

# Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Monday 13 September 2010

7.00 pm

Town Hall, Peckham Road, London SE5 8UB

## Supplemental Agenda

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Date: 7 September 2010

## **Cabinet Member Interview – Councillor Ian Wingfield, Deputy Leader and Housing Management**

### Strategic issues

1. What responsibilities has the leader given to the deputy leader outside the deputy leader's portfolio area? (Councillor A Simmons)
2. How will a potential Government cut of possibly a quarter of the budget impact upon Southwark council tenants? (Councillor H Morrissey)
3. Can the deputy leader confirm that he has no plans to create an arms-length management organisation or transfer the ownership of council homes in any other way? (Councillor L Rajan)
4. The corporate structure which the deputy leader has inherited divided responsibility for housing services between executive directors. What is the deputy leader's assessment of the effectiveness of this structure? (Councillor G Edwards)
5. Can the deputy leader set out the costs of recruiting, interviewing and employing a new strategic director of housing? (Councillor L Manchester)
6. How does the deputy leader expect the government's changes to Housing Benefit to impact on Southwark? (Councillor A Simmons)
7. How many housing benefit claimants in Southwark will be affected by the new financial caps announced by the government? (Councillor D Hubber)
8. Will the reduction in housing benefit potentially hit Southwark council tenants disproportionately than other London councils? (Councillor H Morrissey)
9. Can the deputy leader set out the ways in which he will work with registered social landlords to improve the quality of service they provide to their tenants in the borough? (Councillor L Rajan)

### Answer:

The key forum at which the council shares best practice with our Registered Provider (RP) partners is Southwark Housing Association Group (SouHAG) Housing Management. All RPs with stock in Southwark are invited to attend, and the meetings are chaired by a senior RP officer. The meetings are held once a quarter and the agendas for the meetings are agreed jointly with the RP chair. The meeting covers issues including: updates on Safer Southwark initiatives that can benefit RP residents; nominations and lettings performance; Housing Benefit for RP tenants. In addition over the past year we have discussed issues ranging from emergency planning, Southwark Works and how RPs and their tenants can utilise and benefit from the Sanctuary scheme for residents affected by domestic violence and how RP residents can benefit from initiatives to address under-occupation such as Smart Move.

RPs are represented on the on the Council's Overcrowding steering group and we are currently liaising with the G15 (a group representing the largest RPs) on how they can assist the Council in tackling homelessness.

As part of a Sub-Regional social housing fraud initiative, Southwark Investigations Team is providing a service in Bexley, Bromley and Lewisham as well as Southwark, with officers based respectively with Hexagon, Family Mosaic and Peabody helping them carry out investigation into their stock in Southwark. Sub regionally, as a result of the programme 24 homes have so far been recovered for reletting. The Investigations Team will shortly be offering training sessions for all RPs in the sub region advising them about how they can tackle identity fraud in their own stock.

#### Individual estates/blocks

10. Could the deputy leader give a breakdown of the costs incurred for works undertaken on the Downtown Estate in Surrey Docks ward since 2007 with regard to the district heating system (pipes and boiler house), repairs to radiators and pipes within individual homes, and the cost of repairs and compensation for any homes where damage was caused by floods related to failures in the district heating? (Councillor D Hubber)

Answer:

The total value of the repairs work since 2007 is £129,000. A further £13,000 has been spent on planned maintenance. When divided by 3.5 years and the number of dwellings (278) this represents a cost per property of £146 pa.

Where flooding occurs the repairs service will be ordered to make good flood damage, so decorations allowances will not be payable. Works orders do not specify whether works are ordered as a result of flood damage so it is not possible to provide details of how many works orders have been made out as a consequence of heating failure or more generally leaks/flooding from above.

I have asked officers to track back over 3 financial years, and they have been unable to identify any compensation payments being made for as a result of loss of heating due to in-dwelling district heating bursts. This is likely to be because a resident will not be eligible for a compensation payment where the burst is immediately isolated and repaired. The loss of a radiator does not constitute a loss of the heating system which is the measure for compensation entitlement.

Any damage to personal possessions arising from an in-dwelling burst would be referred for consideration by either the householders or the council's own insurers. There has been one claim in the last 3 years as a result of damage arising from burst in-dwelling district installations.

#### Background information

An analysis of orders raised and closed from 1st January 2007 to date, for works on the Downtown estate (comprising Brew House Walk, Buckters Rent - odd nrs only, Farrins Rent, Fir Trees Close, Redwood Close, Staples Close, Teak Close Mahogany Close, Russia Dock ) confirms that 1,407 orders were raised for repairs work and a further 400 for planned maintenance. In the same period there has been no investment (capital) works commissioned or costs incurred for the boiler house/heating & hot water system during this period.

This is the only incident that has been defined as a 'flood' and insurance/compensation claim occurred at 30 Fir Trees Close and lasted for approximately 1.5 hours. There were no leaseholder claims on insurance for this period.

11. Can the deputy leader provide an update on the result of the entry phone ballot at Kellow House, and given the level of antisocial behaviour problems and that a significant proportion of the 16 properties are leasehold - when will the door entry system be installed? (Councillor T McNally)

Answer:

In the June 2010 ballot, a majority of residents (60%) voted in favour of the installation of an access control system at Kellow House in a ballot conducted by officers. No funding has been identified for the security works in the current two year programme.

Priorities for future investment in the Council's stock will be considered by the Cabinet in October 2010. The delivery of the Decent Homes target will take precedence given the overwhelming need to bring Southwark to the standard of it's peers. Residents will be fully consulted, between October and February 2011 with a final post consultation report back to the Cabinet in April 2011 to enable future investment programmes to be finalised. The residents of Kellow House will be able to feed their views into this wider consultation before the future programme is agreed by Cabinet.

12. How much longer will Southwark Housing continue to light empty floors on the Heygate blocks, and what is the likely cost of this lighting until demolition concludes? (Councillor T McNally)

Answer:

There are still around 40 residents spread across the Heygate Estate, for whom lighting is essential to maintain their safety and security. Many whole landings have been sealed off, and the cost of unsealing them, then removing and disabling the lighting now far outweighs the cost of leaving the lights on. I am advised that security considerations have been paramount at the Heygate, and thus quickly sealing off landings was given priority.

The approximate monthly cost of lighting per year is £21,900 which emits around 72kg of CO2 a year. Given these costs both financial and environmental, I have asked the new Aylesbury Manager to consider whether it would be possible to give due weight to these environmental considerations as we start to move the re-housing process on that Estate.

13. Can the deputy leader set out the timeline for demolition of the Heygate? (Councillor P Noblet)

Answer:

The demolition process funded by the Council for the Rodney Road / Wingrave area is currently underway with the technical and preparatory works currently being carried out and physical deconstruction expected to begin towards the end of the year and be complete by Spring 2011.

Lend Lease have agreed with the Council that as soon as reasonably practicable that they will use all reasonable endeavours to initiate the procurement process for the demolition of the existing buildings on the Heygate Phase in a sequential manner subject to programming and this will be an item reviewed by the Management Board on a regular basis. Vacant possession of the blocks will be a key factor determining the programme of demolition and the Council is working hard to relocate tenants and acquire leaseholder interests in order that demolition can commence as soon as possible.

14. Now that the Elephant and Castle agreement has been signed, how will the deputy leader be involved in the future planning of the social housing in this project? (Councillor H Morrissey)

Answer:

The governance of the project is currently being drafted and agreed, however, a key element will be the regular briefing of the key Cabinet members on an ongoing basis, it is proposed that monthly briefing meetings will be given to the Leader, Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Corporate Strategy, Cabinet Member for Housing Management and Cabinet Member for Resources - this will be based around the key issues in particular affordable housing which will also form a key element of discussions for the planning application.

15. What are the deputy leader's long term plans for Maydew House? (Councillor W Nelson)

Answer:

At a special meeting held on 9<sup>th</sup> August, the Cabinet considered the feedback from consultation with residents and the implications of the refurbishment works required at the block. It was decided that the rehousing of tenants of Maydew House should commence with immediate effect, and to ring fence some new housing association properties at Canada Water to Maydew House tenants. It was also agreed that the long term future of Maydew House should be considered as part of the wider review of the Decent Homes investment strategy and that the decision about the future of the block would be taken in full consultation with Maydew House residents to include consideration of the right to return for tenants. It is anticipated that the decision on the wider Decent Homes review and the future of Maydew House will be taken later in the year.

16. When will a survey be carried out on the Manor Estate, South Bermondsey, to investigate water ingress? (Councillor W Nelson)

Answer:

Officers are not aware of a general problem of water ingress, however I have asked them to commission an urgent survey of the estate to make sure that any problems are immediately identified. This will take place in early September, and I will inform the Scrutiny Committee of the results.

17. When will the deputy leader complete the security works for the remaining two blocks in Four Squares? (Councillor W Nelson)

Answer:

To date the Council has spent £6,606,788 on the security works at Jamaica Road, New Place and Lockwood Squares with a further £130,000 committed to these projects in terms of retention payments, giving a grand total of 6,736,788 committed and spent. This includes a grant of £2, 346, 000 from the London Housing Board to the Council made in 2004/2005. There is no funding for security works in the current two year programme.

Priorities for future investment in the Council's stock will be considered by the Cabinet in October 2010. The delivery of the Decent Homes target will take precedence given the overwhelming need to bring Southwark to the standard of it's peers. Residents will be fully consulted, between October and February 2011 with a final post consultation report back to the Cabinet in April 2011 to enable future investment programmes to be finalised. The residents of Four Squares will be able to feed their views into this wider consultation before the future programme is agreed by Cabinet.

18. Would the deputy leader please outline his proposals for the future of the Aylesbury Estate in the light of recent cabinet decisions and likely shortage of government funding, with particular reference to re-consultation with residents, notably in those parts of the estate where the risks of uncertainty and degeneration may have increased through the delays now proposed? (Councillor T Eckersley)

Answer:

Firstly I should emphasise that the recent changes in phasing have been designed to increase certainty and minimise delays in the context of a difficult external funding environment.

Building work is progressing on Phase 1a, in the south-west of the estate, for the provision of 260 new homes - 37 homes for social rent and 15 intermediate homes are due to be handed over later this year. Preparations are also well underway for procuring more new homes in two other sites of Phase 1:

- Site 7 - North Wolverton (numbers 1-59)
- Site 10 - Missenden (300-311)

Sites 1b & 1c now form part of Aylesbury PFI Housing Project, together with sites 8 & 9, and this comprises:

- Sites 1b & 1c - Bradenham (42-256), Arklow, Chartridge (1-149) and Chiltern
- Site 8 – 218 East Street
- Site 9 - Northchurch (1-76), Taplow and 184 East St

This PFI project is due to commence work on site in 2014. This is subject to the council's outline business case (OBC) for these works being accepted by the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) early in 2011.

However, the recent reconfiguring of the sites comprising the PFI project has resulted in the development timetable of several subsequent sites (i.e. 4, 5 & 6) to change. The blocks comprising these sites are as follows:

- Site 4 - Winslow, Padbury, Foxcote, 140 Albany Road, Ravenstone & Wendover (241-471)
- Site 5 - Wolverton (126-192) & Wendover (37-72, 117-156 & 201-240)
- Site 6 - Wendover (1-36, 73-116 & 157-200), Wolverton (60-125) & Brockley House

Council officers will be reviewing the business case for developing sites 4, 5 & 6 later on this year in order to confirm the programme and funding for developing these sites and a Newsletter will be issued in October updating residents on the council's revised rehousing timetable for the estate following consultation on the estate earlier this year.

Nevertheless, we recognise that for residents in Phase 2 (sites 4 & 5) and part of Phase 3 (site 6) of the regeneration programme there is some uncertainty over the timeframe for the redevelopment of these sites. On this basis we are now re-profiling our stock condition data to include all remaining properties on the Aylesbury.

Given that regeneration will not start for at least five years on some sites, the following properties will be included in the forward planning for achieving decent homes:

- Site 4 - Winslow, Padbury, Foxcote, 140 Albany Road, Ravenstone & Wendover (241-471)
- Site 5 - Wolverton 126-192 & Wendover (37-72, 117-156 & 201-240)
- Site 6 - Wendover (1-36, 73-116 & 157-200), Wolverton (60-125) & Brockley House (1-14)

We will shortly be releasing plans for a new decent homes strategy, with a five year programme for investment. This programme will be the subject of full consultation with all residents including those on the Aylesbury Estate.

19. In the event that a multi-utility services company (MUSCo) is not delivered at the Elephant & Castle, what alternative proposals does the deputy leader have to provide energy and other utilities as part of the Aylesbury regeneration and other surrounding estates which currently use out of date district heating systems? (Councillor P Clarke)

Answer:

With regard to the Aylesbury Estate, the Aylesbury Area Action Plan (AAP) is clear in that developments within this estate must connect to a centralised combined heat and power (CHP) system. Any developments completed prior to the implementation of the proposed CHP plant will be required to be designed so that they can connect to the CHP distribution system once this is available.

The Development is currently assumed to connect into the wider network that would be delivered by the MUSCo project. However, in case this project does not proceed then council officers are currently carrying out some preliminary research looking at the options for providing an replacement Aylesbury estate wide CHP network..

The current proposal from Dalkia is to locate the Aylesbury energy centre as a stand alone development within site 10 and as part of our current research we

will look at the suitability of other locations within the estate along with any programming implications which this may present.

All development briefs to be prepared will include the AAP's requirement for all developments to provide their own stand alone heating and hot water provision with the requirement to be connected to an estate wide system once it becomes available.

#### Housing management

20. Does the deputy leader think that the Homesearch bidding system is a fair and efficient way to conduct housing allocation? (Councillor L Rajan)

Answer:

The council's Homesearch scheme publishes details of vacant homes which can be accessed easily each week on the website or by picking up a copy of the magazine. Applicants on the council's housing list can bid for these and have full choice of area, floor level and property type – but the size is restricted to what suits their family size. The bidder with the highest priority is offered the vacant home and if they refuse it is offered to the next highest bidder. Each week a list is published, giving information on the number of bids received in the previous week for each advertised property as well the priority level of the successful bidder. Bids can be made over the phone, internet, text or use of kiosk at area housing offices.

When introduced with cross party support in 2005, the priority was to ensure a transparent as well as a fair system. By advertising vacancies and giving weekly feedback on the successful bidders, applicants can build up knowledge of the popular and the not so popular properties across the borough. This can help them make an informed decision as to whether to wait longer for the ideal new home or to bid for a less popular vacancy and shorten their family's waiting time.

Applications are registered on the list in one of four priority bands on the housing list – with band 1 having the highest priority. Earlier registration dates within the band give higher priority than later registration dates within that band. Housing legislation requires the council to give priority to certain groups of applicants, eg overcrowding, medical need, homelessness and this is reflected in the council's banding structure. The mismatch between supply and demand, and therefore waiting time for a new home, is however a major source of frustration for housing applicants.

The council has some 2,500 properties to let each year whilst there are some 16,000 households on the housing list. Each year approx 4,500 new housing applications are accepted on the list. A family in band 3 needing a 2-bedroom flat can expect to wait up to 3 years whilst a family needing a 3-bedroom flat up to 4 years. A family in band 2 needing 3 bedrooms will usually wait around 2 years. And in band 1 a year or so. These waiting times are caused by shortage of property available for letting rather than the system for letting them. Of the council advertised homes in 2009-10, 17% of lettings went to Band 1, 32% to Band 2 and 50% to Band 3.

Southwark council is part of a procurement consortium, ChoiceHomes UK, with other local authorities and RSLs to ensure cost effectiveness for the IT, printing

and distribution arrangements. An independent audit in 2006 found that it took less time on average to let empty homes under Homesearch compared to the previous method of officers making allocations to applicants.

21. How many vacant council owned homes will the deputy leader sell off in this municipal year? (Councillor T McNally)

Answer:

The Executive decided in March 2009 to actively dispose of void housing stock to generate additional capital for the housing investment programme to fund decent homes works, landlord obligations and other schemes. Officers have actively been identifying properties that meet with the criteria set out in the void disposal strategy.

The categories of properties being considered for disposal are those which are: uneconomical to repair; difficult to let; small units above 3<sup>rd</sup> floor; valued above £400,000, listed units and also vacant units in blocks with a high percentage of leaseholders which will enable the sale of the freehold (including converted street properties) in the long term.

The agreed target is to dispose of 100 units per annum over 3 years aimed at generating £20m each year.

In the year 2009/10, 66 void properties were sold generating a receipt of £9.5m. In the current year 2010/11, 11 properties have been sold to date with an additional 35 at various stages of the disposal process, i.e. sale agreed but not yet finalised; currently being marketed or featuring at a future auction.

22. Following the leader's response to my question at council assembly (question 6) about the stock condition survey, will the deputy leader provide me with the detailed results of the survey? (Councillor P Clarke)

Answer:

The survey reveals that the Council is in a better position than previously believed – the decency rate has risen from 53% to 65.3%. The main reason for the increase in decency is that the street properties portfolio is generally in better condition than anticipated. This does still mean that Southwark has 34.7%, or around 13,700 homes, that do not meet the decent homes standard. This year we will be upgrading 2,000 homes.

Options for the future investment programme, including the target level for decency, and options to reduce the investment gap, will be presented to Cabinet in October. Following the Cabinet confirming their approach, a full consultation will take place with residents between October and February 2011.

23. What are the start dates for all the major works agreed as part of the 2010-2012 investment programme? When will the plan for works from 2012 be drawn up? and what will the consultation programme consist of? (Councillor P Noblet)

Answer:

The 2010 –12 Investment programme contained 24 projects to be delivered by March 2012. For 2010-11, 17 projects are due to be completed. To date one project has already completed, 10 are on site and the remainder are at the survey/ pre-contract stage and will commence on site between September and January 2011. The remaining seven contracts are scheduled to commence on site in the summer of 2011/12.

The post 2012 programme will be confirmed after the Cabinet has agreed their approach to Decent Homes and following consultation with residents.

24. What is being done to investigate the numbers of people who have council flats and are currently sub-letting them? (Ms J Hole)

Answer

The Housing Management Division began a programme of tenancy checks at the beginning of 2009. By the end of this financial year, all tenancies will have been checked over a 2 year period to confirm that the legal tenants are in occupation and where there is any suspicion of illegal occupation, this is investigated and appropriate actions are taken. We expect to recover 400 tenancies this year through this programme.

I feel there is more that can be done – I am looking at what other measures can be put in place to catch those who abuse the system. I am particularly interested in taking a more targeted approach to tenancy checks, and seeing if there are ways we can persuade unauthorised occupants to give up their tenancies.

Background information

A full tenancy check programme commenced in April 2009. The intention is to check 100% of tenancies by the end of the current financial year. Given that no structured programme had been in place before 2009 it is anticipated that the level of unauthorised occupancy could be between 3% and 5% of the stock.

During the year 2009/10 nearly 20,000 tenancy checks were completed and 200 properties were recovered. For the current year 2010/11, we have set a challenging target to recover 400 properties and to conduct 1500 detailed investigations into illegal occupation. The remaining 18 000 checks will be completed.

The procedures adopted recognise at the outset that many tenants are already well known to Housing Officers, for example people active in the local TRA. The next stage, and the bulk of the programme, is face to face meetings with or visits to people who are not known to the service. The final stage is the more detailed investigations where there is suspicion of illegal occupancy.

From next year a more targeted approach will be introduced. Using intelligence available within the service a sample of checks will take place, aimed at properties where there are more likely to be illegal occupants. The Housing Investigations function will transfer back into Housing Management service to support the TC programme. All delivery options for investigations

are being considered, including the use of private investigators if more effective.

25. Is the deputy leader happy with Fire Safety within Housing? (Councillor A Simmons)
26. When will all council properties with lofts have them insulated and when will all council properties with cavity walls have wall insulation? (Councillor L Rajan)

Answer

Officers have identified 20,000 homes that would benefit from cavity wall or loft insulation. We currently have a cavity wall insulation scheme about to complete that has upgraded the insulation on 3,700 homes – this programme was made possible by a grant of £4.3 million. The Council has recently submitted a further bid for grant funding of £3.4m to undertake cavity wall insulation to a further 5,000 homes. We expect a decision in the next month.

There is also a loft insulation programme of £1.9m over the next two years, commencing on 200 homes at Nunhead in October. This should provide insulation to 9,000 of the 10,600 homes that could potentially be insulated.

Future insulation works will depend upon both the availability of Council resources and our ability to access grant funding.

It is likely that in the current financial climate that grant funding will reduce and become harder to access. Whilst we recognise the value of insulation programmes we might well have to balance this value against the need to bring all Council homes to the national standard of decency.

Decent Homes

27. How many properties does the deputy leader believe do not currently meet the Decent Homes standard? (Councillor L Manchester)

Answer:

Following the assimilation of the Savill's stock condition data into our Apex data base, Southwark can currently evidence 65.3% meet the Government's decency standard. 34.7% (13,700) homes do not meet the decent homes standard.

28. How many properties does the deputy leader intend to bring up to Decent Homes standard in each of the next four years? (Councillor L Manchester)

Answer:

The current investment income projections suggest that around £43m per annum, or £172m will be available to invest over the next four years. The number of homes that will be upgraded will depend upon decisions made on the target standard for each home and the delivery strategy adopted. Southwark could reasonably expect to upgrade around 10,000 homes over 4 years, if the money available was allocated carefully and strictly in accordance with the current relatively high Southwark Standard.

29. What is the current funding gap for bringing council housing in Southwark up to Decent Homes standard? I'd be grateful for details of the funding gap for each of the different standards of Decent Homes refurbishment that are under consideration (Councillor G Edwards)

Answer:

The Cabinet will be fully briefed on the funding gap on decent homes on 10<sup>th</sup> September.

30. What discussions has the deputy leader had, or does he intend to have, with Tenants Council about his intention to deliver Decent Homes by the next election? (Councillor T McNally)

#### Leaseholder issues

31. Would the deputy leader please outline his proposals for improving leaseholder management, with particular reference to the opportunities for building on leaseholder concern for value for money in order to improve housing management generally? (Councillor T Eckersley)

Answer:

The question states 'with particular reference to leaseholder concern for value for money' and this is being dealt with in the detailed response to the findings of the independent audit of service charges, which involves reviewing many of the financial processes to ensure expenditure is reconciled to cost centres and appropriately justified.

Housing management and home ownership unit are working with leaseholder representatives through a project group to implement the recommendations of a service charges audit carried out by external consultants Grant Thornton in 2009.

The audit recommendations have been agreed with Home Ownership Council. They focus on improving service charge billing accuracy; increasing value for money and improved contract management - objectives which are integral to improving the housing management service overall.

A range of additional service improvements are being developed to fulfil the manifesto commitment to a better deal for Leaseholders. Amongst these are a commitment to better billing and information for leaseholders, much better access to all services and quicker resolution of complaints and enquiries

32. Does the deputy leader support the provision included in the private members bill proposed by Simon Hughes MP that leaseholder bills be capped at £10,000? (Councillor T McNally)

Answer:

No such provision is included in the published private members bill, which is because such provisions have been in place since 1997. They were included in the Secretary of State's Directions made pursuant to sections 219/220 Housing Act 1996. It is worth noting that the council has a policy for dealing

with these Directions, it having been agreed by Cllr. Stephen Flannery as Executive Member for Housing as an IDM in October 2004.

#### Overcrowding/under-occupancy

33. The issue of overcrowding is one of the most challenging issues. What does the deputy leader estimate is the size of the issue that he has inherited? (Councillor H Morrissey)

#### Answer

Overcrowding is a serious problem in Southwark. The 2001 Census found that Southwark had the 5<sup>th</sup> highest level of overcrowding in London, and Southwark's Housing Requirements Study 2008 estimated that there were 13,986 overcrowded households in the borough. The highest level of overcrowding was experienced in Southwark's own housing stock with 15% of council tenants, 12% private renters and 9% housing association renters being overcrowded.

As at 1.4.10 there were 5,401 households (all tenures) registered on Southwark's housing list who were overcrowded by Southwark's overcrowding definition, of whom 4,018 met Communities and Local Government's (CLG) definition of overcrowding (Southwark's overcrowding definition allows for a separate bedroom for each person not living as part of a couple on reaching the age of 16, while the Government definition does not allow a separate bedroom until the age of 21). There were also 134 housing association tenants who were registered on registered social landlords transfer lists who met the CLG definition.

In recognition of the impact that overcrowding has on people's lives, Southwark's lettings scheme gives priority to overcrowded households, and additional priority to those experiencing a combination of overcrowding and other problems (such as medical problems made worse by housing conditions). Statutorily overcrowded households attract Band 1 (top) priority. Southwark permanently rehoused 1167 overcrowded households in 2009/10.

Southwark operates a scheme to encourage under-occupying social housing tenants to move to smaller homes (see Question 34 for more information), freeing up larger properties for overcrowded and other needy families. Under-occupiers attract Band 1 priority for a move.

Southwark also carries out home visits to severely overcrowded families (those lacking 2 or more bedrooms) to explore options to make the wait for a larger home more bearable.

34. What is being done to increase the stock of larger flats and small houses for families who are currently in over-crowded situations? (Ms J Hole)

#### Answer:

As covered in Question 33, Southwark operates a scheme to assist under-occupying council and RSL tenants to move to smaller homes, freeing up larger properties for overcrowded families. 165 under-occupiers were rehoused via this initiative in 2009/10. Following a review of the scheme, including consultation with under-occupying tenants and those who had moved

previously about how it could be improved, it was relaunched as Smart Move in July 2010. We now provide the additional practical support that under-occupiers told us that they wanted, including assistance with bidding under the Homesearch choice-based lettings scheme and arranging and paying for removals, balanced against a slight reduction in the levels of financial assistance given. There is a target to assist 178 under-occupiers to move in 2010/11.

35. A large number of blocks have former drying rooms or store rooms which are either locked off or illegally used as private store rooms. In many cases these are not big enough to create flats under the Hidden Homes initiative. What will the deputy leader do to tackle overcrowding in the borough by using these spaces to expand existing adjacent flats? (Councillor P Clarke)

Answer:

As part of the Hidden Homes feasibility work, a number of appraisals have been undertaken of dead spaces adjoining occupied properties. Works are currently in progress to extend two properties in this way. The appraisals have highlighted that whilst the gain of space is clearly beneficial for the household concerned, this has to be balanced against the cost of works, and disruption for neighbouring households. The works required to convert the space to a habitable standard has been found to be very extensive in the some properties considered because of the need to move or create window openings, differences in floor levels, and the need to move landlord services. In some of the properties considered, the dead space has adjoined the occupied properties at a point where the possible gain could be an extension to an existing rooms eg kitchens but has not provided the possibility of adding an extra bedroom. In others, extra bedrooms could only be formed directly off existing bedrooms, which would not be in accordance with building regulations. Whilst there are therefore practical difficulties to overcome in delivering a general programme of extensions, opportunities where benefit can be gained will continue to be sought, and works carried out subject to resources.

#### Service performance

36. Southwark's own key performance indicators show that 90.32% of service users are satisfied with the housing repairs service in the borough. Does the deputy leader think this is an accurate assessment of the opinion held by tenants and leaseholders of the repairs service? (Councillor G Edwards)

Answer:

Since 2006 Southwark has commissioned Vangent to carry out telephone surveys after each Customer Service Centre (CSC) generated repair is marked as completed on our systems. A total of 2970 surveys have been completed so far this financial year, and 2791 of the respondents scored the service overall 3 (satisfactory), or higher, out of 5 (93.97% satisfied).

On paper the levels of satisfaction look very good, but a number of concerns have been brought to my attention around the way these surveys are conducted.

- ✓ The sample used to measure satisfaction is relatively small – at only around 1000 per month.

- ✓ The method used to collect data is not consistently applied meaning that the findings cannot be accurately compared across time periods.
- ✓ The quality of the call handling with the CSC has been brought into question – this can affect the quality of the data collected.
- ✓ The questions might not accurately test customer satisfaction.
- ✓ The contractor, Vangent, has an interest in delivering high standards of satisfaction.

Some immediate actions have been put in place within the Housing Management Service, namely:

- ✓ The sample size is being increased
- ✓ An independent survey of satisfaction is being commissioned quarterly across all areas of housing management
- ✓ Morrison is piloting on site surveys using the new mobile technology.

We will then be able to compare results and see a much more accurate picture. There are also a number of other measures that I would like to explore, namely:

- ✓ All surveys being commissioned independently- including the monthly call backs
- ✓ A sample of complex repairs being added to all surveys to test satisfaction amongst those with the most difficult jobs to complete.
- ✓ Samples to be increased to include outstanding and overdue repairs rather than just completed.

37. How does the deputy leader rate the council's performance with regard to Tenant and Leaseholder satisfaction and what steps are being taken to address any deficiencies? (Councillor A Simmons)

Answer:

In the STATUS Survey carried out by Southwark Council in 2008, resident satisfaction with the landlord service was at 62%. This is low when compared to most of other London authorities and I am convinced that there is much we can do to improve.

The key to increasing tenant and leaseholder's satisfaction will be improving services and the overall tenant and leaseholder experience. The manifesto highlights the areas where residents have made their dissatisfaction most plain – access to housing officers, the link between the repairs service and housing officers, estate lighting, contractor performance and opportunities for resident involvement.

We are committed to creating a culture where residents views are listened to and learnt from. – I am convinced that this approach will drive up satisfaction,

I have already started a programme of work to meet these concerns.

38. At the last Tenants Council meeting, the deputy leader stated that the call centre was unavailable for three weeks over Christmas. Can he confirm that this was the case, and if so, can he say what he intends to do to ensure it does not happen again? (Councillor L Manchester)

Answer:

I did not state that the Call Centre was out of operation at Christmas.

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