

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE HOUSING & REGENERATION SCRUTINY SUB COMMITTEE

HELD AT 6.30 P.M. ON THURSDAY, 16 FEBRUARY 2023

COUNCIL CHAMBER - TOWN HALL, WHITECHAPEL

Members Present:

Councillor Abdul Mannan – (Chair)
Councillor Musthak Ahmed
Councillor Ahmodul Kabir
Councillor Nathalie Bienfait
Councillor Marc Francis
Councillor Asma Islam

Co-opted Members Present:

Mahbub Anam – (Tenant representative)
Susanna Kow – (Leaseholder representative)

Other Councillors Present:

Councillor Kabir Ahmed – (Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Inclusive
Development and Housebuilding)

Apologies:

Councillor Faroque Ahmed

Officers Present:

Mayor Lutfur Rahman – (Executive Mayor)
Andrea Baker – Chair of Tower Hamlets Housing Forum
(THHF)

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of pecuniary interests.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING(S)

The minutes of the sub committee meeting held on 12 January 2023 were approved and signed as a correct record of proceedings.

- Parking on Housing Estates: 'Confirmed Clarion use the National Parking Enforcement (NPE) to manage parking on estates and operate the online telephone service and CCTV'.

Cllr Marc Francis updated the sub committee regarding the Clarion parking system, and noted many elderly residents expressed concern that they are unable to utilise the system as access is via an online portal. The sub committee were requested to revisit this issue and the Chair seconded.

3. OPEN ACTIONS

The Mayors Future Meetings with Housing Associations: 20 October 2022 & 12 January 2023. – The Chair to request an invitation to any future meetings with the Mayor and Housing Associations and to provide an update to the sub committee. The Chair noted that the planned meeting was postponed and rescheduled for March 2023. An update will be brought to the next Sub Committee meeting on 27 April 2023.

3b Letters to the Mayor and Clarion Housing Association: 20 October 2022.- Councillor Nathalie Bienfait queried if the Mayor sent a letter to the Chair of Spitalfields Housing Association to investigate concerns. A Meeting with the Mayor and the CEO of Spitalfields HA has been rescheduled for March 2023 and an update will be brought back to the sub committee for the next meeting scheduled 27 April 2023.

5.4 Approach and Support to Homeless Applications: 12 January 2023. – Councillor Francis to forward queries sent to officers regarding the approach and support to homeless applications to the sub committee.

Councillor Francis subsequently requested Karen Swift forward answers to the initial request made on 20 October to submit the council's KPI for customer satisfaction, response times and performance. This included a breakdown on how personal housing plans are measured by quality of service, as well as queries on the discharge of duty for homeless applicants to the private sector and the suitability of temporary accommodations. Further details on this can be found in item 4.3 of this meeting.

4.1 Social Landlords Performance Report: 12 January 2023. - RP's TSM measures be brought to the sub committee once finalised as a briefing paper.

4.1b.Details on the additional costs incurred to residents who were provided with temporary fan heaters to be submitted for Bow East and West wards. An update on compensation for residents who incurred additional heating and water costs to the sub committee for 27 April meeting and queried why this was not a retrospective payment.

4.1c. A comprehensive report on the THH major works programme to be brought back to the sub committee for 27 April 2023 meeting.

4.1d. Further discussions with THH and sub committee members on poor response times and contractor issues to take place outside of this meeting

RESOLVED that

1. An update on the meeting between the Mayor and the CEO of Spitalfields Housing Association to be brought to the next Sub Committee meeting on 27 April 2023.
2. An update on compensation for residents who incurred additional heating and water costs to be brought to the sub committee for 27 April meeting.
3. An update on the comprehensive report on the THH major works programme to be brought to the sub committee meeting on 27 April 2023.

4. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

4.1 Residents from Polydamas Close - Swan Housing Association

Representatives from Polydamas Close did not appear at the sub committee, instead David Pace, Director of Property Services and Jackie King, Director of Neighbourhoods, Swan Housing Association, provided an update on matters after cutting off the gas supply for safety reasons.

Further to questions by the sub committee, David Pace and Jackie King;

- Conceded that there were a series of events prior to the incident, and engagement with the contractor could have been swifter to rectify issues. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) are currently investigating.
- A digital platform has been established to gather customer satisfaction responses, and a 360 'Ask Questions' document has been compiled for residents listing temporary accommodation in the area, following the shortages experienced at the time of the incident. ICAB are Swan's preferred specialist for emergency accommodation, however, the incident coincided with the marathon and caused booking complications.
- Noted that all damp and mould is reported to the main repairs team for removal, and reoccurring reports are monitored regularly on an operational and executive level. There are presently 44 cases in the housing stock.
- Clarified that all residents have been paid compensation for additional costs incurred for heating and electricity. Good will gestures of £100 were paid to residents for missed appointments and electric efficient Mira showers installed have not been removed unless requested.

- Clarified that the 360 feedback report findings, further resident responses and Tower Hamlet Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) will be brought back to the sub committee once completed in April 2023.

Following comments from David Pace and Jackie King, the sub committee:

- Thanked Swan Housing Association for their feedback, acknowledging issues which resulted in the displacement of residents, and the swift compensation payments made.
- Suggested that feedback from staff members would be beneficial in establishing how events could have been better managed.

RESOLVED that

1. The 360 Feedback Report, resident's responses and KPI's to be brought back to the sub committee once completed in April 2023.
2. The presentation be noted.

4.2 Future of Housing Management Services - Consultation Outcome

Councillor Kabir Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Inclusive Development and Housebuilding, Karen Swift, Director of Housing and Regeneration and Nicola Klinger, Programme Lead – Housing Management Review, updated the sub committee on outcomes from the consultation with Tower Hamlets Homes (THH) including resident engagement, governance arrangements and planned improvements.

Further to questions by the sub committee, Councillor Kabir Ahmed and Karen Swift;

- Explained that following the survey, around 1,444 residents supported the proposal and requested further engagement in the process to improve services.
- Confirmed that a smooth timeline of transition is preferred during this year, although the contract officially ends in April 2024. This will allow for detailed staff discussions to take place and ensure service levels stay consistent. THH will be moving over to Tower Hamlet's new Whitechapel site by March 2023.
- Noted that the majority of concerns related to call handling and repairs. The project team will implement suitable provisions to improve customer services and monitor contractors regarding repair failures. A detailed report on the structure of housing management services will be brought back to the sub committee for review once completed.

- Further investment will be made to services and organisational streamlining will be achieved to eliminate duplications and make savings. This will ensure smoother service provision, clarity for residents and increased tenant satisfaction.
- Noted that ensuring THH are fully prepared with the Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM), which forms part of the government's Social Housing Regulation Bill is a top priority, as accountability for housing failures will lie directly with Tower Hamlets if and when THH come back in-house.
- Explained that conversations are ongoing regarding future housing stock for the borough, and further details will be brought back to the sub committee once completed.

Following comments from Councillor Kabir Ahmed and Karen Swift, the sub committee;

- Thanked the project team for a thorough and responsive consultation and capturing all residents views, as well as including governance arrangements.
- Requested that the project team continue to deal with call handling concerns raised by residents and that ongoing engagement is maintained. This also applies to caretakers and shared services, such as community gardens and waste management.
- The Chair will request Cabinet members give consideration to increase the number of sub committee meetings, to allow more in-depth analysis of housing matters to take place.
- Suggested that more emphasis should be placed on supporting the Tenants and Leaseholders forum and Tenants and Residents Associations (TRA) for residents to raise concerns.

RESOLVED that

1. A detailed report on the structure of housing management services will be brought back to the sub committee for review once completed.
2. The Chair will request Cabinet members give consideration to increase the number of Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Sub Committee meetings, to allow more in-depth analysis of housing matters to take place.
3. The report be noted.

4.3 Homeless Applications - How can the service be improved?

Karen Swift, Director of Housing and Regeneration, Rafiqul Hoque, Head of Housing Options, and Riad Akbur, Service Manager, Homelessness, introduced the presentation which requested sub-committee members examine the key performance indicators on homelessness and the action taken for improvement.

Further to questions by the sub committee, Karen Swift, Rafiqul Hoque and Riad Akbur;

- Clarified that all attempts are made to keep residents in Tower Hamlets, however, due to a scarcity in housing stock only 50% of homeless residents are placed in temporary accommodation within the borough. The remainder are placed in neighbouring areas where possible. All applications are dealt with on an individual basis and priority is placed on educational, medical or support needs.
- Explained that it is difficult to estimate how long families remain outside the borough, as each circumstance differs.
- Noted that consideration is being given to investing in modular homes and temporary accommodation, to ease the housing shortage and allow residents to remain in the borough.
- Explained that Local authorities have a 56-day relief duty for homeless residents. The council has adopted the discharge of duty to the private rented sector (PRS) to alleviate homelessness for around 2,000 families. As affordable housing stock is scarce, this can be the best option.
- Clarified that service delivery has changed post pandemic with over 50 applications a week undertaken via the automated call service. There are plans to increase the number of Resident Hubs in Isle of Dogs, Lansbury, Bethnal Green, Bow and Chrisp Street for face-to-face interaction with residents and staff.

Following comments from Karen Swift, Rafiqul Hoque and Riad Akbur, the sub committee;

- Thanked them for the in-depth report, the hard work being done to clear the backlog of cases and welcomed the details on customer satisfaction in regard to how cases are handled.
- Requested a written update on the discharge of duty to PRS, and consideration be given to a temporary suspension, as many families have been offered PRS accommodation outside the borough which is unaffordable.

RESOLVED that

1. A written update on the councils discharge of homelessness duty to PRS be brought to the sub committee for review at the next meeting in April 2023.
2. The presentation be noted.

4.4 Developing a new Local Plan

Jennifer Peters, Director of Planning and Building Control, and Matthew Wong, Plan Making Manager, introduced the presentation which reviewed planning and building development proposals and how this can be used to deliver priorities for Tower Hamlets.

Further to questions by the sub committee, Jennifer Peters and Matthew Wong;

- Clarified that early engagement will be taking place to understand residents and stakeholders requirements and views, which will be used to develop the Local Plan and create the right policies for the borough.
- Explained that regular engagement with the Greater London Assembly (GLA) is ongoing to ensure all policies are in conformity with the London Plan. The GLA will respond to the formal stages of consultation known and the regulation 18 and 19 consultations).
- Clarified that all neighbourhood planning forums have been included and the creation of an interactive 'story map' aims to convey the Local Plan more easily. There are also drop-in sessions for residents to contribute their ideas and engage in the process.
- Confirmed that Whitechapel North has been added to the Local Plan and consideration will be given on how new homes, open spaces and infrastructure can be provided in the area. Details will be added to the Local Plan draft during the second stage after the consultation period.
- Noted that a 'Development Co-ordination Group' has been set up in the Isle Of Dogs to manage borough construction and inform residents of road closures.

Following comments from Jennifer Peters and Matthew Wong, the sub committee;

- Suggested Officers fully consider residents needs and the environmental impacts in their approach to the Local Plan.
- Requested Officers come back to the sub committee with regular updates.

RESOLVED that

1. The presentation be noted.

5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business discussed.

The meeting ended at 8.59 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Abdul Mannan

Housing & Regeneration Scrutiny Sub Committee