

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE HOUSING SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

HELD AT 6.45 P.M. ON MONDAY, 6 FEBRUARY 2017

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

Members Present:

Councillor Amina Ali (Chair)
Councillor Rabina Khan
Councillor Abdul Mukit MBE
Councillor Gulam Robbani
Councillor Julia Dockerill

Co-opted Members Present:

Moshin Hamim	Leaseholder Representative
Anne Ambrose	Tenant Representative

Other Councillors Present:

Councillor Sirajul Islam	Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Housing Management and Performance
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Others Present:

Andrea Baker	Director of Housing – Poplar HARCA
Sandra Fawcett	Executive Director for Operations – Swan Housing Association
Mak Akinyemi	Director of Property Services – Gateway Housing Association
Hillary Kelly	Head of Repairs – Tower Hamlets Homes
John Tunney	Interim Director of Asset Management – Tower Hamlets Homes
Tracey St Hill	Principle RSL Partnerships Officer
Mohammad Raqib	Tenant’s Representative Tarling West Estate

Officers Present:

Ahmed Choudhury	Senior Strategy, Policy and Performance Officer
Muhibul Hoque	Strategy, Policy and Performance Officer
Alison Thomas	Head of Housing Strategy, Partnerships and Affordable Housing, Development and Renewal
Farhana Zia	Committee Services Officer

1. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

The Chair, Councillor Amina Ali apologised for her lateness and welcomed everybody to the Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee meeting. She stated the meeting would hear presentations from three Housing Associations who operate in Tower Hamlets, plus Tower Hamlets Homes about their Repair Delivery models. She welcomed the presenters and Cllr Sirajul Islam, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Housing Management and Performance.

She requested everyone to introduce themselves and commenced the meeting.

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Andrew Cregan, Vice Chair of Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee, Cllr Helal Uddin and Cllr Andrew Wood. Cllr Julia Dockerill was substituting for Cllr Wood.

Cllr Ali declared she was a board member of Old Ford Housing Association.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING(S)

The Chair referred members of the Sub-Committee to the minutes of the previous meeting held on the 10th October 2016. She asked members to approve these as an accurate record of the meeting.

The Members agreed the minutes to be an accurate record of the meeting.

3. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

3.1 Housing Repair Delivery Models - a series of presentations on a sample of the different models used by Registered Housing Providers in the borough

Cllr Sirajul Islam, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Housing Management and Performance introduced this item stating the Local Authority was working with local Registered Social Landlords (RSL's) to improve the reporting, quality and efficiency with which repairs are dealt with.

He said the presentations would explain the different models adopted by each Housing Association, the challenges they face as well as the elements of best practice they have adopted. The presentations will also explain how residents have been involved in shaping and monitoring the service.

Poplar HARCA

Andrea Baker, Director of Housing at Poplar HARCA, was the first to make her presentation.

She informed members:

- Poplar HARCA operates in a small geographical area – 4miles², has 9000 homes and 45,000 tenants.
- Poplar HARCA works with 4 multi-trade general contractors supplemented by specialist contactors such as gas contractors.
- The contracts are 10 year contracts, with clauses that allow Poplar HARCA to review contacts every 5 years. Both parties have an 8 week 'no fault' determination clause if they decide to terminate the contract.
- Poplar HARCA uses a 'Schedule of rates' system whereby each job is evaluated using a pre-determined cost element.
- The contactors used by Poplar HARCA are locally based small to medium sized businesses, so employ local people and do not sub-contract. They have grown in size with Poplar HARCA and know their customer base.
- They work in partnership to deliver customer care, ensuring they get it right the first time, rather than contactors having to go back to a property several times over.
- An average of 2.5 properties requires repairs, with an average repair cost of £87. The housing stock is older and was transferred from the Council.
- Poplar HARCA monitors its repairs service through its overarching independent customer satisfaction survey. Quarterly reports are presented to the Services Committee and monthly meetings are held with contractors to look at emerging trends.
- Residents are in conversation with Poplar HARCA and qualitative data is collated regarding their satisfaction. Pre and post inspections are also carried out to gauge the nature of repair required and tenant satisfaction.

Members raised the following questions:

- How do you know you are getting value for money by using small, locally based companies as opposed to national companies?
- What impact does anti-social behaviour have on repair bills in communal areas such as lifts and door entry systems?
- Why is the satisfaction rate for repairs lower?
- What incentive do you give residents to report on repairs and their level of satisfaction?

- How many members of staff specifically deal with repairs, at your call centre?
- How satisfied are tenants with your 'out of hours' call out service?

In response Andrea Baker said:

- The procurement process is key and the general builders contact went out to tender. If there was a significant difference between national and local contractors we would challenge that. We know we are getting value for money, as we have local contractors providing local employment and offering apprenticeships.
- Repairs to communal areas are carried out in the same way as any other repair reported.
- 4,279 repairs were carried out in 2015/16 and 92% were satisfied. I do not agree with your analysis the figure is low. Some people do not respond to surveys and you cannot extrapolate information from people we do not hear back from.
- As part of our monitoring process we have introduced real time SMS text messages – making it easier for tenants to report a repair but also provide us with feedback on the quality of the repair.
- We have 6 to 7 members in our repairs team, who log incoming calls, complete orders and notify contractors of jobs. We recently restructured our teams but we have no plans to reduce staff. However we want to make our Online offer better whereby Tenants can log repairs directly.
- The 'Out of Hours' service is contracted out, but contractors are 'on call' and will deal with issues such as 'making safe' – e.g. gas leak etc at night and will deal with potential repairs the next morning.

Swan Housing Association

Sandra Fawcett, Executive Director for Operations at Swan Housing made her presentation.

She stated:

- Swan owned and managed 11,000 homes, supporting communities in East London and Essex.
- Swan provides Landlord services, regeneration, support and care to its residents and is committed to excellence and service improvement.

- Swan's repairs model is based on a partnership with Axis. It is a long term partnering arrangement - a 14 year contract which commenced in April 2009.
- Customer service is top priority especially as Swan covers a larger geographical area.
- Customer satisfaction is monitored via the Annual external survey, responses to complaints and post inspection visits.

Members asked the following questions and made suggestions:

- Statistical information should be provided regarding the number of repairs carried out by Housing Associations, as a result of Environmental Health notices served and the fines associated with them. Member enquiries relating to repairs should also be included.
- It's good to see you have a service improvement programme, however how long do you take to action a reported repair?
- How quickly do you respond to repairs as a result of anti-social behaviour?

In response, Sandra Fawcett said:

- Housing Associations would be happy to provide further statistical information as aforementioned.
- The delivery outputs show the number of repairs undertaken, the cost and the levels of satisfaction. Swan, like many Housing Associations benchmark themselves with Housemark, a social housing data and insight company, who recommend that a total of 560 responses a year to our surveys is a good standard. Complaints are also an indicator and we work in partnership with Axis to ensure post inspections are undertaken where relevant.
- Anti-Social behaviour is a serious problem and some Estates are more prone to this than others. When repairs are reported, for example graffiti we have a rapid response team who will deal with this within hours however damage to Door Entry systems may take longer. It depends on the nature of the damage - this will determine how long it will take to fix.

Gateway Housing Association

Mak Akinyemi, Director of Property Services at Gateway Housing made his presentation.

He informed Members:

- Gateway managed homes across three London Boroughs but mainly had homes in Tower Hamlets – 2727 homes.
- Gateway's approach to repairs was reviewed in 2012 and substantial consultation had been undertaken with residents. This has resulted in the "Homeworks" model being set up in 2015. All housing repairs are undertaken by the in-house team, with Estates having on-site managers, cleaners and specialist cleaners plus a team of operatives who carry out repairs.
- There is a service level agreement with residents and resident satisfaction and monitoring is undertaken through annual surveys and active engagement with post inspections of repair jobs.
- Some jobs are contracted out if they cannot be dealt with by the in-house team – e.g. roofing, door entry systems and making safe – gas/ electricity.

Members asked the following questions and made comments:

- You state 15,707 jobs have been completed. This seems significantly high. For what period were these jobs completed?
- How effective is your Homeworks programme? How do you ensure you have the right balance between works completed and the monitoring of work?
- It's good that on-site Estate Caretakers are available. This is especially important to elderly and vulnerable tenants.
- Poplar HARCA and Swan Housing should be mindful of 'defects' reporting in relation to their regeneration projects at Aberfeldy Estate and Blackwall, as this results in rents and service charge increases.

Mak Akinyemi responded stating

- The figure of 15,707 is the number of jobs completed since the start of the Homeworks project, i.e. since 2015.
- Staff members are inducted and they know what it means to be part of our organisation and to provide good customer service. There isn't a split between those who provide the repairs service and management. They are part of our business and we nurture and value their contribution.
- The Housing Associations duly noted the request regarding the regeneration projects. If the repair is reported within 12 months, it is the contractors' responsibility to rectify it. However after this period it is

dealt with as a general repair and is the responsibility of the respective Housing Association.

8:00 P.M. – *The meeting becomes inquorate however the Chair decides to continue with the meeting, because the sub-committee is not making a decision. She invites the final presenter to make her presentation.*

Tower Hamlets Homes

Hillary Kelly, Head of Repairs at Tower Hamlets Homes made the final presentation of the evening.

- Tower Hamlets Homes (THH) is an Arm's Length Management Organisation (ALMO) of the Council. It manages 21,535 properties with 55% of residents being tenants and 45% being leaseholders.
- With regard to Repairs and Maintenance, approximately 55,000 jobs per year are undertaken and the organisation has a team of in-house engineers and inspectors. It also works with third party contractors – Mears, Openview and Precision.
- THH works in partnership with its contractors, setting stretch targets with a continuous plan for improvement. It monitors contractors on a weekly basis and learns lessons through complaint analysis and customer feedback.
- Recognises it can improve its online digital offer with DIY self – service of repairs and is making improvements to its telephony service.

Members of the Sub-Committee asked the following questions:

- How long have you been in a contract with Mears?
- What is your methodology to monitor the performance of Mears?
- How do you guarantee the quality of the workmanship and do you conduct pre-inspections before a repair?
- What topics do your DIY self-help videos cover?
- How are repairs classified after contractors have completed their 'Decent Homes' programme. Some residents face delays as they are told their repair falls under the responsibility of the Decent Homes contractor and is not a general repair.

In response Hillary stated:

- THH has been in a contract with Mears since 2011. The contract has been extended for a 1 year and will be reviewed again before it's extended over the next 4 years. Although the contract has been

extended, an action and improvement plan is attached to it. It is a Council Contract.

- There is a suite of KPI indicators and weekly meetings take place with our contractors. The Strategic core group involving senior managers from both the contractors and THH meet on a monthly basis. There is an improvement plan with targeted actions, in order to achieve customer satisfaction and best value.
- Mears are the contractors for general repairs and they undertake this work. 10% of repairs are post inspected at random and if a repair costs more than £1000 a pre-inspection is undertaken.
- The DIY Self-Help video's cover a range of topics from unblocking a sink, to finding the stopcock, replacing a fuse etc. More information is available on our website.
- If the repair is beyond the 12 month threshold, its THH's responsibility to fix the repair. I understand that sometimes tenants get caught in the middle, and we do fall short on this, especially if a part needs to be ordered. The computer system will flag the repair as a consequence of the decent homes programme and depending on the nature of the repair we may need the original contractor to comeback – e.g. a leaking roof. However if it's a straightforward repair Mears will follow up the enquiry.

Following on from the Members questions, THH were asked to respond to questions submitted by Ms Halima Islam, a member of the public and from Mr Raqib, Tenants Representative for Tarling West Estate.

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

There was no other business discussed.

The meeting ended at 9.07 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Amina Ali
Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee