

**HOUSING MANAGEMENT AND ALMSHOUSES SUB (COMMUNITY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES) COMMITTEE**  
**Wednesday, 29 November 2023**

Minutes of the meeting of the Housing Management and Almshouses Sub (Community and Children's Services) Committee held at Committee Rooms, 2nd Floor, West Wing, Guildhall on Wednesday, 29 November 2023 at 1.45 pm

**Present**

**Members:**

Helen Fentimen (Deputy Chairman)  
Mary Durcan  
Deputy John Fletcher  
Alderman Susan Pearson

**Officers:**

Pam Wharfe	- Interim Director Assistant Housing
Liam Gillespie	- Community and Children's Services
Jason Hayes	- Community and Children's Services
Michael Gwyther-Jones	- Community and Children's Services
David Blane	- Community and Children's Services
Rhys Campbell	- Town Clerk's Department
Julie Mayer	- Town Clerk's Department

**1. APOLOGIES**

As the Chairman was absent the Deputy Chairman took the Chair. Apologies were received from Ruby Sayed (Chairman), Jamel Banda, Henrika Priest and Ceri Wilkins.

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

Alderman Susan Pearson declared an interest in housing matters as a resident of Golden Lane Estate.

**3. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED** - That the public minutes and non-public summary of the meeting held on 17 April 2023 be approved as a correct record.

**Matters arising**

A Member requested an update on the report concerning right to buy leases, which had been scheduled for this meeting.

Officers replied that the report would be presented at the next meeting.

#### 4. **OUTSTANDING ACTIONS**

The Sub Committee received the actions tracker and noted the following:

1. Regarding the action in respect of vehicle charging points, a consultant had carried out an assessment across all the estates. Officers were preparing to procure the necessary works, but advised that these were expected to be delayed due to changes in personnel.
2. The Housing Working Party would report to the Housing Management and Almshouses Sub-Committee.

#### 5. **FIRE SAFETY UPDATE**

The Sub Committee received a report of the Executive Director, Community and Children's Services providing an update on fire safety.

During discussion, the following points were noted:

- Regarding fire doors, lot 1 and lot 2 had been completed, with a fire door inspection programme expected to take place imminently. Work on lot 3 was underway and had made progress. Initial planning advice was needed for lot 4 and lot 5. A suited key system had been implemented for all risers and plant rooms that would allow one key access across all of the Corporation's estates. A gateway report was due to be produced in 2024 for the replacement of emergency lighting.
- In respect to the installation of sprinkler systems, the project at Avonsdale Estate for the three-point blocks was expected to be completed before Christmas 2023. However, a petition had been raised since installation had received significant resistance from residents at Petticoat Tower. At the time of this meeting, 15 out of 88 residents had engaged with the contractor in terms of allowing access into their residences. Officers highlighted that any further delay to this project would incur prolongation cost of approximately £50,000 per month in terms of costs. A Member asked how officers planned to prevent a stand-off between residents and the City of London Corporation. Officers replied that an ongoing engagement drop-in session for both tenants and leaseholders was expected to take place in the following week, and that engagement and communication activities had been occurring regularly for the past three years. However, the petition was a recent development, and officers hoped that these sessions would reduce the level of resistance. The Chair asked why residents were objecting to the sprinkler installations. In reply, officers responded said that residents were concerned by the cosmetic appearance of the installations, and also the risk of accidental operation (e.g. flooding of flats). Attempts were underway to improve the appearance, and statistics were being provided to reassure residents that it would be unlikely for the systems to be

activated by accident. The Chair asked officers if the City Corporation would be responsible in the event of a system failure. Officers undertook to clarify the Corporation's liability for a systems failure but confirmed that residents or leaseholders would not be liable. There would be additional maintenance requirements which would incur additional cost onto residents, and officers undertook to investigate this further. The Chair advised officers to proceed with installations of those residents who were content and to offer other residents the opportunity to meet individually regarding their concerns. She asked for a progress update at the next meeting of the sub-committee.

- A Member asked if the value of a flat would increase if a sprinkler system had been installed. In reply, officers felt that this was likely and it may have an impact on home insurance costs.

**RESOLVED**, that - Members agreed, in principle, to the proposal to set up the Housing Committee Working Party. The terms of reference for this working party to be brought to the sub-committee at its next meeting.

## 6. **HOUSING MAJOR WORKS PROGRAMME - PROGRESS REPORT**

The Sub Committee received a report of the Executive Director, Community and Children's Services providing an update on the Housing Major Works Programme.

During the discussion and questions, the following points were noted:

- The pilot window replacement project at Crescent House was complete and had received positive feedback. A ventilation strategy had been implemented to prevent damp, mould, and humidity within the property. The Yorkway communal heating system had also been completed.
- A Member, in relation to the window replacements on the William Blake Estate, asked a member if any external funding had been received for any carbon saving measures. Officers confirmed that they would be able to explore available funding options once Gateway 3 had been approved. There were still opportunities to explore more energy efficient measures within William Blake Estate, such as vacuum glazing, despite the complicated nature of the structure of the estate.
- Regarding staffing, officers had been conducting interviews and were expecting to have new staff joining shortly to support the delivery of the Housing Major Works Programme. The new staff would be hired on limited contracts which would be subject to review. A Member highlighted the importance of staff retention.
- The Chair encouraged officers to show residents how well planned and robust the Housing Major Works Programme was, and how it planned to deliver on its targets. The Chair asked officers to highlight key details in reports submitted to the Sub-Committee so that the City Corporation can

respond accordingly. Officers agreed, and suggested consolidating key information relating to the Housing Major Works programme in future reports.

- Regarding the asset management strategy, officers advised the committee that the individual working on this would most likely like to have a discussion with Members regarding high priority issues. The Chair proposed the idea of having a session, if possible, at the next committee meeting or at a time most convenient for Members.

**RESOLVED**, that - the report be received and its contents noted.

## 7. **TENANT SATISFACTION SURVEY**

The Sub Committee received a report of the Executive Director, Community and Children's Services, providing an update on the planned survey of the City Corporation's tenants.

- A Member informed officers of a tenant who had not received a call back and discussion was had as to how these surveys were conducted. The Member asked officers to be professional in their approach when conducting surveys. Officers noted these comments and offered to contact the tenant who didn't receive a call back.
- The Chair asked officers if the target of 320 completed surveys with social tenants was a significant amount, to which officers responded by saying that this figure complied with guidance given by the regulator of social housing. The Chair acknowledged that officers had met the requirement but encouraged officers to identify a way to increase the number of completed surveys to above 320 since this number seemed insignificant compared to the number of tenants that resided on the City of London Corporation estates. Officers undertook to explore how they could increase the number of completed surveys.
- A Member asked officers if a report regarding the first Tenant Perception Survey under the new Tenant Satisfaction Measures regime would be provided to the committee before April 2024. In reply, officers said that they expected to provide the report at the next meeting.

**RESOLVED**, that - the report be received and its contents noted.

## 8. **GUEST ROOMS REVIEW**

The Sub Committee received a report of the Executive Director, Community and Children's Services concerning guest rooms at Golden Lane Estate and Middlesex Street Estate.

A Member enquired as to whether staff used the guest rooms and how much they were charged for its usage. Officers confirmed that staff were charged the standard rate and advised Members that staff usage of these rooms was rare

and only occurred if they were in the locality on work business. The rooms were primarily for resident use.

In terms of the recommended change in nightly rates, a Member asked if there was any evidence that this would increase usage of the guest rooms. In reply, officers advised that the evidence was largely based on discussions with both Members and residents. Officers had attempted to make a generous discount but were willing to review it at a later date. A Member requested that officers provide a date for this review at the next meeting.

A Member asked if officers supported opening up the Middlesex Street Estate guest rooms to the residents of Mansell Street, in a similar way to how residents of the Barbican Estate could use guest rooms on Golden Lane Estate. Officers undertook to review this after refurbishment had been completed on the guest rooms on Middlesex Street Estate before making a commitment. The Chair asked officers to make this a six-month review to which officers agreed.

A Member, acknowledging the pressures on the Housing Revenue Account, and noted that data suggested that the guest rooms were a loss-making service. They felt that if the losses continued then it should be reviewed. Officers replied that if the permanent member of staff on Golden Lane were to focus on the cleaning of the rooms as their sole responsibility then that could help to alleviate the running costs of the guest rooms; better advertising of the guest rooms was also mentioned.

**RESOLVED**, that - Members agreed to approve the proposed pricing structure for the guest room facilities (includes reductions to current nightly rates).

## 9. **UNREASONABLE BEHAVIOUR POLICY**

The Sub Committee received a report of the Executive Director, Community and Children's Services, regarding the Unreasonable Behaviour Policy.

Members noted that the policy aimed to address the requirement from the Housing Ombudsman for local authorities to have a clear policy on how staff deal with unreasonable levels of contact from troublesome complainants and how the City of London Corporation are complying with the Housing Ombudsman's complaints handling code.

Members also advised officers to establish work on the corresponding side of the report, with an emphasis on staff training being mentioned.

**RESOLVED**, that - Members approved the Unreasonable Behaviour Policy for use by the Housing Division.

## 10. **INDEPENDENT ACCESS REVIEW OF OUR SOCIAL HOUSING ESTATES**

The Sub Committee received a report of the Executive Director, Community and Children's Services, concerning access on the social housing estates

Officers advised the Sub-Committee that the costs for the recommended measures needed at Middlesex Street Estate were estimated to be between £64,00-£130,000. A quote for an automatic door opener at Petticoat Tower had been raised due to accessibility issues being emphasised by a member at a previous meeting. Members hailed the access audit review of Middlesex Street Estate and were keen for officers to commence work. They expected similar reviews to be undertaken on all remaining 11 City of London Corporation social housing estates.

**RESOLVED**, that – the report be received and its contents noted.

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

A Member asked what response officers had received following the adoption of the Winter Warmth Measures Programme. Officers replied that they had received ten responses from residents, with more expected.

**12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT**

There was no other business.

**13. 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.

**14. NON-PUBLIC MINUTES**

**RESOLVED**, – That the non-public minutes of the meeting held on 17 April 2023 be approved as a correct record.

**15. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT REPAIRS & MAINTENANCE NEW CONTRACT (VERBAL UPDATE)**

Item 15 and 16 were taken as one item.

**16. EXTENSION TO REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE CONTRACTS**

The Sub Committee considered a report of the Interim Executive Director, Community and Children’s Services regarding two agreements for the provision of Housing Responsive Repairs, Maintenance and Voids Services.

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

There was one non-public question.

**18. 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 ended at 15:29pm**

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Chairman

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