

WANDSWORTH BOROUGH COUNCIL

HOUSING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 30TH JULY 2009

Report by the Director of Housing on a petition regarding cleaning at Highcliffe Drive, SW15 (Roehampton).

SUMMARY

Background: This report has been prepared in response to a petition from 34 households at Highcliffe Drive, SW15 (Roehampton), which was presented by Councillor L. Cooper to the Council meeting on 1st April 2009.

Paper No. 09-380 to the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committees in April 2009 undertook to submit a report in response to the petition to a future meeting of the Committee. This report is submitted to fulfil that requirement.

Policy: Not applicable

Issues/Proposals: The petition is in support a demand for improved cleaning at the five Highcliffe Drive blocks, Dunbridge, Denmead, Charcot, Winchfield and Binley Houses. The petition also calls for better ventilation of the stairwell and entrance lobbies in these blocks.

The report indicates that, for a period between February 2008 and January 2009, cleaning operatives were impaired due to major works including the scaffolding and netting of blocks. However, following the completion of major works, monitoring exercises on the cleaning standards have confirmed that the cleaning schedule is now being adhered to, with good standards of cleaning being maintained.

With regard to the request for enhanced ventilation, the report indicates that surveys have been carried out, the findings of which revealed that the natural ventilation is adequate and the installation of further vents to the stairwell windows would not be productive.

Director of Finance and other services' comments: Not applicable.

Supporting information: Not applicable.

Conclusions: The Chief Executive and Director of Administration will formally write to the petitioners informing them of the consideration of their petition by the Committee.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. This report is submitted to the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee for

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information. No decisions are required on it by the Council, the Executive or the regulatory and other Committees.

2. However, if the Overview and Scrutiny Committee decide that recommendations on the report need to be made, these will be reported to the Executive or the regulatory and other Committees for consideration.

INTRODUCTION

3. At the Council meeting on 1st April 2009, Councillor L. Cooper presented a petition signed by 50 individuals representing 34 households at Highcliffe Drive, SW15 (Roehampton). The petition was in the following terms: -

“I/ we, the undersigned support Stuart King's demand for a doubling of the cleaning of the Highcliffe Drive blocks. I/ we also call for better ventilation of the stairwell and entrance lobby to our block.

4. Paper No. 09-380 to the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committees in April 2009 undertook to submit a report in response to the petition to a future meeting of the Committee. This report is now submitted to fulfil this requirement.

BACKGROUND

5. There are five, ten-storey ‘stilt’ blocks at Highcliffe Drive, which is located on the Alton Estate, SW15, each consisting of 75 homes. The blocks are served by lifts and the total number of dwellings in the five blocks is 375.
6. The Housing Department is responsible for cleaning on Council Housing estates and the Roehampton cleaning contract, which covers the Alton Estate, has been operated by the cleaning contractor, ISS Facility Services Ltd since 1st April 2006. The Estate Services section of the Housing Department monitors contractor performance.
7. The five blocks at Highcliffe Drive were subject to external decorations and roof renewal between February 2008 and January 2009, during which, for extended periods, each was fully scaffolded and netted to facilitate building works. The cleaners’ ability to undertake their routine duties would unavoidably have been impaired during this period owing to the nature of the works underway, which included the painting of floor and wall surfaces. Only once the scaffolding was removed following completion, the date of which varied for the respective blocks, would it have been possible to resume the full range of normal cleaning duties. In addition, a deep clean was then undertaken to regularise the standards in each of the blocks.

CLEANING

8. Currently, there are two cleaning specifications in operation across the Council’s housing estates. The Highcliffe Drive blocks are cleaned to the higher of the two specifications, which stipulates that: -
 - (a) lifts are swept and mopped twice daily;

- (b) bulk rubbish is removed from blocks twice daily;
 - (c) entrances are swept and mopped daily;
 - (d) refuse chambers are swept daily;
 - (e) staircases and balconies are swept daily and mopped weekly; and
 - (f) the whole block is deep cleaned twice annually.
9. ISS Facility Services Ltd also has responsibility for cleaning the external areas, including public highways, on the Alton Estate.
10. It is known that these blocks were visited by Mr King in October 2008, at the height of the major works and, as previously mentioned, it is typically the case for this kind of contract to be necessary to curtail or suspend various cleaning duties on a temporary basis owing to the obstruction caused by the works in progress and potential damage to the newly painted surfaces.
11. The Housing Department's Estate Services Section monitors the cleaning standards and records findings. Upon completion of the major works, both internal and external areas were deep cleaned and post inspected by the Chief Estate Services Manager, who found the standards good. The contractors were also re-called to try and improve the appearance of the lift floors. Following receipt of the petition, Estate Services Officers inspected and photographed the blocks concerned on 8th and 22nd April 2009 and found that the cleaning was being carried out to contract standards. Additionally, daily monitoring of the cleaning commenced on 23rd April 2009 and will continue until further notice. Findings from this monitoring exercise have thus far shown that cleaning standards continue to be acceptable and consistent with the requirements of the cleaning specification.
12. By way of a further response to the petition, in May 2009, a detailed door knocking exercise was undertaken by the Estate Manager and a Senior Estate Services Officer, calling at all 34 of the addresses where a resident had signed the petition. There were 18 responses (55 per cent of all petitioners), nine of whom expressed a view that the cleaning had improved, five of whom remained dissatisfied. Eight respondents commented generally that local residents were contributing to the problems by failing to take proper responsibility for the upkeep of the block, for instance by allowing their dogs to urinate in the lifts, leaving their rubbish in the common parts etc. Subsequently, a series of block letters have been distributed appealing to residents to come forward in confidence with any information that might help to identify the perpetrators of anti-social activity and reminding them as to the correct procedures for disposal of refuse.
13. On 5th May 2009, the Chief Estate Services Manager met on site with ISS Facility Services Ltd's Contracts Manager and highlighted the requirements under the specification, along with expressing a further concern that had been raised about the frequency with which the water used for mopping communal surfaces is changed. The Contracts Manager regularly examines the cleaning standards at Highcliffe Drive jointly with Estate Services Officers, who have also independently reported improved standards following completion of the major works contract. A new cleaning operative at Highcliffe Drive has received positive feedback from several local residents.

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14. The estate cleaning specification is output based and the contractor must determine how best to operate the contract to meet periodic requirements, such as mopping and sweeping of communal lobbies, landings and staircases. The annual tendered cost of the cleaning of the five blocks amounts to £23,949.00. This sum includes deep cleanses (done by a separate crew), collection of bulk refuse, jetting of refuse chambers, materials and supervision. The price offered by ISS Facility Services Ltd for cleaning the five blocks was highly competitive, the leaseholders contributing an average of £63.86 per annum for internal cleaning. This contrasts very favourably with the tendered price achieved for other blocks of a similar design and construction.
15. In view of the significantly improved standard of cleaning following completion of the major works contract, the Director of Housing considers there is no justification for altering the current cleaning specification for the Highcliffe Drive blocks.

INTERNAL VENTILATION

16. The blocks, which share a common design, have been subject to two separate technical inspections, each of which concluded that no useful purpose would be served by augmenting the existing ventilation in the communal entrance lobby and stairwells. The only way that this could be accomplished would be by installing additional spinner vents to the external windows to the staircases but any such measures would be superfluous. The areas are already airy, the landings open to the elements and the staircases benefit from adequate natural ventilation. It should be noted that the activities of some residents, referred to in paragraph 12 above, may contribute to the call by some other residents for better ventilation.

DRAINAGE

17. When in May 2009, ISS Facility Services Ltd reported that blockages to many of the balcony gullies and the majority of the drains in the external hopper areas were restricting the mopping of those areas, a contractor was instructed to thoroughly clean and overhaul all of the gullies and drains. To date, this work has been completed to Dunbridge, Denmead and Winchfield Houses and is currently underway at Charcot and Binley Houses.

CONCLUSION

18. In the usual way, the Chief Executive and Director of Administration will formally write to the petitioners informing them of the consideration of their petition by the Committee.

The Town Hall,
Wandsworth,
SW18 2PU.

ROY EVANS
Director of Housing

29th June 2009

Background Papers

There are no background papers to this report.

All reports to Overview and Scrutiny Committees, regulatory and other committees, the Executive and the full Council can be viewed on the Council's website (www.wandsworth.gov.uk/moderngov) unless the report was published before May 2001, in which case the committee secretary (on 020 8871 6039) can supply if required.