

London Borough of Islington

Housing Scrutiny Committee - 26 January 2015

Minutes of the meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Committee held at on 26 January 2015 at 7.30 pm.

Present: Councillors: O'Sullivan, Kay, Diner, O'Halloran, Andrews, Fletcher, Williamson, Erdogan, Rose Marie McDonald and Jim Rooke

Also Present: Councillors: Hamitouche, Doolan and Murray

Councillor Michael O'Sullivan in the Chair

46 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item 1)

Councillor Kay (for lateness)

47 DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item 2)

None

48 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS (Item 3)

Councillors Andrews, O'Sullivan, O'Halloran declared an interest as they were Members of the GMB Trade Union and Councillor Doolan declared an interest that his wife was a caretaker in relation to agenda item B10

49 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (Item 4)

RESOLVED:

That subject to the following amendment to minute 41 – bullet point 5 of the addition of the words – and provision made for estates, especially larger estates, where there was no TRA, the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 2 December be confirmed and the Chair be authorised to sign them

50 ORDER OF BUSINESS (Item 6)

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

51 PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item)

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

52 CHAIRS REPORT (Item 5)

Welcome to new Members/Protocol for co-opted Members

The Chair welcomed Rose Marie MacDonald and Jim Rooke, the newly co-opted Members of the Committee to the meeting and that a protocol had been laid round in this regard.

Scaffolding site visit

The Chair stated that a visit to 4 sites in the borough had been arranged for 12 February in connection with the scrutiny review on scaffolding and that details would be circulated to Members in the near future.

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The Chair added that it was proposed to invite the Chair of the Islington Leaseholders Association, Dr. Brian Potter to the next meeting of the Committee to give his views and also a representative of the Half Moon co-operative.

Circle 33

The Chair stated that unfortunately Circle 33 were not able to be present that evening but hopefully would be able to attend the next meeting of the Committee. He added that there had been recent articles in the Housing press relating to Circle 33 and he would arrange for them to be circulated to Committee Members.

53 REGISTERED SOCIAL PROVIDERS - PRESENTATION (Item 7)

The Chair stated that Circle 33 were unable to attend the meeting that evening and hopefully they would be attending the next meeting of the Committee on 2 March

54 IN HOUSE REPAIRS SERVICE - PRESENTATION (Item 8)

Matt West, Head of Repairs and Maintenance, was present and laid round a presentation, copy interleaved.

During the presentation the following main points were made –

- The in house Gas repairs went live in June 2014 and the in house repairs service in August 2014
- There were 50,000 works orders per year and 200 plus staff had been transferred under TUPE arrangements
- There are 30 specialist and overspill contractors
- The stores has been established and stock catalogues are being developed
- Performance data is starting to be available but at present needs validating
- The benefits of an in house service include the service being more customer centred, multiskilling, a training centre, materials supply, direct control and digital integration
- Current challenges include – IT systems, reporting, productivity, the roofing supply chain where a new tender process was being prepared and call volumes
- Current challenges – recruitment, 24/7 cover, managing installation contractors, developing staff competence, incentive/bonus scheme, online appointment booking
- Current work in progress – reorganisation, local employment and apprenticeships, fleet and management review, new IT systems, and reviewing contract arrangements
- Concern was expressed that Members still could not see performance data in order to ascertain whether repairs were being carried out effectively. It was stated that the new system would be able to identify cases repairs that had not been dealt with satisfactorily and repairs outstanding for a long time
- In response to a question it was stated that appointment slots were being looked at to make them more realistic and convenient for tenants and there was a Repairs Reference Group set up that would be discussing such issues with residents
- In order to offer the repairs service to leaseholders and RSL's etc. it would be necessary to ensure an efficient and reliable service was in place and appointments offered to fit in with customers lifestyles
- A Member stated that it was important that different parts of the Council worked together as when she had recently moved into a flat it had taken 4 days from her getting the keys to having her gas connected. The Head of Repairs and Maintenance stated that this should not have taken as long as this and if details were supplied to him he would investigate, however wherever possible services were integrated

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- It was noted that the repairs service would continue to be a regular agenda item to ensure the Committee could ensure the service was working as effectively as possible
- A Member raised the issue of outstanding estate repairs and stated that there was a need for data to be available together with other KPI's
- In response to a question it was stated that the repairs service was 100% customer focused and that the focus was on developing this not just only for tenants but also leaseholders
- It was stated that in order to develop services for disabled residents and to understand their needs better discussion should be held with the Disability Panel
- Members were informed that one of the benefits of an 'in house' repairs service was access to the Council's IT systems and that this would enable them to access any tenants special requirements and the translation and sign language services
- In response to a question it was stated that staff transferring under TUPE arrangements from Kiers appeared to be pleased to have done so and there were regular meetings with the Trade Unions. With regard to multiskilling there may be possibilities of achieving savings efficiencies from this in the future
- Reference was made to the system to obtain stores from Travis Perkins and it was stated that orders were being assessed to ensure that stores were in stock when required and there was a quarterly review of the stores catalogue
- In response to a question as to whether consideration had been given to a scooter delivery for parts it was stated that a driver at present did deliver spares if required, however this could be considered in the future. In addition, there will always be occasions where there will be problems with getting some spares however once the joinery shop was operational this would also deal with glazing repairs
- It was stated that whilst housing information was fairly well integrated there was a need to analyse future repair jobs in order to ascertain and build up knowledge of parts that are regularly required. An analysis of kitchen furniture would be the next task to be undertaken
- A Member enquired whether operatives were supposed to take their rubbish away with them after completion of a repair as this did not appear to be the case in all repairs. It was stated that rubbish/discarded materials should be taken however if he was supplied with details he would investigate this
- In response to a question it was stated that it was important to get the IT system to meet the requirements that were needed and that the system requirements were still being designed

RESOLVED:

That regular reports on the progress of the 'in house repairs' service be submitted to the Committee and Members be informed of performance information as soon as possible

The Committee thanked Matt West for his presentation

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EXECUTIVE MEMBER HOUSING PRESENTATION (Item 9)

Councillor James Murray, Executive Member Housing and Development, was present and made a presentation to the Committee, copy interleaved, during which the following main points were made –

- It was noted that the availability of numbers of 4 BR and 5 BR properties was decreasing and under occupation moves were also decreasing
- Across North London there are almost 12,000 households in TA and Islington has 959 the second lowest number behind Camden
- Nightly booked is the most expensive TA and causes overspends since it costs the Council more than it is able to recoup in rent. The overspend for 2014/15 is likely to be £2m. The plan is to reduce the number of households in nightly booked TA to

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reduce this overspend and every week between 10 and 20 households to be booked in so substantially more than that have to be moved out

- In 2014/15 to date the numbers reduced in nightly booked temporary accommodation from 527 to 477. A reduction of at least 150 is planned during 2015/16
- There are around 18,000 households on the housing register, of which 4,200 are Council tenants registered for a transfer
- For 2014/15 it is projected there will be 1,300 lets a 20% drop in available properties
- The social lettings agency will be launched in 2015 to offer a fair deal to private renters and also a service to landlords
- Responsive repairs, gas and voids services have now been brought back in house and are located at offices in Brewery Road and Northway House for gas and there are a number of challenges that are being looked at
- 99.7% of rents due for 2014/15 have been collected and the LBI collection rate is lower than Partners (PFI) collection rate
- Average re-let time for voids for LBI is 19 days and for PFI is 24.3 days
- Concern has been raised by Members and Residents about PFI performance, especially around lifecycle repairs and a number of actions were being taken to address these concerns
- Islington remains committed to delivering affordable new homes to its residents and between 2015-2019 plans to deliver 2000 new units and as part of this the Council is planning on developing 500 new units of housing similar to the development at Vaudeville Court
- A Member enquired how many points were required for a next generation tenant to get a property and it was stated that this was dependent on a number of factors but without new generation points being applied these people would not be able to be rehoused
- In response to a question it was stated that a review of allocations policy would shortly be taking place, however if new generation points were increased this would be at the expense of other people in need not being rehoused as there was only a limited amount of properties available
- It was stated that in relation to the social lettings agency that the Council did have a small lettings agency at the moment called Islington Residential so the Council did have limited experience in this regard. However it is not proposed to grow the business too quickly as it was important to get it right and build it up gradually over the next few years
- Concern was expressed at some of the data provided by PFI regarding their performance and it was stated that the data was currently being assessed by an independent expert appointed by PFI
- Councillor Murray stated that the Council were buying properties using current Right to Buy receipts using these for temporary accommodation in the short term and in the long term returning them to Council housing. An allocation of £6m had been made to purchase 20 properties
- It was stated that with regard to consultation that this was dependent on the type of development and the TRA was involved as soon as possible and proposals discussed with them and tenants were involved as soon as possible
- In response to a question Councillor Murray informed Members that he would provide details of how much rent arrears were written off in the previous year
- Reference was made to recent reports with regard to PFI relating to communal repairs, voids and leaseholder satisfaction and it was stated that these should be circulated to Members of the Committee
- A Member enquired as to the current position on overcrowding and it was stated that the figure had reduced however some people were not moving because of the

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uncertainty over rents. There was an expected drop in the number of properties to let of 20%, and in particular in relation to 4BR and 5 BR properties

- The Chair stated that if there were any further questions from Members these should be forwarded to Councillor Murray

RESOLVED:

- (a) That once the data on PFI performance, referred to above, has been analysed details be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee
- (b) That the Executive Member Housing and Development be requested to provide details of how much rent arrears were written off in the previous year
- (c) That the recent reports with regard to PFI relating to communal repairs, voids and leaseholder satisfaction be circulated to Members of the Committee
- (d) That any further questions on the presentation be forwarded to the Executive Member Housing and Development for consideration

56 ESTATE SERVICES MANAGEMENT SCRUTINY REVIEW - WITNESS EVIDENCE -TO FOLLOW (Item 10)

David Salenius, Housing and Adult Social Services and Garry Harris, GMB Trade Union were present for discussion of this matter.

Members considered a laid round report from Garry Harris, copy interleaved.

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

- In response to a question it was stated that a number of agency staff had been appointed to permanent posts and all agency staff were encouraged to apply, however some were not successful at interview. There were currently 7 vacancies and a recruitment process was currently in operation
- Members were informed that agency staff could not be assimilated into permanent posts but had to undertake a recruitment selection process in accordance with the Council's Human Resources procedures
- Members were of the view that it would be advantageous if consideration of the report should be deferred to the next meeting in order that the Director of Housing and Adult Social Services could respond to the points raised in the laid round submission

RESOLVED:

That consideration of the report be deferred to the next meeting of the Committee in order to enable a response to be considered in conjunction with the response from the Director of Housing and Adult Social Services

57 PROPOSED SITE VISIT - SCAFFOLDING - VERBAL (Item 11)

This matter was dealt with under Minute 52 above

The meeting ended at 9.40p.m.

CHAIR