

**Leicester City Council**

**Communal Cleaning Task Group**

**Report to Housing Scrutiny Commission: 18<sup>th</sup> March 2015**

**Overview Select Committee: 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2015**

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## **1. CONCLUSIONS**

### **TENANT ISSUES**

- 1.1 Tenants did not know the cost of providing the communal cleaning service, despite it being part of the information to new tenants and in updates through annual rent reviews. (See Recommendations 3.7; 3.8)
- 1.2 Tenants were not specifically consulted on the cost of the communal cleaning service, the level of service or whether they wanted it to continue or change in some other way. Tenants who did not receive the service were not asked if they wanted to receive it. (Recommendation 3.9)
- 1.3 Tenant and Member complaints about the service appear not to have been recorded and acted on despite their assertion that the issue has been raised repeatedly in the past. (Recommendation 3.1)
- 1.4 Conversations with tenants, for example during the survey conducted as part of this Task Group's work, indicated that their views about the service varied widely; many were happy while some were dissatisfied with the same service in the same building.
- 1.5 A tenancy condition (Appendix D Par 1.2) is that tenants are required to keep common areas clean and tidy. A recurring issue was that common areas (for example drying rooms and chute areas) were neither covered by the communal cleaning contract nor kept clean and tidy by tenants. This tenancy condition would appear to be difficult to enforce by housing staff or tenants. (Recommendation 3. 3)
- 1.6 The condition of areas outside individual flats varied widely and the requirement for tenants to keep areas associated with their own homes tidy was not always complied with or enforced. (Recommendation 3. 3)
- 1.7 No tenants said they did not want the communal cleaning service. However there was a desire for reforms and improvements. This could involve higher charges to underwrite, at least in part, improvements desired in the delivery of the service.

## THE CONTRACTOR

- 1.8 It was acknowledged on all sides that the contract was difficult to manage and execute. Tenants, visitors to or trespassers in estate buildings in some cases leave common areas in a disgraceful state. Most front-line cleaning staff at some point have had to deal with the results of such behaviour.
- 1.9 Tenants and Members recognised that in a difficult environment many cleaning staff gave an excellent service, sometimes at personal risk to themselves due to the nature of hazards they had to deal with<sup>1</sup>. Cleaning staff who knew the estates they worked on, and were able to develop friendly contacts with tenants, housing staff and tenant reps, were well-respected.
- 1.10 There was a comparatively high turnover of cleaning staff, though it was recognised that payment of the living wage may have helped to retain and recruit staff.
- 1.11 However council employment procedures mean it can take weeks to make a job offer. Some applications are only made through Department of Works and Pensions procedures with the “applicant” having no intention of taking a job. Other applicants’ circumstances may also have changed making it inconvenient, impossible or difficult to take up a job offer.
- 1.12 The vacancy rate of around 10% (30 posts), coupled with normal illness and injury absenteeism, meant that the service often had to be delivered by a standby team at short notice. In general terms, and for understandable reasons, satisfaction with the performance of the standby teams was less than with regular staff.
- 1.13 The City Cleaning Service supervisory team of just two part-time staff for 270 covering more than 100 sites across the city was inadequate for the task. Tenants often turned to council estate or office staff to raise problems with cleaning. The Task Group noted that the Cleaning Service was strengthening this function through recruiting two new supervisors.
- 1.14 The Cleaning Service communal cleaning contract operates to procedures, resources and standards set either in the 1990s or into terms under which a private contractor handed back the contract in 2006. The private contract was significantly cheaper than the original in-house contract bid, in terms of both staff and support costs, which was submitted in 2004.

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<sup>1</sup> Sharps, drugs paraphernalia and human and animal excrement were among issues they had to deal with

- 1.15 Perhaps the most significant change to the contract was the decision to stop periodic deep-cleans. This cost around £500k a year and to be maintained would require an increase in current charges to tenants. This single decision was the most significant in creating the gap between income raised from tenants' charges and the actual cost of the service to the housing department – around £250k this year.
- 1.16 Tenants and the cleaning service said the restoration of the periodic deep-cleans would be the single most significant improvement which could be made to the service, making the weekly cleans easier to do and improving the environment. There was no evidence that tenants were consulted about the ending of this service or had been given an option about it being re-introduced.
- 1.17 The times allocated for cleaning on a storey by storey basis seemed inadequate for current building conditions and social requirements. Buildings surfaces have deteriorated over 20 years, making them both harder to clean and leaving them looking shabby even after they have been cleaned properly<sup>2</sup>.
- 1.18 On-site cleaning facilities have been lost over time. For example, there are fewer available water taps which cleaners can access within buildings. Storage areas for cleaning and other materials have also become less available, making it more difficult to complete tasks adequately and on time. Equipment was inadequate, in some cases, to do the work required in the times allocated.
- 1.19 Attempts to keep to tight schedules led to work being rushed and not done properly. During the review tenants suggested that rebalancing of the weekly frequency of cleaning schedules, with longer times being allowed to do each floor within a block, might help address this problem.<sup>3</sup>
- 1.20 The Cleaning Service raised these and other issues with the housing department and tenants in a major meeting but reported that they were frustrated to find that no action was taken (see Cleaning Service Report Appendix E Par 45).

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<sup>2</sup> It also acknowledged that some surfaces were being repaired or replaced to make them easier to clean.

<sup>3</sup> The Task Group welcomed the news that a pilot project along these lines had been developed and would be interested to know the outcome.

## THE HOUSING DEPARTMENT

- 1.21 Communal cleaning issues were recognised as being only part of the challenges facing housing estate management staff. Building repairs and maintenance, tenant welfare and family protection<sup>4</sup>, anti-social behaviour on many levels and the challenges of households facing increasing debt were all acute and increasing demands on the skills and energy of front-line estate management staff, as well as neighbourhood housing officers and are strategic priorities for the department.
- 1.22 The department and many tenants felt that they were faced with a long-term decline in community commitment, leading among other things to a failure to maintain tidy communal areas.
- 1.23 There are specific tenant responsibilities for areas outside their flats as well as a shared responsibility for keeping communal areas such as drying rooms and chute areas tidy. Estate management staff did not appear to have the procedures to enforce those responsibilities. This issue merged into the wider dissatisfaction with the communal cleaning service.
- 1.24 The communal cleaning service has given rise to complaints and concerns by tenants. This has impacted on tenant satisfaction with the housing service in more general terms. For example, tenants complained about untidy common areas not covered by communal cleaning when asked about the communal cleaning service.
- 1.25 Tenants and members felt that the service, for a variety of reasons, was no longer fit for purpose, a view which appeared to be shared by the contractor. The housing department has a key role in reforming the service.

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<sup>4</sup> Not to say animal welfare in one notable incident during a New Parks site visit

## **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **SHORT TERM RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 Tenants should ensure records of meetings fully reflect the issues they raise and proposed resulting actions should be monitored on a regular basis
- 2.2 Estate management staff should take proportionate steps to ensure able tenants clean the areas for which they are responsible. If necessary tenancy conditions should be amended to make this easier to enforce
- 2.3 Signage showing cleaning schedules and scope and cleaners' sign-offs should be on all estate buildings which have the service. Sign-off boards should be monitored regularly by City Cleaning Service supervisors. Assistant estate management officers should also monitor the sign-offs on a regular basis and report concerns to the cleaning services team as appropriate
- 2.4 The cleaning service should be more proactive about devising new work patterns to deal with the current problems caused by ageing work surfaces, (for example by extending the time allowed for cleansing a block while at the same time reducing the frequency of cleaning)
- 2.5 The housing service should invest in infrastructure within estates to support the cleaning service, including storage areas and accessible water supplies. This should form part of the HRA environmental improvements programme
- 2.6 The cleaning service needs to invest in fit for purpose equipment, including trolleys to carry water and cleaning equipment and materials to enable front line staff to move more easily around the areas they are required to clean.

### **LONG TERM RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.7 A complete renegotiation of the communal cleaning contract is required. Recognising that it will impact on all parties a working group should:
  - (i) define what areas should be covered by a communal cleaning service
  - (ii) re-calibrate work patterns to ensure enough time to do the required work. This should include further investigation into alternative frequency of cleaning associated with more times being allowed to do the work
  - (iii) establish new cleaning standards reflecting current conditions. This should include investigating the cost and value of re-introducing annual and other period deep-cleans.

The tenants and leaseholders forum could be a suitable vehicle for developing these issues, with the cleaning team joining it for the specific programme of developing new contract structures.

- 2.8 Charges should be simplified and more closely reflect the actual cost of the service provided. Tenants and leaseholders should be consulted on the level of service they require and what they are prepared to pay for it.
- 2.9 A clear consultation process should be put in place to specifically ask tenants what service they want, its frequency and the likely cost. This should be repeated on a three-year cycle to ensure consultation is reasonably relevant to all tenants. It could be part of wider tenant satisfaction consultation work. It should include tenants and leaseholders who do not receive the service.
- 2.10 The cleaning service should consider new methods of organising delivery of the service through more locally-based teams, possibly including the setting up of community co-op style contractors to develop greater community connections between contractors and users of the service.

**TENANT FORUM RECOMMENDATIONS**

2.11 The Tenants' and Leaseholders Forum met on 29<sup>th</sup> January 2015 to consider possible recommendations to the Task Group. These are set out in the below table and should be considered in conjunction with the recommendations above.

<b>No.</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>
1.	Regular cleaning times and dates need to be set
2.	Clear information needs to be available on notice boards to say when cleaning takes place and what is cleaned
3.	A cleaning record should be pinned to notice boards and the cleaner should sign, with their name, after each clean
4.	Produce a document that describes what an "acceptable" standard of cleaning is.
4.	A more effective, workable system should be in place for Estate Management Officers and cleaning supervisors to check cleaning has been completed and this is to an acceptable standard. This could be linked to fire safety inspections
5.	People should be made aware of the cost of the cleaning service
6.	A more effective system needs to be in place to cover cleaners when they are on holiday or sick
7.	Work needs to take place to encourage tenants to take more responsibility of keeping communal areas clean and tidy themselves. New tenants need to be advised what responsibilities they have and the responsibilities of the cleaners.
8.	Include window cleaning as part of the cleaning service, also cleaning of communal doors and removal of all cobwebs
9.	Ensure the cleaners have access to hot water to clean and a review to take place to ensure they are provided with the most appropriate cleaning materials and products
10	Take steps to make the communal areas smell nicer
11.	Consider using the Community Payback scheme or the Neighbourhood Improvement Operatives to improve the appearance of the communal areas
12.	Pilot reducing the frequency of the cleaning, but increase the time available to clean when this takes place. To be agreed with tenants prior to the pilot taking place.
13.	Over a specific timeframe review communal cleaning in each block to establish whether people want this to continue, and if so what standard of cleaning they want, involving tenant reps in this process
14.	Review the communal cleaning charges to ensure the charge to tenants actually reflects the cost of the service
15.	Consider using electric machines to carry out cleaning tasks e.g. steamers
16.	If recommendations are implemented but do not improve the service consider whether it is more cost effective to use an external provider.



### 3. MAIN REPORT

#### INTRODUCTION

- 3.1 This is a review of the communal cleaning service undertaken by the City Cleaning Services on behalf of Council tenants and leaseholders. The service involves the periodic cleaning, by sweeping and mopping, of areas within blocks of flats and other housing complexes owned or operated by the Council. The areas vary but can include stairways, hallways, lifts and passages.
- 3.2 The frequency of cleaning varies from block to block and this is reflected in a wide range of charges which are made to tenants. The details of cleaning of each block can also vary, which also contributes to the range of charges made to tenants and leaseholders.
- 3.3 This review has been undertaken in the light of concerns expressed by councillors, tenants and tenant representatives about the standard, value for money and effectiveness of the communal areas cleaning service.
- 3.4 A report on the service previously came from the Housing Department to the Housing Scrutiny Commission in December 2013. The link to this report is <http://www.cabinet.leicester.gov.uk:8071/documents/s60168/3d%20Communa%20Area%20Cleaning%20V%204.pdf>.
- 3.5 The report formed the department's written evidence to the Task Group, which was set following agreement of the Housing Scrutiny Commission and Overview Select Committee to the [scope of the review in August 2014](#).
- 3.6 It set out the numbers of tenants who paid for the service, the blocks or communities which receive the service and the charges made to tenants in those blocks. (See par 3.12).
- 3.7 From the outset, members were determined that tenant and leaseholder representatives were equal partners in the development of the review.
- 3.8 With the help of Housing Department officers, tenant representatives took a full part in task group meetings, site inspections and a limited but informative tenants' survey.
- 3.9 Tenants representatives had also started their own scrutiny of the cleaning service, and needed to be convinced that housing scrutiny commission members were not simply piggy-backing their own review on the tenants' scrutiny work.

- 3.10 Members assured tenant representatives this was not the case, and adopted a joint approach to an issue of shared concern. The tenants' own scrutiny report on the service at Neston Gardens was presented as evidence to the Task Group. Scrutiny Support Officers met regularly with the Tenants and Leaseholders' Forum as part of this joint approach.

### **HOUSING DEPARTMENT DATA**

- 3.11 Baseline data for the review came from the report from the Housing Department to the Housing Scrutiny Commission of December 2013. Main points included:
- 4735 tenants and 220 leaseholders received the cleaning service on 154 sites across the city.<sup>5</sup>
  - There were 11 different weekly tariffs; four applied to just one site
  - The lowest rate, 93p a week, was charged to residents at Neston Gardens
  - Income at that time was £722,200 a year. That rate rose roughly in line with the rise in rents in April; [the report on proposed Housing Revenue Account](#) increases to this Commission in February 2014 suggested service charge income would rise by three per cent (around £21,600 in a full year) to around £743,800. That increase was implemented in April 2014<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Updated figures (October 2014) were that 4954 properties are cleaned, and 1926 are not covered by the service. The number of rates has been reduced to nine.

