

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS
MINUTES OF THE HOUSING SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

HELD AT 6.40 P.M. ON MONDAY, 19 MARCH 2018

MP702 - TOWN HALL MULBERRY PLACE

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

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

Members

Councillor Helal Uddin
Councillor John Pierce
Councillor Andrew Wood

Chair
Vice-Chair
Member

Co-opted Members

Anne Ambrose
Moshin Hamim
Sandra Fawcett

Chair of Tower Hamlets Housing Forum
and Executive Director Operations,
Swan Housing

Officers

Elizabeth Bailey

Senior Strategy, Policy and
Performance Officer

Afazul Hoque

Interim Service Manager, Strategy,
Policy & Performance

Martin Ling

Housing Strategy Manager

Rushena Miah

Committee Services Officer

Susmita Sen

Chief Executive Tower Hamlets Homes

Nick Spenceley

Head of Environmental Services Tower
Hamlets Homes

The Chair decided to take items in the following order:

- Anti-Social Behaviour
- Minutes of the last meeting
- Self-Build
- Void Properties

The minutes will follow the order published on the agenda for improved readability.

1. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

Moshin Hamid declared a personal interest in that he is a member of the self-build forum.

The Chair declared that he is a board member of Tower Hamlets Homes his employer has a working relationship with Poplar HARCA.

John Pierce declared that he sits on the Tower Hamlets Homes board.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 January 2018 were agreed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

3. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION:

3.1 Self Build

The Committee received a presentation from Martin Ling, Housing Strategy Manager, on the Council's work in relation to self-build.

Key points summarised from the presentation:

- Direction is taken from the Council's housing strategy.
- The Self-Build and Custom Housing Act 2015 provides the policy context.
- There is a three year deadline to grant planning permission for self-build.
- With regard to demand, as of January 2018 there were 169 applications for self-build. The majority of applicants lived in the borough and were of the young professional demographic.
- There are several options for self-build projects permitted. These range from one off self-managed, one off build with contractor to manage construction, kit home, community collaboration and community self-build agency.
- Some of the issues associated with self-build include high land values, expensive to purchase, high density applications tend to be favoured, the GLA has set a high housing target, suitable site availability and competition.
- A self-build forum has been established and holds three meetings a year. The next meeting is in May 2018.
- A land disposal model is being worked on.
- The GLA has launched 3 small pilot sites for development, two are based in E1 and one is based in E2.

Comments from Members:

- The cost saving value of self-build is not apparent. The cost of land and building work amounts to roughly £475,000 which is the same as outright purchase of a one or two bedroom home. Significant savings could be made for those willing to carry out construction work themselves.
- The National Planning Policy Framework consultation should consider diversifying the market and allowing for change of use for dwellings from office or commercial to home.

- If would be the Councils responsibility to ensure that fire safety is incorporated into self-build planning applications.

3.2 Anti Social Behaviour

The Committee received a presentation from Susmita Sen, Chief Executive of Tower Hamlets Homes and Nick Spenceley, Head of Environmental Services Tower Hamlets Homes on their work to tackle Anti-Social Behaviour within their housing estate.

Key points from the presentation:

- The ASB Team falls within the environmental services division which is managed by Nick Spenceley. Caretakers are often the first point of contact for ASB reporting.
- THH has secured additional resources for policing.
- The newly formed ASB team work staggered hours for a greater presence.
- Early successes have meant an increase in legal casework, therefore additional caseworkers are due to be appointed.
- So far there have been 75 arrests, 600 incidents logged and 385 stop and searches.
- The additional police presence has been funded by MOPAC on a match funded basis, THH have employed 14 police officers for the price of 7.
- Use of closure orders have enabled police officers to make arrests and insist offenders leave premises.
- It was noted as significant that THH have seen successes as early as 5 months into the strategy.

Questions from Members:

- Why is there such a high prevalence of ASB in this borough compared to the rest of London? Officers provided the following reasons;
 - the 101 non-emergency service captures all elements of crime reporting adding to the statistic,
 - that it was not fully understood why Tower Hamlets was a soft target for ASB but there was consensus at the strategic level that research should be conducted on this topic.
- What is your approach to cross county drug dealing?
- What happens when the money runs out?
- What are you measuring success on?
- Are you doing prevention work?
- What happened to the aim of sharing best practice with other resident providers?

Response from officers:

- Officers explained that their work on ASB was the starting point of a three year strategy. They prioritised social housing because crime was

prevalent on estates. The first five months of the strategy had seen positive results. After three years, work would begin on a new strategy in consultation with the Mayor, Police and residents. Officers could not predict the level of resource that would be required in the future but they were hopeful that current intervention work would significantly reduce levels of ASB in the long term.

- A key indicator for success would be when residents start to report they feel safer. Officers agreed that metrics on the effectiveness of crime intervention measures should be introduced as a next step.
- The Committee noted that the THH funded officers would pursue perpetrators if they had moved to another estate even if this was not a THH estate.
- There is a space for engagement with other providers. Nick Spenceley attends an ASB sub-group for registered social landlords that shares best practice. The next meeting will look at a consistency in police intervention.
- Councillor John Pierce updated the Committee on the Neighbourhood Management Pilot. He said that the Pilot Manager had started in the role and their immediate priorities would include setting up a ward governance structure and engagement with residents.
- Councillor Sirajul Islam, Cabinet Member for Housing, commented:
 - Approximately £2 million had been spent on tackling ASB across the borough and this was the first investment made to tackle ASB in the last five years.
 - The Streets of Growth charity has supported the Council in engaging the 18-25 age groups on ASB issues. It was recognised that ASB is often displaced from one estate to the next and he said he hoped the Council would explore the reasons behind this in the next municipal year.
- Sandra Fawcett stated the Tower Hamlets Housing Forum and ASB Sub Group provide a useful avenue for joint working and sharing of best practice. Across housing providers ASB was a key priority and they would continue working together.
- It was suggested given the concerns amongst local people about ASB that the next Committee look at work taking places across the borough by the Council and RSLs to address ASB.

RESOLVED

To note the presentation.

3.3 Void Properties - What is the Council doing to bring them into use?

The Committee received a presentation from Martin Ling, Housing Strategy Manager, on empty properties in the borough with regard to the private sector.

Summary of presentation:

- Data on voids comes from Council tax records. A void is defined as a home left empty for six months or more.
- There are 1565 homes left empty for more than 6 months and 1264 second homes in the borough.
- Tools to bring empty homes into use include enforcement action (3%), threat of enforcement (11%), grant aid (6%), advice and guidance (58%) and market forces.
- There is a team in the Council that works on private void cases. They can enforce empty dwelling management orders and compulsory purchase orders. They can also provide grants to landlords to bring homes back into lettable condition. These homes are often rented by the Council to place homeless families but are permitted to have other uses, such as community space.

Comments from Members:

- There is an urban myth that there was huge number of empty dwellings as a result of purchase from oversea millionaires. What work will the Council do to dispel this myth?
- It was noted the data the Council has does not support this view and the Council will look into how this could be communicated. Some of the empty flats could be due to short term lets market which would mean it is not being used every day.
- Members requested a presentation on Council voids be presented at a future meeting.

The Chair thanked the Housing Strategy manager for the presentation.

RESOLVED

To note the presentation.

ACTION:

For Council voids to be add to the Forward Plan for discussion at a future meeting.

4. FIRE SAFETY SCRUTINY REVIEW

Elizabeth Bailey, Senior Strategy, Policy and Performance Officer, offered the Committee a final opportunity to feed into the Fire Safety Review.

Comments included:

- There are high density tall buildings in the borough. There should be a recommendation to draft a fire safety policy specific to tall buildings. Advice could be sought from firms in Singapore and New York on how they manage their tall buildings. The UK lacks expertise in this area as tall developments are a relatively recent phenomenon.
- Other Members said that officers would need to see if a Council has the power to action the above recommendation.
- The communications and engagement recommendations should be merged.

- Recommendation 16, emergency plans, to be amended – it appears to be a landlord and resident matter.
- Dame Judith Hackett is conducting the Grenfell inquiry – perhaps a statement of recommendations could be sent to her.
- Regarding recommendation 15, engaging tenant and resident organisations, there are only five established TRA's. The Council will need to have a wider reach.
- There was a suggestion to include timings to the recommendations however the majority of members decided against this, as it was the responsibility of the Council and Executive to implement strategies and timescales.
- As there are several recommendations the report should highlight the five priority areas. .
- Officers to keep up to date with government advice and guidance on fire safety and emergency protocols should be included as a recommendation.
- The report should mention the importance of educating residents on fire safety. Residents often install grills when doors are secure by design, grills are a fire hazard.
- The recommendation for emergency access from inside the building should also include a point about external access as well.

Members were advised to email Elizabeth Bailey if they had further comments on the report and to advise on what the top five priority areas for recommendation should be. The deadline for comments was noted as 25 March 2018.

RESOLVED

- To agree the recommendations, subject to the amendments discussed.
- To authorise the Divisions Director of Strategy Policy and Partnership to amend the draft report before submission to Cabinet, in consultation with the Chair.

5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Chair thanked the Committee and Officers for their work on the review and their contributions towards housing scrutiny over the course of the year.

He also asked THH leaseholders to be added as a future agenda item

The meeting ended at 8.37 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Helal Uddin
Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee