

London Borough of Islington

Housing Scrutiny Committee - 16 October 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 16 October 2018 at 7.30 pm.

Present: Councillors: O'Sullivan (Chair), Lukes (Vice-Chair), Debono, Hamitouche, Heather, Mackmurdie, O'Halloran, Russell,

Observers: McDonald and Donaghey

Councillor Michael O'Sullivan in the Chair

30 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item 1)

Apologies were received from Councillor Gallagher.

31 DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item 2)

There were no declarations of substitute members.

32 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS (Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

33 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (Item 4)

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 11 September 2018 be confirmed as an accurate record of proceedings and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

34 CHAIR'S REPORT (Item 5)

The Chair also highlighted two forthcoming events , the home and build exhibitions which was being held in October in London as a very good resource for anyone interested in housing related issues .

The Chair informed Members that the Council is awaiting further development in light of central government's announcement that it intends to relax its rules about prudential borrowing for house building.

35 ORDER OF BUSINESS (Item 6)

The order of business would be as per the agenda.

36 PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item 7)

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

37 REPAIRS IT PRESENTATION (Item B1)

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Members received a presentation from both Anthony Jonas, Repairs Group Leader and Azim Urfan, Housing Direct Business Analyst on the operations, functionality and challenges of the Housing Services Repairs IT. A copy of the presentation is interleaved with the agenda.

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

- Members were informed that following Council's decision to bring housing services back in-house, there was a recognition that the IT repairs system would need to be upgraded to manage in house resources and improve efficiency and customer service.
- The IT system was procured in 2015, and went live in 2017. Phase 2 of the project aims to fine tune and incorporate a number of functionalities which will be completed in the winter of 2018/19.
- The IT system is made of two elements to it, the One Serve and Synthesis with the latter focuses on job management while Synthesis manages customer relations.
- The online repairs system will take calls and diagnose repairs, is an online portal for customers to request and manage repair jobs via their smart phones or desktops ; schedule works to operatives and order parts via a PDA. In addition the online system will allow invoices to be submitted and payments be made to operatives.
- At present there are about 190 users of the mobile version of One Serve and 350 users of the desktop version, the public take up is still low, this could be as a result of the free 0800 telephone repair line.
- At present One serve covers over 40 areas of work such as day to day repairs, planned maintenance, gas repairs and servicing, estate inspections, communal heating repairs , testing and compliance etc.
- The Online repairs allows residents to raise repairs online, easy to use and accessible to residents 24hours. Also an audit trail of works and issues can be easily tracked and vulnerable tenants would have more options for repair works.
- The dashboard, an interactive management tool will visually track, analyse and measure performance and as it connects to multiple data sets and displays the data as statistical charts, it will be useful for management. Most importantly dashboard provides real time monitoring and reduces time spent analysing data.
- Members were advised that future plans include making further improvement to the PDA version with workflows, extending online repairs portal for customers, extending the online repairs service to leaseholders and customers in the private sector and introducing an improved SMS and web chat for customers.
- In response to a question on how IT could specifically address the 15% dissatisfied residents with regards to first time fixes, Officer advised that the introduction of the dashboard would enable all these areas of concerns to be analysed.
- In response to a question on work load and uncompleted works, members were informed that the system is flexible and allows a repair operative unable to complete the works to record a reason why a second visit would be required and rebook an appointment so as to complete the works using his PDA or call into the office and

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speak to the scheduler.

- Members were reminded that the Service is presently carrying out a programme of multiskilling all their operatives to address situations where repairs cannot be completed due to the operative not having the skills to carry out ancillary works. The Service recognises that the programme would result in an improvement in the number of first time fixes.
- Members were reminded that although customer satisfaction is undertaken by an independent company with specific questions about works carried out, the present IT system would provide management the tools to be able to manage performance at different levels.
- In response to a question about works being carried out and the quality, the meeting was informed that the system allows operatives to take photographs both before and after work is carried out and the IT system is set up in such a way that where no photographs are taken, this is flagged up to management who can act on this shortcoming.
- On the question of whether operatives had access to the needs of vulnerable residents and whether the information held by the Council of the resident was accurate, the Director of Housing advised meeting that, the Council routinely requests information on diversity and disabilities voluntarily from all its residents so that it can provide the right level of service and would expect the information provided to be accurate. In addition housing officers in general are aware of the needs and requirements of vulnerable residents.
- In terms of possible misdiagnosis via the online reporting, the Director of Property Services advised that it was important to recognise that as the Council continues to move its repair service onto an online reporting platform, limitations are expected so human beings would still be required to minimise errors.
- The meeting was informed that to manage work flows especially during peak times, contractors and sub-contractors would be required to undertake repairs. Members were advised that works carried out by contractors would be expected to meet the required standard and quality and checked by Council officers.
- In response to a suggestion on whether carers of vulnerable or disabled residents be given access, the Director of Property Services advised members that issues of data protection and security would need to be considered, however wherever consent is given by the resident, this would be possible.
- In response to a question about local intelligence and history of works in relation to the Council's housing stock especially in instances where operatives have arrived at blocks of flat and not being able to locate service pipes, the Director acknowledged that although not an ideal practice for such information to be limited to long serving staff especially as this would result in delays, information is now being captured online especially with the new stock of housing being built. Members were advised that where for example windows are being replaced, manufacturers details, measurements, date of installation are now captured on a database for future use.
- On whether the Service has a skill sharing programme between the long serving staff and the new employees, the Director advised that the Council recognises the essence of work force development and in most cases would expect staff to learn

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from one another.

- A suggestion on whether as part of the customer satisfaction exercise an option could be offered to unsatisfied residents if their specific complaints could be escalated by the independent survey company to the Council was noted as it will ensure that any operative sent to the dwelling in the future could be aware.
- On the issue of time scales, the Director acknowledged that although most of the repairs undertaken are routine works, it is important to be clear with residents of expected timescales for each type of repairs.
- In response to questions on whether routine works could be carried out by residents, Members were informed that Islington Council as a responsible landlord would still continue to ensure that resident's safety is not compromised.
- In response to a suggestion on whether the repairs service could be extended beyond the working hours and late into the evening to cater for residents that work late shifts, the Director of Housing reminded Members that there is no evidence of any demand for this type of service and secondly the costs would be astronomical. Members were informed that presently residents are offered time slots as it is difficult to ascertain how long an operative would complete works.

The Chair on behalf of the Committee thanked both the Repairs Group Leader and Housing Direct Business Analyst for their presentation.

It was **RESOLVED** that the presentation be noted.

38 **WORK PROGRAMME 2018/19 (Item B2)** **RESOLVED:**

That the work programme be noted

The meeting ended at 9.45 pm

CHAIR