

HOUSING MANAGEMENT AND ALMSHOUSES SUB (COMMUNITY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES) COMMITTEE
Wednesday, 9 October 2024

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, 9 October 2024 at 11.00 am

Present

Members:

Steve Goodman OBE (Chairman)
Helen Fentimen OBE JP (Deputy Chairman)
Deputy John Fletcher
Timothy James McNally
Eamonn Mullally

In Attendance:

Henrika Priest
Ceri Wilkins

Officers:

David Blane	- Community & Children's Services
Peta Caine	- Assistant Director, Housing Management, Community & Children's Services
Liane Coopey	- Community & Children's Services
David Downing	- Community & Children's Services
Anna Donoghue	- Community & Children's Services
Judith Finlay	- Executive Director, Community & Children's Services
Liam Gillespie	- Community & Children's Services
Zoe Gayle	- Community & Children's Services
Michael Gwyther-Jones	- Community & Children's Services
Chris Keesing	- Chamberlain's Department
Marie Rene	- Community & Children's Services
Blair Stringman	- Town Clerk's Department

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Mary Durcan.

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 3rd June 2024 be approved as a correct record.

MATTERS ARISING:

- **Member Allocation for Boroughs:** Members discussed the allocation of Sub-Committee Members to different boroughs for Housing Management. Mary Durkin agreed to handle Islington, John Fletcher agreed to manage Tower Hamlets, and Tim volunteered for Southwark. The remaining boroughs will be allocated offline and brought forward for approval in the next Community and Children's Services Committee meeting.
- **Independent Members Recruitment:** The Sub-Committee discussed the recruitment of external Members for the Sub-Committee. Officers agreed to review the process for appointing external Members to the Sub-Committee and report back to the next meeting.

4. OUTSTANDING ACTIONS

The Sub-Committee received a report of the Town Clerk concerning outstanding actions.

5. HOUSING MATTERS

The Sub-Committee received a report of the Executive Director, Community & Children's Services concerning an update to Members of the Housing Management and Almshouses Sub-Committee on some key issues currently being dealt with by the Social Housing Team.

The following points were noted:

- **Grenfell Inquiry Final Report:** The report outlined the changes made to date and mentioned the introduction of the Building Safety Act 2022, which brought in the building safety regulator. It was noted that further updates would be provided at the next committee meeting in November.
- **Risk Profile Update:** The risk profile update was included as Appendix 2. Questions were raised about the retrofitting of sprinkler systems at Avondale and Middlesex Street. Officers noted that the Avondale sprinklers are nearly complete, with one pending due to litigation. Members were informed that Middlesex Street residents were being consulted about the sprinklers, and a Plan B involving alarm systems is being considered.
- **Major Works Programme:** The major works programme included various projects, with a focus on ensuring value for money and minimising the financial impact on leaseholders. The need for accurate cost estimates and the involvement of quantity surveyors from the start of projects were emphasised.
- **Financial Support for Leaseholders:** Discussions included extending the discretionary loan scheme and maintaining the current position on voluntary charges on properties. The importance of clear communication with leaseholders about costs and support options was highlighted.

6. HOUSING MAJOR WORKS PROGRAMME – PROGRESS REPORT

The Sub-Committee received a report of the Director, Community & Children's Services providing an update to Members on the progress that has been made

with the Housing Major Works Programme and to advise Members on issues affecting progress on individual schemes.

The following points were noted:

- **Programme Overview:** It was noted that the current major works programme was valued at £110 million, covering works completed and those in progress. This did not include future works, which are estimated at £30 million.
- **Governance:** Members noted that there was a need for robust governance, similar to the approach used for the Middlesex Street project, to ensure effective management and communication.
- **Acceleration of Programme:** Discussions included the possibility of accelerating priority issues within the programme, considering financial support and capacity to move projects forward more quickly.
- **Net Zero Considerations:** Officers informed Members the programme included considerations for achieving net zero, with support from the City of London Corporation's Climate Action Strategy team.
- **Golden Lane Project:** Emphasis on the importance of governance for the Golden Lane project, with plans to implement a governance structure by November was expressed.

7. **HOUSING COMPLAINTS UPDATE - QUARTER 1**

The Sub-Committee received a report of the Executive Director, Community & Children's Services concerning an update to Members of the Housing Management and Almshouses Sub-Committee on changes made in the Housing Complaints Team.

The following points were noted:

- **Resident Engagement:** It was noted that there had been significant progress in resident engagement and resolving individual complaints, with a strong partnership between members and housing colleagues.
- **Positive Feedback:** The efforts of the team were praised for their dedication and effectiveness in addressing complaints.

8. **FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR LEASEHOLDERS**

The Sub-Committee received a report of the Executive Director, Community & Children's Services concerning the implications of each of options for the Housing Revenue Account.

Members discussed extending the discretionary loan scheme, increasing the maximum loan amount from £72,500 to £100,000, and extending the loan term from 10 years to 15 years. There was a suggestion to consider extending the loan term to 25 years, as some leaseholders might face difficulties with the proposed terms. Members emphasised the need for a single document covering all loan options for better clarity.

