

Open minutes of Tower Hamlets Homes Board Meeting
Thursday 23rd February **6.10pm – 7.10pm**
Harford Centre, Harford Street, E1 4FG

Board Directors Present:

Ann Lucas (AL & Chair)	-	Chair, Independent Board Director
Claire Tuffin (CT & Vice Chair)	-	Resident Board Director
John Wu (Wu)	-	Independent Board Director
Mahbub Anam (MA)	-	Resident Board Director

Co – Optees Present:

Pam Haluwa (PH)	-	Co-Optee to Standards & Customer Experience Committee
Iain Lawson (IL)	-	Co-Optee to Asset Mgmt & Building Safety Committee

Officers Present:

Ann Otesanya (AO)	-	Acting Chief Executive
Neil Isaac (NI)	-	Director of Finance
Beverley Greenidge (BG)	-	Director of Neighbourhoods
Paul Davey (PD)	-	Director of Business Transformation
Michael Killeen (MK)	-	Director of Asset Management
Gulam Hussain (GH)	-	Head of Regulatory Assurance & Interim Head of NHDs
Darren Cruice (DC)	-	Head of Asset Management & Compliance
Lesley Owen (LO)	-	Business Development & Improvement Manager
Elizabeth Skillen (ES)	-	Housing Policy & Regulations Officer

In Attendance:

Rupert Brandon (RB)	-	LBTH Head of Housing Supply
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Apologies:

Sameena Raouf (SR)	-	Governance Officer
Safia Jama (SJam)	-	Independent Board Director
Abu Chowdhury (AC)	-	Cllr Board Director
Maium Talukdar (MT)	-	Cllr Board Director

1.	Welcome	
1.1.	AL welcomed all to the meeting. Apologies for the above were noted. As Councillor Board Directors were not available to attend it was agreed that recommendations to the Board at this meeting would be shared with these Directors by email for decision. Post meeting note: The Chair exchanged emails with Cllr Board Members which confirmed their agreement to Board decisions taken at this meeting.	
2.	Declaration of Interest	
2.1.	CT, IL, and PH declared their interest as leaseholders of Tower Hamlets Homes.	
3.	Questions from Members of the Public	
3.1.	None received.	
4.	Minutes of the Open Minutes of the Board Meeting Held on 20th December 2022	
4.1.	<i>The THH Board AGREED minutes of meeting held on 20th December 2022 were an accurate record.</i>	
5.	Business Plan 2023/24	

5.1.	GH introduced the full Business Plan for 2023/24, an outline of which was shared with the Board for comment and subsequently with the Client Team in December for review.	
5.2	LO outlined a summary of the aims and deliverables in the report, more specifically picking up on significant changes from the previous plan.	
5.3	JW asked if the Board we have greater detail as to how the 'cost of living'/inflationary crisis has had, and will have, an impact on being able to deliver on our business plan? Especially on staff recruitment, capital works, contract procurement and rent collection.	
5.4	Gulam Hussain's response was that staff Recruitment has proved very difficult in specialist areas of work where there is a high demand for staff. This is especially acute in repairs where damp and mould surveyors are in short supply and in building and fire safety roles are also hard to fill. We have offered longer term roles rather than agency positions or shorter-term fixed term contracts to encourage take up. Staff retention in these areas may well become a problem too. Should we not be able to maintain a full establishment there is a risk that some outputs may not be delivered in full. More generally there are fewer problems with recruitment; we have agreed with LBTH that permanent roles will be recruited to where these are clearly going to be long term roles. For some temp roles we have agreed to use agencies that are not part of the corporate contract where these roles have not been able to be filled. We have previously reported a slowdown in capital spending. Some of this slowdown is due to supply chain issues with contractors alongside the high rate of inflation within the building sector. Contractors have essentially turned down work because they could not deliver projects within their submitted pricing documents. We have done a lot of work on how these prices can be indexed to ensure that works can be undertaken and still provide value for money. For rents perhaps we could say. There has been an increase in UC numbers throughout the year. A number of UC cases are in arrears with residents needing support to sustain their tenancies. The HRA business plan includes a provision for bad and doubtful debts. This will be kept under review as part of updating the Business plan.	
5.5	MK added that for his area, across the industry the technical roles are proving difficult to recruit to as there is an increased use of 'day rates.' THH recruitment drives in this area have been reappraised whilst ensuring due diligence on the benchmarking of roles to reflect the structure of the organisation. The difficulty is that the salaries being offered cannot outweigh values in the structure.	
5.6	JW commented that the Business Plan should act as expectation management, narrative should be transparent and explain about the difficulties of recruiting staff, agreeing on tenders and contracts, and be honest that some don't come to fruition due to the inflationary-related issues.	
5.7	AL added that for the technical roles, there should be reference to having to pay market rates. AO confirmed that this is already done for this area of work.	
5.8	MK commented that benchmarking is completed and believes that pressures on recruitment in that sector may decrease eventually. There is currently a surge of activity recruiting people, an increasing number of requirements and competition against the private sector.	
5.9	MA enquired about whether a THH frontline presence would be available at the NTH?	
5.10	AO confirmed that there will be a THH frontline presence in the NTH, within the Resident Hub. Staff previously working in Rushmead will service our part of the hub alongside colleagues representing other organisations.	
5.11	MA asked about any impact that might be felt by additional resourcing staff costs?	

5.12	NI responded that logistical costs and moving dilapidations will be picked up out of this years' budget. Costs are not concerning at the moment, however not all fees have been received as of yet. With regards to the Business Plan, impact will be minimal as this will fall under this year's costs. Upcoming updates from Cabinet and MAB will provide more detail about the numbers.	
5.13	MA asked if help can be provided to vulnerable residents, those suffering unemployment, in terms of communal gas increases?	
5.14	NI confirmed that increasing gas prices will have an impact on residents as this is not covered in the housing benefit payments, those on communal heating will see a significant increase. This change will be reflected in one bill compared to those on domestic supply have seen increases across the year. It is important to note that despite the increases, the cost of gas is below governmental support level and is lower in cost than gas under governmental control.	
5.15	IL suggested that alongside the bills being sent out, explanatory information should be provided to give background information. Although this isn't going to help people pay directly, it may help to understand the changes in context.	
5.16	MA agreed and suggested a comms piece alongside the new rent statements which outlines the changes.	
5.17	ACTION: Enhance messaging on website, providing context to changes in costs/fees payable by residents.	
5.18	BG and GH added that there is a range of support and information being provided to residents including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comms on the support available (Gov and Council) • Rents Team encouraging support wherever possible • Teams are aware of residents who may be struggling and engaging directly, that covers both tenants and leaseholders • Working with partners to provide support • Financial Health Centre services which provide walk-ins or direct referral • Work focusing maximising the income of older residents, through roadshows and tea/coffee drop-ins 	
5.19	BG noted that the number of residents using the Financial Health Centre services has increased.	
5.20	MA asked whether the Business Plan will be publicly available?	
5.21	AO confirmed that it will be put on the website.	
5.22	MA asked whether more resources would be needed for dealing with DMC?	
5.23	AO responded that recruitment drives spoken about previously (regarding technical roles in Asset Management) relate directly to resource available for Damp and Mould improvements.	
5.24	MA asked why the BCI on reduction of blocks with a substantial fire risk to moderate was empty?	
5.25	AO explained that we are currently in the process of agreeing performance indicator targets with the Council for the upcoming year.	
5.26	MA asked why the programmed rollout of Traffic Management Orders was being paused?	
5.27	AO referred to the CE report where more information on this is provided. Legal advice to move to courtyard arrangement previously, revisited that and will be going	

	to individual bays subject to consultation. Schemes that need replacing, come back to end of programme.	
5.28	MA asked about rooftop developments, where these were submitted last year refused and were back in again for consultation? He provided by way of illustration the example of Armsby House.	
5.29	AO – said leaseholders exercise of their right to enfranchisement caused some difficulties for LBTH. The developer wants two story roof developments. Other blocks were in this queue. Leaseholders need to get independent advisors and do own due diligence.	
5.30	RB explained that there is work going on within the Council to explore rooftop developments and LBTH is working with THH to deliver this. The wider point however is that some are going to first tier tribunal due to issues that need to be legally unpicked, including but not limited to; residents signed up that may not be interested in the scheme, resident concerns about the business partner. It is important to note that residents must obtain their own legal advice for this and be aware it is quite a long process.	
5.31	PH asked for clarification on who is going to tribunal.	
5.32	ACTION: To include information on who is going to tribunal. [RB (24/02/2023) confirmed that the two blocks subject to further queries by the Council are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 33-63 Tomlinson Close – since some time has passed since original application was made to confirm that all leaseholders are still in agreement (there are discrepancies in who the named leaseholders are as ownership on flats has changed hands) • 1-9 Stafford Cripps House – we believe that the threshold for CE has not been reached with only 4/9 owners listed] 	
5.33	<i>The THH Board APPROVED the Business Plan for 2023/24 subject to the confirmation of Cllr Board Directors and the confirmation of BCI targets.</i>	
6.	Community Investment Strategy 2023-24	
6.1.	BG presented the reviewed strategy which was rolled over from previous year and approved at Standards & Customer Experience Committee and covers the aims for the coming year in addition to achievements.	
6.2	ACTION: Community Investment Strategy delivery plan to go to the March Standards & Customer Experience Committee	
6.3	AO informed the Board of the decision made by the Mayor, at MAB on 22/02, to pause work relating to the giving of grants. THH are working with the Council and administration to be transparent and get clarity on what activity falls under this criterion going forward.	
6.4	PH queried whether the most recent round of funding granted through the Inspiring Communities Fund will be withdrawn.	
6.5	AO responded that commitments given need to be captured.	
6.6	CT commented that those recently awarded through the Inspiring Communities Fund have been told outcomes, so we are obliged to go ahead.	
6.7	RB queried this as he is unsure on the formal process, it may be dependent on whether the funding has been contractually signed.	

