

<b>Meeting Name:</b>	Cabinet
<b>Date:</b>	22 July 2024
<b>Report title:</b>	Report of the Housing, Community Safety and Community Engagement Scrutiny Commission: Review of Housing Allocations, Homelessness, and Heating & Hot Water Outages, Fire Safety and Policing in Southwark
<b>Lead Member:</b>	Councillor Sam Foster, Chair, Housing, Community Safety and Community Engagement Scrutiny Commission
<b>Ward(s) or groups affected:</b>	All
<b>Classification:</b>	Open
<b>Reason for lateness (if applicable):</b>	NA

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That cabinet note the recommendations from the housing, community safety and community engagement scrutiny commission arising from the scrutiny review of Housing Allocations, Homelessness, and Heating & Hot Water Outages, Fire Safety and Policing in the Borough of Southwark, paragraphs 16 to 30.
2. That cabinet request that the relevant cabinet member reports back to cabinet on the recommendations within eight weeks.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3. On 5 October 2023 the Housing and Community Safety Scrutiny Commission was decommissioned, and its remit was amended to include Community Engagement. For the purposes of this report, meetings up to the above date are referred to by the previous name of the commission.
4. At its first meeting on 13 July 2023, the commission reviewed the Housing Allocations and Lettings Policy for council homes and housing associations. The commission received a presentation from Deputy Cabinet Member, Councillor Leo Pollak on the housing crisis and evolution of the scheme, a refresh of the housing allocation scheme, homelessness, temporary accommodation (TA), overcrowding, the lettings system and the chain maximising approach to lettings.
5. At its meeting on 12 October 2023, the commission received a report from Strategic Project Manager on Compensations Scheme for heating outages, covering automated compensations, outages, heating system reliability and

the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets (Ofgem) policy for compensation.

6. At its meeting on 14 December 2023, the commission received a background paper from the Cabinet Member for New Homes and Sustainable Development and Program Manager for housing on the fundamentals of the homelessness strategy, and also discussed homelessness data, Home Office discharges, a consultation on draft strategy, Equality Impact Assessments (EIA), IT investment and accommodation capacity.
7. At the same meeting, the commission heard from representatives from partner organisations: the Senior Housing Liaison Officer/Housing Lead at Guy's And St. Thomas' Hospital Homeless Health Team; the St. Mungo's Southwark SPOT & SPOT Navigator Manager; and the Chair of the Southwark Homeless Forum and Director of the Southwark Law Centre. The discussion covered the homelessness forum, access to services, Council referral contacts, security procedures, joint protocol with council, complex needs support, vulnerable people, forms and assessments, evictions, rough sleepers, Accident and Emergency services (A&E), mental health issues and drug and alcohol abuse.
8. At the same meeting, the housing, community safety and community engagement scrutiny commission heard from the Borough Command Unit (BCU) Commander for Southwark and Acting Chief Inspector on policing in Southwark. The discussion encompassed London MET reform, the Baroness Casey Review, community policing, resident feedback, neighbourhood policing, PCSOs in wards, policing structure, robberies and theft snatches, Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) and drug dealing; Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG); systemic issues within the National Policing Service (NPS) such as racism, misogyny and homophobia; and community trust and the Met's confidence improvement plan.
9. At its meeting on 6 February 2024 the commission heard from ward councillors and residents at the Rouel Road estate on heating and hot water outages including; severe outages in winter, previous action plans, incongruence of data, communication issues, repeated calls, maintenance issues, performance of repairs and contract management.
10. At the same meeting the commission also interviewed the Cabinet Member for Council Homes and also heard from the interim Strategic Director for Housing covering resident issues, investment, sustainability, challenges, contract monitoring, accountability, compensations, resident satisfaction, repairs data interrogation, Resident Improvement Board, communal repairs and repairs performance.
11. At its meeting on 29 February 2024, the commission continued to look at the heating and hot water outages on the Rouel Road Estate. It received a report from the Director of Asset Management, Head of Engineering, Gas and Water contracts manager, Strategic project manager, Contact Centre Manager and supported by the Interim Strategic Director for Housing and

Contractors (OCO & BSW). The address to the commission covered 1-to-1 consultation with residents, limitations of resources, delivery of in-house schemes, intrusive analysis of heat networks, SEL-CHIP networks, call centre processes/waiting times, heat pumps, data interpretation in report, issues with reporting, contractor monitoring, contract mechanisms and contract renewals.

