

Housing Scrutiny Committee - 2 December 2014

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

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

Councillor Michael O'Sullivan in the Chair

- 33** **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item 1)**
Councillor Fletcher for lateness
- 34** **DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item 2)**
None
- 35** **DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS (Item 3)**
Councillor Doolan, who was present at the meeting stated that he had an interest in agenda item B10 in that his partner was an employee of the caretaking service
- 36** **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (Item 4)**
RESOLVED:
That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 2 October 2014 be confirmed and the Chair be authorised to sign them
- 37** **CHAIRS REPORT (Item 5)**
None
- 38** **PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item 6)**
The Chair outlined the procedure for dealing with Public questions and filming at meetings
- 39** **HOUSING SCRUTINY TOR (Item 7)**
RESOLVED:
That the report be noted and that the Committee recommend to Council that James Rooke and Rose Marie MacDonald be appointed to serve as Elected Residents Representatives non-voting co-optees on the Committee until September 2016, or until their successors in office are appointed
- 40** **ORDER OF BUSINESS (Item 8)**
The Chair stated that the Committee would consider the item on Tenant Management Organisations then the Registered Social Providers item followed by the Estate Services Management Scrutiny Review witness evidence followed by the Scaffolding/Work Platforms Scrutiny Review Presentation/SID
- 41** **SCRUTINY REVIEW - ESTATE SERVICES MANAGEMENT - WITNESS EVIDENCE (Item 9)**

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David Salenius, Housing and Adult Social Services was present and made a presentation to the Committee on this item, copy interleaved.

Garry Harris GMB and Abena Asante, Housing and Adult Social Services were also present.

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

- A Member stated that there was insufficient equipment available at St.Lukes in the leaf fall season for caretakers and recently the leaf blower had broken and there was no replacement available. David Salenius stated that he would investigate this and ensure appropriate equipment was available
- In response to a question it was stated that there was an incident of an assault on a caretaker some years ago but caretakers now had devices that they could use to contact a call centre to alert the Police if it was needed. David Salenius stated that there had been verbal assaults on caretakers and that he would provide figures for the last 12 months to Members of the Committee
- The view was expressed that tenants often complained about things caretakers did not do and that a schedule of duties could be provided to tenants. David Salenius stated that tenants could be advised of this and if there were complaints these were discussed with them and what was in the SLA
- In response to a question as to tenants surveys on residents satisfaction with caretakers it was stated that these should be returned to the Area Housing Office and any problems would be addressed
- It was stated that inspection of work on estates took place, with the exception of small blocks, and TRA's were invited to attend inspections and dates were publicised on the website and that details could be provided to Councillor Williamson in relation to her estate
- In response to a question it was stated that Housing would look into holding inspections at weekends or evenings in the Summer, although this proposal had not been successful previously
- It was stated that Digital Services had been requested to update the website to show progress of repairs for tenants
- Reference was made to the fact that if a caretaker was off sick it should be picked up fairly quickly by the Quality Assurance Officer and although cover was often able to be arranged this could not be guaranteed in 100% of instances. Members stated that consideration should be given to notifying tenants of a caretakers absence on the website
- GMB stated that the SLA agreement with caretakers had still not finally been signed off but GMB were in agreement with it and there were other tasks that were not included that could be considered and he would be willing to submit a report to a future meeting on these. Members concurred with this view
- Reference was made to the level of management in relation to staffing levels and if the caretaking service needed to generate more income this needed to be looked at in relation to the numbers of caretakers employed
- The need for income generation linked in with the scrutiny review that the Council were undertaking in relation to Income Generation
- The Chair expressed the view that caretakers could carry out small handyperson jobs and liaise with responsive repairs to generate income and it was stated that discussions were taking place with caretakers on additional tasks however in order to do this some current tasks may have to be deleted or additional caretaking staff employed

RESOLVED:

That GMB be requested to submit a report to the next meeting of the Committee as referred to above in relation to additional caretaking duties

The Chair thanked officers and the GMB for attending

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SCRUTINY REVIEW - SCAFFOLDING/ WORK PLATFORMS - PRESENTATION/APPROVAL OF SID (Item 10)

Damian Dempsey, Group Leader – Quantity Surveyors and Ryan Collymore, Group Leader – Contract Monitoring were 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 –

- Scaffolding is used as falls from height are the largest cause of fatality and serious injury in the construction industry and account for 50% of all construction fatalities including falls from low level and falls through fragile material
- It is the Council's duty to ensure all of its staff and contractors work safely and reduce risk
- Precautions are required to prevent falls or minimise the risk of injury from a fall from height
- Scaffolding is used for access over the height of six metres or where it is not possible to use any other working at height equipment to carry out a safety repair
- During the last year 2013/14 approximately 2000 scaffolds had to be erected for responsive repairs only and on average the cost of a single scaffold was £1200 (£2,400,000 total)
- There were a number of different types of access for surveys and works – scaffolding, mast climbers, cradles, abseiling, cherry pickers, hoists, mobile towers, ladders, mobile plant, cranes, pole mounted cameras and drones
- There are advantages and disadvantages to all these methods and there was various health and safety legislation for the management of scaffolding. In simple terms the law requires that scaffolding operations are properly planned and then carried out safely on site
- There were a number of issues with scaffold and solutions to these – scaffolding being up too long at a property – joint working between the delivery and contract teams to manage the contract and improved procedures for erecting and dismantling. In addition, consideration needed to be given to safety of the public, and all tenants are informed of costs prior to works engagement. There are improved contractor rates through competitive tendering and use of schedule of rates to benchmark costs
- Discussion took place as to whether the Council should set up its own in-house scaffolding provision and the following issues were raised –
 - Storage Site – a larger site would have to be available, which would cost in the region of £100k per annum
 - Vehicles – 4 large flat bed lorries costing an estimate of £62k per year
 - Staff – to manage annual demand for 2,000 erected scaffolds, 12 staff would be required at an estimated cost of £420k per year, turnover of staff could be high because of local rates
 - Contractors – would still be needed for high demand periods
 - Equipment – would be cost of management of this, loss of equipment and maintenance
- There would need to be weekly inspections of scaffolds by qualified staff
- There would be increased insurance costs due to risk
- Wherever possible in future the Council were trying to design out the need for scaffolding by using maintenance free materials and fixings, windows, gutters,

fascias, cladding, self-finish renders, clean/jet washing that reduces the need for painting, facilitation of cleaning from inside

- When there was new build design there was a need to think about maintenance needs and access requirements during new build design and if scaffolding was used to undertake a cost in use analysis and consider provision of permanent access facilities including – moveable access platforms, chimney ladders, cradle systems, abseiling harness anchors, ongoing repair/insurance costs of anchorage points
- Advantages of scaffold access for repairs included being innovative, employing local labour, having greater control, potential for cheaper negotiated rates in the long term, potential for partnering/alliances with existing companies or in conjunction with other boroughs
- Disadvantages include the high initial cost of plant, the need for a huge quantity of scaffolding equipment, large storage capacity and depot location, a high number of skilled trained staff, peaks and troughs of work, insurances, existing contract obligations, continuity and non-continuity, potential for disputes/delays with contractors, is the proposal affordable and/or commercially viable
- Members expressed the view that it appeared from the costings in the report that the setting up of an 'in house' scaffolding team would be cost effective and that it would be useful to have more detailed costings provided to a future meeting of the Committee. In addition it would be useful if costings could be provided for scaffolding costs in previous years and a breakdown of costs on cyclical maintenance and major repair works. It was stated that with regard to responsive repairs they could not provide up to date figures as the contract had only just come back 'in house'
- A Member stated that L.B.Camden were looking to set up an 'in house' scaffolding team and that consideration could be given to the sharing of services. It was stated that L.B.Camden would be giving witness evidence to a future meeting of the Committee
- Reference was made to the fact that there was concern that scaffolding was left up on sites for longer than necessary and that there had been scaffolding on the Highbury Quadrant site for 3 to 4 months just to replace a broken roof tile. It was stated that in the contract there was inclusion for the erection of scaffolding and there was no additional cost for the scaffolding remaining up after completion of the works, except where there variations of the works by the Council

RESOLVED:

That the costs of scaffolding for previous years be submitted to the Committee and a breakdown of the costs of cyclical repairs and major repairs

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REGISTERED PROVIDERS - PRESENTATION (Item 11)

Duncan Howard, Regional Director London, Southern Housing Association was in attendance and made a presentation to the Committee, a copy of which is interleaved.

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

- Southern Housing wanted to offer sustainable tenancies, however it now had 6 different tenures and various options needed to be considered in order to get sustainable tenancies
- Southern had improved it's complaints monitoring process
- The repairs service needed to be improved in it's London properties and this was being looked at at present
- Affordable rents were a challenge in London Borough of Islington
- Samuel Lewis Estate had 199 homes at social rent however in London it was now not possible to offer social rents due to the high land costs

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- The current Government subsidy was only £17000 and Southern were considering other funding options
- A number of families had been placed in new build accommodation in Islington on affordable rents and a number of these families were on benefit
- Southern may have to offer shared ownership on the Moorfields school site as it had been a difficult site to develop and less homes than envisaged would be provided however they were looking to offer some affordable homes
- Southern were looking to develop more fixed term tenancies and were discussing with tenants the different housing options available as their income increases such as offering an equity share in the property
- Whilst Southern's core business was the provision of social housing in the current financial climate they had to adopt a pragmatic approach
- The Chair expressed the view that the Government had invested a large amount of money in Housing Associations and this was taxpayer funded money. He expressed concern that Southern now seemed to be concentrating on developing but not necessarily for the benefit of residents as rents were still not affordable
- Southern stated that because of the high land prices in London rents would be unaffordable to many people and it was difficult to compete with developers without significant Government subsidy
- In response to a question it was stated that Southern were converting one bedroom properties at 60% of market rent and that these were properties that would not have gone to the Council for nomination. The average affordable rent is £190 per week. This compares with an average target social rent of £103 per week. Social rent is exclusive of service charge whereas the affordable rent is exclusive. Service charges vary from £5 to £30 depending on services being delivered
- Discussion took place as to the development at Dalmeny Avenue and Southern stated that this had been delayed because of planning issues and they were appealing against the Section 106 requirements
- Southern were committed to paying the LLW and their Chief Executive was relatively low paid in comparison to other Housing Association Chief Executives

The Chair thanked Duncan Howard for attending

44

TMO SCRUTINY REVIEW REPORT BACK (Item 12)

Ros Tresedor, Housing and Adult Social Services outlined the circulated report.

Following this the following main points were made –

- In response to a question it was stated that TMO's were able to deliver services in a more cost efficient manner than the Council and could react quickly as they did not always have to contract out services or need the level of management that the Council needed to provide
- Major works contracts were part of the framework contracts and consultation briefings were held and TMO's often had local knowledge and expertise that could assist in planning major works and measures were in place to invite TMO's to meetings on site with contractors and keep them informed at TMO meetings
- In response to a question it was stated that for cyclical maintenance works were closely monitored and the TMO had to comply with guidelines laid down
- In relation to small works if this was electrical or work that needed certification the Council checked that there was monitoring of this or desktop monitoring took place
- A Member expressed concern that TMO's could engage relatives or friends to carry out works rather than go through an appropriate process. It was stated that if there were examples of malpractice that were notified to them they would be investigated.

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Random sample checks were undertaken of repairs and surveys of residents were carried out

- Seven TMO's now have business plans in place that include ideas for using their surplus funds for improvements on the estates that they manage. A further seven are developing business plans. It was stated that the Council could not force TMO's to have a business plan and whilst it was best practice it was not formally part of the management agreement
- With regard to discussions on shared services it was stated that there had been initial discussions on sharing finance and legal services, however there needed to be a certain level of interest and a questionnaire had been sent out and whilst there had not been much initial interest this matter had been raised again
- It was stated that the possibility of sharing of services across London could be looked at
- Reference was made to the fact that there was guidance for TMO's on funding that was not rechargeable to tenants and it was stated that this could be made available to TMO's
- A Member expressed the view that if TMO's had surpluses that they had not spent they should not be allowed to bid for environmental improvements works until these had been allocated
- The TMO representative for Bemerton TMO stated that in regard to shared services they had a mixed experience of this and in some cases had received good access for Council services but in others they had found the process more difficult. He stated that where possible TMO's should be given direct access to Council services, rather than having to go through a mediator. It was stated that there would need to be a commitment to shared services from TMO's as additional resources would be required
- Bemerton TMO referred to the review of allowances, and that they did not feel that they were receiving an appropriate share of Head Office costs and it was stated that discussions could take place with TMO's
- Reference was made to TMO surpluses and that there needed to be clarification as to how these could be spent without incurring service charges for leaseholders
- In response to a question on TMO allowances it was stated that allowances were reviewed annually and initial draft allowances were sent out in December and finalised in March. It was stated that this could be discussed at the TMO liaison meeting
- Reference was made to consultation on Major Works and that TMO's would have a meeting to discuss the current problems around this and would report back to a future Housing Scrutiny Committee
- In response to a question as to whether there should be a TMO representative on the Committee it was stated that there was not at present any provision for this in the terms of reference, however there is provision for a TMO representative on the Housing taskforce

The Committee thanked officers for attending and welcomed the improvement in relations between TMO's and the Council since the review

45 WORK PROGRAMME 2014/15 (Item)

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted

The meeting ended at 10.30 p.m.

CHAIR