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Scrutiny Homes Sub-Committee

Meeting held on Monday, 24 July 2023 at 6.30 pm in Council Chamber, Town Hall, Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX

MINUTES

Present: Councillors Councillor Leila Ben-Hassel (Chair), Councillor Adele Benson (Vice-Chair), Kola Agboola, Claire Bonham, Danielle Denton, Ellily Ponnuthurai and Nikhil Sherine Thampi.

Also Present: Councillor Lynne Hale (Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Homes)
Councillor Clive Fraser

Apologies: Councillor Sue Bennett

PART A

13/22 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from Councillor Sue Bennett, for which Councillor Nikhil Sherine Thampi was in attendance as a substitute. Apologies for lateness were received from Councillor Kola Agboola.

14/22 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on the 27 February 2023 were approved as an accurate record.

15/22 **Disclosures of Interest**

There were no disclosures of interest made at the meeting.

16/22 **Urgent Business (if any)**

There was no urgent business for the consideration of the Homes Sub-Committee at this meeting.

17/22 **Housing Transformation Programme Update**

The Sub-Committee considered a Cabinet report, set out in the agenda supplement, which provided an update on the delivery of the Housing

Transformation Programme. The report had been included on the agenda to enable the Sub-Committee to review the progress made in the delivery of the programme and to consider whether there are any areas that may benefit from a 'deep dive' to be scheduled on an agenda of the Homes Sub-Committee later in the year. The Cabinet Member for Homes introduced the item and summarised the report, followed by some additional information provided by the Senior Strategy Officer.

Members asked how the 67 projects under the eight workstreams would be prioritised and scheduled, and requested a full list of the projects. The Senior Strategy Officer explained that the full list could be provided, but noted that the list was subject to change as projects merged. The Sub-Committee heard that there was close work with a project management office (PMO) to prioritise projects, and that projects featured as standing items at the Housing Transformation Steering Board. The Chair welcomed the use of 'Red, Amber, Green' (RAG) ratings, and asked which of the 'Amber' actions were at the biggest risk of turning Red. The Senior Strategy Officer explained that these would be the five key risks of the directorate, which were mobilisation of the Responsive Repairs Contract; increased cases of Damp and Mould; risks around Large Panel System (LPS) Blocks; and General Needs Blocks failing to meet fire safety standards. It was explained that actions were defined as Red where it was out of the Council's control with no plan to bring the action back to Amber.

The Chair asked how interdependencies between projects were being managed, and what the key milestones at risk of slipping were as a result of these. The Head of Homelessness & Assessments explained that risks, assumptions, issues, and dependencies (RAID) charts were used, and that PMO colleagues were keenly aware of interdependencies, which were mapped to allow them to be better managed; it was accepted that some interdependencies were beyond the control of the Council. For key risks, there were multiple redundant mitigations to try to alleviate interdependencies and to minimise risk. The Chair asked for reassurance that those who were named against risks were aware and would be accountable. The Senior Strategy Officer explained that there was close work with the Corporate Risk team, and that the CEO and Directorate Management Team reviewed and updated risks quarterly and were named against specific risks. There were quarterly meetings with the Corporate Risk Function to ensure that risks were being properly updated and mitigated using JCAD, which was the risk management software used by all departments to allow for a whole Council approach to risk. The Head of Homelessness & Assessments explained that there were a number of bodies to hold the department to account, alongside regular meetings with tenants, but that it was important that work took place at pace, which could make communication difficult in some cases. The Chair acknowledged that there was a number of Panels and Board overseeing Housing Transformation, but noted that oversight for Members could be difficult, for example, the performance framework for Housing Transformation had not been provided some time after the Sub-Committee had initially requested it.

The Sub-Committee asked if there was sufficient capacity in the service to implement the Transformation programme, how many vacancies there were in the department, and how many roles were filled by agency staff. The Senior Strategy Officer acknowledged that the staffing numbers had been requested before the meeting, and would be provided at a later date. Members heard that capacity and resource needed to be kept under continuous review, but it was accepted that there needed to be additional capacity added in some areas and that this was being accounted for in the departments restructures. The Cabinet Member for Homes explained that the department was still on an improvement journey, and that this was not just about capacity, but also about ensuring staff had the right skill set to take the programme forward; the importance of getting the right directors in place and preparing for forthcoming legislation was also highlighted. Members asked about skills auditing in the department and the Interim Director of Tenancy Services explained that reviewing skills and knowledge needed to be an ongoing process. This had already begun with the provision of internal training and conversations with the Chartered Institute of Housing about qualifications to increase the professionalisation of the service, in line with government recommendations. The Head of Homelessness & Assessments explained a skills audit had been undertaken in the Housing Needs team and that gaps in hard skills had been identified, but that there were also soft skill gaps that needed to be addressed. Members asked about forthcoming legislation, whether it was likely that this might mean that staff with specialist skills would be needed to be hired, and how this would be managed in competition with other boroughs who would also need to recruit specialists. The Cabinet Member for Homes agreed that councils were looking at this across the country, and that if existing staff could be trained then this would be done, but also that people were often keen to work for Croydon and to be part of positive change to improve services for residents.

The Chair asked if the Council had considered hiring specialist organisations to help with projects in the Housing Transformation programme, and the Head of Homelessness & Assessments explained that this was the case and had already been implemented for some projects. The Interim Head of Building Safety and Compliance explained that they had undertaken a gap analysis around building safety to understand what needed to be completed, and had worked with the procurement team to bring in external resource to support fire and building safety assessments. In response to questions on fire safety from the Vice-Chair, it was explained that there was an effort to understand individual buildings in more detail, as well as the residents who lived in each block and their needs through regular meetings as recommended in the Building Safety Act. Members asked that Ward Councillors be informed when blocks in their area were being visited so that they could attend and promote the visits. The Chair asked if the use of specialist companies on a framework contract was being considered, and the Interim Head of Building Safety and Compliance responded that both recruitment and consultancy would be used in a mix and highlighted the importance of good leadership in attracting and developing quality permanent staff.

Members asked for an update on the implementation of the NEC system, and which functionality had already been rolled out. The Head of Homelessness & Assessments explained that the Council was working with a low quality dataset to begin with, but that the introduction of NEC had allowed all data to be stored in one place, which had not been the case previously. There would be a focus in the next two years on rolling out additional functionality to the NEC software to interface with other areas (such as finance, Oracle, repairs, etc.), but it would not solve all problems the department had. The Sub-Committee heard that there was a programme with a roadmap to rolling out this functionality by priority. The Senior Strategy Officer explained that systems were only as good as the data in them, but that NEC was useful in quality assurance as it could highlight data entry errors, duplications and anomalies. Members noted that they would like to meet with the NEC lead to understand the possible functionality of NEC and the plan to roll this out in Croydon.

The Sub-Committee asked about the Housing Needs and Homelessness service restructure, and whether the new structure would be resilient to expected increased demand. The Head of Homelessness & Assessments explained that the current service was not performing well, but that the restructure would ensure that residents accessing the service would receive a face-to-face meeting on the same day; there would be two officers available each day to provide advice and assistance, and to schedule a further appointment within a week or two weeks dependent on their need. The Head of Homelessness & Assessments stated that the desire was to move the service a proactive footing that was able to enact early intervention and prevention by providing advice to households, with urgent action for those who needed it. Members heard that benchmarking had been undertaken with other Local Authorities and that best practise had been provided by Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). It was highlighted that currently the service did not provide housing advice to residents in fulltime work, and that it was an aspiration that the service would be able to provide advice to these individuals, as well as working with residents in hospital discharge at a greater pace. The Head of Homelessness & Assessments stated that they were confident that the new service would be resilient to demand, and that a new backlog team would be starting imminently, running for around six months and funded by Transformation monies, to allow staff to focus on new cases and prevention work.

The Chair noted that there would be a reduction in staff as a result of the restructure, and asked how this reduced resource would be used to improve the quality of interventions. The Head of Homelessness & Assessments explained that the new structure would allow for immediate interventions, which was not currently possible, which would increase homelessness prevention and reduce wait times for service users. A performance management framework had been developed with staff so that demand could be measured, and the Council was working with 'LIFT' and other partners to horizon scan on future demand for homelessness services. It was confirmed that the restructure of the Housing Needs and Homelessness service would be completed by the 18th September 2023.

