

WATFORD COMMUNITY HOUSING TASK GROUP

24 September 2018

Present: Councillor A Khan (Chair)
Councillors S Cavinder, A Dychton, A Grimston and K Hastrick

Also present: Councillor Mo Mills (minute numbers 4 to 6)

Officers: Committee and Scrutiny Officer
Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer (JK)

1 Election of Chair

Councillor Khan was elected Chair.

2 Apologies for absence

There were no apologies for absence.

3 Disclosures of interest

There were no disclosures of interest.

4 Introduction and background to the review

The background to the review was set out for members.

It was noted that the key areas arising out of casework were:

- Value for money of service charges
- The timeliness and quality of repairs and any rectification required
- Customer service, particularly when concerns were raised.

There were anecdotal examples of cases where the service standards set out for residents were not being met.

The key questions for the task group to focus on were set out in the agenda:

- How are the service charges determined?
- What are the procedures for residents to request repairs or maintenance, and to make representations to WCH when a poor standard of work is carried out?

- How is feedback on the performance of contractors sought?
- How does WCH follow up on the feedback?
- How many requests for repairs are made annually and what are the satisfaction levels of residents?
- How are details of repairs/maintenance communicated to residents before and after they take place?
- What is the process for quality assuring the repairs/maintenance undertaken?
- How does WCH ensure that service standards are being maintained, especially in communal areas?

In addition, the following questions were raised:

- What is the process for checking properties before residents move in?
- How is value for money for the service charges established?
- What is the range of cost of service charges and what are some typical examples e.g. a resident in a high rise building/a resident in sheltered accommodation/a resident in a low-rise building?
- Can the task group be provided with any benchmarking information for service charges?
- When are the in-house repairs and maintenance team used and when are external contractors used?
- How are external contractors trained in customer service?
- Could WCH describe the processes from a problem being reported through to feedback being received from the resident?
- What is the procedure for logging complaints about contractors?

Actions:

- Jodie Kloss to send the agreed questions to WCH.

5 **Supporting information**

The task group noted the contents of the documents supplied with the agenda.

6 **Task group's work programme**

1. **Meeting with Watford Community Housing**

At the next meeting, councillors would each lead on a sub-topic within the review and ask questions about that area. The questions for discussion were set out above.

There would be a pre-meeting for councillors between 6.00pm and 6.30 pm on 17 October. The meeting would begin at 6.30pm.

2. Residents' drop in sessions

It was agreed that four or five residents' drop in sessions would be arranged during November, with potential venues being:

- Meriden Community Centre
- Holywell Community Centre
- Orbital Community Centre
- The Harebreaks Community Hub
- Watford Town Hall.

These would take the form of informal discussions between residents and councillors, with refreshments available. The purpose would be to gain a fuller picture of residents' concerns in relation to the areas of focus for the task group.

Officers would assist in putting together a leaflet/poster advertising the sessions. Councillors, both in the task group and other councillors, would promote the sessions. This could be through residents' associations, noticeboards, newsletters and social media. The council's communications team may be able to assist in promoting the sessions using their social media channels. An online survey was suggested to obtain residents' views.

The meetings would generally be between 6.30pm and 8pm on weekdays with the potential for a meeting on a Saturday morning at the Meriden Community Centre, subject to availability. There could also be a late afternoon session. All Watford councillors would be welcome to attend.

It was agreed that a further meeting with WCH was likely to be required after the residents' drop in sessions.

It was noted that WCH's contract for the management of temporary accommodation would be specifically excluded from the review.

Actions:

- A Whatsapp group to be set up for the review by the councillors to allow ongoing informal discussions – Councillor Grimston
- To investigate the costs and availability of the proposed venues in November- Jodie Kloss/Alan Garside
- To draft a poster to advertise the residents' drop-in sessions, once the details have been finalised – Jodie Kloss/Alan Garside with communications
- Look at the feasibility of an online survey for residents

- A task group briefing to be set up before the meeting with WCH- Jodie Kloss/Alan Garside.

Chair

The Meeting started at 6.05 pm
and finished at 7.05 pm