

## November Housing Improvement Board Meeting Minutes

17<sup>th</sup> November 2022, 18:00- 20:00  
HYBRID

### **Attendees**

Martin Wheatley (chair)

Ishia Beckford (tenant representative)

Yaw Boateng (tenant representative, TLP chair)

Phil Brookes (Improvement and Assurance Panel) (via video link)

Les Parry (tenant representative)

Elly Shepherd (London Councils representative)

Executive Mayor Perry

Deputy Mayor Hale (Cabinet Member for Homes)

Susmita Sen (Corporate Director for Housing)

Lara Ashley (Executive Culture & Change Advisor)

Stephen Tate (Director of Estates & Improvement)

Mary Larbie (Director of Tenancy)

Sara Attwood (Head of Finance)

Velvet Dibley (Senior Strategy Officer)

Ellie Kilbride (National Management Trainee)

### **Apologies**

Councillor Darren Rodwell (LGA representative)

Abigail Ashford (Citizens Advice Croydon, VCS representative)

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| <p><b>Welcome &amp; Introduction from the Chair</b></p> <p>MW – HIB’s working approach: providing both challenging critique and constructive support with programme development. FE is no longer part of board; currently recruiting replacement.</p> <p>SS – Gave a brief overview of previous meeting, and how these ideas have been formulated into the transformation plan.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <p><b>Housing Transformation Programme</b></p> <p>LA – This is a dynamic programme change and we’re continually moving forward as new information is discovered.</p> <p>LP – Regarding governance and information management: Are KPI’s referred to for the internal management team?</p> <p>LA – The KPI’s act as a workstream outcome, but KPI’s should apply across the housing directorate, not just workstream projects. They’re measures against each of individual projects, but there will also be governance KPI’s for the whole directorate.</p> <p><b>Action: All workstreams to explicitly identify KPI’s in projects.</b></p> <p>LP – Regarding maintaining our homes and its repairs restructure programme, why is the timeline so late when the project is so integral to customers?</p> <p>LA – The data is aligned with when our restructure is to occur, thus is related to access operatives. But more broadly, the customer service retraining programme is set for January 2023.</p> <p>LP – The project lists timescale Dec 2024 to have 2 new people in training, not 2023.</p> <p>LA – This workstream is focused on a fundamental change in how we treat customers, not just training of new staff.</p> <p>SS – culture change takes years to change behaviour. We want customer service to be fundamentally embedded in what we do, thus need to talk to residents about what is fit-for-purpose across the entire directorate firstly.</p> |
| <p><b>Voids</b></p> <p>ML – Key issues of why we are where we are: lack of clarity, lack of structure of governance, lack of updates of standards since 2014, good practice neglected, no feedback thus no learning, systems and reports outdated, lack of investment in stock, no clarification of type of void, lack of contractors and contractor information, delays at most stages in process.</p> <p>SS – Sycamore house: turned over voids very quickly, thus this evidences capacity when staff have clear guidelines. 34 individuals/families have been rehoused in 4 weeks. Multidisciplinary team used for this. Sycamore demonstrates this can be done, but the issue is having a huge backlog. We need explicit targets for voids.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |

ML – By April 2023: we aim to have end-to-end process of voids established, with a clear ownership of tasks at each stage. It needs to be evident what these processes should look like for major/minor voids, and include accountability, what good practice is, and the outcomes for residents. By January 2023: meaningful information for businesses will be established to drive lettable voids standards. It will demonstrate how to change or embed standards, and clear blockages.

MW – question of what is a void target, and when will it be set?

LP – The target of 20-day voids hasn't been achieved for a decade. Tenants want targets set that are achievable. Concern of landlord services with total lack of resources, resulting in having to take from other teams. Concern due to the service acting as the face-to-face interaction with tenants, having to work with vacancies in the team. How does this impact progress at Regina Road? The procedures used date back to 2014 and have never been reviewed/updated, thus need attention.

MW – We are endorsing findings of the paper, but are keen to have achievable targets set.

ES – It is helpful to have a clear analysis of what was going wrong with the process. Thus a process map is welcomed. Map was successful in previous locations where they're used, and gives positive communication to members. Need to explore and establish what are the benchmark standards, taking into account the large backlog. It needs to be remembered the importance of being realistic; this is acknowledged with the scale of the project

MW – Target setting can be achieved via making vision of times wanted in future, or scrutinising present times and looking at realistic targets. Second method is pessimistic and accepts the status quo. Most preferably, the method should set a benchmark and use it for progress. Is it possible to set targets for newly arising voids?

SS – Ambitious targets are necessary.

ML – New voids turnaround time is now 39 days.

SS – This is still not good enough; we need a better benchmark, but it's better than previous void time of 130+. In 2 years, we're looking for a median void time. How will we do it? what is the top quarter, how do we get there? Set this as target.

ES – There are always lower voids for housing associations than councils.

LP – Champions endorse setting these targets, but quality of void properties must be important. We have seen previous voids with unacceptable standards. A couple more days and better overall quality is preferable

MW – There's a risk of time-led targets creating perverse incentives. Targets should be turnover time for a fit-for-purpose property. Voids for social landlords are bad due to sheer number of families in need of homes; these voids take money out of the business plan. We need to be ambitious but realistic in setting targets, stressing the importance of fit homes. Important to set out newly arising voids from the backlog, to try and get newly arising voids to 25 days.

LP – what went well to get the 39 days compared to the previous times?

ML – more contractors for services, utilising a joined-up approach, with officers no longer holding onto keys. Thus, a clearing of blockages

LP – next meeting, come back with background information to explain these differences

**Action: ML to evaluate reasons for a decrease of void times from 130+ to 39 in clear measures; officers to make proposals for targets for newly arising voids.**

### **Regina Road**

EMP – Cabinet overview: tenants waited far too long for process to start, believing we need to be getting on with the job, whilst respecting tenants. Fatigue of meetings and discussions with no practical progress or change. Change of recommendations in cabinet saw a financial limit on last couple of items, but otherwise paper passed as seen.

DMH – need to look at realistic timescales for programme, whilst also meeting resident needs. This will be achieved via communications to residents persisting, with follow ups on cabinet progress. We have a good team on the ground.

SS – The position of the directorate has been comprehensive, and findings of our investigations have been articulated. There is urgency with this due to the spotlight on damp and mould following the case seen in Rochdale. Outreach to residents has been evidenced via teams going out in evenings and weekends for engagement, asking; who lives there? What are their needs? What is needed in terms of our new delivery?

YB – There is a need to be realistic with residents. What is in place to ensure this, whilst maintaining respect? We need to discern how to draw a line between respect and realistic promises.

SS – We're still in early days of the plan, hence the ongoing door knocking and engagement. The mapping of the progress is ongoing to determine what the leaseholder and tenant offer will look like; this will inform how we manage these expectations. First it needs to be determined how many properties are occupied, how many are overcrowded, how many are sublets. Expectations thus need to be managed, as LBC only own limited number of homes. If the residents do decide the route of demolition and rebuild versus refurbishment, it is yet to be determined what the new estate will look like. This is why we need to bring in expertise to advise what these models will look like.

ML – There's a need for clarity and transparency over these different options, including demolition and rebuild, and refurbishment to govern difficult conversations

EMP – Mayoral team have been going out with door knocking teams to understand views of residents and experience what the conversations are regarding currently.

LP – Met with Regina Road support group, who thanked council for moving the project on since May. Residents have been waiting for 2 years for any action. The current plan and proposals answers solve questions posed by the board previously, particularly regarding the management and governance project. If ballot decides regeneration, will there be the same amount of social housing or less?

SS – Still needs financial modelling to determine this. We have lots of need for improvement and investment in stock across entire borough, not just Regina Road; this need has come out clearly from engagement with Regina Road residents. We need to

develop a financial model using the HRA that can work be rolled out across the borough. We expect to replace homes, but this must work financially.

LP – Regarding the cost of the HRA Business Plan: Will the board get this financial information? Board needs to be able to scrutinise this. SS confirmed this sharing of information.

ES – Champions are praising of door knocking and the teams’ emphasis on honesty and continuity. Residents are receiving honesty regarding what may change for residents financially, regarding the potential reprofiling of interest rates in cases of regeneration.

LP – feedback from Regina Road: Resident stated the lady they spoke to in door-knocking exercise was a ‘diamond’; door knocking engagement is demonstrating putting words into practice and evidencing culture change.

PB – The paper for Regina Road came out too late; this should have been published last year. The purchasing of Brick by Brick previously needs to be captured for future learning. This purchase still had good aspiration to improve number of good quality social housing, thus these properties should be used as a sample to analyse quality of housing that can be acquired.

