

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE HOUSING SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

HELD AT 6.34 P.M. ON MONDAY, 24 APRIL 2017

**MP702, 7TH FLOOR, TOWN HALL, MULBERRY PLACE, 5 CLOVE CRESCENT,
LONDON E14 2BG.**

Members Present:

Councillor Amina Ali (Chair)
Councillor Abdul Mukit MBE
Councillor Gulam Robbani
Councillor Andrew Wood
Councillor John Pierce

Co-opted Members Present:

Moshin Hamim	Leaseholder Representative
Anne Ambrose	Tenant Representative

Other Councillors Present:

Councillor Sirajul Islam	Statutory Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Housing Management & Performance
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Others Present:

Sandra Fawcett	Chair of Tower Hamlets Housing Forum
Neil Isaac	Tower Hamlets Homes
Richard Hards	Tower Hamlets Homes

Officers Present:

Ahmed Choudhury	Senior Strategy Policy and Performance Officer
John Coker	Strategic Housing Manager, Place
Muhibul Hoque	Strategy, Policy and Performance Officer
Rafiqul Hoque	Lettings Services Manager, Housing Options Service, Development & Renewal
Marc Lancaster	Private Sector Housing Policy Officer
Martin Ling	Housing Strategy Manager
Farhana Zia	Democratic Services

1. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

The Chair, Councillor Amina Ali welcomed everybody to the Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee meeting. She stated the meeting would hear presentations from Tower Hamlets Homes regarding 'How the Council meets the needs of

Leaseholders', followed by a presentation on the Private Tenant's Charter. The sub-committee would also be asked to comment upon the 'Under-Occupation Review' and the recommendations made by therein.

She requested everyone to introduce themselves and commenced the meeting.

There were apologies for absence from Cllr Rabina Khan, and Cllr Rachel Blake – Cabinet Member for Strategic Development.

Cllr John Pierce declared he was a Board Member of Tower Hamlets Homes.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING(S)

The Chair referred members of the Sub-Committee to the minutes of the previous meeting held on the 6th February 2017. She asked members to approve these as an accurate record of the meeting.

The Members agreed the minutes to be an accurate record of the meeting.

3. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

3.1 Tower Hamlets Leaseholders Report - to follow

Richard Hards and Neil Isaac, from Tower Hamlets Homes made a presentation to the Sub-Committee relating to how the Council meets the needs of Leaseholders and what steps it has taken to ensure that leaseholder's receive excellent customer service at competitive prices.

Main points from the presentation:

- The 'lease' provides the basis of the contract between the Landlord (Council) and the leaseholder.
- The lease sets out what the Landlord can do and likewise what the leaseholder can do and expect from the landlord.
- Tower Hamlets Homes have developed an improvement plan which seeks to ensure the leaseholders needs and satisfaction are met.
- The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) is ring fenced and the Council needs to ensure it gets value for money across the entire HRA.
- Slide 5 shows the day to day cost and the average service charge, charged to leaseholders and how Tower Hamlets compares with other London boroughs.
- The satisfaction ratings shown on slide 6 shows that leaseholders in Tower Hamlets are satisfied with the services they receive.
- Tower Hamlets Homes has developed an improvement plan and have involved leaseholders in this. They are seeking to publish a 5 year advanced programme of works, which will better inform leaseholders, right to buy applicants as well as open market purchasers.

Members of Sub-Committee made the following comments:

- Great to see there is a five year schedule of planned works however lessons need to be learnt from the previous major works programme of 2013, when residents complained about the delays in the completion of work.
- There is a need to educate people about being a leaseholder, what this entails and what to expect.
- Comparatives should be provided with other Housing Associations within the Borough and not other local authorities in London.
- Do leaseholders qualify for a reduction in service charges if they apply to extend their lease?
- Is there a distinction between an actual leaseholder and a leaseholder who is a Landlord?
- Has any research been conducted with regards to absentee landlords? There has been a boom in Airbnb lettings and a rise in anti-social behaviour associated with this.
- Do Estates have designated Housing Officers? They would know who resides at a flat, if it's in multi-occupation or sub-let?

Action: Tower Hamlets Homes to provide further data on how it compares with other Housing Associations within the Borough as well as how it compares with similar comparative local authorities, via data from the 'Housemark' benchmarking insight company.

3.2 Tower Hamlets Private Tenants' Charter

Martin Ling, Housing Strategy Manager and Marc Lancaster, Private Sector Housing Policy Officer presented to the sub-committee with their proposal of a Private Renters Charter.

Main points from the presentation:

- Many renters in the Private Rented Sector (PRS) received a poor service from their landlords and have a poor understanding of their legal rights.
- There has been a change in tenure since the 1990s with an increase in 'right to buy'.
- About 6,000 ex-council properties are let out, often in poor condition, as homes in multiple-occupation.
- Many vulnerable people live in private rented accommodation.

- The Charter intends to signpost Renters to the right agencies and will create a culture where Landlords and Tenants clearly know what the minimum standards are thus raising standards in this sector.
- The Charter does not intend to be a 'quality' marker, but a set of statements backed up by an alliance of stakeholders such as the Citizens Advice Bureau, Tonybee Hall, Bromley by Bow Advice centres.

Members asked the following questions and made comments on the proposed Charter:

- Do you think it is possible to change the behaviour of Landlords? Will the charter raise standards?
- Crucial the publicity campaign informs and targets private renters. A public relations company may be better placed to run the campaign rather than an in-house campaign.
- Consideration should be given to building up a rapport with companies who intend to sell properties to private investors, so they are aware of the Charter and the minimum standards expected of them.
- What penalties can the Local Authority impose, when Landlords are not compliant?
- Tower Hamlets can learn lessons from Newham, who have been very successful in raising standards in the Private rented sector.
- How do Councillors obtain a copy of the 'Anti-Social Behaviour' plans that Landlords have in place, as part of their licensing agreements. Are they in the public domain?
- What is being done to tackle Managing Agents who guarantee rent to their clients, however these Landlords are oblivious to their properties being in disrepair or in multi-occupation?
- The Charter proposes to signpost people to agencies, but what happens when a tenant cannot get legal aid and does not have the means to challenge their Landlord?

The Chair thanked the Officer for their presentation and hoped the comments made by Members of the Sub-Committee would be incorporated into the development of the Charter. The members noted the timeline to progress this through the governance processes and the intended launch date.

3.3 Under Occupation Review

The Chair referred members of the Sub-Committee to pages 33 and 34 of the agenda pack and asked if Members wanted to add or comment upon the recommendations listed as part of the Under Occupation Review.

Members asked the following questions:

- Some of the good practice Housing Associations are undertaking ought to be shared with others, so they too can improve their practices.

Members were assured the recommendations will be accompanied with a detailed action plan and good practice identified as part of the review would be shared with all Housing Associations.

The Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee

1. Agreed the report and the recommendations; and
2. Authorised the Interim Head of Policy, Performance and Partnership to amend the draft report before submission to Cabinet, the after consultation with the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

4. ANY OTHER BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS TO BE URGENT

There was no other business discussed.

The meeting ended at 8.00 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Amina Ali
Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee