


London Borough of Hackney
Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission
Municipal Year 2016/17
Monday, 16th December, 2019

Minutes of the proceedings of
the Living in Hackney Scrutiny
Commission held at
Hackney Town Hall, Mare
Street, London E8 1EA

Chair:	Councillor Sharon Patrick
Councillors in Attendance:	Cllr Sade Etti (Vice-Chair), Cllr Anthony McMahon, Cllr M Can Ozsen, Cllr Penny Wrout and Cllr Anna Lynch
Apologies:	Cllr Ian Rathbone
Officers In Attendance:	Sara Kulay (Project Manager, Housing Services), Philippa Newis (Senior Delivery Manager, ICT, Finance & Corporate Resources), David Padfield (Interim Director, Housing Services) and Gilbert Stowe (Divisional Head of Tenancy and Leasehold Services)
Other People in Attendance:	Vicky Bonner (Director of Housing), Chyrel Brown (Chief Operating Officer), Gary Coultish (Head of Operations for response), Ruth Davison (Chief Executive), Deborah Shynn (Operations Manager), Sue Hanlon (Director of Maintenance Delivery Services), Shani Denham (Head of Repairs and Maintenance), Sean Kelly (Head of Property), Kevin MacDermott (Director of Direct Maintenance North Region), John McKeon (Reinvestment Manager), Councillor Sem Moema (Mayoral Adviser Private Renting and Housing Affordability), Alison Muir (Director Resident Services), Brendan Sarsfield (Chief Executive) and Michael Thompson (Head of Estate Services)
Members of the Public:	
Officer Contact:	Tom Thorn  0208 356 8186  thomas.thorn@hackney.gov.uk

Councillor Sharon Patrick in the Chair

1 Apologies for Absence

1.1 Apologies had been received from Cllr Rathbone.

2 Urgent Items / Order of Business

2.1 There were no urgent items and the order of business was as laid out.

3 Declarations of Interest

3.1 Interests were declared as below.

- In relation to agenda item 4 Cllr Lynch declared she was a Southern Housing tenant.
- In relation to items 5 and 6 the Chair and Cllr McMahon declared they were Council leaseholders.

4 Evidence gathering for review around Housing Associations - Focus on repairs and maintenance

4.1 The Chair welcomed the following guests for this item:

- Vicky Bonner, Director of Housing, Clarion Housing Group
- Shani Denham, Head of Repairs and Maintenance, Clarion Housing Group
- Gary Coultish, Head of Operations for response, Clarion Housing Group
- Sean Kelly, Head of Property, Industrial Dwellings Society (IDS)
- Ruth Davison, Chief Executive, Islington and Shoreditch Housing Association (ISHA)
- Kevin MacDermott, Director of Direct Maintenance North Region, L&Q Group
- Chyrel Brown, Chief Operating Officer, One Housing Group
- Sue Hanlon, Director of Maintenance Delivery Services, One Housing Group
- Brendan Sarsfield, Chief Executive, Peabody
- Alison Muir, Director Resident Services , Peabody
- Deborah Shynn, Operations Manager, Sanctuary Group
- John McKeon, Reinvestment Manager, Sanctuary Group
- Michael Thompson, Head of Estate Services, Sanctuary Group
- Cllr Sem Moema, Mayoral Adviser, Private Renting and Housing Affordability

4.2 She said that for its main review up to April next year the Commission would look at aspects around Housing Association performance and approaches.

4.3 Housing Associations played a vital role in the borough - managing around 24,000 homes. Good quality suitable housing was fundamental to people's life chances and experiences, and far too many residents did not have this.

4.4 She hoped that over the next few months the review could identify what good performance by Housing Associations looked like in Hackney, and how the Council helped to support and enable good and effective practice. She suggested the Commission might explore areas including the contributions made by Housing Associations to meeting housing need, the ways that providers ensured homes were managed effectively, and the support they provided to enable vulnerable residents to take up and sustain tenancies.

4.5 Tonight's item would be focused on repairs and maintenance. The Commission wished to explore how Housing Association partners monitored and reported performance on repairs and maintenance, and how they were ensuring

responsive services for residents. She thanked guests who had provided papers for the item.

4.6 The Chair asked that one guest from each of the Housing Associations represented gave opening comments on where they saw repairs and maintenance performance for their organisation currently.

4.7 The Director of Housing, Clarion Housing Group made the following points:

- Clarion had emerged three years ago from a merger of Circle Housing and Affinity Sutton.
- It had a stock of 125,000 properties nationally, including around 2,000 units in Hackney.
- They had a blended repairs and maintenance model. Most works were carried out by a Clarion-owned company; Clarion Response. Alongside this, there had historically been a number of external contractors.
- However, following concerns about levels of service from some contractors in some areas, Clarion had moved to bring the function for the North London region (which included Hackney) in-house. The rationale for this was that levels of customer satisfaction with the in-house services had been very strong, and higher than those with the outsourced elements.
- It was fair to say that the integration process was a complex one, which had had some impact on service provision. However - now one year in - there were strong signs of improvement.
- Resident feedback was helping to shape plans, drawn from the involvement structures in place, and other channels including complaints and member enquiries. A practical example of this had seen Clarion respond to feedback that getting issues resolved at first visit was key for customers by recruiting multi trade operatives and upskilling existing staff so that one operative could fully deal with a repair, in more cases.
- On performance, satisfaction rates were going in the right direction towards meeting a target of 85%.
- £10 million would be invested in capital works in the borough in upcoming years, mainly during 2021/22. Again in line with feedback from residents, the programme would be delivered in a way which best avoided disruption through an area by area approach, which would deliver all works to that area within a shortest possible period. This would be alongside continuing to carry out any urgent works to individual units and blocks as required.

4.8 The Chief Operating Officer, One Housing Group made the following made the following points:

- One Housing had a new management team in place.
- They owned and managed 17,000 homes in London and the south east, at least half of which were London living rent, affordable rent, or shared ownership.

Monday, 16th December, 2019

- 35,000 customers lived in a One Housing home. Care and support was provided by One Housing to 8,000 of these customers who had needs including mental health, older people, learning difficulties and those experiencing homelessness.
- One Housing managed 815 units in Hackney.
- They had a direct maintenance and repairs service which had been brought in house in October this year. All contractors operating within the service were based in one office in Camden, with localised teams.
- 97% of routine repairs were completed within 20 working days. For Hackney, there was a satisfaction rate with these repairs of 4.5 out of 5. There was 100% compliance with both fire and water safety.
- Complaints numbers were low in Hackney; there had been less than 10 since April 2019.
- Looking forward over the next 12 months, there would be strategic investment in asset management and in fire safety work, alongside close engagement with residents.

4.9 The Head of Property, Industrial Dwellings Society (IDS) made the following points:

- IDS were one of the largest landlords in Hackney, with around 1000 units. It had been operating since 1885.
- The stock was generally old, and built in the 1930s. This was reflected in the intensity of maintenance programmes.
- The current spend on capital works and asset management was £2 million a year. Post the Grenfell Tower tragedy the majority of this had needed to be diverted away from other works to fire safety (replacement of front doors and compartmentalisation works), and this would be the case for some time. In the medium term this would be likely to impact reactive repairs activity upwards.
- IDS had two main repairs and maintenance contractors, with the functions outsourced.
- Customer satisfaction remained largely constant at around 85%. This level of satisfaction was generally consistent with the stronger providers in the industry.

4.10 The Chief Executive, Islington and Shoreditch Housing Association (ISHA) made the following points:

- She had been in post for less than a year. However she had lived and worked in Hackney and Islington for 25 years. She had seen the impact of change and some communities feeling left behind, and had joined ISHA to help improve life chances of residents.
- ISHA was a small, community Housing Association, with around 2,500 homes.

Monday, 16th December, 2019

- Hackney was a key area for ISHA, and they were committed to contributing to keeping the borough vibrant and to meeting housing need. The majority of its homes in the borough had been developed in the last 20 years, and were predominantly units for social rent and shared ownership.
- A key ethos of ISHA was that units were residents' homes, and that this needed to be fully taken into account in all aspects of work. In repairs and maintenance, this translated partly into offering choice and flexibility. For example, emergency repairs would be dealt with within four hours whilst for other repairs residents could choose from a range of appointment dates and times to give them maximum convenience. On planned maintenance, residents received choice around kitchen and bathroom styles.
- ISHA had had a focus on establishing an effective, meaningful, partnership relationship with its main contractor for repairs, and to achieve a model where the contractor operated with the same values and ethos. The contract team was based in ISHA's office. They operated in ISHA uniforms. A recent away day had sought to further achieve a one organisation approach.
- She would not claim performance on repairs and maintenance not to require improvement. Satisfaction on responsive repairs stood at 75% in 2018/19, which was below where the organisation wanted to be.
- However, work was addressing this. There was an expectation of quality and good customer service, and contractors had and would have agreements terminated when this was not achieved. ISHA was also focused on ensuring a highly skilled, stable workforce. This had been aided by the provider being the first Housing Association in the borough to be a London Living Wage employer. This had helped to ensure that the jobs it advertised were sought after.
- Within work aimed at driving up standards generally, ISHA were co-creating revised sets of service standards and improvement plans with residents. This was through resident scrutiny panels and also newly created action days which brought together senior staff and residents to agree the improvements required in particular elements, and the actions which ISHA would take to achieve them.

4.11 The Chief Executive, Peabody made the following points:

- Peabody managed 6,700 homes in Hackney, 700 of which were supported housing units meeting the needs of more vulnerable residents. Peabody were the largest operator in the borough. They were committed to Hackney, and to working in partnership with the Council. Its core purpose was to house and provide support to vulnerable residents and those on low incomes.
- Peabody was a large organisation serving many areas. It had become larger following a merger with Family Mosaic. There was a keen awareness of the risk of losing its local presence, and work was ongoing to prevent this.
- All Peabody's repairs – in Hackney - had been condensed into an agreement with a single contractor which went live in October 2019. The new contract had started reasonably well. Satisfaction levels with its service for its first month had stood at 84%.

Monday, 16th December, 2019

- Different approaches were being followed in different geographical areas, including testing new ones. His view was that there often did need to be localised approaches in place. Peabody had a Direct Labour Organisation (DLO) covering one area. In another, they had moved to a model of multiple small contracts.
- A large element of Peabody's work was focused on the community, and community activity. In Hackney, this included the offer on the Pembury, and joint work with the Council in this area.
- In terms of stock, Peabody managed relatively high numbers of Victorian street properties which had been converted into flats in the 1970s and 80s, often with very little spend. This had left a legacy of difficult to maintain homes. It was also more difficult to engage residents living in these homes.
- This compared with flats in purpose built blocks on estates which it was easier to maintain, and to engage occupants of. Satisfaction levels were highest amongst these residents, in particular where Peabody's own caretakers served the units.
- Moving forward, a priority was to improve data quality; this was a common challenge for large housing providers. Progress had been made; the implementation of self service and repairs tracking provided greater convenience to residents when reporting repairs and seeking progress updates on them. Further work was planned around digital services, although there would always be appreciation that these channels were not accessible for all.
- Fire safety works had and would continue to take significant focus. Peabody was one of the Housing Associations acting as 'early adopters' of changes proposed in the Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety led by Dame Judith Hackitt. The regulations would apply to blocks of 18 metres or higher (six storeys). Peabody managed nearly 300 of these, so the scale of work involved was very significant.
- Another emerging priority would be an aim around achieving carbon neutrality. This was a complex area and could benefit from a dedicated meeting.

4.12 The Operations Manager, Sanctuary Group made the following points:

- Sanctuary Housing managed around 3,500 units in Hackney. The majority of these were based on five estates – Kingsmead, Morningside, Gascoyne, Shore and Old Kingshold. Its main office was on the Kingsmead Estate.
- There was an in-house maintenance team which had been in place for some years. It had had some problems but these were being worked through.
- Sanctuary's stock in the borough was quite old in some cases and as with Peabody, they also managed a number of street properties which were more challenging to maintain.
- A lot of investment had gone into Sanctuary's estates recently - £12 million in the last four years. Moving forward, a £6 million annual investment in the borough had been agreed as part of a new asset management programme.

