

London Borough of Islington

Housing Scrutiny Committee - 8 June 2015

Minutes of the meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Committee held at Committee Room 4, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD on 8 June 2015 at 7.30 pm.

Present: **Councillors:** O'Sullivan (Chair), Poyser (Vice-Chair), Andrews, Diner, O'Halloran, Williamson and Tenants

Co-opted members: Jim Rooke.

Councillor Michael O'Sullivan in the Chair

- 78 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item A1)**
Apologies for absence were received from Rose Marie Macdonald and Councillor Aysegul Erdogan.
- 79 DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item A2)**
None.
- 80 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS (Item A3)**
None.
- 81 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (Item A4)**

RESOLVED:
That the minutes of the meeting held on 16 April 2015 be confirmed and the Chair be authorised to sign them.
- 82 CHAIRS REPORT (Item A5)**
The Chair reminded the Committee that the scrutiny review reports on Scaffolding and Work Platforms and Estate Services Management presented elsewhere on the agenda were drafts and that comments were encouraged on the content of the reports.
- 83 MEMBERSHIP, TERMS OF REFERENCE AND DATES OF MEETINGS (Item A6)**

RESOLVED:
That the membership, terms of reference and dates of meetings of the Housing Scrutiny Committee for the municipal year 2015/16 be noted.
- 84 ORDER OF BUSINESS (Item A7)**
The Chair stated that the order of business would be as per the agenda.
- 85 PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item A8)**
The Chair outlined the procedure for public questions and the filming and recording of meetings.

86 **RSL SCRUTINY (Item B1)**

The Chair advised that One Housing Association had been invited to the meeting however was unavailable to attend. It was commented that the organisation would be invited to attend a future meeting.

87 **SCAFFOLDING AND WORK PLATFORMS: DRAFT REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS (Item B2)**

The Committee considered the draft report and recommendations of the Scaffolding and Work Platforms review. A discussion was had during which the following main points were made –

- It was noted that the primary ongoing cost of scaffolding was in labour as opposed to equipment and a discussion was had on the economies of scale of scaffolding companies.
- A member of the public was encouraged that the cost of scaffolding for responsive repairs had decreased however commented that scaffolding was quick to assemble and disassemble and for this reason should not be overly expensive. It was commented that the report of the Committee would be sent to members of the Islington Leaseholders Association.
- It was agreed that a number of small amendments should be made to the report before submitting to the Executive.

RESOLVED:

That the report be agreed, subject to the following amendments:

- 1) references to making residents' experiences of scaffolding 'positive' be replaced with more neutral wording;
- 2) recommendation six be amended to make reference to capital works as well as repairs;
- 3) recommendation seven be amended to make reference to schedules of rates in capital contracts.

88 **ESTATE SERVICES MANAGEMENT: DRAFT REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS (Item B3)**

The Committee considered the draft report and recommendations of the Estate Services Management review. A discussion was had during which the following main points were made –

- In addition to the suggestion of offering annualised hours to Greenspace staff to ensure they are retained during the winter months, it was suggested that synergies with other sections could also be explored to offer full annual employment and increase the resources available to other sections.
- It was clarified that the proposal to enhance the caretaking service through the introduction of new tasks should not be at the expense of existing caretaking duties.
- It was queried if the commercial rent of garages had any impact on the conversion of garage units to housing. The Committee considered that it would be inappropriate for a garage to be rented on a commercial basis when it could feasibly be developed into housing for local people. Officers confirmed that the development of garages into housing was prioritised ahead of commercial opportunities.
- The Committee raised concern with the cleanliness and maintenance of garages and suggested that some garages may be used for unintended purposes. It was also suggested that the income received from garage rent may not cover the full cost of providing the service. It was queried if the estates section could monitor the use of garages for purposes not permitted in the terms of their lease.

- Following a question from a member of the public, it was clarified that mechanised services could seek to generate income by selling their services to housing associations, for example.
- It was agreed that, in addition to advising tenants when their caretaker is unavailable, proposals for increased holiday cover should be investigated.
- It was agreed that a number of small amendments should be made to the report before submitting to the Executive.

RESOLVED:

That the report be agreed, subject to the following amendments:

- 1) recommendation one be amended to clarify that enhancing the caretaking service is subject to 'staff and union consultation, and resources being available';
- 2) recommendation six be amended to make reference to exploring synergies with other services;
- 3) the inclusion of an additional recommendation that the cost, condition and usage of garages be reviewed and consideration be given to how estate services can contribute to the monitoring of garage usage;
- 4) the inclusion of an additional recommendation that proposals for increased holiday cover for caretakers be investigated.

89

HOUSING REPAIRS: PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (Item B4)

John Everett, Group Leader for Customer Relations, made a presentation to the Committee, copy interleaved, during which the following main points were made –

- The performance of the in-house repairs service was measured in terms of outcomes for residents.
- The service had commissioned KWEST to undertake independent evaluation of customer satisfaction. This evaluated a statistically significant number of repairs each month.
- It was reported that customer satisfaction was the service's most important measure. From November 2014 to May 2015 customer satisfaction ranged from 65% to 79%. The lowest satisfaction rating was received in February 2015; this was following difficulties with a roofing contractor which the Council no longer used.
- Since insourcing the service staff had received training to instil a focus on customer satisfaction.
- It was explained that the service had three categories of repairs; emergency, in which operatives attended within 2 hours and resolved the issue within 24 hours; urgent, in which operatives attended and resolved the issue within 24 hours; and routine, in which operatives resolved the issue within 20 days. It was noted that 35% of repairs were listed as either emergency or urgent and the service was looking to reduce this number by implementing another category of repair with a completion period of five days.
- For the 2014/15 financial year, repairs completed within the stated timescales were 79.68% for emergency repairs, 80.42% for urgent repairs and 86.24% for routine repairs. In April 2015 these figures had increased in 85%, 85% and 90% respectively. It was hoped that this was indicative of an improvement in performance for 2015/16.
- Action was being taken to improve performance. Stock levels in vehicles and stores were being reviewed to ensure that operatives had access to the right equipment, scheduling systems were being improved, and service failures were being investigated on a monthly basis.
- The service sought to achieve a 'first time fix', which was defined as completing a repair on the day of the first visit by the original operative. The latest overall 'first time fix' performance figure was given as 85%. Officers were seeking to improve

performance by developing the skills of operatives in multiple trades. The service was also working to improve the data collected when repairs are first reported to ensure that operatives arrive at each job knowing what to expect, with the correct parts and skills to complete the repair.

- The Committee was concerned that only around 87% of appointments for routine repairs were kept. The importance of resident faith and trust in the service was emphasised. Improvements were to be made by further training operatives on use of their PDA and improving understanding of how long each repair would take.
- It was noted that the performance of the service was monitored through the Repairs Integration Board which was comprised of senior offers and considered service delivery, work structures, and internal processes. It was considered that there were good communication channels within the service which enabled operative feedback to be reported to the Board.
- In response to a query, it was advised that some level of qualitative analysis was undertaken by KWEST to identify trends and the reasons why residents may not be satisfied. Leaseholders were included in this monitoring, however it was noted that the Council only had limited responsibility for repairs to leaseholder properties. It was suggested that the service could evaluate councillor casework to obtain an insight into more serious complaints and service failures.
- It was advised that the service did benchmark performance against other local authorities, however as data was not collected in a uniform way, a direct comparison could not always be made. Although it was useful to compare performance against other authorities, it was noted that Islington's performance targets were set locally.
- A member of the public queried if regular stock surveys were carried out to minimise the number of repairs needed. It was advised that the Council did have a cyclical improvement programme but did not routinely survey the condition of homes.

The Chair thanked John Everett for his attendance.

90 RESIDENT-LED SCRUTINY: SERVICE REVIEW GROUP PROGRAMME FOR 2015/16 (Item B5)

Jim Rooke presented the report, copy interleaved, during with the following main points were made –

- The Service Review Group was a resident scrutiny group comprised of directly managed tenants, tenant management organisation tenants, and leaseholders.
- It was proposed that the Group would review 'how the housing service learns from complaints' and 'communications around new build housing' in 2015/16. Each review would conclude with a report being presented to the Housing Scrutiny Committee. The scrutiny topics had been suggested by the group.
- The Committee welcomed the proposals for resident-led scrutiny.

RESOLVED:

That the proposed work plan of the Service Review Group for 2015/16 be approved.

91 SCRUTINY TOPICS 2015/16 (Item B6)

The Chair suggested that the Committee undertake reviews as follows:

- Capital Works – to investigate the Council's use and procurement of contractors, value for money, effectiveness, and how capital works can be used to drive local employment;

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- Responsive Repairs – to consider effectiveness, value for money, and resident experiences with the service. This review could include an evidence gathering session.

It was also suggested that the Committee could contribute to the Health and Care Scrutiny Committee's proposed review of dampness in properties.

It was also suggested that the Committee could consider the impact of the new right to buy proposed by the Government. Officers advised that although the right to buy was likely to have significant implications for Islington, legislation was required to implement the scheme and this was not expected to be agreed in the near future. It was advised that officers would provide an update to the Committee when further information was available.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That reviews of Capital Works and Responsive Repairs be undertaken, subject to approval by the Policy and Performance Committee;
- 2) That the Committee contribute to the Health and Care Scrutiny Committee's proposed review of dampness in properties, subject to approval by the Policy and Performance Committee;
- 3) That a work plan and scrutiny initiation documents be drawn up and submitted to the next meeting.

92 INFORMATION ITEM - ESTATE SERVICES MANAGEMENT: WRITTEN WITNESS EVIDENCE (Item B7)

Noted.

The meeting ended at 9.05 pm

CHAIR