

Homes and Communities Scrutiny Committee - 18 July 2024

Minutes of the meeting of the Homes and Communities Scrutiny Committee held at Committee Room 1, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD on 18 July 2024 at 7.30 pm.

Present: **Councillors:** Jackson (Chair), Gilgunn, McHugh, O'Sullivan, North, Donaghey and McDonald

Councillor Jason Jackson in the Chair

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item A1)

Apologies were received from Councillors Cinko-Oner and North.

2 DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item A2)

There were no declarations of substitute members.

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Item A3)

There were no declarations of interest.

4 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Item A4)

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Committee held on 13 May 2024 be confirmed as an accurate record of proceedings and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

5 TERMS OF REFERENCE, MEMBERSHIP AND DATES OF MEETINGS (Item A5)

Chair reminded meeting that membership and Terms of Reference of the Committee was agreed at Annual Council on 11th May 2024.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted

6 CHAIR'S REPORT (Item A6)

None

7 PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item A7)

None

8 ANNUAL REPORT FROM THE METROPOLITAN POLICE - TO FOLLOW (Item B1)

Borough Commander Andy Carter and Superintendent Jack May-Robinson provided the committee with the Police Annual Report and the following issues were highlighted:

- The focus of the Police Force is primarily on community crime-fighting and working with Londoners to make it a safer place. It fundamentally resets how the force serves Londoners, transforming how to protect the public from harm, combatting violence against women and girls and safeguarding children. In addition, it is

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important that all measures are in place to prevent crime through a proactive and precise approach and providing the best results for victims of crime.

- On the issue of culture change, the force has now embedded values and principles of policing by consent in how it undertakes its daily functions. Also it aims to ensure that in terms of its personnel recruitment that it becomes a more diverse and inclusive organisation so as to reflect the society it serves and in addition has put in place systems to root out discrimination and raise standards.
- Meeting was informed that over 18 months the Police was tasked into addressing the issues picked up by Baroness Casey's review and with the conjunction with the leadership of Islington Council it has produced a local action plan with 10 actions that are easily measurable and monitored.
- Board was reminded that following publication of the Baroness Casey Report, local partners and communities from Islington have requested clarity on the Borough commitment to take action locally, in order to address the points raised on policing.
- The Central North Local Action Plan has been developed in order to deliver upon the "A New Met for London" Strategy from feedback raised by the local partnership and communities.
- Delivery of the actions is to be monitored by the community through quarterly New Met for London meetings, which will enable community representatives to provide feedback as part of an ongoing conversation, and actions will also be monitored through quarterly strategic meetings with the Local Authority.
- Board was advised that regular progress updates will be provided to partners and community to ensure confidence in the Police's commitment to deliver on the specific actions within a year; to monitor progress; to continually review; and, ultimately, to change and deliver the Mission of More Trust, Less Crime and High Standards.
- On the issue of Neighbourhood policing, focus is primarily on both coordinated crime fighting and community engagement activity by strengthening local links with communities to build trust by delivering consistency in staffing and staff retention. Also the Police have put in place a 2 year tenure for neighbourhood roles, thereby ending the current probationer carousel system.
- With regards to enhancing professionalism, meeting was advised that a Board is in place which reviews complaints, misconduct and threats identifying opportunities for interventions around professional standards. The Board ensures compliance with policies and processes including focus on the areas that have been identified as a "risk of corruption.
- In terms of citizen involvement, the Police have developed its approach to consultation and public participation in policing, in areas around police use of force, the use of search powers and the use of Taser. In addition, with ward panel serving as advisory forums. It aims to ensure that there is strong representation from diverse backgrounds in order to provide insight and drive improvement and consistency.
- Delivering coordinated crime fighting is data driven by targeting Islington's key places and people who are causing most harm to communities. It is important to note that using Met Insights and Met Maps ensures the approach is intelligence led and targeted. The Police continually listens to feedback from communities and deliver against a wider set of priorities. Police continue to work with partners to identify locations where communities do not feel safe, in order to not only address crime, this but also the areas where there is the greatest fear of crime, that this provides reassurances through visibility, communication and engagement.
- Developing and supporting its people is to ensure residents have a strong voice and are empowered to be involved in decision making . Focus is now on working towards ensuring that officers and staff at Islington reflect the communities they serve. Training is delivered to officers so as to connect them with Islington and

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especially dedicated training for our new recruits to hear from the voices of our residents and communities.

