

## January Housing Improvement Board Meeting

20<sup>th</sup> January 2022, 18:00- 20:00

Microsoft Teams

### Attendees:

#### Board Members

Martin Wheatley (chair)

Yaw Boateng (resident, and Chair of Tenant & Leaseholder Panel)

Ishia Beckford (resident)

Les Parry (resident)

Eloise Shepherd (London Councils)

Phil Brookes (DLUHC Improvement & Assurance Panel)

#### In attendance

Councillor Hamida Ali (Leader of LB Croydon)

Councillor Patricia Hay-Justice (Cabinet Member for Homes)

Councillor Lynne Hale (Deputy Leader of the Opposition, and Shadow Cabinet Member for Homes)

David Padfield (Interim Corporate Director for Housing, LBC)

Yvonne Aryeetey (Executive Officer, LBC)

Velvet Dibley (Senior Strategy Officer, LBC)

#### Apologies

Councillor Hamida Ali (Leader of LB Croydon)

Councillor Darren Rodwell (Leader of LB Barking & Dagenham, Local Government Association)

Fahad Eisa (resident)

<b>18:00- 18:30</b>		<b>Actions from inaugural December meeting</b>
	DP	Overview of three papers 1) Update on progress towards ARK immediate actions 2) Update on completed actions across the three Regina Road blocks 3) Coverage of Resident Involvement Team door-knocking survey
	Chair	Do Board Members have any questions with regards to the submitted papers?
	YB	Most of the Council resources are being concentrated on Regina Road, and whilst I am confident that the improvements are taking place, there are concerns that other areas of the borough are being overlooked.
	DP	The failings at Regina Road are not limited to those blocks, and the Council is doing all it can to identify failings across the borough and address these. The purpose of the Board is to ensure against the conditions at Regina Road being replicated in other areas.
	LP	The Update on progress towards ARK immediate actions report refers to a compliance manager who will be made permanent in March 2021- is this a typo?
	DP	It is a typo, the paper should read 'March 2022', and refers to a Senior Fire Safety Surveyor post.
	LP	Is the compliance manager's remit just for Axis, or other contractors that carry out housing services?
	DP	The compliance manager will cover a range of compliance issues, including gas and lifts.
	LP	With regards to repairs, how many claims are currently live and closed from Regina Road? How many claims were closed throughout the borough in the last two quarters? What type of repairs are these?
	DP	Commencement of new disrepair legislation in 2020 has caused major issues for landlords. DP to confirm and share numbers. <b>Action:</b> DP to share live and closed repairs claims for Regina Road and the borough.
	LP	If a tenant contacts the Council with regards to a repair, the service logs this as an enquiry and not a complaint. How many service enquiries have been received in the last two quarters?
	DP	We're not yet able to provide the data. The Council does not keep a record of service enquiries, and we are currently reviewing our complaints process.
	LP	Can the tenants be advised as to how the HRA Budget works?
	DP	This will be covered in a later agenda item.
	Chair	What has happened to the roof of 1-87 Regina Road? Have the necessary repairs been carried out?
	DP	The roof will require a significant amount of work. Repairs have been carried out where possible, and properties have been decanted where they are affected by the roof. The Council needs to confirm with residents the plans to repair the roof.
	Chair	Can you confirm that no one is living with water penetration?
	DP	I can confirm that there should be no one living under these conditions. The Council is in the process of conducting mould-washing, mould-sampling, and ensuring there are no further leaks from other water sources.

	Chair DP	Have the fire safety issues raised in the ARK report been addressed? Most of the work has been completed, and we are conducting some additional checks to make sure nothing has been missed.
	Chair DP	How is culture change being measured and assessed by the leadership in housing? There are currently no performance measures in place, however, there are plans to capture this.
<b>18:30- 19:00</b>	<b>PB</b>	<p><b>Data &amp; Performance</b></p> <p>The accompanying agenda pack is a work in progress, and there are a few changes which will be made to the pack. The presentation draws from existing data, and it was difficult to identify further data due to time pressures and pressures on housing directorate staff. We will work with DP and VD to bring the presentation up to date. Further data should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial data and costs</li> <li>• Backlog of repairs</li> <li>• Resources Axis have allocated to their contract with LBC</li> <li>• Total number of void council properties</li> <li>• What are the complaints?</li> <li>• What are the recurring problems which generate these complaints?</li> </ul> <p><b>Action:</b> DP and VD to make amendments to the presentation ahead of the next Board meeting.</p>
	DP	<p>The Council has now commissioned tenant satisfaction surveys with regards to specific repairs. The findings from these surveys will be available to share at the next Board meeting</p> <p><b>Action:</b> DP to share tenant satisfaction survey findings at next Board meeting.</p>
	Chair	We should make sure we have the right measures in place, and if information gathering against these measures is accurate.
	ES	<p>Agree with PB that the complaints process needs to be reviewed. Happy to work with DP to look at systems other local authorities use to collect their complaints data.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> ES to work with DP and VD to look at complaint logging systems other local authorities use.</p>
	YB	The Council insists that tenants use 'My Account' when logging a complaint. Complaints from residents should be taken seriously regardless of whether they used 'My Account'.
	DP YB	<p>The Council needs to communicate better internally.</p> <p>I am concerned that residents are not reporting personal issues to residents' groups because they feel Council staff are not listening to them.</p>
	DP	Listening to residents is part of the Housing Improvement Plan. We are looking at how to ensure the right operative is allocated to each repair job, and how the contact centre operates. The contact centre is currently operated by Axis.
	YB	Whenever there appears to be a major issue, the Council brings in a new IT system which is detrimental to human interactions.

	<p>DP</p> <p>YB</p> <p>DP</p> <p>Chair</p> <p>LP</p> <p>Chair</p> <p>PB</p> <p>DP</p>	<p>I understand how face-to-face interaction is important. Croydon's IT system is out of date and is being replaced by the best model on the market which will be able to collect better data.</p> <p>This does not address the IT versus human interaction aspect. In terms of complaints and its relation to 'My Account', this should be followed up in a different forum.</p> <p>There is an opportunity to have a conversation with residents to find out how they would like the Council's front-line service to look like.</p> <p>What would be a good design for an electronic system? The Council should be working alongside tenants rather than imposing systems on them.</p> <p>Two reasons the Board should be interested in voids. One is social; there are over 6,000 residents waiting for homes, and many council properties are empty. Second is financial; empty homes represent a financial loss to the Council. This problem has been recognised by managers for years, and yet the voids process has worsened instead of improving. What is causing the delay to improvement to void turnaround times? What is the action plan to improve repair response time?</p> <p>These questions will be picked up under the Housing Improvement Plan item.</p> <p>Colocating of the contractor and the local Authority often helps enormously with the problem of the wrong trade being sent to a job. Also having it available to someone in the team with the technical skills to actually carry out a diagnosis effectively. Hoping that the council is still going ahead with the colocation plan areas of focus. The new IT system should enhance the customer experience.</p> <p>The colocation system is still in plan, and the Axis contact centre will be back in Bernard Weatherill House.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> LBC to provide an update on improving performance data with regards to complaints, and voids. LBC to provide an update on risk management of the new IT system.</p>
<p>19:00- 19:30</p>	<p>LP</p>	<p><b>Tenant Respect</b></p> <p>The group was not able to visit residents to collect information due to Covid-19 restrictions. Other means of gathering tenant opinions are highlighted in the accompanying paper. Evidence from residents and front-line staff have been included in the paper. Both groups have arrived at a common view as detailed in the paper. The recommendations listed should be a set of standards for staff dealing with residents and tenants receiving a service from Croydon. Some of the key findings include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor communication between LBC and tenants</li> <li>• Tenants not feeling heard by LBC staff</li> <li>• Lack of accountability amongst LBC staff</li> </ul> <p>Residents have requested that the above points are included in the Improvement Plan, but most importantly, would like to see some action and immediate change. Unless there's action, the trust and confidence of residents in the service that they pay for will remain an issue. The residents were asked, 'Are you treated with respect?' and 'Are you communicated with effectively?'</p>

	<p>YB</p> <p>ES</p> <p>Chair</p> <p>LP</p>	<p>Engagement with tenants found that the answer to the questions was 'no'. Tenants and Leaseholders presented a detailed report as a way forward, including a proposal for a new, user-friendly IT system for tenants. This was included in the document as a way forward. The report which was in line with the Tenants Charter was submitted to and accepted by LBC. It was accepted on the basis that there will be a dialogue with the tenants and Leaseholders panel on each aspect with either a director or head of service level to see what was possible. There was effective communication at the meeting on the presentation, however since then the panel felt they have been dismissed and not further communication has taken place on this proposal. This is unacceptable as the report was representative of tenant voices. If this is ignored, then what hope is there for the other 160,000 Council tenants? The Governance Review undertaken in March 2020 has not yet benefitted Council tenants. There are clear recommendations and themes within the report, placing tenants front and centre of decision-making. However, two years later, this has not been implemented. The Board Members hope that the points and recommendations raised above will be taken into consideration and looked at separately, with feedback provided to the Board.</p> <p>The residents' engagement listed in the Housing Improvement Plan are yet to take place due to the Council's financial situation.</p> <p>There is no evidence to suggest that the Council acts as 'One Team', one of the Council's corporate values. Resident enquiries are passed from team to team without officers taking responsibility. This means issues take a long time to resolve.</p> <p>The Resident Involvement team have been brilliant. However, responses to issues meet roadblocks due to a lack of joint-working across Council teams.</p> <p>I hope that the Council's publicity regarding Regina Road has helped to address the issue of 'stigma'. There are clearly learning and development needs within the Council's workforce.</p> <p>Solutions are not going to take place straight away, however, a discussion needs to be had in terms of what actions need to be taken. There were common themes amongst the feedback provided by residents. The Board should not be slowed down by trying to fix everything. The Board should focus on the most significant problems. Councillor Rodwell and I are working on a Governance paper. We will hope to draw a line between what has been said today, and what will be included within the report.</p> <p>The Housing Improvement Plan should make use of the strong tenant involvement structures the Council has. The focus since the ITV news coverage of conditions at 1-87 Regina Road is lost, and the messaging has disappeared. If it has been heard, it has not been acted upon. It is vital for the Improvement Plan to be credible and in progress. The information should not just be heard, but acted on with accountability.</p> <p>DP's predecessor put in place good building blocks to improve housing. There have been some focus groups created regarding a staff training package. There were also two meetings held with an officer who is</p>
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	<p>Chair</p> <p>PB</p> <p>DP</p>	<p>developing the programme. However, progress seems to have stopped, and there has been no further communication.</p> <p>Promises have been made with regards to voids and garages, and tenants have raised issues around these, however nothing has come to fruition. Staff turnover has meant that projects have not been completed.</p> <p>There is a need for the housing directorate to make sure that work that is started is completed.</p> <p>The housing directorate must focus and prioritise.</p> <p>I apologise for all the work that the Panel has completed, but has not been taken forward. The Council welcomes LP's points on service standards and would like the opportunity to work with residents to develop service standards. The Council is not meeting service standards with regards to ombudsman's enquiries, and member enquiries and complaints. It is not because of poor behaviours within the workforce; Council staff are incredibly busy. Any discussion about service standards must tie into what the Council are able to deliver, and the wider Improvement Plan.</p> <p>With regards to the Council's 'One Team' value, agree that residents would find it difficult to navigate between the different Council teams, and teams could be more 'joined-up'. This has been communicated to staff.</p> <p>With regards to stigma, we would welcome a conversation with YB if there are resources that can be commissioned for staff training. The provision of staff training comes back to the resources issues mentioned previously. We are currently missing key roles in the Housing area, and I have put together a resourcing plan for delivering the outcomes required in the Housing Improvement Plan.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> DP to provide an update on recruitment at the next Housing Improvement Board meeting.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> use LP's paper as a template for improving respect for tenants.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> LBC to amend the Housing Improvement Plan following the Board's comments, and use the current Plan as an appendix to the new revised Plan.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> Board Members to send through feedback on the current Housing Improvement Plan to VD by 24<sup>th</sup> January.</p>
<p>19:30- 20:00</p>	<p>Chair</p> <p>DP</p>	<p><b>Housing Improvement Plan and HRA Business Plan</b></p> <p>I invite DP to introduce the Housing Improvement Plan, and explain how the activities planned align with the resources in the HRA Business Plan.</p> <p>Following Regina Road, the Council was tasked with developing the Housing Improvement Plan. The Plan is important, and maps out the work we'll be doing in the next months and years, broken down into workstreams. The Plan is due to go to Cabinet in March, alongside the refreshed HRA Business Plan. We have been found in breach of the Regulator for Social Housing's Tenancy and Resident Engagement standard as a result of Regina Road. The Regulator is expecting us to come back into compliance, and complete a voluntary undertaking</p>

	<p>detailing what we'll do to come back into compliance. The Improvement Plan will be key to demonstrating this. An earlier iteration of the Plan came under heavy criticism from the non-statutory review, saying that the targets were not SMART. In response to this, we have made sure that the actions are time-bound and achievable. With regards to the workforce planning workstream, the dates require further work. There are some challenges around focus, and I would welcome the Board's comments. There's a question as to whether or not the Council has captured what is most important to residents in this Plan. We have received criticism that we are too focused on technical fixes, and not on culture change work.</p> <p>HRA is a ring-fenced account; all our landlord activities are ring-fenced. We use this money to fund repairs and capital works on the estates. The account needs to be kept in balance, it has its own reserves and can't be overdrawn. Best practice- when HRA self-financing was agreed in 2012, every local authority landlord required a business plan for the HRA, and this should cover the forthcoming 30 years. It should answer the question, can we afford our housing stock? We are in the process of reviewing this at the moment, and this is due to go to Cabinet in March. To provide an overview of the HRA, income from the HRA is nearly all rents. For financial year 2021/2022, £77 million is what we receive in rent, £6.4m in service charges, and other sources of income totals £3.2 million. We therefore have a total of £87.4m to spend. And of that, approximately £13.4 million is spent on repairs, £45 million is spent on management. The HRA needs to contribute to the overall running of the Council which constitutes £7 million (internal recharges). The other figures below that are capital; we are spending a lot more than £10 million in capital this year. Depreciation of our housing stock constitutes another £13 million and then revenue contributions accounts for £180,000. Assume £23 million as a contribution towards capital. Our forecast for the current year comes to £89 million, and so we have a projected shortfall of £1.7m. Fortunately, the HRA has healthy reserves; we have £27 million, and so this shortfall could fall on reserves. In fact, that is probably not going to be necessary, we are doing a review of the accounts at the moment. Once the year is finished, the £1.7 million shortfall will be brought much closer to a balanced budget. However, there are a number of pressures, mainly on the repairs side of things, and around disrepair claims that we touched on earlier in the meeting. We are due to do the rent-setting, and I'll be talking about this in more detail with the Tenants &amp; Leaseholder panel. The Council has a rent-setting policy which is to follow government-guidance on rent-setting, and the guidance is that the rent-increase is September CPI plus 1%. CPI in September is 3.1%, and so 4.1% will be the recommendation to Cabinet. This should allow us to have a balanced HRA for next year. The main pressures being those around repair and disrepair which will be built into next year's budget. The other pressure is the Building Safety Act, and we've allocated an extra £500,000 for staffing to be compliant with that.</p>
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	Chair	<p>Will it be possible for this Board to look at the 25-year business plan before we have to report to Cabinet in March?</p>
	DP	<p>The business plan will be ready ahead of that Cabinet meeting, and so we will be releasing it beforehand. It depends on when the next meeting is scheduled, I don't see that being a problem.</p>
	Chair	<p>It is important to look at this at the next meeting, to understand the relationship between the HIP and HRA business plan. <b>Action-</b> to present the HRA Business Plan at the next Housing Improvement Board meeting.</p>
	Chair	<p>There is a lot of detail in this Plan, and so we won't be able to do justice to all of that. If you have detailed comments in relation to the Plan, please send them to VD. Can the Board provide one or two 'hot-takes' each on your concerns? Secondly, can we address whether or not the Plan is 'even a plan'?</p>
	Chair	<p>The Plan is tremendously detailed list of activity, which is not a Plan. I expected something which was more purposive and set out a small number of things that need to be different in the way that tenants experience the service, i.e. performance and repairs service, capital investment in homes, and respect for tenants. Clear timescales and measures for how these issues will be addressed, and an activity plan falls behind those. It needs to say what we're going to do, and by what dates. At the moment, it's a list of activity, 'what good looks like' is not clearly defined, and there is work to be done in terms of putting timescales into things.</p>
	LP	<p>Two questions on the HRA first- is garage income included in the income? With regards to the disrepair protocol payments, is that done directly from the budget, or does the Council carry an insurance policy and a premium is paid from the HRA budget?</p>
	LP	<p><b>Action:</b> VD to circulate a copy of the HRA slide How much at the moment is temporary accommodation costing the Council? Does the cost come from the HRA budget or General Fund? What part of the Plan actually puts a strategy in place to reduce temporary accommodation, or manage existing stock better than what we are now? My conclusion is that is gobbledygook, it does not outline what the end product is- it doesn't outline when or how. It's not a Plan, the Plan will mean nothing to people who live in Council property. The Plan needs to be simplified with end goals and timelines. The majority of people out there want to know what you'll improve and when, and what's the Plan to achieve it. I don't think it's suitable or acceptable.</p>
	ES	<p>I agree with the lack of vision. The work-stream on vision and strategy does not articulate a vision or a strategy. It needs to be communicated more clearly, and therefore make it more meaningful to tenants. I will provide further feedback to VD.</p>
	YB	<p>I think it is a Plan, but I'm not seeing how this relates to Croydon residents. It looks like the only people who get listened to are those who are in the know, actively involved in resident involvement or know who to speak to. This should not be the case, every resident should have access to getting issues resolved. An issue of grass cutting was raised previously, and I was told this was a decision made by corporate, and</p>



		<p>housing staff were not involved. How can corporate make a decision without the housing staff knowing? Each section of the Council can come up with their own Plans, but if corporate can make decisions without consulting Housing, what we're doing here is a complete waste of time. Can we think about how this is understood further and resolved?</p>
	Chair	<p>Residents are customers of the Council, not just the housing service. How does the Housing Improvement Plan fit with the Council's wider improvement plans?</p>
	PB	<p>This is not a Plan, it is a to-do list. Unless it has measurable outcomes against it, it's not helpful. We need to focus this down to make sure how we address the data and performance management around this.</p>
	Chair	<p>Would DP be able to respond to this? Having a genuinely strong Plan is key to ensuring the Council addresses these issues.</p>
	DP	<p>This feedback is incredibly useful, this is the purpose of our discussion today. What we need is a more purposeful document. There's a question for me around recruiting the permanent director who may wish to be part of this discussion. I'm happy to pick up the comments that were made today and take them forward.</p> <p>In response to Les, yes the income from garages is included. Disrepair is included in the repairs amount, it wouldn't be economically feasible to insure against disrepair. Temporary accommodation is a general fund activity, not a HRA activity. The net cost to the Council is in the region of £9-10 million each year. However, this is for the whole of the homelessness operation, including homelessness prevention, as well as the cost of temporary accommodation.</p> <p>In response to Yaw, if we do the things that we've spoken about here that type of problem in the future should not reoccur. We need to improve our transparency around tenant service charges to understand what tenants are contributing to the cost of grass cutting. We need to then be talking to tenants about how often they want their grass cut. If this costs more than what is in the budget, then service charges should go up. We could look at that this year, and implement the new service charges next year.</p>
	Chair	<p>Thank you for your comments DP. My other feedback will be fed to VD. Can Board Members get comments to VD by the end of Monday 24<sup>th</sup> January? What are the next steps for the Improvement Plan? It sounds like there is a lot of work to do on this before it goes to Cabinet? Will there be a chance to engage further?</p>
	DP	<p>We don't have a date in the diary for the next meeting, I will speak to democratic services and my team.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> come back to the Chair with a date to review the Plan with the Board Members.</p>
	Chair	<p>Thanks to fellow Board Members, DP, VD and YA. Thanks to the audience for their patience and contributions.</p>