



Full Council
17 September 2018

**Report from the Director of
Performance Policy & Partnerships**

Housing Scrutiny Committee Chair's Update Report

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	N/A
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
No. of Appendices:	0
Background Papers:	N/A
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1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 This report provides a summary of the work carried out by the Council's Housing Scrutiny Committee. The report covers the period from July 2018 to present, detailing a programme of work and items discussed during this period.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 Council is recommended to note this report.

3.0 Detail

- 3.1 The Housing Scrutiny Committee's remit is to scrutinise housing functions within the Community and Wellbeing department, including Brent Housing Management; housing supply; housing growth numbers; temporary accommodation; landlord licensing; the private rented sector; housing policy; homelessness; Registered Providers; supported housing; floating support, and home adaptations. Its remit primarily covers the portfolio area of the Cabinet Member for Housing & Welfare Reform).

3.2 2018-19 Housing Scrutiny Committee Members

Councillor Janice Long, Chair
Councillor Michael Maurice, Vice-Chair
Councillor Abdfatah Aden
Councillor Tony Ethapemi
Councillor Faduma Hassan
Councillor Robert Johnson
Councillor Daniel Kennelly
Councillor Thomas Stephens

3.3 The Committee also has two appointed co-optees - a leaseholder of a Brent Council home, and a Council tenant – Michele Lonergan and Karin Jaegar.

3.4 There is one committee meeting to report upon.

3.5 At its July meeting the Scrutiny Committee considered an item on Capital Programme Overruns. This report presented by the Operational Director of Housing gave an overview of the Capital Programme, focusing in particular on the issue of overruns, their impact on tenants and leaseholders with slippage to the capital programme and the mitigation plans put in place.

3.6 In the discussion which followed members sought further clarification on covering the cost of works, contract management and overruns. Members focused on the issue of overspends and recouping the cost of works when the total bill had exceeded the original estimates by 25% or more of the original contract value. Members further questioned how works evaluations were carried out, the reasons for the occurrence of discrepancies between them and actual cost and the processes which were in place to ensure the accuracy of estimates. Discussion took place about cost management and members underlined the importance of this and in particular the adverse financial impact experienced by leaseholders in Brent. In noting some of the measures set out in the report, the committee also flagged up the importance of developing specific cost indicators and maintaining historical data to allow for estimates to be continuously benchmarked and compared in the long term.

3.7 In acknowledging members' concerns, officers explained that under the Landlord and Tenants Act 1987, a Section 20 notice had to be served before any works could be carried out, allowing residents to comment and make any observations prior to commencement of work. With the exception of emergency repairs, the totality of any incurred spend was funded by the Housing Revenue Account, with service fees subsequently subsidising the charges. It was noted that this in turn had a knock on effect on available funds and restricted council's capacity to carry out any future major works and repairs, thus stressing the importance of accurate estimates. It was also stated that at the core of the overspend laid contractual management flaws, which were inherited from Brent Housing Partnership, with delays impacting on the total cost and penalty clauses no longer deemed adequate. Members were

assured that the council was determined to follow the processes stipulated within the law in order for estimates to be done accurately and fairly before a notice was served as well as seek to reduce the overall number of reissued notices going forward. Officers stated that the council was committed to seeking best value for money when contracting a repair.

- 3.8 Officers briefed members on the mitigation measures which had been introduced by Housing Management as part of the Capital Programme. The committee was assured that a three-year rolling programme was already under way alongside a stock condition survey to ensure the viability of all council owned properties and to ascertain that leaseholders were not charged more than necessary for the cost of repairs. Further measures which were highlighted included the development of an asset management strategy, improving pre-works processes, use of technology and employment of professional surveyors as part of the contracts management team. It was expected that the above systems would provide the council with a clear benchmark on progress made, measure levels of satisfaction amongst residents and result in provision of more accurate total bill estimates.
- 3.9 The Operational Director for Housing explained that a key factor in improving the Capital Programme processes was the council's increased focus on transparency and strengthening resident involvement. He stressed the importance of having an open and holistic approach, such as carrying out consultations with both tenants and leaseholders on equal terms and allowing them to challenge any decisions. Some of the actions put in place by officers included the introduction of handover meetings to all residents in a given block upon completion of works and use of electronic media to accommodate those residents who may not be able to attend an inspection in person.
- 3.10 The Head of Housing and Neighbourhoods also introduced a report on **Resident Engagement** and highlighted some of the key points. He explained that the previous resident engagement offer had been reviewed and revised. He stated that the council was committed to developing a new, more engaging framework which would put residents at the forefront of shaping services and would offer choice in terms of ways to engage.
- 3.11 In the subsequent discussion, the committee raised questions on the new resident engagement framework and sought more information on the role and function of the customer experience panel. Officers informed members that at the heart of the new framework would be a twelve person council wide customer experience panel, who would represent residents from a wider range of social and economic backgrounds and would ensure their views were represented before the Council. Members raised the need to improve engagement with young people and ensure they were represented on the panel. In acknowledging the members' recommendation, officers advised that the new structure would ensure commitment to resident involvement on all levels, paying particular attention to maintaining local conversations. An even stronger focus would be in place to ensure that the views of the panel on were inclusive and representative of the diversity in Brent.

- 3.12 Further discussion focused on the methods of engagement proposed in the new resident strategy. Points were raised by members on a range of issues including the overall service commitments, the need for a joint holistic approach and fair involvement of residents from all property types and providing accessible options for engagement, including appropriate use of technology and social media. Members suggested that in engaging with residents, the council should consider time commitments and tailor any events to the residents' availability. In acknowledging members' views, the Operational Director for Housing explained that a number of ways would be available to residents, including virtual meetings, use of a customer relationship management system and extending meeting locations beyond the Civic Centre. A discussion followed on service commitments with members receiving an overview on the links between the corporate and service approach. Officers emphasised the importance of involving residents in decisions.
- 3.13 Officers acknowledged that not all residents may be comfortable using technology, and they assured the committee that face to face interactions would be retained through the new housing management model.
- 3.14 Further discussion took place about the progress on estate inspections and resolving grounds maintenance issues. Officers briefed members on the structured approach to estate inspections, including the focus on better liaison with block champions and more inclusiveness, thus allowing inspections to be joined by anyone, including residents, councillors and key stakeholders. Commenting on the issue of grounds maintenance, officers assured the committee that the council considered this a high priority, with discussions already taking place and a strong commitment towards improving joint working between services going forward.
- 3.15 Members finally received a report on **Estate Parking** from the Operational Director for Housing. Officers highlighted that parking on housing estates had become increasingly problematic. The proposals set out in the report therefore proposed the introduction of a controlled parking scheme commencing with five estates in the borough by September 2018. Officers outlined the proposed increase in parking permits from £10 to £85.
- 3.16 In the subsequent discussion, members raised questions on the affordability of the proposed increase, the effectiveness of planned enforcement and overall consultation processes with residents. Officers gave an overview of why increased charges were needed and the plans in place to engage with residents. Officers discussed the current enforcement approach and future plans in this area. Members raised questions on the parking allocations approach and availability of parking spaces. Discussions continued on the five suggested estates for the introduction of this approach. The operational Director re-emphasised the commitment to resident engagement throughout this project.

4.0 Upcoming Scrutiny Meetings

4.1 Future meetings for 2018/19 have been agreed as:

- Thursday 13 September 2018
- Thursday 29 November 2018
- Wednesday 6 February 2019
- Wednesday 27 March 2019
- Thursday 25 April 2019

5.0 Financial Implications

5.1 There are no financial implications.

6.0 Legal Implications

6.1 There are no legal implications.

7.0 Equality Implications

7.1 There are no equality implications.

Report sign off:

Peter Gadsdon

Director of Performance Policy &
Partnerships