

London Borough of Islington

Housing Scrutiny Committee - 19 March 2019

Minutes of the meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Committee held at Committee Room 4, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD - Islington Town Hall on 19 March 2019 at 7.30 pm.

Present: **Councillors:** O'Sullivan (Chair), Lukes (Vice-Chair), Gallagher, Heather, Khondoker, Russell,

Co-optees: McDonald and Donaghey

Councillor Michael O'Sullivan in the Chair

71 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mackmurdie

72 DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item 2)

There were no declarations of substitute members.

73 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS (Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

74 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (Item 4)

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 12 February 2019 be confirmed as an accurate record of proceedings and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

75 CHAIR'S REPORT (Item 5)

The Chair informed members that he recently attended an event at the Centre Point where he received a presentation regarding young people and homelessness which was very informative and could be fed into the committee's review on this issue.

76 ORDER OF BUSINESS (Item 6)

The order of business would be as per the agenda.

77 PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item 7)

None

78 SCRUTINY REVIEW - DRAFT RECOMMENDATION (HOMELESSNESS) (Item B1)

On the issue of homelessness, the meeting was informed that although community groups had been invited to share their experiences and questionnaires sent, the Committee had not been able to obtain any responses or information to collate. In addition Councillors who had participated in the street count in December 2018 had not been able to share their evidence

with the committee.

The meeting was also informed that in light of the above factors and the committee not being able to fully consider the Housing Reduction Act and the Council's Homeless Strategy, a decision has been taken with the permission of the Chair that the review be included in the work programme in the 2019/2020 municipal year.

Members agreed that an informal group of three councillors be set up to continue with the review especially as evidence nationally clearly indicate that with the continuing economic uncertainties this was a serious issue that needs to be addressed.

The informal group of 3 councillors would carry out visits, speak to and receive evidence from community groups in line with what has been agreed in the Scrutiny Initiation Document during the summer months with a view to producing draft recommendations by the autumn of 2019.

Councillors Lukes, O'Sullivan and Khondoker agreed to be on the Informal group to continue the review into Homelessness.

RESOLVED:

1. That an informal group of three councillors continue with the review into Homelessness and report back to the committee its activities and findings by the autumn of 2019.
2. Councillors Lukes, O'Sullivan and Khondoker will be members of the informal group.

79 **SCRUTINY REVIEW - DRAFT RECOMMENDATION (RESPONSIVE REPAIRS) (Item B2)**

A copy of the draft recommendations was circulated at the meeting for consideration. The Chair informed the meeting that the draft recommendations before Members was not an exhaustive list and welcomed any additional recommendations to be submitted to the clerk of the committee.

RESOLVED:

That the draft recommendations be noted, subject to including an additional recommendation which will read: 'The Service needs to focus on a detailed analysis of the root causes of service failures within the population of repair jobs not completed first time to identify the reasons for failure and put in place measures such as systems approach thinking to correct these failures.

80 **FIRE SAFETY IN COUNCIL HOUSING - EXECUTIVE MEMBER RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATION (Item B3)**

The Chair took welcomed Maxine Holdsworth, Islington's Corporate Director of Housing following her stint at Kensington and Chelsea Council in the aftermath of the Grenfell fire incident in 2017.

During consideration of the report, the following points were made:

- With regards to the recommendation about sprinklers, meeting was advised although not a panacea, concerns still remain about safety, its maintenance and vandalism. The Director assured the meeting that Council is currently carrying out a

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full appraisal of this issue and work is ongoing with the implementation of wet risers in high rise buildings which will be done in conjunction with fire safety guidelines.

- On the issue of safety around communal areas in buildings, members welcomed the provision of cycle hangers on council estates but that it should not be at the expense of resident safety. Councillor Ward indicated that he would look into this issue in conjunction with concerns raised about request for keys.
- Members welcomed the support of the Council's SHINE support network and use of other services such as SHP or social services to vulnerable residents.
- In response to concerns about evacuation plans of vulnerable people and caretakers not having a list of those in need, the Corporate Director Housing reassured members that with over 35000 properties, a new approach is required that looks at high complex risks. Council is currently working with the fire service to identify tall buildings with complex layouts on areas where assistance would be required by residents.
- With regard to recommendation 1, it was noted that although the Grenfell Tower inquiry is still ongoing, things were being done especially with the Council considering the potential implications of the Hackitt review into the regulatory framework relating to fire safety.
- Recommendation 2 – An interim report detailing actions that the Council will carry out following fire safety related reviews will be brought back to the Housing Scrutiny Committee in due course. Members requested that fire risk assessment registers for all high rise buildings be updated in order to provide some reassurance to residents.
- Recommendation 5 – The Corporate Director Housing acknowledged that although PEEPs are noticeable in work places buildings, its effectiveness was still dependent on the presence of a member of staff to execute the plan, however following advice from the Fire Services, Premises Information Boxes which is to help direct firefighters to vulnerable tenants in residential blocks is being piloted at Braithwaite House, Perth House, Selkirk House and Fyfield.
- Recommendation 6 – The view was expressed that with regards to properties being managed by Partners for Improvement and plans to bring it back in house, the Committee should consider reviewing Partners evacuation plans to ensure it is in line with the Council's.
- Recommendation 10 – Members requested that the issue of retro fitting of sprinklers be revisited by Council.
- Recommendation 12 – Members welcomed the policy of zero tolerance in respect of resident belongings being stored in the common areas. On the issue of obtaining keys to street properties and the anxiety among residents, members requested that the issue be revisited.
- Recommendation 15 – Members were reassured that in cases of hoarding especially caused by vulnerable people, mobile sprinklers will be installed.
- Recommendation 17 – On the issue of regular inspections of communal fire safety doors, the Corporate Director of Housing indicated that this issue will be looked into

further.

- With regards to Recommendation 4:21, the Corporate Director Housing informed the meeting that her responsibility at Kensington and Chelsea was not related to fire safety issues but with re-housing of tenants affected by the fire. In addition members were made aware of potential conflict of interest in inviting Chelsea and Kensington officers to give evidence as the inquiry was still ongoing. Members agreed to remove this recommendation.

The Chair thanked the Corporate Director Housing on her contribution and requested that in light of the importance of fire safety on all council buildings that a further update be scheduled in the work programme for the 2019/20 municipal year.

RESOLVED:

1. That, subject to the above comments, the report be noted
2. A report on fire safety be brought back to the committee next year for a further update.

81

QUARTERLY REVIEW OF HOUSING PERFORMANCE (Q3 2018/19) (Item B4)

Councillor Diarmaid Ward, Executive Member for Housing and Development, introduced the quarterly performance report.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- Members were informed of two new indicators to be reported quarterly; the number of affordable homes completed by developers and the total number of affordable homes. Members were advised that the Council is on target of building 1900 new homes by 2022, of which 550 will be Council homes. Members were reminded that the supply of homes is secured through its S106 legal agreements with developers.
- The Executive Member advised that the first time fixes of 81% was below the 85% target however the Council continues to aim to do better.
- With regards to the rent arrears of 2.9%, the meeting was advised that this was solely due to the impact of the implementation of the Universal credit.
- On the issue of homelessness, the meeting was informed that the council is meeting its objective to reduce homelessness through its partnership working and the Trailblazer initiative, however members were reminded that the funding received from central government was limited. Meeting was advised that insufficient supply of affordable housing and the removal of assured short-hold tenancies in the private sector such as housing associations still remain the reasons for an increase in homelessness and only a change in government policy would result in an improvement.
- Members were advised that the Homeless Reduction Act has resulted in additional duties and responsibility on local authorities without additional funding support.
- Members were informed of the success of the multi skill training of the operatives, a positive initiative which well received by both the operatives as a career

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development and by residents.

- Meeting was informed that the Council currently has 6 apprentices and 2 new trainee surveyors with emphasis on local residents.
- In response to the Chair request for a detailed report on the 19 % of repair works that required multiple visits by operatives and the reasons, the Executive Member for Housing indicated that he would look into this and report back.
- In terms of affordable homes, the Executive Member advised that affordable is a statutory definition which the council does not recognise. In terms of the Council's planning permissions any development planned, of the 50% described as affordable, 35% must be genuinely affordable for social or council rent and the rest intermediate housing such as shared ownership.
- With regards to concerns about housing associations in the borough disposing their housing assets and using the proceeds to build homes in other parts of the country, the Executive Member Housing reassured members that the council would only dispose assets that were in a serious in a state of disrepair and would expect similar standards but had no control in how they manage their assets. The Executive Member Housing informed that he would be raise this issue with representatives of Clarion Housing and seeking their explanation.
- On the issue of damp and mould, Councillor Russell mentioned a project that the GLA and a RSL had been involved in to address this issue and would circulate the details to Officers.
- The meeting was informed that despite reassurances received from the Managing Director of Partners Improvement at the last committee meeting in February, neither him or any of his senior management team attended the leaseholders forum meeting held which was held in March.

RESOLVED:

That the progress to the end of quarter 2 against key performance indicators be noted.

The meeting ended at 9.35 pm

CHAIR