



ISLINGTON

Estate Services Management Scrutiny Review

REPORT OF THE HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**London Borough of Islington
June 2015**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Estate Services Management Scrutiny Review

Aim

To review the effectiveness and value for money provided by the service.

Evidence

The review ran from September 2014 until May 2015 and evidence was received from a variety of sources:

1. Presentations from witnesses
Garry Harris, GMB Union
2. Presentations from Council Officers
David Salenius, Principal Housing Manager, Estate Services
David Hutchison, Estate Parking Manager
Abena Asante, Housing Environmental Co-ordinator
Barry Emmerson, Grounds Maintenance Manager
John Mootealoo, Cleaner Streets Programme Manager
3. Documentary evidence
Written submission on Estate Maintenance and Special Projects

Main Findings

The teams that comprise Estate Services Management operate from three Area Housing Offices. The services provided by the section include caretaking, communal repairs, grounds maintenance, special projects, estate parking, and mechanised services.

A significant part of the review focused on the management of caretaking services. The GMB highlighted that in their view there were many difficulties in the current system, particularly management duplication and inefficiencies in the management structure, which were clearly not cost effective to the Council or residents.

In addition, the GMB felt that there should be an investigation into the reintroduction of charge hands in order to deal with day to day issues of caretaking and also to reintroduce repairs officers who solely report and chase repairs, giving residents one single person who will have responsibility for repairs. The GMB suggested that such posts could assist in selling services to the private sector and leaseholders, as part of the Council's income generation proposals. However, management did not agree with these proposals.

The Committee agrees that there does appear to be a level of duplication in the management of caretaking services and would support officers in conducting a review of this, in consultation with unions as required. The Committee indicated that a simpler, more direct management structure would be preferred. A proposal for generating income through the selling of caretaking services would also be supported by the Committee.

The Committee were also of the view that caretakers could carry out small handy person duties in liaison with responsive repairs to increase efficiency. The Committee noted that discussions were taking place with caretakers in relation to additional tasks, however in order for these tasks to be undertaken some of the current tasks may have to be deleted or additional resources provided. It is recommended that the Executive agrees with the objective of enhancing the caretaking service through the introduction of new tasks, subject to staff and union consultation.

The GMB noted that tenants often complained about tasks that caretakers had not carried out and that in their view a schedule of duties could be provided to tenants. The Committee agreed with this proposal. The Committee was of the view that if a caretaker was absent due to sickness or holiday this should be detailed on the website and at the estate, together with details of any alternative arrangements that are in place. The Committee also noted the limited holiday cover available for caretakers and recommended that proposals for increased holiday cover be investigated.

The GMB also raised that the facilities and cleaning stores for caretakers are insufficient and further investment is required. The Committee sympathised with caretakers and indicated that the Council should agree a minimum standard for facilities and stores with caretakers and then review provision to ensure that all estates meet this standard.

The Committee noted that although caretakers were responsible for the cleaning of estates, it was the Public Realm section that was responsible for the cleaning of areas surrounding estates. Each section works up to agreed boundaries, however the Committee was concerned that this may not achieve the best outcome for residents. For this reason, it is recommended that consideration be given to how estates staff can work with other services to ensure that the areas surrounding estates are thoroughly cleaned.

The Committee considered how other estate services could generate income. It was suggested that the Estate Parking service could help to generate income through the private rent of garages on estates where there is surplus provision and demand for parking and storage space from private individuals, commercial organisations and social enterprises. The Committee also suggested that the service should prioritise the refurbishment of vacant garages to enable these to be let as quickly as possible. The Committee considered that Greenspace could assist in maximising income by bidding for work from RSL's, TMO's and private residents. It was noted that the Greenspace team already had the requisite knowledge and skills to undertake this work and already provided a similar service to other local authorities.

The Committee noted that, due to seasonal demand, Greenspace is required to employ 25% more staff in the summer months. Greenspace sought to retain staff wherever possible and attempts were made to find staff other roles during the winter months, but this was not always possible. The Committee were of the view that Greenspace should investigate the possibility of annualised hours, where staff are not permitted to take leave in the summer months, but are retained throughout the winter. This should lead to efficiency savings in recruiting new staff annually and offer additional security for workers. It was also suggested that synergies with other sections could be explored to offer full annual employment and increase the resources available to other sections.

The Committee noted that Greenspace were looking to develop schemes such as the 'Incredibly Edible' scheme, whereby residents plant herbs and edible plants in local greenspaces. Resident Associations were encouraged to form gardening clubs and those residents living in areas without residents' associations were able to contact their local Area Housing Office to discuss establishing such schemes. The Committee recommended that information in regards to these schemes should be further publicised, both through the website and print media.

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. To ensure that garages are only used for their permitted purposes, it was suggested that the estates section could help to monitor the use of garages. It was therefore recommended that the Executive ensure that the cost, condition and usage of garages be reviewed, and consideration be given to how estate services can contribute to preventing garages being used for unintended purposes.

The Committee interviewed a number of witnesses during the scrutiny process and have formulated a number of recommendations for consideration by the Executive.

Conclusions

The Committee has made a number of recommendations that it is hoped will increase the effectiveness of the service and ensure better value for money for tenants.

The Committee has focused on areas where they feel that Estate Services can not only improve services for residents but can also generate additional income for the Council, given the financial constraints imposed by the Government.

The Committee would like to thank witnesses that gave evidence in relation to the scrutiny. The Executive is asked to endorse the Committee's recommendations.

Recommendations

- 1. That the Executive agrees with the objective of enhancing the caretaking service through the introduction of new tasks, subject to staff and union consultation and resources being available;**
- 2. That the Executive seek to maximise income generation opportunities through the Estate Services section, including:**
 - The private rent of garages on estates where there is surplus provision and demand for parking and storage space from private individuals, commercial organisations and social enterprises;**
 - Prioritising the refurbishment of garages to enable these to be rented as soon as possible;**
 - Offering caretaking, voids clearance and minor repair and decoration services to external organisations, subject to appropriate consultation with caretaking staff and unions being undertaken;**
 - Making mechanised services available to external organisations.**
- 3. That the Executive review the management arrangements of the estates caretaking service, with a view to moving to a simpler, more direct management structure;**
- 4. That the Executive agree minimum standards for caretaking facilities and stores with staff and ensure that all estates meet these standards;**
- 5. That the Executive consider how estates staff can work with other services to ensure that that the areas surrounding estates are thoroughly cleaned;**
- 6. That the Executive further investigate the retention of grounds maintenance staff by offering annualised hours and exploring possible synergies with other sections;**
- 7. That the Executive increase the publicity of communal gardening and edible plant growing schemes, with a focus on how tenants living on estates without a residents' association can participate in such schemes;**
- 8. That the Executive provide a schedule of duties to tenants to clarify the duties of caretakers;**
- 9. That the Executive advise tenants when their caretaker is unavailable due to holidays or sickness both through the website and by displaying a notice on the estate;**
- 10. That the Executive investigate proposals for increased holiday cover for caretakers;**
- 11. That the Executive ensure that the cost, condition and usage of garages be reviewed, and consideration be given to how estate services can contribute to preventing garages being used for unintended purposes.**

MEMBERSHIP OF THE HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 2014/15

Councillors:

Councillor Michael O'Sullivan (Chair)
Councillor Jenny Kay (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Raphael Andrews
Councillor Kat Fletcher
Councillor Aysegul Erdogan
Councillor Flora Williamson
Councillor Alex Diner
Councillor Una O'Halloran

Co-opted members:

Rose Marie MacDonald – PFI Managed Tenants
Jim Rooke – Directly Managed Tenants

Substitutes:

Councillor Mouna Hamitouche MBE
Councillor Jilani Chowdhury
Councillor Alice Perry
Councillor Gary Heather
Councillor Michelline Safi Ngongo
Councillor Olly Parker

Acknowledgements:

The Committee would like to thank all the witnesses who gave evidence to the review.

