

Housing Scrutiny Committee - 2 October 2014

Minutes of the meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Committee held at on 2 October 2014 at 7.30 pm.

Present: **Councillors:** O'Sullivan (Chair), Kay, Andrews, Fletcher, Erdogan,
Williamson, Diner, O'Halloran

Councillor Mick O'Sullivan in the Chair

21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item 1)

Councillor Williamson for lateness

22 DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item 2)

None

23 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS (Item 3)

None

24 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (Item 4)

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 8 September 2014 be confirmed and the Chair be authorised to sign them

25 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES (Item)

Members were informed that the information requested at the previous meeting would be circulated to Members in the near future

26 ORDER OF BUSINESS (Item 6)

The Chair stated that he would be dealing with the House Guardians and the ISHA items as the first two items on the agenda and the remaining items would be dealt with as indicated on the agenda

27 CHAIRS REPORT (Item 5)

The Chair stated that there would be a report back to the next meeting In relation to the recommendations of the TMO scrutiny and that prior to this he would be attending a TMO liaison Committee and any feedback from this meeting would be circulated to Members.

The Chair also stated that the date of the April Committee had been amended from 13 April to 16 April 2015.

28 ESTATE CAR PARKING- REPORT ON CONSULTATION (Item 7)

David Salenius, Principal Housing Manager, Housing and Adult Social Services was present and was accompanied by David Hutchinson, Estate Parking Manager.

During consideration of the report the following main points were made –

- It was hoped to implement the proposals in the report by June 2015
- Members expressed the view that it was beneficial that monies would be paid in advance

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- Members were informed that the proposals had been considered by 6 resident Panels and all these estates had numbered bays
- The view was expressed that there should be an equality impact assessment carried out to assess the provision of visitor bays on disabled residents or those who needed carers
- The view was expressed that the issue of the ROAMER scheme and the issue of the differential of parking charges for street and estate parking had not been addressed in the report
- Reference was made to the fact that residents who live in car free developments should not be allowed to circumvent this by being allowed to get access to estate parking and this needed to be looked at to ensure they were not able to access such spaces
- Reference was made to the fact that the problem of illegal motorcycle parking on estates had largely been effectively dealt with
- Members were informed that it was hoped that the introduction of the visitors voucher system would restrict usage and that it may be possible to increase the number of visitor bays in the north of the borough
- In response to a question it was stated that it was felt that any price rises should be incremental in order that demand can be gauged
- Reference was made to the charges that residents paid for storage facilities in garages and that there were a number of storage companies in the borough whose prices were reducing. It was felt that given this charges should not be raised at present but the situation kept under review
- In response to a question it was stated that a number of cycle shelters had been provided on estates and that if estates required these bids could be made under the environmental improvements scheme

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the outcomes from consultation, as outlined in 3.2 to 3.8 of the report, be noted
- (b) That as a result of this review, a report will be submitted to the Council's Executive in January 2015 seeking their approval of the final changes to the Estate Parking policy
- (c) That the Director of Housing and Adult Social Services be requested to investigate whether residents of car free developments can be prevented from accessing car parking spaces on estates

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ESTATE SERVICES MANAGEMENT - SCRUTINY REVIEW (Item 8)

David Salenius, Principal Housing Manager, Housing and Adult Social Services and David Hutchinson, Estate Parking Manager were present and outlined the report to the Committee.

During consideration of the report the following main points were made –

- The Estate Parking enforcement contract administration team consists of two staff responsible for over 5000 parking charge notices issued by the Council's patrol contractors and covers over 200 estates. The team manage enforcement appeals and complaints investigation and responses, with over 350 appeals against Parking Charge notices investigated by the team per year, at stage 2 of the appeals process
- In addition, the team administer the Estate Parking Management Database. This entails management of a database that Customer Services teams use to issue over 4000 estate permits this year, for residents, visitors and contractors

