

## Tenant & Leaseholder Panel

Meeting of held on Tuesday, 12 October 2021 at 6.30 pm. This meeting was held remotely. To view the meeting, please click [here](#).

### MINUTES

**Present:** Yaw Boateng (Chair);

Councillors Jade Appleton, Nina Degrads, Lynne Hale, Michael Neal, Patricia Hay-Justice and Louisa Woodley

**Also**

**Present:** Councillor Clive Fraser, Velvet Dibley (Senior Strategy Officer), Cliona May, Peter Mitchell (Interim Director of Commercial Investment), James Perkins (Head of Environment Services & Sustainable Neighborhoods), Stephen Tate (Director of Housing - Estates & Improvement), Yvonne Murray (Director of Housing - Resident Engagement & Allocations), Chris Clark (Resident Involvement Manager), Sharon Murphy (Head of Tenancy & Resident Engagement), David Palmer, Jill Arboine, Les Parry, Stephen Pollard, Marilyn Smithies, Kim Wakely, Sharon Swaby, Jamil Tarik, Ishia Beckford.

**Apologies:** Alison Knight, Dave Mundy and Councillors Lynne Hale and Stephen Tate sent their apologies for lateness.

### PART A

1/21 **Welcome and Introductions**

The Panel Members, Councillors and officers in attendance introduced themselves.

2/21 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from the Interim Corporate Director of Housing, Alison Knight and Dave Mundy.

Councillor Lynne Hale and Councillor Stephen Tate sent their apologies for lateness.

3/21 **Disclosure of Interest**

There were no disclosures at this meeting.

4/21

### **Minutes of Previous Meeting**

**RESOLVED** – That the minutes from the meeting held on 28 July 2021 were agreed as an accurate record.

The Chair informed the Panel that he would sign the minutes once the recent social distancing measures had been relaxed enough to allow him to do so.

5/21

### **Update on Housing Service Restructuring and Latest Appointments**

The Director of Housing, Resident Engagement & Allocations informed the Panel that there was an ongoing restructure of the senior leadership within the Council, from the Chief Executive to the Heads of Service. This was being consulted on and the Council was at the recruitment stage of the restructure. There had been a permanent appointment in the Chief Executive position and they were now looking to fill other positions in senior leadership within the Council. The Director of Housing, Resident Engagement & Allocations explained that in the current structure at the Council, there were Executive Directors in place but once the restructure had taken place they would be addressed as Corporate Directors.

The Director of Housing, Resident Engagement & Allocations then went on to explain that there was now a Housing Director to monitor the new structure and that the recruitment process for the Corporate Director of Housing position had begun and this would be a permanent appointment.

The Director of Housing, Resident Engagement & Allocations informed the Panel that there were currently two Directors of Housing and a new Director of Housing, Estates and Improvement had been appointed.

The new Director of Housing, Estates and Improvement would have three Heads of Service reporting to him: these would be the Head of Responsive Repairs, Planned Maintenance & Safety; the Head of Household Services, Planning & Delivery and the Head of Policy and Performance.

The Director of Housing, Resident Engagement & Allocations stated that there would be three Heads of Service reporting to her, these being: the Head of Allocations, Lettings, Income and Collection; the Head of Homelessness & Assessment; and the Head of Tenancy & Resident Engagement. The Council had recently made an appointment to the Head of Homelessness & Assessment post, and the position had gone to an individual who was previously a Head of Service in a different department within the Council. The recruitment process had begun for the Head of Allocations, Lettings, Income and Collection and the Head of Tenancy & Resident Engagement positions.

Across the Council, the recruitment process for all of the Director and Corporate Director positions were being supported by an external organisation. Once the Council had recruited to all of the Heads of Service positions, attention would then turn to the teams that were reporting into them

and those departments would be redesigned to improve the service that was being delivered.

In response to a question from a resident the Director of Housing, Resident Engagement & Allocations informed the Panel that prior to the restructure the Council did not have a Housing department. The coverage of the Regina Road incident, the Housing Improvement Plan, the Ark Report and staff feedback led to the introduction of the Housing department in the new structure within the Council. This had brought all of the housing services back together under one directorate.

In response to a Councillor, the Director of Housing, Resident Engagement & Allocations stated that the 'estate walkabouts' had been ongoing for years but they had been reduced due to lockdown during the pandemic. The Cabinet Member for Homes and the Interim Head of Tenancy & Resident Engagement had continued to do 'estate walkabouts' alongside other officers. The service was to be redesigned once new appointments for the Heads of Service positions were made to give an improved service to residents and the restructure was being conducted with that in mind. The Director of Housing, Resident Engagement & Allocations informed the Panel that they were implementing Performance Indicators to assess performance and they would use the feedback from customer surveys to shape the service moving forward.

In response to a question from the Chair, the Director of Housing Resident Engagement & Allocations informed the Panel that the residents would be kept up to date on the redesign. There had been many challenges faced by the Council and the interim appointments were a short term solution which helped to stabilise the service before the Council looked to make permanent appointments. The Director of Housing Resident Engagement & Allocations explained that Croydon Council had a policy of training staff so that they have the skills to apply for more senior positions as they appear. The Council had initially looked fill the vacancies within the department by redeploying existing staff however they had begun to look externally as they were unable to recruit to all of the vacant posts at senior level internally.

In response to the Chair, the Director of Housing, Resident Engagement & Allocations informed the Panel that the Council did consult with residents in regards to the removal of the Neighbourhood Warden Service. However, the Director of Housing, Resident Engagement & Allocations did accept that the Council could have consulted further. In terms of the redesign of services the Director of Housing, Resident Engagement & Allocations assured the Panel that this did not mean that there would be a reduction in services provided but assessing how teams were delivering their services.

In response to a resident, the Director of Housing agreed to inform those in senior leadership that Members of the Panel expected to be consulted in all changes to services and expect their suggestions to be considered in a constructive way.

In response to a comment from a resident the Interim Head of Tenancy & Resident Engagement stated that she understands the concerns from residents in regards to the lack of consultation and recognised that it was necessary for the Council to engage with residents when making decisions. The Interim Head of Tenancy & Resident Engagement then went on to explain that the Council often has to assess how they can best spend their budget and unfortunately this can lead to cuts being made to services. The Interim Head of Tenancy & Resident Engagement acknowledged that the Council should have consulted with residents much more effectively in order to prepare them for the cuts that were made to the service and accepted that the council could improve their consultation moving forwards.

**RESOLVED** – That the Panel agreed to note the verbal update.

6/21

### **Update on Development of Housing Improvement Board and How Resident Members will be Selected**

The Senior Strategy Officer conducted a presentation to the panel which provided an update of the Housing Improvement Board and informed them how resident members will be selected. This presentation can be found via the following link: <https://civico.net/croydon/13358-Tenant---Leaseholder-Panel>.

In response to a question from the chair, the Senior Strategy Officer informed the panel that successful applicants would be expected to have some experience in performing similar roles, however they would welcome applications from individuals who were willing to develop their skills and they would provide briefings to all board members so that they would be kept well-informed of what issues would be discussed.

A resident and the Chair expressed their displeasure at there being only one space for a member of the Tenant & Leaseholder Panel on the Housing Improvement Board. In response the Cabinet Member for Homes stated that the Housing Improvement Board needed to have an independent chair and every Croydon resident had their own experiences which would need to be heard in order to improve the service. The Cabinet Member for Homes also mentioned that intention would be to have task and finish groups alongside the Housing Improvement Board and these groups would feed the opinions of residents to the board so that they could take action.

In response to a Councillor, the Senior Strategy Officer informed the panel that the advert for the position of Independent Chair of the Housing Improvement Board closed at 00:00 on the 12 October 2021 and a shortlist would be drawn up by the end of that week. The Senior Strategy Officer also mentioned that the applicants that had applied had extensive experience in the housing sector, working in housing associations and across Local government. They planned to have the Leader of the Council, the Chief Executive, the Interim Executive Director of Housing, the Cabinet Member for Homes and the Chair of the Tenant & Leaseholder Panel on the interview panel to ensure that there was a breadth of experience when interviewing the

candidates. The Senior Strategy Officer explained that the housing improvement board would make quarterly reports to cabinet with recommendations and will be treated just as seriously as any other report that goes to cabinet.

In response to a resident the Senior Strategy Officer stated that the advert closed at midnight for independent chair. Both applicants had extensive exp. across housing in HA's and Local government. They are looking at having the Chair of TLP on the board as well. The housing improvement board will make quarterly reports to cabinet and it would be treated as seriously as any other report that is put forward to cabinet.

In response to a question from a resident, the Interim Head of Tenancy & Resident Engagement stated that the regulator was fully aware of the creation of the Housing Improvement Board and they had been cited on the housing improvement plan.

