
London Borough of Hackney
Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission
Municipal Year 2020/21
Date of meeting Wednesday, 30 September, 2020

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

Chair Cllr Sharon Patrick

Councillors in Attendance: Cllr Sade Etti, Cllr Anthony McMahon, Cllr M Can Ozsen, Cllr Ian Rathbone Cllr Penny Wrout, Cllr Anna Lynch

Apologies:

Officers in Attendance Claire Crawley (Integrated Gangs Unit Manager), Jason Davis (Strategic Lead (Policy)), Sarah Hale (Grants Team Manager), Maurice Mason (Community Safety Partnership Manager), David Padfield (Interim Director, Housing Services)

Other People in Attendance Steve Spencer (Operations Director), Carl Pheasey (Director Strategy & Policy), Tim McMahon, (Head of Water Asset Management), Councillor Caroline Selman (Cabinet Member for Community Safety, policy and the voluntary sector)

Members of the Public None

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Councillor Sharon Patrick in the Chair

1 Apologies for Absence

1.1 No apologies for absence.

2 Urgent Items/ Order of Business

2.1 Items of the meeting was as per the agenda and there was no urgent items.

3 Declaration of Interest

3.1 Cllr Lynch, Cllr Patrick and Cllr McMahon declared they are leaseholders of Hackney Council.

3.2 Cllr McMahon declared he was Vice Chair of Lordship South Tenant Management Organisation (TMO).

4 Update on Thames Water Main Burst N4

- 4.1 In attendance at the meeting for this items was Steve Spencer, Operations Director; Tim McMahon, Head of Water Asset Management from Thames Water; Carl Pheasey, Director Strategy & Policy from Ofwat and Cllr Clare Potter Ward Councillor for Brownswood Ward from London Borough of Hackney (LBH).
- 4.2 The Commission asked for an update from Thames Water and Ofwat about the following:
- 4.3 From Thames Water an update on:
- The progress of repair works
 - The status on residents returning to their homes (home owners, private tenants, council tenants, registered social landlords and leaseholder) and
 - Thames Water's investment plans, timescales and the improvements they expect to achieve from their investment plans.
- 4.4 From Ofwat an update on:
- the progress of Thames Water's performance for and
 - the accessibility of performance information locally
 - investment improvements by Thames Water.
- 4.5 The Director of Operations and Head of Water Asset Management commenced the presentation and made the following main points.
- 4.5.1 The presentation would cover.
- Update on Queens Drive Burst
 - Improved working with Hackney
 - Planned investment in Hackney 2020-2025
 - Queens Drive and Seven Sisters Project
 - Longer term strategy
- 4.5.2 In relation to the impact on residents Thames Water informed 170 properties were impacted by the burst.
- 4.5.3 The current position is:
- Compensation has now been paid to all residents who were affected by the flooding
 - In total, 83 properties had to be vacated while repairs were undertaken
 - 52 have now been repaired and families/residents have returned, including all council tenants
 - 19 remain in alternative accommodation while repairs continue. They are 2 groups:
 - 4 are with Aspect, their insurer.
 - 15 have their own insurer or contractor and they have limited information to update on this group.
 - 12 families have moved from Queens Drive and taken up long-term rentals elsewhere. Thames Water updated this is 4 properties. 2 have been refurbished and 2 the landlords have opted to do repairs themselves.

- They continued with repairs during lockdown, once risk assessments and safe working practices had been established.
 - The Aftercare Team remains in place and oversight is maintained by the Operations Director.
- 4.5.4 It was highlighted for customers who have returned to their property Thames Water still provide customer service and liaise about issues.
- 4.5.5 The Director of Operations gets regular updates from the team about every property. This will remain the case until everyone is back in their properties and settled.
- 4.5.6 Following the incident at Queens Drive. Thames Water have put in place a new structure around how they manage incidents.
- 4.5.7 There is a new incident management structure developed following best practice, which aligns with local government and first (blue) responder arrangements (details in Appendix).
- 4.5.8 Reflects the multi-agency gold incident command
- There is now greater focus on communicating with customers via the website and social media
 - They have a clear chain of command and set roles to eliminate confusion on the ground. Communication is quicker.
 - Following a large leak adjacent to Queens Drive (smaller, local water main) in August, customer reps were quickly on site with regular updates given to the council and customers.
- 4.5.9 They now have a team of Emergency Planners. Employed to improve lines of communication with the council.
- The new team act as the direct link between Thames Water and have formed a key link with the council's emergency planning team
 - Thames Water have recruited staff dedicated to manage customer aftercare until everything is resolved.
- 4.5.10 Thames Water have expended its Business Resilience Team so they can now work with individual borough's resilience forum;
- Thames Water have now attended the Hackney LRF
 - Thames Water are now in a position to work with stakeholders across the borough to plan for future incidents.
- 4.5.11 To build the relationship Thames Water invited the Council to their operation room to learn about the information they have during an incident and to outline what they need from Thames Water. They have maintained regular contact.
- 4.5.12 In coordination with Hackney Council Thames Water have simulated an event like Queen's Drive to put leanings into practice (the pandemic did impact who could support). They have agreed to do a future simulation event with council officers once the pandemic pressure eases. To test all the improvements put to the test, including customer aftercare.

4.5.13 Thames Water have attended LRF meetings in Hackney to ensure if there was a future incident they would be better prepared. ~Thames Water contribute to contingency plans for a range of incidents.

4.5.14 Thames Water plans show they have committed to stretching targets for water supply. Aiming to achieve:

- 20% leakage reduction from their network in the next 5 years
- 70% reduction in interruptions to customers' supplies over the next 5 years.
- Reducing customer bills by £25 over the next 5 years.

4.5.15 Thames Water aim to achieve this through data and insight to effectively understand where problems are before they occur. They will use this intelligent information to:

- targeted investment to replace worst performing pipes
- Look at pressure waves – they are a major issue that cause burst pipes. Reducing damaging pressure waves which can 'shock' the network
- Continuing with their smart meter programme. Installing over 400,000 new smart meters. Smart Meters will help Thames Water to understand consumer usage, educate customers and identify leakages. Thames Water highlighted 30% of leakages come from the pipes on the consumer's side.
- Improvements to the resilience of their treatment and storage capabilities.

4.5.16 The above points give an idea of the challenges and plans over the next 5 years.

4.5.17 In Hackney Thames Water have 2 large risk areas. These are Seven Sisters and Queens Drive. Thames Water are currently commencing work at those sites.

- Following the Queens Drive burst, Thames Water are re-lining two sections of Victorian cast-iron pipes with an enhanced programme of leakage surveys on trunk mains in this area. This process involves turning the pipes off and installing a second pipe in the original pipe.
- Work will increase resilience of two major pipes, including the one which burst on Queen's Drive, by cutting leakage and reducing the chances of future incidents.
- After the Queens Drive mains burst through monitoring Thames Water identified small leaks. Thames Water are investing £7m. This work is due to start in October until summer 2021.
- To keep disruption to a minimum. The work has been designed in partnership with Islington and Hackney borough councils.
- Councillors and residents were invited to an online engagement sessions to help keep everyone informed about the work.

4.5.18 Thames Water outlined other work taking place in Hackney.

- Hackney has had the highest proportion of mains replaced of any borough served by Thames Water (56% replaced since 2000).
- 20 years ago Hackney was the thirteenth worst borough for bursts. Now it is the 3rd best borough in London.
- in Hackney Thames Water have installed over 9,000 smart meters since 2015 and intend to install another 4,800 over the next 5 years.

- Across Thames Water coverage are they have repaired on average 384 mains bursts per year alongside 351 bursts on the 'communication pipes' to customers' properties and repairs to the customers' own pipework.
- There are a number of burst hotspots in the borough which require mains replacement to resolve. There are several schemes put forward
- Discussions are ongoing with OFWAT regarding enhanced mains renewals in London via a "London Network Conditional Allowance". Thames Water have meet the criteria before they can proceed with the schemes.

4.5.19 Thames Water have big pipes called Truck Mains. 2% of the Thames Water truck mains network resides in Hackney. Thames Water operate 68km of trunk mains in Hackney.

4.5.20 60% of Hackney's trunk mains are Victorian and they have enhanced their valve check programme.

4.5.21 Thames Water check 12,000 valve per year across our entire trunk main network of which there are 1,050 in Hackney.

4.5.22 Thames Water plan to complete their work on the 30" trunk main in Stoke Newington High St and Northwold Rd by Mid-October and will commission this vital pipeline following this point.

4.5.23 Thames Water have discussed risk management with representatives of the council. This includes data sharing to enable the council's gully clearance programmes to prioritise high risk trunk main locations.

4.5.24 The next steps were outlined to be:

- Complete the repair of all properties and return all residents to their homes as soon as possible.
- Continue the now established and ongoing dialogue between our emergency planning teams.
- £7m programme at Seven Sisters Rd and Queens Drive to commence October 2020.
- Confirming their additional mains replacement programme with delivery partners (expected early 2021).
- Working with OFWAT on a further package of work for investment specifically in London's water infrastructure (April 2021).
- Continue to work with the regulator to build the case for a substantial programme of investment and specifically water mains and trunk mains renewals in the next regulatory period (2025-30).

4.6 A verbal presentation from the Director Strategy & Policy, from Ofwat, the regulator for Water Services across England and Wales. The main points from the presentation were:

4.6.1 The update will provide their views on Thames Water's performance in London and how the company is addressing the need for the provision of local performance information.

4.6.2 As a regulator they are unable to judge performance in the recent year or provide a reflection on particular incidents at a localised level.

- 4.6.3 The officer recapped at the last Commission meeting Ofwat attended they updated about the challenge they provided to Thames Water in a number of areas to drive up performance e.g. their price review work, leakages, service interruptions for customers, environmental performance and resilience. Ofwat were unable to give an update on the company's performance since they last attended the LiH meeting or the Queens Drive incident because typically they look at a full year's performance.
- 4.6.4 The performance data for the company in 2019/20 shows some improvement for some important metrics.
- 4.6.5 Leakage is a high profile issue and one area that Thames Water has not been performing well in in recent years. In 2019/20 Thames Water reported an improvement in leakage performance. They are going through a process to finalise the views and assess if they met the level they committed to. Ofwat raised concerns based on their view of how performance was measured. However despite concerns raise it is clear there has been improvement in this area and a lot of work to reduce leakage by the company.
- 4.6.6 There has also been an improvement in the number of supply interruptions by Thames Water. Ofwat advised after missing their commitment levels in the last few years in 2019/20 Thames Water have reported meeting it.
- 4.6.7 In reference to local reporting there are areas where performance has declined. The consumer council for water – watchdog for water in this sector – published a complaints report. This showed that Thames Water had an increase in customer complaints, this increased last year during the year by 57%. However, the officer pointed out there could be a number of reasons driving this. The officer highlighted Thames Water have acknowledged this is an area they need to improve their performance and they have a programme to do this.
- 4.6.8 With a company like Thames Water who have huge and diverse areas with various operating conditions; having general customer feedback might not tell the local authority about the experience of customers in Hackney compared to other specific areas.
- 4.6.9 Thames Water have agreed to develop robust measures of performance at a London level; to give everyone including local authorities and customers more visibility of the company's performance in London compared to the other areas they manage. It is the regulators understanding the company is working in earnest in meet this commitment. They anticipate they will see London level report along with the annual companywide reporting they normally produce. They expect to see this emerge next year and in the future.
- 4.6.10 Ofwat suggested council officers may wish to engage with the company to make the reporting information relevant to councillors, residents and officers.
- 4.7 **Questions Answers and Discussions**
- (i) **Members commented the message being communicated at the meeting highlights improvements in their emergency response and that if they had another leak on that scale in Hackney the response would be better. Members asked if there has been another leak on that scale anywhere**

