

REPORT TO:	Tenant & Leaseholder Panel July 2022
SUBJECT:	Update on the Housing Improvement Board
FROM:	Les Parry Tenant Member Housing Improvement Board

BACKGROUND

The board has members from Local Government Association, London Councils, Croydon Improvement Panel (Government Appointed), Community Groups /Charities (a case worker from Croydon Citizens Advice) and Council Residents. Lead by an Independent Chairman

MEETINGS:

The Inaugural meeting was in December 2021 and others followed when Management and Cabinet Member presented proposed Improvement Plans for Croydon Housing Services. (Note all meetings have been webcast which can be accessed along with all documentation.)

The Board also considered matters of Governance, Culture (Staff treatment of Council Residents) and other issues in particular the Repairs Contractor and Performance.

ACTIVITY

Each member(s) undertook exploratory work with the Council Resident Members (3 Tenants) undertaking an exercise on Council Staff Culture and producing a report to the February 2022 Board meeting.

The information was gathered from personal experience, Council Estate feedback from tenants and groups and online public forums (we could not make visits at this time due to COVID Restrictions. (Note this report can also be accessed via the website)

PROPOSED HOUSING IMPROVEMENT PLANS

To date 2 proposed plans were presented to the full board, both were heavily criticized and not supported by the board. Neither report contained any recommendations/action points from the ARK Report or complied with the Regulatory notice served in May 2021.

The plans read like a management wish list and commentary and never dealt with specific issues.

There was a third report which was not presented to the Board but was presented by Management and the previous Cabinet Member for Homes direct to the previous administrations Cabinet Meeting in March 2021.

The Board Chair and two Tenant Board Members spoke at that meeting we gave the views of the board after a “ring round & email consultation” (noting we were not able to give a detailed critique).

As a result, the Cabinet of the previous administration made amendments to the version three report/recommendations from the Cabinet Member and Management.

THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE

Following the election of the Executive Mayor Perry and the Housing Improvement Board's criticism of the Plan in their March 2022 report (can be accessed via the website), the Council's planned improvements to the housing service must be reshaped and reinvigorated to reflect the views of our residents and address comprehensively the root causes of its past service failings.

The independent Housing Improvement Board's report to March 2022 Cabinet stated that the existing version of the Housing Improvement Plan “Needs considerable further work if it is to command [the Housing Improvement Board's] confidence, and, much more important, the council's tenants’”. The Housing Improvement Board's report made a number of key recommendations against the following key themes:

- Conditions at Regina Road
- Governance
- Treating tenants with respect
- Improving data and its use
- Staff capability
- Quality of planning

1. THE CHANGE IN DIRECTION

The Corporate Director, Mayor and Deputy Mayor (Cabinet lead for Homes/Housing) have committed at the July Cabinet Meeting to basically rewrite the Housing Improvement Plan to include the Boards recommendations from the Boards March Report.

But both Board and Council Residents must be aware of the risks, this will be a long road to reach a state of excellence in our services. The transition to new repairs contractors are also a risk and this should include the risk of not improving existing housing stock so capital projects must be considered carefully.

But another major factor is that of the Housing Revenue Account and the Associated long term Business Plan. Changes will have a cost, that cost will have to be met by the Housing Revenue Account and the funding of that account is from our rent and charges money.

As such both Board and Tenants & Leaseholders and Garage Tenants must be involved in decisions and use of our revenue.

HOW IT WILL BE ACHIEVED

(An extract from the agreed Cabinet Report 6 July 2022.)

- 4.1 The review of the Housing Improvement Plan will utilise the following approach:
- Co-creation with residents, staff and Members of a shared vision and mission for the directorate with customers at the heart of how we lead and deliver services
 - Prioritising the importance of treating our customers with respect and empathy throughout all service delivery

- Deep dives and review of existing service performance, performance measures and standards. Utilisation of benchmarking, Home Standard, Tenant Involvement & Empowerment Standard and extensive engagement with customers, colleagues and other key partners
- Learning from best practice provided by industry leaders including the Chartered Institute of Housing, and the Tenants Participation Advisory Service
- High level map of the transformational change required to deliver our vision including structure, operating model, culture, systems, capability, behavioural standards and professionalisation - co-produced with key partners
- Review of existing governance and project management arrangements to deliver impactful change
- Broader evaluation of the interdependencies within the Council which will enable the delivery of the Housing Improvement Plan and other mayoral priorities
- Alignment with the Council-wide transformation plans as outlined in the Mayor's Plan

4.2 We anticipate the above to be completed and inform the Cabinet paper in November.

4.3 Undertaking the actions above will enable the Council to provide our partners with an accurate assessment of the improvements needed with honest timescales. An update on the Plan will be presented to Cabinet in November 2022. Several projects will be kickstarted ahead of the November Cabinet meeting including the...

- Development of a vision and mission for the housing directorate
- Development and implementation of Residents' Charter action plan □ Gap analysis of service performance in alignment with Tenant Involvement & Empowerment Standard and Homes Standard
- End-to-end review of voids
- End-to-end review of complaints aligned with Housing Ombudsman's Complaints Handling code
- Professionalisation of the workforce to improve employee capability and retention

4.4 The list above is not exhaustive, and all projects within the revised Housing Improvement Plan will align with the Social Housing Regulation Bill by ensuring residents' voices are heard. Further projects will be brought into the scope of the Plan following engagement with residents.

4.5 The reshaping and reinvigoration of the housing directorate is a longterm project which will take place in phases. Timescales will be developed to set

the expectation as to what will be achieved at each stage. The transformation of the housing service will be first evidenced by tangible improvements to the areas listed in 4.3. Further detail will become available once the directorate has completed the deep-dives and review of existing service performance outlined in 4.1.

- 8.3 Clear evidence of discrimination is immaterial to residents' lived experience and the reputation of the Council. There should be an onus on both officers and contractors to ensure that their behaviours to residents is both helpful and respectful and that residents should no longer perceive that they have been discriminated against in relation to their race.
- 8.4 Poor housing conditions and perceptions of unfair treatment are likely to exasperate existing mental health conditions or create new mental health conditions. In particular, when exasperated by other socio-economic impacts such as poverty, unemployment and the cost-of-living crisis. It is important that residents are treated in a fair, respectful and equitable manner to ensure that existing or new conditions are not triggered by behaviour of staff or suppliers. It is important that staff training reflects this.
- 8.5 Residents with disabilities or parents of children with disabilities may be treated more favourably than others in relation to housing improvements. This will not amount to discrimination in relation to the Equality Act 2010.
- 8.6 The Council will also encourage its suppliers to adopt the Council's standards for equality in the borough: Croydon's Equalities Pledge and the George Floyd Race Matters Pledge.