

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE HOUSING & REGENERATION SCRUTINY SUB COMMITTEE

HELD AT 6.30 P.M. ON THURSDAY, 19 OCTOBER 2023

COUNCIL CHAMBER - TOWN HALL, WHITECHAPEL

Members Present:

Councillor Abdul Mannan (Chair)
Councillor Shafi Ahmed
Councillor Musthak Ahmed
Councillor Marc Francis
Councillor Asma Islam
Councillor James King

Co-opted Members Present:

Mahbub Anam (Tenant representative)
Susanna Kow (Leaseholder representative)

Other Councillors Present:

Councillor Kabir Ahmed (Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Inclusive
Development and Housebuilding)

Officers Present:

Paul Burgess – (Project Officer, Corporate Strategy and
Equalities)
Daniel Kerr – (Strategy and Policy Manager)
Karen Swift – (Divisional Director, Housing and
Regeneration)
David Leslie – (Building Safety Lead)
– Principal Project Manager (Housing New
Development))

Officers Present Remotely:

Nicola Klinger - (Programme Lead, Housing Management
Strategic Review)

Invited Guests:

Andrea Baker - (Chair of Tower Hamlets Housing Forum
(THHF))
Lesley Owen - (Business Development & Information Manager
(THH))

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of pecuniary interests, however, Councillor James King declared he is a Tower Hamlets Homes Leaseholder, Mahbub Anam declared he is a Tower Hamlets Homes Board Member and Tower Hamlets Tenant, Councillor Shafi Ahmed declared he is a Tower Hamlets Homes Leaseholder and Board Member and Susanna Kow declared she is a Tower Hamlets Homes Leaseholder.

The Monitoring officer considered the above statements and granted a dispensation for item 4.1 to be discussed by sub-committee members.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING(S)

The minutes of the Sub Committee meeting held on 11 September 2023 were approved as a correct record of proceedings.

Matters Arising

A vote was taken on 27 April 2023 to increase sub-committee meetings from five to nine for the municipal year 2023/24. On a vote of 5 for, 0 against and 1 abstention, the sub-committee agreed a formal note be submitted to the Chief Executive to increase the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Sub-Committee meetings from five to nine.

Paul Burgess, Strategy and Policy Officer, noted that the request was taken to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) on 18 September and a formal request was sent to the Chief Executive, to earmark additional resources to OSC. Details are pending.

3. OUTSTANDING ACTIONS

Paul Burgess updated sub-committee members on the following;

- Local Plan Update – 16 February 2023 meeting. The update from the Planning and Building Control department to be included in the HRSSC work programme for 2023/24. Paul Burgess informed sub-committee members that this will be picked up at OSC as part of the budget and policy framework.
- Swan Housing Presentation: 360 Report – 16 February 2023 meeting. Swan Housing to submit their 360 Feedback Report, resident's response and KPI's before the 27th July meeting. Details are still pending.
- Social Landlords Report – 27 April 2023 meeting: THH to submit a brief outlining contractor response times and general performance to the sub-committee for the first meeting of the municipal year 2023/24. This

item has been added to the work programme for the 14th December 2023 meeting.

- Homelessness backlog – 27 April 2023 meeting. To be brought to the sub-committee for municipal year 2023/24. This item has been added to the work programme for the 14th December 2023 meeting.
- THH Major Works Programme – 27 April 2023 meeting. A comprehensive report on THH Major Works Programme (with details on response times and general performance) to be included in the HRSSC work programme for 19th October meeting. Details are still pending.
- An Estates ASB Summer Action Plan – 27 April 2023 meeting. Action plan to be brought to the sub-committee for municipal year 2023/24. Details are still pending.
- Details on the number of properties bought by the council on the open market, for use as temporary accommodation. – 11 September 2023 meeting. Members were informed that 430 homes (up to September 2023) have been acquired for use as TA. 182 were purchased from existing LBTH leaseholders, 224 from Poplar Harca and 24 private purchases made on out of borough homes. 2 homes are still to be completed within the existing programme.

Karen Swift, Director of Housing, informed members that the 430 homes were acquired through a buyback scheme, over a four year period for around £173 million. The programme was paused to enable the money be used for direct delivery. Discussions to resume the program are ongoing, as well as discussions on a tenant incentive scheme for larger homes.

- A written brief of modular homes located in the borough – 11 September 2023 meeting. This will be circulated to members outside this meeting.
- A written update on Homeless referral figures, TA and placement details in and out of the borough. – 11 September 2023 meeting. Details including improvement measures were circulated to members outside this meeting.
- A written update on the number of families in bed and breakfast – 11 September 2023 meeting. A briefing note was sent to members prior to this meeting. Karen Swift informed the sub-committee that discussions are ongoing with a large hotel provider in Lewisham, to alleviate the current shortage of suitable accommodation. A second buy-back purchase has been completed on the Clichy Estate and further property discussions are ongoing following a decant.

The National Housing Summit meeting took place in September 2023 and negotiations are now taking place with regard to releasing void, shared ownership and unsold properties to the council. Requests to registered providers (RPs) via the Tower Hamlet Housing Forum (THHF) for void properties are frequently made.

- A Housing Options briefing note will be recirculated to members outside this meeting. Members were informed that a HR grievance investigation and not a police investigation occurred.

4. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

4.1 Fire Safety Action Plan

Karen Swift, the Director of Housing, informed members of the action plan, developed from recommendations made by the Housing & Regeneration Scrutiny Sub Committee, which followed a Fire Safety Scrutiny Review conducted in May 2021.

The action plan detailed the progress made in implementing the recommendations of the review, which were approved by the Mayor and Cabinet in November 2022. Actions were categorised as 'Ongoing Business as Usual (BAU)', 'Completed' and 'Actions which cannot be progressed due to resource and legal implications'. The sub-committee were asked to note the progress made and give approval to close down the action plan.

Further to questions from the sub-committee, Karen Swift and Councillor Kabir Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Inclusive Development and Housebuilding;

- Clarified that the review and subsequent action plan related to the remediation of private sector residential tall buildings, following the fire at New Providence Wharf in May 2021.
- Confirmed that a review of the licensing policy within Houses in multiple occupations (HMO) various other workstreams and housing stock is underway.
- Observed that landlords are encouraged to work with the council to re-house residents in emergencies, as landlords should have insurance. The TA officers work to locate accommodation and support residents in these instances.
- Confirmed that both the Environmental Health and Small Fire Safety teams can issue improvement notices to landlords who breach building safety regulations. The Building Safety Act 2022 allows for a Remediation Order to be issued by the council and individual residents, to ensure defects to a building are rectified. See item 4.3 for further details.

- Noted that details on the progress and implementation of the Building Safety database, including its expected benefits for resident safety and wellbeing are currently being transferred onto a new system. A briefing note will be circulated to the Chair for review once completed.
- Confirmed that 'Ask the Mayor' sessions no longer exist as they were conducted during the previous administration. Mayor Lutfur Rahman conducts two surgeries a week by appointment. The council engages with residents on fire safety issues involving the landlord, agent, or developer and officers are currently inspecting all stock to ensure that fire safety measures are in place. Additional investment in surveys and audits will be undertaken.

Further details on long-term building safety requirements for residents in tall buildings are discussed in item 4.3.

RESOLVED that

1. A briefing note on the progress and implementation of the Building Safety database, including its expected benefits for resident safety and wellbeing, to be brought to the Chair for review once details are completed.
2. The presentation be noted and the closure of the action plan **AGREED**.

4.2 Bringing Housing Management Services (THH) back in-house

Councillor Kabir Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Inclusive Development and Housebuilding, Karen Swift and Nicola Klinger, Programme Lead, Housing Management Strategic Review, provided an update on the THH insourcing programme, outlined approaches to monitor service performance and requested feedback on two submitted proposals for improved resident engagement.

Councillor Kabir Ahmed discussed the phased programme of delivery, beginning with the transfer of THH back in-house on 1st November 2023. A Board of council officers and members will oversee the winding down of Tower Hamlets Homes.

Lesley Owen, Business Development & Information Manager, Tower Hamlets Homes (THH), also briefed the sub-committee on the resident engagement options and other structures used by neighbouring local authorities.

A proposal for a third hybrid option, which includes the sub-committee, was presented by members, to link the operational and strategic aspects of engagement. The requirement for residents to take the lead with support was stressed, and the level of sub-committee involvement would require further discussion. A proposal for a mixed panel to include a resident's panel and a Board was also presented, as a resident's panel cannot make recommendations to Cabinet.

Further to questions from the sub-committee, Karen Swift, Nicola Klinger and Lesley Owen;

- Confirmed that THH staff have now relocated to the town hall, contracts have been transferred to council contracts and HR details are currently being transferred, as minimal disruption for residents to access services is essential.
- Explained the key principles include a 'lift and shift' approach to transferring services, initially under two divisions to reduce the timescale, and five services will be relocated to back office administration and support functions. A review will then be conducted for integration alongside ongoing resident consultation.
- Clarified that the THH resident consultation took place in November and ended in December 2022, with the Cabinet decision taken in February 2023. 550 THH staff will integrate into the Housing and Regeneration directorate and both directors will report to the Corporate Director. Discussions are ongoing regarding the implementation of current governance procedures within THH.
- Noted that concerns around anti-social behaviour, customer service contact and estate facilities will be addressed and improved during phase two of the transition.
- Confirmed that an interim Corporate Director for Housing and Regeneration will be appointed on 06 November. Further details will be announced shortly.
- Explained that the proposed panel members will be advertised and details on the board's scope and review periods will be incorporated in the usual manner. The new strategic engagement model will go 'live' from March 2024.

RESOLVED that

1. This item to be brought back to the sub-committee for further discussion on progress at a later date.
2. The presentation be noted.

4.3 Building Safety Update

Karen Swift, Director of Housing, introduced David Leslie, Building Safety Lead, and Enamul Goni, Principal Project Manager, Housing New Development, who gave a brief overview of the governance and accountability arrangements in preparation for the New Build Compliance and Regulator. In

November, all existing structures in the THH housing stock will be transferred to the Council and are currently being evaluated to ensure compliance.

Details of the new gateway requirements applicable to tall buildings from application, pre-construction to after completion were presented.

The Building Safety Regulator will oversee the planning application stage, which now requires a fire safety statement. Local Authority Building Control and the Fire Service will ensure that there is sufficient access for fire engines to park and sprinklers to use in the event of a fire, prior to commencement to the next stage. A Health and Safety Executive will be appointed as a statutory consultee.

Building control approval must be sought from the Building Regulator, prior to any building work and a 12-week determination period from receipt of an application including key documentation is now mandatory. If approved, inspections will be conducted during the construction phase and a certification application and a final inspection are required to ensure the building conforms to the approved design following completion.

In October, both Gateways two and three were implemented, and full details are pending as these processes have not been completed for the following schemes: Edward Mann Close, HAP (Harriot, Apsley and Pattison Houses respectively) and Caxton Grove. Indicative costs and timelines were also included, as were the Building Control Enforcement penalties available for any non-compliance.

Further to questions from the sub-committee, David Leslie and Enamul Goni;

- Confirmed that secondary staircases for new buildings over 18 metres will be considered as a mandatory requirement by the government. The current threshold is 30 metres. The council's new build programme is now being reviewed, as three developments noted will be effected and extra costs may be incurred.
- Explained that consideration is given to lighting and safety issues caused by hoarding and scaffolding used for major works. Engagement with contractors and Tenant Residents Associations (TRA) routinely takes place.
- Clarified that necessary requirements for existing and new housing stock are being taken to ensure that borough properties are complying with the Building Safety Act 2022.
- Explained that once a development is completed, the stock is transferred to the THH team and a 20-week process is followed to ensure protocol is implemented. A working group has been established with THH's handover team to ensure all necessary details are included.

- Noted that the New Development team are currently incorporating the employers requirements and contract with the Building Safety Act 2022, to ensure compliance with Gateway two and three.
- Confirmed that the indicative costs outlined in the presentation should not compromise unit size, although developers have not yet completed Gateway two and three, as details were published in October. Full costs will be determined once the project is fully complete.
- Explained that the 64 THH housing stock requiring major works will be registered and an intrusive survey to identify any remediation work required. A workshop will begin to undertake risk assessments and determine the compliance requirements once the transfer is completed.

RESOLVED that:

1. The presentation be noted.

5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Paul Burgess reminded members of the 'Ask The Housing Ombudsman' event scheduled for Monday 23 October 2023 in the Council Chamber.

Councillor Marc Francis informed the members of the potential merger with Tower Hamlets Community Housing (THCH) and Poplar Harca and requested representatives attend the next sub-committee to discuss performance concerns raised by residents. The Chair noted the request and will establish if there is adequate space for the item at the next meeting on 14 December 2023.

The meeting ended at 8.40 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Abdul Mannan

Housing & Regeneration Scrutiny Sub Committee