Caretakers, the council divides this cost across all residents no matter what service on the estates they receive. It could be that a resident pays the same if they get 7 days a week cleaning as someone who only gets two days a week which is inconstant across the council.

The caretaking measurement scheme is a scheme that determines how many caretakers we need to achieve a service. However the scheme fails to take many issues into consideration, such as traveling time like homecare, Health and Safety inspections, leaf clearance, management duties like lumber collections, report writing, attending the ever increasing meetings called by management.

The most important issue here is that there is no built in measurement for covering a caretaker's annual leave or indeed sickness this is achieved by getting other caretakers to cover outside of his or her own estate measurement scheme.

What is required is a cleaning set of frequencies for each estate, which relates to a charge to each resident and not a global charge. These are what the union has been pursuing for some time now by what is know as a "estate service level agreement". This will determine the exact resources needed, and determine a fairer consistent system to each household, which will highlight the actual costs to each resident, not the overall estate.

At the moment we have the same costs to residents no matter how much service they get they all pay the same.

An example is where we have less than 20 dwellings in a block; these blocks only get cleaned twice a week. Where as blocks such as Andover have a seven-day daily cleaning service, the charge to the resident is exactly the same.

Although there is a significant difference in distributed resources applied, the cost to the residents so different.

## **Estate Facilities**

Caretakers have been complaining for many years about the complete lack of basic facilities on their estates. Many are working out of converted sheds with poor toilet facilities if any. Women caretakers are increasing which is a welcomed asset within this service. However there are no separate facilities for women caretakers, which is a barrier we must challenge and conquer.

In the offices there has been extensive budgets spent on workplace facilities for all office based staff. However compared to the facilities caretakers and others have available, it could be said that those who work in the offices are treated far more favorably than those manual workers on estates.

There needs to be a massive investment in basic facilities for staff working outside the office environment as a matter of urgency.

## **Caretaking Stores**

There is a noticeable reduction in the supply and allocation of cleaning stores to caretakers, both non resident and resident. Stores allocation is a fundamental problem for caretakers to reach an agreeable standard.

There's an urgent need to review the stores allocation to each estate in line with the estate service level agreements for each estate not an area housing office based group of estates or caretakers. It should be on the basis of need per estate, which identifies the actual costs per residents for which these stores are used.

## **Caretaking Recruitment**

The GMBs view is to increase the numbers of women caretakers within the caretaking service. Identifying shorter hours to allow Single parents to work while the children are in school. This will result in many women coming off of out of work benefits and into the workplace, gaining both experience and a pathway into suitable employment.

At the moment many caretakers are overlooked for promotion into office based jobs. The current way to gain promotion is via an old friends network, or by agency use.

The current caretakers have lost all confidence in the recruitment process ever since the removal of trade union Equality Observers, this has left the process open to abuse and nepotism.

However, this problem is not only within caretaking, it's a serious issue within many departments within the council, and needs a serious investigation if we are to be seen as a serious equality-promoting employer.

## **GMB Trade Union shop stewards**

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