



ISLINGTON

# HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

## 25 November 2019

### SECOND DESPATCH

**Please find enclosed the following items:**

**Item 2** Effectiveness of Communications -12 month report back

1 - 22

Enquiries to : Ola Adeoye  
Tel : 020 7527 044  
Email : [democracy@islington.gov.uk](mailto:democracy@islington.gov.uk)



This page is intentionally left blank



**Report of:** Executive Member for Housing and Development

<b>Meeting of:</b>	<b>Date:</b>	<b>Ward(s):</b>
Housing Scrutiny Committee	25 <sup>th</sup> November 2019	All

<b>Delete as appropriate</b>	<b>Exempt</b>	<b>Non-exempt</b>
------------------------------	---------------	-------------------



Page 1

## **SUBJECT: Housing Scrutiny Review of services for the effectiveness of Housing Services Communications – Executive Member response – 12-month update on recommendations**

### **1. Synopsis**

- 1.1 On 4<sup>th</sup> September 2018, the Executive agreed a report from the Housing Scrutiny Committee about their review of the effectiveness of Housing Services provided communication. The report highlighted 19 recommendations to improve housing services to vulnerable residents.
- 1.2 This report updates the Housing Scrutiny Committee on work carried out by Housing Services to meet the recommendations of the original scrutiny report and outlines future work to improve the effectiveness of communications in the department.

### **2. Background**

- 2.1 In September 2017, the Housing Scrutiny Committee started a review looking at the effectiveness of Housing Services communications.
- 2.2 The main objectives of the review were:

- To review the effectiveness of verbal, on-line and written communication channels, with residents, tenant and resident associations and internally
- To assess if internal processes and staff training are sufficient to achieve effective communications with residents
- To review how Housing Services and respond to and learn from feedback and complaints
- To review how the council can be assured that the council’s contractors and their subcontractors are communicating with residents effectively.
- To identify areas of good practice and how housing communications could be improved.

### 3. 12-month update on Recommendations

Page 2

Recommendation	Response to Recommendations	What we have done over the past 12 months and future plans
<p><b>Recommendation 1</b> The council should agree a Code of Communications among the council’s Housing services, Partners for Improvement in Islington, and contractors. This should set out agreed principles for effective communication, and should seek to ensure consistent quality in communication with residents. The Code should cover issues such as responsiveness, accessibility, tone of voice, joined up working and record keeping. Tenant Management</p>	<p><b>Response –</b> The review highlighted the need for better communication between different parts of Housing and between Housing, Partners for Improvement and contractors.</p> <p>The council’s communication’s team provide detailed branding guidelines on the intranet which include advice on plain English, accessibility and various design templates. In addition, the council has clear customer care standards and specific “write first time” training for staff that also incorporates good practice advice.</p> <p><b><u>We will</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share this existing communications guidance with Tenant Management Organisations, Partners for Improvement and with Housing Associations at quarterly Islington Housing Group meetings. We will also agree a basic protocol for communications</li> </ul>	<p>The council has the following guidance available to staff:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Updated branding guidelines</li> <li>• New global accessibility standards for websites</li> <li>• Write First Time Toolkit</li> <li>• Writing Style Guidelines</li> <li>• Guidance on writing a good/letters and email</li> <li>• Guidance on writing for the web and social media</li> <li>• Guidance on standards we expect for contractors and third parties</li> </ul> <p>While Partners are responsible for improving communications in their organisation; the council will be giving Partners access to the council’s on-line Housing Library on the intranet which will allow Partners access the guidance and documents listed above.</p> <p>Our respective communications teams are in touch so that we can work more closely and improve the co-ordination of council messages across Partners’ channels.</p>

<p>Organisations and Housing Associations should be encouraged to adopt a similar code, if they have not done so already.</p>	<p>between various partners to promote common principles.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highlight the need for improved communication at TMO Liaison Committee Meetings.</li> <li>• Make TMOs aware of the council-run training on communications skills and encourage TMO staff to attend.</li> <li>• Arrange bespoke training for TMO staff, if required (TMOs are usually responsible for sourcing and running training for their own staff).</li> <li>• Share communications good practice information with Partners for Improvement and work with them to improve how their staff communicate with residents.</li> </ul> <p>Partners for Improvement are responsible for improving communications in their organisation and run communications training for their staff. They carry out a rolling internal audit of correspondence and complaints handling to drive up standards and produce an annual communications plan.</p> <p>A recommendation from last year's Scrutiny Review of Services to Vulnerable Residents was to set clear expectations for contractors about working with disabled and vulnerable residents. Housing Property Services are putting together a guidance pack for contractors, which will include service standards covering best practice on communicating with disabled and vulnerable residents; this pack can also be used as a best practice guide for communicating with all residents.</p>	<p>In the past year, Partners have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Re-designed their Housing Management Team to increase the volume of resident queries resolved at the first point of contact.</li> <li>• Completed a range of quality audits</li> <li>• Updated and improved their website</li> </ul> <p>The communications guidance and good practice information mentioned above has also been shared with TMOs. While TMOs continue to be responsible for their own staff training, they have been made aware that their staff can apply to attend customer care related courses that are available to council staff.</p> <p>Bespoke training can be offered to TMO if there is the demand.</p> <p>Sharing the council's communications style guide and communications tool kit information with Partners and TMOs seeks to ensure a consistent quality of communication with residents.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 2</b> Processes for Housing management to review the quality of staff</p>	<p><b>Response</b> – All parts of Housing deal with complaints under the Council's corporate complaints policy and are expected to adhere to the corporate standards; although different parts of Housing have varying</p>	<p>Property Services have put a complaints improvement action plan in place. The action plan focuses on the following main areas:</p>

<p>communications, complaint responses and customer journeys should be enhanced. Communications and complaints should be reviewed on a regular basis, with clear procedures for how quality will be monitored, how these can be escalated for management review, and how this will inform officer training and development and internal processes.</p>	<p>internal procedures for managing and monitoring complaints in their own service areas.</p> <p>The Scrutiny Committee received a presentation from Housing Property Services on their complaints handling processes, so there was a focus on repairs complaints. Whilst the number of complaints received in relation to repairs is relatively high, the number is quite small when measured against the high number of repairs successfully completed. Also, the number of complaints repairs that have been upheld in recent years has reduced.</p> <p>Satisfaction with the repairs service is monitored independently on a rolling basis by KWEST, a research organisation that specialises housing customer satisfaction surveys.</p> <p>The committee noted some positive comments about how communications on repairs issues were handled, but also noted individual cases where communication with residents around delayed repairs could have been better.</p> <p>Complaints received by Homes and Communities have decreased greatly across the years, as have the number of upheld complaints.</p> <p><b><u>We will</u></b></p> <p>Draw up a Property Services complaints action plan for improvement, focusing on improved communication with residents who complain about repairs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review how Homes and Communities manage and monitor complaints to focus more on learning from complaints outcomes.</li> <li>• Develop Homes and Communities staff behaviours with a focus on improved communications with</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preventing complaints</li> <li>• Responding to complaints</li> <li>• Learning from complaints</li> </ul> <p>Better communication with residents is a key thread that runs through the action plan.</p> <p>The Repairs Customer Service Team have had training on complaints handling and dealing with difficult phone calls. The quality checking system for complaints responses from the team has also been reviewed. Housing Property Services staff responsible for responding to complaints will also be attending further training which is planned to take place this year. This training will help the team to further develop their skills further in respect of responding empathetically to residents when complaints are raised. The effectiveness of this training will be evaluated following completion.</p> <p>A specific Property Services Complaints Resident Group has been set up to ensure we get resident input into improving complaints handling. In the past 12 months, the group have had the opportunity to audit a sample of complaints responses and has had presentations from managers about learning from complaints and how complaints feedback is used to drive service improvement and help ensure our policies and procedures are more customer focused. This group will continue to meet for the coming year and will be able to suggest their own topics for discussion for future meetings.</p> <p>Changes have recently been made to the learning from complaints process within Property Services to ensure Repairs Group Leaders have more timely information about complaints linked to the performance of their service area. This change is enabling Group Leaders to take more responsibility to ensure actions needed to resolve complaints are completed on time and learning outcomes identified and actioned more quickly in their service area.</p> <p>The corporate stage 1 complaints template used by Repairs Customer Services Team has been reviewed to tailor the</p>
--	---	---

	<p>residents to better understand their needs and tailor services more effectively.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluate training to assess if it is making a difference to the way complaints are handled across the department, with a view to re-designing the training, if required.</li> <li>• Ask the Housing Resident Service Review Group to carry out an audit of complaints responses to get a resident perspective on how complaints handling is improving.</li> </ul>	<p>existing template to best meet the needs of the housing repairs service. This review took account of comments and suggestions made by residents on the Property Services Complaints Resident Group and also feedback from staff in the Repairs Customer Service Team.</p> <p>As part of the introduction of the new Homes and Communities service, the management and monitoring of complaints has been reviewed.</p> <p>Homes and Communities have created a new system of complaints response monitoring, so that weekly, monthly and quarterly reports are now generated automatically to managers. Learning from complaints is reviewed on a quarterly basis.</p> <p>Housing Needs and Strategy have recently reviewed how complaints are monitored and responded to. This function is now undertaken by a small dedicated team, resulting in higher quality, more comprehensive responses. As a result, we have also seen a significant improvement in compliance and a reduction in escalation.</p> <p>We are working to streamline and centralise how complaints are managed and reported across Housing to improve consistency. Monthly compliance reports are now circulated to Housing Management Team (HMT), and learning reports will be taken to HMT quarterly.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 3</b> All front-facing housing staff should have an objective in their appraisal related to providing high quality customer services and communication. Progress against this objective should be regularly reviewed in one-to-one meetings with management.</p>	<p><b><u>We will</u></b></p> <p>Ensure all front-facing staff have an appropriate objective included in their annual performance appraisal promoting good customer care. The council's new values of being efficient, collaborative and empowering should help facilitate this</p>	<p>A new appraisal system was implemented this year that replaces the previous system where annual objectives were set and reviewed at the end of each year.</p> <p>As part of the council's Workforce Strategy, managers now have "quality conversations" with their staff throughout the year rather, than operating a formal appraisal process at one point. The new approach sets out an adaptable framework for regular dialogue at 1-2-1 meetings to give managers and their team members the opportunity to have quality conversations. This will ensure that:</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Our efforts are focused on activities that contribute to achieving corporate goals</li> <li>• Our values of efficiency, collaboration and empowerment are at the heart of everything we do</li> <li>• Our employees are valued, supported and empowered. This means that employees are recognised for effort, achievement and expertise; given feedback to improve performance and support development and given space to discuss aspirations and needs including career aspirations, wellbeing, adjustments relating to disability, and work-life balance</li> <li>• Employees can give feedback to managers and share ideas for values-based working and performance improvement</li> </ul> <p>Staff have access to comprehensive guidance on “quality conversations” available on the intranet. Managers also have access to new templates to help guide them to have quality conversations with their team members during regular 1 to 1 meetings. Improved customer care will be reinforced and promoted through this way of working.</p> <p>The new Homes and Communities restructure has brought staff together in one coherent structure that manages demand for services in a targeted, proactive and person-centred way. The service will move to an agile, flexible and responsive service with three ‘tiers’ designed to provide tenancy services to residents with different levels of engagement and need.</p> <p>There is a commitment to prioritise behavioural aspects of staff development alongside necessary technical training that emphasises how we communicate with residents in a way that shows everyone matters. Training undertaken this year has included Making Every Contact Count, trauma informed practice, behavioural insight and motivational interviewing.</p> <p>Team and individual training plans are now in development to build further on this objective.</p>
--	--	---



		This will lead to improved customer services.
<p><b>Recommendation 4 –</b> Digital notice boards on estates should be developed further to include more localised content. It is suggested that residents’ associations and other groups be consulted on the information these notice boards should display</p>	<p><b>Response –</b> Use of digital notice boards is currently being reviewed. Residents have already commented that they feel messages sometimes move to quickly and need to display for a longer period to enable them to be fully read and that they have a preference for more relevant local, relevant information.</p> <p><b><u>We will</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As part of the review of digital noticeboards, Housing Services will upgrade notice boards to make them more interactive. There are plans to make notice boards touchscreen, which would allow residents to pause messages, or select more tailored information, e.g. services for young people or employment opportunities</li> <li>• Meet with tenant and leaseholder residents’ groups to identify their priorities for digital noticeboards.</li> <li>• Ensure notice boards better reflect the needs of estate residents.</li> </ul>	<p>There is now a protocol in place for use of Electronic Notice Boards (ENBs).</p> <p>Increasingly ENBs are being used to support corporate messages as well as more localised messages, e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Corporate campaigns (supplied by Communications Teams as campaigns are launched)</li> <li>• Operational messages for Housing - including rent reminders, safety advice, ASB reporting, recycling etc. through to estate-specific updates on repairs, new build and utilities</li> <li>• Local events and activities, including ward partnership meetings and estate events</li> <li>• Local issues – for example safety issues in the Finsbury Park area have been cross-promoted on the Andover Estate screens. We have also used the screens at Hathersage Court to provide regular updates on the current gas safety issues in the block.</li> </ul> <p>ENBs can promote community events and messages from partners in the community with whom we have a trusted relationship; as long as they are not in conflict with council priorities or values.</p> <p>Last year a group of residents were asked to give feedback on ENBs on their estates. Their views were they would like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To see more local information specific to their estate or area</li> <li>• If possible, to see information about job opportunities and training and community services for different groups</li> </ul>

		<p>Housing are working to develop enhanced screen access for residents. This will be benefit residents by giving a more interactive and “community feel” to the notices, which will be more in line with the brand of the Islington Life magazine</p> <p>We have fitted another 67 boards this year with interactive buttons to allow users to scroll through content and choose what information is of most interest to them. Currently, we have 100 boards with interactive features and in total 224 boards across the borough. We already have specific block, estate and ward information on the boards and information on job and training opportunities in the local community, which sit under the “jobs and money” banner on the boards.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 5</b> A ‘Frequently Asked Questions’ section should be added to the Housing section of the council’s website. This would help to signpost residents and officers to relevant information and answer the most common queries. It is thought that this would free-up staff time for other issues.</p>	<p><b>Response –</b> A significant number of residents search for on-line information on council services through Google or other search engines rather than going to the council’s website directly, so setting up a “Frequently Asked Questions” page on the Council’s website may not be the most effective way to help residents access information or help with sign-posting.</p> <p>The current page structure on the website was organised around the most popular searches (the more popular pages are more prominent). The pages were also user tested. We do need to keep reviewing the pages, to ensure that they remain up to date and relevant. Our housing pages are reviewed at quarterly meetings with the council’s Web Team and information is updated to reflect service changes and priorities.</p> <p>There is also now a mechanism in place for residents who use the website to leave on-line feedback about their experiences. Residents can comment where they have found it difficult to find the information they wanted or where they think information is confusing or missing. This information is then sent to managers to enable</p>	<p>There is now a well- established process for residents and staff to report issues with information on the website or query information that needs clarification. If someone using the website clicks on the “your feedback” button or “Was this information helpful?” button, this information is automatically sent to the Communications Team, who then pass the feedback to the relevant service area. This allows the service area to contact the resident to clarify their query. The service area can also request changes to website content as a result of uses feedback. We also have an automated tool that sweeps the site for broken links and technical problems so that they can be swiftly resolved.</p> <p>As stated in our earlier response, many website users search for on-line information through Google rather than searching the council’s website directly so will often land on the page they want from a Google search. In these cases, having a FAQ section on our website would not assist them in finding information more quickly</p> <p>Both staff and residents have access to the council directories on the website. These directories hold a wealth of council, local and community information. (see link below)</p>

them to review the pages in question and make changes, where necessary. Staff can also use this same facility to report out of date or incorrect information on the website. Staff can also access lots of helpful information on the council's intranet including policy and procedure documents and structure charts.

