

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE HOUSING SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

HELD AT 5.06 P.M. ON MONDAY, 29 JANUARY 2018

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

Name	Role
Councillor John Pierce	Vice-Chair
Councillor Shiria Khatun	Member
Councillor Andrew Wood	Member
Anne Ambrose	Co-opted Member
Councillor Rachel Blake	Invited speaker

Apologies

Moshin Hamim	Co-opted Member
Councillor Rabina Khan	Member
Councillor Gulam Robbani	Member
Councillor Helal Uddin	Chair

Officers

Mark Baigent	Interim Divisional Director Housing
Elizabeth Bailey	Senior Strategy, Policy and Performance Officer
Seema Chote	Housing Options Manager
Rafiqul Hoque	Service Manager – Housing Options
Rushena Miah	Committee Services Officer
Ellie Kuper-Thomas	Planning Officer

Due to the Chair's apologies, the Vice Chair, Councillor John Pierce, Chaired the meeting.

1. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

Councillor John Pierce declared that he is a Board Member of Tower Hamlets Homes and East End Homes.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

There was one amendment in reference to page 12 of the agenda pack. It was clarified that it was Sandra Fawcett, not Anne Ambrose, who chaired an ASB sub-group in the borough.

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 November 2017 were approved and signed by the Chair further to the amendment being noted.

3. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION:

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Due to speaker availability, it was noted that the order of business would be changed as follows:

1. The London Plan
2. Homeless Scrutiny Review Action Plan
3. Spotlight Session from the Lead Member for Strategic Development and Waste.

However for convenience the minutes will follow the order as published on the agenda.

4. SPOTLIGHT SESSION: CABINET MEMBER FOR STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT AND WASTE

The Committee heard a presentation from Councillor Rachel Blake, Lead Member for Strategic Development and Waste, on housing development and housing delivery vehicles. Councillor Blake began the presentation by listing key housing achievements over 2017/18. These included:

- 148 new Council homes delivered at Watts Grove and let at social rents and Tower Hamlets Living Rents.
- Facilitated delivery of 3,326 affordable homes since April 2014. 6,879 market (private) units completed since April 2014.
- New Build contract let for 5 infill sites.
- 132 homes purchased, 83 Poplar HARCA and 49 Council, using £13.8m spend of Right to Buy Receipts (RTB).
- Implementation of Affordability Commission recommendations, including new Rent Policy May 2017, introducing Tower Hamlets Living Rent aimed at households on median incomes.
- 150 resident sign ups on new Self Build & Custom Build register, forum established.
- New housing vehicles launched including Mulberry Housing Society and Seahorse Homes.

Councillor Blake then moved on to explain some of the risks:

- Financial restrictions – housing revenue account borrowing cap, RTB receipts (30% cap and 3 year deadline).
- Brexit and ensuing challenges.
- Reduced CIL & S106 income for infrastructure and sustainability of residential developments.
- Availability of land and supporting funds.
- The affordability of shared ownership schemes.

The presentation concluded to state what could be done to mitigate the risks. This included:

- Positive planning – masterplan/development frameworks for growth areas.
- Infrastructure provision to un-lock difficult sites.

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- Fast tracking schemes that meet the 35% affordable homes policy requirement.
- Implementing recommendations of the Fire Safety Scrutiny Review.

Questions from Members:

Members asked if there was an update on the Isle of Dogs and Poplar Opportunity Framework. Councillor Blake explained that this was a Greater London Authority policy to coordinate the planning and coordination of development on the Island. It was noted that it was the first time that such a policy was being applied to a residential space.

When questioned whether the one thousand affordable homes mentioned in the presentation would be delivered via a big scheme, Mark Baigent, Interim Head of Strategy, Sustainability and Housing Options, confirmed that the Council would be welcoming both large and small schemes. Councillor Blake said that the Council had drafted a programme of development so a number of sites have already been identified for development.

It was confirmed that Tower Hamlets Homes would be expected to manage new build affordable properties.

Members highlighted the importance of sufficient and innovative waste management solutions as there had been issues reported in the borough about the difficulty of waste vehicles gaining access to new build properties.

Councillor Blake said that she was aware of the issue and would be eager to return to the Committee to discuss waste management at a later date.

Councillor John Pierce queried who was on the Mulberry Housing Society Board. It was confirmed that the membership of the board consisted of Ken Jones, who has had housing management experience from Waltham Forest Council, Sayed Uddin from Deloitte, Ann Sutcliffe from Tower Hamlets Homes and Mark Baigent from Tower Hamlets Council.

The Committee requested to see a trajectory of development for Mulberry Housing and invited the Chair of the organisation to speak at a future meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Committee, in order to engage with its work.

<p>ACTION: Elizabeth Bailey, Senior Strategy, Policy and Performance Officer, to add update from the Mulberry Housing Organisation Chair to the Forward Plan.</p>

Members asked what the alternative options were in response to unaffordable shared ownership schemes. Councillor Blake said that the Council needed to make stronger arguments for sustainability with the providers of the schemes.

A query was raised on how to get community support for the infill approach. It was clarified that infill development is the process of developing vacant or under-used pockets of land within existing urban areas. It was suggested that

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some of the reasons why the community disliked infill development was because they felt no connection to the development and because of density implications. One solution was to adopt a local lettings approach in relation to infill.

In response to a question about large developments dominating areas with poor infrastructure, Councillor Blake confirmed that the Local Plan will be prescriptive on the scale of developments and will be working with neighbouring boroughs, such as Newham, to build infrastructure such as bridges connecting isolated developments to town centres.

Members expressed concern that ground floor commercial space on new developments often remained unoccupied. Councillor Blake confirmed that the Council would be willing to take a risk on businesses applying to occupy the space to ensure they were not left vacant for too long.

RESOLVED

To note the presentation from Councillor Blake housing development and housing delivery vehicles.

5. QUARTER 3 PERFORMANCE DATA FOR KEY RESIDENT PROVIDERS

It was noted that the quarter two performance data would be emailed to Members after the meeting. It was requested that any questions arising from the report should be emailed to Elizabeth Bailey, Senior Strategic Policy Officer, who will collate the responses and share with the Committee.

ACTION: Members to be emailed Q3 performance data.

6. THE LONDON PLAN

The Committee heard a presentation from Ellie Kuper-Thomas, Planning Officer, on the new London Plan. The Greater London Authority's London Plan is being consulted upon until March 2018 for implementation and adoption in 2019. The Tower Hamlets Local Plan will be adopted in autumn 2018.

Key aims of the London Plan:

- Ensuring good growth that is both sustainable and inclusive
- Re-balancing housing delivery
- Determining a policy on small site delivery
- Determining a policy on the green belt

The London Plan themes included:

1. Planning London's Future – target to make 80% of journeys sustainable.

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2. Spatial Development Patterns – identifying strategic areas of regeneration.
3. Design – managing the impact of tall buildings and introducing tall building zones.
4. Fire safety.
5. Social Infrastructure – more public toilets.
6. Economy – 400m hot food takeaway restriction zone to schools.
7. Pub protection policy, new emphasis in heritage policy.
8. Green Infrastructure – new urban green factoring score to be introduced.
9. Sustainable Infrastructure – air quality policy and circular economy of recycle and reuse.
10. Transport – target of 80% of all journeys to be made by public transport, bicycle or foot by 2041.

With regard to housing, the London target was to build 660,000 new homes, 65% of which would be affordable. Therefore the new Tower Hamlets housing target was reduced from 3,931 to 3,511 new homes a year.

Ms Thomas explained that eighteen new policies on housing were to be introduced. These included:

- Increasing housing supply.
- Presumption in favour of small site development where no design code is present.
- Identifying ‘meanwhile’ use of sites for housing.
- Increasing affordable housing target to 50%.
- Threshold approach to applications.
- Affordable housing tenure.
- Redevelopment of existing housing and estate regeneration.
- Ensuring best use of stock – to target voids and holiday let issues.
- Housing size mix - determining suitable housing unit mix but not setting prescriptive dwelling size mix requirements for market and intermediate homes.
- Supporting build to rent and reducing affordable housing targets on such developments.
- Widening the definition of gypsy traveller.
- Student Accommodation – increasing the target to 35% of affordable student accommodation.
- Introducing purpose built shared living.

Questions and comments from Members

Some Members expressed concern that the increase in development projects would impact urban density, narrow streets, increase pollution levels, impact access to community services such as GP surgeries and negatively impact community cohesion. There were concerns that some of the newer developments seemed to be purposefully segregating its residents from the wider community by restricting the use of the new build gyms and swimming pools to residents.

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They also queried why Tower Hamlets was seeing more development compared to outer London. Ms Kuper-Thomas explained that it was due to a mixture of east London being a popular location and because there were a large number of feasible sites identified for development.

When asked if the Council knew where the 3511 new homes would be built, it was confirmed that the Council had a good idea of where development would be taking place due to site mapping exercises.

With regard to protecting pubs, Councillor Pierce asked if the plan included a more generous Section 106 agreement in order to enable businesses to thrive. Ms Kuper-Thomson said that there was nothing specific on S106.

The Committee requested to learn more about the work of the Conservation and Design Advisory Panel and how the community could engage with their work.

<p>ACTION: Michael Ritchie, Place Shaping Team Leader LBTH, to write a briefing note on the Conservation and Design Advisory Panel (CADAP).</p>

Members asked for clarification on the term 'meanwhile use', it was explained that this was the redevelopment of empty commercial premises for non-commercial use. Members were of the opinion that the spaces should be utilised for community benefit.

Councillor Andrew Woods raised concerns about the small sites policy. He used an example from his ward to illustrate how the policy could be exploited. He said that there was an unsuccessful attempt to convert a garage space into a tall tower block of one room apartments. Ms Kuper-Thompson assured Councillor Woods that there were design codes in place to prevent incongruous development.

Ms Thomas reiterated that the deadline for comment on the consultation was 2 March 2018. Members were instructed to get in touch with Ms Thomas if they had anything to add to the Council's response.

RESOLVED

To note the presentation on the London Plan.

7. HOMELESS SCRUTINY REVIEW ACTION PLAN

The Committee heard a presentation from Rafiqul Hoque, Service Manager Housing Options and Seema Chote, Housing Options Manager, on the Homeless Scrutiny Review Action Plan.

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Key points from the presentation included:

- A working group within Housing Options has been formed to implement the Housing Reduction Act 2018, which will come into force from April 2018.
- Preventing homelessness has become a statute in law.
- A personalised housing plan will be created for people in risk of homelessness. A fresh approach will be required to support people in sustaining their tenancy or to provide secure accommodation.
- Staff will be required to do a homelessness assessment and a face to face interview with homeless people.
- Housing Options will be delivering motivational interview training to staff.
- Greater working with the voluntary sector to provide frontline services, information on benefits and finding employment.
- There will be an emphasis in recording feedback on what is working and what could be improved.

Questions and comments from Members:

Members asked for clarification on recommendation 9, page 21 of the pack, because it seemed to contradict itself. It stated that those in rent arrears would be considered intentionally homeless but then went on to say that those tenants who signed a tenancy unaware it was unaffordable would not be considered intentionally homeless.

Mr Hoque said that if a tenancy was approved after the Council had done an assessment and it was later discovered the tenant could no longer afford to live in the property, they would not be deemed intentionally homeless as the fault would lie with the Council in not assessing that person properly. He went on to say the Council had a duty to support anyone in danger of becoming homeless whether that was to provide advice on money, benefits or issues with their landlord.

Councillor Khatun raised a concern saying that in their ward they had seen previously decanted buildings being used for temporary accommodation for homeless families. Mr Hoque assured Members that there are quality checks performed on the suitability of the accommodation and some funding available to bring the accommodation up to standard.

Officers reiterated that the Housing Reduction Act is planned to come into force from April 2018 and that the Government would be providing local authorities with transitional money to facilitate implementation.

<p>ACTION: for the Committee to receive an update on the Homeless Reduction Act and Action Plan six months after implementation. Elizabeth Bailey, Senior Strategy Policy and Performance Officer, to add to the Forward Plan.</p>

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Members wished to know what role the Council would play in conflicts between tenants and private landlords. Officers said that the Council had a duty to mediate with both the landlord and tenant to come to a resolution.

With regard to street homelessness, Officers confirmed that the new Act also required the Housing Options team to provide rough sleepers with a personalised housing plan. They said the borough may see an increase in rough sleepers who wish to access the service. In order to facilitate greater access, the reception areas of housing support services will provide resources such as access to advisors and telephones to enable homeless people to make enquires.

RESOLVED

To note the report and action plan.

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Ann Ambrose, Tenant Representative, requested the Committee review the Committee's actions list at a future meeting.

The meeting ended at 7.06 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Helal Uddin
Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee