

London Borough of Islington

Housing Scrutiny Committee - 11 November 2021

Minutes of the meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Committee held at Town Hall on 11 November 2021 at 7.30 pm.

Present: Councillors: O'Sullivan (Chair), Bossman-Quarshie, Gantly, Graham and Jackson

Co-opted Members: Rose Marie MacDonald and Dean Donaghey

Also Present: Councillor : Ward

Councillor Michael O'Sullivan in the Chair

301 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item 1)

Apologies were received from Councillors Spall, Debono and Ozdemir Councillor Bossman-Quarshie although present at the meeting requested that it be noted in the minutes that due to an illness she is unable to ask questions at the meeting

302 DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item 2)

None

303 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS (Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest

304 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (Item 4)

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 21 September 2021 be confirmed and the Chair be authorised to sign them

305 CHAIR'S REPORT (Item 5)

The Chair informed the meeting of 2 events being held at the Excel Centre in London, the Build Exhibition next week and the Homes Conference 23rd and 24th November 2021.

306 ORDER OF BUSINESS (Item 6)

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

307 PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item 7)

The Chair outlined the procedure for Public questions

308 **MAJOR WORKS SCRUTINY REVIEW- 12 MONTH REPORT BACK (Item B1)**

Matt West, Director of Housing Property Services was present and outlined the report.

Meeting was advised of the progress of some of the recommendations and that a number of pilots will be commencing in 2023.

RESOLVED:

That the report and progress to date be noted.

The Chair thanked Matt West for attending.

309 **MINI SCRUTINY REVIEW - COMMUNAL HEATING - FINAL REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS (Item B2)**

Matt West, Director of Property Services and Garrett McEntee, Housing Directorate was present for the report

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

- Reference was made to the continual problems with the communal heating system in the Bunhill area, that this was not acceptable to residents or Members. Meeting was informed of an incident over the weekend, and the poor communication between the contractor and the Council. Members were informed that the contractor had recognised the problems and stated that staff training was taking place to rectify the situation
- With the continuing problems with Bunhill 2, a Member suggested that unless the problems were resolved quickly, residents should be converted to individual gas boiler systems.
- In response, the Director of Housing Property Services acknowledged that he would look into this issue, that members request for drawings and design of the relevant boiler system, will be circulated to the Committee if interested.
- On the existence of penalty clauses for the Bunhill 2 contract especially when the system fails, the meeting was advised that this information could be provided to the Committee.
- The Executive Member Housing suggested a informal sub-group of Members should be established to monitor the situation, and that all Members of the Committee interested should be invited when there is any breakdown with the communal heating systems in Islington.
- It was noted that with the net zero carbon targets, individual gas boilers would not achieve this. The Chair stated that this may be an item for scrutiny in the forthcoming year, especially in tower blocks

RESOLVED:

That consideration of the report be deferred until the next meeting of the Committee,

and responses to the issues raised above in relation to penalty clauses and drawing of boiler plants be reported to Members

The Chair thanked Matt West for attending

**310 COMMUNITY FIBRE OPTICS IN HOUSING ESTATE - OFFICER UPDATE
/PRESENTATION (Item B3)**

Ian Swift, Director of Housing Needs and Strategy was present and outlined the presentation, a copy of which is interleaved

During consideration of the presentation the following main points were made-

- Fixed fibre to the property or FTTP fibre broadband that is wired directly to the home instead of a cabinet that services it
- Most Council homes are currently connected to these cabinets via copper cable which unreliable, and only capable of delivering limited connection speeds
- FTTP connections is 3 times faster and can support significantly higher levels of household demand, making it possible to use a number of devices and stream data, music or videos at the same time
- Faster and more reliable connectivity has become more important now than ever with increases in home working, home schooling, streaming digital media, and the significance towards accessing goods and services online
- The Council recognises the significant social and financial benefits of a well connected borough; the huge demand for faster, more affordable and reliable digital connectivity by residents. Over the past year the Council has developed an approach to secure investment to upgrade estates to FTTP and is working closely with GLA, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sports, and a number of local authorities, in particular Hackney because of the similarity in approach especially as lessons are being learnt from other Local Authorities
- The Council envisages working with a number of internet service providers to deliver services across the borough in order to facilitate the rollout of FTTP to our estates as quickly as possible, maximise the choice of provider available to residents, keep the costs of services as low as possible, maximise the social benefits of improved connectivity
- The Council will engage with the FTTP market providers in mid-November 2021, seeking expressions of interest from potential partners who will be expected to make commitments, that they will provide high quality and affordable connections to all Council owned estates and to a mutually agreed timescale, to work collaboratively with the Council and other providers to minimise disruption to residents, to install all equipment and cabling in a way that is safe (protecting compartmentalisation of homes), and protects the Council's and residents interest in homes and buildings. To contribute toward the Council significant costs in facilitating the safety compliant rollout
- Community benefit – through market engagement the Council hopes to maximise the community benefit of the rollout of FTTP to our estates and

wipe out digital connectivity blackspots on Council estates entirely within the next few years

- The Council is seeking a broad range of measures and commitments from providers in this area, but also recognises that the providers will need to make significant levels of investment to deliver fibre to estates
- Specific expectations around these have been set out in the expressions of interest document and will be subject to discussion and negotiation with providers. Publication of these ahead of market engagement this month would not be prudent as it may compromise the Council's ability to secure the best outcomes from the market
- In terms of implementation and rollout, the Council has developed a Wayleave agreement that all providers will be expected to sign up to. This agreement will cover the broad terms of the agreement and provide the service providers with rights to access Council property to survey, install, repair and maintain their equipment. A full technical specification for the installation of equipment and cables on estates has been developed, that will govern all works undertaken on housing estates and ensure works are delivered safely and all necessary repairs are made. Detailed site by site approval and technical supervision, particularly around fire stopping and safety, will be undertaken by specialist officers within Homes and Neighbourhoods team
- FTTP rollout in the UK has been slow, and the levels of investment required are significant. There are also very few FTTP providers operating in the UK and London markets so competition is limited. There are also diminishing returns for the investment for subsequent providers so attracting multiple providers onto the same estates is unlikely. The Electronic communications code allows the Courts to impose leases or licences on the Council or any private landowner, this means that providers can serve notices on landowners who are subsequently forced to allow Code providers to install equipment on their land and for very little in way of compensation or consideration. It would be unlikely to successfully gain any community benefit or other concessions if this should happen
- Meeting was advised that both the Chair and Councillor Convery have had a significant input into discussions on this issue, and that their contribution should be placed on record especially as social value and inclusivity were core to the proposals
- Reference was made with the example when roads works are dug up to put in utilities, and the road restored to its original position, that this approach should be replicated with this scheme and that any removal of fibre optics going forward should not result in additional cost to the Council. It was stated that this would be investigated
- Council aims to have 70% of residents connected to fibre optic within 2 years and 90% within 3 years. There would be a project plan available, which could be shared, and the Council would be seeking a contribution from providers of £55,000 and an officer would be monitoring implementation
- The Council is seeking a reduction of 50% in costs for the poorest 10% of residents. In addition free broadband would be provided to community centres and hostels. There would also be a £10m insurance liability

- In response to a question it was stated that in relation to fire safety alarm checks, especially in tower blocks, this could be looked at and whether this could be carried out in conjunction with CP12 gas checks
- It was noted that that project plans could be shared with ward councillors and residents
- It was stated that providers would provide upgrades to the system as improvements are made to ensure all fibre optic broadband was up to date and that all residents would be offered choice of providers

RESOLVED:

That the proposals be welcomed, and that the issues with utility companies noted above be investigated

The Chair thanked Ian Swift for his presentation

311 WORK PROGRAMME 2021/22 (Item B4)

The Chair stated that the work programme be amended, noting that further information would be considered in relation to the Scrutiny Review on Communal Heating given the concerns raised earlier during the meeting

The Chair also indicated that the Committee will take further witness evidence into the Scrutiny Review on Partners at the next meeting, with the final report deferred for consideration in the New Year

RESOLVED:

That the amendments referred to above be incorporated into the revised work programme 2021/22

312 OTHER BUSINESS (Item)

A Member referred to the recent fire at Godfrey House in his ward, stating and stated that the first he had learnt of this was from a reporter. This was not acceptable and Ward Members and the TRA should have been informed. In addition, a fire improvement notice had been issued and the Fire Brigade had been critical of the fire safety knowledge of Council officers and it was added that this was not acceptable

The Chair referred to a previous Scrutiny Review on Fire Safety that had taken place a few years ago, that progress on these recommendations should be reviewed by the Committee at the next meeting. It was noted that fire safety testing is in place and there is a programme of works

Members were informed that the Council did take fire safety extremely seriously and training for staff did take place. There is a Home Safety Training Board that is independently chaired which focuses on fire safety. In addition, the Council held regular meetings with the Fire Brigade and other groups in relation to tall buildings. It was stated that in future an invitation should be sent to Members to attend these meetings if they wished to do so given the concerns over fire safety following

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Grenfell.

In response to a member question regarding management of trees on housing estates and in particular safety for residents and children and any planned activities, the Executive Member for Housing & Development advised that this should be referred to the Executive Member of the possibility of reporting back to committee about tree wardens

The meeting ended at 8.55 p.m.

CHAIR