

Minutes

PETITION HEARING - CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE, PROPERTY AND BUSINESS SERVICES

24 June 2015



Meeting held at Committee Room 3 - Civic Centre,
High Street, Uxbridge UB8 1UW

	<p>Committee Members Present: Councillors Jonathan Bianco (Chairman)</p> <p>LBH Officers Present: Nigel Dicker - Deputy Director, Residents Services Perry Scott - Acting Director - Development and Assets Gill Oswell - Democratic Services</p>
1.	<p>TO CONFIRM THAT THE BUSINESS OF THE MEETING WILL TAKE PLACE IN PUBLIC. (<i>Agenda Item 2</i>)</p> <p>All items were to be considered in public</p>
2.	<p>TO CONSIDER THE REPORT OF THE OFFICERS ON THE FOLLOWING PETITIONS RECEIVED. (<i>Agenda Item 3</i>)</p> <p>The petitions were considered, as set out in the agenda</p>
3.	<p>REPLACEMENT WINDOW FRAMES AT RABBS MILL HOUSE (<i>Agenda Item 4</i>)</p> <p>Councillor Tony Burles attended the meeting and spoke as Ward Councillor. Councillors Keith Burrows and Judith Cooper had emailed in support of the petition as they were unable to attend the meeting.</p> <p>Concerns and suggestions from petitioners included the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Petitioner stated that it had taken 18 months for the petition to be heard by the Cabinet Member.• Hoped that residents can now be informed of what was going to be done about the request for the windows to be replaced in Rabbs Mill House.• The cost of heating bills for the flats was high during winter months due to the poor condition of the windows.• Residents had been taping up windows to stop drafts from coming through. <p>The petitioner referred to the lifts, which had been constantly breaking down over the past 3 weeks and a petition that had been submitted in relation to this issue. Although the lift had been repaired yesterday it had broken down again today.</p> <p>The Ward Councillor made the following points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The petition had been submitted before he had been elected but had since being elected had received complaints about the poor condition of the windows.• As the replacement window programme had been pushed back it would be nice for residents to know what was now going to happen.

- The building had served residents well over the years but felt that the fabric of the building was in parts coming to an end.
- As the petitioner had already stated the soaring cost of heating in winter months was an increasing issue for residents.

The Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Business Services advised the petitioners that the Council had not reacted as quickly as it had liked in bringing the petition to a hearing. The Cabinet Member noted that the existing windows were not those original fitted as they had been replaced approximately 20 years ago. The petitioners were informed that another petition on the agenda to be heard was in relation to three tower blocks built around the same time as Rabbs Mill. The Council had installed replacement windows in the tower blocks, which had caused other problems. It was hoped that replacing windows in Rabbs Mill House would not create more problems that they solved.

The Cabinet Member explained that part of the delay in replacing the windows in Rabbs Mill House was due to the Council commissioning a condition survey of all its residential dwellings in the Borough. The survey showed what work needed to be undertaken. Petitioners were informed that Rabbs Mill House was top of the list in respect of needing replacement windows and the Council would now go ahead with the programme.

The Cabinet Member explained the process that officers would need to take in appointing a contractor to carry out the works and asked officer to explain this in more detail.

Officers explained that before starting the tendering process, by law leaseholders would need to be consulted at each step of the process. Once a contractor had been appointed leaseholders would again need to be consulted on cost that would be recharged to them. Officers advised that it was envisaged that this process would take at least 6 months to complete, which would mean windows being replaced in December.

The Cabinet Member felt that December would not be the ideal time to replace windows, but gave an undertaking for works to start in April 2016 or as soon as weather conditions permitted. Officers were asked to keep the lead petitioner and Ward Councillors updated on each stage of the process.

In answer to a question raised in relation to whether the windows could be replaced from inside, officers advised that all options as to how the windows would be replaced would form part of the tendering process.

The Cabinet Member in response to the reference made by the petitioner about the lifts in Rabbs Mill House breaking down on a regular basis, advised that in the short term the Council needed to ensure that the lifts were working. In the long term a permanent solution was necessary and this would be discussed at a future petition hearing meeting. .

