

Housing Scrutiny Committee - 6 June 2023

Minutes of the meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD on 6 June 2023 at 7.30 pm.

Present: **Councillors:** Jackson (Chair), Cinko-Oner (Vice-Chair), Graham, Bossman-Quarshie, O'Sullivan, Gilgunn, Ozdemir and Jegorovas-Armstrong

Councillor Jason Jackson in the Chair

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item 1)

There were no apologies for absence.

2 DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item 2)

There were no declarations of substitute members.

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS (Item 3)

No member declared any interest however Rose Marie-McDonald, PFI tenant representative declared that she is a trustee of Campaign for Holloway.

4 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (Item 4)

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 9 May 2023 be confirmed as an accurate record of proceedings and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

5 CHAIR'S REPORT (Item 5)

The Chair informed the meeting that since the last meeting he has met Peabody representatives regarding the issue of the recent fire safety regulations and its impact on the provision of social housing.

6 MEMBERSHIP , TERMS OF REFERENCE AND DATES OF MEETINGS (Item 6)

The Chair informed the meeting that although membership was agreed at Annual Council on 11 May 2023, there is an error in membership as published in Appendix 1 of the report, however noting that this has been amended on the online version.

Councillor Gilgunn to be included as a member of the committee and Councillor Jegorovas-Armstrong replaces Cllr Hamdache.

7 EXTERNAL ATTENDEES (IF ANY) (Item 7)

None

8 **ORDER OF BUSINESS (Item 8)**

The order of business would be as per the agenda.

9 **PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item 9)**

10 **EXTERNAL ATTENDEES (IF ANY) (Item 10)**

11 **MAJOR SCRUTINY REVIEW: STRATEGIC REVIEW OF OVERCROWDING IN ISLINGTON - WITNESS EVIDENCE (HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS IN ISLINGTON) (Item B1)**

The Chair informed the meeting that committee will be receiving 3 presentations from 3 of Islington's Housing Associations as part of the Committee's review into the Overcrowding and their performance issues.

Committee received a presentation from Ruth Davison, Chief Executive, Islington and Shoreditch Housing Association about its work, challenges and future plans as a landlord in the borough.

The following points were highlighted:

- Islington and Shoreditch Housing Association (ISHA) is committed to building homes of high quality where everyone irrespective of their background has the opportunity to reach their potential and enjoy a good quality of life.
- ISHA has developed many homes in the borough in partnership with developers and with Islington Council , which enabled ISHA to build 60 homes - 100 percent of which were social rent or shared ownership.
- Meeting was informed that half of ISHA homes have been built in the last 20 years and it continues to look for opportunities to grow and to build more houses.
- Chief Executive informed members that in its pursuit to build and help others to build homes ISHA established the North River Alliance(NRA) 15 years ago, a development consortium of 11 small housing associations where both expertise and resources are shared and has over the years delivered 3,500 homes.
- Meeting was advised that ISHA continues to strive to be a good landlord, does not have starter tenancies; is committed to life tenancies; new homes and all re-lets are provided at social rents and importantly it does not carry out affordability checks for social rented homes. In addition, homes are built with great space and high environmental standards.
- ISHA continues to invest in stock and repairs and have been able to set new standards, which was co-created with residents at 'action days'.
On the consultations held at St Mary's Path estate, Ruth Davison reminded members that on taking office, she made commitments that secure and assured tenants had the right to remain; that there would be no loss of social homes and no increase in rents for its residents.
Ruth Davison informed the meeting that following the consultation ISHA has abided by the majority view and would not be demolishing any of the buildings on the estate, nor carrying out the refurbishment as consulted

upon. It will now form a task and finish group to reach agreement on the scope of works.

- ISHA prides itself as being anchored in the community it serves, it remains the first housing authority to become a London Living Wage employer which is also applied to contractors that carry out work on behalf of the organisation.
- In response to overcrowding concerns in households, Ruth Davison informed the meeting that due to lack of capacity ISHA is unable to address this but continues to work in conjunction with Islington's Housing Needs Manager by signposting its residents to available support. Members were informed that a piece of work being carried out in conjunction with other housing associations to find suitable accommodation for tenants interested in downsizing will help alleviate the overcrowding issues in the borough.
- In response to a question about rents, meeting was advised that tenants pay affordable social rents and only increased by 7%, that ISHA has not made profit as it intends to ensure rents are affordable.
- In terms of community engagement and consultation, the meeting was advised that efforts are made to ensure participation of its residents and provides transport for vulnerable residents to such meetings.
- Meeting was advised that ISHA mission is to co-create homes and communities where everyone can flourish, that in its delivery of its strategic plan, it is important that safety is paramount and it aims to ensure there is service satisfaction by being a consistent and quality landlord.
- In terms of security and growth, the Director informed the meeting that it sets resident on a good footing ISHA homes as standard are let with carpets/laminates and curtains and decorated and that a 'New let' package is available to downsizers, along with cash payment and removal costs so as to free homes for those households experiencing overcrowding.
- ISHA have no intention to evict, noting that despite the pandemic it continued to house its people as it recognises the challenges of tenants.
- Of the 800 homes in Islington, 640 are for the lowest social rents and there is no affordability checks. It was noted that ISHA is a London living wage employer.
- In terms of supply of homes, meeting was reminded of the acute shortage of social homes and that ISHA continues to play its part in building homes that it has built 60% of social homes in the last 20 years
- In terms of sustainability, meeting was advised of the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund, that £2.4million was available for a consortium of 11 small HAs, including others in Islington.
- Meeting was advised that further investment will be required with the Newcombe Estate with its 36 homes (all 1 bed and bedsits built) in the 1950's to ensure it meets sustainability targets.
- The director acknowledged that more than £1m extra will be required for the past 3 years, noting the £3m St Mary's Path is planned for this year.
- With regards to damp and mould issues, ISHA has employed the services of a third party contractor to undertake a survey of 1/3 of all its stock last year and the rest will be completed this year, that so far only One significant damp and mould problem so far.

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- In terms of challenges experienced by ISHA, meeting was advised that funding for building safety is unavailable as social landlords receive no funding to make buildings safe where the residents are social renters and will cost £14m to replace cladding.
- Other notable challenges is the need to invest more in stock especially in light of financial constraints; sustainability and planning constraints; inflation in materials and labour; constraints on income and anti-social behaviour.
- In response to questions about overcrowding, the Chief Executive acknowledged the difficulty due to shortage of larger dwellings, that ISHA is planning to have a 'House Swap' day where both under occupiers and households experiencing overcrowding will be invited with a view that ISHA officers will be able to facilitate mutual exchange. Outcomes can be shared with committee after the experiment has been concluded. Also meeting was informed of an initiative which was mooted some time ago by the Islington Housing Group working together to identify the most overcrowded family to see if a task group could facilitate this, that this initiative might need to be revisited.
- On incentives such as providing fittings such as carpets and curtains, the meeting was advised that the cost were not recovered back from the tenants as ISHA view this as standard provision.
- ISHA owns all its housing stock and reports of a 30% turnover is not true as rents are kept at social rent, that investment in the housing stock key and that in comparison to other benchmarking group, ISHA is first.
- On tenant engagement, meeting was advised that residents participate on tender panels so they tend to know one another. Also recently ISHA is running a community involvement pilot programme which is being written up, the aim of which is to bring people together, details of which can be shared with the committee when published.
- With regards the £3m investment for St Mary's Path, the Chief Executive acknowledged that although this to a certain extent involved works on addressing damp and mould, it should be noted that historically there were issues and although Board recommended it to be demolished, following consultation residents overwhelming voted against it being demolished. The investment was primarily for retrofitting the dwellings,
- On the issue of service charges, meeting was advised that charges have gone up for leaseholders and this is recoverable however for tenants a proportion of the service charge is recoverable, details which can be provided for members after clarification.
- With regards lack of funding to address fire safety concerns, ie the removal of cladding, the Chief Executive reassured Committee that it intends to submit a representation to a House of Commons Select Committee looking into this issue.
- On the proportion of overcrowded households even with the incentives being offered, meeting was informed that data is not available at this moment.
- On the proportion of first time repairs completed within 24hrs, meeting was informed that this is captured in its Tenancy Satisfaction Measures a requirement of all RSL's and can be shared with Committee.

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The Chair thanked Ruth Davison for her presentation and that data requested by the Committee can be sent to either the clerk or the Chair.

The Committee received a presentation from Catherine Kyne, Regional Director of Clarion Housing on its work as a landlord in the borough.

The following points were highlighted:

- Clarion has 3,804 units in Islington in wards such as Finsbury Park, Holloway, St Georges and St Mary's offering a range of tenures.
- In terms of resident engagement, the Regional Director informed the meeting that tenants are included in void inspection visits to ensure that these units meet high standard for future tenants that will occupy the units. Another area that tenants are involved in is drafting the new letting pack by making it informative and signposting new occupiers to the available sources in their area such as doctors surgeries, council offices etc.
- In terms of challenges, meeting was informed that Clarion is addressing Street Homeless, installing door entry systems in its property to protect residents, addressing ASB and Vandalism, cost of living rises, tenancy sustainment, damp and mould issues, unemployment, Overcrowding and the decanting process for residents when complex repairs is to be carried out.
- Meeting was advised that Clarion has put in place a dedicated Tenancy Specialist Team, an increase in its Planned Investment, Closure Orders, Secured by Design Replacements, a £166k financial support for residents which has prevented 125 evictions and is presently supporting 176 households with money advice and energy costs. In addition 28 Islington residents have gained employment via Clarions Employment & Training programmes.
- It was noted that currently there are 575 live repairs which represents 14% of North London repairs and is managed by Clarion's Internal Complex works team. Also presently there are 69 Legal disrepair cases and that it should be noted that resident satisfaction with Clarion on various aspects of delivery with its residents is currently about 88.4%
- In terms of damp and mould, there are 70 operatives involved nationally with 13 surveyors, 3 of which are based in the North London, that with the reported 102 cases with contractors, 28 cases are with the LCDM surveyor to assess root cause.
- Meeting was also advised of Clarions Property MOTs, which has piloted across North London over a period, that 225 MOTs have been completed in region, that there is a MOT target to complete 50 per week nationally.
- With regard to building Safety, the Director advised that there are no overdue cases regarding fire risk assessments, that currently 96.2% compliant for NL 3 HRB in LBI.
- Meeting was informed that external wall system inspections is being prioritised, that the planned Investment for 2022/23 of £7.1m investment of which £3.9m was for windows. In 2023/24, £14.8m planned investment of which £6.1m on windows as part of Clarions LCDM programme.

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- In terms of building safety, meeting was advised that fire assessment have been carried out on all their buildings, that there is no overdue cases so 96.2% compliant for its 3 high rise buildings in Islington and that it is prioritised for external wall system inspections.
- In 2022/23 £7.1m was invested of which £3.9m involved window replacement, in 2023/24 £14.8m investment is planned, £6.1m on windows as part of Clarion's Leaks, Condensation, Damp and Mould programme (LCDM).
- Meeting was advised that a number of challenges include, having large volumes of converted street unit, planning requirements around conservation areas and parking and logistics.
- In terms of Stakeholder Engagement and Collaboration, meeting was advised of the quarterly Executive group meeting to discuss housing strategy; that there is a dedicated email address for member enquiries; meetings are scheduled to discuss complex cases and agree resolutions; R&M staff meet with the EHO to discuss cases and potential orders; regular safeguarding review meetings with multiple partners; Regular communication with senior leaders on complex and major incidents.
- Meeting was advised that recently Clarion Commitments which include providing services which will be easy to access and respond promptly to resident enquiries, willing to listen, keep you informed, and treat you fairly and with has been refreshed, that Clarion aims to keep their properties well maintained and maintaining the building safety.
- In response to the fire incident at Cope House in Bunhill ward and Clarion's attitude to the vulnerable residents on issues such as drug dealing and anti-social activities, the Regional Director acknowledged that specialist teams are in place to deal with the anti-social activities, noting the involvement of the police and not much could be divulged or discussed in public. The Regional Director indicated that she is willing to meet the ward councillors after the meeting to provide more details. On the issue of the state of the building, the Director noted that there was no excuse on the delay in responding to the repairs.
- A member suggestion of ways of addressing anti- social activities in Cope House was for Clarion to include tenant participation or preferably elected representatives and not hand picked tenants was noted.
- With regards to Housing Ombudsman's recommendations around Clarion's customer service ineffectiveness, the regional director noted that although this was 6-8 years ago, all recommendations had been implemented.
- In terms of selling off properties, the Regional Director stated that following meetings with elected representatives on this issue she was not aware of any sales and that any historical sales would have been gone through the Group's optional appraisal system where each property would have been thoroughly assessed.
- In response to compensation claims, meeting was informed that Clarion has a Compensation Policy, that in the case of Cope House she could circulate details to ward councillors after the meeting. Also insurance claims details can be circulated to members if interested.

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- On whether there had been any reported fire incident similar to Cope House, the Director indicated that she was aware of only one but there were no safeguarding issue involved, however indicating that she will look into it and revert back to committee.
- With regard to downsizing, meeting was informed that resident feedback indicates that it is viewed as a complex issue, that families do not want to move out of the borough due to family and local ties, it can be very challenging however Clarion has in place a dedicated tenant liaison officer who works with interested resident and offer all the various options of either within or outside the borough.
- With regard to timescales for repairs, Clarion's Director of Surveying noted that for day-to-day repairs, the target is 28 days but with leaks, damp and mould, a range of targets exists depending on the level of repair which will have to be assessed either by a surveyor or officer.
- Meeting was advised that the reporting of any repairs can either be via online or by making a call to the contact centre.
- In response to a further invitation to a future meeting to clarify the issues raised, the Regional Director indicated that she was amiable to attending committee meetings or meet councillors informally to provide answers to issues raised going forward.

The Chair thanked the Regional Director for her presentation, noting the difficulty of not being able to provide answers to all the issues raised but welcoming her willingness to come back and respond with her team to some of the issues raised that the Committee would want to be seen as a critical friend as it is important that resident and councillors expectations are addressed .

Committee received a presentation from Tracy Packer, Managing Director for North East London, Peabody Housing Association on its management of overcrowding issues. The following points were highlighted:

- Peabody is one of the UK oldest housing associations with 5500 homes across Islington with the majority let at social rent.
- Peabody is dedicated to having a close relationship with its customers, and this is achieved with its locally based service delivery teams supported by colleagues across the organisation. It also aims to gain customer trust by simplifying its processes and always looking at new ways of working, thinking and behaving.
- Peabody is committed to addressing any damp and mould issues in homes as Peabody recognises how distressing this can be and will continue to work hard to put it right. Meeting was informed that a specialist team is in place to ensure that all residents have a warm, safe and dry home.
- On the issue of overcrowding, the Director advised that Peabody currently have 382 households who have applied to move and this is in context of other households who have a need to move due to medical/health needs, welfare and fleeing domestic violence etc and that support is available to

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residents throughout the move process however due to the limited number of empty homes available, the wait to be rehoused can be lengthy.

- Meeting was advised that during the 2021/22, only 14 x larger homes became available in the borough (3/4 bed).
- In response to a question, meeting was informed that the number of lettings completed is driven by the availability of homes, that Peabody has completed 115 lettings in Islington in 2021/22, the majority of which are for 1 and 2 bed homes
- In addition to the above, meeting was advised that empty homes are let through working in partnership with LBI via nomination's agreement with the Council which receives 100% nomination rights of all 1st lets (new homes), 50% of studio/1bedroom relets and 75% of 2 bedroom or larger relets
- It is important to note that Peabody residents who have requested a move are considered when a relet becomes available and there is priority move list for those in most need.
- In addressing overcrowding Peabody offers solutions and where impossible to rehouse a number of mitigating measures are available to lessen the impact of overcrowding especially as it is recognised that it has a detrimental impact on the welfare and well-being of residents.
- Households requesting a move whether in a priority band or not, are supported through the bidding process and where there is long wait times further support is provided. In the case of Mutual Exchange where advice and guidance is provided on the opportunities that a mutual exchange can bring and which will make it easier to engage with the process.
- In response to resident with barriers, meeting was advised that information is provided in multiple language, that 1-2-1 advice sessions is scheduled with experts in rehousing offering support in finding alternative accommodation through other tenures such as shared ownership, market rent and potential moves to areas with lower housing demand.
- All these possible options are customer led and dependent on customer requirements.
- Meeting was advised that over the years Peabody have developed mutually beneficial relationships with LBI and other housing providers and will continue to do so to find solutions that work for customers.
- Home visits are scheduled by Peabody officers to its residents offering space saving furniture to alleviate shared sleeping arrangements, offering advice on costs of living, and to manage energy costs.
- In summary meeting was advised that Peabody aims to use its housing stock in the most effective way to meet housing need, that it will continue to actively support those who are requesting for a move and if unable Peabody will find the option that will work best for them.
- It was reiterated that due to a lack of larger home, waiting times for a move can be lengthy, that Peabody we do all it can to alleviate the pressures whilst waiting.
- The Director noted that Peabody are considering a broad range of approaches to address this challenge and are open to all new ideas and partnership opportunities with LBI.

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- It was reiterated that due to a lack of larger home, waiting times for a move can be lengthy, that Peabody we do all it can to alleviate the pressures
- A suggestion for Peabody to consider the provision of homes on their built up estate by removing car parking and garages was noted, that Peabody is open to considering better use of open space but also the need to be aware of density issues.
- The Managing Director reminded the meeting that Peabody has not provided any homes for a long time and that the Parkhurst development represents the first big project in the borough and it will include 3-4 bedroom social housing which will help alleviate overcrowding.
- It was noted that these high-quality homes and are up to high safety standard, that the recent request to provide an extra stair case on buildings over a certain height have all been taken on board and that all efforts are being made to ensure that it will not result in the reduction of the number of social housing.
- Member reiterated welcome the issue of safety but noted that members will be against the reduction of the number of social housing.
- In response to a question of Peabody selling off street properties, the managing director advised that any decision to sell or dispose of any property within Peabody's portfolio is not taken lightly and each case is assessed in terms of its cost in restoring the property to a decent standard, cost of maintenance over a long period and the condition of the property.
- The Managing Director assured the meeting that selling of properties only occurs in very small instances, noting that over the next few years Peabody will be building new social housing on the Holloway site
- In response to a question on the request for an additional staircase at the Parkhurst Road development, the managing director stated that everything is being done in complying with the Mayor of London's request and that a new planning permission will not be required.
- The Chair thanked the Managing Director for her attendance and the presentation requesting that in persons involved in the Parkhurst development be available for further scrutiny around the issue of safety regulation and that he would be prepared to attend Peabody internal management where these issues can be discussed.
- In response, the managing director welcomed any invitation with Peabody Development colleagues who have been working on the project, that a forum can be established with the different stakeholders involved to discuss the issues.
- A request for the Peabody issue to be an item on the agenda at a future meeting considering that this large scale development , the largest in recent times in Islington which has promised to deliver 415 3 or bedroom homes will go a long way to address overcrowding will go a long way to assure residents that plans are not being altered to make provision for the stair case and thereby impacting social housing on the site was noted.
- The Chair reiterated that both himself and the Vice Chair would be interested in attending meetings with Peabody on this issue and that Peabody in the future would likely be invited to a committee meeting,

RESOLVED:

That the presentations be noted.

That the Chair and Vice chair explore either through an informal forum or committee meeting with Peabody representatives issues relating to the former Holloway Prison site highlighted above.

That officers liaise with ISHA and Clarion to obtain data relating to overcrowding, sale of street properties etc as noted above and circulate to members.

12 DAMP AND MOULD - OFFICER UPDATE (Item B2)

Due to time the Chair agreed to defer the item to the next meeting

13 ISLINGTON BROADBAND - UPDATE ON PROGRAMME DELIVERY (Item B3)

Due to time, the Chair agreed to defer the item to the next meeting

14 WORK PROGRAMME 2023 2024 (Item B4)

The Chair informed the meeting that following discussions with members a number of topics were suggested and it was agreed that in light of the ongoing challenges of supply of homes, the Committee should consider reviewing Council's New Build homes.

Meeting was advised that over the next few weeks, the Chair, Vice Chair will be meeting with Lead officers to scope the review which will be brought to the committee at the next meeting in July.

In response to a member suggestion for repairs to be included on the Committee's work programme, the Chair reminded the meeting of the recent review on this topic and that officers during the year bring an update report on the implementation of the recommendations.

RESOLVED:

That the main scrutiny topic for 2023/24 Municipal year will be New Build and that a Scrutiny Initiation Document be drafted ahead of the next meeting in July.

That Committee to receive a presentation on the topic at the next meeting

The meeting ended at 10.10 pm

CHAIR