

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE HOUSING SCRUTINY PANEL HELD ON THURSDAY, 22ND SEPTEMBER, 2022

MEMBERS: Councillors Maria Alexandrou (Chair), Lee Chamberlain (Vice-Chair), Josh Abey, Hivran Dalkaya, Nelly Gyosheva, Tom O'Halloran and Mahmut Aksanoglu

Officers: Joanne Drew (Acting Executive Director, Place), Martin Greenway (Head of Repairs & Estate Services), Karen Lucas (Head of Housing Management), Kayt Wilson (Head of Private Housing Solutions), Stacey Gilmour (Governance Officer)

Also Attending: Councillor George Savva, Cabinet Member for Social Housing

1. WELCOME & APOLOGIES

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made.

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Ayten Guzel and Sinan Boztas. Cllr Mahmut Aksanoglu was substituting for Cllr Guzel.

Apologies for lateness were received from Joanne Drew, Acting Executive Director, Place as she was attending an earlier meeting.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chair, Cllr Alexandrou stated an interest as she is a landlord.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

AGREED the minutes of the meeting held on 5 July 2022.

4. ENFIELD REPAIRS DIRECT- OVERVIEW ON PROGRESS, DELIVERY, RESPONSE TIMES AND OUT OF HOURS REPAIRS

RECEIVED the report of Martin Greenway, Head of Repairs & Estate Services.

NOTED

1. Key points of the report were highlighted by Councillor George Savva, Cabinet Member for Social Housing.

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2. Members were invited to raise questions and comments.
3. In response to Members' questions regarding the introduction of the service, Officers explained that the service was launched in May 2020. In arriving at this decision, Cabinet considered the wider feedback from service users which included residents wanting to register their repair to polite, helpful staff who could diagnose their problems accurately and a book a convenient appointment slot with minimum customer effort. There was also a need to achieve a higher rate of 'first time fix' as well as communicating better to satisfactorily resolve repair issues including improving the handling of escalations and complaint casework.
4. Officers provided an overview of the Repairs Team outlining how functions are organised. The structure is predicated on maximising efficiency so there are several functions brought together or share common resources.
5. Regarding the establishment of the Housing Resolution Centre officers explained that one of the key drivers of creating a dedicated Contact Centre for Housing repairs was to improve the customer journey and have the process from 'telephone to screwdriver' all in one team. As agreed in the plan a Housing Resolution Centre was established in January 2022.
6. In response to Members' concerns regarding the efficiency of contractors, officers advised that the service fields 80,000 calls per annum resulting in 49,000 repair orders being raised. (30,000 of which pass through Enfield Repairs Direct (ERD)). The service is based at Edmonton Green and co-located with technical staff and staff from other teams in Housing to develop more of a joined-up approach. Core repair services are still in-house meaning that there is still a need to rely on external specialist contractors where there's not a business case to take in-house (e.g. a roofing repair).
7. The department is in the process of procuring new contractors which will provide the ability to consolidate what is already in place. However, it is currently a very difficult market as material and labour costs continue to increase therefore companies are not coming forward with tenders. Therefore, as many repairs as possible are being covered in-house with the skills available and external contractors are only used for very specialised jobs.
8. Officers went on to say that the in-house repairs operation is of critical importance to the future success of the service as having to over-rely on contractors has been a problem in the past. Instead the vision is to create a dedicated in-house workforce with trained and knowledgeable tradespeople, with apprenticeship programmes and succession planning. The benefit of an in-house service is that there is greater control and accountability for the standard of work. A training programme has been agreed which will enable staff to work safely, understand the systems used and to receive further trade skill training.
9. To improve the quality of service provided to customers and to reduce call volumes officers advised that a digital shift plan has been devised. While offering a comprehensive telephone service, residents should be able to book routine repairs online and engage in more digital

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interactions. Reflecting societal shifts in behaviour, it is anticipated that there will be a year on year tapering down in telephone demand and a corresponding increase in digital transactions.

10. Members asked how this newly devised service would work and officers clarified that it would be implemented over three phases, the first being improving the website content, the second phase would develop additional functionality on the website to embed live repairs diaries on the website and allow for customers to book and cancel routine repairs. And finally phase 3 would involve expanding digital options. The target date for this service to be fully up and running is April 2023.
11. In response to a question raised regarding the budget shortfall eluded to on page 13 paragraph 28 of the report, officers clarified the urgent actions which would be taken to further reduce expenditure, one of which is completing contractual repairs only.
12. Further information was provided on efficiency indicators, including mechanisms in place to improve productivity from an average of 3.5 jobs per day to an average of 4 which will enable the service to derive greater efficiency from its staff. Discussions also took place regarding the tracking of missed appointments and how these are monitored.
13. In response to a suggestion regarding the possibility of 'virtual site visits' it was agreed that officers would investigate this further and feedback accordingly.

Action: Martin Greenway, Head of Repairs & Estate Services

5. SOCIAL HOUSING REGULATION BILL

RECEIVED the report of Karen Lucas, Head of Housing Management.

NOTED

1. Cllr George Savva, Cabinet Member for Social Housing introduced the report and explained that it reviews the preparation of the Council Housing Service for the Social Housing Regulation bill which is anticipated to pass through parliament in spring/summer 2023.
2. In relation to the information eluded to on page 15, paragraph 2 of the report, clarification was provided on the expected shortfall should rent increases be capped next year. Officers explained that whilst this is necessary to support tenants during the cost of living crisis it will put significant strain on resources – because actual costs of the service are rising significantly faster than the proposed rent increases. Options are being considered but this will mean reductions to service standards and impacts on the investment in existing council homes and the new build programme whilst seeking to balance costs with income.
3. Preparation for the enactment of the Social Housing Regulation Bill outlined in the report seek to deliver on the Council's commitment to ensure all residents, regardless of whether they are council tenants or housing association tenants, are provided with good homes in well-connected neighbourhoods and the creation or management of safe, healthy and confident communities.

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4. Officers highlighted various aspects of the report and said that it is anticipated that the Bill will introduce key changes in how social housing is regulated which included strengthening the ability of the Regulator of Social Housing to regulate the condition of social housing and the quality of the services provided by registered providers, non-profit organisations such as housing associations and co-operatives, profit making registered providers and local authorities.
5. Further information was provided, and discussions took place regarding the Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM's). The twenty-two proposed TSM's are broken into two groups – those where the Council will be asked to provide performance data and those where the Council will collect information from residents directly on their satisfaction with elements of the service.
6. Officers confirmed that work is ongoing to ensure that Enfield Council is prepared for the new regulatory regime and to understand how it is currently performing in comparison with other authorities and Registered Providers (RPs). This includes partnership with other London boroughs in commissioning a benchmarking report to understand performance across London relative to the rest of the country and areas for improvement against TSM's.
7. The Panel noted the Council's preparation for the new social housing regulatory regime whilst acknowledging the challenges faced as set out in the report.

6. HOUSING GATEWAY LTD - PRIVATE RENTERS REFORM WHITE PAPER

RECEIVED the report of Kayt Wilson, Head of Private Housing Solutions.

NOTED

1. Councillor Savva, Cabinet Member for Social Housing introduced the report.
2. The Renters Reform White Paper was published on 16th June 2022, the proposals in the white paper outline a new private renter's bill. The Government intends to bring forward this Bill in the 2022-23 parliamentary season.
3. Central government believe that the Private Rented Sector (PRS) does not meet the needs of all residents and aim to deliver a fairer, more secure and high quality PRS by focussing on the following main points: Safe and Decent Homes, Increased Security and Stability, Improved Dispute Resolution, Better Compliance and Robust Enforcement and Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Regulations 2022.
4. The values of the Renters Reform White paper align with that of the Council's Housing and Growth Strategy. The Council has a key role to play in shaping the private rented sector by the introduction of the selective licensing scheme and the continued growth of Housing Gateway Ltd (HGL).
5. Further key points of the report highlighted by Kayt Wilson, Head of Private Housing Solutions. Members were invited to raise questions and comments.

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6. In response to Members' queries regarding the impact of the Renters Reform White Paper on the Housing Advisory Service it was advised that for landlords, the high market value combined with the cost of improving their properties means that many are exiting the market, and this is a trend that may be expected to continue. These factors have led to a shortage in the supply of privately rented properties and a rise in rent levels. To mitigate these problems the Council are offering landlords the option to lease or sell their property, this is a joined-up piece of work, using the Landlord's Forum to spread the word. However, the White Paper does not address the main issues of affordability and supply of accommodation in the Private Rented Sector (PRS) and this remains one of the Council's biggest challenges and contributors to budget pressures.
7. In response to a question regarding the levels charged for rent it was explained that the decision-making process uses two streams; affordability for tenants and state aid.
8. Members asked for an update on the portfolio position of Housing Gateway Ltd (HGL). Officers advised that HGL has a portfolio of 660 owned properties and 250 leased properties which means it is one of the largest PRS landlords in the borough. HGL is well placed to meet the proposed requirements of the Renters Reform White Paper.
9. In response to Members' concerns regarding requiring more homes Officers acknowledged that this was a desperate and challenging situation. Enfield Council are building new homes but unfortunately this is still not enough to meet demand and this was an issue affecting all London boroughs. The Climate Change Bill was also creating pressures as it will cost Local Authorities a substantial amount of money to modify properties to the required standard.
10. Officers provided further information on the shortage of private rented accommodation across all boroughs and the reasons for this which included landlords exiting the market due to changes in tax laws. As a result of this, and the pent-up demand for accommodation, more residents are having to be housed in commercial hotels, and it was agreed that this was far from ideal.
11. Officers went on to advise that the ideal option to address demand is to build new homes. However, inflationary pressures are making it very difficult to enter into affordable contracts with providers. Therefore, as a result of this Enfield Council's response has been to switch rapidly to acquiring homes which economically is the next best option.

7. WORK PROGRAMME 2022/23

NOTED the Housing Scrutiny Work Programme 2022/23.

8. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

NOTED the dates of future meetings as follows:

Tuesday 29 November 2022

Wednesday 22 March 2023.

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These meetings will commence at 7:00pm and will be held in the Conference Room at the Civic Centre.

The meeting ended at 8.40 pm.