

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE HOUSING & REGENERATION SCRUTINY SUB COMMITTEE

HELD AT 5.30 P.M. ON THURSDAY, 15 APRIL 2021

ONLINE 'VIRTUAL' MEETING - [HTTPS://TOWERHAMLETS.PUBLIC-I.TV/CORE/PORTAL/HOME](https://towerhamlets.public-i.tv/core/portal/home)

Members Present:

Councillor Ehtasham Haque (Chair)
Councillor Amina Ali
Councillor Marc Francis
Councillor Andrew Wood

Co-opted Members Present:

Anne Ambrose Tenant Representative

Others Present:

John Henderson, – Managing Director, East End Homes
Paul Bloss, – Chief Executive, East End Homes
Susmita Sen – Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets Homes
Pam Bhamra – Chair of Tower Hamlets Housing Forum

Officers Present:

Mark Slowikowski – (Strategy, Policy and Performance Manager)
Rafiqul Hoque – (Head of Housing Options)
Shalim Uddin – (Affordable Housing Providers Co-ordinator)
Jane Abraham – (Interim Head of Capital Delivery)
Vicky Clark – (Divisional Director for Growth and Economic Development)
Jennifer Peters – (Divisional Director, Planning and Building Control, Place)
Aelswith Frayne – (Interim Head of Employment and Skills)
Jen Pepper – (Affordable Housing Development and Partnerships Manager)
Joel West – (Democratic Services Team Leader (Committee))

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

There were declarations made.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING(S)

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the sub committee, 10 February 2021 were approved as a correct record of the proceedings.

3. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

3.1 Social Landlords Performance Report

Shalim Uddin, Affordable Housing Coordinator, introduced the report which summarised quarterly performance data for 14 registered providers (RPs) within the borough and an update on the work of the THHF benchmarking group. 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.

Further to the officer introduction, the sub committee:

- Requested a report to a future meeting comparing rent and service charge increases across the main providers.
- Noted work to date exploring how the council could encourage all providers with stock in the borough to join the Tower Hamlets Housing Forum. It was noted that many providers are reluctant to do so as their stock numbers within LBTH are relatively small. The Chair asked officers to explore ways to encourage providers who do not wish to join the forum to otherwise engage meaningfully with the council.
- Reiterated its concerns (expressed in previous meetings) that the performance data presentation did not allow members to make fair comparisons of performance between providers.

b) East End Homes presentation),

John Henderson, Managing Director and Paul Bloss, Chief Executive, from East End Homes gave a brief presentation. The presentation provided an overview of the current position of the provider, how it responded to the challenges of Covid19; current performance; and plans for the future, including the delivery of new homes.

Further to questions from members of the sub committee, Mr Henderson and Mr Bloss:

- Provided detail of the providers plans to address fire safety issues in its stock, including its priority on replacing non-compliant cladding and its risk based approach.

- Explained how the provider seeks to manage relationships in mixed tenure schemes.
- Outlined their communications strategy and in particular how they communicate and engage with residents for whom English is not their first language.

RESOLVED that the Sub Committee:

1. Noted progress in the performance outturns achieved by individual Social Landlords and the overall performance trend.

3.2 Fire Safety Progress Report

Jennifer Peters, Divisional Director, Planning and Building Control, introduced the report and highlighted the main points. In particular, Jennifer explained the justification for the closure of the fire safety action plan. Closure would allow the council to focus on preparing for the Building Safety Bill provisions. Jen Pepper, Affordable Housing Development and Partnerships Manager, provided additional detail on the presentation.

Further to questions from members of the sub committee, Jennifer and Jen:

- Explained the main elements to the strategic approach to preventing any fire incidents in future as: understanding cladding issues; working closely with key partners (inc the GLA and London Fire Brigade) and preparing for the Building Safety Bill.
- Provided more detail on the scope of works that might be impacted by the council's new obligations under the Bill and the resources available to support it. The council has bid for central government funding to meet the additional need.

Further to the presentation and questions, the sub committee

- Noted – further to recommendation 2 - that the London Fire Brigade had yet to report to the sub committee.
- Noted – further to various recommendations - that Tower Hamlets Homes (THH) would provide the sub committee with copies of its Fire Risk Assessment dashboard
- Indicated – further to recommendation 3 - that the council could do more than developing a position statement to encourage social landlords to publish fire risk assessments. Some members of the sub committee reported that many providers in the borough had been unwilling to publish their statements and, whilst they recognised that the council had no authority to enforce publication, felt that it should be

willing to use its influence to achieve this, such as its choice of preferred/partner providers.

RESOLVED that the Sub Committee:

1. Recommended the closure of the Fire Safety Scrutiny Review Action Plan to the Mayor/Mayor in cabinet.
2. Noted the content of the report in respect of the actions taken on ACM remediation, the EWS survey and the forthcoming Building Safety Bill.

3.3 Improving health, environmental quality, economic and social outcomes through Housing Open Spaces - Action Plan Update

Jane Abraham, Interim Head of Capital Delivery, introduced the report and highlighted the main achievements arising from the approval of the action plan since its approval by the mayor in cabinet.

Further to questions from members of the sub committee, Jane:

- Explained that a mapping exercise is planned to identify areas of particular deficiencies, which could be used to identify specific examples of improvements that have been realised as a result of the action plan, on a ward by ward basis.
- Explained how the council aims to prevent segregated outdoor/play areas in mixed tenure schemes through its planning policies.

RESOLVED that the Sub Committee:

1. Noted the progress made to date in delivering the recommendations from the scrutiny review as set out in the Action Plan emanating from the original report to Cabinet in November 2019.

3.4 Covid: Responding to the employment challenge presentation

Vicky Clark, Divisional Director, Growth & Economic Development, provided a brief presentation on how the council is responding to the employment challenges created by the Covid 19 pandemic.

Further to questions from members of the sub committee, Vicky:

- Provided more detail on the council's WorkPath service, including eligibility for the service; number of users; how performance is monitored and measured and how its work aligns to the councils corporate priorities.
- Explained how the council seeks to develop relationships with public and private sector employers to maximise the effectiveness of

WorkPath service. The sub committee noted that the strongest support has so far come from public sector employers.

- Explained that the council is a partner in a commissioning exercise to track population and demographic trends/projections which helps it to understand how any changes might impact the labour market and the local economy.

RESOLVED that the Sub Committee noted the presentation.

4. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The sub committee indicated it would welcome sight of the results of the scrutiny survey that members and co-optees had been invited to contribute to.

The meeting ended at 7.25 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Ehtasham Haque
Housing & Regeneration Scrutiny Sub Committee