- Communication is vital so utilising local partnership best practices and networks to maximise the spread of its community engagement, key message sharing and promotion of good news stories with the use of online platforms to communicate more effectively, including expanding the use of Social Media including Twitter (now X), Instagram, Next Door, and introduce ZenCity. Also monthly regular news are now circulated to ensure that the community are kept up to date on how to contact the policing teams of Islington along with good news stories and key updates.
- The Police have taken up the offer of partners with staff released to receive training and awareness of community based trauma, which enables the Service to tailor its approach as required, an example such as working with Islington's Young Black Men and Mental Health, and Cultural Competency Training to enhance knowledge and compassion. The Service has prioritised teams which have the most regular contact with our community including Response and Neighbourhood policing teams and will continue to deliver and enhance lived experience inputs for new officers, regarding the impact which policing can have on our communities. Meeting was advised that line managers have regular health checks with their team, in order to identify trauma and signpost support where required.
- In terms of strengthening public protection, the number of staff have been increased within prioritised Public Protection units. In addition the Police will ensure closer scrutiny and management of high risk wanted offenders and perpetrators, through the use of Op Dauntless and the 100 VAWG mechanisms.
- With regards to protecting the most vulnerable, the Service in conjunction with the LGA to supports the Fairer Together Access Islington Hubs, in order to provide joint support to those who need it most. There has been an increase in standards in relation to the investigation of Hate Crime, an increase with the investment of a dedicated investigation team, in order to build trust and confidence whilst providing a better victim experience. The Service proactively share investigative updates with partners, Hate Crime charities and those with lived experience, to improve our service and outcomes.
- The Service is keen to deliver high quality investigations by improving support for less experienced investigators by creating and resourcing a dedicated "Support Detective Sergeant" role, sitting alongside Criminal Investigation Department (CID) Main Office, to oversee the development of investigators, and increase the range of support, training and mentoring available to TDCs and DHEP- D officers.
- In response to how the police force addresses concerns about trust and confidence, the Commander acknowledged that although it undertakes a public attitude survey, which consist of a small sample of 200 residents seeking feedback on issues of safety and crime within the area, noting there is still room for improvement.
- With regards to representation of the force, meeting was advised that in comparison to May 2021 where there were only 21 female, there has been an increase of 35.3%. With regards to BAME officers over the same period there has been a drop of 0.01%. At future meetings presentations to the committee will reflect the issues raised and in particular the breakdown of frontline and backroom staff.
- On the issue of recruitment, meeting was advised that this was not done locally but centrally.
- Chair welcomed a suggestion by Corporate Director for members of the Committee and relevant ward councillors to receive a personal briefing on the issue of criminal profiling.
- On the question of the success with delivering coordinated crime fighting in and around the Finsbury Park area and the possibility of rolling it out to other notable areas like housing estates, meeting was advised that this was specific to that area

because of its uniqueness, that there were no immediate plans to roll it out. Nearly 45% of serious violence exacted on under 25s is committed by under 25s.

- With regards to facial recognition and its usage, meeting was reassured that serious crimes has been prevented by the use of the technology and that if Police decide to use it within the borough, the Council would be notified on the day and will be widely publicised.

RESOLVED:

That the Annual report be noted

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9 PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR HOUSING UPDATE (Item B2)

Besserat Atsebaha, Director of Community Safety, Security and Resilience, Homes & Neighbourhoods and Nick Austin, Interim Project Delivery Manager provided an update on Islington's Property licensing scheme in the private rented sector. The following points were highlighted.

