



HOUSING, ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND COMMUNITY SAFETY SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Housing, Environment, Transport and Community Safety Scrutiny Sub-Committee held on Monday 9 July 2012 at 7.00 pm at 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

PRESENT: Councillor Gavin Edwards (Chair)
Councillor Graham Neale (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Chris Brown
Councillor Michael Bukola
Councillor Lorraine Lauder MBE
Councillor Tim McNally
Councillor Martin Seaton

ALSO PRESENT: Lesley Wertheimer, tenants' representative

OFFICER SUPPORT: Stephen Douglass, Head of Community Engagement
Simon Godfrey, Resident Involvement Senior Manager
Sarah Scutt, Senior Lawyer, Litigation (Housing Services)
Peter Roberts, Scrutiny Project Manager

1. APOLOGIES

1.1 There were no apologies for absence.

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

2.1 There were no late items of business.

3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

3.1 There were no disclosures of interests or dispensations.

4. MINUTES

- 4.1 The vice-chair of the sub-committee felt that some of his comments had not been reflected in the minutes. These related to his concern that some of the language used in discussing domestic violence had not acknowledged that men could be the victims and also to his disappointment in the quality of the presentation in respect of anti-social behaviour.

RESOLVED:

That, subject to the above, the minutes of the meeting of the Housing & Community Safety Scrutiny Sub-Committee held on 19 April 2012 be agreed as a true and accurate record.

5. DOMESTIC ABUSE - DRAFT REPORT

- 5.1 The chair introduced the draft report and outlined the recommendations.
- 5.2 Members highlighted additional issues for consideration and possible inclusion in the report:

- existence of any schemes enabling victims to remain in their homes
- including the views of the LGBT Forum
- violence towards the elderly (possibly from younger generations within a family and complicated where the elderly person is living with the perpetrator)
- possible action where a leaseholder is the perpetrator, including termination of the lease
- recommendation of research aimed at understanding why particular ethnic groups appear to experience a higher level of domestic abuse and violence
- a questioning of the location of the rape crisis centre in Croydon and whether this adequately serves the needs of inner London boroughs

- 5.3 The chair indicated that he would investigate these issues and make amendments to the report. He would circulate a revised draft to all members for agreement before submission to overview & scrutiny committee.

6. WORK PROGRAMMING

- 6.1 The chair reported that representatives of the Tenants' and Homeowners' Councils had suggested Tenants' and Residents' Association (TRA) halls and bars as a possible topic for a scrutiny

review. There seemed to be a wide variety of rental agreements and a varied provision of halls across the borough. In some circumstances small groups took over use of a hall and excluded other residents.

- 6.2 Stephen Douglass, head of community engagement, briefed the sub-committee on TRA halls and bars. As far as he was aware, only two halls had bars on the premises. One of these was in difficulty over governance issues and preventing general use of the facility. Of one hundred and twelve halls across the borough, about half consisted of very small meeting rooms and the other half were bigger facilities which could accommodate other community uses. Not every estate had a hall and halls were not evenly distributed geographically across the borough. Looking at the possibility of TRAs sharing premises might release properties for other uses such as housing. The head of community engagement explained that the halls working party was developing an overview of the portfolio, resolving problems, supporting good practice and offering advice on lettings and generally aiming to encourage use. A stock condition survey had established the state of repairs of individual halls and any works needed.
- 6.3 In response to questions, the head of community engagement confirmed that the capital investment sum of £3.1 million over five years (paragraph 18 of the report) was considered adequate for the works needed to the halls. An analysis of the stock condition survey would help determine the priority of works to be done with health and safety an important element of this.
- 6.4 A member referred to a previous survey of TRA halls which had identified some interesting situations. For instance, in one road there were four TRA halls out of which one was in heavy use and the other three were all one-bed flats. One of the flats was used once a month, the second once a quarter and the third was used once a year. In another area there were three TRA halls within two hundred yards of each other. The member suggested that a lot of work had already been done to look at the distribution and use of halls and that this should be made use of. He particularly remembered a map showing TRA halls and other community facilities. Simon Godfrey, resident involvement senior manager, assured the sub-committee that this earlier work was being taken into account. The chair asked for the map to be circulated to the sub-committee.
- 6.5 A member asked whether the two bars were licensed. The head of community engagement explained that both bars had licences but one of them was not following the correct financial or governance procedures. Members highlighted paragraph 7 of the report which stated that rent was charged on only fifty-three of the halls. The head of community engagement responded that this issue needed

to be fully explored in order to determine the different potentials for income generation. He reported that rents ranged from £1.50 to £27 per week and bore little or no relation to the size or condition of the property. The difference in rents had not resulted from a particular strategy but reflected individual decisions across a number of council departments. The chair indicated that a list of the various rents would be brought to the next meeting.

- 6.6 Members asked whether there were any examples of fraud relating to the hiring of halls. The head of community engagement responded that this was not unknown but was often difficult to prove because of a lack of records.
- 6.7 The chair asked whether the vice-chair and he would be able to attend a meeting of the tenants halls working party. The head of community engagement indicated that he would raise this with Ian Ritchie, the chair of the working party.
- 6.8 The resident involvement senior manager briefed the sub-committee on the structures for engaging tenants and residents, including area housing forums, the tenants' and homeowners' councils and a number of working parties. He explained that the housing service also aimed to engage directly with residents, outside the formal structure, for instance the repairs service wanted to talk to young people on estates about improving security measures.
- 6.9 Members were concerned that the lists of TRAs and TMOs at the end of the response to the earlier scrutiny recommendations were incorrect and incomplete. Some organisations were missing and some were shown in the wrong wards. The chair asked for a revised list to be produced and circulated.
- 6.10 The chair asked whether officers felt that the structures for tenant engagement were working well. The resident involvement senior manager explained that it was always the case that some TRAs were in need of help and required a lot of support from officers. He commented that not all TRAs chose to take part in the formal structure and that a huge burden was placed on the small number of people who took part in the working parties. Members commented on a number of TRAs which had turned themselves around to become very successful in their wards. The resident involvement senior manager believed that the new recognition policy would help TRAs to change and to re-establish themselves. The head of community engagement stressed that there were a lot of good TRAs. The council needed to both support and improve the formal structures and to engage with residents outside the formal structure.

- 6.11 The chair asked what help was available to re-start failed TRAs. The resident involvement senior manager confirmed that effort was being made and that thirty-nine had been re-started. Support was available and included help to develop an action plan, raise interest, set up meetings, sort out bank accounts and to explain constitutional and governance issues.
- 6.12 Some members were concerned at the level of training and quality of staff and their ability to attend AGMs. The vice-chair reported difficulties in re-starting Draper TRA. The resident involvement senior manager explained that particular advice had been received from Southwark Anti-Social Behaviour Unit in respect of this TRA. The vice-chair stressed that this should be communicated to the residents trying to re-start the TRA.
- 6.13 The resident involvement senior manager explained that since the 2009 re-structure the focus of his team's work had been on those TRAs with problems while other TRAs were supposed to deal with housing management staff. Dissatisfaction more often arose where residents were not happy with the advice that the team gave rather than in cases where the team had failed to give advice. Some members remained concerned, for instance at the quality of advice given by officers at AGMs and at general levels of communication.
- 6.14 The chair thanked the two officers for their briefings and suggested the issue of dog fouling as another possible topic for a scrutiny review. He invited other members to put forward topics. The vice-chair proposed looking at the council's tree policy, specifically on housing estates and in the public realm. Other members suggested cycling routes, particularly where routes were not joined up, and the impact of the loss of the South London Line.
- 6.15 The sub-committee considered the various topics and potential cabinet member interviews and

RESOLVED:

1. That the following scrutiny reviews be undertaken during this municipal year:
 - TRA halls & bars
 - Trees policy on streets & estates
 - Tenant involvement structure
 - Cycling routes

2. That the following cabinet member interviews be undertaken during this municipal year:
 - Councillor Richard Livingstone, Community Safety
 - Councillor Ian Wingfield, Housing
 - Councillor Barrie Hargrove, Environment and Transport
3. That the sub-committee also receive quarterly breakdowns of numbers on the housing waiting list.

Meeting ended at 8.40 pm