

Housing & Regeneration Scrutiny Sub Committee

Agenda

Thursday, 29 February 2024 6.30 p.m.
Council Chamber - Town Hall, Whitechapel

Members:

Chair: Councillor Abdul Mannan

Vice Chair: Councillor Shafi Ahmed

Councillor Musthak Ahmed, Councillor Saif Uddin Khaled, Councillor Marc Francis,
Councillor Asma Islam and Councillor James King

Co-opted Members:

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

Deputies: Councillor Mohammad Chowdhury, Councillor Amina Ali, Councillor Bellal
Uddin, Councillor Kamrul Hussain and Councillor Bodrul Choudhury

[The quorum for this body is 3 voting Members]

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<http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk>



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A Guide to Overview and Scrutiny

The Local Government Act 2000 established the overview and scrutiny function for every council, with the key roles of:

- Scrutinising decisions before or after they are made or implemented
- Proposing new policies and commenting on draft policies, and
- Ensuring customer satisfaction and value for money.

The aim is to make the decision-making process more transparent, accountable and inclusive, and improve services for people by being responsive to their needs.

In Tower Hamlets, the function is exercised by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee (OSC). The OSC considers issues from across the council and partnership remit. The Committee has 3 Sub-Committees which focus on health, housing and grants.

Housing & Regeneration Scrutiny Sub Committee

The Housing & Regeneration Scrutiny Sub Committee will undertake overview and scrutiny, pertaining to housing matters. This will include:

- (a) Reviewing and/or scrutinise decisions made or actions taken in connection with the discharge of the Council's housing functions;
- (b) Advising the Mayor, DCLG Commissioners or Cabinet of key issues/questions arising in relation to housing reports due to be considered by the Mayor, DCLG Commissioners or Cabinet;
- (c) Making reports and/or recommendations to the full Council and/or the Mayor, DCLG Commissioners or Cabinet in connection with the discharge of housing functions;
- (d) Delivering (c) by organising an annual work programme, drawing on the knowledge and priorities of the council, registered providers and other stakeholders, that will identify relevant topics or issues that can be properly scrutinised;
- (e) Holding service providers to account, where recent performance fails to meet the recognised standard, by looking at relevant evidence and make recommendations for service improvements;
- (f) Considering housing matters affecting the area or its inhabitants, including where these matters have been brought to the attention of the sub-committee by tenant and resident associations, or members of the general public.
- (g) The Sub-Committee will report annually to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on its work.

Public Engagement

Meetings of the sub committee are open to the public to attend, and a timetable for meeting dates and deadlines can be found on the council's website.



London Borough of Tower Hamlets

Housing & Regeneration Scrutiny Sub Committee

Thursday, 29 February 2024

6.30 p.m.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS (PAGES 7 - 8)

Members are reminded to consider the categories of interest in the Code of Conduct for Members to determine whether they have an interest in any agenda item and any action they should take. For further details, please see the attached note from the Monitoring Officer.

Members are reminded to declare the nature of the interest and the agenda item it relates to. Please note that ultimately it's the Members' responsibility to declare any interests and to update their register of interest form as required by the Code.

If in doubt as to the nature of your interest, you are advised to seek advice prior to the meeting by contacting the Monitoring Officer or Democratic Services

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING(S) (PAGES 9 - 14)

To confirm as a correct record of the proceedings the unrestricted minutes of the meeting held on 14 December 2023.

3. OUTSTANDING ACTIONS

4. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

4.1 Housing and Climate Emergency (Pages 17 - 32)

4.2 Swan Housing Presentation

TO FOLLOW

4.3 Social Housing Regulation Act 2023

5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Next Meeting of the Housing & Regeneration Scrutiny Sub Committee

Wednesday, 1 May 2024 at 6.30 p.m. to be held in Council Chamber - Town Hall, Whitechapel

Tower Hamlets Council
Tower Hamlets Town Hall
160 Whitechapel Road
London E1 1BJ

Agenda Item 1

DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS AT MEETINGS– NOTE FROM THE MONITORING OFFICER

This note is for guidance only. For further details please consult the Code of Conduct for Members at Part C, Section 31 of the Council's Constitution

(i) Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPI)

You have a DPI in any item of business on the agenda where it relates to the categories listed in **Appendix A** to this guidance. Please note that a DPI includes: (i) Your own relevant interests; (ii) Those of your spouse or civil partner; (iii) A person with whom the Member is living as husband/wife/civil partners. Other individuals, e.g. Children, siblings and flatmates do not need to be considered. Failure to disclose or register a DPI (within 28 days) is a criminal offence.

Members with a DPI, (unless granted a dispensation) must not seek to improperly influence the decision, must declare the nature of the interest and leave the meeting room (including the public gallery) during the consideration and decision on the item – unless exercising their right to address the Committee.

DPI Dispensations and Sensitive Interests. In certain circumstances, Members may make a request to the Monitoring Officer for a dispensation or for an interest to be treated as sensitive.

(ii) Non - DPI Interests that the Council has decided should be registered – (Non - DPIs)

You will have 'Non DPI Interest' in any item on the agenda, where it relates to (i) the offer of gifts or hospitality, (with an estimated value of at least £25) (ii) Council Appointments or nominations to bodies (iii) Membership of any body exercising a function of a public nature, a charitable purpose or aimed at influencing public opinion.

Members must declare the nature of the interest, but may stay in the meeting room and participate in the consideration of the matter and vote on it **unless:**

- A reasonable person would think that your interest is so significant that it would be likely to impair your judgement of the public interest. **If so, you must withdraw and take no part in the consideration or discussion of the matter.**

(iii) Declarations of Interests not included in the Register of Members' Interest.

Occasions may arise where a matter under consideration would, or would be likely to, **affect the wellbeing of you, your family, or close associate(s) more than it would anyone else living in the local area** but which is not required to be included in the Register of Members' Interests. In such matters, Members must consider the information set out in paragraph (ii) above regarding Non DPI - interests and apply the test, set out in this paragraph.

Guidance on Predetermination and Bias

Member's attention is drawn to the guidance on predetermination and bias, particularly the need to consider the merits of the case with an open mind, as set out in the Planning and Licensing Codes of Conduct, (Part C, Section 34 and 35 of the Constitution). For further advice on the possibility of bias or predetermination, you are advised to seek advice prior to the meeting.

Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act, 1992 - Declarations which restrict Members in Council Tax arrears, for at least a two months from voting

In such circumstances the member may not vote on any reports and motions with respect to the matter.

Further Advice contact: Janet Fasan, Acting Monitoring Officer, Tel: 0207 364 4800.

APPENDIX A: Definition of a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest

(Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012, Reg 2 and Schedule)

| Subject | Prescribed description |
|---|--|
| Employment, office, trade, profession or vacation | Any employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for profit or gain. |
| Sponsorship | Any payment or provision of any other financial benefit (other than from the relevant authority) made or provided within the relevant period in respect of any expenses incurred by the Member in carrying out duties as a member, or towards the election expenses of the Member. This includes any payment or financial benefit from a trade union within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992. |
| Contracts | Any contract which is made between the relevant person (or a body in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest) and the relevant authority— (a) under which goods or services are to be provided or works are to be executed; and (b) which has not been fully discharged. |
| Land | Any beneficial interest in land which is within the area of the relevant authority. |
| Licences | Any licence (alone or jointly with others) to occupy land in the area of the relevant authority for a month or longer. |
| Corporate tenancies | Any tenancy where (to the Member's knowledge)— (a) the landlord is the relevant authority; and (b) the tenant is a body in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest. |
| Securities | Any beneficial interest in securities of a body where— (a) that body (to the Member's knowledge) has a place of business or land in the area of the relevant authority; and (b) either— (i) the total nominal value of the securities exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body; or (ii) if the share capital of that body is of more than one class, the total nominal value of the shares of any one class in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest exceeds one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that class. |

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE HOUSING & REGENERATION SCRUTINY SUB COMMITTEE

HELD AT 6.40 P.M. ON THURSDAY, 14 DECEMBER 2023

COUNCIL CHAMBER - TOWN HALL, WHITECHAPEL

Members Present:

Councillor Abdul Mannan -(Chair)

Councillor Shafi Ahmed

Councillor Saif Uddin Khaled

Councillor Marc Francis

Councillor Asma Islam

Councillor James King

Co-opted Members Present:

Mahbub Anam - (Tenant representative)

Other Councillors Present:

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

Officers Present:

Karen Swift – (Divisional Director, Housing and
Regeneration)

Mubin Choudhury – (Performance Improvement Analyst)

Justina Bridgeman – (Democratic Services Officer (Committee))

Invited Guests:

Andrea Baker - (Chair of Tower Hamlets Housing Forum
(THHF))

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of pecuniary interests, however, Councillor James King declared he is a Tower Hamlets Homes Leaseholder and Councillor Abdul Mannan declared he is a Poplar Harca leaseholder.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING(S)

The minutes of the Sub Committee meeting held on 19 October 2023 were approved and signed as a correct record of proceedings.

3. OUTSTANDING ACTIONS

Paul Burgess, Strategy and Policy Officer, updated sub-committee members on the following;

- Swan Housing Presentation: 360 Report – 16 February 2023 meeting. Swan Housing to submit their 360 Feedback Report. This report will now be submitted for the 29th February meeting.
- THH Major Works Programme – 27 April 2023 meeting. A comprehensive report on THH Major Works Programme (with details on response times and general performance) This report will now be submitted for the 1st May meeting.

Members raised concerns around an automated email which requested 2,200 residents change their login details within a limited timeframe. This was deemed unreasonable as repairs or rent concerns could not be raised by residents who missed the deadline. Consideration for residents to change login details should be given. Details will be forwarded to Karen Swift and the Chair outside of this meeting.

- Estates ASB Report — 27 April 2023 meeting. Details still pending.
- Social Landlords Report – 27 April 2023 meeting. See item 4.1 for details on individual registered providers.
- Request to increase Housing and Regenerations Scrutiny Sub-Committee meetings from 5 to 9. –11 September meeting. The Monitoring Officer circulated a briefing note to members which confirmed that due to resource issues the number of meetings could not be increased. However, Stephen Halsey, Chief Executive Officer, informed members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at the last meeting that this would be reviewed. Details are pending.
- Fire Safety Database Update – 19 October meeting. Karen Swift, Director of Housing, circulated details to sub-committee members outside of that meeting.

- Poplar Harca and THCH Potential Merger – 19 October meeting. Andrea Baker, Chair of Tower Hamlet Housing Forum (THHF) informed members that both Poplar Harca and Tower Hamlets Community Homes (THCH) have met, consulted with respective residents, received feedback and at present a merger is likely to take place. If it does, the aim for legal completion will be for April 2024. Further details cannot be disclosed at this time due to ongoing discussions.

Members initially requested a vote to bring the discussion to the next meeting scheduled for 29 February. Ms Baker informed them that any agreed merger would not be held in this financial year. Therefore, on a vote of 4 to 3, Members approved to bring the discussion back to the sub-committee for the 1st May meeting.

RESOLVED that;

1. Details on the THH automated email will be forwarded by members to Karen Swift and the Chair outside of this meeting.
2. Members to discuss the potential merger of Poplar Harca and THCH for 1st May 2024 meeting.

4. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

4.1 Social Housing Landlords Performance Report Q2

Shalim Uddin, Partnerships Officer, Strategy and Policy, introduced the performance report for quarters 1 and 2 for Registered Providers (RPs). This included a summary of the key strengths, challenges and general updates reflected in the report.

Further to questions from the sub-committee, Shalim Uddin, Karen Swift, Councillor Kabir Ahmed and Andrea Baker;

- Clarified that the council does not regulate the RP's, although they are all now required to generate tenant satisfaction data to the Regulator of Social Housing in the same manner. Any concerns raised by Members in regard to KPI's will be circulated back to the RP's.
- Confirmed that the number of vacant units in Bentworth Court, are due to a fire which took place in June. Asbestos was also found in some units following the incident, which has now been rectified. There are five flats currently vacant.
- Clarified that there are currently 11,000 vacant units in stock throughout the borough. Malting House and Brewster House are still voided properties. Further details will be brought back to the sub-committee.

- Explained that the Lead Member is expected to attend scrutiny meetings rather than the Mayor, although he has attended both sub-committee and Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings in the past. Members can contact Cllr Kabir Ahmed outside of this meeting if they require further details.

Sub-committee members were extremely sceptical of the performance data received from all but one RP, Peabody, and voiced major concerns that representatives have not attended sub-committee meetings to discuss performance issues raised by residents. Details on individual response times and actual tenant satisfaction are missing, which are required for scrutiny.

Paul Burgess informed Members that the remit of the sub-committee does allow for an additional challenge session, which could be utilised to invite RP's to discuss issues raised at this meeting. The Chair approved and Shalim Uddin will invite RP's once a date is confirmed in spring 2024.

RESOLVED that;

1. Additional information on Malting House and Brewster House's properties to be provided for circulation to members.
2. The report be noted.

4.2 Homelessness Strategy

Councillor Kabir Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Inclusive Development and Housebuilding, presented the council's review of homelessness and rough sleeping in the borough following the Homelessness Act 2002.

Details of the strategy to combat homelessness, the boroughs homelessness levels, prevention measures and support and allocated resources were outlined. The review findings, support needs and legislation to give assistance to those at risk were noted, as were details of the operational challenges, housing stock shortages and lack of affordable properties in the borough.

Sub-committee members were reminded of the Renters Reform Bill 2023, which terminates the section 21 'no fault' eviction, and concerns made as proposed court reforms are yet to be addressed by the government. Approval was sought from Mayor Rahman at MAB on 06 December on recommended priorities, and a consultation with residents and stakeholders is scheduled for February 2024. The feedback obtained will develop the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for Tower Hamlets.

Further to questions from the sub-committee, Councillor Kabir Ahmed, Karen Swift and Riad Akbur, Service Manager, Homelessness;

- Clarified that the priorities include preventing homelessness through early detection and reducing the need for temporary accommodation with quality housing options. Other priorities include improving the customer journey and supporting staff's wellbeing.
- Conceded that housing appointments can take time which can be disheartening to those facing eviction. Residents are assured that in most cases they may not have to vacate on the date specified by the landlord and are always notified of their tenant rights, All efforts are made to keep them in the property and they are encouraged to contact the housing team if they require further reassurance.
- Confirmed that there are two modular home sites for temporary accommodation in the borough, Landon Walk and Candy Street. Due to minor faults with some of the units whilst in transit, repairs are currently being rectified. Once completed the units will be ready for residents.
- Clarified that a number of residents recently moved into a property in Lewisham which will house approximately 120 families.
- Explained that a review of the placement policy, which outlines how temporary and private rented accommodation is allocated, is being conducted and will emphasise geographical areas rather than distance. All efforts are made to keep residents within the borough and around 50% do. The remainder are placed in neighbouring areas where possible.
- Confirmed that caseworkers are allocated to residents in temporary accommodation to advise them with rent, repair or GP registration assistance. Consideration will be given to ensure caseworkers are more proactive with residents in terms of home visits.
- Clarified that under the 'Accelerated Possession Procedure', whereby a landlord requests a possession order without a hearing, housing officers will assist in completing tenants defence forms and submit applications to rent tribunals on their behalf. In some cases, they will undertake criminal investigations on landlords for rent increases above market levels.
- Noted that landlord harassment is a criminal offence and if locks are altered without notice and the tenancy not reinstated, landlords are informed that an investigation will be conducted. Details on the number of investigations conducted on landlord harassment and breached tenancies will be brought back to the sub-committee for review.
- Explained that all applications are dealt with on an individual basis and priority is placed on educational, medical or support needs. Different approaches are taken dependant on specific circumstances. Some

residents require emergency accommodation the same day and will receive a full assessment, whilst others may have only been given a notice of eviction or friends and family have requested they leave. A discussion with landlords or family and friends can be conducted with officers for possible resolutions.

- Clarified that service improvements are ongoing and include staff training, swifter telephone and email response times, more robust technology and a better customer journey. A service improvement group takes place every Wednesday to review communication techniques.

Sub-committee members were concerned that key data was not available for scrutiny and suggested a service improvement report be brought back for review, including an action log with response time outcomes and a delivery plan.

Members also requested data on family and friends no longer willing to accommodate be more clearly specified, as these are often multi-generational families in one household.

RESOLVED that;

1. Details on the number of investigations conducted on landlord harassment and breached tenancies to be provided for circulation to members.
2. Details on the Housing Emergency Taskforce to be brought back to the sub-committee for review.
3. The presentation be noted.

5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Chair reminded the sub-committee of the Member Relations Protocol and Councillor expectations at meetings. Individual party rhetoric must not be included and instructions were made to adhere to the code at all times when addressing fellow Councillors.

The meeting ended at 8.50 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Abdul Mannan

Housing & Regeneration Scrutiny Sub Committee

Scrutiny Action Log

Name of Committee: **Housing & Regeneration Scrutiny Sub-Committee**


Municipal Year: **2023-24**

| Reference | Action | Assigned to | Scrutiny Lead | Due Date | Response |
|-------------|--|-------------------------|----------------------|-------------|---|
| Insert date | Insert agenda item title and the action requested by the committee | Insert name of director | Insert scrutiny lead | Insert Date | Response provided by the service/ witness |
| 27.04.23 | Swan Housing to submit their 360 Feedback Report, resident's response and KPI's before the 27 July meeting. <i>(Meeting moved to 11.09.23)</i> | Swan Housing | | 11.09.23 | Swan Housing to present the 360 Feedback report at the February meeting. |
| | A comprehensive report on THH Major Works Programme <i>(with details on response times and general performance)</i> to be included in the HRSSC work programme for 23/24. | THH | | TBC | |
| | An Estates ASB Summer Action Plan be submitted to the sub-committee for municipal year 2023/24. | THH | | TBC | |
| | lastly, Councillor Nathalie Bienfait requested The Chair take a vote on increasing sub-committee meetings from five to nine for municipal year 2023/24. This was seconded by Councillor Marc Francis. On a vote of 5 for, 0 against and 1 abstention, the sub-committee agreed a formal note be submitted to the Chief Executive to increase the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Sub-Committee meetings from five to nine. | Chair | | 19.10.23 | OSC is awaiting a response from the CEO which will be forwarded to HRSSC. |
| 11.09.23 | The request to increase the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Sub Committee meetings from 5 to 9 for 2023/24 | OSC | | 19.10.23 | As above |
| 19.10.23 | THH in house arrangements – review resident engagement to give residents more opportunity to contribute and not just putting the emphasis on residents board. | THH | | 14.12.23 | |

Scrutiny Action Log

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|----------|---|----------------|--|----------|---|
| | | | | | |
| | THCH merger with Poplar HARCA. Request update on the merger. Chair to review. | Chair | | 14.12.23 | Re-reviewed with Chair. Invite to THCH to May meeting to discuss. |
| 14.12.23 | Details on the Housing Emergency Taskforce will be circulated to Members | Cabinet Member | | 29.2.24 | Briefing note provided. |
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Insert attachments as appendices where applicable

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| <p>Non-Executive Report of the:</p> <p>Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Sub-Committee</p> <p>29th February 2024</p> |  <p>TOWER HAMLETS</p> |
| <p>Report of: Karen Swift, Director for Housing</p> | <p>Classification: Unrestricted</p> |
| <p>Review of Housing and Climate Emergency</p> | |

| | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Originating Officer(s) | Paul Burgess, Corporate Strategy and Communities |
| Wards affected | All wards |

Summary

This cover report accompanies the presentation on considering how the council can retrofit housing to meet climate net zero targets.

Recommendations:

The Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Sub-Committee is recommended to:

1. Review the presentation topic to help inform the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Sub-Committee discussion.

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