



ISLINGTON

Scaffolding and Work Platforms Scrutiny Review

REPORT OF THE HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



**London Borough of Islington
June 2015**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Scaffolding and Work Platforms Scrutiny Review

Aim

To review the current use of scaffolding and other work platforms by Housing Property Services, considering the costs, issues and pros and cons of different forms of provision.

Evidence

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

1. Presentations from Council Officers
Damian Dempsey, Group Leader – Quantity Surveyors;
Ryan Collymore, Group Leader – Contract Monitoring;
2. Site visits
Visits to several “live” scaffolding sites and discussions with the Council’s capital works contractors, Breyers Group and Mears Projects;
3. Documentary evidence
Information relating to the in-house scaffolding service previously provided by the London Borough of Camden; indicative costs of establishing the Council’s own scaffolding service;
4. Information from witnesses
Dr Brian Potter, Chairman of Islington Leaseholders Association.

Main Findings

The Housing Property Services section makes use of scaffolding for both responsive repairs and capital works. Responsive repairs are carried out directly by the Council, with scaffolding erected by a contractor on behalf of the authority. Capital works are carried out by contractors on a seven year rolling programme and include the general improvement and maintenance of council properties.

The Committee considered problems with scaffolding reported by local residents, including the comments on the Islington Leaseholders’ Association, and investigated these issues further with officers and contractors.

Local people can have a perception that scaffolding is erected for long periods of time, with seemingly little work taking place. The Committee heard from officers and contractors that, although there can be delays to works, unoccupied scaffolding is often due to inspections and preparatory work taking place.

Although the importance of inspections and preparatory work is appreciated, the Committee is concerned by the length of time scaffolding can be erected for and consider that better scheduling of works could lead to better outcomes for residents. It was also suggested that working in partnership with housing associations undertaking repair works to nearby properties could help to minimise disruption.

Local people can also have a perception that scaffolding is expensive and that works could be carried out with less expense and inconvenience by using alternatives, such as cherry pickers. Leaseholders were particularly concerned about the cost of scaffolding as they are partially responsible for the cost of repairs to their properties.

The Committee noted that scaffolding is a fixed cost, regardless of the length of time it is erected for, and as a result scaffolding can represent a significant expense within the overall cost of an otherwise low value scheme. Although alternatives to scaffolding may be appropriate in some instances, the use of scaffolding is determined by several factors, including access arrangements, the extent of the work that needs to be carried out, and resource requirements.

However, the Committee noted that the cost of scaffolding for responsive repairs had recently decreased, from around £1,200 to £400 per project. As a result, the Committee was concerned that the Council may not be achieving best value on scaffolding for capital works. Although capital contractors are paid on an agreed schedule of rates, it was suggested that further work is needed to ensure best value and minimise disruption to residents. In particular, the Council could specify target prices in schedules of rates for scaffolding when procuring future capital contracts, and could contractually specify that the use of scaffolding is minimised where possible.

To help clarify which alternatives to scaffolding, if any, are suitable for use on each property, the Committee suggested that the Council should formulate an estate-based asset management plan which would assess the access needs of each property. This would help to guide future capital and repairs work and clarify residents' expectations around the use of scaffolding. This could be created over time by simply maintaining a database of the inspections carried out by surveyors prior to repair work commencing on each property.

It was confirmed that the Council did not yet have access to technology such as drones and specialist cameras. The Committee supported the use of such technologies as a way of minimising the use of scaffolding.

The Council is seeking to design out the need for scaffolding in future by using maintenance free materials and fixings and designing with access in mind. For example, new Council housing is making use of materials which reduce the need for painting and are designed to facilitate access without scaffolding as far as possible. The Committee supports this approach.

The Committee noted the negative perception that some members of the public have of scaffolding. The Committee strongly believes that the Council and contractors should work to ensure that scaffolding has as little impact on residents as possible. Regular communication with residents is considered essential and the use of resident liaison officers for major works is particularly supported.

The Committee considered the pros and cons of insourcing scaffolding for responsive repair works. It is estimated that a full service would cost £1.6 million to set up and run in the first year and £1.1 million thereafter. The current cost to the Council of providing the same number of scaffolds would be £414,000. An in-house scaffolding service was previously provided by the London Borough of Camden; however this has since been outsourced.

The Committee wish for the Executive to give further consideration to piloting an in-house work platform service, capable of erecting scaffolding and a range of other work platforms. Initially this could be as small as one gang working on four scaffolds a day. Although the Committee recognise the initial outlay required to develop such a service, it is thought that such a team would enable the Council to have better control over its use of scaffolding, would provide jobs for local people, and could be used as an income generation opportunity by carrying out external contract work. The Committee is keen for this team to offer part-time and flexible working to encourage applicants from a diverse range of backgrounds. Using this team to develop the skills of local people through apprenticeships would also be encouraged.

Conclusions

The Committee recognise that the use of scaffolding can represent a significant cost to the Council and inconvenience to local people. For this reason, recommendations have been made which seek to minimise the use of scaffolding and secure best value. In formulating its recommendations, the Committee has also considered to the Council's need to maximise income and the importance of increasing local employment opportunities.

In carrying out the review, the Committee has met with officers, contractors and members of the public to gain a balanced view. The Committee would like to thank the witnesses that gave evidence to the Committee. The Executive is asked to endorse the Committee's recommendations.

Recommendations

- 1. That the Executive seeks to minimise the use of scaffolding by Housing Property Services and encourage the use of alternative work platforms;**
- 2. That the Executive encourage capital works contractors to use alternative work platforms by specifying in contracts that scaffolding should be minimised and used in a way which will cause the least disruption for residents;**
- 3. That the Executive continue work to design out the need for scaffolding in Council housing;**
- 4. That the Executive work to improve the scheduling of all works to minimise the time length of time scaffolding is erected for;**
- 5. That the Executive consider working in partnership with housing associations which are undertaking repair works to nearby properties to minimise disruption;**
- 6. That the Executive investigate formulating an estate-based asset management plan which assesses the access requirements of each property to guide future capital and repairs work and clarify the suitability of erecting scaffolding on each property;**
- 7. That the Executive explore the reduction of the cost of scaffolding for capital works by specifying target prices in schedules of rates in future contracts;**
- 8. That the Executive note the negative perception that residents have of scaffolding and encourage regular communication with residents whose homes are undergoing repair and improvement works;**
- 9. That the Executive consider procuring a range of work platforms and technologies to facilitate responsive repair works without the use of scaffolding;**
- 10. That the Executive give further consideration to piloting a multi-skilled work platform team, capable of erecting scaffolding and other work platforms.**

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:

*Damian Dempsey and Ryan Collymore – Lead Officers
Peter Moore and Jonathan Moore – Democratic Services*

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Committee commenced the review in December 2014 with the aim of reviewing the current use of scaffolding and other work platforms by Housing Property Services, considering the costs, issues and pros and cons of different forms of provision.
- 1.2 In carrying out the review the Committee met with officers, a representative of the Islington Leaseholders' Association, representatives of the Council's capital works contractors, the Breyers Group and Mears Projects, and visited several "live" scaffolding sites: the Mayville Estate (N16), Riversdene (N5), Stavely/Keighley Close (N7) and Ewe Close, off Shearling Way (N7).
- 1.3 The Council has responsibility for around 23,000 secure tenancies and 7,000 leaseholders.
- 1.4 There are two types of property repairs which require the use of working platforms. Responsive repairs restore properties to their original condition and are often needed to make urgent repairs to a property. Capital works are improvement works that enhance the existing housing stock and are carried out on a seven year rolling programme.
- 1.5 In 2013/14 the Council had to erect approximately 2,000 scaffolds for responsive repairs. The Council had recently procured a cherry picker which was available for property works, as well as repairs to street lighting.
- 1.6 Scaffolding is the most frequently used type of working platform, however there are alternative methods of access, including mast climbers, cradles, cherry pickers, abseilers and mobile towers. However, not all alternatives to scaffolding are suitable for all types of work. Each property is assessed on its own merits before the most suitable method of carrying out the work is agreed.

2. Findings

The importance of health and safety

- 2.1 The Committee noted that health and safety is the most important consideration when carrying out improvement works. The Council has a duty to ensure that all of its staff and contractors work safely, and must take reasonable steps to reduce health and safety risks to its workers. The use of scaffolds is highly regulated through health and safety legislation.
- 2.2 Falls from height are the largest cause of fatality and serious injury in the construction industry, accounting for 50% of all construction fatalities. The safety of residents is equally important, as improvement works must not impede emergency access or present a risk to occupiers of properties.
- 2.3 When repair or improvement works are to be carried out, an assessment is made in regards to what is the safest way to carry out the works. Often this will result in scaffolding being erected.

Resident concerns

- 2.4 The Committee considered problems with scaffolding reported by local residents, including the comments of the Islington Leaseholders' Association. There can be a perception that scaffolding is erected for long periods of time with seemingly little work taking place.

- 2.5 The Committee heard from officers and contractors that, although there can be delays to works, unoccupied scaffolding is often due to inspections and preparatory work taking place. A series of inspections are carried out before, during, and after the works take place, the results of which are discussed between the contractor and the Council.
- 2.6 However, on inspecting the Mayville Estate, members inspected several housing blocks encased in scaffolding and expressed concern at the apparently low number of operatives working on the site. This was particularly disappointing given the length of the contract and the inconvenience to residents. Given the disruption that can be caused by scaffolding, the Committee queried if more could be done to ensure that works are carried out and scaffolding disassembled as quickly as possible.
- 2.7 Scaffolding is a fixed cost, regardless of the length of time it is erected for. As a result, scaffolding can represent a significant expense within the overall cost of an otherwise low-value scheme. The Committee noted that the cost of scaffolding through the Council's responsive repairs contract had recently decreased, from around £1,200 to £400 per project. The cost of scaffolding on capital projects varied from project to project, and was paid against an agreed schedule of rates.
- 2.8 The ILA considered that scaffolding was too expensive, and although scaffolding was a fixed cost, prices were unnecessarily "front loaded" and represented poor value for money for both the Council, tenants and leaseholders. Given the decrease in the cost of scaffolding for responsive repairs, the Committee queried if the Council is achieving best value on the procurement of scaffolding for capital works. As scaffolding for capital works is paid for against a contractual schedule of rates the Council is unable to decrease this cost through the duration of the current contract, however the Committee suggested that the Executive could explore the reduction of the cost of scaffolding for capital works by specifying target prices in schedules of rates in future contracts.

Communication with residents

- 2.9 The Committee noted the negative perception that some members of the public have of scaffolding. Local people are worried about the safety of their homes while scaffolding is erected, the damage that erecting scaffolding can cause to their homes, and are frustrated with the nuisance of having scaffolding on their homes for long periods of time.
- 2.10 The Committee strongly believes that the Council and contractors should work to ensure that scaffolding has as little impact on residents as possible. Regular communication with residents is considered essential and the use of resident liaison officers for major works is particularly supported. It is considered that engagement with residents can add value to repair works, as discussions with residents can help to identify problems with properties and assess which resources are required.

Minimising the use of scaffolding

- 2.11 The use of scaffolding is determined by several factors, including access arrangements, the extent of the work that needs to be carried out, and resource requirements. Works which require a significant amount of manpower, or working at height for a prolonged period of time, will often require scaffolding. Certain works, for example roof works requiring hot bitumen, are only permitted to be carried out from a scaffold.
- 2.12 The Committee visited estates where several housing blocks had scaffolding erected at the start of a major project which then remained assembled for several months. Sometimes, this would lead to scaffolding remaining on a property for long periods of time before works started, or after

works finished. Although it was recognised that this may be the most cost effective method of providing scaffolding, the Committee sympathised with residents' concerns.

- 2.13 The Committee inspected alternatives to fixed scaffolding, including mobile scaffold towers, cherry pickers and mast climbers. Whilst it was recognised that each of these are limited by the local environment, it was considered that alternatives to scaffolding should be used where possible to reduce the disruption to residents.
- 2.14 Although there can be access difficulties for cherry pickers, it was noted that some cherry pickers have a very small footprint and the Council may wish to consider making use of these, and other work platforms, for otherwise inaccessible properties.
- 2.15 The Committee consider that the Council's use of scaffolding should be minimised as far as possible and support the use of alternative work platforms. It was suggested that the Council should formulate an estate-based asset management plan which would assess the access needs for each property. This could clarify which alternatives to scaffolding, if any, are suitable for use on each property and would help to guide future capital and repairs work and residents' expectations. This could be created over time by simply maintaining a database of the inspections carried out by surveyors prior to repair work commencing on each property.
- 2.16 It was suggested that future capital works contracts could specify that the use of scaffolding should be minimised or scheduled in a way which causes the least disruption to residents.
- 2.17 The Council is seeking to design out the need for scaffolding in future by using maintenance free materials and fixings and designing with access in mind. For example, new Council housing is making use of materials which reduce the need for painting and are designed to facilitate access without scaffolding as far as possible. The Committee supports this approach, and would encourage a similar approach to be taken in the refurbishment of existing housing stock, where possible.

Amending Council procedures

- 2.18 The Committee heard examples of scaffolding that had been erected and disassembled, only to be erected again a few weeks later. The Committee considered that better scheduling of such works would both reduce inconvenience for residents and minimise costs.
- 2.19 Capital works are currently carried out on a seven year rolling programme. It was queried if non-urgent works could be moved to a fourteen year cycle, or if an alternative cycle could be adopted, such as ten years. The Committee did not wish to make a specific recommendation on this point.
- 2.20 Working in partnership with housing associations undertaking repair works to nearby properties could also help to minimise disruption.
- 2.21 Due to the urgent nature of responsive repairs, scaffold licences were occasionally sought retrospectively to ensure repairs were carried out as soon as possible.
- 2.22 It was confirmed that the Council did not yet have access to technology such as drones and specialist cameras. The Committee supported the use of such technology as a means of minimising scaffolding.

Feasibility of an in-house service

- 2.23 The Committee considered the pros and cons of insourcing scaffolding for responsive repair works. It is estimated that a full service would cost £1.6 million to set up and run in the first year £1.1 million thereafter. This cost is based on four gangs working on approximately four scaffolds a day each. The current cost to the Council of providing the same number of scaffolds would be £414,000.
- 2.24 If the Council was to establish its own in-house service, the Council would require a large storage site with an estimated annual rent of approximately £100k per annum, four large flat-bed lorries at an estimated cost of £62k per annum, a great deal of scaffolding equipment and appropriately trained and qualified staff.
- 2.25 An in-house scaffolding service was previously provided by the London Borough of Camden. However, the Committee learned that this was outsourced due to difficulties in recruiting, the amount of space needed to store equipment, the level of investment needed to renew equipment, and the sizeable health and safety assurances associated with delivering an in-house service. Officers were not aware of any other local authorities that had an in-house scaffolding service.
- 2.26 However, the Committee wish for the Executive to give further consideration to piloting a small in-house work platform service, which initially could be as small as one gang. This team would be able to erect scaffolding and other work platforms such as cherry pickers and towers, as well as use technology to assist responsive repairs, such as drones and specialist cameras.
- 2.27 Although the initial outlay to develop such a service is recognised, it is thought that such a team would enable greater control of scaffolding works and could be used as an income generation opportunity, with any initial cost recouped over time through a combination of savings on responsive repairs and income from external contract work.
- 2.28 An in-house service could also help local people by providing employment and developing their skills. If the Council is to provide an in-house service, it is recommended that this provides apprenticeships to local people and offers part-time and flexible working to encourage applicants from a diverse range of backgrounds. One of the Council's capital works contractors, Mears Projects, had recently employed four apprentices, three of which were female.
- 2.29 Any in-house service would also have to consider seasonal demand. Responsive repairs are often required most during the winter months, as damage to properties is often caused during periods of inclement weather. It is suggested that an in-house service provides multi-skilled staff which can work on other services during periods of low demand during the summer.
- 2.30 The Committee noted that, even with an in-house service, contractors may still be required during peak periods.
- 2.31 The Committee wishes for further thought to be given to the type of scaffolding provided by an in-house service. It is understood that cuplock scaffolding may be cheaper and easier to assemble, if the Executive is minded to pursue an in-house service.

3. Conclusions

- 3.1 The Committee recognise that the use of scaffolding can represent a significant cost to the Council and inconvenience to local people. For this reason, recommendations have been made which seek to minimise the use of scaffolding and secure best value. In formulating its

recommendations, the Committee has also had regard to the Council's need to maximise income and the importance of increasing local employment opportunities.

- 3.2 In carrying out the review, the Committee has met with officers, contractors and members of the public to gain a balanced view. 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.

SCRUTINY REVIEW INITIATION DOCUMENT (SID)
Review: Scaffolding and Work Platforms
Scrutiny Review Committee: Housing
Director leading the review: Simon Kwong
Lead Officers: Ryan Collymore and Damian Dempsey
<p>Overall aim:</p> <p>To review the current use of scaffolding and other work platforms by Housing Property Services, considering the costs, issues and pros and cons of different forms of provision.</p>
<p>Objectives of the review:</p> <p>Report the current scaffolding arrangements for capital and responsive repairs. Discuss health and safety requirements. Consider the pros and cons of insourcing scaffolding for responsive repairs.</p>
<p>How is the review to be carried out:</p> <p>The review will take place in three stages, first a presentation to ensure all parties have an understanding of the current arrangements and possible options to be considered and provision of all documentation supporting the presentation. In a second stage the committee will be invited to attend a tour of a number of sites looking at a range of scaffolding arrangements and other forms of access. Thirdly the Committee will have the chance to interview a series of staff working on scaffolding from different perspectives and two comparable landlords to consider how they manage scaffolding.</p> <p>Scope of the review:</p> <p>The review will consider the application, methodology, cost and practice of using scaffolding for repairs and capital investment works on Islington's housing stock. The presentation will not cover scaffolding for other non-housing services provided by the council.</p> <p>Types of evidence that will be assessed by the review:</p> <p>1. Documentary submissions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Copy of Presentation; HSE Guidance; Schedule of Rates Preambles and prices for Roofing and Scaffolding; Contract Documents with Breyer Group and Mears Ltd; Procedure Documents; Example of the roofing register and relevant related paperwork; Copy of H&S audits for roofing.

2. It is proposed that witness evidence be taken from:

- i) Health and Safety Team - to provide further info on the safety of scaffolding
- ii) Direct Works Group Leader – to provide information regarding repairs process
- iii) Capital Works Contractors – to discuss their delivery and issues
- iv) Repairs Contractor – to discuss their delivery and issues
- v) Camden Repairs Manager (TBC) – for comparison with another LA
- vi) Circle Anglia Repairs Manager (TBC) – for comparison with an RSL
- vii) Capital Quantity Surveying Group Leader – to discuss cost control, provision of access equipment and terms of contract.
- viii) Customer Services Group Leader – to discuss complaints regarding scaffold.

3. Visits

- Visit to a live capital site with scaffold (location to be agreed)
- Visit to a live repairs site with scaffold (location to be agreed)
- Visit to a range of properties to explain the different issues and methods of access

Additional Information:

None.

Programme

Key output:	To be submitted to Committee on:
1. Scrutiny Initiation Document	2 December 2014
2. Timetable	
3. Interim Report	16 April 2015
4. Final Report	8 June 2015