- A planned engagement exercise was being planned which would target those residents who made little contact with the organisation; known as those living in 'cold properties'. Street properties took a high share of these units.
 - Satisfaction levels were not where the organisation wanted them to be – partly reflecting a difficult financial climate in recent years in terms of the reductions in social rents. There were aims to improve this in forthcoming periods.
 - A number of resident-led estate inspections were carried out with staff, which had led to the creation of agreed action plans to improve communal areas.
- 4.13 The Director of Direct Maintenance North Region, L&Q Group made the following points:
- L&Q managed 2,200 units in Hackney, 600 and 100 of which were for shared ownership and supported housing respectively.
 - They carried out an average of around 5,500 repairs per year, and voids works in 27 units prior to their handover for a new tenancy.
 - L&Q had a DLO in place, which had expanded over the last five years to now provide services to 97,000 homes.
 - The DLO started delivering repairs in Hackney in April 2019. Satisfaction levels were at 82% for the year up to this point. The Operational Team were co-located with the Housing Management Team. This meant that property managers on estates had direct lines into wider support.
 - As with Peabody, L&Q was also an early adopter of the Hackitt recommendations. The level of focus and investment in fire safety had brought stresses and strains to the repairs and general maintenance offer.
 - This said, a focus on quality remained. Void standards had been revised upwards; units had kitchens and bathrooms (with less than five years life) replaced and were fully re-decorated, prior to a new tenancy. The aim was to bring a new build experience to all those moving into an L&Q unit. This was challenging. However, it had helped to achieve a satisfaction rate on this element of over 90%.
- 4.14 The Chair thanked guests. She noted that a survey in 2018 had found Hackney's housing stock to be in generally good condition – particularly the insides of homes - due to the Decent Homes Programme and further investment. She asked if a general picture was available on the condition of the stock of the Housing Associations represented, and what shares of their units were at Decent Homes standard.
- 4.15 The Chief Executive, ISHA advised that unlike what had been the case for local authorities' housing stock, Housing Associations had received no funding for Decent Homes works. Collectively however they had invested £20 billion in the UK in bringing their stock up to these standards. Generally, across the sector there would be very few units not at the standard which had not already been identified for works or demolition. This was not to say there were not other significant challenges to meet - including the one mentioned earlier around carbon neutrality.

- 4.16 The Chair noted the large detrimental impact that lift breakdowns could have on residents, particularly those with limited mobility, and or young children. Breakdowns could result in vulnerable people being stuck inside or outside their homes. She asked what was being done to address what appeared from her dialogue with residents to be high numbers of lift breakdowns and long waiting times for repairs.
- 4.17 The Head of Property, IDS agreed that working lifts were crucial to many residents' quality of life. IDS had taken measures to improve repair turnarounds. This had included putting monitors on lifts to detect and report faults automatically so issues could be resolved more quickly. One challenge was around the cost imperative to maintain rather than replace lifts where it was viable to do so. New lifts typically cost £100,000. IDS were currently procuring 5 new lifts which constituted a major investment for the organisation.
- 4.18 As an organisation predominantly letting at social rent levels, a cautious approach was required around spend, and there was a need to generally maintain rather than replace lifts. Maintenance could bring challenges; older lifts sometimes relied on parts being manufactured on a bespoke basis, bringing a greater waiting time for repair. Another issue was around closed software sometimes being used to service lifts. In these cases and in a similar way to some cars, sometimes it was only the manufacturer whose software was able to diagnose and then resolve issues. Newer lifts were increasingly coming with open software which was welcome.
- 4.19 Noting earlier points about the challenge to reduce emissions, the use of technology was aiding IDS in addressing this. They were piloting a scheme where sensing equipment was put in residents homes so that advice could be given in cases where there appeared to be inefficient use of energy and or excess levels of humidity. This also had a role to play in helping to address fuel poverty.
- 4.20 The Operations Manager, Sanctuary Group agreed with the points around there being a need to balance the replacement of lifts with maintenance where it was feasible. Lifts were a challenge.
- 4.21 Adding to this, the Head of Estate Services, Sanctuary Group had changed its processes to ensure that they only procured lifts which had parts available to purchase in the UK.
- 4.22 A Member noted the importance of lifts to more vulnerable residents. She felt that this highlighted the importance of housing providers having full and up to date information on their residents, including where there were vulnerabilities. This would better enable an informed approach to prioritising actions on lifts, and other aspects.
- 4.23 On a broader point, she was also aware that as a Council there were schemes to support and incentivise residents to take up other units when - due to changes in circumstances – they had more bedrooms that they needed. She asked if similar schemes were followed by Housing Associations, and if Housing Associations regularly reviewed the situations of its residents so that it could target these schemes effectively.

- 4.24 Coming in at this point, the Chief Executive, Peabody said that providers would generally have similar incentivisation schemes to Councils. They appreciated the importance of freeing up larger homes to those in most need of them.
- 4.25 On lifts, he was very aware of the need for them to be in operation, and of the detrimental impact that faults with lifts and any other communal aspects had on the experience and satisfaction of high numbers of residents. There was a strong incentive to get communal repairs right. This had been a focus for Peabody in recent years.
- 4.26 He felt it important to quantify the level of issue with lifts. For Peabody's part, there was actually little issue with lifts. He was aware that any incident with a lift could cause significant impact, but data did evidence that incident numbers were low.
- 4.27 He genuinely welcomed the role of Members as advocates for their residents. This provided value in helping to ensure that providers were held to account, and that issues were picked up when they were missed.
- 4.28 This said, he also felt that caution needed to be applied when making generalisations. He would really value feedback which collated and analysed any common issues raised with Members and other Council Services in regards to Peabody specifically. This would better enable informed measures to be put in place. He felt that all providers would benefit from this more specific feedback.
- 4.29 A Member thanked the Chief Executive for these points which she said were useful. However, she and other Members noted that residents of a number of Housing Associations did commonly raise faulty lifts, repeated breakdowns and delays in repairs as having significant impacts on their lives. This had included Peabody residents.
- 4.30 The Chief Executive, Peabody noted previous points made about reducing budgets. Fire safety and also responding to carbon issues would bring quite significant change – both to what providers could offer and do for its residents, and to the scale of new development which it was possible to deliver. The need to focus on these areas would have an impact on what could be done in future.
- 4.31 A Member asked if joint work among larger providers (the G15) could help achieve more efficient repairs and maintenance functions. On the lifts example, he noted earlier points around some parts not being available in the UK. He asked if there were discussions around working together to have shared and larger parts stores, as an example.
- 4.32 A Member recalled a point earlier from the Chief Executive of Peabody around seeking to retain local, visible presence despite the organisation becoming larger through mergers. She asked the representatives of the larger providers in attendance if mergers had impacted on their repairs performance, particularly in terms of customer care and residents feeling listened to. She worried that changes had corresponded with a decrease in customer care. She recalled cases she had taken up on behalf of residents where letters from providers had no name on them. This had left both residents and her feeling that they were

- not having their concerns listened to, and it also being left unclear as to how cases could be chased and escalated.
- 4.33 The Director of Housing, Clarion Housing Group thanked the Member for these points. The merger from which Clarion was formed took place three years ago. This could be felt to be a long time, but the complexity and scale of the organisations meant that Clarion was still a relatively new organisation, which was still developing.
- 4.34 Measures were being put in place to better ensure both residents and their advocates could more easily track and escalate issues. A new ways of working programme had been implemented during the previous month, supported by a new computer system which amalgamated separate systems. This was within the aim of ensuring that a 'one version of the truth' approach was in place, which would better enable affective case management, issues to be dealt with promptly, and residents to be able to receive full updates on progress.
- 4.35 The Chief Executive, Peabody said that major change programmes – whether these were parts of mergers or other initiatives – did cause periods of lower performance.
- 4.36 When recently ending a number of repairs contracts to change to a single contract model, some providers involved had appeared to have taken their foot off of the delivery pedal over their notice period. Peabody had also merged two call centres, and performance had dipped during the period of change being planned and implemented due to resistance from some staff.
- 4.37 In the long run these changes would deliver benefits; better repairs performance and a more streamlined and consistent customer service offer. However, in the short term during change programmes, there would inevitably be an impact on performance.
- 4.38 The Chief Operating Officer, One Housing Group added that her organisation had also changed its IT system and merged call centres. She agreed with points made about the detrimental impact that these changes could have in the short term before longer term improvements were achieved.
- 4.39 This said, a lesson for One Housing had been around the need to give continual focus to ensuring basics around customer care were maintained at all times. The new Leadership Team was committed to continually enforcing standards of customer service; this included tone of letters and other areas.
- 4.40 They had realised that in a context where there were multiple pressures – including the need to conduct fire safety works alongside general repairs and maintenance – that sight could be lost of fundamental customer care, for example with staff solely focused on getting a letter out rather than ensuring that it gave information in a respectful, and accessible way. Experience had shown that without this ongoing focus, standards did fall.
- 4.41 Customer care and resident engagement was particularly crucial during this challenging period. One Housing needed to take residents with them.

Monday, 16th December, 2019

- 4.42 An example was with fire safety measures when bulky items were removed from communal areas. Some of these cases had drawn complaints from residents. Her team was working towards an approach which sought to explain the reasons for these and other actions being taken, and also to encourage the involvement of residents by letters setting out how they could contribute to improving fire safety for themselves and their neighbours.
- 4.43 She also saw the fire safety work as an opportunity to engage more residents than those currently involved through the formal involvement structures (which were strong and had been further improved through the revision of its Resident Engagement Strategy).
- 4.44 On communications, a Member quoted the following from a comment made to her by a resident, regarding one of the providers represented in this meeting:
- “long waits on phone to call centre, no dedicated Housing Managers, everything must go through a call centre, responses seldom arrive, no paper trails, no email addresses, only call centre staff”.*
- 4.45 She said that whilst this was a single comment, a high number of residents had raised similar concerns with her in terms of remote call centres being used as the single option available when seeking to get issues addressed, and these often being ineffective.
- 4.46 The Chief Operating Officer, One Housing Group said these comments helped to explain her organisation’s refocus on getting customer care basics right. They had changed electronic customer contact arrangements in the summer. However - more importantly and alongside this - they were training and developing staff to better ensure they took ownership of cases. This was both the customer care staff who issues were raised with, and the operatives / departments to whom they were referred.
- 4.47 Staff were working in a busy and pressured environment. This brought an ongoing need to remind staff of what constituted good customer care and resolution, and that customers needed to be kept informed of progress with cases. This was alongside proper regular dialogue with residents through TRAs and other forums about the services they were receiving and where improvement was needed.
- 4.48 The Member thanked the Chief Operating Officer, One Housing Group for this approach which she said sounded exemplary. However, she wondered if other guests were also feeling any miscommunication issues between the call centres and those areas responding to the issues reported.
- 4.49 The Director of Maintenance Delivery Services, One Housing Group wished to add that alongside a focus on internal customer care, One Housing had reinvigorated estate noticeboards. This was to ensure that they were up to date, and gave the names and contact details of estate managers and caretakers, and cleaning standards and schedules.
- 4.50 In terms of customer care, the Head of Property, IDS said that thanks to the small size of his organisation, residents were often known by name to staff. The risks around remoteness were less applicable.

- 4.51 The Chief Executive ISHA advised that as with One Housing, ISHA worked hard to ensure that noticeboards were up to date and contained information on their neighbourhood patch officer and their specialist housing manager, and on service standards.
- 4.52 This said, they did have a central email and a central number which customers were encouraged to use to report issues. This helped to ensure that these were dealt with in a timely way, and lessened the risk of a delay in the event of a named person being away for a period of time. This approach was balanced by written complaints responses containing the name and direct contact details of the investigating officer.
- 4.53 The Chief Executive, Peabody agreed with this point. He understood the view that there should ideally be a named contact who residents could go to in all cases. Sometimes – and understandably – residents did prefer this approach. However, analysis of cases where issues had not been dealt with properly did show this was sometimes due to only the named contact knowing about something, rather than the wider organisation. When issues were raised with a centralised point – subject to effective processes being in place – it could better allow cases to be managed. This said, there was a need to ensure that residents were communicated with on the reasons for this approach.
- 4.54 The Chair agreed with the need for improved communications. She appreciated the point around a call centre approach sometimes better ensuring that cases were logged and tracked. However, she knew from an estate in her ward that some Housing Association residents had complained about call centre staff not having a knowledge of the local area or the estate. She felt that this might be something that could be addressed with training, or an approach where different sections of a call centre dealt with specific geographical areas so had a better insight.
- 4.55 The Chief Executive, ISHA, agreed on the need to shape services and service improvement around what was needed by residents, and to give full and clear explanations around the rationale for changes.
- 4.56 ISHA had a resident Scrutiny Committee which - together with ISHA and the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) - had created a new and innovative solution which better enabled more residents to apply scrutiny to the organisation. Within this approach, the Committee had considered the issues raised in meetings over the last 12 months, and then identified the aspects they wanted to apply scrutiny to over the forthcoming period. Further to this, Quarterly Resident Action Forums focused on a particular aspect would be open to all residents, and attended by senior staff.
- 4.57 The first forum had been focused on communications around repairs and maintenance, which 30 residents had attended along with senior staff including herself. They had found that – due to staff being present who could make decisions – a single meeting could end with mutually agreed actions which would be taken, without the need for issues to be escalated upwards for possible resolutions to be considered outside of the meeting. The meetings were held quarterly within an appreciation that many residents would not feel able to attend meetings more regularly. However, the Scrutiny Committee in its

- more regular meetings would work to hold ISHA to account against its delivery of the actions arising from the forums.
- 4.58 She was very proud of the way that this approach had been designed and delivered. Only one other provider in the country was doing this. She would welcome Members attending to observe a future Forum.
- 4.59 The Director Resident Services, Peabody said a central contact centre was complemented by local offices. This enabled officers to be available on the ground to ensure issues were resolved. They were piloting an approach where local property managers were responsible for resolving property and communal area aspects. This was alongside Neighbourhood Managers who focused on ensuring that vulnerable residents received the services they needed.
- 4.60 On resident engagement, Peabody had 11 Tenant and Resident Associations (TRAs) in the borough, complemented by a number of other elements including estate walkabouts, a scrutiny panel which had recently explored the complaints process, a policy and strategy group which had been involved in the procurement of a number of contractors, and regular question and answer sessions between residents and staff at a wide range of levels.
- 4.61 The Mayoral Advisor for Private Renting and Affordability said her remit covered social housing stock which did not belong to the Council. She wished to explore how providers might work better with the Council. In some cases there were challenges around developing meaningful relationships around repairs and maintenance. While appreciating that some operated across boroughs, she had been frustrated by some cases where residents were not getting issues resolved and had needed to go to the Ombudsman, despite seeking help from the Housing Association and the Council. In these cases Members had been unable to get reasonable responses from providers when they had sought to advocate for their residents. She was able to get reasonable responses from the guests in the room, but this was not always the case.
- 4.62 She also had specific concerns around the quality of responses to Housing Association residents in tenures other than social rent; from casework it sometimes appeared that they were falling between the cracks in terms of customer care.
- 4.63 The Chief Executive, Peabody thanked the Mayoral Advisor. This said, he returned to an earlier point around the value in providing feedback on his organisation specifically. This compared to what could be seen as generalisations from which he could not identify whether there was learning for Peabody specifically.
- 4.64 The Operations Manager, Sanctuary Group agreed with this point. She did not feel that generalisations in this forum were helpful, and suggested that issues might be better resolved by the Mayoral Advisor seeking meetings with the individual housing associations concerned. She said the item had been very useful in identifying solutions that some providers were putting in place; for example one she would take away was the actions taken by another provider to put fault sensors on lifts.

- 4.65 The Mayoral Advisor for Private renting and affordability accepted these points. She was very keen that the Council and Housing Associations worked together to reach a position where each provider operating in Hackney reported borough-specific data on a common set of indicators which could be used by residents to reach a view on the performance of their provider compared to others.
- 4.66 The Director of Maintenance Delivery Services, One Housing Group advised that some Housing Associations did partake in benchmarking arrangements put in place by some of the boroughs they operated in. Tower Hamlets was one of these, where Housing Associations reported on a number of common, local metrics. She understood that most of the providers in the room were involved in this.
- 4.67 A Member noted the recent election result and previous plans of the Conservative Party to extend the Right to Buy to Housing Association residents.
- 4.68 She worried that if enacted this would impact on the ability of both the Council and Housing Associations to provide homes to households awaiting social housing. She felt that it would lend further weight to both seeking to learn from one another, and to work together more closely.
- 4.69 She noted that for some time many Housing Associations were offering units other than homes for social rent. Her view was that the needs and demands of residents in other forms of rented homes - including affordable and intermediate rent - were sometimes different from those in social rent homes. She noted that the Council was diversifying its offer of the types of tenure it delivered – for example homes for London Living Rent – and that it could be useful to seek to explore the approaches of Housing Associations to ensuring that these needs could be met.
- 4.70 She said that any move to extend the Right to Buy to Housing Association tenants would add a complexity for these organisations which the Council had needed to manage for some time. Managing the processes and around leaseholder charges for major works in blocks was a crucial one of these. In some cases Council leaseholders were asset rich but cash poor, and had concerns and difficulties around needing to contribute to maintenance programmes.
- 4.71 The Director of Housing, Clarion Housing Group advised that Clarion and others would need to respond to any change in legislation, despite any extension of right to buy having the likely effect of exacerbating the shortage of affordable housing. Most Housing Associations did have experience of managing multi tenure blocks, including homes bought under the right to buy under stock transfer rights.
- 4.72 She did see room for clearer information from her organisation around the different rights and responsibilities which households would have according to the tenure they were entering into. For example, for households considering shared ownership, there was a need for clearer messaging that they would be fully responsible for meeting the cost of internal repairs, and on the broad levels of service charges they should expect to incur. There was a need to be clear on

- the rights and responsibilities on both sides. Sometimes there was a risk of residents having a view they could afford something when this was not the case.
- 4.73 The Chief Executive, Peabody advised that when the extended right to buy was initially proposed, Peabody's line back to Government had been that for any scheme to be sustainable, there would be a need for Government to meet discount costs, and to require Housing Associations the provider to replace sold units with new ones. Misconceptions about this position had damaged Peabody's relationship with local authorities in some cases. He said that any emerging new policy needed to be responded to by Councils and Housing Associations in partnership; there was a need to work together.
- 4.74 Again on right to buy, he said that the very high values of housing meant that – even with substantial discounts applied – the option might remain unaffordable to many residents. Tenants living in social rented homes were generally on low incomes. He therefore felt that the impact of any scheme on a reduction in affordable housing might prove to be less than sometimes envisaged.
- 4.75 A Member noted that in some cases social rented homes had been changed to an affordable rent upon them becoming void. She was an advocate of providers including rental products other than social rents in their offer, as these offered suitable housing options to some households not fitting the criteria for social housing. However, she was interested in the scale of this 'flipping' activity.
- 4.76 The Chief Executive, Peabody said that providers took their own approaches around this. Peabody had frozen their affordable rent levels, and were aiming to generally get rents down to social rent levels. This was in reflection of Peabody's primary concerns being to enable more homeless households out of temporary accommodation into forms of affordable housing accessible to them, and to support vulnerable people. However, different providers would devise their own approaches according to their ethos and priorities.
- 4.77 A Member asked each provider in a few words to say where they felt their performance was with repairs currently, whether they were satisfied with this, and where improvement was needed.
- 4.78 Guests made the following comments:
- The Director of Housing, Clarion Housing Group felt the organisation was moving in the right direction. There was a lot more to do and steps were being taken, most notably the move to have brought housing repairs and maintenance in house.
 - The Director of Maintenance Delivery Services North Region, L&Q Group, said there were strong areas of performance, including voids. There would be a future focus on upskilling operatives and on offering more apprenticeship opportunities.
 - The Chief Executive, ISHA, said her report had noted the need for further improvement. Performance data and statistics did not always tell the full story. One way she would measure impact was by being in a position where she regularly received good feedback from her residents when walking around ISHA estates.

- The Head of Estate Services, Sanctuary Group said that he was generally pleased with the direction of travel in repairs and maintenance. Sanctuary was seven years into an internalisation of repairs and maintenance. There did need to be a greater focus on first time fixes. They were seeking to address this via large programmes of work, within an aim of reaching over 90% on this measure.
- The Chief Executive, Peabody said that a provider could never be fully satisfied. Getting things right first time was crucial. The more visits that there were to resolve a single issue, the more likely customers were to be dissatisfied, and for jobs to go unresolved.
- The Head of Property, Industrial Dwellings Society (IDS) said that they were generally pleased with levels of satisfaction. There would be further focus on improving procurement.
- The Director of Direct Maintenance North Region, L&Q Group said that the bringing of repairs and maintenance into a DLO was enabling a focus on both ensuring decent homes for people, and on giving opportunities to local residents through apprenticeships and other initiatives to learn skill sets which would enable them to succeed.

4.79 A Member noted a common theme of providers bringing DLOs in house. She would be interested in hearing more detail on the reasons for this. She also felt there would be value in exploring the approach to the monitoring of performance and standards within DLOS, and what the strengths and any weaknesses were of these. She wondered whether all paid DLO at London Living Wage or above. She felt that this might be an aspect for further scrutiny, perhaps through written correspondence.

4.80 Another Member agreed with this. He also noted a point from the Chief Executive, Peabody, around trialling an approach of having a number of small contracts in place. He felt a further exploration of this would be useful.

4.81 A Member noted that the review would seek to explore the views of Housing Association tenants and leaseholders in Hackney. She suggested this might be partly achieved through hearing from the London Tenants Federation, and Pat Turnbull who was regional representative and a Hackney resident.

5 Update on review of Housing Services' Community Halls

5.1 The Chair welcomed the following guests for this item:

- David Padfield, Interim Director, Housing Services
- Gilbert Stowe, Head of Tenant and Leasehold Services, Housing Services
- Sara Kulay, Project Manager, Housing Transformation, Housing Services
- Philippa Newis, Senior Delivery Manager, Finance & Corporate Resources

5.2 The Project Manager, Housing Transformation and Senior Delivery Manager, Finance & Corporate Resources presented the slides which were available in the agenda packs. They made the following substantive points:

- The Council had a manifesto commitment to improve access to community spaces (community halls and others) across the borough at no or low cost to

Monday, 16th December, 2019

residents and community groups. This was within an aim of supporting the valuable contributions made to social, cultural and economic life in the borough by community groups, residents, start-ups.

