

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE HOUSING & REGENERATION SCRUTINY SUB COMMITTEE

HELD AT 6.30 P.M. ON THURSDAY, 20 OCTOBER 2022

**COMMITTEE ROOM ONE - TOWN HALL, MULBERRY PLACE, 5 CLOVE
CRESCENT, LONDON, E14 2BG**

Members Present:

Councillor Abdul Mannan (Chair)

Councillor Musthak Ahmed

Councillor Nathalie Bienfait

Councillor Marc Francis

Councillor Sabina Khan

Councillor Bellal Uddin

Co-opted Members Present:

Mahbub Anam (Tenant representative)

Susanna Kow (Leaseholder representative)

Councillors Present Remotely:

Councillor Ahmodul Kabir

Officers Present:

Mark Slowikowski (Strategy, Policy and Performance Manager)

Officers Present Remotely:

Karen Swift (Director Housing and Regeneration)

Nicola Klinger (Housing Companies Manager)

Riad Akbur (Service Manager, Homelessness)

Guest:

Andrea Baker (Chair of Tower Hamlets Housing Forum (THHF))

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of pecuniary interests. Mahbub Anam declared for transparency, that he is a resident board member for Tower Hamlets Homes (THH).

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING(S)

The minutes of the sub committee, 14 July 2022 were approved as a correct record of the proceedings.

3. OPEN ACTIONS

Minutes of the sub committee meeting held on 15 March 2022. – Councillor Marc Francis expressed concern that Tower Hamlets Homes (THH) has not attended the sub committee as requested. The Chair explained that it was not deemed appropriate for THH to discuss performance issues, due to an ongoing consultation being held at that time. THH are scheduled to attend the next Housing and Regeneration Sub Committee meeting.

3.1.1. Social Landlord's Performance Report: 15 March 2022. – Councillor Marc Francis asked that this become a regular standing agenda item, as performance data requires robust scrutiny. The item is on the work plan for the next Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Sub Committee meeting.

3.1.4. Letters to the Mayor and Clarion Housing Association. – Councillor Nathalie Bienfait requested an update on the recent meeting between the Mayor and Clarion Housing Association. Councillor Marc Francis also queried if the Mayor would issue a formal request for the Regulator to investigate performance concerns, raised by residents of Spitalfields Housing Association.

The Chair clarified that the current Mayor will be sending a letter to the chair of Spitalfields Housing Association to investigate concerns, rather than the Regulator. Karen Swift, Director of Housing and Regeneration, confirmed that a meeting with the Mayor, Spitalfields management team and residents has been arranged. It is hoped that discussions will include an update on the legal case taken by residents, believed to have now been resolved.

Karen Swift also confirmed that a separate meeting with the Mayor and Clarion had taken place and discussions included Clarion's recent cyber-attack, affordable housing site options, an update on decanted residents and redevelopment options for Clare House. The Mayor requested regular updates and a briefing note on the meeting will be shared with the sub committee, once reviewed by the Mayor's Office.

B/F Fire Safety Action Plan. – Karen Swift confirmed a meeting with the Mayor is scheduled for 21 October 2022. Discussions will include ways to strengthen the plan and will contain priorities outlined in the strategic delivery

proposals derived from the Mayor's manifesto. The draft is scheduled for submittance to Cabinet before the end of December 2022.

Following responses from Karen Swift, the sub committee;

Suggested the Chair request an invitation to attend any future meetings with the Mayor and Housing Associations, to provide an extra level of insight and scrutiny to discussions. Details will be provided to the sub committee.

RESOLVED that

1. The Chair to request an invitation to any future meetings with the Mayor and Housing Associations and to provide an update to the sub committee.
2. The presentation be noted.

4. WORK PROGRAMME 2022/23

4.1 Housing & Regeneration Sub-Committee Work Programme

The Chair introduced the work programme for the sub committee and noted that 15 December 2022 meeting has been moved to 12 January 2023. This was approved by the Mayor.

RESOLVED that

1. The presentation be noted.

5. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

5.1 Challenge Session Recommendations

The Chair introduced the recommendations from the challenge sessions held on 15 September 2022 to the sub committee. Karen Swift, Director of Housing and Regeneration and Nicola Klinger, Housing Companies Manager, were asked to discuss the details of the report.

Further to questions from members of the sub committee, Karen and Nicola:

- Confirmed that the Mayor reviewed the report and requested amendments, including having three options for responses and using more clear and concise language. The consultation paper will be sent out to residents from 24 October, and copies will be made available for the sub committee's review.
- Explained that the questionnaire is one of several ways of engaging with residents. Both tenants and leaseholders will receive a copy by

post which will have a specific reference number, and a Frequently Ask Questions section.

- Confirmed that an email address, and an anonymous comments box will be made available for residents to send feedback. There will also be two information webinars, one detailing how to participate, the other enabling residents to interact directly with the council.
- Explained that all resident feedback and response rates will be closely monitored by a dedicated programme team for analysis. The survey's will be available online via the 'Let's Talk Tower Hamlets' engagement platform. The results including the methodology will form part of a report scheduled for Cabinet submittance in March 2023.
- Clarified that the initial proposed consultation budget of £463K encompasses a programme lead, staff costs with initial fees for legal advice, along with Communications and Marketing costs. This also includes further legal and IT costs, and finance analysis required prior to a Cabinet decision for the municipal year 2022/23. Financial analysis on other local authorities who have used external consultants, showed a comparatively higher budget than the costs proposed, which will be met by the Housing Revenue Account reserves (HRA).
- Indicated that a number of options are being considered regarding a transition period with THH staff and residents. Proposals for embedding various functions whilst ensuring resident engagement and services remain consistent are ongoing. Collective views on how the process should evolve will be updated to the sub committee.

Further to the presentation and questions, the sub committee;

- Requested a full breakdown of the associated £463K cost and a rationale on why this was apportioned to the HRA and not the general fund.
- Requested that Informed discussions with the Tenants Residents Association (TRA) be considered with Members and Officers present.

RESOLVED that

1. A full breakdown on the associated £463k with a rationale on why this was apportioned to the HRA be submitted.
2. The presentation be noted.

5.2 Council Representation on the Boards of Social Landlords - THHF

Andrea Baker, Chair of Tower Hamlets Housing Forum (THHF) introduced a presentation on register provider governance, to explore the feasibility of

including council representation on the board of social landlords operating in the borough. Andrea will be attending the sub committee going forward to address any concerns within the sector.

Andrea gave a brief overview of the Board's key responsibilities to set strategy, accountability and development that ensure the mission and core values are adhered to. Details of the Regulator of Social Housing's in-depth assessments on governance and financial viability were outlined, as were the key objectives of the National Housing Federations Code of Governance, required by all registered provider's.

RESOLVED that

1. The presentation be noted.

5.3 Council Representation on the Board of Social Landlords

Karen Swift, Director of Housing and Regeneration, followed Andrea's presentation and introduced the sub committee to the current level of councillors represented on the boards of social landlords in the borough. Currently there are only three registered social landlords who have councillors on the boards of social landlords; East End Homes, Tower Hamlets Community Housing (THCH) and Tower Hamlets Homes (THH). Board recruitment is openly advertised to those with the skillset specific to the needs of the RP and in accordance to the Regulator.

Further to questions from members of the sub committee, Andrea and Karen;

- Explained that council representation to increase transparency with housing associations can only rise when more councillors apply for vacancies on the Governing Board and demonstrate they have the skills and experience required.
- Clarified that there are a number of external independent bodies who deal with social landlord governance concerns, including the Regulator of Social Housing who has a relationship with forum members and encourages transparency. The Regulator can request in-depth assessments, require yearly Governance health checks, which are independently verified by experts, and can even place members to sit at governing Board meetings if required to strengthen the regulatory remit. The Housing Ombudsman also uses warning systems to alert serious service failures reported by residents.
- Clarified that the Regulator does not advocate for RP's nominating councillors to the Board, as this raises concerns.

Further to the presentation and questions, the sub committee;

- Indicated that the solution lies in including more resident representation to the Governance Board, to improve services and to hold registered social landlords more accountable.
- Noted that until the Social Housing Regulation Bill comes into effect with the consumer mandate, the Regulator is under no obligation to discuss any concerns tenants may have when it conducts in-depth assessments compiled of social landlords.

RESOLVED that

1. The presentation be noted.

5.4 Approach and Support to Homeless Applications

Karen Swift, Director, Housing and Regeneration, and Riad Akbur, Service Manager, Homelessness, introduced the report which examined the councils approach to supporting homeless applications. The service receives around 2,000 applicants a year, all requiring specific approaches, and temporary accommodation being one approach.

A Task and Finish group working in conjunction with Customer Services, was established to review long waiting times, emergencies without appointments and applicants with more complex issues. Work is taking place to streamline the process, with departments working together to improve the customer experience.

Further to questions from members of the sub committee, Karen and Riad:

- Explained that a work stream for the emergency out of hours service is currently taking place with the Adult Social Care and Facilities Management, in preparation for when the new Resident's Hub is established at the Whitechapel building. The homeless service will be one of the last services to move from Mulberry Place.
- Indicated that financial advice for residents is available, including a dedicated team to assist social housing tenants facing difficulties or eviction.
- A briefing note on the standards required for temporary accommodation was submitted by the procurement lead to the sub committee for information.
- The council has a duty to assist homeless residents and seeking advice early on is advisable.
- Confirmed that every effort is made to place families within the borough, although housing stock is scarce and demand is high, meaning it is sometimes necessary to place residents in neighbouring

boroughs, or private sector housing when available. It is difficult to estimate how long families remain outside the borough, as each circumstance differs. Where possible family mediation is encouraged.

Further to the presentation and questions, the sub committee;

- Observed that constituents at surgeries express frustration at the level of service. More improvement, external transparency and scrutiny is required.
- Requested the council's KPI's on customer satisfaction, response times and performance, including how personal housing plans are measured by quality of service, be submitted at the next Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Sub Committee meeting.

RESOLVED that

1. The council's KPI for customer satisfaction, response times and performance, including a breakdown on how personal housing plans are measured by quality of service, be submitted to the next Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Sub Committee meeting.
2. The recommendations be noted.

6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business discussed.

The meeting ended at 8.34 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Abdul Mannan

Housing & Regeneration Scrutiny Sub Committee