

HOUSING MANAGEMENT AND ALMSHOUSES SUB (COMMUNITY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES) COMMITTEE

Monday, 27 April 2015

Minutes of the meeting of the Housing Management and Almshouses Sub (Community and Children's Services) Committee held at the Guildhall EC2 at 1.45 pm

Present

Members:

Virginia Rounding (Chairman)	Ann Holmes
Deputy Billy Dove	Gareth Moore
Alderman David Graves	Dhruv Patel
Deputy the Revd Stephen Haines	

Officers:

Philippa Sewell	Town Clerk's Department
Mark Jarvis	Chamberlain's Department
Ade Adetosoye	Director of Community & Children's Services
Jacque Campbell	Community & Children's Services
Karen Tarbox	Community & Children's Services
Simon Cribbens	Community & Children's Services
Kirsty Leitch	Community & Children's Services
Elizabeth Donnelly	Community & Children's Services

1. APOLOGIES

The Chairman congratulated Deputy Billy Dove, past Chairman of the Housing Management & Almshouses Sub Committee, on his election as Chief Commoner.

Apologies were received from the Deputy Chairman the Revd Dr Martin Dudley, Deputy Henry Jones, Adam Richardson and Elizabeth Rogula.

2. MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT IN RESPECT OF ITEMS ON THE AGENDA

Mr Gareth Moore declared an interest in housing matters as a tenant of Golden Lane Estate.

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED – That the public minutes and non-public summary of the meeting held on 12 January 2015 be approved as a correct record.

Matters Arising

Horace Jones House

The Chairman advised that the formal opening had taken place on 25th March, and all tenants had accepted their places.

Welfare Benefits Update & Financial Inclusion Programme

Members noted that despite the expectation for rental arrears to increase, rental collections were better by £2,000 than the previous financial year. In response to a Member's question, officers confirmed that the 'bedroom tax' had affected a number of residents, but the work to support tenants through money and budget management had helped mitigate the effects.

Asset Management – Golden Lane Estate

The Assistant Director – Barbican & Property Services reported that there had been two incidents at the Golden Lane Estate: a collapse of external cladding at Stanley Cohen House, and a fire in the basement of Crescent House.

(a) Stanley Cohen House

The Assistant Director – Barbican & Property Services advised that, although there was a wider review of building fabric testing underway, Stanley Cohen House was being reviewed urgently, with fabric testing scheduled for later in the week.

(b) Crescent House

The Assistant Director – Barbican & Property Services advised that the fire had originated in the basement, where a single meter had caught fire and spread to others, affecting 36 households. Members noted that, although it was the responsibility of residents to contact their suppliers to get meters replaced, blank meters had been installed to ensure residents had electricity again. Officers confirmed that currently three households were still without power as access could not be gained to the flats.

Members expressed their concern, and queried the level of inspection that could be undertaken to prevent reoccurrence. Officers confirmed that, although checks were carried out by electricity suppliers, no records were kept of which meters were checked and when. In future these could be maintained, along with the addition of meter checks and the possibility of thermal imaging in the five-year cyclical tests.

Members requested the report of the City Fire Officer be circulated electronically to Sub Committee Members, along with the report of the Fire Brigade once it had been received.

4. GATEWAY 7 OUTCOME REPORT: BOILER REPLACEMENT PROJECT - 2013/14 - 2014/15

The Sub Committee considered a report of the Director of Community & Children's Services concerning a boiler replacement project. Officers advised that this had been completed within the agreed budget and on schedule, though the lessons to be learned included better communication, including comprehensive record-keeping. Members queried the financial assessment for the boiler costs, and the Chamberlain confirmed that rigorous City Procurement processes had been followed and consequently the costs represented value for money at that time.

RESOLVED – That the lessons learnt be noted and the project be closed.

5. **GOOD NEIGHBOUR SCHEME REVIEW**

The Sub Committee received a report of the Director of Community & Children's Services providing an overview and evaluation of the Good Neighbour Scheme, which had been operating on Middlesex Street and Golden Lane Estate for almost two years to match volunteers with vulnerable people or newcomers to the estate. Officers outlined the strengths and areas for improvement and Members noted that the Scheme was being refined and re-launched, although further evaluation would be required before it could be rolled out across all of the City of London estates.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted

6. **TENANCY AND RENTS POLICY**

The Sub Committee considered a report of the Director of Community & Children's Services which sought approval for the draft Tenancy and Rents Policy. This followed on from the Tenancy Strategy previously agreed by Members, and set out the City's policies in relation to tenancy and rent with regard to its stock of social rented homes, both within the Square Mile and outside. Members noted key changes included:

- the addition of "flexible tenancies" as type of tenancy available for use by the City;
- the City's willingness to apply to the Court to "demote" tenancies in response to anti-social behaviour and threats to staff; and
- reduced entitlement to succession for new tenants.

In response to a Member's query, officers confirmed that the City of London Corporation's policy for increasing social rents is set in line with government policy. This sets increases at the level of the Consumer Price Index (CPI) rate of inflation plus 1% for the next ten years from April 2015. Members noted that the service charges for properties would rise in line with the cost of providing services.

RESOLVED – That the draft Tenancy and Rents Policy be approved.

7. **RIGHT TO BUY SOCIAL MOBILITY FUND (CITY HOME PURCHASE GRANTS)**

The Sub Committee received a report of the Director of Community & Children's Services regarding the City of London's successful bid to the Right to Buy Social Mobility Fund. The City of London was one of 42 successful bidders, and has been allocated £600k to support twenty grants of £30k to Right to Buy eligible tenants to enable them to purchase a property on the open market.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

8. **BARBICAN AREA CCTV**

This item had been withdrawn from the agenda as it had been discussed at the Grand Committee meeting held on 17th April 2015 and Members had no further questions.

9. **QUESTIONS ON MATTERS RELATING TO THE WORK OF THE SUB COMMITTEE**

A series of written questions had been received and were answered as follows:

1. What is being done to progress the proposal to have a single contact number for emergencies and out of hours provision? When will this be in place?

We currently provide two numbers for residents to call out of office hours. One is the Repairs Reporting Line, which is answered by our contractors, Wates during evenings and weekends. All emergencies relating to property issues should be reported to this line.

The other number allows residents to contact a duty Estate Officer at these times. Estate Officers from a group of estates located within easy reach share this duty on a rota basis. The number should only be used for reporting urgent issues, which cannot wait until the office opens and are either non-property related, or not blue-light emergencies. In reality, this number is rarely used, and calls to it are nearly always either non-urgent matters, or issues, which should have been reported by either calling the Repairs Line, by dialling 999 or calling the police or other services on the 101 non-emergency number.

However, as we do publicise the Estate Officer number, it is only right that residents expect it to be answered. This has failed on two recent occasions – once due to a technical fault, and the second due to a human error. We apologise for this.

We agree that it is confusing for residents to be offered two different numbers, and are committed to having one number only. This should be the Repairs Reporting Line, as the vast majority of calls are concerning property. We need to work with our contractors to ensure that they are able to deal appropriately with non-emergency calls and to correctly refer non-property issues. This will require some training and the negotiation of a slightly amended contract.

We would still maintain a duty rota for Estate Officers, and their details would be made available to Wates, the police and the Guildhall, as is the case at present, so that they could be called out by those services in an emergency. However, to avoid confusion, their number would not be advertised to residents.

We expect this to be in place by the end of May.

2. Is there a problem with departmental resources/capacity/suitable technical cover? If so, what is being done to address these shortfalls? What are the timescales for adequate capacity to be achieved?

Following development and approval of the Asset Management Strategy and Major works programme in December 2014, senior officers determined that additional technical resources were required to deliver the programme of works, as this volume of work is previously unprecedented. The property services team structure, approved in November 2013 (effective April 2014), provides the flexibility of using permanent internal resources as well as procuring external contractors, project managers and specialists to deliver major projects on an “as required” basis.

We currently have two Building Surveyor vacancies within the team, and unfortunately, a recruitment process carried out earlier this failed to result in appointments. This was due to the poor calibre of applicants. We are in the process of appointing two x temporary Building Surveyors, to progress a number of projects, whilst we complete a further recruitment process of vacant permanent positions. Interviews for the permanent posts are scheduled for the week commencing 11th May, however, it is likely to be a couple of months before these vacancies are then filled, hence the appointment of temporary resources.

Having said this, many of the major works projects, such as the windows replacement scheme, building fabric testing, redecorations etc will be carried out by external professionals / contractors who will be procured as part of the project process.

Other technical specialists e.g. architects, structural engineers and quantity surveyors, are brought in ‘as and when required’, or for specific projects, as these skills are not within the Property Services team. When appropriate support is also obtained from City Surveyors in regards to advice or guidance on specific projects or technical matters.

3. A pro-active technical walk was suggested at the GLERA meeting. This would be by appropriately qualified staff from the City, along with appropriately qualified residents if they chose to attend. Are resources being put in place to achieve this goal? Will the potential problem areas be identified and relevant action be taken in a timely fashion to avoid escalation of problems?

Property Services officers do already attend most of the quarterly walkabouts held on all estates, and all residents are welcome to attend. However, we recognise that, in some cases, it may be helpful to have a specific focus on maintenance issues.

As mentioned in Q2. above, we are currently recruiting for the posts of Building Surveyor. These posts require individuals to be recognised chartered surveyors / building professionals accredited by RICS (Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors) or CIOB (Chartered Institute of Builders).

However, other specialists such as Architects, Structural Engineers or Quantity Surveyors are not employed within the Housing service on a permanent basis. These services are procured as required. Arrangements are not in place for these services to form part of regular estate walkabouts. Officers will investigate the need for, cost of such, and inform Members of this as soon as possible.

4. Is there a detailed cyclical maintenance programme for Golden Lane? Could this information be provided to residents?

Following approval of the 5-year asset management programme, we are currently procuring long-term agreements / contracts for the provision of planned maintenance, such as internal and external redecoration, clearing and maintaining drainage & gullies.

Other cyclical maintenance / testing, such as electrical testing, gas servicing is already in place.

Whilst we have been able to provide residents with the high level information in the 5-year plan, and subsequent project updates at residents' meetings, we have not at this stage been able to provide a detailed plans of works to specific blocks , with specific timings. Part of the procurement process of these contracts is to determine the programme of works and once the contractor(s) has been appointed, we will then be able to provide the detailed programme of works.

5. There seems to be a question about the standard of the repair service, both in quality of repairs and arrangements to carry out said repairs. Can the City provide details of this service and the quality assurance measures in place post repairs?

Currently the performance indicators used to monitor the repairs contract apply to work carried out across all City of London Housing estates (excluding the Barbican Residential estate). Repairs requiring access to the home are carried out on an appointment basis. During 2014/15, of the appointments made, 99% of these were kept by the contractors (except where rescheduled at resident's request).

Post work checks are carried out through a combination of:

- Post Inspections - on average 1 in 10 routine repairs are inspected. 2014/15 performance monitoring shows 99% of jobs were approved by the Property Services officer who carried out the inspection and inspected.
and
- Customer Satisfaction Surveys about the repairs services – the survey includes questions about the process of reporting the repair through to the attendance of operatives and quality of repair. There has been a significant improvement in regard to responsive repairs as shown in the performance figures over the past few years.

2011/12 – 73%
2012/13 – 84%
2013/14 – 97%
2014/15 – 97%

However, customer satisfaction about major works is not currently monitored but this will be done as projects within the Asset Management Plan are delivered.

The Assistant Director – Barbican & Property Services has given a commitment to consider implementing performance reporting on an individual estate basis and will provide further information on this in due course. The AD has also agreed to review performance indicators with current contractors to identify the % of first time resolution of repairs and to engage with Members and Residents in preparation for when the contract is due to be re-let – in 2017.

6. At the GLERA meeting, it was raised that there is a perception that communications need to be improved. Is this being addressed, if so, in what way?

Members will be aware that they agreed a Resident Communications & Engagement Strategy in July 2014. This gave details of a number of improvements, which had been made in the last year, and the actions, which are now being taken. On Golden Lane, existing communication mechanisms include a quarterly meeting with residents, a quarterly newsletter, regular postings on a Facebook page and on the estate's website, plus numerous letters to residents on specific issues.

We understand, however, that residents expect to be kept up to date more frequently on some matters, in particular the progress on the major projects on the estate such as the Great Arthur House re-cladding, windows programme and concrete repairs. Property Services Officers produce a monthly update report on these matters, and we are happy to circulate this to the residents each month.

Whilst recognising that some residents continue to need to communicate with us in traditional ways, we know that we are somewhat behind the times in terms of our use of technology, and have been trying to address this for some time. I am pleased to say that the Director and the Chamberlain have just approved a programme of enhancements to our IT systems, which will transform many of our processes and not only make it easier for residents to get information for themselves, but also for us to communicate with and consult them. That programme of work starts today, and the ability to send information to residents quickly and effectively, is the number one priority.

7. Can relevant information from the City's Health & Safety Team and the London Fire Brigade be communicated to residents as soon as possible, regarding the recent incident at Crescent House?

Yes. We now have a draft report from the City's Fire Safety Advisor, and are happy to share this once finalised. We still await the London Fire Brigade report, but will make this available as soon as we receive it.

8. The upcoming Service Level Agreement for the estate needs to contain Key Performance Indicators specific to work strands. Can this be addressed? On a wider note, can the City separate the Key Performance Indicators for individual estates so that these can be scrutinised against locally agreed KPIs contained in the estate-specific SLA?

Most estates have not had specific Service Level Agreements for some years. We found that the vast majority of residents showed no interest in them at all and so we have tried hard to put in place arrangements, which are more meaningful to a wider community. Managers use work schedules and clear photographic standards to ensure that cleaning, gardening etc is carried out regularly and to a high standard. They monitor satisfaction through feedback from complaints, walkabouts and comments raised at meetings, as well as through the annual satisfaction survey, and use this feedback to address any problems. Longer term issues are addressed in the Estate Plan.

Golden Lane is one of two estates, which do still have a formal SLA, at the behest of the Residents' Association. The Estate Manager has been happy to work with GLERA to update this and, if they tell him the performance measures they would like included, he will be equally happy to incorporate these.

The Key Performance Indicators for estate management focus on resident satisfaction. Annually, we ask residents to tell us whether they are satisfied with the cleanliness of their estate, the general attractiveness, the customer service, and the overall service they receive. We also ask them if they feel safe on their estate. These are simple measures but reflect national practice and allow us to benchmark our performance against other landlords.

We already collect and report these indicators at an individual estate level. We also publish the overall results in the Annual Report, which is sent to residents. Over the years, we have simplified this in response to feedback that residents do not want to be overloaded with information. However, the more detailed results for each estate can be made available to interested residents on request, and we will include a note to that effect in this year's Annual Report.

With regard to performance information on repairs and maintenance, please also see the comments under the response to question 5.

9. Can the complaints system be made known and the results of said complaints be made transparent per estate?

The Corporate Complaints Process is already widely publicised and Housing complaints follow that process. Members will be aware that we recently produced a more detailed procedure to make the process more transparent and specific for Housing tenants and residents, which was agreed by the Sub-Committee. Following further consultation with the Housing User Board, we have produced a leaflet outlining the process and that is about to be printed and available on all estates.

Statistics relating to formal complaints are presented to the Community & Children's Services Committee and to this Sub-Committee, and those papers are already publicly available. Most formal complaints are in connection with an individual and their private and personal situation, and it would be inappropriate to make that information public. We are happy, however, to look at what information, beyond statistical data, we might be able to publish.

10. Some residents have suggested that they form a Tenant Management Organisation? What would the response of officers be to this?

Tenants and leaseholders have a statutory "Right to Manage" their homes and thereby to take over the management of budgets, staffing and services for their estate. To do this, they must form a Tenant Management Organisation. The TMO would need to develop clear and viable proposals, which would have to have the support of the residents. Their ability to take over management of the estate would need to be assessed by an independent body. A crucial part of the process would be that all residents would need to be balloted on whether they wished the management of the estate to be removed from the City and given to the TMO. The views of secure tenants would have extra weighting in this ballot. We would, of course, co-operate fully with a TMO if that was the preference of residents.

Members requested that these responses be made public as soon as possible after the meeting.

Members of the Sub Committee and members of the public were then invited to ask further questions.

Members of the public from Golden Lane Estate presented a petition to the Town Clerk which had over 200 signatures registering their concern about the "...continuing neglect of [the] Estate by the Corporation of London, resulting in its serious state of disrepair and so posing a significant risk to residents' health and safety". The Chairman gave her assurances that this petition would be recognised and worked through immediately. The Director confirmed this, and resolved to present a detailed plan of action for the key issues for the next Sub Committee meeting.

A resident stated that concern extended to a myriad of smaller incidents, not just the two recent events. The Assistant Director - Housing & Neighbourhoods discussed the Annual Resident Satisfaction Survey and the Assistant Director – Barbican & Property Services confirmed that written and telephone surveys were carried out after responsive repairs with a good response rate, although these were not in place for major works.

With regard to specific issues, a resident at Stanley Cohen House had reported a crack in his wall; the Assistant Director – Barbican & Property Services advised that the Senior Team Manager had visited the property and found no evidence of further cracking, but undertook to contact the resident again. With regard to outstanding repairs, the Assistant Director – Barbican & Property Services reported there was not a long list to be undertaken and advised residents to phone and log any repairs that were unresolved.

RESOLVED – That:

- (a) The written response to questions be made publically available after the meeting; and
- (b) The resolution of issues raised be reported on at the next Sub Committee meeting.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT

The Chairman advised of a change in guidance to vacant building credit.

11. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED – That under Section 100(A) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act.

Item	Paragraph
12-14	3
15	-

12. NON-PUBLIC MINUTES

RESOLVED – That the non-public minutes of the meeting held on 12 January 2015 be approved as a correct record.

13. ESTATE STAFFING UPDATE

The Sub Committee considered a report of the Director of Community & Children’s Services.

14. QUESTIONS ON MATTERS RELATING TO THE WORK OF THE SUB COMMITTEE

There was one non-public question.

15. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT AND WHICH THE SUB COMMITTEE AGREE SHOULD BE CONSIDERED WHILST THE PUBLIC ARE EXCLUDED

There was no other business.

The meeting closed at 3.17 pm

Chairman

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