6.8	ACTION: Collate all grant-related activity, including planned and recently signed off, and further details about the Mayor's decision to go to S&CEC and subsequently Board.	
6.9	AO noted that there is one exception to this decision, the TRA funding as this was agreed under the constitution.	
6.10	<i>The THH Board APPROVED the Community Investment Strategy 2023-24 subject to the confirmation of which grant-related activities will continue.</i>	
7.	Satisfaction Survey Service 2023-2027	
7.1	LO presented a report on the Satisfaction Survey Service which covers two key areas; progress on the ongoing procurement and preparations for the new Tenant Satisfaction Measures.	
7.2	<u>Procurement</u> LO notified the Committee of a minor delay in the procurement process, a 3-day extension on the submission of tenders. This is due to some last-minute and complex clarifications. Timelines for mobilisation should still be achievable.	
7.3	<u>Tenant Satisfaction Measures</u> LO outlined some of the work being completed in preparation for the new regime, including a comparative analysis between TSM and current THH indicators, the results of which showed many similarities but higher levels of detail from the current THH measures.	
7.4	LO explained that THH are planning to work with LBTH regarding the BCIs and aligning these to the TSMs.	
7.5	EMT requested that leaseholders continued to be surveyed in terms of satisfaction.	
7.6	LO added that a small number of qualitative questions will be added to ensure we get the level of detail needed to inform our services.	
7.7	LO noted that, to meet the new TSM requirements, we needed to make savings across other areas of the organisation who conduct surveys. An analysis of all surveys is being conducted to check relevance and duplication, results of which are going positively. Savings are to be fully quantified with the new supplier.	
7.8	JW asked if the mandatory nature of TSMs in which all social housing organisations would be required to change was pushing up the costs of suppliers?	
7.9	LO responded that it is likely the price will have increase however it is too early to say at present.	
7.10	ACTION: Detail on work concerning the satisfaction survey service to go to S&CEC and then to Board.	
7.11	<i>The THH Board NOTED the Satisfaction Survey Service update.</i>	
8.	Regulatory Compliance – monitoring, evidence and actions	
8.1	ES presented a report detailing how THH are monitoring, evidencing and improving regulatory compliance. Actions receive scrutiny at the appropriate Committee's before coming to Board for oversight periodically.	

8.2	ES highlighted that timelines for the proactive regulatory regime are becoming clearer and we are expecting to see inspections commence in 2024.	
8.3	ES explained that in Q3, focus was improving our evidence base, through the document library project. The focus for Q4 has been planning for and making progress against regulatory compliance improvement actions.	
8.4	JW asked how significant the concern is, regarding recruitment issues and the Home Standard.	
8.5	ES explained this links to earlier discussions about the potential delays in specialised areas. (Please also see response at 5.4 in these minutes)	
8.6	<i>The THH Board NOTED the Regulatory Compliance update.</i>	
9.	CE Report	
9.1	AO presented the CE report and highlighted some areas to note, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bentworth Court – Ramadan will be taken into account when planning for residents return to their homes • Going back in-house – The Mayor was thankful to THH staff and would like the transition to happen by the end of the year. Project teams have been set up and continue to be put in place to plan for the transition 	
9.2	CT asked if we actively encouraging residents (tenants and leaseholders) to report all cases of damp and mould? If not, do you think its likely cases in categories 3 and 4 are under-reported?	
9.3	AO confirmed that we are underreporting, however we are making significant efforts to make it easy for people to report and methods put in place, specifically the IVR (telephone) route are being used. We know underreporting is occurring as we discover damp and mould in multiple properties within the same block however reports have never been raised. We must continue to do as much as we can to proactively seek incidences and improve publicity for reporting channels.	
9.4	Claire staff noted that sickness seems significantly over target. Are there any underlying trends and what interventions being taken in response?	
9.5	AO responded that the average number of days lost per employee (FTE) increased markedly from 1.8 days in Q1 2022 to 2.7 days in Q2 2022 and remained around 2.8 days for the balance of the year. Both long term and short-term absence has increased at a similar rate during this time. Covid (confirmed) and Covid-related (Suspected and long-covid issues) still account for almost 18.5% of absences. Absence is recorded against 25 distinct reasons. The most recorded reasons are stress/anxiety and Musculo skeletal problems. HRBPs are now meeting with Heads of Service on a monthly basis to review their service areas – ensure absence is being recorded accurately; return to work interviews are conducted promptly; Stress Risk Assessments conducted and followed up; Occupational Health (OHP) referrals are followed up and Absence Management Procedures are evoked when trigger levels have been hit. Delays in OHP appointments are sometimes hindering progress in absence management and often, the advice given by OHP is biased towards employees remaining off work or away from the workplace.	
9.6	JW queried the timetable for THH going back in-house, whether a buffer has been included in timings and if there are any areas at risk of service disruption.	
9.7	AO responded that the new administration has proposed November as an ambition. A detailed piece of work, which will make it clear that all tasks can be completed	

	with due diligence, is yet to happen. ALMOs of a similar size have been taken back in within the proposed timetable but there won't be a great deal of comfort room.	
9.8	PD added that it is doable within the timescales, the biggest task is to ensure everything is in order for an effective TUPE (THH staff getting clarity on where they are going and LBTH getting data on the staff they are receiving). The first stage of work will be THH and LBTH thinking about where we have staff/combinations of functions that will not fit in the Council.	
9.9	PD provided an example of this, the HSC take calls but also look at estate facilities. LBTH call centre will not want to be concerned with estate facilities so we must think about where this could go.	
9.10	PD explained that there will be 4-6 weeks of consultation time once these questions have been unpicked and a broad consensus on where staff should go has been reached.	
9.11	JW queried whether we are aware of where the risks lie in the (going back in-house) planning process and have mapped out how to monitor these.	
9.12	PD explained that a key principle in the planning process is to make the process as seamless and unnoticeable as possible for residents. We are specifically looking at areas that will be kept the same for resident experience. For example, keeping the same telephone number.	
9.13	AL added that the target is for a detailed plan to have been created by the end of March.	
9.14	ACTION: Detailed plan on the future of the housing management function to come back to Board.	
9.15	PH enquired how prepared the Council are to accept additional functions. PH also asked how prepared we are to outline a plan to residents, to ease the transition.	
9.16	PD responded that a key part of the transition is communication and residents are a key part of that, but we don't want to be communicating that much change. THH are meeting regularly with the Council to talk through complexities. We are responsible for the TUPE preparation work and if done correctly, a clear plan can be agreed and both sides will be prepared.	
9.17	PD added that it has been agreed by THH and LBTH that an integrated housing service is needed so that the key components can speak to each other and services are easy to access.	
9.18	IL asked, concerning the Diversity Programme, whether we have good contact with other youth provider services in the borough.	
9.19	BG explained that commissioning around youth services directly for THH is coming to an end but there are plans within LBTH to expand these services and a desire to make sure they link back in with our services. BG noted the point around keeping in contact with other providers.	
9.20	ACTION: Work with external youth service providers in the borough to maintain contact and communication <i>The THH Board NOTED the CE Report.</i>	

10.1	RB left the meeting at 7.10pm.	
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Actions Log: Open Board Meeting
23rd February 2023 6.10pm – 7.10pm

Item	Action	Who	Due	Status
5.17	Enhance messaging on website, providing context to changes in costs/fees payable by residents.	GH/BS		Completed
5.32	To include information on who is going to tribunal.	RB		Complete – added in the minutes above
6.2	Community Investment Strategy delivery plan to go to the March Standards & Customer Experience Committee	FH		Completed
6.8	Collate all grant-related activity, including planned and recently signed off, and further details about the Mayor's decision to go to S&CEC and subsequently Board.	FH		Discussions continue with the Mayor's Office
7.10	Detail on work concerning the satisfaction survey service to go to S&CEC and then to Board.	LO		Contract award report on agenda for Board meeting on 4 th May 2023. Details of proposed refocused survey programme will be reported to next S&CEC and Board meetings.
9.16	Detailed plan on the future of the housing management function to come back to Board.	PD		On agenda for Board meeting on the 4 th May 2023
9.22	Work with external youth service providers in the borough to maintain contact and communication	BG/FH		Work continues with our youth service partners who are delivering diversionary and intervention programmes on our estates. We are also working closely with our ASB team and LBTH Youth Service to ensure services are co-ordinated.

Chair

Date