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- The team also manage public enquiries about estate parking, advising on costs and availability of parking facilities and resolving reported parking problems
- The team develop initiatives to maximise income from underused estate car parks and ensure that signs warning of parking restrictions and giving public information are legally compliant and effectively maintained
- In addition the Council has a statutory responsibility to remove abandoned vehicles and on average the team remove 45 abandoned vehicles from Council estates each year
- The team also maintains maps of patrol boundaries and layout/numbering of estate car parks and garages. It also identifies priorities to meet demand and help to develop initiatives, such as garage storage, new build, commercial use and social enterprise use
- In response to a question as to whether discussions had taken place on whether caretakers could take on additional duties it was stated that there had been a meeting with the GMB to discuss this and Members stated that the GMB should be invited to a future meeting of the Committee
- In addition, Members requested that the previous reports that had been considered by the Housing Executive on caretaking, and estate parking be circulated to the Committee
- In response to a question it was stated that it was now illegal to tow cars away. The majority of the abandoned cars were old and often the DVLA did not have the information on the last registered owner
- It was stated that where there was demand and the budget was available garages would be refurbished for letting and that garages that were let were checked to ensure that nothing was being kept there illegally

RESOLVED:

That the witness evidence be noted and the previous reports to the Housing Executive in relation to Estate Car parking and caretakers be circulated to the Committee for information

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HOUSE GUARDIANS - PRESENTATION (Item 9)

Stephen Davies of Camelot House Guardians was present and made a presentation to the Committee, a copy of which is interleaved.

During consideration of the presentation the following main points were made –

- Camelot Europe was established in 1993 and had 5 offices in the UK. Camelot had an £18 million turnover in 2013 and over 225 employees
- Camelot were the only live in guardian company to achieve a number of quality standards
- Camelot were the only live in guardian company with full insurance in place and covers all aspects of Camelot's operation including any damage caused by Camelot's operation to the property
- There were criminal risks to the property e.g. squatting, vandalism, arson, illegal raves etc., technical risks such as water leaks, fire, dilapidation, etc. and economic risks such as depreciation, planning/development and empty business rates
- There was also social risk to vacant properties such as them being a magnet for trouble makers and the lost sense of community. Camelot offers a 'one stop' solution with tailored advice, a bespoke solution and a range of services
- Live in guardians were mainly key workers who acted as temporary occupants and offered a quick solution and cost savings in comparison to traditional methods of security. The property is kept in permanent use and indicates to the neighbourhood

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that the property is occupied and any squatters rights are not valid and constitute a criminal offence. Camelot Guardians care for the property as their own home

- Camelot offer flexible security solutions and have a hand back period of 4 weeks notice
- The economic benefits include permanent protection for a fraction of the cost of conventional security methods
- There were property requirements and Camelot provided the most cost effective price to return property to occupiable condition and offered the experience to deliver the full range of facilities management services
- In relation to decants there is increased level of communication between the client and Camelot and an agreed and clearly defined the intake process. There were fixed budgets pre-approved for repairs if required, with any units needing more than agreed level discussed before proceeding
- Camelot had a wide range of clients and were guardians to a number of properties in Islington
- In response to a question it was stated that people initially applied on the website, or heard about Guardians by word of mouth. The average length of stay for a Guardian was 8/9 months, and most moved on to other properties. However some properties had been in a Guardian tenancy for several years
- Guardians have a notice period of 4 weeks and have to take out contents insurance but buildings insurance is covered by Camelot
- Camelot worked with a number of London Boroughs
- Guardians were vetted directly by Camelot and Camelot did not take people directly off the Council waiting list, as this type of accommodation they offered was often not suitable for them, especially families
- In response to a question it was stated that very few of Guardian clients used their services to 'land bank' properties and the average length of time Camelot occupied properties for clients was 8/9 months

The Chair thanked Stephen Davies of Camelot for his presentation

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REGISTERED PROVIDERS - PRESENTATION (Item 10)

Colin Archer, Director of Development and New Business, Islington and Shoreditch Housing Association was present and made a presentation to the Committee, a copy of which is interleaved.

The Chair circulated a number of questions for consideration by Members in relation to the scrutiny.

During consideration of the report the following main points were made –

- ISHA had been operating for 80 years in Islington and the issues were similar to those when it started – poverty, high rents, overcrowding and poor health
- ISHA had a community/resident focus and is the first Housing Association in Islington to be a LLW employer
- ISHA has a subsidiary, Lien Vet, which promotes the housing needs for Vietnamese and wider SE communities and provides a landlord service, an outreach and support team, partnership working and an advocacy role
- ISHA's largest estate in the borough is St.Mary's Path and there have been new school developments in New North Academy and St.Jude and St. Pauls school
- ISHA is developing sites at Zoffany Street, Tufnell Park Road and on the Ashmount school site

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- Shared challenges include providing good quality, truly affordable housing for low waged and poor people given the high house prices and market rents in the borough, land values, reductions in grant, lack of affordable supply and welfare reform
- There had been a minimum of 41 LBI households direct housing benefit cases affected by the bedroom tax, however most people wanted to remain in their property and pay
- ISHA had introduced 'speed dating' where 50 households had exchanged properties. There was a £2500 incentive to assist with moving and there was a good relationship with the HB team. An outreach team assisted to sustain tenancies and this has reduced arrears and evictions
- The welfare reforms changes were due to impact more severely with the introduction of Universal Credit, frozen or reduced benefit caps, direct payments, 4 week payments in arrears, the need to administer claims digitally
- ISHA is committed to life time tenancies, new homes at social rent, re-lets at social rent and affordable shared ownership targeted at high priority groups
- ISHA had in the past utilised intermediate rents rather than shared ownership when the housing market fell in value
- ISHA adopted space guide lines on the guidance provided by L.B.Waltham Forest which was similar to Parker Morris standards
- In response to a question it was stated that the vast majority of lettings in the borough were as a result of Council nominations and that ISHA did not have a separate local lettings policy as the vast majority of lettings went to Council nominations
- It was stated that in terms of preparation for Universal Credit ISHA were offering advice to tenants on budgeting and to avoid pay day lenders and use a credit union
- Reference was made to the fact that ISHA would be contacting tenants at an early stage if welfare reforms impacted on rent payments
- Councillor O'Halloran expressed concern at recent problems at Maynard Court with a fire and the resulting repairs and the ISHA representative stated that he was not personally aware of all the details but that he would discuss this with Councillor O'Halloran following the meeting and investigate the problems raised
- It was stated that the last tenants survey on repairs satisfaction showed a 85% satisfaction rate
- In relation to inspections it was stated that there was a system of Estate offices and that these were responsible for a 'patch', and that inspections were made by them with local estate representatives on a monthly basis
- With reference to a development in Stroud Green Road and possible problems with this, the ISHA representative stated that ISHA had originally developed this site but it was now managed by Bangla. The ISHA representative indicated that he would investigate the problems if he was informed of them. However he was personally unaware of any problems and that in fact Bangla were currently in the process of purchasing the property from ISHA
- The ISHA representative stated that there was a residents forum and 2/3 Members of the ISHA Board were residents, There was also a residents away day and KPI's were on the website for residents
- ISHA participated in 'House Mark', which was a benchmarking scheme for social landlords and ISHA were usually amongst the best performers. Some 'House Mark' data was not published as it contained commercially sensitive material
- In response to a question as to how the energy efficiency of the stock could be improved, it was stated that this was a challenge in Islington, given that a number of properties were in conservation areas. However ISHA were committed to becoming a more green organisation and to tackle fuel poverty. New housing stock was energy efficient and a retro fit was being done on some of the older properties

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- A Member enquired as to the number of properties that ISHA had in shared ownership and it was stated that there were currently 370 properties, which enabled a subsidy to be given. Usually around 30% of properties were sold as shared ownership and there was the ability to sell back the shared ownership to ISHA or sell it on the open market. In the event of the property being sold back to ISHA there was a Panel of 3 valuers who decided on the market value of the property
- In response to a question on target rents it was stated that there was a complicated formula that was based on the market value of the property and new properties were still being developed at target rents

RESOLVED:

That following discussion by Members of the Committee of a list of supplementary questions, these be circulated to Housing Associations for consideration

The Chair thanked Colin Archer of ISHA for his presentation

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WORK PROGRAMME 204/15 (Item 11)

The Chair stated that with regard to the Registered Social Landlords scrutiny it would be useful to provide witnesses in advance with a list of questions in advance, and that a pro forma be prepared on this basis for consideration by Members.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the work programme be noted
- (b) That the Director of Housing and Adult Social Services be requested to prepare a pro forma for questions to Registered Social Landlords, and that these be circulated to Members for consideration

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The meeting ended at 9.50P.M.

CHAIR