

COMMITTEE, 12/01/2023

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS
MINUTES OF THE HOUSING & REGENERATION SCRUTINY SUB
COMMITTEE

HELD AT 6.30 P.M. ON THURSDAY, 12 JANUARY 2023
COUNCIL CHAMBERS – TOWN HALL, MULBERRY PLACE, 5
CLOVE CRESCENT, LONDON E14 2BG

Members Present in Person:

Councillor Abdul Mannan (Chair)

Councillor Nathalie Bienfait

Councillor Musthak Ahmed

Councillor Ahmodul Kabir

Councillor Marc Francis

Councillor Asma Islam

Councillor Faroque Ahmed

Co-Optees Present in Person

Mahbub Anam -(Tenant Representative)

Susanna Kow -(Leaseholder Representative)

Officers Present in Person

Mark Slowikowski -(Senior Strategy and Policy Officer)

Justina Bridgeman -(Democratic Services Officer, Committees)

Officers Present Remotely:

Karen Swift -(Director, Housing and Regeneration)

Shalim Uddin -(Partnerships Officer, Strategy and Policy)

Guest:

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

Helen Wilson -(Head of Housing, Clarion Housing)

Ana Otesanya -(Interim Chief Executive Tower Hamlets Homes (THH))

Hillary Kelly -(Head of Repairs Tower Hamlets Homes (THH))

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Michael Killeen

-(Director, Asset Management, Tower Hamlets Homes (THH))

1 DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

There were no declarations of pecuniary interests.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING(S)

RESOLVED that:

The minutes of the sub committee meeting held on 20 October 2022 were approved and signed as a correct record of proceedings.

3. OPEN ACTIONS

3.1.4. Letters to the Mayor and Clarion Housing Association: 20 October 2022.

– Councillor Nathalie Bienfait queried if the Mayor sent a letter to the chair of Spitalfields Housing Association to investigate concerns. Karen Swift, Director of Housing and Regeneration, could not confirm this, although Shalim Uddin, Partnerships Officer, Strategy and Policy confirmed that a meeting arranged with the Mayor was postponed and will be rescheduled in due course. The sub committee will receive an update when available.

Councillor Bienfait also requested an update on the Tower Hamlets Homes consultation. Karen Swift confirmed the summary findings were sent to the Mayor and the public document will be made available on 24 January 2023.

5.1. Challenge Sessions Recommendations: 20 October 2022.

– The submission of the full breakdown on the associated £463k with a rationale on why it was apportioned to the HRA. Karen Swift explained the cost submitted at the last sub committee was an estimate. Further work has been undertaken and a lower revised cost breakdown will be made available in the budget report for Cabinet in January.

All consultation work related to housing stock is apportioned to the HRA, as specified by the finance and legal comments detailed in the report. Councillor Francis requested the sub committee consider if it is appropriate to apportion the cost to tenants and leaseholders once the report is available.

The Mayors Future Meetings with Housing Associations: 20 October 2022.

– 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. The Chair noted that the planned meeting was postponed and further updates will be submitted at the next sub committee meeting.

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5.4. Approach and Support to Homeless Applications: 20 October 2022. – The Submission of the councils KPI for customer satisfaction, response times and performance, including a breakdown on how personal housing plans are measured by quality of service. Karen Swift apologised for not submitting updates and requested details be reviewed at the next meeting. Discussions with Councillor Francis took place on the matter outside of the meeting. All questions will be submitted at the next meeting scheduled for 16 February 2023.

B/F Safety Action Plan: 15 March 2022. – Sub committee members suggested that the Fire Safety Group submit the draft action plan for review before Cabinet in July 2022. Karen Swift confirmed that the recommendations were approved by Cabinet on 30 November 2022 and officers are scheduled to complete all actions by the end of 2023.

RESOLVED that

1. The sub committee will review the details of the consultation and consider if it is appropriate to apportion costs to tenants and leaseholders once the Cabinet report is available.
2. 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.
3. Karen Swift to forward questions regarding the approach and support to homeless applications to the sub committee.
4. The presentation be noted.

4 REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

4.1 Social Landlords Performance Report

Shalim Uddin, Partnerships Officer, Strategy and Policy, introduced the performance report for quarters 1 and 2 for Registered Providers (RP). This included a summary of the key strengths, challenges and general updates reflected in the report:

Further to questions from the sub committee, Shalim Uddin, Andrea Baker, Chair of THHF and Helen Wilson, Head of Housing for North London, Clarion Housing:

- Clarified that in regard to the Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM's), 10 of the 22 measures are produced by the landlord's and are scheduled to commence in April 2023. At present six of the RP's who have not yet submitted data have been requested to complete a survey, specifying what information will be provided to the council for the next 12 months and at what frequency.

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- Confirmed that all RP's are ultimately responsible for the performance of repairs outsourced to external contractors.
- Explained that the current KPI's compiled were established by THHF's Benchmarking Sub Group. Details are collected quarterly. As the council does not regulate the RP's, the validity of the data cannot be accurately assessed.
- Noted that Clarion complaints data submitted related to housing stock within the borough. Targets for response times fell during the cyber-attack, although the majority of emergency repairs were undertaken. The response times for Q3 will be significantly higher and more operations staff are now in place to deal with recent boiler issues.

Following comments from Officers, the sub committee requested:

- Details on the definitive set of RP's TSM's to be brought to the sub committee once published.
- Details on the additional costs incurred to residents provided with temporary fan heaters will be submitted for Bow East and West wards.

Ana Otesanya, Interim Chief Executive, Tower Hamlet Homes (THH), then gave a brief overview on performance, an update on day-to-day repairs and details on improving the resident experience of service.

Further to questions from the sub committee, Ana Otesanya, Hillary Kelly and Michael Killeen:

- Conceded that THH are experiencing challenges regarding higher levels of Members Enquiries compared to other RP's. Those issues were reflected in the presentation.
- Explained the call times on repairs stated are an average, although this does not take into account residents who have waited longer. The data is derived from the contact centres wait time reports. More resources have been put in place and further work is required to deal with this issue.
- Clarified that the turnaround time for domestic replacement boilers is three days. A communal plant failure could take much longer, as it would depend on the severity of the situation and would fall into the category of major works. In that instance a temporary plant would be provided to fulfil the resident's needs. Residents would also be provided with temporary fan heaters in the interim.
- Explained that contractors are monitored with quality checks and post inspections by engineers to ensure good service. Further details on this can be provided to the sub committee.

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- Clarified that better engagement with residents regarding the 'out of hours' contracted and sub contracted services is required. This issue is currently under review.
- Explained that the major works programme is under review to establish which projects have been deferred and why. The contractual costs have risen and a comprehensive report will be brought back to the sub committee.

Following comments from Officers and invitees, the sub committee;

- Thanked Clarion Housing and THH for acknowledging the performance concerns raised with repair waiting times and Member Enquiries.
- Requested urgent improvement to ensure major works are delivered in a timelier manner, and detailed information on the Capital programme of works be submitted.
- Noted that a view on the merits on stronger accountability for residents and elected members should be taken at a subsequent meeting.

RESOLVED that

1. RP's TSM measures be brought to the sub committee once published.
2. Details on the additional costs incurred to residents who were provided with temporary fan heaters to be submitted for Bow East and West wards.
3. Further discussions with THH and sub committee members on poor response times and contractor issues to take place outside of this meeting.
4. A comprehensive report on the THH major works programme to be brought back to the sub committee.
5. The presentation be noted.

4.2 PARKING ON HOUSING ESTATES

Andrea Baker, Chair of Tower Hamlets Housing Forum (THHF), and Helen Wilson, Head of Housing for North London, Clarion Housing, introduced presentations reviewing parking on housing estates.

Following questions from the sub committee, Andrea Baker and Helen Wilson:

- Clarified that RP's parking enforcement powers differ greatly from the local authority, and Poplar Harca in particular only have powers to issue PCN's,

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contact the DVLA to establish who the driver is and go through a legal process to obtain the penalty fines.

- Confirmed Clarion use the National Parking Enforcement (NPE) to manage parking on estates and operate the online telephone service and CCTV.
- Clarified that Poplar Harca's Board has reversed its electric vehicles only policy, which will come into effect in April. All parking charges will be waived and designated bays removed. Residents will now be permitted to park in estate parking bays.

Following the comments from invitees, the sub committee;

- Noted concerns with the digital process to register vehicles and apply for parking bays. The placement of CCTV cameras and the lack of parking enforcement within estates has been controversial.
- Suggested TMO's can assist in tailoring its approach to the needs of each estate, as improving the disparity between RSL parking is a priority for the Mayor.

RESOLVED that

1. The presentation be noted.

4.3 DAMP AND MOULD – ACTION TAKEN

Karen Swift, Director of Housing and Regeneration, introduced the report which examined the council's response to the Social Housing Regulators directive on damp and mould by the Secretary of State. This included a summary of the background details leading to the initial response on 30 November 2022 and the subsequent response due on 27 January 2023.

Following questions from the sub committee, Karen Swift, Andrea Baker, Helen Wilson, Ana Otesanya and Michael Killeen;

- Clarified that all RP's responded to the Secretary of State by 19 December 2022 and are currently undertaking a stock condition analysis workstream to focus on diagnostics. This includes the use of smart technology to establish the temperature and humidity of the homes. Staff are obligated to report any cases of damp and mould, specifically with vulnerable residents.
- Explained that other provisions to tackle damp and mould include using gas safety checks to also look for damp, mould and condensation issues. Clarion have established resident liaison officers assisting with decant and access issues to enable remedial works to progress.

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- Confirmed that THH does have a process to record roof leaks and stock condition surveys are undertaken as part of the Capital programme. The external fabric of a building is one of many contributing factors to the life cycle of homes at risk of fire and is one workstream. Damp and mould requires separate workstream and analysis, as mould is not currently classified as a life cycle of an element and further validation is required. Checks on both need to be incorporated prior to any investment programme.
- Explained that all boroughs have high density issues and specific buildings create damp and mould. The Mayor is seeking larger affordable housing and existing stock needs to be reviewed, including knocking through homes to ease overcrowded families.
- Clarified that all residents in temporary accommodation (TA) have been advised to report any issues of damp and mould to their RP and housing officer. Providers of TA have been informed of the findings and to treat reports received with the utmost urgency. A survey has also been issued to residents regarding the condition of the property to identify worst cases.

Following comments from Officers and invitees, the sub committee;

- Clarified that damp, mould and condensation issues have been ongoing, and the problem relates to disrepair unfairly deemed a resident lifestyle issue. Other factors include major works repairs and unidentified leaks.
- Indicated that appropriate inspections and remedies are required. Temporary accommodation inspections placed in and out of the borough also require an urgent review.
- Requested an update on action taken from all RP's within five months to the sub committee.

RESOLVED that

1. A damp and mould update on action taken from all RP's to be brought to the sub committee within five months.
2. The presentation be noted.

5 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Councillor Francis requested Officers submit an update on residents of Polydamas Close, who experienced fire safety issues for several months with Swan Housing (now L&Q). The Chair will discuss with Councillor Kabir Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Inclusive Development and Housebuilding, outside of the meeting.

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RESOLVED that

1. The Chair will discuss the matter with Councillor Kabir Ahmed outside of the sub committee meeting.

The meeting ended at 9.16pm

Chair, Councillor Abdul Mannan

Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Sub Committee