



## **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 21 March 2024 at 7.00 pm at Ground Floor West Wing - 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

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**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  
Ina Negoita (Co-opted member)

**OTHER MEMBERS  
PRESENT:**

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

### **1. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Cris Claridge (Co-opted Member) and Dave Hodgson, Director of Asset Management.

### **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 29 February 2024 were approved as a correct record.

#### **5. INTERVIEW WITH BOROUGH FIRE COMMANDER**

The commission first heard from the Borough Fire Commander, Verona Rawlings on the following themes

- Borough Statistics (Dock head, Old Kent & Peckham) – 5183 fire incidents 2023-2024, 4% increase since last year in primary fires (insurable risks), secondary fires such as rubbish fires down by 12%, single dwelling fires up by 1%. Care home fires down by 14% (intervention by dialogue with care homes- fire safety messaging)
- 1945 Home Safety Fire visits conducted, Online fire safety check launched last year, 218 accidental dwelling fires, fire casualties 16 % decrease, decrease in arson incidents to 67, commercial properties shops and dwelling fire safety checks
- 179 E-bike fires in London; modification kits purchased online not up to British standard, Council working with fire service on clearing communal areas where e-bikes are being charged to provide egress to residents, campaigns on charge safe

The commission then asked questions on the following points

- Data on how many e-bike modifications have taken place; e-bike storage and legislation; Steps taken to further reduce the no. of e-bike fires
- Risk assessment of shops and dwelling fires and fire service capacity; specific fire safety concerns in wards
- High rise buildings update

The commission heard from Verona that e-bike modification data is not currently available as they are available freely online and also that there is currently no legislation in place to regulate people from purchasing modification kits for e-bikes. Furthermore, the fire service is actively spreading fire safety message to the public on avoiding such fires by ensuring proper storage and charging methods. In addition the fire service has overhauled its community engagement team with more fire safety interaction within the community.

Verona informed the commission that the fire service capacity of dealing with fires is sufficient at the moment. London Fire Brigade data is shared across the London

fire stations with every station having access to risk assessments, entry's' and exit's of high rise buildings remotely, in case of resources being stretched as in wild fires last year other stations step in to help. Fire borough commanders' work together to produce borough risk management plans with specific safeguarding plans for wards, these plans are shared with the ward councillors on email by the fire safety watch teams and ward councillors are encouraged to respond to them. The commission requested that ward wise breakdown on fire safety data be provided at a later stage.

Verona explained to the commission that high rise building are profiled according to the severity of risk factors and some high risk blocks could get weekly visits and simultaneous evacuation plans. Southwark council was on the first councils' to upload data into the high rise portal which is shared across the London fire brigade, any modifications to building are also uploaded and risk areas are targeted with home safety visits. Grenfell Phase 1 recommendations have been implemented across the London fire brigade with high reach ladders located centrally at Old Kent Road. Furthermore, command unit at Dockhead fire station is equipped with specialist crew and drone technology. Statistically in Southwark the fire risk profile indicates a higher risk in shops and dwelling rather than tall buildings, this is a result of the work done in fire safety of tall buildings across partner agencies.

## **6. HEATING & HOT WATER OUTAGES- BOROUGH WIDE**

The commission then received a report from officers' Hakeem Osinaike, Strategic Director for Housing, Simon Holmes, Head of Engineering, Paul Gathercole, Gas and Water Contracts Manager, Tom Vosper, Strategic Project Manager, on Heating & Hot Water Outages across the London Borough of Southwark.

The commission then asked questions on the following topics

- Sustainability and affordability of heat networks over medium and long terms; local government financing of heat networks and future risks
- Compensation Scheme for outages, compensation payments for shorter periods of outage; recording multiple shorter outages
- Improvements and feasibility study criteria for areas; contract management of service provider OCO and penalties; conflicting reports of repairs issues between public and council staff; operational risk of implementing new projects and technology in heating systems considering reliability.

The commission heard from Tom that individual heat networks across the borough are options appraised on the basis of customer service and environmental aspects when compared alternative heating systems such as individual boilers and electric heaters. Existing heat network are being retained in line with the government's target of increasing heat networks from 2 % to 20% nationally. The initial

investment in heat networks can be expensive as underground mains and distribution systems are needed as part of the infrastructure, however over the life cycle of a heat network they are more cost effective when compared to traditional heat systems.

Furthermore, local government target of net zero carbon is 2030 and central government target is 2050 is a future risk as conflicting priorities, de-carbonising of heat networks are done by connecting heat networks to low carbon source such as SEL-CHIP and heat pumps. However, such risks also exist in replacing existing boilers with individual heat pumps whilst trying energy costs low for the consumers'.

Simon explained to the commission that the current call centre recording for heating outages are not setup for shorter periods, and only more than 24 hrs outages are compensated. The challenges in recording shorter outages lies in whether it's an individual property outage or block wide outage. A recent paper on compensation to scrutiny in October 2023 evaluated the payments for outages considering rising energy costs.

Paul informed the commission that in Appendix.1 data for 2022, shows availability at block level, however shorter outages could be recorded in the future with changes to the process, percentage of outages at block can also be recorded.

The commission learned from Hakeem that it's recognised that residents are having issues with heating outages, however the data in Appendix. 1 shows the overall good availability and reliability of heating systems as a whole. These heating systems have been in place since 1960's and are susceptible to breaking down and the challenges are in responding quickly and effectively.

The commission discussed that the data shown in Appendix 1. shows boiler room data across the heating systems and network and understands this can be drilled down to plant room level, however plant rooms could serve multiple blocks.

Tom informed the commission that calculating outages is currently done manually, furthermore the heating contracts for repairs are expiring soon and the re-procurement exercise would be an opportunity to recommend adding better reporting standards from contractors so that outages can be calculated more accurately.

Paul explained to the commission that even though data is recorded at boiler room level, compensations are paid at more specific plant room level which could serve one or more blocks, all of whom would receive compensation in case of an outage.

The commission heard from Tom that feasibility studies are data driven and carried out on the basis of availability statistics; concerns at individual sites with a view to prioritise top 20 sites. Secondly, efficiency is assessed based on the boilers rooms in question compared to its capacity to serve a number of properties. Lastly, heating inspectors and term contractors' work together to produce a risk rating to

individual heat networks which is also a part of the decision making process. The repairs to failed boilers are done on an urgent basis factoring in availability of parts and time required to complete the repair. Currently there 7 feasibility studies out of which 2 have been completed by consultants, once all seven have been completed a prioritisation exercise will determine the priorities for investment.

Paul informed the commission that contract management for OCO and its improvement plan has been in place since January 2023, there has been positive improvement across the key performance indicators (KPI) such as resourcing, repairs completions, reduced overdue repairs. Monthly meeting with owners to discuss progress and change in higher management has seen significant progress. Contracts do legally have the power to impose fines and even termination of the contract.

The commission learnt from Hakeem that this report does highlight areas where heating networks are working well, but it's also recognised that there are areas where public facing significant issues with outages, It is also important to note there is an expectation with aging heating systems to fail at some point, procuring new parts sometimes is not possible or heavily delayed, wherein alternative heating system are put in place. The team is constantly endeavouring to respond better to outages.

Tom explained to the commission that pilot projects in estates such as Windham have had new technology where in water from groundwater aquifers are pumped into heat pumps for heat extraction and circulated across the estate whilst leaving old boiler rooms in-situ as a back-up, this has worked in providing more resilience in heating networks. Overall reliability is prioritised over low carbon but team are still working on the low carbon sources in line with the Council's commitment. Installation of individual property heat meters and heat interface units does have advantages of accurately calculating outages and more control to the consumer, however in heat interface units, an outage could the property lose heating and hot water when compared to only loss of heating in boiling cylinders which store hot water.

The commission then asked further questions on the following themes

- Recommendation to improve contract management; Timings, process, cost, penalties, terminations, quality and social value for procurement of contracts

The commission heard from Hakeem that the new contracts being procured could some of the stipulated KPIs' mentioned by Tom previously with better reporting standards, in addition experience from ward councillors and feedback from friends relatives living on council estates will also contribute towards this work.

Paul and Simon informed the commission that a bigger pool of service providers and contracts could increase flexibility resilience, coverage and timely repairs completion.

Officer agreed to provide details on contract procurement timings, process, cost, quality and social value outside of the meeting.

Paul and Hakeem explained to the commission that there is no preclusion that contractors that have had their contracts terminated or not renewed can't provide other services to the council for 18 months. However local government procurement rules are followed while tendering which tends to ask the right questions before a bid is entered. A good mechanism to keep outages in check would be for the contracts to include compensations payment to come from the service providers. There is some work being done to resource the team appropriately to speed up the procurement process. The size of the housing stock in Southwark does make it a challenge to procure contracts with multiple providers and existing contractors need to be place until the new contractors have mobilised and started operations.

Furthermore, the commission noted that the extension of the current contracts would be a rolling contract and could result in termination if new contracts are procured earlier. However the commission also notes that the procurement exercise should have started earlier to coincide with the date of termination of the existing ones; and a more timely approach to procure faster is due to the complexities of the local government procurement process.

Hakeem informed the commission that procurement work is on the highest priority within the team, the large size of the service and the volume of work being delivered by contractors is enormous, procurement resourcing and its associated costs needs to be factored in to costs of the delivery of the housing repairs works. The commission heard from Paul that the current contracts till 2026 is 3 year plus 2 year contractual arrangement and is not a new extension but conditions from the original contract.

The commission learnt from Hakeem that the new contractors that are procured will have the same ground staff transferred (TUPE) over from OCO and Smith & Byford, thus retaining knowledge and expertise of the local area. The aim is to have contractors that can manage better, have better resources, equipment access to sub-contractors.

## **7. DRAFT SCRUTINY REPORTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS- 2023-2024**

The Chair explained to the commission that due to the very short timelines between council meetings as a result of the pre-election purdah period for London Mayoral Elections in May 2024; and the limited time for reviewing commission's draft report that he has decided not to review the draft reports at this stage and only agree the recommendations.

The commission discussed the recommendation on e-bikes charging and storing in detail, the council's role in regulating storage and charging of e-bikes in communal

areas.

Furthermore, the commission also discussed ward councillors engaging with London Fire Brigade (LFB) with issues around fire in their wards and further engagement between the communities, LFB and Cabinet Member for Community Safety. It was agreed that the Chair would email the Cabinet Member for Community Safety informally on this matter.

The commission discussed the draft recommendations in detail. It was agreed that recommendations on housing allocation and lettings policy redrafted to make it more clear and effective. Councillor Ellie Cumbo agreed to email the redrafted Recommendations 1 and 2 to the commission as per the discussion at the meeting. Final recommendations 1 & 2 below as emailed after the meeting.

**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.

**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.

The commission agreed to make split recommendation 3 to make it more specific and clear. Final recommendations below agreed on email.

**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.

**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.

The commission discussed and agreed recommendations for Rouel Road Estate, Heating and Hot Water Outages and Compensation Scheme. Final recommendations below as discussed at this meeting and later agreed on email.

**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.

**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.

**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

**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.

**Recommendation 11** - 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.

Councillor Victoria Mills drafted the below recommendation on e-bikes and this was agreed at this meeting by the commission

**Recommendation 12** – 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.

## 8. WORK PROGRAMME 2023-2024

The commission noted the work programme for the year 2023-2024.

Meeting ended at 10:09 pm

**CHAIR:**

**DATED:**