



HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Housing and Community Safety Scrutiny Sub-Committee held on Tuesday 1 February 2011 at 7.00 pm at Town Hall, Peckham Road, London SE5 8UB

PRESENT: Councillor Gavin Edwards (Chair)
Councillor Linda Manchester
Councillor Poddy Clark
Councillor Stephen Govier
Councillor Michael Situ

CO-OPTED MEMBERS: Miriam Facey
Non Nosworthy
Jane Salmon
Lesley Wertheimer

OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT: Councillor Anood Al-Samerai
Councillor Ian Wingfield

OFFICER SUPPORT: Gerri Scott, Director of Housing
Gill Davies, Director of
Jonathon Toy, Head of Community Safety & Enforcement
Margaret O'Brien, Head of Housing Management
Shaun Regan, Finance and Performance Manager
Debbi Gooch, Principal Lawyer
Karen Harris, Scrutiny Project Manager

1. APOLOGIES

1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Claire Hickson. Councillor Darren Merrill attended in her place.

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

2.1 There were none

3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

3.1 There were no disclosures of interests or dispensations.

4. MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on 11 January be agreed as an accurate record.

5. FOUR SQUARES SCRUTINY

5.1 The Chair introduced the 4 Squares issue, reminding members of the sub-committee that this was a continuation of the discussion held on 11 January. He welcomed the residents to the meeting, and Councillor Ian Wingfield, cabinet member with responsibility for housing.

5.2 Councillor Wingfield was invited to make some introductory comments on the 4 Squares issue

5.3 He began by stating that there was still a serious issue to be addressed and how unhappy he felt with the way residents felt misled.

5.4 He summarised that there are 3 main issues that he intended to address

- The paucity of the decision-making process
- Inclusion and meaningful consultation with the residents
- Contract management

5.5 He also explained that there was a large funding shortfall of some £313 million for housing maintenance overall, and he had a responsibility to look across the whole borough at priorities. The full information from the stock condition survey would be available in April and this is the time when decisions on funding for schemes can be made.

5.6 Members of the sub-committee reminded Councillor Wingfield that the outstanding work was not “decent homes” work.

5.7 The Chair invited members of the sub-committee to ask questions to Councillor Wingfield.

5.8 **What work is underway to get a cost-effective solution to security on estates?**

In one instance it was windows rather than doors that are the issue. The residents explained the other security issues on the estate and the benefits that have been seen at the 2 blocks which have had the work done. The Council needed to involve residents when devising solutions and in the future would be doing so on an

ongoing basis.

- 5.9 **It is important that the Council does not make promises that it can not keep. It is clear that in this instance the tendering process went wrong. What lessons have be learnt from this?**

In the future contract management needs to be a lot tighter, and a better key performance indicator framework will be used.

- 5.10 **Why is the leftover money from the original £8million not allocated to the estate?**

It was only ever an indicative allocation. When the decent homes priority was established the amount available for other works was diminished.

- 5.11 **Can you give some indication that 4 squares will be a priority once the resource levels are known in April?**

We will be giving 4 Squares special consideration but can not make an absolute commitment at this stage. The Council will be looking at it closely.

- 5.12 **Can we be reassured that the new director of housing will have a tight grip on the contract management?**

We will ensure that the process is much more open in the future and be looking at 2 aspects of 4 Squares, what needs to happen now, and also what went wrong in terms of the contract overspend, communications with residents, and communications between officers and councillors.

The overspend on the first contract was signed off by the director under delegated powers.

The council accepts that the main issue was the lack of openness about the decision-making processes. This can be improved in the future.

- 5.13 **In 2009 it was not clear that work at 4 Squares would not be progressed. What has changed?**

By April/May we will be able to publish the results of the 2010 stock condition survey and will be able to take things forward.

- 5.14 **Why was there no progress on 4 Squares last year when correspondence with the local councillor said it would be looked at again after the contracts process had been resolved?**

Until the stock condition survey becomes available there is no real baseline of the level of resources necessary to deliver the overall housing investment need. Difficult choices had to be made because there was a gap between need and the resources available.

5.15 Is there a way of taking action against the contractors?

The contractors do still do some work for Southwark. The issue is one of contract management which will be strengthened in the future. Legal advice will be taken about the first contract tender which was so much lower than the final cost of the work.

5.16 There is a strong feeling that there should still be £1.5 million available to be spent on 4 Squares. What assurances can be given that this resource will be made available?

We need a comprehensive solution to the 4 Squares issues, it may be that it costs more or less than the original amount indicated for the project. We need to wait until April/May for the Stock Condition survey report before a decision can be taken.

5.17 When the council makes its decisions in April will they look not only at the costs of the scheme but also at the savings which will result from not having to constantly repair the vandalism on Marden and Layard?

All factors will be taken into consideration.

5.18 Things on the estate are bad; does the Council recognise the urgency of the situation?

We do, and we have processes underway for improvements in contract management. We will make a decision as soon as the stock condition survey becomes available.

5.19 The Chair thanked the residents and Councillor Al-Samerai for their attendance and undertook to keep those at the meeting updated on progress on this issue over the coming months.

6. FORMAL AGREEMENT OF THE DRAFT REPORT ON HOUSING REPAIRS KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

6.1 The Housing Repairs KPI scrutiny report was agreed and will be forwarded to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for their consideration on 7 February 2011.

7. POSSIBLE SCRUTINY OF HOUSING REVENUE BUDGET PROCESS

7.1 Shaun Regan, Finance and Performance Manager introduced the report on the HRA Budget-Setting process, outlining that the report had been written from a financial perspective.

- 7.2 He explained that the council had a statutory obligation not to set an HRA budget in deficit
- 7.3 As a result of the process set out in the paper, the cabinet agreed rents and charges and the council must give residents 28 days notice of changes.
- 7.4 The Finance and Performance Manager explained that the figures are largely pre-determined by Government through the calculation of the rents increase figure and the subsidy. In addition there is a sum for Thames Water charges, meaning that up to 75% of HRA income was determined by external factors.
- 7.5 It was explained to the sub-committee that for 2011, the process of agreeing the HRA had changed to facilitate greater transparency, with the formal consultation taking place with the Tenants Council, Area Housing Forums and the Homeowners Council during January.
- 7.6 In addition to the formal consultation a Savings Panel had been established and is considering the HRA in terms of service provision and priorities, including members from both the Homeowners Council and Tenants Council.
- 7.7 The sub-committee discussed what intervention they could make which would be helpful in enhancing the HRA process.
- 7.8 Lesley Wertheimer informed the sub-committee of the work already underway through the Tenants Council looking into 2 issues
- Total Recovery Cost
 - Double-Charging
- 7.9 It was agreed to request a report from the Savings Panel for the meeting of the sub-committee on 4 April.

8. POSSIBLE SCRUTINY OF CCTV

- 8.1 Jonathon Toy, Head of Community Safety and enforcement presented the CCTV strategy which was adopted by the Council in January 2010.
- 8.2 He outlined the overall purpose, which is to achieve the most effective CCTV we can in the borough, by delivering in the 5 priority areas of the strategy
- A Safer Southwark – in support of the Safer Southwark Partnership priorities
 - Working in Partnership
 - Effective Council CCTV
 - A Proportionate approach
 - Communication – to deter offenders and reduce the fear of crime
- 8.3 The Head of Community Safety explained that the council has 20 re-locatable cameras which are operated within the code of practice, and these have facilitated a good record in covert surveillance.

- 8.4 Members of the sub-committee enquired about the control room, and were informed that as a vital part of the strategy it is hoped to move to a digital recording system from the current non-digital one as this would allow fixed time and date retrieval of images. The cost of this upgrade would be £320,000.
- 8.5 It was highlighted that Lambeth has a digital system already and there may be a possibility of Southwark linking with this.
- 8.6 The sub-committee discussed some alternative approaches including cabling, which could be built into the public realm strategy and capitalise upon the opportunities of the growing business community in the borough. There was recognition of a need to link up better with major developments such as More London.
- 8.7 The sub-committee requested some data on the effectiveness of the cameras and agreed that a site visit to the control room where this could be presented would take place at the next meeting.
- 8.8 The sub-committee discussed several issues which could make an effective scrutiny review:
- The importance of building an effective network across the public realm, including the views of other stakeholders and partners
 - How we can get the CCTV where it needs to be
 - How the whole strategy and actions flowing from it are easy to access for residents

9. PREPARATION FOR INTERVIEW WITH COUNCILLOR JOHN FRIARY, CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY SAFETY

- 8.1 This item was deferred until the next meeting of the sub-committee as there had been a recent change in responsibility for Community Safety within the Cabinet.

10. HOUSING BENEFIT

- 10.1 Councillor Govier circulated a draft report. It was agreed that this would be discussed at the next meeting of the sub-committee.

The meeting ended a 9.30pm