

Proposer: Cllr Danny Hassell

Seconder: Cllr Mufeedah Bustin

12.2 Motion regarding One Housing Group Takeover by Riverside Housing

Association

Proposer: Cllr Peter Golds

Seconder: Cllr Andrew Wood

The Council notes that in July the troubled One Housing Group, which manages 17,312 homes announced that it was to be taken over by the Riverside Housing Association based in Liverpool which currently manages 58,671 homes.

The Council further notes that:

This followed the revelation that One Housing had recorded a loss of £25.5 million in the last financial year and that the Regulator of Social Housing has downgraded the status of One Housing, which is a serious reputational loss to One Housing as an organisation.

There is a significant impact on the finances of One Housing in relation to building and fire safety works.

At the time of the stock transfer the four estates of the Isle of Dogs; the Barkantine, Kingsbridge, St John's and Samuda, were all managed by Toynbee Island Homes. In 2007 Toynbee Island Homes merged with the Community Housing Association to form One Housing. One Housing also own other homes across the borough.

Based in Camden Town, One Housing has frequently appeared remote to residents of this borough. This remoteness caused irreparable damage to the reputation of One Housing when, despite repeated denials, it was revealed that the organisation was secretly planning to replace the 2,000 homes on the four estates of the Isle of Dogs with 8,000 new properties. This resulted in the Regulator of Social Housing reporting in 2013 that, "the board (of One Housing) needs to enhance its oversight and scrutiny of the group's activities to maintain compliance with regulatory requirements"

The Council further notes that:

The original announcement of the takeover of One Housing by Riverside was reported to Councillors and covered in a press release, tenants were not notified by One Housing until later. ~~Tenants of the four estates were initially notified by the proposer of this motion by way of leaflets delivered by volunteers to their addresses.~~

There appear to have been no other options explored apart from this takeover, by Riverside, an organisation which itself has faced criticism for "taking away tenant's voices."

Tower Hamlets tenants and leaseholders of One Housing have expressed concerns regarding:

- The lack of meaningful consultation
- Inability to produce impact data for lessees
- Poor estate management
- Misleading brochures and information, which lack information on exactly how services to residents can or will be improved as part of the merger.
- Failing to share financial data with residents.

Despite the failure of Project Stone, One Housing have continued to propose redevelopment of the Kingsbridge Estate and before the takeover became known terminated a resident led steering group, whilst continuing to promote a ballot on a proposed redevelopment.

Following a letter to the Chief Executive of the Regulator of Social Housing by the proposer of this motion, to delay the takeover and cancel the ballot on the Kingsbridge development, the regulator has responded to say:

“The matters you raise about One Housing Group have now been assessed by our Consumer Regulation Panel in accordance with our Serious Detriment procedures. The panel was unable to conclude whether there has been a breach of the Consumer Regulations standards which has or could lead to serious harm to tenants.”

“As such, further consideration is required and your complaint has been passed to our Investigation & Enforcement team, who will be contacting One Housing Group for further information. Once our Investigation & Enforcement team has investigated your concerns, they will contact you again within a further 20 working days from the date of this email with a reply or revised deadline.”

During this period and despite increasing concerns, residents have received a brochure urging them to support the takeover with a promise of financial investment, after the takeover.

The Mayor, the Cabinet Member for Housing and local councillors have written to One Housing highlighting their concerns and those of residents.

This Council believes:

Residents should be applauded for their hard work over many years to scrutinise One Housing and to hold them to account for their performance as a landlord and the delivery of their services.

Residents deserve to have access to information which enables them to make an informed decision on any mergers.

Consultation on issues such as mergers should be comprehensive and seek to engage residents in many ways with a dialogue about the issues involved.

One Housing and Riverside have not clearly set out the improvements that will be delivered to residents from the proposed merger.

The Council therefore agrees:

To call on the Regulator of Social Housing to delay the takeover until they are satisfied that this takeover is in the best interest of tenants and residents.

To ask the government that for future such mergers that tenants and leaseholders are given real and meaningful choices ~~including a referendum vote. That residents be offered three options~~The range of options could include:

- ~~1. The~~A recommended merger partner, who then has an incentive to make commitments about their future performance in order to win the vote
- Joining another local housing association or local housing provider where one is willing to accept them (and for the government to make necessary funding available to enable this).
- Use of referendum ballots on the decision.

~~2. To join any Council run housing provider (if one exists) which for many estates may well be a choice to reverse the decision they made in the stock transfer process~~

~~3. To join a locally based housing association willing to take them~~

That if the government truly believe in consumer choice and giving homeowners and tenants greater involvement in the management of their homes (as we see in the moves towards Commonhold) that logically this should apply to all residents of homes regardless of tenure.

To call on the Regulator and the Minister to ensure that in these discussions tenants and residents come first and are consulted properly and independently as to the future management of their homes.