

Kensington & Chelsea Local Scrutiny Panel

Minutes of meeting held on 01 November 2017

Present:

Chair:

(SJ)

Residents:

(MB), (LC), (JF), (SM), (JN), (RS), (LS), (TA), (GD), (HM)

Staff Members:

(GG)	- PA to Director of NH Home Ownership
(OL)	- Resident Involvement Officer
(LJ)	- Leasehold Manager
(LG)	- Housing Operations Manager ATB1
(PB)	-Welfare Reform Project Manager
(DR)	- Leasehold Team Co-ordinator
(AC)	-Regional Head of Housing

Apologies:

Staff: HG

Residents: PK

1. Chair's welcome and opening remarks

- 1.1 Chair welcomed the panel to the meeting and apologised on behalf of those that could not attend.
- 1.2 SJ introduced PB who would give the Welfare Reform Update, AC Regional Head of Housing, GG who replaces LD as PA to Director of NH Home Ownership, and DR who has taken on LD previous duties for this meeting before handing over to GG for future meetings.
- 1.3 SJ read a message from LD explaining her relocation to Ireland and commenting on the fond memories she has of all.
- 1.4 SJ announced that DE, Senior Involvement Officer, would be leaving and passed around a card for panel members to sign.
- 1.5 SJ announced that HM will be the new business leader for PAM, and the panel will meet them next year.
- 1.6 SJ announced next meeting would take place 7 February 2018 when AB would give a presentation on Workwise. SJ explained that at that meeting the panel will need to sign the updated Code of Conduct which aims to be more appropriate to LSPs. OL confirmed the new version would be sent out for LSP member in the coming weeks.

1.7 SJ proceeded to comment that the terms of reference also needs updating which will be reviewed in turn.

1.8 LS volunteered to stand for Vice Chair. All voted in favour

2. Minutes of the Meeting Held 7 September 2017

2.1 Re: point 2.1- MB stated this question was meant to be answered in the 6 week update but it had not. SJ suggested the main area this referred to was Welfare Reform so PB's presentation would likely answer it.

3. Welfare Reform Update

3.1 PB explained her main focus would be Universal Credit. She was pleased to announce government plans to cap LHA had been cancelled which would help the 800 NHH tenants who were at risk. PB gave a brief summary of what Universal Credit is.

3.2 PB explained the stage the roll out of Universal Credit had reached. Nationwide full roll out is expected by 2022. However in K&C, the implementation of full service (for all new cases or changes of circumstance) has been delayed until September 2018 due to issues related to Grenfell. PB highlighted that 130 K&C residents were receiving Universal Credit because their job centres were in Hammersmith.

3.3 PB addressed some of the most controversial aspects of Universal Credit. She explained the 6 week wait was due to the built-in 4 week assessment, 7 day processing time, then additional time for the payment to go through. PB confirmed that no entitlement is paid during wait days, with some exceptions. She emphasised Housing Officers should ensure residents are aware they can get an advance (although it is taken out of future payments).

3.4 PB commented that we may see a removal of the 7 day wait in the upcoming budget.

3.5 PB commented that data suggests Universal Credit is linked to higher arrears but more analysis is needed to see how the 6 week wait ties in with this pattern.

3.6 PB highlighted problems arising with people not claiming as soon as they are entitled because there is no back-dating and they can only receive payments from the time they claim.

3.7 PB also emphasised Christmas could be difficult if people claim in December because they will not receive any money until after the Christmas period. NHH plan to use the Tenancy Support Network to ease the strain.

3.8 LG suggested Tenancy Support attend a future meeting.

3.9 LC stated people are waiting even longer than 6 weeks and the waiting time kicks in every time circumstances change. PB explained the six week wait should only occur when a person claims for the first time, delays at later stages are normally to do with evidence gathering.

3.10 PB displayed NH figures of Universal Credit claims, with most claims in Hammersmith & Fulham, Hounslow in second place.

- 3.11 SJ asked why there were figures for Universal Claims in K&C if it hadn't been rolled out there yet. PB reiterated that it was based on Job Centre location so there was some overlap with Hammersmith.
- 3.12 SM expressed concerns about demands of rent payments during the 6 week wait. LG explained NHH will follow normal rent collection procedures but also offer tenants support with chasing up their claims.
- 3.13 MB cited the prime minister as saying no one would be evicted from social housing as a result of Universal Credit delays and asked if that was certain. LG replied probably not because some people receiving Universal Credit do not pass on their rent to the housing association.
- 3.14 MB asked whether it was true for Universal Credit that you could apply for your rent to be paid directly to NHH. LG explained that there are occasions when NHH follows that process but sometimes requests are denied and it can be a very slow process. AC added that the DWP are rolling out a new online landlords' portal that will make NHH a "trusted partner" thereby easing the process of applying for Alternative Payment Arrangements (APAs). If an APA is refused NHH have to work with residents to help them, eg. through work coaches.
- 3.15 MB stated he was under the impression that retired and self-employed people are exempt from claiming Universal Credit.
- 3.16 PB clarified retired people did not have to claim Universal Credit but self-employed people do.
- 3.17 JF asked if claimants can choose whether Universal Credit is paid directly to themselves or the housing association. PB advised this is not an option, however it is advised that the resident speak directly with NH should they request this.
- 3.18 LC asked if there would be an increase in the number of HOs to cope with the additional strain when more people are affected by the changes. AC said AB's presentation on Workwise in the New Year will shed light as to how NHH hopes to work smarter to cover the changes. LG added NHH is trying to build relationships with key people at the job centres to identify those most at risk of falling into arrears and being prepared to target them for support.
- 3.19 JF commented that residents will always be 6 weeks in arrears. LG confirmed this is similar for those who are currently paying their rent via housing benefit (4 weeks in arrears).
- 3.20 SM asked what would be done to help people without any money over Christmas. PB explained plans to use the Welfare Fund.
- 3.21 TA asked what would happen to people with mental health issues & whether or not NHH work with support workers. LG emphasised that wherever NHH were aware of mental health issues, they would work with case workers etc to minimise problems.
- 3.22 SJ asked PB to share the Universal Credit borough breakdown chart.
- 3.23 SJ requested following the budget announcement that PB send any relevant updates.

4. Performance Report- a. Leasehold

- 4a.1 LJ reported customer satisfaction was down by 1.5% which she said was disappointing though not a huge fall and equal to the drop in the same quarter last year. She suggested a big reason for customer dissatisfaction was problems with emails not being received. IT were made aware and the inbox was being monitored which rectified the problem but the changeover of IT provider meant problems returned. The IT director assured LJ things have been resolved now but nevertheless, it had a negative effect on satisfaction.
- 4a.2 MB queried whether it was due the chaotic nature of the systems and wanted to know the problems were also being experienced in PRH. LJ did not know who was affected and was just very aware that a number of emails had gone into a black hole so was trying to deal with the problem. LC had heard about similar problems at Kings Cross.
- 4a.3 LJ said there were also problems with emails between Housing Associations, for example a problem had just been flagged with emails not appearing in the sent box although they had been received and were sitting in a holding inbox in IT. However LJ did say IT have said this problem is now resolved so this will be monitored going forwards.
- 4a.4 AC said staff would take away LSP feedback but suggested the LSP might want to escalate it. **An updated on emails will be provided within the 6 week update.**
- 4a.5 JN suggested inviting IT to the next meeting. SJ informed the panel that previously there were IT issues with complaints handling and reporting, which took several months to rectify. **SJ will take the issue to the Scrutiny Review but MV or AMF needs to ensure IT come to the meeting.**
- 4a.6 TA asked what, other than IT, had caused the dissatisfaction. LJ cited difficulties in contacting PMOs coincide with email technical issues, causing residents to feel unvalued.
- 4a.7 LJ emphasised that although overall satisfaction had fallen, value for money for service charge had risen.
- 4a.8 MB asked if with 10 point scale for customer satisfaction surveys, a score on 1.5 would equal 15%. LJ advised she does not know if equating the scores to percentages in that way was accurate.
- 4a.9 LC commented staff seem unaware when phone lines are down. LJ commented as most of the communication within her team, and leasehold as a whole, is received via email that would be an issue more prevalent within PRH.
- 4a.10 SJ closed this discussion due to time constraints by thanking staff because K&C had come top in two areas.
- 4a.11 LJ informed LSP that unfortunately, for the first time, inspections had not gone well. ****NB The fall to 67% on the graph of page 26 on the agenda should show a fall to 87%** LJ attributed the failure to complete inspections to time being allocated to accounts and other staffing problems but apologised.

- 4a.12 LJ noted arrears have increased although the percentages aren't as bad as the totals seem (explained in the report).
- 4a.13 LS asked if the decrease in completed inspections and increase in arrears were linked to staff members spending time focussing on their accounts. LJ confirmed that accounts were being audited within this quarter; however this should not be an issue for the following quarter.
- 4a.14 LJ emphasised on the positive side, the percentage of repairs completed on time had increased, meeting with Workwise rep. They had successfully agreed to try and include more areas from the leasehold repairs project in the workwise stream. There was only one late response and review of a complaint. There were no new reports of ASB.

4. Performance Report – b. PRH and cyclical

- 4b.1 LG gave an update on Grenfell; NHH has rehoused 7 residents, a mixture of stage 2 & 3. 18 properties are still available if needed. Those requesting to stay have had stage 3 offers agreed in line with central government offer. We're continuing to work with them on this. The numbers and rent levels are driven by the council.
- 4b.2 LG stated customer satisfaction was just over 4% and expressed how pleased she was to finally see the results of increased staff efforts, though acknowledged there was still work to be done.
- 4b.3 LC asked if information shared within LSP is confidential. SJ confirmed part of the code of conducts advises the discussions cannot be shared. SM pointed out that the minutes and agenda are on the website, SJ said he was unaware of this.
- 4b.4 LG commented that inspections had dropped, likely due to staff on annual leave and advised that the figures should increase in Q3.
- 4b.5 LG said arrears had increased but was confident in the plans in place to ensure people had breathing space around Christmas. HOs would be using reports more to pinpoint causes.
- 4b.6 LG said voids are going well, partly helped by Grenfell. SJ asked for clarification on how Grenfell was reflected in NHH statistics for K&C. LG explained voids allocated for Grenfell were not included in re-let statistics but once allocated for Grenfell rehousing, were no longer counted as voids.
- 4b.7 LG added repairs performance has improved slightly so issues would continue to be addressed at weekly meetings with contractors. SJ reminded the panel that the contractor had changed to Wates in the middle of the period being discussed.
- 4b.8 LG informed residents that Wates have committed to a recovery plan and to reduce overdue repairs. GD commented that the system is too complacent, even though the contractor has changed, the same people are turning up to do repairs.
- 4b.9 SJ reminded LSP members of the monthly KPI breakdown. He has met with Peter Forsythe who emphasised that many operatives were not closing jobs properly on the system so figures are skewed. SJ suggested data is analysed further.

- 4b.10 TA asked if NHH would work alongside Waites. LG explained 3 Waites operatives sit on the same floor as NHH staff.
- 4b.11 LG explained Waites took a different approach to larger projects. Unlike other contractors, they send a supervisor to assess jobs *first*, so when work starts it is completed more efficiently. This is resulting in slower turnaround, but increased satisfaction.
- 4b.12 SJ added that 6 week updates reflect concerns about Waites over cyclical. He explained CT has said they have the same system as Waites and it works successfully.
- 4b.13 LG stated that Kitchen and Bathroom programmes are running slightly behind but new RAs should get things back on track. In response to complaints about external works being untidy and scaffolding being left up too long, a new scaffolding tracker has been created to ensure it is only up for 1 week before and after work is ongoing. AC added NHH are aware it's a problem and it will not be up over Christmas. TA emphasised it's a security issue and LC added it can invalidate home insurance.
- 4b.14 Chair confirmed to the panel that while the current table format for cyclical performance will remain the same each quarter, PAM will be invited to attend every 4th Quarter meeting to discuss their performance over the previous 12 months. **SJ will take this forward to the Scrutiny Review.**
- 4b.15 MB, GD, SM & HM left meeting at 8pm.

5. Resident Repairs Rep Report

- 5.1 SJ introduced RS and explained No. 5 Warwick Road was unique because although it is a Leasehold property, it is managed by PRH.
- 5.2 RS gave a presentation on his situation. He explained cyclical work due in 2013 had only started in March 2017 due to NHH postponements and issues with communication. Work has repeatedly started and then soon stopped with the scaffolding left up for months. When scaffolding eventually went down, a leaking roof meant it had to go up again. A lot of work has not been done or is not up to standard and residents feel ignored.
- 5.3 SJ said he has been trying to improve communication in these situations and that he knew complaints made by RS had been ignored for a long time. All residents agreed it was not acceptable and that leaving scaffolding up was a big waste of money. **SJ said he would raise the issue of post-repairs inspections at the next Cyclical meeting to ensure repairs are checked.**
- 5.4 JN asked who at NHH project manages this area. LJ explained it is the Property Asset Management Team but RS's situation was unusual because his point of contact is within the leasehold team, although she admitted it should not make a difference.
- 5.5 LJ said once she got involved and took people to see the site, they then began to accept how poor the standard of work was. The major problem was the failing cyclical contractor. LC said the contractors must be responsible. LJ confirmed they have been replaced. **SJ reiterated in order to give this problem justice he would raise it at the Scrutiny Panel.**

- 5.6 JN asked who is accountable for paying for the weeks and the constant implementing of scaffolding. LJ confirmed RS is protected by law not to pay for sub-standard work so he is safe from charges. If NHH want to pursue costs they can pursue Wates.
- 5.7 AC explained how the budget is apportioned and that it will be made up of three other charges. **He advised it be flagged to MV.**
- 5.8 LS asked if there is anyone at NHH with technical knowledge of construction. LJ confirmed there was and all equipment and materials were specified in contracts. LJ added that a clerk of work and a surveyor are meant to routinely check the progress of work.

****NB.**

6. Scrutiny Review Meeting was not addressed due to lack of time

7. Resident Involvement Update

- 7.1 OL gave the dates for 2018 LSP. Quarter 3 on 7 February, Quarter 4 on 9 May, Quarter 1 on 8 August, Quarter 2 on 7 November.
- 7.2 OL reminded members of the end of year social on 12 December at The Lyric.

8. A.O.B.

No points were raised.

MEETING CLOSED