

Tenant & Leaseholder Panel

Meeting of held on Tuesday, 18 July 2023 at 6.30 pm in Council Chamber, Town Hall, Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX

MINUTES

Present: Leslie Parry (Chair);

Councillors Lara Fish, Brigitte Graham, Lynne Hale, Alisa Flemming (virtual) and Chrishni Reshekaron (virtual)

Also Present: Ishia Beckford, Dave Mundy, David Palmer, Marilyn Smithies

Apologies: Yaw John Boateng and Jill Airborne, Kim Wakeley, Councillor Ben-Hassel entered late 7.08pm.

PART A

47/23 **Welcome and Introductions**

48/23 **Disclosure of Interest**

There were no disclosures at this meeting.

49/23 **Minutes of Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 25 April 2023 were agreed as an accurate record.

50/23 **Resident Engagement Framework Refresh**

Emma Gilpin, Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS), presented the report on the Resident Engagement Framework Refresh*.

In response to question the Officer explained:

- The resident sessions were focused on the contributors in the room, the discovery phase was used to establish context for the report, and the participants would be asked for their thoughts and opinions. The report would use direct quotes from contributors.

51/23 **Report on Voids**

The Chair invited Mary Larbie to present the report on Voids to the Panel. In response to questions the Officer explained:

- In the last two months, residents had been consulted on moving to properties on the lettable standards. Their views about the current standards had been ascertained and the feedback from 21 residents formed the basis for how existing standards would be improved. By September, Voids should be in position to introduce the new standards. In July and August, the feedback would be used to evaluate affordability and to determine how the standard could be improved. It has been decided that the current action would be to decorate various properties.
- Inspectors and surveyors would inspect properties to the new lettable standards. Once inspected, notes should be placed on a property file along with photos and the scope of what was agreed at the beginning. Where there were issues with inspections, it had been the role of the void manager to address those with the individual as well as the contact. To tackle ongoing issues, a satisfaction survey had been introduced and at the end of each month, each service head i.e., lettings, allocation, voids, must address identified issues and use the void meeting to confirm any actions to resolve issues.
- The end-to-end process would be the responsibility of one director or manager. They would be responsible for escalating any issues in other teams. They also should oversee collective responsibility of all teams so where an issue arose within a department, i.e., letting or tenancy, they could discuss the issue directly with the responsible officer.
- The Voids manager should be in place this year and there was a post for evaluation.
- All departments had met to outline their processes and agreed stages to ensure that delivery timescales were met. Construction was timetabled to commence in August with completion at the end of September. During the build, there would be testing to ensure that it was fit for purpose.

52/23 **Update on Decent Homes Standard**

Kevin Hartshorn, Interim Head of Asset Planning & Capital Delivery presented the update on Decent Home Standards.

In response to questions the Officer explained:

- Key Building Components were part of the Decent Home Standard. The department were seeking to complete a full survey of stock within 3 to 4 years. When determining the Asset Management strategy, which would involve engagement with residents, the consideration would be whether a standard for Croydon should be created.

- The need for better quality installations was to be balanced with costing and quality of stock. The Croydon standard could establish a refresh and renew standard aimed at lengthening the age of installations. The objective was to develop ideas to address long-term maintenance needs, procurement of replacements for used or worn parts, and to tackle issues with supply chain-management.
- All 20 properties with performance failures were occupied. A category 1 failure was a different issue as some mitigation and work was required to address the core issues and hazards. Others that failed for various reasons adopted a plan programme. Each of the 18 ordinary failures and 2 category 1 failures were on a plan programme this year. Residents would not need to be relocated to fix the issues. However, with category 1 failures, relocation was determined on a case-by-case basis; if work could be done to reduce the hazard and risk, this would be sufficient.
- Councillors could provide ideas on how best to approach conversations with residents about their homes and to explain the importance of information gathering for resource allocation and investment.

53/23 **Update on Housing Revenue Account (HRA)**

Orlugh Guarnori, Finance Manager, presented the update on the Housing Revenue Account.

In response to questions the Officers explained:

- The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) were brought in to design bespoke training. This was issued to all departments to put in place good governance to prevent reoccurrence and to ensure that only core services were being charged to the HRA, and that HRA tenants were not double paying for services. Service Level Agreements (SLAs) would also be instated going forward. Any charges to the HRA, would require a robust SLA outlining why the charge occurred and what the benefit to the HRA tenant was. Also, key performance indicators (KPIs) would be introduced to determine what had been achieved and if the objective was not achieved, the charge would not be paid.
- The CIPFA training was recorded and would be uploaded to Croydon learning, the staff portal for training. This would be used for this financial year, but the agreement was to complete refresher training to ensure everyone was up to speed so that good governance was embedded, and new employees were made aware. The training slides and pack provided background to what the HRA was and what could

and could not be charged. It has been made available at Croydon Learning for all staff members to review.

- In this financial year, SLAs were not submitted as they were not prepared. However, Mary Larbie had signed off a couple of agreements that the department was comfortable with. These were to be registered. In total, there were two agreements signed and 2 drafted for discussion.
- The opening of the books exercise looked back to years 2019/20 as these were the accounts that were open, so it had gone back as far as it could go back for 3 years.
- SLAs had been signed with the Corporate Anti-fraud team and Community Safety team. An SLA was drafted for the Sustainable Community Grounds and Parks team and another in discussion with Legal.
- CIPFA had reviewed the work conducted by the HRA since the opening of the books exercise and had confirmed that appropriate governance had been put in place. The external audits that would take place and the internal audit structure was now geared for governance to be tested continuously.

54/23 **Update on Housing Strategy**

Velvet Dibley, Senior Strategy Officer, presented the update on the Housing Strategy.

In response to questions the Officers explained:

The officer confirmed that the updated report would be circulated to the panel as a slide was missing.

- Currently, the Resident's Charter was only formally adopted by Housing. Corporately, there was an effort to adopt something similar or a Charter on customer service more broadly to improve the culture and people strategy. The officer advised that they would return to the panel with an update on the matter of adopting the Charter throughout the council.
- Housing services had employed a Customer Services Manager to primarily focus on clearing the backlog of repair complaints. This was supported by a team and newly established systems to prevent backlogs from emerging in the future.
- Mayor Perry was interested in modular housing; he previously visited a site in Southwark ran by Centrepont. Dave Baptiste, the Regeneration lead, was interested in speaking with Southwark and Centrepont about

the development of modular homes and off-site construction, where appropriate.

- The Census data included housing associations. 17% of socially rented homes within Croydon had a split of 9.7% owned by Croydon Council and 8.2% owned by other registered providers which included larger and smaller housing associations.
- Croylease was a part of the homelessness prevention and rough sleeping strategy and wider procurement of private sector accommodation. Separate to the issues with Croylease on voids, the private sector rent offer in Croydon compared to other local authorities was not competitive. The incentive for private sector landlords to give properties to the council for allocation to those on the housing register was not sufficiently competitive, but this would be reviewed as part of the wider review on procuring private renters accommodation.
- In terms of rough sleeping, Croydon performed well in that there were low rates of people sleeping rough for a second night. However, homelessness prevention and relief were not as good. Benchmarking informed the aim to shift the proportion of prevention and relief duties offered so more people could access services at the prevention stage. Presently, 30% of duties offered were for prevention whilst 70% of duties were offered for relief. In other London Boroughs an inverse relationship may be present, so ratios needed improving. However, per head, considering the homelessness applications received, homelessness services were standard, but the relationship with the public should be changed so that people seek resources before crisis point.
- There had not been a Housing strategy since 2013. The Housing directorate was new and prior to 2021, Housing was not a discreet entity. Housing Association engagement sessions had not been held yet and there was no established relationship with Housing Associations. However, resources were dedicated to working on the relationship. The officer offered to provide an update on how the session went.
- Councillors may share the online service consultation with any of their networks; physical copies of the consultation were in some libraries. There was consideration to extend the deadline for engagement by another week to boost the number of participants. The officer confirmed that they would send the consultation's link to all councillors.

Leslie Parry made a note about the Tenants Charter. This was meant to be applied across the Council as presented to Katherine Kerswell, CEO, the Interim Director of Housing, Alison Knight, and Labour Cabinet member, Patricia Hay-Justice. It was made clear at the meeting that the Charter would

apply across the borough. This was accepted but not acted upon until June 2022 when the policy was adopted by the Mayor, its cabinet and formally later that year. Leslie Parry and Yaw Boateng will be meeting with the Executive Mayor, Jason Perry, on the 3rd of August on this issue.

55/23 Report from resident representatives

- Marilyn Smithies gave a report about the next meeting of the Resident Voice Group due to take place on Thursday 31 August.
- Leslie Parry delivered a report on behalf of Yaw Boateng: ARCH Tenants Conference is Thursday 14 September in Stevenage. Each landlord has 5 free spaces, but they need to register. The recommendation is that more tenants than officers(e.g., 3 tenants 2 officers) register. ARCH have asked for booking as soon as possible. Leslie Parry has registered an interest.

56/23 Any Other Business

There were none.

57/23 Date of next meeting

Tuesday 5th September 2023 at 6:30pm in Room 1.01, Bernard Weatherill House, 8 Mint Walk, Croydon CR0 1EA.

The meeting ended at 8.31 pm

Signed:

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Date:

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