

Tenant & Leaseholder Panel

Meeting held on Tuesday, 9 January 2024 at 6.30 pm in Room 1.01 and 1.02 - Bernard Weatherill House, Mint Walk, Croydon CR0 1EA

MINUTES

Present: Yaw Boateng (Chair);
Leslie Parry (Vice-Chair);
Councillors Adele Benson (online), Lara Fish, Alisa Flemming (online),
Brigitte Graham (online), Lynne Hale and Chrisdni Reshekaron

Also

Present: James Watt (Resident Involvement Officer), Orlagh Guarnori (Acting Head of Finance), Susmita Sen (Corporate Director of Housing), Mary Larby (Interim Director of Tenancy Services), Sue Hanlon (Interim Director of Assets), Jerry Austin (Interim Head of Repairs and Maintenance), Tariq Aniemeka-Bailey (Democratic Services Officer), Debra Pring, Theresa French, Ian Leonard, Jill Arboine, Ishia Beckford, Monica Binns, Tamar Coleman, James Gitau, Nicola Glover, Grace Osoata, David Palmer, Guy Pile-Grey, Marilyn Smithies, Sharon Swaby, Jamil Tarik and Kim Wakely; Kelly Gater and Yvonne Davy.

Apologies: Theresa French, Dave Mundy and James Fraser

PART A

1/24 **Welcome and Introductions**

The Panel Members, Councillors and officers in attendance introduced themselves.

2/24 **Disclosure of Interest**

There were no disclosures at this meeting.

3/24 **Minutes of Previous Meeting**

The Panel resolved to defer the decision on whether to approve the minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday, 10 October 2023 as an accurate record to the next Tenant and Leaseholder Panel meeting on the 6 February 2024.

Councillor Reshekaron entered the meeting at 6.39pm.

Rent Consultation

The Chair introduced the item and invited the Corporate Director of Housing to address the Panel. The Corporate Director of Housing explained that purpose of the meeting was for officers to explain the implications of the rent increase, the pressures that the housing revenue account was under and the work that was underway to address the housing needs within the borough.

The Corporate Director of Housing informed the Panel that the Council's housing department was on a transformation journey following the notice served by the regulator for social housing for breaching the consumer regulation standards. The Corporate Director of Housing explained that the focus over the past 18 months had been to turn these services around, and key part of this strategy was investment into the Council's housing stock.

The Finance Manager conducted a presentation to the Panel, which can be found via the following link: <https://civico.net/croydon/meetings>

In response to questions from Panel members, officers informed the Panel that:

- The caretaking duties which were referred to in the presentation included litter pickers from Veolia.
- The service charges increase of 7.7% only applied to social housing tenants and not leaseholders or freeholders whose charges were handled separately.
- Officers would have to scale back on some of the services provided to tenants if they did not recommend a 7.7% rent increase.
- Cabinet would decide whether to increase the rent, but officers had presented the proposal to the Tenant and Leaseholder Panel first as they wanted to understand their priorities.
- The rent increase would help to ensure that the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) reserves were adequately built up.
- Officers agreed to give the Tenant and Leaseholder Panel a breakdown on the HRA in future.
- The HRA had around £15 million in reserve, this was a result of the open book exercise which looked at the previous charges to the HRA from the general fund where officers retrospectively took back money from the general fund.
- Leaseholders and freeholders paid the actual cost of the services they received, so officers were not able to add any additional charges.
- Officers planned to review their service arrangements for the current year, and they were aware that there were tenants who did not claim benefits that they were entitled to.
- Officers had advertised the fact that they had a hardship fund, and the aim was to use the fund more intelligently by using data to target residents in need.
- Currently there were 15 additional repairs raised and 2000 additional calls received per month on average.

- Generally, when a contract was demobilised and a new contract is then mobilised, there was a period of time where tenants tended to hold back on reporting and repairs as they knew that the old contract had come to an end. Officers believed the increase in the number of calls and repairs was due to some residents holding back repairs for a period of time before reporting them from the 1st of August.
- Officers had factored in the increase in the number of surveys in their budget setting however they did not know what type of repairs or maintenance would be needed following the surveys. This is why it was important for officers to regularly review the HRA and levels of rent being charged to ensure that the Council could meet the investment needs of their housing stock.
- Fire risk assessments were being carried out and there was a clear timeline set out by the government which was linked to the Building Safety Act.
- Once officers had received the data from the surveys which were currently being conducted, they would use the data to inform them on decisions about which work would be prioritised.
- Officers were required to update the government on the 1 October 2024.
- Officers had targeted to complete 40% stock conditions survey of their stock by the 31 March 2024. Officers would then conduct a stock condition survey of 20% of their housing stock each year, so that over the course of five years they would have inspected every property in their stock. This data would then inform officers on which properties they would prioritise planned investment work for.
- Officers had to inform the government that they had completed a fire risk assessment for all of their buildings which were over 18 metres and any other buildings which were considered high risk (a property could be considered high risk due to who its occupier) by the 31 September.
- If there were properties which had water leaks, then officers encouraged residents to report the issues to them.
- There were around 500 legal disrepair legacy cases and the oldest case dated back to 2019.
- The additional 1,500 repairs raised that had been mentioned in the presentation included repairs that had been raised online.
- The three core areas in which the increased amount of repair cases related to were voids, damp and mould and day to day repairs.
- The contractors conducting the repairs were using sub-contractors to achieve the key performance indicators (KPI's) and standards set out in the contract. Due to the additional demand of 1500 repairs per month, the contractors had decided to bring in additional resources to help them to meet the demand.
- The emergency damp and mould cases would be prioritised ahead of the less critical cases.

- The 7.7% increase was required in order for the Council to be able to increase their resources to meet the demand of their damp and mould cases.
- The extra resource would ensure that there was a sufficient number of trained staff members who could help the Council to work through its backlog and new cases.
- The damp and mould team would be a permanent fixture due to the volume of cases that had arisen, this had been factored into the structure of the housing department.
- Officers would check whether the contact centre advisor was following the agreed process to avoid duplication, advisors should be looking at repair history first to determine whether a repair had already been raised previously before raising a new repair.
- The contact centre had a telephony system where the managers could listen into calls to monitor whether advisors were following the agreed processes.
- The contract agreement that the Council had with its contractors enabled the Council to recall a contractor to a job in which repairs that had already been carried out had become faulty again within a year, this would be done at no extra cost to the Council.
- In damp and mould cases, officers would be monitoring how the initial visits were managed, the request for jobs and ensuring that the check was conducted within 12 weeks.
- The Council would respond to the government's consultation as part of the London Councils Group and on behalf of Croydon, the Council would need to provide a response to the government within six weeks.
- The Council would need to conduct stock conditions surveys in order to improve the accuracy of their data regarding the condition of their housing stock.
- Part of the response to the Councils legal disrepair cases required tenants to be re housed, this had been included in the overspend that the housing department sought to manage.
- The draft budget that had been proposed for the next municipal year saw a 33% increase in the repairs budget. This increase would be dependent on the 7.7% increase in rent being agreed.
- This would allow the Council to avoid paying a compensation for legal disrepair cases as they would manage repairs before properties became disrepair cases.
- Emergency repairs were measured separately to routine repairs.
- New contact centre advisors would need to be adequately trained so that they understood the differences between the nine categories, how to diagnose repairs and to ensure that they knew the right trade was requested to attend.
- The target time for emergency repairs was within 24 hours.
- Emergency repairs could include a leak in a property or if the only toilet within a property was unable to flush.
- A routine repair could involve fixing a kitchen tap.

- The Council had appointed a new Head of Caretaking, they were currently working their notice period in their current role.
- The Council had appointed a new communications officer who had been tasked with improving the housing departments social media profile.
- If the recommendation for a rent increase was completely rejected, then the rent would stay at the same price it was at in the year 2023-24.
- Social housing tenants service charges were pooled, and money was allocated from this pool to provide services to social housing tenants.
- The Mayor and cabinet would decide on whether to agree the officers recommendations on the rent increase at the Cabinet meeting on the 14 February.

5/24 **Date of next meeting**

It was confirmed that the next meeting would be held on 6 February 2024 at 6:30pm in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX.

The meeting ended at 8.42 pm

Signed:

Date:

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