

HOUSING MANAGEMENT AND ALMSHOUSES SUB (COMMUNITY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES) COMMITTEE
Monday, 30 January 2023

Minutes of the meeting held at Guildhall at 11.00 am

Present

Members:

Deputy Marianne Fredericks (Chair)
Timothy James McNally (Deputy Chair)
Helen Fentimen (Deputy Chair - Community and Children's Services Committee)
Deputy John Fletcher
Ceri Wilkins
Henrika Priest

Officers:

Paul Murtagh	- Assistant Director, Barbican and Property Services, Community and Children's Services Committee
Liam Gillespie	- Head of Housing Management, Community and Children's Services Committee
Jason Hayes	- Head of Major Projects, Community and Children's Services Committee
Mike Saunders	- Community and Children's Services Committee
Marie Rene	- Community and Children's Services Committee
Paul Dudley	- Chamberlains
Julie Pridham	- Comptroller and City Solicitors
Julie Mayer	- Town Clerks

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Ruby Sayed (Chair of Community and Children's Services Committee), Jamel Banda, and Mary Durcan, who joined the meeting remotely.

Before commencing the business on the agenda, the Chair thanked the following Members who would be standing down: Florence Keelson-Anfu, Alderman Gregory Jones, and recently elected Alderwoman Susan Pearson, noting that Alderwoman Pearson had served as a Member of the Sub Committee for a number of years. Florence Keelson-Anfu had been the 'Allocated Member' for the Sydenham Hill Estate and the Deputy Chair agreed to take over this role, given his considerable local knowledge.

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 14th October 2022 be approved as a correct record.

Matters arising

In respect of the water rates rebates, Members noted that the main claims (for the period 2005-2019) had been actioned. The focus was now on the 2001-2005 period, for which there had been 219 claims, with 124 processed so far. The majority of tenants had requested a refund but some had asked for a credit to their rent accounts.

The Chair had noticed that some questions asked at the Housing Sub Meetings are often responded to at the Grand Committee meetings; ie – when the officer cannot respond immediately, and because the Grand Committees meet more frequently. The Chair asked therefore, when this happens, that the answer is also recorded in the Housing Sub Minutes as a point of reference, noting that it has been answered.

4. OUTSTANDING ACTIONS

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

1. The Chair advised that Members of both the Grand and Sub Committee are welcome on the Estate visits and/or the drop-in sessions, which take place a few weeks later. The Chair has asked for a report from the Estate visits (both in and out of the City) in order to track issues. The Head of Housing Management advised that this data is already captured and agreed to discuss the content and format with the Chair and Deputy Chair after the meeting.
2. The action in respect of charging points now captures all of the City's Estates, not just Middlesex Street and Golden Lane, so would need to be renamed. The Committee would receive a report at the next meeting.
3. The policy on video camera door bells had been completed and could be removed.
4. Automatic door devices are key in terms of equalities legislation. Any work to address accessibility on our estates must be done alongside work to improve security. Audits on accessibility and security had been completed and Members had already received a presentation on the outcomes of the security audit. The Chair suggested, and Members agreed, that the Sub Committee should consider a report on this first, to fully scrutinise the proposals, before making recommendations to the Grand Committee.

5. HOUSING MAJOR WORKS PROGRAMME - PROGRESS REPORT

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

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

1. All projects had been affected by the City Corporation's Capital Review, including William Blake Windows and the Fire Door replacements. The fire doors contract had been awarded and mobilised since the agenda had

been published. The window replacement project would need to be re-started, and a new tender and planning application would be required, but this will fully address damp and mould issues and ensure best value for money. Residents have been advised of the position and the website updated. Officers are available for questions at the walkabouts and drop-in sessions and estate officers are fully aware.

2. The website for Golden Lane was due to go live today and the Head of Major Projects agreed to send the link to Members. The information would cover storage of furniture, the duration of works, contractors' insurance liabilities, the various communication channels and FAQ document.
3. There is a possibility that the sprinkler and compartmentation works can be combined and a Project Manager was being recruited to oversee this work. A further appointment was imminent in respect of a Project Manager for the Golden Lane window installation.
4. The Chair stressed that the Communications Strategy is a key outcome of the Customer Services Review and asked for it to be scheduled for a future meeting. The Head of Housing Management advised that resident involvement is being refreshed, as part of the Housing Strategy, and there will be consistency across communication channels. The Deputy Chair had found the communications at Avondale, in respect of the delayed sprinkler installation, to be very satisfactory.
5. There will be a new communal heating system before the Winter of 2023/24, with Petticoat Tower works due to start in February 2023.
6. The Ball Courts at Middlesex Street had been discussed at the Community and Children's Services Committee on 30th January 2023, when Members approved the surplus declaration. Members noted that funding had been identified for refurbishment, including soundproofing measures, and City Surveyors had undertaken to re-open them soon as possible. The Head of Major Projects had visited the site and obtained quotations for a time lock, ahead of a conversation with the Chair of the Residents' Association in respect of residents' preferences. The Chair stressed that this needs to be actioned as soon as possible, as the evenings are getting lighter, noting that they had been unavailable for two years.
7. The Deputy for Portsoken Ward, also a Member of this Committee, asked if officers could assist the Residents' Association with applications apply for CILF funding, which is available for various community benefits.
8. There is now a full complement of resident services officers and estate officers, with just one outstanding vacancy in respect of a gardener for the Almshouses. The Committee welcomed the appointment of full-time members of staff, which will give further reassurance to residents.

9. It was expected that a material amendment to the Planning Application for Sydenham Hill would speed up the process. Members noted that some 4500 windows would be installed at Lammas Green; they had been ordered and a very experienced Project Manager was in post.
10. Stanley Cohen and Crescent House are part of the accelerated work programme and are similar in construction. Soft market testing is progressing and condition reports and planning applications would follow. Members would be kept updated on progress.
11. The Chair asked if the leaseholders at Lammas Green had been provided with the specifications of the new windows, and connected to the Contractor, to enable them to pay for double glazed windows, should they wish to do so.

In concluding, the Head of Major Projects and his team were commended for the volume of progress achieved, despite considerable challenges.

RESOLVED, that – the report be noted.

6. **DAMP AND MOULD IN OUR SOCIAL HOUSING STOCK - UPDATE REPORT**

The Sub Committee received a report of the Interim Executive Director, Community and Children's Services, which updated Members on the City of London Corporation's work in dealing with damp and mould in social housing, and its response to recent national concerns raised by government. The Assistant Director advised that this has always been a very high priority for the City Corporation, notwithstanding the tragic case in Rochester last year.

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

1. Following surveys, severe cases are categorised as 1 or 2, with 2 being the most serious. There had been 120 orders raised for remedial works but most properties had submitted two orders. The Interim Executive Director of Community and Children's Services and the Assistant Director had visited the Golden Lane Estate the previous week, and found no severe cases, and there are no category 1 or 2 cases in City Corporation properties. The Assistant Director stressed the importance of residents and/or members advising his team of damp and mould concerns as soon as possible. The 1 and 2 categorisations are a technical description and would not prejudice this.
2. Members received a draft leaflet, to be circulated to residents, noting a couple of typographical errors. There was a request for photographs of severe examples to be included in the leaflet, as well as on the web site and to be made available at the drop-in sessions. There was a further suggestion in that the colour of the printing leaflet was a little difficult to read.

3. A Member advised of a particularly poor response to a complaint, which the Director took very seriously and agreed to investigate after the meeting.
4. An Almshouses resident had been decanted whilst urgent works were being carried out to damp and dry rot, and all other cases at the Almshouses were under investigation.
5. Members noted that the Saville's Stock Condition Survey, undertaken in 2018, had identified 20 moderate cases but all of them would be resurveyed. Members noted that this, and other industry surveys, are generally conducted every 10 years. However, given climate change and the heightened awareness of severe damp and mould, this is likely to change. Notwithstanding this, if other mould and damp 'hot spots' are found, then the level of surveys will increase.
6. All contractors on the estates; i.e. gas servicing, electrical testing and window fitters, will advise the Assistant Director and his team if they spot areas of damp and mould.
7. The Assistant Director works closely with the Environmental Team in respect of issues in the private rented sector and social housing, which does not fall under the City's remit. Members noted the Environmental Team's enforcement powers under the housing act and asked if it could be made very clear in the minutes from this meeting and in relevant communications.
8. Once the full extent of the problem is known, and particularly if the repairs will have a considerable impact on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), then it is likely to be added to the Corporate Risk Register.

RESOLVED, that – the report be noted.

7. **REPAIRS & MAINTENANCE AND VOIDS UPDATE**

The Sub Committee received a report of the Interim Director, Community and Children's Services, which provided an update on the repairs and maintenance (R&M) service delivered by Wates Living Space and the void process. Members noted that the R&M service covers all Housing Revenue Account (HRA) estates, including the Almshouses and commercial properties.

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

1. The Chair asked if future reports could include KPI's which have been missed: i.e. works not completed on time and appointments not kept.
2. In respect of letting standards, an email address had been provided for complaints and officers agreed to add a telephone contact.
3. Although the tendering process is likely to attract new companies, the City awards at 60/40 in favour of quality over price. Information gathered at the drop-in sessions will also be incorporated into the questions. The team will

carry out site visits of tenderers' previous work and speak to the tenants, noting that all resident feedback is anonymous.

4. Most voids meet the target dates but those needing more complex works before re-letting might take a little longer.
5. It was suggested that a KPI be introduced in respect of repairs not fixed on a first visit or missed appointments. It was suggested that initial contact is key in ensuring the fault is correctly identified, noting that some tenants do not have English as a first language. It was also accepted that there are cases where a second visit is necessary but anything beyond that might warrant closer member scrutiny. The City Corporation has a Compensation Policy in terms of missed appointments, and Members asked if this could be fully visible on the web site.
6. A Member shared some anecdotal evidence of a void that had not been signed off satisfactorily and the Assistant Director agreed to investigate this after the meeting.
7. The Head of Housing Management advised that the Repairs and Housing Management Teams are looking at empty property handovers, from the residents' perspective, and this will include an additional signatory before re-letting. Resident satisfaction with new properties would also be gathered as part of the new process. Once Civica is fully implemented, voids management will be fully automated, with survey links sent to residents when they move in, and this will provide an audit trail for those that are not satisfactory. Resident Services Officers also visit new tenants following a property being re-let, and can deal with any quality issues.
8. Some City Corporation properties have asbestos, but this is perfectly safe provided it is encapsulated and not disturbed. There is a contract in place to undertake annual checks.

RESOLVED, that – the report be noted.

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

In response to a question about the provision of guest flats on the Golden Lane Estate, the Head of Housing Management advised that this is being looked at holistically, in terms of the pricing structure, noting that they are heavily subsidised by HRA. An element of their provision will be service chargeable but the structure will be clarified and it should be possible to justify affordable rates. The flats were never intended to be profitable but they should also not be a burden to the HRA. The Assistant Director advised that this had been raised at the Golden Lane/Cripplegate Member Officer Meeting; he had produced a briefing note for this which would be shared with Members.

Members also noted that the guest flats on Petticoat Lane had required extensive redecorations and funding would need to be identified. The Head of

Housing Management would progress this with the repairs service, noting that they will need to be in use during the sprinkler and heating works.

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

There were no items

10. **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
11-12

Paragraph
3

11. **NON-PUBLIC MINUTES**

RESOLVED – That the non-public minutes of the meeting held on 14th October 2022 be approved.

12. **RISK MANAGEMENT UPDATE: THE CITY OF LONDON ALMSHOUSES (REGISTERED CHARITY NUMBER: 1005857)**

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

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

There were no non-public questions.

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

There were no items.

The meeting ended at 1 pm

Chairman

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