<sup>6</sup> Leaseholders pay approximately £44,000 a year for the service.

**Table 1: Sites and tenant numbers covered by different service charges**

<b>Weekly service charge (£)</b>	<b>Number of sites charged the rate</b>	<b>Number of homes charged</b>	<b>%age of total homes covered</b>
0.93	1	63	1.33
0.95	4	50	1.06
1.04	11	357	7.54
1.11	1	23	0.49
1.28	1	48	1.01
1.72	44	996	21.03
2.04	17	577	12.19
2.61	3	19	0.40
2.64	2	29	0.61
3.34	1	24	0.51
4.23	69	2549	53.83
<b>Total</b>	<b>154</b>	<b>4735</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source: Housing department report to scrutiny: 10<sup>th</sup> December 2013

**Table 2: Distribution of charges by homes covered**

<b>Weekly service charge (£)</b>	<b>Number of sites charged the rate</b>	<b>Number of homes charged</b>	<b>%age of total homes covered</b>
4.23	69	2549	53.83
1.72	44	996	21.03
2.04	17	577	12.19
1.04	11	357	7.54
0.93	1	63	1.33
0.95	4	50	1.06
1.28	1	48	1.01
2.64	2	29	0.61
3.34	1	24	0.51
1.11	1	23	0.49
2.61	3	19	0.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>154</b>	<b>4735</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Housing department report to scrutiny: 10<sup>th</sup> December 2013

3.12 It can be seen that:

- 54% of tenants covered by the communal cleaning scheme come into the highest payment band
- 87% of tenants (and 84.4% of sites) are covered by just three payment bands 13 sites are covered by a further seven pay bands and 25 by eight bands
- Four bands had just one site covering them.

So while there was a wide and somewhat confusing range of charges, almost 90% of sites and tenants were covered by just three charges, making it possible to consider streamlining the charges and the range of services provided.

3.13 The report noted that in many cases “most of these arrangements have been in place for many years...they were originally established in response to requests from the tenants in the block living there at the time.” The charge is

reviewed annually and moves in line with general Housing Revenue Account rent increases.

- 3.14 Cleaning contracts were “monitored and checked by the Area Offices, who (addressed) any issues arising with the service provider.” Local area office staff “regularly inspect the communal areas of all flats, maisonettes, houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) and tower blocks (including Aikman Avenue flats)”, the report said.
- 3.15 Regular fire inspections also take place and estate and fire inspections are documented and actions taken noted. Additionally, Estate Wardens also check for issues in the communal areas as they go about their work.
- 3.16 Initial observations from members and tenants are that despite these procedures there was:
- a wide and confusing range of charges
  - little understanding of what was required of the cleaning team; and
  - little understanding, despite the information provided within the report, of how work was monitored by either the estate management team or the cleaning team themselves.

## **SITE VISITS**

- 3.17 Site visits were made by Task Group councillors and tenants to inspect the effectiveness of communal area cleaning. The Task Group was helped by area managers and estate staff to conduct these visits.
- 3.18 On Monday 13<sup>th</sup> October visits were made to Emburn House, Fairburn House and Gorseburn House (in the New Parks management area) and to blocks in Lombardy Rise (St Andrews).
- 3.19 The St Matthews estate (covered by the St Matthews housing office) was visited on Friday 17<sup>th</sup> October. Councillors Newcombe and Alfonso went on the visit, along with tenant representatives Gwen Clifford and Peter Hookway. Jean Williams was the estate tenant rep on the visit.
- 3.20 Comments from members on the site visits were reported to the Task Group. These were unedited so as to give the immediate authentic sense of members’ comments.
- 3.21 Points which emerged were from comments during the visits and written feedback included:

- The age and deteriorating condition of the buildings contributed to the difficulty of cleaning the surfaces and to their poor appearance after cleaning
- There were significant “no-go” cleaning areas where no-one – tenants, housing management or cleaners – had taken responsibility. Members were particularly concerned about the state of the drying rooms at the Lombardy Rise flats.
- This was also an issue on the St Matthews Estate. Here there was also concern about the state of the rooms used to put rubbish down the chute (and the state of the skips used to collect rubbish)
- There was criticism of the performance of the cleaning service on St Matthews – but also praise for individual cleaners who knew the estate and who were considered diligent and thorough in the way they did their work
- The cover team, used to fill in for absences in the normal cleaning personnel were not considered to perform as well as regular staff
- Some areas which were tenants’ responsibility showed evidence of extensive and long-present dirt and detritus. This was sometime seen as the fault of the cleaning team when it was not their responsibility
- Cleaners spoken to during the inspections said they were not subject to physical or other abuse by tenants; however they complained of antisocial behaviour which included urine and sometimes faeces in communal areas
- Some areas with high tenant satisfaction were associated with cleaners who knew the area well, were committed to the community and who were trusted by the community and community reps
- Lack of on-tap hot water for cleaners was a significant problem on some estates
- Tenants who littered public areas, or who smoked in non-smoking communal areas, or who were indifferent to or refused to report antisocial behaviour of this kind were a contributory factor to the problems faced by tenants, housing management officers and cleaning staff.

### **CLEANING SERVICE REPORT**

- 3.22 Cleaning Services manager Bev Packwood and head of facilities management Alick Doyle reported on the work of the Cleaning Service and the challenges the service faced. (See Appendix E).
- 3.23 The service is within the property division of the city council, and is responsible for a wide range of council-owned building, including City Hall and community buildings. There are fewer school cleaning contracts and reduced

community facilities to be cleaned, and the tenants' communal cleaning service accounts for around 80% of the service workload.

- 3.24 The Task Group was told around 270 operatives delivered the service. There were also around 30 vacancies. The first line of supervision consisted of two part-time staff, but this was being strengthened by two further supervisory staff.
- 3.25 The nature of the work made it sometimes difficult to recruit staff. Procurement procedures meant that it could take several weeks for the department to get to a position of being able to offer a job after a post became vacant.
- 3.26 This was further complicated because many applicants were only going through the motions of applying for work, under pressure from the Department of Works and Pensions, but who had little intention of taking up a work offer according to evidence from the Cleaning Service team. There is no evidence for this and it should just be left as difficulties in recruiting etc.
- 3.27 Members were particularly concerned to understand how the prices for the service were set and service standards and performance indicators were met. They were told that:
- There was no formal contract between the cleaning department and the housing department
  - There were no performance indicators or service standards on which to judge the service.
- 3.28 Times set to complete tasks, including getting equipment from floor to floor as well as times for completing tasks on a storey by storey basis, had been devised in the 1990s when the service was first provided. But in the intervening years many of those surfaces had deteriorated, making them both difficult to clean and more shabby.
- 3.29 Furthermore, on-site facilities for cleaners such as water taps and storage for cleaning materials became less available, meaning that these have to be carried for greater distances. In particular, hot water has become less readily available.
- 3.30 The Task Group was told of two key episodes; Citywide Cleaning Services (CWC) had won the cleaning contract in 1998 under Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) regulations. Under a further tendering procedure, a four year contract was let to ISS in 2004, but in 2006, 18 months into the contract, the contractor walked away from the project, saying that it was unable to deliver the service for the contract price.

- 3.31 The Cleaning Services team said it had supported ISS despite a lack of resources by the contractor. When ISS terminated the contract, the City Cleaning Service was asked to take on the work under the same terms and costs as those applying to the ISS contract.
- 3.32 These have been subject to annual inflation-related increases, but the outcome has been that the cleaning team has struggled to deliver the service on stretched and under-funded resources.
- 3.33 The cleaning team made it clear in evidence to the Task Group that it had made repeated attempts to address this issue with the housing department, but without success.
- 3.34 The Building Cleaning department was asked a series of questions about costings which led to responses being provided after the last meeting of the Task Group.
- 3.35 The department confirmed that
- Building Cleaning service set the rates charged to the housing department for communal cleaning
  - The charge was based on overhead costs, cleaner wages and cleaning products and consumables
  - No negotiations on rate-setting took place with the housing department
  - There was no formal contract with the housing department
  - Payment was made on a recharge basis.

### **TENANTS' SURVEY**

- 3.36 The task group agreed that a survey should gather tenants' views on the communal cleaning service. It was agreed that estate management staff and where possible Members (of the Commission and ward members) and tenant representatives should accompany scrutiny officers undertaking the survey interviews.
- 3.37 The surveys were conducted at St Matthews, Neston Gardens, Beaumont Leys and New Parks. A total of 77 residents were interviewed. The report to the Task Group is in Appendix F.
- 3.38 The main conclusions were that:
- Tenants knew there was a cleaning service for their communal areas.



- Only one tenant knew the cost of the service. This included new tenants who might have been expected to have been recently told about the charges
- Tenants were asked what they *thought* the service cost. In every response (except one) the cost was over-estimated, in some cases by three times.
- Almost 80% could describe what the service provided
- There was a range of attitudes to the service; many comments were positive; some felt cleaners were not given enough time to do a proper job
- There was widespread criticism or concern that the tools provided were not adequate for the required work
- There was considerable support for some cleaners who were felt to know and were committed to the communities they worked with
- By contrast it was felt relief teams did not have the same knowledge and commitment, and the service may have suffered as a result
- Five tenants said they had complained in the past about the service
- Most tenants would direct any complaints they had to the local housing office
- Common areas such as drying rooms and chute rooms were left uncleaned and should be included in the specification for the service
- Tenants were largely happy with the quality and effectiveness of the service, in terms of cleaning the communal areas, so long as chronic problems, such as spilled rubbish, urine and faeces, needles – were also dealt with.

## **THE HOUSING DEPARTMENT**

- 3.39 The department has a key role in the administration of the city cleaning service. Effectively it acts as the representative of the client – in this case the tenants who pay for the service.
- 3.40 It also acts as a key intermediary in the maintenance of service quality in that tenants normally go to the local housing office or estate management staff if they have a concern or a complaint about the cleaning service (and a wide range of other housing management issues).
- 3.41 This is particularly important in the context of a highly stretched cleaning service departmental supervisory team which, according to the evidence to the Task Group, consisted of just two part-time supervisors.
- 3.42 The department on an annual basis consults with tenants' representatives on the increases to rents as part of the review of the wider Housing Revenue

Account budget, which includes investment in housing repairs, new homes and estate and environmental projects.

- 3.43 Increases in charges, including communal cleaning charges, have been traditionally linked directly to the wider rent changes so service charges have risen at the same rates as rent increases.
- 3.44 Charges to tenants have over time outstripped the charges by the cleaning department to the housing department to such an extent that the charge to tenants for the service is now around 50% higher than the cost of the service. The surplus goes into the HRA and over five years this amounts to around £1m.
- 3.45 The department can point to the long record of consultations on this and other services, and has said that there is no record within tenants' forum meeting notes of concerns about the service. However, members and tenants have said they have repeatedly complained about the quality of the communal cleaning service. (These complaints have been made alongside evidence that tenants are in some cases failing to observe their own responsibilities to keep areas not covered by the service clean and tidy).
- 3.46 Tenants were concerned enough to do their own investigation into cleaning standards, producing a report on the service at Neston Gardens for the tenants and leaseholders Forum which formed part of the evidence to the Task Group.
- 3.47 The origins of the service lay in the department asking tenants if they wanted to have a cleaning service and the level of service they wanted. Over time most of the tenants originally consulted have moved out for a variety of reasons.
- 3.48 There is no current mechanism for consulting tenants about whether they want the service and the level of service to be provided. As a result almost no tenants have currently been consulted about whether they want the service to continue and the level of service they would like. Also, performance monitoring and customer satisfaction mechanisms?
- 3.49 Some estates have notice boards at the entrances to individual buildings setting out what is provided by the communal cleaning service. These include in some cases sign-off by cleaners on when they have visited the building and cleaned it. This is however not a feature of all sites which receive the service.

## CONCLUSION

**The Commission is asked to agree the following actions:**

1. That the recommendations in Section 2 above be approved
2. That the recommendations from the Tenants' Forum in paragraph 2.11 be accepted by the Scrutiny Commission and integrated into the main recommendations from the Task Group as a submission from the Tenants' and Leaseholders' Forum
3. The Departments be asked to respond to the recommendations set out in Section 2 within three months of the report's approval by the Overview Select Committee
4. That the response includes detailed information about contractual arrangements between the Housing Department and the Cleaning Service department, including information on how cleaning rates are set and who sets them.
5. That the Housing Capital Programme includes a specific line providing funding to repair and improve worn and damaged surfaces in communal areas.

**4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

Peter Coles (Principal Accountant) x374077

**5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 There are no specific legal implications arising from this report.

Jeremy Rainbow (Supervisory Legal Executive) x. 371435

**6. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 This review looks at the relationship between two council departments and their relationship with an external client group – namely council tenants and leaseholders who use their services.
- 6.2 The objective of the review is to make proposals which improve the service to tenants. Initiatives/recommendations that lead to improvements will impact tenants across all protected characteristics in a positive way. Well managed communal spaces can contribute to a sense of belonging and can foster good relations between, and within communities.

Surinder Singh (Equalities Officer) x 374148

**7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

- 7.1 The chair of the Task Group would like to thank all those who helped in providing information and assistance in the course of this review. They include

members of the task group, including tenant representatives, who are set out in Appendix A.

- 7.2 Within the Housing Department I would like to thank Marie Murray and Suki Supria, who acted as main liaison officers between the department and the Task Group. I would also like to thank to Dipesh Joshi and his colleagues for the work in liaising with tenant reps.
- 7.3 The work done by Bev Packwood and Alick Doyle in providing evidence and information on behalf of the Cleaning Service is appreciated, as was the evidence from Enid Grant in respect of financial issues relating to leaseholders.
- 7.4 I would also like to thank Jon Browne, who was with the scrutiny team on a graduate placement and who has now left to start a Ph.D, for his work. Thanks also to Yusuf Sader, on work experience placement from Judgemeanow Community College, who provided help with this report.

CLLR PAUL NEWCOMBE  
CHAIR OF HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMISSION  
JANUARY 2015  
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## **APPENDICES**

### APPENDIX A – NOTES OF MEETING ON 12<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2014

#### **Present**

**CLLrs:** Dawn Alfonso, Paul Westley, Rashmikant Joshi,

**Tenant Reps:** Wendy Biddles, Redvers Forryan, Ebrahim Jassat, Joe Carroll, Gwen Clifford

**CASE-da:** Ian Wilson

**City Cleaning Services:** Bev Packwood, Alick Doyle

**Business Service Centre:** Enid Grant

**Housing:** Suki Supria

**Scrutiny Team:** Jerry Connolly, Jon Browne

**Item 1 - Apologies for absence**

Apologies: Cllr Paul Newcombe, Cllr Hanif Aqbany, Cllr Mian Mayat, Marie Murray

**Item 2 – Notes from the last meeting**

Approved

**Enid Grant – Verbal update about Leaseholders and Complaints information**

1. Enid explained how leaseholders sit under her responsibility. Previously only anecdotal evidence about leaseholders and service charges was known to the Business Service Centre.
2. Tenants can buy Council property under the right-to-buy system, becoming leaseholders. Communal areas still require a charge from leaseholders to cover costs of maintenance and upkeep.
3. Leaseholders also contribute to a designated reserve fund (also known as sinking funds) which builds up reserves to fund new improvements such as doors/windows/other structural improvements, repairs and replacements.
4. The funds have been found to be holding too much of the leaseholders' money – around 720 leaseholders have been given back £1.5m so far in a scheme to pay back excess money held in the sinking fund. There is around £500,000 still to give back to leaseholders who haven't responded so far.
5. Cleaning charges made to leaseholders are on a par with those made to tenants.
6. Any charges made to leaseholders need to have levels of consultation to a similar and appropriate level as with tenants.
7. Anecdotal evidence shows that approximately four leaseholders have made complaints to business service centre – in relation to:
  - Not being happy with charges in relation to the reserve funds

- Not being happy with the conduct of other leaseholders and the state in which they leave communal areas
8. Cllr Westley asked what the financial contribution is that leaseholders make towards communal cleaning.

**ACTION:**

- It's believed to be around £30,000. Jerry Connolly and Enid Grant will confirm this
- The Task Group will consider conducting the same survey that was conducted for tenants, again for leaseholders. Enid to work with Jerry to organise the survey
- Enid to provide Cllr Westley with the costs of the communal cleaning to leaseholders

9. Red Forryan asked how capital investments are charged to tenants. Enid explained that they're not – not for large scale capital investments in the property.

**Item 3 – Tenant Survey report feedback**

10. Jon Browne invited questions and comments on the paper.
11. It was stressed that not a single tenant interviewed knew the cost they were paying for the service, and this was felt to be very interesting and illuminating. It was said that previous use of rent cards broke down the different charges – highlighting to tenants what they were paying for.
12. It was suggested that the cleaning charges be frozen until the whole service is reviewed/reformed.
13. Cllr Westley stated that Leicester City Council should be sending out clear information that outlined what tenants pay for and how much.
14. Cllr Joshi outlined how, to him, it seemed that the crux of the issue is the quality of the cleaning and the inconsistency of the cleaning provided.
15. Jon Browne outlined the main conclusions of the survey work:
- The survey provided useful qualitative information and a general sense of the views of tenants
  - It must also be noted that the results were based on only 77 respondents
  - The vast majority of tenants were aware of the cleaning service and what it provided, but the variance in descriptions of the cleaning provided highlighted the confusion and lack of awareness amongst tenants about what they are paying for.
  - In a large majority of cases, tenants are happy with the cleaning that is done, when it is done, therefore the pertinent issues are in relation to the inconsistency in the delivery of the service and the lack of information that

tenants receive about the charges and what the service should be delivering.

16. Suki Supria added that in many cases, the building materials present in blocks and communal areas are not conducive to good cleaning.

**Item 4 – Communal Cleaning – report from City Cleaning Service**

17. Gwen Clifford raised concerns over the wording and design of the cleaning standards – with ‘basic’ and ‘prestige’ designations – it was seen to be an insult to tenants that there was a variance in the cleaning standards, with one standard for tenants and another for other areas/buildings. Why not one standard and one price?
18. Bev Packwood explained how the names of the standards did not relate to the quality of the cleaning, but rather the hours invested in the cleaning.
19. Bev supplied the task group with photographic evidence of some of the worst areas.
20. Tenant representatives highlighted how whenever they visit Council buildings such as City Hall or the Town Hall, they see many cleaners that are well equipped, yet out in the housing estates and in tower blocks they often don’t have the tools for the job.
21. Bev explained that new cleaning products and methods are continually being piloted and new bespoke trolleys were being designed. Steam cleaners have been considered, but they require power points – which are rarely available in the estates.
22. Cllr Alfonso asked what proportion of the cleaning service is taken up by communal cleaning. She also asked whether the cleaners were paid the Living wage.
23. Bev confirmed that all staff are paid the Living Wage of £7.85 per hour and that approximately 80% of the cleaning service is taken up by communal cleaning.
24. There are several issues relating to staffing:
  - Turnover is high
  - Filling vacancies can sometimes take 10 weeks
  - 270 staff provide the cleaning – with a cover team of only 12
  - It’s a continual challenge to get staff to cover areas at the right time
  - There is approximately 30 vacancies

- Some staff are not committed to the job and only present due to job centre obligations
  - Currently there is only 2 part-time supervisors covering the entire city and staff of 270 cleaners; two more are beginning in the new year.
25. Bev confirmed that the service currently does not have in place, a service level agreement, written contract or performance indicators, although they do have standards to adhere to, including a required pass rate of 85%.
26. Bev outlined the process of the contract being taken over by the Council. In 2004 the contract was put out to tender, with the aim of reducing the cost of the service.
27. Alick Doyle explained how ISS won the contract on price and quality set then and when it came back in house, the same rationale – that the service had to continue at that price – was never revised.
28. Suki Supria, explained that the cost of the cleaning service is around £550,000 per year. Cleaning arrangements are set by the majority of tenants. Cleaning services don't have a contract – they just pay in line with prices set per block, which cleaning services charge Housing with monthly. Cleaning charges change annually in line with rent.
29. Questions from members of the task group highlighted several issues:
- How is it that tenants and leaseholders pay £800,000 and yet the service costs £550,000?
  - It seems that LCC has less stock than housing associations and yet provides a worse service and less value
  - Mechanisation and capital investment in the cleaning services is required
  - It's unclear what level of consultation tenants receive in relation to cleaning arrangements and charges
  - Housing should look to prioritise zero tolerance enforcement of tenancy agreements
  - New cleaning arrangements could trial longer, less frequent cleaning times.
30. In terms of budgets, housing area managers set the charges and budgets; housing dictates to cleaning services the amount of money available for cleaning services to deliver cleaning to each block or estate. After housing set the price, cleaning services receive the charge, but the charge to tenants is more than what cleaning services receive. Whilst charges go up in line with rent, cleaning services do not receive similar increases.



**ACTION:**

- Alick Doyle to provide the task group with details of the annual upgrades to the cleaning budget from the last 5-10 years.

31. Members of the task group discussed the possibility of repurposing old storage cupboards throughout blocks, to store water/cleaning products, reducing the need to transport cleaning tools around and therefore reducing the time pressure on conducting the cleaning.
32. In relation to the potential for the mechanisation of the cleaning service, it was highlighted that power points were a barrier. Firstly many would need to be installed; they may become a target for vandalism and health & safety concerns would need to be addressed.
33. Benchmarking the service against other Councils was also raised as a possible recommendation for the task group.

**ACTION:**

- Alick Doyle to provide the task group with details of the LCC commissioned report into benchmarking, from last year.
- Alick and Bev to provide details of the ongoing trials of new products and ways of working within the cleaning service

34. The task group concluded that the biggest issue is that the organisation of the whole service, from Leicester City Council's perspective is vastly inadequate.
35. Bev believes that a complete review of the service is required; it has been on the agenda for many years but there's never been a formal response.

**Item 5 – Different ways of working – briefing from CASE-da**

36. Ian Wilson attended the meeting. He works for CASE-da (Co-operative and Social Enterprise – development agency), which provides support in the formation and growth of community enterprises and co-operatives. He gave a short briefing to the task group on three main ways of working in this area:
  - Tenants form a legal body and run the service
  - Community Cashback – break down management of the budget to a tenant ran organisation, they chose who gets to deliver the service and all surpluses are reinvested into the organisation
  - Spin-Out – tenants manage and run the service themselves

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37. Additionally the Teckel approach would allow tenants to set up a separate organisation – ran in accordance with Leicester City Council policies – without a tendering process – but would operate separately from the Council.
38. CASE-da strongly advocates ownership and control over simple consultation.
39. CASE-da is happy to provide additional support and information to the task group and to the Tenant Representatives Forum.

### **Item 6 – AOB**

40. None was raised

### **Item 7 - Next meeting: 6th January 2015 – consideration of final report and recommendations to the Housing Scrutiny Commission**

Meeting closed at 12:00pm