

London Borough of Islington

Housing Scrutiny Committee - 21 June 2022

Minutes of the meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD on 21 June 2022 at 7.30 pm.

Present: **Councillors:** Jackson (Chair), Cinko-Oner, Gilgunn, Hamdache, O'Sullivan and Ogunro

Councillor Jason Jackson in the Chair

347 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item 1)

Apologies were received from Councillors Spall and Bossman-Quarshie and Co-optee Rose McDonald

348 DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item 2)

There were no declarations of substitute members

349 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS (Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

350 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (Item 4)

RESOLVED:

That subject to the deletion of an incomplete statement in the minutes referencing homelessness, the minutes of the meeting held on 21 March 2022 be confirmed as an accurate record of proceedings and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

351 CHAIR'S REPORT (Item 5)

None

352 ORDER OF BUSINESS (Item 6)

The order of business would be as per the agenda.

353 PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item 7)

Chair informed the meeting that Councillor Bossman-Quarshie had submitted a number of questions to the clerk and they include the following -

1- To have a review on the customer care and explore points allocations for those under medical conditions whether visible or invisible including those in overcrowding residency

2- Also the allocation housing units that are proposed by planning applications by architects- the question is where the equity is seen or considered, within the units

allocated to those with disabilities visible/invisible [again exploring the amount of sheltered housing and the support put in place.

3- Lastly, to explore the service feedback accessibility i.e face to face review sheet or online or an app function to capture resident satisfaction

In response to Member questions stated above, the Executive Member advised that she will be providing a written response which will be copied to the clerk and the Chair.

354 MEMBERSHIP, TERMS OF REFERENCE AND DATES OF MEETINGS (Item 8)

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted

355 QUARTER 4 HOUSING PERFORMANCE REPORT (2021/2022) (Item 9)

Councillor Una O'Halloran, Executive Member of Homes and Communities and Maxine Holdsworth, Corporate Director of Homes and Neighbourhood was present and outlined the report

The following points were highlighted:

The Executive Member acknowledged the number of new council homes being built was behind schedule, noting that this has been due to external commercial pressures including the rise in steel prices resulting from the war in Ukraine

With regards to rent arrears as a proportion of the rent roll of properties managed by Partners, which is off target, meeting was advised that it is monitored closely as many of these properties have just been brought back in-house in April 2022. In comparison, the Executive Member welcomed the efforts of Islington's Income Recovery Team, that despite the impacts of the pandemic and the roll out of the universal credit, rent arrears as a proportion of the rent roll are at its lowest. Meeting was advised that the council has provided support for its tenants in alleviating their cost of living in areas such as council tax

Meeting was informed that some new councillors went on a site visit with Councillor Ward to view the new build homes and commented positively about the high quality council homes.

The Corporate Director welcomed the high fixed time repairs rate, acknowledging that it was lower in comparison to the repairs carried out during the covid period which were primarily emergency repairs and urgent.

In response to the question of number of households in nightly booked temporary accommodation which is behind target and whether Council tracks those who do not have recourse to public funds, the Executive Member assured the meeting that the Council documents all cases and can share information and data with the committee if required. The Executive Member wanted the Council to recognise the efforts of the team at 222 upper street who do a remarkable job, noting that

despite covid and its impact, the Council was still able to target those who could not access public funds

With regards to the developers decision to withdraw from the development of the site building at Wellington news, the Corporate Director acknowledged that property is owned by the Ministry of Justice, that the council's planning department is clear via its policies and criteria on social housing, which is clear to developers in the borough.

On the suggestion of including other KPI's to the quarterly reports, for example the number of repairs, the response times, and emergency responses, meeting was reminded that some of the issues were presented to committee at the last meeting when members scrutinised the Triage System.

With other KPI requests, ie data about private renters and the number of people intentionally homeless and net zero targets, the meeting was advised that some of this can be presented to committee as briefings after which members can decide whether more information is required.

The Corporate Director advised that in light of the forthcoming inspection by the Social Housing Regulator, officers would want to propose with the permission of the Chair a new indicator around resident satisfaction with capital works on estates.

In response to the Chair's suggestion about officers amending the terminology used in the quarterly reports, such as 'better or worse', the Corporate Director stated that options will be presented to the Chair on how data is to reported so that it is easy for members to understand and also to note the present position and the trend.

356 **SCRUTINY TOPICS AND WORK PROGRAMME 2022/2023 (Item 10)**

On the topic for the Committee to review during the 2022/23 Municipal Year, the Chair highlighted the following potential areas for members to consider:

- Regulator of Social Housing + implementation of the new regulatory framework+ the new bill. On the issue of Regulator Social Housing, the Chair noted that members will be receiving a briefing on this issue during the municipal year from Housing Officers.
- Increasing resident engagement (covering the work of the newly restructured community development team, estate champions, thriving neighbourhoods and how other teams deal with residents)
- Developing an Overcrowding strategy (to cover over 55s housing, grants for under occupiers, building large homes, converting street properties back into larger units, working with sheltered accommodation providers) - The Chair acknowledged that this appears to be an issue that comes up regularly in

Housing Scrutiny Committee - 21 June 2022

conversations with residents and noticeable in members case work. In response to a question on whether the Service is able to provide the number of people that have actually downsized, the Corporate Director indicated that information will be circulated to committee

- Supporting victims of domestic violence (what has changed since the Domestic Violence Act last year)

In response to a suggestion on the possibility of reviewing private rented sector especially in light of the increasing cost of living, the Corporate Director acknowledged that although the council has a policy in place and registration of landlords via the Environmental Health Team, noting that it would be helpful to invite a local private renters union to share their experience with members, committee should note that a scrutiny was carried out 2-3 years ago which looked at regulation and licensing. The Corporate Director suggested that an update on actions could be provided as a first step so the current situation could be considered alongside the recommendations.

On the issue of Committee engaging residents especially those on Estates and TRA's at committee meetings, the chair stated that committee meetings are held in public and there are numerous opportunities for public involvement either to attend meetings in persons, view proceedings on webcasting or the submission of questions

The Chair moved a motion that the topic for review during this 2022/23 Municipal year is Overcrowding. This was seconded and carried.

The Chair informed the meeting that prior to the next committee meeting he would be liaising with housing officers to scope the review, and that a draft scrutiny initiation document (SID) will be circulated for members input.

The Corporate Director reminded members that in putting the SID together, members could decide its aims and objectives, evidence it wants presented, reminding members that topics such as overcrowding does not necessarily look at allocation policy itself but its impacts, such as damp, mould and condensation with children not being able to concentrate on their homework, so committee will be looking at aspects such as well-being and mental health etc . In addition Corporate Director advised that TRA's can be invited to give evidence especially if that is evident through member casework and neighbouring boroughs can be invited to observe their own experience.

RESOLVED:

That Overcrowding is the main topic for review

That the Committee work plan be noted and items be scheduled following discussion with the Chair and Housing Officers before the next meeting.

The Chair acknowledged the good work carried out by the previous Chair of the Committee, Councillor O'Sullivan Mick, noting that his experience will be of immense benefit going forward as he remains on the Committee.

Housing Scrutiny Committee - 21 June 2022

A member wanted the Committee to acknowledge the enormous work carried out by an inhouse architect who has been involved in the new homes build programme whose effort and passion about social housing has been recognised by winning a top award in architecture .

The meeting ended at 8.15 pm

CHAIR