



---

**AGENDA FOR THE HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

---

Members of the Housing Scrutiny Committee are summoned to Committee Room 4, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD on **16 November 2017 at 7.30 pm.**

**Yinka Owa**  
**Director of Law and Governance**

Enquiries to : Jonathan Moore  
Tel : 020 7527 3308  
E-mail : [democracy@islington.gov.uk](mailto:democracy@islington.gov.uk)  
Despatched : 8 November 2017

Membership

Councillor Michael O'Sullivan (Chair)  
Councillor Marian Spall (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor Alex Diner  
Councillor Gary Doolan  
Councillor Aysegul Erdogan  
Councillor Troy Gallagher  
Councillor Osh Gantly  
Councillor Mouna Hamitouche MBE

Rose Marie McDonald (Resident Observer)  
Dean Donaghey (Resident Observer)

Substitute Members

Councillor Satnam Gill OBE  
Councillor Gary Heather  
Councillor Jenny Kay  
Councillor Una O'Halloran  
Councillor Olly Parker  
Councillor Angela Picknell  
Councillor Dave Poyser  
Councillor Nurullah Turan

**Quorum: is 4 Councillors**



## A. Formal Matters

Page

1. Apologies for Absence
2. Declaration of Substitute Members
3. Declarations of Interests

If you have a **Disclosable Pecuniary Interest\*** in an item of business:

- if it is not yet on the council's register, you **must** declare both the existence and details of it at the start of the meeting or when it becomes apparent;
- you may **choose** to declare a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest that is already in the register in the interests of openness and transparency.

In both the above cases, you **must** leave the room without participating in discussion of the item.

If you have a **personal** interest in an item of business **and** you intend to speak or vote on the item you **must** declare both the existence and details of it at the start of the meeting or when it becomes apparent but you **may** participate in the discussion and vote on the item.

**\*(a) Employment, etc** - Any employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for profit or gain.

**(b) Sponsorship** - Any payment or other financial benefit in respect of your expenses in carrying out duties as a member, or of your election; including from a trade union.

**(c) Contracts** - Any current contract for goods, services or works, between you or your partner (or a body in which one of you has a beneficial interest) and the council.

**(d) Land** - Any beneficial interest in land which is within the council's area.

**(e) Licences**- Any licence to occupy land in the council's area for a month or longer.

**(f) Corporate tenancies** - Any tenancy between the council and a body in which you or your partner have a beneficial interest.

**(g) Securities** - Any beneficial interest in securities of a body which has a place of business or land in the council's area, if the total nominal value of the securities exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body or of any one class of its issued share capital.

This applies to **all** members present at the meeting.

4. Minutes of Previous Meeting
5. Chair's Report
6. Order of Business
7. Public Questions

1 - 10

For members of the public to ask questions relating to any subject on the meeting agenda under Procedure Rule 70.5. Alternatively, the Chair may opt to accept questions from the public during the discussion on each agenda item.

<b>B. Items for Decision/Discussion</b>	<b>Page</b>
1. Housing Communications Scrutiny Review: Witness Evidence	11 - 18
a) Jo Murphy, Service Director – Homes and Communities	
b) Christine Short, Head of Capital Programming	
c) Notes of focus group sessions	
2. Fire Safety Scrutiny Review: Witness Evidence	19 - 26
a) Evidence from the London Hazards Centre (TBC)	
b) Briefing note: Re-homing residents in the event of a fire	
c) Notes of sessions attended by the Chair	
3. Capital Programme Scrutiny 2015/16 - 12 Month Update	27 - 34
4. Work Programme	35 - 36

**C. Urgent non-exempt items (if any)**

Any non- exempt items which the Chair agrees should be considered urgent by reason of special circumstances. The reasons for urgency will be agreed by the Chair and recorded in the minutes.

**D. Exclusion of press and public**

To consider whether, in view of the nature of the remaining items on the agenda, any of them are likely to involve the disclosure of exempt or confidential information within the terms of the Access to Information Procedure Rules in the Constitution and, if so, whether to exclude the press and public during discussion thereof.

**E. Confidential/exempt items**

**F. Urgent exempt items (if any)**

Any exempt items which the Chair agrees should be considered urgently by reason of special circumstances. The reasons for urgency will be agreed by the Chair and recorded in the minutes.

The next meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Committee will be on 11 December 2017

This page is intentionally left blank

# Agenda Item 4

London Borough of Islington

## Housing Scrutiny Committee - 3 October 2017

Minutes of the meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Committee held at Committee Room 4, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD on 3 October 2017 at 7.30 pm.

**Present:**           **Councillors:**           Spall (Vice-Chair, in the Chair), Diner, Erdogan, Gallagher, Gantly, Heather and O'Halloran.

**Resident Observers:**   Rose-Marie McDonald and Dean Donaghey

### Councillor Marian Spall in the Chair

#### **301        APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item A1)**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mick O'Sullivan, Gary Doolan, and Mouna Hamitouche.

#### **302        DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item A2)**

Councillor Heather substituted for Councillor O'Sullivan.  
Councillor O'Halloran substituted for Councillor Doolan.

#### **303        DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS (Item A3)**

None.

#### **304        MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (Item A4)**

##### **RESOLVED:**

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 4 September 2017 be confirmed as a correct record and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

#### **305        CHAIR'S REPORT (Item A5)**

None.

#### **306        ORDER OF BUSINESS (Item A6)**

No changes were proposed to the order of business.

**307**      **PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item A7)**

A member of the public advised of a missed appointment with the Housing Repairs service. Officers advised that they would take this up outside of the meeting.

A member of the public enquired about changes to the funding of estate environmental improvements, and how decisions on such improvements would be made. It was advised that a written response would be provided outside of the meeting.

**308**      **FIRE SAFETY SCRUTINY REVIEW: WITNESS EVIDENCE (Item B1)**

a) Paul Hobbs, Borough Commander of the London Fire Brigade, provided evidence to the Committee.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- The Borough Commander was responsible for the operational response to fires in Islington. Around 80 individuals were employed by the Fire Brigade in Islington, based across two sites.
- Two fire engines were assigned to the borough, however engines based in neighbouring boroughs were also available in the event of an emergency. The nearest available fire engine was always despatched to attend a fire. It was commented that around 40 fire engines attended the Grenfell Tower fire.
- Fire fighters spent less than 10% of their working day responding to fires. The remainder of their time was spent carrying out familiarisation visits and training.
- The Fire Brigade was not responsible for carrying out fire safety risk assessments. This was the responsibility of the building owner; however, the Fire Brigade carried out safety audits for properties over 18 metres in height to ensure that the Responsible Person had carried out the risk assessment correctly.
- If the Fire Brigade identified a safety risk, then a range of powers were available to enforce corrective action. The most severe of these was a Prohibition Notice, which restricted use of the building.
- The Fire Brigade carried out youth engagement work, including the LIFE (Local Intervention Fire Education) project. This was a one-week intensive course which taught practical firefighting skills, and was aimed at young people involved in ASB or known to the criminal justice system. It was commented that there was not a suitable facility in the borough to provide this project locally, however the local Fire Brigade was hoping to acquire a suitable facility in the near future. Islington residents had to travel to neighbouring boroughs to take part.
- The Fire Brigade also operated a fire cadet programme which allowed young people to gain a BTEC qualification and develop their skills, and a Youth Commissioner scheme. These activities were open to all young people.
- The Fire Brigade administered a Fire Safety Investment Fund which provided preventative equipment to vulnerable residents. Around £31,000 had been spent in Islington; typical purchases included fire retardant bedding, and sprinkler systems for bed bound residents.
- The Fire Brigade carried out joint work with the council; it was reported that a senior officer would be co-located at 222 Upper Street every Tuesday morning from the following week onwards. This would strengthen collaborative working between the council and Fire Brigade.
- The Fire Brigade was invited to comment on planning applications, however this work was not carried out at the local operational level.

## Housing Scrutiny Committee - 3 October 2017

- The Committee enquired about the challenges of tackling fires in high-rise blocks. Although tower blocks had wet or dry risers, these were only effective for fighting fires inside buildings, not external fires such as the Grenfell Tower fire. Fires to external material, such as cladding, needed to be tackled externally; however the Fire Brigade did not have ladders tall enough to tackle external fires at great height.
- Although it would be possible to commission fire engines with very tall ladders of over 100 meters, these would require large vehicles which would not be suitable for many of London's streets. It was commented that such vehicles would need to be parked in a large space and secured before the ladder was extended. Working at greater heights also presented risks to fire fighters.
- Members commented on the successful youth engagement work carried out by the Police Safer Neighbourhood Team, and suggested that further partnership work in this area between the Police and Fire Brigade could be effective.
- The Fire Brigade offered some apprenticeships in office-based roles.
- The Committee asked if the London Fire Brigade was confident that tenant management organisations in Islington were sufficiently aware of fire risks and their responsibilities. In response, it was advised that the Brigade was required to be familiar with hundreds of buildings and could not comment on individual cases. However, it was commented that succession planning was particularly important for resident-led housing management organisations, as smaller organisations tended to only have one person who was aware of fire risks and responsibilities. It was suggested that organisations that did not have sufficient expertise to carry out a fire safety risk assessment should commission an independent assessor to do so.
- The Committee highlighted the budget cuts to the fire service and asked if these had a detrimental effect on the service's responsiveness. In response, it was advised that although the resources to deal with major incidents were more limited, the cuts had not had a detrimental impact on the service's response times. Islington's Fire Brigade was able to respond to fires within six minutes of a call being received.
- Islington used to have six fire engines stationed inside the borough. Although Islington now had four fewer engines, response times had been maintained through an increased focus on fire prevention. The London Fire Brigade had increased their focus on home safety visits, hoarding, and problematic smoking in recent years.
- Major fire incidents requiring several fire engines resulted in resources being deployed from across London. It was explained that the Merton Control Room monitored the activity of London's fire engines and relocated available teams to ensure that no area was left vulnerable to fire.
- The Mayor of London had allocated £6 million for new fire safety equipment. It was commented that the Fire Brigade was already in the process of procuring new fire engines, however since the Grenfell Tower fire the procurement specification had been revised to require taller ladders.
- In response to a question, the Borough Commander advised that Islington Council appeared to be very proactive in managing fire safety risks, and was very willing to engage with the Fire Brigade. The Borough Commander explained that he had only been in post for three months, however he had not faced any barriers to working with the council, which was not the case in all boroughs.
- The Borough Commander believed that the Grenfell Tower fire would result in significant changes to how fire risks are managed, and thought that there would be implications for both high rise and low rise properties.
- The London Fire Brigade had appointed a dedicated Grenfell Tower team to assist the national inquiry.
- It was suggested that fire fighters could make use of breathing apparatus with a greater capacity to tackle major fires, however it was acknowledged that these were heavier and as a result presented an additional risk to fire fighters.

## Housing Scrutiny Committee - 3 October 2017

- The Borough Commander commented that greater information on the location and needs of disabled and vulnerable people would help in an emergency, however clear guidance would be needed on where the information was stored and who would be responsible for maintaining its accuracy. It was noted that an information box was being installed at Braithwaite House which would hold such information.
- A member of the public queried if parked cars in cul-de-sacs obstructed access for fire engines. In response, it was advised that this could be an issue, however fire engines were able to pump water over a considerable distance and did not need to be parked immediately next to a fire. In an emergency fire fighters would pick up and move vehicles. Officers advised that they were aware of parking obstruction issues and were reviewing estate parking arrangements.
- Dr Brian Potter, Chair of the Islington Leaseholders Association, commented that he had been in correspondence with officers about the requirement for leaseholders to fit fire safe doors to their properties, and queried the legal basis for requiring leaseholders to install these doors at their own expense. In response, officers advised that the entrance doors and frames of leaseholder properties were the leaseholder's responsibility under the terms of their lease. It was clarified that the Fire Brigade and Building Control were the enforcing authorities for fire safety concerns, however the council as landlord had a duty of care to all residents in its properties and would take action in instances where leaseholders would not fit fire safe doors.

The Committee thanked the Borough Commander for his contribution.

- b) Jan Hart, Service Director for Public Protection, provided evidence to the Committee on the council's Emergency Planning function.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- The council had statutory duties under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 to prepare for emergencies. The council's Emergency Planning service was comprised of three officers who worked in partnership with other services and agencies to meet the council's duties under the Act.
- Islington Council had an emergency planning officer and corporate director on duty at all times in case of emergencies. The council had also appointed 23 Local Authority Liaison Officers (LALOs), council officers who were trained in emergency response and making decisions in emergency situations. 60 staff were trained to manage rest centres, and 150 staff in total were available to attend an emergency situation if required.
- Most local authorities appointed around five LALOs, however Islington's approach was that a number of staff should be able to respond and make decisions in emergency situations.
- London boroughs offered mutual aid to each other in emergency situations. Islington officers had assisted Kensington and Chelsea following the Grenfell Tower fire, and Camden following the evacuation of the Chalcots Estate. Islington's own emergency plans had been revised in light of officers' experiences of attending those emergencies. In particular, it was recognised that the council needed to be prepared to deal with larger emergencies which continued for several weeks. Islington Council would be seeking to train more officers in emergency response as a result.
- Mutual aid was requested by triggering London Local Authority Gold Arrangements, whereby a single London local authority chief executive would take control of the strategic response, and a London Local Authority Coordination Centre would be established to coordinate emergency activities.



## Housing Scrutiny Committee - 3 October 2017

- Following a question, the Service Director commented that the council was well prepared to deal with emergency situations, and Islington Council staff attending emergencies in other boroughs had been very well received. However, emergencies on the scale of the Grenfell Tower fire required cross-London support and coordination.
- A member commented on his experience of a recent fire in the early hours of the morning. He advised that the fire fighters attending the scene did not seem to be aware of the council's emergency procedures, and concerned residents contacted an elected member for support, who was not aware of who to contact. The situation was resolved by the councillor contacting a corporate director by telephone. In response, it was advised that out-of-hours emergencies should be reported to Contact Islington on 020 7527 2000; which was staffed 24 hours a day. It was also commented that the emergency services control room was able to contact the council in an emergency. It was advised that a note would be circulated to all councillors to clarify this position.
- A member commented on the criticism of Kensington and Chelsea Council following the Grenfell Tower fire, in particular the delay to triggering London Local Authority Gold arrangements and requesting mutual aid from other boroughs. It was queried if Islington Council understood its limitations, and at what point Gold command would be triggered. In response, it was advised that whilst Islington was well resourced to deal with localised emergencies, an incident on the scale of the Grenfell Tower fire would result in Gold command being triggered immediately.
- Officers commented on the council's swift response times. It was noted that following the Finsbury Park terrorist attack council officers were in attendance and offering assistance within 30 minutes.
- Islington's Emergency Planning service was in weekly contact with the council officers on emergency response duty.
- The Committee suggested that training should be given to councillors to help them to better understand how they can assist in an emergency situation. It was suggested that a demonstration of how Gold command was triggered and worked in practice would also be useful.
- The Committee queried the emergency evacuation plans for disabled and vulnerable people. It was advised that Housing and Adult Social Services held details of disabled and vulnerable residents, and in the case of a planned evacuation a multi-agency meeting would be held to prepare for evacuation and after care. For example, it was commented that rest centres were not appropriate for vulnerable people with complex needs, and social services would need to find suitable temporary accommodation before the evacuation commenced. However, officers advised that in an urgent emergency situation with limited time to prepare the reality would be officers knocking on doors to establish who was in each property and identify their needs. In that scenario, information on resident vulnerabilities would be ascertained from the residents themselves and their neighbours, friends and family. The Committee considered that this was not sufficient to guarantee the safety of disabled and vulnerable people, and suggested that a list of disabled or vulnerable people would support emergency evacuation efforts.
- Islington Council had a contract with the Red Cross to provide emergency clothing, toiletries and bedding if required. Provision would also be made to provide residents with emergency money.
- A member of the public queried if emergency and temporary accommodation was located in the borough. In response, it was advised that rest centres would be located in the borough. If residents were unable to return to their home then they would likely be offered hotel accommodation which could be outside of the borough, however each resident would have a named contact at the council to liaise with.

## Housing Scrutiny Committee - 3 October 2017

- A member of the public queried evacuation procedures for schools. In response, it was advised that schools held test evacuations once a term. Schools were responsible for arranging these, however the role of the Emergency Planning service was to ensure that schools were aware of their responsibilities.

The Committee thanked Jan Hart for her contribution.

- c) John Venning, Asset Manager at Partners for Improvement in Islington, presented to the Committee on Partners' fire safety work.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- Partners managed the council's street properties. These properties tended to be older and faced different risks to more modern housing blocks on estates. The majority of Partners' properties were low rise buildings of brick construction with timber floors. None of the properties had external cladding and none were over five storeys in height.
- Partners had its own fire safety policy which was most recently audited in February 2017. Fire risk assessments were carried out for all Partners properties.
- Partners monitored the fire safety of its properties through regular fire safety meetings, contract performance meetings with Islington Council, and attendance at Islington Homes and Estates Safety Board meetings. It was emphasised that Partners took its fire safety responsibilities very seriously.
- The most significant fire risk to Partners properties was the lack of linked fire protection systems. For this reason, linked fire alarms were to be installed in all Partners properties. This work would be carried out by Islington Council and would commence in 2018, concluding in 2020.
- Fire risks in communal areas were re-assessed regularly. High risk properties were assessed every six months, other properties were assessed every two years. Some properties had emergency lighting and this was tested on an annual basis.
- Partners had recently introduced a zero tolerance policy to keeping items in communal areas. Partners used to operate a more lenient 'managed use' policy however this had been revised to minimise fire risks.
- Partners was concerned about the fire risks associated with hoarding, and made referrals to the London Fire Brigade for home fire safety visits on a regular basis.
- All Partners tenants had received evacuation guidance following the Grenfell Tower fire. This was provided by the council to ensure that Partners tenants received the same information as Islington Council tenants.
- The Committee noted the fire safety advice in Partners publications and suggested that fire safety advice should be provided in different languages and large print as standard.
- The Committee asked if Partners was satisfied that their residents knew what to do in the event of a fire; and asked if Partners had a register of their vulnerable and disabled tenants which they could refer to in the event of a fire. In response, it was advised that Partners did maintain a list of disabled and vulnerable tenants, including hoarders, however this largely relied on tenants self-identifying as vulnerable or disabled and it was acknowledged that the data may not be complete. To improve their data, all Partners staff were required to feedback any concerns about vulnerable residents to their manager.
- Following a question, it was advised that Partners worked with other agencies to support hoarders and remove combustible material from their properties.
- The Committee asked if Partners was confident that they were taking all reasonable steps to prevent fires, and if they had any specific fire safety concerns. In response it was advised that Partners constantly monitored and reviewed fire risks.

## Housing Scrutiny Committee - 3 October 2017

- Following the audit of Partners' fire safety policy in February 2017, Partners had amended internal forms for reviewing fire risks.
- It was queried if Partners would re-audit their fire safety policy following the Grenfell Tower fire. It was advised that Partners had sought the advice of a consultant on this matter in August 2017, and the advice was that a re-audit was not required. Partners was confident that their policy remained fit for purpose.
- Concerns were expressed about the fire risks to vulnerable leaseholders. A member commented that landlords did not need to access leasehold properties on a regular basis, and as a result there may be vulnerable leaseholders who were not known to Partners. Partners recognised this risk, and commented that they did try to engage with leaseholders on a regular basis, however it was also commented that most hoarders tended to be tenants.
- A member of the Committee highlighted properties in Milner Square with very high ceilings. Smoke alarms had been installed on those ceilings, however it was not possible to test or deactivate them without a ladder. Residents were using broomsticks to test and deactivate them but this could damage the alarms. It was suggested that the alarms were not fit for purpose and remote control alarms were better suited to the properties. In response, it was advised that the alarms were installed in 2003 and there were no plans to install new alarms before the next scheduled maintenance work in 2018. The Committee suggested that such issues should be addressed on a more regular basis.
- The audit of Partners' fire safety policy was carried out by an independent health and safety consultant. The Committee suggested that a second opinion on the policy may provide additional reassurance.
- It was advised that residents evacuating in emergency situations were able to take their pets with them.
- Following a question from Dr Brian Potter, Chair of the Islington Leaseholders Association, it was confirmed that fire safety improvements to Partners properties would be recharged to leaseholders. A notice of intent was due to be issued in the near future.

The Committee thanked John Venning for his contribution.

### **309 HOUSING COMMUNICATIONS SCRUTINY REVIEW: WITNESS EVIDENCE (Item B2)**

- a) Tom Irvine, Deputy Managing Director of Partners for Improvement in Islington, presented to the Committee on how Partners communicates with its residents.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- All new Partners tenants were provided with a 'new tenant handbook' of key information and received a home visit within four weeks of their moving date.
- Partners circulated a newsletter to residents five times a year, as well as additional direct mailings on topical issues such as fire safety.
- The majority of residents contacted Partners by telephone; the organisation received around 7,000 calls a month. Partners' call handling system was simplified in 2016 to provide callers with three options; gas and heating, repairs, or anything else. This helped residents to get to the right person quicker.
- All front line staff received the council's Make Every Contact Count training, which trained staff to identify problems and refer residents to early help and support services.
- Partners worked with residents to improve their communications, and had recently consulted with leaseholders to improve their leaseholder FAQs.

## Housing Scrutiny Committee - 3 October 2017

- Whilst response time targets for complaints and members' enquiries were met, Partners had recently introduced new processes to ensure greater quality control over responses to members' enquiries.
- Partners' heads of service met monthly to discuss complaints and review complaint responses. The number of complaints received had fallen in recent years.
- Ensuring good communication was one of Partners' priorities for 2017/18.
- The Committee queried Partners' internal performance statistics which suggested the quality of responses to correspondence had improved to a score of 97/100 in July 2017. It was explained that Partners assessed their responses against 10 criteria which included accuracy, tone, and joined-up working. The Committee suggested that the assessment criteria was not sufficiently robust, as member casework regularly highlighted instances of poor service from Partners. The Committee considered that the performance information provided was not credible, and suggested that Partners' quality assessment criteria should be more challenging.
- A member of the Committee suggested that Partners' processes were not easy to navigate, and this could be distressing for vulnerable people. It was emphasised that Partners was passionate about providing a good service to residents, and trained staff in recognising the needs of vulnerable residents.
- Partners reported a range of key performance indicators to Islington Council on a regular basis and these were evaluated for accuracy. Partners was seeking to engage with councillors in regards to why their perceptions of Partners' service varied considerably from the organisation's performance indicators.
- It was suggested that Partners should consult with residents on its quality assessment criteria to better align its performance reporting to the needs of residents.
- The Committee requested that an additional meeting be arranged to consider Partners performance in greater detail.
- A member of the public reported dissatisfaction with Partners and commented that work was needed to build trust between Partners and residents.
- Dr Brian Potter, Chair of the Islington Leaseholders Association, queried the methodology of Partners satisfaction surveys, and suggested that Islington Leaseholders Association could assist with reviewing the satisfaction surveys sent to Partners leaseholders. It was also suggested that Partners would benefit from a more robust leaseholder forum.
- A member of the public suggested that members of the Housing Scrutiny Committee could attend and contribute to the Partners resident scrutiny forums.

The Committee thanked Tom Irvine for his contribution.

- b) Matt West, Head of Repairs and Maintenance, provided evidence to the Committee on the online repairs reporting system.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- The online repairs reporting system was not intended to replace traditional routes of reporting repairs, but was intended to supplement the existing service, provide choice to residents, modernise the service and generate savings.
- The repairs service previously had an online form for reporting repairs, but this was not integrated with the repairs management system. The form would generate an email which an officer would then need to manually input into the system, often following up with a telephone call to the resident to clarify the details. As a result the system did not save time or resources.

