

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE HOUSING SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

HELD AT 6.30 P.M. ON TUESDAY, 3 JULY 2018

MP702 - TOWN HALL MULBERRY PLACE

Members Present:

Councillor Dipa Das (Chair)
Councillor Muhammad Harun
Councillor Dan Tomlinson
Councillor Andrew Wood

Co-opted Members Present:

Anne Ambrose
Moshin Hamim

Officers Present:

Abidah Kamali	Business Assurance Team – Development and Renewal
Ann Sutcliffe	Acting Corporate Director, Place
Godfrey Heyman	Strategic Housing, Strategy, Regeneration and Sustainability - THHF
Mark Baigent	Interim Divisional Director, Housing and Regeneration
Paul Davey	Director of Business Transformation THH
Rushena Miah	Committee Clerk – Democratic Services
Susmita Sen	Chief Executive of Tower Hamlets Homes (THH)
Tracey St Hill	Principal RSL Partnerships Officer - THHF
Zakia Variava	Senior Strategy, Policy and Performance Officer

1. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

There were no declarations of pecuniary interests.

2. COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE:

Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee Terms of Reference Report 2018/19

There was one point of clarification with regard to 3.1.2 of the Terms of Reference. It was clarified that the paragraph is referring to 'housing reports' in general across the borough as opposed to solely Tower Hamlets Homes.

RESOLVED

- i. To note the Terms of Reference

2.1 Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee Terms of Reference Report 2018/19

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RESOLVED

- i. To note the Terms of Reference

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 March 2018 were approved as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

RESOLVED

- i. To note approve the minutes of the last meeting.

4. ACTIONS LOG

There was one remaining item on the actions log from 2017/18, this was a suggestion to hold a spotlight session on service charges to leaseholders to the work programme 2018/19. The committee resolved to discuss this in the work programming session held after this meeting.

RESOLVED

- i. To note the topic for discussion.

5. APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIR

The Chair sought nominations for the position of Vice-Chair. The Chair nominated Councillor Dan Tomlinson. Councillor Tomlinson was seconded by Councillor Muhammad Harun.

RESOLVED

- i. To appoint Councillor Dan Tomlinson as the Vice-Chair of Housing.

6. INTRODUCTION TO HOUSING IN TOWER HAMLETS

The Committee received a short presentation from Mark Baigent, Interim Divisional Director for Housing and Regeneration.

Key points from the presentation:

- Some of the areas the council has been particularly focussing on have included increasing housing supply with a target of 1000 new homes a year, estate regeneration, prevention of rough sleeping.
- Fire safety has been a high priority.
- The government would be publishing a green paper on the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. It was recommended this topic be incorporated into the forward plan.
- Mayor of London will be publishing a new Rough Sleeping Strategy in 2018
- Challenges include: tackling homelessness, implementation of the Housing Revenue Act 2017, housing supply and regeneration, increased costs for fire safety.

- Opportunities ahead include, self-build, Community Land Trusts, Poplar Riverside Masterplan and the Isle of Dogs Planning Framework.

Comments from Members:

- Page 30 states that 32% of units were affordable how many units does this cover?
- A Member suggested the Committee consider a review of planning permission at the Council.
- Out of the 800 homes which ones are progressing as affordable?
- Affordable homes was suggested as a work programme topic.
- The Government recently announced a £400 million fire safety fund will the Council be bidding for this?

Response from Officers:

- The Council will not be bidding for part of the £400 million fund for fire safety, it will likely support registered providers in bidding for it because they are most likely to be in need of the fund.
- The definition of affordability in planning terms includes shared ownership, rented at below market rent and council social rented properties. 70% of homes in the affordable bracket are socially rented.
- A new rate has been introduced called Tower Hamlets Living Rent. This option costs slightly more than social rent.
- Last year 1000 new builds were defined as 'affordable'.

The Chair thanked Mark Baigent for his presentation.

RESOLVED:

- i. To note the presentation.

7. INTRODUCTION TO TOWER HAMLETS HOMES

The Committee received a presentation from Susmita Sen, Chief Executive of Tower Hamlets Homes.

Key points:

- Tower Hamlets Homes (THH) is the Council's arm's length management organisation for Housing. It is wholly owned by the Council as it's only shareholder
- THH carries out Council management of homes such as repairs, tenants and leasehold management, fire safety, community investment, engagement with police.
- Investing in communities is part of their ethos and they produce a community investment strategy as part of their business plan.
- They have a growing portfolio of leaseholders of which approximately half are sub-lets.
- They are run by a board of directors both independent and elected councillors
- They work with the voluntary sector to share expertise.
- Their caretakers work on risk management.

- They conducted fire risk assessments on all of their properties and found all were fit for purpose.
- Further to an online survey of over two thousand residents, feedback found that there was an appetite for more online services.
- Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour was identified as a key priority. ASB has reduced by 48% on THH estates.
- THH has provided significant apprenticeship opportunities.
- Some issues they have experienced include rent arrears due to the transition towards Universal Credit. They worked with voluntary sector charities such as account3 to help residents manage their money. Other issues included hoarding and illegal sub-letting.
- THH's 5 year plan and capital works information can be accessed on their website.
- It was noted that the THH management agreement was in review.

Comments from Members:

- Members asked about the financial sustainability of the police unit.
- A question was asked about the Council review of THH. Officers responded that any review should have the best interest of the residents at heart.
- A Member asked if THH had a financial deficit. It was confirmed that THH have never been in deficit and have reserves.
- Members asked about the impact of Universal Credit. THH officers agreed that it was important to carry out financial inclusion work with residents to prevent rent arrears.

RESOLVED

- i. To note the presentation.

8. PARTNERSHIP WORKING - TOWER HAMLETS HOUSING FORUM

In Sandra Fawcett's absence, Mark Baigent introduced the item.

Overview of Tower Hamlets Housing Forum:

- It was noted the aim of THHF was to bring local housing providers together to work in partnership to deliver quality home and services to their residents.
- They meet to share best practice to discuss issues and current policies.
- They have several sub-groups in areas such as anti-social behaviour, asset management and benchmarking sub-groups.
- They support the Council in its delivery of the strategic housing and community plan.
- It was noted Godfrey Heyman would be leaving THHF.

Comments from Members:

- There was a request to get an overview of the scale and geography of registered providers in the borough. Mark Baigent said he could provide a map for information.

- There was a request to invite other registered providers to the meeting for feedback and discussion this municipal year. For Zakia Variava to follow up on.

RESOLVED:

- i. To note the presentation.

9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business discussed.

10. WORK PROGRAMMING SESSION

This was a private workshop between Members to discuss work programming for 2018/19.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING:

Tuesday 11 September 2018, 6.30pm, Room 701, Town Hall Mulberry Place.
(Post meeting note - the next meeting was rescheduled to **26 September 2018** due to a clash with Rosh Hashannah on 11 September).

The meeting ended at 7.32 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Dipa Das
Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee