

Housing and Homelessness Policy and Accountability Committee Minutes

Monday 14 November 2022

PRESENT

Committee members: Councillors Jacolyn Daly (Chair), Paul Alexander, David Morton, Asif Siddique and Adronie Alford

Other Councillors: Councillor Frances Umeh (Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness)

Officers:

Mark Lowthian (Interim Director of Housing Transformation)

Gerry Crowley (Head of Allocations & Lettings)

Lucy Baker (Prevention & Rough Sleeping Commissioner)

Richard Buckley (Assistant Director, Residents & Buildings Safety)

Linda Jackson (Director of Social Care Transformation)

Colette Prior (Head of Property Engagement)

Debbie Yau (Committee Coordinator)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were received.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 July 2022 were agreed as an accurate record.

4. INTRODUCTION BY MARK LOWTHIAN, INTERIM DIRECTOR OF HOUSING & TRANSFORMATION

The Chair explained that the presentation slides for the four discussion items would be circulated for members' reference after the meeting and attached to the minutes of the meeting.

NOTE: The presentations are attached as Appendices 1, 2, 3, and 4

Councillor Adronie Alford expressed concern that no papers were provided for the meeting. Without the relevant papers, Committee members could not exercise their role of scrutinising the work and performance of officers and cabinet members. Councillor Alford considered that the act of not providing any papers for the said meeting was in breach of the relevant legislation and hence she had drawn the attention of the Monitoring Officer in writing. The Chair requested the Governance Team to look into the matter and advise the Committee.

NOTE: The Monitoring Officer's response is attached as Appendix 5

Mark Lowthian (Interim Director of Housing Transformation) gave an introductory presentation, sharing his experience and early perspectives since taking up the current role in September this year. He noted that partnership working had achieved much for communities and hoped to continue collaboration with the delivery partners to meet the housing needs of the Council. Mark also appreciated residents' involvement and how their influence on the decision-making had never been more important than now in the face of the cost-of-living crisis. While celebrating the great outcomes delivered for residents, he remarked that increasing the digital offer and increasing the visibility of the housing teams were two areas his department was working hard to deliver.

Councillor David Morton welcomed Mark and hoped that his past experience might benefit the Council. He however endorsed Councillor Alford's concern as the Committee might fail to cover some important updates due to the lack of relevant information.

Councillor Alford considered it crucial for the Administration to provide timely information and explanations on upcoming policies and matters on the pipelines.

The Chair requested that the budget including the Housing Revenue Account be presented at the Committee's next meeting to be held in January 2023.

ACTION: Mark Lowthian

Councillor Paul Alexander noted that a lot of his casework related to housing issues and that, unfortunately, he did not get many residents celebrating the service, nor praise for involving local residents.

Noting Mark's previous experience in housing services for various local authorities and housing associations, the Chair asked his view of best

practices and lessons learnt. In response, Mark noted that each service improvement plan was drawn up having regard to individual historical and political context of the local authority. It was important to evaluate the current position and concentrate on the positive aspects of work to inspire everyone across the borough as a brilliant service provider.

5. HOMELESSNESS PARTNERSHIP UPDATE

Gerry Crowley (Head of Allocations & Lettings) and Lucy Baker (Prevention & Rough Sleeping Commissioner) presented the item.

Councillor Morton asked about the percentage of void reduction as he observed some properties in his ward had been left unoccupied for 3 years. Gerry Crowley noted that the target was to reduce void by 2% by the end of the financial year. He undertook to follow up the situation of the void unit in the Councillor's ward.

ACTION: Gerry Crowley

Councillor Alexander also considered it was necessary to get void units back to use as soon as possible in order to relocate to residents facing homelessness. He was keen to ensure these units meet the minimum standards without the need for the residents to go through the lengthy repair procedures. Gerry Crowley explained that the lettings standard had recently been enhanced and they would ensure the relevant standards were met by the recovered void units.

Richard Buckley (Assistant Director, Residents & Building Safety) undertook to circulate after the meeting information on the building specifications adopted by H&F which was of a high standard. He highlighted a key aspect of the void reduction plan was to upgrade 50% of the properties with new kitchens and bathrooms in the next 5 years.

ACTION: Richard Buckley

Councillor Alford asked about the rate of relapse where hostel residents resumed rough sleeping. Lucy Baker advised some hostel residents who had come out of institutions like the hospitals or prisons might settle on the streets again. Staff in her team might arrange them to stay at temporary accommodation and then hostel residence. While the majority would be placed successfully, a few chose to return to the street.

Councillor Alford was concerned about the accommodation of refugees at the low-standard hotels. Gerry Crowley noted that the Home Office was providing support to refugees from Syria and Afghanistan and running the Homes for Ukraine scheme matching UK sponsors with those fleeing the country. H&F had established a dedicated team to help eligible households on the waiting list to set up family homes in the borough. Lucy Baker noted that the Director of Social Care Transformation might provide further information in writing on the accommodation of refugees.

ACTION: Lucy Baker / Linda Jackson

Noting that rough sleeping in London had increased by 24% in Q2 this year compared to the same period last year, Councillor Asif Siddique asked about the situation in H&F. Lucy Baker noted that rough sleeping in H&F had increased by 22% in Q2 2022 with some being new rough sleepers. While granular details for individual cases were available, the reasons of rough sleeping in general were due to loss of rental accommodation, relationship breakdown or the rough sleepers were asked to move out by families or friends.

In reply to Councillor Siddique's further enquiry, Lucy Baker noted health and wellbeing usually formed part of the assessment conducted by the outreach team. For example, the Rough Sleepers Assessment Hub conducted a comprehensive assessment aligning the support of the registered GP and mental health service provider like RAMHP which was part of the West London Mental Health Trust.

Responding to Councillor Siddique's concern, Gerry Crowley noted that people unfamiliar with the digital services might make applications via paper forms obtainable from the Housing Officers.

Summing up, the Chair noted that the cost-of-living crisis was unfortunately likely continue, and the Committee would welcome further reports on the topic.

ACTION: Gerry Crowley & Lucy Baker

6. COMPLIANCE UPDATE - KEEPING RESIDENTS SAFE

Richard Buckley (Assistant Director, Residents & Building Safety) presented the item.

Noting the time to complete a routine repair was 35 days against the target of 20 days which was an improving position, the Chair sought information on the figures in the past. Richard Buckley noted that 50% of the repairs received were routine repairs completed within 89 days. The other 50% were more complicated involving a lot of works and sub-contractors and hence it was hard to segregate the data. He added that the improvement position was made possible by investment for better equipment, an excellent project manager and better-quality sub-contractors. Responding to Councillor Siddique's concern, Richard Buckley explained that a priority mechanism was in place to bring the time to complete a routine repair towards achieving its performance target of 20 days.

In reply to Councillor Alford's questions, Richard Buckley noted the following:

- in H&F, all residents were offered the option to have a personal emergency evacuation plan (PEEP). There was a dedicated resource who proactively approached residents with disabilities or mobility issues, prioritising high rise buildings (six storeys or more);
- the needs of residents at sheltered housing would be individually assessed/met and reviewed once every six months;

- asbestos was inherent in the ceiling concrete in all buildings across London. The annual asbestos survey aimed at ensuring their presence otherwise remedial actions needed to be taken;
- the operation of boiler and carbon monoxide monitor constituted part of the gas safety compliance;
- the United Living, being part of a big team, had been making good improvement;
- there were 216 passenger lifts which were independently inspected. Special facilities like care-lines could be put in place should anyone was at risk;

Mark Lowthian added that Richard was having conversations with the service providers in resolving a number of long-standing specific cases. He undertook to report the improvements to be made at a future meeting.

ACTION: Mark Lowthian

Councillor Alexander noted that the repairs system needed to be looked at as some of the efforts to help had caused further issues with the reporting of problems. He also asked that, rather than inspectors, the service considered an audit-based system. He also highlighted the issue of 'tower block solutions' being rolled out to smaller street properties despite being inappropriate due to a lack of engagement with residents in those smaller properties. He requested the officers to provide a written response to his concern.

ACTION: Richard Buckley

7. DEVELOPING OUR CAPITAL WORKS PROGRAMME

Richard Buckley (Assistant Director, Residents & Building Safety) presented the item.

Noting that the Stock Condition Survey was due to complete in Q4 2023, the Chair asked about the basis for capital works to proceed. Richard Buckley noted that the Stock Condition Survey was run in a 3-year cycle and capital works would be carried out for buildings which had already undertaken the survey. In addition, urgent capital works were done in compliance with the post-Grenfell requirements.

In response to Councillor Siddique's concern, Richard Buckley noted that staff in the respective teams would contact the residents via email or other means as soon as possible once capital works were scheduled for properties in their estates, which could be 2 to 5 years ahead if the works formed part of the Asset Management Strategy (AMS). He further explained that under the 3-stage consultation, the residents would be consulted about the details of the works at different stages.

Richard Buckley said that the AMS, on the other hand, was for the entire borough lasting for the next 10 years and accessible to local councillors who would be able to understand the different issues involved therein. Mark Lowthian added that the AMS aimed at informing priority over a long period of

time. It depicted what would happen in the next few years without giving a concrete date of capital works. The AMS was a general approach and the best practice used to deliver the programmes effectively.

In this connection, Colette Prior (Head of Property Engagement) noted that some consultation events for the West Kensington blocks, Linacre Court and Aldine Court were held at the Main Hall on that evening. She undertook to follow up the situation raised by a resident about his property in Sullivan Court.

ACTION: Colette Prior

8. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The Committee noted the dates scheduled for future meetings:

- 23 January 2023
- 20 March 2023

The Chair said that the Committee would consider the Budget and the Housing Revenue Account at the meeting on 23 January 2023.

ACTION: Mark Lowthian

Meeting started: 7.00 pm

Meeting ended: 9.10 pm

Chair:

Contact officer Debbie Yau
Governance and Scrutiny
Tel 07901 517470
E-mail: Debbie.Yau@lbhf.gov.uk

Links to Appendices

[Appendix 1 - Introduction by Mark Lowthian](#)

[Appendix 2 - Homelessness Partnership Update](#)

[Appendix 3 - Compliance Update - Keeping Residents Safe](#)

[Appendix 4 - Developing our Capital Investment Programme](#)

[Appendix 5 - Response from the Monitoring Officer](#)