

Scrutiny Challenge Session of Housing Provider Performance in Tower Hamlets

Housing Provider Performance in the Borough

01/05/2024



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Chair's Foreword

I am pleased to present this Housing Challenge Report, which provides a comprehensive overview of housing providers' performance data in Tower Hamlets. This report represents a critical milestone in our ongoing efforts to ensure the delivery of high-quality housing services that meet the needs of our residents and contribute to the well-being of our community.

Housing is a fundamental human right, and ensuring access to safe, affordable, and secure housing is a top priority for Tower Hamlets. As such, it is essential that we regularly assess the performance of housing providers to identify areas of strength and opportunities for improvement. This report serves as a valuable tool for assessing the effectiveness of housing services and guiding decision-making to drive positive change.

Through rigorous analysis of performance data across various key indicators, this report offers insights into the performance of housing providers in areas such as maintenance responsiveness, tenant satisfaction, and affordability. By examining trends, benchmarks, and best practices, we can identify areas where providers excel and areas where interventions may be needed to enhance service delivery.

Importantly, this report underscores the importance of collaboration and transparency in improving housing outcomes. By engaging with housing providers, residents, and stakeholders, we have fostered a shared understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing our housing system and work together to develop innovative solutions.

I would like to extend my gratitude to all those who contributed to the development of this report, including housing providers, residents, and members of the scrutiny team. Your dedication, insights, and expertise have been invaluable in shaping this document and advancing our collective efforts to strengthen housing services in Tower Hamlets.

As we move forward, let us remain committed to using the findings of this report to inform policy decisions, drive improvement, and ensure that all residents have access to safe, affordable, and quality housing.



Cllr Abdul Mannan

Chair of Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Sub-Committee

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation 1	HRSSC and key stakeholders to ensure Registered Providers (RPs) are invited to attend more committee meetings by conducting regular spotlight session at every Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee meeting and inviting RPs to attend when their RP is being discussed.
Recommendation 2	Build in training provision and develop Committee Members with analysing performance data.
Recommendation 3	Invite Residents to give evidence at Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee adding value and making committee meetings more robust.
Recommendation 4	HRSSC to review the management of council's own housing stock and ensure it is being well managed.
Recommendation 5	HRSSC to work with stakeholders and ensure the council maximises it powers to improve the standards and the services housing providers give to residents.

Reason for Enquiry

- 1.1 The Social Housing (Regulation) Act paves the way for important changes, but social tenants will have to wait for these measures to come into force.
- 1.2 The Act received royal assent on 20 July 2023, so it is now law, but many provisions need regulations before they can come into force. These are expected to be published in 2024.
- 1.3 The Act provides a strong legal framework, but the practical changes will depend on how robustly it is implemented.
- 1.4 The purpose of this Scrutiny Challenge Session was to better understand the new role for Regulator of Social Housing and the Housing Ombudsman and also how the Housing & Regeneration Scrutiny Sub-Committee can best add value in the work it does with Registered Providers (RPs) to drive performance and improvements for residents.

What is the Social Housing (Regulation) Act

- 1.5 The Act lays foundations for changes to how social housing is managed. It includes increased regulation of social landlords and new rules for protecting tenants from serious hazards in their homes.
- 1.6 Many of the provisions in the Act are responses to the tragedies of the 2017 Grenfell Tower fire and death of two-year old Awaab Ishak, who died in 2020 from exposure to serious mould.
- 1.7 The Act allows the Regulator of Social Housing to take action against social landlords before people are at risk and hold landlords to account with regular inspections. It introduces new social housing consumer standards and gives the Secretary of State power to require social landlords to investigate and rectify serious health hazards.
- 1.8 RPs will be expected to meet explicit standards under key areas of service delivery, namely:

CONSUMER STANDARDS – Covering:	ECONOMIC STANDARDS – Covering:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Safety & Quality Standard • The Transparency, Influence & Accountability Standard • Neighbourhood & Community Standard • The Tenancy Standard 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rent - Applies to all Social Housing providers including local authorities. (The Standards below do not apply to local authorities) • Governance & Financial Viability • Value for Money

- 1.9 Until recently, the Regulator must have had reasonable grounds to suspect that a social landlord’s breach of the consumer standards has caused, or could cause, serious detriment to a tenant before it could use its intervention powers.
- 1.10 The Act removes the ‘serious detriment’ test from the consumer standards for social homes. This allows the Regulator to act before people are at risk.
- 1.11 It gives the Regulator stronger powers, including the power to impose unlimited fines.

Performance improvement plans

- 1.12 The Regulator will be able to give notice to require a social landlord to prepare and implement a performance improvement plan where the landlord is failing to meet regulatory standards.
- 1.13 Performance improvement plans are intended to be used proactively and will enable the Regulator to hold providers to account. Tenants can request copies of improvement plans

Other powers

1.14 The Act includes other enforcement powers. For example, the Regulator can:

- impose unlimited fines
- undertake surveys on properties
- authorise emergency remedial action to remedy failures by a landlord¹

Tenant Satisfaction Measures

1.14 The introduction of a new performance management framework for all RPs called the Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM) and are a central part of the of the Act that will be used to help demonstrate compliance with the standards outlined above. It sets out the expectation that all social housing providers to submit annual performance data to the RSH.

1.15 The data is based on a suite of 22 performance measures – 10 of which are landlord data and 12 based on tenant satisfaction.

1.16 The council is working with all housing providers in addition to its own stock to deliver on provisions contained within the new Social Housing Regulation Act which will give tenants more rights and opportunities to hold their landlords to account and influence decisions that affect their homes and communities.

1.17 Taking the above into account, in particular, that reporting processes of the statutory annual measures need to bed in, and that RP's have indicated for the first year, six monthly reporting to Scrutiny is possible, RP landlord performance is reported to the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Sub-Committee on a six-monthly basis with tenant satisfaction reported annually.

Methodology

2.1 This scrutiny challenge session was chaired by Cllr Abdul Mannan (Scrutiny Chair for Housing & Regeneration Scrutiny Sub-Committee and Overview and Scrutiny Committee Member). This challenge session was held on Tuesday 26th March 2024.

2.2 The session allowed the Committee to hear from the Regulator of Social Housing, Housing Ombudsman, leading social housing and tenant engagement organisations and RPs themselves.

¹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2023/36/enacted>

2.3 The focus was to review RP Performance and the scope set out the following key questions:

- 1) How is the RP performance aligned with the organisation’s strategic priorities;
- 2) What issues Registered Providers face when providing RP performance data particularly at local level;
- 3) How is the data used to drive improvement for residents;
- 4) What impact the new Tenant Satisfaction Measures are having;
- 5) How can Scrutiny best add value.

Members in attendance:

Councillor Abdul Mannan	Scrutiny challenge session chair and chair of HRSSC
Councillor Marc Francis	HRSSC Member
Councillor Asma Islam	HRSSC Member
Councillor James King	HRSSC Member
Councillor Musthak Ahmed	HRSSC Member
Councillor Saif Uddin	HRSSC Member
Susanna Kow	Co-opted OSC Member
Councillor Kabir Ahmed	Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Inclusive Development and Housebuilding

Evidence heard from council officers, witnesses and guests:

Kate Dodsworth	Chief of Regulatory Engagement, Regulator of Social Housing
Angela Holden	Director of Regulatory Engagement, Regulator of Social Housing
Richard Blakeway	Housing Ombudsman
Andrea Baker	Director of Housing, Poplar HARCA, Chair of Tower Hamlets Housing Forum
Helen Wilson	Head of Housing for North London, Clarion Housing
Caritas Charles	Policy & Insight Manager, TPAS - The tenant engagement experts
Alistair McIntosh	Chief Executive, Housing Quality Network (HQN)

Key Findings and Recommendations

Recommendation 1

HRSSC and key stakeholders to ensure Registered Providers (RPs) are invited to attend more committee meetings by conducting regular spotlight session at every Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee meeting and inviting RPs to attend when their RP is being discussed.

- 3.1 The committee questioned the RPs at the challenge session. The committee periodically receives performance data reports that appear to indicate that RPs are performing well with most repairs completed within target times. However, Members of the committee and Councillors often received complaints from residents that have been waiting a long time for repairs to be completed. The Members of the committee are concerned that the data does not seem to correspond with the feedback they receive from residents of the borough. In the past the committee has asked if performance data can be discussed more frequently but were informed only six-monthly reporting is possible.
- 3.2 At the end of the challenge session Members reiterated their request that has been raised at sub-committee meetings to bring RPs to every Sub-Committee meeting not only to review performance data but to answer questions that residents have asked Members. The committee recommends that at each HRSSC meeting some RPs are invited to attend so that any discrepancies between the performance data and feedback from residents can be clarified. For example, the committee will soon be listening to residents of Tower Hamlets Community Housing on the quality of service provided so it would be useful for Tower Hamlets Community Housing to appear before the committee in the near future to discuss any concerns residents may raise.

This will be done on a rotating basis until all RPs in the borough have had an opportunity to attend and contribute.

Recommendation 2

Build in training provision and develop Committee Members with analysing performance data.

- 4.1 The committee question the RPs that attended the session about the performance data they receive. Much of the questioning was focused on how the data is gathered to produce the reports as the data does not seem to correspond to the feedback Members receive from residents on the quality of services. Members expressed their concern that the data may not only include housing within Tower Hamlets from RPs with stock in other parts of the country. Members asked the providers if the data is local or regional and the providers acknowledged that due to the size of the organisations and the properties across London and wider some of the data may be more regional but that they were unable to give a definitive response.
- 4.2 At the end of the session Members were asked to summarise the key areas to be developed as a result of the discussion had at this challenge session. At this point Members raised the issue that the sub-committee felt that the reports received are difficult to decipher and interpret as it not always clear if the data is consistently from homes in the borough from the RPs that have region/nationwide housing stock which the committee feels may impact on the validity and accuracy of the data reflections on resident housing issues. The RP performance data is sometimes unclear. Committee Members felt they would like to be provided with training enable them to get more value out of reviewing data so that the committee can collectively better review the performance data that is driving improvements for residents.

Recommendation 3

Invite Residents to give evidence at Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee adding value and making committee meetings more robust.

- 4.1 The committee heard evidence from Caritas Charles, Policy & Insight Manager from TPAS and Alistair McIntosh, Chief Executive from HQN of best practice and they shared their experience of the experience they have in working with decision makers on behalf of residents. The committee recognises that engagement with residents is a critical part of the role of scrutiny committees of ensuring that local decision-makers are being held accountable that the services they provide are delivered efficiently and drive improvement within the borough. To ensure this the committee recommends that residents be regularly invited to Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee meetings to ensure the voices and concerns of the public are heard by policy and decision makers.

Recommendation 4

HRSSC to review the management of council's own housing stock and ensure it is being well managed.

- 5.1 On the 1st of November 2023, the council completed the transfer of Tower Hamlets Homes (THH) to the Council. The aim of bringing THH into the council was to achieve a stronger resident voice, more accountability, and joined-up services that support residentsⁱ
- 5.2 The Council is now responsible for managing and maintaining all council homes.
- 5.3 Members have at previous sub-committee meetings raised the serious concerns they have about the management of the stock and the pressures being faced by the council by an increasing number of people requiring social housing and the number of homeless people in temporary accommodation waiting for Council housing stock to be made available to them.
- 5.4 When Members began their reflection on evidence they heard and summarised the key areas of learning from the meeting the committee recognised that, in addition to continuing to monitor the performance of RPs, the council also need to continue to hold to account the management of its own stock for the maintenance of services and the progress of major works to improve the housing stock.
- 5.5 The committee recommends that THH provides regular updates to HRSSC to provide more scope for meaningful on the delivery of services.

Recommendation 5

HRSSC to work with stakeholders and ensure the council maximises its powers to improve the standards and the services housing providers give to residents.

- 6.1 The committee heard from the Chief of Regulatory Engagement and the Director of from the Regulator of Social Housing as well as the Housing Ombudsman. They question them about the concerns the residents of Tower Hamlets have about the regulator not making useful interventions in the past when serious complaints have been made and ask why tenants should have any confidence that the regulator in the new system. The Regulator responded by saying the Act now allows the Regulator of Social Housing to take action against social landlords before people are at risk and that this change will mean the Regulator can be involved at an earlier stage and from April 2024 RPs will need to meet the new improved consumer standards that are more fit for purpose.
- 6.2 The committee notes that as the powers that are provided by the Social Housing (Regulation) Act principally extend to the Regulator of Social Housing and the Housing Ombudsman the powers that the HRSSC has to direct RP to a course of action are limited. When summarising the key points of the meeting Members expressed concern that it remains to be seen if the new powers given to the

Regulators will be applied. The committee is not convinced of this given previous housing issues and the lack of response and therefore it recommends that the council needs to review what powers it has relating to RPs, such as planning permission and consider adding community benefit clauses to better drive improvement in standards.

Conclusion

- 7.1 This scrutiny challenge session provided the HRSSC an opportunity to scrutinise RPs in the borough. It is clear to the Committee (from the evidence heard) that resident in Tower Hamlets still need public bodies, such as this committee to ensure the resident complaints are heard by policy and decision makers.
 - 7.2 The Committee noted that the new powers given by the Social Housing (Regulation) Act are a welcome improvement over the previous ones, but it remains to be seen if they will be implemented in a robust manner.
 - 7.3 The Committee have made the above five recommendations as they feel more need to be done to improve the standard of housing in the borough. The Committee hopes the Mayor, Cabinet and RPs take forward our recommendations and work with HRSSC to ensure we have good housing for all in Tower Hamlets.
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[Open Door Annual Report 2023 \(towerhamletshomes.org.uk\)](https://towerhamletshomes.org.uk)