



MINUTES OF THE HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Thursday 12 July 2018 at 6.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Long (Chair), Councillor Maurice (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Aden, Ethapemi, Hassan, Johnson, Kennelly, Stephens, and Michelle Lonergan (co-opted member)

Also Present: Councillor Southwood

1. Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members

Apologies for absence were received from Ms Karin Jaeger (co-opted member)

2. Declarations of interests

None declared.

3. Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 21 March 2018 were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

4. Matters arising (if any)

The committee heard a follow up on the request for a performance indicator on the impact of landlord licensing scheme on illegal rubbish dumping in Brent which the committee had previously recommended to Cabinet at the meeting on 21 March 2018. Members heard that the aim of the landlord licensing scheme was to improve quality of accommodation and were advised that the focus be shifted on reviewing recycling issues which were better linked with the environmental provision in HMOs.

RESOLVED:-

- i. That the Operational Director and Lead Member for Housing address the issue of tackling fly-tipping and take forward ways of measuring and analysing outcomes with Environmental Services
- ii. That, following its autumn publication, the Operational Director of Housing shares findings from the Landlord Licensing Report with the Committee

5. Deputations (if any)

None.

6. Petitions (if any)

None.

7. Capital Programme Overruns

At the invitation of the Chair, Hakeem Osinaike (Operational Director Housing) introduced the report and gave a general overview of the Capital Programme, focusing in particular on the issue of overruns, their impact on leaseholders and the mitigation plans put in place.

In the discussion which followed members sought further clarification on covering the cost of works, contract management and overruns. Particular onus was paid 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 and prevent overspends which fell below the 25% threshold from happening. The Committee felt strongly on the issue of cost management and 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 against in the long term.

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 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 Section 20 was served as well as seek to reduce the overall number of reissued notices going forward. The Council was committed to seeking best value for money when contracting a repair but noted that quotes were currently based on the difference between estimates and actuals. It was stated that the Council had a long-term agreements with Wates to carry out contractual works but assured that independent surveyors would do all preliminary measurements before a Section 20 was served to the residents.

Discussion continued with officers referencing section 6 from the report and briefing members about some of the mitigation measures which had been introduced by Housing Management as part of the Capital Programme. The committee was assured that a 3 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 spotlighted on 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.

With regards to resident engagement, Mr Osinaike explained that a key factor in improving the Capital Programme processes was the Council's increased focus on transparency working 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 which officers raised also 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.

RESOLVED:-

- i. That contents of the report and progress made to date be noted

- ii. that a system to measure cost overruns be set up by Housing Management
- iii. that Housing Management Team provides further details on overruns procedures, improvements and Key Performance Indicators (KPI) by next committee meeting
- iv. that Housing Management Team explores the possibility of setting up a measure to cover estimated and final cost of capital works, benchmarking this against previous years.

8. Overview of Resident Engagement Framework

Troy Francis (Head of Housing Management Customer Service) drew members' attention to the report and highlighted some of the key points. He explained that the previous resident engagement offer was considered obsolete, nor did it achieve the level of outreach required to actively engage with residents, with strong evidence suggesting that the previous approach had only reached 3% of the residents. Therefore, 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.

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 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 paid particular emphasis on the need to improve engagement with the youth 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 onus on maintaining local conversations, setting example through senior management but also carrying inspections to ensure expectations were met. It was highlighted that the organisational structure was already there through the existence of neighbouring network groups but an ever stronger focus would now be paid on capturing neighbourhood related activities and ensuring views of panel were inclusive and representative of the diversity in Brent.

Discussion moved to the methods of engagement envisioned in the new resident strategy. Points were raised 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' concerns Hakeem Osinaike explained that a number of ways would be available to residents, including virtual meetings, use of CRM and extending meeting locations beyond the Civic Centre. With regards to service commitments, the committee heard that were two sets of strategy available – corporate customer promise and housing promise, with an additional resident charter due to be published. Mr Francis added that the Council was determined to improve management of resident interactions and was particularly keen to hear residents' feedback on different matters. Local views would therefore be captured through a variety of methods such as surveys, focus groups and consultations, while also offering a wider choice to residents to engage on a day to day basis. Whilst acknowledging that not all residents may be comfortable using technology, he assured the committee that face to face interactions would be retained through the new housing management model. This would see the creation of two teams – visiting and duty, the latter of which would be based at the Civic Centre and would deal with residents' enquiries. It was also confirmed that a key interface link at the main reception was going to be set up serving as a primary point of contact.

Discussion continued with the committee seeking further information on progress made with estate inspections regime and resolving issues around ground maintenance. With regards to estate inspections, officers stressed the importance of having a structured approach. As a result, they explained that the current inspection regime was in the process of being redesigned and would be renamed to "neighbourhood inspection". It would seek better liaison with block champions and more inclusiveness, thus allowing inspections to be joined by anyone, including residents, councillors and key stakeholders. The review was expected to be completed by end of August/beginning of September 2018 and information would be advertised on the website. 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.

