**STRATEGIC TENANT AND RESIDENTS’ PANEL MEETING**

Wednesday 25th January 2023

6.30pm-8.30pm

Walthamstow Assembly Hall - Hybrid

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| MINUTES | ACTION |
| Present:  **STAR Panel Members**  Bert Morris (Chair) (BM)  William Wood (WW)  Josie Lewis (JL)  Juli Ozer (JO)  Heather Gardiner (HG)  Tommaso Rupolo (TR)  Hajah Fofanah (HF)  Stephen Jeffery (SJ)  Lesley Cartwright (LC)  Linda Cambridge (LC)  **Officers**  Jane Martin – Divisional Director of Housing Operations (JM)  Shahid Mallam – Head of Insight and Engagement (SM)  Yasmin White – Housing Engagement Manager (YW)  Masuma Begum – Housing Engagement Officer (MB)  Farzana Kahair – Housing Engagement Officer (FK)  Richard Tomkinson – Independent Mentor (RT)  Charlotte Rayner – Change Team Project Manager (CR)  Julie Curtis – Strategic Finance Advisor  **Apologies:**  Cllr Ahsan Khan  Arsalan Tariq (SAMs TMO) |  |
| 1. **WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS** |  |
| BM opened meeting and invited everyone to introduce themselves, including new STAR panel members Tom, Hajah and Linda.  Apologies were noted as above. |  |
| 1. **SU GOMER: TRIBUTE** |  |
| Everyone took part in 1 minute silence for Su Gomer and her family as tribute of her passing in December 2022.    JM: Su was our Divisional Director of Housing Asset, who actively contributed to STAR panel meetings.  BM: Asked Officers to please pass on condolences to her family, on behalf of the STAR Panel. |  |
| **3.** **MINUTES OF LAST MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING** |  |
| JL: Query about parking at Tenby Court:  Is it controlled by Highways or Estate parking?  JM: Any consultation letter should include a map with the roads being affected.  **Action: Find out which whether Tenby Court has controlled parking and if it is part of a highway CPZ or an estate controlled TMO.**  BM: We are waiting to find out results of CPZ consultation at Aldriche Way.  **Action: To find out results of CPZ survey and whether it is for highways or estate roads.**  (WW left the in-person meeting to re-join virtually) | YW  YW |
| 1. **MYSTERY SHOPPING** |  |
| CR: As part of corporate mystery shopping, Mystery Shopping Limited (MSL) is to undertake an exercise on behalf of the Council.  Customers will be asked to give feedback from an interaction with a Council service.  The Customer Experience Programme will allow ease of access to our residents.  The Mystery Shoppers will be testing services via customer access channels, website, email, in person and virtually. The aim is to make sure that all of them are easily accessible. This will really provide clear data to improve services.  How will this be delivered?  MSL will deliver 190 shops, 50 scenarios, at places such as the Town Hall and libraries.  The first wave will take place in February 2023.  The second wave will be in March and June 2023.  Throughout the first wave, the objective is to understand what feedback we are getting, whether it is positive or negative from service users.  The Council can then make some changes before the next wave.  TR: (Question) What is the reason for 190 shops and 50 scenarios?  CR: (Answer) It came from speaking to services directly, which led us to this figure. This will provide a cross-section of responses.  TR: (Question) What were the challenges from residents? Quantitative or qualitative?  CR: (Answer) They are driven by quality; multiple shops testing the quality of the customer journey for residents.  HG: You need an external set of eyes to look at the scenarios.  CR: That’s why we set MSL to deliver the programme.  BM: (Question) will someone be allocated to one scenario or a group of scenarios? Concerned that some will get missed out.  CR: (Answer) MSL will work with mystery shoppers to distribute the scenarios. MSL has a live portal to see which ones have been covered.  JL said she has completed mystery shopping in the past. If it’s a choice she might not undertake this project and asked, “How are you going to cover them all?”    SM: Housing shops will cover allocations and satisfaction surveys for each service e.g. Bidding, repairs and housing services.  CR: We are keen to use STAR Panel members to use as mystery shoppers.  JO: When are you getting feedback and taking action?  CR: Between February and May we will take feedback and make some quick changes before the second wave. We will be able to see at the end of the second wave what needs doing in terms of actions/improvements.  RT: (Question) What training and support will be made available to volunteers?  They'll need a solid understanding of published service standards for their feedback to be objective, rather than subjective.  CR: We will ask STAR panel members if they would like to participate, and training and support will be given by MSL.  JM: We will also give out information about what to expect from the exercises.  CR: We will show the Mystery Shoppers the correct responses we expect, so residents can mark against it.  BM: (Question) Can anyone contact you directly?  CR: (Answer) Yes, anyone can contact me directly or MSL.    BM: We cannot expect payments but if MSL decides to pay then that’s a different matter.  LW: (Question) Would this include those of us from out of the borough?  CR – yes, any resident can participate.  JO: We don’t get much payment.  BM: To make it clear, the council will not be paying Mystery Shoppers, but the company may offer some payment as a thank you for time.  SM: Encourage residents to put their names forward.  **Action: Send details on basecamp on how to sign up for mystery shopping. Panel members can also let YW/Engagement Team know if they are interested and details will be passed on to CR.** | All/YW |
| 1. **RENTS AND SERVICE CHARGE SETTING** |  |
| HRA presentation was shared on screen and presented by JC.  Update on housing revenue account 2024 is that from 3rd April 2023, rents for new tenancies are set at the 2023/24 formula rent for their property in line with the Rent Standard issued by the Regulator.  The government set a rent policy until 2025 for social housing that would permit rents to increase by up to 7% for the year 2023/24.  Rents charged by LBWF are 21st in terms of the lowest out of 30 London Boroughs with an HRA putting them in the lowest 10 Council's in London. All HRA Dwellings rents are set as Social Rents.  Rents charged by the Council are 13% lower on average than the rents charged by RP Providers in the Borough.  Over 70% of Council Tenants receive Housing Benefit or the Housing Element of Universal Credit and 36% of the rent collected comes directly from Housing Benefit.  Annual rent increases are covered by HB and UC up to LHA rates which are paid directly to tenants.  By capping rents at 7% there will be a direct reduction in income in the HRA and then in turn resources available for capital investment. The HRA income drives the capacity to borrow and resources to service debt. The loss in income by applying a cap of 7% would be £4.6m in 2023/24. Over the next ten years this income would be lost from the base making the cumulative impact approx. £46m.  The loss of income will impact on the HRA’s future capacity for capital investment  What’s the impact of 7% rent rise?  Expenditure is rising quicker than rate of income, creating gap in HRA.  Consequence is losing significant amount of money and no future rents policy after 23/24, suggesting large reduction in capital investment.  Loss of income will mean it will be more challenging to borrow money.  Table presented shows the different levels of rents with different bedroom sizes.  Based on the Autumn Statement announcement a 7% rent increase has been assumed to inform a Draft HRA Budget for 2023/24.  The assumptions made within the HRA MTFS, and Business Plan are consistent, where applicable, with those made in the Council’s General Fund MTFS (e.g. staff pay awards, fees, and charges uplifts, etc). These will continue to be reviewed and updated where applicable.  Energy Budgets rebased for 2022/23 and a 25% increase assumed for 2023/24. Assumption that impact is dampened over time.  Repairs and Maintenance budgets rebased for 2022/23 – contract inflation then linked to CPI.  Cost and income estimate for new build units have been included where appropriate.  No inflation included on other service budgets.  Work has been undertaken on a Base Budget Review, which involved reviewing all revenue budgets in detail, to align with the current service needs and commitments, and this resulted in net savings  A number of actions have been considered to address the funding gap in resources as a result of the 7% cap.  A review of the Capital Programme priorities is being undertaken and improvements to Council Housing will need to be scaled back to match the resources available.  The roll out of climate change retrofits will be dependent on external funding.  Alternative options may need to be considered for Sixty Bricks pipeline schemes.  All investment decisions will require prioritisation. Loss of resources e.g., kitchen, bathroom, fire safety work so we will make sure we prioritise.  May have to look at plans for delivering new homes.  Capital program will not affect residents.  Tom (Question) On slide 8, will the STAR panel be informed when the details will be available?    JC: (Answer) can share an appendix where it sets out the current budget, plan for capital program etc.  **Action: To share Plan for Capital Program Appendix by 13th or 14th February as it will need to go through internal checking first.**  HG: calculated the shortfall for CP from borrowing, the interest rate will be high.  JC: Dampens the impact of high rates of new interest rate. HRA has already secured a competitive interest rate and maximise using other services before borrowing.  HG: (Question) Will the 10-year plan keep changing?  JC: (Answer) Yes. We will have to predict and take advice. We review annually to be as realistic as possible.  WW: (Question) Is there external funding?  JC: will make sure we maximise the external funding, so we use less from the council?    Prioritise safety of tenants and leaseholders, gas services, repairs.  WW: New buildings maximise carbon reduction on new building units.  BM: New rents taking effect in April 2023. 65% of affordable homes by 60 Bricks will drop.  Linda C: (Question) Why have LHA rates have stayed the same?  JC: (Answer) That is decided by central government and the Council doesn’t have a say. | JC/YW |
| 1. **HOUSING COMMISSION** |  |
| JM presented Housing Commission presentation.  JM: We had the first meeting / launch of Housing Commission tonight.  As with the rest of London, WF is facing a housing crisis, pressure is building up.  Council has an ambitious target of building an average of 1,800 homes per year in the next 15 years to meet local housing need and is committed to delivering 1,000 homes for social rent over the next four years.  Some residents feel positive but 22% feel negative about the development of new homes. Lack of affordable housing affects residents on low income.  There are 2 phases of Housing Commission approach:   1. Developing evidence base which shows impacts in the next 10 years. 2. Independent challenge by bringing together an Advisory Group of 7 experts to provide strong academic, policy and sector-based expertise.   The group’s responsibilities will include:   * Making recommendations on how our approach could better meet housing needs. * Identifying any gaps in our approach. * Ensuring the Marmot review and climate evidence supports the approach.   Advisory group set up and will work on delivery recommendations and will go to scrutiny and cabinet.  Final slide is a timeline of work for the Housing Commission.  BM invites members to ask any questions.  JL: (Question) Who makes up the Housing Commission?  JM: (Answer) People who work in/have expertise in housing. The Chair is called Geeta Nanda who is the CEO of Metropolitan Housing Trust.  JC: This particular HC is from Waltham Forest Council to check if the approach is the right one.  WW: There are new tower blocks in south of borough, not sure how many in north?  JO: Also depends on the transport in the area.  SM: Yasmin and I met up with research colleagues to help inform the engagement approach the commission’s work will take. The Commission will look into the cumulative impact and will have opportunities to feed into the program.  **Action:** Panel members requested that:   1. Details of all the advisory group members 2. Which research company we used and some more detail on their brief.   Panel members encouraged to feed into the Commission’s work through the planned engagement. | JM |
| 1. **STAR FORWARD PLAN** |  |
| BM: Suggested we leave more time for AOB at future meetings.  SM: Outlined approach to agenda planning. The panel meets quarterly, and ambition is for one council led item and one resident led item.  Sometimes we make space for more items.  You can make suggestions on basecamp of items you would like to come to panel, and these can be scheduled in to the Forward Plan in consultation with the Chair.  **Action: Panel members to have a think of next agendas and let team or basecamp know.** | MB/FK  All/YW |
| 1. **A.O. B** |  |
| BM: Cllr Khan said when new builds are completed, STAR panel members will be invited to see it. Cllr Khan is very keen on keeping a small STAR panel of 12 because it enables to direct issues more efficiently.    Cllr Khan sends apologies for not attending this meeting, he is in housing commission meeting today and will attempt to attend next one.  RT: will be in touch with new members to discuss tonight’s experience.  BM: to new residents, do you know what a Place Officer does?  New members were unclear of the role of Place Officers.  JM: Almost 2 years ago, we changed the service structure, as we had one team dealing with all housing management issues, with generic housing officers. We decided to create dedicated teams for Tenancy and Place to give additional capacity. The tenancy team cover all people specific work e.g. sign-ups, succession etc and Place team look after all communal related work areas on the estate.  Panel members agreed that this was sensible.  HG: (Question) Who does caretakers work for?  JM: (Answer) they were managed by different department but 12 months ago came into housing.  BM: Updated panel on the focused work the housing service is doing on Damp & Mould with a particular task force.  WW: Suggested an idea of ground maintenance, reducing amount of cutting, maintaining greens, less you cut more money you save. Being in contact with tenants to avoid complaints. Will share details.  LC: Love the idea and would like to be involved in projects.  **Action: WW to share ‘How to maintain green lands’ information.** | WW |
| 1. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING AND CLOSE** |  |
| Next meeting Wednesday 26th April 2023.  Will circulate in resident news. | FK/MB |