



## **HOUSING SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE**

MINUTES of the meeting of the HOUSING SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE held on  
MONDAY 1 DECEMBER 2003 at 7.00 PM at the Town Hall, Peckham Road,  
London SE5 8UB

---

**PRESENT:** Councillor Gavin O'Brien (Chair)  
Councillor Fiona Colley (Vice-Chair)  
Councillors Abdul Mohamed, Charlie Smith, Dr Abdur-Rahman  
Olayiwola and Anne Yates

**CO-OPTED  
MEMBERS  
(NON VOTING)** Mr Al-Issa Munu – Tenant Representative  
Mr Lionel Wright – Tenant Representative  
Mr Dave Clark – Leaseholder Representative

**ALSO PRESENT:** Cllr Beverley Bassom – Executive Member for Housing  
Keith Broxup – Director of Housing  
Chris Brown – Head of Housing Management  
Lucas Lundgren – Scrutiny  
Paul Ewing - Scrutiny

### **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor Jonathan Hunt.

### **CONFIRMATION OF VOTING MEMBERS**

The Members listed as being present were confirmed as the Voting Members.

### **NOTIFICATION OF ANY OTHER ITEMS WHICH THE CHAIR DEEMS AS URGENT**

There were no items.

### **DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS**

Councillor Anne Yates disclosed her interest as a Southwark Council tenant.

### **RECORDING OF MEMBERS' VOTES**

Council Procedure Rule 1.17(5) allows a Member to record her/his vote in respect of any motions and amendments. Such requests are detailed in the following Minutes. Should a Member's vote be recorded in respect to an amendment, a copy of the amendment may be found in the Minute File and is available for public inspection.

The Sub-Committee considered the items set out on the agenda, a copy of which has been incorporated in the Minute File. Each of the following paragraphs relates to the item bearing the same number on the agenda.

## **MINUTES**

**RESOLVED:** That the Open minutes of the meeting held on 3 November 2003 be agreed and signed as a correct record of the proceedings.

### 1. **EXECUTIVE PERFORMANCE REVIEW INTERVIEW**

The Sub-Committee welcomed Councillor Beverley Bassom, Executive Member for Housing. Councillor Bassom and the Director of Housing and Head of Housing Management responded to the following areas of questioning.

#### *Housing vision and policy*

Southwark's vision for housing was first agreed in 1998 by members and is contained in our Housing Strategy. The vision is to provide quality service and quality homes, maximising choice and affordability for Southwark's residents and to build sustainable, inclusive communities. To achieve this vision there are four priorities for housing within the Borough:

- Making the best use of existing housing
- Regenerating and improving the condition of housing across all tenures
- Meeting housing needs and promoting affordable housing across the borough
- Continuous improvement in the quality and value of housing services

The Housing Strategy links with other key Southwark strategies, in particular the Community and Neighbourhood Renewal Strategies. It has also been developed to address Government and regional housing and related policy priorities, which include:

- Brining all social housing up to the Government's decent home standard by 2010
- Preventing and managing homelessness
- Ensuring vulnerable residents in the private sector live in decent homes
- Providing more affordable housing for people who need it, including key workers

The priorities of the current Administration were on target to be achieved, including:

- Existing tenancy agreement being reviewed. Revised conditions were out for consultation.
- Targeting anti-social behaviour via SASBU and strengthened tenancy agreement.
- Introductory tenancies agreed October 2003. Every new tenant had a 12-month introductory period.
- Unauthorised occupants. Targeted special investigations to complement

existing checks. Extension of tenancy ID scheme part of tenancy agreement review.

- Rewarding good tenants. Vacating tenants given financial incentive if they left their dwelling in good condition and gave notice. Diamond service being developed.
- Free phone for repairs introduced and migrating to the repairs call centre.
- Ensuring contractors and subcontractors meet their obligations
- Reduction target set for number of agency staff.
- Housing Allocations Review due to report in March
- Older people dwellings. Intended to review designation in future.
- Leaseholder Review. A range of new policies had been developed with Leaseholder Council including revised admin charges and 5 payment schemes for Major Works bills. A programme of 21 policy reviews had been programmed with Leaseholder Council beginning with Buy-Back policy.

#### *Housing Repairs Call Centre [HRCC]*

The need for change was identified by

- Repairs Improvement Plan
- Best Value Review
- Tenant Consultation
- CPA Recommendation
- MORI surveys

The project objective was

“To improve the end service delivery process around the tenants perspective with enhanced customer focused staff and better use of emerging technology”

What we have done since April 2003

- Understand the current way of doing things
- Look at efficiency and effectiveness of current operation
- Review tenants consultations
- Break service delivery into individual components
- Identify changes required
- Walk the process from the tenant’s perspective
- Create an environment for change
- Implement and deliver change

End to end process – walk through

- Tenant contracts HRCC
- Translation
- Tenant Enquiry
- Tenant Request
- Request for a service
- Rechargeable work
- Priority
- Pre inspection
- Authorisation
- Raise a repair

- Appointment
- Generate works order
- Allocation
- Variation
- Works order / job closure
- Port inspection
- Tenant satisfaction feedback
- Tenant problem resolution
- Tenant incident and complaint resolution

#### Current service delivery – Key findings

- 16 different processes
- Inconsistent delivery
- Concern with generating a works order
- Centred around the department's needs
- Reactive

#### Planned Service Delivery – Tenant Centred approach

- Single process
- Consistent
- Tenant advocacy approach
- Centred around the tenant's needs
- Proactive

#### We have designed the business process that

- Is designed around the customer's needs and expectations
- Has built-in quality
- Gets it right the first time
- Gets it done the first time and on time
- Accurately measure end-to-end performance and levels of service
- Provides staff with the tools, training and skills to "do the job"
- Reduce the complexities
- Takes responsibilities and ownership for the repairs
- Provides a proactive approach to the overall repair process
- Provides a tenant advocacy approach and builds relationships

#### Financial benefits

- Increased ability to monitor the component elements
  - Cost of pre inspection
  - Cost of raising a repairs order
- Better cost time quality of service
  - Less time spent on delivering defects
- Environment to create better value for money service
  - Economies of scale

#### Operational benefits

- Centralised repair ownership and advocacy
- Quality documentation

- What to do and how to do it
  - Responsibility for the repair, responsibility for the tenant
- Easier access to tenant & repair information
- Composite codes
  - simplifying task of ordering work
  - Easier to identify and order repairs
  - Fewer variations as not getting wrong
- Trained and motivated permanent staff
- Reporting and performance
  - Better understanding of how we are doing
  - What needs to be done better

#### Benefits for tenants

- Easier to get through
- Reduced abandoned calls Target <5%
- Introduction of Translation service
- Integrated 7 x 24 service
- Consistent service delivery
- Improved single call resolution
  - Appointment made
  - Repair status
- Contact call centre from neighbourhood offices
- Tele satisfaction surveys

#### Progress update

- HRCC based at Spa Road
- Rooms refurbished
- 34 positions with ability to expand to 46
- Rest rooms and dining facilities
- Up to HSE standards
- State of the art technology
- Completed on time

#### Transitioning to steady state

- Seamless to tenants
  - Use same numbers as now
  - No button pressing
- Interim management structure
  - Recruitment of permanent management by Jan – Feb 04
- Customer facing focus skills, managing culture change
  - CSO mentoring, development and performance management
- Technical knowledge transfer NHOs to call centre
- Neighbourhoods transfer across incrementally from 15 – 22 December

#### Moving forward

- Creating means for further improvements
- Fine-tuning and adjustments
- Handling the management of change
- Exploration of better ways of delivering value
- Acceptance by all stakeholders as “first step in the right direction”
- Continuous improvement

## Future of Neighbourhood Housing Offices

The Best Value Review of Housing Management concluded in the 23 July 2003 Executive decision to move to eight Housing Management Areas and that each management area has a main office but that ongoing discussion is held regarding the location of main offices and sub-offices and is linked to the Council's review of face to face provision. Discussions on specific offices has been delayed while the long term face-to-face proposals have been developed

Following this decision the Executive has agreed on 25 November 2003 to the Modernising Face to Face services to Customers Report. It is proposed that by 2007 the Council will move incrementally to a position where there will be

- A) Three one stop shops (Bermondsey, Welworth and Peckham) which will provide housing plus a full range of other services
- B) Five supplemental Housing Area Offices which will provide housing plus other services in
  - Rotherhithe – Abbeyfield area
  - Camberwell – Harris Street area
  - Nunhead – Bournemouth Rd area
  - Dulwich – Crown House
  - Borough and Bankside – Library St
- C) One sub office at Kingswood

It is recognised in the Face-to-Face report that to get to this position officers will need to rationalise office provision from the current 16 neighbourhood offices in ongoing consultation with Tenants and Residents in line with recommendation from the July Executive.

Office provision is being viewed in the context of major improvements of other services provision – e.g. the customer Services Centre and increased opportunity for payments of cash and in the light of the fact that 80% of council / public interface is via telephone.

The Executive Member gave an assurance that the HRCC was not intended to replace Neighbourhood Housing Offices but would take on the bulk of the repair-reporting function.

Recruitment of staff to the HRCC had focused on increasing the quality of customer service, and the level of operator salaries was higher than in NHOs. The level of HRCC induction training was also high. The authority was committed to retention of some agency staff for at least one month to ensure continuity of service.

Members particularly asked the Executive Member to ensure that the HRCC advised callers clearly of who was accountable for taking action arising from their calls – lack of accountability being a common problem with other call centres.

## *Stock Options and future of NHOs*

## Decent Homes Standards

Government Target 2010. Investment needs assessment to meet this target and other landlord obligations via Stock Conditions Survey.

- January 2003 – September 2003 surveying of 8-10% of properties on estates and 22% of street properties internally. 100% of properties externally.
- September – November 2003 – Validation process
- November / December 2003 – calculation of investment requirements
- Currently no information on specific estate investment needs.
- When fully developed, the SCS will be a tool to prioritise investment to specific areas / neighbourhoods / estates to meet the Decent Homes Standard.

Other issues

- Decent Homes standard being met on major regeneration schemes, void properties where the building already meets the standard and most major works contracts either in full or via phased schemes.
- The Decent Homes standard does not address tenant aspirations for their homes. Decent Homes Plus – over 9000 questionnaires currently being analysed.

July 2005 Option Appraisal to be with ODPM on how authorities will meet Decent Homes by 2010.

HRA Business Plan identifies investment needs and potential resources available to LBS and investment gap.

Communities Plan gives three options to close the gap:

- i) Stock Transfer
- ii) ALMO
- iii) PFI

The Executive was to receive a report on 16 December 2003 following consideration by Overview and Scrutiny.

#### *Tenant Fund*

A Best Value Review of support for Tenant and Resident involvement was begun in 2001. At the 6 January Executive that agreed the draft vision for the Housing Management BVR, all proposals for concluding the review on support for Tenant and Resident involvement were also agreed.

At a meeting of the Executive on 27 July 2002 that reviewed the Tenant Fund budget, it was agreed that a mini best value review of the Tenants Fund be undertaken as an addendum to the BVR of Housing Management and support for Tenant and Resident involvement.

Officers followed the BVR guidelines on involvement by utilising the Housing Management BVR structures that had been established (Project Board, Stakeholder Forum, Tenant and Leaseholder Panels etc).

IT widespread consultation and comparison was undertaken with 'Best Practice'



authorities.

It became apparent to the Project Board that following comparison, consultation, challenge and view on competition, the 2 mini-reviews significantly inter-related

Two 'vision' documents were produced on the two mini-reviews but were combined in a joint report to Tenant council on 1 September 2003. This report broadly found the key issues to be:

- The need for a new approach by the Council for increased resident participation.
- The need for a fresh start for the Tenant and Residents involvement.
- A better use of resources deployed for tenant participation.

The principle solution proposed in the overarching 'vision' were -

- transfer of the Housing Community Development function Housing Management plus other methods of engagement to be developed in the new Housing Management areas (e.g. local conferences, roadshows, fun days etc)
- A new single residents federation with new methods of election and a dedicated resource centre. That federation to oversee the provision of tenant and Leaseholder Councils.
- Funding to be agreed and administered via Area Forums and Area Housing Management offices in accordance with Council procedures for grant aid.

The report outlined the steps to implementation.

The Tenant council received the draft vision on 1 September 2003 and agreed at October 2003 Tenant Council that there will be a series of tenant meetings across the Borough before Tenant Council meets with Officers and Councillors. These meetings have been held and the draft vision and the feedback from the SGTO on those meetings were both consulted at the Tenant Council on 24 November 2003.

The Tenant Council has referred the SGTO report back to Neighbourhood Forums in January thus delaying any concrete report / decision for Executive.

Members noted that Tenants Council had referred its comments on the Best Value Review (BVR) to the Neighbourhood Housing Forums, for consideration in January 2004, thus delaying its consideration by the Executive. The Executive Member reiterated her willingness to meet with Tenants Council and all party representatives on this matter.

Concerns were raised in the BVR about the involvement of black and ethnic minority groups in tenant bodies, and the wider consultation process. The Executive Member acknowledged that the consultation process had been undertaken through existing structures, and that the authority was reviewing tenant involvement

#### *SGTO funding*

Following SGTO's Annual General Meeting, the Executive agreed additional funding

of £6000.

To date £4500 has been released

Any further funding will be dependent on SGTO submitting a bid for consideration in the first instance by the Tenant Fund Management Committee and then by Tenant Council and the Executive.

Discussion took place on the Southwark Group of Tenants Organisation (SGTO) and SBMETRO funding.

Some members raised concerns re funding procedure for SGTO, and it was agreed that a report be presented at a future meeting on SBMETRO's funding position.

*Item 7 – Leaseholder Council*

The Leaseholder Council had asked the Executive Member what commitment both Members and Officers had towards Leaseholders. The reason for this question had been that the Leasehold Management Unit Manager had produced a new structure in June and this had yet to be implemented. No jobs had been advertised and the group consisted mainly of temporary staff.

Councillor Bassom responded that both Members and Officers were wholly committed to providing the best possible services to Leaseholders and to that end the post of Leasehold Manager had been designated 3rd tier to attract one of the leading experts on Leasehold Management. A model structure had been devised and agreed to mirror best practice authorities and to be prepared for the implementation of the new Common hold & Leasehold Act.

Additional resources had been agreed for a phased expansion of services concentrating initially on tackling the influx of RTB applications caused by the Government's reduction in RTB discount and maximising income from major works (S20) accounts and other billing processes.

Immediate recruitment had occurred deliberately on a temporary and agency basis to the first phase posts by attracting many key & experienced staff from other authorities in advance of formal job descriptions and job variations being finalised. Formal recruitment would commence to these posts before Christmas with all current incumbents given the opportunity to apply.

In addition, major office space adaptations had been made at the LMU and new office space obtained (at Chatelaine House) to accommodate the new structure.

Commitment to Leaseholders had further been exemplified by the creation of innovative options for payment of large major works bills and the introduction of a sliding scale of admin charges both of which had been agreed by the Executive.

A programme of policies and procedures had been identified between the Leasehold Manager and Leaseholder Council for phased review and implementation.

Close partnership working had been established between the Leasehold Manager and the Leaseholder Working Group and Leaseholder Council building further on a relationship that had been developed between Housing and its Leaseholder representatives over the last two years. The Leasehold Management Improvement Plan was one of the key plans in Housing to drive forward improved services.

Evidence of the success of the revamped and expanded LMU could already be seen in the successful reduction of the RTB acceptance backlog so that all that backlog had been cleared and that all new RTB applications were accepted/denied within statutory timescales.

Widespread training on the new legislation had been undertaken with Members, Officers and Leaseholder representatives.

Targets for Leasehold income for 2003/04 were already being exceeded.

Whilst it was recognised that the Leaseholder service had and still had areas for improvement as recorded in the Best Value Review process, the evidence of the Council's commitment was plain to see and would continue until Southwark's service was amongst the best.

The leaseholder representative had been informed that all matters concerning this subject would be dealt with by LMU as of early October, but this had not happened, and members of the Leaseholder Council were being pushed between the LMU and the Neighbourhood offices. Members asked why this had not been cascaded to the local offices?

In response Councillor Bassom responded that the reorganisation of the Leasehold Management Unit included a group of officers who would deal with the more onerous and detailed statutory consultation process introduced by the Common hold and Leasehold Reform Act 2002. The phased handover of this function to the LMU would be completed by 1 January 2004 when all statutory consultation issues will be dealt with at Lorrimore Road.

The Chair thanked the Executive Member and Strategic Director of Housing for attending for interview.

2. **FORWARD PLAN**

Additional papers were circulated for future meetings including:

- Draft Scrutiny Project Brief on HRA and the rent setting process
- Scrutiny Project Brief on Anti Social Behaviour Strategy

Members agreed to look at anti social behaviour issues at a future meeting.

The meeting concluded at 9.30pm

**CHAIR:**

**DATED:**