



HOUSING SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE MINUTES

Tuesday 1 March 2022 at 7.00 pm

Room THB-06, Town Hall, Lambeth Town Hall, Brixton Hill, London SW2 1RW

Members Present: Councillor Liz Atkins (Substitute), Councillor Mary Atkins (Chair), Councillor Marcia Cameron (Substitute), Councillor Rezina Chowdhury and Councillor Pete Elliott

Apologies: Councillor Paul Gadsby, Councillor Emma Nye and Councillor Clair Wilcox

1 There were none. Declarations of Pecuniary Interest

There were none.

2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting of 16 November 2021 were approved as a correct record of proceedings.

3 Housing Contracts: Responsive Repairs

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness, Councillor Maria Kay, Neil Euesden, Director for Housing; and Andrew Jacques, Assistant Director for Repairs and Maintenance introduced the report.

The Sub-Committee next heard from Risq Animasaun, leaseholder and previous Tenants and Residents Association (TRA) Chair, who stated:

- Her estate had a WhatsApp group which kept participants informed on the state of repairs. A common theme of this group was that outsourced contractors were letting residents and the Council down, with frequent changes of contractors and works not undertaken.
- Many residents were not having repairs undertaken in a suitable period of time and the quality of service received was very poor.
- One elderly leaseholder was in dire need of help, with a leak in the above tenanted property not fixed for four years and he now had crumbling kitchen and bathroom ceilings.

The Chair requested that officers review the above noted case further with Ms Animasaun, Councillor Masters, and the affected leaseholder outside the meeting.

The Sub-Committee next heard from Councillor Jackie Meldrum, who stated:

- The Price per Property Model should be reviewed for responsive repairs and other housing contracts.

- Residents were concerned about repair appointments no shows, and it was essential they be informed when this was going to happen and received apologies when it occurred.
- Under the old Mears contract, tenants could apply for a £20 voucher for missed appointments.
- Councillors generally only received notice of the most complex repairs and it would be useful if there were statistics on long-term repairs.
- Lambeth's housing stock was old and its infrastructure was now suspect, requiring multiple trades to fix issues, and surveyors needed to carry out a full investigation of stock.
- It was requested to introduce a better system to protect tenants from cancelled appointments and provide analysis of overdue repairs.

The Sub-Committee next heard from Councillor Adrian Garden, on behalf of Antony Wynn – Chair of the Lambeth Homeowners Association, who stated:

- There was no mention of resident involvement in monitoring contractors' performance and it was queried whether there would be a formal residents' panel to do so.
- It was also queried whether there was a penalty clause for under-performance; and what were the targets, how were they monitored, at which point contractors were fined for failing to meet these and who monitored targets.

In response to the above and Member's questions, the Cabinet Member and officers stated the following:

- The Cabinet Member had spoken to leaseholders on Ms Animasaun's estate and remained available to discuss issues with residents and continue to work together.
- Officers would review a price per property model.
- The early performance of Wates on appointments was poor and the Council, and Wates, had apologised. However, since the report was published, data from February showed that appointments had increased to 76% for Wates.
- Measures had been put in place so that as soon as contractors were aware they were running over time on previous jobs, they would alert residents via call or text. The technology now in place would also allow residents to see arrival times and routes of attending operatives.
- A stock condition survey was just starting and a cyclical repair programme would be implemented to carry out planned maintenance programme to maintain stock. Additionally, smaller teams focused on estates were to be created in the move to a neighbourhood model.
- Residents were involved in service design, tendering contracts, and evaluating questions.
- Contract management was reviewed daily and the Council could now review individual contract management and performances, including when payment penalties started.
- Wates had increased its customer service team to four persons and they were to contact residents when appointments were missed and had committed to delivering that service.
- The call centre was still experiencing issues, such as detailing 50% of appointments as emergencies, when it should be closer to 20%. This effected how contractors were reacting and meant that routine appointments were subsequently missed. However, the Repairs and Maintenance team were working with contractors and Capita to alleviate these issues.
- Lambeth had always had a missed appointment compensation policy and aimed for residents to receive repairs as quickly as possible, but this would be reviewed.
- Recruitment across London remained difficult due to impacts from Brexit and Covid-19, with a condensed labour market ensuring higher salary demands than 18 months previously. Lambeth had encouraged Wates and its 10 other housing contractors to use

the Lambeth Portal to ensure local people were hired where possible.

- Wates had recruited significant numbers of Lambeth-based staff (75%) and now had that as a recruitment policy, in addition to offering apprenticeships to local residents.
- Lambeth had reviewed its Housing complaints process and carried out extensive discussions with the Housing Ombudsman over the last six months, who were satisfied with processes in place since July, and the Council continued to work closely with them to maintain standards.
- Lambeth's contractors' prices were linked to CPI and the Council was only obligated to increase rates as per the CPI regardless of material increases or labour market changes.
- Community works had a fixed long-term arrangement with Travis Perkins, as per the procurement framework, which actively protected budgets and fixed costs to indexes.
- Mighty Property Services (MPS) was a gas servicing contractor, that had been acquired by the Mears Group, who carried out day-to-day repairs. As detailed in the agenda pack, page 18, MPS had performed very well over ten years but had not received operatives under TUPE transfer nor recruited necessary employees and was underperforming. Lessons learnt from this experience were also included in the agenda pack, page 19, to ensure it did not happen again.
- Wates performed poorly on appointments during the start of its contract, but this had improved to 75% on-time, and further improvement was expected as a result of increasing numbers of customer service operators.
- The old contract had a £20 deduction for missed appointments which was paid out to residents. Deductions were still present and had significantly increased to c.£400,000 over the current contract term but was paid into the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and HRA social activity, and subsequently used for resident compensation.
- Targets were 2-24 hours for emergency and 7-28 days for routine repairs, with earlier appointments prioritised over those requested later. The previous appointment system did not receive this data nor offer monitoring, but Lambeth had invested in its own system giving it full visibility, which all contractors connected into, and helped the Council drive improvement.
- Further reassurance would be requested at the next weekly Repairs and Maintenance team meeting to ensure missed appointments were immediately called, rearranged, and prioritised.
- Lambeth had a strategy for vulnerable residents, which meant that it was aware of all vulnerable persons on estates, which was detailed on the Northgate system, and ensure they were prioritised.
- Home visits were underway and staff could log information directly onto the Northgate system, to allow better identification of casework, and this was expected to go live in April this year.
- A vulnerability team in Lambeth's Housing department was being created.
- All data from the appointments system was held securely on the Council's the Northgate system and linked up with contracts and repairs information.

The Chair noted the Sub-Committee's pleasure to see progress on voids, cultural changes, and repairs- particularly relation to action on damp.

RESOLVED:

1. To provide the Sub-Committee with details on measures to monitor performance and how residents were to be involved in this process in addition to the area boards.
2. To standardise missed appointments communications sent to residents.
3. To provide the Sub-Committee with an analysis of the backlog of repairs.

4. To provide the Sub-Committee with analysis of how the backlog was being reduced and how repairs were prioritised and undertaken, including for complex and vulnerable cases.
5. To report back to the Sub-Committee on how the new contract procurement process delivered value for money.
6. To examine how missed appointments were prioritised and rescheduled and ensure apologies were promptly provided to residents, by text or phone call.
7. To publicise the Compensation Policy more widely and ensure that contractors were held to account for missed appointments and residents compensated for issues such as taking time off work.
8. To provide the Sub-Committee with detail of the consideration to deliver an in-house repairs service.
9. To provide the Sub-Committee with further information on how the Council audited and checked repairs carried out by contractors.

4 Housing Contracts: DLO

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5 Estate Services Improvement Action Plan

During the discussion of this item the guillotine fell at 9.00 pm.

RESOLVED: That the meeting continue for a further period of up to 30 minutes.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness, Councillor Maria Kay; Neil Euesden, Director for Housing; and Chris Flynn, Assistant Director for Home Ownership and Rents, introduced the report.

The Sub-Committee next heard from Councillor Adrian Garden, on behalf of Antony Wynn – Chair of the Lambeth Homeowners Association, who stated:

- The report detailed that resident engagement was not applicable, although paragraph 2.8 recorded strong and constructive resident engagement.
- Significant issues remained over resident communications; particularly on overcharging for day-to-day services, adequately monitoring contractors, and responding to homeowner queries. It was suspected that poor communications between Housing and Finance were at fault, and improvement was requested.

The Sub-Committee next heard from Councillor Jackie Meldrum, who stated:

- It was difficult to report communal repairs, as the telephone number provided by the website in turn instructed you to call another number which had unacceptably long wait times.
- Improving the service design would mean that even people passing by could report repairs.
- She requested that communal repairs be put online and that officers be mindful that residents could be effective in monitoring repairs

In response to the above and Member's questions, the Cabinet Member and officers stated the following:

- FAQs and KPIs information being hosted on the Portal had been suggested by leaseholder groups and demonstrated constructive resident engagement.
- The Portal was going live at the end of April with the ability to raise communal repairs to be implemented in early May (in addition to property repairs).
- Officers were currently reviewing a better call experience with Capita and expected the call centre waiting times to decrease over the coming months.
- 60% of tenants and 33% of leaseholders were online, but the online Portal was an alternative option to report repairs alongside the current telephony option and was expected to help a significant number of leaseholders and reduce telephony demands.
- The Portal required persons to register with personal details, however there was currently no provision for councillors to use it to report communal repairs, although this would be explored.
- The Portal would not actively reduce the numbers of repairs that existed.
- Homeowner invoices were cleansed before being uploaded to the Portal and would enable residents to review breakdowns of financial years' invoices.
- There had been significant resident engagement over last 19 months developing the Portal and Lambeth was continually evolving the Portal to improve functionality based on feedback.
- 3,000 leaseholders had signed-up to date, although there was much more in terms of engagement to do, particularly with homeowners.

