

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations on interest declared.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING(S)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the sub committee, 9 September 2021 were approved as a correct record of the proceedings.

Matters arising

Further to Item 3.2 - Fire Safety Scrutiny Report, the vice chair suggested it may be appropriate for the Committee to invite residents of Clare House to come and speak to us about their experiences of the recent fire-safety related incident. He indicated he would consult the Chair about putting this on the sub committee's work plan.

3. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

3.1 Social Landlords Performance Report

It was noted that the invitations to Spitalfields Housing Association (SHA) to attend both the 9 September and this (19 October) meeting had been declined, and that there were some SHA residents in attendance who wished to raise concerns with their housing provider. At the invitation of the chair, a number of residents addressed the sub committee to highlight concerns with SHA, including:

- No response from SHA to complaints (residents also expressed doubt over the accuracy of SHA's complaints data as presented in the report).
- Repairs not being completed.
- No non-email option to submit issues in writing. Little or no response to emails. Very difficult to contact SHA via phone.
- Lack of engagement with residents and no local presence of SHA; very difficult to speak to a representative face-to-face; the former local office has closed with no explanation and moved to Canada Square, but residents cannot access it.
- Residents being denied opportunity to participate in governance arrangements. Breaking down of community and democratic participation opportunities and an absence of oversight and accountability arrangements. Meetings (inc. the AGM) being held away from Spitalfields making it very difficult for residents to attend.
- Residents would like the Council to intervene as they feel they currently have no outlet to raise their grievances within SHA.

Further to the comments of residents, The sub committee expressed concern and alarm at the seriousness, range and volume of issues raised, their longstanding nature and the apparent failure of the provider to respond

adequately to them or to make representatives available to attend sub committee meetings (the chair noted that he had received a written statement from SHA which responded to some of the concerns made by residents at the 9 September meeting, however, this could not be made public as it disclosed personal information pertaining to tenants). The chair suggested that SHA be given a further opportunity to attend a meeting of the sub committee to respond to residents' concerns, following which the sub committee should develop recommendations for the administration, to include a proposed a course of action for steps the council can take to address the matter.

Shalim Uddin, Affordable Housing Coordinator, introduced the report which provided cumulative performance data for 14 registered providers (RPs) within the borough for quarter 2. Shalim provided a summary of the key achievements and challenges reflected in the report and, further to questions from the sub committee, explained some of the performance trends. He also highlighted an error in the performance table at Appendix 1 to the report: the number of complaints received by Southern Housing Group (question 1) should read 56.

Karen Swift, Director of Housing and Regeneration, provided some further context on the improvements that had been made to the format of the report since it was last submitted and future work that would make the data more accessible and useful to the sub committee. Karen noted there had been some mis-communications recently between the council and RPs and this had led to inaccuracies with some of the performance data. She indicated officers would be pursuing a more 'curious' approach to RP performance data, instead of simply taking it on face-value.

Pam Bhamra, Chair of THHF, provided an update on work of the THHF benchmarking group to respond to the sub committee's previous comments and observations on the way performance data is presented.

Further to the social landlords performance report, the sub committee:

- Indicated concern with the accuracy and reliability of some of the data supplied by RPs. The sub committee noted the council has limited options to challenge or check data supplied, but welcomed officers' assurances that a more 'curious' approach to RP performance data would be used to address this.
- Noted that the ranking approach taken in the report's appendices was not always illuminating, as it did not reflect the volume of housing stock each RP holds.
- Reiterated concerns that the report did not provide clarity on the actual targets each provider set themselves to complete repairs. The sub committee would welcome this to enable a more robust comparison of repairs performance between providers.
- Welcomed the recent work to improve the format and presentation of the report and accompanying performance data, which helped to provide a more realistic reflection of RP performance than had been the case in past reports.

RESOLVED

1. To review and note progress in the performance outturns achieved by individual Social Landlords and the overall performance trend.
2. To invite Spitalfields Housing Association to attend the next meeting of the sub committee on 2 December 2021.

3.2 Economic Growth - Employment presentation

Vicky Clark, Director for Growth and integration provided a brief presentation to the sub committee on the Council's services to improve employment outcomes for residents. The presentation provided a summary of the strategic context, including the Council's Growth Plan priorities; the key performance metrics of the Work path service and Workpath partnership; and an overview of recent activity. Aelswith Frayne, Economic Development, provided some further information on the partnership working that had been undertaken with local universities and with Central London Forward on the green skills agenda.

Further to questions from sub committee members on the presentation, Vicky and Aelswith, provided more information on the following:

- Apprenticeship opportunities in the borough, and the impact the Covid lockdown had on this work.
- Discussions and plans for the co-location of services, including Job Centre Plus, Idea Stores and adult learning services.
- Awareness of smaller projects and providers to help residents into work (for example Spear project in St Peters) and partnership work currently undertaken
- Background of the Watney Market career advice site and possibilities for resuming operation at this site and options for services once the Town Hall moves to Whitechapel.

Further to a question from the chair which referred to the most recent cabinet report on strategic performance monitoring and revisions to Workpath targets since the pandemic, Vicky and Aelswith:

- Provided an outline of the work underway to return performance to pre-pandemic levels.
- Indicated that due to various factors, including the reduced overall capacity of the service as a result of recent restructure and the uncertainty around the national employment market (including the impact of the impact end of furlough arrangements) that the current Workpath targets should remain at least until the start of the next municipal year.

The chair thanked Vicky and Aelswith for their contribution.

RESOLVED

That the presentation be noted.

3.3 Regeneration Framework - presentation

Mayor John Biggs and Sripriya Sudhakar, Head of Regeneration, provided a brief update presentation to the sub committee on the Council's regeneration approach. The presentation provided an Overview of the council's regeneration policy and structures; how the council embedded its approach to regeneration; how the council monitored its policies to deliver regeneration outcomes and an overview of new ways of working.

Further to questions from sub committee members on the presentation, Mayor Biggs and Sripriya provided more information on the following:

- Update of Crossharbour DLR station proposed works and how CIL may be used to help deliver the partnership project.
- How the council's regeneration outcomes are linked to its Local Plan to promote affordability, ensure uplift and deliver homes which can reduce pressure on the current housing waiting list.

Further to the presentation the chair expressed concern that past regeneration projects in the 1990s and 2000s did not do enough to address the wider economic decline of Tower Hamlets. He felt that the limited time and scope of this item did not allow the sub-committee to provide sufficiently meaningful input into the council's regeneration approach. He proposed an informal meeting or challenge session in the new year, to involve a wider group of non-executive Councillors, co optees and expert speakers from other authorities.

The chair thanked Mayor Biggs and Sripriya for their contribution.

RESOLVED

1. That the presentation be noted.
2. That the sub committee consider an informal meeting or challenge session in the new year, to involve a wider group of non-executive Councillors, co-optees and expert speakers from other authorities, to explore the council's regeneration approach.

4. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The sub-committee asked for a note from officers on the refund of water commission rates to Tower Hamlets Homes' (and other social housing) tenants following a recent court case and asked how the council can reassure residents they do not need to approach claims management companies to get refunds they are entitled to.

The meeting ended at 8.30 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Ehtasham Haque
Housing & Regeneration Scrutiny Sub Committee