

Housing Scrutiny Committee - 23 March 2016

Minutes of the meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Committee held at Committee Room 1, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD on 23 March 2016 at 7.30 pm.

Present: **Councillors:** O'Sullivan (Chair), Poyser (Vice-Chair), Andrews, Erdogan, Ismail, O'Halloran, Hamitouche, and Williamson.

Co-Opted Members: Rose-Marie McDonald and Jim Rooke.

Councillor Michael O'Sullivan in the Chair

- 160** **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item A1)**
Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Alex Diner and Raphael Andrews (for lateness).
- 161** **DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item A2)**
Councillor Rakhia Ismail for Councillor Alex Diner.
- 162** **DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS (Item A3)**
Councillor Una O'Halloran, Councillor Rakhia Ismail and Jim Rooke declared personal interests in Item B1, Responsive Repairs Witness Evidence, as council tenants and users of the responsive repairs service.
- 163** **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (Item A4)**
RESOLVED:
That the minutes of the meeting held on 29 February 2016 be confirmed as a correct record and the Chair be authorised to sign them.
- 164** **CHAIR'S REPORT (Item A5)**
The Chair reminded the Committee of the forthcoming scrutiny visit to the council facilities at Brewery Road and Tufnell Park on 13 April 2016. This would enable members to meet with responsive repairs staff and tour the council's training facility.

It was noted that One Housing Group would be presenting to the April meeting and Hyde Housing Association had been invited to the May meeting.

The Chair advised that he had recently attended an informative presentation on the Affinity Sutton repairs service. The Chair had invited the organisation to provide witness evidence as part of the responsive repairs scrutiny.
- 165** **ORDER OF BUSINESS (Item A6)**
No changes were proposed to the order of business.
- 166** **PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item A7)**
The Chair outlined the procedure for public questions and the filming and recording of meetings.

167 **RESPONSIVE REPAIRS: WITNESS EVIDENCE (Item B1)**

(a) Evidence from Kwest

Susan Richmond of Kwest Research made a presentation to the Committee on the organisation's work in surveying resident satisfaction with the responsive repairs service.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- Kwest was a Manchester-based organisation with over 25 years' experience in social housing research. The organisation was a member of the Market Research Society and had provided services to Islington since 2003. Responsive repairs surveys had been conducted since 2008.
- Kwest did not sub-contract any aspect of its service. The organisation provided research services to a number of local authorities and housing providers on areas such as repairs satisfaction, anti-social behaviour, complaints, grounds maintenance and estate services.
- The organisation's surveying methods provided clients with instant feedback on their services. For satisfaction with Islington's repairs service, the data collected was automatically transferred to a spreadsheet which updated overnight. Data was available to Islington Council the following day, which allowed any complaints or other comments to be investigated as required.
- Kwest's latest contract with the council was for surveying repairs satisfaction over a two year period from December 2015. At the time the contract was renewed, the council changed its survey questions. It was commented that the previous survey was somewhat repetitive and considered to be too long. It was also agreed that the organisation would increase its number of interviews to 15% of repairs provided in order to survey a greater sample size.
- The organisation surveyed Islington residents via telephone, with the interviewer filling in a response form online. If a resident was unhappy with the service received, a verbatim record of their dissatisfaction was made.
- The council provided Kwest with data on the residents receiving repairs. Those who had received multiple repairs to their property were excluded in order to link each interview to a single repair. Kwest then amended the data to remove records with no contact details, residents whose repair had not been recently completed, and anyone already interviewed in the last three months to avoid survey fatigue. It was noted that many residents were happy to take part in the survey; however this goodwill was lost by repeatedly surveying residents.
- Kwest had a large team of interviewers who called residents throughout the day and early evening Monday to Thursday, morning and afternoon on Friday, and also at the weekend. Multiple attempts were made to call residents and call-backs could be arranged for more convenient times.
- Data from December 2015 to February 2016 indicated that current satisfaction levels were good, with 69% of respondents very satisfied with their repair. A slight decrease in satisfaction was recorded for the month of February.
- Reported satisfaction levels had increased since the survey questions were revised in December 2015. This is because the council had asked Kwest to survey satisfaction with the repair received 'on this occasion' as opposed to overall satisfaction, which tended to be lower as residents included wider factors in their response. Due to the change in interview questions it was not possible to provide a direct comparison to historic satisfaction data.

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- It was commented that, in general, organisations received a lower satisfaction score when they asked about overall satisfaction as opposed to satisfaction with a specific task.
- As all housing providers asked different interview questions it was not possible to directly compare the council to other organisations, however anecdotally it was reported that Islington had a good level of satisfaction. It was commented that Islington residents were generally happy to provide feedback, which was not true in all areas.
- It was suggested that comparable data could be obtained if the council decided to ask the same interview questions as another housing provider.
- It was noted that, once Kwest excluded those who did not want to take part in the survey, those who did not provide contact details, and those who could not be interviewed for other reasons, up to half of those receiving repairs were exempt from being interviewed.
- Kwest did not survey residents via email as it did not have this contact information. Although some research organisations surveyed via email, it was noted that this tended to yield a low response rate of around 10%. Email surveying did not tend to increase response rates, however did attract a different demographic.
- Some Kwest staff were bi-lingual, however there could be a language barrier when interviewing some residents. It was commented that often someone in the household was able to speak English and translate if necessary.
- Kwest did not intend to interview those with incomplete repairs; however this did happen occasionally due to data anomalies, for example if a repair was thought to be complete but then further work was required. In such instances the interview was completed to provide feedback to the council.
- Kwest did not have data on if satisfaction had increased since the repairs service was brought in-house however it was noted that council officers would have access to this data.
- It was commented that very few leaseholders were interviewed as they were not eligible for the majority of repairs.
- The Committee queried the cost of the council's contract with Kwest.
- Interviews were carried out in accordance with a script, which was circulated to the Committee. Members commented that many of the questions seemed to focus on the operative as opposed to the repair. The survey collected demographic information and members noted that there was no option for respondents to identify themselves as transgender.
- It was noted that the survey question asked to establish the resident's ethnic background did not provide sub-categories for African residents. In response, it was commented the ethnic categories listed were standard in survey data.
- It was requested that the officers responsible for designing the survey attend the next meeting to provide further information on how the survey was compiled.
- It was requested that a sample of anonymised interview data be submitted to the committee. Members also requested to review the list of suggested service improvements identified by residents via the survey.
- It was noted that the survey results were not published in the public domain.
- Dr Brian Potter of the Islington Leaseholders Association queried the potential for misrepresentation of satisfaction statistics.

The Committee thanked Susan Richmond for her attendance.

(b) Housing Direct CCA Accreditation

Lorenzo Heanue, Productivity and Compliance Group Leader, presented a paper which detailed the call centre customer service accreditation awarded to Housing Direct.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- Housing Direct had held CCA accreditation since 2011. In 2015/16 the service was awarded the new Version 6 accreditation, which indicated that the service was meeting a global standard over eight 'modules' related to customer service, effectiveness, processes, staff training, use of technology and other areas.
- It was noted that the implementation of the online repairs reporting system had greatly assisted the award of the accreditation. Repairs were also able to be reported via email.
- It was noted that staff training was wider than customer service standards and included areas such as mental health awareness.
- Officers commented on the importance of using ICT to improve the customer experience. For example, if a call unexpectedly ended, the service would call the customer back and resume from the point the call ended.
- It was suggested that the new ICT system would improve the level of service further. Operatives were engaged in the design of the call centre diagnostic script to ensure that they had access to the information they required.
- It was commented that sometimes operatives called residents from mobile telephones which displayed as a "private number" calling them. It was suggested that displaying the telephone number would enable residents to call their operative back if necessary.
- Staff entitlements were assessed by the CCA. It was noted that staff were eligible for a range of benefits including discounted leisure centre membership.
- Following a query, it was noted that it was too early to report on the number of people using the online reporting service and their demographic information; however this would be of interest in future.
- It was noted that Housing Direct had experienced an increase in calls since the service was brought in-house as the call centre was required to respond to secondary issues which had previously been the responsibility of the contractor.
- Officers considered that the service had improved since coming in-house as the council had greater control and was able to ensure that the service was resident-focused. For example, if a resident was unhappy with the service the council would seek to rectify this the next day. The council was unable to directly influence such matters when the service was outsourced.
- The Committee queried if operatives could have the ability to book second appointments with residents via their PDA. It was suggested that this would be a significant service improvement. It was also suggested that taking photographs before and after each repair would assist in complaint resolution.
- Following a query by Dr Brian Potter of the Islington Leaseholders Association, it was noted that Housing Direct KPIs included telephone system data such as waiting times and call flows. The Committee requested that KPI data be reported to the next meeting.
- It was explained that accreditation module 6 'Managing the outsourced relationship' related to the service's relationship with Contact Islington, as the service handled Housing Direct calls outside of normal working hours (8am – 8pm). It was commented that ensuring consistent quality was essential, regardless of which service answered the call.

