

MINUTES OF MEETING Housing, Planning and Development Scrutiny Panel HELD ON Tuesday, 1st November, 2022, 6.37 pm

PRESENT:

Councillors: Dawn Barnes, Mark Blake, Holly Harrison-Mullane, Tammy Hymas, Khaled Moyeed, Matt White (Chair) and Charles Adje

73. 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'.

74. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

75. URGENT BUSINESS

There were no items of urgent business.

76. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

77. DEPUTATIONS/PETITIONS/PRESENTATIONS/QUESTIONS

None.

78. MINUTES

In response to a point captured in the minutes, the Chair sought clarification about the term council rents and what exactly this meant. The Chair sought clarification as to whether this term was specific to formula rents, or whether there were other forms of rent used under the category council rents and whether the Council was considering using alternative rent calculations in any of its new council homes. In response, the Cabinet Member for Housing Services, Private Renters and Planning clarified that:

Council rents applied to secure council tenancies, but didn't apply to other forms of social housing e.g. housing associations. Social rents, therefore, applied to a larger envelope of housing provision. Council rents only applied to council properties. It used to be the case that all council rents were formula rents, which were based on a formula set by central government. However, the Mayor of London set up another

form of council rent, which also only applied to secure council tenancies, called London Affordable Rent. In order to receive funding from the GLA, you had to build homes at either of these two rent formulas. Both of these rent formulas came under the umbrella of the term council rents.

Haringey Council had other properties which were not let at council rents, such as temporary accommodation and the HCBS. London Affordable Rent was a higher calculation of rent, but it used to be very similar in terms of the amount to formula rent. However, the government have followed a policy of reducing formula rents by 1% a year, whilst London Affordable Rents have increased by CPI +1%, therefore the amount of rent charged under each calculation has diverged. The current gap was estimated to be between £30-£35 per tenure. This was still significantly lower than other forms of social rents and was below the London Housing Allowance. Some forms of social rent could exceed LHA rates.

In response to a follow up, the Cabinet Member advised that to date the Council's house building programme had been based on formula rents. However, the financial situation had gotten a lot worse, with rising costs for materials and building combined with interest rates from the Public Works Loan Board having doubled. The Panel was advised that the council was allowed to borrow money to build houses using the HRA, for as long as the HRA remained sustainable. This meant that increased interest rates had to be paid for by future rental income and at present the increased interest costs would not be met by formula rents. The Cabinet Member set out that the administration was looking at building some homes at London Affordable Rents in order that those sites were viable

The Cabinet Member set out that most boroughs had moved to using London Affordable Rents for new builds, but there was some speculation that the GLA may remove London Affordable Rent as an option, which meant that the Council would not be able to use it going forwards. The Cabinet Member emphasised that the viability of the house building programme required grants from the GLA and that they would continue to build homes on the basis of meeting the relevant grant criteria. The Cabinet Member advised that the most important factor in all of this was that the Council was able to build new homes of a type and tenure that its residents needed. The Chair questioned whether there were any specific new schemes that were being considered for London Affordable Rents. In response, the Cabinet Member advised that the Cranwood scheme was currently not viable without using London Affordable Rents.

In response to a further follow-up question, the Director of Place Making and Housing clarified that the GLA had two house building programmes in place and that the programme funding was being sought from determined which rent formula you were allowed to use. The 2019-23 scheme allowed London Affordable Rents, whilst the 2021-25 scheme would be more restrictive in terms of the funding formula used. The Director advised that a piece of work was under way to look at which schemes were being built under which funding scheme as part of the update to the HRA business plan.

The Panel requested a further written briefing on London Affordable Rents and any changes to the current practice of using formula rents towards calculations based on London Affordable Rents. **(Action Cllr Gordon).**

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting on 29th September were agreed as a correct record.

79. UPDATE ON THE INSOURCING OF ALMO

The Panel received a report, which provided an update on the progress of the insourcing of the Council ALMO service, previously known as Homes for Haringey. The report was introduced by Cllr Carlin, Cabinet Member for Housing Services, Private Renters and Planning as set out in the agenda pack at pages 9-12 of the agenda pack. The Director for Place Making and Housing was also present for this agenda item. The following arose during the discussion of this report:

- a. The Panel sought clarification about the timeframe for systems to be in one place and for the transfer to be working well. In response, the panel was advised that there would be regular updates to the panel in future as part of the improvement journey. The Panel queried whether there was an action plan which detailed when various aspects were transferred across and when improvements would be implemented. In response, the Cabinet Member advised that that this was part of the action planning and improvement plan which would be going to Cabinet in due course. It was noted that this entailed around 80 separate projects.
- b. The Panel requested that they would like to see the improvement plan and some key milestones at an early opportunity. The Cabinet Member agreed to share this with the Panel when it was ready and once the prioritisation structure had been agreed. The Cabinet Member advised that the Panel would also be scrutinising the wider process of improvements as part of its remit going forwards. **(Action: Cllr Carlin/Clerk).**
- c. The Panel enquired about whether complaints and member enquiries had been transferred over to the Council following the transfer. The Panel were advised that HfH member enquiries no longer existed and that all MEs were now dealt with by the Council's member enquiry inbox.
- d. The Panel sought clarification around savings arising from the transfer, highlighting that a previous administration had identified £500k a year in savings from bringing the ALMO back in house. In response, the Cabinet Member advised that savings had already been made in this area over the years and that she did not think that savings of the level referred to were possible. It was noted that insourcing at other boroughs had not generated that level of savings.
- e. The Cabinet Member also set out that the HRA was ringfenced and that any savings that were generated would be used to improve the housing stock. The Cabinet Member advised that the driver for bringing the ALMO in house was improving services and the quality of housing provision, rather than savings. The Director added that the Council had adopted a 'lift and shift' model of bringing the services in house, partially to reassure staff that their jobs were not at risk. The Director advised that service reviews would be conducted going

- forwards as part of the improvement plan, to ensure that money in the HRA was being spent in the right areas.
- f. The Panel queried when Members could expect to see an improvement in terms of the level of service provided to tenants, particularly around repairs. Members noted that a lot of the casework they received was around repairs not being done. In response, the Cabinet Member advised that the standard of service would improve but that it would take time. It was noted that there were significant backlogs to get through and that the ALMO was not performing well when it came in-house, so there was a lot of work to do to bring it up to standard. There was also a lot of work to be done to change the culture of the services previously managed by HfH.
 - g. The Director advised that one of the key things to consider was that a lot of the housing stock was in poor condition and had suffered generational underinvestment. The level of spend being put in by the Council was increasing year on year as part of a planned investment programme. Officers advised that they were bringing a report on this to the next panel meeting and emphasised that there was a detailed improvement plan in place and that the Council was reviewing its systems and processes as part of this.
 - h. Members commented that residents had raised concerns that it seemed to be the same people responsible, it was just that they had transferred from HfH to the Council. In response, Cllr Carlin disputed this characterisation, stating that by bringing the ALMO in-house, the entire housing service had been brought into the Council's corporate structure and was now led by the Chief Executive and David Joyce. Similarly, in terms of political control, housing was now under the auspices of the Leader and the Cabinet.
 - i. The Panel enquired whether, as part of the review planned, there was any intention to change the ratio of operational staff to management. In response, officers advised that this wasn't something that they had specifically looked at but that this would fall within the planned service reviews. Anecdotally, the Director commented that from his perspective he had seen some service areas that had adequate lacked management supervision.

RESOLVED

The Panel noted the report.

80. TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION STANDARDS AND COMPLIANCE

The Panel received a report, which provided an update on the standards and quality of temporary accommodation, and how the Council worked with and sought compliance from external temporary accommodation providers. The report was introduced by Denise Gandy, Assistant Director of Housing Demand, as set out in the agenda pack at pages 13-94. The Cabinet Member for Housing Services, Private Renters and Planning, Cllr Carlin, was also present for this agenda item. The following arose during the discussion of this report:

- a. The Panel sought assurances about how to reduce reliance on nightly paid accommodation and how long on average people were housed in this situation. In response, officers advised that the night by night basis of paying landlords was originally used as a short term last resort measure, but that these arrangements were no longer short term as other more long term options were

- no longer available, and demand continued to increase. The Cabinet Member commented that there was an acute shortage of temporary accommodation but that the Council was doing what it could to reduce its reliance on nightly accommodation.
- b. The Panel was advised that there were around 4k households a year who were under the threat of homelessness. Around 50 new households per month were placed in temporary accommodation.
 - c. Officers agreed to provide a written update to members which set out what the relative costs of different types of temporary accommodation used compared to other tenures, and the impact this had on the budget.
 - d. The Panel sought clarification about why the Council had not sort to regularise long term use of properties on a nightly basis through long term contracts. In response, officers advised that London Councils had an agreement in place that London local authorities would not seek to outbid each other and the Council had a maximum rate it would pay. Fundamentally, however, there was a shortage of housing stock, and the Council was tied to the wider private sector housing market.
 - e. The Panel questioned the use of commercial hotels as temporary accommodation and queried whether this was new and the costs and length of stay involved. In response, officers advised that this was a relatively new undertaking, having been used in the past three or four months. The Council had a dynamic purchasing system in place, which it used to find nightly accommodation. At present there was very little accommodation available and when there was nightly rate accommodation available, then a hotel or B&B was used as a last resort. The length of stay varied from a few nights to longer. The maximum length of stay in B&Bs, as set out by the government, was six weeks. It was noted that the cost would be higher than other forms of nightly accommodation but that officers didn't have the exact figures to hand.
 - f. Officers advised that the inspection of hotels was done at a pan-London level, and they reported back and graded each provider. The Council paid a fee for this.
 - g. The Cabinet Member emphasised that the use of hotels and B&Bs was a last resort but that officers had no other choice due to there being no other alternatives available.
 - h. The Cabinet Member set out that the biggest issue was that private sector landlords were selling up due to adverse market conditions including rising interest rates, and this had a huge impact on the availability of accommodation available in general. It was commented that this was the long term implication of having an overreliance on private sector accommodation, throughout the housing market, which had been propped up by Housing Benefit payments for many years.
 - i. In relation to enforcement powers, officers advised that for nightly properties, they worked closely with the housing improvement team who would liaise directly with providers. Officers noted that tenants would have the right to expect reasonable repairs in temporary accommodation, even if the landlord was looking to sell up.

RESOLVED

Noted.

81. HARINGEY COMMUNITY BENEFIT SOCIETY

The Panel received a report, which provided an overview of the process of acquiring homes to lease to the Haringey Community Benefits Society (HCBS) and ensuring that these homes were up to a high standard. The report was introduced by Cllr Carlin, Cabinet Member for Housing Services, Private Renters and Planning as set out in the agenda pack at pages 95-98 of the agenda pack. Hannah Adler, Interim Head of Housing Strategy and Policy was also present for this agenda item. The following arose during the discussion of this report:

