

## **Housing Scrutiny Committee**

### **Scrutiny Review: Scaffolding and Work Platforms**

#### **Site Visit: 12 February 2015**

On 12 February 2015, members of the Housing Scrutiny Committee visited a number of active sites where the Council is carrying out improvement works to housing stock through the use of scaffolding, mobile scaffold towers, mast climbers, and cherry pickers.

The visit was attended by Councillors O'Sullivan, Kay, Andrews, Erdogan, and O'Halloran; Jim Rooke, the Housing Scrutiny Committee Directly Managed Tenants Representative; officers from the Property and Democratic Services sections, and representatives of the Council's contractors, the Breyers Group and Mears Projects.

The following sites were visited:

- Mayeville Estate, N16
- Riversdene, N5
- Stavely/Keighley Close, N7
- Ewe Close, off Shearling Way, N7

Those present inspected the works being carried out on site and discussed the appropriate usage of different types of working platform, how improvement works are planned and delivered, health and safety aspects, access arrangements and communication with residents.

During the visit the following main points were made –

- Each property is assessed on its own merits before the most suitable way of carrying out the work is agreed. Before deciding if scaffolding is required, contractors will take into account the extent of the work that needs to be carried out, the resources required, and if there are any alternatives. Discussing works with residents can also help to assess which resources are required, as residents may be able to identify problems with their own property.
- Works which require a significant amount of manpower, or working at considerable height for a prolonged period of time, will often require scaffolding. Cherry pickers are height limited and are only able to accommodate a maximum of two workers. For safety reasons certain works are only able to be carried out from a scaffold, for example roof works involving hot bitumen.
- Cherry pickers can be limited by the local environment. Works must allow access for emergency vehicles and it would not be considered good practice to close a road or obstruct a footpath to enable works when there is an alternative available.
- Safety is the most important consideration when carrying out improvement works. A series of inspections are carried out before, during and after the works, the results of which are discussed between the Council and the contractor.
- There can be a perception that scaffolding is erected for a long period of time with little work taking place. Although there can be unforeseen delays to works, unoccupied scaffolding is often due to inspections and preparatory work taking place.

- There are various reasons why works may be delayed. Delays can be caused when additional works are identified during the course of the works. This requires agreeing additional funding and re-evaluating project plans. A delay has previously been caused by scaffolding not being erected to a sufficient standard. Delays can also be caused by ongoing consultation with leaseholders.
- When visiting the Mayeville Estate, some Members expressed concern at the apparently low number of operatives working on the site given the length of the contract and the inconvenience to residents.
- When working on a number of properties, it is not possible to work in series moving scaffolding from one property to the next as the materials must undergo a safety inspection following disassembly.
- Members provided details of relevant complaints received from local residents.
- Contractors use a variety of methods to engage with local residents including monthly newsletters and resident liaison officers. Breyers informed Members that residents were the most important part of the process and this was stressed to their Resident Liaison officers.
- The Council works closely with contractors, with clerk of works officers visiting key sites daily. Officers consider the Council to have sufficient resources to administer the volume of work currently being undertaken.
- Scaffolding is a fixed cost regardless of the time period it is erected for. As a result, scaffolding can represent a significant expense within the overall cost of a scheme, especially if the works being carried out are relatively low value. However, the cost of scaffolding through the Council's responsive repairs contract has significantly decreased recently, and the fixed cost only increases if additional works are required or if a project is intentionally delayed.
- Capital works are carried out on a seven year rolling programme. Officers could consider moving non-urgent works to a fourteen year cycle; however each would require assessing on a case by case basis. It was queried if an alternative cycle should be adopted, such as ten years.
- On visiting Stavely/Keighley Close, Members were advised that Mears has recently employed four apprentices, three of which were female, and apprentices are regularly offered full time jobs at the end of their apprenticeship.
- It was suggested that the Council could seek to work with housing associations which are due to undertake capital works to properties neighbouring council-owned properties, as this could lead to efficiencies.
- The Council has recently procured its own cherry picker, which is available for property works, as well as repairs to street lighting and similar works.

Those present thanked the contractors for their cooperation and contribution to the scrutiny review.