The Committee thanked Lorenzo Heanue for his attendance.

168 **INFORMATION ITEM: PRESENTATION ON ROLLIT HOUSE (Item B2)**

Christine Short, Head of Capital Programming, made a presentation to the Committee on the large fire at Rollit House and the reinstatement works underway.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- The Committee considered the scale and context of the fire, reviewing images, plans, and the challenges associated with major reinstatement works.
- It was noted that there was no loss of life due to the actions of one resident who quickly alerted her neighbours to the fire. The Committee commented that the actions of the resident should be formally recognised in some way.
- Rollit House was compliant with building regulations at the time it was constructed and additional fire safety measures were due to be installed two weeks after the fire occurred.
- The Committee considered the logistical challenges associated with rehousing an entire block of residents and securing their possessions at short notice.
- The Committee noted the meetings held with and communications sent to residents. Engaging residents in the reinstatement works was essential.
- It was decided to reinstate rather than demolish the building as Rollit House was still structurally intact.
- Challenges associated with the reinstatement works included carrying out surveys, clearing damaged furniture and fittings, the removal of asbestos, the relaying of the gas supply, assessing and rectifying water damage, and amending the layout of properties to ensure they were consistent with the latest fire regulations.
- It was reported that the council was working closely with its insurer to ensure that the cost of the reinstatement works would be covered. The council self-insured to the value of £1million and costs above this level were due to be met by the insurer. Leaseholders were required to make a contribution in the region of a few hundred pounds.
- A significant procurement exercise had been conducted to appoint a single contractor to carry out all of the reinstatement works. It was commented that the council had the expertise to produce its own technical documents to support the procurement process, whereas other authorities would likely have to buy in this service. A contractor had been appointed and works were due to finish by October 2016. The contract required working to strict deadlines otherwise the contractor was liable for any additional costs.
- It was advised that the fire appeared to be accidental and the likely cause was unattended candles.
- The Committee queried the council's emergency response processes. It was commented that emergency plans were in place and in the event of a fire such as that at Rollit House residents were booked into hotels and provided with a small amount of money if necessary.
- It was queried if the council would analyse the payments made against insurance claims. It was reported that such tasks would be the responsibility of the council's insurance team. The council re-tendered its insurances every few years to ensure value for money.
- The council did not have existing floor plans for all of its properties and no existing plans were held for Rollit House. It was noted that plans were held for larger properties, such as tower blocks, and these had been passed on to the London Fire Brigade.

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- It was suggested that the specifications of new fixtures and fittings and other detailed information be recorded on the council's databases to assist with future repair and capital works.
- It was noted that the council was risk assessing similar buildings and those which required fire safety improvements would be brought forward in the capital programme.
- Following a question from Dr Brian Potter of the Islington Leaseholders Association, it was advised that the procurement of the reinstatement contractor was below the threshold of European public procurement regulations. The procurement exercise was a one stage tender process and ten full submissions had been received. It was noted that there were likely to be confidentiality clauses in the contract.

The Committee thanked Christine Short for her attendance.

RESOLVED:

That consideration be given to honouring the resident who alerted other residents to the fire.

The meeting ended at 9.35 pm

CHAIR