Members asked about central government funding, and the Head of Homelessness & Assessments explained that funding came from the General Fund and from the Homelessness Prevention Grant. Currently the Council received £7.1 million from the Grant, which was calculated by a formula measuring temporary accommodation placements, and the number of cases of homelessness prevented or relived. The Head of Homelessness & Assessments stated they felt was too low, and that this was a result of Croydon's high number of placements and poor performance on homelessness prevention. Members heard that until the number of people in temporary or emergency accommodation fell, and the departments' performance on homelessness prevention improved, Grant funding would not increase.

Members asked about the quality of temporary accommodation, and the progress on improving this. The Head of Homelessness & Assessments explained that the inherited stock of temporary and emergency accommodation was not fit for purpose, but that the introduction of the dynamic purchasing system would improve the quality of available accommodation while reducing the cost. The review of temporary accommodation and supported housing would also be used to improve the quality of available housing stock; a team would be deployed in the next 12 months to visit and review every temporary accommodation in the borough, and to assess who was living in each unit. The Head of Homelessness & Assessments highlighted a case in the Court of Appeals concerning a woman who had been living in temporary accommodation with a previous ruling deciding that, as they had been in temporary accommodation for longer than six weeks, then they were entitled to jump the housing waiting list and be offered a permanent home. It was the Council's opinion that this was not correct, and that should the ruling stand, then this would have severe repercussions for all Local Authorities, as well as on Croydon's Housing Strategy and Homelessness Strategy.

The Chair asked why there had not been a trial of the new Homelessness Service structure, until there was a ruling on the ongoing Court of Appeals case, to ensure that the restructure would be resilient and could utilise learning from the trial period. The Head of Homelessness & Assessments explained that the restructure would be reviewed with staff and unions in six months, but that the Council needed to move at pace to make improvements. The Chair highlighted residents with complex needs and asked how it would be ensured they received good specialist service with the removal of the triage team. The Head of Homelessness & Assessments explained that the front door would be 23 staff as opposed to the four in the current triage team. Members heard that there were specialist staff in the back office who residents would be signposted to, and who could work best with residents to meet their particular needs through face-to-face meetings.

The Vice-Chair asked what the Council would do to ensure that temporary and emergency accommodation in Croydon, where other boroughs were vulnerable placing people, were fit for purpose. The Head of Homelessness &

Assessments explained that the placing authority were responsible for these individuals if they were placed under homelessness legislation; if another authority placed an individual into Croydon, but had discharged their homelessness duty, then Croydon would be responsible for these residents after a period of two years. The Sub-Committee heard that the Executive Mayor had written to other boroughs to ask that they reduce placements into Croydon.

The Chair asked why external resources were not being used to conduct occupancy checks, which could free up properties for use. The Interim Director of Tenancy Services explained that there was ongoing work with an external company to look at the Council's data to see where individuals may have multiple addresses, and to then target these for occupancy checks; these checks would commence within the next three months to try to release accommodation and produce savings. A specialist would be brought in for Temporary Accommodation checks, and internal staff would be used for general needs stock. Members asked if property inspections would be conducted alongside the occupancy checks, and were informed that this would be the case, and that work would be done as part of the restructure to ensure staff had the needed skills.

The Chair asked how confident officers were that the new structure would reduce the Council's legal exposure. The Head of Homelessness & Assessments explained that they were talking to the Council's legal partner about providing training for staff but that it was unlikely that legal exposure could be mitigated completely as there was not the skill set to deal with 'pre-action protocol letters'. Members were informed that there were ongoing conversations with the Director of Legal Services about increasing the resources for Housing legal services. The Head of Homelessness & Assessments stated that the pace of legal challenges could be slowed but, unless there was a change in the law, they would not stop.

Members asked what would be done for residents with no recourse to public funds. The Head of Homelessness & Assessments explained that there was a 'no recourse to public funds' team, which was likely the biggest in London, which would be reduced by two staff. The Sub-Committee were assured that this would not affect the quality of the team's work, and heard that this was not a statutory service.

The Chair explained that the Sub-Committee had received a briefing on damp and mould, and were impressed with the progress so far in establishing the new Damp & Mould Response Team, but highlighted that support was needed in the form of recruiting additional surveyors to increase capacity and ensure that change continued to be positive. The Vice-Chair praised the work of the new Damp & Mould Response Team, and the huge improvement the team had made over the work of the previous contractor. Members asked about the total number of damp and mould visits, and the total number of cases. The Interim Head of Repairs and Maintenance explained there was about 1200 cases of damp and mould, and that around 200 of these were 'Stage 2', with around five new cases being reported per week. It was

confirmed that damp and mould cases would always be addressed as a priority even if this meant that budget would need to be taken from other areas, but that the budget was built with demand modelling.

Members asked how the department was supporting private housing tenants with damp and mould, and how much budget was being allocated to this. The Interim Head of Repairs and Maintenance explained that their team primarily focussed on the Council's housing stock, but that they were working closely with the private sector housing team to provide support and guidance. The Head of Homelessness & Assessments stated that there was good partnership working with the private sector housing team, and that there were two extra private sector housing posts funded out of the General Fund to do work around damp and mould. The Damp and Mould Strategy did account for private sector tenants to ensure a uniform approach, and ensure that tenants dealing with damp and mould or other hazards could be placed into temporary accommodation when needed. The Cabinet Member for Homes explained that the Damp and Mould Action Team contained officers from both the Housing department and private sector housing team.

The Chair asked if the department was sufficiently resourced to do education the education piece for tenants around preventing damp and mould. The Interim Head of Repairs and Maintenance explained that there were eight officers in the Damp & Mould team to ensure there was sufficient resource, but that this would be kept under review to ensure it was rightsized. Members heard that communications went out across the department to ensure everyone was involved in identifying hazards.

The Chair highlighted the importance of culture change in the department and asked what was being done to ensure this was prioritised, given the number of projects being implemented. The Senior Strategy Officer explained that this would be delivered alongside other projects and ways of working, and was integral to ensuring that these succeeded. The Vice-Chair asked how resident feedback would be incorporated so that the change in culture was what residents wanted. The Interim Director of Tenancy Services explained that there needed to be good training for staff, but it was also recognised that robust challenge of behaviour would be needed in some cases; it was acknowledged that this would be an ongoing process.

The Chair asked for greater clarity on the customer journey for different areas of the service to better understand the experience for residents and how the 'resident's voice' would be incorporated into culture change and training. It was further asked if officers had looked to incorporate recommendations from the Chartered Institute for Housing campaign 'It's not okay', around stigma for residents living in social housing. The Interim Director of Tenancy Services explained that there were discreet projects, such as a website review, being undertaken with residents as well as projects around reducing stigma for social housing tenants; it was stated that reports on this could be provided for future meetings. The Sub-Committee heard that 'resident's voice' was captured through resident feedback surveys and talking directly to residents, and that officers tried to directly implement learning from these resources.

The Head of Homelessness & Assessments explained that the transformation of the Housing Needs service had been informed by direct engagement with residents and from looking at the feedback from customer complaints. The result of this engagement had been that the transformation focussed on reinstating face-to-face meetings to reinforce the dignity of customers who should be treated with kindness, respect and dignity. The Senior Strategy Officer explained that they were working with 'Tpas', who were tenancy engagement specialists, on the best ways to improve tenant involvement structures and develop a Resident Engagement Strategy, alongside the Housing Improvement Board and Tenants and Leaseholder Panel. The aim of this work was to improve how the voice of residents was fed back to the Directorate Management Team to inform decisions, and increase the number of residents who could be engaged, and the ways that they could be engaged. Members heard that the Social Housing Regulation Bill had introduced tenant satisfaction measures, and the department were now looking at tenant perception survey results on a quarterly basis which fed into a performance monitoring report that was reviewed and shared with residents; work was ongoing on an annual performance report that would be shared with residents.

The Chair asked how the diversity of Croydon's communities would be reflected in the teams engaging with residents, and commented that there were already a number of well organised tenants group in the borough, some of who were frustrated that their feedback had not been acted on by the Housing department. The Senior Strategy Officer explained that this would be addressed as part of the Resident Engagement Strategy, to ensure that recommendations were collected in an auditable way and responded to even where they were not accepted. Members heard that there would be work with existing groups and panels to ensure that their terms of references and governance structures were fit for purpose, and that there would be a broad range of ways for residents to engage.

Actions

The Sub-Committee requested that they were provided with the most up to date structure of the Housing department that included the roles and responsibilities of each team.

The Sub-Committee requested a briefing on the rollout of the NEC system by the NEC lead, including detail on the available additional functionality and which of these would be deployed in Croydon.

The Sub-Committee requested that an update be provided on the Housing Needs and Homelessness service once the planned review had been completed six months after the restructure, including information on legal challenges/exposure to the service and the outcome of the Imam court case.

The Sub-Committee requested that a briefing be provided to Members on the Resident Engagement Strategy before this was finalised at Cabinet in December 2023.

The Sub-Committee concluded that they would like to meet with the programme management team to better understand how the Housing Transformation Programme was structured and how interdependencies between projects were being managed.

Conclusions

The Sub-Committee welcomed the work being done by the new Damp & Mould Response Team, and encouraged officers to continue the work being done with the private sector on this.

Recommendation

The Sub-Committee recommended that, for future updates on the Housing Transformation Plan, a full list of all the projects under each workstream be provided as well as additional detail mapping out the customer journey.

18/22 Update on the Mobilisation of the Responsive Repairs Contract

The Sub-Committee considered a report set out in the supplementary agenda, which provided an update on the mobilisation of the new responsive repair contracts. The report had been included on the agenda to enable the Sub-Committee to review the information provided and consider whether there was sufficient reassurance that the mobilisation of the new responsive repairs contracts was on-track for delivery; whether there was sufficient mitigation in place to manage the risks to delivery; and whether there are any recommendations on the mobilisation of the responsive repairs contract to submit for the consideration of the Mayor. The Cabinet Member for Homes introduced the item and acknowledged the hard work officers. The Interim Head of Repairs and Maintenance summarised the report.

Members asked whether there would be a full service from the start of the contracts, what the key risks to core slippage were, and what mitigations were in place. The Interim Head of Repairs and Maintenance confirmed that a full service would begin from 1 August 2023; a key risk was that appointments would not be able to be raised through the NEC system, but jobs could be raised through the contractor's system as a redundancy should this not be resolved. The Sub-Committee heard that residents would be able to ring one number and receive service and were assured that any information entered into the contractor's system, should this need to be used, would be collated for later entry into the NEC system.

The Chair asked how contract management would be undertaken across the three contracts. The Interim Head of Repairs and Maintenance explained that

there was a Head of Service assigned to each contractor to manage the day-to-day operations, as well as a Strategic Client Team across all of the contracts to ensure governance and performance were monitored effectively. The Council would be in control of all repairs data, which had not been the case previously, which would allow for interventions where things were not working. The Chair asked if there was capacity to analyse this data to ensure that performance issues were caught early, and Members heard that this was the case, and that capacity would be increased as new contracts were signed.

The Vice-Chair asked where the data on the backlog of legacy repairs had been gathered from, and whether there was a risk of additional repairs the Council were not aware of where residents had given up reporting issues to the previous contractor. The Interim Head of Repairs and Maintenance explained that Wates and Mears had specific teams to deal with legacy repairs, to ensure that new responsive repairs could be deployed quickly. Members heard that residents with legacy repairs had been contacted to explain that a new contractor would soon be in contact to organise their repair. The Vice-Chair explained that they had seen some of these communications, and were concerned that there had not been triaging of the legacy repairs. The Interim Head of Repairs and Maintenance explained that the Council was reviewing the legacy backlog to triage it using complaints, and were already contacting residents to book in appointments with the new contractor. The Chair asked how double booking legacy repairs as new repairs would be dealt with, and the Interim Head of Repairs and Maintenance stated that this would be checkable on the booking system but would hopefully not happen due to the additional capacity being built in to deal with the legacy backlog of repairs. The Vice-Chair highlighted that the Council was working with Axis data, and that this could be unreliable. The Interim Head of Repairs and Maintenance explained that they thought the current backlog amounted to a months work, and that the new contractors had been provided with three months to complete these jobs to account for this. The Chair queried how the backlog would be prioritised and whether there was a dedicated Council resource to work on the legacy repairs, and the Interim Head of Repairs and Maintenance confirmed that there was a member of staff solely working on this as part of the mobilisation project.

Members highlighted the late signing of the gas contract, and asked whether the contractor would be prepared for high demand in the winter season, and if they would have sufficient stock of new/PAC tested heaters for residents with broken boilers. The Interim Head of Repairs and Maintenance explained that there was still some time before the highest demand months, but acknowledged that the contractor may need to bring in additional resource to complete boiler servicing at the commencement of the contract. The Sub-Committee asked how the contractor would be provided information on the expiry of gas safety certifications, and the Interim Head of Building Safety and Compliance stated that they had been collating, validating and reconciling data on this from Axis and sharing it with K&T Heating. The Interim Head of Repairs and Maintenance stated that K&T Heating were using this data to prepare letter rollouts, and to predict what demand would be over the coming year. Members heard that there would be on boarding of new staff, and

Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) (TUPE) of some Axis staff, with the deployment of staff from K&T Heating's other areas to ensure the contract started smoothly.

Members asked who would be carrying out periodic testing of electrical safety, and the Interim Head of Building Safety and Compliance explained this was done through an existing contract, but that Mears and Wates would do electrical testing as part of voids work. The Sub-Committee asked if this contractor or Mears and Wates were responsible for electrical remedial works, and heard that Mears and Wates would deal with electrical works on a responsive repairs basis and had a duty to leave properties in a safe state. The Interim Head of Repairs and Maintenance explained that there was an effort to reduce silo working, and to ensure that information on repairs for a property, including periodic inspection data, were looked at cumulatively to help identify where there needed to be capital spend interventions on properties and to improve housing stock data overall.

The Vice-Chair raised concerns about the use of temporary repairs and sub-contractors, and asked what would be done to change the culture of the service, especially where former Axis staff would be subject to TUPE. The Interim Head of Repairs and Maintenance explained that the Council had the right to approve any sub-contractors, and made this decision by looking at their work history and health and safety records. Members heard that independent satisfaction surveys would be used to ensure that the contractors were providing a good service, alongside surveyors visiting sites and speaking to residents. The Interim Head of Repairs and Maintenance explained that not every job could be checked, but that good processes would be used to ensure things were working as they should be; if contractors did not have ID cards, residents would be advised to not admit them to their properties.

The Chair asked how contractors would be informed about vulnerable residents for priority service and whose system this information would be held on. The Interim Head of Repairs and Maintenance explained that this data would be held on the NEC system, but that there needed to be careful management to ensure GDPR compliance. Members heard that there had already been data cleansing during the transfer to the NEC system and officers were planning how to fill in the gaps in the information held; going forward the contact centre would be used to ensure data was kept up to date. Members asked if the contractors had dedicated teams to deploy to vulnerable residents, and whether assurances could be provided that sub-contractors would not be used for these jobs. The Interim Head of Repairs and Maintenance stated that they would come back to Members on if contractors had a specialist provision for vulnerable residents.

Members heard that eight members of Axis staff would be transferred by TUPE to the Council contact centre, in addition to the 18 staff already in the team. The Interim Head of Repairs and Maintenance explained that of TUPE staff there would be around 20 going to Mears, 40 to Wates and 15 to K&T Heating; it was confirmed that the contractor teams to deal with the backlog

would not be TUPE staff from Axis. The Chair stated that they would request the total number of staff transferred by TUPE after the 1 August 2023. The Interim Head of Repairs and Maintenance explained that that induction, training, management and processes would be used to ensure that there was a change of culture over the conduct of the outgoing contractor.

The Chair asked if residents would have the ability to submit pictures when raising jobs, and the Interim Head of Repairs and Maintenance explained that this would be the case, and that contractors would need to send before and after photos to validate that jobs had been completed. As the contracts rolled out there would be additional functionality for operatives and residents including geotagging, and video and picture submissions. It was confirmed that residents would be required to sign off on completed jobs. The Sub-Committee asked if the submission of customer photos would be used to ensure that contractor operatives had the correct parts, and the Interim Head of Repairs and Maintenance explained that this would not be available initially, but would be rolled out in the future. The Chair asked how duplication of jobs submitted would be identified, and the Interim Head of Repairs and Maintenance explained that this would be identified through the use of the NEC system but was not automated. The Vice-Chair highlighted that there needed to be a system to identify duplicate calls as this would show where something was going wrong. The Interim Head of Repairs and Maintenance explained that this would be the responsibility of Council staff who would have access to the history of issues raised at a given property through the NEC system.

The Chair asked how out of hours calls would be handled, and the Interim Head of Repairs and Maintenance explained that initially this would be handled directly by Wates who could pass on jobs to Mears and K&T Heating by phone call or email. The Chair asked how this would be monitored, how jobs would be triaged and how priority repairs would be responded to. The Interim Head of Repairs and Maintenance explained that jobs would be raised and escalated in the usual way, with jobs handed on to out of hours teams.

The Sub-Committee asked about Social Value in the contract. The Interim Head of Repairs and Maintenance explained that the lead manager had met with all three contractors to agree baseline figures and Members could be updated on this at a later date.

The Chair asked if there had been any consideration of using the responsive repairs contractor to install kitchens and bathrooms, as they would have an interest in ensuring these were built to last, as they would be responsible for maintaining them. The Interim Head of Repairs and Maintenance explained that there would be some installations of this type on a case-by-case basis, and a planned works contract covering these kind of installations would be up for procurement in 2024, which the contractor could bid on.

The Vice-Chair asked if there would be additional monitoring of the Gas contractor due to their late start and highlighted the number of boilers coming to end of life and the coming winter period. The Interim Head of Building

Safety and Compliance explained that data had been shared with the contractor and that they were meeting with them on a regular basis to discuss domestic repairs and servicing, as well as commercial boiler plants. The Council had reviewed letters sent out for annual gas servicing, and asked the contractor to come back with a report on what works are likely to be needed in the immediate future.

Actions

The Sub-Committee requested that the number of Axis staff transferred to the new contractors by TUPE be provided after the start of the new contracts on the 1st August 2023.

Conclusions

The Sub-Committee welcomed the establishment of the Strategic Client Team and dedicated senior Social Value officer post, as well as the Council's approach to dealing with the backlog of legacy repairs.

Recommendations

1. The Sub-Committee recommended that each of the Responsive Repair Contractors develop a dedicated team that specialised in helping vulnerable tenants with their repairs, and that sub-contractors were not used for these jobs.
2. The Sub-Committee recommended that there was additional qualitative monitoring of the contracts for the initial periods of commencement, to identify and address and cultural issues as early as possible.
3. The Sub-Committee recommended that the Council have some oversight of the training being provided to staff of each of the new contractors, and that the Council has the ability to monitor training attendance to ensure it is completed by all contractor staff.
4. The Sub-Committee recommended that the Council ensure that automation in the NEC system is used to identify where repeated calls are being logged for the same repair to ensure that the department is not reliant on individual officers proactively identifying issues.
5. The Sub-Committee recommended that the Council undertake a 'Mystery Shopping' exercise on the out-of-hours responsive repairs service to provide reassurance of service quality, and to identify and mitigate any issues.

The Sub-Committee considered a report set out on pages 15 to 28 of the agenda, which provided a presentation on the development of a Housing Strategy. The report had been included on the agenda to enable the Sub-Committee to review the information provided and consider whether there were any conclusions or recommendations it wished to make to be fed into the development of the new Housing Strategy. The Cabinet Member for Homes introduced the item.

The Chair asked what had informed the development of the key strategic objectives, and how these compared to other well-rated London authorities. The Senior Strategy Officer explained that the broad strategic themes were the same across London, and these had been taken to form the five key priorities with 14 objectives underneath in Croydon's Housing Strategy. Members heard that there had been 20 Vision & Mission sessions to understand what 'good looked like' with residents, tenants, leaseholders, and staff. Following this, Housing Strategy leads had been identified from across the Council directorates to feed in Council wide priorities to the Strategy. The Strategy had been developed with attention to the legislative context.

