

London Borough of Islington

Housing Scrutiny Committee - 17 July 2023

Minutes of the meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD on 17 July 2023 at 7.30 pm.

Present: **Councillors:** Jackson (Chair), Cinko-Oner (Vice-Chair), Graham, Bossman-Quarshie, O'Sullivan, Gilgunn and Jegorovas-Armstrong

Councillor Jason Jackson in the Chair

15 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item 1)

Apologies were received from Councillor Ozdemir and apologies for lateness from Councillor Bossman-Quarshie due to council business.

16 DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item 2)

There were no declarations of substitute members.

17 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS (Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

18 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (Item 4)

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 6 June 2023 be confirmed as an accurate record of proceedings and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

19 CHAIR'S REPORT (Item 5)

The Chair informed the meeting that since the last meeting he attended the Local Government Association, an opportunity to learn what other authorities are doing in relation to housing challenges and what they are doing. Very informative views were shared which will be of benefit to the committee and its ongoing work.

20 EXTERNAL ATTENDEES (IF ANY) (Item 6)

None

21 ORDER OF BUSINESS (Item 7)

The order of business would be as per the agenda.

22 PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item 8)

None

23 **MAJOR SCRUTINY REVIEW 2023/24 : NEW HOMES BUILD IN ISLINGTON - TO AGREE SCRUTINY INITIATION DOCUMENT (Item B1)**

As an update, the Interim Acting Director of New Building Development & Delivery informed the meeting that due to council restructuring Karen Sullivan, the Acting Corporate Director of Community and Well Being will now be the Lead officer for the Committee's review into New Build Homes .

Meeting was advised that the overall aim of the review is to understand the Council's historic performance in comparison with other Local authority developers and to understand how the programme intends to adapt or mitigate against future challenges such as lack of land supply, high development costs and fluctuating current and future economic climates.

Officer explained how the review would be carried out, highlighting that committee will receive a presentation at the next meeting which will explain in detail where the Council is in terms of its housing programme and its challenges so that members could put the issues in context prior to the review exercise commencing. Committee will also receive written evidence, performance data, witness evidence from neighbouring boroughs and will benchmark council performances with other developing boroughs.

A number of suggestions, that the review should include evidence from other local authorities in other parts of England, that the review should not only focus on quantity but also consider issues around resilience and sustainability especially in light of the climate emergency. It was also noted that the SID made no reference to engagement with residents and tenants.

In light of the issue around scarcity of land within the borough, the review should consider the possibility of building up and in addition purchase land outside the borough to build good quality homes for Islington residents.

RESOLVED:

That subject to amending the details of the Acting Director as noted above, the Scrutiny Initiation Document be agreed.

24 **MAJOR SCRUTINY REVIEW 2022/23 : STRATEGIC REVIEW OF OVERCROWDING IN ISLINGTON - DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS (Item B2)**

The Chair informed the meeting that following the last committee in June, he and the Vice-Chair Councillor Cinko-Oner had met with the Director of Housing needs to draft recommendations, inviting members for their views, to add any additional recommendations or amend the draft recommendations in the agenda pack.

The Director of Housing advised members that draft recommendations are a result of officer presentation committee received, evidence from external parties such as Islington Law centre, Peabody etc .it was also noted that committee approved questionnaire that was sent not only to Islington tenants but residents living in properties managed by Partners Improvement, that feedback has been fed into some of the draft recommendations.

With regards to the downsizing scheme and the suggestion for it to be reported to the September meeting it was agreed that this should be considered at the November meeting.

The Chair stated that going forward when Executive have accepted the committee final report and draft recommendations he would suggest that Committee receive a 6 month update so that members will be able to monitor the implementation of the recommendations.

RESOLVED:

That the draft recommendations be agreed

That the reporting of the downsizing scheme to the Committee be considered at the November meeting

That an officer update regarding the draft recommendations be considered 6 months after being considered at Executive.

25

DAMP, CONDENSATION AND MOULD - OFFICER UPDATE (Item B3)

Matt West, the Director Housing Property Service updated the meeting on how council is addressing damp, condensation and mould within its housing stock and the following points were highlighted:

- Feedback on key performance indicators from members have been received which has informed headline key performance indicators and that a sub-set of indicators are being scoped.
- Further demographics data and "known to" Adult Social Care and Children Social Care has been added to the One View dashboard and that officers continue to work with Public Health to have a strong data-led approach, as a result of which a structured data monitoring plan has been designed and agreed for the short, mid- and long-term time of the programme.
- Phase two of Council's urgent response has been launched and letters to the remaining tenants who reported damp and mould between Jan 2020 – Dec 2022 were sent on the 19th of June 2023. It was noted that from that mail-out there, 37 new jobs were raised, that officers are monitoring responses and will design a process for contacting tenants who are yet to respond.
- It was noted that Officers continue to apply learning from its on-going engagement with residents, benchmarking and Housing Ombudsman special investigation reports. Also Council continues studying the outcomes of all Housing Ombudsman investigations, the 3 reports into other council's and housing associations to learn from these reports so as to ensure Islington Council continuously improves the services for its residents.
- The Homes and Neighbourhoods service updated the Islington Health and Wellbeing Board on the 4th of July, report was positively received which has now led to the Health and Well-Being Board agreeing to undertake a strategic review of Health and Housing work to improve the health outcomes, educational attainment, reduce stress in households and improving the living conditions for its communities.
- In addition to the above, meeting was advised that the Housing and Neighbourhoods service have reached out to Health colleagues to progress

Housing Scrutiny Committee - 17 July 2023

this important work, that a meeting is being arranged to conduct this strategic review over the next 12 months.

- It was noted that with Childrens Social Care leads, it has been agreed initially for there to be a frequent data sharing arrangement to maintain the level of visibility of the whole household and risk factors. This area of work will expand to Adult Social Care. The Homes and Neighbourhoods service is meeting with the Adult Social Care service on the 11th of July 2023, to progress this seamless delivery of services.
- The Tenancy and Property visits pilot is in phase two, that tenanted properties in the north and south of the borough will be visited, and that a new digital tool has been designed with the aim to improve data quality and reporting.
- Director informed meeting that training is ongoing and includes call handlers, that this is built into the continuous learning programme. Training for elected members was conducted in June 2023 and July 2023 around Damp and Mould and Disrepair.
- In June, officers met with representatives of University College London to discuss a research project to inform the services Council delivers in relation to damp, condensation and mould. This is an academic input and review of damp techniques and processes to ensure the most up to date and rigorous systems are adopted. It aims to reusing Net Zero Carbon data to prepare funding/investment bids targeting damp and Net Zero Carbon.
- Council conducted a positive meeting with the Housing Ombudsman on the 6th of July 2023, relating to the Section 49 investigation, that officers will update members on the outcomes of the meeting in due course.
- As part of Council being proactive in addressing damp and mould, Council is conducting 30 community drop-in sessions for all 36,000 residents living in an Islington Council property from June 2023 to the end of September 2023, that these community drop-in sessions will ensure residents voices are heard and council acts upon these views, this will include residents living also in street properties.
- Community drop-in sessions provides an opportunity for council to 'walk' in the shoes of its residents and services provided going forward meet the expectations and needs of our residents.
- The proposed new housing allocations scheme is to be considered at Executive meeting on the 20th of July 2023 with proposals that will ensure people living in damp and mould properties are provided with higher priority for rehousing through the Choice Based Lettings scheme.
- Meeting was advised that training of elected member provided on damp and mould and disrepair is to ensure elected members are empowered to challenge the service for the benefits of its residents.
- With regard to the council's collaboration with UCL on issues around damp and mould, the Director acknowledged that Committee will be updated at future meeting, a further opportunity for members to scrutinise this work.
- A suggestion that council workers on estates be more proactive on issues such as repairing broken drain pipes and leaks and removal of plants was noted.

Housing Scrutiny Committee - 17 July 2023

- In terms of monitoring works of contractors, meeting was advised that all work is post inspected, that roughly about 10% is randomly inspected, that includes any repairs over £500, that the council expects its contractors to adhere to the Council's high standards.
- On the question of the pending number of staff awaiting training, the Director acknowledged that 100% of staff in Housing services had been trained and in house surveyors, that details about staff trained in customer services will be provided at a future meeting.
- In response to a question, the Director stated that following the decision of Council to revisit cases identified over 3 years, 37 new jobs were identified, that details will be provided at future meetings.
- On the issue of digital tools, the director acknowledged that it has been designed and implanted, that the next stage is to put it into action with live cases.
- In terms of the housing ombudsman, meeting was informed that Council has a very short time to respond to the outcome of the investigations, however details will be brought back to committee in September or later.

The Chair welcomed the ongoing work and actions being undertaken in addressing damp, mould and condensation, in particular its proactive stance, thanking officers and the Executive Member and its importance of it being on the committee agenda as it is for the benefit of its residents well being.

26

ROUGH SLEEPING DATA ANALYSIS (Item B4)

Islington's Director Housing Needs and Strategy informed the meeting that following request from members on rough sleeping in Islington, the report provides the following details:

- The report outlines the central Government data for rough sleeping in Islington, that the information was requested at the previous Housing Scrutiny meeting, that the performance data will ensure that Islington Council will indicate that it is the best housing service in the country.
- It was noted that one person sleeping on the streets of Islington is one person too many, that elected members expressed concern about the numbers of people sleeping rough in Islington at a previous meeting.
- Meeting was advised that the attached data in the report honestly and transparently shows rough sleeping in Islington over a longer period of time than the data provided through the quarterly performance data reporting framework allows.
- The attached report allows members to critically appraise Council work and to assist with its Improvement plan.
- Director advised that rough sleeping is soaring in London, with over 1,700 more people living on the streets of London compared to last year, a 21% rise, according to figures released from the Greater London Authority (GLA) on the 28th of June 2023. It should be noted as stated in the attached report, that Islington Council performance is actually far better than the rest of London.

Housing Scrutiny Committee - 17 July 2023

- It was noted that the increase from 8,329 people seen sleeping rough in London in 2021-22 to 10,053 sleeping rough in London in 2022-23 was described as “categorically terrible” by Rick Henderson, the chief executive of the Homeless Link frontline charity, and “extremely alarming” by Sadiq Khan, the mayor of London.
- Increase in rough sleeping is a result of the cost of living crisis, Brexit and the pandemic.
- It was noted that although government made a manifesto commitment to “end the blight of rough sleeping by the end of the next parliament” and with 18 months to go it is looking increasingly unlikely this target will be met across London.
- There is a particularly sharp rise in the number of people sleeping rough for the first time, up 26% on last year to 6,391. This trend in Islington is not the same and the majority of people sleeping rough for the first time in Islington have been sleeping rough in other parts of London but are new to sleeping on the streets of Islington. However, in this area it is clear the performance in Islington is better than the data released for other London Council’s.
- Also the number of people who returned to living on the streets after more than a year without sleeping rough jumped to 1,578, a 31% increase. However, in Islington this is not the case.
- It was noted that Council will require much more support from central government, and better cooperation between central Government departments if it intends to end rough sleeping in Islington.
- It was reiterated that cost of living crisis is driving increases in homelessness and rough sleeping and the majority of the levers and controls to prevent homelessness and eliminating rough sleeping rests with central Government policies around the Local Housing Allowance rates, Welfare Benefits, the cost of living crisis and immigration policies.
- Analysis published on the 27th of June 2023, by the Institute for Fiscal Studies revealed only one in 20 private rented homes in Britain are now affordable to people relying on housing benefit– the lowest level on record.
- Islington Council remains committed to eliminating rough sleeping so as to assist people to build a better future, that in comparison to other local authorities released by GLA, which is demonstrated by our performances.
- On the question of discretionary housing payments, meeting was advised that this is not within the remit of Housing Services but the Community Wealth Building Team, that details can be provided.
- Members were reminded this issue will remain a challenge for all local authorities in light of the cost of living crisis, universal credit changes, less funding from central government and lately Central government’s eviction notice to the 4000 Afghan living in bridging hotels on 31st October and the ending of the hosting arrangement with united kingdom households for the Ukraine refugee.

The Chair thanked officers for the update acknowledging that the myriad of factors causing the increase in rough sleeping across London and welcoming the efforts of the Council.

27

COUNCIL'S BENCHMARKING OF THE TENANT SATISFACTION MEASURES AND PILOT REGULATOR OF SOCIAL HOUSING WORK INSPECTION FRAMEWORK (Item B5)

Meeting was informed that the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill enacts a set of measures to improve standards for people living in social housing, that it had gone through 1st and 2nd reading in House of Parliament . The bill sets out a new regulatory framework for the consumer regulation of social housing to strengthen the accountability of landlords for providing safe homes, quality services and treating residents with respect.

- It was noted that many of the changes in the Bill are to be implemented by the Regulator for Social Housing (RSH) with Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM) forming part of this new framework.
- Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) are the new performance metric for all landlords and in addition to the TSMs, the RSH will also carry out regular "Ofsted style" inspections and investigate organisational complaints to ensure compliance with the new standards.
- The 22 TSM's were published by the government in September 2022 after consultation. TSMs came into force from 1st April 2023 and it applies to all social landlords in England with over 1,000 properties.
- Regulator for Social Housing (RSH) will monitor performance and standards through the above measures which will ensure standard and consistent measure across the social housing sector. There is an Annual reporting requirement and that RSH will publish results, including naming & shame social landlords.
- RSH have powers to impose unlimited fines, remedial action orders, compensation.
- It was also noted that Council's with TMOs/Partners, are responsible for collecting and reporting on all TSMs and that Landlords must share the results with their residents.
- Meeting was advised that earlier in the year, London Housing Directors' Group commissioned Housemark to undertake a survey of stock-holding London borough Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs), that report was finalised and published in March 2023.
- LBI scores 80% for complaints responded to within timescales (stage 1), which comparatively falls within the London Councils median quartile and the national average. The London Councils upper quartile score sits at 93.2% which is considerably higher than the LBI score and the national average. Contextually, the total number of complaints in London has increased by 20% from the previous year and this is representative of the fact that the sheer volume of properties in London is higher, and as such the complaints teams are seeing a greater demand for their services.
- LBI scores favourably in the number of complaints per 1,000 properties at 29, which is in line with the national average. Comparatively the London Councils lower quartile scores this at 92.6 and the upper quartile at 38.6. This would indicate the LBI responds to a lower proportion of complaints based on the total number of properties it manages.

Housing Scrutiny Committee - 17 July 2023

- The LBI score for satisfaction that the home is safe and secure is 74%, which comparatively falls within the London Councils upper quartile, but lower than the national average at almost 83%. Contextually, resident perception will vary from London and inner-city areas to more rural areas, as local crime rates and other factors will differ considerably.
- For the number of ASB cases per 1,000 properties, LBI scores favourably at 8. Comparatively, the national average is nearly 50 with London Councils lower and upper quartiles scoring at 55.4 and 69.8 respectively. Whilst this appears encouraging, the caveat would be that LBI has only recently started collecting and reporting on this specific metric, and therefore we need to exercise caution until we have at least two quarters worth of data to see a fuller and more accurate and up to date picture in this area.
- LBI is taking part in RSH Pilot Inspection Framework, that the process started in May 2023, that initial contextual information and documentation has been provided.
- Meeting was advised that RSH announced its first wave of Pilot inspections in 2022 with seven landlords, that the 2nd Wave of Pilot Inspections announced in April 2023 with four landlords, that the pilots will enable the regulator to test and refine its approach to consumer inspections, before rolling them out to social landlords from April 2024.
- In addition to the above, meeting was advised that regulator will continue its work to prepare for new consumer regulation over the next 12 months and that another key milestone will come in summer 2023, when the regulator intends to launch its consultation on the revised consumer standards.
- Identifying areas for improvement before an actual inspection will include, assessing the effectiveness of service delivery and quality assurance processes; identifying gaps in compliance with regulatory requirements; Improving staff understanding of regulatory requirements; boosting staff confidence in handling actual inspections; improving customer care/experience and outcomes; boosting resident confidence that landlord is compliant and offering excellent services – increase satisfaction.
- Meeting was advised that detailed information has been provided to the RSH, who have acknowledged that the submission is highly professional compared to other submissions. Islington Council presently is the only large Local Authority Landlord which is participating in this pilot work.
- Meeting is being arranged to scope work out with the RSH in two weeks, that RSH are aware of the Housing Ombudsman investigation work at Islington, and they are liaising together. The RSH will inspect the service during the last week in July or the first week in August.
- Meeting was advised that going forward, RSH will be meeting the Chief Executive, Leader of the Council, Executive Member for Homes and Communities, the Corporate Director of Homes and Neighbourhoods, Housing officers, the Complaints Team. Also the RSH will aim to visit one of the Community drop in sessions and will view the meetings of the Housing Scrutiny and the Executive in July.
- As part of the process, LBI will not receive a grading from RSH but will receive an action plan, that RSH welcome Islington piloting this work in areas

such as tenants' views and empowerment, Health and Safety, Repairs and complaints.

- The Director acknowledged that this regulation only applies to social housing landlords, that a bill on private sector regulation is presently going through parliament.
- The Director acknowledged that detailed data breakdown can be made available at future meetings for easy understanding.
- On resident's concerns highlighted in the report about safety in their homes, Director noted that is not in relation to building safety such as lift, gas and fire but around anti-social behaviour issues and crime in their neighbourhood.

The Chair thanked Officers for the update, acknowledging that the measures will be an addition to the performance indicators which are reported quarterly to committee, and an opportunity for members to scrutinise the services.

28 ISLINGTON BROADBAND - UPDATE ON PROGRAMME DELIVERY (Item B6)

- As an update to the Council's programme on the fibre broadband rollout since the last meeting, meeting was advised that G-Network wayleave agreement was signed on 28th June, that 184 survey packs from Community Fibre and Hyperoptic have now been approved by the delivery team as of 1 July.
- In addition to the above, cabling is now complete for 16 blocks, 14 further blocks since the last update (1247 units) have been cabled in addition to Spriggs House and Barratt House already reported. These completed blocks are now waiting for the providers' network builds.
- Meeting was advised that providers are keeping Council informed of their timetables for these works, so that residents are informed as soon as services are live.

RESOLVED:

That officer update on Islington Broadband rollout should be quarterly rather than monthly.

29 WORK PROGRAMME 2023/24 (Item B7)

RESOLVED:

That the work programme be noted.

That at the next meeting committee will receive an officer presentation on the scrutiny review topic of 2023/24, New Build Homes

The meeting ended at 10.05 pm

CHAIR