



## **HOUSING & COMMUNITY SAFETY SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE**

MINUTES of the Housing & Community Safety Scrutiny Sub-Committee held on Monday 7 July 2014 at 7.00 pm. at Ground Floor Meeting Room G02C - 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

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**PRESENT:** Councillor Tom Flynn (Chair)  
Councillor Vijay Luthra  
Councillor Claire Maugham  
Councillor Damian O'Brien  
Councillor Martin Seaton

**OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT:** Councillor David Hubber (Reserve)  
Councillor Lorraine Lauder (Reserve)

**OFFICER SUPPORT:** Shelley Burke – Head of Overview & Scrutiny  
Gerri Scott - Strategic Director Housing & Community Services  
Jonathon Toy - Head of Community Safety & Enforcement  
Fitzroy Williams – Scrutiny Team

### **1. APOLOGIES**

1.1 Apologies for absence were received from councillors Ben Johnson, Johnson Situ and Cris Claridge. The chair also welcomed reserve members councillors Lorraine Lauder and David Hubber.

### **2. NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR DEEMS URGENT**

2.1 There were no urgent items of business.

### **3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS**

3.1 There were no disclosures of interests or dispensations.

#### **4. GENERAL TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR SCRUTINY COMMITTEES/SUB-COMMITTEES**

4.1 Members noted the general terms of reference for scrutiny sub-committees.

#### **5. THE HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SERVICES HORIZON 2014-15**

5.1 The Strategic Director Housing & Community Services reported that this was a large department. The bulk of the port-folio is housing services, but the department also includes responsibility for customer services and community engagement.

5.2 There are about 53,000 properties in Southwark which makes us the biggest social landlord in London and one of the largest in the country. It is also unusual in comparison to much of London in that Southwark's housing stock is in-house. A number of other local authorities landlords have transfered stock or have arrangements with management companies, ALMOs or housing associations.

5.3 The scale of the department's responsibilities are enormous and as such are split into 6 divisions, community engagement, customer experience, maintenance and compliance, major works, housing operations and specialist housing services.

5.4 The sub-committee were informed that the department has a strong performance management culture overseeing a comprehensive suite of key performance indicators providing stretching targets benchmarked against the best social housing providers.

5.5 Members were informed that the contract management teams were split into North (Southwark Building Services) and South (Mears), delivering internal and communal repairs. The director pointed out that officers were monitoring the current service provided by Mears with a view to improvement.

5.6 The strategic director reported that officers continue to work hard on tackling illegal occupancy and investigate who actually lives in Southwark properties which is an ongoing process. At the time of the meeting there was still 2,000 properties that the council is trying to get access to check that these are occupied by the legal tenant.

5.7 Key objectives are:-

- Implement a programme to ensure Southwark's housing stock is warm, dry and safe (report to Cabinet 22.07.2014)

- Deliver an improved housing repairs service, verified by residents
  - Improve customer services and increase online services customer experience
  - Ensure that charges for homeowners are fair
  - Provide improved value for money and deliver savings
  - Increase the supply of housing, use our stock effectively, reduce the numbers in temporary accommodation
  - Involve tenants and homeowners in the improvement of service delivery.
- 5.8 The sub-committee were informed that the Cabinet had already agreed to increase the level of tenant management in the borough. Southwark already has some very successful TMO's such as the Leathermarket JMB model, and there are also other options which will be explored such as estate management board arrangements.
- 5.9 The chair thanked the strategic director for the briefing and report and opened the meeting for questions from members of the sub-committee.
- 5.10 A member stated that tenants were complaining about condensation issues and damp problems that seem to keep occurring, treatments are undertaken but the problems persist. What has been done to address this problem?
- 5.11 The strategic director reported that last year there were a number of residents who reported damp and or condensation problems. Where there are clusters of complaints which may identify an underlying issue in specific blocks or estates. Officers conducted a thorough review and appointed independent consultants to have a look at the structure of the building to tackle the problem in a different way. It has to be said that some of it is truly condensation and vents and windows need to be opened to ensure that there is adequate air circulation. Sometimes it is not condensation and instead is a deep rooted problem i.e. waste pipes have broken down in the building and are causing structural defects, rising damp and cold bridging because of the concrete structures of the building. Particularly with some of our system built properties.
- 5.12 In terms of the warm, dry and safe programme officers have had some success with gaining funding from British Gas, which enabled the council to clad buildings in a completely different way and this has really helped to improve the insulation of buildings and improve the thermal efficiency. Officers will always try to find imaginative and long lasting solutions and information is available to tenants to help address issues of condensation and damp.

- 5.13 A member asked regarding community engagement involving tenants in the management of their estates. The problem is over the years more and more TRA's find it difficult to find people who would volunteer to be responsible and run the association. Is there any way the council can change our approach, offer more encouragement or training?
- 5.14 The strategic director reported that a report was considered by Cabinet in the last administration which called for a new approach to community engagement. It is recognised that TRA's are not the foolproof way to involve people on estates. There are some very active and committed residents who give up a lot of their time, but that form of engagement is not for everybody. So there needs to be alternatives whether that is Face book or web pages or something else that people can tap into or even issue based consultation recognising that people are very interested in one thing and not another issue so they can dip in and contribute and then dip out again.
- 5.15 There is a continuing role for TRA's but officers are also looking at ways to engage with younger people in a way that works for them. Officers have experimented with Face book and trialled it with a few community council's. This has been successful.
- 5.16 A member stated he was keen to understand the situation with temporary accommodation, in some other London boroughs the fiscal pressures that authorities are under have placed a lot of pressure on temporary accommodation and levels of homelessness are on the rise. What is the situation in Southwark, have officers seen levels of homelessness increase? Are people being held in bed and breakfast for longer than need be?
- 5.17 The strategic director reported that Southwark has been relatively successful historically in containing temporary accommodation placements but have seen over recent months that there is increasing demand. There are pressures on supply and the reason why officers were successful previously was when the council had large scale regeneration programmes like the Aylesbury, those empty properties were used for temporary accommodation, but as those schemes start on site obviously those options were no longer available.
- 5.18 The sub-committee were informed that officers are looking at procuring more hostel accommodation where possible and moving into private sector leasing arrangements. The authority is also trying to encourage landlords to sign up to the council rather than put their properties into the private market. This route is no longer as attractive to private sector landlords as they can charge much higher rents to the market.

- 5.19 Officers are also being stringent in carrying out checks so that people who are genuinely homeless are being looked after as they should be and people who have alternative options available to them, whether that be staying at home or renting in the private sector take up those options.
- 5.20 Bournemouth Road which is our homelessness and housing service is seeing a lot of people coming through the doors. London generally is becoming difficult to find accommodation in due to the fact that it is so expensive in terms of the rental market. People are having to make choices about considering whether they should live outside of London. Where we have a responsibility for temporary accommodation, officers in Southwark try very hard not to go for outer borough placements and try to house in the borough or at least London.
- 5.21 A member asked to what extent are people having to move out of borough or to find accommodation themselves?
- 5.22 The strategic director stated that this is not encouraged, as other authorities have their own problems. London Councils the representative body for all London authorities have very rigid inter borough agreement which all parties comply with but there is a recognition that occasionally people will need to be placed in other boroughs, but we really try to avoid this wherever possible.
- 5.23 A member asked for some information regarding community engagement in the context of new council homes delivery, it has been great to read about the engagement that took place over the last year or two and the helpful things residents were saying about what sort of new council housing they wanted. How are we going to make sure that conversation welcomes new housing at the same time as giving people ownership and decision making that they want?
- 5.24 The strategic director informed members that a report would be going to Cabinet on the 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2014 which sets out how the council intends to deliver 11,000 new council homes. Contained in the report is a appendix which is a charter of principles regarding how to involve the community. One area proving difficult in terms of new builds is sometimes local communities feel quite distant, they do not see what is in it for them, whether they are a leaseholder or tenant they feel they are not fully engaged in the proposals for that area. What is being said in the report is that conversations with the community should happen at the earliest stage, including the potential opportunities for the local community in terms of any council new build. For example, the council recently introduced a shared equity stake for leaseholders affected by large scale regeneration schemes, which offer leaseholders the choice of a shared equity stake in the new property as opposed to getting bought out.

- 5.25 There is also the opportunity for local letting schemes within that locality which will determine who should live in the new properties with existing residents helping to determine the local policy.
- 5.26 The other example is the refurbishment of Lakanal, where the block has remained empty following the tragic fire. For many months officers have been working with the tenants and residents association regarding what they want to happen to the block, who should live in it, and opportunities for new build housing.
- 5.27 A member asked a question regarding pest control and lack of communication, giving details of a particular case. The Head of Community Safety & Enforcement stated that if the member gave him the details he would pick up the matter.
- 5.28 A members asked if the strategic director could expand on the leaseholder issues, major works are now receiving bills and explain the options available?
- 5.29 The strategic director stated there were a number of options for leaseholders, although the options are not the same if you are a resident leaseholder or non-residential leaseholder. The options for residential leaseholders include a number of fixed payment terms, i.e. up to 48 months for people to pay their service charges. If people are in financial hardship a charge can be taken on the property, so they don't actually pay anything but it is a charge on the property in terms of the eventual resale.
- 5.30 There is also a fixed service charge verses variable service charges option giving cost certainty to leaseholders for and option of being able to pay a same set amount year on year.
- 5.31 In cases of severe financial hardship there is the buy back option available where the council buy back the property and provide a tenancy for the leaseholder. This information is available on the website and will be circulated to members.
- 5.32 The chair asked if the handyperson services and the 100% satisfaction which seemed high, how did officers get to this number? And how many people might have been surveyed?
- 5.33 The strategic director stated that this information would be sent to members. The important thing about the handyperson service is it is something that people choose, so it is not delivered in terms of a responsive service, it is particularly for elderly/vulnerable clients and it is generally a very well perceived service but is separate to the normal day to day service and is funded in a different way.
- 5.34 A member asked about housing options system, is there likely to be a review of having a band 4? When there is very little chance

on anyone in this band ever being re-housed?

- 5.35 The strategic director stated that the allocation policy was reviewed by a cross party review group which was chaired by the previous cabinet member for Housing. It also involved tenants and expert advice from housing associations and took evidence from what worked well from elsewhere. There was discussion regarding band 4 because the bulk of the waiting list is contained in band 4 which is approximately 9,000 people currently.
- 5.36 Officers are writing out to every single person in band 4 because people have been in that category for so long that their circumstances may have changed. Officers have already found that a number of people have found their own accommodation, either have bought or rented elsewhere or have moved out of Southwark.
- 5.37 The allocation policy is going to be reviewed and there will be a report going back to cabinet in October 2014.
- 5.38 The strategic director undertook to circulate the following documents to members:-
- Leaseholders options
  - Handypersons Services Satisfaction Levels
  - Letter to residents in Band 4

## **6. COMMUNITY SAFETY ISSUES OVER THE NEXT TWELVE MONTHS**

- 6.1 The Head of Community Safety & Enforcement introduced the briefing report to members, and stated officers were really focused on community safety priorities over the next six to twelve months as officers worked in partnership with other department and agencies.
- 6.2 The first part of the report was to try and give the sub-committee a understanding of where our partners/agencies are at this moment in time. It is important to understand that whilst the council continues through its own changes our partner organisations are going through similar changes and in some cases even bigger changes than the council are going through.
- 6.3 In terms of Southwark Police and the met as a whole they are seeing significant changes to their structures and how they organise and operate. Officers have had some particular pressures locally and there have been big changes in the police senior management team and further changes in terms of Inspectors and Chief Inspectors.

- 6.4 The analytical capacity that the council previously had no longer exists and the reason this has been high lighted on this report is when officers are looking at local intelligence and trying build a picture of what is happening over a period of time that is no longer done in Southwark. That work is now done in a regional centre which covers 6 to 7 different boroughs and both the council and police are reliant on the quality of the analytical products that comes through and we are often driven by good researched intelligence.
- 6.5 The agency going through the biggest changes are the probation service, the service in effect is being split into two different functions. In future they will look at high risk cases, those that have a significant risk of the offender may have gone into custody for some considerable period of time and may have a high tariff custodial offence that is the group of people they will be looking after.
- 6.6 Those that are low to medium risk will now be looked after through a community Rehabilitation Company and that will be a tendered company in each of the probation areas across the whole of England and Wales. There will be one area for London and that company will look after the management of low risk offenders. Quite often they are the people who commit the largest amount of crimes although it is considered low tariff offences. So things like shoplifting, theft from a person without any form of violence and theft from a motor vehicle, so crimes that really affect local residents so there is going to be quite a change to how those offenders are looked after in the future.
- 6.7 The Fire Brigade is also going through considerable changes, last year the council collectively took a very robust stance to the closure of Southwark Fire Station and the loss of tender at Peckham, we lost 50 fire fighters in this borough, this causes significant problems, particularly around the issue of familiarisation that is the ability for local fire fighters to understand the area/patches/blocks that they are visiting and looking after, this continues to cause concerns on a partnership level.
- 6.8 Domestic abuse is a very big area for officers and fits into the scheme of setting in terms of violent crimes agenda. In Southwark there are high levels of domestic abuse officers have recorded somewhere in the region of 2,200 incidents a year on average. There a lot of services that officers put into place in terms of domestic abuse. The sub-committee may wish to refer back to the report that this sub-committee produced last year in terms of domestic abuse and the recommendations it provided. Officers are aware that there is likely to be a new domestic abuse bill coming through government at some stage in the not too distant future. There is still a considerable amount of work to be undertaken with regards to the whole issue of violence against women and the

wider premises of that work area.

- 6.9 Anti-social behaviour is a very big issues for residents and officers in the borough, most of officers post consists of complaints of anti-social behaviour affecting residents on estates and this will remain a big priority over the 6 to 12 months. Members were informed that there will be new legislation the anti-social behaviour policing act which will become active in the autumn of 2014, it changes the landscape in terms of how anti-social behaviour and those powers are used.
- 6.10 The sub-committee were informed that violent crimes has been a long standing issue, unfortunately for many of our local communities they have been seriously affected by the stigma of violence and that has had a big impact on them.
- 6.11 Over the last few years officers have seen a 29% reduction of violence with injury, 51% reduction in gun crime and 43% reduction in knife crime, those figures do not come through anything less than a lot of hard work across the board by all agencies over a long period of time.
- 6.12 Members were informed that support to victims of crime was very important and there was a big change in terms of how victims services are being delivered across London and officers would not want to lose focus that support to victims is still paramount. Officer want victims in Southwark to receive the best possible support.
- 6.13 The chair thanked the Head of Community Safety & Enforcement and opened the questions section of the meeting.
- 6.14 A member of the sub-committee asked a question around people who use a different range of services across the council, a victim of domestic violence for example might also be a family with dependencies issues that exist within that family/community. How are you working with other departments across the council to bring it all together and deal with the whole range of issues, rather than one at a time?
- 6.15 The work officers do with any of the services is just as much in collaboration with those partner agencies, so picking up on your example officers would undertake that work through the troubled families team, we have substance misuse providers that officers work alongside and the way that officers work is like a team around the family and it may be picked up and lead by one particular agency. The council has a Domestic Violence Service which actually provides a whole range of different support for the individual and the wider family.
- 6.16 A member asked how do community wardens fit into community safety or are they entirely focused on environmental issues?

- 6.17 The officer reported community wardens are not entirely focused on environmental issues, officers provide quite a range of services through the wardens and again it would depend on the kind of issue and pressure happening at certain time of the year or events coming up.
- 6.18 Officers are really proud of the work of wardens including aspects such as working with the most vulnerable residents, when there are bad spells of weather, be it hot or cold quite often the social services team will call on the wardens to do visits in certain areas and it is a job they really enjoy doing. They also do a lot of work in terms of trying to support the more vulnerable members of the communities into services.
- 6.19 A member asked about ranking which were produced by the statistical unit which ranks the numbers of incidents and ranks them across London or our neighbours? The officer report the figures in the report were ranked across London.
- 6.20 The member asked about our statistical neighbours in that case, in both stats here the changes in recorded crime by crime types, I knowledge those figures but I am told that crime across the country has been significantly reduced, I do not know if these figures are for the London condition or our statistical neighbours. Are you able to tell us that?
- 6.21 The officer stated he could not tell you every one, officers can probably pull out the information, in term of percentage reductions on the serious end of violence agenda, and Southwark pretty much out performs anybody in the country.
- 6.22 The GLA had produced their anti-gangs strategy if members look to the map that they produced in that strategy you would see 2011-12 that Southwark is green showing there are lots of issues in terms of serious gang related violence, it is now clear.
- 6.23 The officer reported that he had worked with Professor David Kennedy who had come over from America and he talked about percentage figures in terms of the work he had done in Boston, LA and Baltimore our figures compared or bettered those cities in terms of our reductions.
- 6.24 \*The officer undertook to send the links to these papers to members of the sub-committee.
- 6.25 \*The officer undertook to provide a briefing paper on serious violence.
- 6.26 A member asked about noise complaint, what will this review look like? What ideas are going to be put forward? The residents'

experience of making noise complaints is they are reluctant to do so because of the requirement for officers to come to their property before addressing the source of the noise, and it does not feel like a common sense approach when there is a big noise in the small hours of the morning. How might that experience be different after the review?

- 6.27 The officer reported that the noise team have been discussing these points, if officers respond to a noise nuisance there are two ways of looking at it, from a statutory noise nuisance point of view and that requires officers to do certain things to meet with the legislation and that does not always suit people. Officers are trying to work through collectively as a team is see whether or not a response that can be provided if not that night to meet the statutory requirements then certainly to support the residents the day after to make sure they get the level of support and something can be done about the people who have caused that nuisance, in a way that resolves that issue.
- 6.28 A member asked if the noise team operated all night? Or is there a cut off point? The officer reported that at this moment in time there is a cut off point, so Monday to Thursday the services ends at 3.30 a.m., and weekends the service operates until 4.30 a.m.
- 6.29 The officer informed members that there was a conversation ongoing regarding, are the hours right, have officers got the level of seasonality right, do officers need to shift some of the coverage, do we need the level of daytime service or is there another way officers can deliver that in a way that actually provides a case management services to cover the points that you raised.
- 6.30 There are also other pressures particularly with the elderly and mental health that in itself is causing officers some challenges and trying to design service that is sensitive to these issues and in terms of mental health related issues such as Alzheimer's and dementia, these are areas that officers need to be careful about dealing with regards to complaints because these issues are more common now than a few years ago.
- 6.31 The chair asked a question regarding fire station closures and asked whether officers held figures on this information on twitter about instances that happen about the promises that the Mayor gave on response times and on where fire engines were coming from in London, are we collecting information as a borough on where we are being let down as a result of those closures so that we can use as ammunition in the future maybe to see some of that come back?
- 6.32 The officer stated that information could be provided for members, Southwark's point of view was that the measurement used in terms of a two tendered response was not sufficient from Southwark's

point of view. Many of the fires in this borough requires more than a two tendered response, it usually requires a three tendered response and sometimes more and our argument collectively as a council was the vulnerability of our blokes and residents, we need a measure of a three tendered response.

- 6.33 Officers were trying to gather evidence in terms of both two and three tender, because anything which is over six stories or more requires three tenders. What happens is the crew will arrive and will then wait for the right level of support before they will go and deal with the fire, so officers can extract figures which will give the sub-committee an indication of response times.
- 6.34 A member asked a question regarding counter terrorism and perhaps the council playing a bigger role, and also to what extent is that affected by the current reorganisation of the police and fire services?
- 6.35 The officer reported that the police would like to see councils to taking on a much greater role in terms of the prevention agenda, that might mean how the council manage those people who they deem as a risk of terrorism, or taking a stronger role in terms of building an infrastructure which increases the safety of our more iconic buildings and historic locations and both of those would be a challenge to officers.
- 6.36 The officer explained that there are areas which would need to be explored with the police and fire services, but there is a need to be clear that there is a level of expertise which the council would need from policing point of view before officers would say that the council were in the right ability to take on those kind of roles. Specialist skills are required to provide that level of service that they are talking around the council would probably need to bring in specialist services to provide that service.
- 6.37 A member asked a question regarding under reporting of certain hate crimes, such as domestic violence, male on female and same sex, have you noticed any change in Southwark's figures, a while ago we had quite a high profile publicity campaign on this subject and I wonder if there are any thoughts of repeating that or do you think it necessary?
- 6.38 The officer reported that there was a strong view that anything the council can do to encourage or to make the community feel safer and report even the most minor incidents is really important, this gives officers a better understanding of what was actually is going on in the community. It was wider than hate crime it also extends to the issue of women's safety as well, there is a whole range of things which are valuable for officers to encourage that level of input.

- 6.39 Hate crime figures have not particularly gone up considerably over the last couple of years, they are still low but there is still an awful lot that goes on out there in the borough that people seem to believe is daily life, so there are things that can be done to encourage addressing these problems.
- 6.40 The chair thanked the officers for the report and answering members' questions and with the sub-committee's agreement took a 5 minute break. The meeting will commence at 20.10 p.m.

## **7. WORK PROGRAMME**

- 7.1 The chair introduced the item and reminded members that they were to bring suggested items of business for this year. He then stated that this would be an opportunity for members to influence two major work areas, housing and community safety. The sub-committee then discussed and suggested the following areas :-

### **Housing**

- Arbitration Service
- Housing Repairs/ How effective are contractors
- Leaseholder Charges/ Communications/ Contractor Charges
- Allocations Policy/ Temporary Accommodation/ Home Search
- Community Engagement/ TMO delivery
- Damp/ Pest Control/ Maintenance
- Cycling/ Infrastructure /Amenities
- Bathrooms & Kitchens
- Regulation of Private Rented Sector

### **Community Safety**

- Domestic Violence/ Women's Safety Charter – how the council aim to deliver
  - Anti-Social Behaviour and Noise Team
  - Closure of Police and Fire Stations
  - Borough & Fire Commander (Interview)
  - Role of Wardens (Visit)
  - Victims support – what the council has in place?
- 7.2 After considerable discussion members suggested the work programme should start with the following items of business:-
1. Housing Repairs – Draper House (October 2014)
  2. Women's Safety Charter (September 2014)
  3. Borough & Fire Commander & MOPAC – Interview

- (November 2014)
4. Allocation Policy (September 2014)
  5. Anti-Social Behaviour & Noise Team (Date required)

Meeting ended at 9.20 p.m.

**CHAIR:**

**DATED:**