

Housing, Community Safety and Community Engagement Scrutiny Commission

MINUTES of the OPEN section of the Housing, Community Safety and Community Engagement Scrutiny Commission held on Thursday 29 February 2024 at 7.00 pm at Ground Floor West Wing - 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

PRESENT: Councillor Sam Foster (Chair)
Councillor Emily Tester (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Ellie Cumbo
Councillor Jane Salmon
Councillor Barrie Hargrove
Councillor Esme Hicks
Councillor Victoria Mills
Cris Claridge (Co-opted member)
Ina Negoita (Co-opted member)

OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT:

Councillor Natasha Enin

OFFICER SUPPORT:

Amit Alva, Scrutiny Officer

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Bassey Bassey (Co-opted member).

Apologies for lateness were received from Councillor Victoria Mills.

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

There were no items of business which the Chair deemed urgent.

3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS.

Councillor Jane Salmon, Councillor Esme Hicks and Ina Negoita (Co-opted member) declared that they are leaseholder in a council block.

4. MINUTES

Minutes of the meeting held on 6 February 2024 were approved as a correct record.

5. ROUEL ROAD ESTATE - HEATING & HOT WATER OUTAGES

The commission first heard from Dave Hodgson on the following points

- Resident feedback on reports, 1 to 1 technical consultations on issues and review on the estate in terms of outage complaints, resident frustration with the call centre, 6 complaints outstanding on the estate
- Limitation of resources within housing, spread across repairs, building safety, fire safety etc., current officer structure (new team) have designed and delivered two new schemes in-house
- Impact of current schemes to residents and communication with residents (web-links in report), intrusive analysis of heat networks when compared to individual heating
- Over-riding success stories of heat networks globally, 70% heat networks in Russia, burning waste through SEL-CHIP network in Lewisham; £15m funding for heat pumps and successful examples in borough

The commission then asked questions on the following themes

- Quality of service, residents feeling ignored, Call Centre issues, Data monitoring in previous report misleading (6 February 2024) data shown over the course of whole estate not block wise data, granular data needed and communication with residents
- Use of data points from calls made by residents on individual properties; confirmation with residents whether issues has been fixed; Compensation for private renters through heat meters monitoring, currently payments going to leaseholders and landlords

The commission heard from Tom Vosper, Strategic Project Manager that the previous report only reported on block outages and not individual properties indicating the outages for the entire block. Furthermore, these issues are reported as resolved when the plant rooms and boiler rooms are fixed and individual

properties on the first floor can have airlocks, which would take longer for their heating to be restored. The council have installed heat meters at 1000 individual properties out of 17,000 properties in an effort to monitor temperatures and look at ways to provide compensation to individual properties which is currently only done on a block wise basis for 24 hours outages. Outages are also used to monitor contractors with target of having 99% availability across the borough. Improvements have been made over the last few years in heating availability, however the data being recorded has its limitations.

Tom explained to the commission that when individual properties are reported, the call centre would then contact other neighbouring residents to assess whether it's a block outage before sending in the engineers and raising job requests. Outages are reported on the communal outage website and text messages are sent to residents to inform them to allow up to 2 hours for heating to be restored after the outage has been fixed.

The commission also noted that the current data of outages block wise does hide the underlying issues with individual properties, using customer calling data to include individual properties in the reporting would be a more efficient way of reporting outages

The commission heard from Adrian that there is constant communication with the call centre every 4-5 hours on status of outages, efforts are also made to fix issues with air-locks in and around individual properties.

Dave explained to the commission that there a lot of human steps in the process of reporting and monitoring outages at the moment. It is important to note that heat meters require phone lines from BT and IT infrastructure dependent on other organisations. It would take the council 4-5 years if heat meter installations are to be carried out across the entire borough. The council is doing wider engagement with residents through Estate Action Days (repairs) and the Resident Improvement Boards.

The commission understood from Tom that it is unclear whether the council could make arrangements with private tenants for compensation from a legal standpoint as private tenants have their arrangement with their landlord and the council might not be able to intervene legally. However, the government has appointed the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets (Ofgem) as the regulatory authority for heat networks in 2024 with regulations (in effect 2025) providing statutory compensations and protection all users of the heat network.

The commission then asked further questions around the following themes

- Timeframe for improvement in better data collection of heating and hot water outages in individual properties; Call centre data to show customer initial contact, case studies of estates

- No reflection on changes in service within the report, success stories are resolution on repairs issues faced by residents; top 5 actions to resolve issues on Rouel road; answer to resident questions; 5 year plan for resolving issues
- Report of hot water up to 90 C in some properties, being too high according an independent engineer, leading to request for mixer taps; thermostats for individual properties

David explained to the commission that we are encouraging residents to use the hotline to report issues. Collating individual data and triangulation would show impact on individual resident experiences. Furthermore, that the director of asset management will be meeting with residents to discuss actions, resolve issues and answering questions at Rouel road. It is also important to note success stories in the report is a result of the in-house schemes delivered by the team and also that Rouel road estate heating network was setup much earlier.

Paul explained to the commission that thermostats are not applicable to all properties as it's a control valve and depends on the design of the property. As properties are improved thermostats can be fitted, design permitting, this would also mean temperature setting on individual radiators. With regards to hot water, based on design and needs of the estate, temperatures can be set between 70C - 120C from the boiler rooms, however residents need to inform the council if the water is too hot as adjustments can be made. Boiler rooms and plant rooms in estates being worked on are being fitted with modern controls, however a massive amount of investment is needed and this is a long term process.

Dave informed the commission that 85% of Southwark residents are living in tower blocks and buildings with many of them run my management organisations, and with regards to getting access to properties through court orders takes 8-10 weeks. There is added complexity and big scale of housing within Southwark and we still haven't managed to get back to pre-pandemic levels. Officers often have to make difficult decisions on which homes and estates would benefit from investment based on resident engagement and feedback.

The commission then asked further questions on the following topics

- Sustainability and existing issues with district heating networks and connection of new homes to the same network; age of piping issues in some estates
- OCO contract renewal; point 17 of report indicates delay in rolling out the heat strategy, pressures on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) causing further delays to heating system, pressure on resources within the team
- Strategic investment in homes and estates and HRA; urgency in resolving Rouel road estate issues; Call Centre process, issues raised by TRA chair

or Ward councillor directly results in jobs being raised via a different number; Individual outages being treated as communal outages and vice-versa

Tom explained to the commission that central and local governments are committed to low carbon emissions target by 2030, and it's easier to address green energy concerns with a central boiler supplying 200 homes rather than individual properties. There have been successful projects at Consort, Newham and Windham estates, funded from Mayor's energy efficiency funds to install green energy heat pumps sitting alongside existing gas boilers. On age of pipes the primary SEL-CHIP is connected to a lot of the new estates and pipework is new and has no outages reported; its complex if there are outages with branching pipework from the primary pipework to different estates, however there are temporary boilers that can be installed to ensure there is heating in the system.

Paul explained to the commission that OCO contract is up for renewal in March 2024, two year extension decision to go to Cabinet. There were some issues with performance within the OCO contract and after discussions with operational and senior managers an improvement plan has been put in place since January 2023. The commission learnt from Dave that previous contracts had fewer controls mechanisms and unsuitable to carry out the work efficiently, the newer proposed contracts have been divided into district heat network and individual heating giving council more options in terms of suppliers and contractors, issues with performance can be moved to other contractors giving flexibility. The industry in general is facing challenges in terms of apprenticeship funding, delay in heating strategy roll out is due to consideration of low carbon solutions. It is important to note that stepping back and investing in projects similar to SEL-CHIP will reduce planned maintenance works and reduce pressure on the HRA.

David explained to the commission that the HRA has shrunk due to high costs and rent caps, which has reduced by £40m as a result of the cost of living crisis and there was no central government funding to maintain the HRA. In addition enhanced safety regulations has diverted the focus, Budget Recovery Board (BRB) has been formed to recover budget deficits.

Paul explained to the commission that there was a request through repairs call group for TRA Chairs and Ward councillors to be given a separate number due to issues in contacting the call centre. If residents call in with individual outages and it turns out to be a communal outage, the response time could be doubled due to different engineer skillsets required.

The commission then asked further questions on the following topics

- Call centre waiting time of 45 times; pt. 11 of report indicates it's the responsibility to confirm with resident before closing the case.

The commission heard from Ade Aderemi, Contact Centre Manager who also distributed handouts (attached to minutes Appendix 1.) with some data

visualisations; a new repair waiting time is 3 minutes down from 30 minutes since April 2023, challenges are an average of 26,000 calls, with more calls during the winter. Initial calls made for repairs are assessed with diagnostic tools and with probing question; and appointments are made immediately, however fulfilment of those jobs lies with contractors. The reasons for long waiting on repeat callers are; job unattended by contractor, follow up job not done, tenant not updated about job etc., thus affecting waiting time in the customer journey. Residents are often persistent to receive updates on the call building up a queue behind them, while a real time update is sought from contractors. A pilot project for outbound calls to residents with existing repairs is working successfully, however there is an overwhelming number of calls. Day time calling in the contact centre has been extended from 8am to 8pm. Resource limitations make it incredibly challenging and also due to customer management system not being linked with contractor systems.

Paul informed the commission that issues and responsibility around confirming with residents on closing jobs will be discussed with contractors.

6. INTERVIEW WITH CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY SAFETY

The commission first heard from Councillor Enin on the following themes

- Regulatory services- licensing, night economy; Private Rented Sector (PRS) enforcements and licensing; report on PRS by Citizen advice and Generation rent, partnership working with diverse communities, more efficient licensing for building with multiple dwellings
- Food and Safety sector- delays due to the pandemic, bringing forward plans
- Commitment of £2m in Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) to increase community wardens targeting hotspots and dedicated patrolling, ASB team working with other organisations for drug use and rough sleeping (Calm Mediation and MOPAC).
- Working with police to address disproportionate impact on Black & Ethnic minority communities, women safety hotspots to benefit from £250m in funding to increase lighting by trimming trees and pruning bushes. CCTV operation to track harassment and Environmental Visual Audits in Peckham, Canada water, Tooley street etc. aiding the targeting of resources
- Women's safety survey to meet needs of all women, stakeholder engagement process and horizon scanning for major partners; Casey review resulted in council commitment and working on terms of reference on the police oversight board. Scrutiny to be consulted on the paper.

The commission then asked questions on the following topics

- Street robberies and injury and harm to residents, performance data from police; Facial recognition and mask wearing
- Women's safety mapping of lower CCTV coverage and low footfall areas, public realm investment; One women's safety centre to cover all the cases in the borough
- Trans people especially transwomen safety; Diversity within community safety team and community wardens to reflect the diverse demographic of Southwark

The commission heard from Councillor Enin that targeting resources in hotspots and live facial recognition is being used in such areas to deter and monitor street robberies which have increased according to data received by the police. Canada water has had specific problems.

Stephen explained to the commission that live facial recognition is very sophisticated works incredibly with masks as well, pictures that are not of missing or wanted people are pixelated and deleted within seconds and not stored in any way. Facial recognition on London Bridge has resulted in no robberies occurring and works well as a deterrent.

Councillor Enin explained to the commission that CCTV resources can be directed to areas where incidents have been reported, some mapping has been done and resources have been allocated in diverse communities with language barriers. Dimly lit areas and LED replacements are mapped as well. Public realm investment can be done and there are plans for it. The council are looking for a strategic partner to support all women in diverse communities and there are options for more than one women's safety centre.

Stephen informed the commission that there are other activities in the form of Through Your Eyes campaign and women's safety centre is one part of the strategy.

Councillor Enin explained that Southwark has a commitment towards being a Trans inclusive borough, the council is looking at service providers across without delineating any one group of women.

The commission learnt from Councillor Enin that on visiting different services within the council it is clear that black people are disproportionately in the lower levels of the corporate structure when compared to their male counterparts and also that this needs to be addressed through the council's Civic Leadership Program, mentoring future leaders through working relationships and commonalities.

Noise and Nuisance

The commission then heard from Councillor Enin on the following points

- Budget proposal on savings in Noise and Nuisance £90k/year; metrics on the service indicates high workload when compared to other London boroughs
- Mental health issues are significant and noise and nuisance teams often have to deal with such cases; some other issues are also related to medical emergencies such as a heart attack and the television being left on

The commission then asked questions on the following topics

- Decision taken on budget saving and its impact on the service- rise in complaints and legal duties; motivation behind proposed savings and the review which would lead to more officer time being utilised
- Consequences of the larger cut to the budget option; involvement of users in the redesign process of noise and nuisance; pt. 28 and 29 of report, responses/outcomes for users not included in categories of notices and prosecutions
- Data on tenancies and resulting actions due to noise and nuisance; council powers according to licensing schemes; accessibility and solutions for basic ways of communicating with residents; pg.24 of report assessing statutory noise and nuisance

Matt explained to the commission throughout the budgetary process it was concluded that it was unclear the impact that proposed savings could have on the provisions of the service. As a result, the proposal for savings has been included in 2025-2026 budgetary process to give officers enough time to measure the impact whilst working with customer service colleagues to review the service and improve the customer journey. The review will also look at safety of officers in attending these complaints and also looking at bottlenecks which could affect the savings proposals in 2025-2026. Savings option of £90k/year would result in reduction of service on weekends for 4 hrs, a total of 8 hrs reduction per week.

The commission heard from Matt that the motivation behind the proposal and review was to improve the customer journey and as a part of this process if savings can be made to make it a more efficient service. Improving the service to ensure resident satisfaction is the main concern to be addressed in this review.

Matt explained to the commission that there would be a significantly much larger impact on the service if the larger cut option was taken. A review of Southwark needs in Noise and Nuisance were compared to Councils smaller in size, it was revealed that industry standards would not be met, with regards to legal obligations.

Councillor Enin informed the commission that it is about raising awareness amongst residents and training officers to signpost them to the right service; engaging residents through TRA's and ward councillors with the right information pack with contacts.

Matt clarified in the report that Southwark has higher averages in calls for Noise and Nuisance across London, however Southwark serves a lot more people and responds to higher number calls and a significantly high percentage resulting in prosecutions.

Nick explained to the commission that as the data in the report indicates, during Covid courts were closed and prosecutions dropped off. Notices were served according to specific guidance from government. Noise and Nuisance teams have a statutory noise threshold which would then be classed as a legal action. Officers endeavour to give advice according to guidelines which doesn't necessarily result in a formal action.

Councillor explained to the commission that there is a recommendation to have a dedicated Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) officer.

Matt explained to the commission that the licensing scheme covers the property standards and the property being fit for purpose and does not cover tenant behaviours.

Councillor Enin explained to the commission that call centre is available for residents to complain about noise and nuisance, communication work with TRAs is also being done.

Matt informed the commission that statutory noise assessment occurs at the victim's property and investigates levels of noise as per an average person would experience. The team is reviewing, the process from the point of contact all the way through to when an outcome is reached.

7. WORK PROGRAMME 2023-2024

The Chair suggested that the contact centre element of heating and hot water outages be discussed at the upcoming meeting. However the commission agreed that the contact centre element would need a more elaborate and detailed session at a later date.

The commission agreed the following elements to be added to heating and hot water outages for the upcoming meeting.

- Strategic look at district heating network focusing on future strategy, improvement plans and delivery.

- Contract Management - Areas of weaknesses and planned improvements to the framework

Meeting ended at 9:47pm

CHAIR:

DATED: