

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE HOUSING SCRUTINY PANEL HELD ON TUESDAY, 1ST DECEMBER, 2020

MEMBERS: Councillors Elif Erbil, Susan Erbil, Alessandro Georgiou, Margaret Greer, Edward Smith and Hass Yusuf

Officers: Joanne Drew, Director of Housing and Regeneration, Sarah Stevenson-Jones, Resident Safety Director, Metin Halil, Democratic Services Officer, Andy Ellis, Governance and Scrutiny Officer.

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The Chair, Cllr Elif Erbil welcomed everyone to the meeting and members of the Panel introduced themselves.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 3 SEPTEMBER 2020

Further clarification was given in relation to two items in the minutes.

- 1) A correction was noted that the Civica Housing Management System has a projected go-live date of February 2021, depending on Covid-19 and year end issues. It was confirmed that the new Housing Allocations Policy was implemented on 1 December.
- 2) The former Housing Advisory Board no longer operates. The Housing Advisory Group, which has membership from across the housing system held their first meeting recently. Unlike the previous Board, this group is not part of the formal constitution framework and has no political representation. It was confirmed that residents on the group are able to share opinions and recommendations with officers, in order to shape future policy decisions. The agenda for the first meeting of the group included the two items being discussed at scrutiny tonight, to allow residents views on the issues to be noted. Cllr Smith, as a former member of the Housing Board asked that his concerns relating to the remit and membership of the new group were noted.
- 3) With the necessary corrections addressed, the minutes were agreed.

4. BUILDING SAFETY AND CAPITAL WORKS

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Joanne Drew, Director of Housing and Regeneration and Sarah Stevenson Jones, Resident Safety Director gave a presentation on Building Safety and Capital works and highlighted the following.

- 1) There are 5 key themes linked to the investment strategy: Improving building safety, eradicating anti-social behaviour with innovative design, replacing aged infrastructure, creating sustainable homes for the future and reducing maintenance and service costs with appropriate procurement.
- 2) Life cycle modelling is used to define the life-span of a range of different elements such as windows and roofs. A well-defined life cycle allows forward planning.
- 3) A stock condition survey can identify well performing areas and those that require attention, for example, fire alarms and lightening detectors.
- 4) As part of the life-cycle modelling, statutory requirements and historical repair costs are considered along with the important feedback provided by residents.
- 5) To ensure the correct work is undertaken at the most appropriate time, a 5 year, 10 year and 30 year programme is developed, forming the asset investment model. A programme design for estates and buildings is followed by an internal scope challenge, involving stakeholders and resident engagement on the proposals.
- 6) Capital investment and affordability should be considered. Investment in building improvements needs to be recovered, in part, from leaseholders. In the current period of uncertainty caused by the pandemic and the financial climate, capital investment needs to be balanced with leaseholders ability to pay.
- 7) Over the next 5 years, there is an investment plan, totalling in excess of £200m, which will include building safety work in advance of the new regulations.
- 8) All new contracts are subject to a competitive tendering exercise to ensure value for money, with a greater emphasis on quality control when considering tender submissions. Smart decisions are made in relation to the quality, performance and life expectancy of products as opposed to cost. To ensure robust quality monitoring on main contracts is undertaken, external Clerk of Works will be used.
- 9) There are no buildings in the Council's housing stock with Aluminium Composite Material within the external walls. In addition, there are no buildings over 6 storeys with High Pressure Laminate remaining, however, remediation work will take place on 4 blocks below 4 storeys. Work will commence next year to address balcony finishes and timber cladding systems across low rise homes.
- 10) 12 high rise blocks will be retrofitted this year as part of the High Rise Residential Blocks Retrofit and Safety programme. The remaining blocks will be retrofitted over a 4 year time-scale.
- 11) Plant rooms and communal risers will form part of the work to demonstrate enhanced safety.
- 12) There will be additional safety programmes carried out to include, fire doors, in-flat fire detection and sprinkler installation in specialised housing schemes.

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- 13) Resident engagement forms an important part of the developments being carried out. A new resident engagement strategy is being planned and part of this will be improved communications.
- 14) There will be improvements to the Council website to include advice on safety and maintenance issues. Digital notice boards will be installed in high rise blocks.
- 15) A Residents Charter has been devised in consultation with the Residents Voice
- 16) Building Safety Managers will be employed to support residents living in high rise blocks.
- 17) The focus for the next 5 years is safety and sustainability with an aim to reach 100% of the Decent Home targets. If funding is secured, a pilot scheme will be established to retrofit an entire council house to carbon zero standards.
- 18) Looking further ahead to the next 6-10 years, Decent Home standards will be maintained, there will be continued investment in safety, sustainability and estates.

The Chair thanked Officers for their presentation and asked for questions and comments from Members of the Scrutiny Panel.

- 19) In response to a question relating to additional issues and challenges on funding, it was confirmed that further clarity is required from MHCLG on the timing of legislation to allow the Council to mitigate any potential risk.
- 20) Capacity could be a problem as qualified Building Safety Officers are drawn from a small pool. The Council will consider up-skilling existing staff to carry out these roles which will also aid succession planning.
- 21) A comment was made that the report to go to Cabinet in February should include reference to the 5,000 leaseholders in the borough.
- 22) It was confirmed that the 5 year programme includes details of buildings and timescales for works, however the 5-10 year programme will only be populated once the strategy has been approved.
- 23) As part of the Asset Management Strategy, decisions are made on whether to retrofit a building or consider demolition and regeneration. There is a move towards retrofitting when it is economic to do so. Studies have highlighted that community cohesion should be considered, as moving people out of their homes to other areas can have an adverse effect.
- 24) The GLA Affordable Housing Programme has been launched and the Council will be bidding for funds to support our council house building programme. However, Central Government have given the GLA significantly less than was requested and have stated they will not fund the cost of replacement homes, it will only fund net new supply. This is a significant challenge for the Council. The Leader has been lobbying the Housing Minister as The Joyce and Snells redevelopment will be affected by this funding gap.
- 25) It was noted that the carbon footprint of concrete is huge, making retrofitting a more sustainable option.

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- 26) It was confirmed that stock condition surveys confirm the expected life-span of items such as doors, windows and lifts. This allows for planning replacements in future years.
- 27) To ensure any remedial work is carried out at the appropriate time, liaison takes place between the survey team, repairs team and building safety team.
- 28) It was noted that a tender is assessed on 3 criteria; price, quality (what products will be used, labour force, management controls, training programme), social value (local employment, training for residents, financial investment in the community). Based on all 3 criteria, the contract is awarded.
- 29) Modern, powder coated aluminium window frames are now used, as opposed to UPVC frames.
- 30) The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) is ring fenced, taking rents from tenants and service charges from leaseholders. The Business Plan balances between investing in new housing supply, currently 3,500 new council houses and provision for some regeneration over the next 10 years. It also includes investment in existing council housing stock. With the high level of homelessness in Enfield, the importance of the House Building programme is apparent. Providing new homes helps to balance the stock portfolio which contains a number of very old buildings.
- 31) Cabinet have agreed that any burden placed on the HRA by further legislation should be addressed by Central Government.
- 32) Financial risk will be mitigated by the substantial reserves within the HRA. There opportunities to scale back projects in certain areas to mitigate risk. The capital programme is constantly reviewed and any unforeseen financial pressures would reflect on areas such as estate greening, rather than building safety.
- 33) It was confirmed that there is a 3 year programme to replace fire doors for tenants, but also available to leaseholders too.

5. SOCIAL HOUSING WHITE PAPER

Joanne Drew, Director of Housing and Regeneration and Sarah Stevenson Jones, Resident Safety Director gave a presentation on the Social Housing White Paper and highlighted the following.

- 1) The Government have now published the Social Housing White Paper, which contains what all social housing residents should expect from social housing providers. There are 7 themes or charters comprising the White Paper.
- 2) In addition, the White Paper sets out what the government will do to ensure landlords live up to the new charter and it means Local Authorities must be transparent about its performance and decision making. This will ensure that tenants and the Regulator of Social Housing can hold them to account.
- 3) The 7 Charters outlined in the White Paper, relate to safety in your own home, landlord performance, improved complaints handling

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performance, to be treated with respect, landlords engagement with residents, a good quality home and neighbourhood and support for first steps towards homeownership.

- 4) Enfield Council are well positioned to respond to 'Safety in your own home.'
- 5) 'Landlord Performance' will be increasingly in the spotlight and will include issues such as how anti-social behaviour is dealt with, which is extremely important for residents.
- 6) Within the scope of the White Paper it is important to note how effectively the Council respond and deal with complaints, rather than the number of complaints themselves.
- 7) Charter 4 is a key part, which relates to how we will listen to residents and respond to their views.
- 8) Under Charter 5, the Ombudsman will have the power to refer any systemic complaints to the Regulator of Social Housing if appropriate.
- 9) The review of the Decent Homes Standard and ensuring neighbourhoods are safe form part of Charter 6.
- 10) Charter 7 outlines the government's commitment to provide social housing tenants greater opportunities to buy their own home. Half of the homes provided via the Affordable Programme will be for affordable home ownership. A new Right to Shared Ownership will provide an opportunity to purchase a minimum stake of 10% in their home, with provision to purchase further shares in the future. It is important in Enfield to have a wide variety of housing products to meet the need.

The Chair thanked Officers for their presentation and asked for questions and comments from Members of the Scrutiny Panel.

- 11) It was noted that to engage with residents, focus groups, work-shops and 'Housing News.' would all be utilised and the Resident Engagement Strategy would be refreshed. Officers will also be working with the Customer Voice.
- 12) A suggestion was made that there should be more collaboration between landlords and residents to prevent referrals to the ombudsman. In response, it was noted that in order to resolve complex complaints, resident panels could hear the final stage complaint, a process which works well in other boroughs.
- 13) Once the pandemic has passed, it may be beneficial to encourage the formation of more resident's associations to improve the sense of community.
- 14) The Right to Buy Scheme is still in operation but in addition, within the council house building programme the Council could build shared ownership homes at the lower entry level.
- 15) It was confirmed that the White Paper does not include private landlords who will not be part of the regulatory framework. Cabinet are due to consider setting up a voluntary charter that private landlords could sign up to, promoting good standards of housing provision.

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- 16) A comment was noted that all residents, either tenants or leaseholders should be treated equally.
- 17) A question was asked in relation to the former Housing Advisory Board and the newly established Housing Advisory Group, specifically how will the administration ensure transparency in dealing with issues of concern from residents? In response, it was noted that an annual satisfaction survey will be carried out with tenants and leaseholders, the results of which will be submitted to the most appropriate governance forum.
- 18) It was noted that the private rented sector should be scrutinised in an appropriate way to ensure tenants rights are enforced and private rented landlords should be accountable. Enfield has the highest level of evictions from private rented accommodation in the country so this is a massive challenge and we need to take proportionate but reasonable actions to protect this sector. To support private landlords the council has established a telephone advisory support service as it is recognised that some tenants can be difficult. This will assist to sustain the tenancy in both the parties interest.
- 19) It was confirmed that an organisation called Better Homes Enfield was not involved in council housing service provision.

6. WORK PROGRAMME 2020/21

The work programme for 2020/21 was agreed.

7. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The dates of future meetings were noted.

The meeting ended at Time Not Specified.