- The Private rented sector now accounts for a third of housing in Islington and although many privately rented properties are satisfactory, a significant amount are not up to standard.
- Islington's Private Rented Sector Charter sets out Council's commitment to stand alongside private renters and work with private landlords to maintain and improve standards.
- Property licensing is one of the tools the Council employs to help address inadequate housing standards, rogue landlords, anti-social tenants, and the impact of poor management. In an area subject to licensing, all private landlords must demonstrate that they are a 'fit and proper' person to let a property, obtain a licence and provide and manage accommodation to a reasonable standard. If they fail to do so, the Council could take enforcement action.
- Director informed meeting that there are three licensing schemes currently in operation in Islington, mandatory, additional and selective.
- Mandatory licenses is a borough wide scheme for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO's) covering five or more people from two or more household's sharing one or more basic facilities such as a bathroom and/or kitchen. This obligation has been in place across the country since 2006 and does not expire.
- With regards to Additional licensing schemes, meeting was informed that it is a boroughwide discretionary scheme adopted by the council which commenced in February 2021, and covers smaller HMOs occupied by 3 or 4 persons who are not members of the same household who share kitchen and/or bathroom facilities. It also includes properties converted into self-contained flats where the conversion work was not carried out in accordance with the Building Regulations 1991. The Council's additional scheme is due to expire in February 2026 unless a new scheme is approved.

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- Selective licensing scheme is a discretionary scheme adopted by the Council in February 2021 covering the old Finsbury Park ward boundary for single and two-person household properties or a single family. This has now been expanded in May 2024 to cover the new Finsbury Park, Tollington and Hillrise wards.
- In response to a question, meeting was advised that Licensing schemes run for a maximum of five years and a fee is payable for each licence.
- In terms of benefits of a licensing scheme, meeting was advised that it enables Council to regulate the condition and management of private rented properties in the borough so as to improve property standards and management; protect our residents from rogue landlords; support the reduction of other problems being caused by poorly managed privately rented accommodation such as antisocial behaviour and waste management issues.
- Property licensing also helps deliver improvements by driving better management and faster resolution of issues; helps to identify landlords who do not proactively manage property standards and struggle with other property management issues; identify properties that are more likely to have serious hazards and are in need of regulation; prevent criminal landlords from renting property to residents through the fit and proper test and issuing of shorter licences to landlords subject to enforcement action to encourage better management and apply additional licensing conditions. This closer monitoring ensures struggling landlords are forced to improve the management of their properties.
- In terms of compliance and unlicensed properties significant effort has been made to encourage applications and bring properties into compliance during the first phase of the scheme; that that as of the 1st April 2024, council has achieved a high level of compliance with 94% of our original estimated number of properties receiving applications.
- In addition to the above meeting was advised that Council has recommissioned its tenure intelligence modelling and would have updated estimated property numbers shortly.
- Meeting was advised that an updated report will be brought back to Committee at a future meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the update be noted.

- 10** **SELECTION OF SCRUTINY TOPIC 2024/25 (Item B3)**
With regard to the topic to scrutinise during the 2024/25 Municipal Year, the following topics were raised and discussed:

Review of Community Centres

Members were advised that although officers are presently undertaking an information gathering exercise on this issue, no time scale has been agreed on completion date. Chair suggested officer's exercise could be fed into the Committee's formal review, stating that he would want the review to be undertaken from a resident perspective.

Executive Member stated that although this could be addressed via the Asset review, any scrutiny by committee is welcome

Private Rented Sector

Meeting was advised that in light of the challenges experienced by private renters such as high rent and quality of accommodation and the high cost of living, this would be a review topic welcomed by private renters as quite a number of properties in Islington are privately rented.

The Chair moved a motion that Community Centres be the topic for review during the 2024/25 Municipal year is Community Centres and a potential review on Private rented sector. This was seconded by Cllr McHugh.

The Chair informed meeting that prior to the next committee meeting in September both he and the Vice Chair will be meeting the lead housing officers to scope the review with the view of drafting the Scrutiny Initiation Document (SID).

RESOLVED:

That community centres will be the main topic for review of the Committee.

That Committee consider a mini review or an officer update on Private Rented Sector.

11

PURCHASING THE EX-RIGHT TO BUY PROPERTIES - OFFICER UPDATE (Item B4)

Ian Swift, Director of Housing Needs and Strategy updated committee on Council's commitment in addressing temporary accommodation by purchasing Ex-right to Buy Properties. The following points were noted:

- The aim of report before Committee is to provide an update on the Council's purchase of Ex - Right to Buy properties with funding provided by the GLA/DLUH&C and approved by Executive on the 19th October 2024.
- The Director advised that officers welcome suggestions from the Committee on any additional actions to ensure that the Council completes the purchases of these properties before the 31st of March 2026 deadline.
- The Executive Committee on the 19th of October 2023 approved the borrowing of £85,304,000 within the Housing Revenue Account to supplement the funding provided by the DLUH&C to enable the council to purchase 310 Ex Right to Buy properties and to accept the DLUH&C capital grant funding of £81,725,260.
- In response to a question on funding, meeting was advised that on 20th of July 2023 Executive approved borrowing of £26,359,000 within the Housing Revenue Account to supplement the funding provided by the GLA/DLUH&C to enable the council to purchase 40 x 1 bedroom Ex Right to Buy properties, for care experienced young adults and people sleeping rough in Islington or the prevention of people sleeping rough, 20 x 2 bedroom Ex Right to Buy properties 20 x 3 bedroom Ex Right to Buy properties and 20 x 4 bedroom Ex Right to Buy properties for people who are homeless from Afghanistan and the Ukraine as part of the council's humanitarian housing work. With capital funding totalling £20,591,000 allocated to Islington Council by the DLUH&C/GLA.

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- Council has purchased 156 Ex Right to Buy properties in Islington since these programmes commenced. This performance shows the council has completed the purchase of four properties every week since the 19th of October 2023 approvals provided by the Executive.
- Therefore, combining the completed purchased properties with the properties due to be completed soon will result in 246 (60%) of properties being purchased from the 410 properties in the programme. The Housing Operations services aim to complete the purchase of a further 164 Ex Right to Buy properties in the year before the end of the 2025/2026 financial year.
- In response to a question, Director stated that he would circulate a heat map showing the locations of the Ex-Right to Buy properties.
- On the question of whether these properties could be subjected to right to buy, meeting was advised that these properties are to address temporary accommodation and protected from sale.
- An updated report with more details will be shared with committee in the near future.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted

An update report on Void be scheduled for a future meeting.

12

STRATEGIC REVIEW OF OVERCROWDING & UNDER-OCCUPATION - PROGRESS REPORT (Item B5)

Ian Swift, Director of Housing Needs and Strategy updated committee on the progress of the recommendations following the committee's review into overcrowding and under occupation. The following points were noted:

- The Action plan has been designed in partnership with Adult Social Care, Homes and Neighbourhoods and Children's services, plus Health agencies.
- The Housing Scrutiny Committee conducted a 12-month strategic review for Overcrowding and Under-Occupation, by considering presentations from across the council, presentations from partner agencies including Housing Associations, legal advice agencies etc, reviewing all available data and considering best practice from other councils.
- The Review conducted by the Housing Scrutiny Committee approved twenty recommendations and these are contained within the attached Action Plan
- The Housing Scrutiny Committee decided at the January 2024, to receive regular updates to all future Housing Scrutiny Committee meetings on the progress in implementing these recommendations to ensure momentum continues with this important work.
- The Action plan identifies the following progress for implementing the twenty recommendations: 9 (45%) Green, 10 (50%) Amber and One Red to implement the recommendations in full. Please note since the last update provided in February 2024, the actions in Green have increased by three, Ambers have reduced by four and Reds have increased by one.

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- The housing crisis continues to be challenging for Islington Council and all council's with a 25% increase in the use of temporary accommodation for homeless households in Islington, a reduction in available lettings for Islington Council and Housing Association homes, an increase in households joining the housing register, an increase in Home Office evictions for people with a legal right to remain in the country with limited eviction notices provided to these people and reduction in new build affordable housing due to the current economic environment. However, it remains of the greatest importance to implement the twenty recommendations approved by the Housing Scrutiny Committee despite the context provided.

RESOLVED:

That the 6 monthly progress report be noted.

13 PROVISIONAL WORK PLAN 2024/25 (Item B6)

RESOLVED:

That the draft work plan be noted.

The meeting ended at 9.30 pm

CHAIR