

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE HOUSING SCRUTINY PANEL HELD ON TUESDAY, 7TH DECEMBER, 2021

MEMBERS: Councillors Anne Brown, Ergin Erbil (Associate Cabinet Member (Non-geographical based)), Ayten Guzel and Edward Smith

Officers: Joanne Drew (Director of Housing & Regeneration), Karen Lucas (Head of Housing Management), Martin Greenway (Head of Repairs & Estate Services), Helen Baeckstroem (Strategy & Policy Team Manager), Stacey Gilmour (Governance Officer)

Also Attending: Councillor Gina Needs, Cabinet Member for Social Housing

1. WELCOME & APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Hockney (Chair), Yusef (Vice-Chair), Greer and Karakus.

In the absence of the Chair and Vice-Chair, nominations were sought and seconded and Councillor Ergin Erbil chaired the meeting.

The Chair welcomed all attendees to the meeting and introductions were made.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations were received.

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

AGREED the minutes of the meeting held on 30 September 2021

4. ENFIELD REPAIRS DIRECT - OVERVIEW ON DELIVERY AND RECENT CHANGES

The Chair thanked Officers and Members for attending to present the item on the Review of Enfield Repairs Direct.

Councillor Needs introduced the item highlighting that the report views the progress and performance of Enfield Repairs Direct as it approaches a year and a half from its setup.

Councillor Needs stated that this administration had listened to residents and brought the service in house which has paid off dividends. She added that she was very proud of the team, who were working really hard and, thanks to Officers, there was currently no back log of work.

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Martin Greenway, Head of Repairs & Estate Services provided an update on the Review of Enfield Repairs Direct which covered the below points;

- Response to the challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic
- Performance
- Staffing structure changes
- ERD Operations
- Contracts and Quality Team
- Planned IT improvements
- Resident Involvement
- Future plans for the development of the service.

During his update Martin made the following key points:

- Resident and member feedback on previous repairs contractors responsible for undertaking repairs in recent years has been poor.
- In June 2019, the Cabinet approved the in-sourcing of the Housing Repairs Service. This service was launched in May 2020.
- In addition to the setting up of a new inhouse team wider feedback was considered which included residents wanted their call answered quickly by polite, helpful staff and being able to book a convenient appointment slot with minimum customer effort.
- There also needed to be more reliability in attending appointments and higher rates of 'first time fix'. Communication needed to be better to satisfactorily resolve repair issues including how escalations and complaint casework are handled.
- In February 2020 Cabinet reviewed a report detailing the design of the service, a policy for repairs, timescales for delivery, a financial business, branding and a service model with proposed timetable for introduction of defined functions.

Response to the challenge of the COVID-19 Pandemic

- The pandemic had a disruptive impact upon the service as with all other sectors in economic and social life.
- Repairs services across the country have applied restrictions in repairs to critical emergencies only, furloughed staff and have been fraught with supply chain difficulties.
- Enfield Repairs Direct (ERD) having launched in may 2020 has remained operational throughout.

Performance

- Residents expect a responsive repairs service which is fast and effective. ERD has extended a great deal of effort in developing its job management system to enable appointments to be managed effectively.
- A chart was provided in the report showing progress over the past year in completing appointments on time.
- The team have not carried a backlog coming out of Covid restrictions as other housing providers have experienced.
- A level of confidence in the system and method has been achieved where the operating Works In progress (WIP) is below a thousand jobs and targets are expected to be met in the last quarter of the year.

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- Recognising that the route to improving the responsive repairs service, the team needs to act on feedback. For this reason, data is captured on a transactional basis from completed jobs.
- The feedback team also review data from complaints and Members' Enquiries.

Staffing Structure Changes

- The service has changed its delivery model following a review of structures across the Housing Department as well as an extended period of staff consultation earlier this year. A chart included in the report outlines how functions are organised.

ERD Operations

- The inhouse repairs operation is of critical importance to the future success of the service. The reason for this is to not over-rely on contractors as has been a problem in the past.
- The vision is to create a dedicated inhouse workforce with trained and knowledgeable tradespeople, with apprenticeship programmes and succession planning.
- The benefit of an inhouse service is that there is greater control and accountability for the standard of work.
- The apprenticeship programme includes 5 apprentices in the next intake. There are significant advantages to the 'grow our own' strategy including affording local residents an opportunity to develop themselves and at the same time the Council benefits from the knowledge they have.

Resident Involvement

- The insourcing and development of Enfield Repairs Direct has been monitored by the Repairs stakeholders' Group. This has been very valuable in understanding the key concerns of residents and where to prioritise focus.

Future Plans for the Development of the service

- ERD is emerging from the start-up phase of its establishment and is now stabilising. The public service ethos of the team is strong and there is great willingness to succeed in its next phase of development. As performance continues to improve gauged by internal indicators and more importantly by customer and member satisfaction, opportunities will continue to be sought for the growth of the service.

The Panel then asked questions of the Officers. A summary of the questions and answers are set out below.

Q: Councillor Smith stated that he regularly receives complaints from residents in his ward (particularly Poplar estate) regarding outstanding repairs, delayed appointment times and lack of response to enquires from Officers. He acknowledged that repairs are a very emotive subject with some residents expressing dissatisfaction from the outset therefore he appreciated that there would always be an element of challenge. However,

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in his opinion, the feedback he is receiving from residents is somewhat different from the honed words in the report.

A: Martin replied that the data and statistics for complaints shows a decrease overall and therefore this has formed the basis for the information included in the report. He agreed however that it is important that the service responds to challenges and rectifies them at the earliest opportunity. Joanne Drew, Director of Housing & Regeneration added that monthly performance sessions take place at which data and statistics are discussed. She agreed however to do a deep dive into data, particularly around the Poplar estate as discussed by Cllr Smith.

Action: Joanne Drew, Director of Housing & Regeneration

Q: Although there is now more control over repairs there still appears to be areas for improvements and we are still outsourcing to contractors. Why is this?

A: Although we procure a whole host of support contractors, we start with the premise that works are carried out inhouse where possible. Some specialist works (e.g. roofing and draining) cannot currently be done inhouse therefore there is sometimes the need to use support contractors. A procurement exercise is currently taking place which is moving to the second stage shortly.

Q: Are there any plans for a Residents' Portal Service whereby they can log into their account, look a job references/progress and keep track of their own repairs?

A: A modern Repairs Team's success is largely tied up in the effectiveness of its IT and how it is used and as such, an upgrade to the Housing System is currently taking place. This is a large project, but the aim is to get to the stage where residents can book their own repairs and appointment slots which will in turn reduce customer effort as much as possible resulting in a better customer experience.

Q: Have the numbers of permanent staff within the Housing Department now increased and is it the aspiration to have all permanent staff? Can exact figures for agency and permanent staff be provided?

A: A recruitment process is currently taking place with more staff coming on board permanently. This is a rigorous process involving a skills test and interview with a review to recruiting good quality staff. The market as a whole is very tough at the moment which is why there is also a focus on the apprenticeship programme. Figures for agency and permanent staff will be circulated to members.

Action: Martin Greenway, Head of Repairs & Estate Services

5. ESTATE SERVICES

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

NOTED

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1. Councillor Gina Needs, Cabinet Member for Social Housing introduced the report and gave credit to Officers for their achievements.
2. Key points of the report highlighted by Martin Greenway, Head of Repairs & Estate Services.
3. Estate Services & Repairs are now located in the same building so all responsible for communal repairs, tracing and tracking.
4. Continually looking at ways in which recycling can be improved, including educating residents on how best to recycle.
5. Fly tipping remains a national issue, therefore Enforcement Officers are working collaboratively with estate staff. Two posts have been created dedicated to waste enforcement on council land.
6. A wider remit is in place to manage anti-social behaviour on estates. This includes looking at the design of estates, the possibility of better lighting and working closely with the Council's First Response Team.
7. Through its resident engagement service, the council seeks to involve a wide range of tenants, leaseholders and other residents, not only in housing issues but also in the context of place shaping in the borough.
8. In response to Members' queries regarding estate walkabouts and the need for these to be more flexible and to involve closer liaison with Councillors, it was confirmed that future calendar dates for appointments were now being looked at and it was agreed that these could be more flexible as these walkabouts are very important.
9. In response to a question regarding a new abseiling cleaning service for high rise buildings it was confirmed that as communal windows in tower blocks were not currently cleaned an enhancement to this service was being looked at with a view to instructing companies to carry out this task
10. Officers provided more information on bulk waste collection points, the action taking place to prevent these areas from becoming dumping grounds, and how this would be reviewed and monitored.
11. Regarding fly tipping, Officers advised that the inhouse team will respond quickly and efficiently to remove it and the enforcement team will work closely with the estate caretakers and seek intelligence from on the ground to identify the source of each item.
12. In response to Members' concerns regarding bulk waste items being dumped on estates from people outside it was advised that if this was a particular problem then in an attempt to tackle this issue, rapid measures could be considered such as the installation of CCTV. Members felt that a strategy to deal with this matter needed to be developed and Officers took this point on board.
13. The Chair, Councillor Erbil expressed concerns regarding the location of cycle storage units as, although these had been successfully delivered, residents were reluctant to use them due to theft. It was agreed that the location and take up of these units would be looked at.
14. Discussions took place regarding car parking on estates and how this was often abused by residents from adjoining roads. Councillor Needs confirmed that she had been meeting with Officers to discuss the possible introduction of Controlled Parking Zones (CPZs)/permits. She

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emphasised however that any such measures would need to be affordable to everyone.

The Cabinet Member and Officers were thanked for attending and presenting the report.

6. DRAFT TENANCY STRATEGY

RECEIVED the report of Helen Baeckstroem, Strategy and Policy Team Manager.

NOTED

1. The verbal introduction by Councillor Gina Needs, Cabinet Member for Social Housing in which she thanked Officers for all their hard work on the draft Strategy.
2. The report presents the new draft Tenancy Strategy 2021-2025 for discussion as part of its engagement process before approval by Cabinet.
3. The draft strategy outlines the Councils' commitment to good homes in well-connected neighbourhoods through the setting of high standards for tenancies in the Borough and also sets out requirements regarding lifetime tenancies for social housing and also recommends good practice for private landlords and letting agents in regard to the tenancy agreements they use.
4. The draft strategy proposes that all tenants of social housing are given lifetime tenancies to enable them to live safe, healthy and confident lives in settled communities across the borough.
5. Key points of the reported highlighted by Karen Lucas, Head of Housing Management, Helen Baeckstroem, Strategy and Policy Team Manager and Joanne Drew, Director of Housing & Regeneration. Members were invited to raise questions and comments.
6. Officers advised that the draft strategy has benefited from engagement and formal consultation with a wide range of stakeholders throughout its development.
7. In response to questions from Members, Officers explained that the policy focused on four priority areas which were:
 - Residents have a clear understanding of their tenancy;
 - Lifetime tenancies are the preferred option as to the best approach for addressing housing need in the borough;
 - Residents are able to stay in their home for as long as it remains suitable for them;
 - If a tenancy ends, residents are supported to avoid homelessness
8. In response to Members' queries regarding what happens when a property is no longer suitable for a tenant's needs due to overcrowding, Officers explained the allocations scheme which awards priority to tenants in severely overcrowded properties. Resident Relationship Officers work closely with these families to offer support, help and advice with various other schemes that can be accessed.

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9. Councillor Brown expressed concerns regarding the number of residents on the housing register as well as the number of families living in overcrowded accommodation and asked how the council intended to address these issues. Officers explained that due to the national housing crisis there were just not enough homes to meet the needs at the right price point to address this. However, Enfield Council is working to make sure that existing stock is used most effectively. Further information was provided on various schemes in place such as home share, under occupation incentives and a vacancy chain system which creates a chain of moves that allows people to end up in the right size property. The Council is being as active and pro-active as possible in an attempt to address these issues.
10. In relation to the Draft Tenancy Strategy, Councillor Smith expressed his concerns regarding the relationship the Council envisaged between itself and the HAS. He said he would be concerned if Enfield Council went further than trying to persuade Registered Providers (RPs) to adopt the strategy but instead insisted and he very much hoped that it would not be the latter. Officers gave assurances that the Council wanted to retain as positive relationships as possible with its RPs.
11. Members agreed that this strategy was good for cohesion and social inclusion and also commented that long term tenancies are extremely important for children and young people especially in regard to schooling and education. It was also felt that long term tenancies can create pride in homes as well as pride in the neighbourhood.

The Cabinet Member and Officers were thanked for attending and presenting the Draft Tenancy Strategy.

7. RETENTION OF STAFF IN HOUSING DEPARTMENT

NOTED the report and agreed that this would be discussed further at the next meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Panel in March 2022.

Action: Joanne Drew, Director of Housing & Regeneration

8. WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2021/22

NOTED the Work Programme for 2021/22 and agreed that the report in respect of Retention of Staff in Housing Department would be discussed in more detail at the next meeting in March 2022 and therefore included on the agenda for this meeting along with the other two items marked on the panel's work programme for the March meeting.

Action: Stacey Gilmour, Governance Officer

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

NOTED the date of the next meeting was Thursday 17 March 2022.

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