12. At the same meeting, the commission interviewed the Cabinet Member for Community Safety, and also heard from Director of Stronger Neighbourhoods, Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Nuisance Service Manager. The commission also received a report on noise and nuisance and in addition the following points were covered: regulatory services licensing, night-time economy; private rented sector (PRS) enforcements and licensing; partnership working, food and safety sector, anti-social behaviour (ASB); Calm Mediation and Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC); disproportionate impact on Black & Ethnic minority communities, women safety hotspots, Environmental Visual Audits, women's safety survey and Police Oversight Board.
13. At its meeting on 21 March 2024 the commission interviewed the Borough Fire Commander and received statistics on fire incidents, rise of incidents by 4% in property fires, secondary fires in rubbish bins etc. down by 12%; in addition fire safety work and public messaging, care home fire safety intervention, home fire safety visits, deliberate fires (arson), fire safety checks in commercial properties (shops & dwellings), high rise buildings - risk profiles and visits, e-bike fires; community engagement for fire safety, borough risk management plan, HMO safety checks and working with ward councillors.
14. At the same meeting, the commission received a report and an address from Strategic Director for Housing, Strategic Project Manager, Head of Engineering and the Gas and Contracts Manager on district heating and hot water outages. The following points were covered sustainability of heat networks compared to individual heating systems, feasibility studies, cost effectiveness, compensation payments for block outages and individual property outages, site-by-site availability statistics, contractor penalty fines, risks with new technologies and reliability of older heating network systems. In addition, the following points were covered: procurement of new contracts, and hiring more contractors to provide more options in providing the service.
15. The commission considered and agreed the set of recommendations at its meeting on 21 March 2024. The rationale and commission recommendations are set out in paragraphs 16 to 30.

## **KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION**

Set out below are the recommendations of the housing and community engagement scrutiny commission.

## Housing Allocations Policy

16. The commission appreciates the novel approach to the Housing Allocations Scheme refresh; housing mobility schemes; right-sizing action plan in the current offer which includes bespoke offers, mutual exchange platforms, promotional campaigns and £1,000/room incentives. The commission discussed in detail the pilot of chain maximising approach to lettings, based on detailed data of homes needed and also the ones vacated. The commission noted the analytical approach to lettings, and also enhancing the offer for under occupiers.
17. The commission also acknowledged that a pilot project's success can only be assessed once it's implemented. However, the commission agreed that any pilot project and especially one that is complex and technical in nature needs clear targets and key performance indicators to gauge its success. Furthermore, these success criteria should be based on quantitative analysis of performance and resident satisfaction measures. The commission also discussed risks associated with this new approach, where in a tenant move could fail after it has been completed, due to the changing family circumstances and repairs related issues. The commission agreed that this could be measured by tenant satisfaction surveys.

**Recommendation 1-** That the Cabinet ensure a clear set of success criteria for the Housing Allocations scheme and lettings policy before they are finalised, with details on how these will be measured. This should include not only quantitative analysis of how the scheme is helping to meet housing need in the borough, but should also include post-move tenant satisfaction surveys to ensure the council is able to monitor tenants' views and experiences. Also, that the Cabinet make a clear plan to monitor and audit this data regularly. This should happen within the municipal year 2024-2025.

18. The commission also noted the objectives of the housing allocations refresh, reducing under-occupancy and overcrowding and higher volume of lets by reducing the turnaround times of void homes, which could result in savings in temporary accommodation. The commission also agreed that the Cabinet should explore policy changes for dealing with under-occupancy by encouraging private landlords of second homes, holiday homes and Airbnbs', with incentives for long term renting.

**Recommendation 2-** That in the review of the Housing Allocations scheme and Lettings policy, Cabinet improves incentives for residents and communication of the Rightsizing scheme, to address under-occupancy through increased uptake of the scheme, within the municipal year 2024-2025.

## Homelessness

19. The commission understood from addresses of the partner organisations collectively, that there is an overwhelming need to reinstate the post of

Hospital Discharge Housing Officer. A single point of contact is essential to ensure a quick response time for most vulnerable rough sleepers. Furthermore, current processes for referrals involve emailing a large group of officers, resulting in a loss of time and resources for the council, and causing detriment to homeless people. The commission agrees that the Council should recognise the importance and significance of a single point of contact, and the positive impact it can have on the lives of the homeless with regards to the response time. The commission understands from officers that a single point of contact is being considered in the draft strategy and hopes the recommendation below will bolster the support for it.

**Recommendation 3-** That the Cabinet reinstate the post of the Hospital Discharge Housing Officer (as a single point of contact); and also that the Cabinet do this immediately after the adoption of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy by the Council.