else since Thames Water introduced its new ways of working and response.

In response Thames Water replied they have not had many leaks on a similar scale to Queens Drive in their history. They have had 2 other large trunk mains burst since Queens Drive. There was one outside Southwark tube station. This risk was to the tube station and other properties. The other was at Staples Corner on the North Circular. In both cases they were able to enact their new incident and response structure. In their view they responded better and isolated the main quicker. For Staples Corner it took 53 minutes to isolate and the return of customer's water. For the Southwark burst Thames Water cited feedback from the Fire Brigade that said "this was the best response they had seen from Thames Water on any large mains burst."

Thames Water pointed out there are still areas for them to learn and improve and they strive to get better and better. In their view for the 2 other bursts since Queens Drive they have made improvements. Thames Water pointed out they would like to build the same relationship they have with Hackney with other Boroughs in London.

The Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Policy and the Voluntary Sector from London Borough of Hackney referred Members to page 6 of the Thames Water presentation and advised they have done a simulation exercise to build their understanding. Pointing out there is another simulation planned. Whilst this is no substitute for the real incident, there has been some joint working to simulate and gather as much information as possible to prepare for future emergency incidents.

- (ii) Members agreed there are indications of progress since the first water burst in Stoke Newington and there had been work to improve. Members acknowledged Thames Water had taken on board some of their criticisms in relation to emergency planning and their response. Both on the technical side and with how they engage with residents.
- (iii) **The Ward Councillor (Councillor Potter) representing Queens Drive residents raised the following question and made the points and comments below.**

The Cllr Potter commenced by pointing out the comments would focus on the recovery and repair to resident property phase.

Cllr Potter acknowledged the huge disruption to residents following this incident. Pointing out there is still a significant number out of their homes.

- (iv) In response to the point made by Thames Water in their presentation about the estimated timescale for residents to return to their properties – a few weeks. The Cllr Potter advised the feedback she received from residents seem to indicate it would be longer. **Cllr Potter asked for clarity on this from Thames Water.**
- (v) **Cllr Potter highlighted 5 key themes that seem to be reoccurring and asked Thames Water to provide a response to these themes.**

Resident Contents

Feedback from residents have highlighted upon return to their homes a number of items were either missing, mouldy and damaged or disposed of (valuable and sentiment value) without consultation. The feedback highlighted an issue in relation to communication about storage. In light of this the care of items needed to be reviewed. Highlighting that residents will follow up on this in their claims.

Repair Works

There has been a variety of feedback. Some resident were completely satisfied and their experience positive. But some were finding issues and damp. Damp appeared to be the most prominent issue in the feedback. Many residents commented that the driers were removed too quickly leaving the properties still damp. Residents having works are finding that other works are being impacted like unable to fit the flooring because the walls are still too damp.

There has been disputes with residents about whether a damp proof course should be installed or not. Residents have had to really put a strong case forward about whether they had pre-existing DPC. Cllr Potter is aware that the response from Thames Water has been they did not want to add DPC that was not there previously. However Cllr Potter argued Thames Water could have taken a more generous approach considering so much plaster was removed.

Insurance

Cllr Potter is aware a number of residents are unhappy with the response to their claims. Offers have been significantly lower than expected. Residents have been feeling mistreated and that they need to be bold in staking their claim, leaving no room for ambiguity. There are some residents who felt less confident about the process and their response was not as bullish with their claim. Cllr Potter is worried some residents will be worse off in this process.

Cllr Potter said residents who have used their own insurance company seemed to feel better off and that they had a better claim outcome.

Temporary Accommodation

Residents have been through a number of hotels and types of accommodation and the effort, standard and quality were very good. Most feedback about this has been positive.

The difficulty residents encountered was the notice to leave temporary accommodation. This was quite quick and sometimes their home was not completely ready. Some felt they had no option but to leave and go back home. This was perceived as a way to encourage them to accept the outcome being offered.

Communication between the agency managing the temporary accommodation and the resident was sometimes unsatisfactory. Some private rental tenants did not return because they were unhappy and therefore moved on.

The Process

This related to communication. One residents described sending 400 emails in total. In essence many residents felt they have had to devote a lot of time to micro manage and resolve the situation. Often this resulted in a number of counter claims and counter blame. This has been an incredibly difficult process. **The Cllr Potter asked Thames Water to look at how they could improve the process for residents in this situation and if there were any future cases.**

Thames Water thanked Cllr Potter for the feedback.

In response to the points raised by Cllr Potter Thames Water officers clarified that the properties referenced in the presentation, where residents would be returning in the next few weeks, related to the properties being refurbished by Thames Water. They were aware there would be a number of people still out of their property and who will be for some time. For example at least 15 families would be out of their home for longer but that is going through another insurance process.

Thames Water acknowledge it had been incredibly difficult for residents. Thames Water pointed out they have a dedicated team working with the residents. Issues around snagging they want to understand and this team is there to help with that. The Director of Operations at Thames Water gets a regular update about cases to keep abreast of their progress. The officer is also in communication with the ward councillors about residents too.

Thames Water acknowledged they have had a number of questions regarding the extent of the damp proof course that was there prior to the burst. Thames Water confirmed they have relayed to their experts to restore to the condition it was before. The officer confirmed he is aware of 2/3 cases where there was a dispute about prior damp proof course. This feedback they will take on board.

Thames Water accepted the feedback was something they need to reflect on. Thames Water were disappointed to hear the comments from people using their own insurers. To their knowledge some residents using their own insurers have contacted them asking to transfer to Thames Water because they cannot progress and Thames Water are unable to obtain information for them if they do not manage the claim.

The Director of Operations asked Cllr Potter to share the information about specific cases outside the meeting. Thames Water will highlight communication issues to dedicated team and ask to follow up with residents.

- (vi) **Cllr Potter pointed out from the feedback she received she noted council tenants and housing associations had a better experience than a leaseholder. The sense was if an organisation was representing the residents and property the experience for the residents appeared to be better. Whereas the experience for individual residents was it feels like a battle.**

In response Thames Water agreed to follow up.

- (vii) Members referred to slide 8 in the Thames Water presentation showing a map with red dots. Members queried if these dots represented vulnerable areas and asked if Thames Water was waiting for Ofwat to give agreement to spend.**

In response Thames Water explained this was a conditional allowance which in essence was a pot of money which requires them to pass a number of stages. This process tests their asset management. The first step needs to be completed by December 2020. The most important step is in May next year (2021). In May they will confirm the scope, cost benefit and stretching targets they set themselves. This is agreed with the company board and regulator. As long as they pass the 3 stages the red dots would be progressed.

- (viii) Members asked if there was any risks that they might burst.**

In response Thames Water replied in relation to their priority in the overall plan of works by Thames Water. They were not as high risk as their current priorities. There is always an element of risk but these pipes are not the same size as the pipes on Queens Drive. The officer explained these pipes are distribution pipes which pose a risk to leakage and traffic disruption, not to flooding peoples properties. There are a number of factors that could trigger a burst so there is always some degree of risk.

- (ix) Members referred to the comments made in the presentation about smart meters and how good they are. Setting aside the issue about pricing for customers using a smart meter. Members asked about the saving to residents in relation to these meters helping Thames Water to find leaks in resident pipes? Members also asked how Thames Water inform residents about the savings a smart meter can provide residents.**

- (x) Members also asked the following:**
- a) if Thames Water charge to install the smart meters?**
 - b) benefits to customers**
 - c) If charging for installation are households on a low income exempt?**

In response to Members questions Thames Water explained they used smart meters to understand usage and leaks. This information feeds into the organisation's long term planning (water resource management plan) to ensure they can meet supply for customers. By reducing leakage and use they can reduce demand. Key to this is smart meters. Smart meters can reduce usage by up to 20% per property. The current water meter can reduce by up to 11%.

In relation to how good they are at finding leaks. It has been proved that 30% of leakage in the system is on the customer side pipe work. A smart meter helps to find leaks. Over the last 5 years it has helped the organisation find approximately 70 mega litres of leakage (Equivalent to 35 Olympic size swimming pools).

Thames Water pointed out smart metres are more cost efficient as a tool to help find leaks. Leaks costs them approximately £1million to find and repair. Doing blanket pipe replacement work costs 10 times more.

In relation to affordability for customers. Thames Water agreed a household with a large number of occupants can see increased costs.

In relation to customers paying for smart meters. It is estimated that for every £1 spent half will get funded through customers and half by the company's shareholders. This is the approximate cost ratio. However if Thames Water did find a leak their current policy is to fix it for free. Thames Water pointed out they are one of only a few water companies that will do this. Highlighting that many charge customers to fix leaks found on their property.

Thames Water explained when they install smart meters this is part of their smarter meter programme. This involves visiting people's homes (pre-covid) to go through it with customers. There is a programme of support and education and they will fix toilets if required. There is also a tariff to help people who are on low income. They could get up to 50% off. There is a programme to support people who cannot afford to pay their water bill.

(xi) Cllr Potter asked if the Commission could keep this under observation and request an update in 6 months' time.

In response the Chair suggested they have a report back next year in March 2021 to look at resident satisfaction, residents returned to their properties and the increase in customer complaints.

(xii) Members referred to the last slide in the presentation (a diagram) of teams called control towers. Members asked if control tower 2 would work closely with customer public relation. Pointing out in the diagram they were not connected in any way.

In response Thames Water replied the term control towers is industry terminology. The customer tower relates to the topic of discussion tonight – people on the ground being available to support customers with personal water, accommodation and more personal support. Whereas the information tower related to communication on a wider scale. This is public information to keep all the other people affected informed (councils, Ofwat, GLA and other stakeholders).

The Chair thanked officers for attending.

5 Update on the Impact of Covid 19 on Hackney's Housing Service

- 5.1 The Chair welcomed to the meeting David Padfield, Interim Director, Housing Services from London Borough of Hackney.
- 5.2 The Chair informed the Commission this items was an update on the impact of Covid-19 on Hackney's Housing Service in relation the challenges and opportunities faced; business as usual activities; repairs; financial position; support to residents and customer service. The presentation was on pages 7-12 in the agenda. The main points from the presentation were:
 - 5.2.1 The Director last updated the Commission about Housing Services response to Covid-19 on 13th May 2020. They have kept all essential services up and

- running during lockdown. Whilst suspending all non-essential services to protect residents and staff.
- 5.2.2 Currently most services have resumed.
 - 5.2.3 This update provides information about how Housing Services have supported residents during the pandemic. The presentation covers the current position of Housing Services and a reflection on how the last 6 months might shape how the service changes in the future.
 - 5.2.4 Overall the Director is proud of how all Housing Services staff have responded throughout the pandemic.
 - 5.2.5 DLO staff continued to undertake emergency repairs throughout lockdown. During that period they completed approximately 6000 urgent repairs.
 - 5.2.6 DLO staff volunteered to help with the Council's wider humanitarian programme to support residents. Delivering more than 13,000 food packages and hot meals.
 - 5.2.7 Office based staff transitioned to home working seamlessly. Housing management maintained a presence on their estates and a skeleton service at the Hackney Service Centre (HSC).
 - 5.2.8 Housing Services kept up with their health and safety inspections on estates albeit with a slight change to frequency.
 - 5.2.9 Housing contact centre moved under corporate customer services management at the start of lock down. This service will remain there. They coped admirably during the crisis.
 - 5.2.10 Ground maintenance work continued during lockdown, keeping all green areas on the estates well maintained.
 - 5.2.11 Housing Services carried on letting void properties during lock down to get some of their families out of temporary accommodation (TA).
 - 5.2.12 Housing made calls to vulnerable residents both tenants and leaseholders. Overall they made 6000 calls to residents and set up the popular 'let's talk service'. The Council provided training to staff to support them talking to residents who were feeling lonely or frightened. Overall they took over 500 calls and received a huge amount of praise.
 - 5.2.13 Currently they are now back to business as usual. Repairs service has resumed and gas certificates are at 98% of target and the normal benchmark is to do 99.8%. However they are still experiencing some access issues where people do not want to let them into the property. Comparing with other social landlords 98% is still good achievement.
 - 5.2.14 The capital programme is operational again. Due to the current climate they have extended their existing big capital contracts.

- 5.2.15 During lockdown they put a pause on issuing Section 20 notices. Section 20 notices are being issued now.
- 5.2.16 The Council has kept their satellite district housing (Stamford Hill and Queensbridge De Beauvoir) offices closed and there are no current plans to re-open the 2 offices.
- 5.2.17 Overall housing services have coped well taking into consideration increases in noise nuisance and anti-social behaviour they have needed to manage.
- 5.2.18 All community halls remain closed. They were starting to move towards operating a limited programme of low risk activities but the changes to the restrictions and a potential second lockdown means this is on hold again.
- 5.2.19 All estate play grounds are still open.
- 5.2.20 Their resident engagement activity has been severely impacted by Covid-19. Some of these meetings have now moved to the virtual environment.
- 5.2.21 A key challenge has been the increasing volume of rent arrears. Residential rent arrears has increased by £2.3 million and this is expected to increase further. The Council is also expecting a second spike following further job losses. This will have a big impact on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) finances.
- 5.2.22 There is a commercial element to the HRA and there is an increase in rent arrears from commercial properties too.
- 5.2.23 Leaseholder service charge collection has remained steady during this period.
- 5.2.24 Going forward the HRA is required to make savings this was due to previous policy changes related to rent reductions. Members were informed some expected costs impacting the HRA include:
- Health and safety work – post Grenfell
 - Pension pressures on HRA account.
- 5.2.25 Housing Services is needs to find £2.5 million of savings each year for the HRA but if rent arrears continue to increase this could be more.
- 5.2.26 The pandemic has highlighted new ways of working. Raising questions about organisational structure and service changes in the future. Areas they are looking at are:
- Working from home - do they need to have a large office foot print
 - Moved systems to paperless - do they need to spend so much time on administration
 - A new ICT programme - this should improve efficiency
 - Resident interaction - As a result of the last few months the council is considering how their residents might want to interact with them. However where there are high support needs or things like tenancy audit this is still face to face contact. Notwithstanding this there is an opportunity to move away from face to face contact as the default option.

5.2.27 Housing Services welcomed any input from Members of the LiH Commission to shape the work moving forward.

5.3 Questions, Discussions and Answers

(i) Members referred to the district housing offices being closed and asked if there was any physical space residents could go to if they needed to?

The Interim Director of Housing from LBH confirmed in reference to the housing management day to day service they have maintained a skeleton service at the HSC from the start of lockdown. This has enable residents to come to them and for staff to go out onto estates if required. In recent weeks they have increased the staffing levels of that skeleton service.

(ii) Members commended staff for their smooth transition from the office to working from home and DLO staff for carrying on providing service to residents.

(iii) Members referred to a question they were asked by a local resident in relation to gas safety certificates and staff wearing PPE. Members enquired if staff entering properties or doing work should be wearing PPE on visits?

In response the Interim Director of Housing from LBH expressed concern about these comments and concerns by residents. The Director confirmed staff entering properties should be wearing the correct PPE equipment. The Director advised he would pick this up with the Gas Team. The Director highlighted most of this work is done by Hackney Council staff but some work is carried out by the council's contractors. However, all staff should be wearing protective equipment.

(iv) Members referred to rent arrears and the end of the Governments current furlough scheme. Members asked:

- **What work the council is doing to assist residents who have lost their job or who has short term employment to claim benefits?**
- **If the council's sending out information or sign posting to help and support?**
- **If there is pre-work with residents before they get to this situation?**

Members pointed out the new business support system would not be protecting as many jobs as the first support scheme did.

In response the Interim Director of Housing from LBH confirmed as part of the rent collection service they have a Financial Inclusion Team. They provide support, advice and assistance with claiming benefits. Pointing out the emphasis in this process is to get people to talk to them as early as possible. The Director highlighted Housing Services had done some joint work with the Council Tax team to ensure consistent messaging. The Director pointed out although a large number have been in contact there is still a large cohort not contacting and not paying anything towards their rent. The Council is extremely concerned about this cohort and need them to start engaging. This group currently owes large sums of money and this is growing rapidly.

- (v) Members asked what would be the main thing Housing Service would take forward in relation to the future of housing services, taking aside how staff might work?**

In response the Interim Director of Housing from LBH informed this is a piece of work in progress. The council has set up workshops with staff to discuss what has worked well, what has not worked well and their idea of what the future of the service might look like. So far comments from staff cover working from home more and they are working through the ideas from staff. This is in parallel to developing a new IT system. Coming out from this work maybe a new operating model and as indicated earlier may impact on the future office footprint and face to face contact with residents. This work will be developed over the next 18 months.

- (vi) Members referred to community halls expressing disappointment that some of the facilities in community halls like the one in Gasconyne estate 2, with great kitchen facilities, could have been used to help provide food during the lockdown. Members pointed out as we approach the winter months there would be people struggling to feed themselves and charities could use the space. Members asked if this could be reviewed for restricted use and opened to support services organised by charities to help in the future. Members referred to a particular charity that was using the facilities but at the start of lockdown were exited out from the premises. Members pointed out this charity had to find a new location. Members asked if the council could take less of a blanket approach to community centres and review what facilities might be appropriate to use.**

In response the Interim Director of Housing from LBH advised they were approached by a number of organisations to use the facilities during this period. They did do some work with various organisations to help facilitate requests. This was dependent on satisfactory risk assessments based on venue and the activities they wanted to do. Some did get used at various points.

Although not in use currently they do have a list of low risk activities they want to take forward. Top if this list is food preparation by charities.

The Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Policy and Voluntary Sector informed the Commission she has been doing some joint work with cabinet colleagues, officers, and Community Partnership Network and the Food Alliance. In response officers have been working closely with the Community Halls Team in Resident Participation to consider at how they can get community hall facilities back in use. This includes Gasgone 2. The most recent update received showed they have a good plan in place to support the Community Partnership Network and Food Network.

- (vii) Members referred to their previous work looking at community halls. Members asked about digital divide and the work to put internet access in community halls. Members suggest the council looks at providing internet access as well as IT equipment to access the internet, to help residents' access digital services and children to do their homework.**

- (viii) Members referred to the Council’s progress in the provision of internet access in community halls to help residents with access to the internet and asked about the timescale?**
- (ix) Members referred to other community halls that could be used by organisations for a second wave of Covid. Members asked if the council could help organisations with delivery of meals.**
- (x) Members also asked if the Council could provide free internet access to residents who could not afford the internet.**

In response to Members questions the Interim Director of Housing explained in relation to food delivery the council had a humanitarian assistance programme in place throughout the first lock down. This involved co-ordinating things like the delivery of food. Housing Services redeployed staff (DLO staff) not doing emergency works to help with food delivery. The Director suggested the organisation links into the wider humanitarian programme to get access to support to help with food deliver. The Director pointed out during lock down DLO staff delivered approximately 13,000 meals.

In relation to broadband the council has a large scale project looking at working with commercial fibre companies to deliver cost effective fibre to all blocks in their estates. The council is looking at getting some benefits from this working. The two benefits are:

- Access to connections in all their community halls and;
- A voucher scheme for the vulnerable or most needy residents to give them subsidised access to the system.

- (xi) Members asked if there were any timescales for this work.**

In response the Interim Director of Housing confirmed he did not have any timescales at present but he would check and report back to the Commission.

ACTION:	The Interim Director of Housing to report back on the timescales for delivery for the project implementing cost effective internet access to all blocks in their estates, community halls and the voucher scheme.
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- (xii) Members referred to resident engagement meetings on Zoom and asked what provision are in place for residents who are unable to participate through Zoom. Members asked how the council is getting in touch with them and communicating with them. Members asked how the council is reaching this cohort.**

In response the Interim Director of Housing informed currently this is being tested and led by the TRAs that wanted to do it. The council has offered advice and people can dial into the meetings. At the moment they are observing and reviewing how inclusive this is. The Director pointed out digital exclusion is

something the Cabinet Member for Housing is concerned about and they are making sure people are not excluded.

The other big resident meeting that has moved online is the RLG meetings. So far most of the group's members are willing to dial in and the Chair of the RLG has done some outreach too. The Council is not aware of anyone from that group feeling excluded but this will be monitored.

The Council will be looking at what is happening nationally and by other organisations to draw on best practice for implementation.

- (xiii) Members made the following comments and asked questions:**
- **Welcomed resident led improvement consultation fund and the text message to advise this was going out direct to residents. Commenting this was a good improvement to the service. Consulting in this way is good and innovative.**
 - **What are the plans for monitoring and reporting back the response rate?**
 - **Asked for the Commission to get a report back later in the year about the outcome.**
 - **In relation to Section 20 notices being paused due to Covid-19. Members referred to the tenant levy that feeds into the resident improvement budget and asked if there was a mechanism in the leaseholder structure that would work in the same way for leaseholders?**
 - **Commenting this could replace the need for Section 20 notices for works undertaken or reduce the amount sent out on Section 20 notices.**

In response the Interim Director of Housing advised one of the things they wanted to improve was their communication with residents. They had a big outage on an estate and communicating by text was a big step forward alongside using it for the resident led improvement consultation. It was an exploration to test this way of communicating. The Director was pleased to get positive feedback.

The resident improvement budget has been traditionally underspent because it is so tightly controlled in a limited way. They have received a number of comments from residents. The Director confirmed he would be happy to report back to the Commission about the programme and what they might be able to deliver.

In relation to having a leaseholder levy. The reason they have one for tenants and not leaseholders is because there is no provisions within the legislation that would allow the council to impose a charge on leaseholders. The only option is a voluntary charge. The Director advised he is always happy to explore creative ways, although charges to leaseholder have been considered in the past but not pursued.

- (xiv) Members referred to tower blocks in Hackney that have had their wall cladding removed. The blocks are 6-10 storeys high. Members pointed out in the winter time the pipes in between the flats burst and cause flooding to multiple properties. Members asked while the cladding is off**

could the council change the old pipes to reduce the problem. Highlighting the blocks are 30-40 years old. Members confirmed the blocks are Fellows Court tower blocks north and south. Members also asked if anything can be done to complete the work faster.

The Interim Director of Housing was not aware of floods in the blocks mentioned. The Director advised he would confirmed and report back to the Commission.

ACTION:	The Interim Director of Housing to report back about the floods in the blocks in Fellows Court tower blocks north and south and timescale for current works.
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The Chair thanked the officer for his attendance and commended all Housing and DLO staff for their work during the pandemic.

6 Executive Response to LiH Scrutiny Review - Council and Partnership Response to Escalation in Serious Violence Review

- 6.1 The Chair welcomed to the meeting Cllr Caroline Selman, Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Policy and Voluntary Sector; Maurice Mason, Community Safety Partnerships Manager, Claire Crawley Integrated Gangs Unit Manager and Jason Davis Strategic Lead (Policy) from London Borough of Hackney (LBH).
- 6.2 The Commission discussed the Cabinet response to the recommendations made in the scrutiny review looking at serious violence in the borough.
- 6.3 The Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Policy and Voluntary Sector commenced the discussion with the following main points:
 - 6.3.1 The Cabinet Member thanked the Commission for maintaining focus on serious violence. Highlighting that pre-covid one of the key areas of concern was tackling serious violence.
 - 6.3.2 Although a key focus in the review was on gangs. One of the Commission's concerns (rec12) was about having a whole system approach to tackling serious violence and joining up. The council wants to be clear about embedding a public health approach to serious violence. Not just being reactive but tackling the key causes and determinants.
 - 6.3.3 One of the key pieces of work has been developing a single serious violence action plan which has identified across the partnerships, the key principles to tackling serious violence. The Cabinet Member explained having strategic principles of what they want to do e.g. tackling the underlining drivers and outcomes, making sure they are co-producing with the community.

- 6.3.4 Working with partners to look at all the different action plans to see how they meet or match the key principles. Showing how the full partnership is tackling serious violence holistically.
- 6.3.5 The mental health practitioner post has been approved and is out for advertisement. They hope to have the additional resource in place imminently. They have worked closely with East London Foundation Trust (ELFT) in developing the role. There will be a link in line management for the role. This will be a useful addition to bolstering the strong work of the Integrated Ganga Unit (IGU).
- 6.3.6 In relation to the recommendation about increased transparency and a specific request to set up a web page. The Communications team have been working on this and they have been refreshing the content to outline the broader context of their work. The web page is ready and signed off so it should be released later that week.
- 6.3.7 In reference to rec 1 about monitoring the effectiveness of the IGU. The aim is to look at the impact the unit is having. They have secured a graduate trainee to work on demonstrating the impact. The graduate will be in post for 6 months to draft a framework. To get a robust way of monitoring.
- 6.3.8 In reference to rec 10 they are slightly behind schedule. Officers were working up a series of options to present to the Cabinet Members. The Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Policy and Voluntary Sector will follow this up with the Cabinet Member for Employment, Skills and Human Resources. Options will be presenting to the IGU Board. In addition to considering how they can support work with the wider employment support programmes.
- 6.3.9 The Community Safety Partnerships Manager from LBH added in reference to Rec 9 and a link to pre-apprenticeship programme. They have had a meeting to take this forward. The initial work carried out was to ascertain the current take up. They have identified that there is a small number that would be ready to go into the pre-apprenticeship programme. However out of the individuals identified 2 have secured apprenticeships one with TfL and one in construction. From their work they did not find a large cohort that would be ready for the scheme.
- 6.3.10 In reference to rec 14 the police have grown in number. Particularly concerning this topic. This is genuine growth going into the Violence Suppress Unit in the Police. The IGU is joining up activities.
- 6.3.11 In reference to rec 15 and 16 a lot of work is being done by the police in relation to stop and search and trust and confidence. The officer suggested the Commission invites the Police to give an update on their trust and confidence plan.
- 6.3.12 The Strategic Lead (Policy) from LBH added information about the methodology. Highlighting the serious violence plans drew out principles from the great work of partners in the CSP and consolidated that work into one place.

6.3.13 The aim is to give a comprehensive overview and understanding to the key strategic principles. This links into further collaboration with the community like Young Futures Commission and co-production work with the Young Black Men programme

6.4 Questions, Answers and Discussions

- (i) **Members referred to rec 3 and 4 getting the IGU more into the public arena. Members expressed concern about this taking too long or being delayed. In reference to rec 4 Members asked if children under 18 and their cohort were going to be more included in the process.**

In response the Community Safety Partnerships Manager from LBH confirmed yes to rec 4. There has been a lot of work since the scrutiny review. They have monthly meetings to review risk and the Children and Families Service is represented. There is strong consideration being given to a separate unit within Children and Families to link into the IGU.

Within the IGU they have developed and implemented a referral process that encourages referrals into the IGU.

The Community Safety Partnerships Manager confirmed the website was complete and due to go live this week.

- (ii) **Members referred to rec 4 and the response that Children and Families Service will provide trauma informed practice training within the IGU.**

In response the Community Safety Partnerships Manager from LBH advised this has not been taken forward at this stage. This will be progressed and a separate update provided to the Commission about the progress.

The Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Policy and Voluntary Sector added the recommendation relates to IGU and this incorporates services like the Youth Offending Team. All the team and police officers have been through trauma informed training. They are scrutinising how the training is being incorporated in reports, to see if the learning is being reflected in how they record information.

- (iii) **Members asked if they have a violence reduction unit in Hackney and do they work with the IGU?**

- (iv) **The Chair commented Members of the Commission were pleased the recommendations were taken on board and that there is closer working between the IGU and Children and Families service in LBH.**

In response to the Community Safety Partnerships Manager from LBH confirmed yes. They are aspiring to have 70 people in the Violence Suppress Unit. The IGU manager has made contact with the Inspector of that unit and they are drawing up plans.

The Integrated Gangs Unit Manager advised she could provide a briefing to Members about their plans. Highlighting to Members they have communication on a daily basis.

The Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Policy and Voluntary Sector put on record her thanks to Jan Stout for her contribution and work managing the IGU over the last 11 years.

7 Update on Thames Water Donation for Lea Bridge Distribution / Use of Funds

- 7.1 In response to a letter sent by the Chair of the LiH Scrutiny Commission to Thames Water the Council received a donation of £10,000 for Leabridge Ward (specifically in recognition of the impact caused by the 2018 mains burst and flood in the Leabridge Ward).
- 7.2 The Commission asked the ward councillors from Leabridge Ward to make recommendations and suggest ideas for spend to benefit the local community. Following some consultation with residents the ward councillors recommended giving £5k to Hackney Food bank and £5k to a local playgroup in the Ward.
- 7.3 The Grants and Investment Manager from LBH confirmed the Council has received the £10k payment from Thames Water. This is a goodwill gesture for the 2018 floods in Leabridge and is not a replacement for any compensation payments.
- 7.4 Through consultation the proposal was to split the funds equally between 2 organisations (Hackney Foodbank and a local play group in Leabridge Ward.
- 7.5 The Grants and Investment Manager was asking for the Commission to agree the dispersal amount for the funds and that the grants would be awarded unrestricted. The officer explained in the current climate voluntary sector organisations were facing a very delicate financial position. Therefore the Grants Team would suggest £5k to each organisation and that the grants was awarded as unrestricted.
- 7.6 Cllr Rathbone (the Ward Councillor for Leabridge) explained the playgroup in the ward was forced to close (for 9 months) because they were completely flooded. They lost customers because the children who were previously attending found new placements. Consequently the playgroup is still recovering from this incident and a local shop too because they have not received full compensation. The Councillor commented the loss of customers for a business can be proved if you have been trading for a number of years. Cllr Rathbone wanted to highlight that local businesses have been affected too.
- 7.7 The Chair suggested the Commission could write to Thames Water on behalf of the play group and local shop who did not get full compensation.
- 7.8 The Chair expressed appreciation of the donation for Hackney Food bank by the residents of Leabridge Ward.

8 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

- 8.1 The minutes of the previous meeting held on 15th July 2020 was approved.

RESOLVED: Minutes were approved
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9 Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission- 2020/2021 Work Programme

- 9.1 The Chair introduced this item to outline the current proposals. The Chair commenced with suggesting the work programme includes the following:
 - 1) The Council’s relationship with leaseholders
 - 2) Hackney Carnival - There was also the suggestion to follow up on the Commission’s recommendation for Hackney Carnival to review what happened this year and the success of a virtual carnival.
- 9.2 In discussions members made the following suggestions for the work programme.
 - 9.2.1 Cllr Lynch suggested a review of the regeneration programme in particular the process of supporting people who have become leaseholders through the shared ownership scheme. Suggesting they get information from people who have been through the process.
 - 9.2.2 The Chair added the additional suggestion to review green infrastructure which would include the play infrastructure in parks and toilet provision in Hackney’s green spaces. The aim is to see if they are sustainable and fit for purpose in the 21st century. The Chair pointed out during the pandemic there have been a number of new people using the parks and green spaces in the borough.
 - 9.2.3 Cllr Rathbone pointed out as Chair of the parks forum they have talked about how green spaces are being used around the borough. In addition how they manage conflict between use and keeping as a green space. This is not just related to the main parks but all green spaces in the borough and how they use them.
 - 9.2.4 Cllr Lynch commented there is a lot of concern locally about the road closures and low traffic streets. The Councillor suggested they get an update on the schemes and the benefits of them to feed back to residents. Cllr Rathbone supported this suggestion.
 - 9.2.5 The Chair also highlighted the council was scheduled to consult on allocation of their property and suggested this is included in the work programme for January/February.
- 9.3 The Chair advised she would put together a draft work programme and send it to Member of the Commission for comment.

ACTION:	The Chair and Overview and Scrutiny Officer to circulate draft Work programme to Commission Members.
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10 Any Other Business

- 10.1 None.

Duration of the meeting: 7.00 - 9.32 pm