Members asked how the Housing Strategy had been developed to be complimentary to the Local Plan, and if there was a focus on improving the supply of social housing in the borough. The Senior Strategy Officer explained that the Council was looking at working with housing associations and registered social landlords in the borough to increase social housing stock, as it was not viable for the Council to build additional units. The Sub-Committee heard that one of the directorate leads was a Planning colleague who was working on the Local Plan. The Local Plan was developed using the Strategic Housing Market Assessment from 2019, and this would be reviewed over Summer 2023 to ascertain housing needs in Croydon and how this should be delivered. The Senior Strategy Officer explained that they had been involved in testing the priorities of the Local Plan with Planning colleagues. The Chair asked if officers were confident in finalising the Housing Strategy before the completion of the Local Plan, and it was explained that the Local Plan would be the mechanism for delivering the homes and that the Housing Strategy was developed so that it would be strategically broad enough to support the delivery of the Local Plan.

The Chair invited Councillor Fraser to ask a question on whether there would be a sufficient supply of affordable housing stock in the borough and engagement with housing associations. The Senior Strategy Officer explained that the Council was engaging with housing associations, and would be setting up a forum for this as it had been identified as a gap in the development of the Strategy.

The Sub-Committee asked for reassurance that these were the correct priorities for Croydon residents and asked how the Strategy would improve resident outcomes. The Cabinet Member for Homes explained that the priorities were being developed with residents at every step to ensure that they were correct, and that they were visiting residents to engage them on a one to one level and gather views their views to feed into the Strategy; it was

highlighted that the Council would continue to listen to residents and adapt the Strategy to changing needs. The Senior Strategy Officer added that this was an external document as much as it was internal, and needed to be visible to private landlords, the government and tenants so that they understood what the Council's priorities were to maximise outcomes for residents. The Chair asked about the development of the HRA Business Plan and Senior Strategy Officer that this, the Asset Management Strategy and the Housing Strategy were all feeding into each other through close partnership working across the Council.

The Chair asked how the Strategy accounted for residents fleeing domestic violence and how the Council planned to work closely with housing associations who operated the majority of social housing in the borough. The Head of Homelessness & Assessments explained that the Homelessness Strategy was the primary document that dealt with partners such as housing associations. This was a statutory document, and the Council had statutory powers in these areas to work with registered social housing providers. The Homelessness Strategy also explained how domestic abuse was dealt with in a housing context. Members heard that the forthcoming Allocation Scheme would be developed with residents and registered social housing providers. The Chair asked if the Council needed to wait for these Strategies to be adopted before starting to deal with these issues and the Cabinet Member for Homes explained that they and the Mayor had been meeting with Housing Associations to engage on a number of issues. The Head of Homelessness & Assessments explained that work was under way to setting up a Housing Association forum.

The Chair asked about training of staff to ensure that they were able to engage with residents to find out all relevant information to identify where domestic violence was an issue. The Vice-Chair highlighted issues of mental abuse and the role shame played in underreporting. The Head of Homelessness confirmed that a training plan was being developed, and that work to better integrate with the Family Justice Centre on domestic violence work was ongoing to ensure there was a single point of contact. It was highlighted that better data capture in this area was needed to ensure the Council could access all available DLUHC funding.

The Chair asked what plans were in place to address anti-social behaviour and ensure residents were not afraid of reprisals when reporting this. The Senior Strategy Officer explained that this was picked up under tenant satisfaction measures and a Service Level Agreement had been developed with the Anti-Social Behaviour team. Members heard that reports of anti-social behaviour, and the perception of anti-social behaviour, would be mapped and reviewed quarterly. The Interim Director of Tenancy Services explained that when the Council would immediately send satisfaction surveys to residents once anti-social behaviour cases were closed.

Action

The Sub-Committee requested that more information be provided to Members on the new approach the Council is taking to address anti-social behaviour on housing estates.

Conclusions

The Sub-Committee welcomed the work done so far in developing the Housing Strategy and were supportive of the engagement work undertaken through the Vision & Mission sessions with residents, tenants, leaseholders, and staff.

The Sub-Committee were reassured that work on establishing a Housing Association Forum had already begun and asked that an update be provided to Members once this was completed.

Recommendations

1. The Sub-Committee recommended that the Housing department deliver training on Domestic Violence to all frontline staff.
3. The Sub-Committee recommended that the final Housing Strategy address the Council's relationship with the Housing association and Registered Social Landlord sector in Croydon.

20/22 Work Programme 2023/24

The Sub-Committee noted the report.

The meeting ended at 9.55 pm

Signed:

Date:

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