20. The commission noted the concerns of the Chair of the Homeless Forum that only 30% of callers to Bournemouth Road are getting through to the service, and that these are also the most vulnerable rough sleepers. The commission also noted that the current drop-in process at Bournemouth Road on page 61 of the draft strategy requires vulnerable people to speak through the foyer, between two closed doors guarded by a security guard. The commission understands that this is to ensure security of council staff, however this process is invasive and impersonal especially when dealing with cases of Domestic Abuse (DA) and sexual exploitation.
21. The commission also gathered from partner organisations the difficulty they face when trying to access services for the most vulnerable people, including rough sleepers, substance abuse (drug and alcohol), ex-offenders, victims of domestic abuse and sexual exploitation, women, LGBTQ+ communities and refugees being discharged from Home Office accommodation. Partner agencies are key in providing support to these cohorts and it is important that the partner organisations have a separate escalation process and contact number for appointments.
22. In addition the commission also heard from partners that the current Joint Protocol for working with partners is ineffective; the partners raised issues with contacting the council, a lack of timely responses and an overall lack of engagement with the housing options team. The commission feels that there is a strong need to investigate and address these issues. The partners also informed the commission that same day assessments take four weeks to process and it was also noted that officers were unaware of this specific issue. Furthermore, there are also issues in other areas such as long waiting times, flagging cases, updating forms and documentations and IT processes. The commission felt that a part of the issue can be attributed to the existing IT infrastructure which could be improved with some investment.

**Recommendation 4-** That the Cabinet in reviewing its Draft Homelessness Strategy include the recommendations below as a part of the feedback for

the consultation, which includes the following points:

- An improved, less invasive drop-in process at Bournemouth Road for homeless people, with easier in-person security and access procedures to council buildings/offices when dealing with domestic abuse and sexual exploitation victims.
- Separate escalation process and telephone contact numbers for partner agencies to book appointments.
- Resolution of the issues faced in the joint protocol working between partner agencies and the housing options team when working with refugee and asylum cases.
- Investment in better IT infrastructure, especially with regards to flagging same-day assessments, waiting times, updating forms, documentation and processes.

### **Heating and Hot Water Outages**

23. The commission heard in great detail from ward Councillors and residents of the Rouel Road estate the immense hardships they faced in dealing with the severe heating and hot water outages since 2016. According to this evidence, issues arose after the upgrades to the heating systems at Rouel Road and previous action plans made with the council to resolve issues had not been implemented. The commission also noted issues with communication especially long call waiting times, repeated calls, incomplete repairs, planned maintenance works and incongruence of data in officer reports and resident experiences.
24. The commission was also addressed by officers in response to the above issues explaining that the long call waiting times of 40 minutes at the contact centre is due to existing repairs, all new repairs are answered in 3 minutes. Existing repairs take longer to handle as staff endeavour to get real time updates from contractors. Furthermore, that current reporting methods rely on data from plant rooms and boiler rooms; individual properties data which is challenging to report as individual heat meters need to be fitted, design permitting. In addition, installation of heat meters rely on other organisations such as British Telecom for phone lines and internet access. Officers also noted that regular maintenance and pipework is carried out at Rouel Road. The commission also noted the success of the deliveries of in-house schemes at other estates and also that Rouel Road estate upgrade happened prior to these new schemes.
25. However, the commission is clear that there is an urgent need for the Cabinet to review issues and provide solutions to the residents at Rouel Road. Furthermore, the commission also agrees that the maintenance of just plant rooms and boiler rooms is not sufficient, confirming with residents who have reported issues is paramount. In addition, the commission is also clear that current compensation scheme payments, paid only for block outages are not adequate. The commission also agrees that going forward it is important that contractors at Rouel Road are closely monitored on their KPIs.

26. Evidence from ward councillors and residents demonstrated that reporting within housing repairs (heating and hot water outages) suffers from the lack of granular data in individual properties. The council in its oversight of repairs reporting should look at individual properties repairs within the contact centre data to get a clearer picture of the issues across the borough.

**Recommendation 5-** That the Cabinet urgently commission officers to review the heating and hot water outages at Rouel Road Estate to make an action and delivery plan to address the problems, including:

- Resolve issues faced with customers contacting the call centre, waiting times, repeated calls and no previous system records of customer calls
- Deliver regular maintenance and servicing tasks of plant rooms and pipework including checking individual properties and confirming with residents
- Compensation payments for outages that have caused health detriments, disruption and inconvenience
- Monitor contractor Key Performance Indicators (KPI) at Rouel Road and Four Squares

**Recommendation 6-** That the Cabinet commission a resident consultation and engagement exercise with residents of Rouel Road Estate undertaken as soon as possible, working closely with ward councillors, focusing on post-repair resident and tenant satisfaction surveys with regards to heating and hot water outages. This should include an estate walkabout, an in-person meeting with residents, an online meeting, an online survey, and door-knocking, with the outcome of this exercise brought back to this scrutiny commission.

**Recommendation 7-** That the Cabinet undertake a “deep dive” into heating and hot water performance on two estates, one of which should be Rouel Road, in the winter of 2024. This should particularly focus on the gap between the self-reported experience of residents of their heating and hot water at individual properties, and the performance as indicated by centrally held data monitoring.

27. The commission understood from officers that the contract for OCO service provider is due for renewal in March 2024, it is also noted that the new contracts will provide the council with options of changing contractors in specific areas. The commission recognises the importance of continuity of service with heating and hot water repairs. However, it is clear that more robust and stricter control mechanisms are needed and especially at the start of the inception of planned upgrade works.

**Recommendation 8-** That the Cabinet put in place more robust and stricter controls for contract monitoring and accountability, prior to contract renewal of service providers for heating and hot water repairs in the municipal year 2024-25; and that the Cabinet should invest greater resources in the

management of contracts, including team capacity and upskilling of officers. Contract management controls should include better data monitoring and reporting standards from contractors, to enable automatic payment of compensation, which should be clawed back from the contractor, and contracts should include penalty notices for under-performance.

28. The commission notes from officer addresses that the compensation scheme first published in 2021 and due for review in 2022 was not reviewed. Furthermore, the scheme only includes automated payments for residents who have experienced outages consecutively for 24 hrs. The residents have had to report separate substantive outages through complaints. The commission also noted that shorter multiple outages in individual properties are not recorded through the call centre and contractor data, and compensation is mainly paid for block outages based on boiler room and plant room data. In addition, the current scheme does not account for the harm to health, disruptions to work and inconveniences faced by residents. Lastly, since the scheme's inception in 2021, the cost-of-living crisis and the following inflation needs to be considered.

**Recommendation 9-** That the Cabinet review the compensation scheme payments for heating and hot water outages being paid to residents. The compensation scheme should:

- Take account of where there are continual non-consecutive outages or shorter multiple outages
- Extended periods of time taken for resolution of existing repairs causing detriment to health, disruption and inconvenience
- Include a mechanism for automatic uprating of the compensation taking inflation into account

29. The commission discussed the issue of compensation payments to private renters that are paying all-inclusive rents (energy bills included), where in the compensation payments are being paid to private landlords. The commission also understands that there might be legal implications with payments to private renters as they have a private contract with their landlords. However, in the light of the government announcement that district heat networks are to be regulated by Ofgem in 2024, it would be a great opportunity for the council to proactively explore legal options for such payments to private renters; and also given that regulations would come in to effect in 2025 for statutory compensation payments to all users of the district heat network.

**Recommendation 10** - That the Cabinet immediately review the Compensation Scheme for heating outages to find a mechanism for compensations to be paid directly to private tenants' bank accounts through an application process, rather than private landlords and leaseholders who already benefit from all-inclusive rents (included energy bills) as a part of their tenancy agreements.



## **Policing In Southwark**

30. The commission noted from the Borough Commanders address that the MET is accountable to Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) which conducts its own scrutiny. The commission learnt that the London Mayor is calling for urgency in implementing the recommendations from the Baroness Casey review to rebuild trust and confidence in the MET. The commission also understood from the Baroness Casey review that if improvements in policing are not implemented it could lead to the breakdown of MET police into national and London Police units. The commission also noted that the role of Borough Commander specifically for Southwark doesn't exist anymore; and also recognised that there is a lack of accountability due to restructuring and redundancy of Borough Commanders positions which is down from 32 to 12 BCU Commanders feeding into 4 central directorates.

**Recommendation 10** - That the Cabinet member for Community Safety work with the Metropolitan Police to develop new local accountability mechanisms for policing in Southwark, and that this includes a new forum or body that allows regular, multi-ward engagement between councillors and a senior police officer for each area in the borough. The council should work with the Metropolitan Police to appoint named senior officers for each multi-ward area, to allow councillors a realistic opportunity to develop a relationship with policing at a more strategic level, and to fill the gap between ward panels and the MOPAC. This should happen within the municipal year 2024-2025.

## **Fire Safety in Southwark**

31. The commission noted from the Borough Fire Commander interview that although e-bikes are environmentally friendly, e-bike users often modify their e-bikes using adaptive kits available online which are not up to British standards. Any such modified e-bikes are a fire risk as evident from the fire incident at Old Kent Road which prevented residents from an easy egress since they were placed in communal areas, 179 such fires have been reported in London over the past year.

**Recommendation 11** – That the Cabinet investigates the emerging problem of lithium-ion battery fires in e-bikes, this should include the requirement of guidelines for storage and charging in communal areas on council estates and planning guidelines for new builds. The council should use this information to influence decisions for communal charging points and highways.

32. It is for the cabinet to decide whether or not to accept the scrutiny commission's recommendations.
33. Overview and scrutiny procedure rule 15.3 requires the cabinet to consider and provide a written response to the report within two months.

## BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Housing and Community Safety Scrutiny Commission agenda and minutes- 13 July 2023	Southwark Council Website	Amit Alva <a href="mailto:Amit.alva@southwark.gov.uk">Amit.alva@southwark.gov.uk</a>
<b>Link (please copy and paste into browser):</b> <a href="https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=605&amp;MId=7661&amp;Ver=4">https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=605&amp;MId=7661&amp;Ver=4</a> (see item 5)		
Housing and Community Safety Scrutiny Commission agenda and minutes - 12 October 2023	Southwark Council Website	Amit Alva <a href="mailto:Amit.alva@southwark.gov.uk">Amit.alva@southwark.gov.uk</a>
<b>Link (please copy and paste into browser):</b> <a href="https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=605&amp;MId=7662&amp;Ver=4">https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=605&amp;MId=7662&amp;Ver=4</a> (see item 6)		
Housing, Community Safety and Community Engagement Scrutiny Commission agenda and minutes – 14 December 2023	Southwark Council Website	Amit Alva <a href="mailto:Amit.alva@southwark.gov.uk">Amit.alva@southwark.gov.uk</a>
<b>Link (please copy and paste into browser):</b> <a href="https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=662&amp;MId=7867&amp;Ver=4">https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=662&amp;MId=7867&amp;Ver=4</a> (see item 5 & 6)		
Housing, Community Safety and Community Engagement Scrutiny Commission agenda and minutes – 6 February 2024	Southwark Council Website	Amit Alva <a href="mailto:Amit.alva@southwark.gov.uk">Amit.alva@southwark.gov.uk</a>
<b>Link (please copy and paste into browser):</b> <a href="https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=662&amp;MId=7868&amp;Ver=4">https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=662&amp;MId=7868&amp;Ver=4</a> (see item 5 & 6)		
Housing, Community Safety and Community Engagement Scrutiny Commission agenda and minutes – 29 February 2024	Southwark Council Website	Amit Alva <a href="mailto:Amit.alva@southwark.gov.uk">Amit.alva@southwark.gov.uk</a>
<b>Link (please copy and paste into browser):</b>		

<a href="https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=662&amp;MId=7876&amp;Ver=4">https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=662&amp;MId=7876&amp;Ver=4</a> (see item 5 & 6)		
Housing, Community Safety and Community Engagement Scrutiny Commission agenda and minutes – 21 March 2024	Southwark Council Website	Amit Alva <a href="mailto:Amit.alva@southwark.gov.uk">Amit.alva@southwark.gov.uk</a>
<b>Link (please copy and paste into browser):</b> <a href="https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=662&amp;MId=7877&amp;Ver=4">https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=662&amp;MId=7877&amp;Ver=4</a> (see item 5 & 6) <i>To Follow</i>		
Baroness Casey Review	Met Police Website	
<a href="https://www.met.police.uk/SysSiteAssets/media/downloads/met/about-us/baroness-casey-review/update-march-2023/baroness-casey-review-press-notice.pdf">https://www.met.police.uk/SysSiteAssets/media/downloads/met/about-us/baroness-casey-review/update-march-2023/baroness-casey-review-press-notice.pdf</a>		
<a href="https://www.met.police.uk/police-forces/metropolitan-police/areas/about-us/about-the-met/bcr/baroness-casey-review/">https://www.met.police.uk/police-forces/metropolitan-police/areas/about-us/about-the-met/bcr/baroness-casey-review/</a>		

## APPENDICES

No.	Title
None	

## AUDIT TRAIL

<b>Lead Member</b>	Councillor Sam Foster, Chair, Housing, Community Safety and Community Engagement Scrutiny Commission		
<b>Lead Officer</b>	Everton Roberts, Head of Scrutiny		
<b>Report Author</b>	Amit Alva, Scrutiny Officer		
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<b>Dated</b>	10 June 2024		
<b>Key Decision?</b>	No		
<b>CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER</b>			
	<b>Officer Title</b>	<b>Comments Sought</b>	<b>Comments Included</b>
	Assistant Chief Executive - Governance and Assurance	No	No
	Strategic Director of Finance	No	No
	<b>Cabinet Member</b>	No	No
	<b>Date final report sent to Constitutional Team</b>	10 June 2024	