Officer Support:

*David Salenius – Principal Housing Manager, Estate Services
Peter Moore and Jonathan Moore – Democratic Services*

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Committee commenced the review in September 2014 with the aim to review the effectiveness and value for money provided by the service.
- 1.2 The Estate Services section comprises of the following areas –

Estate Services Management/Caretaking

- 1.3 The Estate Services Management team consists of three Area Housing Offices, each with an Estate Services team, responsible for the management of all 301 Council Estates, including caretaking. Each team is comprised of an Estate Services Manager, Area Housing Manager, Quality Assurance Officer, Support Manager and Estate Service co-ordinators.
- 1.4 Communal repairs are completed by the Estate Maintenance Team at Downham Road and involve repairs to shared areas (apart from lighting, roofing, drainage and door entry systems, which are referred to the Islington Repairs Team). The Estate Maintenance team comprises 4 office staff and 22 operatives who receive repairs from staff in the Area Housing Offices. In 2013/14 the team completed 6,000 jobs.
- 1.5 The current establishment consists of 3 Estate Services Managers, 23 Quality Assurance Officers and 189 Caretakers. The Estate Services Co-ordinators manage on average 17 caretakers each.
- 1.6 The Estate Services team manage caretaking to approximately 26,000 estate based properties and each caretaker is responsible for communal cleaning to an average of 150 properties.
- 1.7 The issue of caretaking and management of caretakers is dealt with in more detail later in the report.

Grounds Maintenance

- 1.8 The Grounds Maintenance service is provided by the Environmental and Regeneration division and involves grass cutting, shrub and flower bed maintenance. The team is responsible for maintaining the Council's parks and open spaces and completing this work on estates to contractual specifications. Grounds maintenance work is monitored by the estate services staff based at the local Area Housing Offices. Formal monitoring of completed works and communal green areas is carried out by a separate team within grounds maintenance to ensure impartiality.

Special Projects

- 1.9 Special Projects involve improvement to Islington's estates funded by the Environmental Improvement Programme, Estate Security Programme, Section 106 funding, and an assortment of other funding streams. The team is comprised of a team manager, two project managers and one administrative assistant. The majority of the work is consulting on improvements with local residents to ensure the correct works are carried out within the available funds.

Mechanised Services

- 1.10 The Mechanised Services team is responsible for the collection of bulk refuse, mechanical sweeping of estate roads and pressure washing. This team of operatives consists of a manager, supervisor and an administrative assistant based at the Delhi/Outram estate. There are also 18 operatives who are responsible for the regular collection of bulk refuse from estates as required,

sweeping of the estate roads on a rota basis and carrying out pressure washing to remove graffiti and deep cleaning.

Estate Maintenance

- 1.11 The estate maintenance team was established in 2010 and carries out estate repairs and some decoration work. The team was expanded in 2012 to cover metal work and additional ground works. The team is comprised of 20 operatives, two administrators, a senior analyst and a manager.

2. Findings

Estate Parking

- 2.1 The Estate Parking Team comprises two staff and involves the management of parking enforcement by a separate team to the allocation of empty spaces across Council estates, which is carried out by the Area Housing Office customer service teams.
- 2.2 Over 5,000 Parking Charge Notices are issued by the Council's patrol contractors each year. The service covers over 200 estates throughout the borough. The team manage enforcement appeals, complaints, investigations and responses. Over 350 appeals against Parking Charge Notices are investigated by the team each year.
- 2.3 The team also administers the Estate Parking Maintenance Database, which the Customer Services team uses to issue over 4,000 estate permits each year for residents, visitors and contractors. The team also manages a public enquiry line and mailbox, advising on costs and availability of parking facilities and resolving reported parking problems. In addition, the team develops initiatives to maximise income from underused estate car parks.
- 2.4 The Estate Parking team also co-ordinates cyclical maintenance of car parks, including parking bay lining and numbering. They also ensure that signs warning of parking restrictions and giving public information are legally compliant and effectively maintained. The Council has a statutory responsibility to remove abandoned vehicles and on average 45 abandoned vehicles are removed from estates each year.
- 2.5 The section maintains maps of patrol boundaries and layouts, and the numbering of estate car parks and garage areas. They also identify repair priorities for estate garages and cages to meet demand and help to develop initiatives, such as garage storage, new builds, and commercial and social enterprise use. Garages that are let are periodically checked to ensure that there is nothing kept there illegally and where there is demand and the budget is available garages are refurbished for letting.
- 2.6 The Committee was informed that it is now illegal to tow cars away. The majority of the abandoned vehicles removed were old and often the owners could not be traced because the DVLA did not have information on the last registered owner. Therefore it is not possible in many instances to chase owners for fines or removal costs of the vehicles.
- 2.7 The Committee suggested that the service could help to generate income through the private rent of garages on estates where there is surplus provision and demand for parking and storage space from private individuals, commercial organisations and social enterprises. However, it was noted that the redevelopment of vacant garage units into housing should be prioritised ahead of commercial opportunities.

- 2.8 The Committee also suggested that the service should prioritise the refurbishment of vacant garages to enable these to be let as quickly as possible, as this will generate income for the service.
- 2.9 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. To ensure that garages are only used for their permitted purposes, it was suggested that the estates section could help to monitor the use of garages. It was therefore recommended that the Executive ensure that the cost, condition and usage of garages is reviewed, and consideration be given to how estate services can contribute to preventing garages being used for unintended purposes.

Estate Services/Caretaking

- 2.10 The current establishment spread across the three local Area Housing Offices consists of 3 Estate Services Managers, 23 Quality Assurance Officers and 189 caretakers. The Estate Services Co-ordinators manage an average of 17 caretakers each.
- 2.11 The Estate Services team also manage caretaking to approximately 26,000 estate based properties and each caretaker is responsible for communal cleaning to an average of 150 properties. There are currently three types of caretaker, 122 non-resident caretakers, 54 Resident Caretakers and 13 mobile relief caretakers.
- 2.12 The main focus of caretakers' duties is the cleaning of communal areas, completion of management information and reports of complaints, visiting new residents, maintenance of estate communal lighting, reporting abandoned vehicles, unauthorised parking and making safe/taking appropriate action regarding emergencies.
- 2.13 The cleaning tasks completed by the caretakers have been time measured to ensure adequate staffing levels across the Borough. The tasks are performed either on a daily/weekly/monthly or longer term basis and these include sweeping and mopping of the communal entrance area and lifts, sweeping of all paths, roadways and courtyards, removal of litter from grass areas and shrub beds, and collection of lumber and inspection of play areas and seating areas.
- 2.14 Although caretakers spend most of their day out on estates working by themselves, there are regular meetings to help them develop and improve the service. There are senior management and GMB shop stewards meetings every 4 weeks, a caretaker development group with shop stewards meets quarterly, an estates services health and safety meeting with shop stewards is held every 6 weeks, and a Corporate Health and Safety meeting with shop stewards is held quarterly. There are also caretaker group meetings with local 'patch' caretakers.
- 2.15 There is an Environmental Co-ordinator, whose role is to review the procedures for the service and to conduct, score and report on monthly independent caretaking inspections, audit parts of the estate and caretaker service, and assess tree maintenance, waste management and grounds maintenance. The co-ordinator also organises the cleaning of the communal windows below 36 feet, organises autumn leaf clearance and Christmas tree collection, and the cleaning of estate paladin bins.
- 2.16 The Estate Services Co-ordinators manage the caretaking service and co-ordinate delivery of other services with residents, including grounds maintenance, communal repairs, refuse collection, lumber clearance, estate road sweeping and estate improvements.

- 2.17 Quality Assurance Officers complete inspections of estates to ensure communal repairs are raised and caretaking cleaning standards are maintained. The team works closely with residents completing regular estate inspections with TRA representatives. At the caretaking conference held in November 2014, 94% of caretakers said that they had a good working relationship with their line manager and Quality Assurance Officer.
- 2.18 The Committee noted that the Tenant Satisfaction survey, completed in 2013, found that 81% were satisfied with the caretaking service, 80.5% were satisfied with the estate or area as a place to live, 76% were satisfied with street cleaning and 71% were satisfied with the cleanliness of the communal areas. The next satisfaction survey is due later in 2015.
- 2.19 The Committee received evidence from Gary Harris, GMB Trade Union in relation to caretakers taking on additional duties and the duplication of management functions.
- 2.20 The GMB highlighted that in their view there were many difficulties with the current system, particularly management duplication and inefficiencies in the management structure, which were clearly not cost effective to the Council or residents. Although this type of management structure may have worked well in the Homes for Islington (HFI) era, it fails to fit in well with the structure of Islington Council, now that the service is back 'in house'.
- 2.21 The GMB indicated that the current service has several layers of management and in each Area Housing Office there is a serious issue about the duplication of caretaking management and tasks. This was compared to the caretaking service, which the GMB consider to have been reduced significantly. The Committee noted that management of the caretaking service is not attached to resident's service charges and layers of management could be 'hidden' across various budgets, whereas the manual side of the service is transparent and related to service charges.
- 2.22 In light of the above, the Committee recommended that the management structure should be reviewed, and suggested that a simpler, more direct management structure would be preferred.
- 2.23 The GMB were of the view that there is a need to split the management of caretaking in two areas, one part of management dealing with caretaking and the other into dealing with estate repairs and selling the new 'in house' repairs service to the private sector. This would allow both areas to concentrate on their own service area, rather than the present arrangement. In addition the GMB felt that there should be an investigation into the reintroduction of charge hands in order to deal with day to day issues of caretaking and also to reintroduce repairs officers who solely report and chase repairs, giving residents one single person who will have responsibility for repairs. Such posts could assist in selling services to the private sector and leaseholders, as part of the Council's income generation proposals.
- 2.24 GMB also informed the Committee that whilst the Estate Services support team has expanded considerably over the years, it appeared to play no part in dealing with repairs. It was stated that such problems stemmed from HFI's historic membership of One Housing Group, which was an organisation that had a 'one size fits all' policy designed to drive down costs. However the GMB felt that this was at the risk of service provision, as it operated on behalf of housing associations and not always in the best interests of boroughs such as Islington. Whilst it was accepted that caretaking standards were high in Islington there was room for improvement in service delivery and cost.
- 2.25 The GMB informed the Committee that the caretaking service is the only Council service that openly determines the cost payable to the residents of the borough. Currently the residents pay a percentage of a global service charge of an accumulation of the overall budget costs.

- 2.26 The GMB made reference to the fact that the caretaking measurement scheme determines how many caretakers are needed to provide the service. However the scheme fails to take into account issues such as travelling time, health and safety inspections, leaf clearance, lumber collections, report writing, and attending the increasing number of meetings requested by management. Furthermore, there is no measurement built in for covering a caretaker's annual leave or sickness, and this is achieved by requiring other caretakers to cover outside of his or her own estate measurement scheme.
- 2.27 The GMB felt that resident charges should relate to cleaning frequencies, instead of the current arrangement where all estate residents are charged the same amount. For example, estates with fewer than 20 dwellings are only cleaned once a week, whereas larger estates such as the Andover Estate have a seven day cleaning frequency, yet the charge to residents is exactly the same for all estates. The Committee considered this, however did not agree that an alternative charging schedule should be implemented. It was noted that all estates are different, and some may need a more regular cleaning schedule to ensure they are cleaned to the same standard.
- 2.28 The GMB also raised concern at the lack of basic facilities on estates for caretakers. Many are working out of converted sheds and have pooled toilet facilities, if any. There are increasing numbers of female caretakers, however there are no separate facilities for female caretakers which was not considered acceptable. This is in comparison to officers, where the GMB contended that there had been extensive funding of workplace facilities.
- 2.29 In addition, the GMB advised that there had been a noticeable reduction in the supply and allocation of cleaning stores to caretakers, both non-resident and resident. Stores allocation is fundamental to enable caretakers to provide an acceptable level of service. The GMB stated that there was a need to review the stores allocation to each estate, in line with the estate service level agreements, and for this to be based on the needs of the estate, which identifies the actual costs per resident.
- 2.30 The Committee sympathised with caretakers and indicated that the Council should agree a minimum standard for facilities and stores with caretakers and then review provision to ensure that all estates meet this standard.
- 2.31 In terms of caretaking recruitment, the GMB was in favour of increasing the number of female caretakers and to identify opportunities for them to work flexible hours, especially those who have children at school, which would assist in many women being able to come off out of work benefits and into the workplace. It was also suggested that many caretakers are overlooked for promotion into office based posts.
- 2.32 The Committee also considered evidence from Housing management. The current management structure was developed following a Best Value review in 2006 and had led to improvements in tenant satisfaction. Caretakers are currently line managed by Estate Services Co-ordinators and are assisted by Quality Assurance Officers. There are also Estate Services Support Managers, whose primary function is to assist the Estate Services Co-ordinators by ensuring stores, equipment and training is provided for caretakers and leave is managed and covered.
- 2.33 The responsibility for repairs ordering varies across the offices; however each office is responsible for investigating reported communal repairs and ordering repairs mainly through the Estate Maintenance Team. However, this only amounts to ordering approximately one order per officer per day, although they may chase orders reported to them by residents or ones found on estate inspections.

- 2.34 The Committee were informed that a number of resident inspectors had been recruited to check a variety of services in housing, including customer services and estate services. These provide management with residents' views and ensure that services are maintained and improved.
- 2.35 The Committee also received evidence from management which indicated that the caretaking service had not been reduced and in fact since 2002 the establishment actually increased by two posts. These staff were introduced following the introduction of the measurement scheme and had been agreed with the GMB.
- 2.36 During the same period the housing management structure had been reduced by 33%, saving approximately £500,000. In addition, services to support the caretaking service had been increased, such as by the introduction of mechanised estate road sweeping and bulk refuse disposal provided by the Environment and Regeneration Department. It was stated that the GMB proposal to separate caretaking management and estate repairs would divide responsibility and would not provide a clear service structure for residents.
- 2.37 Housing management accepted that the current service was expensive however advised that savings had already been made. Following these savings the caretaking service now costs approximately £7.7 million, as compared to the estate services management function which costs approximately £1.2 million.
- 2.38 Housing management agreed that changes did need to be made to the service and advised that discussions were taking place with the GMB. These discussions included changes to improve cover for caretaker absence, weekend cover and the introduction of new tasks and developing additional income. The Committee was advised of proposed changes to job descriptions and management functions and that discussions were continuing on these.
- 2.39 In relation to improving cover for caretaker absence, management informed the Committee that the Council did not have funding to pay for full cover when a caretaker is on leave and proposals recently put to the GMB included paired working and the use of mobile relief cover. The current arrangements for weekend cover are expensive and not seen as an effective use of resources. Management is to consider full week day cover and an alternative weekend cover to improve the service and customer satisfaction.
- 2.40 Consideration is also being given to the introduction of new tasks; however this will require discussion with GMB. Introducing new tasks will be extremely important going forward if the Council is to offer services to other organisations in order to raise income. Increasing income is a priority for the Council and services such as voids clearance or minor decorations could be offered to other social landlords, for example.
- 2.41 The GMB noted that tenants often complained about tasks that caretakers had not carried out and that in their view a schedule of duties could be provided to tenants. The Committee agreed with this proposal. In addition, Digital Services had been requested to ensure information about progress of repairs was available for tenants. The Committee were of the view that if a caretaker was absent due to sickness or holiday this should be detailed on the website and at the estate, together with details of any alternative arrangements that are in place. The Committee also noted the limited holiday cover available for caretakers and recommended that proposals for increased holiday cover be investigated.

- 2.42 The Committee were also of the view that caretakers could carry out small handy person duties in liaison with the responsive repairs team to increase efficiency. The Committee noted that discussions were taking place with caretakers in relation to additional tasks, however in order for these tasks to be undertaken some of the current tasks may have to be deleted or additional resources provided. It is therefore recommended that the Executive agrees with the objective of enhancing the caretaking service through the introduction of new tasks, subject to staff and union consultation.
- 2.43 The Committee noted that although caretakers were responsible for the cleaning of estates, it was the Public Realm section that was responsible for the cleaning of areas surrounding estates. Each section works up to agreed boundaries, however the Committee was concerned that this may not achieve the best outcome for residents. For this reason, it is recommended that the Executive consider how estates staff can work with other services to ensure that the areas surrounding estates are thoroughly cleaned.

Grounds Maintenance (Greenspace)

- 2.44 The Committee also considered evidence in relation to the Grounds Maintenance service function on housing estates. Greenspace manage and deliver all the grounds maintenance on behalf of the Council and this includes all parks and the majority of housing estates.
- 2.45 The Grounds Maintenance service was brought back 'in house' in January 2013 and all staff are now on Council terms and conditions and paid the London Living Wage.
- 2.46 Retaining the same staff had avoided performance problems, which sometimes arise at the end of such contracts. Staff had attended training courses on customer service and equalities and it was emphasised to staff that they were now representatives of the Council.
- 2.47 Due to the seasonal nature of grounds maintenance work and the fact that due to climate change the seasons were not as well defined as in the past, there was a requirement to employ 25% more staff in the summer months. Greenspace sought to retain staff wherever possible and attempts were made to find staff other roles during the winter, but this was not always possible. The Committee were of the view that Greenspace should investigate the possibility of annualised hours, where staff were not permitted to take leave in the summer months, but are retained throughout the winter. This would lead to efficiency savings in recruiting new staff annually and offer additional security for workers. It was also suggested that synergies with other sections could be explored to offer full annual employment and increase the resources available to other sections.
- 2.48 The Committee were of the view that Greenspace should also consider maximising income by bidding for work from RSL's, TMO's and private residents. It was noted that the Greenspace team already had the requisite knowledge and skills to undertake this work and already provided a similar service to other local authorities. Income maximisation was an area that should be further investigated given the financial constraints imposed on the Council by the Government.
- 2.49 Greenspace monitor performance and ensure quality and value for money service is delivered. This is in addition to advice on re-instatement works and new planting to housing officers and residents and the mapping out all horticultural elements and supporting the improvement of biodiversity on estates. Greenspace worked closely with Housing officers and residents to make improvements to green spaces on estates including new bulb planting, renovation of grassed areas and the removal of large shrub areas and improved sight lines.

- 2.50 The service is split into three geographic areas and the teams function as stand-alone areas servicing parks and housing. This enables staff to become very familiar with their sites and develop relationships with key stakeholders and residents.
- 2.51 The Committee were concerned that local housing offices did not appear able to provide residents with details of dates on which the grass would be cut on estates. Greenspace indicated that grass cutting was not a frequency based service and a time period of two to three weeks was set for a date for grass to be cut and for this reason it was not possible to give an exact date for each estate. The service was also about to introduce a new ICT system, which would allow the monitoring of grounds maintenance work in real time. With regard to weeding of pathways the grounds maintenance service applies weed killer approximately three times a year and it is the responsibility of caretakers to pull out the weeds.
- 2.52 All staff have access to the IT performance monitoring system and formal monitoring is undertaken by a separate team within the Grounds Maintenance Service and in addition Grounds Maintenance carry out their own monitoring, which is then passed to housing officers to check. Monthly and quarterly meetings are held between officers to review performance and discuss upcoming work and in 2014 90.18% of all tasks checked met required standards and of tasks checked by housing officers 94.5% met required standards.
- 2.53 In relation to resident engagement in garden schemes, it was stated that such schemes are usually driven by a small number of dedicated individuals and not all estates had expressed an interest in such schemes. Although some schemes were very successful, and in some instances the Council had handed over gardening responsibilities to residents, in other areas there was a mixed reception to gardening schemes from residents and for this reason this transfer of responsibility was not appropriate on all estates.
- 2.54 Greenspace were also looking to develop schemes such as the 'Incredibly Edible' scheme, whereby residents plant herbs and edible plants in local greenspaces. Residents Associations were encouraged to form gardening clubs and those residents living in areas without residents' associations were able to contact their local Area Housing Office to discuss establishing such schemes. The Committee recommended that information in regards to these schemes should be further publicised, both through the website and print media.
- 2.55 Greenspace has a horticultural apprenticeship scheme and employed three local residents and work toward a Diploma in Horticulture. The apprentices gain experience working with experienced gardeners and one apprentice had already been successful in securing a full time post.

Mechanised Services

- 2.56 The Committee also considered evidence in relation to mechanised services. The Mechanised Services team, based in the Environment and Regeneration Department, are responsible for the collection of bulk refuse, mechanical sweeping of estate roads, fly tip removal, graffiti removal and pressure washing. This team of operatives consists of a manager, supervisor and an administrative assistant, based at Delhi/Outram estate. There are 18 mechanised services operatives.
- 2.57 The Mechanised Services team was transferred from Housing to Environment and Regeneration in April 2013. At the time of transfer there was a reduction of 4 full time and 4 agency posts with the same service specification transferred.

- 2.58 The 165 Islington estates are mechanically swept each week, and some are swept twice. On average 150 tonnes of lumber is collected every month and on average 1,452 lumber collections are completed every month. There are also approximately 110 pressure washing requests completed every month.
- 2.59 In terms of service delivery the Committee noted that the performance in relation to lumber removal there had been an improvement of 14% since 2013, in relation to mechanical estate road sweeping a 5.5% improvement since 2013 and in relation to pressure washing a 2.9% improvement since 2013.
- 2.60 The Committee recommended that mechanised services should also seek to generate income by selling their services to third parties.

Estate Maintenance

- 2.61 The Estate Maintenance team carries out repairs to estates. The service was launched in 2010 and expanded in 2012 to include metal work and additional ground works. Over 90% of reported works are carried out by the team and around 90% of repairs are completed on time. There are 20 estate maintenance operatives, two administrators, a senior analyst and a manager. The team has employed apprentices which have later become permanent employees.
- 2.62 The administration team raise repair orders, respond to enquiries, manage the workload, manage inspections and order stock.
- 2.63 Each operative has a smartphone through which work is managed and identified. An app allows operatives to log the progress of repairs as they are carried out. Progress is monitored on a monthly basis, which includes measures such as the percentage of repairs completed on time, individual operative productivity and the quality of repairs. Residents also evaluate the repairs carried out through the service.
- 2.64 Health and safety is a priority of the team. Health and safety meetings are held monthly, equipment is regularly checked and new fleet vehicles had recently been introduced to improve safety.

3. Conclusions

- 3.1 The Committee has made a number of recommendations that it is hoped will increase the effectiveness of the service provided and to ensure better value for money for tenants.
- 3.2 The Committee has focused on areas where they feel that Estate Services can not only improve services for residents but can also generate additional income for the Council, given the financial constraints imposed by the Government.
- 3.3 The Committee heard evidence in relation to the caretaking service in particular, where we consider that there are, whilst customer satisfaction is high, opportunities to develop the service and improve income generation opportunities whilst at the same time rationalising costs and avoiding duplication of responsibilities. In addition, there are a number of areas within Estate Services where it is felt that there are opportunities to maximise income and provide additional services for other organisations and residents.
- 3.4 The Committee would like to thank witnesses that gave evidence in relation to the scrutiny. The Executive is asked to endorse the Committee's recommendations.

APPENDIX – SCRUTINY INITIATION DOCUMENT

SCRUTINY REVIEW INITIATION DOCUMENT (SID)
Review: Estates Services Management
Scrutiny Review Committee: Housing Scrutiny Committee
Director leading the Review: Sean McLaughlin
Lead Officer: David Salenius
Overall aim: To review the effectiveness and value for money provided by the service
Objectives of the review: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Define the scope of estates services management• Identify the performance of each part of the service• Identify the costs of each part of the service• Identify resident satisfaction with the service• Compare the service provided with other London Boroughs and Estates Services Benchmarking Club• Identify areas for improvement
How is the review to be carried out: <p>It is proposed that the review be undertaken through a review of existing procedures and policies, performance data and obtaining witness evidence from officers, residents, other London Boroughs and from visits to provide a picture of the service and identify any areas for improvement.</p> <p>Scope of the Review</p> <p>Types of evidence will be assessed by the review: (add additional categories as needed)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Documentary submissions: Procedures and policies, budget reports, performance data2. It is proposed that witness evidence be taken from:<ol style="list-style-type: none">i) David Saleniusii) Estates Services Co-ordinators, Quality Assurance officers, other managers as requirediii) TRAs, TMOs3. Visits<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Estate(s)• Caretakers meeting• EMT Downham Road• Completed Estates Improvement Schemes• Other London Borough(s)
Additional Information: <p>Estates services management covers caretaking, communal repairs, grounds maintenance, special projects and estate parking.</p>