- 380 freeholders had currently signed up to the Portal and the system included freeholder service charges. However, private tenants' access to leaseholder information remained an issue and needed further review.
- Lambeth was reviewing a new call centre provider and contract, with increased demands over winter meaning that the 30 staff stipulated in the current contract was not enough to handle call volumes. It was recognised that present waiting times had improved, and whilst further improvement was expected, call waiting times had been too long.

RESOLVED:

1. To provide Sub-Committee Members with a demonstration of Portal and FAQs.
2. To review allowing councillors to access the repairs portal and how to enable private tenants to raise communal repairs.
3. To provide further detail on plans to increase registration of leaseholders, freeholders, and tenants.
4. To provide case studies of what leaseholders can and cannot do, including the short videos, on the Portal.
5. To correct the telephone number on the website.
6. To provide the Sub-Committee with details on the interim call centre solution prior to the new contract and provide key performance indicators that will be monitored.
7. To provide the Sub-Committee with lessons learnt from the terminated call centre contract.
8. To provide further information to the Sub-Committee on the analysis and consideration of providing a future in-house solution for the asset partner including maintaining knowledge of stock (knowledge management).

6 Housing Communications and Portal

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness, Councillor Maria Kay; Neil Euesden, Director for Housing; Tim Fairhurst, Assistant Director for Neighbourhood Housing; and Linda Elliott, Head of Estate Services, introduced the report.

In response to Member's questions, the Cabinet Member and officers stated the following:

- Resident-drafted Estate Action Plans were available on the Council's website for all residents, which were reviewed by housing officers.
- Lambeth recognised further improvements were needed after the Estate Action Plans, to match residents' ambition and to incorporate other services, and had devised the overarching Estate Services Improvement Action Plan.
- Resident satisfaction had declined and officers were identifying and reviewing causes, such as grounds maintenance, which would then be shared with contractors who would provide comments on how they would progress works. These would subsequently be put into the Improvement Action Plan, covering all contracts and different elements of council services.
- Estate Action Plans were originally developed by residents during meetings with housing officers to understand issues facing residents and were often simply a list of actions to undertake.
- The Improvement Plans were more critical and sought to tackle residents' satisfaction and overarching estate actions required.
- Resident groups owned Estate Action Plans and the Council worked with them to progress.

- The Estate Improvement Plan was ambitious and included resident engagement and repairs in a complicated process that built on pre-existing plans.
- Resident health and wellbeing strongly correlated with estate condition and was a key consideration during improvement works, such as providing high-quality ballcourts and community gardens.
- CCTV was being refreshed to improve safety and were included in the Improvement Plans.
- Lambeth had ordered dual use bins so that dog fouling could be collected by contractors, and stickers had been placed on normal litter bins to notify of this dual use.
- The Council was trialling digital advertising to push messaging and to promote and attract local businesses, in addition to reviewing electric vehicle charging provision.
- Tree planting was under review with 20-30 estates identified to receive more planting.

RESOLVED:

1. Further information and clarity was needed to detail:
 - a. the hierarchy of aims and performance indicators to enable monitoring;
 - b. more reasoning behind the aims detailed in the Plan; and,
 - c. how wider strategies linked into the Plan.
2. To review the status of Estate Action Plans and how Tenant and Resident Associations (TRAs) were to co-produce the Improvement Plan.
3. To ensure the Estates Services Improvement Plan included underlying Estate Action Plans.

7 Work Programme

The Chair introduced the Sub-Committee's Work Programme item detailing provisional items and themes for the rest of the municipal year. In discussion, the Sub-Committee noted the following items be included as potential areas for further scrutiny and would discuss further outside the meeting:

- To escalate the overdue reply to Gerlinde Gniewosz.
- To scrutinise leaseholders' policies and working in more detail, particularly on insurance, subsistence and for those in mixed-use buildings.
- To review the reaction and response for residents impacted by recent storms and resultant damage, particularly the emergency situation on Cressingham Gardens.
- To bring the Housing Strategy for further scrutiny.
- To receive a paper on repairs on regeneration estates.
- To hold a briefing session to discuss this years' work programme and input into topics of consideration for the next municipal year's housing scrutiny.

RESOLVED:

1. To consider and approve the work programme as currently drafted (Appendix 1) and identify and prioritise matters for future scrutiny of Housing.

The meeting ended at 9.29 pm

CHAIR
HOUSING SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

Date of Despatch: Tuesday 29 March 2022

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