

London Borough of Islington

Housing Scrutiny Committee - 30 April 2024

Minutes of the meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD on 30 April 2024 at 7.30 pm.

Present: **Councillors:** Jackson (Chair), Bossman-Quarshie, Ozdemir and Jegorovas-Armstrong

Councillor Jason Jackson in the Chair

42 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item 1)

Apologies were received from Councillors Cinko-Oner, Graham and Gilgunn.

43 DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item 2)

There were no declarations of substitute members.

44 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS (Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

45 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING - TO FOLLOW (Item 4)

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 18 April 2024 be confirmed as an accurate record of proceedings and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

46 CHAIR'S REPORT (Item 5)

None

47 EXTERNAL ATTENDEES (IF ANY) (Item 6)

The Chair informed the meeting that as part of the review, Committee would invite residents and volunteers of the TRA of both Parkview Estate and Hathersage to share their experiences on New Homes Build – see B1below

48 ORDER OF BUSINESS (Item 7)

The order of business would be B2 and B1.

49 PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item 8)

In response to a question from a member of public who is a tenant of Hyde Housing who raised concerns about damp and mould and its detrimental impact on her well-being and health, the Executive Member Cllr O'Halloran stated that although RSL's(Registered Social Landlords) are independent of Council she will take the resident's details with her after the meeting.

50 MAIN SCRUTINY REVIEW 2023/24 - NEW HOMES BUILD IN ISLINGTON - DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS - TO FOLLOW (Item B1)

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Chair informed the meeting that prior to consideration of the draft recommendations, residents and TRA representatives from Parkview Estate and Hathersage Estate will be making representations of their experience of the New build Homes in Islington.

- Some of the issues are that schemes have resulted in immense disruption to their daily lives; loss of open spaces and play areas for children for over 10 years; lack of leadership from council officers and importantly no communication on future plans for areas that have remained fenced off.
- In response, the Acting Director informed that previously there was a scheme and team worked with TRA but unfortunately it was not possible to get it work, that going all efforts will be made to repair the relationship with the TRA which is reflected in one of the recommendations being considered later in the meeting.
- On whether the scheme at Hathersage would still be going ahead, Officer advised that although he could not commit to any scheme officers are working on bringing back the communal spaces/play areas.
- Meeting was informed that going forward all attempts should be made to reinstate the communal open fields/play areas which had been fenced off and lots more work need to be done in terms of communication as it is obvious that residents were communicating with officers but were left in limbo.
- Executive Member, Finance, Performance and Planning reiterated his commitment to scheduling a meeting with Hathersage TRA, apologised that he had visited other new schemes in the borough besides Hathersage, all attempts will be made to address their concerns.
- Another resident said despite their willingness tenants on the onset, trust and respect to the council has been lost, that tenants are subject to cyclical works and capital works.
- Another resident of Parkview reiterated her concerns about lack of consultation, that as a disabled person she experienced accessibility around the estate, no notice of announcement of diversions and importantly the contract liaison officer has been ineffective. Members were reminded that this project should have been a textbook example for resident engagement but unfortunately fell short.
- In response, the Acting Director noted inconveniences the planned schemes had caused and the catalogue of issues raised by the residents. The Officer reiterated that the Council have completed some successful schemes, that going forward Council will look to keep residents updated at every stage of the building process.
- It was noted that in light of the concerns raised by residents, it was suggested that maybe a check list was required which allows officers to work through bit by bit so that everyone has a clear understanding of where things are, a clear path of how to move forward.
- Chair thanked residents and TRA representatives, apologising for the inconveniences it has caused, the disruption to their lives, noting that this is an issue that has come to the attention of this committee and that having now heard from residents, members will now be able to hold officers to account.
- Another resident informed the meeting that her autistic child suffered an injury despite having raised issues of safety earlier to council officers, that residents have not gone to the press, stating that in one particular instance was advised not to make a complaint, that having sent an email to Executive Member he had not responded, that as council tenants who pay their rent, this was not good at all.
- Councillor Kay reiterated her concerns that after last meeting there was a request for survey plans and that up to date this is not forthcoming, that in her ward only 1 social housing has built and it is noticeable that Council is not building 3-4 bedroom houses which is supposed to address overcrowding.
- In response to a question raised by Noel of Parkview TRA on the timeline when the reasons for the abandoned schemes which the Corporate Director had suggested

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will be shared with the Committee, the Chair indicated that he would look into and respond back to him personally.

- Chair thanked the residents notifying meeting that as members consider the draft recommendations, the additional evidence from the residents will be incorporated, the following issues were highlighted with regards to some of the recommendations:

Recommendation 1

Committee agreed for it to be reworded as this is not within the Executive's function but the Chief Executive. It was agreed by the Committee for the wording to be delegated to the Chair and Officer. Amended recommendation be circulated ahead of the next meeting on 13 May 2024.

Recommendation 2

Executive to review alternative funding and delivery models. Meeting was advised that this was evidence from a company called .Be First (Barking and Dagenham). Member had reservations as this could create issues around accountability especially in light of complaints by resident's of lack of engagement.

Recommendation 3 – Resident Engagement

Assistant Director informed meeting that from evidence it appears the concern is the over reliance or expectation of contractors to do more on liaising with residents instead of council officers. Committee were advised against the need to recruit external consultants that this is primarily a culture issue within council, that this could be addressed with the sufficient capacity and skills of the inhouse staff which will result in savings and addresses accountability concerns.

Recommendation 6

A member suggested that officers look into schemes being built in Barnet where delivery of homes is quick, ie pre-fab accommodation.

Recommendation 7

Member suggested the rewording of the recommendation to put some emphasis on low energy use, that council needs to move away from boilers. Another suggestion that Council recycle building materials from abandoned schemes or when buildings are demolished.

Recommendation 8

Viability issues around supporting Islington residents to buy some of the private homes built by Council at discounted rates who would not necessarily be eligible for social housing but never the less cannot afford to buy in the borough. The aim is to incentivise Islington residents to stay and own homes.

RESOLVED:

1. That the draft recommendations is agreed subject to the rewording of recommendation 1 and 7.
2. That the wording of the recommendations be delegated to the Chair and Officers.
3. Amended recommendations be circulated ahead of the meeting on 13 May 2024

51

HOUSING PERFORMANCE ANNUAL REPORT FROM EXECUTIVE MEMBER
(Item B2)

Meeting was reminded that report was deferred from previous meeting, that both Executive Member and Acting Corporate Director were available to respond to questions. The following points were noted:

- Meeting was informed that formal notification had been received from the Housing Ombudsman that it had discharged its monitoring period as it was satisfied that Council had undertaken a number of actions that it had recommended.
- On the issue of removal of car parking spaces and conversion of garages, the Acting Director acknowledged Council's commitment to reducing car spaces and where garages are lent out it is under licence.
- Service has installed over one hundred remote sensors related to damp and mould to help residents and alert the council to any of the issues. On the low take up by residents, Acting Corporate Director stated that more communications is required to promote the benefits and to allay any concerns as remote sensors are of low energy use. Meeting was informed that this is presently being piloted.
- Meeting was advised that a pre maintenance team is in place to address damp and mould for example, the Council is embarking on its roofing programme, reinstated its guttering service which had paused and communication on the website around damp and mould for residents has been refreshed. It was noted that investment spent per dwelling has gone up , that over the last 2 years £2.7m investment has been spent and permanent staff have been recruited.

On the 350/per day fire call out especially around communal area, meeting was advised that details will be provided to committee members.

- On issues of damp and mould experienced by RSL's tenants, meeting was advised that Council has a partnership agreement with all of them, that RSL's experience the same issues at the Council, however Council officers, Executive Member meet regularly to share best practices.
- With regards to private tenants, meeting was advised that Council has a licensing scheme in the borough which requires private landlords to register and that environmental officers are there to address any reported issues.

RESOLVED:

That the Housing Performance Annual Report be noted.

The meeting ended at 10.00 pm

CHAIR