

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE HOUSING & REGENERATION SCRUTINY SUB COMMITTEE

HELD AT 6.32 P.M. ON THURSDAY, 29 FEBRUARY 2024

COUNCIL CHAMBER - TOWN HALL, WHITECHAPEL

Members Present:

Councillor Abdul Mannan - (Chair)

Councillor Shafi Ahmed

Councillor Musthak Ahmed

Councillor Marc Francis

Councillor Asma Islam

Councillor Bodrul Choudhury

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 Patterson – (Interim Corporate Director Housing And Regeneration)

Gulam Hussain – (Strategy, Policy and Performance Officer)

Justina Bridgeman – (Democratic Services Officer (Committee))

Michael Killeen - (Director, Asset Management)

Darren Cruise - (Head of Asset & Compliance)

Invited Guests:

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

- Jackie King - (Assistant Director of Neighbourhoods, Swan Housing)
- Ian Haworth - (Director of Communities & Home Ownership, Swan Housing)

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of pecuniary interests, however, Councillor Shafi Ahmed declared he is a Tower Hamlets Homes Leaseholder.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING(S)

The minutes of the Sub Committee meeting held on 14 December 2023 were approved as a correct record of proceedings.

Amendment

Susanna Kow, Leasehold representative requested the minutes reflect her apologies given for 14 December meeting.

Chairs Update

- The Chair informed sub-committee members that a response by the Chief Executive had been received to state that no additional resources can be provided for increasing Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Sub-committee meetings, although the subject will be reviewed twice yearly. The key issues will continue to be discussed, in particular the acquisition of Tower Hamlets Homes (THH) and the Registered Providers (RP) performance. A HRSSC RP Performance Review will take place on 26 March 2024 and members were urged to attend.

Councillor Marc Francis and Councillor Asma Islam voiced disappointment with the decision not to increase meetings and lack of feedback and performance data in regards to the Housing Options service, insourcing of Tower Hamlets Homes and PR performance. The Chair will request an update on Housing Options.

- Sub-committee members and attendees were reminded not to make political statements, to focus on scrutinising issues and not interrupt other speakers. All statements must go through the Chair.

RESOLVED that;

1. The Chair will request an update on the Housing Options service.

3. OUTSTANDING ACTIONS

Paul Burgess, Strategy and Policy Officer, updated sub-committee members on the following;

- 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. This item will be brought back in the first meeting of the municipal year in June.
- Estates ASB Report — 27 April 2023 meeting. Details still pending.
- THH In-House Arrangements Review – 19 October 2023 meeting: A resident engagement strategy is still in development. This item will be added to the HRSSC work programme for the municipal year once details are complete.
- Housing Emergency Taskforce - 14 December meeting. A briefing note was circulated to members on 15 February 2024. All follow up questions from sub-committee members will be provided by the service in due course.

Andrea Baker, Chair of Tower Hamlets Housing Forum (THHF), informed members that the legal completion for the Tower Hamlets Community Housing (THCH) and Poplar Harca merger has been delayed until July or August. The Regulator and lenders are unable to disclose further details at this time due to ongoing discussions between the Regulator and lenders. Members discussed bringing the item back, as residents have expressed concerns. Afazul Hoque, Head of Corporate Strategy & Communities, stated that the work programme is at full capacity, however the Chair stated that it will be considered for the next meeting if there is sufficient availability.

RESOLVED that;

1. The Chair will consider resuming the THCH and Poplar Harca discussion to the next meeting if there is sufficient availability.

4. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

4.1 Housing and Climate Emergency

Councillor Kabir Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Inclusive Development and Housebuilding, introduced the report and Paul Patterson, Corporate Director of Housing & Regeneration, Michael Killeen, Director of Asset Management, and Darren Cruise, Head of Asset & Compliance, presented details on how the council will retrofit housing to meet climate net zero targets.

Councillor Kabir Ahmed discussed how the council's capital investment programme will ensure effective building safety and compliance, as the borough has a high number of estate buildings requiring substantial fire safety improvements due to the age and height of some buildings, particularly ones over 18 metres. Over the next five years the 'Fabric First' approach will be utilised in retro fitting properties, to ensure energy efficiency and remediation of outdated communal heating systems and damp and mould issues.

The sub-committee were informed that around £85 million will be invested incrementally with £23 million for the next financial year, £28 million for 2025 to 2026 and £34 million for 2026 to 2027. Funding opportunities are also being considered for capital investment as well as heating controls and heat network to reduce carbon emissions. Borough residents will also be advised on ways to improve energy consumption within the home.

Paul Patterson noted that THH major works programme focused on energy efficiency improvements, using the fabric first approach. Further collaboration with the Greater London Authority (GLA) and London Councils regarding fire safety, compliance and damp and mould remediations and the climate programme will continue. The all-encompassing housing strategy is in line with HRA's financial business plan.

Further to questions from the sub-committee, Councillor Kabir Ahmed, Paul Patterson and Gulam Hussain, Head of Regulatory Assurance;

- Clarified that the Risk Team are currently identifying properties for damp, mould and energy efficiency improvements within existing heating systems using a risk assessment matrix. Once assessments have concluded, further delivery programs will be implemented in the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).
- Explained that a holistic approach will be taken with reducing carbon emissions and further opportunities will be sourced for additional funds. There are plans to demonstrate evidence of carbon reduction with surveys on heating systems, as well as remediation works on windows and roofs, which can be measured and submitted to the 'Better Homes' programme.
- Confirmed that adhering to the regulations is a priority, although reaching the net zero target by 2045 is a council aspiration, since other boroughs cannot achieve those objectives.
- Explained the long-term plans for replacing heat networks and energy efficiency by adhering to the Publicly Available Specification (PAS) 2035 for retrofitting. There are opportunities for heat zoning in designated areas, to provide low carbon emission options, as the borough has several data centres.
- Observed that some of the replacement heating systems are complex and engaging with residents on how to use them is crucial so they are

aware of how they can reduce energy consumption. The installations must be user friendly.

- Clarified that contracts for the capital investment programme are currently up for renewal. A series of surveys are ongoing to analyse the integrity of the buildings prior to sourcing products and contractors required for specialist works.

RESOLVED that;

1. Details on further delivery programs and costings to be brought back to the sub-committee once assessments have concluded.
2. The report be noted.

4.2 Swan Housing Presentation

Ian Haworth, Director of Communities and Home Ownership, and Jackie King, Assistant Director of Neighbourhoods at Swan Housing gave an update on Polydamas Close, after a series of events led to the gas being cut off without notice due to safety concerns. The sub-committee were informed that Swan Housing will shortly merge with Sanctuary Housing. Members were informed that remediation work on heating and communal areas were completed in April 2023, although cladding issues are still being addressed.

Following the incident, a 360 report was conducted, and a series of measures are now in place; primarily having staff on site, the availability of emergency temporary accommodation, frontline housing teams and technical experts on hand. Customer engagement took place and residents requested that one person lead the project in an emergencies going forward, which is now standard practice. Checks on similar gas installations in other properties were conducted to ensure the incident was not repeated, and that planned operations are more focused on customer satisfaction.

Further to questions from the sub-committee, Jackie King & Ian Haworth;

- Confirmed that lessons have been learnt from the incident and have been implemented on other schemes. A focus to allow residents to remain in their homes as much as possible has now been adopted. It was acknowledged that residents require more communication.
- Clarified that Swan Housing has approximately 12,000 properties including leaseholds with Tower Hamlets, their second largest local authority. Full details on exact leasehold property figures will be submitted for review. Sanctuary have around 110,000 properties in both England and Scotland and is the third largest provider in the country. All Swan staff will stay once the merger is complete to give continuity of service.

- Explained the faulty lift issue was caused by criminal damage and the repair delay was due to the parts not being manufactured in this country. New parts were sourced from abroad, but were later stolen, which further exacerbated the delay. Sanctuary have a larger purchasing ability and compliance team than Swan and are currently dealing with all lift repairs. The lift in Milo House has been restored to working order.
- Clarified that Sanctuary will achieve continuity in service by utilising their Regional Directors to ensure service delivery and staff currently within Swan Housing who have local expertise.

After the presentation, Sub-committee members requested Ian Haworth and Jackie King to return with updates within six months.

RESOLVED that;

1. Details on Swan Housing leasehold property figures to be brought back to the sub-committee for review.
2. Swan / Sanctuary to update the Sub-committee within six months.
3. The presentation be noted.

4.3 Social Housing Regulation Act 2023

Councillor Kabir Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Inclusive Development and Housebuilding presented details of the Social Housing Regulation Act 2023 and the councils response. A Briefing paper was circulated to Members prior to the meeting. Details of the key aspects of the Act, associated regulatory changes and a series of improvement projects including health and safety measures, external scrutiny and resident engagement were noted.

Paul Patterson informed members that consultants have been appointed to ensure that the council is adequately prepared with an implementation plan for the new regulations and upcoming inspections, scheduled to commence on 01 April 2024. This work initially began with the insourcing of Tower Hamlets Homes.

Further to questions from the sub-committee, Paul Patterson, Gulam Hussain and Darren Cruise;

- Clarified that there will be opportunities for residents who are not already engaged in existing forums such as Tenant & Resident Associations (TRA's) to participate, further maximising the diversity of tenant views. Consideration will be given to include TRA members, as it was acknowledged that those members also come from diverse backgrounds and wish to participate in the engagement process,

- Confirmed that My THH system is under major renovation to ensure a smoother process with repairs appointment bookings for residents. This process will take a few months as contract integration is necessary.
- Explained that gas contractors who provide boilers will also identify any damp and mould within properties and contact the Risk Team to fully investigate for remediation which will include energy efficiency. If residents require decanting for extensive projects, arrangements will be made, as a budget is available.
- Confirmed that contract performance will be at the forefront and accountability will be incorporated in the contracts to ensure works are completed to a high standard. Financial penalties are also included within contracts.
- Noted that there are various reasons why leasehold service charges increase, such as higher cost of energy prices and inflation. A detailed breakdown of leasehold service charges from estate landlords will be submitted for review.

RESOLVED that;

1. Regular updates on the implementation plan to be circulated to the sub-committee for review outside of the meeting.
2. A detailed breakdown on leasehold service charges from estate landlords to be presented to the sub-committee for review outside of the meeting.
3. The presentation be noted.

5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Paul Burgess, Strategy and Policy Officer, reminded members that A HRSSC RP Performance Review will be held on 26 March 2024 and members were informed of the invitations and urged to attend. The Chair also emphasized attendance.

Councillor Marc Francis requested details of the terms of reference for the Service Improvement Group on Homelessness, which is a task and finishing group and outcome information.

RESOLVED that;

1. The terms of reference for the Service Improvement Group on Homelessness and the outcome of the task and finishing group to be circulated to sub-committee members by the Director of Housing for consideration.

The meeting ended at 8.37 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Abdul Mannan

Housing & Regeneration Scrutiny Sub Committee