SS – Conscious of variability of previous schemes, but it is important to build on this learning, and this learning needs to feed into our HRA business plan. Homes now have different elements and are more advanced in technology. We need to learn, as a local authority, how to manage and maintain homes different to our current stocks, such as having different heating systems, different panels etc.

**Repairs Re-Procurement**

MW – for commercial confidentiality, certain detail has to be obscured, but colleagues involved are pleased with progress

ST – Workstream has managed to keep to anticipated timeline, thanks to the resident contributions. The negotiation process currently has 3 bids. Heating contracts are being evaluated with resident involvement.

EMP –The procurement process papers need to go to cabinet for contract management update. We need to get back on top with an annual procurement plan update for the council with scheme and delegation. This procurement plan needs to include new contract management arrangements, cabinet office training on contract management, and the grading of contracts (platinum remains with mayors, gold with cabinet members).

YB – if stages of contracts face blockages or delays, there used to be no penalties. Now, there needs to be less hand-holding. It is not up to a landlord to be handholding contractor; this did occur with previous contractors. There needs to be accountability applied to contractors

LP – As a board, what is the contingency if there’s a slip in timetable or delay with contract?

ST – The work ongoing now is having good project management to ensure its delivery. There’s a focus on understanding risks, and mitigating them. This has been spot on so far. We’re also considering back-up contracts and not relying solely on one; currently 10 contracts working on one repair. 5-6 across voids. We’re still looking at other alternatives,

but don't want to get to position getting to 1<sup>st</sup> August with no contract, hence focus on first plan.

**Other questions/comments:**

PB – There is a good impact from the people and development plan, but it doesn't talk about staff retention, only stabilising current staff vacancies. There's an importance of retaining posts in a difficult job market. The plan discusses interim targets, but need to keep in mind affordability as the priority of panel. There's a constant struggle to get the capacity to the right level, and thus how to utilise technology to gather data and respond proactively (lacking in plan thus far).

**Action: LA to incorporate aim of staff retention explicitly into workstream.**

ES – The discussion around governance is helpful, but needs to focus on legislative changes coming in: the social housing bill, building safety act etc. We still need to make sure KPI's are explicitly outlined, as this is a major step change for landlords.

LP – Meetings surrounding customer service and the tenants charter, with submissions tenants have made, have previously been utilised to formulate benchmarks. Waiting on Mary for an invitation for a future meeting on this.

**Action: ML to arrange meetings with board surrounding customer service and tenants charter, evidencing submissions from tenants which have formulated benchmarks.**

MW – Agrees that the governance workstream is developing well in complex housing context, not just in a HA setting, as is considering factors such as staff capacity, management, tenants etc. When will an overall performance dashboard, that can be utilised by all, be developed?

SS – We need to see overall track of performance asap. There's a difficulty holding ourselves to account without dashboard to be used for horizon scanning. Preventative tracking is necessary. We need to pull out potential risks, resourcing separately and discreetly.

**Action: VD/EK to devise plan to create performance dashboard which can be observed by HIB to oversee progress and 'horizon scan', with milestones identified and measures included.**

LA – interim milestones need to be integrated as part of plans. Retention is a key outcome for projects. Digitalisation should act as an enabling lens to observe projects and make processes more efficient.

SS – Building safety and compliance: new company for compliance, for awareness about building safety. We are still not where we should be; we need to factor staff training into plan.

LH – transformation steering board identifies one risk with the NEC implementations. An issue is seen in NEC's inability give a specific time which they can deliver the uploading onto system, yet many projects rely on this.

SS – A decision was made years ago to change IT systems which wasn't supported. We're now moving to NEC, which SS and ST are very familiar with. We'll be able to modify this for our own needs. This progress has paused for cleansing of data. NEC needs to become priority, so this data cleansing must be done by April. NEC are struggling with us as a client; we haven't resourced effectively. If this is not ready, we stick with what we've got for the time being. NEC is a ultimately better system than what is currently in place, so the plan remains, and greater resources will be invested in such.

LA – Previous pressure to plough on with this project without considerations or understanding. Now, the project includes time to gain understanding, to consider blockages and how to overcome them in the programme. It is right to pause for preparation.

MW – NEC and preparation of programme are therefore another example of culture change. Next meeting to be focused on voids and targets, interest in Regina Road updates, and repairs progress to be clearer. Dashboard by next meeting needed to review progress. Risk analysis and negation is essential.

