

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

HELD AT 6.00 P.M. ON MONDAY, 9 JANUARY 2023

**COUNCIL CHAMBER, MULBERRY PLACE, 5 CLOVE CRESCENT, LONDON,
E14 2BG**

Members Present in Person:

Councillor Musthak Ahmed	(Chair)
Councillor Maisha Begum	
Councillor Bodrul Choudhury	Scrutiny Lead for Children's and Education
Councillor Marc Francis	
Councillor Asma Islam	
Councillor Ahmodur Khan	Scrutiny Lead for Health and Adults
Councillor Sabina Khan	Scrutiny Lead for Resources and Finance
Councillor Abdul Malik	Scrutiny Lead for Community Safety

Other Councillors Present in Person:

Councillor Sirajul Islam

Other Councillors In Attendance Virtually:

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

Co-optees Present in Person:

Jahid Ahmed
Halima Islam

Officers Present in Person:

Afazul Hoque	(Head of Corporate Strategy & Policy)
Jane Abraham	(Head of Capital Delivery)
Rupert Brandon	Interim Head of Housing Supply
Joel West	(Democratic Services Team Leader (Committee))

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

2. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTEREST AND OTHER INTERESTS

Councillor Sirajul Islam, attending on behalf of call-in members, declared a non-pecuniary interest as he was a Council tenant.

3. UNRESTRICTED REPORTS 'CALLED IN'

3.1 Call in of Housing Revenue Account (HRA) 2022 - 25 Capital Programme: Latest position

CALL-IN MEMBERS' PRESENTATION

Councillor Sirajul Islam members presented the reasons for call-in on behalf of the Call-in members and proposed alternative course of action as set out in the report. Councillor Islam added that:

- Call in councillors acknowledge the Ashington House scheme's slow progression, but are not persuaded that it should be dropped from the capital program.
- Council homes are desperately needed to address the shortage and combat overcrowding. Removal of the Ashington House scheme will remove vital new homes from the development pipeline.
- Call in councillors understand the value of investing in improving Watney Market car park, but believe the funding should not come from the HRA Capital program. This account should be restricted for improving homes and repairs.

Following questions from Committee members, the Councillor Islam provided opinion on:

- His opinion of the need for substantial investment in Ashington House.
- Details of actions and plans from when he was the lead member for housing. There had been strong political commitment to redevelopment. He advised that at no point was he minded not to have the development move forward. Consultation with residents was well attended, positive and the TRA was supportive. Refurbishment of Ashington House was considered but redevelopment was concluded to be the better option.

LEAD MEMBER'S PRESENTATION

The Lead Member, Councillor Kabir Ahmed, set out the context of the Cabinet Decision and reviewed the key elements of the decision, reflecting that:

- The call in submission contained an inaccuracy, as it referred to build of 79 new homes at Ashington, but scheme can deliver only 64 new homes.
- Redevelopment of Ashington House was at design stage, a long way off in terms of planning.
- Potential for refurbishment as well as building a new program for Ashington is being explored.
- Removal releases funds to deliver alternative programs which are further developed and will deliver 88 new council homes – a better deal for the money spent.
- Fire safety issues at Watney Market car park had been known to the council for several years and work needed to be done urgently.

- Leaseholders would not have to pay for the works as a section 20 notice has not been issued and a contractor had already been appointed.
- Once design feasibilities had been discussed with the Mayor, consultation with stakeholders, board members, and local residents will take place regarding Albert Jacob House.

Following questions from Committee members, Councillor Ahmed provided more details on:

- How the proposals would address the borough's housing shortage.
- His opinion of the how long will it take for Ashington House to be in a position where redevelopment could be pursued. He explained this was difficult due to the current economic situation, including rising inflation rates and prices.
- How soon essential safety works at Watney Market would be completed. He explained scoping and summarised work underway, but could not give an estimate for how soon it would be done.
- How the administration was working with planners and developers to deliver more family-sized homes.

Officers advised that the design panel had reduced the proposed number of units for Ashington House from 79 to 64. This led to the conclusion that it was best to look at refurbishment instead of a new build. The consultation for Ashington House was well-attended; exact number of attendees could be provided.

CONSIDERATION OF THE CALL IN

After hearing from the Call-in Members and the Mayor, the Committee considered the following issues and concerns:

- Ashington House properties are in need of desperate repairs, especially around mould and damp. Could residents continue to live in such poor conditions? Would interim proposals be put in place?
- Albert Jacob house should not be converted into temporary accommodation using HRA money. Risk of whether HRA funds would be eligible to pay for temporary accommodation as it is not a service for tenants/leaseholders.
- Proposal would stop the building of new affordable homes which are badly needed.
- Proposal would result in more homes than with Ashington House scheme, so represents a better deal for the borough.
- Watney Market car park is an ASB hotspot and a fire risk. Proposal to redevelop would address this.

DECISION

The Committee **RESOLVED** that no further action would be taken on the call in.

The meeting ended at 7.00 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Musthak Ahmed
Overview & Scrutiny Committee