

London Borough of Islington

**Housing Scrutiny Committee - 12 September 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 12 September 2019 at 7.30 pm.

**Present:**      **Councillors:**      O'Sullivan (Chair), Lukes (Vice-Chair), Debono, Gallagher, Hamitouche, Heather, Mackmurdie, McDonald (Co-Optee) and Donaghey (Co-Optee)

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

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

Apologies were received from Councillor Spall.

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

There were no declarations of substitute members.

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

There were no declarations of interest.

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

**RESOLVED:**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 15 July 2019 be confirmed as an accurate record of proceedings and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

**116      CHAIR'S REPORT (Item 5)**

None.

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

The order of business would be as per the agenda.

**118      PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item 7)**

None

**119      FIRE SAFETY IN COUNCIL HOUSING - OFFICER UPDATE (Item B1)**

Maxine Holdsworth, Corporate Director of Housing updated the meeting on fire safety in the council housing stock. The following points were highlighted.

- Meeting was advised that prior to the Grenfell fire, fire safety has always been on the radar, however following the incident a decision was taken to review all its cladding systems and a risk assessment of all its buildings. ACM cladding was identified in Braithwaite house and removed by August 2017.

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- The Council monitors fire safety guidance and regulation for tall buildings through the London Council Housing Directors attended by Directors from councils across London, the Homes and Estates Safety Board which is independently chaired and the London Fire Brigade. At these forums or meetings recent fire incidents are discussed and serves as an opportunity to review any new guidance.
- Meeting was informed that Fire risk Assessments for the councils tall blocks are published on the council website.
- The Corporate Director highlighted the various works carried in some of the buildings. The insulation installed in Fyfield was identified as not suitable for tall blocks and therefore had to be removed and has now been replaced with a new cladding system with rock wool insulation.
- With regards to a question about delays in Spa Green fire stopping and communal heating works, the council appointed contractors has now agreed a programme of works in each of the three affected blocks. In response to the timescales, the Director advised that the programme timetable will be circulated to members.
- On the issue of sprinklers, regulations state that new build buildings of 10 storeys and over should include sprinkler systems. The council has not built any blocks above that height but is installing sprinklers at the new 9 storey block at Redbrick.
- The meeting was informed that keeping communal areas clear and safe remains an ongoing issue with residents and the Council keeps reiterating its message that this reduces the risk of fire outbreak and its spread. Members were advised that the policy is simple for residents to follow and estate staff will enforce if necessary.
- In terms of evacuation procedures, the meeting was advised that with regards to the council's purpose built properties, the stay put policy remains however with some properties – largely mansion blocks and street properties - evacuation procedures are in place.
- With regards to the evacuation plans for vulnerable residents in the case of a fire incident, the meeting was advised that the Council holds details of vulnerable residents which is available to be shared with London Fire Brigade (LFB). Following the Scrutiny meeting in March, officers in conjunction with the local fire brigade met the Housing Disability Panel where the LFB offer of home fire safety visits was promoted to concerned residents, a number of whom took up the offer.
- Members were reminded that both the council's Construction and Fire Safety Team are currently working on a pilot to trial the provision of data on resident mobility within a Premises Information Box (PIB) to look at how useful this type of information would be to LFB in practice and how to keep this information secure and up to date.
- On the issue of communication with residents, members were advised that fire safety advice and reassurances continues to be provided to residents around issues such as what to do in the event of a fire outbreak using leaflets, electronic noticeboards, revised safety notices, Islington Life Magazine, fire safety web pages and dedicated fire safety email address.

- Members were advised that the Council has budgeted £74m to spend on fire safety works over the next 5 years and to date the Service has spent £16.7m including works to convert dry rising mains to wet rising mains in Peregrine House and Michael Cliff House. Fire compartmentation will be included where necessary within the £20m for tall blocks.
- With regards to cladding concerns of properties managed by other landlords such as housing associations, the meeting was advised that a list of buildings had been provided. The removal of the cladding has been slow for a number of issues in some cases.
- In response to a suggestion that the Council should be installing FD 30 doors rather than FD 60, the meeting was informed that this was in line with the national guidance and not cost related.
- The meeting was advised that contracting with fire safety consultants is competitive and expensive following the Grenfell fire, the Council has its own in-house fire safety team which includes a team of in-house surveyors who monitor contractors' works and eventually sign it off. Meeting was informed that the Council is in the middle of a huge fire training event for fire engineers which will preclude the Council using the services of fire consultants. A member's concern that the monitoring of fire safety only occurs after works had been completed instead of during the works was noted.
- A suggestion to install sprinklers in vulnerable residents' properties was noted especially with residents with mobility issues who will find it difficult to evacuate and residents with mental issues. Corporate Director agreed to circulate the criteria employed for the use of sprinklers. A member agreed to email some further ideas regarding the criteria for the use of sprinklers. A suggestion for Officers to consider installing single use sprinklers in the flats of known hoarders was noted.
- In response to suggestions that the review on fire safety should be extended beyond tower blocks especially as there are a number of blocks of flats in the borough which have wooden claddings especially on their exteriors such as balconies, the Corporate Director acknowledged that all buildings with any form of cladding had been part of the review.

**RESOLVED:**

That the report be noted

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**QUARTERLY REVIEW OF HOUSING PERFORMANCE ( Q1 2019-2020) (Item B2)**

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

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- The Executive Member for Housing informed Committee that in quarter One 8 affordable homes were completed and the Council is anticipating another 31 homes to be completed by quarter 2. 11 Right to Buy sales occurred in this quarter hence the slight fall in affordable homes provided by the Council as there was a fall in receipts from tenants buying their homes.

- Meeting was advised that Council has assisted 35 over-crowded households during this period which is still below the profiled target for the quarter of 38, however this is an improvement on performance compared to last year.
- With regard to performances by Partners, the Executive Member for Housing acknowledged the complex repair works being carried out, however the lack of communication with their residents appear to be the main reasons for delays in completing repairs.
- Councillor Ward welcomed the improvement in first time repairs by the Council's responsive service. An improvement of 81.4% at the end of March 2019 to 85.4% at the end of June due to the service implementing a first time fix review and improvement plan.
- Rent arrears remains a concern as most tenants are affected by the continued roll-out of Universal Credit. Meeting was informed that at the start of June, 2,494 households were on universal credit with the result that there is an average increase in rent arrears of nearly £500.
- With regard to street homelessness, meeting was advised that 28 households had been supported in to accommodation which is slightly below the profiled target. Members were informed of the additional burden on all authorities due to the Housing Reduction Act which aims at preventing or relieving homelessness without households needing to be accepted for statutory homelessness.
- Members welcomed the improvement in first time fixes, the 85% was good however the 15% reported as not being completed first time needs to be addressed. A member of the committee enquired about the progress of the dashboard considering its expectation that it will boost performances. Cllr Ward indicated that he will report back on this issue at the next meeting.

**RESOLVED:**

That the report be noted

**121 SCRUTINY REVIEW ( MAJOR WORKS) PRESENTATION BY HEAD OF CAPITAL PROGRAMME DELIVERY (Item B3)**

Members received a presentation from Christine Short, Head of Capital Programme and Delivery. A copy of the presentation is interleaved with the agenda.

The following main points were noted in the presentation and in the discussion:

- Major works are planned, anticipated and often involve the renewal of major building components and tend to be of high value. Major works affect the whole block and in most cases the whole estate.
- Members were advised that considering major works tend to be high value, leaseholder consultation is mandatory especially as they will be charged for the works carried out. Similarly, resident consultation is carried out seeking their ideas and suggestions about the works.
- Major works is divided into 3 distinct phases, planning and information gathering, the design of the works and when work commences. The Asset Management database remains the primary source as it contains detailed information about the block and flats; what and when works had been carried out such as installation of roofs, kitchens, bathrooms, doors and

windows and their guarantees. As part of the information gathering exercise advice is sought from the responsive repairs team, Area Housing Officers and Estate Services in assessing works to be carried out.

- Members were advised that as a result of the high level of investments over the years the council now has a 10 year rolling programme instead of 7 years. The Council has a budget of £20M-£30M p.a. to carry out major works. All major works are split into projects to be managed by a project manager whose first task is to carry out an initial inspection of the building aided with photographs. Project managers will subsequently facilitate a resident consultation meeting to discuss the works and an opportunity to gather information and identify issues which a visual inspection may not necessarily reveal. Things such as resident experiencing similar issues with their internal drainage, or offer suggestions to address anti-social behaviour which could be addressed by some landscaping solutions.
- After the meeting with residents, the project manager has an on-site meeting with the appointed contractor where the scope of the works is discussed, the merits of materials and systems are researched to find the best solutions to certain specific issues and problems.
- The design stage involves plans and drawings being prepared and planning permission will be sought especially where windows are to be replaced. During this period prices for all elements are calculated, discussed and eventually agreed. Also Section 20 notices are served on leaseholders which details the works to be carried out from which an estimated cost will be provided to the leaseholder. On completion of this exercise, a works order is eventually issued to the contractor.
- The works phase involves the contractor setting up a site office, organises sub- contractors which involves tendering for the various tasks to ensure that they receive the best prices. The preparation at this point is really important as it helps to ensure that all the different trades are synchronised. At this stage the project manager changes his role and become the Contract Administrator. This is a contractual term and really means the building surveyor who manages the contract that oversees the project to ensure that programme runs smoothly and the cost is managed.
- While work is ongoing the service appoints a clerk of works who checks the quality of the works. The service monitors the works carried out as the contractor submits a spreadsheet every week which details progress of work. monthly call meetings are conducted between the management of both organisations.
- Members were advised that once works start on site there are always unexpected work that requires decisions and some which will affect the price. Although the Contract Administrator is responsible for making all decisions, those with financial implications are referred to the project Quantity Surveyor to negotiate. The project Quantity Surveyor will track expenditure and agree monthly valuations of work and release stage payments. In all projects, work is inspected and signed off by the contract administrator after inspections by clerk of works and mechanical and electrical inspectors. Any snagging items identified during the process are resolved. Members were reminded that for all major work, a 12 month's defects liability is incorporated into the contract

which ensures that they rectify any issue identified after the completion of the works and handover.

- In response to a question regarding remedial costs incurred by works carried out by contractors, the Head of Capital Programme and Delivery advised that any damage caused by contractors whilst carrying out their works was the responsibility of the contractors as they were duty bound to rectify it and did not result in additional cost to the Council.
- In response to a Members concern regarding the contractor involved in works on Highbury Quadrant Estate and their lack of communication with the residents, the Head of Capital Programme acknowledged that she would raise it with the project manager and revert back with a detailed response.
- On the question on whether bidders could be excluded from any current procurement exercise as a result of their previous performances, the meeting was advised that bids are assessed on the submission provided as part of the procurement process, Officers are not permitted to use background knowledge when marking submissions. Sometimes bids are anonymised to ensure fairness to all. The meeting was further advised that although Officers seek references for shortlisted contractors, they would not write a reference themselves for a contractor that had worked for Islington.

**RESOLVED:**

That the presentation be noted.

**122      WORK PROGRAMME 2019/2020 (Item B4)**  
**RESOLVED:**

That the work programme be noted.

The meeting ended at 9.45 pm

**CHAIR**