

HOUSING MANAGEMENT AND ALMSHOUSES SUB (COMMUNITY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES) COMMITTEE
Thursday, 28 November 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 Thursday, 28 November 2024 at 2.00 pm

Present

Members:

Steve Goodman OBE (Chairman)
Helen Fentimen OBE JP (Deputy Chairman)
Mary Durcan
Deputy John Fletcher
Eamonn Mullally
Henrika Priest
Deputy Ceri Wilkins

Officers:

Sam Bedford	- Community & Children's Services Department
David Blane	- Community & Children's Services Department
Peta Caine	- Assistant Director, Housing, Community & Children's Services Department
Judith Finlay	- Executive Director, Community and Children's Services
Liam Gillespie	- Community & Children's Services Department
Michael Gwyther-Jones	- Community & Children's Services Department
Blair Stringman	- Town Clerk's Department
Greg Wade	- Community & Children's Services Department

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Joanna Abeyie and Timothy McNally.

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

There were no declarations.

3. MINUTES

MATTERS ARISING:

- Financial Support for leaseholders – It was noted that this was due to be addressed in November but will now be discussed at the next meeting in January 2025.

- After consultation, it was noted that Members listed below had been put forward for the various allocations. This will be noted and agreed at the next Community & Children’s Services Committee:
 - Southwark: Timothy McNally
 - Islington: Mary Durcan
 - Hackney : Ceri Wilkins
 - Tower Hamlets : John Fletcher
 - Lewisham: Steve Goodman
 - Lambeth: Eamonn Mullally
 - City of London – Golden Lane Estate: Ceri Wilkins, Middx St Estate: John Fletcher .

- Officers also confirmed that a member of the management team would buddy up with each member.

- In relation to the appointment of external Members, following investigation outside of the sub-committee the Town Clerk concluded that the Terms of Reference in the first instance needed to be amended (of this sub-committee) for recruitment to take place. Once agreed this must then be taken to the Community & Children’s Services Committee for approval. The following was therefore to be asked of the sub-committee:
 - That Members agree in principle to change the terms of reference of the HMASC, subject to the community and children’s services committee approval, to allow for up to three external appointments for the following terms:
 - For a term of two years
 - For a term of two years
 - For a term of three years

RESOLVED - That Members,

- a) Agree the public minutes and non-public summary of the meeting held on 9 October 2024 be approved as a correct record.
- b) Agree in principle to change the terms of reference of the HMASC, subject to the Community and Children’s Services committee approval, to allow for up to three external appointments for the following terms:
 - For a term of two years
 - For a term of two years
 - For a term of three years

4. OUTSTANDING ACTIONS

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

5. HOUSING MAJOR WORKS PROGRAMME – PROGRESS REPORT

The Sub-Committee received a report of the Director of Community & Children's Services concerning an update for Members on the progress that has been made with development of the Housing Major Works Programme following September's HRA briefing session and to advise Members on issues affecting progress on individual schemes.

The following points were noted:

- **Window Replacement Projects:** Officers provided updates on various window replacement projects. Holloway Estate, Sydenham Hill, and Windsor House have achieved practical completion. William Blake was in the design phase, with an updated program expected soon.
- **Middlesex Street Heating:** The project is expected to complete by April 2025, pending the outcome of a tribunal in December.
- **Fire Door Programme:** Progress on the fire door programme was discussed, with specific updates on different lots. Avondale Square is complete, and work is ongoing at Sumner House, William Blake, Dron House, and Petticoat Tower.
- **Golden Lane Estate:** Concerns were raised about the timeline, costs, and scope of works, including the need to address common parts and decanting plans. The Deputy Chairman emphasised the need for a detailed plan and clear communication with residents.
- **General Concerns:** Members expressed concerns about project delays, costs, and the need for better planning and communication with residents. Officers acknowledged these issues and committed to providing more detailed updates and plans in future meetings.

6. HOUSING COMPLAINTS UPDATE

The Sub-Committee considered a report of the Executive Director, Community & Children's Services concerning an update for 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:

- **Policy Approvals:** The sub-committee reviewed several policies, including compensation, fire safety, repairs and maintenance, damp, mould and condensation, and the empty property void policy.
- **Damp and Mould:** Concerns were raised about the response times for addressing damp and mould issues. A Member suggested that the current seven-day response time was too long. Officers agreed to review and potentially tighten the response times.
- **Self-Assessment:** The housing damp and mould self-assessment was discussed, highlighting the importance of addressing these issues promptly. The Deputy Chairman emphasised the need to ensure all recommendations from the self-assessment were included in the policy.
- **Grenfell Inquiry:** The sub-committee discussed the Grenfell Inquiry Phase Two report and the toolkit developed by London Councils and the

Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. Officers suggested using the toolkit for a self-assessment to improve practices.

- **Impact of New Repair Contracts:** A Member expressed concerns about approving the repairs policy while the new repair contract was still being negotiated. They questioned whether the policy would be affected by changes in the contract, such as penalties for non-compliance.

RESOLVED – That, subject to comments and feedback made by Members, approve of the following policies:

- Compensation Policy – Appendix 1
- Fire Safety Policy – Appendix 2
- Repairs and Maintenance Policy – Appendix 3
- Damp, Mould and Condensation Policy – Appendix 4
- The Empty Property (Voids) Policy – Appendix 5
- Observations Received – Appendix 6

7. **HOUSING STRATEGY ONE YEAR ACTION PLAN – 2025-26**

The Sub-Committee considered a report of the Executive Director, Community & Children’s Services concerning the Housing Strategy 2025-29 one year action plan for 2025-26 for Member approval, following the strategy's approval by Members in June 2024.

The following points were noted

- **Current Status:** Officers explained that the action plan was still being developed and is not yet finalised. The plan was intended to address immediate needs and lay the groundwork for a more strategic three-year plan commencing 2026/27.
- **Feedback Request:** The sub-committee was asked to provide comments and feedback on the current draft to help refine the plan. The goal was to incorporate this feedback and present a final draft in January. Members noted the need for further development, and the importance of establishing firm foundations for future strategic planning
- **Focus on Foundations:** The plan aims to establish firm foundations and address key areas that need immediate attention within the housing division. This foundational work is seen as essential for the success of the future three-year strategic plan.
- **Next Steps:** The committee will review the updated action plan in January, which will include more specific and measurable objectives. The final draft will reflect the committee's feedback and aim to provide a clear direction for the upcoming year.

RESOLVED – That Members, agree in principle to the action plan for 2025-26.

8. **DECANTS POLICY AND CRESCENT HOUSE LOCAL DECANTS POLICY**

The Sub-Committee considered a report of the Executive Director, Community & Children’s Services concerning the decants policy and crescent house local decants policy.

The following points were noted:

- **Policy Update:** Officers introduced the updated decants policy, which has been broadened to cover situations where temporary or permanent moves might be necessary for repairs or improvements. The policy now includes specific provisions for the Crescent House project.
- **Support for Residents:** The policy emphasises a supportive approach, ensuring that both tenants and leaseholders receive assistance during the decant process. This includes practical help aimed at addressing individual needs.
- **Notice and Communication:** Members raised concerns about the notice period for residents and the need for effective communication. Officers assured that reasonable notice would be given, and there would be multiple conversations leading up to any move.
- **Temporary Accommodation:** The aim is to house residents on the estate itself, but if not possible, alternative accommodation within a reasonable distance will be sought. The feasibility of renting local accommodation, was also discussed.
- **Resource Allocation:** Concerns were raised about the logistical challenges and the need for adequate resources. Officers mentioned that the contractor would have resident liaison officers, and the corporation would have a senior decant officer to oversee the process.
- **Individual Needs Assessment:** A full assessment of each household's needs will be conducted to ensure appropriate support. This includes practical help and addressing emotional and psychological impacts.
- **Phased Approach:** The decant process will be phased, with an initial plan to open up six properties at a time. It is likely that more properties will be needed to accommodate the overflow.
- **Charter and Standards:** A Member suggested creating a charter to outline minimum standards and maintain trust with residents. This would include clear communication and support throughout the process.

RESOLVED – That Members,

- a) Approve the Decant Policy
- b) Approve the Crescent House Local Decant Policy

9. **FIRE SAFETY UPDATE – HRA PROPERTIES**

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

The following points were noted:

- The report provided an update on the current status of fire safety measures across HRA properties, highlighting specific estates and ongoing projects.

- **Almshouses** : Officers provided an update on the recent London Fire Brigade (LFB) audit of the almshouses. The LFB identified a number of concerns.
- **Resident Satisfaction**: Members noted the high satisfaction rate (96%) with the replacement fire doors at the York Way and Holloway Estates, commending the work done.

10. **PETS POLICY CONSULTATION**

The Sub-Committee considered a report of the Executive Director, Community & Children's Services concerning the outcome of the recent resident consultation on the Housing Division's Pets Policy, which focused on the question of dog ownership.

The following points were noted:

- **Consultation Process**: Officers discussed the extensive consultation process, which included in-person sessions and a survey managed by an independent organisation. The consultation received over 1200 responses, reflecting strong resident engagement.
- **Survey Results**: The survey results showed a clear preference for maintaining the current policy, which does not permit dogs unless they are assistance dogs or fall under specific exceptions.
- **Exceptional Circumstances**: Questions were raised about how residents could apply for exceptions, especially in cases involving medical or mental health needs. Officers clarified that applications could be made through the resident services officer, and evidence from various professionals would be considered.
- **Cost of Consultation**: A Member inquired about the cost of the consultation. Officers estimated the initial cost at around £8000, with some additional expenses for follow-up letters.
- **Future Considerations**: A Member raised concerns about potential changes in tenancy laws that might affect pet ownership. Officers assured that the policy would be reviewed if new legislation impacts social housing tenancies.

RESOLVED – That Member, approve the attached Pets Policy, which maintains the current position in relation to dog ownership, in line with the majority resident view following consultation.

11. **UPDATES FROM ALLOCATED MEMBERS AND PORTFOLIO HOLDERS**

There were no updates.

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

There was one question raised on an Organogram Request.

- A Member requested an updated organogram to clarify the recent staff changes in the housing department's management team. Officers confirmed that they are in the process of creating one and will include it in the next set of papers.

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

There was no other business.

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.

15. **NON-PUBLIC MINUTES**

RESOLVED – That the non-public minutes of the meeting held on 9 October 2024 be approved as a correct record.

16. **OUTLINE COSTS FOR FUTURE INVESTMENT AND RESOURCING OF HOUSING MAJOR WORKS AND COMPLIANCE**

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

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 one item of other business.

The meeting ended at 3.40pm

Chairman

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