

**Housing Scrutiny Committee - 11 September 2018**

Minutes of the meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Committee held at Committee Room 1, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD - Islington Town Hall on 11 September 2018 at 7.30 pm.

**Present:**           **Councillors:**           O'Sullivan (Chair), Lukes (Vice-Chair), Debono, Gallagher, Heather, Mackmurdie, O'Halloran, Russell, McDonald and Dean

**Councillor Michael O'Sullivan in the Chair**

**20           APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item 1)**

Apologies were received from Councillor Hamitouche.

**21           DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item 2)**

There were no declarations of substitute members.

**22           DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS (Item 3)**

There were no declarations of interest.

**23           MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (Item 4)**

**RESOLVED:**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 12 July 2018 be confirmed as an accurate record of proceedings and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

**24           CHAIR'S REPORT (Item 5)**

A minutes silence was observed by members of the Committee on the death of ex Councillor Gary Doolan.

The Chair expressed the Committee's thanks on Officers speedy response to the cladding problem in Bunhill in conjunction with Peabody Housing and hoped that lessons and experiences learnt will be shared in any future incident.

Also the Chair informed the meeting that an officer briefing with regards to the Housing Green Paper will be provided to Members at a future meeting.

The Chair informed the meeting that both Mr Donaghey and Councillor MacKmurdie had volunteered to attend the Homelessness Conference on 16 October. The Clerk to look at facilitating their attendance.

**25           ORDER OF BUSINESS (Item 6)**

The order of business would be B2, B1 and B3.

**26           PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item 7)**

The chair set out the procedure for public questions and the filming of meetings.

**27** **QUARTERLY REVIEW OF HOUSING PERFORMANCE (Q1 2018/19) (Item B1)**  
Councillor Diarmaid Ward, Executive Member for Housing and Development, introduced the quarterly performance report.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- 183 affordable homes was completed in quarter one and the Council was on target to build 1900 affordable homes, of which 550 are being built as Council homes for rent. Members were reminded that supply of homes was beyond the council's powers as this was through S106 agreements and housing associations and private developers.
- The Executive Member for Housing reiterated that although vast amount of repairs are completed on time, complex repairs fester for too long hence the increase in complaints received by councillors. Councillor Ward acknowledged that the figure of 20% of repairs not being done on time was not good and need addressed as soon as possible.
- Suggestions such as introducing a traffic light system to denote peak and quiet periods for customers when reporting repairs online and allowing residents to access their repairs history was noted. Councillor Ward indicated that with the newly launched technology, possible suggestions could be possibly incorporated into the system.
- On the reported 96.6% satisfaction rate of repairs undertaken by Partners, Members were directed to focus on the figure of 11% of major works open over three months as this was worrying. The Executive Member advised that 97% satisfaction rate was easily achieved especially if this relates to routine and minor works. The Committee welcomed the Chief Executive of Partners offer to contact 20 of their residents every month.
- The number of rent arrears is presently high and with the impending universal credit, the situation was likely to worsen. Members were informed that issues such as low income and benefit not being paid for six weeks were bound to cause rent arrears and all are symptoms of government policies in relation to social housing.
- Members welcomed the news that the number of households accepted as homeless had fallen, which is attributable to the effective work of staff and in particular the Trail Blazer Programme which recognises the need to intervene before people become homeless. Councillor Ward welcomed the central government programme but was concerned with the impact when funds are withdrawn. The meeting was informed that Council recognises the need to work with landlords and employers by intervening early on issues such as universal credit, rent plan etc, measures which would mitigate the level of homelessness. It was noted that a main reason for homelessness was the end of assured shorthold tenancy.
- In response to a question about the impact of housing allowance being capped, Councillor Ward informed the meeting that Officers continue to liaise with landlords on accepting local housing allowance rates, with the Council prepared to guarantee rent payments for a year.
- Members were informed of the devastating impact of the S20 of the Housing Act which allows landlords in the private rented sector to evict tenants for good reason

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and that the homelessness could only be addressed through national legislation.

- In response to a question on controls the Council had in place to ensure that homeless people are not denied support due to central governments targets, Councillor Ward acknowledged that traditionally this practice of 'gatekeeping' existed however Islington's informal method of control via its scrutiny members would ensure that this does not happen.
- With regards to concerns about multi skilling of its operatives, Councillor Ward informed members that that this was not about operatives having multi trades but operatives being able to undertake ancillary minor works while on site. Meeting was informed that some of the 2016/17 apprentices who had completed their training would be applying for permanent jobs.
- In a response to gas safety concerns about how works are carried out especially within a block of flat where leaseholders are not subjected to the same treatment as Council tenants, members were advised that this was a national government issue with Council having no control over it, however Councillor Ward advised that he would look into the issue.
- On the issue of low rent collection in June being attributed to the 2018 football world cup, Members were reassured that trends like this occur during certain events such as Christmas and not due to staff absences or inability to collect rents.
- The meeting was informed that although definition of affordable rents is regarded as 80% of the market rent, Islington would not be applying the definition or the guidelines set by central government.
- On whether Islington's experience of Trailblazer was being shared with other neighbouring boroughs such as Hackney, Councillor Ward advised that this initiative involved a consortium of 8 boroughs.

The Committee thanked Councillor Ward for his attendance.

### **RESOLVED:**

That that progress against key performance indicators in Quarter 1 2018/2019 be noted.

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### **DRAFT SCRUTINY INITIATION DOCUMENT AND INTRODUCTORY PRESENTATION ON RESPONSIVE REPAIRS (Item B2)**

Matt West, Housing Director – Housing Property Services, presented the Scrutiny Initiation Document, copy interleaved and the Committee received a presentation on Responsive Repairs. Following a discussion the issues raised included –

- Responsive Repairs include emergency repairs to council housing and communal works to roof spaces, communal electrics and drainages. Also included are trades and cyclical testing programmes. The responsive repairs team also undertake adaptations in council homes and offer handy person service to all residents, however Gas and safety checks, estate works, repairs to the road and capital works are not include in responsive repairs.
- The responsive team undertake over 75,000 repairs yearly of which 7,500 are completed within 2hrs, 15,000 in 24 hours and the rest is completed within 20

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working days.

- The repairs budget is £30 million, with 110 operatives covering over 21,000 directly managed properties
- The repairs process commences immediately from the moment the issue is logged either by telephone, online system or referral by councillors. Repairs are then prioritised, then the scheduling system allocates the work to the operatives by PDA. Operatives attend and complete work taking photographs before and after the works and records notes on system
- Random sampling is regularly carried out when jobs are completed however in instances about the quality of the works undertaken by a particular contractor, further sampling is undertaken.
- Due to the scale of the service, measures to monitor performance include customer satisfaction surveys, number of first time fix, jobs completed on time and appointments made and kept. Customer satisfaction is primary driver and it is carried out independently of the Council with a 93% satisfaction level as indicated in the survey carried out last month
- The Assistant Director acknowledged that the service receives about 1% complaints however this should be looked at in context of the 75,000 repairs undertaken yearly.
- Challenges experienced by the service include the number of complaints, diversity of the workforce, recruitment, IT development, unstable market and the scale of the operations.
- With regards to diversity in the work place, the Assistant Director acknowledged that although an industry wide issue, more needs to be done in terms of gender and ethnic background of staff as there is a recognition that the responsive team needs to reflect the society it serves. This is being addressed through its outreach and apprentice programme.
- In response to a question, the meeting was advised that the IT issues still remain especially with regards to the rollout of the capability of the dashboard which monitors performance across teams and wards. The Assistant Director indicated that by December, the system should be fully operational.
- In light of the concerns about the recent high prices in the building industry, the service has positioned itself into carrying out 85% of the repairs in house as compared to using contractors. Also the Council continues to work with neighbouring boroughs such as Hackney and Haringey on possible savings and sharing of services especially in terms of procurement.
- The Assistant Director highlighted a number of developments and work in progress to improve the service such as the soft launch of the Dashboard in winter of 2018; improvements to online services and appointments; offering its services to leaseholders at competitive rates; also commencing direct works on void properties and recently signed up 6 more young people on apprenticeship schemes.
- With regard to online repairs, Members were informed that public take up was low however further developments would be introduced to increase its functionality by

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the end of the year.

- The Service will be providing DIY videos to resident to assist residents with repairs that are not undertaken by the Council. Members were advised that although the multi skilling programme involving all operatives was presently half way through its duration, there is a recognition that this would assist in improving the levels of first time fixes. New vans, tools and materials are to be made available in 2019.
- Members were advised that with regards to the recommendations from the previous review on responsive repairs in 2016, the Ring and Bring service was currently being trialled. In addition the use of texts to update residents about appointments was being considered and the Service will be making better use of notice boards and Area Teams in an attempt to address and improve communication.
- With regard to the scrutiny process, Members were advised that a presentation will be provided from the repairs front line staff, a comparative neighbouring borough and site visits to be facilitated as part of the evidence gathering exercise.
- The Assistant Director acknowledged that during peak times there can be long waiting time experienced by tenants logging a repair, however advised that the online repair service should bring improvements. A suggestion on the possibility of incorporating a traffic light system on the Council website as a guide for tenants denoting peak and quiet times was noted.
- On concerns regarding how work was being allocated, the meeting was advised that the scheduling system should allocate work to the nearest operative.
- Members were concerned with the discrepancies reported about customer satisfaction levels by Officers, compared to experiences of their case work, the Assistant Director informed the meeting that the survey is carried out by independent company, and Officers look at further analysing where the level of dissatisfaction lies.
- On the long running casework mentioned by Members, the Assistant Director apologised and advised that details of such cases be referred to him or the customer services and it would be looked into.
- A suggestion that with the introduction of the Ring and Bring service, whether there was scope for repair operatives who presently work out of transit vans to switch to the use of electric assisted bicycles especially for minor works was noted.
- Photographs are being taken before and after carrying out repair works by operatives which has positively received by the operatives and beneficial as it allows the service to monitor the quality of the works undertaken by the operatives and importantly help to improve customer satisfaction.
- In response to a question on the possibility of tenant's being able to assess their repair history, the Assistant Director advised that this would be taken on board. In addition the Director advised that Members would be provided a demonstration of the online system so any input or suggestions are welcomed.
- A question was raised on whether the present dashboard system could seamlessly integrate with the 2 IT housing system especially in instances where a tenant is involved with another section of the council, such as social services, or the tenant

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has a support worker ie mental health.

- In response to a question about the challenges experienced by operatives accessing a leaseholders flat to fully address a fault in the tenants dwelling, the meeting was advised that in the short term not much could be done, however in the future with new blocks of flats being built, officers are liaising with the new build team on issues of the siting and location of communal cables and pipes to avoid access issues that repair operatives currently experiencing.
- On the issue of multiskilling, the Assistant Director advised Members that the Council is currently half way through a 3 year training programme which has been welcomed by operatives and beneficial to residents especially where works being undertaken are ancillary. A concern was raised that the programme could result in low morale amongst operatives as main skills acquired over the year was being diluted and concerns in the future that this initiative could be abandoned as it is evident in the private sector.
- In response to a question on the impact of cyclical repairs on responsive repairs, the Chair stated that although not being considered in this review , the Committee would be interested in the relationship between cyclical improvements and responsive repairs in the future.
- With regards to concerns raised by a leaseholder of being repeatedly charged for works undertaken, the Assistant Director requested that details be sent to Officers.
- A suggestion to involve the Disability Housing Panel very early on during the design of any IT systems and to be invited when Members visit Brewery Road to view the demonstration of the dashboard was noted.
- Members welcomed the dashboard system as it would result in the ability to measure performances of staff but concerns were raised about what the situation was with Partners as Islington residents should not be subjected to a two tiered system.

The Chair on behalf of the Committee thanked the Assistant Director for his presentation and requested that the Director of Property Services be invited to attend the next meeting.

### **RESOLVED**

1. That the Scrutiny Initiation Document be agreed.
2. That the Director of Property Services be invited to the next meeting.

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### **WORK PROGRAMME 2018/19 (Item B3)**

The Chair informed Members that as part of the Committee remit to review operations of housing associations, Clarion Housing will be invited to the October meeting . Also members were informed that later in the municipal year an invite will be sent to Partners to attend a Committee meeting for an update on their performances.

### **RESOLVED:**

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1. That the work programme for 2018/19 be noted
2. That Clarion be invited to the next meeting of the Committee in October .

The meeting ended at 9.50 pm

**CHAIR**