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## SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 3 NOVEMBER 2022

(7.15 pm - 10.00 pm)

PRESENT Councillors Councillor Stuart Neaverson (in the Chair),  
Councillor Daniel Holden, Councillor John Braithwaite,  
Councillor Caroline Charles, Councillor Anthony Fairclough,  
Councillor Dan Johnston, Councillor Gill Manly,  
Councillor Stephen Mercer, Councillor Martin Whelton,  
Councillor James Williscroft and Councillor Victoria Wilson

John Bosley (Assistant Director Public Space Contracts and Commissioning), Elliot Brunton and Paul McGarry (FutureMerton Manager)

### 1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

No apologies were received

### 2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

There were no declarations of pecuniary interest.

### 3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

The minutes were agreed as a true and accurate record.

### 4 ACTION LOG (Agenda Item 4)

Members agreed that the 'community waste' item stays on the actions log as something we might want to pick up in future after the results of the consultation.

### 5 WASTE & RECYCLING UPDATE FROM THE CABINET MEMBER (VERBAL) (Agenda Item 5)

The Chair invited Councillor Irons, Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate Change, to give an update on the waste consultation and the recent decision by the Council to not extend our current contract with Veolia.

We have kicked off our consultation into the future of waste services. This is a chance to understand what our residents want us to prioritise and focus on and our online survey has had over 1000 responses so far.

The next pop-up road show is on 9 November in Mitcham Town Centre.

The consultation will end on 22 November with results hopefully available in December and the plan is to come back to the Panel for pre-decision scrutiny on next steps.

In response to questions from Panel Members, the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate Change added:

- There will be a one-off extra meeting of the panel to look at the waste options once all the information is available.
- Every borough in the partnership is doing its own version of the consultation - We adapted the questions for Merton because we wanted to place a focus on street cleaning and add in questions around digital technology.
- There will be external advice and an independent look at what officers are recommending, and we also have a project board set up to work through the options.
- An external partner will be collating the data from the consultation and undertaking an analysis which will then form part of the recommendations about what we should do next.

## 6 CLARION: REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE (Agenda Item 6)

The Chair welcomed the representatives from Clarion – Vicky Bonner, Marek Witko and Jacqui Thomas.

Marek Witko drew the Panels attention to a few points in the report: There are around 100 repairs a day in Merton. We absolutely accept that not everything goes right on all of these. At 100 per day that's probably less by volume than other Clarion areas and other stock types, however, the spend is far higher. So as an average it shows the complexity of the repairs here (slightly less repairs at a higher price) and I think that goes back to something we've said previously that the type of property and the type of stock here is extremely complex and that's reflected in those statistics.

The planned reactive maintenance team is an acknowledgment of that, as is the complex case team.

The Chair invited the Public Speakers to share their experiences.

**Tony Wells** - In 2016 we had major works done on our estate – there was no detail about the costing of the job and at the end of the job we had an awful argument to try and get refunds. Some of the works were £16,000 over budgeted and back into town back last year in around about this time last year because So many of our tenants had complained about repairs, we had a meeting which Clarion officials attended, and I reported several issues for my immediate neighbours

and other residents on the estate. To this day those issues still have not been dealt with. In April this year we had our first AGM since before lockdown and back in the AGM we had to threaten to go to the Ombudsman or to solicitors to get things done. Finally, after all this, a task and finish action plan has been brought to the table however it is very slow in the process. Personally, I cannot say that we've had a very good experience with Clarion at all.

**Sarah Henley** - Really difficult that Clarion only allows repairs to be reported online, this is less accessible than using the telephone.

There have been issues with windows and doors fitted in the flats that have needed repeated repairs for recurring problems.

Very long wait times for repairs to a hoist, which is a key piece of equipment for her daily life.

Some residents have been told they can't have automatic doors - in the event of a fire they would be stuck inside.

**Charles Odulana** - Many residents are affected by austerity measures, declining healthcare standards, low pay, and inadequate housing.

Energy performance within the properties on the estate rates between B and F.

When the council privatised its housing, with the full support of the then Labour Councillors, tenants were promised a new enhanced life.

The issue with Clarion is that it is not a democratically run local housing association.

In theory it may think it is, but in practice, it's not. Just replacing light bulb in front of your house takes a year for Clarion to replace. Those bulbs are not readily available in the supermarket or high street which leaves the front of the house in total darkness. Clarion give all sorts of excuses as to why they can't come, they promise they will turn up but then don't come.

The porta-cabin right in front of my house is supposed to be an extension of Clarion's office – There is hardly ever anybody there and if someone is there for you to lodge your complaint to, it is never passed forward.

The roof is still a work in progress. No attention paid to ceilings inside where there is damage also.

Vicky Bonner, Director of Housing at Clarion apologised to residents and agreed to follow up on the issues described.

In response to Panel Member questions, Marek Witko provided further information as follows:

- Sadler's close - Committed to come back by December to talk to you about what we need to do on that estate. We accept that the conditions those residents are living in isn't what we would want and that's why we are looking at a longer-term solution for that estate.
- Key performance indicator data is done independently by the leadership factor, which is a well-known and independent organisation. We send over our entire list of people who have had a repair over to the leadership factor and they randomly pick a selection of those residents to contact.

- Action: Marek agreed to send more detail about the satisfaction survey and methodology.
- Attaching photos to all repairs is a key priority.
- With regards to the tracker to monitor repairs, we meet with the leader's office to go through all the active cases that come through that route. I don't think there's any issues in circulating that more widely but we may have to check in terms of confidentiality.
- In terms of leaks from leasehold properties, we don't expect the tenant to sort it out. However, we don't have an automatic right to go into a leaseholder's property. Not everybody lets us in so it's not an easy process and ultimately, we would have to go to court if we wanted to get into that property without agreement. As a Housing Association, we do want to have better powers to go into properties to carry out essential repairs.
- In preparing the Regeneration plans for Ravensbury, flood risks have been addressed in the design. We're re-grading the whole site and so all the potential flow of water has been modelled and we've redesigned the layout of the ground across the whole of the Regeneration site as well as introduced sustainable urban drainage.
- Voids average figures - We have recently taken on two new contractors specifically to look at voids and complex repairs.

The Panel moved to discuss recommendations.

The Panel RESOLVED to recommend to Cabinet that:

1. This Panel recommends that it be a default procedure for all repairs to have before and after pictures.
2. Resident associations are a great tool for Clarion and residents to stay in touch therefore this Panel recommends that Clarion, at least once a quarter, help advertise the Resident Association meetings, including where and when they will be held, and that resident associations are allowed access to the communal boards for them to advertise these meetings.
3. This panel request that Clarion report back on the improvements it makes to communications around repairs and update the panel at the next session they are due to report at.
4. Clarion commit to review all their Merton properties with regards to retrofitting and improving their energy efficiency.

5. The panel recommends that Clarion undertakes a review of all empty or unused Community spaces so that some, if usable, can be allocated for use by resident associations.
6. Clarion to review its protocols for communicating with freeholders and leaseholders on its properties with regards to complaints and repair response times.
7. Recommend greater transparency published about individual estates data on repairs and the satisfaction rates from residents.

The Chair thanked Clarion Management and residents for attending.

## 7 CLARION: ESTATE REGENERATION (Agenda Item 7)

This item was introduced by Paul Quinn, Director of Regeneration at Clarion. We are now working on all three estates and there's been a couple of quite important milestones this year.

- First of which is that we secured planning approval at Eastfields and that paves the way for a start on site in the spring of next year.
- Almost all the 134 new homes at High Path now been moved into (there's just a few leaseholders now to move into the last few homes) and all those homes are being occupied by existing residents of High Path.
- The next 50 new homes are under construction, and they'll be ready early in the summer next year.
- We'll be submitting the next series of planning applications before the end of the year
- Looking ahead to next year - 314 homes across High Path and Ravensbury, all earmarked for existing residents.

Bear in mind we're just at 5% of the total number of homes we have to build. We have got a long way to go so this is all about continuous improvement and learning lessons from these early stages and seeing how we can improve each phase.

The backdrop to all of this continues to be a program of extensive community engagement and supporting people to prepare for and to move into the new Homes.

In response to questions,

New planning applications - planning application is going to be submitted probably around December and it is a significant uplift. This does mean that we're able to build

more affordable homes, which is our core objective, and it also means we can re-house the existing residents quicker because we're building out phase four that much quicker.

Ravensbury Court - When we did the survey that underpinned the decision to move forward for regeneration, every area within the three estates showed a significant majority in favour of the regeneration. The only exception was Ravensbury Court and that's why it's not included within the regeneration project. Having said that our responsibility is still to keep the building in good condition.

Eastfields - around 45 of the homes are right to buy and privately owned so we've been buying those homes back. In total we've bought back around about 230 homes across the board and rather than let those homes just go out to private rent, which is what we could have done with them, as a Local Authority you are nominating people to live in those homes on an assured shorthold tenancy basis

Building inflation is running at 9/10% but the thing to bear in mind is we run a 30–40-year business plan so inflation goes up, goes down, sales rates go up and go down as does sales value, so we have to take a long-term view.

There is 35% overcrowding on the estates, and these are very high levels. The average overcrowding in London for social rent is 14%.

## 8 PERFORMANCE MONITORING (Agenda Item 8)

The Assistant Director of Public Space highlighted a few key points as below.

SP454 in relation to the collection of fly tipping within a specified period currently operating about 90 level. We have put a lot of attention into that in working with our service provider that has improved in terms of that activity

SP568 which is a red indicator and that is the how promptly we are responding to Street Cleansing enquiries That has moved in a positive direction and we are very focused on improving this aspect further. So far this year in September, my inspectors undertook 700 inspections and Year To Date is 4775 inspections so there's a lot of eyes out there making sure that the service provider is delivering on these aspects.

SP405 - amount of leisure centre users. September figures were 92,000 users of our leisure centres and this really echoes our priorities in terms of a borough of sport.

SP 407 - % of FPN's that have been paid. This figure has been flagged as something that we need to recalibrate. Essentially the number reported here is based on the month, so those are the ones that are immediately paid. There's about a three-month process in terms of the payment of the FPN so it doesn't truly reflect that the performance of that annually. If we look at the performance of the FPN's issued by our service provider, it is around the 70% mark. In September we undertook 253 formal enforcement actions and year to date is 2326 as well

9 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 9)

The work programme was agreed.