

# **MINUTES OF THE MEETING Housing, Planning and Development Scrutiny Panel HELD ON Tuesday, 5th November, 2024, 6.43 pm**

## **PRESENT:**

**Councillors: Alexandra Worrell (Chair), Tammy Hymas, John Bevan and Diakides**

## **ALSO ATTENDING:**

### **194. FILMING AT MEETINGS**

The Chair referred Members present to agenda Item 1 as shown on the agenda in respect of filming at this meeting, and Members noted the information contained therein'.

### **195. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Moyeed and Cllr Barnes.

Cllr Cawley Harrison was in attendance as a substitute for Cllr Barnes.

### **196. URGENT BUSINESS**

There were no items of urgent business.

### **197. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **198. DEPUTATIONS/PETITIONS/PRESENTATIONS/QUESTIONS**

None.

### **199. MINUTES**

In response to a point raised in the minutes of the last meeting, the Cabinet Member advised that work around the LCP Framework was progressing, and that all of the pre-tender engagement had been completed. There were two in-person events lined up for potential bidders to attend. The next stage of the process was expected to start in 2025. It was acknowledged that it was a long process.

## **RESOLVED**

That the minutes of the previous meeting on 26<sup>th</sup> September were agreed as a correct record.

## **200. HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS**

The Panel invited a number of representatives of Housing Associations that operated in Haringey to attend the meeting and provide an update around some key resident satisfaction metrics, including things like repairs performance and work to tackle damp and mould. The submissions were published as part of the agenda pack and Members took these as read, in order to focus on putting questions to the registered providers. Hannah Adler, Head of Housing Strategy and Policy introduced a report which provided some background to Housing Associations and the relationship between housing associations and the Council, as set out in the agenda pack at pages 17-20. Talia Knoble-Gershon, Housing Partnerships Officer was also present for this item, along with Cllr Sarah Williams Cabinet Member for Housing & Planning and Deputy Leader of the Council.

The following housing association representatives were present at the meeting:

- Hornsey Housing Trust (HHT)– Euan Barr (Chief Executive)
- Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing (MTVH) - Surinder Bains (Head of Housing -North London/Central) & Maxine Gordon (Director of Housing)
- L&Q – Angela James (Head of Housing)
- Peabody – Tracey Packer (Managing Director NE London) & Vatel Ntankeu Mbami (AD Customer Services)
- Clarion – Felicity Dunmall (Head of Housing North London)

The following was noted in discussion of this agenda item:

- a. The Panel put forward a suggestion that ward councillors should be invited to attend walkabouts of estates in their wards when these were undertaken but housing association staff. In response, the Cabinet Member commented that this seemed like a good idea and that these had happened in the past but tended to differ from provider to provider.
- b. The Panel commented that there seemed to be very little interaction between the registered housing providers and ward councillors, other than when Members were following up on casework. The Panel questioned how the Cabinet Member thought Councillors could be better utilised by housing associations. In response, the Cabinet Member set out that this could be complicated by the fact that a number of estates had multiple providers operating there, and that they could have a different relationship i.e. one could be the freeholder and another could be a leaseholder. Officers advised that there were examples of ward councillors being involved with specific providers in individual wards, and that they would be happy to help facilitate more of this. It was also suggested that there could be scope for ward councillors to be involved in relation to positive developments such as a tour of new developments.
- c. The Panel questioned whether the Council still maintained a list of preferred housing providers. In response, officers advised that they did not.
- d. In response to a question, officers advised that the Council had nomination rights to place people on its housing register into housing association

- properties. The Council tended to have 100% of first lets available for nomination rights and 75% of secondary nomination rights when a property became void.
- e. The Panel questioned to what extent housing associations required the local authorities agreement to undertake certain things. In response, officers advised that there were no statutory requirements to consult with the local authority, but that as a Planning authority, the Council had leverage over the design and approval of housing schemes. The Cabinet Member advised that she was aware of the Council working with one provider in order to help them access grant funding, but that there was nothing formal in place.
  - f. The Panel asked about shared services, around things like ASB. In response, officers advised that there were no existing SLAs in place for things like ASB or CCTV enforcement with housing associations. However, the Housing team would work with other teams across the Council, and housing associations where appropriate, to tackle specific issues.
  - g. The Panel sought assurances around the frequency of meetings that were held with housing associations. In response, officers advised that they currently met at a strategic levels on an annual basis, usually around February/March time. It was acknowledged that there was a desire to increase this to twice a year, staffing resources permitting. Meetings on a bilateral basis took place twice a year, depending on the issues that arose. The task and finish groups were running on an annual basis and met around 3-4 times per topic.
  - h. The Chair sought assurances around the apparent much higher levels of homes that met the Decent Homes standard in homes managed by housing associations compared to Council-owned properties. Officers commented that part of the reason for this was likely to be because they had newer housing stock. It was commented that it was in everyone's interest that decency levels were improved across the board regardless of who the landlord was. The Operational Director for Housing was requested to provide a written response of comparative decency levels and whether, for instance they were being recorded differently. **(Action: Jahedur Rahman).**
  - i. The Panel sought clarification about the fact that many of the housing associations seemed to be reporting better outcomes than the Council in their metrics, including around repairs and whether there were any lessons the Council could learn. In response, the Cabinet Member advised that in her discussions with the regulator, the issues affecting housing associations were the same as those affecting the Council.
  - j. In response to a comment about smaller housing cooperative providers tending to be not very transparent and having poor complaints handling in many cases, officers advised that the size of the provider should have no bearing on the standards that it was held to. Officers invited Members to provide them with an specific information or concerns they had.
  - k. The Panel sought clarification about the 25% of properties that the Council did not have secondary nomination rights to. In response, officers advised that these would be used by the housing associations for an internal transfer of tenants within their own stock.
  - l. In response, to a question, the Cabinet Member advised that the Council was unable to escalate complaints from residents about housing association properties if it had not been through the housing associations internal

- complaints process. It was commented that this did not preclude the Cabinet Member from writing to the providers to raise issues more generally.
- m. The Panel requested that an updated contact list for the housing associations in the borough be circulated to the Panel. **(Action: Talia Knoble-Gershon).**

*\*Clerk's note – At this point in the meeting Members put questions to the housing association representatives.*

- n. The Panel sought clarification around the extent to which the housing associations were up to speed with meeting the new consumer standards and whether there were any areas of concern. In response, MTVH advised that they had a team within the organisation that was leading on the new consumer standards and that they were expecting an inspection to take place at some point. A variety of internal communications had gone out to staff to raise awareness. Clarion advised that they also had a team dedicated to meeting the new consumers standards and that some of the key areas of concern were around resident perception. Peabody advised that they had made some changes to their operating model and that they had carried out an internal audit to understand whether there were any gaps. One of the key challenges put forward was understanding how the regulator would seek to measure compliance. L&Q advised that they were planning to undertake a mock inspection in January and that they had looked at the role of the neighbourhood housing lead and the quality of estate inspections. Hornsey Housing Trust advised that they were a smaller organisation and not subject to the compliance regime, however it was acknowledged that compliance was important and that Hornsey Housing Trust had implemented a self-assessment tool to bring them up to a comparable standard.
- o. The Panel sought assurances from the providers about how they had seemingly achieved significantly better outcomes on decency levels. In response, providers acknowledged the earlier point about stock-type being important and the age of the housing stock. Peabody advised that they had internal and external contractor staff to carry out repairs, and that a key challenge for both was having enough qualified staff. L&Q advised that they had moved towards planned investment over a 15 year period, rather than reactive maintenance.
- p. The Panel questioned whether there were areas for greater co-operation between the Council and providers, and sought suggestions for possible shared services. MTVH advised that they had a community impact team in Haringey who supported residents, and who could refer tenants for an assessment for help with things like appliances or food vouchers. Clarion advised that they also referred tenants to 3<sup>rd</sup> party VCOs and had a clarion futures programme which offered apprenticeships and CV support. Peabody advised that they had specialist community safety teams, who worked with multi-agency partners to tackle ASB. L&Q advised that they had a foundation that worked in south Haringey around employment and tenancy sustainment, it was commented that councillors working with them to raise awareness of the foundation would be beneficial. HHT advised that they also offered support through tenancy sustainment and also offered daily wellbeing calls to residents.
- q. A Panel Member raised concerns about Kerala Court and requested that Clarion meet with housing officers and ward councillors to undertake a

- walkabout of the site. In response, Clarion advised they were more than happy to do so.
- r. A Panel Member also requested a walkabout with the ward councillors and MTVH staff around Hastings & Kent House in Ashford Mews. MTVH agreed to contact Cllr Bevan outside of the meeting.
  - s. The Panel requested an update from the providers about legal disrepair claims and whether they had seen a significant rise in these cases over the last 12-18 months. HHT acknowledged that disrepair cases had seen an increase and that there had been an increase in legal costs around those. It was commented that for a small organisation, keeping on top of these could be a challenge, but that they were trying to be proactive and deal with issues before they got worse. L&Q advised that they had seen a big increase in cases and that it was becoming an industry, with legal firms aggressively leafleting tenants. They had put a dedicated team in place to manage the cases and to manage the customer experience. Both Peabody and Clarion advised that they had also seen an increase in cases and that both organisations now engaged a surveyor to visit the property and carry out the works at the same time as the legal claim was processed. MTVH echoed some of the comments made by others, and advised that they were working through a backlog using a dedicated team.
  - t. The Panel asked about the latest ombudsman landlord performance report and that the number of orders and levels of compensation seemed to have increased in the past year. Members sought assurances about why that was. In response, Members were advised that HHT had been working with the Ombudsman to get advice on their complaints process. Mr Barr advised that they had not had engagement on many cases but the ones they did they found positive. L&Q advised that they had had a number of orders from the Ombudsman in the last 18 months and that they had increased their complaints team to deal with a backlog of complaints. They also had a dedicated repairs team to work on damp & mould. The other organisations advised that they had definitely seen an increase in both the number of orders made by the regulator and an increase in the amount of fines received following the additional powers given to the regulator.
  - u. Members asked what the providers' approach was to planned maintenance, particularly in regards to making those homes green and introducing mechanical ventilation. HHT advised that they had brought their repairs team in-house in order to be more responsive. HHT were also looking at a warm homes application to increase the EPC rating in specific properties, as well as replacing single glazed windows in some units. Peabody advised that they had had a rolling stock condition survey in place, in order to support their planned maintenance programme and that they were spending more than they ever had on these works. Peabody also advised that they were looking at retrofitting a range of energy efficiency improvements to their stock. Clarion advised that they had a policy to undertake an internal inspection of every property every 5 years. Clarion were looking at a green approach to meeting future home standards. They had an asset team who looked for 3<sup>rd</sup> party funding for things like air-source heat pumps and improving ventilation. MTVH advised that they had a standalone reporting system to monitor damp and mould and had collected 12 months of data post the implementation of the inspection regime. MTVH also advised that they had a policy to re-inspect a property after 12 months when they had carried out works on damp & mould cases.

- v. The Chair requested some further details about what the Council's approach to dealing with damp and mould was and whether they monitored cases on a dedicated system and carried out mandatory re-inspection visits. **(Action: Jahedur Rahman).**
- w. The Panel sought clarification about what was being done to try and push social rents over affordable rent products. Members also asked if they had any properties that were privately rented at market rates. In response, HHT advised that all their properties were social rents, but that this did come with some funding challenges. L&Q advised that they had a range of products and that this was largely due to viability considerations and the need to make a particular site viable. L&Q advised that there was some demand for their customers for things like shared ownership. L&Q advised that they had a portfolio of private rented properties but were looking to divest these. Peabody advised that they had 926 homes at social rent in Haringey, 54 at affordable rent and 171 shared ownership. The Panel was advised that the challenge for developments such as St Ann's was how to make the scheme happen and how to maximise social rents without necessary grant funding. Peabody were looking to achieve 60% mix of affordable and social rents at St Ann's site. Clarion advised that like the other providers they would always prefer social rents, but that there were viability challenges. Clarion emphasised the impact of rising service charges of tenants as having a big impact during the cost of living crisis. Affordable housing models tended not to be subject to service charge rises as services charges were included in the 80%. MTVH advised that they had introduced a rent-to-buy scheme that allowed tenants to build up 10% equity over ten years.
- x. The Head of Housing Strategy and Policy advised that the Council position was that the Strategic Housing Market Assessment set out that the overwhelming need for Haringey was for low-cost rented housing, which was either at social rent or London Affordable Rent. To this effect, developers were made aware of this through the planning process. Officers advised that it was also recognised that there was some demand for intermediate housing products in the borough.
- y. Peabody to provide a written response on the breakdown of the 60% social vs affordable rent at the St Ann's site. **(Action: Tracy Packer).**
- z. The Chair questioned the providers about whether they had any plans to either build or acquire new housing in Haringey and what their current position was with voids. Peabody advised that St Ann's was their only development site in the borough at present, and that they usually had 4 or 5 void properties a year which were turned around fairly quickly. Clarion advised they were not aware of any new developments in the borough, and that they currently had 14 voids coming back online. MTVH advised that they did not have any voids in the borough at present. L&Q advised that they had no current development plans in Haringey. L&Q acknowledged that they had a backlog of voids that they were working through to bring them back online. L&Q also advised that they were doing a review to look at offering 100% nomination rights to LBH for second lets. HHT advised that they had proposals to build 20 new homes over the next five years in their business plan. HHT advised that they had a building of long-term voids and that they had received funding to tackle the re-modelling of this building.
- aa. The Chair enquired about the perceived east/west divide that HHT had in terms of their resident satisfaction metrics in the borough. In response, HHT

- acknowledged that this was an issue and that it was attributable to concerns around specific buildings (and their fabric condition surveys) as well as a degree of isolation.
- bb. A member of the Panel commented that HHT had a Haringey specific focus, and that as a local provider it was more responsive to the local community and had better links with Council. HHT were asked why they had maintained their model and what the pros and cons were of this approach. In response, HHT advised that they had been around for 90 years and has grown modestly in that time period. HHT were a specialist provider of community focused homes for older people. The advantages of being a local organisation were around knowing their homes and knowing their tenants. Some of the key challenges were financial vulnerability around scale. The organisation only had 17 staff, so this made it more difficult to respond to regulatory changes.
  - cc. The Panel sought comments around how well the interaction with the Council worked around supplying new homes or doing home swaps. In response, L&Q advised that they had undertaken process maps to improve the process and that part of it was learning from residents and managing the communication process effectively. It was suggested that there would be delays sometimes, but that the key thing was to manage those delays and to keep people informed when they did occur.
  - dd. The Panel sought assurances from Clarion around the extent to which Fire Risk Assessments had been carried out. In response, Clarion advised that they had a dedicated building safety team who undertook the inspections. There were no outstanding FRAs on high rise blocks in the borough. Clarion also carried out monthly inspections of the internal parts of the building and were leading the way on retrofitting things like sprinklers to buildings. Peabody advised that like most providers, they had prioritised inspections based on the level of risk of a particular building, which was predominantly about their height. Peabody had completed all FRAs on high rise buildings.
  - ee. A Member in attendance enquired what proactive steps the providers had taken to engage residents on walkabout and to tap-into existing residents networks. In response, L&Q advised that they undertook walkabouts of their estates with residents who sat on their residents board. L&Q advised that they would be happy to do more walkabouts involving councillors. L&Q also provided assurances that they did work together with other providers to tackle complex issues around their being different landlords on a particular estate. Clarion also advised that they recognised the need to engage with councillors more on estate inspections. Clarion advised that they supported residents groups and committees, and also organised one off-meetings with the relevant stakeholders when needed.
  - ff. The Panel queried Peabody's overall tenant satisfaction score of 49% and the community handling satisfaction rate of 17%. In response, Peabody advised that they surveyed residents when a complaint had been handled, and the low score reflected the fact that some residents may be unhappy with the process and some may be unhappy with the complaint outcome. It was commented that it was difficult to separate these two factors. Peabody acknowledged that they needed to improve how they handled complaints and had recruited additional complaint handlers and introduced a process of triaging complaints.
  - gg. The Panel commented that MTVH was originally set up to provide BAME housing and queried whether this was still part of their constitution. In

- response, MTVH advised that it was no longer part of their mission statement, but that they were proud of their background and had recently set up the Molly Higgins Foundation.
- hh. The Chair enquired about Fire Risk Assessments carried out by HHT. In response, it was noted that they carried out inspections annually in their sheltered developments and every two years for their street properties. HHT advised that they were fully up to date with FRAs and kept track of fire safety actions at their monthly corporate health and safety meetings.
- ii. In relation to a questions about placemaking, L&Q summarised this as looking at how they could involve residents in design and construction going forwards, as well as looking at what community assets they had in the area.
- jj. In relation to their homelessness prevention work, Clarion advised that they worked with local authorities on their rough sleeping strategies, as well as a number of VCOs in this field. A key aspect of their homelessness prevention work was around tenancy sustainment in order to keep people in their homes.
- kk. The Panel queried the extent to which the providers had up-to-date and accurate information on vulnerable residents. In response, HHT advised that they were working to improve their tenancy audit data and that they also undertook personal based risk assessments. L&Q advised that they had resident support leads who carried out vulnerability audits. Peabody advised that they had good basic data for things like contact details but acknowledged that disability and vulnerability data were much less complete. It was also observed that a person's vulnerability level changed over time. Clarion advised that they had a CRM system that recorded data on people's vulnerability. MTVH advised that they carried out a home visit pilot and this had uncovered unrecorded vulnerabilities. MTVH also advised that they had provided training for their contractors in order to help them identify and make referrals for low-level vulnerability concerns.
- ll. The Panel requested an update on the number of void properties on any given date, that were held in both the HCBS and within the HRA housing stock.  
**(Action: Jahedur/Sara Sutton).**
- mm. Officers advised that a recent Cabinet Member signing appointed a new contractor to support delivery of HCBS void properties. So, it was recognised as an area that needed attention and there was a plan in place to resolve it.
- nn. In relation to a questions about the ongoing industrial dispute with housing repair operatives, the Cabinet Member advised that the dispute was ongoing and that she couldn't really say more than that.
- oo. The Chair summarised the actions from this agenda item as:
- The Panel requested that regular walkabouts of housing association estates take place and that ward councillors be invited to those.
  - That Councillors be made aware of support services that are available through the housing associations, so that Members can help signpost residents to these services. The Panel requested that there be a comms drive on this also.
  - The Panel requested that officers circulate an updated contact list for the registered providers, and also any relevant Council officer contacts.  
**(Action: Hannah Adler).**
  - The Panel requested that an update on the type of performance data/metrics received at this meeting be provided to the Panel at a future date in around one year's time. **(Action: Philip).**



The Chair thanked everyone present for coming along and speaking to the Panel.

**RESOLVED**

Noted

**201. WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE**

A Member of the Panel raised an issue with a lack of TA Housing units and delays in turning around voids. It was questioned whether there was an underlying policy issue behind this. The Panel agreed to look at this as part of a future update on various policies coming to the Panel, including the allocations policy.

The Panel agreed to undertake a short piece of scrutiny work around the TA Allocations and Discharge of Duty Policy.

**RESOLVED**

That the outcomes from the Scrutiny Survey and Scrutiny Café were noted

That the Work Programme for 2024-26 was agreed.

**202. NEW ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS**

N/A

**203. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

Noted as:

- 21<sup>st</sup> November (Budget)
- 6<sup>th</sup> March

CHAIR: Councillor Alexandra Worrell

Signed by Chair .....

Date .....