

The Economy, Housing and the Arts Policy and Accountability Committee Minutes

Wednesday 12 June 2019

PRESENT

Committee members: Councillors Rory Vaughan (Chair), Rowan Ree, Ann Rosenberg and Adronie Alford

Other Councillors: Councillor Lisa Homan

Officers: Mark Meehan (Chief Housing Officer), Richard Buckley (Assistant Director of Property and Compliance), David McNulty (Assistant Director Operations) and Labab Labub (Partnership Manager and Strategy, Housing)

Others: Chris Took (Fire Safety Action Resident Group) FRAG and Chair of Charecroft Tenants and Residents Association.

38. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Alan De'Ath and Andrew Jones.

39. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

40. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 March 2019 were agreed as an accurate record subject to the amendment being made to the spelling of the name Sylvain Malburet (Bush Theatre).

The Chair highlighted that there were two outstanding action points, namely: i) details about who and what the competencies were of the Panel Members for the Arts Commission and ii) details of whether the digital inclusion work included Sheltered Housing. The clerk was asked to pursue these points outside the meeting.

41. **FIRE SAFETY UPDATE**

Mark Meehan, Chief Housing Officer introduced the report which provided an update on the work undertaken to improve fire safety across Council Housing.

Richard Buckley, Assistant Director of Property and Compliance informed the Committee, that to ensure the delivery of fire safety works was coordinated and was as effective as possible, the Council had developed a clear strategic approach to improving fire safety.

The three main strands of strategy were:

- H&F Fire Safety Plus
- Compliance Based Asset Management Strategy
- The Hackitt Review

H&F Fire Safety Plus

Richard Buckley explained that in October 2017, the Council launched *Fire Safety Plus*. This committed the Council to achieving the highest possible standard of fire safety across its housing stock. Fire Safety Plus made available £20 million of capital funding for fire safety testing and capital works which was agreed by Full Council on 18 October 2017.

It set out the Council's commitment to:

- Do more than the minimum requirement to keep residents safe.
- Ensure that homes across Hammersmith and Fulham were safe and compliant.
- Undertake a thorough review of fire safety in all communal blocks.
- Organise a programme of work to install new fire doors, enhanced fire-fighting equipment, facilities and automated detection.

The Committee noted that the Council was committed not to charge leaseholders for fire safety work.

Compliance Based Asset Management Strategy

The Committee were informed that in addition to the work that emerged from Fire Safety Plus, the next stage was to gain approval for a compliance-based Asset Management Strategy. This set out the Council's commitment to achieve a compliance-based asset management approach to its housing stock and through its capital programme, deliver a higher standard of fire safety and compliance.

The Hackitt Review

Underpinning the Council's approach was the Government's Hackitt Review. The key strategic aims were incorporated into the Council's Asset Management Strategy. The adoption of the recommendations in the Hackitt Review will ensure the Council manages housing in line with best practice.

The key themes of the review were:

- Clear roles and responsibilities to ensure a stronger focus on safety.
- Enhanced layers of fire safety for buildings 10 storeys and above.
- Clear governance and record keeping of investment decisions.
- Robust record keeping of all changes made to detailed plans.
- Clear rights and obligations for residents to ensure fire compliance

Examples of Action already taken

Richard Buckley highlighted a number of the actions which had already been taken. These included:

Specialised Teams -The Economy Directorate has put in place specialised teams with fire and associated systems expertise to undertake fire risk assessment, fire incident investigation, training, fire engineering solution, testing and maintenance and to deliver an extensive work programme of fire safety capital works.

Firefighting Lifts - As part of H&F lift programme, all future replacement lifts will be upgraded to firefighting standard, within the constraints of the existing building fabric. Forty are tabled to be installed over the next 36 months.

FD60 Doors – An extensive fire door enhancement programme has been commissioned. Two contractors will start to deliver from Autumn 2019, over 4,000 doors to blocks of 10 or more storeys, sheltered homes, hostels and premises identified through fire risk assessment. H&F has committed to install doors with 60 minute fire integrity in blocks of 6 or more storeys and 30 minutes in other blocks as identified through its fire risk assessment programme.

Installation of dry risers - The programme includes the installation of 19 dry risers to improve firefighting across several blocks. In blocks of 10 or more storeys, fire doors to the firefighting shaft/protected stair are to also be upgraded.

Emergency Lighting - The LED programme approved by Cabinet to commence in early 2020 will include the upgrade of emergency lighting in communal spaces in estates. In addition, an improvement and installation programme of lightning conductors is on-going.

Automated smoke control - In February, the automated smoke control system in Jepson House (18 storeys) was upgraded following damage to the system.

Continuous Maintenance and Testing - Completed to industry best practice is a key component of the Council's fire safety initiative. The Council service and certify annually over 11,000 gas appliances, inspect 100s of hardwired electrical systems, test over 80 dry/wet risers and smoke control systems and over 7,700 emergency lights.

Amnesty for Leaseholders - H&F gave an amnesty for leaseholders who had undertaken alterations without permission to their property that placed them and neighbours at potential risk in the event of a fire. To date, around 30 leasehold properties have come forward. Fire safety and structural engineers and buildings surveyors have put forward remedial plans, which are now in the design and implementation stage.

Engagement with Residents and LFB

Listening to residents FRAG - Frequent meetings, at least monthly, are held with residents' fire safety plus advisory group, FRAG. FRAG have met on 17 occasions to date. The group provide invaluable feedback and contributions to the fire safety programme. Working with residents and tenants is a key tenet of the Hackitt recommendations and H&F's commitment to work with residents.

Working with LFB

Officers meet with LFB bi-monthly to exchange local intelligence on fire safety programme, lift entrapment, fire incidents and initiatives around vulnerable persons. A recent initiative included a programme of training of the LFB on how Council lifts work and how to release persons in an emergency.

Chris Took, Chair of the Charecroft Estate FRAG & TRA, provided an overview of the groups' activities to date. He explained that clear lines of communication were paramount to ensure that residents understood what action was being taken and why. It was noted that for most residents living in tower blocks, their overriding concern was security rather than fire safety. Chris Took highlighted that a bug bear for residents was the modification of any internal doors which invalidated them as fire doors. He explained that one of his roles was to liaise with residents to ensure they notified the Council if keys were lost. Other notable issues which were flagged included: the risk posed by mobility scooters to access and egress routes, ineffectual signage, the fire risk posed by hoarding and the suitability of deploying sprinklers in some circumstances.

Councillor Lisa Homan thanked Chris Took and other residents for their work to improve fire safety across Council Housing. It was highlighted that it was important to involve those residents which lived in Council accommodation, including tower blocks, as they were most conversant with the local issues.

Councillor Rowan Ree asked Chris Took how he had achieved a 25% response rate to a questionnaire the FRAG (Fire Safety Action Resident Group) had circulated. In response, Chris Took explained that since the fire at Shepherds Court, the FRAG and Council had worked closely together and windows, lifts and fire doors had been replaced. This continued interaction with residents, whilst the work was ongoing, had enabled the FRAG to engage with residents successfully.

Councillor Rowan Ree asked what the main form of communication was between the FRAG and residents. Chris Took explained that the FRAG had tried digital engagement with limited success and word of mouth tended to be most effective. It was noted that 40 to 50 residents sometimes attended TRA meetings.

Councillor Rowan Ree asked whether officers sent out leaflets on the Fire Safety Strategy to residents. In response, Richard Buckley confirmed that the Council had established a Fire Safety Working Group which publicised news letters and events. He explained that due to the volume of ongoing works, it

tended to be a question of trying to strike a balance between too much information and not enough. Richard Buckley confirmed that if the Council was conducting specific works, then the newsletter targeted these. In addition, the Council also raised these works with TRAs and resident's groups. Councillor Lisa Homan highlighted that last summer, an illegal BBQ had been held on a balcony in Emlyn Gardens, and in these instances, all blocks received a letter reminding residents of their terms of their tenancies.

Councillor Rowan Ree asked officers, if fire drills were conducted in large Council housing blocks. In response, Richard Buckley confirmed that while it was impractical to evacuate entire blocks of residents, fire wardens tested evacuation procedures every 6 months in partnership with the London Fire Brigade.

Councillor Adronie Alford confirmed the Fire Safety Plus scheme was an excellent initiative and agreed it was a good idea that kitchen doors were being upgraded across high rise blocks. She asked whether the phasing and introduction of these works involved tenants and leaseholders. In response, Richard Buckley confirmed that the Council took steps to ensure both parties were involved in the process.

Councillor Adrione Alford asked if leaseholders were being charged for the Fire Safety Plus works. In response, Councillor Lisa Homan confirmed that residents were not being charged and the Council had an amnesty in place at present but this could not last indefinitely. Talking about the safety aspects of renting within the private rented sector, Councillor Adrione Alford asked officers about the number of absentee landlords in the borough and how these were found. In response, Richard Buckley explained that the Council relied on local intelligence as well as officers working across service departments to track these down.

In relation to properties in Riverside Gardens, Councillor Adrione Alford asked how the Council enforced the requirement that gas cookers were installed by professionals. In response, Richard Buckley drew the Committees' attention to the Hackitt recommendations and the requirement that buildings of shared occupancy needed to ensure they met the requisite compartmentalisation standards and this needed to be tested by the Council. Mr Labub (Partnership Manager and Strategy, Housing) also confirmed that the standards of a particular property would also come to light when a leaseholder came to sell their property and conveyancing was conducted. Mark Meehan (Chief Housing Officer) explained that as part of the Fire Safety Plus scheme, the Council was in the process of addressing defective kitchen equipment in council properties (thereby reducing the fire risk posed by old equipment). As a result, tenants were being provided with new fridges, freezers, tumble dryers and microwaves free of charge under the scheme.

Commenting on the requirement of compartmentalisation, the Chair observed that it looked like a complicated process and he asked how easy it would be to maintain in the future. Richard Buckley explained that most aspects of compartmentalisation would be covered by service conduits (i.e. electricity or gas) but that it was not an easy task which was why it was a 3-year

programme. The Chair asked about the implications of the process and if this meant that leaseholders would still be able to update their properties and install further wiring without breaching compartmentalisation regulations. Commenting on the Grenfell fire, Chris Took explained that the fire had not spread due to a lack of compartmentalisation but a combination of other factors.

Councillor Ann Rosenberg commented that internal fire doors appeared to be optional in some cases, and in her view, sprinkler systems should be mandatory in kitchens. She asked if the technology allowed for sprinkler systems to be activated when a certain temperature level had been exceeded. In response, Richard Buckley explained that if the property was a new building over 30 metres high, then sprinkler systems were a mandatory requirement. These were designed to trigger when the temperature exceeded 68 degrees Centigrade. However, sprinkler systems were not designed to be a silver bullet and could not cope with multiple fires. The Committee noted that retro fitting these to old buildings was often a complex and costly exercise. Often the most effective fire prevention solutions lay in multiple prevention systems operating in tandem (fire doors, compartmentalisation and portable fire suppression systems) rather than sprinkler systems.

The Chair asked apart from where it was requirement, if there was any particular mix of property where sprinklers were a good enhancement and where they could work effectively. Richard Buckley confirmed that feasibility studies were being conducted, however, Mark Meehan explained that sprinklers would not work everywhere.

Chris Took explained that people that did not live in tower blocks, should exercise caution about sprinkler systems and they should not be seen as a panacea. Malfunctions or even small kitchen fires could activate systems which could then cause their own problems like flooding. The disruption caused by repairs and redecoration also needed to be considered.

Councillor Ann Rosenberg asked what the choice was if sprinkler systems were not installed in tower blocks. In response, Chris Took explained that before the Grenfell tragedy, the perception was that tower blocks were safe. He stated that it would be wrong to treat every building as a potential Grenfell Tower. There were finite resources to consider, as well as the feelings of some residents which found the prolonged focus on tower blocks upsetting in the aftermath of the tragedy.

Councillor Lisa Homan confirmed that sprinkler systems were still being considered but further resident engagement was required. On balance, the deployment of sprinkler systems, might, in many cases, be considered an over-reaction given that other safety measures and enhancements could be introduced which would avoid the complex retrofitting of buildings.

A member of the public who attended the meeting aired concerns about how residents were consulted in blocks where there was no TRA and also the replacement of old fire doors which had been invalidated by internal modifications. In response, Richard Buckley confirmed that the Fire Door

replacement programme had not started yet, but when it did, 90% of all fire doors in sheltered housing would be replaced on a like for like basis. Richard Buckley confirmed that as the Council took action with residents rather than doing things to them, the Council would be working with residents to ensure the correct type and colour of door was installed by certified tradesmen.

A member of the public asked whether the lifts installed at Lancaster Court were firefighting lifts. Richard Buckley confirmed he would check and inform the resident outside the meeting.

**Action – Richard Buckley to check whether firefighting lifts were installed at Lancaster Court.
Outside the meeting, Richard confirmed that they are.**

In relation to the installation of smoke and fire detectors, the Chair asked if there had been any reported issues of these having been set off if they were very sensitive. In response, Richard Buckley explained that heat detectors, rather than smoke detectors were used in kitchens and this sensitivity was pre-set at 58 degrees Centigrade .

Concluding the item, the Chair noted that the Fire Safety Plus scheme would be rolled out over the next few years, working in partnership with FRAGs and residents' groups. The Chair asked when progress would be reviewed to ensure delivery and value for money was achieved.

In response, Richard Buckley confirmed that most aspects of the programme were not scheduled to start until the autumn of 2019 and in terms of monitoring progress, officers would be meeting with Councillor Homan every 2 weeks to ensure she was kept appraised and updated. David McNulty also confirmed that the Asset Management Programme, included an annual update which provided details of the programme and its costs. The Chair asked officers to ensure an update was provided to the Committee in a year's time.

Action – Richard Buckley to ensure an update report on Fire Safety was provided to PAC in a year's time.

The Chair thanked officers for the update and commented that the Fire Safety Plus scheme was a good example of the Council working with residents. It was noted that a further update would be provided in a year's time and that a thorough and comprehensive enhancement to fire safety capabilities was under way.

Action – Charles Francis to circulate the Fire Safety Plus PowerPoint presentation to the Committee outside the meeting.

RESOLVED

That the Committee reviewed and commented on the report.

That officers provide a further update later in the year.

42. AFFORDABLE HOUSING DELIVERY STRATEGY - VERBAL UPDATE

Labab Labub (Partnership Manager and Strategy, Housing) provided a presentation which set out the current work train and the emerging strategy. Mr Labub explained the change in council policy from the a fiscally prudent approach of paying down debt to being emphasizing growth and delivery of affordable housing while being ruthlessly financially efficient.

Mr Labub set out the Council's strategic approach to development through two main routes;

1. The Asset and Growth Strategy

This involved reviewing Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and General Fund land to develop a better understanding of the opportunities from the Council's estate and then consider the best delivery routes to maximise the benefit for the Council.

2. The Schools Renewal Programme

This programme centred on developing modern, fit for purpose schools as provide housing through better use of the schools' estate. The workstream involved Public Service Reform, Social Services and Housing.

Councillor Ann Rosenberg asked about the Watermeadow Court demolition in 2019 and what the latest information was. In response, Mr Labub explained that the Council was looking at a revised date for this to take place and he would provide the Committee with some revised information outside the meeting.

Action: Mr Labub to provide the Committee with further information about the timetable for demolition of Water Meadow Water Court.

Councillor Adronie Alford asked about the tenure breakdown of Edith Summerskill House and whether the intention was for the development only to be used as a key worker scheme. In response, Mr Labub explained that he would be able to provide a breakdown of the tenure outside the meeting.

Action: Mr Labub to provide the Committee with further information about the breakdown of tenure at Edith Summerskill House

Discussing the innovative ways new housing could be delivered, Councillor Rowan Ree noted that a recent housing development had incorporated a school at ground level, with flats directly above the school. While new thinking was commended, he asked about the safeguarding implications for these types of development.

In response, Mr Labub explained that schools were designed in consultation with the schools' governors and access and egress rights were considered at length during the design consultation phases. Asking a further question, Councillor Rowan Ree enquired how many market rent properties were in the

pipeline. In response, Mr Labub explained this information could be provided outside the meeting.

Action: Mr Labub to provide details on the number of market rent properties were scheduled to be built on 19/20.

Concluding the item, the Chair explained there were a number of market rent schemes that were on site, apart from those developments which were multi-phase. Mr Labub confirmed that the Housing Department were looking to identify further sites in the borough which could potentially be used for a further 800 units of affordable housing. The Chair stated that the Administrations' aim was to deliver 1500 additional units over the next 5 years and he welcomed the initiatives officers were pursuing in relation to S106 agreements and their links to employment opportunities and apprenticeships.

Action: That officers provide a further update on The Affordable Housing Strategy later in the 19/20 municipal year.

RESOLVED

That the Committee reviewed and commented on the report.

That officers provide a further update later in the year.

5. WORK PROGRAMMING 2018/19

The Chair introduced the item and confirmed that the Committee would examine Sheltered Housing at its September 2019 meeting and the Repairs Service would be examined later in the year.

Meeting started: 7.00 pm
Meeting ended: 9.04 pm

Chairman

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