

Appendix A to the Council Minutes – 23 July 2014

Item 6 – Questions from the Public

Mayor

I will now take questions from the public. Three questions have been submitted and accepted by the Monitoring Officer. These are set out on page 31 of the agenda.

Can I ask that Democratic Services please guide the members of the public to the seating area? For the benefit of the recording of this meeting I would ask that the questioners read out their question when asked to do so. I would also inform the questioners that any supplementary question that they may ask, should not take the form of a statement and must be related to the original question or the answer that is given.

Mr Perrin would you please read out your question to Cllr Worrall as set out on page 31 of the agenda?

Mr Perrin

Thank you Mr Mayor.

You may be aware of the axiom 'an Englishman's home is his castle', a proposition that commends itself to general acceptance and is a well established principal. Would you agree with me that the principal should equally apply to the tenant whose home is a Council rented property?

Mayor

Would Councillor Worrall please respond to the question?

Councillor Worrall

Thank you for that Mr Perrin. Firstly I think it is important to point out that of our tenancies 62% are held by women and 38% by men, so more likely in Thurrock housing stock the saying should be that an English woman's home is her castle.

Housing have, in the last 6 months, started to use introductory tenancies to any new tenant in Thurrock's council housing stock. We've currently got 136 such tenancies which confer different restricted rights upon a tenant for the first 12 months of their tenancy, to ensure that they pay their rent, look after their property and settle into their new community. The principal agreement between tenants and the Council is their tenancy agreement which bestows the rights and expectations of both the tenant and the Council. Therefore, I would not agree that the saying applies equally to tenants whose home is Council rented property.

Mayor

Mr Perrin, do you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Mr Perrin

I may Mr Mayor, thank you.

Firstly, on behalf of the residents who attended the meeting at my home on Thursday 17th July, I thank you Councillor Baker and the Director of Housing, Barbara Brownlee, for taking time to meet and listen to the issues raised.

Tenants are encouraged that as the result of the meeting, a satisfactory conclusion regarding their concerns will be arrived at.

Some Councillors may wonder why I felt it necessary to ask such a question....

Mayor

Mr Perrin, is this a question?

Mr Perrin, Yes it is Mr Mayor, if I might just lead into it.....it goes without saying that the homes of Council tenants are entitled to be treated with the same respect and consideration they would demand for their homes, unfortunately all too often, this is not the case as you, Councillor Baker and Barbara Brownlee witnessed at the aforementioned meeting. This is not the appropriate time to detail the bad experiences of many Council tenants.....

Mayor

Mr Perrin, this is not a question.

Mr Perrin

....when work is being done in their homes or adjacent premises suffice to say, some contractors who rely....

Mayor:

Mr Perrin.....

Mr Perrin:

...on minimising costs and increasing profits appear to encourage their workforce to march into tenants homes and get the job done regardless of the inconvenience caused and in some instances damage....

Mayor:

Mr Perrin, I'm asking you to put the question please.

Mr Perrin

My question therefore is you have indicated that you recognise that such a problem does exist and needs to be dealt with, so I will ask you to commit yourself to making every endeavour to solve it. May I suggest as a first step, you appoint a Council officer to liaise between the tenant and the contractor at the time a complaint dispute occurs?

Councillor Worrall

Thank you Mr Perrin. It was a pleasure to come out and meet with you, you know, and I think that it shows my commitment to tackle any problems that arise in my portfolio head on, and I think that we dealt with everything on the day that was there, you know, so more than happy to do that and I do believe that because you are a Council tenant you should be treated the same as if they were working in a private home, you know, and I'm sure that the Director of Housing has the same view as, me so complaints will be taken seriously and yes, when a complaint does happen, they're already assigned to a Council office, so just stay with me, lets just get into it, give me a couple of months to get really my teeth into it and I'm sure that you will see me putting my own stamp on stuff.

Mr Perrin

Thank you Councillor Worrall, thank you Mr Mayor.

Mayor

Mrs Lodge, would you please read out your question to Councillor Worrall as set out on page 31 of the agenda?

Mrs Lodge

Before I start Mayor, is it not the constitution that there is a half hour slot for questions from the residents of Thurrock?

Mayor

It's a maximum of 30 minutes.

Mrs Lodge

Right, so Mr Perrin took maybe 5 minutes. What I've got to say tonight before my supplementary question, I would like the courtesy before I start, before you say to me please get on with your question, because of my terminal condition I would like the courtesy of yourself and the Chamber here to give me a couple of minutes to explain why....you have to excuse me as I can't breathe....why I'm asking my supplementary question, is that ok with everybody? It will be about 2 minutes.

Mayor

If you could lead quickly to the question then please....

Mrs Lodge

I'll try, but my breathing is quite difficult. Councillor Worrall, congratulations on your role. I'm sure it's going to be very difficult for you, I can imagine, but I know you will do your best.

Right, whilst I appreciate that the Council cannot remove all damp and mould from all properties immediately, I do believe there are some properties that are so badly affected that they are a threat to the health and well being of occupants. Can you assure me that the Council still have a programme for prioritising such homes?

Councillor Worrall

Thank you Mrs Lodge and that you also for congratulating me and I am absolutely happy to be doing this portfolio. First of all, yes I can assure you that the Council has such a programme.

The Council takes reports of condensation, damp and mould very seriously, and your understanding of damp, condensation and associated mould concerning is supported by the evidence of the Council's own work undertaking in addressing this.

This evidence has been integral to the housing departments recently reshaping and introducing a range of different means for addressing underlying causes. The Council work with residents to ensure we are able to identify homes with damp, mould as well as other priority defects such as structural issues and OT adaptations.

These properties can, and have been moved forward from their allocated year under the Transforming Homes Programme, and then given to an appointed contractor as a priority. As a direct result of this, 60 homes originally scheduled for later years, were completed as part of year 1. This brought the total homes completed under Transforming Homes to 2058, of which 182 included damp control works.

There are many complexities around condensation, damp and mould with many factors attributing. The Transforming Homes Programme has been designed to ensure that we are able to address these complexities by obtaining a detailed understanding of the causes of any damp or condensation and then ensuring the correct remedial action is undertaken. All works undertaken are validated and monitored through a range of quality control mechanisms.

In February 2013 the pilot of our current programme undertook a comprehensive assessment of the number of homes to ensure that we have a detailed understanding of the types of damp and/or associated mould within our Council homes. The programme was established on a set of key principals, one of which included ensuring the homes that were found to be the worst condition, could be re-prioritised and addressed sooner.

Our evidence from the work undertaken shows that it is estimated 5% of the properties within Council stock are likely to require remedial work and or advice taken with the tenant in addressing damp or condensation and associated mould. The usage of this data ensures that the wards with the highest reported incidents of condensation, damp and mould were included in the first two years of our five year Transforming Homes Programme.

In addition, we are also in the process of introducing a new leaflet to inform tenants about the different types and causes of condensation, damp and mould and offer advise on how they, as tenants, can help reduce this occurring. I hope this answers your question.

Mrs Lodge

I did know that anyway.

Mayor

Mrs Lodge, do you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Mrs Lodge

Yes I do Mayor, thank you. So I want a couple of minutes just to try and get across why I'm asking my supplementary, ok?

Mayor

Well that's fine, it's not a platform for political point making...

Mrs Lodge

No, no not at all.....this is about my life, ok?

Councillor Worrall, I'm glad that you came back and I'm sure you are going to try and do a good job. Everybody here to get my picture of Aspergilla's of the lung which I got. It's a terminal condition and we also know that asthma is associated with mould.

Right, in 2013, Thurrock Council sent a surveyor round to do a survey of my home in I think its March 2013, which was 1 page. I had to employ my own surveyor who is a top surveyor in the country, to do a survey also in March, which came back as a lot of information confirming that I have mould in my home.

Right, I had a meeting in May with the Head of Housing to discuss the survey, Kathryn Adedeji, and we took the survey and that was with the top surveyor, Jeff Charm, to discuss what works needed to be doing in my home.

Right, after that I heard nothing. Emails to the Director of Housing, Barbara Brownlee asking if the mould could be done in my home if I was to have any chance of survival. I was completely ignored. A letter from my lung consultant to Thurrock

Council saying that I have asthma and Aspergilla and plenty of other things on my lungs, that was totally ignored, that was in October 2013.

In November, a top surveyor of Thurrock Council came round and basically sat and had a look at the mould and didn't do any tests and informed me that he was of greater knowledge than the top surveyor in the country. He promised me that my home would be done before Christmas, I'm still waiting.

I spoke to our Chief Executive in May with regarding, it was just a quick talk, regarding the mould in my home and why I was really struggling. I was told that he would investigate it...nothing.

So what I'm saying, my question to you Cllr Worrall, I'm sorry I've got to say this, this is going to really not sound very nice, we've got to note that its a year and a half down the road for me from when, you know, the survey was done with no works carried out.

Could we conclude from all the evidence I have amassed for this Council, that there is a vendetta towards myself due to my awareness campaign from our Director of Housing, our Chief Executive, the Leader of the Council and his colleagues?

Councillor Worrall

Thank you Mrs Lodge. I absolutely wouldn't agree with that. But what I am offering is like what I'm offering when I went to Mr Perrin's and to the flats where he lives and we went in every single flat, I'm offering that I will come to your home with Barbara Brownlee and I will have that as a personal thing that we look at your mould.

If your telling me that you've been ignored, then that's wrong, you know, but if they've offered to do it and its not been done then that needs looking at as well but I cannot say for one moment that they have got any sort of vendetta against you.

Mrs Lodge

Well due to my terminal condition and the Director of Housing does know about it...

Mayor

Mrs Lodge...

Mrs Lodge

I'm sorry.

Councillor Worrall

But absolutely, you can take me at my word, I will be at your house, you arrange through the Housing Department that Kathryn and Barbara and myself will come to your home because I can assure you that we do not have any vendettas against you.

I'm sure that we have all taken the time to read this you know, and there is maybe a couple of bits that I don't agree with that in there as well, you know so maybe the stuff that me and you can have a conversation about, about dealing with mould, moulds a priority to me, you know you can be rest assured. I live in a Council estate where I watch houses being done; I live in a Council estate where we are dealing with mould all the time so I'm not somebody who will shy away from dealing with the mould problem.

Mrs Lodge

That's nice to hear, thank you. I shall send you an email then, yes? Ok thank you.

Mayor

Thanks Councillor Worrall.

Is Mr Adam's in the Chamber? No? We will now move onto Item 7.