

These minutes are draft and subject to confirmation at the next meeting of the sub-committee

Housing Sub-Committee

27 June 2016

Present: Councillor S Cox (Chair)
Councillors A Arkle, K Bolger, L Darke, D
Drummond, N Huscroft, M Madden, P Mason,
A Newman, M Rankin and M Thirlaway

HO01/06/16 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor John Hunter.

HO02/06/16 Substitute Members

There were no substitute members appointed.

HO03/06/16 Declarations of Interest

Cllr K Bolger declared a registerable personal interest in relation to Minute HO05/06/16 Kier North Tyneside Performance, as she worked for partner ENGIE and served customers on housing related issues including repairs and programmed works.

Cllr M Thirlaway declared a non-registerable personal interest in relation to Minute HO05/06/16 Kier North Tyneside Performance, as his father worked for Kier North Tyneside.

HO04/06/16 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 22 March 2016 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

HO05/06/16 Kier North Tyneside Performance

The sub-committee received a report which provided the latest performance information relating to housing repairs and housing investment work delivered through Kier North Tyneside, the Council's Joint Venture Company (JVCo). Kier North Tyneside delivered all construction and maintenance services for the Council.

It was explained that the key premise of the partnership was to deliver high performing services to customers that continue to improve over time. A comprehensive suite of Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) had been developed across the service and were regularly reviewed through contract governance arrangements. Targets were realigned each year to ensure continuous improvement in line with benchmarking data.

The sub-committee was presented with current and past performance in order to allow Members to understand the recent trend. The performance information was split into gas servicing; repairs; empty homes; contact centre and the investment performance.

Officers referred to the measure 'the number of capped gas properties', which was

currently off target. It was explained that there were a number of tenants choosing not to use gas within their properties and that, as a safeguarding measure, these tenants were being asked to sign a form to confirm they were happy to have the gas capped. The target for this measure had been set at zero. However, plans were in place to review this target due to the number of tenants choosing to run households without gas. Members were assured that this was down to individual choice and that a tenant could request to be reconnected to the gas supply at any time with no costs incurred.

In relation to customer satisfaction levels with gas servicing, it was noted that, whilst still on target, the satisfaction level had dropped from 9.16 in 2014/15 to 9.12 in 2015/16. This was attributed to the level of care taken by operatives, i.e. not using dust sheets and hovering. Customer satisfaction had also dropped in relation to the repairs service, though again still meeting the target. This was also down to the care taken by operatives. Officers informed that steps were in place to improve this.

In relation to empty homes, the 'average number of calendar days to repair empty homes' had increased from 16.37 days in 2014/15 to 18.59 days in 2015/16. However, whilst there was an increase in the time taken, the customer satisfaction levels of new tenants had gone up from 7.82 in 2014/15 to 8.17 in 2015/16. It was noted that this number of days was reducing in the most up-to-date performance information and that some of the indicators had been reorganised to focus attention on this area.

A Member of the sub-committee asked whether there was a high level of repairs within the first 6 weeks after a tenant had moved into the property. It was highlighted that every property has an inspection to ensure it meets the Decent Homes Standard before the tenant moves in. Repair works once a tenant is in the property usually arise when the tenant re-decorates and the plaster comes off the walls with the wallpaper. It was noted that there would be a cost implication and an impact on the void times if the walls were stripped prior to tenants moving in. In relation to jobs such as rewiring, Members questioned if it was better to strip all the wallpaper rather than just the patch required to do the works as the tenant would then need to decorate afterwards anyway. The sub-committee was informed that when work such as re-wiring takes place, the tenant is given some contribution in order to help with the necessary decorating. Members asked for some information to be provided that compared the cost of stripping all wallpaper whilst re-wiring against the cost of being called back to carry out patch jobs.

In relation to the contact centre, it was noted that the 'average customer telephone call waiting time' had increased from 7.76 seconds in 2014/15 to 15.16 seconds in 2015/16. This had been due to a 3 month period (November, December and January) where high volume of calls and staffing issues had drove up the overall wait times. It was noted that calls were answered in a shorter time by Kier than by the corporate call centre. A Member asked whether Kier preferred communicating with customers via telephone or web based solutions. It was noted that the contact centre was currently the main point of contact but that other solutions would be explored as part of the Council's Target Operating Model that promoted self service. It was highlighted that a significant number of elderly people do not have access to a computer making it important to always retain a telephone option.

The sub-committee discussed the investment performance indicators. It was noted that the 2016/17 Housing Investment Programme consisted of 29 main projects and a range of other ancillary projects. To date, there were 0 projects completed, 9 schemes on site and 29 schemes still to commence. It was noted that, although still above target, there had been a slight drop in satisfaction levels for the kitchens and bathrooms scheme, from 76.00 in 2014/15 to 75.57 in 2015/16. This was attributed to a delay in the completion of works undertaken in Marden and Howdon.

In relation to the fencing replacement schemes, Members noted that many tenants had been waiting some time for a replacement and asked what the timescales were. It was noted that 3 years ago a 15 year fence replacement scheme was embarked upon, so it would be another 12 years until all fences were replaced. Whilst this had brought some criticism, resources were limited and priority was given to replacing fences based on age and condition. If health and safety issues were raised with a fence it may be moved up the programme or a temporary repair may be undertaken until it is due to be replaced in accordance with the scheme timetable.

It was **agreed** to note the performance information presented in relation to Kier North Tyneside.

HO06/06/16 Work programme 2016/17

The sub-committee was presented a report which set out the potential topics received for inclusion in the 2016/17 work programme, the work programme process that had been undertaken to date and the next steps for finalising the topics.

The sub-committee was informed that the process of establishing the 2016/17 overview and scrutiny work programme had began in February 2016, with an email to all Members and Tier 1, 2 and 3 managers, seeking ideas for topics scrutiny could usefully look at. It had been explained with this request that the focus of overview and scrutiny would be on contributing to policy development. In addition to asking senior staff and Members to put forward ideas, an article was placed in the residents' magazine inviting members of the public to raise any issue that they thought would be suitable for scrutiny to investigate.

A list of all the suggestions received relevant to Housing Sub-committee was appended to the report. These topics had been split into topics that would constitute an in-depth investigation and monitoring reports that could be considered during committee meetings. In determining which topics should be prioritised for in-depth investigation, the following criteria should be considered:

- Is it timely?
- Will it duplicate any other work ongoing within the Council or the NECA scrutiny work programme?
- Will it add value/contribute to policy development?

The suggestions received for the Housing Sub-committee were as follows:

- Sustainable tenancies (in depth investigation)
- Housing strategy
- Affordable Homes
- Kier North Tyneside
- Police and Community Protection Team
- Police and Crime Commissioner
- Lettings Policy
- Housing and Planning Act 2016
- Universal credit

In relation to the Police and Community Protection Team, the sub-committee expressed an interest in discussing the process for dealing with nuisance neighbours, as it seemed to take a long time to make any progress with this issue. Members were invited to put forward any additional suggestions that they had for the work programme. A member suggested that the committee could receive update reports on the Kier contact and provide input into its operation. It was noted that Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee had

recently undertaken a piece of work in this area. It was suggested that the outcomes of that study be examined to see if there was any follow up or additional work that the sub-committee could undertake.

It was **agreed** to note the report and incorporate all the suggestions set out in the report into the 2016/17 work programme.

HO07/06/16 Commencement of future meetings

A report was presented to the sub-committee which invited members to give consideration to the start time for future meetings and to endorse the dates set out in the timetable of meetings, as presented to Annual Council.

The general consensus of members was that meetings should remain at 6pm in order to allow those working to attend. It was suggested that, where a meeting has a large amount of business to get through, consideration be given to bringing the start time forward in order to ensure the sub-committee can conclude its work by 8pm.

It was **agreed** that the commencement time of Housing Sub-committee meetings remain at 6pm.