

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE HOUSING SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

HELD AT TIME NOT SPECIFIED ON MONDAY, 10 OCTOBER 2016

**C1, 1ST FLOOR, TOWN HALL, MULBERRY PLACE, 5 CLOVE CRESCENT,
LONDON, E14 2BG**

Members Present:

Councillor Amina Ali (Chair)
Councillor Andrew Cregan
Councillor Rabina Khan
Councillor Abdul Mukit MBE
Councillor Helal Uddin
Councillor Andrew Wood
Moshin Hamim
Anne Ambrose

Co-opted Members Present:

Moshin Hamim
Anne Ambrose

Leaseholder Representative
Tenant Representative

Other Councillors Present:

Councillor Dave Chesterton –
Councillor Rachel Blake
Councillor Sirajul Islam

Others Present:

Andrea Baker –

Officers Present:

Mark Baigent – (Interim Head of Strategy, Regeneration,
Sustainability and Housing Options)
Paul Buckenham – (Development Control Manager, Development
and Renewal)
Mark Bursnell – Senior Strategy, Policy & Performance Officer
Afazul Hoque – Interim Service Manager, Strategy, Policy &
Performance
Martin Ling – Housing Policy Manager
Jen Pepper – (Affordable Housing Programme Manager,
Development and Renewal)
Owen Whalley – Head of Planning and Building Control
Godfrey Heyman – Registered Providers Preferred Partnership
Officer
Tracey St Hill – Principle RSL Partnerships Officer

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1. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

The Chair, Councillor Amina Ali welcomed everybody to the Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee meeting and introduced the two co-optee's who had been appointed to the Sub-Committee – Moshin Hamim, Leaseholder representative and Anne Ambrose, Tenant Representative.

She requested everyone to introduce themselves and commenced the meeting.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Gulam Robbani.

Councillor Helal Uddin declared an interest with regard to item 3.2 as a Board Member of Tower Hamlets Homes and as an employee of Poplar HARCA.

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 18th July 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 LBTH Housing Strategy 2016- 2021

Martin Ling, Housing Strategy Manager presented his report outlining the progress made so far in developing the Council's new Housing Strategy.

Martin explained the aim of the Housing Strategy was to set out an overarching vision for the borough and was supported by a full evidence base. Economic need and the issue of supply and demand were the biggest concerns raised by residents and the Council needed to have a measured approach.

He said the strategy included the Council's commitment to deliver affordable housing, meeting people's housing needs, improve the living conditions of residents who lived in private rented accommodation and having an effective partnership with residents and stakeholders.

The Council had consulted with residents and held a Housing Conference on the 1st October which was well attended. The Strategy would be going to Full Council for approval on the 16th November.

In his presentation Martin referred to the key themes of the strategy.

Theme 1 – Building affordable housing, economic growth and regeneration

Theme 2 – Meeting People’s housing need

Theme 3 – Raising private rented housing standards

Theme 4 – Effective Partnership working with residents and stakeholders

Martin referred to the Housing and Planning Act 2016 and the Mayor of London’s Housing Strategy and stated that key decisions regarding these policies would impact on the local strategy which had been developed.

This was followed by questions from Members who made the following points:

- Are affordable homes truly affordable in Tower Hamlets? Consideration should be given to modular homes; Pocket Living was referred to as an example.
- Cost and quality of construction for social housing requires scrutiny.
- Government should rethink the 20% starter homes condition stated in the Housing and Planning Act 2016. More reference to the Community Land Fund, Brown field sites and self-build homes should be included in the local Housing Strategy.
- Further analysis was required regarding consultation methodology and if every opportunity had been given to residents to participate in the consultation. Reference was made to underrepresented groups such as certain BME groups, the unemployed and young people in the borough.
- How do you engage with RSLs within the borough, 50 are mentioned but only 21 have responded?
- What action is being taken to ensure Outer London Boroughs’ are achieving housing targets set by the Mayor of London?

Councillor Blake, Cabinet Member for Strategic Development and Martin Ling responded stating:

- Affordability was a big issue and the Welfare cap had impacted on how affordable homes were in the borough. The Strategy included the Council’s commitment of introducing a ‘Tower Hamlets’ living rent which would subsidise those who fall outside the welfare cap thresholds and/or do not earn enough to pay top rents.

- Regarding the quality and cost of construction, Councillor Blake said work was on going with Developers to ensure quality standards were being met. Further discussion on this would take place when discussing item 3.3 of the agenda.
- The Council was looking at the Centre for London report and alternatives such as 'in fill' homes and would share the 'Affordability Commission's report' with the Sub-Committee.
- With regard to methodology Martin stated that the Council had followed its consultation procedures and had tried to engage with as many people as possible. The Council had consulted with the general public and attended the Older Persons forum, the Health and Wellbeing Board as well as various other groups representing local people.
- The 21 RSLs consulted are significant stakeholders in the borough but it is difficult to engage with all RSLs as some are regionally based or are small enterprises. The RSLs are represented by the Tower Hamlets Housing Forum (THHF) and they have been extensively consulted in formulating the Housing Strategy.
- Issues such as Housing Management – performance of Landlords, Anti-Social Behaviour, the churn on Estates, Right to Buy, etc all create issues for Landlords and Tenants
- The Mayor of London's Housing strategy sets out targets for all London Boroughs and Outer London Boroughs will be playing a role to tackle the housing crisis.

The Sub-Committee **RESOLVED** to **NOTE**:

The draft Housing Strategy and the attached appendices which have been consulted upon and to note the responses to the 1st stage of the consultation.

3.2 Registered Providers Cumulative End of Year Performance Report 2015/16 and First Quarter Report for 2016/17

Godfrey Heyman, Registered Providers Preferred Partnership Officer presented his report stating the Quarterly performance data was produced to reflect the key customer facing performance indicators, so tenants and local residents can be assured that RP's were delivering effective and customer focussed services.

The report provided cumulative data for 2015/16 and the first quarter of 2016/17. The Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) concentrated on 14 areas and had been agreed between the Council and senior officers of the Registered Providers.

The statistics are provided to the Tower Hamlets Housing Forum and also to Cllr Sirajul Islam, Cabinet Member for Housing Management and Performance.

At various sub-groups of the THHF the performance outturns are used to develop intelligence and ensure good practice is shared between the Registered Providers.

Godfrey cautioned that whilst the KPI information showed mixed performance it should not be considered alone and Members should look at emerging trends. Figures can be skewed by sample size and methodology used by RP's. It was a risky science as like for like comparisons could not easily be made.

He referred Members to points 5.3 and 5.4 of the report and stated that the Housing and Communities Agency (HCA) were the regulators for Registered Providers. The Council worked alongside Registered Providers but had no legal powers to ensure a fixed standard in terms of the quality and level of customer outcomes provided by the sector was achieved.

This was followed by questions from Members

- Councillor Wood referred to page 137 of the agenda pack and asked for clarification regarding named providers? - 5th table 1st row should be Providence Row and 5th table 2nd row should be Southern Housing.
- Could more data be provided regarding individual estates?
- Performance charts, whilst useful did not measure the effectiveness of the response or the quality of service provided – for example, repairs. If escalated by a tenant usually will end up as a complaint (following another procedure) rather than the actual issue being dealt with swiftly.
- What the purpose of the KPI data was? What was it hoping to achieve?
- Have Registered Providers utilised the Disability Facilities Grant (DFG) or is the Council funding adaptations to homes of people with disabilities?
- Why is it that some RPs cannot provide data on levels of satisfaction regarding Anti-Social Behaviour?

Godfrey responded stating the following:

- Acknowledged the discrepancy and was thankful to Cllr Wood for alerting him to it.
- Difficult to attain data relating to a single estate as Registered Providers use different methodologies and some do not produce that type of data.
- Each Registered Provider will have different procedures to identifying issues and dealing with them and whether this then escalates into a complaint. We have service standards so we expect them to adhere to these. In terms of measuring customer satisfaction, each RP needs to learn from a complaint and have an open and flexible approach.
- The purpose is to look at best practise amongst RP's and learn from each other.
- DFG funding the Council keeps 50% of it. The service shall provide a more detailed answer to the Sub-Committee.
- Cllr Sirajul Islam responded stating ASB is an issue everywhere. RP's have a covenant with Tenants but rules are broken. He informed the Sub-Committee he was undertaking a joint piece of work with RPs and will be visiting estates in the borough where ASB is a particular problem.

The Sub-Committee **RESOLVED** to **NOTE** the recommendations contained within the report

1. Review the progress in the performance outturns achieved by individual RPs and THH and the overall performance trend for both reports;
2. Comment on any variances in the performance of individual RPs over 2015/16 and the first quarter of 2016/17.

3.3 Challenge Session Progress Update - The Quality of s106 Funded Social Housing

Cllr Dave Chesterton introduced this item stating he was lending support to Owen Whalley, Service Head of Planning and Building Control following the Scrutiny Challenge session held last year concerning Section 106 agreements.

The Challenge session resulted in four recommendations being made and the action plan appended to the report gives further detail about the progress being made. Cllr Dave Chesterton commended the legal comments within the

report and hoped the new guidance would assist developers as well as Registered Providers.

Officers informed the Sub-Committee that each recommendation had been progressed and highlighted that the Council's Developer Forum which meets at the end of October/early November would provide further feedback. The quality of construction materials used in new builds – both external and internal finishes - had been raised and Swan Housing was assisting in developing guidance and procedure notes which the Tower Hamlets Housing Forum (THHF) would be examining further.

Officers said they were mindful of the legal framework in which they operated, ensuring developers met the national standards and were keen to work alongside developers to ensure Section 106 agreements were abided to.

Members of the Sub-Committee raised the following issues:

- Cllr Dave Chesterton recommended the Sub-Committee revisit the progress made against the action plan in a year's time.
- Quality of a section 106 build – a community centre was discussed by the Sub-Committee and Members asked if there was a legal proviso, to claw back some of the money due to the poor quality of the build.
- Will the quality of build – i.e. construction materials used, standards and design be included in the Local Plan?

The Sub-Committee **RESOLVED** to **NOTE** the recommendations within the report:

1. Note the progress in implementing the recommendations from the scrutiny challenge session, based on the evidence in the action plan;
2. Raise any issues in relation to the progress detailed in the action plan.
3. Revisit the progress made against the action plan in a year's time

3.4 Spotlight session-Cabinet Member for Housing Management and Performance

Cllr Sirajul Islam, Statutory Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Housing Management and Performance, gave a presentation about his portfolio and the current achievements, challenges and opportunities that the Council faced.

He informed the Sub-Committee of his priorities and said he was working in partnership with housing providers, developing new homes, managing the Council's housing stock, meeting housing needs and preventing homelessness.

He highlighted the achievements so far and said the new Housing Strategy 2016-2021 set out the vision for the Council and how it would work alongside key partners and stakeholders to deliver housing to Tower Hamlet residents. He praised the work of the Affordability Commission and the Council's commitment to the London Living Rent.

The Council had the highest number of new affordable homes in London between 2010-2015 and was working to build a further 233 new homes including Watts Grove and Poplar Baths.

The Council's arms-length management company – Tower Hamlets Homes had been re-invigorated and a new five year major works plan had been agreed. Over 1,000 homes had been made decent last year bringing the programme total to over 7,500.

The Council had achieved good results in preventing homelessness with 100% less unlawful B&B placements, and 88% less families in B&B.

Some of the challenges were ensuring that the number of people in Temporary Accommodation did not increase and also working to prevent the number of rough sleepers growing. The growing lack of affordable private rented housing was also a concern and the council was looking to work with private landlords to improve the quality and standard of private rented homes.

The Sub-Committee made the following comments:

- More work needs to be done to reduce the number of people facing homelessness. More interventions needed to be made.
- Are the homes at West Grove and Poplar Baths going to be affordable and will the London living rent apply?
- What impact has the welfare reforms had on communities in Tower Hamlets?
- Will there be a borough-wide resident's forum? The one operated by the THHF needs to be re-vitalised and then re-launched.
- How can the Council influence owners of under-used land – for example, redundant former commercial buildings?
- How many families especially women are placed in out of borough accommodation?
- Can Leaseholders have the right to manage their own housing block?
- Estate re-generation and the Lettings Plan needs to be discussed with local residents.

Councillor Amina Ali thanked Councillor Sirajul Islam for his presentation and hoped the questions raised by the Sub-Committee would assist him in delivering his priorities.

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

There was no other business discussed.

The meeting ended at Time Not Specified

Chair, Councillor Amina Ali
Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee