

Inaugural Housing Improvement Board Meeting

7th December 2021, 17:30- 19:30
Society Room, Stanley Arts, SE25 6AB

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)

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

Phil Brookes (DLUHC Improvement & Assurance Panel)

In attendance

Councillor Hamid 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)

<p>17:30- 17:50</p>	<p>HA PHJ LH</p>	<p>Introductions Introduction from Councillor Hamida Ali (Leader of the Council) Thank you to the Board Members for coming together to set up this Board. There is utter political determination from us to improve the experiences of Council tenants. It is clear how badly we have let our residents down at Regina Road. We need to repair our relationship with council tenants. Council tenants must feel listened to, and that they have a good level of service. The Housing Improvement Board is important to ensure we're not 'marking our own homework'. Thank you to the tenant representative Board Members for taking the time to join the Board. Through partnership working, we will get through this journey and arrive at the point where we can say we put our residents first and deliver the best service we can offer. I welcome the setting up of this Board. The Board would do well to focus, very keenly, on what residents have to say. This will ensure that the priorities of residents are embedded in the work of the Board. One of the best things we can do is to start being kind, and treat residents with decency.</p>
<p>17:50- 18:15</p>	<p>MW LP YB MW YB PB LP DP</p>	<p>Role, composition, timetable and working approach of the board Invitation to board members to review membership of the Board. A further post is available on the Board, a representative from the Regina Road blocks. The Board will not be able to achieve its aspirations between now and March 2022. The Board should meet more frequently. Key to this is the provision of information; information provided to residents and councillors has often been inaccurate. The frequency of meetings could be increased through either informal or formal meetings. We must make sure that there is representation from the whole of the borough. The Board should also represent the borough's diverse population, including ensuring accessibility. Should we be recruiting a further resident from another part of the borough? We need to make sure, to as great an extent as possible, that the Board is representative; we can have a further discussion. We need a plan following purdah, to ensure that representation from other parts of the borough. This will have to happen in stages. Last week, there were still 80 outstanding repairs at Regina Road. However, residents have not received an update on outstanding repairs across the borough- it would be useful to have this update. Another issues is that the contractor, Axis, does not comply with standards advertised to tenants. There needs to be clarity with regards to how big an issues repair performance is across the borough. We must not lose sight of the notice served by the Regulator for Social Housing. Has the Regulator set timescales or a timetable? We met with the Regulator last week, and we discussed the timetable with the Regulator. There are no set timescales for when the notice is</p>

	<p>YB</p> <p>MW</p>	<p>lifted. Lifting the notice is a matter of the Council getting back into regulatory compliance, as opposed to ensuring the service is perfect. I understand why there are concerns about the timescale.</p> <p>If we're focused, we can do some useful things in three months. We need to make sure that we listen to as many tenants and residents as we can. We need to strike a balance with regards to membership of the Board. Can Board Members reflect on the membership of the Board, and how the Board captures the views of residents more broadly? Can members of the Board go out into the borough? I think accessibility of the Board to those with disabilities should also be considered. We need to develop a longer-term work-programme for the Board.</p> <p>For the time being, the focus of further member recruitment should be a Regina Road area resident. No practicable number of tenant board members could represent all areas and segments of the tenant population. Instead, the board should aim to get out and listen to as many people as possible. This should include disabled residents, if there is a suitable forum for this.</p> <p>Action: VD to work with Chair to progress selection of additional tenant board member. VD and Chair to work with tenant involvement team to draw up a programme of listening as widely as possible across the borough</p>
<p>18:15- 18:45</p>	<p>DP</p> <p>ES</p> <p>DP</p> <p>DR</p>	<p>Current state of housing service</p> <p>In the six weeks as interim housing director, I've seen Council staff doing their best in challenging circumstances. There are significant issues around responsive repairs, void turnaround, complaints and staff handling of complaints. All of these issues add up to a low level of resident satisfaction; there are a lot of different issues to address. There are a number of key vacancies in the housing directorate which act as a blocker to addressing these significant issues. Resourcing the significant change that is required is a challenge. The Regina Road Resident Support Group felt like a step forward with regards to jointly resolving issues. The Board must work to shape what the Housing Improvement Plan should look like, including what the priorities should be, which will inform our conversation with the Regulator for Social Housing. This should not be about council officers working in isolation, we must have a dialogue with residents with regards to how issues are put right (the Housing Improvement Board will be part of this).</p> <p>ES Would you be able to provide your perception of how the Axis contract works, and when it is up for renewal?</p> <p>DP Axis is a reputable contractor, however, this relationship is strained. From what I've seen so far, the Croydon must work with the contractor to make the necessary changes. In the longer term, the Council needs to ask itself what it wants from a repairs contractor. The Contact Centre sits with Axis- is this the model we would like to have in the future? In the short term, we're in the process of moving the Axis contact centre into the Council's office.</p> <p>DR Where is the desktop provision that Axis should have been given so that residents know how many repairs are being completed?</p>

	DP	Could Axis come to the Board for a focused conversation on responsive repairs?
	MW	Having suppliers as well as council officers attending meetings could be helpful.
	LP	As a tenant, I either email or phone. As we speak, there is no call centre due to staff working from home. Axis algorithm does not adequately assess the urgency of resident repairs. Repairs to my stairs were not addressed until a health and safety council officer was contacted. Some repairs have taken up to a year, even if this is an extreme example. Axis should be in the meeting to listen to resident feedback. Since May and the publication of conditions at Regina Road, there has been a lot of noise- we have not had a response to the paper we submitted to managers, which is not acceptable.
	MW	In the slide pack provided, there is a slide on priority actions which claimed that they had all been addressed. I am surprised by the blanket assertion that a number of challenging and difficult things had already been addressed. No one would expect a completed 180 degree transformation of how the Council interacts with tenants; however, I was concerned that the slide deck said the issues had been “addressed”. Going forward, we must have candour in this Board meeting. The Board would prefer a candid information of where progress has been made, and where it hasn’t been made.
	DP	The slide did not intend to suggest that the actions had been completed, there is still a long way to go. There has been some very good work done in terms of resident engagement (scrutiny panels and door-knocking), however, this is only the beginning. Key to successful resident engagement is making sure that their feedback is properly fed back to the Council, and actions taken by the Council has been fed back to the tenants.
	LP	This was only one example.
	DR	Covid-19 has put a massive strain on every Council in London, there is not one LA where repairs numbers have not gone up. The residents should help develop a dashboard- conversation between resident leads on different estates, who can work with council officers, to create a dashboard which provides an update on repairs and progress across the borough (including new jobs, and jobs that have been completed). The contract with Axis needs to be scrutinised, to ensure that the contract is commercially appropriate.
	MW	Could Darren’s suggestion be picked up? “You said, we did” by individual estate. Action: DP to provide an update to the Board on progress towards a “you said, you did” dashboard
	ES	The Board should be provided this same dashboard. London Councils can provide some benchmarking data. Action: ES to discuss provision of benchmarking data to VD.
	MW	Data and performance information should be one of our focuses, which is built into the next few sessions that the Board has. Could the board be provided with a more detailed analysis of where the priority actions have got to?

	<p>PB</p> <p>DP</p>	<p>Action: DP to provide in-depth analysis of progress towards priority actions.</p> <p>The contract should actually encourage Axis to fix problems in as few visits as possible. I think it's more about contract management improvement in my view.</p> <p>In the first instance, we need to improve our contract management. Not just Axis, but the other five major contracts. Then we can consider what we want our contracts to look like.</p>
<p>18:45- 19:15</p>	<p>MW</p> <p>DR</p> <p>DP</p> <p>LP</p> <p>MW</p> <p>DR</p>	<p>Focus of the Board's work</p> <p>What can the Board feasibly do ahead of March? What should the Board be doing following this to provide scrutiny and support to the new administration after the mayoral election? We should be holding the formal meetings remotely going forward. We need to recognise that we cannot cover everything in these meetings. Can we look at five themes across the two meetings?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Extent to which issues at Regina Road have been resolved 2. Member and officer governance- conversations as to what governance has been like in the past, and what it should be like in the future. 3. Resident satisfaction- how do improvements feel for our tenants? 4. Data and performance 5. Staff capability issues, and extent to which the Council has put in place a capable senior management team in the Housing service. <p>Action: at the next meeting, officers present what has been completed at the three Regina Road blocks which is supplemented by Board member visits to the blocks.</p> <p>This is a starter for ten, what do Board members think?</p> <p>Could there be a resident survey to ensure all voices across the borough are captured? This could feed into a programme which is rolled out across the borough. I am happy to speak to all political colleagues (members, and MPs) to ensure we have a cross-party understanding of what has worked well, and what hasn't worked well.</p> <p>We have already done a lot of work with regards to talking to Regina Road residents; further detail can be commissioned. We need to understand exactly what it is that is required.</p> <p>There have already been door-knocking surveys across 5,000 households. I welcome the suggestion of further surveying of residents, but it may be logistically difficult. Door-knocking and surveying cannot be beaten, but it cannot all be done at once.</p> <p>How much coverage did the door-knocking achieve at Regina Road?</p> <p>Action: DP to provide information of coverage from door-knocking survey and feasibility of further canvassing of Regina Road residents' perceptions of improvement..</p> <p>This is not just about Housing, it is about the lived experience of the place. The survey must ask what is it like to live on this estate, and what are your concerns? If you want genuine conversation, you need to provide an opportunity to residents to provide a genuine view. A place isn't just about the home, it's about their surroundings. We need a holistic approach to ensure we hear their voices.</p>

	<p>MW</p> <p>YB</p> <p>MW</p> <p>DP</p> <p>YB</p> <p>MW</p>	<p>This would provide us with useful information with regards to Regina Road, and would provide a steer on our approach more broadly.</p> <p>Issues at Regina Road and the borough more broadly stem from the culture amongst council officers. Stigma has developed over time, and it is not something that can be changed overnight. What is the Council doing to address this, and what sort of work is being done? If the Council doesn't change, not much else will.</p> <p>This needs to be one of our main agenda items. We may want to look at other landlord organisations who have also been on an improvement journey. Toxic cultures can take root incredibly quickly. Action: identify other social landlords who have faced a similar challenge.</p> <p>Culture change is one of the single biggest challenges we face, highlighted by the statutory review, and via the Regulator for Social Housing. Since the ARK report, there have been a lot of internal discussions that have taken place with staff. The staff are very committed, but defensive. There is a lot of deep-set change to be undertaken. We must empower staff to address the resident issues in front of them, we need a set of shared values between staff and residents. I'm keen to tease out what those values should be. I would be interested to get feedback from the Board in terms of what these values should be? And how we measure the progress of front-line staff.</p> <p>We can't just address this with just Housing staff, the attitudes and culture of all Council staff needs to be addressed This would include joint-working between housing and other teams such as waste management. Cultural change and joint-working needs to happen more broadly- this issue needs to be cracked, otherwise the issues won't go away</p> <p>I have heard that environmental services officers have similar cultural change issues as housing officers. What departments in the Council, other than the housing service, are making sure residents receive the services they are entitled to? Can Board members reflect on whether or not they would like to lead on one or more of the five work-streams? Action: MW and VD to develop a forward plan and work-plan.</p>
<p>19:15</p>	<p>DR</p> <p>YB</p> <p>PB</p> <p>MW</p>	<p>Close</p> <p>I think this is a great response, it is good to see residents leading the change. I remember when Croydon was the pioneering, beacon council for resident engagement, and I can see that the Council wants to get to this position again.</p> <p>What aspect would you like myself, Ishia and Les to pick out from the five points? Action: Ishia, Les and Yaw to take on the culture work-stream.</p> <p>I'd be happy to lead on the data and performance management.</p> <p>Closed the meeting thanking members, councillors, David Padfield and Velvet Dibley for their contributions ahead of and during the meeting.</p>