

London Borough of Islington

Housing Scrutiny Committee - 21 September 2021

Minutes of the meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Committee held at Town Hall on 21 September 2021 at 7.30 pm.

Present: Councillors: O'Sullivan (Chair), Bossman-Quarshie, Gantly, Graham and Jackson
Co-opted Members: Rose Marie McDonald and Dean Donaghey

Also Present: Councillor: Ward

Councillor Michael O'Sullivan in the Chair

288 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item 1)

Councillor Spall

289 DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item 2)

There were no declarations of substitute members

290 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS (Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest

291 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (Item 4)

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 13 July 2021 be confirmed as an accurate record of proceedings and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

292 CHAIR'S REPORT (Item 5)

The Chair stated that he had expected a SID on the Community Fibre optic scrutiny review to be submitted that evening and was concerned that there was not an item to this effect on the agenda. The Chair added that he had discussed this and the Committee required a SID to the next meeting on this topic

293 ORDER OF BUSINESS (Item 6)

The Chair stated that the order of business would be as per the agenda, with the exception of item B5 Partners Scrutiny Review draft recommendations being considered as the first substantive item on the agenda

294 PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item 7)

The Chair stated that any questions from members of the public should be sent to the clerk or Chair following the meeting for a response

295 SCRUTINY REVIEW: TRIAGE SYSTEM (Item B1)

Jo Murphy, Housing Directorate was present and outlined the report

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During discussion the following main points were made –

- The situation had improved substantially following the surge in calls during the pandemic
- A new performance management system to measure performance and new software has been put in place to support the service
- It was noted that if Members wished to visit the service they could contact Jo Murphy
- 'Dip sampling' was due to start to ascertain follow up on calls within the next few months and this would provide additional information
- Staff were now working in the office after working from home during most of the pandemic
- Noted that there had been an 8 fold increase in ASB calls during the pandemic but this had now reduced

RESOLVED:

That a further progress report be submitted to the January 2022 meeting, and the results of the 'dip sampling' exercise be reported to the Committee at such meeting if this is available

The Chair thanked Jo Murphy for attending

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MINI SCRUTINY REVIEW - COMMUNAL HEATING - WITNESS EVIDENCE **(Item B2)**

Garrett McEntee and Robert Matthison, Housing Directorate were present.

During consideration the following main points were made –

- Members expressed their concern that despite another request and the fact that GEM had stated that they would attend the meeting that evening they had still failed to attend. Members felt that this showed contempt for the Committee
- Reference was made to the fact that with Winter coming residents needed to be assured that there would be a speedy response to breakdowns, especially given the breakdowns on the Redbrick Estate
- A Member referred to the resetting of the boiler at Redbrick Estate and that the uninterruptable power supply system used in office blocks in the City could be looked at. In addition when systems are designed in future consideration should be given to an automatic resetting of the boiler system in the event of breakdown
- Noted that the contract had been awarded to GEM following the previous contractors contract being terminated for poor performance
- Reference was made to individual end point metering and the need for this to be installed by September 2022, and that a report on this should be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee's concern be expressed to GEM that they had not attended the Committee on a second occasion when invited, and that they be requested to attend the next meeting of the Committee. In addition a report be submitted on the contract management procedures in place between the Council and GEM

- (b) That a report on end point metering be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee

297 **REGISTERED PROVIDERS - REGULATOR OF SOCIAL HOUSING DATA (Item B3)**

Ian Swift, Housing Directorate, was present for discussion of this item

During consideration of the report the following main points were made –

- Concern was expressed at the selling off of former Council homes transferred to Housing Associations in the borough and the affordability of some Housing Association rents. The Executive Member Housing stated that he had had discussions with Housing Associations and had made it clear that even if street properties were sold off as they were not economic to maintain then replacement social housing should be provided in the borough
- Noted that there was no formal powers the Council could enforce against Housing Associations apart from Environmental Health powers if the property needed repair
- In response to a question as to Newlon and the Arsenal development it was stated that it was not thought that much social housing had been agreed on this site, however Members could be provided with details thereon
- Reference was made to cladding on properties in the borough, especially Housing Association properties and it was stated that a report thereon should be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee. It was stated that discussions were taking place between the Council and Housing Associations and reports on progress are being submitted

RESOLVED:

That a report on cladding be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee and Members be provided with details of the social housing properties that had been provided on the Arsenal redevelopment project

298 **QUARTERLY REVIEW OF HOUSING PERFORMANCE (Q1 2021/22) (Item B4)**

Councillor Dairmaid Ward, Executive Member Housing and the Director of Housing, Maxine Holdsworth were present and outlined the report –

- Number of new Council homes started on site this year on target – 103 properties expected to receive planning permission this year are all scheduled for later in the year
- Number of affordable new homes on target, however the percentage of homeless decisions made in the timeframe target is currently below target
- Number of households in nightly booked temporary accommodation is slightly off target however this will continue to fall as remaining cases are housed through the Everyone In programme
- Number of homeless preventions is off target and weekly performance monitoring in place and staff performance surgeries and best practice training for staff taking place
- Number of people sleeping rough – figure off target but prevention work is succeeding and there are currently no long term street homeless in the borough
- Percentage of all lettings provided to tenants transferring to alternative accommodation – this figure is off target, however the gap is relatively small and will be narrowed over the coming months

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- First fix repairs – above target however performance in Q1 was artificially inflated given the pandemic focused on emergency repairs
- Rent arrears as a proportion of rent roll by Council/Partners – indicator on target
- In response to a question as to the effects of the Government's Universal Credit cut and rising bills will have on rent arrears, it was stated that these would have an impact but the Council favoured early intervention and work was taking place in this regard
- Reference was made to the long waiting list for Council housing and that many residents could not afford to buy their own house in the borough. It was stated that this was a problem, especially for young people, and that the Mayor of London's Living Rent scheme was trying to address this whereby rents should not be more than one third of the median rent in the ward. This would apply to the Holloway prison site which is being redeveloped. In addition the Council were purchasing properties in the borough for temporary accommodation so that residents did not, wherever possible, have to move out the borough if they did not wish to do so
- In response to a question it was stated that the new homes target was expected to be met and the Quarter 2 figures would be a more realistic situation. The view was expressed that indicative figures should be provided in future reports
- Discussion took place as to whether it was expected that a skills shortage in the construction industry may affect timescales, and it was stated that this was not an issue at present, however this was being kept under review. In response to a question as to whether staff in the DLO could be used in the event of a shortage of labour, it was stated that this was not an issue at present, however this could be looked at if necessary

RESOLVED:

- (a) That future reports include indicative figures for following quarters of expected completion of affordable and new build homes in the borough
- (b) That Members place on record their appreciation for the work carried out by the Homelessness team during the pandemic

The Chair thanked Councillor Ward and Maxine Holdsworth for attending

299 **SCRUTINY REVIEW: PARTNERS IMPROVEMENT - DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS (Item B5)**

Hannah Bowman, Housing Directorate was present for consideration of this item

The Chair stated that the draft recommendations were there for consideration by Members and any comments should be submitted to the Clerk or himself for consideration prior to the next meeting

RESOLVED:

That the draft recommendations be noted and the final report be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee in November

The Chair thanked Hannah Bowman for attending

300 **WORK PROGRAMME 2021/22 (Item B6)**

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted

The meeting ended at 9.05 p.m.

CHAIR