

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

Tuesday 1 October 2019

## **PRESENT**

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

**Other Councillors:** Councillor Lisa Homan

**Officers:** Mark Meehan (Chief Housing Officer), David McNulty (Assistant Director Operations), Colette Prior (Resident Involvement and Governance Officer) and Darren Smith (Managing Director DLO).

**Others:** Eight residents attended the meeting.

## **43. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence.

## **44. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

## **45. MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 June 2019 were agreed as an accurate record. Councillor Adronie Alford expressed concern about the tardy response from officers, in relation to information requests which had been made by the Committee about the Arts Commission. Councillor Lisa Homan confirmed that she would raise the matter with Councillor Andrew Jones outside the meeting.

It was also noted that a response had not been received about the Affordable Housing Delivery Strategy. The Clerk confirmed that this information would be circulated within the next few days.

**46. A LONG-TERM REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE MODEL FOR HAMMERSMITH AND FULHAM**

David McNulty, Assistant Director Operations, introduced the report which set out the framework and timetable for the procurement, implementation and mobilisation of the long-term model for repairs and maintenance service.

It was noted the Council was committed to providing a repairs and maintenance service that was high-quality, efficient and responsive to the needs of residents. David McNulty explained that residents were a key partner in developing the Council's vision for repairs services and were engaged in the future model. As a result of this engagement, officers had identified several key priorities for the long-term model, which would deliver against the administration's manifesto promises, as follows:

- Every repair should be completed to a 'quality-performance' standard, whether delivered by the Council directly or providers
- Repairs and maintenance services should represent good value for money to residents
- Every resident should be aware of the repairs service, how to access it, and how it should work for them. This is captured in the resident handbooks, which will be shared with every resident
- The Council should get the best social return on its investment in repairs services, including identifying opportunities for young people and local businesses to be a part of the long-term solution
- Repairs and maintenance services should be sensitive and personalised around the needs of every tenant, ensuring every repair takes account of each resident's individual circumstances and requirements
- The Council should ensure the long-term model is as flexible as possible, ensuring repairs and maintenance service can develop over time.

It was noted that the Council had made significant progress in transforming its housing repairs since the launch of the new repairs model in April 2019. The model was made up of H&F Maintenance which undertook communal repairs, supported by a dedicated in-house Customer Service Centre. It was noted that three general repairs providers based in the north, centre and south of the borough and specialist providers existed (for gas, electric and asbestos) across the borough.

Officers explained that the interim model was developed, procured and put into operation in six months. The priority was to minimise the risk of service failure and to establish some core principles for the long-term procurement. The second phase would to be delivered in a 12 to 15-month timeframe and include as much learning as possible from the interim solution.

Discussing the current performance, David McNulty explained that it was still too early to fully assess the major changes to the repairs service as these had only been operational since April 2019. However, there were some encouraging areas of performance from the first four months of operation which included:

- over 95% of all jobs ordered are now completed on the first visit,
- 99% of our highest priority jobs (24hr target) are completed within target,
- 100% of forward planned repairs are completed within our targets,
- 97% of our non-emergency jobs are completed within our targets.

**Hammersmith and Fulham Maintenance:** Officers explained that the Council's newly formed in-house service team had delivered a high-quality and responsive communal repairs programme. For this reason, the various services being procured would have sufficient contract flexibility to allow specific additional services and functions to be undertaken by H&F Maintenance over time.

**Customer Service Centre (CSC):** The Committee learnt the implementation of the in-house CSC represented a significant achievement. It enabled full visibility and control of customer experience across repairs services. The Committee heard that residents had responded positively to this at a recent 'Residents Voice' and 'Summer Roadshows', that the customer service centre was responsive and helpful in understanding what constituted a repair.

The report also provided details on a number of other areas including: specialist providers, technology and the budgets, costs and the commercial model.

In relation to the performance targets for repairs, Councillor Rowan Ree stated that it would have been useful if the Committee had been provided with past figures so that comparisons could be made. In response, David McNulty accepted that the report did not provide the level of detail the Committee required, however, the slide presentation (augmenting the report) illustrated that for July /August 2019, the repairs target was 92% and 93% had been achieved.

Councillor Rowan Ree noted that plumbing repairs was an area in higher demand than had been anticipated. He asked why this was the case and whether there had been a sudden spike of plumbing problems in the borough. In response, David McNulty confirmed that the performance data which had been received from the previous contact had not been as full as it could have been. There were also some historic long-term investment issues and opportunities to look at developing a complimentary work programme for the DLO to reduce the demand and pressure on the Council's responsive service. He confirmed that by taking the contact centre back in house, this would make key repairs issues more visible and enable the Authority to be in a better position to respond by establishing a baseline and then modelling the response.

Adding further detail, Councillor Lisa Homan cited the example of continued flooding of the walkways at Emlyn Gardens, which had been treated, but was a recurrent problem. She explained that after maintenance had been conducted on the pipes, the problem had not recurred because the gullies had been kept clean. This was a good example of the DLO conducting communal works which had seen improved monitoring compared to the past.

Mark Meehan, Chief Housing officer, also highlighted that as this was a new model and a new service was being created, some of the information the Council had been reliant on was from another organisation's data. So, relating this back to the plumbing issue raised by Councillor Ree previously, the service planning was based on the historical data it had received.

Councillor Rowan Ree commented that one of the positive aspects of the new model was that the Council was receiving considerably more data. He therefore asked why the Council was making the decision now about the new model, rather than letting the interim model run for a longer period of time so that more information could be collected. In response, David McNulty commented that overall, the new model, which had been introduced from April, would continue and the reason for the timing of the decision was to ensure that contracts were put in place before the existing ones lapsed.

Cllr Alford asked what was meant by 'the Council inherited a significant amount of legacy works?'. In response, David McNulty confirmed that the Council had a number of outstanding works which need to be completed but that, in addition, there were now a number of areas where the Council had a better understanding of the needs and was in a better position to use capital to invest in these areas in a more informed way than it had in the past.

In relation to the Call Centre, Councillor Alford asked whether these were the same staff that had been with the repairs service or whether new staff had been recruited. In response, Mark Meehan confirmed that the Call Centre would be predominantly be new service with mostly new staff. However, some staff from the old service would be TUPEd in, but would be working to new standards set by the Council and not to those of the previous contractor. Cllr Homan confirmed that a considerable amount of training needed to be undertaken by staff before they were permitted to work in the Call Centre. David McNulty added that all new staff underwent a 3-month training programme as well as considerable amount of liaison work with existing staff to ensure they were conversant with the Council vision, aims and objectives.

Councillor Alford commented that in the past, some of the Call Centre staff had not been conversant with or had appreciated the nature of some of the problems which had been raised by residents. In response, Mark Meehan confirmed that the Call Centre was a work in progress, but on an encouraging note, when a recent Residents Voice meeting was held, residents had commented how polite and courteous Call Centre staff were. Staff would be operating to a high standard and he confirmed that since the new Call Centre had been introduced some staff had left the Council.

Councillor Alford asked whether the same standards applied to the DLO. In response, Mark Meehan confirmed that the expectation of high standards applied to everyone involved in delivering the new model. David McNulty confirmed, in relation to the contractors, that officers were proactively raising individual complaints and members enquiries with them to improve standards and as a result the volume of members enquiries had declined quite significantly.

Councillor Ann Rosenberg expressed concern about some case work where actions had slipped through the cracks and cited several examples where requests for work had been referred internally to several departments, but no action had been taken. Mark Meehan asked Councillor Rosenberg to liaise with him after the meeting and he confirmed he would provide her with information by the end of the working week.

The Chair then invited several of the residents who attended the meeting to ask questions. Officers were asked if the new model would incorporate a code of conduct for how staff should relate to residents and the language that should be used. Colette Prior, Residents Engagement Team, confirmed that the Council had worked on a Customers' Charter. Although this had not been mentioned in the officer's presentation, she confirmed that the Charter would be inserted into every contract. David McNulty also confirmed that, moving forwards, the code of conduct would be incorporated as a core detail.

A further resident asked a series of questions. These included: whether there was a process for when caretakers phoned in repairs, as in her experience caretakers were completely ignored. Whether the Council was monitoring the average time residents had to wait before their calls were answered and, finally, were officers aware that some of the Council's contractors were cold calling residents which many people found disturbing.

In response, Mark Meehan confirmed that caretakers were not being treated differently from any other caller. It was noted that any Council officer could report a repair and officers would speak to Pinnacle Services about this issue. In terms of the waiting times for a response, Mark Meehan confirmed that there was a call back facility (email and telephone) which residents could use, but there was scope to advertise and communicate this more fully. As part of the future model, Mark Meehan explained that the Council was working towards a system whereby a repairs job could be submitted by officers on their phones. The Committee noted that there should be no instances of cold calling under any circumstance. Residents were advised that if cold calling occurred, it should be reported to a caretaker or Mark Meehan, Chief Housing Officer.

The Chair asked if future contracts could stipulate that cold calling was prohibited. Mark Meehan confirmed that this could be picked up and included in future contracts.

A resident asked about roofing repairs to her block and specifically, where high winds had caused tiles to become dislodged. She noted she had been informed by email that her repairs would be actioned in three days. However,

the repair took five months to action. The resident also raised concerns about how the TUPE process was operating and explained that on numerous occasions she had tried to report an issue to the Call Centre but had been disconnected due to the waiting time she had experienced.

In relation to the timescales for the repair, Mark Meehan apologised for the delay, noting that this would have occurred under the old contract and an instance like this was a reason why the Council changed the repairs service. With regards to TUPE, officers confirmed that most of the Call Centre staff were new staff and an explanation was provided about how TUPE was a legal right which had to be offered and exercised. In answer to the final point about getting through to the Call Centre, Mark Meehan reiterated that email and telephone calls could be used, and all staff had the means and equipment to respond to either method of communication. The Committee noted that the all enquiries should be responded to within 48 hours and if they had not been then this could be investigated further outside of the meeting.

Developing this further, the Chair enquired whether there were performance indicators on the time it took for officers to respond to calls and emails and for there to be evidence that a repairs job had been raised. In response, Mark Meehan confirmed that there were performance indicators. He highlighted that at this stage, only five months had elapsed since the new model had been introduced. As a result, some calls were taking longer than others to resolve. However, it was important for residents to recognise that the Council as an organisation was listening to their concerns and was endeavouring to ensure the right person was despatched to action their specific repair.

The Chair asked for a further update to be provided in 6-months time on the repairs model and for this to include a number of key performance indicators including how long it had taken to answer and respond to calls. David McNulty stated there were two key statistics which were the length of waiting time and abandonment breaks (i.e. those callers which had decided to terminate their call due to the length of the queue) which could be provided, as well as the number of calls which generated a job. However, it was highlighted that 'good' was a matter of perspective, as sometimes longer conversations were needed depending on the complexity of the issue, to ensure the contractor understood the task, so more effective action could be taken and the number of jobs which were resolved first time increased.

David McNulty also explained that customer feedback data was also very important, and it was hoped that automated text feedback could be put in place to capture this important metric, as well as residents' feedback on their experience with the contact centre and the actual repairs themselves. Officers confirmed that the next report on the repairs model would therefore include extensive performance information and feedback on residents' experience.

A resident raised concerns about the nature of the repairs contract, the Council's ability to vary the contract should the need arise and the actual number of repairs which were conducted, as the figures in the presentation did not tally with residents' experiences.

The Chair asked officers to provide further information on the types of contracts the Council would be signing as well as details on the break clauses. In response, David McNulty confirmed that the 5-year contracts were shorter than the previous contracts. The Council was looking to retain a number of features which gave it control of the contracts it will propose a no fault termination clause, a review point in the contract (after 3 years) and a clear sense of key performance indicators which reflect residents experience. It was also very important that the Council has a very clear set of key performance indicators which the Council client and monitor effectively so that contractors can be held to account.

Discussing the length of the contracts, David McNulty explained that the duration of these was also a balancing act between the cost of these and economies of scale. Shorter contracts are more expensive and also meant that a continual retendering process needed to be undertaken to ensure probity and best value within the confines of the HRA budget. To clarify the position, Mark Meehan confirmed that the Council's aim was to take back control of the council's maintenance service, under H&F Maintenance, with 3 contractors and there would be a process of continual learning. In response, a resident explained that he and others, felt very nervous about signing a 5-year contract after such a short trial period and the ramifications of residents having to pay for a service which was not fully proven.

A resident explained his concerns centred around the fear that the DLO would not be put under the same scrutiny as the contractors as there were no KPIs for their work. Further concerns included, that he had not seen any budgets for the interim model and, as the DLO was not allowed to make a profit, how would the DLOs costings compare to that of a contractor needing to make a profit. Would the DLO be awarded a price per property for example. In summary he thought there were significant flaws in the way the DLO was operating.

As a result, the Chair asked officers to unpick the clienting aspects that had been raised and also a series of underlying issues the resident had raised about poor-quality work which may have gone under the radar and the provisions made to ensure the work was completed.

Addressing these points, David McNulty explained that the KPIs which had been set for the DLO were identical to those which had been set for all the other contractors. Officers were monitoring the responsiveness of the DLO and the focus of the DLOs work would be communal areas. The Committee heard the monthly monitoring meetings were being held with the DLO (identical to other contractors) to ensure the priority and non-priority areas of work were completed within target. David McNulty confirmed that any issues that were raised about quality would be followed up.

In terms of the future model, David McNulty confirmed that the Council wanted to put in place a robust post-inspection process of both contractors and the DLO. The Committee noted that in the last six months, the Council had made great strides, moving from the previous contract to the interim

arrangements in such a short period of time. This meant that shorter contracts had been used to give the Council added flexibility to grow the DLO over time.

The Chair noted that it was impossible to physically check all repairs had been completed and asked for further details to be provided about the sampling process which was undertaken. In response, David McNulty confirmed that from August 2019, a text messaging service had been put in place, and for those residents without a mobile phone, the Council would be writing to them to ascertain feedback. In relation to the clienting of the contract, the Council intended to do a 10% sampling inspection of the work conducted all three contractors and the DLO. The Chair asked for further details to be provided about the return rate and what residents have been saying and how this would translate into future monitoring. In response, David McNulty confirmed that at this stage, about 30 responses per contractor had been received over the first few weeks this had been applied and a variety of performance information would be supplied to Councillor Homan on a monthly basis.

Councillor Lisa Homan stated that, despite it being early days, she was confident that the interim model was heading in the right direction. Taking on board the comments which had been previously raised, she explained that if less than 5-year contracts were used extensively, there would be a danger of officers having to continually go through a tender exercise for contracts, notwithstanding the economies of scale issues. The Committee were informed that the interim model had enough flexibility to ensure one contractor could cover for the other if an issue arose. Councillor Homan explained that the main driver for the change was to acquire a quality service and deliver customer satisfaction. Councillor Homan confirmed that since the interim model had been introduced, her volume of case work concerning repairs complaints had declined.

A final resident made comments. She confirmed that in her view, the interim model was the right way forward and the flexibility which had been built in would allow the service to adapt on a needs basis.

Asking a final question and on the assumption that Cabinet endorsed the interim model; the Chair asked what work would be taking place with residents about procurement. In response, Mark Meehan explained that there was scope for one tenant and one leaseholder to be involved in all the lots and provide their comments between November and the New Year.

Concluding the item, the Chair confirmed the meeting had provided a good opportunity to learn about the new interim model, proposals and had given residents an opportunity to air their views. Summarising the discussions, the Chair and Committee agreed to submit the following comments to Cabinet:

- The Committee welcomed the Interim Service Model which had been introduced, which they felt was an improvement on the previous MITIE arrangements. However, the Committee acknowledged it was still early days and they noted that some tenants and residents who had attended the meeting had been nervous about how the longer-term



model would work given that the interim arrangements had only been in place for a short time. However, there was evidence service improvements had been made.

- The Committee agreed the Interim Service Model had enabled good resident involvement to date through working parties, which the Committee expected would continue.
- The Committee were encouraged that data on first time repairs showed this was on target. The Committee confirmed that, going forward, it would want to monitor the quality of works, as well as overall resident satisfaction levels.
- The Committee hoped the Authority would continue to work with residents to provide a strong oversight of the repairs and maintenance service through resident working groups and future PAC meetings.

### **RESOLVED**

That the Committee note the report and provide comments to Cabinet as appropriate (as bulleted above).

That Officers provided a further report on the repairs model in 6-months time including the performance and monitoring information discussed at the meeting.

## **5. WORK PROGRAMMING 2019/20**

The Chair introduced the item and confirmed that the Committee would examine Sheltered Housing and Rough Sleeping / homelessness at its November 2019 meeting.

Meeting started: 7.00 pm  
Meeting ended: 9.03 pm

Chairman .....

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