Members raised concerns about the adequacy of the £100,000 loan to cover major works projects and suggested having multiple options for different loan

amounts and terms. The importance of involving leaseholders in discussions about their needs was highlighted. The Sub-Committee decided to take the questions about the loan amount and term extension to the Chamberlain's department for further consideration.

The Sub-Committee agreed to bring the matter back in November after further discussions with the Chamberlain. There was a consensus that the recommendations should be stretched to meet the estimated costs of the works and to consider extending the loan term beyond 15 years.

9. **FINANCIAL SUPPORT WITH MAJOR WORKS (LONG LEASEHOLDERS)**

The Sub-Committee received a report of the Executive Director, Community & Children's Services concerning the current range of options for financial support for leaseholders in relation to major works costs; provide Members with information on options offered by other landlords; and inform discussion on possible variations or alternative offers.

It was noted to Members that item 9 was a background paper to item 8 and therefore there was no further comments.

10. **FIRE SAFETY UPDATE - HRA PROPERTIES**

The Sub-Committee received a report of the Executive Director, Community & Children's Services providing Members of the Sub-Committee with information on how the City of London Corporation (the Corporation), through its Housing Team, is ensuring that its homes on its twelve social housing estates are managed in a way that residents are safe and we comply with current health and safety legislation, best practice, and regulatory standards relating to fire safety.

The following points were noted:

- **Fire Safety Measures:** Members noted the update included the implementation of various fire safety measures across the housing estates. This included the installation of fire doors, smoke alarms, and emergency lighting.
- **Compliance with Regulations:** Members were informed that the measures were in compliance with the latest fire safety regulations and standards.
- **Resident Engagement:** There has been ongoing engagement with residents to ensure they are aware of the new safety measures and how to use them effectively.
- **Future Plans:** Future plans include further enhancements to fire safety systems and regular reviews to ensure continued compliance and effectiveness.

11. **LEASEHOLD AND FREEHOLD REFORM ACT 2024**

The Sub-Committee received a report of Executive Director, Community & Children's Services concerning information on the Leasehold and Freehold Reform Act 2024 was given Royal Assent in May 2024 and will introduce wide-ranging changes to current legislation on residential long leases.

The following points were noted:

- **Legislative Changes:** The Leasehold and Reform Act introduces significant changes to leasehold law, including the abolition of ground rents for new leases and the extension of lease terms.
- **Impact on Existing Leaseholders:** Existing leaseholders will benefit from the right to extend their leases by 990 years at zero ground rent.
- **Enfranchisement Costs:** The Act simplifies the process and reduces the costs associated with leasehold enfranchisement, making it easier for leaseholders to buy the freehold of their properties.
- **Commonhold:** The Act promotes the use of commonhold as an alternative to leasehold, providing greater control and ownership to property owners.
- **Implementation:** The changes will be implemented in phases, with further details and guidance to be provided by the government.

12. SOCIAL HOUSING TENANCY FRAUD – 2023/24 ANNUAL REPORT

The Sub-Committee received a report of the Head of Audit concerning an update on our Social Housing Tenancy Fraud activity during the 2023/24 reporting year. It also provides Members with an update against our key anti-fraud initiatives in this area.

The following points were noted:

- **Fraud Detection:** The team has been actively working on detecting and addressing housing tenancy fraud. This includes identifying fraudulent activities and taking necessary actions to mitigate them.
- **Collaboration:** There has been significant collaboration with other departments and agencies to ensure a comprehensive approach to tackling tenancy fraud.
- **Outcomes:** The efforts have led to several successful interventions, resulting in the recovery of properties and prevention of further fraudulent activities.

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

The following points were noted:

- **Middlesex St and York Way:** It was noted that there is no maximum temperature set on the system, and some residents have been experiencing issues. The contractor will be asked to visit homes to address these problems.
- There was also a discussion about the heat metering system, which was not implemented as initially planned. Efforts are now being made to resolve this issue.
- The exposed wiring in the hallways was another topic of concern. Prices have been obtained for the necessary work, and it is in progress.
- Regarding the lifts, repairs are being carried out, and the issues have reduced.
- The play area at York Way is operational and will remain so for the rest of the year.

- There was a mention of the replacement of main entrance doors, which would include entry controls but not automatic door devices.

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

There was no other business.

15. **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.

16. **WAIVER REPORT FOR CIVICA CX SYSTEMS SUPPORT WORK**

The Sub-Committee considered a report of the Executive Director, Community & Children's Services.

17. **HOUSING REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE CONTRACTS PROCUREMENT STAGE 1 REPORT**

The Sub-Committee received a report of the Executive Director, Community & Children's Services.

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

There were no non-public questions.

19. **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 12.09 pm

Chairman

Contact Officer: Blair Stringman
Blair.Stringman@cityoflondon.gov.uk