

Proposed work programme for the Housing Scrutiny Commission 2019/2020

Gavin Edwards – Chair

For our proposed work programme I suggest we take four bigger issues and aim to produce reports and recommendations on them by the completion of the council year.

Concentrating on these four issues will allow the commission to carry out in-depth scrutiny on bigger topics. This method will allow space for agenda items on other topics which arise during the year, but these will not be subject to long-term work.

In addition, the Housing Scrutiny Commission will carry out the annual Cabinet Member interview with the Cabinet member for Housing. Obviously, part of this session can be used to enquire about scrutiny topics, but will be wider-ranging. This does not mean that the Cabinet Member will not attend other meetings during the year for particular agenda items. We should also plan to carry out the cabinet member interview for the Cabinet Member for Social Regeneration, Great Estates and New Council Homes.

A piece of work which we should also continue from last year's scrutiny commissions is on empty homes, particularly how Southwark deals with void properties. This has also been included in the schedule below.

District Heating

There are 17,000 council properties which use district heating and the council has acknowledged that there are too many failures and it often takes too long to fix when they break. In addition, the way we heat our estates is a crucial element in delivering on Southwark's pledge to become carbon neutral by 2030. We're into the final year of the interim investment programme which began in 2017 and a further Cabinet paper outlining the development of this work comes to Cabinet in the week after our first meeting. In the coming 12 months, Southwark should be making big radical decisions about how make district heating fit for purpose. The aim of this scrutiny is to analyse the approach being taken and make recommendations which improve heating repairs, investment and carbon efficiency, both in the short and longer term.

Methodology

The district heating scrutiny should include the following activities:

- A review of previous reports and documentation on district heating in Southwark
- Officer interviews (both in committee and informal interviews)
- Consideration of best practice from other councils/housing associations
- An online survey of TRAs affected by district heating
- Cabinet member interview
- Call for ward councillor views (particularly where there have been acute problems with district heating)

- Review of a selection of calls to the Southwark call centre in regard to district heating repairs/failures
- Publication of report on findings, including focussed recommendations separated into short-term and long-term proposals for change.

Housing Repairs

It is more than ten months since housing repairs came back in-house. How is this service performing and how might it be improved? From the point of view of tenants, what are the continuing frustrations? These are key questions which our scrutiny commission should look at.

Methodology:

- Tenants survey
- Review of housing repairs calls to the call centre
- Member enquiry statistics
- Interview with Cabinet Member
- Officer interviews (both in committee and informal interviews)
- Chair spending a day with housing repairs operatives
- Look at other councils who have returned services back in house
- Review of key performance indicators (including method of collection)

Temporary Accommodation

The council has recently changed its approach to temporary accommodation. this is a vital service on which many individuals and families depend. How successfully is the new approach being implemented. The housing commission should seek assurance that we are still doing everything possible for residents stay in or close to Southwark.

Methodology:

- Review of placement statistics over a prescribed period
- Review of anonymised case studies
- Survey of service users post-placement in temporary Accommodation
- Officer Interviews
- Cabinet member interviews.

Council home building programme

Southwark Council has made a commitment to deliver 11,000 new homes in Southwark by 2043, with 2,500 delivered by 2022. Some new homes have been completed and many are in the construction or planning phases. The committee should check in on the delivery of new homes with a session in November and then decide on additional scrutiny activity required at that point.

Schedule

The proposed schedule for consideration of topics at meetings is

Meeting 1

1. District Heating
2. Housing repairs
3. Other?
4. Sign off of work programme

Meeting 2

1. District heating
2. Housing repairs
3. Temporary Accommodation
4. Void properties

Meeting 3

1. Housing repairs
2. Temporary Accommodation
3. Council home building programme
4. Cabinet member for housing interview

Meeting 4

1. District heating
2. Sign off district heating report
3. Interview of Cabinet Member for Social Regeneration, Great Estates and New Council Homes
4. Housing Repairs

Meeting 5

1. Council home building programme
2. Sign off housing repairs report
3. Sign off temporary accommodation report
4. Other (shorter term topic)