

Homes and Neighbourhoods

222 Upper Street, N1 1XR

Report of: Cllr Una O'Halloran, Executive Member for Homes and Communities

Meeting of: Executive

Date: 14 July 2022

Ward(s): All

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## Subject: Executive Response to the Housing Scrutiny Committee – Communal Heating Review

### 1. Synopsis

- 1.1. In February 2022 the Executive received a report from the Housing Scrutiny Committee regarding the Housing Department's management of Communal Heating Systems. The report provided recommendations to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the service as well as improving the resident experience. The report also considered possible environmental improvements to the service.

### 2. Recommendations

- 2.1. To agree the Executive responses to the recommendations of the Housing Scrutiny Committee as set out in section 4 of this report.
- 2.2. To agree that officers report back on progress to the Housing Scrutiny Committee in twelve months' time.

### 3. Background

- 3.1. The Committee commenced the review on 12 January 2021, with the overall aim to evaluate the communal heating service provided to approximately 4,000

properties throughout the borough, to identify opportunities for further development and improvement in service delivery, and to consider potential low-carbon alternatives and their implications.

3.2. The Committee also agreed to the following objectives:

- a. To evaluate the performance of Islington Council's communal heating services, and to make recommendations on how this may be improved.
- b. To review examples of gaps and failures in service provision, identifying what went wrong to prevent recurrences going forward.
- c. To consider if the systems and processes in place are optimal, and if there is scope for further improvement.
- d. To evaluate how services communicate with residents, and to identify opportunities for further development, and improvement.
- e. To consider and evaluate potential options for using low-carbon heating technologies as an alternative to gas-fired communal heating systems.
- f. To consider communal heating charges and the communal heating season.

## 4. Responses To Recommendations

- 4.1. Set out in this section are the recommendations made in the Scrutiny report with the responses recommended to the Executive.
- 4.2. **Recommendation 1:** That subject to compliance with procurement rules, there should be standardised parts and equipment procured for communal heating systems so that spare parts/replacement parts are available and kept in stock in case of breakdown. Consideration should also be given to an inhouse team to be trained and available for emergency repairs call out.
- 4.3. **Response:** The Council will continue to try to standardise parts as much as feasible within our plant rooms ensuring this is captured within the standard mechanical specification and New Build Employees Requirements moving forward.
- 4.4. The Technical Services Team Manager will investigate what skills within the existing out of hours work force could be developed to assist with call outs to our plant rooms.
- 4.5. **Recommendation 2:** That the council maintain a risk register of boiler plant, and where faults have occurred/likely to occur, and to maintain records in order

for the Council to have a history of repair and likely replacement parts that will need to be available in the event of breakdown

- 4.6. **Response:** The Technical Service Team will establish a register of all communal boilers and provide a monthly report to the Assistant Director Property Services showing the numbers of breakdowns and repairs at each site. The report will be used to identify sites in need of further investment and investigation. The Team will also share information with residents by attending local TRA meetings or holding drop in sessions.
- 4.7. The contractor will be required to identify regular parts requirements and ensure adequate stock. A report of parts on hand and use will be sent to the Technical Services Team each month as part of the contractual operational meetings.
- 4.8. **Recommendation 3:** That in light of the government regulations for end point metering/installation of heat pumps, the Council should explore the possibility of personalised heat tariffs for tenants to reduce fuel poverty . The Committee recognises that the introduction of end point metering/heat pumps, as a result of government legislation, will increase costs for some tenants, and that this introduction should be communicated to tenants in order to ensure tenants are aware that some bills are likely to increase
- 4.9. **Response:** The council is working to meet the regulations for end point metering and has begun communication with affected residents.
- 4.10. **Recommendation 4:** That the future development of new build properties should as be energy efficient as possible, in order to meet net zero carbon 2030, and to have adequate budgets in place in order to achieve this. The council do not want recurring costs in heating plant/repairs, and any risk register adopted should include new build as well as existing plant
- 4.11. **Response:** Property Services and the New Build Team are working closely to ensure new heating systems are both energy efficiency and easy to maintain. Energy efficiency targets for new homes built through the council's new build programme are aimed to deliver net-zero carbon buildings in operational use. This will be achieved through increased fabric performance, alternatives to gas-fuelled heating systems such as air-source heat pumps and maximising other renewable technology such as photo-voltaic panels. These requirements are being captured in project briefs, the new build design guide and employer's requirements. There are also trials to introduce systems which do not use gas in existing properties.

- 4.12. **Recommendation 5:** That the Committee recommend clerk of works inspections, and supervision of works, should be increased in frequency, in order to ensure that plant is installed correctly, and that contract clauses ensure that any subsequent failures of any plant installation are legally enforceable by penalty clauses
- 4.13. **Response:** The Technical Services Manager will review inspection regimes to ensure adequate oversight of the contractor's work. Future contracts will include specific clauses relating to performance of plant and timeliness of repairs.
- 4.14. **Recommendation 6:** That whilst the committee do not feel that hydrogen and other similar technology is well enough advanced, and is unsuitable at present, this situation should be kept in review in the future, if it is shown that heat pump technology is not able to be installed for certain properties, and as hydrogen technology and other progresses and become practicable and she looked at
- 4.15. **Response:** The Councils Net Zero Carbon Workstream One Group is tracking the development of several different options for low carbon heating. While Hydrogen is not a current option progress in this area is being considered and will continue to be tracked by this group.
- 4.16. **Recommendation 7:** That an investigation be carried out into the insulation of certain blocks, especially certain tower blocks, where the fabric of the building leads to a substantial heat loss. This is to ensure that any possible remedial action takes place during the major works programme, and adequate heating is able to be put in place to ensure tenants dwellings heating is as effective as possible and that the Council should make sure that, where there is one, the Energy Performance Certificate is made available for all properties including street properties to the resident.
- 4.17. **Response:** Energy Performance Certificates are only created at the point a property is void and are available to the resident on request if they have been created. The majority of Council homes are rated EPC C or better and work is continuing to bring properties below that up to higher energy performance standards. This includes street properties. Based on the council's partnership work with University College London it is increasingly becoming clear that a combination of heating system retrofit and work to improve the energy efficiency of the

building fabric is required simultaneously to maximise carbon savings and tackle heat loss. As such initial schemes are trialling this whole building approach.

- 4.18. **Recommendation 8:** That the committee welcome the investigation being carried out on rapid resetting of boiler plant, in order that residents are not without hot water/heating whilst an engineer comes to reset the system, and trust that this is available as soon as possible.
- 4.19. **Response:** After careful investigation no suitable safe system to automatically or remotely reset boiler plant has been identified. However real time monitoring is being tested. These BMS systems featuring alarms that alert the contractor to any issues so operatives can be dispatched, and heat restored as soon as possible.
- 4.20. **Recommendation 9:** That committee note that work is taking place with GEM on the BMS system, and the One Serve System, in order to ensure maximum integration, and sharing of information between the Council and GEM, and that this should be expedited as soon as possible
- 4.21. **Response:** The council and Gem are working with their respective IT teams to implement this recommendation which included the remote monitoring systems from recommendation 8
- 4.22. **Recommendation 10:** That the Council maintain information on those tenants who have heat meters and heat pumps installed to ensure that when there is a change of tenancy, that the council are aware of such changes so that heat tariffs can be adjusted accordingly
- 4.23. **Response:** As part of the legislation for end point metering the council is required to retain an asset list which should be completed by Autumn 2022 and maintained going forward.
- 4.24. **Recommendation 11:** That further information be provided to leaseholders about the support available to assist them where there is a low carbon solution alternative that is less expensive than a traditional system

**Response:** The relative difference in operating costs between low carbon heating and traditional systems is very situational. However the councils Net Zero Carbon Programme is offering advice and support to all residents in the borough to help them change to more environmentally friendly options including highlighting grant funding and improving planning advice.

- 4.25. **Recommendation 12:** That the Council promote awareness on the benefit of the Bunhill 2 network, particularly amongst those residents who have been affected by the Bunhill 2 installation works
- 4.26. **Response:** The Property Services Team will work with the Energy Team to help residents understand and appreciate the Bunhill 2 scheme we are currently considering how this can be best delivered.
- 4.27. **Recommendation 13:** That greater awareness be promoted across different platforms of the dates proposed that the communal heating system is due to shut down for the summer months
- 4.28. **Response:** The Technical Services Manager will work with Homes and Neighbourhood Safety Teams to ensure heating dates are promoted on estates. This will include using communications to residents such as newsletters, updating the website and using Electronic Notice Boards.<sup>2</sup>
- 4.29. **Recommendation 14:** On blocks where external sensors are used to control the boiler plant a check is undertaken to ensure that these sensors are in the correct location and giving representative readings.
- 4.30. **Response:** Having reviewed the use of local temperature sensors the Technical Services Team identified issues relating to the location of the sensors. A trial is underway using National Weather Service Data which is having improved results.

## 5. Implications

### 5.1. Financial Implications

- 5.2. The recommendations & proposed actions, as they stand, will be accommodated within existing HRA budget provision, primarily the major works capital prog. budget.

### 5.3. Legal Implications

- 5.4. There are no specific legal implications arising from this report. Legal advice and support will be provided, as required, in the implementation of the recommendations.

**5.5. Environmental Implications and contribution to achieving a net zero carbon Islington by 2030**

5.6. Several of the recommendations above will have positive impacts on the council's net zero carbon objectives. Detailed environmental impacts and implications will be reviewed as part of the specific projects during the procurement stage. The work on building fabric and heating improvements is also reviewed as part of the Net Zero Carbon Board Work Stream One.

**5.7. Equalities Impact Assessment**

5.8. The council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and to advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations, between those who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it (section 149 Equality Act 2010). The council has a duty to have due regard to the need to remove or minimise disadvantages, take steps to meet needs, in particular steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities, and encourage people to participate in public life. The council must have due regard to the need to tackle prejudice and promote understanding.

5.9. An Equalities Impact Assessment is not required in relation to this report, because assessments will be conducted as part of any operational changes or procurement as a result of the above recommendations

## **6. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations**

6.1. The scrutiny reviewed the communal boiler service within housing over the last twelve months. It is recommended that the executive consider the responses in section 4 and approve them.

6.2. It is recommended that the Housing Scrutiny Panel is asked by the Executive to review the progress the service is making on implementing these recommendations in twelve months time.

### **Appendices:**

- Please list any appendices, and detail if any are exempt.

- If an Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed it must be listed here and submitted alongside the report.

**Background papers:**

- Please list any background papers; i.e. papers that are not otherwise published in the public domain that support this report. Please note that all background papers must be published alongside the report.

**Final report clearance:**

Signed by:

*Una O'Halloran*

**Cllr Una O'Halloran, Executive Member for Homes and Communities**

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