

Cabinet

Meeting Date: 21/03/2022

Item 5: Update on the Housing Improvement Board, and the development of the Croydon Housing Improvement Plan

Recommendations from the Streets, Environment & Homes Sub-Committee

At the meeting of the Streets, Environment & Homes Sub-Committee held on 15 March 2022, the Sub-Committee had the opportunity to discuss the update in the Housing Improvement Board and the development of the Croydon Housing Improvement Plan advance of its consideration by Cabinet. This report sets out the key outcomes from the Sub-Committee's discussion along with recommendations for the Cabinet to take account of as part of its deliberation on this item.

Overall the Sub-Committee welcomed the update on the set up and work of the independently chaired Housing Improvement Board and recognised that a lot of work has been undertaken by officers with the Board's input to inform the development of the Improvement Plan. The Sub-Committee shared the broad sentiment and concerns expressed by the independent Housing Improvement Board on pace and culture that have been communicated to the Exec Director of Housing and Cabinet Member for Homes.

The Sub-Committee shared the view that despite strong statement of commitment towards fundamentally transform and improve the housing service, action thus far has not translated into a notable improved experience for our council tenants. The Sub-Committee welcomed the additional capacity created in recent months to enable a programme approach to underpin the change and improvement journey ("Vision & Governance workstream"). It noted however that considering the healthy HRA balance, that it was regrettable that the resourcing of this essential work was not prioritised sooner to drive pace in the development of the Improvement Plan & governance while also making capacity to prioritise work on the Ark report's immediate actions. When questions about outside help, the committee did not share the view that bringing external resources would not enable to drive change internally and felt this was a missed opportunity. The committee is of the view that a number of key milestones in the plan are scheduled for later than the committee feels adequate.

The sub-committee recognised the efforts undertaken to produce a plan that easily readable but highlighted the need to have clear start date / planned end dates / actual end dates / priority / risk level / dependencies. Officers shared other Programme Management documents that reassured the Sub-Committee that these are captured through the programme management approach and agreed that this is the documentation that both the Independent Housing Board and the SHE Scrutiny Committee Sub-Committee should be monitoring. The Sub-Committee recognised that both the sub-committee and the Housing Improvement Board are complementary assurance processes and that there should be coordination in the monitoring of the plan by both groups and agreed that both groups should routinely review and coordinate feedback on the delivery of the improvement plan given the urgency around Housing and Tenants improvement.

The committee recognised that the key risks to the delivery of the Improvement Plan were mostly related to IT system delivery and mostly down to capacity issues and therefore these should be prioritised with urgency.

Recommendations:

1/ The Sub-Committee to receive the detailed programme documentation followed by an officer briefing on it.

2/ While recognising that they are separate assurance processes, it is recommended that, in order to avoid duplication of monitoring of the delivery of the improvement plan, the Sub-Committee should meet with the Independent Housing Improvement Board to discuss the roles that both forums play in monitoring and scrutinising the delivery of the plan with recommendations noted and agreed before any amendments of the plan are finalised; and how the two forums can work as value adding partners in this important role.

3/ The Sub-Committee further agreed with the Housing Improvement Board's feedback that any changes to the plan should be agreed by the Board (not just delegated as per the Cabinet recommendation).

4/ Considering key risks inherent to staffing capacity within the organisation, the Sub-Committee would welcome an update on staffing capacity to deliver the plan by the incoming permanent Corporate Director of Housing at a future meeting in no later than 3 months' time.

5/ That although a streamlined version of the plan for ease of access is welcome, the plan available publicly should be amended to include greater detail on when specific actions would be delivered by; who would be responsible for delivering them; the processes that would be used for managing their delivery; and a clear sense of how improvement actions would be delivered. This should include the order in which actions are being prioritised. Any prioritised amendments should be approved by the Housing Improvement Board so there is a clear line of understanding and justification. The committee feels that would help address the Ark's report point on the importance of improving clear lines of accountability.

6/ That Cabinet assures itself that risks relating to document management (incl. version control) are being properly mitigated by having good practice documentation management and retention systems in place. This would enable the plan being treated as a live / rolling document without risks while enhancing transparency of how the plan evolves over the improvement journey.

7/ On engagement, the Sub-Committee is reiterating a previous recommendation to produce an engagement and communications plan to be appended to the Improvement Plan and reviewed by the sub-committee and the Housing Improvement Board before approval. This should be done no later than the next 3 months as this was raised at the Sub-Committee July's meeting.

8/ That Cabinet assures itself that risks relating to the delivery of the new Housing Service IT system, would impede many actions of the plan and should therefore be prioritised as this new system would enable a significant improvement in enabling data collection on contacts made to the Housing teams – the analysis of which could be passed onto residents, members and others in a timely manner.

9/ The Sub-Committee reiterated a previous recommendation from its July Committee that data from the responsive repairs contractor must be shared with the appropriate Management team in order to form a dedicated plan to deal with historic repetitive calls and have a more responsive and effective prioritisation of repairs calls as well as flagging any repetitive calls that would require management to intervene to speed up resolution thus improving tenant's experience.

10/ That Cabinet also considers the comments and recommendations made on the Improvement Plan by the Independent Housing Improvement Board for inclusion in future iterations of the Plan which are then brought back to the Sub Committee and Housing Improvement Board for consideration.