

**HOUSING MANAGEMENT AND ALMSHOUSES SUB (COMMUNITY AND
CHILDREN'S SERVICES) COMMITTEE**
Thursday, 26 May 2022

Minutes of the meeting at Guildhall at 2pm.

Present

Members:

Deputy Marianne Fredericks (Chairman)
Timothy James McNally (Deputy Chairman)
Deputy John Fletcher
Mary Durcan
Helen Fentimen
Florence Keelson-Anfu
Ceri Wilkins

Officers:

Paul Murtagh	- Assistant Director, Barbican and Property Services, Community and Children's Services
Marie Rene	- Community and Children's Services
Liam Gillespie	- Community and Children's Services
Sam Bedford	- Community and Children's Services
Jason Hayes	- Community and Children's Services
Chris Keesing	- Chamberlains
Julie Mayer	- Town Clerks
Emily Rimington	- Comptroller and City Solicitors
Julia Pridham	- Comptroller and City Solicitors

1. APOLOGIES

At the start of the meeting, it was Proposed by John Fletcher, Seconded by Helen Fentimen and agreed that Marianne Fredericks, being most senior member present, should take the chair until the election of the new Chairman at agenda item 4.

As there were a number of new Members on the sub Committee all those present introduced themselves.

Apologies were received from Ruby Sayed, Chair of the Grand Committee, who would be joining the meeting on line, and Alderman Gregory Jones.

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

There were no declarations.

3. SUMMARY OF A CHARITY TRUSTEE'S ROLE - THE CITY OF LONDON ALMSHOUSES (1005857)

The Town Clerk advised that this document was included in the agenda for Members information, noting the report later in the non-public section at agenda item 22.

4. **ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN**

The Sub Committee proceeded to elect a Chairman in accordance with Standing Order 29. Further to a ballot between Marianne Fredericks and Mary Durcan, in which Marianne Fredericks received 4 votes and Mary Durcan received 3 votes, it was RESOLVED, that - Marianne Fredericks be declared as Chair of the Housing Management and Almshouses Sub Committee for 2022/23.

5. **ELECTION OF DEPUTY CHAIRMAN**

The Sub Committee proceeded to elect a Deputy Chairman in accordance with Standing Order 30. Further to a ballot between Tim McNally and John Fletcher, in which Tim McNally received 4 votes and John Fletcher received 3 votes, it was RESOLVED, that - Tim McNally be declared as Deputy Chair of the Housing Management and Almshouses Sub Committee for 2022/23.

6. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED – That the public minutes and non-public summary of the meeting held on 14th January 2021 be approved as a correct record.

7. **OUTSTANDING ACTIONS**

During the discussion on this item, the following points were noted:

1. Members agreed that the estate visits should include informal meetings with residents, particularly as there are new Members on the Sub Committee. Officers confirmed that the visits would cover both the City and out of City estates and Members will be provided with a proposed schedule.
2. The Chair of the Grand Committee was present on line and asked Members to be mindful of resource implications. The Town Clerk advised these would not be formally constituted Sub Committee meetings, as there would be logistical difficulties. The new Chair (of the Sub Committee) felt that the estate visits were long overdue, as a result of the pandemic, and that such meetings should take place on an informal basis only. Furthermore, Members noted that the meetings could take place at premises within the estates, at no additional cost. The Chair asked if this action could be taken forward, in consultation with the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Grand Committee.
3. A judgement was still pending in respect of Great Arthur House (GAH).
4. Charging points was the subject of a report at agenda item 15.
5. The information on communications, as requested at the last meeting, was included at agenda item 21.

6. In respect of the evacuation of vulnerable residents, Members noted that the relevant GAH residents had been assessed, and 17 added to the list shared with the Fire Brigade.
7. Members noted that PEEPs do not apply in general needs housing. However, officers were giving consideration as to how they might apply at GAH and would provide Members with an update in due course. In the interim, if Members are aware of any vulnerable residents, then they should refer them to the housing team. Members noted that outcomes from the assessments are shared with residents, stored in a GDPR compliant format, and the information is shared with the Fire Brigade. Officers advised that similar assessments are conducted across all of the City's Estates, in accordance with best practice, and the frequency being dependent on the level of risk and need.

8. ALLOCATED MEMBERS TO THE CITY'S ESTATES

The Town Clerk advised that Members are allocated to the various estates at the first meeting of the Sub Committee, following the Annual Meeting of the Court of Common Council and the first meeting of the Grand Committee, which appoints to its Sub Committees. There are generally no ballots, as it is helpful if more than one Member expresses an interest.

