

MINUTES

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

20 JUNE 2012

Present:

Councillors:

Adeleke	Marshall (Chairman)
Adshead	McLean
Bassadone	Organ
Flint	Wixted
Mahmood (Vice-Chairman)	

Co-Opted Members:

M Cook

Also attended:

Councillor M Griffiths Portfolio Holder for Housing

Officers:

James Deane	Group Manager, Financial Services
Andy Vincent	Group Manager, Tenants & Leaseholders
Sue Prowse	Tenant Involvement Officer
Lucy Stone	Member Support Officer, Democratic Services (Minutes)

The meeting began at 7:30pm

OS/136/12 MINUTES

The Part 1 and Part 2 minutes of the meeting held on 9 May 2012 were agreed by the Members present and signed by the Chairman.

OS/137/12 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor G Chapman, Conway, Harden, Hearn and N Hollinghurst. Councillor Wixted substituted for Councillor G Chapman.

OS/138/12 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

OS/139/12 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

None.

**OS/140/12 CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE IN
RELATION TO A CALL-IN**

None.

OS/141/12 COMMUNITY ALARM CALL RESPONSE PERFORMANCE

A Vincent introduced the report and drew attention to the two performance indicators which Eldercare was exceeding. They were also achieving the additional two targets set by the Committee. With regard to the calls which took longer than 180 seconds to answer, A Vincent said that those which said the reason for call was not known, could be where the units were being tested. Where it stated 'front door, no reply when answered' this was where a visitor called and when the call was answered, the person was no longer there. A Vincent confirmed that there was a different system for paramedics to use. A lot of the late calls were where wardens had called which were always given lower priority.

Councillor Griffiths arrived at 7.35pm.

Key points of discussion:

Councillor Adshead expressed concern that a lot of the calls which took more than 180 seconds to answer waited for more than 150% of the target time. He asked why there were no specific reasons where the time had been so long. A Vincent said that Eldercare had provided all the information they had and explained that they did not always know the reason. He added that some schemes only had one phone line, so if more than one call was made to Eldercare at the same time, the calls would stack up.

Councillor Marshall said that schemes varied in size and asked if all schemes only had one phone line. A Vincent said that not all schemes only had one line, some had more. He said that it was an issue and that more lines needed to be provided. Councillor Marshall asked for information to be given to subsequent meeting of the Committee on which schemes only had one phone line and the number of residents in those schemes.

Councillor Griffiths said that she would look into this and report back to the Committee.

Councillor McLean said that in the past, the Committee had been very critical of Eldercare, and said that they should now be commended for the improvements made. A Vincent agreed and said that they had taken on more operatives for calls and given additional training to make the handling of the calls more efficient. It was important that the level of service was maintained.

Councillor Adeleke asked what size sample was taken for the customer satisfaction survey and if new or repeat customers were questioned. A Vincent said that a random 10% of the customers who had made a call during the previous week were questioned. Councillor Adeleke said that 10% was too low. A Vincent said that other surveys were more comprehensive; this provided an indication to support other work.

Councillor Adeleke asked about the reference to mains failure and if there was an alternative system. A Vincent said there was no alternative, but that there was a regular maintenance programme and systems were tested regularly. He said that a mains failure referred to the scheme, not Eldercare. If there was a mains failure, all the alarms would be triggered to call Eldercare so they were aware of the problem.

Councillor Marshall asked if the reasons for the mains failures were known. A Vincent said not always, but they were resolved quickly. He added that some of the equipment in schemes was quite old. Councillor Marshall asked for more information on this.

Councillor Mahmood referred to the performance results and asked how the percentages were calculated. Councillor Bassadone said the figures were cumulative.

Outcome:

The Committee noted the report and asked for a report to come to the next meeting on the number of schemes with only one phone line, more detail where there had been mains failures and further information on the calculations of the performance results.

OS/142/12 PROVISIONAL REVENUE OUTTURN 2011/12

J Deane presented the report and highlighted the General Fund Budget Provisional Outturn 2011/12. He said the variances had been split into those controllable by officers and those which were not. J Deane explained that there was only a £54,000 variance in the budget relating to Housing and Community OSC.

With regard to the Housing Revenue Account, there was an underspend of £754,000 from the revised budget. Some of the larger variances were outlined in the report.

Key points of discussion:

Councillor Adshead asked if the Council were £754,000 better or worse off. J Deane confirmed it was better off as there was an underspend.

Councillor Mahmood asked if this was due to less work being carried out or due to the budget being managed better. J Deane said the budget was managed better which was shown in the high level of satisfaction in the STAR survey,

Councillor Marshall said that the level of variance was modest in view of the large size of the budget. She asked that housing capital expenditure be included in future reports. J Deane said this would be included in future. He added that there was a Capital budget of £9.7 million, with an outturn of £8.4 million, which was a 13% underspend. There were four material variances: £214,000 on lifts, £156,000 on fire alarms, £480,000 on Pelham Court structural repairs and £396,000 on the roof at the flats in Queen Square and J Deane gave the reasons for these slippages in expenditure.

Councillor Adeleke referred to the 3.2% interest rate on the interest payable and asked if this was fixed. J Deane explained that this was fixed and was an average rate for the 30 year life of the loan. This was actually made up of a series of loans which would mature each year with different interest rates, the average of all of those was 3.2%. This rate was not been linked to the Bank of England's base rate.

Outcome:

The Committee noted the report.

OS/143/12 PRESENTATION OF 'STAR' RESULTS

S Prowse gave a presentation of the STAR (Survey of Tenants and Residents) results. She highlighted the background, the methodology, how the survey was promoted, the excellent response rate, key results and how the work would continue.

Key points of discussion:

Councillor Marshall said the Committee had the detailed results document and asked where the answer to the discrimination question was included. S Prowse explained that the detailed results contained only the answers to the closed questions. She said there was a separate document which included the results of the more open questions including the question on discrimination. Councillor Marshall asked that this document, giving the answers to questions not listed in the "Overall Satisfaction Results" be provided to the Committee.

Councillor Adshead referred to the 277 people who said they felt they had been discriminated against. He asked what was being done to address this. S Prowse said that 277 people had said they felt discriminated against out of 4,739 respondents. She said that the majority of those were unhappy with something rather than suffering discrimination. One example answer was 'my neighbour has had a new kitchen, I haven't'. Any real discrimination issues would be addressed.

Councillor Adshead suggested that in future surveys, the question be made clearer. Councillor Griffiths disagreed and said that in leaving it open, it allowed the respondent to say anything; a closed question would not gain such valuable information. Councillor Marshall recommended care as a figure under the simple heading of "discrimination" could be very easily misinterpreted or misused.

Councillor Adeleke commended the survey and the excellent work which had gone into it. He asked when the next survey would be carried out. S Prowse said that it would be carried out every two years. She said that lessons had been learnt from this survey which would lead to improvements in the next.

Councillor Marshall suggested that every two years was too frequent as there would be insufficient time to carry out the work before the next survey. A Vincent said that carrying out a survey every two years had been recommended by the previous Government. He said that the actions would be incorporated into the Housing Landlord Service Plan and the progress tracked. Councillor Adeleke suggested that there could be an interim survey in two years with a full survey in four years.

Councillor Mahmood asked how the results could be split into areas and used by other departments such as the Neighbourhood Action team. S Prowse said that each survey form had a unique reference which included three letters identifying the area. Consequently the results would be broken down by area. Councillor Griffiths said that these would then be shared with other Council departments.

Councillor Marshall noted the small proportion of houses with the internet and there was an overwhelming preference for information to be given to tenants and leaseholders in writing and through Tenants News & Views. Because of the limited use of internet, she believed it should be of concern that the Choice Based Lettings list was only available online.

Councillor Marshall referred to the results of the STAR question on satisfaction with repairs and maintenance. This was 75.6% of General Needs, 54% of Leaseholders and 88.2% for Sheltered Housing. She said this was very different to the MITIE results reported at the last meeting which was at 98% for quarter 4. She said that the Tenants and Leaseholders Committee had said that people felt pressured to give a positive answer to the MITIE survey and that there was no opportunity to give additional comments.

Councillor Griffiths said they were two different questions, MITIE asked people who had just had repairs carried out, the STAR survey questioned those who could have had repairs carried out two years previously.

S Prowse added that as a result of this work, there were tenant inspectors also calling for feedback. Councillor Marshall said that five tenant inspectors was an insufficient number. She asked who had set the questions that MITIE asked. Councillor Griffiths thought they had been set jointly some time ago. Councillor Marshall said that the questions needed improving or maybe even DBC carry out the survey.

M Cook said the survey was very good where the Council were providing the service. She said there was a problem where the service was provided by MITIE or Apollo. Their

questions were closed and needed improvement as they did cause stress in people needing to chase them to carry work out. A Vincent said that this would be added to the action plan.

Councillor Flint asked about hard copies of the Choice Based Lettings document and said that Community Centres no longer received one. Councillor Griffiths said that no hard copies went out at all anymore, they were only available online.

Councillor Flint asked for a breakdown on repairs and maintenance in order to see how it related to planned maintenance as there was a lot of slippage in the programme. S Prowse said the question had been catch all for repairs and maintenance.

Councillor Marshall thanked the officers for the presentation and the Committee commended the officers for an excellent survey.

Outcome

The Committee noted the results and asked that a report be brought to the September meeting tracking the progress and looking at the satisfaction questions asked by MITIE following repairs and maintenance.

OS/144/12 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee discussed the work programme and made the following amendments:

July 2012

Add a report on Community Alarm lines to DBC sheltered schemes, reasons for mains failures and calculations of results.

September 2012

Add a report on STAR progress and the satisfaction questions asked by MITIE.

October 2012

Add a report on the Planned Maintenance Programme.

Councillor Marshall said that the Choice Based Lettings and Housing Allocations Policy report had not been available to this meeting. It would be added to a future meeting.

The meeting ended at 9.00 pm.