

LBC HOUSING DEPARTMENT

“A WAY FORWARD”

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MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

Current structure is divided between two Directorships and multiple Heads of Service the work ethic is not a united philosophy and needs a radical change. It is suggested that there should be one Director giving outstanding Leadership.

Regarding Head of Service areas it is suggested that Tenancy and Housing Needs(allocations) should be with one Head of Service including garages and leaseholders Tenant Members can give examples of fragmented working that affects dealing with tenant issues and a recent example is that of Housing Voids as presented to the CEO Council Leader and Cabinet Member.

DIGITAL MEASURES TO BE EXAMINED AND DISCUSSED WITH TENANTS

- Tenant Housing Records and other data the council holds must be able to be viewed by tenants and this is a legal right under GDPR
- This should be in the form of an integrated single tenant record
- Such records should be open to amendment by the tenant if information is inaccurate.
- No data or information should be made available to third parties including contractors.

HOUSING STOCK MANAGEMENT

There is a cycle of Stock-Demand-Supply this needs to be a joined up process and needs very critical examination and improvement:-

- Greater choice
- Building
- Refurbishment (to a fit for lifetime standard)
- Include eco standards for example (installation of solar panels, power walls, rainwater butts. These are examples as the list and ideas will be long.

- Due to low levels of suitable stock to meet demand and only building 83 council rented homes between 2014-2020 (as per Freedom of Information reply) then thought should be given to purchasing property and say converting shop units into homes due to the decline in High Streets.

ACCESSIBILLITY

Further new technology to be introduced for tenants to report matters in particular a repairs reporting app must be a priority with a facility to upload photographs (e.g. Don`t Mess with Croydon mobile app reporting for many issues including fly tipping) noting that axis and not the council handle reporting initially form a call centre in offices at South Croydon, but now schedulers and call handling is deployed from staff homes etc.

Such Apps can be bought off the shelf examples being :-

- Housemark.co.uk
- landlordtoday.co.uk
- hellofranklin.co.uk
- activehousing.co.uk/repairs

All of this should be benchmarked and introduced urgently to improve the repairs service for tenants

The facility for Chatbots(automatic communication and advise system) should also be explored and considered and this will improve service and communication for tenants and could operate 24/7. This could be deployed to:-

- Record tenant queries out of hours
- Direct Tenants to Emergency Housing contacts
- Give updates on Tenant Involvement (meeting dates and contacts)
- Other council information
- Tenants to be informed of who their Tenancy Officer is

An urgent review of the Council website with a view to improving it with say a dashboard format.

COMPLAINTS

Currently all customer complaints under the umbrella of LBC Housing for example repairs, tenancy or housing allocation are processed via the generic process and the inherent time lines. In addition any calls into any of these departments are deemed enquiries and are not recorded, this is not acceptable.

There should be a dedicated complaints team for LBC Housing covering every function and each contact should be recorded and appropriate standards for dealing with such complaints.

CUSTOMER SERVICE

It must be recognised that Tenants are the shareholders in Council Housing and provide the funding for the appropriate budget. So tenants must receive a friction free customer service system, with dedicated Housing Customer Service Officers for Housing.

SELF SERVICE SYSTEMS

Online services for tenants such as:- Check

Repairs History on the property

Reports (e.g. anti social behaviour)

Updating family/household details

Log complaints and compliments

Access information about the home (how to use central heating, where is the stop cock, how to operate the electrical consumer unit)

Access virtual on-line 3D property tours(as estate agents offer) and project design for refurbishment schemes (e.g. Bathroom & Kitchens etc.)

REPAIRS

Tenants must be consulted regarding type of service, current contractor only performs responsive repairs and this was a change from the previous contractor where the terms were repair and replace. A handyman service should be considered and benchmarked accordingly in particular with the providers being local Croydon small business firms.

A consultation of tenants on the type of repair service they would wish to consider for example rather than one large provider examine having a mixture of contractors (Croydon Firms) or directly employed council labour force.

HEALTH & SAFETY

Tenants need to see greater transparency and the change in IT and digital services can enhance that for example by publishing on the tenants digital file:-

All Inspection results and certificates (ERIC - Electrical, Gas, Fire Safety Results etc.)

Warranty`s for work where appropriate

Publishing all reports such as asbestos inspections

Damp & Mould Inspection Reports

Dedicated named Health & Safety Officers

SUMMARY

The council must undertake greater consultation of tenants and put the tenants needs first. To do this the starting point must be a higher profile for existing Tenant Involvement Groups, public tenant forums throughout the borough and improved contact/communication systems with tenants.

All recommendations from the ARK Report of May 2021 must be accepted by Council Leaders and all Managers and implemented as a first step to change with an associated timeline.

Tenant Representatives must be part of any review and recommended changes to LBC Housing Department and it`s processes.