The Allocated Members list was updated for 2022/23 as set out below:

ESTATE	ALLOCATED MEMBER
Avondale Square (Southwark), including Harman Close	Tim McNally
Small Estates: Isleden House (Islington); Windsor House (Hackney)	Ceri Wilkins
Golden Lane (City)	Marianne Fredericks
Holloway & York Way (Islington)	Mary Durcan
Middlesex Street (City) & Dron House/Spitalfields (Tower Hamlets)	John Fletcher
South Bank Estates: Southwark Blocks (Southwark) William Blake (Lambeth)	Tim McNally
City of London & Gresham Almshouses (Lambeth)	Florence Keelson-Anfu
Sydenham Hill: Lammas Green/Otto Close (Lewisham)	Ruby Sayed Florence Keelson-Anfu

9. SOCIAL HOUSING TENANCY FRAUD - 2020/21 ANNUAL REPORT

The Sub Committee received a report of the Head of Internal Audit which provided Members with an update on social housing tenancy fraud activity during the 2021/22 reporting year. It also provided Members with an update against our key anti-fraud initiatives in this area.

There were mixed views expressed in terms of criminalisation, particularly in respect of defendants appearing at the Central Criminal Court. The officer advised that prosecutions only occurred in the most serious cases and support is always offered before recovery action, giving careful consideration to means and assets. However, a criminal conviction is necessary in order to recover proceeds from crime, to cover the City's legal costs. There was a further point made in that a strong visible deterrent is necessary, as fraudsters are effectively depriving someone in genuine need of social housing.

Members noted a current anomaly whereby social housing tenants can purchase another property, whilst remaining in their social housing unit. The officer advised that the Tenancy Fraud Forum is supporting lobbying to change this.

RESOLVED, that – the report be noted.

10. HOUSING MAJOR WORKS PROGRAMME - PROGRESS REPORT

The Sub Committee received a report of the Director of Community and Children's Services which updated Members on progress with the Housing Major Works Programme and advised Members on issues affecting progress on individual schemes.

During questions, the following points were noted:

1. The Assistant Director drew Members attention to paragraph 14 of the report, which set out the significant pressure the HRA is experiencing. Officers are liaising with the Chamberlain to reassess the affordability of the current Major Works Programme. It is highly likely that there will be at least a two-year gap before being able to bring forward the 2nd phase of the major works projects, which are currently unfunded. A more detailed report from the Chamberlain's Dept will be presented the Grand committee on 8th June, which will set out the full financial position, along with the challenges in terms of project delivery and options. This will be a non-public report and for decision by the Grand Committee.
2. There had been no slippage in the windows programme since the last report to this Sub Committee.
3. Data was constantly being updated, given the rising construction costs.
4. The original 5 year plan, drawn up in 2015, had been extended to 7 years. This Sub Committee frequently receives reports from the City Surveyor in

terms of how they are seeking to maximise funding from alternative funding sources; i.e. - housing decarbonisation grants.

5. The HRA is a ring-fenced account and cannot be used for any other purpose.
6. The second phase of the MWP does not currently have funding identified and, it is likely that there will be a two-year 'gap' between the completion of Phase 1 of the MWP and the commencement of Phase 2. The position is changing however, for example, the City Corporation will soon be receiving a rental income stream from the 66 new units at COLPAI, with other new development projects also being completed in subsequent years. The HRA will eventually recover, but this is likely to take a few years.
7. The team has had some recent resourcing issues, in common with the construction sector nationally and, to maintain momentum with the MWP, has appointed external consultants to cover some vacant posts. Wherever possible, the City Corporation will keep these services in-house, so that there is a strong link between residents and the team. In the past, the team has shared resources with the City Surveyor, and this remains an option.
8. Members received a presentation at the last Community and Children's Services Committee Section in respect of Section 106 Funding, noting that this is currently depleted, as it was used up on schemes at York Way, Sydenham Hill and COLPAI, and there are no new builds imminent in the City.
9. Section 20 Consultation was underway for the Southwark Estates window replacement but due to rising inflation, officers are constantly reviewing affordability for the HRA, and seeking to fix prices with contractors as part of the tender process. Officers anticipated final Committee approval on 5th June and, after this date, Members would be provided with a realistic completion date. However, Members were asked to be mindful of delivery delays due to high demand for materials. In the interim, the general redecoration works were underway to improve the appearance of the Estate.
10. Pre the pandemic, nearly all projects came in at 20% under the costs predicted at Gateway 5 ('Authority to Start Work' - in the City's Project Management Procedure). This is not the case now.
11. Officers had been designing a new website, which would set out progress on each project and be accessible for residents, together with hard copy options. 'Meet the Contractor events' had been planned and there is a designated Resident Liaison Officer and Clerk of Works on each estate.

RESOLVED, that – the report be noted.

11. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT - HOUSING PORTFOLIO

The Sub Committee received a report of the Director of Community and Children's Services which provided Members with information relating to the make-up of the City of London Corporation's (the Corporation) Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Housing Portfolio including, breakdown of stock, voids, and the current waiting list. Members noted there are 44 Almshouses; 8 of them falling under Gresham.

The Officer advised that, whilst the voids figure was higher than it had been for a while, it includes void properties that are being used for pilot projects for the MWP, including installations of sprinklers and/or extensive refurbishments, which are rare. Some of the sheltered units had also been void for a while but were awaiting nominations. Members noted that a voids level of 1-2% is usual, and 25 days turnaround is not uncommon, but an officer team is looking at how we can improve turnaround times. A turnaround of 20 days would be a significant achievement but it would be dependent on other factors. Members noted that this would be explored further in the report on the Responsive Repairs contract later on this agenda.

RESOLVED, that – the report be noted.

12. HOUSING UPDATE AND RISK REGISTER

The Sub Committee received a report of the Director of Community and Children's Services which provided Members with Housing Service performance and management information in key areas. Members noted that the report is submitted twice yearly; this report covered the period from 1st October 2021 to 31st March 2022 (i.e., Quarters 3 and 4 of 2021-22).

During the discussion on this item, the following points were noted:

1. Members were pleased to note the improvement in the arrears figure as we emerge from the pandemic. Officers advised that there are 4 specialist income recovery officers based on the estates, who also offer support and advice about rent and general finances, working with the relevant agencies and signposting to the City Advice service. These services have a good take-up on the estates, as the officers cover relatively small areas and get to know the residents.
2. The last couple of meetings of this Sub Committee had received 2 reports on some of the higher profile housing complaints and how they were being resolved.
3. The Property Information Boxes are checked monthly, to ensure they contain estate plans, details of vulnerable residents and information for the Fire Brigade.
4. There had been some confusion amongst residents as to the responsibility for making-good works that they are responsible for. Whilst tenants would be expected to provide their own contents insurance, making-good after structural defects is the responsibility of the Landlord; i.e., the City of

London Corporation. Members made a number of suggestions: i.e. - taking photographs before and after works, and the use of signing off sheets at each stage. The Assistant Director agreed to follow up on these suggestions as part of the responsive repair contract renewal.

5. There is a dedicated repairs line and phones available in the estate offices for residents' use. Members were encouraged to let officers know of any residents experiencing problems.
6. Wider customer services were also being reviewed, beyond the main repairs contact, and Members would be involved in this.
7. The current repairs policy is on the City Corporation's website (in the Tenants' Handbook) and Members were encouraged to look at this and suggest enhancements. More information could also be obtained from the informal meetings with residents, as discussed earlier.
8. The Housing Team was emerging from a restructure, as part of the Target Operating Model, and there would be a new Communications Strategy as part of this. There was a new Resident Involvement Manager in post and Members would be consulted on the Strategy.

RESOLVED, that – the report be noted.

13. **WATER CHARGE REBATES UPDATE**

The Sub Committee received a report of the Director of Community and Children's Services in respect of the decision taken, in February 2022, approving a repayment of an element of weekly water charges paid by secure tenants of the Corporation, from 2005-2019. The rebate amounted to approximately £1.4m and was credited to rent accounts for current and former tenants in March 2022. This report provided Members with an update on progress. There had been a significant reduction in rent arrears; which are currently at their lowest since 2015/16.

Members noted that the team were now concentrating on claims from former tenants and credit refunds to current tenants. Some 177 claims were pending. The officer explained that, initially, the backlog had been due to the sheer volume of work but the team were catching up, and residents can approach the Estate Offices and income recovery officers for assistance.

In respect of the rebates between 2001-2005, officers had written to residents about this period, explaining the procedure and the difference between this and claims post 2005. Since then, 99 tenants had come forward to claim for 2001-5 and officers would be writing to eligible people again, by way of a reminder. There had been a number of claims taking longer than 30 days, but this was due to a mixture of staff absence and the detailed checks that Chamberlains need to carry out before approving payment. Additionally, the rebate has to be credited to the rent account before it is paid out, in order to comply with accounting procedures.

RESOLVED, that – the report be noted.

14. COMMUNITY CENTRE POLICY REVIEW

The Sub Committee considered a report of the Director of Community and Children's Services in respect of the Community Centres Policy, which was first approved in 2019. Members noted that the Policy reflected the recent addition of the Portsoken Community Centre to the facilities managed by the Housing Division but there had been no changes to the substance of the policy.

Members were concerned about an outstanding issue in respect of the Wi-Fi provision, and two commercial users were being significantly affected. Officers advised that they had been in constant contact with BT Open Reach; the matter should have been resolved on 11th May but only half of the work had been done. Subsequent to this meeting this, the matter was finally resolved.

Members would receive an annual report on Community Centre income and expenditure, as part of the Housing Update report. The Officer advised that Portsoken's closed accounts had not been available when this report was produced.

RESOLVED, that – the revised Community Centres Policy be approved, for use by the Housing Division, and with a standard three-year review period

15. ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING - FEASIBILITY STUDY

The Sub Committee received a report of the Director of Community and Children's Services in respect of a study which explored the feasibility of providing electric vehicle charging points (EVCPs) on the City Corporation's housing estates, for use by residents and visitors. Members noted that Detailed reports had been completed for each of the eight estates, with parking facilities, and recommendations have been made as to how many active and passive charging points could be provided at each site. The officer agreed to circulate the background detailed reports to Members.

The officer agreed to approach the City Bridge Trust in respect of the possibility of CIL funding, given that this is a green infrastructure project. Members noted that this work is a priority, as funding may run out before the deadline and they would receive an update as soon as possible.

Members noted that, whilst the recommendations in the report are sound and reasonable, further consideration would need to be given as to whether all of them would be necessary, in terms of the funding available. Officers would be applying to the Energy Saving Trust Off-street Charging Scheme, as used by the successful Barbican project, but they need to know the amount required. The charging station on Golden Lane is available for residents but there were some constraints on signage due to its listed status. The slower charging facilities will be more suitable for overnight parking but the final type is still to be determined.

The officer confirmed that the bays would be for communal use and if residents are misusing the bays, then action may be taken to rescind permits. Furthermore, the enforcement contract is due for renewal, and ANPR cameras are under consideration as part of the general upgrade of car parking on the estates.

RESOLVED, that – the report be noted.

16. **SMOKE AND CARBON MONOXIDE DETECTORS**

The Sub Committee received a report of the Director of Community and Children's Services which provided an update on progress to ensure that tenanted properties have adequate levels of smoke and carbon monoxide detection. Members noted that the City's work goes above and beyond legislation in this area and they are always replaced in voids as a matter of course.

RESOLVED, that – the report be noted.

17. **REPORT OF ACTION TAKEN**

The Sub Committee received a report of the Town Clerk in respect of action taken under urgency, in accordance with Standing Order 41, since the last meeting.

Members noted that measures had to be in place, by 30 June 2022, for the grant funding in respect of **Cullum Welch House Energy Efficiency Improvements**. The next meetings of the Housing Management & Almshouses Sub Committee and the Operational Property and Projects Sub Committee were not scheduled until 26 May and 30 May 2022 and, therefore, an urgent decision was sought.

Action Taken:

The Town Clerk, in consultation with the Chairman and Deputy Chairmen of the Housing Management and Operational Property and Projects Sub Committee agreed:

1. To approve the maximum project budget of £88,000.
2. To note that the funding for the works would be provided from a central government grant, the existing departmental repairs budget and from the Climate Action Strategy.
3. That Warmworks would conduct surveys and then works in each eligible property.
4. To note that no costed Risk Provision is required for this project.
5. That Warmworks would undertake the necessary works.

RESOLVED, that – the report be noted.

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

Deputy John Fletcher has submitted the following question ahead of the meeting in respect payments for rent and service charges. The officer advised that Chamberlains are in the closing stages of setting up an automated phone line for card payments. The officers advised that communications in this area, together with the others discussed today, will be reviewed as part of the new Resident Involvement and Communications Strategy.

19. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT

Members discussed the following two items of urgent business:

1. The Chair advised of the grants available for retrofitting heating enhancements for low income families across London, ranging from £5 - £25,000. The officers advised that this is in hand and the Department had been working with City Surveyors, who are managing grant applications on their behalf.

At 3.55pm, Members agreed to extend the meeting in order to conclude the business on the agenda.

2. Members noted that the new Chair of the Policy and Resources Committee is very keen to increase resident engagement and a date had been set for him to visit the City's estates in July. There would be further visits arranged, open to all Members of the Court. The officers advised that if any Members would like to visit the estates, either individually or as part of a small group, then they should contact: liam.gillespie@cityoflondon.gov.uk in order to get the most benefit from their visit(s).

20. 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
21-24 and 26	3

21. OUTSTANDING ACTIONS - NON PUBLIC APPENDIX

The Committee received a non-public appendix in respect of agenda item 4.

22. CHARITIES REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS: THE CITY OF LONDON ALMSHOUSES (REGISTERED CHARITY NUMBER: 1005857)

The Sub Committee considered and approved a report of the Director of Community and Children's Services.

23. PROCUREMENT OF A NEW DAY-TO-DAY RESPONSIVE REPAIRS CONTRACT

The Sub Committee received a report of the Director of Community and Children's Services.

24. HOUSING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM UPGRADE

The Sub Committee received a report of the Director of Community and Children's Services.

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

There were no non-public questions.

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

Four items were discussed whilst the public were excluded.

The meeting ended at 4.20 pm

Chair