



HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Housing and Community Safety Scrutiny Sub-Committee held on Monday 4 October 2010 at 7.00 pm at Ground Floor Meeting Room G02A - Tooley Street, London SE1

- PRESENT:** Councillor Gavin Edwards (Chair)
Councillor Poddy Clark
Councillor Stephen Govier
Councillor Claire Hickson
Councillor Linda Manchester
Councillor Wilma Nelson
Jane Salmon
Lesley Wertheimer, Tenants Council
- OTHERS PRESENT:** Julian Jackson Friar's Estate
Steve Hedger Chair, Tenants' Council
- OFFICER SUPPORT:** Debbie Gooch, Principal Lawyer
Tracey Downie, Acting Housing Management Borough Coordinator (South)
Margaret O'Brien, Head of Housing Management
Catherine Spence, Housing Client Officer
Karen Harris, Scrutiny Project Manager

1. APOLOGIES

- 1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Michael Situ and John Nosworthy.

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

- 2.1 There were no items notified.

3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

- 3.1 Councillor Stephen Govier declared an interest as a council housing tenant. Councillor Linda Manchester, Councillor Wilma Nelson and Jane Salmon declared an interest as council leaseholders..

4. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 7 September 2010 be agreed as an accurate record.

5. FEEDBACK FROM CALL LISTEN-IN EXERCISE

- 5.1 Members of the sub-committee were invited to give feedback on their experience of listening to the 50 random incoming calls to the call centre.

- 5.2 The key issues raised were as follows:

- The flow of the calls was not very good because of the order in which call centre staff obtain information. Quite a lot of questions have to be asked before the customer is asked what their problem is.
- In many instances the caller is held on the line for a long time with no indication of what is happening. In some instances the call centre staff were not very patient and polite with the customers.
- The operatives in the call centre were sometimes continuing existing repairs under the "recall" procedures, on other occasions they were raising new jobs. This would impact on how things are recorded in the key performance indicators (KPIs).
- There seemed to be little consistency in terms of jobs being raised, their level of urgency and whether the matter would be referred to the contractor.
- There doesn't seem to be a way to record contractor behaviour on the ground – self recording of outcomes by the contractor does not seem satisfactory.

- 5.3 The sub-committee discussed the fact that the calls had flagged up a number of problems and issues that need to be dealt with. It was agreed that this would be done by tracking a number of the cases to find out exactly what happened and how this was recorded and thus fed into the KPIs.

RESOLVED:

1. That the case tracking exercise would be undertaken with 8 cases from the call centre listening exercise and 2 other cases.
2. That the results of the case tracking exercise would be available for discussion at the next meeting of the sub-committee.

6. TENANTS' COUNCIL CALL CENTRE WORKING PARTY

- 6.1 The Acting Housing Management Borough Coordinator introduced the report on the work of the Customer Service Centre (CSC) working party, a working party of the Tenants' Council.
- 6.2 She explained that in summer 2008 the Southwark Group of Tenants Organisations (SGTO) had raised concerns about the management of housing repairs through the customer service centre.
- 6.3 The outcome was the establishment in March 2010 of a group of council officers, residents and representatives from the call centre with the purpose of improving the customer service experience.
- 6.4 The group had met several times and positive changes had been made as a result of their work which were outlined in the report circulated with the agenda for the meeting.
- 6.5 The working party had 4 areas of work that it would be looking into with regard to the call centre:
- Quality
 - Vulnerability
 - Script
 - Training
- 6.6 Steve Hedger, Chair of the Tenants' Council, explained to the sub-committee that as part of its ongoing work, the working party had listened in to 4 outbound calls from the call centre. These were the call back calls done following a housing repair.
- 6.7 He explained that there were considerable concerns around the collection of data as a result of these calls as it appeared that some residents were not understanding the script used, and in some instances questions on the script were not asked at all.
- 6.8 The sub-committee discussed how this part of the working party's findings linked directly to the performance indicators scrutiny, and that it would be useful for sub-committee members to listen to a random selection of outbound calls, as they had inbound calls.

RESOLVED

1. That the sub-committee would be provided with a CD of 50 random outbound housing repairs call-back calls to listen to in advance of the next meeting of the sub-committee.
2. That the sub-committee would be provided with the script which is used by the staff in the call centre as they make these calls.

7. HOUSING REPAIRS SURVEY 2010

- 7.1 The Head of Housing Management explained that the department was going to do

an independent verification of the Key Performance Indicator (KPI) information.

- 7.2 She explained that there was currently a discrepancy between the results in relation to customer satisfaction which were associated with the call-back from the call centre, and the data collected in the Mori satisfaction survey, which showed a lower level of satisfaction because of the way the data was collated.
- 7.3 Members of the sub-committee explained that they were also interested in undertaking a survey to measure satisfaction against the KPIs, as discussed at the last meeting of the sub-committee
- 7.4 It was agreed that if possible the independent validation survey would be adjusted to incorporate the needs of the sub-committee, and that this should be done independently of either the call centre or repairs contractors.
- 7.5 It was agreed that it is vital that the survey is done professionally to industry standards. If possible one survey would be done to cover the needs of scrutiny and the validation exercise for housing.

8. LOCAL HOUSING OFFERS

- 8.1 The report on the development of a local housing offer was noted.

9. HOUSING BENEFIT REFORM

- 9.1 Councillor Govier, who had agreed at the previous meeting of the sub-committee to be "rapporteur" on housing benefit reform, gave an update on his work.
- 9.2 Councillor Govier explained that there were significant concerns for the borough, which fell into 2 main categories:
 - a) Impact on existing housing benefit recipients
 - b) Supply of housing benefit to future tenants
- 9.3 The changes were due to come into place very quickly, with the first phase of impact in April 2011, and further changes in October 2011.
- 9.4 The measures proposed to come in next year included capping the amount that can be claimed under the LHA at between £250 and £400 a week depending on property size and setting rents based on the 30th percentile of private sector rents rather than the median.
- 9.4 Councillor Govier had had discussions with various different parts of the council that were working on contingency plans and also partners on housing issues, including South London and Maudsley (SLAM); Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), Nacro and the Legal Advice Network.
- 9.5 In addition to the changes to housing benefit itself, which were initially expected to result in pulling people into the borough because rents in Southwark were lower

than in some neighbouring boroughs, Councillor Govier explained that Southwark would be particularly affected by the overall cap on benefits which would affect those in work.

RESOLVED:

Councillor Govier will continue his work and provide a further report to the next meeting of the sub-committee