

**HOUSING MANAGEMENT AND ALMSHOUSES SUB (COMMUNITY AND
CHILDREN'S SERVICES) COMMITTEE**
Monday, 3 June 2024

Minutes of the meeting held at Guildhall at 11.00 am

Members:

Steve Goodman OBE (Chair)
Helen Fentimen OBE JP (Deputy Chair)
Mary Durcan
Deputy John Fletcher
Ceri Wilkins

Officers:

Judith Finlay	-Executive Director, Community and Children's Services (CCS)
Peta Caine	-Assistant Director, Housing CCS
Liam Gillespie	-Head of Housing Management, CCS
Michael Gwyther-Jones	-Head of New Development and Special Projects, CCS
Gerri Scott	-Community and Children's Services
David Blane	-Community and Children's Services
Zoe Gayle	-Community and Children's Services
Julie Mayer	-Town Clerk's Department
Mark Jarvis	-Chamberlains

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Joanna Abeyie*, Deputy Keith Bottomley, Tim McNally*, Eamonn Mullally and Henrika Priest.

**Members joining the meeting remotely.*

The Chair welcomed new Members; Tim McNally and Keith Bottomley and thanked retiring Members; Ruby Sayed, Jamel Banda and Alderwoman Susan Pearson.

The Chair also welcomed the new Assistant Director for Housing , Peta Caine, who had joined the City of London Corporation the previous week.

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

There were no declarations

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED, that - the public minutes and non-public summary of the meeting held on 30th January 2024 be approved as a correct record.

Matters arising

Some actions from the Minutes had not been included in the Outstanding Actions List and the Chair asked for this to be rectified. However, Members noted that the date of this meeting had been brought forward by 5 weeks, making it difficult to include all of the items requested.

The Deputy Chair had asked for an informal briefing on the HRA and the Assistant Director agreed to progress this. The Assistant Director advised that two sessions might be appropriate; one for the benefit of new and existing Members and a further session to align with the emerging Asset Management Strategy. The Deputy Chair suggested, and the Chair and Sub Committee agreed, that these sessions should cover investments, constraints, outstanding items, other funding streams and future programming etc. The Assistant Director endorsed this approach, noting that it would also determine work plans and officer responsibilities.

The Head of Service agreed to provide Members with a further update on automatic doors, noting that quotations had been received for Middlesex Street.

4. OUTSTANDING ACTIONS

The Sub Committee received the Outstanding Actions List, noting the comments set out above.

5. HOUSING COMPLAINTS UPDATE

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director, Community and Children's Services which addressed two actions in the actions tracker.

During the discussion, the following points were noted:

- Recent Statutory changes to complaints handling for Landlords.
- The value of effective arbitration, given the cost of First Tier Tribunals and County Court referrals. Whilst it was noted that arbitration might need to be funded from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), improvements to complaints handling and/or a reduction in the number of complaints would also reduce the need for arbitration and litigation.
- The true definition of complaints (which might also take the form of informal comments), the rising number of complaints and the need for an update at each meeting of the Sub Committee.

RESOLVED, that – the report be noted and the following points endorsed:

1. The suitability of arbitration as a potential dispute resolution measure for housing complaints. Subject to reference being made to the Housing Ombudsman.
2. The Assistant Director for Housing Management to act as the 'Senior Lead Person' for housing complaints in accordance with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.

3. The Chairman of this Sub-Committee acts as the 'Member Responsible for Complaints' under the same Code.
4. The Sub Committee to receive updates on the complaints process at each meeting.

6. **MEMBER ENGAGEMENT - HOUSING ESTATES**

The Sub Committee considered a report of the Executive Director, Community and Children's Services in respect of Member engagement on the City Corporation's Housing Estates.

The Chair and Deputy Chair suggested, and Members agreed, that Members of the Sub Committee should act as Allocated Members for the various Boroughs, rather than for individual Estates. Members also stressed the importance of robust communications between the Officers and Allocated Members.

Members noted that officers would be working on job descriptions and the distinction between the Member and Officer role in this process. The Guidance Notes had become out of date and would also be updated.

The Chair was confident that this would work well and Members noted the following:

1. Mary Durcan had volunteered for the London Borough of Islington.
2. Ceri Wilkins and John Fletcher agreed to continue with the City Estates (Middlesex Street and Golden Lane). John Fletcher also agreed to continue with Tower Hamlets (Dron House).
3. Whilst the Chair and Deputy Chair would not take on a full Allocated Member role; they would step in the event of a Borough generating a high work load.
4. Members welcomed the regular update reports from Allocated Members to the Grand Committee, noting their value in the scrutiny process. Whilst the reports tended to contain a lot of technical detail, it was anticipated that the need for this would reduce as services improve. The Chair would like to eventually move to a position whereby update reports are drafted by Officers, in consultation with Members.

In concluding, Members commended a helpful report and the New Assistant Director and Head of Service agreed to incorporate the above comments.

RESOLVED, that – the report and comments set out above be noted.

7. **HOUSING STRATEGY REPORT**

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director, Community and Children's Services, which presented the draft Housing Strategy for 2024-2029

for approval. Members commended the direction of travel of the report, noting that it would be dynamic and subject to continued consultation.

During the discussion, the following points were noted:

1. The link to housing needs assessments and population changes could be stronger, together with references to the City of London Corporation's and London's Local Plans.
2. The low attendance at a recent webinar on the Strategy had been disappointing, reinforcing the importance of publicity and communications with residents.
3. The need for customer focussed well trained and pro-active estate- officers.
4. The report should include Almshouses voids and the investment required.
5. The positioning of leaseholders in the Strategy should be more visible.
6. The next iteration of the report should include a draft implementation plan.

The Chair endorsed the above comments and welcomed further contributions outside of the meeting.

RESOLVED, that:

1. The draft Housing Strategy be approved, noting the comments set out above.
2. Oversight and scrutiny of delivery be via an annual report; setting out progress against each of the priorities, to be presented to the Community and Children's Services Committee.

External / Independent Members

Members discussed the appointment of external/independent Members to the Housing Management and Almshouses Sub Committee, as had recently been agreed for the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Sub Committee. Members noted that an external perspective had added value to a number of City of London Corporation Boards and Committees.

Members agreed, unanimously, to recommend this approach to the Community and Children's Services Committee. The Chair and Deputy Chair (of the Sub Committee) were keen to progress this at pace, to enable a recruitment exercise to be underway in the early Autumn. The Assistant Director, Housing agreed to provide guidance as to the scope and calibre of potential candidates; i.e. - individuals with experience in social/public sector housing/the ombudsman service. The Town Clerk advised that the Grand Committee would also need to consider whether the external Members would have voting rights and access to non-public agendas etc.

RESOLVED, that – the Community and Children’s Services Committee be asked to consider the appointment of independent/external Members to the Housing Management and Almshouses Sub Committee, noting the comments set out above, the advice of the Assistant Director, Housing, in respect of perspective nominees, and the voting rights of those Members.

8. **EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION POLICY**

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director, Community and Children’s Services in respect of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy. Whilst social and economic disadvantage and care leavers were covered under vulnerability, Members agreed that it should be more explicit.

RESOLVED, that – the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy be approved for use by the Housing Division, noting the comments set out above..

9. **EXTENSION OF POLICY REVIEW DATES**

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director, Community and Children’s Services, which sought approval to extend the review date on several current policies, thereby avoiding the need for a number of renewals at the same time. Members noted that, if a Policy was in urgent need of a review, it would be presented to the Sub Committee at the earliest opportunity.

RESOLVED, that:

1. The extension of the policy review dates be approved, as set out in the report.
2. The revised Estate Management Policy for use by the Housing Division be approved.

10. **HOUSING MAJOR WORKS PROGRAMME - PROGRESS REPORT**

The Committee received a report of the Executive Director, Community and Children’s Services in respect of the major works programme.

The Assistant Director advised that the format of the appendix to the report would be reviewed, with the current Interim and new Head of Service, to make it less complex, noting that Members would prefer a high level summary. Members noted that further enhancements would also align with the Asset Management Strategy and reflect how Members would like to receive the information.

RESOLVED, that – the report be noted.

11. **ACCESS AUDIT REMEDIAL PROJECT**

The Committee received a report of the Executive Director, Community and Children’s Services, which outlined progress made with the Access Audit

Remedial Project for the City of London Housing Estates. The report provided a brief update and noted that the project requires authorisation through the necessary steps of the Corporation's governance structure and project processes.

The Assistant Director advised that the work underway would be incorporated into the Asset Management Strategy; the first draft of which is expected at the end of this month.

Members expressed disappointment at the lack of progress on automatic doors, which should have been relatively simple to resolve and had been outstanding since July 2022. The Assistant Director agreed to progress this at pace and look at possible grant funding to support this work.

RESOLVED, that – the report be noted.

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

The Allocated Member for Middlesex Street had submitted a question in advance about the new heating system, noting that it had been sold to residents, and promoted to Members, on the understanding that it would provide maximum user control and metered billing. However, the metering had since been decoupled from the installation, and the level of heating restricted to 21 degrees, to comply with government advice. The Member was concerned that residents were not advised of the changes and should not have to pay until they are fully satisfied.

In response, the Assistant Director agreed to investigate these issues, noting that the benefits would not be realised until the metering is rolled out, and agreed to advise Members when this would take place. The Chair suggested, and Members agreed, that this matter be taken off-line, to ensure a swift resolution, and the Sub Committee would receive an update at the next meeting.

The Allocated Member for Golden Lane had reported a serious drainage issue a week ago. Whilst this had originally been attributed to residents flushing wet wipes, the blockage recurred shortly after the response, resulting in raw sewage leaking into the car park and staff at the public house close by becoming unwell.

The Executive Director and Assistant Director gave assurance that this matter would now be investigated thoroughly and, whilst wet wipes had been a contributory factor, they were not the reason for the drainage failure. The management of the public house would be contacted and Environmental Health engaged. Members noted that an interim Head of Repairs and Maintenance had recently left the City Corporation and this had created a temporary skills/knowledge gap. Members expressed concerns about the perceived lack of a regular drains maintenance programme and the Assistant Director agreed to review this.

13. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT**
Members noted a display of York Way Estate during the meeting and commended an excellent example of infill housing.
14. **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.
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|-------------|------------------|
| Item | Paragraph |
| 15-18 | 3 |
15. **NON-PUBLIC MINUTES**
RESOLVED – That the non-public minutes of the meeting held on xxxx be approved as a correct record.
16. **HOUSING REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE CONTRACTS - PROCUREMENT STAGE 1 REPORT**
The Sub Committee received a report of the Executive Director, Community and Children’s Services and noted that, since its passage through the various Committees, the tender process was on track to meet the target contract date.
17. **QUESTIONS ON MATTERS RELATING TO THE WORK OF THE SUB COMMITTEE**
There were no non-public questions.
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 12.25 pm

Chairman

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