RESOLVED:-

- i. that Housing Management Team seeks liaison with the welfare service in designing the resident engagement offer.
- ii. that Housing Management Team shares a copy of the Corporate Customer Service Strategy and Housing Promise Strategy with committee members
- iii. that Housing Management Team explores possibility of alternating Talk Back events venues between Brent Civic Centre and Willesden Library to allow further resident engagement
- iv. that Housing Management Team shares copy of the Resident Promise with committee members.

9. Estate Parking Project

At the invitation of the Chair, Hakeem Osinaike (Operational Director Housing) introduced the Estate Parking Project report which set out the Council's proposed solutions to estate parking. It was noted that following the Protection of Freedom Act 2012 parking on housing estates had become increasingly problematic and have restricted the Council's ability to carry out effective enforcement action. The proposals set out in the report therefore envisioned the introduction of the first controlled parking scheme commencing with five estates in the borough by September 2018. In acknowledging the challenges at stake, officers advised that an essential element of the new measures was the proposed increase in parking permits from £10 to £85 which was required to fund appropriate enforcement action.

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. Members were particularly critical of the level of detail provided in the report, noting that many questions remained unanswered. They expressed concerns that the new parking charges may leave residents feeling penalised by the Council putting them in hardship. The Committee also questioned whether the Council had investigated fully the level of proportionality between the number of parking spaces available on each estate and number of people as well as any additional arrangements in place including exemptions for staff and short term visitors parking.

With regards to the increased charges, members heard that there was clear evidence highlighting the inadequacy of the current charges and the lack of adequate parking enforcement funding. The proposed increase was considered a viable solution which would also ensure better residents' compliance. Officers emphasised their commitment to manage residents expectations and be clear about the implications of the changes, stressing that estates would not be obliged to take up the changes unless residents decided to do so. However, it was noted that the estates which chose not to accept the new charges would not have any parking enforcement carried out. It was noted that the £85 charge would bring the cost of parking permits in line with the CPZ scheme, without the

complex pricing schedules, with the Council reserving the right to review the cost in the future, depending on the demand and subject to consultation. Members heard that any funds raised by the parking charges would be ring-fenced within the Housing Revenue Account and would be separate from CPZ management, with any loss or profit made to be reported on.

On the issue of enforcement, officers addressed members concerns and explained that the current implementation, carried out by Wing Security, had been limited in scope and had flagged up issues imposed by the legal restrictions on accessing DVLA data. This had reduced the effectiveness of issuing penalties on unauthorised vehicles, permitting enforcement officers to target only those residents whose details were already known to the Council. In order to tackle these issues, the Council had recently extended its parking contract with Serco to carry out enforcement on public highways and off street car parks until 2023. The committee was assured that Serco's processes and coverage were flexible enough to accommodate a quick expansion of the parking enforcement on the Councils estates.

(8.23pm – Cllr Johnson left the meeting)

Discussion continued with officers addressing members' concerns about availability of parking spaces. Mindful of the existing issues of parking space shortage versus the number of residents requiring permit, officers detailed the Council's commitment to applying a fair allocation policy. It was explained that whilst permits were not a guarantee for a parking space, the Council was in the process of revising the parking space markings to ensure viability of the new proposals. Eligibility criteria would be applied accordingly, with priority given to blue badge holders and exemptions made for staff and care workers. Clear signage informing residents that parking enforcement was in place would also be placed.

(8.35pm – Michelle Lonergan left the meeting)

Referencing the report, officers responded to members queries about the consultation process and how representative the identified five estates on were of the parking problems experienced in the borough. They explained that the initial cohort of estates referenced in point 5.3 were chosen as a starting point because were deemed to be worst affected, with a wider consultation strategy was being prepared in conjunction with Housing and Environmental Services encompassing the rest of the borough. Addressing members concerns, Mr Osinaike stated that consultation with residents was of paramount importance to the Estate Parking Project with residents given opportunity to choose on a range of options including types of parking controls, preferred hours of operation and areas to be included.

RESOLVED:-

- i. that details on the outcome of the estate parking be shared with members of the committee
- ii. that First Wave Housing Board be asked to provide details on current parking arrangements within their estates and expected impact by the estate parking consultation.
- iii. that a detailed cost breakdown of increased parking charges be shared with committee members
- iv. that a list of registered vehicles on estate be compiled and compared against spaces available.

10. **Annual Report 2017/18**

RESOLVED:-

- i. That the contents of the Annual Report be noted

11. **Housing Scrutiny Work Programme 2018/19**

RESOLVED:-

- i. That the contents of the Work Programme be noted

12. **Forward Plan**

RESOLVED:-

- i. That the contents of the report be noted

13. **Any other urgent business**

None.

The meeting closed at 8.57 pm

COUNCILLOR JANICE LONG
Chair