- ICT were co-ordinating the implementation of this commitment. It had started with engagement work with both people in need of space to deliver groups and activities, and others who had space to offer. This was within an aim of understanding the needs of both groups.
- A common perception had been identified among residents around community spaces being generally underused and difficult to access in some cases. Actions already taken to address this included work with staff in libraries to improve information on the spaces available in these, and to make the booking processes for them easier.
- In the summer, the focus had moved onto Community Halls. Work between ICT and the Housing Transformation Service was complementing the Community Halls Project which was already underway. One point of clarity was that of the 87 assets defined as community halls, around 27 were actually community rooms and community flats.
- This project was looking at all of Housing Services' Community Halls, some of which were managed by TRAs and Tenant Management Organisations (TMOs) rather than the Council.
- A key initial focus was on reaching a fuller and more advanced understanding of the assets; in regards to cost, levels of usage, condition and their geography in relation to one another. Another aspect was identifying the management arrangements in place, which could differ according to the party managing them.
- This work might be described as the discovery phase of the programme of work. Findings of this were now available.
- These showed Community Halls to be quite evenly spread around the borough; while there was a greater concentration of halls in some areas, mapping the assets had shown that most households were based within 10 minutes' walk of a hall.
- A physical visit had been carried out to each asset within the delivery phase. This had provided real clarity.
- In relation to the 60 conventional Community Halls in the borough (where the potential for use as community spaces was greatest), the service had aimed to group them into different categories. These were:
 - The largest halls which could be described as multi functional halls. These were often built over more than one storey. Some could accommodate over 100 people, with a range of different spaces within them which could be used for separate purposes; for example one had a children's nursery downstairs and a hall for hire above.
 - Larger halls, of which there were around 22. Typically, these offered a large hall and or a working space, with a small kitchen attached.

- Smaller, local halls. These varied significantly in size and construction. One pictured in the presentation could accommodate 60 people, another could hold 10.
- An important point around the different types of halls was that the shares which were managed by TRAs or TMOs rather than the Council, were higher among the smaller halls than the larger ones. TRAs or TMOs managed few (5) multi-functional halls and larger halls (7). However, they managed around half the smaller, local halls.
- The service had analysed the level of usage of halls for September 2019 (only covering Hackney managed Halls). This had shown some assumptions around usage to be incorrect. Officers had previously understood there to be greater usage of halls in the evenings and at weekends. However, the analysis showed the shares of bookings taken by morning and evening slots to be similar, and for some weekdays to see greater usage than weekend days.
- The analysis also showed that around two thirds of bookings were regular bookings - for example through regular exercise or cooking classes.
- It also confirmed the under-utilisation of halls; under 25% of spaces available in time periods between 9am and 11pm, had been used. The data showed large periods of time where halls were not being used.
- The service had sought to identify the issues causing this.
- In some cases the reasons were simple – a lack of signage, and membership restrictions meaning they were not available to many groups. This was in particular relation to halls managed locally, by parties other than the Council. Examples of restrictions sometimes applied locally included a hall only being available to residents of the estate on which it was based, and halls not being made available for birthday parties of older teenagers.
- Other barriers to greater usage were a lack of modern decorations and facilities (for example Wi-Fi). There was an issue around a lack of attractiveness of venues.
- Locations were also important to levels of usage; one hall close to Old Street roundabout drew a relatively high level of bookings compared to a hall in the east of the borough with lack of transport links.
- Another important barrier which ICT had worked to identify was around visibility and availability of information. Information both online and offline was hard to find. In terms of online, 14,000 unique views of the community halls information page compared to only 132 enquiries about bookings being made online. This highlighted an extremely low conversion rate, and also a likely high staff cost due to customers needing to make contact after not getting the information required from the website. This led or was compounded by difficulties in getting answers to queries.
- On pricing, community halls booking charges offered good value, but the service was not clear about who needed to pay and who could use the

facilities for free, creating tension. A generous discount applied to day bookings brought an incentive to groups not using the hall for a full day to book for this period anyway, excluding use by others.

- There was a lack of information on the extent to which halls were wheelchair accessible.
- There were a range of improvements planned.
- Aspects led by ICT within the wider space bank programme included introducing online bookings and payments, diaries for availability, improving pricing transparency and providing video guides. The service would be trialling a remote access arrangement where customers would no longer need to collect keys from another venue or arrange to meet a key holder at a given time.
- On the Community Halls Project specifically, works to improve the internals and externals of halls would be delivered within Housing Services' Asset Management Strategy. Facilities would be improved through Wi-Fi being installed in halls. There would be work to improve regulation of local management arrangements, and work with the Resident Participation Team to better enable a wide range of community groups and networks to utilise the halls for their activities.

- 5.3 A Member raised concern around the under-utilisation of halls. She noted that barriers to usage appeared greater for the halls not managed by the Council. She suggested that the data provided could give challenge around the current arrangements around halls being fit for purpose. She wished to seek clarity on whether all the 87 halls mentioned 87 were owned by the Council.
- 5.4 The Project Manager, Housing Transformation confirmed that the 87 halls were Council-owned, Housing Revenue Account assets. However, 47 were locally managed, by TRAs or TMOs. Only 40 of the halls were managed directly by the Council's Community Halls Team.
- 5.5 The Member asked what governance arrangements were in place for the groups managing the halls.
- 5.6 The Project Manager, Housing Transformation said that locally managed arrangements had grown in number over a period of time. She acknowledged that the discovery phase had identified a lack of robust management agreements in place between the Council and third parties managing halls.
- 5.7 There were issues around a lack of regulation including costs, charge outs, and third party lettings.
- 5.8 The Chair asked if consideration was being given to bringing halls all back into direct management by the Council.
- 5.9 The Head of Tenant and Leasehold Services, Housing Services said the discovery phase had been a crucial piece of work. There were issues due to a

- legacy of previous management. Now that this research had been done, consideration needed to be given to all options, in dialogue with residents.
- 5.10 A Member asked which party kept the income from locally managed community hall bookings, and which party delivered and funded repairs.
- 5.11 The Head of Tenant and Leasehold Services, Housing Services confirmed that TRAs generally retained income from community halls they managed locally, and that the Council funded repairs. In cases where TMOs managed halls, the TMOs contributed to day to day repair costs, but not structural works. There was a need to fully identify the costs that these assets would bring in terms of repairs and maintenance over future years, and to ensure that these (and other costs) were taken into account within overall strategies to manage the halls.
- 5.12 A Member agreed with the need to get a full grasp on the cost to the Council of Community Halls – both those managed by the Council and by others. She was frustrated – in a climate where the Council had already suffered major cuts in funding – that for high shares of Community Halls, maintenance and repair costs were met by the Council without it having any control over the income generated for them. She was disappointed with the low levels of usage of the halls when set against the costs incurred by the Council for them being open, which she supposed were very considerable.
- 5.13 A Member asked whether the review was giving consideration to how other boroughs used and managed their community halls.
- 5.14 The Project Manager, Housing Transformation confirmed that the approaches of other boroughs had been looked at. This had found that – in inner London in particular – other boroughs did not have the type of spread of assets which Hackney operated. Some neighbouring boroughs had moved towards a community hub model where a number of hubs combined particular services along with offering some community facilities. The model in Hackney as it stood was quite unique.
- 5.15 A Member noted the proposal to improve regulation of management arrangements, including the development of a framework of rights and responsibilities. She noted that TRA keyholders to community halls were sometimes reluctant open and close halls for events. She asked if this would be considered within this work.
- 5.16 The Project Manager, Housing Transformation agreed with this point. In some cases those holding keys were elderly. They did a great job for the community but sometimes were very understandably reluctant to leave their homes late in the day and at night to open and close halls for events held in the evening. This was one of the reasons why the service was to pilot remote access arrangements where customers would be able to open and close the halls themselves.
- 5.17 A Member wished to thank Officers for the significant work which she knew would have gone into producing this discovery work. She was pleased that the service now had the insight in place which would enable it consider next steps in an informed way.

- 5.18 The Chair thanked guests. She would liaise with Officers outside of the meeting so that a further update to the Commission could be scheduled.

6 Housing Services support of resident engagement - update on review

- 6.1 The Chair welcomed the following guests for this item:
- David Padfield, Interim Director, Housing Services
 - Gilbert Stowe, Head of Tenant and Leasehold Services, Housing Services
- 6.2 The Head of Tenant and Leasehold Services, Housing Services presented the paper for this item, which was available in the agenda packs.
- 6.3 This provided an update on his service's approach to supporting engagement and participation by Hackney Housing's tenants and leaseholders. This included responses to the 11 recommendations made by the Commission in a letter of reference to the Cabinet Member for Housing Services, following an item in its July meeting. The letter and recommendations had been very useful in helping to shape the review of the Resident Participation Team.
- 6.4 The service had commissioned the Tenant Participation and Advisory Service to assess the service's performance on engagement and participation of those living in Council-managed homes. The findings of the review were available in the agenda packs.
- 6.5 These findings along with the Commission's recommendations and other feedback would now be used to help inform a new Resident Engagement Strategy for Hackney Housing for the next three years. Alongside this, the service would be implementing the new Resident Engagement Team's structure following the review which had now been completed. Full implementation was targeted for April 2020.
- 6.6 In response to a question, the Head of Tenant and Leasehold Services, Housing Services advised that post-restructure the Resident Participation Team would be formed of 11 Officers, compared to 13 prior to the review, and that three of the 11 posts were vacant currently. The vacancies were managerial-level posts.
- 6.7 The Chair mentioned comments received in advance of the meeting from the Chair of the Stamford Hill Neighbourhood Panel, Muriel Gordon MBE. This set out the Panel's views on changes needed to improve the Resident Led Improvement Budget (RLIB). She felt these to have been very sensible. She asked how they were being taken on board.
- 6.8 The Head of Tenant and Leasehold Services, Housing Services agreed that the comments had been useful. One had been around the current timings of the inspections which helped to identify areas for investment from the RLIB. He agreed that they needed to be timed earlier in the year. Holding them in the lighter, spring and summer months enabled participation by more residents. It also allowed for more effective procurement, and earlier delivery of works. He was going to work with Muriel Gordon to ensure that this was taken forward.

- 6.9 A Member noted from the report that the Community Development Fund was being marketed to groups other than TRAs, as well as TRAs. She asked how it was being advertised and what the current level of take up was.
- 6.9 The Head of Tenant and Leasehold Services, Housing Services confirmed that information on the fund was available online. However work would be done to improve this. The fund was also being advertised in an upcoming newsletter. He did not have take-up information to hand, but would provide this following the meeting.

ACTION 1 (Head of Tenant and Leasehold Services, Housing Services):

To provide application numbers for 2019/20 Community Development Fund, and current amount of £342,000 fund currently allocated. Within this, to provide numbers of applications and value of allocations to groups other than TRAs.

- 6.10 A Member asked how streamlined the application process was for the Community Development fund. She was aware of a TRA which had sought to go through the process but which had encountered delays in receiving responses throughout it. She also understood from TRA members that some were put off by the bureaucracy.
- 6.11 The Head of Tenant and Leasehold Services, Housing Services said that both the levels of responsiveness to applications and the extent of requirements which were put on applicants would be two priority areas to be addressed when the leadership roles within the area were recruited to. There did need to be a change in approach in the service, away from setting demands and expectations for those going through the process, towards proactively taking applicants through it. One measure to achieve this would be through putting workshops in place where potential applications could see how it worked, and also where the service would seek ideas to make things more straight forward.
- 6.12 A Member asked when the service had last reviewed the maximum amounts allowed in individual awards from the Community Development Fund. She understood that £2,000 was the maximum.
- 6.13 The Head of Tenant and Leasehold Services, Housing Services said this was a question he would take forward. He was not clear as to where the £2,000 limit was established (the Chair understood that this was the Tenant's Levy Steering Group), but he felt it was a matter to investigate. He agreed that consideration might be needed to greater flexibility, and greater awards being allocated where there was capacity.

ACTION 2 (Head of Tenant and Leasehold Services, Housing Services):

To identify origins of £2,000 limit on individual allocations from Community Development Fund, and to consider review of this.

7 Council and partnership response to escalation in serious violence review - draft report

Monday, 16th December, 2019

7.1 The draft report from the Commission's review around serious violence, was agreed. This was subject to Cllr Wrout being given an additional 24 hours to review it.

8 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

8.1 The minutes from the Commission meeting of 30th September were agreed as an accurate record.

9 Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission- 2019/20 Work Programme

9.1 The work programme was noted.

10 Any Other Business

10.1 There was no other business.

Duration of the meeting: 7.00 - 10.10 pm