



HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Housing and Community Safety Scrutiny Sub-Committee held on Tuesday 7 September 2010 at 7.00 pm at Town Hall, Peckham Road, London SE5 8UB

PRESENT: Councillor Gavin Edwards (Chair)
Councillor Poddy Clark
Councillor Stephen Govier
Councillor Claire Hickson
Councillor Linda Manchester
Councillor Wilma Nelson
Councillor Michael Situ

OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT: Jane Salmon, Homeowners' Council

OFFICER SUPPORT: Christian O'Mahoney, Housing Repairs and Maintenance Manager
Catherine Spence, Housing Client Officer
Karen Harris, Scrutiny Project Manager

1. APOLOGIES

- 1.1 Apologies for absence were received from John Nosworthy, Homeowners' Council. Jane Salmon attended in his place.

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

- 2.1 There were none.

3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

- 3.1 Councillor Stephen Govier declared an interest as a council housing tenant. Councillor Linda Manchester and Councillor Wilma Nelson both declared an

interest as council leaseholders.

4. MINUTES FROM JULY MEETING

RESOLVED

- 1) The minutes from the meeting of the Housing and Community Safety sub-committee held on 6 July be agreed as an accurate record.
- 2) That in future the minutes will provide a consistent level of detail for all agenda items.

5. PLAN FOR HOUSING REPAIRS SCRUTINY REVIEW

- 5.1 The chair referred to the draft document outlining the planned approach to be taken to the scrutiny review. He reminded members that the first draft of this report had been circulated following the last meeting, and comments incorporated.

RESOLVED

That the plan for Scrutiny of Performance Management of the Housing Repairs Service in Southwark be agreed as the terms of reference for the review.

6. PRESENTATION ON KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS FOR HOUSING REPAIRS

- 6.1 The Chair introduced his presentation on Key Performance Indicators, explaining that it was important that the sub-committee had discussions based upon facts rather than on anecdotal information.
- 6.2 He thanked staff from the Environment and Housing Department for the information they had provided to make the presentation possible.
- 6.3 The Chair referred to the handout on key performance indicators (attached to the minutes for ease of reference), and explained that the indicators selected are those where there is a discrepancy between the performance indicated by the information received by councillors and the data. He explained each indicator in turn and what the data shown on the graphs is telling the Council about performance.
- 6.4 According to the indicators the council was performing well or excellently against each performance indicator selected.
- 6.5 The Chair reminded the sub-committee of a previous scrutiny which was done last year on housing performance. This scrutiny had a clear draft recommendation that the performance indicators should be looked at in more detail, which forms an important part of the rationale for the current scrutiny project.

- 6.6 The sub-committee discussed the significant proportion of members' complaints and enquiries that are related to housing repairs, and the percentage of all repairs that this formed. They also the discussed the need to retain balance between the issues raised in casework, which usually are predominantly focused on the complainant, and the facts around the repairs themselves and how the information on these is recorded.
- 6.7 The Chair informed the sub-committee of some work done on behalf of the Environment and Housing Department by consultants to give an idea of what the outcome of a formal assessment of housing repairs would be if one were done now. The results were not favourable, again highlighting that there are improvements needed that the scrutiny process can help to identify.
- 6.8 The sub-committee discussed the methodology of the collection of the statistics for Key Performance Indicators and noted
- The huge problems that could arise with the reliability of the KPIs because so many are "self-reported" by the contractors. It was suggested by the chair that there is currently little or no way of knowing if and when a repair has been completed other than when the contractor tells the council that it has been completed. This may be a key reason why there is such a disparity between KPIs showing excellent performance in repairs and other strong evidence of poor performance
 - Length of time within which a repair is expected to be completed is variable according to priority. In addition, if communal repairs are recorded in the same system as individual repairs this can skew the statistics.
 - Satisfaction call-backs are done by the call-centre but there is a need for greater clarity over the scripts used – for example the experience of the Tenant's call centre working party listening to example calls was quite different to what was recorded in the satisfaction survey.
 - Coverage- whether the indicators are capturing the whole of the experience which is emerging through the casework.
 - There is a lack of clarity around the recording processes for queries and repairs that are re-raised numerous times because they are unresolved.
 - The fact that not all repairs and regeneration work goes through the call centre and this may be adding to the sense in the community of repairs remaining uncompleted because they are being handled within a different system.
- 6.9 It was agreed that there is a need for verification of the satisfaction statistics, and the sub-committee recognised work has begun on a separate satisfaction survey, not run by the call-centre or contractors to look into this issue further. The sub-committee agreed that it would be helpful for them assist this by giving some thought to a more pro-active approach to test the hypotheses around the performance indicators. Any survey work done by the sub-committee would need to have a rigorous methodology which meets market research society standards.
- 6.10 The sub-committee discussed equalities issues around the call centre, in particular language, especially in the context of the call-back surveys. It was confirmed by the chair that this issue was one of the concerns highlighted in the consultants report.

RESOLVED

- 1) That the sub-committee should spend some time listening to a selection of calls to the customer call centre to establish how the call handling process works
- 2) The scripts which the call centre is using to inform their responses to customers should be made available to the sub-committee to aid this process.
- 3) The sub-committee should meet with the Tenant's Council call centre working party to share information and intelligence about the issues around KPIs

7. METHODOLOGY FOR TRACKING HOUSING REPAIRS CASES

- 7.1 The sub-committee agreed that casework tracking would be a good way to gather facts about some of the underlying issues on repairs and the discrepancies between experience and indicators.
- 7.2 There was a discussion on the issues that should be covered in casework tracking, including:
 - Divergence of opinion between the contractor and the customer over whether a repair has been completed
 - The need to track individual complaints to individual contractors
 - The length of time/number of calls needed overall for a single issue to be resolved to the satisfaction of the customer
 - The use of existing customer information and repair diagnosis by the call-centre and contractors
 - The value of including examples and information from the Homeowners Council and Tenants Council to inform the process.
 - Whether things go wrong because they are "not normal" requests, or if they go wrong more generally
 - The identification of issues which should be reflected in the performance indicators which are currently not
- 7.3 The focus of the casework exercise will be on looking at how to make the customer experience as good as it can be rather than focusing on what has gone wrong in the past.

RESOLVED

- 1) That each sub-committee member, including co-optees should submit casework examples to the chair. From these submissions the chair will select a number which can be followed through and end to end process.
- 2) Following this exercise the sub-committee will discuss constructive proposals of changes to case handling for the future.

8. HOUSING REPAIRS SURVEY 2010

- 8.1 The sub-committee discussed the draft survey proposed by the chair as a way of comparing actual customer experience with the data collected through the performance indicators.
- 8.2 The focus of the survey will be to capture information which can be directly related to the performance indicators.
- 8.3 A number of changes were discussed to the wording of the questions in the survey and it was agreed that the sub-committee will take further advice on the formulation of the survey in order to
- Ensure that it meets market research standards
 - Does not duplicate/confuse other survey work being done by the council
 - Is clear about which elements of housing repairs are included as some matters e.g. door entries and lift repairs do not form part of this particular scrutiny exercise.
- 8.4 Housing Officers informed the sub-committee of some survey work being done by MORI. This will be circulated to the sub-committee for information.

RESOLVED

That the chair would take forward work on the survey so that it would be carried out at the earliest opportunity and the results reported back to the sub-committee.

9. VISIT TO THE CALL CENTRE

- 9.1 The sub-committee agreed that it would be useful to visit the customer call centre to find out how the centre operates and meet Adrian Jones.
- 9.2 The sub-committee were advised by the Housing Repairs and maintenance manager that a new team is now in place within the council- the Commercial Team, and it would also be useful to meet with this team in advance of the next meeting.

RESOLVED

- 1) A visit to the call centre will take place on the day of the next meeting of the sub-committee before the main meeting.
- 2) The visit to the call centre will be followed by a short meeting with the Commercial team.

10. HOUSING BENEFIT

- 10.1 The chair relayed to the sub-committee the discussion which took place at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in relation to the proposed changes to housing benefit, and whether this would be an appropriate topic for scrutiny.

- 10.2 It was agreed that this is a national/London-wide issue and as such Southwark would need to feed information and intelligence into a broader case rather than undertaking a scrutiny on our own.
- 10.3 Following a suggestion from the Homeowners' Council representative, it was agreed that it would be useful for a member of the Housing and Community Safety Sub-Committee to act as a rapporteur to build a strong Southwark opinion on this issue.

RESOLVED

Councillor Govier will act as rapporteur for the sub-committee to build the case on the housing benefits issue.