

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE HOUSING SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

HELD AT 6.30 P.M. ON MONDAY, 11 SEPTEMBER 2017

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

Members Present:

Councillor Helal Uddin (Chair)
Councillor Dave Chesterton
Councillor Andrew Wood

Co-opted Members Present:

Anne Ambrose (Tenant Representative)
Moshin Hamim (Leaseholder Representative)

Other Councillors Present:

Councillor Marc Francis

Others Present:

Sandra Fawcett (Chair of Tower Hamlets Housing Forum)

Officers Present:

Martin Ling (Housing Strategy Manager, Place)
Janet Slater (Service Manager Options and Assessments, Place)
Godfrey Heyman (Strategic Housing, Strategy, Regeneration and Sustainability)
Joseph Lacey-Holland (Senior Strategy Policy & Performance Officer)
Zoe Folley (Committee Officer, Governance)

1. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

The Chair, Councillor Helal Uddin welcomed everybody to the Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee meeting and invited them to introduce one another

The Chair declared an interest as his employer – The Bromley by Bow Centre – undertook partnership work with the Poplar HARCA.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Committee **RESOLVED**

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 12 July 2017 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

A Member asked about progress in implementing the actions agreed at the previous meeting. The Member requested that each action agreed at the meeting should be recorded as an action point with timescales for their delivery to enable the Committee to monitor progress. Officers reported that a separate action log for the Committee would be created to record agreed actions with dates for their delivery. It was also discussed whether the Committee could receive Petitions from the public and hold meetings at external venues outside the Town Hall and it was noted that Officers would explore this further and report back to the Committee.

3. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

3.1 Housing Performance Monitoring: Quarterly Performance Data for Key Registered Providers

Godfrey Heyman (Strategy, Regeneration and Sustainability) and Sandra Fawcett, (the Chair of the Tower Hamlets Housing Forum) (THHF) gave a presentation which provided Members with an update on social landlords performance for quarter one 2017-8.

Members were reminded of the role of the THHF that promoted partnership working between the Council and Social Landlords to share good practice amongst other things. It was also reported that THHF had a number of themed sub groups and published annual reports on their website. The forums achievements in 2016/17 included: enhanced work on ASB, environmental protection and health protocol, fire safety work, a Service Charge Review, new guidance for sub regional nominations, overcrowding and under-occupation initiatives. The Forum had also worked to deliver a range of employment initiatives, developed Section 106 design guidance, provided specialist support for welfare reform and a successful caretakers conference.

The Committee were also advised of the key features of the Performance Management Framework (PMF) that assessed the performance of social landlords against key Performance Indicators and measured engagement. The Committee also heard about the work of the THHF Benchmarking Sub Group that shared best practice and Councillor Sirajul Islams' (Cabinet Member for Housing) performance management group. They also noted that it was important to take into account the data health checks when considering performance data to get a realistic picture, such as sample size, survey methodology and the need to take into account longer terms trends.

Turning to the quarter one results, the Committee were advised of the performance data for eight key areas in relation to repair work, appointments made and kept, average re-let times, gas certificate completion, resident satisfaction with the outcome of ASB cases, complaints and Members Enquiries response times. Overall, the results showed that the majority of social landlords were meeting their targets. Where there were issues, the Council would work with social landlords to improve performance.

In response, the Committee requested to receive a more detailed performance report. In particular, Members requested to receive a 'rolling programme' showing performance over the course of a 12 month period including data on the most recent quarter. Members stated that they would find this helpful in assessing performance. It was also suggested that this should list the individual social landlords.

The Committee also asked to receive information on social landlords participation in THHF in terms of attendance at meetings. Members also asked Council Officers about the robustness of the health checks carried out on the performance information. Questions were also asked about public access to information (such as the Performance Management Framework, THHF meeting minutes, their Constitution, the service charge review) and whether social landlords communicated performance information to residents. Members also asked questions about whether social landlords conducted resident surveys and the merits of such surveys.

In response, Officers reported that most of this information could be found on the THHF website including the Annual reports. Officers offered to send a link to the website to the Committee. In addition, the social landlords published performance information on their websites, circulated performance information to residents and undertook resident satisfaction surveys (in addition to the Council's Annual resident satisfaction survey). However, Ms Fawcett undertook to raise these issues about communication with residents at the THHF's next meeting. It was also emphasised that the Council would work with social landlords where necessary if performance improvements were required and it was felt that such action was generally very effective.

In light of the comments from the Committee, it was agreed that Officers and the Chair would discuss and agree a revised format for the performance information for future meetings taking on board the Committee's comments

3.2 Overview and Scrutiny Report: Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 Tower Hamlets Implementation

Janet Slater (Service Manager Options and Assessments) presented the report setting out the main duties of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and the additional obligations that it would place on the Council and the timescales involved.

The Committee noted that the Act, which stemmed from a CRISIS report around the experiences of single homeless people, imposed a duty to assess

prevent and relieve homelessness. Specifically, the Act imposed a duty to agree a plan to secure and retain accommodation with eligible homelessness applicants. It was the intention of the Government to commence the Act in 2018. The Government would provide additional funding to local authorities to meet the new burdens with a view to announcing funding allocations in the Autumn and issuing the first payments in winter 2017/18. It was not clear at this stage what funding would be made available as the funding formulae had yet to be finalised. Consequently, a concern for Local Authorities was whether the funding levels would be sufficient given the resource implications, including the costs associated with updating the database (as required by the Act). Furthermore, due to the uncertainties around this, recruitment of additional officers or work on the database could not yet commence.

The DCLG had also been in consultation about the revised Code of Conduct and the final draft would be out for consultation in the autumn and published in the spring. The key dates and actions were set out in the report.

In response, Members expressed concern about the additional burdens this change would place on the Council given the likelihood that no additional funding would be provided for the provision of homeless accommodation. It could place additional burdens on homeless people without providing them with any actual support.

In response, Officers confirmed that the change would add a number of additional stages to the assessment process and therefore place an extra burden on the Council, particularly in terms of preparing the detailed plans. The work would be very time consuming and would necessitate the recruitment of specialist officers to carry out this work. It was also confirmed that the plans included a duty to secure accommodation but there was no indication that additional funding would be made available for accommodation. The Committee also asked questions about the proposed changes to the data collection system. It was commented that it would be helpful if the DCLG took over this function.

With the agreement of the Chair, Councillor Marc Francis addressed the Committee. He stated that he worked for a charity that supported this legislation. He spoke about the positive aspects of the Act in terms of helping single homeless people especially in the private rented sector.

In response to questions about the implementation date, it was confirmed that the Act would come into effect by April 2018. Sir Steve Bulluck, the Mayor of Lewisham had written to Marcus Jones MP asking that the implementation date be postponed to allow sufficient time to prepare for the changes given the issues.

It was also noted that there was some uncertainty about the proposed timetable as the deadlines within it (such as 'autumn and winter 2017') were not very specific. So this made planning for the process quite difficult. It was expected that the first payment would be issued in winter 2017 and it was anticipated that there could be a shortage of review officers that could carry

out the work given the level of demand that there would be for such Officers across Authorities.

Members stressed the need to communicate these proposals widely across the Council and with partners and asked for a progress report in the new year.

RESOLVED:

1. That the contents of the report.
2. That a progress report be brought to the Committee in the new year.

3.3 Overview and Scrutiny Report: Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee Work Programme 2017-18

The Committee considered the draft work programme for the Housing Scrutiny Sub – Committee for the municipal year 2017/18 that reflected the discussions on the programme at the previous Committee meeting.

The Committee made a number of comments on the report.

Members requested that the quarterly monitoring information be brought forward in the new format agreed by the Committee (as discussed under the previous agenda item). The Quarter two information should be brought to the Committee in November and the Quarter three information in March.

Members also referred to the proposed review of the use of Air BnB in the private sector. It was requested that this should explore the impact of such accommodation in terms of anti-social behaviour and prostitution.

Members also stressed the need for an in-depth review of fire safety issues, covering the wider issues such as fire safety in private tower blocks and other buildings. Officers referred to the work plan review on this subject. It was noted that it would be at the Committee's discretion to determine what this would cover. A schedule of dates would be prepared for this scrutiny review and circulated to the Committee

It was also requested that there be a Spotlight Review of leaseholders services. There was some discussion about whether this should look at experience in the private sector as well as with RSLs. It was agreed that Officers would discuss this with the Chair.

It was also requested that the Committee receive a progress report on the housing delivery vehicle, a report on the future status of the ALMO, an update on the Right to Buy Scheme and the Housing and Planning Act 2016.

RESOLVED:

1. That the proposed draft work programme is noted.

2. That the Interim Service Manager, Strategy, Policy & Performance - after consultation with the Chair of the Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee, to finalise the work programme.

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

There was no other business discussed.

The meeting ended at 8.45 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Helal Uddin
Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee