

London Borough of Islington

Housing Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting of a virtual meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Committee on 13 October 2020 at 7.30 pm.

Present: **Councillors:** O'Sullivan (Chair), Spall (Vice-Chair), Debono, Graham, Heather, Ozedmir and McDonald (Co-Optee)

Councillor Michael O'Sullivan in the Chair

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

Apologies were received from Councillors Hamitouche, Gallagher and Dean Donaghey

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

There were no declarations of substitute members

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

There were no declarations of interest

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

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 8 September 2020 be confirmed as an accurate record of proceedings and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

200 **MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES (Item)**

Scrutiny Review – Major Works – Minute 192

It was stated that a presentation would be submitted to the January meeting of the Committee on the 30 year business plan and Asset Management Strategy

Presentation – Dashboards – Minute 194

In response to a question it was stated that the visit to Brewery Road had still not taken place and that this would be arranged in November

It was also stated that in relation to the issues raised at Braithwaite House a vote on the communal heating had taken place and residents had opted for the communal heating to remain on throughout the year, and not turned off during the Summer months

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

None

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

The order of business would be as per the agenda...

203 **PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item 7)**

The Chair outlined the procedure for Public questions

204 **MEMBERSHIP, TERMS OF REFERENCE AND DATES OF MEETINGS (Item B1)**

RESOLVED:

That the membership, terms of reference and dates of meetings for the remainder of the municipal year 2020/21 be noted

205 **RESPONSIVE REPAIRS - 12 MONTH REPORT BACK (Item B2)**

Councillor Diarmaid Ward, Executive Member Housing, was present and accompanied by Matt West, Assistant Director Housing and Property Services and outlined the report

During discussion the following main points were made –

- Members were informed that during the COVID period there had been only a brief interruption to repairs, with only emergency service repairs being able to be carried out. PPE had been available to staff and staff had also been able to work from home, where appropriate. Some staff had been redeployed to the call line, and housing staff had erected Perspex screens at Council locations
- It was noted that 90% of repairs were first time fix but that there were always occasions where more than one visit would be required
- In response to a question as to the position to the phasing out of gas boilers from 2024, it was stated that the service is looking at how any new regulations can be complied with in order to meet the new Zero carbon targets
- In response to a question it was stated that the dashboard would also be used for the performance management of staff, and that this would be embedded in the training provided
- The Chair referred to a report that he had received detailing the repairs that had had to have a number of visits, and that this had shown the reasons why multiple visits had had to be undertaken, and that in most cases this was necessary. The Chair stated that this should be submitted to the Committee at a future meeting
- In response to a question, it was stated that staff would be skilled up to enable them to do repairs on electrical boilers when they are installed, however this is a 'work in progress', and solutions to the replacement of gas boilers was still being looked at
- Reference was made to leaseholders not being able to ascertain the cost of repairs in relation to Partner properties, and it was stated that where a Section 20 notice is not necessary, this information should be available. The Director of Housing stated that she would look at ways of improving information available to residents and leaseholders, and would inform Members of the action to be taken to improve this situation

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Director of Housing be requested to report to Members on the improvements to information to be provided to residents/leaseholders in relation to the issue raised above

- (b) That the report referred to above in relation to multiple repairs be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee

The Chair thanked Councillor Ward and Matt West for attending

206

SCRUTINY TOPICS AND WORK PROGRAMME 2020/2021 (Item B3)

Members discussed the options for the scrutiny topics and following such discussion it was –

RESOLVED:

- (a) That a major scrutiny review be agreed on Planning for the end of the PFI Partners properties in 2022, and that an initial presentation be made to the next meeting from the PFI Integration Board
- (b) That a presentation be made to the next meeting on the Triage system, and on the ASB team, including call response times, given the problems being experienced as a result of pressure on the system, as a result of the increase in calls due to COVID, and the measures that are being taken to address this
- (c) That a mini- scrutiny review be carried out into communal heating systems, including the benefits/risks of communal heating systems, costs to tenants, installation of smart meters, and including plans for Council new build properties, and insulation for such properties. The Council's new contractor on communal heating should give evidence to the Committee
- (d) That a presentation be given to the Committee on the position with regard to Housing Associations, including any disposal of properties, change of tenure and nomination rights

207

OTHER BUSINESS (Item)

Braithwaite House

A Member stated that he had not received an update on the position with regard to water pressure and the moving of the sensor as referred to at a previous meeting
In addition, it was stated that some leaseholders were experiencing difficulty obtaining re-mortgages and selling their properties due to the inability to obtain ESW1 forms that related to fire safety/cladding on high rise blocks. It was stated that this was a national problem and Government had recognised this and were addressing it. Whilst Braithwaite House had had its cladding replaced following the Grenfell tragedy, the current provisions did not recognise this and that there had only been 900 ESW1 forms completed across the country

The Committee were informed that there is also a shortage of professionals who are recognised to carry out the necessary requirements to complete an ESW1 form as a large professional indemnity is required. However not all mortgage lenders require an ESW1 form and that the Council were aware of leaseholders with problems and that the Council were making progress, and had requested a professional company, with a professional indemnity to look at these cases. The Council were talking to residents in this regard and work is taking place with other Local Authorities to lobby Government on this issue

In response to a question as to the position on local lettings on estates and how tenants are informed, where new build is taking place, such as on the Elthorne Estate, it was stated that

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a letter is sent out informing residents how they can apply, and Ward Councillors and Estate Managers are informed before such letter is circulated, and local lettings are monitored

RESOLVED:

- (a) That Director of Housing be requested to provide the information on ESW1 forms referred to above to Councillor Graham and the leaseholder that had raised the issue with him

- (b) That the Director of Housing inform Councillor Graham with regard to the situation with regard to the water pressure at Braithwaite House and moving of the sensor

The meeting ended at 8.45 p.m.

CHAIR