

London Borough of Hackney
Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission
Municipal Year 2023/24
Monday 11 December 2023

Minutes of the proceedings of
the Living in Hackney Scrutiny
Commission held at
Hackney Town Hall, Mare
Street, London E8 1EA

Chair:	Councillor Soraya Adejare
Councillors in Attendance:	Cllr Joseph Ogundemuren, Cllr Sam Pallis, Cllr Zoe Garbett
Councillors in Virtual Attendance:	Cllr Clare Joseph, Cllr Ian Rathbone and Cllr Caroline Selman
Apologies:	Cllr M Can Ozsen, Cllr Ali Sadek and Cllr Yvonne Maxwell
Officers In Attendance:	Steve Waddington (Strategic Director Housing Services), Rob Miller (Strategic Director Customer & Workplace), Kain Roach (Assistant Director Building Maintenance) and James Gibson (Specialist Lawyer)
Other People in Attendance:	Cllr Clayeon McKenzie (Cabinet Member for Housing Services & Resident Participation)
Officers in Virtual Attendance:	Helena Stephenson (Assistant Director Tenancy Services), Sarah Kulay (Head of Resident Participation, TMOs and Communities), Ron Springer (Assistant Director Customer Operations)
Other People in Virtual Attendance:	Steve Webster (Resident Liaison Group Co-Chair)
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Councillor Soraya Adejare in the Chair

1 Apologies for Absence

1.1 The Chair updated those in attendance on the meeting etiquette and that the meeting was being recorded and livestreamed.

1.2 Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Oszen, Cllr Maxwell and Cllr Sadek.

1.3 Cllr Selman, Cllr Rathbone and Cllr Joseph were in online attendance.

2 Urgent Items / Order of Business

2.1 There were no urgent items, and the order of business was as set out in the agenda.

3 Declaration of Interest

3.1 There were no declarations of interest.

4 Housing Services Resident Engagement Strategy 2022-25

4.1 The Chair opened the item by explaining that the Commission was keen to hear about the progress the Council had made against the key commitments outlined in the Housing Services Resident Engagement Strategy (RES), and any plans for it to be refreshed to reflect what had been achieved and new things which may need to be done.

4.2 The Commission saw this discussion as a timely means of monitoring progress in delivering the action plan against the five strategic priorities of the strategy.

4.3 Representing London Borough of Hackney

- Councillor Clayeon McKenzie, Cabinet Member for Housing Services & Resident Participation
- Steve Waddington, Strategic Director Housing Services
- Helena Stephenson, Assistant Director Tenancy Services
- Sarah Kulay, Head of Resident Participation, TMOs and Communities

4.4 External Guests

- Steve Webster, Resident Liaison Group Co-Chair

4.5 The Chair then invited the Cabinet Member for Housing Services & Resident Participation and Council officers to give a verbal presentation. The main points are highlighted below.

4.6 The RES was co-produced with residents, with its development had been overseen by a Project Champions Group, made up of the Resident Liaison Group (RLG) Co-Chairs and the Cabinet Member for Housing Services and Resident Participation, alongside a wider Strategy Scrutiny Group bringing together officers and involved and uninvolved residents.

4.7 Final proposals were informed by wider feedback from housing residents and staff, including focus groups, major surveys, and outreach to residents via local community and faith groups. This provided confidence that the direction outlined in the final document was a fair representation of the issues and challenges residents faced, and their priorities for improvement.

4.8 The strongest message from the consultation was a need to get the basics right, with a stronger focus on timely, transparent and honest communication. It was also clear that some tenants and residents associations (TRAs) wanted more support, and

some residents who were not involved felt that some TRAs needed to be more inclusive.

4.9 Strategic Priority 1 (Embed a 'Resident First' culture across the service) focused on actions to ensure that the service culture, and behaviour of staff, puts the residents' voice at the centre of its work, with policies, service delivery and priorities shaped by active listening and engagement.

4.10 To support this priority the service had worked with involved residents to agree on a set of new service standards. This had resulted in a suite of 21 indicators which reflected a focus on getting the basics right.

4.11 There had also been a focus on embedding improvements in service performance in those areas which were a high priority for residents. This included repairs, customer contact and responding to damp and mould.

4.12 The service had also sought to enable strong engagement between the involved resident structure and senior housing leaders, with the development of all new housing policies and procedures to include resident engagement.

4.13 It had also looked to ensure regular and effective communication of key housing messages and service developments to the wider resident base, using a variety of channels such as social media, leaflets, Love Hackney features, estate posters and the residents' annual report.

4.14 Strategic Priority 2 (Support involved residents' groups to thrive) focused on work to support tenants and residents' groups to be as effective as possible and to work in ways that supported the service's engagement principles.

4.15 This year the focus had been on developing the tools and support to better promote the creation and sustainment of TRAs. This included the development of a new guide to resident engagement which set out a range of information and guidance on setting up and running a TRA, including templates and policies that can be used and adapted by new groups, and advice on other forms of engagement.

4.16 The service had also worked with involved residents to develop a new model constitution for TRAs and a refreshed code of conduct. Consultation on these new model documents would take place early in 2024.

4.17 It had also published a new Resident Training Programme, based on feedback from TRAs. The new programme was designed to support both new and existing involved residents, with sessions on running a successful TRA, chairing meetings, taking minutes and dealing with finance, as well as more specialist courses.

4.18 Since 2022 10 new TRAs had been formed, meaning there were now 55 TRAs covering the Council's directly managed homes. The service would continue to work at grassroots level to support new and emerging groups and to run activities on unrepresented estates.

4.19 Strategic Priority 3 (Widen the ways residents can engage with us) focused on widening the range of engagement options available, with opportunities tailored to the different needs, lifestyles and interests of Hackney's diverse communities.

4.20 So far, the service had extended opportunities for residents to make contact online for bookings and appointments., as well as creating new opportunities for residents involved in community gardens to come together to share their experiences and network.

4.21 It had also recruited to a new Housing Services Youth Forum, with 13 young people now signed up. The Forum would provide a platform for young people to have their say about housing services, influence how the service engages with young people, and support wider succession planning in the involved structure.

4.22 There had been a strong focus on the approach to housing estate surgeries with 225 estate-based surgeries held between April and October 2023. The approach had evolved to deliver surgeries in partnership with voluntary and community groups. Opportunities to co-locate in GPs surgeries were also being developed, helping the service to work more collaboratively with health colleagues and support healthy placemaking.

4.23 Strategic Priority 4 (Ensure that residents influence our decision-making and drive service improvement) focused on how the service would work with residents so that they could influence decision-making and ensure that proposals for improvement reflect their priorities and concerns.

4.24 There had been a strong focus on getting residents' views through surveys and consultation exercises, particularly on spending priorities, rent increases, estate surgeries and annual resident satisfaction (STAR) surveys.

4.25 A new performance dashboard had also been developed which would be presented at each RLG meeting and provided further opportunities for the group to hold management to account and challenge under-performance.

4.25 A new framework for resident scrutiny was in development, which would include a Resident Scrutiny Panel comprising up to 12 residents who were not currently involved. The Panel would undertake two scrutiny reviews per year, with recommendations for improvement presented to and monitored by both the Panel and Housing Services Management Team.

4.26 Strategic Priority 5 (Promote engagement activity that strengthens our communities) focused on the work to promote the integration and resilience of housing communities and build partnerships with others services and the third sector to develop projects that delivered community benefits.

4.27 To support this, the service had allocated 100% of the Community Development Fund in 2022/23 to support TRA and other resident-led projects and initiatives, and was on track to spend the full budget again in 2023/24.

4.28 It had also continued to support over 50 community gardens and grow projects across estates, with 13 new projects taken forward in 2023, including those on Pond Farm, Nightingale Estate, Landfield Estate, Wick Village, and Sandford Court and St Andrews Mews.

4.29 Initiatives had been developed to support residents during the cost of living crisis. This included awarding grant funding of £40k to voluntary and community partners to extend their provision to offer warm spaces during the winter months, and producing

the cost of living booklet, with information on money and debt, free food and activities in the borough, and jobs and training support.

4.30 Two estate-based food projects had been funded to support housing residents, and the use of community halls had been promoted by funding health and wellbeing projects, digital skills classes and young projects.

4.31 In terms of monitoring impact, bids to run youth and other commissioned projects were evaluated with a focus on value for money, deliverability and service quality. Projects were underpinned by service levels agreements, with a range of output/outcome measures such as level of participation and retention, impact on participant behaviour and personal development.

4.32 The RES Action Plan included key milestones and KPI indicators for the 42 actions, with a range of output and outcome indicators and linked to work on implementing the new Social Housing Regulator consumer standards.

4.33 The annual STAR survey measured progress on key outcome indicators, and the 2023/24 survey showed improvements in all Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) - with the overall satisfaction level in the service rising from 52% in 2022/23 to 59%.

4.34 The Chair then invited the Resident Liaison Group (RLG) Co-Chair to give a verbal presentation. The main points are highlighted below.

4.35 There had been some areas of progress over the last year, and the RLG was looking forward to working with Housing Services to take forward other areas of work. Progress had been made in getting the basics right, for example, with the overall satisfaction in the service increasing.

4.36 The RLG did however have some areas of concern in regard to the implementation of the strategy. With the action plans yet to be finalised, it was difficult to see how the strategy could be implemented by 2025 as planned. There may therefore be a need to consider extending the implementation of the strategy until 2026/27.

4.37 It was felt that the action plans would need to be ambitious but also realistic and achievable within the current staffing and financial resources. They would also need to address service improvement issues, organisational culture change and the expectations of residents, elected members and staff.

4.38 The action plans would need to map out the journey to meet the five priorities identified in the strategy. That would require detailed action plans which were thoroughly consulted on and with buy in from residents, staff and elected members.

4.39 The action plans would require ownership and buy in from across Housing Services, but also other council services. Each department would need to focus on how their service and workforce could support the implementation of the strategy and ensure there was not an over reliance on the Resident Participation Team.

4.40 The action plans would also need to set out a clear process so that they could be reviewed, monitored, scrutinised and adjusted, with residents, staff and elected members involved throughout. There would also need to be strong engagement between senior management, residents and elected members to map out the

relationship between the action plans, the overall strategy and the introduction of the Government's social housing regulatory framework.

Questions, Answers and Discussion

4.41 A Commission Member asked what steps had been taken to ensure the involved resident structure was representative of the wider community, and to bring residents who were not currently involved on board.

4.42 The Head of Resident Participation, TMOs and Communities explained that work to widen participation needed to be underpinned by better information about residents. This involved developing an approach to collecting data on protected characteristics and vulnerabilities, and profiling involved structures to better understand which groups and tenures may be under-represented.

4.43 In parallel to this work, the service was looking to create social and demographic profiles of neighbourhoods, drawing upon information from the 2021 Census and local knowledge of communities and local groups/organisations.

4.44 A Commission Member asked for further information on the governance arrangements for the new Housing Scrutiny Panel, and how its recommendations would be monitored.

4.45 The Head of Resident Participation, TMOs and Communities explained that the Resident Scrutiny Panel would comprise up to 12 residents who were not currently involved. The recruitment and training of Panel members would take place in the last quarter of 2023/24, and training and support would be provided for participants.

4.46 The Panel would undertake two scrutiny reviews per year, with recommendations for improvement presented to, and monitored, by both the Panel and Housing Services Management Team. The Housing Services Management Team was committed to being open and transparent in sharing information, and following up on recommendations.

4.47 Suggestions for topics would be put forward by Panel members, resident groups and the Housing Services Management Team. The topics would ultimately be agreed upon by members as part of the Panel's work planning process.

4.48 A Commission Member asked for further information on how the recruitment process for the new Housing Scrutiny Panel would be publicised.

4.49 The Head of Resident Participation, TMOs and Communities explained that the recruitment process for the Housing Scrutiny Panel would be widely publicised. This included leaflets being widely distributed and shared in public spaces and on estates.

4.50 It would also include features in Love Hackney, as well as communications via the Council's social media channels. Tenants' and residents' groups would also be encouraged to share the recruitment process with their networks.

4.51 A Commission Member asked how the impact and outcomes of projects undertaken to support Strategic Priority 5 (Promote engagement activity that strengthens our communities) would be evaluated.

4.52 The Head of Resident Participation, TMOs and Communities explained that the Community Development Fund (CDF) was used to support local resident-led projects and initiatives. A total of £191k had been made available for the current financial year, and residents could apply for up to £3.5k of funding depending on the size of their estate.

4.53 Separate funding was also available to support voluntary and community organisations to run activities on estates. For example, the Housing Youth Development Fund received £60k to fund commissioned youth projects across estates and funding was made available to support over 50 community gardens across estates.

4.54 Projects were evaluated through a range of output/outcome measures such as level of participation and retention, impact on participant behaviour and personal development. For example, particular focus would be given to increasing understanding of healthy lifestyles, increasing understanding and awareness of diversity and improving communication and social skills.

4.55 A Commission Member asked whether engagement activity looked the same across the borough, or whether it was tailored to reflect the needs of individual estates.

4.56 The Head of Resident Participation, TMOs and Communities explained that the service wanted to take a strategic approach to engagement activity, but retain the flexibility to be reactive to the needs of individual estates where appropriate.

4.57 In practice this meant that some areas of work, such as digital skills courses or health and wellbeing projects, may be offered widely across the borough, but there may also be instances where the Council supports tailored projects at a locality level.

4.58 A Commission Member asked for further information on the new Vulnerable Residents Policy.

4.59 The Assistant Director Tenancy Services explained that the service recognised that many housing residents experience financial hardship, social isolation, poor health and increasingly complex vulnerabilities.

4.60 To address this, a new policy to underpin the approach to supporting vulnerable households was being developed. It would be informed by wider work to improve data collection around protected characteristics and vulnerabilities, and would set out how the service offer would be flexed for residents with additional needs and those who were at risk of experiencing disadvantages in accessing services and inequality in outcomes once they do.

4.61 A Commission Member asked for further information on the level of responses to the Housing Services annual STAR survey.

4.62 The Strategic Director Housing Services explained that the annual STAR survey was undertaken over the summer, and around 13% of residents responded to the survey (2.5-3k respondents). This was a slight decrease on the previous year but the statistical relevance was similar.

4.63 It was advised that a breakdown for results of the survey and the number of responses by geography/tenure/demographics could be provided to Commission Members following the meeting.

4.64 A Commission Member asked how a culture of accountability would be embedded across the service, and how senior management would ensure service delivery was shaped by active listening and engagement with residents.

4.65 The Assistant Director Tenancy Services explained that promoting a culture of accountability was central to the overall focus of the RES, demonstrating how residents' voice would be at the heart of policies, service delivery and priorities, but also being honest with residents about what they should expect from staff.

4.66 This underlined the need for the RES to be owned across the service, with engagement understood as the responsibility of all housing leaders, managers and staff. It was recognised that staff having the right skills, being empowered to take decisions at the right level, and being accountable, were key to good service delivery.

4.67 To support this, a workforce development plan for Housing Services would be developed which would identify the skills and behaviours which needed to be embedded in different roles across the service, and create a staff training plan and updated staff induction packs.

4.68 A Commission Member asked whether there was confidence amongst senior management that the aims of the RES would be fulfilled in the timescales set out.

4.69 The Cabinet Member for Housing Services & Resident Participation recognised that delivering the actions identified in the RES in a timely manner was challenging, especially when considering capacity issues in some areas and increasing Council-wide financial constraints.

4.70 Nonetheless, there were some significant areas of progress, as well as some work that would be taken forward next year to further embed the approach and ensure that all actions were delivered by December 2025. Deliverability of key actions against the milestones set out in the action plan would continue to be monitored and amendments could be made if appropriate.

4.71 A Commission Member asked for further information on plans to strengthen neighbourhood panels.

4.72 The Head of Resident Participation, TMOs and Communities recognised that neighbourhood panels provided a forum to bring together TRAs to share experiences, consider common areas of concern, consider housing policy and performance and make suggestions for improvement.

4.73 The service would be revisiting recommendations made following a review undertaken with some of the Panel Chairs in 2021/22, including proposals to review the terms of reference, widen participation, and improve promotion of the meetings.

4.74 A Commission Member asked how staff managed the contact details of involved resident groups to ensure key housing messages and engagement opportunities were received.

4.75 The Head of Resident Participation, TMOs and Communities explained that a master list of the contact details of all involved resident groups was kept within the Resident Participation Team. It was recognised however that, since Covid, it had not been kept entirely up to date and work was underway to ensure an updated, centralised list was available to all staff across the service.

4.76 A Commission Member asked for further information on plans to ensure more effective follow up on issues raised by TRAs.

4.77 The Head of Resident Participation, TMOs and Communities explained that all registered TRAs could hold quarterly meetings with their housing officers (ETRA meetings) to flag areas of concern and follow up on matters raised that remain.

4.78 A new online ETRA monitoring tool had recently been developed to better track performance on the actions arising from these meetings and this was now being rolled out to housing officers. The service was working to embed this way of working over the next few months, and develop a more accessible version of the tool so that TRAs could monitor follow-up from their meetings in real time.

4.79 A Commission Member asked for further information on plans to increase promotion of the benefits of TRAs and encourage more interest in formal resident involvement.

4.80 The Head of Resident Participation, TMOs and Communities explained that there was a target to reach out to 30 unrepresented estates per year to promote the benefits of TRAs, which was often exceeded. Staff also continued to work at grassroots level to support new and emerging groups, and to run activities on unrepresented estates.

Summing Up

4.81 The Chair thanked Commission Members for their questions and all witnesses for their responses and engagement with the scrutiny process.

4.82 It was explained that, after the meeting, the Commission would reflect on the evidence heard and may make suggestions or recommendations for consideration.

5 Housing Repairs

5.1 The Chair opened the item by explaining that the Commission was keen to follow up on progress against the improvement actions identified at the previous meeting in December 2022, where the measures to improve the Council's repairs performance and customer care following the pandemic and cyber-attack were discussed.

5.2 As part of the scrutiny process, Commission Members undertook a focus group with residents living in council-managed homes to understand their experiences of the repairs service over the past year and what they may like to see happen differently in the future.

5.3 Representing London Borough of Hackney

- Councillor Clayeon McKenzie, Cabinet Member for Housing Services & Resident Participation
- Steve Waddington, Strategic Director Housing Services
- Kain Roach, Assistant Director Building Maintenance

- Rob Miller, Strategic Director Customer & Workplace
- Ron Springer, Assistant Director Customer Operations

5.4 The Chair began by giving an overview of the key issues, patterns and trends which were highlighted during the focus group with residents.

5.5 It was noted that the findings represented a small sample of the experiences of residents living in council properties, and that there had been improvements in some areas over the past year. However, many of the issues raised were familiar to Commission Members who dealt with housing repairs issues routinely through their casework.

5.6 Reporting repairs online

- Online reporting not providing a written record of the repair being reported, which could lead to inaccurate information being logged and wrong or unprepared operatives being sent to a job
- No online reporting function for communal repairs

5.7 Call centre performance

- Recognition that wait times had improved recently, although residents were still waiting a long time to obtain a job ticket once through
- Call centre staff generally polite and helpful, although reporting more complicated issues could be difficult

5.8 Communication

- Lack of prompt communication and appointment rearrangement where agreed appointment cannot be kept
- Not keeping residents up-to-date at the various stages of a case, and on the timelines for resolutions
- Not communicating the resolution/outcome of an issue with the resident who reported the issue (with communal visits it was difficult to know whether someone has attended at all)
- Lack of communication between Council officers and contractors, leading to delays in repairs being undertaken and repeat visits
- Lack of communication with leaseholders around which repairs issues may be the leaseholder or landlord's responsibility, and how to report issues which are thought to be the landlord's responsibility
- Walkarounds and surgeries with housing officers were helpful, allowing residents to raise issues and concerns with officers directly

5.9 Waits for repairs

- Long wait times between reporting an issue and initial assessment, as well as between initial assessment and resolution of issue
- Repairs not being finished to the required standard, and residents having to chase the Council multiple times to find a resolution
- No emergency service at weekend for boiler and heating repairs, meaning in some cases elderly and families have had to wait over a week for a visit which can be particularly challenging in the winter months
- New communal repairs officer role is helpful and communal repairs were getting resolved more quickly

5.10 Repeat visits

- Repairs orders not being logged properly, leading to wrong or unprepared operatives being sent to a job
- Not arriving to an appointment with the correct equipment and/or keys for access
- Repeat visits to assess seemingly straightforward issues, leading to delays in getting the issue resolved
- Repairs not being of the best standard initially, leading to repeat visits and lengthy delays

5.11 The Chair then invited the Cabinet Member for Housing Services & Resident Participation and Council officers to give a verbal presentation. The main points are highlighted below.

5.12 Since the last meeting, the service had implemented a five day inspection target for reports of damp and mould. As of October 2023, the average time to inspect reports of damp and mould was 4.92 days.

5.13 It had also implemented a target to raise and attend all plumbing jobs by the end of the next working day. As of October 2023, 88% of plumbing jobs were being raised as emergency (24 hours) or immediate (two hours) priority, and plumbing leaks were being completed on average in 1.45 days.

5.14 Overall, resident satisfaction with plumbing had increased from 56% in October 2022 to 76% in October 2023. Further improvements had been made to follow on work and leak hub referrals, with plumbers now fully completing one job at a time. The Leaks Hub Team were handling complex cases that involved more than one home and taking a proactive approach to access and resolution.

5.15 The service had also introduced property MOTs, which were targeted inspections where data and intel suggested there may be a wider issue in a block. For example, at Colville Estate operatives had completed further surveys on the block and would now look to collate property survey information with the Regeneration Team and address any further issues.

5.16 Operatives had reviewed damp and mould issues in properties at Tradescant House, with a long-term aim to develop a future works programme and addressing immediate general build issues. At Vain House, operatives had inspected properties following leaks, floods and upsurges in recent weeks, and were planning to extend these surveys to the whole block to review waste pipe services.

5.17 The service had also been working closely with the Regeneration Team on the property condition survey for Woodberry Down Estate, actively addressing cases of damp and mould and commencing a data-insight led approach to predict likely cases. In addition the service had reviewed its damp and mould process in line with Housing Ombudsman recommendations and was following up with residents after works were completed.

5.18 In terms of Director Labour Organisation (DLO) growth, the trade operative base had increased from 145 in 2021/22 to 165 currently, and the service was on track to reach its 20% increase target by the end of 2023/24.

5.19 In addition to the 20% growth target, a business case had recently been approved to expand by a further 20 operative posts over the next two years to increase the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Team.

5.20 In addition to growing the number of operatives the service was also looking to improve infrastructure and invest in workforce development, namely by improving depot and stores facilities, renewing the fleet of trade vehicles, and investing in skills and development of the workforce including apprenticeships.

5.21 There had been a significant increase in the number of completed repairs (both DLO operatives and contractors), with 101k forecasted for 2023/24 compared to 91k in 2022/23 and 58k in 2021/22.

5.22 Void turnarounds times had decreased, with average times at 84 days in November 2023 compared to 107 days in March 2022 and 118 days in March 2023. It was recognised that this was still too high, although the average was slightly higher than anticipated as the service had recently been letting a number of properties which had been empty for a long time.

5.23 The number of 24 hour leaks jobs completed was also forecasted to increase, with 12k forecasted to be completed this year compared to 2.25k in 2021/22 and 7.6k in 2022/23.

5.24 The backlog of over 7k repairs jobs from November 2022 had been cleared. However, there were currently 460 overdue repairs with the DLO, and 1.8k with contractors. The vast majority of these were only just out of time and the external contractor element was mostly linked to the demobilisation of the current contract.

5.25 Each month the service undertook transaction satisfaction surveys. Key performance indicators were listed as below:

- Overall Satisfaction - October 2022 63.06% / October 2023 71.11%
- Average days to complete a repair - October 2022 11.07 days / October 2023 10.20 days
- Satisfaction with quality of work - October 2022 67.57% / October 2023 68.82%
- Satisfaction with complete on first visit - October 2022 / October 2023 65.77% 63.33%

5.26 It was recognised that there had been a slight decrease in satisfaction with repairs jobs being completed first time. One reason for this was that where multiple repairs were needed, satisfaction surveys were sent out to residents after each visit rather than at the end of the repairs process.

5.27 All repairs with the DLO and main contractor were included on the Repairs Hub system. Work was ongoing with IT to onboard all remaining contractors onto the system (new contractors would be on the system from day one). The system recently went live with 'one job at a time' for plumbers which improved efficiency and responsiveness, with a roll out planned for other trades.

5.28 Scoping and requirement gathering was underway for an integrated housing IT system and this would be going out to tender imminently, with a priority area being to procure a data and information management system.

5.29 Measures had been put in place to improve the management and performance of contractors. This included onboarding all contractors to the Repairs Hub to further improve the visibility and management of contractor performance, as well as expanding the supply chain with onboarding of specialist contractors - particularly to support the approach to damp and mould.

5.30 Regular contractor performance management meetings were being held, reviewing the suite of reporting data and information. A Quantity Surveyors and Audit Team function had also been added to the Commercial and Contracts Team to scrutinise contractor and DLO performance.

5.31 There had also been a re-tendering of the DLO support contract with four contractors rather than one (two large/two small), which would be geographically split between the north and south of the borough.

5.32 The overall number of disrepair cases continued to increase as was the case across London (current number of open cases being 1.1k), but over the last six months the number of new cases had been reducing. More cases were being completed and closed with three times more cases closed/completed in the last 12 months than the previous 12 months.

5.33 The ADR approach would make a significant positive impact, with an expansion of the Legal Disrepair and ADR Team to resolve a higher number of cases more quickly. The ADR approach had fully resolved 92 cases so far, with repairs completed much more quickly, and residents receiving 100% of any compensation.

5.34 Breakdown of spend on disrepair cases since November 2022, compared to previous six months was listed as below:

- Repair costs - April to October 2022 £555,723 / April to October 2023 £1,361,118
- Compensation - April to October 2022 £497,197 / April to October 2023 £226,254
- Associated costs - April to October 2022 £335,328 / April to October 2023 £353,125
- Legal fees (external) - April to October 2022 £1,078,856 / April to October 2023 £264,153
- Legal fees (internal) - April to October 2022 £152,551 / April to October 2023 £152,551
- Total spend - April to October 2022 £2,619,655 / April to October 2023 £2,357,202

5.35 Spend was expected to increase as more cases were completed, however there were significant savings for cases completed via ADR instead of legal disrepair in the long run.

5.36 In terms of customer care, complaint numbers had continued to increase however the time to respond had reduced as listed below:

- 2021/22 - 672 complaints / 19.15 average days to respond
- 2022/23 - 1323 complaints / 13.50 average days to respond
- 2023/24 (to date) - 832 complaints / 14.78 average days to respond

5.37 There had been a 27% increase in stage 1 responses being provided on target compared to 2021/22 and an 11% increase compared to 2022/23. So far this year, only around 1% of DLO reactive repairs had turned into stage 1 complaints.

5.38 The results of annual STAR Resident Satisfaction Survey had seen overall satisfaction in the repairs service increase from 58% in 2022/23 to 63% in 2023/24, satisfaction with the time taken to complete the most recent repair increase from 52% in 2022/23 to 60% in 2023/24, satisfaction that home was well maintained increase from 53% in 2022/23 to 61% in 2023/24 and satisfaction that home was safe from 58% in 2022/23 to 63% in 2023/24.

5.39 Demand on the repairs contact centre had reduced by 6%, with 1,152 less calls in October 23 compared to October 22. However, there had been a seasonal increase in the volume of calls by 46% from September 23 to October 23 (18,930 calls received in total). Average call volumes were 4.4k per week, and call demand was 15-20% higher than pre-pandemic volumes.

5.40 There had been a 9% increase in routine repair calls answered - from 74% in October 2022 to 83% in October 23, and a 7% increase in emergency calls answered from 87% in October 22 to 94% in October 23. There had also been a 47% improvement in wait times for routine repair calls from 17 minutes to 9 minutes over the past year, and a 50% improvement in wait time for emergency calls from 6 minutes to 3 minutes over the past year.

Questions, Answers and Discussion

5.41 *A Commission Member asked how the Council learned from repairs complaints, and how it used Housing Ombudsman reports and decisions to develop policy and practice.*

5.42 The Strategic Director Housing Services explained that all complaints received by the service were reviewed with a focus on resolving the issues raised and learning from mistakes to prevent similar problems in the future.

5.43 For example, many of the improvement actions identified in terms of mould, damp and leaks responses were influenced by resident feedback and the recommendation of the Housing Ombudsman's recent spotlight report on damp and mould.

5.44 Complaints data and Housing Ombudsman cases were reviewed at senior management team meetings on a quarterly basis to ensure service planning and delivery reflected learning and best practice.

5.45 *A Commission Member asked how contractor performance was monitored and evaluated, and how contractors were held accountable for poor performance.*

5.46 The Strategic Director Housing Services recognised that contractor performance had been an issue. The Council had one main contractor which had at times been overwhelmed with the volume of work raised, especially post cyber-attack and during the pandemic.

5.46 One of the responses to this was to increase the DLO trade operative base, improve infrastructure and invest in workforce development. Another was to re-tender

the DLO support contract to move away from one large contractor to two larger and two smaller contractors, with work being apportioned appropriately.

5.47 The Assistant Director Building Maintenance added that the DLO had recently gone live with 'one job at a time' for plumbers and planned to roll it out to other trades. This improved efficiency and responsiveness by ensuring that, where needed, the next repairs job was booked straight after the previous one.

5.48 Measures had also been put in place to improve the management of contractors, including onboarding all contractors to the Repairs Hub to improve visibility and management and regular contractor performance management meetings.

5.49 A Commission Member asked whether the Council was able to hold subcontractors accountable for their performance.

5.50 The Assistant Director Building Maintenance explained that the Council evaluated the proportion of works which were delivered by contractors in-house when re-tendering the DLO support contract, and wanted contractors to be less reliant on subcontractors. It was important to note, however, that the use of subcontractors was common in the industry, especially during periods of higher demand.

5.51 A Commission Member asked for further information on how onboarding contractors to the Repairs Hub would improve visibility and the management of contractor performance.

5.52 The Assistant Director Building Maintenance explained that onboarding all contractors to the Repairs Hub allowed the service to monitor the journey of all repairs jobs from initial contact through to job completion. This allowed staff to easily access the status of a job, update residents accordingly, and record more detailed performance data.

5.53 A Commission Member asked for further information on the routes available to residents if they were not satisfied with a repairs job and wanted an operative to revisit their home.

5.54 The Assistant Director Building Maintenance explained that the resident could call the customer service centre or use the online reporting tool to arrange a follow-up appointment. This would then be entered into the Repairs Hub, but residents did not have access to the Repairs Hub itself. The longer term aspiration was to have a resident portal to allow for more transparency and visibility, but this was not possible until the new housing IT system was in place.

5.55 Residents were also encouraged to fill out a feedback form following the completion of a repairs job, which gave them an opportunity to raise any outstanding issues or concerns. When a resident was dissatisfied with a repairs job, staff made efforts to get in touch with them to find out more about their experience and take any follow up action where required.

5.56 A Commission Member asked why the number of complaints continued to increase despite improvement actions being implemented across the service and performance improving in some areas.

5.57 The Strategic Director Housing Services recognised that complaints numbers continued to increase. A lag time between things improving and complaints numbers decreasing was expected, but it must also be accepted that the service was not where it wanted to be.

5.58 There were also other factors which had led to an increase in complaints across the sector, such as heightened media coverage on social housing encouraging residents to speak up about the issues in their homes, which was ultimately welcomed.

5.59 The Cabinet Member for Housing Services and Resident Participation added that depreciating housing stock continued to be an issue and put increased demand on the service.

5.60 A Commission Member asked about average wait times between initial inspection and job completion for damp and mould cases, and how residents were kept up to date on the progress of the job.

5.61 The Strategic Director Housing Services recognised that while the service was meeting its five-day target for inspecting reports of damp and mould, residents sometimes had to wait for a long period of time before the issue itself was resolved.

5.62 One of the improvement measures put in place to address this was expanding the supply chain and onboarding specialist contractors to support the approach to damp and mould. The service also needed to be more transparent with residents about how long jobs may take, as damp and mould cases were often complex and required more time to complete.

5.63 The Assistant Director Building Maintenance added that measures to improve visibility and the management of contractor performance would also be helpful in this respect, promoting a culture of ownership and accountability.

5.64 The ADR process would also decrease the length of time it took to resolve some cases, with these cases taking around 70 days to resolve on average. The ADR approach was already making a significant impact, and resources within the area were being expanded to resolve a higher number of cases more quickly.

5.65 The Strategic Director Housing Services then explained that promoting a culture of accountability was central to service improvement, and was linked to ongoing work around workforce development. A behaviour framework would be developed to set out expectations in terms of how staff go about their work and engage with residents.

5.66 A Commission Member asked what the approach was to decanting residents when repairs works had to be carried out which could not be completed with the resident staying in the property.

5.67 The Assistant Director Building Maintenance recognised that residents would sometimes need to be decanted to another property to carry out repairs, although this was rare. Decants could be disruptive and difficult for residents, and as such residents' needs were considered regarding alternative accommodation and residents were provided with clear information and kept informed throughout the decant process.

5.68 *A Commission Member queried whether the data provided around average working days to respond to plumbing leaks related to initial inspections or jobs being completed.*

5.69 The Strategic Director Housing Services confirmed that the data relating to the average working days it took to respond to plumbing leaks related to the completion of the job. The aim was to inspect and complete repairs for plumbing leaks at the same appointment date by the next working day after an issue was reported.

5.70 *A Commission Member asked whether there were performance monitoring measures in place to ensure housing officers and estate management staff were identifying and raising repairs issues.*

5.71 The Strategic Director Housing Services explained that there was an expectation for housing officers and estate management staff to raise repairs issues when they were identified whilst undertaking their normal duties. Housing officers also monitored and reported repairs identified at estate and block inspections. Having said this, developing key performance indicators around this particular aspect of their roles was not straightforward.

5.72 *A Commission Member asked whether housing officers had access to information pertaining to communal repairs, and whether chasing outstanding communal repairs was part of their role.*

5.73 The Strategic Director Housing Services explained that the Communal Works team had responsibility for managing communal areas works such as the Resident Estate Improvement Fund (REIF) and undertook regular estate walkabouts. Housing officers had access to communal repairs information via the Repairs Hub where necessary, and were expected to monitor and report repairs.

5.74 Having said this, it was important that housing officers spent their time focusing on their day-to-day duties and, ultimately, the responsibility for completing all repairs sat with the building maintenance team. The focus must be to ensure that communal repairs were completed within the agreed time period rather than how housing officers could chase them up.

5.75 *A Commission Member asked whether it would be possible for elected members to access the Repairs Hub to enable them to monitor repairs issues in their wards and chase up outstanding issues.*

5.76 The Strategic Director Housing Services explained that it would not be possible for elected members to access the Repairs Hub as it was an operational system. However, there were plans to embed a members' portal into the new integrated housing IT system which would allow them to track repairs issues more easily.

5.77 *A Commission Member asked what the approach was to ensuring residents were kept up-to-date at each stage of the repairs process.*

5.78 The Strategic Director Housing Services explained that the aspiration was for residents to receive text messages at each stage of the repairs process, for example to confirm appointment dates, send out reminders or communicate any changes to an appointment.

5.79 The Assistant Director Customer Operations added that a text message was sent out to residents each time a repairs job was raised. Contact centre staff were also encouraged to confirm contact details when booking appointments over the phone to ensure that they were up-to-date.

5.80 Keeping residents informed beyond this was an area which needed to improve, and the service was looking at ways in which it could implement systems which would give residents more information on the operatives which were attending the appointment and their expected arrival time.

5.81 In response to a follow up question, the Assistant Director Customer Operations confirmed that residents received basic information on the job via text message rather than just the ticket number. It was acknowledged that more information would be useful to residents, especially those with multiple repairs jobs open.

5.82 A Commission Member asked what the approach was to communicating with residents when additional work may be needed to be undertaken to resolve a repairs issue.

5.83 The Strategic Director Housing Services explained that the aspiration would be for this to be communicated clearly via text. Having said this, it was also important for operatives to be clear with residents about what work may be needed and associated timescale when carrying out inspections or works. Whilst damp and mould cases may be more complex, operatives should be making use of the Repairs Hub when attending jobs and making appointments there and then.

5.84 A Commission Member asked about the level of information sharing across Housing Services and Customer Services to ensure contact centre staff had access to all necessary information relating to a repairs issue.

5.85 The Strategic Director Housing Services explained that there were plans to put an interim system in place to allow for better information sharing between Housing Services and Customer Service before the implementation of the fully integrated housing IT system.

5.86 It was recognised that giving contact centre staff more detailed information on repairs issues would allow them to more easily resolve residents' issues and improve their experience of reporting issues. For example, this may include more information on repairs currently underway at a property and a residents' contact centre history.

5.87 The Strategic Director Customer & Workplace clarified that contact centre staff had full visibility of a repairs job where the contractor had been onboarded onto the Repairs Hub. However, there were challenges in getting relevant information from those contractors which were not yet onboarded which could lead to delays.

Summing Up

5.88 The Chair thanked Commission Members for their questions and all witnesses for their responses and engagement with the scrutiny process.

5.89 It was explained that, after the meeting, the Commission would reflect on the evidence heard and may make suggestions or recommendations for consideration.

6 Minutes of the Meeting

6.1 The draft minutes of the previous meeting on 22nd November 2023 would follow in the next meeting agenda.

7 Living in Hackney Work Programme 2023/24

7.1 The Chair referred to the Commission's work programme and highlighted the discussion items planned for the remainder of the municipal year.

7.2 It was explained that the draft Housing Strategy, draft Private Rented Sector Strategy and Intermediate Housing Panel interim findings were now due to be taken at the March meeting, as the timelines for their completion had been extended. The Community Halls discussion would therefore be moved to the February meeting.

7.3 It was also noted that a follow up discussion on supported accommodation for homeless people with complex needs including Housing Regeneration & Delivery colleagues, health partners and Health in Hackney Scrutiny Members would be held at the meeting in February. This would be in place of the discussion on the Parks & Green Spaces Strategy which had been postponed.

8 Any Other Business

8.1 None.

Duration of the meeting: 7.00 - 9.35 pm