#### **We will**

- Involve resident groups in the ongoing website review process in order to check how easily accessible information is and to invite suggestions for how the website could be improved.
- Take note of comments received from residents who use the website to give on-line feedback to ensure housing web pages are providing the information that residents need.

#### **Finding Support - Islington Directory**

An example of where we have acted on feedback from residents is the creation of a vulnerability and disability web page. (see link below)

<https://www.islington.gov.uk/housing/vulnerable-and-disabled-residents>

This page has recently been created and pulls together some existing information from other parts of the website onto one page. This page will be developed over time following feedback from disabled residents in the borough

Since June 2019, the Communications team has taken on responsibility for managing the content on the website and will be working more closely with services to review and improve their pages. They are already exploring options with colleagues in Homes and Communities starting with the most looked at pages in their section of the website.

Communications are also about to undertake a review of the entire website with a view to implementing WCAG 2.1 accessibility standards (which are legally binding and must be in place by September 2020). WCAG2.1 compliance will make content more accessible to a wider range of people with disabilities, including accommodations for blindness and low vision, deafness and hearing loss, limited movement, speech disabilities, photosensitivity, and combinations of these, and some accommodation for learning disabilities and cognitive limitations

We always build user testing into processes like this to ensure that content is easy to find and to understand.

<p><b>Recommendation 6</b> Housing services should seek to provide better feedback to residents on issues they report, including estate environmental issues and communal repairs. This could include more direct communication with residents, or “you said, we did” style communications</p>	<p><b><u>We will</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make better use of digital noticeboards and other communications methods to provide feedback to residents on the progress and completion of communal repairs and other local issues.</li> <li>• Investigate the practicalities of sending out bulk texts or emails to residents in blocks or on estates where communal works have been completed, as a way of keeping residents updated and better informed.</li> </ul> <p>There may be GDPR issues with sending texts or emails to residents about repairs they have not individually raised. This is why this proposal will need more investigation.</p>	<p>As mentioned under our response to recommendation 4, we are already making better use of Electronic Notice Boards.</p> <p>We are currently working with a number of teams including Corporate Communications Team to create tailored messages to residents. We have recently used the boards for to update residents about the progress of lift repairs, door entry system issues and gas works. Prior to this, we had tailored contractor updates for the Higgins’ development at Kings Square estate and for the building works at Fyfield.</p> <p>Once we have established our legal standing on residents’ data, we can then look at signing them up to an agreement to send tailored information to them by one of our many platforms, which can deal with repairs on their specific estates via the electronic notice board app when it is launched.</p> <p>The council has a new GDPR-compliant e-bulletin system. This enables residents to sign up for updates on specific issues by clicking on a button on the council’s website. Potentially this could be used for providing estate-based updates assuming residents are willing to sign up.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 7</b> Housing services should keep residents informed of progress with delayed and complex repairs, and explain any relevant processes and the reasons for delays. The Repairs service should schedule reminders on case files for officers to provide regular updates to residents with unresolved repairs</p>	<p><b>Response –</b> The committee commented that some residents had expressed frustration about lack of progress on delayed or complex repairs, but acknowledged that legitimate delays to more complex repairs may appear as inaction to residents as they are not always provided with regular updates.</p> <p><b><u>We will</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify the types of complex repairs that can lead to delays in completion, and map out these processes, to enable staff to prioritise contact with affected residents.</li> <li>• Ask the Housing Management and Repairs Resident Reference Group for their views on how we can communicate more effectively with residents on</li> </ul>	<p>Property Services staff are aware of the more complex types of repairs and are now counting any jobs that will take more than two days to complete and involve multi-trades as “complex repairs”.</p> <p>As part of their complaints improvement action plan, Property Services will be using a customer journey model to map out key parts of the repairs process and its robustness when responding to complex repair jobs.</p> <p>To help keep residents with complex repairs updated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Residents waiting for complex repairs to be completed in their homes will now have a named contact in the Repairs Section. Repairs Supervisors will coordinate these works and are responsible for keeping the</li> </ul>

	<p>complex repair issues to see how this can be built more effectively into the project management process.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investigate if the repairs IT system can generate “prompts” to staff to remind staff to update residents by email or phone about the progress of their repair to re-assure them that they have not been forgotten about. This would need ICT development.</li> </ul>	<p>affected resident informed of the progress of the complex repair job they are case managing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The current repairs IT system cannot generate system “prompts” at the moment. However, Property Services are working with Islington Digital Services to implement a new suite of IT reporting and monitoring dashboards, (called Power BI). This new system will allow all repairs, and particularly progress on the completion of more complex jobs, to be monitored at team, operative and repair level. This will lead to much easier and quicker monitoring of repairs, which should enable the service to provide a more responsive service to residents.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Recommendation 8</b> Housing services should consider the feasibility of allocating named case officers to deal with complex issues. This would ensure consistency in communication and reassure residents that their issue is being dealt with. These officers should be empowered to liaise with other services to secure the best outcome for residents.</p>	<p><b>Response</b> – Partnership working and good collaboration with other services is a key part of the re-design of the Homes and Communities Service. This service is developing enhanced working relationships with colleagues and partners.</p> <p>Officers are already empowered to liaise with other services across the council and many front line staff have attended Making Every Contact Count (MECC) training, which aims to offer better help and support to residents and improve their quality of life. However, it is appreciated that there is scope for more productive working across different sections and departments. The Head of Homes and Neighbourhood Services will work with colleagues to improve this as part of the new Homes and Communities Service offer</p> <p>The Housing and Adult Social Services Protocol and Housing and Mental Health Services Protocol are both under review. These documents set the standards that Housing should maintain, when carrying out joint working, to help resolve issues that affect mutual service users. As part of the review, the information</p>	<p>As mentioned in our response to recommendation 7 of this report, Property Services now offer named officers as a point of contact for tenants with complex repairs.</p> <p>Two of the main priorities in the Homes and Communities three-year departmental plan are:</p> <p><u>Being proactive and person-centred</u> - Building strong, meaningful and person-centred relationships with residents, enabling staff to intervene early, appropriately and effectively to support residents to achieve improved outcomes in the areas of Jobs and Money, Health and Well-Being and Belonging.</p> <p><u>Having an agile empowered and committed workforce</u> - Delivering high quality resident-focused services, empowered to intervene effectively and appropriately, and to adopt a strength-based, solution focused approach and where staff are able to contribute to the aims and priorities of the services and are supported to learn, develop and progress</p> <p>Homes and Communities are currently implementing a new three-tier housing management system.</p>

	<p>sharing arrangements between departments are being reviewed to see if they can be improved. Any changes to these protocols will need to take account of GDPR restrictions and the need to protect sensitive information provided by residents.</p> <p><b><u>We will</u></b></p> <p>Consider the feasibility of tenancy management staff taking on the role of allocated named case officers to deal with certain complex issues, that would benefit from one officer taking on a coordinating role across all housing services.</p>	<p>The top tier will be a small team of specialist staff providing holistic and person-centred tenancy management services to residents with a range of high risk, acute needs, including those:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experiencing domestic violence and abuse</li> <li>• With multiple and complex disadvantages</li> <li>• With disabilities and frailer, older people</li> <li>• At high risk of harm due to antisocial behaviour and crime</li> </ul> <p>The aim of the team will be to enable our most vulnerable residents to address their underlying issues, as well as helping them with their presenting tenancy management requirements. Staff will have lower caseloads, enabling them to work more intensively with residents whose complex circumstances put them at the greatest risk of poor outcomes (e.g. loss of tenancy, escalation of health and safety-related concerns or loss of independence associated with their vulnerability, criminal justice risks etc.). This will be a borough-wide team expected to work flexibly across three localities as demand requires.</p> <p>We are also committed to developing the Fairer Together working model. We are currently co-locating a team of housing staff two full days per week at the Newington Barrow Way office as part of an emerging multi-disciplinary team currently including the North Adult Social Care and Rehab team and the Whittington Health 'Reach' service. This has enabled the development of professional relationships across services that are more tailored to addressing the needs of residents with more complex needs.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 9</b> It is recommended that a booklet is produced after each capital works</p>	<p><b>Response –</b> Following feedback from the Resident Leasehold Reference Group last year, a booklet was designed to be given to residents before capital works</p>	<p>The Capital Programme Delivery team have developed a template for a Major Works Review booklet to be issued to residents living on estates where capital improvement works have been completed. The booklet is designed to provide</p>

<p>scheme detailing the works carried out with before and after images and the cost of the scheme. This booklet should be provided to both tenants and leaseholders, and should be available in a range of formats.</p>	<p>start, laying out the cost, scope and specifications of proposed works. The revised booklet was well received.</p> <p>There would be cost implications for creating a similar sort of booklet for distribution at the end of each capital works scheme, so Housing will devise other cost-effective options for communicating better with residents on completion of works.</p> <p><b><u>We will</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Find a simple, efficient way of updating residents following completion of capital works through better use of the major works pages on the Council's website or updating residents by text and email, depending on the level of information they want.</li> </ul>	<p>residents with a summary of the works undertaken during the project using photographs and written in plain English.</p> <p>The booklet will be sent to residents alongside the existing letter of completion which formally advises the residents of the end of the project of works to their estate. The booklet also advises residents how to contact the council's Capital Works Team if they have any queries about the works that have recently been completed.</p> <p>The booklet will include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A brief description of the main aims of major works – to monitor, manage and prevent structural problems as well as to improve buildings</li> <li>• A brief overview of a particular block (age and construction of building, number of flats)</li> <li>• A reminder of the work undertaken and 'before' and 'after' images where appropriate</li> <li>• Confirmation of the costs, the completion procedure and contacts at the council for queries</li> </ul>
<p><b>Recommendation 10</b> The mechanism for officers to report out of date information on the council's website should be promoted further in internal communications</p>	<p>Recommendation 10 - The mechanism for officers to report out of date information on the council's website should be promoted further in internal communications.</p> <p>Response – As mentioned under the response to recommendation 4.5, there is now a facility on the website to report out of date, inaccurate or missing information by using the "Was this information helpful" tab. This is relatively new development that allows staff and service users to contact the council on-line with queries about web content</p> <p>Each division in Housing has a Business Manager responsible for working with the Web Team on content and website development.</p>	<p>As mentioned in our response to recommendation 5, there is now an automated tool that sweeps the council's website for broken links and technical problems.</p> <p>Since June 2019, the Communications team has had responsibility for managing the content on the website and will be working more closely with services across Housing to review and improve their pages.</p>

<p><b>Recommendation 11</b> The council should use internal communications to raise awareness of communications guidance and relevant training courses. Service managers should encourage their staff to make use of the guidance and training available</p>	<p><b>Response –</b> There is a wide variety of communications related training available to staff, e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write First Time – writing skills training</li> <li>• Courageous Conversations</li> <li>• Confident Communication</li> <li>• Customer Care</li> <li>• Effective Complaints Handling</li> <li>• Dealing with Persistent Complaints</li> <li>• Customer Service Excellence</li> <li>• Negotiation Skills.</li> </ul> <p>A quarterly Learning and Development Training Events calendar of training opportunities is emailed to all HASS staff on a quarterly basis and there is guidance on communications good practice available on the intranet (see response to recommendation 4.1)</p> <p>The council will shortly be launching a new Office 365 based intranet, which will include a revised section on communications that should be easier and clearer to use.</p> <p><b><u>We will</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote the availability of training courses to staff and encourage them to attend as part of 1-2-1 supervision meetings and appraisals.</li> </ul>	<p>As mentioned in our earlier response, a quarterly Learning and Development Training Events calendar of training opportunities is emailed to all Housing staff on a quarterly basis and there is guidance on communications good practice available on the intranet (see response to recommendation 4.1). Training is also advertised on the council’s intranet.</p> <p>As mentioned in our response to recommendation 4.3, the new “quality conversations” framework focuses on developing staff to enhance their performance.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 12</b></p>	<p><b>Response –</b> Service Ambassadors are a relatively new initiative; currently only based in the Homes and</p>	<p>The Service Ambassador programme in Homes and Communities was time limited and was a model set up to</p>



<p>The Housing Service Ambassadors should have a key role in encouraging joined up working. It is recommended that the Service Ambassadors scheme be extended to include representatives of all Housing services, and other key services that work in partnership with Housing, such as Adult Social Care</p>	<p>Communities division and are an important part of delivering the new Homes and Communities service offer.</p> <p><b><u>We will</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make best use of the current Service Ambassadors as a way of engaging with staff and residents to improve service delivery. We will develop this role further to assess how Service Ambassadors can promote improved joint working to help better deal with some of the issues that the committee highlighted in their recommendations that need a more coordinated response across the whole of Housing. (e.g. repair access for floods and damp and condensation).</li> </ul>	<p>“listen, set up and recommend” by building links with other services and working with them to improve our offer to residents. There have been positive benefits from this programme and these have been integrated into day to day work.</p> <p>The use of advocacy and service ambassadors/champion type roles continue be used in a variety of ways throughout the Housing Directorate and the council. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Domestic Abuse Response Leads – This is a new role that has been created aimed at staff across different parts of Housing who have a specific interest in improving services offered to residents who have experience domestic violence/abuse. The response leads will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Raise awareness across the Housing Directorate</li> <li>➤ Keep up to date on domestic abuse issues and cascade information across teams</li> <li>➤ Be champions on the front line; identifying victims and referring them to local resources and support</li> <li>➤ Review approaches to domestic abuse across Housing</li> <li>➤ Contribute to the Housing Domestic Abuse Network and to expand knowledge and share best practice</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Making Every Contact Count (MECC) Champions - Making Every Contact Count (MECC) is about getting people early help and support. It’s about using the thousands of day-to-day interactions we have with residents to support them in making positive changes and improving their quality of life. MECC allows us to deliver the right information to residents through a holistic service, enabling individuals to engage in conversations about their health, wellbeing, housing and money concerns.</li> </ul> <p>MECC champions:</p>
---	--	--

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Encourage and support colleagues to put MECC into practice and help build an organisational culture with MECC at the heart of the way we work with residents</li> <li>➤ Identify and help share good practice with other Champions and the MECC team</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brew Crew – This network was set up to allow staff to meet informally with colleagues in other parts of the council. It is a very simple idea – each month members of staff are matched up with colleague to have a coffee with and find out more about each other’s work. From these small conversations stronger ties will grow and strengthen networks across the council.</li> </ul> <p>See our responses to recommendations 8 and 13 for information about improved partnership working across Housing and other departments/organisations.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 13</b></p> <p>To encourage joined-up working and improve services for residents, staff workshops should be held which focus on how best to resolve specific and complex issues. These workshops should include representation from all relevant housing services and partners, and should consider how internal processes and working arrangements can be improved to ensure the best possible outcome for residents. This would</p>	<p><b>Response –</b> The Head of Homes and Neighbourhood Services will meet with Assistant Director of Housing Property Services to identify the main areas of complex work that would benefit from more joint working across services.</p> <p>A customer journey exercise was carried out last year to improve how Housing deals with reports of damp and condensation and this process will be used to help improve the way other complex housing issues are dealt with.</p> <p><b><u>We will</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Identify the sort of joint working that would be most effective when dealing with issues that cross more than one housing service area and</li> </ul>	<p>A series of workshops focusing on the issues of damp and condensation involving staff from across Housing and other services, including the Communications Team, have been completed. This resulted in a review of the damp and mould procedure and processes within the repairs service ensuring that investigations take place for structural and recurring causes of damp prior to condensation being considered as a contributory factor to damp and mould. In addition, letters and guidance for residents on the topic of damp and mould were also thoroughly reviewed to emphasise the change in focus of our response to reports of damp and mould.</p> <p>The repairs team are currently reviewing the processes followed in response to reports of leaks in residents’ homes, including leaks affecting other properties. This review will seek input as necessary from colleagues in Homes and Communities and Housing Strategy and Service Improvement.</p>

<p>assist in particularly complex matters such as damp and condensation, the repairs access procedure, anti-social behaviour, and other matters that require a coordinated response.</p>	<p>need a more coordinated response. This could be case conferences to address individual resident's complex service issues or wider staff workshops to find ways to resolve complex issues more effectively and quickly.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Ask the Leasehold Reference Group and Housing Management and Repairs Reference Group to consider how complex housing issues are dealt with at future meetings, to ensure we have resident input into improving these how we deal with these areas of work.</li> </ul>	<p>As mentioned in our response to recommendation 8, a new Intensive Tenancy Sustainment Team has just been set up in Homes and Communities. This team will have dedicated managers and officers, who will focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Domestic Violence and Abuse</li> <li>• Anti-Social Behaviour and Community Cohesion</li> <li>• Complex Needs</li> <li>• Older People and Physical Disability</li> </ul> <p>These teams will have a strong focus on crisis intervention and management, prevention of harm and management of risk, as well as integration and partnership working with other departments across the council and specialist services. This will include providing operational input for Homes and Communities at relevant cross-borough risk management initiatives and panels, such as Domestic Abuse and Community MARACs, and The Hoarding panel. They will also oversee schemes for more vulnerable residents such as Housing First and the House Project for care leavers.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 14</b> Housing services should review their use of CRM, the council's customer record management system. Wider use of the system would assist officers in communicating with residents and assist officers in providing joined up services. It is suggested that interaction with other key systems, such as the repairs</p>	<p><b>Response</b> –The Housing Repairs Service IT system (Synthesys), which is used extensively by the Housing Direct team to record and diagnose repairs requests already links with the council's wider CRM system; drawing down relevant customer information and populating the CRM system with summary information about repairs calls</p>	<p>As stated in our earlier response to the recommendation, the housing repairs service IT system (Synthesys), which is used extensively by the Housing Direct team to record and diagnose repairs requests already links with the council's wider CRM system; drawing down relevant customer information and populating the CRM system with summary information about repairs calls</p>

management system, would be beneficial		
<p><b>Recommendation 15</b> Caretakers and other front line staff should be empowered to report and follow up issues on behalf of residents</p>	<p><b>Response –</b> The development of caretakers to provide a wider role to support residents is already taking place as part of the re-design of the Homes and Communities Service. Caretakers undergo on-going training to allow them to act as the eyes and ears of the Housing Service. Caretakers have recently attended training to help them identify domestic violence.</p> <p><b><u>We will</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to develop caretakers to ensure they have the knowledge and confidence to follow up issues on behalf of residents.</li> <li>• Develop a new app system for caretakers to report concerns, which will go live later this year. This will allow them communicate with other housing staff more quickly over any issues that come to their attention.</li> </ul>	<p>All caretakers and estate-based staff have undertaken bespoke “Eyes and Ears” training. This training was specifically developed to include all types of scenarios our staff can face whilst working on our estates. The training included fully trained actors, where staff received and gave feedback on various scenarios. This training was designed to enable and empower staff to be vigilant, ask questions, build relationships and report issues to relevant teams, where they have concerns.</p> <p>We’ve also developed a pilot “quick referral” process for caretakers and Estates Services state staff, which links in directly with Single Homeless Project. This allows caretakers to report concerns relating to resident’s welfare or where they feel someone may need a helping hand. This has enabled early intervention and a sense of responsibility for caretakers, who directly liaise with support staff.</p> <p>The anti-social behaviour function on the phone App used by caretakers is currently under development. This should be piloted later this year and rolled out to all staff early in the new year.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 16</b> The online repairs reporting system should be promoted further to encourage greater usage. It is suggested that the system could be developed further by incorporating the reporting of communal repairs</p>	<p><b>Response –</b> Housing has aspirations to develop the current on-line repairs system to see if it can be extended to incorporate the recording of communal repairs. This would be dependent on several factors including the ability of the system to deal with communal repairs and the cost of developing the existing system or creating a new one.</p> <p>In the meantime, there is an on-line form that allows residents to report communal repairs on their estate. Residents can also click on a link on the website that will take them through to a directory of Estates Services staff, so they can check if a communal repair has already been raised and check on its progress.</p>	<p>The on-line repairs system has been re-launched with an article in Islington Life in the summer edition. The system has been enhanced to allow residents to re-schedule and cancel appointments on-line</p> <p>Googling “Islington Housing Repairs” will now take you to the repairs on-line landing page (see link below).</p> <p><a href="https://www.islington.gov.uk/housing/repairs-and-estate-management/repairs">https://www.islington.gov.uk/housing/repairs-and-estate-management/repairs</a></p> <p>At present there are no plans to extend the on-line repairs system to allow the ordering of communal repairs. However, residents are able order communal repairs through the councils’ website by completing an e-form (see link below).</p>

	<p><b><u>We will</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote the on-line repairs service more widely as part of the council's drive to promote digitised services.</li> </ul>	<p><a href="https://www.islington.gov.uk/housing/repairs-and-estate-management/repairs/communal-repairs/report-a-communal-repair">https://www.islington.gov.uk/housing/repairs-and-estate-management/repairs/communal-repairs/report-a-communal-repair</a></p>
<p><b>Recommendation 17 -</b> The Committee welcomes that the Housing Operations service has been redesigned as a Homes and Communities service. The Committee requests that an update be submitted to the Committee in 12 months' time on progress in transforming the service.</p>	<p><b>Response –</b> The Head of Homes and Neighbourhood Services will report back to the Committee in 12 months on the Homes and Communities service transformation.</p>	<p>This will be a verbal update from Jo Murphy, Service Director, Homes and Communities at the 25<sup>th</sup> November Committee meeting.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 18</b> Better use should be made of mailings to residents, such as the annual rent statement. For example, the reverse side of letters could include information and advice on property maintenance, tenancy</p>	<p><b>Response –</b> In the past, important information has been sent out with rent statements, e.g. promoting home contents insurance for tenants.</p> <p><b><u>We will</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review (with the Communications Team) what key messages can be sent out with statements</li> </ul>	<p>Better use has been made of rent statements across the past two years.</p> <p>Over the past year, we have made better use of the rent statement mailing to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote our new build priority to residents as well as our success at settling more homeless households in the borough with a message from the Executive Member for Housing</li> </ul>

<p>management, or promotion of early intervention services. The council should also review the key contact information circulated with the rent statement, as residents commented that they were unsure which teams to contact about different issues.</p>	<p>in time for the 2019/20 annual rent statements mail out.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make better use of Homes and Communities bulk mail outs with a view to including information on letters about other services or support available to residents.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote useful contacts and services to residents. We have used the council tax mailing as our model, specially designing the back of the letter to provide information about financial support, help with benefits and contact information.</li> </ul> <p>The next mailing will include information about SHINE (our seasonal health initiative) and Universal Credit.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 19 -</b> The council should produce a structure chart for housing services detailing key officers and the responsibilities of different teams. This would assist officers and councillors in directing their queries</p>	<p><b>Response –</b> The council’s updated intranet and also Yammer should encourage more effective collaboration and information sharing across the council. Structure charts have just been updated on the intranet.</p> <p><b><u>We will</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that structure charts are updated regularly by twice-yearly reviews of the housing pages on the intranet.</li> </ul>	<p>Information on the council’s intranet is regularly updated, including structure charts and descriptions of service area duties.</p> <p>A new senior management structure chart for Housing has recently been added to izzi.</p> <p>More detailed structure charts will be added in the near future as they become available.</p>

**4. Implications**

#### 4.1 **Financial Implications**

Whilst the report proposes the implementation of a number of improvements and changes to current working practices, relationships and procedures within Housing, across the Council and with external partners. It is not anticipated that any of these changes in ways of working will require additional funding.

#### 4.2 **Legal Implications**

The council is under a duty to have due regard to the need to achieve the goals identified in paragraphs (a) to (c) of s149(1) of the Equality Act:

- (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

The council is also under a duty to make reasonable adjustments to the delivery of its housing services to ensure that disabled and vulnerable people can use the services and can communicate and engage with the Homes and Communities division.

Consideration of the council's equalities responsibilities is evidenced in the responses to the recommendations made by the Housing Scrutiny Committee.

#### **Environmental Implications**

There are no significant environmental implications related to the recommendations outlined in this report, although making information for residents available in a variety of formats, as well as on-line, may involve the printing of leaflets

#### **Resident Impact Assessment**

The council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and to advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations, between those who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it (section 149 Equality Act 2010). The council has a duty to have due regard to the need to remove or minimise disadvantages, take steps to meet needs, in particular steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities, and encourage people to participate in public life. The council must have due regard to the need to tackle prejudice and promote understanding.

A Resident Impact Assessment (RIA) has not been completed at this stage. Where the proposals in the report may have equalities implications for residents, RIAs will be undertaken. For example, an RIA would be completed as part of consideration of moving more services on-line.

**Appendices:** N/A

**Background papers:** N/A

**Final report clearance:**

Signed by:



**Executive Member for Housing and Development**

**Date: 18.11.2019**

**Report Author:** Paul Byer, Service Improvement and Involvement Manager  
**Tel:** 020 7527 4005  
**Email:** [Paul.Byer@islington.gov.uk](mailto:Paul.Byer@islington.gov.uk)

**Financial Implications Author:** Lydia Hajimichael  
**Tel:** 020 7527 5160  
**Email:** [lydia.hajimichael@islington.gov.uk](mailto:lydia.hajimichael@islington.gov.uk)

**Legal Implications Author:** Marina Lipscomb  
**Tel:** 020 7527 3314  
**Email:** [marina.lipscomb@islington.gov.uk](mailto:marina.lipscomb@islington.gov.uk)