

# **MINUTES OF MEETING Housing, Planning and Development Scrutiny Panel HELD ON Wednesday, 20th September, 2023, 18:30**

## **PRESENT:**

**Councillors: Dawn Barnes, Mark Blake, Harrison-Mullane, Tammy Hymas, John Bevan and Alexandra Worrell (Chair)**

### **122. FILMING AT MEETINGS**

The Chair referred Members present to agenda Item 1 as shown on the agenda in respect of filming at this meeting, and Members noted the information contained therein'.

### **123. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Moyeed.

Apologies for lateness were received from Cllr Harrison-Mullane and Cllr Barnes.

### **124. URGENT BUSINESS**

There were no items of urgent business.

### **125. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None

### **126. DEPUTATIONS/PETITIONS/PRESENTATIONS/QUESTIONS**

None

### **127. MINUTES**

#### **RESOLVED**

That the minutes of the meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> June 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

### **128. HOUSING IMPROVEMENT PLAN UPDATE**

The Panel received a report and a verbal presentation that provided an update on the progress of the Housing Improvement Plan, which was approved at Cabinet on 18<sup>th</sup> April 2023. The report and the Housing Improvement Plan, attached at Appendix A of the report, was included in the agenda pack at pages 11-88. The presentation was

introduced by Jahedur Rahman, Operational Director of Housing Services & Building Safety as set out in the tabled papers pack. David Joyce, Director of Placemaking and Housing was present for this item. Cllr Williams, the Cabinet Member for Housing Services, Private Renters and Planning was also present for this item. The following arose in discussion of this agenda item:

- a. The Panel queried why there weren't performance milestones in place regarding repairs from the outset of the improvement plan. In response, officers advised that in order to drive the levels of improvement required that there would need to be a period of time for the changes to be embedded in the service. Officers set out that they were in the process of introducing a new category of repairs for a five to seven day turnaround, but that they needed to ensure that the staff and technology were in place to do this. Officers emphasised that they wanted to make sure that they were able to deliver what was promised.
- b. The Panel members raised concerns about delays to repair work and multiple visits being carried out by different operatives before repair work was undertaken. In this context, the Panel queried how productivity would be measured by repair staff. In response, officers advised that the number of jobs carried out per day would vary according to the type of work that person undertook. It was suggested that five to six jobs a day was a reasonable, for non-wet work. Officers confirmed they monitored where jobs took longer than they should and were trying to recruit operatives that were multi-skilled and could undertake a variety of trades.
- c. In response to a question about the process for repair jobs being logged, officers advised that they were logged through the call centre and emphasised the importance of being able to accurately diagnose the problem/repair to ensure that repairs were not unnecessarily delayed.
- d. The Panel sought clarification about whether the council was monitoring claims of legal disrepair. In response, officers acknowledged that there was a concern around rising legal costs in relation to disrepair and that the service was discussing with legal colleagues about how to reduce this. It was suggested that, ultimately, a better repairs service would bring the number of cases down.
- e. As a follow-up, it was suggested that this should be monitored as a performance indicator as it was indicative of where things were going wrong and cases of severe resident dissatisfaction. Officers responded by reiterating the need to put the right structures in place to reduce legal disrepair claims. Officers advised that legal disrepair claims were a symptom of a wider problem and that they were putting in place the building blocks to improve the repairs service step by step, but that the service had to initially prioritise serious safety disrepair issues and then damp and mould repairs. The Panel requested that some consideration be given to developing a performance metric around the cost of legal fees being paid out on legal disrepair claims. **(Action: Jahedur Rahman).**
- f. The Panel emphasised the importance of having a framework agreement in place and noted concern with delays in implementing this. In response, the Panel was advised that this was something that was being worked on and the Cabinet Member offered to bring an update on this to a future meeting. **(Action: Clerk).**
- g. The Panel requested more information about recruiting to apprenticeship roles and the impact of the national pay award. In response, officers advised that

apprenticeships were not specifically mentioned in the HIP but that there was a wider recognition of there being an aging work force and the need to bring in apprentices. Officers acknowledged that repairs operatives were on the Red Book scheme and that this was determined through a national pay award.

- h. The Panel raised an issue about the working culture of staff and suggested that too many staff were still working from home. In response, officers acknowledged the need for housing to be a place-based service and that management had brought staff back into the office where this was required or where it was felt that output had dipped. It was suggested that the number of housing staff working in Haringey had increased significantly and that management were continuing to engage with unions on this.
- i. The Panel sought clarification around Resident Voice and how residents were chosen to sit on this. In response, officers advised that around 80 applications had been received and that these had been whittled down to a short list of 50. It was envisaged that this groups would monitor and scrutinise progress against the 180 actions set out within the HIP, along with scrutinising performance data and complaints data.
- j. In response to the report setting out plans to automate notice to quit letters, the members sought clarification about checks and safeguards for vulnerable tenants. In response, officers set out that the first letters informing the tenant of rent arrears would be automatically generated. If a payment plan was put in place this would resolve the issue. If no response was received then door knocking and an in-person visit to the property would be undertaken. Officers acknowledged that there were safeguards in place to ascertain if that person was eligible for unclaimed benefits and that Legal would undertake a checklist of actions undertaken before a notice to quit was issued.
- k. In response to the point made about neighbouring boroughs paying more to repairs staff, officers set out that the market was very challenging as all landlords were all competing for qualified staff following the heightened national profile of damp and mould issues, in light of the recent case in Rotherham.
- l. In response to a question, officers advised that the deep cleaning team was employed on an initial one year programme and that this would be reassessed after a year.
- m. In response to a question around comparative boroughs and those who specifically monitored housing management cases for leaseholders. Officers set out that there were 14 London Boroughs who used the NEC Northgate system and also used the leaseholder module. Officers also highlighted Thurrock as a comparative borough.
- n. The Panel sought assurances around the impact of upcoming strike action by Unite housing operatives, officers advised that the first strike day would see the service scaled back to providing only emergency works, but that it was envisaged that the other three proposed strike days would have a full service available to residents.
- o. The Panel asked whether there was a plan in place to increase maintenance, given that the Council was going to be building 3000 council homes. In response, officers advised that it was envisaged that the Council's Housing Delivery Programme would increase the overall management and staffing capacity going forwards. In response to a follow-up question, officers suggested that a housing manager would look after 600-800 properties and

that staffing levels would be increased accordingly. The Director emphasised the successful recruitment of all of the top management posts within the service and the fact that a full top-level management team had probably not been in place for a long time. The Cabinet Member also emphasised the fact that snagging issues were reported and picked up.

- p. Concerns were raised by Members around a failure to implement a holistic approach to repairs on estates and that focusing on Decent Homes improvements would result in long overdue repairs and maintenance being side-lined. In response, officers acknowledged that adopting a holistic approach would ultimately save the council money. Officers set out that they had to do targeted work this year on Decent Homes as this had been mandated by the Housing Regulator. The holistic approach would be focused on non-Decent Homes stock estates.
- q. Officers confirmed that the target was to bring 1000 homes up to Decent Homes Standards year on year.
- r. In response to a question, officers advised that the report did not reflect the actions arising from the Ombudsman report as they were working to different timescales for the HIP and the Ombudsman report.

## **RESOLVED**

That the report and presentation were noted.

### **129. UPDATE ON THE COUNCIL'S HOUSING DELIVERY PROGRAMME**

The Panel received a report which provided an overview of the Council's progress towards delivering 3000 Council homes for Council rent by 2031. Work had begun on 2027 homes as of August 2023, of these 199 homes had been finished and new tenants had moved in. The report was introduced by Cllr Ruth Gordon, Cabinet Member for Council House Building, Placemaking and Local Economy, as set out in the agenda pack at pages 89-114. The Director of Placemaking & Housing, the Assistant Director of Housing and the Head of Housing Development were also present for this agenda item. The following arose as part of the discussion of the report:

- a. The Panel raised concerns about how the first new properties were let and sought assurances about what lessons had been learned. In response, the Cabinet Member advised that the first batch of flats were let at the same time and that lessons had been learned so that in future this would be staggered and would not happen over the Christmas period. Housing officers would also be onsite for the period when people moved in.
- b. The Panel sought assurances about stoppages being caused by contractors going bust. In response, officers advised that this was a national issue and was being discussed with colleagues on a regional level. Officers from Placemaking and Housing were working with procurement colleagues to assess the financial health of contractors before entering into any contracts as well as expanding the assessment of contractual risks.
- c. The Panel commented that they were impressed by the design of the new housing blocks and questioned how the additional up-keep of green spaces would be managed by Parks. The Cabinet Member welcomed these comments and commented that she was very positive about the design of the blocks on

- Ashley Road. Officers set out that they were working closely with Parks to ensure that there was a common approach to maintaining these spaces and that the seasonal variation in parks staffing was considered. Similarly, wider considerations about the design of open spaces and whether this contributed to ASB was also being considered for each scheme.
- d. The Panel questioned how the cost of building new homes stacked up against buying existing properties. In response, officers advised that this was done through the Haringey Community Benefit Society and that there they currently let around 300 properties. In general, the Panel was advised that, new builds tended to be cheaper to build due to grants from the GLA for new housing schemes. The purpose of the scheme was to build homes on council land. Where it was more cost effective to purchase existing properties, this would be done but it tended to be leaseholder properties on a limited number of estates. The Cabinet Member clarified that within the commitment for 3000 new homes, some of these would be acquisitions as well as new build properties. On the Hale Wharf development, 77 properties had been acquired by the Council.
  - e. The Panel sought assurances around financial viability and whether it was anticipated that Council rents would increase to help with the viability of schemes. In response, officers set out that it was quite complicated, but in general the type of rent charged was determined by the type of grant used to build that scheme. Some GLA grants were based on London Affordable Rent and some used council rents. The AD for Housing assured Members that every year they went through the HRA Business Plan to make sure that the underlying assumptions were robust. It was acknowledged that the economic circumstances were difficult, but that the Housing Delivery Programme was still considered achievable. Officers provided assurances that there were no plans to mothball any of the schemes. Officers suggested that they were beginning to see some positive movement on construction costs and that they were looking at seeing if they could get more grant funding for some smaller schemes.
  - f. The Panel sought assurances about the fact that there were varying definitions of what constituted a start on site and whether this was only a start on paper. In response, officers provided assurances that works were not undertaken just to trigger a start on site and that for some of the larger sites this could be a process that took a couple of years. A start on site reflected that work was genuinely being undertaken on site, none of the starts were tokenistic. There were occasions where a scheme had to start by a certain date to receive grant funding.
  - g. In response to a question, the Cabinet Member set out that there were occasions where utility supplies had to be re-routed due to the design of a particular scheme and that discussions would be undertaken with contractors to determine who would pay for the additional cost.
  - h. In terms of defects, the Cabinet Member suggested that there had been a limited number of snagging issues with entry monitoring systems and air source heat pumps, for example but that it was sometimes difficult to determine whether problems were defects or caused by inappropriate use. The setting up of an after care team had made a big difference in terms of addressing snagging issues.

**RESOLVED**

That the update was noted.

### **130. SEVEN SISTERS MARKET SCRUTINY REVIEW - RECOMMENDATIONS IMPLEMENTATION UPDATE**

The Panel received a report which provided an update on the recommendations to a Scrutiny Review carried out by the Housing & Regeneration Scrutiny Panel on the future of Seven Sisters Market (SSM) in 2022. The report also provided an update on the current position with SSM, including works to create a temporary market with both indoor and outdoor space. The report was introduced by Toussainte Reba, Head of Area Regeneration, as set out in the agenda pack at pages 115-262. Cllr Ruth Gordon, Cabinet Member for Council House Building, Placemaking and Local Economy and the Director of Placemaking & Housing were also present for this agenda item. The following arose as part of the discussion of the report:

- a. The Panel sought assurances about how the different groups of traders were being brought together. In response, officers set out that TfL had undertaken one to one meetings with every trader who had a stall in the previous market to understand their requirements. TfL had appointed an independent chair to the Partnership Board and that the chair would provide a level of mediation. A temporary market operator had been appointed by TfL and they would be looking to engage with tenants on rents. The Council's general position on rents at the market is that the rents should reflect the fact that SSM was a community asset.
- b. The Panel sought clarification about whether any contact had been received from another bidder that wasn't involved with the CBS and Community Plan. Officers advised that this process was being managed by TTLP (TfL) but that no other bidders has been received for the long lease of the market site so far but that there was some work needed to be done to flush out whether there were any other bidders.
- c. In response to a follow-up about possible interest from the Creative Land Trust, officers advised that they had not received any communication about this but reiterated that they were expecting TfL to seek expressions of interest for the long-term lease of the site and that this would bring the process along. The Cabinet Member emphasised that she and officers were pushing TfL, and that this was as much as they could do at this stage.
- d. In relation to a questions around hardship payments, officers advised that all 36 eligible traders had received payments, which equated to around £30k each over a three year period.
- e. In response to a question, officers advised that 38 different traders was the figure that TfL were working towards in terms of designing the new market site.
- f. In response to a question, officers confirmed that two independent Spanish translators were provided at meetings with the traders.

### **RESOLVED**

The Panel noted the update on progress with the implementation of the HRSP recommendations relating to the Seven Sisters Markets site, which were agreed by Cabinet in July 2022.

**131. WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE**

**RESOLVED**

That the Panel noted the work plan.

**132. NEW ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS**

N/A

**133. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

- 14 November 2023
- 18 December 2023
- 26 February 2024

CHAIR: Councillor Alexandra Worrell

Signed by Chair .....

Date .....