



Housing Scrutiny Commission

MINUTES of the OPEN section of the Housing Scrutiny Commission held on Monday 28 July 2025 at 7.00 pm at Ground Floor Meeting Room G02A - 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

PRESENT: Councillor Jason Ochere (Chair)
Councillor Emily Tester (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Barrie Hargrove
Councillor Richard Livingstone
Councillor Catherine Rose
Councillor Jane Salmon
Bassey Bassey (Co-opted Member)
Ina Negoita (Co-opted Member)
Althea Smith (Co-opted Member)

**OTHER
MEMBERS
PRESENT:** Councillor Stephanie Cryan
Councillor Sam Dalton
Councillor Emily Hickson
Councillor Bethan Roberts
Councillor Kath Whittam

**OFFICER
SUPPORT:** Sarah Feasey, Head of Law
Adam Wood, Scrutiny Officer

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Ketzia Harper.

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

There were no late items of business.

3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

Councillor Emily Tester declared that the Kirby Estate which would be a subject of

discussion under items 5 and 6 was within her ward of North Bermondsey.

Ina Negoita declared an interest in items 5 and 6 of the agenda as she was a resident leaseholder of Devon Mansions. Ms Negoita did not take part in the meeting in her role as a non-voting co-opted member as she intended to present evidence to the Commission on the works at the Estate from a resident's perspective.

Councillor Richard Livingstone declared that he had attended a briefing on the Kirby Estate with Neil Coyle, MP, and officers.

4. MINUTES

The minutes of the Housing, Community Safety and Community Engagement Scrutiny Commission's meeting held on 22 April 2025 were noted.

Note: The remit of this new housing commission had substantially changed in the new municipal year hence the minutes were *noted* rather than *agreed*.

5. OUTCOME OF THE REVIEW OF THE CANADA ESTATE 2017/18, FAIR STREET/DEVON MANSIONS 2018/19 AND KIRBY ESTATE 2018/19 QHIP MAJOR WORKS PROJECTS

The Chair introduced the item by briefly explaining the background to the reports.

He then read out a written submission from the Leader which stated (in summary):

- the poor management of works led to unacceptable outcomes for tenants and leaseholders
- the Leader apologised on behalf of the Council for the sub-standard works
- while Cabinet Member for Council Homes, she had introduced new processes for contract management and works oversight in response to the issues found
- engagement with tenants and leaseholders had also been reviewed and a new senior management team appointed
- she would work to rebuild trust between the council and affected tenants and leaseholders

The Chair then invited Ward Councillors Sam Dalton and Emily Hickson for London Bridge and West Bermondsey to address the Commission in respect of Fair Street / Devon Mansions.

The ward councillors reported:

- the length of time for which residents were let down and failed to get answers to their questions about the works

- the significant time required for the investigations to begin and to be completed
- the investigations focused on four key areas including the cost of the works, the poor quality of works and their risks, communications with residents, and the Council's performance
- the aims of the investigations were for residents to pay only for works completed to a high standard and to receive answers as to why works went over budget, over time and were of poor quality
- that Council promises to residents that they would have advance sight of the reports under discussion were not fulfilled because of their delayed publication

The ward councillors made a number of recommendations regarding the processes and structures through which residents could have greater input into and scrutiny over works before, during and after their delivery. They also recommended improvements to the process for inspecting and signing off works still outstanding or deemed not to be completed to the appropriate quality.

Subsequently, Ward Councillors Stephanie Cryan, Bethan Roberts and Kath Whittam for Rotherhithe addressed the Commission in respect of the Canada Estate, reporting that:

- many of their experiences and those of residents matched those reported by the Councillors for London Bridge and West Bermondsey
- the Pellings' report (and work processes leading to it) for the Canada Estate did not seem to match the insight provided in the Devon Mansions report
- detail contained within some recommendations needed to be attended to e.g. around the commitment to monitor the brick work on low rise buildings every two years (amongst others)
- challenges remained around how leaseholders could be protected from paying for substandard/incomplete work whilst also ensuring that tenants were similarly protected from subsidising those works through their contributions to the Housing Revenue Account
- ongoing issues remained about the cleaning of windows (e.g. safety and responsibility for cleaning)
- the standard of work for the new windows was poor and a new contractor should be appointed to make good all defects as a matter of priority
- the contractor's self-certification of works for windows was not enough to ensure their effective installation
- the officer leading the Task and Finish Team had been extremely helpful

Three residents who had previously spoken about the works to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee were invited to speak to the reports' findings.

Mr Barry Duckett (Chair of Canada Estate TRA) spoke first, highlighting:

- the original design intention for the windows was that they could be cleaned by residents via access to their balconies
- that earlier and more thorough engagement with residents by Pellings could have led to a more useful report
- that an earlier response to resident concerns could have prevented issues developing

Next, Mr Michael Robertson, local resident of Canada Estate, gave his views, reporting that:

- residents were frustrated with the Council failing to listen to and act on their representations
- since the departure of a number of senior officers from the Housing department, more information had been shared and residents were able to learn more about the failings in the works processes
- the rejection of requests for information amounted, in two cases, to obstruction of statutory disclosure

Ms Ina Negoita, local resident of Devon Mansions, closed the resident input part of the meeting, stating that:

- the information sought often required FoI requests for it to be provided
- poor governance, overspend and resident inconvenience resulted from lack of oversight, for example, scaffolding was up for nine months without significant work being carried out, and despite this, automatic payments were being made to contractors without checks on whether works had been completed
- contractor worklogs were missing
- residents obtained the services of an independent surveyor who identified only 11% of claimed, paid works actually existed, and that this had been communicated to the Council
- £2.1m of payments to the TMO over 20 years for internal works on Devon Mansions were not completed leading to further frustrations when the Council rejected calls to investigate and to refund residents' expenditure on external surveyor advice
- the TMO's closure with debt meant a loss to the HRA of £1.3m

Ms Negoita asked that:

- management culture change to increase its regard for accountability and that officers follow the Council's policies more closely, in particular, "Putting Residents First"
- a resident-officer working group be organised to develop a strategy for Devon Mansions (internally and externally)

- the quarterly Resident Panel Meetings be continued
- issues where fire safety compliance is in doubt be prioritised

The Chair then invited the Strategic Director of Housing, Hakeem Osinaike, and officers Ryan Collymore, Paul Murtagh and Syeed Kadir to present the reports.

Paul Murtagh (Interim Design Delivery Manager) who had led the Task and Finish Team conducting the Council's internal review into the major works projects introduced the report. He advised that the review sought to find out if anything had gone wrong in the delivery of the three projects and, if so, to identify lessons useful for avoiding similar issues in the future.

Paul expressed his thanks to residents for his many meetings with them and sharing their concerns about the works. He reported that he had also spoken to the consultants and contractors, and the resulting review identified 30 recommendations which Paul recapped. He also linked the actions around recommendations to work already underway to improve contracts and processes around works oversight.

Ryan Collymore (Director of Repairs and Maintenance) apologised on behalf of the Council for failing tenants and leaseholders on the three estates. He advised that the Council's preference was to ensure contractors do the work they were paid to do rather than issue refunds for poor quality work or work not carried out, however, the Council was prepared to speak with leaseholders on an individual basis about refunds.

Syed Kadir (Interim Assistant Director of Planned Maintenance) explained how they were integrating lessons learned from the reviews into the Consort Estate works, citing examples of meetings with the TRA and Leaseholder representatives, attended also by ward councillors. These had brought down the costs of the works planned. Monthly progress meetings with the contractor where TRA representatives are present to communicate concerns have also been initiated.

Hakeem Osinaike (Strategic Director of Housing) apologised both for the quality of the works and the time taken for the findings to be published. He assured the Commission that the lessons learned were being put into place.

Before opening to questions from Commission members, the Chair expressed that Cabinet should be recommended to act on the findings made and to provide a timeline of actions identifying when recommendations will be addressed.

The Commission members then asked officers questions and made broader comments including:

- what a clear process for escalating disputes between residents and those taking part in the project might look like. Officers recounted improved

relations as a result of applying the lessons learned from the reviews to the new works on the Consort Estate. It was then requested by the Commission that a process known to all parties should be established in addition to applying more broader lessons

- whether the new governance structures would recalibrate the Housing department as intended and how the rest of the Council might support the work of the Housing department – Officers advised that there was a range of accountability and governance structures capable of securing better outcomes (e.g. upwards from new governance and accountability structures being put in place by the Director of Repairs and Maintenance in their Directorate to the Strategic Director's Housing Improvement Board, the Chief Executive's Housing Assurance Board and the Strategic Housing Oversight Board chaired by the Leader of the Council)
- that work within budgetary processes would be useful to establish what monies might be clawed back from contractors
- that trust needed to be rebuilt not just between residents and elected representatives but between those representatives and officers so that scrutiny and challenge are conducted in a context of accurate and transparent information
- why the internal review explored works across three estates – Officers advised that individual investigations were carried out but these showed the problems found were broadly similar hence one review report was the most appropriate structure to highlight types of issue
- why other major works projects in the QHIP programme which also suffered from overspend and poor quality works were not investigated

There followed a discussion among members on the Commission's next steps. Proposals included:

- whether the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as the originating body for these investigations should continue to have a role in their resolution
- creating an inter-ward forum to share lessons and concerns among Councillors and facilitate escalation (where necessary)
- that the Commission make recommendations during the meeting which could be fine-tuned afterwards, if necessary, with the intention that Cabinet be presented with the information needed at the earliest opportunity

Subsequent discussion explored potential draft recommendations. It was agreed that these would be refined by the scrutiny officer for the meeting and then sent to the Commission for final confirmation. The recommendations set out below are the confirmed Commission recommendations to cabinet.

RESOLVED:

1. That Cabinet consider and agree the recommendations set out in:

- the Council's Task and Finishing Team's (TFT) *Internal Review of the Canada Estate (Phase 2) 2017/18 QHIP Major Works Project, Fair Street/Devon Mansions 2018/19 QHIP Major Works Project and the Kirby Estate 2018/19 QHIP Major Works Project*
- Pellings' *Review of Works Project for the Quality Homes Investment Programme - Canada Estate*
- Pellings' *Review of Works Project for the Quality Homes Investment Programme - Fair Street / Devon Mansions*

2. That the individual ward member recommendations presented to the commission, and other additional recommendations as a result of their reading the report and what they heard at the meeting, be included in the report from scrutiny to cabinet.
3. That Cabinet ensure more information on works and their costings is shared with residents before and during the works taking place.
4. That Cabinet assess whether there are sufficient Council skills and workforce expertise needed for effective oversight of major works, and build skills and capacity in these areas.
5. That in connection with recommendation 11 of the action plan (breakdown in communications between residents and LBS Project Team) a clear escalation process be established for where there are disputes between residents and officers, so that both parties know how to raise disputes and how they will be resolved.
6. That Cabinet ensure that automatic payments to contractors do not happen without a Contract and without Gateway 3 reports being approved.
7. That Members have training or updates on the revised processes around Statutory Disclosure.
8. That residents be required to pay only for works completed and to a high standard.
9. That information on the quality of work completed at LBS or other councils by contractors bidding in new tender processes have greater weight in contract-awarding decisions.
10. That the management response to Recommendation 21 of the TFT review not be limited to developing a Code of Conduct for TRAs but also undertake the 'deep dive' audit into the relationships between, and conduct of, residents and officers as per the TFT recommendation.
11. That Cabinet eliminate the possibility that fraud occurred in the interests of transparency.

12. That a Ward Councillor forum be created to share learning and/or concerns about works, which is facilitated by Senior Housing Officers and Housing Cabinet Member.
13. That quarterly Residents' Panel Meetings be established.

6. MANAGEMENT RESPONSE TO THE OUTCOME OF THE REVIEW OF THE CANADA ESTATE 2017/18, FAIR STREET/DEVON MANSIONS 2018/19 AND KIRBY ESTATE 2018/19 QHIP MAJOR WORKS PROJECTS

This item was considered in conjunction with Item 5. See item 5 above for decision.

7. HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMISSION WORK PROGRAMME 2025-2026

This item was deferred due to the lateness of the hour.

Meeting ended at 9.58pm.

CHAIR:

DATED: