

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY BOARD
Havering Town Hall, Main Road, Romford
19 January 2022 (7.30 - 9.23 pm)**

Present:

COUNCILLORS

Conservative Group	Ray Best, Philippa Crowder, Judith Holt, Nisha Patel, Christine Smith and Maggie Themistocli
Residents' Group	Ray Morgon and Stephanie Nunn
Upminster & Cranham Residents' Group	Linda Hawthorn and Christopher Wilkins
Independent Residents' Group	Natasha Summers and Graham Williamson
Labour Group	Keith Darvill
North Havering Residents' Group	Darren Wise (Chairman)

Apologies were received for the absence of Councillors Michael White and Barry Mugglestone (Stephanie Nunn substituting).

Also present:

Garry Knights, Assistant Director, Property Services
Lucas Critchley, Mears

Present via videoconferencing:

Councillor Joshua Chapman, Cabinet Member, Housing
Councillor Paul McGeary
Patrick Odling-Smee, Director of Housing Services

All decisions were taken with no votes against.

The Chairman reminded Members of the action to be taken in an emergency.

34 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

There were no disclosures of interest.

35 AWARD OF CONTRACT FOR HOUSING REPAIRS AND VOIDS

Officers responded to the requisition grounds by stating that a robust repairs service was needed. Whilst the use of technology and IT would produce a better service for residents, there was also a commitment to protect in-person services. The co-location of services under the new contract was also essential. Eleven people across the housing department were involved in the procurement of the contract including one resident. No Members were directly involved.

The detailed contract specification did cover issues such as service delivery, IT and handling of customer complaints. This was however too large to include in the Cabinet report. The contract drove efficiencies by not giving any cost benefits if performance indicators were not met. The full document could be provided to Members if required although officers felt this mainly covered operational details that were not relevant to Members. The final version would be a public document.

The contract procurement was OJEU compliant and did include due diligence. Members felt that it would have been useful to have written answers to the call-in grounds prior to the meeting.

It was confirmed the contract covered approximately 700 properties and that a full list would be provided to the contractor at the commencement of the contract.

There had been a delay to the procurement exercise due to a conflict of interest between a bidder and the procurement consultant. A national schedule of rates would be used for the maintenance of communal areas.

Some 44 improvements were included in the contract covering areas such as greater availability of appointments over longer hours, more support for vulnerable residents and greater involvement of residents in the operation of the contract. The team monitoring the contract would include external independent advisors. An extra surveyor and two additional back office staff were being recruited to supporting monitoring of the contract and staff training was in progress for this. Overall staff numbers involved with the contract would increase from 30 to 55.

Some 90% of the contract would be delivered directly by the contractor. The remainder would be sub-contracted to local companies. The new contract contained more detail on the price per property and further details could be supplied on this. It was clarified that the term void referred to an empty property between lets.

A longer term contract allowed more investment in Havering by the contractor although officers added that 10 years was a relatively short duration for a housing contract. It was accepted that some work was required to be completed but officers were confident this could be completed prior to the start of the contract on 1 April. Progress on this could

be reported to the Towns and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee.

Details on alternative options considered were included in the Cabinet report. Officers confirmed that it was not possible to confirm the precise numbers of staff included in the TUPE transfer, prior to the transfer taking place.

The cost of the out of hours service was included as part of the price per property figure. The numbers of out of hours calls attended per year could be provided. Appointments would now be available until 8 pm on weekdays and on Saturday mornings. It was clarified that phone, as well as on-line contact methods would be retained as part of the core service.

Staff would be on-call to assist with e.g. incidents of flooding. This would be co-ordinated by the Council's out of hours service. The target for responding to emergency calls was 4 hours but responses would be made as soon as possible. Vulnerable residents were prioritised for response.

A representative of the proposed new contractor – Mears explained that a responsive repairs contract such as this was part of their core business. The company would look to employ people directly from the local community and have a local depot. Mears already a similar contract in Thurrock. It was wished to introduce digital services but also keep traditional methods of communication.

The new contract would start on 1 April 2022 and existing staff would have the opportunity to transfer to Mears. It was also planned to employ more apprentices on the contract. The matter of whether call handling would be undertaken by Mears or Council employees would be discussed. All IT systems would be developed in-house and it was hoped that technology would play a big part in the success of the contract. The new systems would allow the name and photograph of staff attending to be given to tenants. Officers were happy to bring a report in one year on the social value generated by the contract.

Mears would not take over part-completed work which would be finished by the existing contractor. It was likely that the previous contractor would undertaking new work from early March.

Mears employed around 4,500 people nationally across approximately 50 contracts. The amount of recruitment required would depend on the extent of the TUPE transfer. The out of hours phone number for the service would be the same as for all Council services and this would be communicated physically to all residents.

It was **AGREED** to exclude the press and public from the remainder of the meeting (other than the voting) since this would involve discussion of information that was not available to press or public by virtue of paragraphs 3 and 5 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

Overview & Scrutiny Board, 19 January
2022

The requisition was **NOT UPHELD** by 8 votes to 7 on the casting vote of the Chairman.

Members voting to uphold the requisition – Councillors Morgon, Nunn, Hawthorn, Wilkins, Summers, Williamson and Darvill.

Members voting not to uphold the requisition – Councillors Wise, Best, P Crowder, Holt, N Patel, Christine Smith and Themistocli. Second/casting vote not to uphold the requisition – Councillor Wise.

Chairman