**RESOLVED:** That the panel agreed to note the verbal update.

7/21

### **Update on Regina Road**

The Director of Housing, Estates & Improvement explained to the panel that his role was responsible for the responsive repairs service, the planned maintenance into the capital works and how the Council maintains its resident's homes.

The Director of Housing, Estates & Improvement then provided an update of Regina road. In terms of integral repairs, the Interim Head of Tenancy & Resident Engagement had worked hard to open a tenancy office on Regina Road. This office was open between 10am and 2pm every day and there were two tenancy officers there who act as a point of contact for residents in that area. The Director of Housing, Estates & Improvement did acknowledge that the opening hours of the office may not be ideal for some residents and stated that his department would have to consider how to solve this issue.

The Director of Housing, Estates & Improvement went on to explain that there was an inspector on site two days a week, so if a resident had a particular issue that needed to be resolved they can come to the office without an appointment and an inspector would go out immediately to assess the problem.

The Director of Housing, Estates & Improvement also mentioned that Axis, the Council's contractor, would also be present on site from the following week and that there would be a Resident Liaison Officer on site in order to discuss any issues with the service with the residents.

In regards to the back office the Director of Housing, Estates & Improvement acknowledged that the Council needed to be able to identify problems before they get escalated and outlined how the Council would be more proactive with their repairs service.

The Director of Housing, Estates & Improvement explained that in order to gain a better understanding of their housing stock and determine the work required to improve their properties, the Council has conducted a number of surveys across various sites. The information gathered from these surveys would then be collected and be fed into future capital works programmes.

The Director of Housing, Estates & Improvement stated that the Council were already aware of a number of issues within their properties which was being collated into a programme. These repairs would not be immediate as they would require planning before work to resolve these issues can be carried out. However, the Director of Housing, Estates & Improvement acknowledged that residents cannot be left in poor conditions which is why reactive maintenance was being conducted ahead of the major works which were required.

In response to question from a resident, the Director of Housing, Estates & Improvement stated that part of the reason for doing the additional surveys across the 26 tall buildings across the borough was to get a clearer understanding of the issues within the Councils housing estates, this would then enable him to provide residents with accurate information about what the capital programme would consist of in the coming years.

The Director of Housing, Estates & Improvement went on to explain that while the focus was on Regina road as the conditions in those blocks were very bad, he was aware that there were other properties that may need immediate attention.

In response to question from a resident, the Director of Housing, Estates & Improvement agreed that the Council needed to do tighter contract management on Axis (Contractor) and he would be willing to consult with members of the Tenant & Leaseholder Panel about how this could be achieved.

In response to a question from a resident, the Director of Housing, Estates & Improvement informed the panel that there were 80 outstanding repairs at Regina road, he also welcomed members of the panel to notify him about the repairs stats they would be like him to provide which he would deliver on a quarterly basis.

In response to a resident, the Director of Housing, Estates & Improvement stated that brick by brick should have carried out the repairs on the resident's neighbourhood where there are a number of health and safety issues. The Director of Housing, Estates & Improvement assured the resident that he would look into this issue and update him on the situation.

In response to a resident the Director of Housing, Estates & Improvement acknowledged that the scheduling of work that is carried out by Axis was not always ideal for residents and informed the panel that he was planning to see whether it was possible to co-locate Council staff with Axis call centre staff to improve communication.

The Interim Director of Commercial Investment informed the panel that he was the lead responsible officer for Brick by Brick and he stated that if there were any issues then residents should go through the help desk. Residents could then escalate their issues to the Interim Director of Commercial Investment or the Director of Housing, Estates & Improvement and they would get them a response.

**RESOLVED:** That the Panel agreed to note the verbal update.

8/21

### **Acquisition of BBB Properties and Future of BBB**

The Interim Director of Commercial Investment informed the panel that as he had recently joined the Council, he was unaware that the panel had requested written rather than verbal updates but assured the panel that he did not have an issue with producing written reports in future.

The Interim Director of Commercial Investment explained to the panel that his role had recently been created within the council and stated that he had procurement responsibilities which included contract management.

The Interim Director of Commercial Investment acknowledged that there had been numerous issues with Brick by Brick over the past year and stated that after three important Cabinet meetings earlier in the year, the decision was made that Brick by Brick would wind itself down. The Council exercised its shareholder function to change directors and therefore change the course of Brick by Brick. In the past year there had been a review into whether the company would be dissolved or sold to another organisation and they decided not to. The strategy would now be to trade out Brick by Brick's 23 sites, 21 of which were due to be completed this financial year. This would result in an around extra 370 homes being delivered into Croydon this year and there was a proposed acquisition 104 of these properties by the local authority. The Interim Director of Commercial Investment mentioned that he believed this would be completed by the end of the calendar year but accepted that there would be some issues such as GLA funding etc.

The Interim Director of Commercial Investment informed the panel that there are six other sites that would be looked at and of the six sites, five would shortly be going on the market. In terms of personnel changes at Brick by Brick, there was an advert for some new directors with expertise in terms of housing to make sure that the housing that was built would be suitable for residents.

The Interim Director of Commercial Investment explained that there were two sites that would take longer than this year to complete. He mentioned that he had a report which was the first quarterly update and would be taken to the next cabinet meeting. This was an update report so no decisions would be made from it.

In response to a question from chair, the Interim Director of Commercial Investment informed the panel that Brick by Brick had planning permission

and had started to appoint builders and those sites would be fully developed and traded out in line with their plan. The mix and ratio of London affordable rent, social rented houses, private for sale houses as well as some shared ownership homes would continue to be delivered. These were the 23 sites and there were six sites where they had received planning permission but had not placed those contracts, these were the six sites that he had referred to in his earlier comments.

In response to a question from a resident, the Interim Head of Tenancy & Resident Engagement stated that she would take away the residents request for a meeting with Brick by Brick and the new Operations Manager taking over his area in order to arrange a site visit. The Interim Head of Tenancy & Resident Engagement assured the resident that if it was not possible for Brick by Brick to attend a meeting then at the very least they would have a meeting with the new Operations Manager to discuss their issues.

In response to questions from residents, the Interim Director of Commercial Investment provided an update to the panel on the new development at Heathfield Gardens, he stated that all 20 units had been sold and there was now a desire to ensure that these properties were occupied in the near future. The Interim Director of Commercial Investment acknowledged that placing residents in their recently developed units would reduce the dependency on temporary accommodation and explained that many of the Brick by Brick units were in the sale process and there had been some bulk transactions by housing associations, some units would go through a different process to provide affordable housing and other units had been put up for private sale. The Interim Director of Commercial Investment informed the panel that the council would not force sales of units but there would come a point where a decision needs to be made as to whether the council need to step in and buy the properties at a different rate.

The chair invited the Head of Environment Services & Sustainable Neighbourhoods to provide the panel with an update on grounds maintenance throughout Croydon. The Head of Environment Services & Sustainable Neighbourhoods informed the panel that he had recently taken on the enforcement section, this meant that issues such as anti-social behaviour, fly tipping and littering were within his remit.

The Head of Environment Services & Sustainable Neighbourhoods explained that the reduction in services last year had made it difficult to carry out grounds maintenance across of the Councils housing stock across the borough. The Head of Environment Services & Sustainable Neighbourhoods stated that for the past 6 weeks all of his grounds maintenance resources had been devoted to housing areas in the borough. The Head of Environment Services & Sustainable Neighbourhoods explained to the panel that his department would be working closely with their colleagues in housing in order to provide a more proactive grounds maintenance service, the grass cutting operations on all of the housing areas within the borough would be coming to an end and these resources would be redirected towards the areas surrounding highways.



In response to questions from residents, the Head of Environment Services & Sustainable Neighbourhoods assured members of the panel that despite winding down grass cutting operations, the resident grass would be cut. The winter maintenance programme would be starting shortly which involves planting for next year and cutting areas that have not been touched. The Head of Environment Services & Sustainable Neighbourhoods offered apologies that the grounds maintenance programme had not reached to particular estates, the service had initially prioritised emergency sites which had the most complaints and went systematically through the borough.

In response to a question from a resident, the Head of Tenancy & Resident Engagement explained that the grass cutting operations had been completed on the Croftleigh Avenue estate however the steep banks had not been cut due to the lack of correct equipment. The Head of Environment Services & Sustainable Neighbourhoods then informed the panel that there are certain areas of Croydon that the council were not equipped to cut, they usually outsource this work to external contractors.

**RESOLVED:** That the Panel agreed to note the verbal updates.

9/21

### **Resident Involvement Roadshow - Summary of Door Step Survey**

The Resident Involvement manager conducted a presentation to the panel which provided an update of the Resident Involvement Roadshow and provided a summary of the Door Step Survey. This presentation can be found via the following link: <https://civico.net/croydon/13358-Tenant---Leaseholder-Panel>.

In response to a question from a resident, the Resident Involvement Manager informed the panel that they had advised residents in advance that they would conduct door step surveys for their feedback. The Resident Involvement Manager then explained that the Council would be doing tracker surveys in future and the housing regulator would review the questions and amendments could be made in the new-year.

In response to a question from a Councillor, the Resident Involvement Manager stated that the data from his presentation could be broken down further if required and that knocking on doors enabled him to receive the best response. In order to improve the survey, the Resident Involvement Manager acknowledged that they could vary the times of the door step survey. He suggested that they could schedule the survey for between 10am-1pm or 2pm-5pm and they would also consider weekend and evening calls to try and reach people who work during the day. The Resident Involvement Manager felt as though there was more value gained from face to face surveys than those conducted by post as they were able to receive extra information that could not be obtained from a posted survey.

In response to a question from a resident, the Resident Involvement Manager stated that he could do a more detailed breakdown of the data from the survey for example, if an estate had a particular issue, he could conduct a

more specific survey in order to explore the residents issues in more detail. The only potential issue would be down to resourcing as door step surveys required many hours from staff however they were worth the time they opened the lines of communication between officers and residents.

**RESOLVED:** That the Panel agreed to note the presentation.

10/21 **Scrutiny Update - Voids**

The Chair introduced the item and invited a resident to provide a scrutiny update regarding voids to the panel. The resident informed the panel that various tenants' involvement groups had expressed concerns that the council had failed to meet the target of 20 days in dealing with void properties. There had been correspondence with senior management and Councillors and tenants put forward six recommendations however there has not been a significant improvement in the turn around on void properties.

The resident explained that a recent tenant health and safety group had been created but members of tenant involvement forum's had not been invited to this group to discuss void properties.

**RESOLVED:** That the Panel agreed to note the verbal update.

11/21 **Feedback from ARCH & CIH Conference**

**AGREED:** That the Panel decided that this item would be omitted due to a lack of time and that the update would be put in writing to the members of the Panel.

12/21 **Any Other Business**

The Chair introduced the item and suggested that members of the panel should complete a survey about how they felt about attending meetings in person. The Chair also suggested that once the panel were able to meet in person, they should hold surgeries for residents to raise personal or community issues ahead of meetings.

In response to the Chairs suggestions, the Interim Director of Commercial Investment informed the panel that he was responsible for all of the council's premises and that the recent full council meeting had a reduced number of Members in attendance. The Council had tried their best to ensure that people had proper engagement whilst to ensuring that people operated in a safe way.

In response to the proposals regarding meeting formats, a Councillor stated that hybrid meetings had made meetings easier to attend for many people. The Councillor suggested that she could put ideas to the Chair who could then inform members of the panel about any proposals.

In response to a question from a Councillor the Director of Housing, Estates & Improvement stated that the accounts were fine and the Council were looking

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at their 30 year business plan. The 30 year business plan would go to Cabinet in February however the Director of Housing, Estates & Improvement intended to bring the business plan to the Tenant & Leaseholder Panel beforehand.

In response to a suggestion from a Councillor, the Chair explained to the panel that he felt that any figures or accounts that were relevant to the Tenant & Leaseholder panel were welcomed however he did not feel as though it needed to be a regular item if it was not necessary.

In response to question from a resident, the Director of Housing, Resident Engagement & Allocations stated that the Council had reviewed the decant policy which had been in operation for a number of months and they were reviewing the allocations policy which had fallen under the housing strategy that the Council was revising. The Director of Housing, Resident Engagement & Allocations informed the panel that the allocations policy would be in line with the timelines from the Senior Strategy Officer's presentation.

The Resident Involvement manager informed the panel that the Association of Retained Council Housing (ARCH) had a tenant panel and they asked for nominations for each member to serve on the panel for two years. The Resident Involvement manager asked the panel whether they wanted to support the nomination of the Chair to continue representing Croydon Council on the ARCH tenant panel. The members agreed to support the decision to put the Chair forward for nomination.

13/21 **Date of next meeting**

It was confirmed that the next meeting would be held on 8 February 2022 at 6:30pm, the venue would be confirmed closer to the meeting date.

The meeting ended at 9.33 pm

**Signed:**

**Date:** .....