

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE HOUSING SCRUTINY SUB COMMITTEE

HELD AT 6.30 P.M. ON TUESDAY, 9 APRIL 2019

MP702, 7TH FLOOR, TOWN HALL, MULBERRY PLACE

Members Present:

Councillor Dipa Das (Chair)
Councillor Dan Tomlinson (Vice Chair)
Councillor Gabriela Salva Macallan
Councillor Shah Ameen
Councillor Shad Chowdhury
Councillor Andrew Wood

Co-opted Members Present:

Anne Ambrose Tenant Representative

Other Councillors Present:

Councillor Marc Francis
Councillor Asma Islam

Others Present:

Sandra Fawcett	THHF Chair
William Manning	Tower Hamlets Homes
Simon Moore	Thames Water
John Hernon	Thames Water
Celia Larkin	Thames Water
Hilary Kelly	Tower Hamlets Homes

Officers Present:

Mark Baigent	Interim Divisional Director, Housing and Regeneration
Abidah Kamali	Strategy and Policy Manager (Place)
Rushena Miah	Committee Officer
Matthew Pullen	Infrastructure Planning Manager
Shalim Uddin	Affordable Housing Coordinator

Apologies:

Moshin Hamim Leaseholder Representative

1. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

Councillor Gabriela Salva Macallan declared a personal interest in that she resides in a Clarion Housing Association property and that she works for the charity Groundworks.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

1. The minutes of the meeting held on 26 February 2019 were approved as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

3. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

The Chair decided to change the order of business at the meeting. The reports were discussed in the following order:

- The National Planning Policy Framework and Letwin Review on Build Out Rates
- Responding to Growth and Water Infrastructure Needs and Tackling the Issue of Low Water Pressure
- Social Landlord Performance Quarter 3
- Infrastructure Planning and the Infrastructure Delivery Plan
- Strategic Plan Reporting Quarter 1-3, 2018/19.

The minutes will follow the order published on the agenda.

4. RESPONDING TO GROWTH AND WATER INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS AND TACKLING THE ISSUE OF LOW WATER PRESSURE

The Committee Received the Report of Matthew Pullen (Infrastructure Planning Manager) regarding low water pressure. Simon Moore and colleagues from Thames Water (TW) were present to respond to questions from Members.

In response to Member questions Thames Water representatives provided the following:

- TW representative agreed to provide the Committee with a detailed breakdown of complaints.
- Members informed Thames Water that there was a common issue in the borough in that once water was used in one part of the house, pressure fell elsewhere. TW representatives said that booster boxes were installed for the whole block and were designed to supply the whole property.
- TW had installed boosters to improve areas as a whole, not just for the new builds.
- TW takes measurements throughout the day and at critical points. Where there is a low pressure issue a technician is sent to investigate.

A measurement device is left at the customer's stop value for the next couple of days to continue to record pressures. TW produces an annual pressure profile.

- Members reported that residents had experienced a reduction in water pressure after the introduction of a new build in the area. They asked if TW could install temporary measures in blocks to resolve problems in the short term, whilst longer term infrastructure was being developed.
- TW representatives said that they were operating at an average pressure of 1.8 bar which was above the 1 bar statutory requirement. Members pointed out that Bow and Poplar were getting below the average pressure.
- TW representatives said additional booster pumps had been installed to address concerns raised by Tower Hamlets residents. They were not aware of further projects to install additional boosters in blocks. There was however a longer term plan for reinforcing works from Walthamstow to feed into the borough, over the next year, which would alleviate pressure issues.
- Customers were now paying bills directly to TW rather than via their landlords. There was a query about bill increases when Tower Hamlets Community Housing was acting as a collection agent. TW said they would need to investigate the query outside of the meeting before they could comment.
- With regards to lowering bills, TW offered a range of affordable tariffs and advised people to look into switching their tariff to lower costs.
- TW agreed to provide the Committee with data on the number of call outs in relation to low pressure complaints.
- Councillors were asked to send Simon Moore a list of affected properties or housing association blocks affected by low pressure for investigation. Councillors said Poplar HARCA properties in particular seemed to be significantly affected.

RESOLVED:

1. To note the report.

5. INFRASTRUCTURE PLANNING AND THE INFRASTRUCTURE DELIVERY PLAN

The Committee received a presentation from Matthew Pullen (Infrastructure Planning Manager) on the Infrastructure Delivery Plan.

In response to Member questions officers provided the following:

- The council had a general idea of how much infrastructure was required. The infrastructure delivery plan was at a formative stage and additional projects could be included.
- A new occupancy survey was being conducted that collected data on whether infrastructure was being used as intended. It was for example looking at whether three bed properties were being used by families or single individuals. Registered Providers were being approached to assist with the survey in order to provide benchmarking data.
- The council allocates sites for social infrastructure. It conducts viability impacts and determines the level of affordable housing. Housing and infrastructure assessments are conducted simultaneously in order to anticipate need.
- Consultation exercises included surveys, information posters at Idea Stores, website and videos, drop-in sessions and workshops. The council aims to employ digital solutions in order to improve accessibility. It was a challenge to balance resources against the number of projects.
- Members said it was difficult to locate the Infrastructure Delivery Plan on the Council's website.
- There has been a slight delay on the Annual Infrastructure Plan due to a planning inspectorate examination. The annual update and examination results are due to be published later in the year.
- The council works closely with the London Legacy Development Corporation that has the overall authority for planning and delivery, including the allocation of S106 money.

ACTION: For Matthew Pullen to re-upload the Infrastructure Delivery Plan on a more prominent page of the council's website.

RESOLVED:

1. To note the presentation.

6. NPPF UPDATE AND LETWIN REVIEW ON BUILD-OUT RATES

The Committee received a presentation from Matthew Pullen (Infrastructure Development Manager) on the National Planning Policy Framework.

In response to Member questions officers provided the following:

- Housing projections were informed by a combination of the London Plan and Local Plan. Tower Hamlets was maintaining targets above the national average in relation to affordable housing delivery. A slow-down was not expected.
- The Letwin review was not targeted to London. It discussed issues around shortages in labour and building skills, which seemed to apply

to areas like Kent, Essex and Surrey, where building projects were not being completed in time. In contrast Tower Hamlets had been a top deliverer for the last 8-9 years.

The Chair thanked officers for their report.

RESOLVED:

1. To note the presentation.

7. SOCIAL HOUSING LANDLORD PERFORMANCE REPORT - Q3 2018/19

The Committee received a report on Q3 2018/19 performance indicators, introduced by Shallim Uddin (Affordable Housing Co-ordinator). Catherine Kyne and Lisa Buckingham from Clarion were present to respond to Member questions.

Representatives from Clarion acknowledged that complaints were not being responded to in time but said that they were working on improving the quality of responses as a priority and then would look to improve the speed of the response. Reasons for delay included:

- A two-step review process by management on responses which sometimes resulted in redrafts and subsequent delays.
- The underlying service – the organisation was transitioning from one repair service to a new contractor so they were also dealing with routine day to day complaints as well as new contractor teething issues. This inflated demands on officer time. It was predicted that once the contractor performance issues improved, enquiry response times would improve.

Clarion have a bulk pick up service and an officer dedicated to resolving refuse issues. If there was a boundary issues they would communicate with the council to get the rubbish cleared.

Clarion was planning to introduce a gold silver bronze performance standard on blocks. Bronze blocks would generate an investigation and action plan.

It was noted that Circle Housing had been poorly performing and had since been TUPE transferred to Clarion, where its performance improved to a satisfactory level. Members said it was important residents got better than satisfactory going forward.

Members appreciated Clarion's candour in acknowledging that there was room for improvement. They said they hoped Clarion would use complaints as a learning opportunity and requested a written update in six months' time.

The Committee requested that performance data be presented in a consistent format. They preferred to view 6 monthly reporting and the quarter 4 year end reporting should provide year on year comparisons.

ACTIONS:

- Sandra Fawcett to speak to the THHF benchmarking sub-group Chair about driving up performance where levels were at 50% or less.
- Sandra Fawcett to advise Shallim Uddin and Mark Baigent on preferred reporting format outside of the meeting.

RESOLVED:

1. To note the report.

8. STRATEGIC PLAN REPORTING Q1-Q3 2018/19 - EXTRACT FROM THE CABINET REPORT: ACTIVITIES AND MEASURES RELATING TO HOUSING

The Committee received the report of Mark Baigent, Interim Divisional Director of Housing and Regeneration, on the Strategic Plan Q3 2018/19.

The Committee noted that the Regeneration Team would be recruiting new officers to implement the plan and that information on action plans and timelines would be advisable by the new officers.

Members requested breakdown of affordable and socially rented units.

ACTION:

Mark Baigent to provide the Committee with a breakdown of affordable and social rent units.

RESOLVED:

1. To note the report.

9. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

The press and public were excluded from the proceedings, in accordance with Section 100 (A) of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended, on the grounds that further consideration of the item and options would involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A to the Act. - Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding the information) and would not be in the public interest.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS - RESTRICTED PART 2 ITEM

The Committee moved into a closed session to discuss the options appraisal conducted on Tower Hamlets Homes.

The meeting ended at 8.44 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Dipa Das
Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee