

Housing and Community Safety Scrutiny Commission

MINUTES of the OPEN section of the Housing and Community Safety Scrutiny Commission held on Thursday 13 April 2023 at 7.00 pm at Ground Floor Meeting Room G02A - 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

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

**OTHER
MEMBERS
PRESENT:**

Councillor Darren Merrill

**OFFICER
SUPPORT:** Amit Alva, Scrutiny Officer

1. APOLOGIES

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

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.

There were no disclosure of interests and dispensations.

4. MINUTES

Minutes of the meeting held on 15 February 2023 were approved as a correct record.

5. COUNCIL SUPPORT FOR RESIDENT-LED HOUSING MEETINGS- PROCESS IMPROVEMENTS

The commission first heard from Councillor Darren Merrill and Cheryl Russell on the lessons learnt from the recent resident-led housing meeting

- High number of residents were in attendance; Cabinet member and officers are working with Chairs of forums to identify issues and setting agenda suitably, given the size of the meetings; Council's role to facilitate and provide officer support whilst giving the freedom to the Chairs to guide the meeting through the process.
- Upcoming rent setting meeting to be managed thoroughly to ensure residents can provide their input in a methodical way.
- Senior officers, Directors and Cabinet member attending agenda planning meetings with Chair to help inform the agenda setting; Ideal location and style of meetings needs some thought.
- On interaction with residents, officers made a note and responded to all individual case work from identified residents except anonymous ones.
- Planning and preparation of rent setting meetings scheduled in the diary to be carefully managed without any predetermination of issues and questions.
- Subsequent resident meetings held in early April 2023 were successful in terms of engagement, dialogue and officer support and presentations.

The commission then asked questions around the following points

- Council's plans to ensure the focus of these meetings is not only on repairs and other items on the agenda are also discussed.
- Chairmanship and proper representation; revisiting the structure of resident engagement meetings.
- Leaseholders and tenants that attended the meeting focused mainly on repairs and rent setting was not properly discussed.
- Updates on the resident engagement strategy from the Environment and Community Engagement Scrutiny commission
- Reengaging residents that were dissatisfied at the last resident-led meeting

Councillor Merrill explained to the commission that Chairs' would be guided in legislative matters with the running of the meetings especially in terms of proper and fair representation from area forums, with the hope of bringing in more strategic items on the agenda. The commission also heard from Councillor Merrill that it is important that we review the structure with focus on feedback from grass roots level upwards to ensure fair and proper representation from residents.

Cheryl informed the commission that officers are working on identifying issues that would ensure more engagement and participation across the borough. Different areas and their local issues need to be considered when planning any engagement as some areas might require quick action as opposed to others.

Councillor Merrill informed the commission that residents being unable to get more help from the council on repairs issues has been a source of frustration. On reviewing the engagement strategy, the commission learnt that the Environment and Community Engagement Scrutiny Commission is working on recommendations which would take into account any future updates to the strategy.

The commission then learnt from Nat Stevens that out of the approximately 400 residents that attended the meeting, 41 did not provide any contact details, 7 residents are in the process of engagement and 5 residents having outstanding issues haven't received a complete response yet due to the complex nature of their repair issues. Hybrid meetings do create issues with getting contact details for residents with specific issues due to different user names that don't reflect their correct names etc. however, all the residents that attended had been invited to attend through the Council's resident contact database.

6. HOUSING REPAIRS SERVICE OVERALL STRATEGY REVIEW INCLUDING CONTACT CENTRE REPEATED CALLS (MULTIPLE FAILURES)

The commission then heard from Dave Hodgson, Ade Aderemi and Marc Cook on the following topics

- Repairs Improvement Plan looking granularly at issues within the repairs process along with resident engagement and feedback to come up with a Repairs Action Plan
- Uniqueness of Southwark's housing stock with 85% of homes in flats which is 50,000 homes; 70% of repair issues are water related such as floor ingress, roof leaks, heating leak, bath overflows etc. making it quite complex to diagnose
- Scope of plans have been broadened to include leaseholders who are affected by issues from resident homes and other communal repairs
- Housing Quality Network (HQN) independently selected organisation who are reviewing the repairs service in detail; implementing their findings in the

HQN report into the wider repairs improvement plan.

- Repairs improvement workload grown substantially due to influx of the government led complaints service on damp and mould.
- Need for resources that are qualified to carry out repairs, Council funding issues.
- Resident Board meetings which includes tenant forums dealing with issues on the repairs agenda
- Recruitment of multi-trade operatives as 85% of operatives are single trade and residents are frustrated due to multiple visits require to repair a complex case; Dedicated teams for mould and damp.
- Update to Housing data and work management systems and IT Systems throughout the service; Leaflets with QR codes leading to the repairs website, reporting repairs by taking pictures through the website, text messaging for repair scheduling
- Using Power Business Intelligence (BI) for smart monitoring of asset management data through extrapolating data on homes, buildings and estates to identify common issues.
- Estate action days based on resident feedback, supplying residents with hydrometers for damp and mould measurements
- 200% rise in repairs cases from November 2022 onwards
- Repairs service working together with Asset Management in developing a pro-active and preventive approach to repairs by bringing the service, engagement and feedback mechanisms to residents, Tenants and Residents Association (TRAs).
- Covid backlog of repairs has been now completed

The commission then asked question on the following themes

- Multiple failures as a part of the repairs improvement plan
- Repairs improvement plan, first time fixes metrics, HQN report time lines
- Damp and mould team successes, supply change and liaison council contact for managing estate agents
- Issues with recruitment policies, pay scale and resourcing
- Working mechanism between Asset Management and Repairs, proactive maintenance or preventive maintenance

Dave informed the commission that multiple failures or calls are a result of single trade operatives having to visit the same home due to the complex nature of the

repair and variety of skills required, such repairs often lead to frustration for the resident as repairs might only be half way through to completion in the first visit. Telematics on operative vehicles is due to be introduced to track operatives in real time and match operatives to repair jobs in the community based on their location. Operatives are being continuously trained in variety of issues faced such as pest control issues during repairs, operatives have to contact their supervisors to report the reasons for not completing a job, residents are then notified by text and phone calls.

Dave explained to the commission that first time fixes are at 70-75% with a target of 90-95%, improvement expected when more multi trade operatives are employed. On HQN the commission learnt that the final report is expected in the next few days and will be made public including Southwark's response to recommendations in the report with target dates for implementation.

On Damp and Mould team the commission heard from Marc Cook, Customer Journey Lead that inspection visits are carried out within 5 days and followed up within 30 days. There is a backup supply chain bringing in damp and mould surveyors from the market. Liaison council officers do contact estate agents in managing properties.

Dave explained to the commission that the corporate elements such as policies, resourcing and pay scales have to be discussed with HR and unions to protect existing staff force as well as hiring new staff, IT systems are a cause for frustration with the technological advancements planned in the repairs service. Asset management is working with repairs to analyse estates in a holistic way with regards to its needs and issues. There are also plan to have an Area Repairs Manager working with TRA's and resident managers. Data led approach such as stock condition surveys of housing stock and appropriate funding measures which would be important steps in reaching a stage where proactive and preventive maintenance can be carried out.

Dave informed the commission that there is a need to lobby government to have greater access to grants and funding, considering Southwark's unique position and the lack of a funding structure.

The commission then heard from Ade Aderemi on the contact centre and customer operations around the following points.

- 50% of all calls are repairs issues; repeat calling mainly due to Covid and subsequent avoidable contact, chasing existing jobs from backlogs
- Contact centre staff carry out a basic diagnosis, code it appropriately on the system and pass it on to the fulfilment team, they do not control the repair contractors or operatives
- Contact centre agents sometimes spend 40 minutes on a call with repeat callers to chase contractors on the second line to get an update on their repair work, majority of repeat calls are a result of the repair works that

could not be carried out during Covid and have now resulted in multiple repairs

- Repair contractors are inundated with repair jobs over the winter months; from the third week of March a tenant liaison team has been setup in the contact centre to record details of repair issues and calling back customers with resolutions thus freeing up the lines for new repairs and other calls. This has brought the average waiting time down from 20mins to 2mins and 14s.
- Call Answer rate is at 89% and corporately target for Service Level Agreement (SLA) is 75%, however SLA Levels are at 77%; 94.5% of 2,269 calls for chasing repair works have been fulfilled by the repairs team.
- Call monitoring process has indicated that complaints are always unrelated to call handling. Currently repeat callers account for 42% and a potential target would be to reduce this further in the repairs improvement plan.

The commission then asked questions on the following themes

- IT System- Fit for purpose
- Clear communication and sign posting to residents from contact centre agents
- Omni channel

Ade explained to the commission there is much needed improvement to the IT service which is shared with two other Local Authorities and there is a need for the contact centre IT services and its issues to be prioritised.

Marc and Ade explained to the commission that in quarterly meetings clear procedures and signposting details are shared with contact centre agents for the benefit of customers and also that the Interactive Voice Recognition (IVR) System informs the customer of quicker ways to report issues and queries online whilst waiting on a call.

Ade informed the commission that Omni channel is used to understand and customise the delivery of services for the customer, this is achieved by tracking the customer journey through different channels such as face to face, online, telephone and web chat. Omni channel is based on the fundamental of 'digital by design and accessible by choice' where customer is tracked through a unique identifier on the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) platform. Omni channel is part of the new repairs service strategy where it looks at all channels of resident communication including the elderly and disabled people who often use the voice channel.

7. FINALISING SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATIONS

The commission then discussed the following draft recommendations circulated in writing at the meeting

Housing

- 1) That the Cabinet set a clear target for the housing repairs contact centre to reduce multiple failures which lead to repeat calls by the end of the year 2023-2024 and collect data on causes and recurring themes.
- 2) That the Cabinet update the Repairs Improvement Plan to include a commitment to pro-active maintenance as a part of its *new Asset Management Strategy* and also that repairs improvement targets are reviewed quarterly.
- 3) *That the Cabinet review the funding for resources in the repairs service to ensure the right levels of staffing and also endeavour to provide fit for purpose IT systems such as the integrated Customer Relationship Management (CRM) platform to fulfil the aspirations in the new Asset Management Strategy and the Repairs Improvement Plan. (New recommendation derived from discussions at the meeting, subject to review by the Chair and commission members)*
- 4) That the Cabinet ensure that there is clear and transparent communication with Council leaseholders on decisions to undertake repair works, including value for money, and also set out a clear process for Council leaseholders to challenge estimations and requirements of major works through complaint and escalation procedures; *and also ensure that this process is widely understood and publicised through all resident communication channels.*
- 5) That the Cabinet commit to ensuring that all service charges statements and specifications of works will be written in plain English by the end of the year 2023-24, and that appropriate training of officers is in place to support this.
- 6) That the Cabinet ensure that appropriate residents' organisations have the access to audit major repair works and that this is a key component of the repairs review processes.
- 7) That the Cabinet carry out quarterly reviews and assessments of major repair works, especially with regards to competency, quality, value for money, timely

completion and resident feedback, and make this information available to ward councillors and residents' associations.

- 8) That the Cabinet include empty homes on the agendas for meetings held with housing associations with more than 1000 units from the start of the year 2023-24.

Community Safety

- 1) That the Cabinet prioritise the delivery of the Women's Safety Centre, aiming to launch a consultation with relevant voluntary sector organisations in the borough within the year 2023-24.
- 2) That the Cabinet Member for Community Safety work with the Metropolitan Police, Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime and the voluntary sector to establish enhanced collection of data on sex-related hate crime and non-hate crime incidents, including how this intersects with the other protected characteristics in the borough of Southwark and that the data from these reports is reviewed annually.
- 3) That the Cabinet Member for Community Safety liaise with the Metropolitan Police, Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime and the voluntary sector to ensure that feedback is routinely collected from victims of domestic and sexual violence and child abuse about their experience of the police, in line with the findings of The Baroness Casey Review.

8. WORK PROGRAMME 2022-2023

The Work Programme 2022-2023 was noted by the commission.

Meeting ended at 9:16 pm

CHAIR:

DATED: