

London Borough of Islington

Housing Scrutiny Committee - 6 December 2021

Minutes of the meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD - Islington Town Hall on 6 December 2021 at 7.30 pm.

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

Co- opted Members: Rose Marie MacDonald and Dean Donaghey

Also Present: Councillor Dairmaid Ward

Councillor Michael O'Sullivan in the Chair

313 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item 1)

Apologies were received from Councillor Spall, Ozdemir and Bossman-Quarshie for lateness

314 DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item 2)

There were no declarations of substitute members

315 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS (Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest

316 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (Item 4)

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 11 November 2021 be confirmed as an accurate record of proceedings and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

317 CHAIR'S REPORT (Item 5)

The Chair stated that a meeting had been held with GEM, which had been constructive, and it had been agreed that the Council would work with GEM and residents in order to improve communication issues to ensure residents got a better service in future, and that performance improved

Reference was made to the availability of spare parts and that the GEM contract did not cover spare parts, however GEM had offered to assist and this would be looked at in the future

The Chair stated that Housing contracts could be subject of a scrutiny review for the Committee at a future date

318 ORDER OF BUSINESS (Item 6)

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

319 PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item 7)

The Chair outlined the procedure for Public questions

320 MAJOR SCRUTINY REVIEW - PARTNERS IMPROVEMENT - WITNESS EVIDENCE (Item B1)

Ms. Portia Msigmanga, Charteris Road co-op was present and gave witness evidence to the Committee

During the evidence the following main points were made –

- Noted that Portia had been a tenant since 1992 and that she had had a number of repairs carried out on her roof since that time. She expressed concern at the number of repairs to her roof that had taken place during that time, and the length of time scaffolding had been erected at the property, which must be costly to the Council. The Chair stated that scaffolding had been the subject of a scrutiny review and that the review could be circulated to Members
- Noted that she had raised a formal complaint with the Council but had not yet received a response, nearly a year later. The Director of Corporate Housing stated that if she was provided with details she would investigate this
- Noted that some tenants seemed concerned to report repairs, although she had not experienced concerns of this nature when contacting the Council
- In response to a question it was stated that all Council owned properties were available to view on the Council website
- Noted that cyclical repairs were taking place on street properties
- In response to a question it was stated that discussions were taking place with regard to staff transferring to the Council under TUPE from Partners and that a report on progress would be submitted to the next meeting
- Discussion took place as to installation of fire alarms and it was stated that this would be investigated

RESOLVED:

(a) That the scrutiny review on scaffolding be circulated to Members of the Committee for discussion at the March meeting of the Committee

(b) That a report on progress of TUPE staff transfer from Partners be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee

The Chair thanked the witness for attending

321 HOUSING FIRE SAFETY UPDATE (Item B2)

Maxine Holdsworth, Corporate Director Housing and Stuart Fuller, Head of Housing Safety and Compliance were present and outlined the report

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

- Noted Fire Safety Act 2021 is likely to be effective from October 2022. The legislation will impose new duties on the Council as a landlord

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- Noted the Council monitors fire safety developments through a number of meetings, as outlined in the report
- The Council has reviewed its investment plans, and refocused them to ensure there are sufficient resources in the building safety programme, ensuring all aspects of building safety are being addressed within a 5 year programme
- A programme of fire safety improvements to the Communal Areas of the Council's high rise residential blocks commenced in 2020
- Noted that the programme to install interlinked smoke/heat detectors, and warning systems in the Council's directly managed properties and Partner street properties is now underway, and gaining momentum
- Noted the employee training and development taking place, and enforcement action taking place from the London Fire Brigade, and the actions being taken in respect of enforcement action on the notice relating to Godfrey House
- FED programme – Council has ongoing programme to replace fire doors that do not meet current fire safety standards or comply with relevant guidance. This was paused due to national concerns about composite, glass reinforced plastic doors, however, since November 2019 the Council has installed 2882 fire doors. There are currently 1136 FED replacements outstanding, which are due to be completed by September 2022
- Noted that visits can be arranged by the Fire Brigade for elderly and vulnerable tenants to advise on fire safety
- Noted that there were payment plans in place for replacement of doors for leaseholders
- In response to a question it was stated that with regard to paragraph 5.2 of the report that monthly reports of all FRA activity for the preceding month, including outcomes from FRA, summary of actions arising, monitoring of overall FRA actions outstanding and tracking of high risk actions could be circulated to Members
- It was noted that training for staff was taking place following the Godfrey House fire and the view was expressed that fire safety training for all staff should be undertaken on a yearly basis
- Reference was made to the boxes containing detailed information for the Fire Brigade on plans for estates in case of fire and that details of these and vulnerable residents are also kept on the Council database which was available at all times
- In response to a question the Executive Member Housing stated that he was in discussions with Housing Associations in regard to improving fire safety in their properties
- Reference was made to paragraph 5.7 of the report in relation to FRA actions in low rise properties and it was stated that an analysis of planned actions could be circulated to Members when available
- The view was expressed that with regard to safeguarding the quicker the Fire Brigade knew information about vulnerable residents in the event of fire the better and measures to improve this should be looked at
- Discussion took place as to whether FP60 or FP30 fire doors should be installed and it was stated that the Borough Fire Commander could be invited to a future meeting of the Committee to discuss fire safety issues
- Discussion took place as to the responsibility for replacing internal doors to properties and it was stated that tenants were advised not to remove internal doors, however if they did this they would need to replace them if they vacated the property, as the Council would not let a property without any such doors being replaced due to fire risks. Tenants were advised to keep doors closed at night

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Borough Fire Brigade Commander be invited to a future meeting of the Committee to discuss fire safety

- (b) That the report be noted and that the details referred to above in relation to FRA actions be circulated to Members when available

The Chair thanked Maxine Holdsworth and Stuart Fuller for attending

322 QUARTERLY REVIEW OF HOUSING PERFORMANCE Q2 (2021/2022) (Item B3)

Councillor Diarmaid Ward, Executive Member of Housing was present and outlined the report

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

- Noted the number of planning permissions for new Council housing was on target at this point. The number of new council homes started on site was ahead of schedule with 30 homes rather than the 21 planned that quarter
- Number of affordable new homes completed by the Council is on target, however figures are not available for developers at this point
- Noted that number of homeless decisions made in target timeframe and number of households in nightly booked temporary accommodation were not on target
- Noted that number of homeless preventions is off target at this point in the year, and weekly performance monitoring is taking place and best practice training to support staff in meeting this challenging target
- Number of people sleeping rough is off target however the rough sleepers found in the most recent counts have only been sleeping rough for one or two weeks
- Percentage of all lettings provided to Council tenants securing a transfer indicator shows that 169 residents have been supported to move into more suitable accommodation, and whilst this is off target the gap is relatively small
- Percentage of LBI repairs fixed first time is above target but it is a not like for like comparison with the previous year
- Rent arrears as a proportion of rent roll for LBI is on target and arrears have remained stable
- Rent arrears as a proportion of the rent roll for Partner properties is slightly off target
- In response to a question it was stated that there were 14000 on the Council housing waiting list but many would never be eligible for Council housing due to the fact that they did not have enough points
- In response to a question as to when the new properties on the Redbrick Estate would be tenanted it was stated that the contractors had stated that these should be completed for occupation in January and viewings were taking place
- Reference was made to the recent heating problems on the Redbrick Estate and compensation awarded to tenants which had been credited to rent accounts rather than tenants being able to use this money in other ways. The Executive Member Housing stated that he would discuss this matter with officers
- A Member referred to the number of families housed with children under 18 in temporary accommodation and the Executive Member stated that he would e mail Members following the meeting with this information

RESOLVED:

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That the Executive Member Housing be requested to circulate details to Members as to how many families with children under 18 are housed in temporary accommodation

The Chair thanked Councillor Ward for attending

323 WORK PROGRAMME 2021/22 (Item B4)

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted

The meeting ended at 9.35 p.m.

CHAIR