- a. The Panel noted that the HCBS was a separate organisation, albeit with a close relationship to the Council (two of the five directors were nominated by LBH) which purchased properties using retained right to buy receipts through the HRA. These properties were leased to households nominated by the Council and the leases lasted for seven years, before returning to the Council's HRA at the end of this period.
- b. The Panel sought clarification about what happened to properties after seven years. In response, officers advised that this eventuality had not arisen as none of the properties had reached the seven year milestone yet. However, after the properties had been returned to the Council, they would go back into the Council's housing stock and would be allocated to those at the top of the priority register.
- c. The Panel queried what would happen to the person living in that property, as it was assumed that their circumstances would have been deemed to have changed in the intervening seven years, as they may no longer be eligible for a Council home. In response, officers advised that they did not have a specific policy in place at present and that this eventuality would not arise for another three years or so. However, a policy position would be developed in due course as part of the wider allocations policy.
- d. In response to a follow up question on timescales, the Panel were advised that officers were currently in the process of developing a new allocations policy to cover all types of allocations. This would go out to consultation once it had been developed.
- e. The Panel raised concerns that a family living in temporary accommodation, allocated through the HCBS, would lose their place on the housing register for that seven year period. In response, the Panel was advised that this was the same if that family had been placed into the private rented sector for those seven years or had not made a homelessness declaration. A new assessment of need would be carried out after those seven years and a determination would be made based in their circumstances at that point. There was huge level of need for housing in the borough and it was likely that many people's situation would have changed in the intervening seven year period. Some people would likely be able to live in private rented accommodation.
- f. The Cabinet Member set out that there was an acute shortage of housing in the borough and that, as politicians, members were going to have think about how they wanted to prioritise social housing in the borough as it was not possible to provide it to everyone who wanted it.
- g. The Cabinet Member commented that the private renters White Paper, if passed into law, would provide an additional level of regulation in the private

rented sector, including rent controls of sorts as landlords would not be allowed to charge over the market rate. It was hoped that this would make a tangible difference for those renting in the private sector, particularly as it would prohibit no fault evictions and provide those living in this sector with greater security of tenure. The Chair commented that he worried that there seemed to be a lot of faith being put in the government to pass this bill, given it was developed under a previous administration. The Cabinet Member advised that Michael Gove was now back in the Cabinet, and it was his White Paper.

RESOLVED

Noted

RESOLVED

That the report was noted.

82. AIDS AND ADAPTATION

The Panel received a report which provided an overview of the process for assessing and providing adaptations to residents' homes to make them disability friendly. The report was introduced by Cllr Carlin, the Cabinet Member for Housing Services, Private Renters and Planning as set out in the agenda pack at page 99. Judith Page, AD for Property Services and Anita Marsden, Head of Integrated Care in Adult Social services were also present for this agenda item. The following arose during the discussion of this report:

- a. The Cabinet Member advised that aids and adaptations sat with both Adult Social Services, who managed the process for non-Council housing stock and HfH who had their own team with occupational therapists. The two different teams still existed now that HfH had been brought in house and there was some work to do to look at how this would look going forwards.
- b. In light of a number of concerns being raised at the Scrutiny Café event about people being placed in unsuitable accommodation, the Chair sought clarification from the Cabinet Member about what the issues were. In response, the Cabinet Member advised that there had historically been a backlog in carrying out aids and adaptations and that this was why HfH had decide to set up their own service provision. The back log was exacerbated by Covid and lockdown and the backlog was still an issue. In addition to retrofitting adaptations in people's homes, the Council was also building bespoke properties as part of its housebuilding programme, as well as adapting void properties. The Cabinet Member acknowledged that there were delays and that this was something that required improvement.
- c. Officers advised that it could be lengthy process and that in some cases it was difficult to change adaptations as quickly as people's needs may change. Officers set out that there was an opportunity to look at adapting first floor void properties as well as some larger properties when older residents perhaps did not need a large property any longer.
- d. The Head of Integrated Care advised that within Adults there was a significant improvement plan in place for major adaptations across all tenures. It was noted

that the delays were moving the right direction and that improvements were being made. Officers agreed to share the Service improvement plan with the Panel. **(Action: Anita Marsden).**

- e. The Panel queried about funding from health colleagues for adaptations. In response, officers advised that disability grants were fully funded by the NHS through the Better Care Fund but that no discussion had been had around funding for adapting HRA properties. Officers agreed to raise this with colleagues in the Health sector **(Action: Anita Marsden).**

RESOLVED

Noted.

83. WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

RESOLVED

The Panel noted the draft work plan and the feedback from the Scrutiny Café Event on 16 September.

84. NEW ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

N/A

85. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

12 December 2022
27 February 2023

CHAIR: Councillor Matt White

Signed by Chair

Date