

London Borough of Islington

Housing Scrutiny Committee - 23 March 2021

Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Committee held on 23 March 2021 at 7.00 pm.

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

Councillor Michael O'Sullivan in the Chair

246 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item 1)

No apologies were received from Councillors

247 DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item 2)

There were no declarations of substitute members

248 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS (Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest

249 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (Item 4)

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 2 March 2021 be confirmed as an accurate record of proceedings and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

250 CHAIR'S REPORT (Item 5)

The Chair expressed concern that the item on the Partners scrutiny review, which was scheduled for discussion that evening was not on the agenda, and in view of this it may be June/July before the report on the handback of Partner properties would be completed. The Chair added that he was endeavouring to obtain information from other organisations experienced in Victorian street properties and that when this was available he would circulate it to Members of the Committee

251 ORDER OF BUSINESS (Item 6)

The Chair stated that the order of business would be as per the agenda

252 PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item 7)

The Chair outlined the procedure for Public questions

253 MINI SCRUTINY REVIEW - COMMUNAL HEATING - WITNESS EVIDENCE (Item B1)

Rob Jack, Mechanical and Electrical Manager, L.B.Hackney was present and made a verbal presentation to the Committee, and the following main points were made –

- Noted that there were 68 plant rooms serving 3308 properties consisting of both tenants and leaseholders
- Noted that the efficiency of the pipework and materials in individual properties was insufficient, and 47% of the plant rooms serviced only 11% of the properties, and 32 of these plant rooms only serviced 361 properties. L.B.Hackney were seeking to rationalise the number of plant rooms and a review was being carried out to ascertain the most efficient way of servicing the properties
- The systems were maintained by the DLO, however during the pandemic a contractor had assisted
- There had been no significant issues with the failure of communal heating systems in the previous 12/18 months, and as stated previously work is taking place with a consultant to ascertain the best method of providing heating to tenants/leaseholders in the future. The Consultant had recommended heat pumps and a heating network, however this would take a long time to install and also could be prone to breakdown for a number of reasons
- Another option was green hydrogen, but at the moment this was expensive but it did meet net Zero Carbon requirements
- Noted that Council communal heating system is the cheapest option over a 40 year period, and there is no intention to replace these at the moment but to rationalise them. Members were informed that the boilers in the plant rooms were not used constantly in order to preserve their life and risk of breakdown as back up boilers were available
- In relation to new build properties these are serviced by a communal boilers, but there is a back-up system boiler in the event of the boiler failing, however from 2025 individual gas boilers could not be installed
- A Member enquired whether underfloor electric heating or Dimplex radiator systems had been investigated. Rob Jack stated that this had not been considered by the consultant who had carried out the L.B.Hackney survey and that they had only considered heat pumps, but this idea in his view did have advantages

The Chair thanked Rob Jack for attending

254 WORK PROGRAMME 2020/21 (Item B2)

The Chair stated that the timescale for the Partners scrutiny review may need to be extended and this would be reflected in the future work programme of the Committee

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted

255 OTHER BUSINESS (Item)

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Thames Water

The Executive Member Housing informed Members that a meeting would take place that Thursday with Thames Water and that all Members of the Committee were welcome to attend

Discussion took place as to the information available to tenants about the installation of a water meter, and that there needed to be clear information to tenants about their options for a water meter, and also that tenants should not be disadvantaged if for a technical reason one could not be installed

Reference was made to the fact that if there is a large family consuming water, it may not be advantageous for them to have a water meter installed. In addition, tenants needed to be given clear information as to how much their bills would be, and it was noted that this information would be circulated to tenants by Thames Water in April, however bills would be both for water and sewerage charges, and that only 3% of the bill costs was for the consumption of water

Discussion took place as to the water pressure, particularly in high rise blocks, and that this was an issue that should be raised as it took a long time to fill a bath or boil a kettle

RESOLVED:

That the Executive Member Housing be requested to raise the above issues with Thames Water at the meeting to be held later that week

The meeting ended at Time Not Specified

CHAIR