RESOLVED: That the Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Business Services:

- 1. met with petitioners to discuss the petitioners' request for the implementation of a programme of works to replace existing windows.**
- 2. instructed officers to start the process for the window replacement at**

Rabbs Mill House and keep the lead petitioner and Ward Councillors updated on the progress at each stage of the process and a start date for the works to commence.

4. REQUEST FOR THE PROVISION OF PUBLIC TOILETS IN THE AREA AROUND UXBRIDGE UNDERGROUND AND BUS GARAGE (Agenda Item 5)

Councillor Ray Graham attended the meeting and spoke as Ward Councillor.

Concerns and suggestions from petitioners included the following:

- The petitioner stated that there needed to be toilet facilities in the vicinity of Uxbridge Station first thing in the morning and last thing at night.
- The petitioner explained that she had initially contacted Poundland and Superdrug with a view to toilet facilities being provided to the rear of these premises, which they referred to their Head Offices.
- Both Superdrug and Poundland had advised that as they were leaseholders of the premises they had no knowledge of who the freeholder was of the land to the rear of their premises.
- The petitioner believed that the freeholder of the area that she had suggested within Uxbridge Bus Station was in fact the Council.
- The petitioner had met with a Ward Councillors and this was when the petition was put together.
- There was an existing toilet facility contained within Uxbridge Underground Station, which had been closed due to vandalism and misuse. With over 50 CCTV cameras in the area this would be an ideal solution.
- There were currently 4 CCTV cameras in the station that could be trained onto the entrance, as this is where a disabled toilet was currently located.
- The petitioner had contacted Transport for London to request the re-opening of the toilets within the underground station, but they had been very unhelpful and were unwilling to re-open the toilets.
- The simple solution would be for the entrance corridor leading to the toilets removed so that the CCTV operators could see what was happening in this area.
- The petitioner felt that the most suitable location for an automated toilet would be at the rear of Superdrug and Poundland.
- Suggested that signage should be erected to in the station to provide information on where public toilets could be found in the town centre.

The Ward Councillor made the following points:

- There was an obvious need for toilets to be provided in the vicinity of Uxbridge station.
- During the shopping centre opening hours there were toilet facilities so was only a problem during early morning and late evening.
- Felt that the ownership of the area suggested by the petitioner for an automated toilet needed to be investigated.
- Suggested that the Council should have an input into the control of the CCTV within the Uxbridge Station area.

The Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Business Services advised that there was a long history of vandalism and misuse of public toilets in many areas and eventually resulted in these facilities being closed.

The Cabinet Member stated that there was obviously a need for toilet facilities outside

of the shopping centre hours and would ask officers to speak to TfL to see whether there was a possibility of re-opening the toilets within Uxbridge underground station. This may not be successful as it was not within the Council's control. It was suggested that the petitioner may wish to consider writing to the local MP to enlist his help in try to push for these toilets to be re-opened.

The Cabinet Member explained that whilst automated toilets had been successful in some areas, the cost of installation and the number of people that used them needed to be taken into consideration, when considering this option.

Officers advised that it was often a challenge to find suitable locations for automated toilets, as businesses often objected to them being located outside their premises. Consultation would need to take place with surrounding businesses but felt that there may be fewer objections to the location being suggested by the petitioner.

In answer to a question raised, officers advised that he thought that it was possible to limit the times that an automated toilet could operate but would need to make enquiries on this.

The Cabinet Member agreed the three recommendations as set out in the report.

RESOLVED: The Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Business Services:

- 1. considered the issues raised by the petitioners in relation to the provision of toilet facilities in the vicinity of Uxbridge Bus and Underground Stations.**
- 2. instructed officers to lobby both TfL and London Underground to see whether they would consider re-opening the public toilets in the underground station.**
- 3. instructed officers to look at the possibility of the provision of an automated toilet in the vicinity of Uxbridge Station and report back to the Cabinet Member and Ward Councillors with their findings.**

5. **AVONDALE DRIVE TOWER BLOCKS - DAMP AND CONDENSATION** (*Agenda Item 6*)

Councillor Lynne Allen attended the meeting and spoke as Ward Councillor.

Concerns and suggestions from petitioners included the following:

- The petitioner felt that the report in a number of areas differed from the facts of the situation at the Avondale Tower Blocks.
- The damp and condensation had impacted on the health of residents living in the blocks.
- The Residents Association had undertaken a number of surveys independently.
- The tower blocks still had the original heating that had been installed when they were first built.
- The heating in the flats were an ecological nightmare, which breaks down on a regular basis.
- Some of the flats had no heating, which officer had been made aware of, although upgrading had been promised over the last 4 years but still not materialised.
- The report made reference to work that had been carried out in a void dwelling but these works had been unsuccessful.

- Complaints had been made about the works and believed that an acceptable compromise now been reached.
- There was no evidence that the void flat where the works had been carried out had suffered from damp/condensation.
- An investigation had been carried out into the problems being caused in the tower blocks but the report stated that there were only moderate problems.
- The petitioner advised that he had photographs that showed that the problems were more than moderate.
- The petitioner provided details of the problems that residents had to contend with over the past 9 years.
- The petitioner questioned the energy efficiency of the replacement windows installed as they had been Grade D the lowest that anyone would accept.
- Felt that whilst the replacement windows were being fitted the insulation could have been put in properly, as the insulation of the flats had been intermittent when they were first built.
- There was no evidence that there was a ventilation shaft fitted in two of the blocks, but if one was to be installed now this would be at an astronomical cost.
- The simple facts of the case was that the residents living in the blocks have had their lives blighted by the damp and condensation problems
- Some residents had tried to remove the mould from their walls with bleach without success.

The Ward Councillor made the following points:

- The Ward Councillor felt the problems had been exacerbated by a lack of action by the Housing Department since 2009.
- Although residents had been assured that the heating system would be signed off, nothing had materialised.
- Officers had often not attended residents meeting when requested to do so and, when they had attended, were unable to provide updates (which was the purpose of inviting them to attend the meeting).
- Felt that residents' health and wellbeing was suffering as a result of their living conditions.
- Although the Ward Councillor had been informed that 3 or 4 properties would be used in a pilot scheme, no information about this pilot had been forthcoming despite requests for updates.

The Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Business Services stated that after 9 years a resolution to the problem was paramount and any solution must be the right one. The petitioners were informed that a competent specialist would need to be sought to carry out a detailed quality survey, which would provide recommendations for an appropriate solution. It was noted that Glenister House had a negative air system but it was unclear if this was present in the other two blocks, an investigations needed to clarify this issue.

The petitioner agreed to assist officers with this investigation by providing plans of the blocks and felt that if primary problems were identified other factors may be found. The Cabinet Member gave assurances that it was the Council's aim to find a solution to the problems being experienced by residents. Officers would be instructed to appoint a company with sufficient experience to carry out a comprehensive survey and

recommend solutions that would work to eradicate the damp and condensation currently being experienced. The lead petitioner and Ward Councillors would be kept updated by officers once a survey report had been received and on the solution that had been put forward.

Officers informed the petitioners that once the outcome of the survey and the suggested solutions had been received officers would write to all residents providing details of a programme of works.

In answer to a question raised in relation to the expected timescales officers advised that it was hoped that a comprehensive report from an appointed contractor would be possible within 2 - 3 months. The petitioner suggested that any survey should be undertaken during the winter months as this was when the problems were more apparent.

The Cabinet Member asked the petitioner if he could provide officers with a list of approximately 20 flats that were felt to be the worst affected by the damp/condensation currently being experienced. The petitioner agreed to provide this information.

In relation to the concerns raised about the heating system in the blocks the Cabinet Member explained that the Council was aware of the concerns and that this would form part of the solution if this was identified in the survey report.

RESOLVED: That the Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Business Services:

- 1. met with petitioners and considered their request for the Council to investigate and rectify issues arising from damp, condensation and Health & Safety issues in Glenister House, Fitzgerald House and Wellings House.**
- 2. instructed officers to appoint a suitable contractor to carry out a comprehensive survey and recommend solutions, which would formulate a schedule of works and how any works would be carried out.**
- 3. instructed officers to provide the petitioner and Ward Councillors with regular updates on the situation and, once the survey had been completed, that officers write to all residents setting out the position and how recommended works would be taken forward.**

The meeting, which commenced at 7.00 pm, closed at 8.35 pm.

These are the minutes of the above meeting. For more information on any of the resolutions please contact Gill Oswell on 01895 250693. Circulation of these minutes is to Councillors, Officers, the Press and Members of the Public.