## Housing Scrutiny Committee - 3 October 2017

- The new online repairs reporting system was integrated with the repairs management system, so repairs logged online generated cost savings by not requiring officer time to input the information.
- The online repairs reporting system was designed to be user friendly and operated on a pictogram basis, which was intended to overcome language barriers and knowledge gaps.
- Officers recognised the limits of the system. The system was only able to handle repair requests from directly managed tenants, did not cover communal repairs, and the system was not appropriate for reporting emergency repairs. If a repair appeared to be an emergency (for example, tenants were in danger or the security of the property was compromised) then the system suggested that the resident call Housing Direct to ensure the issue was dealt with quickly.
- The system was being developed further to enable residents to book their gas service online.
- Uptake of the online repairs reporting system had been low, although feedback received had been generally positive. The council needed to encourage residents to make use of the system to realise the cost savings the system offered.
- The Committee suggested that reporting communal repairs online would be a helpful development.
- The Committee thought it would be helpful if the system could generate a repair request for Partners or TMOs. Officers agreed, however explained that this would require significant development work and the service would rather focus on establishing the system for directly managed tenants first. Tom Irvine, Deputy Managing Director of Partners for Improvement in Islington, commented that Partners had an online repairs reporting system, however was interested in the council's system and would be keen to learn from the council's experiences.

The Committee thanked Matt West for his contribution.

### **310 REVIEW OF WORK PLAN (Item B3)**

Noted.

The meeting ended at 10.10 pm.

**CHAIR**

This page is intentionally left blank

# Agenda Item 1

## Housing Scrutiny Committee 2017/18

### The Effectiveness of Housing Services Communications – Witness Evidence Plan

Overall aim: To review the effectiveness of Housing Service communications.

<b>Committee Meeting – 4 September 2017</b>		
<b>Who / What</b>	<b>Organisation / Purpose</b>	<b>Other key information</b>
Lynn Stratton, Deputy Head of Communication and Change	To provide the committee with a range of information on Housing Communications which will inform the review.	<p>To include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a summary of previous communications reviews,</li> <li>• a summary of resident priorities, regular feedback and complaints</li> <li>• feedback received on specific communications issues, i.e. from the Housing Disability Panel</li> <li>• details of staff training,</li> <li>• details of how staff are supported in communicating (templates etc)</li> <li>• overview of current range of communications channels used by the service</li> <li>• a structure chart identifying key communications channels</li> <li>• how the quality of communications is evaluated,</li> <li>• What is the housing service's approach to making communications accessible to residents needing different formats?</li> </ul> <p>To meet SID objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To review the effectiveness of verbal, online and written communication channels; with residents, tenant and resident associations, and internally.</li> </ul>
Lorenzo Heanue, Group Leader - Productivity & Compliance	To look in detail at how feedback and complaints are handled – to focus on the Repairs service as a case study of a front line service which receives a number of complex complaints	<p>To include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examples of common complaints and feedback</li> <li>• How can feedback and complaints processes be improved</li> <li>• How can housing services resolve issues to avoid them being escalated</li> </ul> <p>To meet SID objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To review how Housing Services respond to and learn from feedback and complaints.</li> </ul>

<b>Committee Meeting – 3 October 2017</b>		
<b>Who / What</b>	<b>Organisation / Purpose</b>	<b>Other key information</b>
Tom Irvine, Deputy Managing Director, Partners for Improvement in Islington	Representative from Partners on how they communicate with residents	To meet objective: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To review how the council can be assured that the council's contractors and their subcontractors are communicating with residents effectively.</li> </ul>
Matt West, Head of Repairs and Maintenance	To provide the Committee with an update on the council's online housing services; including performance and accessibility, the effectiveness of online repairs reporting, the reasons for 'channel shift', how channel shift can be encouraged, and plans for the further development of online services.	To include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Web data and website performance information</li> </ul> To meet objective: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To evaluate the take-up of new electronic communication methods used by the Council's Housing Services, if these have been successfully implemented, and plans for any further 'channel shift'</li> </ul>

<b>Resident Focus Group – 1 November 2017</b>	
Members of the Committee to interview residents on their priorities, preferences and experiences of housing communications.  Findings of the Focus Group to be reported to the next Committee Meeting	To meet objective: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To review the effectiveness of verbal, online and written communication channels; with residents, tenant and resident associations, and internally.</li> </ul>

<b>Staff Focus Group – 6 November 2017</b>	
Members of the Committee to interview staff from a range of front line services – Customer Services, housing Direct, caretakers, service ambassadors, repairs operatives, AHO staff, complaints teams, etc.  Findings of the Focus Group to be reported to the next Committee Meeting	To meet objective: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To assess if internal processes and staff training are sufficient to achieve effective communication with residents.</li> </ul>



<b>Committee Meeting – 16 November 2017</b>		
<b>Who / What</b>	<b>Organisation / Purpose</b>	<b>Other key information</b>
Jo Murphy, Service Director – Homes and Communities	To provide a strategic insight into Housing Service communications and to respond to any specific issues raised in the course of the review	To include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Principles and expectations of communication</li> <li>• Do housing services consider the 'bigger picture' when issues are raised by multiple residents, or are issues considered on an individual basis?</li> </ul>
Christine Short, Head of Capital Programming	To provide evidence on how capital works contractors communicate with residents, and how the council could seek to influence this.	To meet objective: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To review how the council can be assured that the council's contractors and their subcontractors are communicating with residents effectively.</li> </ul>
Notes of focus groups sessions.	To note the findings of the focus groups held with residents and staff.	

**Key dates:**

30 January 2018: Draft Recommendations

8 March 2018: Final Report

This page is intentionally left blank

## **HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

### **HOUSING COMMUNICATIONS SCRUTINY REVIEW**

#### **Notes from the resident focus group held on 1 November 2017**

A resident focus group was held on 1 November 2017. The session was attended by six residents from the Housing Service's resident scrutiny panels, Cllr Mick O'Sullivan, Rose-Marie McDonald, Dean Donaghey, the Deputy Head of Communications and Change, and the committee clerk.

A number of points were made which were relevant to the committee's review, as follows:

- Residents identified joined-up working between teams and departments as a priority. It was commented that it was frustrating to be given different information from different officers, and having to repeat yourself to different teams. It was suggested that Housing Services should follow up issues and report back to residents, rather than residents having to chase services for progress updates.
- It was commented that join-up between Housing and Adult Social Services was very important for vulnerable tenants. It was suggested that vulnerable people may have difficulty managing their tenancy and social workers should provide information to housing to enable them to be better supported.
- It was suggested that residents raising issues such as repairs, complaints, nuisances, and so on should be given a single point of contact. Residents preferred to speak to the same officer and build a relationship with them, rather than deal with a different officer each time.
- Residents would welcome information on contact information for different departments. It was reported that residents did not know who to contact about different issues.
- The residents present thought that email was the most effective way to get a response from the council, as this provided a record of the communication. There was a concern that there was no record of issues raised by telephone.
- It was suggested that information on notice boards about forthcoming public meetings would be useful.
- Although the electronic notice boards on estates were welcomed, residents reported that there had been issues with these, including the boards moving too slowly and some notice boards not working. It was suggested that interactive notice boards would be a positive development.
- Residents said that most members of staff were polite and helpful, however some members of staff could be more sympathetic to their issues.
- A resident gave an example of poor service. He said that officers had put the phone down on him several times when reporting a repair. He had submitted a complaint to the council.
- Residents thought that communication around important issues could be improved. An example was given of water leaking into a property from the property above. It was commented that this issue had been ongoing for some time and it appeared that no progress was being made. The resident was regularly calling the council to try and progress the matter. Residents thought that the council should explain their processes, explain any delays, and keep them informed of progress.

- Residents raised issues of repairs being delayed without explanation. An example was circulated of a resident chasing a repair by email from July to October with no progress update given. The resident said she felt like giving up pursuing the issue, which related to water dripping into her flat.
- It was suggested that notices should be put up to communicate important information in communal areas. An example was given of a lift that regularly broke down. The contractor fixing the lift explained to a resident that it was because the door was being held open and this damaged an internal mechanism. The resident had suggested to a housing officer that a notice should be put on the lift doors explaining the issue, but was told that they couldn't put up a notice as it cost money.
- Residents highlighted issues associated with Partners for Improvement in Islington, commenting that some residents did not understand what was a Partners responsibility and what was a council responsibility.
- Residents highlighted issues with major works being carried out by sub-contractors. They felt that they did not know who was responsible for works being carried out to their properties, or who to contact when there were problems.
- Residents thought that there should be more openness and transparency around how decisions are made on major works. It was suggested that more communication was needed on the reasons why works were being carried out. It was also suggested that communications on major works should use simple language.
- It was commented that tenants and leaseholders attended separate consultation meetings when the scope of major works was being developed; the residents present understood the reasons for this, but felt that the separate sessions divided people. Both leaseholders and tenants thought that their views were being treated differently to each other.
- A leaseholder said that pursuing a claim as a leaseholder was a particularly onerous process and communication around this could be improved.
- Residents were supportive of the council using new communication channels, particularly text messaging.
- The residents present identified their top communication priorities as:
  - Having a named officer they can contact about their issue;
  - More joined-up services;
  - Receiving courtesy calls, and not having to chase the progress of repairs and other issues;
  - The council should communicate with residents through their preferred communications channel;
  - The website should only have up to date information.

## Notes from the staff focus group held on 6 November 2017

A staff focus group was held on 6 November 2017. The session was attended by officers from a number of frontline housing services, including the Customer Service Team (which deals with complaints), Housing Direct (which receives requests for repairs), the Anti-Social Behaviour Team, the Revenue Control team (which deals with rent arrears), the Home Ownership Team, and the Tenancy Management Team (whose officers are based in area housing offices); Cllr Mick O'Sullivan, Dean Donaghey, the Deputy Head of Communications and Change, and the committee clerk.

A number of points were made which were relevant to the committee's review, as follows:

- Officers commented that the council website could be improved. They reported that both residents and officers could find it difficult to navigate, and sometimes the website included out of date information which led to residents having different expectations of council services. It was suggested that there should be more robust mechanisms for officers to report any inaccuracies or issues they have.
- A number of the staff members present had recently been appointed as 'service ambassadors'. It was suggested that service ambassadors could be appointed to review communication across departments and work through any issues.
- An officer commented that residents and officers found it frustrating when the council did not take a consistent approach. Complex issues which required several different teams to communicate with residents sometimes resulted in confusion.
- An example was given of the Repairs Access Procedure. This was the procedure to be followed when it was necessary to access a property to complete a repair that was causing damage to a neighbouring property. A common example of this was a leak from a property above dripping into a property below. It was explained that this was not a straightforward issue, only a judge could grant the council entry into a property without the tenant or leaseholder's permission, and this process was lengthy. The council had to demonstrate that it had repeatedly tried to contact the tenant or leaseholder without response. It was commented that complaints related to this sometimes focused on residents receiving different information from Repairs and Tenancy teams.
- It was advised that traditionally the Tenancy team had carried out a mediation or advocacy role on complex issues such as access and complex repairs; mediating between Repairs and the resident, and between residents, even if one was a leaseholder. It was suggested that this role was implemented because the Tenancy team were known to be experienced at dealing with complex complaints, however tenancy officers felt that it was not an efficient use of their time to pass messages between residents and other housing services. It was suggested that this process could be frustrating to both officers and residents.
- It was suggested that the council could arrange training days focused around specific complex issues and have staff attend from all services involved. This would ensure that all services understood their responsibilities, the responsibilities of other services, and the processes that should be followed. It was suggested that leaks from neighbouring properties and damp/condensation were complex issues that needed a more coordinated response.
- Officers dealing with complaints said it was preferential to be contacted by email rather than by phone. This was because an email allowed a resident to include all

necessary information, attach images, and so on. Often officers would need to call back residents who complained via telephone, as they did not have all of the relevant information to progress their complaint.

- It was suggested that residents wanted their complaint or issue to be acknowledged within 24 hours. However, officers advised that customer service advisors could take up to three days to log and begin processing a complaint submitted online. It was suggested that some teams responded to complaints faster than others.
- It was suggested that the council should advertise when it offered a flexible service. For example, the repairs service offered appointments between 12noon and 3pm to parents of school-age children, however it was suggested that many people did not know about this.
- Committee members suggested that services should not be afraid to promote the positive work they are doing. It was thought that when the council provided a good service this should be recognised and communicated.
- Officers thought that the council could make better use of record management systems. Some officers used CRM, the council's customer record management system. This allowed all council officers to make notes of their correspondence with residents. However, it was explained that not all services used the system, and the system had limitations. For example, it did not interact with the repairs system.
- Officers confirmed that they had attended various training sessions related to communication, including 'Make Every Contact Count', mental health awareness, and safeguarding. It was also advised that department specific training sessions were available, including negotiation skills, letter writing, and telephone manner.
- Officers advised that customer services issues should be addressed in one-to-one supervision meetings with their line manager.
- Officers said that they were motivated to provide a good service and were frustrated when things did not go well.
- It was suggested that the council could make better use of mailings to residents, such as the annual rent statement. For example, the reverse side of letters could include 'hints and tips' for maintaining their property or managing their tenancy, other useful information. It was thought that this would fit the council's early intervention agenda.
- It was not usually a problem if leaseholders let their property to private tenants, however it was important to have contact details for leaseholders on file. Most leaseholders who let their properties were responsible landlords, however issues could arise when the council had to communicate with management agents who would not pass on important messages to leaseholders. An example was given of management agents not supporting the council on tackling anti-social behaviour.
- It was advised that Housing Direct took service levels very seriously. All telephone calls were recorded. The council had commissioned Kwest to undertake independent satisfaction surveys for all repairs carried out, and management listened back to any calls if it was suggested that the response from the council was poor.

## Housing Scrutiny Committee 2017/18

### Fire Safety in Council Housing – Witness Evidence Plan

Overall aim: To review if the fire safety features of the council's housing stock and associated arrangements are sufficient

<b>Committee Meeting – 4 September 2017</b>		
<b>Who / What</b>	<b>Organisation / Purpose</b>	<b>Other key information</b>
Damian Dempsey, Group Leader – Quantity Surveyors, and Stuart Fuller, Construction, Fire and Gas Safety Manager.	To provide a range of information on how the council ensures fire safety in its properties.	<p>To include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Council's responsibilities for directly managed properties, PFI properties, and TMO properties</li> <li>• The responsibilities of tenants and the responsibilities of leaseholders</li> <li>• how fire risks in council properties are identified, assessed, and responded to</li> <li>• The communications channels for residents to report fire safety concerns to the council, and how these are responded to</li> <li>• What general fire safety advice is provided to residents</li> <li>• If it is feasible to fit alarm systems, sprinklers and fire escapes to council housing.</li> <li>• If capital resources are sufficient to complete any required fire safety improvements to the council's housing stock</li> <li>• If revenue resources are sufficient to ensure that the council's housing stock remains compliant with fire regulations, building control and health and safety standards, and that any fire risks are proactively managed.</li> <li>• How fire safety is considered at the design stage of refurbishment works and new developments, and to review how decisions are made on matters which affect fire safety.</li> <li>• How capital works are monitored to ensure that they are being carried out to the agreed specification</li> <li>• How the council works with Partners and TMOs on fire safety matters</li> </ul>

**Committee Meeting – 3 October 2017**

Who / What	Organisation / Purpose	Other key information
<p>Paul Hobbs, Borough Commander, London Fire Brigade</p>	<p>To provide the Committee with advice and guidance on fire safety, and information on working relationships with the council.</p>	<p>To include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The fire risks to council housing</li> <li>• If any additional risks are posed by takeaways and hazardous materials being located on the ground floor of blocks of flats, as well as the storage of barbeques and gas canisters</li> <li>• The council's compliance with advice and guidance from the London Fire Brigade</li> <li>• Working relationships between Housing Services, Emergency Planning, Local Authority Liaison Officers, and the London Fire Brigade</li> <li>• Can Islington Council do anything additional to ensure that a major fire is prevented.</li> </ul>
<p>Jan Hart, Service Director, Public Protection</p>	<p>To understand the work of the Emergency Planning unit and how the council would respond in the event of a major fire.</p>	<p>To include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How emergency plans are triggered and what these entail</li> <li>• Working relationships between Emergency Planning, Housing Services, Local Authority Liaison Officers, and the London Fire Brigade</li> </ul>
<p>John Venning, Head of Asset Management, Partners for Improvement in Islington</p>	<p>Partners for Improvement in Islington – to provide information on the organisation's fire safety procedures and joint-working with the council.</p>	<p>To include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How the council works with Partners on fire safety matters</li> <li>• How Partners works with the fire brigade and others</li> <li>• How Partners assesses and responds to fire safety risks</li> <li>• The communications channels for residents to report fire safety concerns, and how these are responded to</li> <li>• What general fire safety advice is provided to residents</li> </ul>



<b>Committee Meeting – 16 November 2017</b>		
<b>Who / What</b>	<b>Organisation / Purpose</b>	<b>Other key information</b>
London Hazards Centre (TBC)	The London Hazards Centre is a not for profit organisation which campaigns for Londoners to live and work in safe and healthy environments. To provide the Committee with advice and guidance on fire safety.	To include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Best practice guidance</li> <li>• The fire risks to council housing</li> <li>• Can Islington Council do anything additional to ensure that a major fire is prevented.</li> </ul>
Briefing note: Rehousing residents in the event of a fire	To note the council's arrangements for rehousing residents in the event of a fire.	
Notes of sessions attended by the Chair	Notes taken at a recent London Scrutiny Network meeting and the London Build Expo. Both sessions had a focus on fire safety.	
Damian Dempsey and Stuart Fuller	To provide any further information requested by the Committee or respond to any issues raised during the course of the review.	

**Key dates:**

11 December 2017: Draft Recommendations

30 January 2018: Final Report

This page is intentionally left blank

## **Briefing note on re-homing and ongoing support in the event of a fire**

### **1. Provision of temporary accommodation immediately after a fire or other emergency**

If there is a fire or other emergency in a council property that means that a tenant cannot return to their home, they will initially be asked if they have any friends or family nearby they can stay with. If this is not possible and they are, in effect, homeless; the council will find them emergency temporary accommodation.

Some self-contained rooms are kept empty in Reception Centres for this purpose. If there are not enough empty rooms in Reception Centres, then tenants would be offered hotel rooms booked for them by the council. How quickly emergency accommodation would be found is dependent on the number of tenants affected by the emergency and the size and type of hotel rooms needed by individual households.

Depending on the nature and size of an emergency; in the immediate aftermath, tenants can be taken to an emergency rest centre in the borough so they can keep dry and warm until emergency temporary accommodation is found.

Tenants would only be expected to stay in hotel or Reception Centre rooms for a short period of time and would be offered more appropriate temporary accommodation, either from council stock or sourced from the private sector, if they were likely to be displaced from their home for a longer period.

If the damage to a tenant's home was so severe that they would be unable to return to their property, they would be agreed for a "management transfer" while in temporary accommodation.

### **2. Management transfers and longer term rehousing options**

If a tenant was unable to return to their home due to the severity of the fire in their property; then they would be agreed for a management transfer (to another permanent property) while in temporary accommodation.

Being granted a management transfer means the tenant would be given a high number of points that would allow them to bid for available properties through the choice based letting scheme. The tenant would be given full details of how to bid for properties and advice and support to help with placing bids would be available from the Housing Options Team.

Tenants could also be referred to a variety of support services if they were suffering any personal issues as a result of exposure to a fire in their home or block.

It is difficult to state how long it would take someone to successfully bid for a vacant property as this would depend on a number of factors, including the property size required and whether or not the household had any specific rehousing needs (e.g. needing a ground floor property)

Tenants granted management transfers do have some priority for bidding for available properties but they would be bidding alongside others who also have high priority for bidding on other grounds (e.g. priority homeless and priority medical transfers). This means it is not possible to say how long it would take someone to successfully bid. In the last year, 40% of properties let were one-bedroom properties and only 3% had four bedrooms.

Paul Byer  
Service Improvement and Involvement Manager  
06/11/17

This page is intentionally left blank

## **HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

### **FIRE SAFETY SCRUTINY REVIEW**

#### **Notes from the London Scrutiny Network meeting – 13 October 2017**

Cllr Mick O’Sullivan, Chair of the Housing Scrutiny Committee, and the committee clerk attended the recent London Scrutiny Network meeting on fire safety. The session included presentations from the Centre for Public Scrutiny, the London Fire Brigade, the London Assembly, and the Royal Society of Arts.

A number of points were made which were relevant to the committee’s review, as follows:

- Local authorities need to take responsibility for the housing stock they own, even if they do not manage it directly. Although Grenfell Tower was managed by Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation, the local authority was being held to account for the failings that led to the fire.
- Local authorities need to engage with residents in a meaningful way, and build trust and positive relationships with local communities. Some local authorities tend to carry out resident engagement in a very formal way; it may be beneficial to carry out more engagement in community settings and online.
- Residents who are worried, distressed or angry may not engage with local authorities in a calm and controlled way. This does not mean their views should be discounted.
- High rise buildings will become increasingly common as the density of cities increases. In general, fires in tall buildings need to be tackled internally, as hoses from fire engines cannot reach the upper floors of tall buildings.
- The ‘Stay Put’ Policy is still supported by the London Fire Brigade. Many high-rise residential buildings are not designed to facilitate mass evacuation and therefore ‘Stay Put’ is the safest option. Mass evacuations can hinder the work of the Fire Brigade, and can contribute to the spread of fire if fire doors are propped open.
- Although the Stay Put policy was supported, the London Fire Brigade was campaigning for landlords to make evacuation plans for residents in case they had to leave their property. This was particularly important for vulnerable residents, who may require a personal emergency evacuation plan.
- The Fire Brigade was aware that some residents tampered with self-closing mechanisms on fire doors. As this compromised the safety of buildings, it was suggested that landlords should regularly check that these mechanisms are working properly.
- The Fire Brigade emphasised the importance of fire risk assessments being completed by a suitably qualified and competent person. It was suggested that fire risks could be assessed by a chartered fire engineer.
- The London Assembly was reviewing how it could contribute to scrutiny work being carried out following the Grenfell Tower fire. Possible topics included a review of mutual aid arrangements, how tenants are included in regeneration plans, and the governance of social housing in London. From April 2018 the London Assembly would have a Fire, Resilience, and Emergency Planning Committee.

## Notes from the London Build Expo Fire Safety Summit – 25 October 2017

Cllr Mick O’Sullivan, Chair of the Housing Scrutiny Committee, and the committee clerk attended the recent London Build Expo Fire Safety Summit. The event included a panel discussion on the fire safety work of local authorities, and presentations on fire safety in tall buildings, the benefits of retrofitting sprinkler systems, and the importance of professional fire engineering.

A number of points were made which were relevant to the committee’s review, as follows:

- Some local authorities had taken the decision to retrofit sprinkler systems in their housing blocks, including Waltham Forest and Croydon.
- If a local authority intends to retrofit sprinklers it needs to clearly communicate with residents about what is required of them during the installation, and take decisions on whether to provide sprinklers to all residents at cost to the local authority, or recharge leaseholders for the works.
- The cost of installing sprinkler systems was increasing. The cost of installing sprinkler systems significantly affected the housing revenue account, and authorities that had installed sprinkler systems had delayed other housing improvements as a result.
- Some local authorities were considering installing secondary stairwells in their properties, although it was recognised that this was complex work that would likely involve reconfiguring properties and rehoming residents.
- Around 400 new tall buildings would be built in London over the next three years. Many of these would be mixed use, and as a result different regulatory frameworks applied to different sections of the building. This created a complex environment for fire fighters to work in.
- The regulations on the installation of sprinkler systems varied across the UK. In Wales, sprinkler systems are required in all new and refurbished residential buildings. In Scotland, all new buildings taller than 18m must be fitted with sprinklers. In England, only new buildings taller than 30m are required to have a sprinkler system.
- There are various sprinkler products available. Different buildings need different systems depending on plumbing and the configuration of the building. Although some landlords are concerned about vandalism, some sprinkler systems are concealed in light fittings and are only visible in the event of a fire.
- The first high rise residential building in England to be retrofitted with a sprinkler system was Callow Mount in Sheffield. These works were carried out in 2011 at a cost of approximately £1,150 for each one bedroom flat. Retrofitting sprinklers in a three bedroom flat cost approximately £2,300.
- Sprinklers are very effective and it was suggested that retrofitting sprinklers is also cost effective given the significant costs associated with refurbishment and rehoming residents in the event of a fire.
- Sprinklers activated within 30 seconds of a fire starting. Research had demonstrated that it could take up to 20 minutes for fire fighters to begin tackling a fire, taking into account the time it takes for the fire to be identified, for a call to be made to the emergency services, and for them to attend and prepare their equipment.
- The Fire Industry Association recommended that a chartered fire engineer should be consulted from the design stage of a new build project through to completion. Although many developers employed a fire engineer to produce a building’s fire strategy, a professional fire engineer with the relevant competencies and experience could contribute to the design of the building and oversee construction to ensure that fire safety features are installed successfully.



Report of: **Service Director - Housing Property Services**

Meeting of:	Date	Ward(s)
Housing Scrutiny Committee	16 November 2017	All

Delete as appropriate	Exempt	Non-exempt
-----------------------	--------	------------

## **SUBJECT: Capital Programme Scrutiny - 12 Month Update**

### **1. Synopsis**

- 1.1 On 21 April 2016 the Executive received a report from the Housing Scrutiny Committee regarding the delivery of the capital programme of cyclical works to Islington's own housing stock. Subsequently, on 20 October 2016, the Executive agreed its response to the recommendations set out in the scrutiny report to further improve the effective and efficient delivery of this service for the benefit of all Council residents (tenants and leaseholders). This report updates the Housing Scrutiny Committee on progress with the recommendations agreed by the Executive.

### **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 To note the progress made against the recommendations, as set out in paragraph 4 of this report.

### **3. Background**

3. The aims of the review were to: investigate how contractors are selected, look at opportunities for using local labour and explore who determines what works are undertaken.

The review ran from September 2015 until January 2016 and evidence was received from a variety of sources, namely Council Officers, a representative from one of the current service providers, and the Islington Leaseholders Association. Certain relevant documentary evidence was presented such as:

- Key performance indicators for capital works contractors
- Building inflation data and associated analysis
- Residents' Improvement Taskforce Major Works Consultation Report and Action Plan
- Results of major works telephone survey
- Summaries of ward councillor case work
- Information on Mears' social value work, satisfaction survey form and technical diagrams.

3.2 The scrutiny review resulted in 15 recommendations to help improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the delivery of the Housing Capital Programme. Progress made with each of the recommendations is set out below.

#### 4. Recommendations and Service Update

4.1 The existing capital works contracts used to deliver cyclical works projects to Islington’s housing stock were let as a Term Partnering Contract for a minimum of 10 years, but with two break clauses at years 4 and 7. The 7 year term expires in 2018, the contract allows a final extension of up to 3 years. A review of the contract was undertaken including its value for money and a decision made in February 2017 to extend the contract for one year.

Work is now underway to re-procure new contractors, the recommendations from the Housing Scrutiny Committee are therefore very relevant and will be used in the decision making process. Many of the decisions are yet to be finalised as officers are still at the options appraisal stage. Responses provided below should be read with this in mind.

##### 4.2 Recommendation 1

**In future capital works contracts, the council should consider increasing its role in the selection and monitoring of sub-contractors, to ensure that those contractors which carry out high-quality work, establish positive relationships with residents and use local labour are preferred over those with recorded performance issues.**

A variety of options to achieve greater control over subcontractors is currently being considered, along with pros and cons, please see table below:

<b>Option</b>	<b>Pro</b>	<b>Con</b>
Set up framework of “approved” subcontractors, from which main contractor can choose.	Provides a vetting procedure.	Very time consuming for Islington to set up and monitor.  The more formal system may cause delays to contracts for which Islington would be charged.  May provide insufficient work for subcontractors.  Likely to be too time consuming for subcontractors to get set up to give best VFM.  Could be deemed inflexible, can’t take on new companies once the framework is set up.
Devise simple quality check list for subcontractors and insist that all subcontractors are subject to Islington Council checks before being used.	Provides a more robust system than currently in place but leaves main contractor to choose preferred subcontractor on a project by project arrangement.	Will be a little more onerous in terms of Council officer time up front but may save time later into the process.
Introduce a requirement that evidence of payments to subcontractors is provided upon request.	Aimed at overcoming problems with subcontractors alleging that they are not paid on time by main contractor.	

All the above are subject to further legal, procurement and financial advice.



4.3 **Recommendation 2**  
**That penalty clauses be reinstated into future capital works contracts to ensure appropriate recourse in the event of performance issues, and incentives be explored as a means of improving performance.**

The contract (whichever is selected) will contain penalty clauses to allow the contract to be terminated following irredeemable break down in relationship between the Council and the contractor, or as a result of very poor performance by the contractor where there is no realistic prospect of satisfactory improvement.

Incentives are likely to be included with a view to achieving best value for money, such as scaffolding being charged for erection and striking only (i.e. no hire period), and schedule or rate items to be inclusive of preliminaries, thus over running projects (where delays are caused by the contractor) start to cost the contractor.

4.4 **Recommendation 3**  
**That the council further consider social value matters when procuring capital works contracts.**

Inclusion of social gain will be included in the contract but is likely to be restricted to initiatives that benefit the area/borough as a whole and not just a small section of the community. Initiatives are likely to be modest and the cost of Social Value works will be discretely re-charged to the Council, it is therefore in our interests to ensure they are carefully specified and sanctioned by the Council. However, initiatives such as teaching basic DIY decorating skills to residents have always been well received (and help residents to care for their homes), providing careers insight to local schools about the construction industry has been gratefully received, providing reduced hours paid employment for a small number of young people with severe learning difficulties is also something that has a modest price tag but is very valuable to those who benefit from the scheme.

4.5 **Recommendation 4**  
**Given the financial challenges facing the council, all procurement options be explored to ensure that best value is achieved when the capital works contracts are due to be re-tendered. The council should consider if the greatest value can be obtained through term partnering agreements, procuring works in smaller lots, or carrying out certain works in-house.**

All the points raised under within this recommendation are very pertinent and have formed an important part of our discussion and analysis. We are still in the decision making process, but to summarise our findings to date, please see table overleaf:

<u>Option for greatest VFM</u>	<u>Pros</u>	<u>Cons</u>
<p>Use of Partnering Contracts and long term agreements, as opposed to individual traditional forms of contract.</p>	<p>The value and benefits to the Council of using Partnering Contracts is considered to vastly outweigh advantages of traditional individual tender arrangements. The Council benefits hugely from utilising the Contractors' experience and knowledge during the design stages of the contract.</p> <p>Collaborative working is an extremely cost effective and economic way of working, money and time is not wasted on litigation.</p> <p>Our recent experience undertaking emergency work at Braithwaite House was only possible because we had a very good partnering relationship with Breyer Group.</p> <p>Partnering contracts give cost certainty over the life of the contract (possibly up to 10 years).</p>	<p>The pre-contract period and start on site date are often harder to predict than when using an individually tendered traditional contract.</p> <p>Very few other tangible benefits to a traditional contract for this type of work.</p>
<p>Use of smaller lots</p>	<p>More but smaller lots will give smaller contractors an opportunity to work with us.</p> <p>We are currently considering this model for the street properties rather than estate based properties.</p>	<p>Smaller contractors often experience cash flow problems with large contracts.</p> <p>Smaller contractors will not have the infrastructure or be able to cope with the huge amount of work and expenditure that is required in some projects on some of our estates (e.g. Bemerton or Girdlestone) nor some of the complex problems posed by tower blocks (use of mast climbers).</p> <p>Unlikely to achieve value for money as numerous tenders are expensive for both Islington and for contractors.</p> <p>Smaller contractors are often unable to quickly adapt to changing situations/work flow etc.</p> <p>Using a greater number of smaller lots will result in numerous contracts which will be more labour intensive to manage, and generate greater difficulty in achieving uniformity.</p> <p>Smaller contractors all making much smaller profit margins will have far less scope to assist with Social Value initiatives.</p>

Undertaking certain works in-house	No management company overheads and profit to pay.	<p>The skills and experience of the in-house team do not readily lend themselves to the level of site management, tendering, organisation and supervision that this model would require.</p> <p>Islington Council is almost certainly unable to compete competitively with large specialist Building Contractors, driven and experienced in making profit.</p> <p>This model would require the use of smaller “subcontractor” type companies who would be required to follow Islington’s exacting procurement procedures, which, are likely to be difficult to achieve.</p> <p>This option carries significant health and safety and financial implications.</p>
------------------------------------	--	--

**4.6 Recommendation 5**

**To assist in the future procurement of capital works, consideration be given to establishing a benchmarking club with other London local authorities, to ensure best practice on contractual, financial, and performance matters.**

We are currently in the process of resurrecting this with colleagues from the London Boroughs of Haringey and Redbridge.

**4.7 Recommendation 6**

**In order to continue gauging satisfaction and identifying performance issues, the council should continue and expand the pilot survey of residents before, during and after capital works.**

The pilot monitoring of satisfaction before and during works was successful in that it demonstrated numerous problems, the two most significant being that residents reported problems and issues with work that was not linked to the capital works, or found fault with work that was only partially completed. We are currently looking into ways to gauge resident satisfaction upon completion of projects which is something we are very committed to doing as thoroughly and as meaningfully as possible.

We intend to incorporate a detailed monitoring of defects exercise at the end of 12 months from completion of projects and may incorporate some form of resident satisfaction survey at this point.

**4.8 Recommendation 7**

**That further work be carried out to increase the accessibility and transparency of leaseholder service charges for capital works, and the council seek to discontinue the use of commercial sensitivity clauses relating to the schedules of rates when tendering for future capital works contracts.**

We are currently looking seriously at the option of using nationally recognised Schedules of Rates rather than a bespoke schedule of items which our current contracts use. This would overcome the above mentioned problem with leaseholders.

Over the last 12 months we have developed a much better template for the dissemination of information to leaseholders around costs incurred as a result of capital works, far fewer enquiries are being received as a result.

- 4.9 **Recommendation 8**  
**With a view to increasing resident engagement and transparency, resident inspectors be appointed to review capital works as they are being carried out. It is suggested that the council engage with TRAs, TMOs and other resident groups on this matter.**

We always encourage residents via their TRAs and TMOs to join professional staff on the final estate walk about and this will continue. Our Project Liaison Officers are always very keen to assist residents in setting up Steering Groups at the beginning of cyclical works and we will be continuing to do this as they form a very useful channel for two way communications. We would like to develop this further to ensure full resident engagement through the steering groups and transparency.

- 4.10 **Recommendation 9**  
**The seven-year basis of the cyclical improvement programme be reviewed to ensure that the greatest value for money is achieved. It is suggested that the basis of any capital works programme should be flexible and based on the life-cycles of components.**

This initiative has already been introduced. Contract documentation for our new contracts will reflect this way of working.

- 4.11 **Recommendation 10**  
**Following previous resident involvement in the selection of capital works contractors, tenants and leaseholders should continue to be involved in decisions about procurement and the future of the service.**

Tenants and leaseholders will be consulted on this procurement exercise. However, procurement is highly technical and complex and we are working to a tight programme, it is not always appropriate to include residents in tender assessments.

- 4.12 **Recommendation 11**  
**To improve the response to capital works consultations, the council seek to engage further with tenants and leaseholders, particularly those in areas without TRAs which tend to have a lower response rate to consultations.**

Agreed. A recent Service Review Group made up of Leaseholders and tenants have provided some very helpful feedback with regards the delivery of cyclical works that we are very grateful for and will be taking on board. Amongst an array of suggestions, we have been asked to provide tenants with information about the cost of cyclical works, which we shall be very happy to do, we have been asked to provide a quick, easy to read summary at the beginning of correspondence that contains a lot of detailed information, thus assisting residents with limited time, which we shall endeavour to provide and we have been asked specifically to provide residents with more information on time frames.

- 4.13 **Recommendation 12**  
**The council seek to use the capital works programme to increase the quantity and quality of local employment opportunities and implement the findings of the Employment Commission.**

Agreed, this will be included in the procurement documents (see response to recommendation 4 above).

- 4.14 **Recommendation 13**  
**Consideration be given to establishing an in-house capability to carry out a proportion of planned maintenance works, subject to consultations with labour unions.**

As discussed in response to recommendation 4 above.

- 4.15 **Recommendation 14**  
**Future capital works contracts should require property data compiled by contractors to be held in an accessible format to enable integration into the council's own ICT systems. The contracts should stipulate that all such data is owned by the council.**

This is already in place.

- 4.16 **Recommendation 15**  
**The service explore opportunities for income generation, such as providing contractors with on-site facilities on a commercial basis.**

Agreed, this is already in hand.

## **5. Implications**

### **5.1 Financial Implications:**

Some of the recommendations mentioned above will/could have financial implications, and these have been alluded to in the response.

### **5.2 Legal Implications:**

As part of the procurement exercise advice will be sought from colleagues in the legal department as well as the procurement team at all relevant stages.

### **5.3 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.

Resident Impact Assessments (including assessment of equalities implications) will be undertaken as part of the re-procurement exercise. Assessments will also be carried out where proposals have equalities implications and other implications for residents.

### **5.4 Environmental Impact Assessment:**

Procurement documents will contain specific requirements relating to the recycling of the majority of waste materials from site, the use of vehicles, local suppliers. The nature of the cyclical works will, wherever possible, combine the renewal of life expired components with new components that are environmentally friendly, reduce carbon emissions.

## **6. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations**

- 6.1 The Committee is asked to note progress made with implementation of the recommendations.

**Background papers:** None

**Appendices:** None

**Final report clearance:**

**Signed by:**

Simon Kwong

6<sup>th</sup> November 2017

Service Director - Housing Property Services

Date:

Report Author: Christine Short, Head of Capital Programme  
Tel: 020 7527 4202  
Email: Christine.short@islington.gov.uk

## HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2017/18

### 20 JUNE 2017

1. Urgent Item: Fire Safety following the Grenfell Tower Fire
2. Membership, Terms of Reference and Dates of Meetings
3. Quarterly Review of Housing Performance (Q4 2016/17)
4. Housing Services for Vulnerable People: Final Report
5. Scrutiny Topics and Work Plan 2017/18

### 17 JULY 2017

1. Fire Safety Scrutiny Review: SID and Witness Evidence
2. Housing Communications Scrutiny Review: SID and Introductory Presentation

### 4 SEPTEMBER 2017

1. Fire Safety Scrutiny Review: Witness Evidence
2. Housing Communications Scrutiny Review: Witness Evidence
3. Quarterly Review of Housing Performance (Q1 2017/18)

### 3 OCTOBER 2017

1. Fire Safety Scrutiny Review: Witness Evidence
2. Housing Communications Scrutiny Review: Witness Evidence

### 16 NOVEMBER 2017

1. Housing Communications Scrutiny Review: Witness Evidence
2. Fire Safety Scrutiny Review: Witness Evidence
3. Capital Programme Scrutiny 2015/16 – 12 Month Report Back

### 11 DECEMBER 2017

1. Fire Safety Scrutiny Review: Draft Recommendations
2. The Council's New Build Programme Mini-Review: SID and Witness Evidence
3. Responsive Repairs Scrutiny 2015/16 – 12 Month Report Back
4. Quarterly Review of Housing Performance (Q2 2017/18)

### 30 JANUARY 2018

1. RSL Scrutiny (*Guinness Partnership TBC*)
2. Fire Safety Scrutiny Review: Final Report
3. Housing Communications Scrutiny Review: Draft Recommendations
4. The Council's New Build Programme Mini-Review: Witness Evidence and Conclusions

## **FEBRUARY 2018 – TBC**

1. Scrutiny of Partners for Improvement in Islington

## **13 MARCH 2018**

1. [The Council's New Build Programme Mini-Review: Final Report](#)
2. [Housing Communications Scrutiny Review: Final Report](#)
3. How Islington Council works with Housing Associations
4. Quarterly Review of Housing Performance (Q3 2017/18) & Annual Executive Member Presentation