

Appendix A to the Council Minutes – 24 February 2016

Item 6 – Questions from Members of the Public.

Two questions were submitted from members of the public.

1. From Mr Perrin to Councillor Worrall

Are you entirely satisfied with the quality of the work done by contractors such as Mears and Wates including sub-contractors employed by them and do you consider such work to be value for money?"

Councillor Worrall

Thank you Mr Perrin, am I entirely satisfied with the quality of work done by contractors? No not every single time over the last three years our transforming homes programme has refurbished over 5,000 Council homes a responsive repairs contract handles over 40,000 repairs a year, well over 100 a day on average. To say that each of these would be delivered perfectly every single time would just be unrealistic. Am I entirely satisfied that when issues are raised through the correct channels they are taken seriously and officer work hard to address those issues? Yes I am. Repairs satisfaction levels are carried out independently of this Council, this means that people with no housing department bias are involved with asking the questions, those responses are reported at every cabinet meeting as you know Mr Perrin as you are a regular attendee of Cabinet you will know that these figures consistently show satisfaction level of above 85% and this year they have been better still around 88%. But as always I will push this further to see what we can do as a Council to get this above 90% and I would like to take it to 95% I announced in the January Cabinet meeting that I would get a cross party working group together to look at this, this group has now been formed and we will begin a series of meetings and visits throughout March, this starts next week and a report of the finding will be finalised in April.

Deputy Mayor

Thank you Councillor Worrall

Deputy Mayor

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

Mr Perrin

I ask this question, yet again, as your recent claim to an 85% satisfaction rate for work done by Mears, Wates and Keepmoat appears to be at odds with the number of dissatisfied tenants making complaints to their respective Councillors, just ask some of your fellow Councillors what they perceive to be the highest cause for complaints by tenants and they will tell you it is to do with the standard of work carried out in the home, which is still ongoing. I am

also given to understand that yesterday you were made aware of serious flooding in the home of Mrs Dierdre Lodge, caused by faulty capping of water pipes after the removal of a water cistern. I believe that the method used to calculate the satisfaction figure is at best spurious, at worst deliberately misleading or you are in denial that any problems exist. Do you accept that the standard of work is equally if not more important than cost and that if repairs and maintenance are carried out to a high standard at the outset, in the long term, the cost will be less than that of a papering over of the cracks job which will probably have to be redone in a matter of months rather than years. Can you assure tenants of Council housing that quality and a high standard of workmanship will be the main criteria for awarding contracts and that any lowering of standards in order to cut costs will not be accepted?

Councillor Worrall

We have a governance structure in place for each of our contracts which closely monitor their performance across all aspects of delivery. This includes a monthly review of customer satisfaction, quality of works, cost and timeframes. This approach enables us to quickly identify if any aspects of delivery that might fall below target so they can be promptly addressed with a contractor.

Headlines from performance to the end of Quarter 3 are as follows:

- The Transforming Homes programme has achieved a resident satisfaction of 81% good to excellent rating, which is 5 percentage points higher than the 2014/15 outturn.
- Resident Satisfaction with the Repairs Service averages 88% in 2015/16 which is 4 percentage points higher than 2014/15 and 6 percentage points higher than 2013/14.

In addition to this, over 30% of the contract spend is within the local economy, with 120 jobs and 27 apprenticeships having been created across the housing delivery programmes. 32% of the delivery workforce is based locally and over 300 of the subcontractors are registered in Thurrock.

We are committed to stringent contract management that ensures that housing programmes deliver value for money, the necessary improvements to our housing stock and improve the lives and opportunities of our residents.

2. From Ms Webster to Councillor Worrall

Councillor Worrall. Does Thurrock Council have any plans to review the scope of which HMOs are within its mandatory licensing policy so that HMOs under three or more storeys are brought within the policy - this may help to alleviate the poor living conditions experienced by some of our most vulnerable people, who feel they have no other choice but to accept the poor conditions they are living in when renting from unscrupulous private agents/landlords?

Councillor Worrall

Thank you for your question Teresa, firstly I should explain to those that are here this evening what this is really about, what is a HMO. A HMO is a house in multiple occupations, a home occupied by more than two that who are not all member of the same family. Minimum standards applying to HMOs are set out under the Housing Act 2004, national regulations and codes of practice. So Local authorities like us cannot legally require or enforce on landlords to comply with a different standard. The government published a consultation paper in November last year about changes to the mandatory licensing of HMO's in England. And its proposing to change the definition of HMO's to bring smaller properties under mandatory licensing which would be the two floors that I'm sure you are alluring to there. The consultation period ended December 2015 and we await that outcome. However I can say as an authority we promote good standards in privately rented accommodation through a Landlord Accreditation Scheme. We would encourage any concerns relating to conditions in private rented accommodation to be brought to the attention of our Private Housing Team at the Council.

Deputy Mayor

Thank you Councillor Worrall

Deputy Mayor

Ms Webster, do you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Ms Webster

Thank you Councillor Worrall, I would like to ask because that in the interim there's no dates set for when the mandatory two story licensing is going to come in, is whether Thurrock Council will impose their own additional licensing on the two story properties given the poor conditions that I have identified with approximately 47 properties in East Tilbury?

Councillor Worrall

Thank you, I have has this conversation with Officers on many occasions and I think that is there is very little that we can actually do outside of the law, we have to operate within the guidelines that are set, So I think that first, if you do know of anybody that you believe is living in conditions that are not what you expect them to be, that you would either send them to me or to a member of the team and we can get the well homes team to go out and visit them, as well as inspecting and holding landlords to account, they could also offer them advise on benefits, making sure that they are getting everything they are entitled too. This is a service that is paid for out of the health budget and I encourage you to use, I think that secondly we need to wait and see what comes out of the consultation, there's nothing much that we can do to encourage to do anything outside of that, we have to hope that really this government recognises that there are unscrupulous landlords out there and

so I would hope that they do bring them in line with us as the private landlords should be brought in lined with us as the social landlords, we wouldn't get away with it as the Council so why should landlords, and so I think that once we have seen what actually comes out of it. If it doesn't go far enough I encourage you, yourself to write to our MP for her to put better pressure on this government, she obviously has better contacts in the government than we have accrued, and us a Council should also write. So I think we need to wait, there is nothing that we can do, you would literally have to go street to street and consult with every resident in that street on every HMO that still in there and we would still need to go to the government for agreement that we could have those licenses there.