
**GRENFELL TOWER
PUBLIC INQUIRY**

Exhibit TC/11

PRESENT

Members of the Committee

Councillor Quentin Marshall (Chairman)
Councillor Carol Caruana
Councillor Emma Dent Coad, MA
Councillor Robert Mingay
Councillor Matthew Palmer
Councillor Will Pascall
Councillor Jonathon Read (for items A1 – A5)
Councillor Marie-Therese Rossi

Others in Attendance

Councillor Timothy Coleridge (Cabinet Member for Housing and Property)
Carl Ainley (Senior Commercial Property Manager)
Robert Black (Chief Executive of the TMO)
Yvonne Birch (Head of Strategy and Engagement, TMO)
Celia Caliskan (General Needs Housing Commissioning Manager)
Michael Clark (Director of Corporate Property)
Jean Daintith (Executive Director for Housing, Health and Adult Social Care)
Nicholas Holgate (Town Clerk and Executive Director for Finance) for item A5
Laura Johnson (Head of Housing)
Andy Marshall (Assistant Director, TMO)
Steve Mellor (Group Finance Manager)
Lornette Pemberton (Director of People & Organisational Development, TMO)
Gillian Tobin (Senior Housing Policy Officer)
Jerome Treherne (Governance Services)

A1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies had been received from Councillors Sam Mackover and Tony Holt.

A2 MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations were made.

A3 MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 14TH SEPTEMBER 2011

For A9, Councillor Rossi pointed out that she had highlighted the reduction in time that void properties remained empty. For A8, Councillor Dent Coad's concern was that the period of six months during which tenants could find alternative accommodation, would not necessarily make it any easier for them to secure it.

With these amendments the Minutes of the Meeting on 14th September 2011 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

A4 REPORT BY THE CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING AND PROPERTY

Over the Silchester Garage Site, Councillor Dent Coad said she was waiting for confirmation from Mr Derek Taylor of an additional 15 housing units to those referred to in the report. Ms Johnson said the Bard Road units had been included in the 63 homes mentioned in the report.

On the response to changes in Housing Benefit, the Cabinet Member noted that from the start of 2012 the Department was expecting more tenants to seek Council assistance and it had taken measures to prepare itself for this.

Over the update report on fire risks, Cabinet Member drew attention to the medium rating of all accommodation assessed so far, advising that this was the best score that a block of flats could achieve. The Committee noted that by the start of April 2012 all blocks of flats should have been checked.

In response to the Chairman's question, Mr Black confirmed that in the event of fire the leaseholder not the Council or TMO would be legally responsible once flat entrance doors which significantly improved fire safety within blocks, had been replaced. Ms Pemberton reported that all leaseholders had been reminded of their responsibilities and in order to keep their costs down, use of the borough's contractor had been offered to them. The TMO continued to liaise with the Fire Brigade and the Fire Safety Team.

Councillor Pascall referred to the speed fire spread from flat to flat within blocks and believed that residual liability if such a fire broke out could lie with the Council as freeholder. He urged officers to double check this aspect as a priority. The Committee noted that those entrance doors not replaced were sufficiently robust with fire stops behind them. Furthermore recommendations had been made to reduce fire risk linked to exits from buildings and communal areas.

Subject to the above, the report was received and noted.

A5 FINAL REPORT FROM THE SUB-GROUP ON ALLOCATION, USE AND MANAGEMENT OF PROPERTY RESOURCES

Councillor Read introduced the report and summarised its recommendations. The Cabinet Member generally welcomed the report and recognised that it raised lots of important issues. He reminded the Committee the Corporate Property Department was at the start of a major period of change. He drew attention to restrictions placed on local authorities in relation to a total return approach, pointing out that to invest in property for its own sake was not permitted, but the Council could re-develop property in order to secure better returns. However under powers from the Localism Bill there could be an opportunity to buy property in particular streets if this would lead to a general improvement in that location.

The Cabinet Member in response to the recommendations for incentivising more cost effective use of office space, agreed that hidden subsidies over use of halls should end. He supported income maximisation from events run in Council halls but highlighted the Council's role in providing venue hire at reduced rates for local charities as this benefited the community.

Over proposals for incentivising more efficient use of space, the Cabinet Member noted this was already encouraged as when space was freed up, it was rented to other users and recharges made. He said the Council's use of office space was also determined from the centre by plans for more officers to work from the Town Hall.

Councillor Dent Coad shared the Sub-Group's wish for an end to the under-use of council property and suggested that property acquisition in some areas could promote fuller occupancy and link in with Core Strategy aims. Mr Holgate said a theoretical case for such acquisitions could be made, for example for credit unions, under the wellbeing powers of the Localism Bill and noted this bill might introduce wider powers soon. Mr Clark pointed out that in considering wider borough benefits, market drivers linked to regeneration were critical factors and new landlords might not necessary be better tenants.

Councillor Dent Coad expressed concern that proposed delegation on lease decisions might lead to less scope for Member scrutiny. Mr Clark explained that many transactions currently required copious input by officers. In his view the recommendations allowed Members to continue to take the decisions which committed the Council to longer term costs and decisions over disposals. Councillor Coleridge said that under the proposals the Cabinet and Cabinet Member would continue to be kept well informed and in addition there would be information reports to Cabinet.

Councillor Pascall referred to the SPACE programme and congratulated Mr Harper on completion of the Town Hall third floor on time and budget. He said the programme was still at an early stage but already markedly fewer desks & space were allocated for officer use. In relation to incentivising the efficient use of space, Councillor Pascall said targets were set centrally but business groups themselves had to agree targets. Because of recent developments he suspected staff head count to be significantly altered and plans for improved office space use should reflect this. He drew attention to the recent radical change in the Planning Department, in moving from reliance on paper documents to electronic storage.

Councillor Pascall suggested that in paragraph 3.12, 'cheaper' be replaced by 'best value for money' as this phrase placed more emphasis on the need for several aspects to be taken into account. Councillor Read agreed that the most appropriate location, including economic factors needed to be considered in choosing office locations. Councillor Pascall also suggested that the term 'full cost recovery' rather than 'total return' was more in keeping with local authority culture.

The Committee congratulated Mr Clark for revealing the extent of the Council's overall property portfolio for the first time. The Chairman said the report was very useful and with Councillor Read, thanked Members and officers for the work of the Sub-Group.

Subject to the above, the report's recommendations were supported by the Committee.

A6 CONFERENCE AND EVENTS REVIEW

Mr Ainley introduced the report and noted that the officers' brief was not to look at costs associated with improvements to the Conference and Events service but rather, to identify an operational model that would lead to long term sustainable growth in the use and profitability of facilities. The next stage was to provide recommendations for Cabinet including full details of costs. He clarified that evening bookings were included in total occupancy figures.

In response to a question from Councillor Rossi over advertising, Mr Ainley said that a new structure for sales and marketing was now in place for Chelsea Old Town Hall. Councillor Palmer was surprised that the total spend on marketing for the 2010/11 financial year was as much as £128k especially as so many venue bookings came from repeat business users

The Committee noted that the Blackswan report recognised that compared to other venues in central London, the town hall did not compare favourably as its premises were dated and lacked facilities such as break out rooms and Wi-Fi. Mr Clark highlighted the advantages of waiting for suggested improvements from market testing companies based on commercial considerations. Officers would send Councillor Palmer Blackswan's full report.

Action: Mr Ainley

Mr Clark responded to fears that commercial lettings would prevent community use of facilities saying that much community use was consistent and it was therefore easy to predict when venues would be needed. If there were conflicts between commercial and local voluntary group users, it would be for the Cabinet Member to decide over any recharges. Mr Clark said the new ICT booking system which covered all venues would assist in managing commercial and community demands for venue.

The Committee noted that the current entrance to Chelsea Old Town Hall's back hall required users to pass the library entrance and that it had little provision for parking, both unwelcome features. It was also noted that selecting one caterer with sole control of premises was now a common model and one the market was used to.

Subject to the above, the report was received and noted.

A7 INVESTMENT PORTFOLIO: MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONAL CHANGES SINCE APRIL 2011

The report was received and noted.

A8 INVESTMENT PORTFOLIO END OF YEAR FINANCIAL REPORT APRIL 2011

The report was received and noted.

A9 TMO/HRA MID YEAR REVIEW

Mr Black said the report gave better assurance of tighter management. He pointed out improved rent collection compared with November 2010 and a fall in the number of voids which he hoped would mean the end of year target would be met. He was pleased with the audit report on responses to requests for repairs.

In response to Cllr Mingay's query on the approved housing capital investment programme spend, Mr Black noted spend tended to be higher in the final quarters. In future, he hoped that five year programmes would smooth out the timing of expenditure.

The Committee noted that recent re-letting of void properties had been ahead of the target and Mr Black wanted to embed continuous improvement and if this continued, he would be looking to review the target for 2012/13.

In response to Councillor Pascall's query on the long term stock condition analysis and energy requirements on existing and new stock, Mr Black referred to the asset management survey which provided better information than had existed before. Councillor Dent Coad questioned the accuracy of this survey but Mr Black said it covered many aspects and was continually updated and improved.

The report was received and noted.

A10 PRIORITY FOR THOSE IN WORK IN THE ALLOCATIONS SYSTEM

Ms Tobin introduced the report. She advised that the allocation policy was restricted in its impact as demand for local housing outstripped supply to such an extent. She referred to Appendix One which revealed that two tenants had moved house because they were in work, as a result of the change in the allocation system.

The Committee raised the issue of priority through the allocation scheme for people who are actively involved in the community. It was noted that those tenants who chose to stay at home because of caring duties also contributed and this could be recognised in the points system. Ms Johnson confirmed that statutory duties in allocating housing had still to be fulfilled but that powers in the Localism Bill would allow more flexibility in making allocations. She said the system could be tailored to a certain extent to take account of Members' preferences and would be reviewed after six months.

Action: *Head of Housing*

Subject to the above, the report was received and noted.

A11 PRIVATE RENTED ACCOMMODATION SCHEME

A list of responses from the Head of Housing to 19 queries raised by Councillors Dent Coad and Mingay had been tabled; a copy was kept for the minute book.

■ A Johnson introduced the report and said the scheme was now at the proposed key decision stage and represented a response to changes in the Housing Benefit reforms.

Councillor Dent Coad was concerned that the most vulnerable needed more help and suggested that well-being powers could be used to find more funding and ease the process. The Cabinet Member did not accept that the Council was ignoring the vulnerable and he was particularly concerned with the elderly. He drew attention to the previous Lets Start Scheme which had assisted 350 tenants in finding homes.

Councillor Dent Coad referred to a report by Shelter that highlighted how landlords held back a proportion of deposits. However the Committee noted a change in the law that forbade landlords from holding deposits and that Shelter's report was likely to reflect past experience when landlords were allowed to keep deposits during a tenancy. The Committee noted that officers would need to identify the reasons if individuals were without a deposit and look into instances where landlords withheld deposits. Ms Johnson also advised that lettings agreements provided tenants with guidance on the law on deposits. She said that the housing officers had extensive experience of the private access scheme and emphasised the scheme under discussion was a pilot.

Subject to the above the report was received and noted.

A12 FINANCIAL INFORMATION FOR HOUSING SERVICES

Mr Mellor introduced the report. Ms Johnson reported that in a recent housing need costs benchmark exercise this Council's costs compared favourably with those of many other west London boroughs. In response to the Chairman's query on costs for mental health workers, Mr Mellor confirmed the figure in page 3 of the report was not the hourly rate but the full cost of delivering the service.

Mr Mellor advised the Committee that last year the Council had run the temporary accommodation service at a smaller profit than for the previous two years. A surplus was expected in the temporary accommodation account and £1.5 million was set aside for one-off funding. Ms Johnson agreed to brief Councillor Dent Coad on the provisional budget figures on this service up to April 2013.

Action: *Head of Housing*

Ms Johnson explained that seven boroughs were involved in a framework contract for Temporary Accommodation with a view to agreeing payment levels. This Council had used external providers for some years and the framework contract would provide further opportunities to find more temporary accommodation.

A13 MISCELLANEOUS MATTERS

Councillor Pascall assured the Chairman he would carry out his visit outstanding from the previous rota. The Chairman had already visited the Homeless Persons Hostel in Cromwell Road. If possible, where more than one Member wanted to visit a site, they were encouraged to combine them.

The Chairman encouraged Members to submit ideas for reviews to him. The Chairman drew attention to laminated sheets of the glossary of terms made available at the meeting. These and files of information on properties, policies and key budgets would be available at future meetings to facilitate discussion.

A14 ANY OTHER URGENT MATTERS

The meeting finished at 8.27pm

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