**HRA Business Plan**

SS – HIB expressed interest into understanding HRA. This includes an explanation of ringfenced monies, made from rents and service charges. Explanation of the money only to be spent on social, council housing stock.

SA – HRA is a part of housing general fund, but it is ringfenced. This enables more efficient spending, thus meaning better development of stock. Our £91m HRA income is spent on management and maintenance, and stock investment. HRA has been financially healthy, with £27m reserve. This only needs to be £10m. There is a current project for all payments to general fund for HRA sign off, so tenants know what they're paying for. There's a current issue of high inflation, not seen in the previous financial environment. Thus, this has a big impact on our future business plan. Stock condition surveys will show how much needs to be invested in our current stock, and thus infers the long-term position of HRA reserves.

SS – There is an ability to raise borrowing to £500m, currently set at £300-320m.

SA – rents need to be enough to cover maintenance and redevelopment with this issue of inflation. This issue thus creates more of a squeeze, as interest and borrowing grows. Thus, the council must rely on rents for HRA stability.

SS – LBC own over 13,000 homes: 54% houses or low rise, 34% medium rise, 12% high rise. There are 45 high-rise buildings in Croydon. Fire safety thus poses a demand on homes. We need to pull tall buildings apart, thus rising investment needs. We're currently plugging gaps in knowledge via Savills (previously brought in through Regina Road), asking what current stock data we have, what assumptions can be made against various components (fire doors, windows), what are the findings of the fire safety service data, compliance data, and to develop assumptions for future plan. We have not even had opportunity to discuss Net-zero yet; we cannot before fire safety policy.

ST – stock condition survey: involves 3 streams of activity. Savills 5% service is occurring from now-Christmas, for security in current data. The main stock condition survey is to be mobilised in Dec, from which we will get the data in Jan 2023. There will be an annual survey following this (20% at this time) dependent on Savills 5% survey data and how this complies with our data assumptions. Tall building safety certification is needed. Now there

will be a HRA business plan every year for our 30-year plan, which we will keep updating and sending to cabinet.

SS – We need to challenge data outside our reports. Stock data is only a sample, we need to develop a programme of investment across it, to check it, and conduct a sense check with residents and members. HRA plan will come first, then we can develop the investment plan. We need to question whether repairs are worthwhile to bring housing stock up to standard, also including net-zero considerations.

ES – Interest rates are an importance. 5.5-6% now, but were 2-2.5% last year. There is a need to consider the impact of borrowing. Stock improvement doesn't see income back.

LP – Payments against HRA borrowing are not shown. There is no plan to repay debt, only to retain debt. This repayment has never been an aim at Croydon, and should be considered.

SS – The retaining of debt is equivalent to just paying interest rates, and is normal for authorities

EMP – We need to consider the interest rates against debts.

LP – Capital project has £22m budget, but this is not shown

SA – This is within depreciation of the HRA, in maintenance costs, and maintenance contribution

SS – suggestion for additional session for HRA information in the next board meeting and for future cabinet meetings, so board can make informed comments on this

**Action: Inclusion of a segment of next HIB meeting to be dedicated to information on the HRA**

**Forward Plan**

MW –The immediate next steps from board meeting to cabinet next month, proposed as chair writing to Executive Mayor Perry with independent advice. When will next meeting be, and what should the main items be? Meeting to occur in the second half of Jan, with discussion of HRA. Progress report needs to be presented, including key items, and a better picture of repairs and procurement. Governance data dashboard needs to be developed.

**Action: ST to provide clarity for repairs progress for next HIB meeting.**

**Action: Risk analysis and negation needs to be presented at next meeting.**

**AOB**

SS – Need to discuss the death of child in Rochdale due to mould in property. As an organisation, we'll look at the spotlight report on damp and mould (Oct 2021). We'll undertake a stocktake against it, which has now started. We'll adopt a zero-tolerance policy toward damp and mould. We must stop blaming it on lifestyle, we must know our data and our homes. We need to know where such complaints are, where are the repairs at, what are our archetypes of stock, and what is the profile of our residents (who has young children in these homes?) This may well be recommended as a strategy or policy item



PB – next meeting: Needs to address what the capital programme will look like 2023-24.

ES – Rochdale report: Next meeting to cover the implications of disrepair, and the previous closing of cases dealt with by lawyers. Recognise this closing of cases as bad practice.

LP – The previous administration ignored issue of mould and damp, blaming tenants. Thus, we now have progress occurring, but it isn't quick enough.