



**MINUTES OF THE HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**  
**Wednesday 1 November 2017 at 6.30 pm**

PRESENT: Councillor Long (Chair), Councillor Ms Shaw (Vice-Chair) and Councillors S Choudhary, Daly, Harrison, Kabir and Naheerathan

Also Present: Councillor Ketan Sheth

1. **Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members**

None.

2. **Declarations of interests**

None.

3. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the previous meeting, held on 14 September 2017, be approved as an accurate record.

4. **Matters arising (if any)**

None.

5. **Deputations (if any)**

None.

6. **Petitions (if any)**

None.

7. **Leaseholder Services**

Dawn Martin (Head of Income and Leasehold) introduced the item and answered members' questions. Referencing the report, she informed the Committee about the Section 20 consultation process and the various schedules which come under it before service charges can be collected. She continued by explaining the engagement processes in place for both tenants and leaseholders and gave details on payment plan options available to leaseholders.

During the discussion which centred on resident engagement, commissioning works and payment options, councillors expressed particular concerns about the level of engagement with leaseholders, ongoing issues with communication and lack of consultation with resident associations. In response to members questions

officers explained that the consultation process depended largely on an effective long-term planning of the capital investment programme, particularly with regards to asset management. Officers highlighted a commitment to improve the overall consultation process within the Council including to ensure quality of commissioned works.

Members heard that although there was a strong understanding of the need to find the right balance in decision making and feasibility assessments, the Council had an overarching obligation to maintain its stock in good condition. Depending on the type of schedule being served and level of repairs required the Council would either invite residents to nominate contractors, use framework contractors or refer to long term contractors to resolve it. Members were reassured that the correct legal processes were being followed throughout and the appropriate level of consultation had been applied on each occasion. Members also heard that a batch of Section 20 works had been put on hold and their release was planned to be trialled under the proposed new process.

The Committee also discussed the issue of payment of major works bills and ways of raising better awareness about the different options available to residents. Referencing point 7.1 from the report officers explained that various payment options were available including payment plans, resident income maximisation, and communal sinking funds and in certain cases - release of equity, with the notices used to give a clear indication of the works planned and an estimation of the costs. In addition, officers stated that additional support was available through the Council's financial inclusion team for any residents facing payment difficulties and ten year payment plans were available for bills over £6,101. Members heard that the Council had a legal responsibility to charge actual costs of works and where challenges to estimates arose these would be put through the Council's property services team for further investigation. Assurances were given that in the case of any cost which had been incorrectly imposed, the overcharged amount would be levied off the final bill or, if already charged, a refund or credits would be given. Payment options, including sinking fund, were being considered under the transformation process.

Councillors mentioned that the presented report made reference only to the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 but not to the Common Law Act 2003, which superseded it. This was discussed and it was resolved that the report would be subsequently amended to reflect this change.

**RESOLVED** that:

- i. The report is amended to make reference to both Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 and Common Law Act 2003.
- ii. Further information on number of framework agreements and accompanying legislative processes to be provided to the Committee.
- iii. Further information on number of qualifying long term contracts including fire safety works be presented to the committee, specifying total cost and duration of each contract to be provided to the Committee.
- iv. Report on Resident engagement plan with timeline for delivery of final document to be submitted by 17 November 2017.

- v. Update on the review of payment options
- vi. Update on number of outstanding Section 20 bills since FY14.
- vii. Update on the collection of major works since FY14.

8. **Brent's Housing Associations: Scrutiny Task Group Report (July 2016)**

**RESOLVED** that a report be shared addressing the items included in the original notification by 17 November 2017.

9. **Housing Complaints**

*(Councillor Shaw left the meeting at 8.25pm)*

Hakeem Osinaike (Operational Director, Housing) introduced the report and answered members' questions. Referencing point 3.5 from the report he informed members that the overall number of complaints had been gradually decreasing, which was an indicator for an improving service.

In the discussion which followed, members queried the procedures followed with regards to members' enquiries, insisting that no specific protocol was in place to deal specifically with members' complaints or escalate them further. Responding to members questions regarding the increase in private housing services complaints, officers stated that contract management was an area that required further improvement and that this would be tackled through the reorganisation of the housing service and improvement of process and protocols.

*(Councillor Daly left the meeting at 8.31pm)*

**RESOLVED** that:

- i. Brent Complaints Procedure to be circulated to committee members
- ii. Report on impact on licensing scheme on Private Rented Sector (PRS) tenants to be presented to the Committee in the next municipal year.

10. **Housing Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme 2017-18**

**RESOLVED** that the contents of the updated Housing Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme 2017-18 report, be noted.

11. **Any other urgent business**

None.

The meeting closed at 8.35 pm

J LONG  
Chair